

A HOSPITAL HERO.

It was a cold night in December, and the wind blew along the slushy London streets; the blazing lights in the butchers' shops of Clare Market waved about like infernal banners. The policemen stood stiffly up in the doorways for shelter; and we, who were snugly ensconced in the house-surgeon's room of old St Barnabas, were perhaps the only people perfectly comfortable in the parish of St. Clement Danes. Our party consisted of Brown (we'll call him Brown), of myself, and a small thin man called Jourdan. How small and fragile he looked as he sat on the arm of the old horsehair sofa discussing with Brown and myself a question in physiology. How red the spots grew over his cheek bones; and how his cough rattled as he called Muller, and Kolliker, and Schroeder van der Kolk to witness that he was right, and we two signally and miserably wrong.

"Well, so be it," said I at last. "How the wind howls. It must matter but little to these poor neighbours of ours under the Adelphi arches whether their sensory nerve-fibres can be traced upward from the posterior columns of the cord or not. For my own part, I don't believe a"-----

"What!" shrieked Jourdan, "when Wagner has demonstrated that"-----

"Oh, please sir," said a nurse bouncing into the room, "that man in the Top-Ward has got out of bed, and is a jumpin' mad."

"Well, make him go back again."

"I can't, sir. He's got the crutch from the patient in the next bed, and I daren't go near him."

"Heigh-ho!" said Jourdan, "it's always thus in our profession. We just taste occasionally the sweets of scientific discussion, when we have to leave them for the disgusting practical applications."

Up stairs we went, past wards where the sufferers were most of them forgetting in sleep the distresses to which they would presently awake. All was quiet in the old hospital, save the howl of the wind and Jourdan's cough. "Confound the pedantic little chap," I thought to myself; "he'll waken that operation case." One more stair to climb, and we reached the Top-Ward, where there was unusual excitement, the patients sitting up in their beds; the poor fellow with heart-disease, the consumptive, the dropsical patient, all watching a tall stalwart figure standing in a flannel night-gown, with his back to the fire, leaning with his chin on a crutch, and evidently in deep thought. Directly he saw us, he shouldered the said piece of timber, if not to show how fields were won, to give as good a representation as circumstances would allow of how he intended winning the field on the present occasion. Whisk came the handle over my head as I ducked and escaped the blow.

"My good man," said Brown, "now, do go into bed. Is there anything I?"

Whisk came the crutch again over our heads; and as we ducked, the maniac leaped rapidly past us from bed to bed, gained the door, and ere we had time to intercept him, was in the passage.

In the ceiling of the passage just outside this door was a trap which led out upon the roof; it was not far from the floor. With the activity of madness he leaped, caught the edge of the trap, swung himself up, and was upon the roof. We looked at each other.

"Here's a business," says Brown; "he'll be down into the street in a twinkling, for he'll never stand against this wind."

"What a mess we shall get into!" was my selfish thought. We got a pair of steps, and getting up them, put our heads out of the trap. The moon was shining

bright, but the wind was shrieking through the old stacks of chimneys; and now and then a tile detached would slide down the roof and drop into the street.

"By Jove," says Brown, "he must have fallen; I can't see him anywhere. Let me look. Ah, there! Good heavens! how could he have got there, right at the end of this pointed old roof, covered with slippery tiles?"

Across this, in the moonlight, we could see a long shadow, and what I at first took to be a chimney-stalk, was the madman, standing gazing on the moon. At each gust of the fierce wind his body swayed as though he would fall; but there he stood in all the sublimity and strength of mania, gazing at that planet whose supposed influence over such unfortunates as himself, has given its name to the most awful of maladies. What could we do? The nurses, the porters were assembled at the foot of the steps. Our feeling of responsibility was intensely painful. An exclamation, a sudden noise, might send that poor wretch tumbling into the street. What were we to do? I felt something push me on the steps, and then, for the first time, noticed that Jourdan had rejoined us. A paroxysm of coughing had kept him below stairs when Brown and I hurried into the ward. I saw his eyes sparkling, and heard his rough breathing as the little fellow said: "Hold these," and put a pair of half-Wellingtons into my hand. Was he mad, too, taking off his boots in such a place?

"Why, Jourdan, what?"

"Hush!" said he as he raised himself through the trap and stood on the roof. We now saw he was going to seize the madman.

The latter, as I have said, was a tall stout man in a state of acute mania; our friend was diminutive, and his naturally small frame was wasted by disease. He got on the sharp apex of the sloping roof; a blast of wind came, and down he went, but he caught something, raised himself, and walked along, like one on a tight-rope.

The madman does not seem to notice him. We watch them both, and our hearts beat not only with anxiety but shame. The possibility of such a feat never had entered our own imaginations. Now he nears the maniac, who notices him, turns half round, and throws his arms up in defiance. But on Jourdan goes. Their shadows now mingle on the roof. The wind seems to howl louder, and our eyes less able to distinguish objects.

"Great Heaven! they're down," said Brown, squeezing my arms, as something rattled over the roof.

"No! it was only a tile."

What are they doing? They are nearer us now - Jourdan walking warily backward, and leading the maniac, whom he has grasped by the breast of his night-shirt. Still are these mad hands held out threateningly over the frail figure guiding him to safety. They reach the trap. Brown and I descend the steps so as to make room for this strange pair. Down they come. We seize the great mad arms, and pin them down, and put the man to bed.

We turn to look for Jourdan; he is quietly pulling on his boots again; and so we all return to the house-surgeon's room. I shall not trouble the reader with any moral reflections, which he may draw, as well as myself, from this little adventure. Poor Jourdan's brave spirit is now, I trust, where he obtains a clearer insight into those great truths he so enthusiastically investigated in his short and useful life. The patient whose life he saved was only suffering from temporary mental excitement, and is now a strong and useful man.

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A man who cannot be a good man in a small circle of social acquaintances would find it much harder if he were higher up.