



The Doctor's Ideal.

(Maggie Fearn, Author of 'That Maid of Monsons,' 'Tempted,' etc., in the 'Alliance News'.)

(Concluded.)

'An uncommonly nasty night,' he said to himself, with some disgust. 'Now where is No. 19, I wonder? What a mad thing to come out on a night like this, to see what may not be worth seeing! I wouldn't have done it for everybody; but Davinia Sinclair is a woman with her head put on the right way, and her jokes generally turn out lucky. Phew!'

He had stopped abruptly before what was evidently No. 19, for the house bore that legend in golden figures over the door, and there was an addition to the number, which ran thus: 'Charlotte-street Coffee Room.'

'So,' remarked Dr. Gordon, still acting as his own informant, 'this is Miss Sinclair's latest hobby.'

He peered curiously about for some minutes, intent on observing all that could be observed from the outside. A ruby lamp threw a warm glowing illumination upon the wet pavement, and through the large plate-glass window the light from within streamed invitingly. Mechanically, the doctor pushed open the door and entered, wondering the while at finding himself inside such an unlikely place as a coffee room. His quick eye, accustomed to critical alertness, began instantly taking note of the surroundings. Small, but thoroughly substantial, tables were dispersed about the large long room, and on the white marble slabs were dozens of cups and saucers of an attractive design; while sugar bowls and jugs of sparkling glass, alternate ruby and white, stood invitingly filled ready for immediate use. There were light delicate buns, and more solid biscuits piled on square basket dishes, and pyramids of golden oranges made the beholder experience a sudden sensation of thirst and longing. Light shone down from above through ruby-colored globes, and there crept over the senses a delicious sensation of warm, pleasurable comfort, upon entering the room. An aromatic smell pervaded the entire place, partly due to the steaming coffee and cocoa, partially exhaled by sturdy plants, which seemed delighted to thrive in so congenial an atmosphere. The sitting accommodation was such as to suit all tastes and inclinations. There were stout Windsor chairs for the hardy people who professed contempt for the softer luxuries of house civilization, and a huge old-fashioned settee in one corner, against a wall, which looked almost capable of supporting Atlas with the earth artistically poised upon his shoulders if he should feel a sudden weariness, and be inclined for an hour's repose. Some cane-seated chairs, and a few absurdly uncomfortable three-legged stools for restless folk, who are never caught napping, made up a not unpleasant selection; and the bright rush mats, with scarlet borders, dropped here and there, interspersed with a few more pretentious skin rugs, gave one the feeling that the feet might easily be made comfortable if they were at all reasonable in their requirements.

Dr. Gordon had taken critical note of these details almost at the first glance, and he lifted his eyebrows and said, 'Pshaw!' again. Then he stopped short. It began to be apparent that the ear was to be charmed as well as the eye, for the lively strains of a well-known march struck pleasantly upon the air, educed from a good sounding piano at the opposite end of the room. Then it was possible to have music other than at a public-house? The doctor clasped and unclasped his hands thoughtfully, as he gazed around. Why couldn't a man reasonably expect to spend a comfortable evening amid these by no means undesirable surroundings? The question lingered in his thoughts, and refused to be put aside. Why was it such an indispensable adjunct to a so-

cial evening to have the accompaniment of a glass of something 'hot and strong?' or the inevitable tankard of ale? He moved slowly forward, and began to stroll round the room. All the usual 'dailies' were lying ready to hand, and many of the better-class of pictorial papers—the objectionable ones were carefully excluded, and this did not escape the critical eye of the doctor. He nodded his head, and said to himself that whatever men might say and think he saw no reason why they should delight in the immoral and the horrible.

A brisk man, with a manner that meant business, came forward, and inquired if he could serve the gentleman, and the doctor ordered a cup of coffee, to see what its quality might be. He examined it with the same critical judgment as he had bestowed upon all else, and it stood the test. It was unquestionably good coffee. He made a few casual remarks to the manager, and noticed meanwhile while speaking that one or two men looked half shyly in the door, and after hesitating a little ventured suspiciously to step inside. The piano kept up its inspiring martial strains, and the lights shone brilliantly through the ruby glasses, and outside the storm raged.

Dr. Gordon drew on his gloves, and pulled up his overcoat collar. He was used to facing the most inclement weather and did not feel intimidated. But as he stepped out into the stormy darkness he threw a backward glance into the large, well-lighted, well-furnished coffee restaurant, and acknowledged that the thing looked likely to be a success. No one at that crucial moment could have honestly said that it was not attractive.

Miss Davinia Sinclair sat in her pretty cushioned chair beside the decorated mantelshelf. Outside the storm was expending its fury. It was nearly 8 o'clock. She looked thoughtful. Would Dr. Gordon call, or had he a more important engagement? Had he been to No. 19, Charlotte-street, or—? She suddenly sat upright, and listened. There was a knock at the hall door, and a quick decided ringing of the hall bell. She surely recognized both, as one recognizes something familiar. A minute later Dr. Gordon was beside her, having hastily divested himself of his overcoat.

'I had thought the days of witchery were past,' said he, drawing up a chair in a way that proved he felt himself no stranger. 'I don't know whether I am friendly with you this evening, Miss Sinclair. A man hates to surrender a point.'

'Doctor,' said Miss Sinclair, soberly, 't sounds a dreadful night. Isn't it a pity that the public-house is a man's only refuge?'

He sat and looked at her in a way peculiar to himself. His glances were keen as lightning, and the shapely hand resting on his knee showed culture and indicated skill.

'I said the public-house was a working man's only "refuge," because those who condemn it offer him no equivalent.'

'True; I wish an equivalent could be offered.'

The two, one on either side of the fire, looked straight into each other's eyes. The doctor spoke, and his answer was given with deliberation.

'I think I have seen an equivalent this evening,' he said.

'You have?'

Miss Sinclair may be pardoned if her cheeks flushed with some flattering excitement.

'Yes, at No. 19, Charlotte-street.'

'Doctor, have you come to cross swords with me again?'

'No. I think the correct thing is to relinquish one's sword to the conqueror, isn't it? I drank a cup of coffee just now, Miss Sinclair.'

'Did it agree with you, as well as the "punch" on New Year's Eve?' she asked, with a little covert smile.

'They were both very good,' Dr. Gordon replied. He was not a man who would allow his pet prejudices to be lightly yielded up, and yet— They were very silent for a little while. Miss Sinclair sat looking into the glowing fire, and the doctor regarded her as a new scientific problem worthy of study. She lifted her eyes after a time, and met his scrutiny with some amusement and a great deal of earnest inquiry.

'Dr. Gordon, will you "own up" that a man's physical requirements can be met, and his

comforts catered for, without reference to alcohol?'

The doctor leaned forward with one of his fascinating smiles.

'Yes, Miss Sinclair, I'll "own up," as I promised I would, for I see that the thing can be done. The pity is that there are not more magicians like yourself in the world to prove the truth, the practical truth, of your theory. I frankly confess that I have found my unexpected ideal at No. 19, Charlotte-street, and though you are making it very hard for me, I hope I am an honest man, and know how to do the right thing.'

'And about the "punch," doctor?'

He drew back, and tipped his chair in a half irritated, half amused way.

'The punch was very good, Miss Davinia; I told you so just now; but—'

'But you won't brew any more, will you, doctor?'

He rose and stood by the fire, with his hands clasped behind him.

'Miss Sinclair, we were discussing the needs of the working man, and not our own,' he said.

Yet as he shook hands with her his laughing eyes met hers, and she knew that at last they perfectly agreed.

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