

I nodded.

"It must be, I suppose," he said, sighing profoundly.

It would have been a comparatively simple operation under ordinary circumstances, but with Mr. Brabazon it was almost a question of life and death for him and for us. Anæsthetics I could not administer. I had seen men bear up with marvellous fortitude under similar conditions without the aid of anæsthetics ; but with Mr. Brabazon it was different. Pain, acute physical suffering, meant the outbreak of deadly passion. However, there was no help for it. I made the necessary preparations with as much haste as possible, and Mr. Ashcroft stood over the patient to soothe him, and hold him down. It was a terribly dangerous operation under the circumstances, but other aid we dare not summon.

At the first touch of the knife a hideous yell burst from Mr. Brabazon : he rose in the bed, flinging the old man from him as if he were a feather-weight. I seized him with both arms, and before I could even guess what his object was he wrenched his left arm from my grasp and bit deeply into it.

"It must be either you or me," he cried in agony, as we fell upon him.

Mr. Ashcroft struggled to seize his arm in order to suck the venom from the wound ; but our efforts were of no avail. With the strength of ten men he tossed us from him, and rising from his couch he seized my knife and kept us at bay with the fury of a madman. "What matters my life!" he cried. "You are men : I am but a monster."