

FAMILY CIRCLE.

The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb.

By A. CONAN DOYLE.

Of all the problems which have been submitted to my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes for solution during the years of our intimacy, there were only two which I was the means of introducing to his notice, that of Mr. Hatherley's thumb and that of Colonel Warburton's madness. Of these the latter may have afforded a finer field for an acute and original observer, but the other was so strange in its inception and so dramatic in its details, that it may be the more worthy of being placed upon record, even if it gave my friend fewer openings for those deductive methods of reasoning by which he achieved such remarkable results. The story has, I believe, been told more than once in the newspapers, but, like all such narratives, its effect is much less striking when set forth en bloc in a single half-column of print than when the facts slowly evolve before your own eyes and the mystery clears gradually away as each new discovery furnishes a step which leads on to the complete truth. At the time the circumstances made a deep impression upon me, and the lapse of two years has hardly served to weaken the effect.

It was in the summer of '89, not long after my marriage, that the events occurred which I am now about to summarise. I had returned to civil practice, and had finally abandoned Holmes in his Baker street rooms, although I continually visited him, and occasionally even persuaded him to forego his Bohemian habits so far as to come and visit us. My practice had steadily increased, and as I happened to live at no very great distance from Paddington Station, I got a few patients from among the officials. One of these whom I had cured of a painful and lingering disease was never weary of advertising my virtues, and of endeavouring to send me on every sufferer over whom he might have any influence.

One morning, at a little before seven o'clock, I was awakened by the maid tapping at the door, to announce that two men had come from Paddington, and were waiting in the consulting room. I dressed hurriedly, for I knew by experience that railway cases were seldom trivial, and hastened downstairs. As I descended, my old ally, the guard, came out of the room, and closed the door tightly behind him.

"I've got him here," he whispered, jerking his thumb over his shoulder; "he's all right."

"What is it, then?" I asked, for his manner suggested that it was some strange creature which he had caged up in my room.

"It's a new patient," he whispered. "I thought I'd bring him round myself; then he couldn't slip away. There he is, all safe and sound. I must go now, doctor. I have my dooties, just the same as you." And off he went, this trusty tout, without even giving me time to thank him.

I entered my consulting room, and found a gentleman seated by the table. He was quietly dressed in a suit of heather tweed, with a soft cloth cap, which he had laid down upon my books. Round one of his hands he held a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all over with bloodstains. He was young, not more than five-and-twenty, I should say, with a strong masculine face; but he was exceedingly pale, and gave me the impression of a man who was suffering from some strong agitation, which it took all his strength of mind to control.

"I am sorry to knock you up so early, doctor," said he. "But I have had a very serious accident during the night. I came in by train this morning, and on inquiring at Paddington as to where I might find a doctor a worthy fellow very kindly escorted me here. I gave the maid a card, but I see that she has left it upon the side table."

I took it up and glanced at it. "Mr. Victor Hatherley, hydraulic engineer, 16A, Victoria street (3rd floor)." That was the name, style and abode of my morning visitor. "I regret that I have kept you waiting," said I, sitting down in my library chair. "You are fresh from a night journey, I understand, which is in itself a monotonous occupation."

"Oh, my night could not be called monotonous," said he, and laughed. He laughed very heartily, with a high ringing note, leaning back in his chair, and shaking his sides. All my medical instincts rose up against that laugh.

"Stop it!" I cried. "Pull yourself together!" and I poured out some water from a carafe.

It was useless, however. He was off in one of those hysterical outbursts which come upon a strong nature when some great crisis is over and gone. Presently he came to himself once more, very weary and blushing hotly.

"I have been making a fool of myself," he gasped.

"Not at all. Drink this." I dashed some brandy into the water, and the color began to come back to his bloodless cheeks.

"That's better!" said he. "And now, doctor, perhaps you would kindly attend to my thumb, or rather to the place where my thumb used to be."

He unwound the handkerchief and held out his hand. It gave even my hardened nerves a shudder to look at it. There were four protruding fingers and a horrid red spongy surface where the thumb should have been. It had been hacked or torn right out from the roots.

"Good heavens!" I cried. "This is a terrible injury. It must have bled considerably."

"Yes, it did. I fainted when it was done; and I think that I must have been senseless for a long time. When I came to, I found that it was still bleeding, so I tied one end of my handkerchief very tightly round the wrist and braced it up with a twig."

"Excellent! You should have been a surgeon."

"It is a question of hydraulics, you see, and came within my own province."

"This has been done," said I, examining the wound. "By a very heavy and sharp instrument."

"A thing like a cleaver," said he.

"An accident, I presume?"

"By no means."

"What a murderous attack!"

"Very murderous indeed."

"You horrify me."

I sponged the wound, cleaned it, dressed it; and, finally, covered it over with cotton wadding and carbolic bandages. He lay back without wincing, though he bit his lip from time to time.

"How is that?" I asked, when I had finished.

"Capital! Between your brandy and your bandage, I feel a new man. I was very weak, but I have had a good deal to go through."

"Perhaps you had better not speak of the matter. It is evidently trying to your nerves."

"Oh, no; not now. I shall have to tell my tale to the police; but, between ourselves, if it were not for the convincing evidence of this wound of mine, I should be surprised if they believed my statement, for it is a very extraordinary one, and I have not much in the way of proof with which to back it up. And even if they believe me, the clues which I can give them are so vague that it is a question whether justice will be done."

"Ha!" cried I; "if it is anything in the nature of a problem which you desire to see solved, I should strongly recommend you to come to my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes before you go to the official police."

"Oh, I have heard of that fellow," answered my visitor, "and I should be very glad if he would take the matter in hand, though of course I must use the official police as well. Would you give me an introduction to him?"

"I'll do better. I'll take you round to him myself."

"I should be immensely obliged to you."

"We'll call a cab, and go together. We shall just be in time to have a little breakfast with him. Do you feel equal to it?"

"Yes, I shall not feel easy until I have told my story."

"Then my servant will call a cab, and I shall be with you

in an instant." I rushed upstairs, explained the matter shortly to my wife, and in five minutes was inside a hansom, driving with my new acquaintance to Baker street.

Sherlock Holmes was, as I expected, lounging about his sitting-room in his dressing gown, reading the agony column of *The Times*, and smoking his before breakfast pipe, which was composed of all the plugs and dottels left from his smokes of the day before, all carefully dried and collected on the corner of the mantel-piece. He received us in his quietly genial fashion, ordered fresh rashers and eggs, and joined us in a hearty meal. When it was concluded he settled our new acquaintance upon the sofa, placed a pillow beneath his head, and laid a glass of brandy and water within his reach.

"It is easy to see that your experience has been no common one, Mr. Hatherley," said he. "Pray lie down there and make yourself absolutely at home. Tell us what you can, but stop when you are tired, and keep up your strength with a little stimulant."

"Thank you," said my patient. "but I have felt another man since the doctor bandaged me, and I think that your breakfast has completed the cure. I shall take up as little of your valuable time as possible, so I shall start at once upon my peculiar experiences."

Holmes said in his big armchair with the weary, heavy-lidded expression which veiled his keen and eager nature, while I sat opposite to him, and we listened in silence to the strange story which our visitor detailed to us.

"You must know," said he, "that I am an orphan and a bachelor, residing alone in lodgings in London. By profession I am a hydraulic engineer, and I have had considerable experience of my work during the seven years that I was apprenticed to Venner and Matheson, the well-known firm at Greenwich. Two years ago, having served my time, and having also come into a fair sum of money through my poor father's death, I determined to start in business for myself, and took professional chambers in Victoria street."

I suppose that everyone finds his first independent start in business a dreary experience. To me it has been exceptionally so. During two years I have had three consultations and one small job, and that is absolutely all that my profession has brought me. My gross takings amount to twenty-seven pounds ten. Every day, from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, I waited in my little den, until at last my heart began to sink, and I came to believe that I should never have any practice at all.

Yesterday, however, just as I was thinking of leaving the office, my clerk entered to say there was a gentleman waiting who wished to see me upon business. He brought up a card, too, with the name of "Colonel Lysander Stark" engraved upon it. Close at his heels came the Colonel himself, a man rather over the middle size but of an exceeding thinness. I do not think that I have ever seen so thin a man. His whole face sharpened away into nose and chin, and the skin of his cheeks was drawn quite taut over his outstanding bones. Yet this emaciation seemed to be his natural habit, and due to no disease, for his eye was bright, his step brisk, and his bearing assured. He was plainly but neatly dressed, and his age, I should judge, would be nearer forty than thirty.

"Mr. Hatherley?" said he, with something of a German accent. "You have been recommended to me, Mr. Hatherley, as being a man who is not only proficient in his profession, but is also discreet and capable of preserving a secret."

I bowed, feeling as flattered as any young man would at such an address. "May I ask who it was who gave me so good a character?" I asked.

"Well, perhaps it is better that I should not tell you that just at this moment. I have it from the same source that you are both an orphan and a bachelor, and are residing alone in London."

"That is quite correct," I answered, "but you will excuse me if I say that I cannot see how all this bears upon my professional qualifications. I understood that it was on a professional matter that you wished to speak to me?"

"Undoubtedly so. But you will find that all I say is really to the point. I have a professional commission for you, but absolute secrecy is quite essential—absolute secrecy, you understand, and of course we may expect that more from a man who is alone than from one who lives in the bosom of his family."

"If I promise to keep a secret," said I, "you may absolutely depend upon my doing so."

"He looked very hard at me as I spoke, and it seemed to me that I had never seen so suspicious and questioning an eye."

"You do promise, then?" said he at last.

"Yes, I promise."

"Absolute and complete silence, before, during and after? No reference to the matter at all, either in word or writing?"

"I have already given you my word."

"Very good." He suddenly sprang up, and darting like lightning across the room he flung open the door. The passage outside was empty.

"That's right," said he, coming back. "I know that clerks are sometimes curious as to their master's affairs. Now we can talk in safety." He drew up his chair very close to mine, and began to stare at me again with the same questioning and thoughtful look.

A feeling of repulsion, and of something akin to fear had begun to rise within me at the strange antics of this fleshless man. Even my dread of losing a client could not restrain me from showing my impatience.

"I beg that you will state your business, sir," said I; "my time is of value. Heaven forgive me for that last sentence, but the words came to my lips."

"How would fifty guineas for a night's work suit you?" he asked.

"Most admirably."

"I say a night's work, but an hour's would be nearer the mark. I simply want your opinion about a hydraulic stamping machine which has got out of gear. If you show us what is wrong we shall soon set it right ourselves. What do you think of such a commission as that?"

"A thing like a cleaver, and the pay munificent."

"Precisely so. We shall want you to come to-night by the last train."

"Where to?"

"To Eyford, in Berkshire. It is a little place near the borders of Oxfordshire, and within seven miles of Reading. There is a train from Paddington which would bring you in there at about eleven fifteen."

"Very good."

"I shall come down in a carriage to meet you."

"There is a drive, then?"

"Yes, our little place is quite out in the country. It is a good seven miles from Eyford Station."

"Then we can hardly get there before midnight. I suppose there would be no chance of a train back. I should be compelled to stop the night?"

"Yes, we could easily give you a shakedown."

"That is very awkward. Could I not come at some more convenient hour?"

"We have judged it best that you should come late. It is to recompense you for any inconvenience that we are paying to you, a young and unknown man, a fee which would buy an opinion from the very heads of your profession. Still, of course, if you would like to draw out of the business, there is plenty of time to do so."

"I thought of the fifty guineas, and of how very useful they would be to me. Not at all," said I. "I shall be very happy to accommodate myself to your wishes. I should like, however, to understand a little more clearly what it is that you wish me to do."

"Quite so. It is very natural that the pledge of secrecy which we have exacted from you should have aroused your curiosity. I have no wish to commit you to anything without your having it all laid before you. I suppose that we are absolutely safe from eavesdroppers?"

"Entirely."

TO BE CONTINUED.

MINNIE MAY'S DEPARTMENT.

Fashion Notes.

The effect of the many-gored skirt is the same as the old bell skirt, but many costumes show a polonaise producing a rippling effect. Some skirts are elaborately trimmed to the waist, while others have only bands of braid, velvet or moire ribbon, laid on. Flat flounces of lace are favorites for summer suits, and groups of small flowers made of the material continue in fashion. The cool and comfortable blouse-waist, made of washing material, comes made up in all materials and all prices, but the dexterous needle-woman can make her own at half the cost, and quite as pretty as imported ones. Basques are round, pointed, long and short, trimmed and plain, with vests or without, just as the purse and fancy of the wearer dictates. Breteles are very improving to most shoulders, giving every costume a dressy effect. Sleeves are wider, if possible, than before, and puff, leg-o-mutton and gigot sleeves are equally favorite patterns. None of these sleeves are trimmed, only a small cuff at the wrist or a few rows of whatever trims the skirt.

Hats and bonnets are bewildering in their beauty and variety. Flowers and lace are seen on



all of them, and huge bows of ribbon—if black, moire is used, but silk, satin and fancy ribbon, the brighter the better—adorns the crown and brim. Bonnets are small as they can be made, but very becoming, and one of these dressy affairs imparts a smartness to the plainest toilet, and the large bow under the chin is again the favorite.

Sashes promise to become popular, tied in large bows at the back, the ends finished with fringe or lace. "Choker" collars are the approved finish for woolen gowns.

Recipes.

MAPLE SUGAR CARAMELS.

Maple and yellow sugar, of each 1 1/2 lbs.; boil until it snaps when tested, and slowly add 1/2 pint cream; boil until brittle; add 1/2 lb. butter and boil again until brittle. Pour into greased tins, and when nearly cold cut into squares.

GRAHAM PUDDING.

Take 1 1/2 cups of Graham flour, 1 cup sweet milk, 1 cup molasses, 1 cup stoned raisins, 1/2 teaspoonful salt, 1 teaspoon saleratus. Steam three hours. Eat with sauce. Excellent.

FRIED CAKES.

Two eggs, 1 cup sugar, 3 tablespoons melted butter, 1 teaspoon soda dissolved in 1 cup sour milk, 1 heaping teaspoon baking powder, sifted in enough flour to roll out smoothly. Season with nutmeg or cinnamon. Roll them and fry in moderately hot lard.

EGG OMELET.

Take 6 eggs, 1 cup cream, 1 tablespoon flour and a little salt. Butter a hot skillet and pour in the batter.

In the Berkshire hills there was a funeral, and, as they gathered in the little parlor, there came the typical New England female, who mingles curiosity with her sympathy, and, as she glanced about the darkened room, she said to the bereaved widow, "When did you get that new eight-day clock?" "When did you get that new eight-day clock?" "We ain't got no new eight-day clock," was the reply. "You ain't? What's that in the corner there?" "Why, no; that's not an eight-day clock; that's the deceased; we stood him on end to make room for the mourners."