

АРТУР КОНАН ДОЙЛ

THE STARK MUNRO
LETTERS

Артур Конан Дойл

The Stark Munro Letters

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Дойл А.

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Arthur Conan Doyle
The Stark Munro Letters Being series of
twelve letters written by J. Stark Munro,
M.B., to his friend and former fellow-
student, Herbert Swanborough, of Lowell,
Massachusetts, during the years 1881-1884

The letters of my friend Mr. Stark Munro appear to me to form so connected a whole, and to give so plain an account of some of the troubles which a young man may be called upon to face right away at the outset of his career, that I have handed them over to the gentleman who is about to edit them. There are two of them, the fifth and the ninth, from which some excisions are necessary; but in the main I hope that they may be reproduced as they stand. I am sure that there is no privilege which my friend would value more highly than the thought that some other young man, harassed by the needs of this world and doubts of the next, should have gotten strength by reading how a brother had passed down the valley of shadow before him.

HERBERT SWANBOROUGH. LOWELL, MASS.

I. HOME. 30th March, 1881

I have missed you very much since your return to America, my dear Bertie, for you are the one man upon this earth to whom I have ever been able to unreservedly open my whole mind. I don't know why it is; for, now that I come to think of it, I have never enjoyed very much of your confidence in return. But that may be my fault. Perhaps you don't find me sympathetic, even though I have every wish to be. I can only say that I find you intensely so, and perhaps I presume too much upon the fact. But no, every instinct in my nature tells me that I don't bore you by my confidences.

Can you remember Cullingworth at the University? You never were in the athletic set, and so it is possible that you don't. Anyway, I'll take it for granted that you don't, and explain it all from the beginning. I'm sure that you would know his photograph, however, for the reason that he was the ugliest and queerest-looking man of our year.

Physically he was a fine athlete – one of the fastest and most determined Rugby forwards that I have ever known, though he played so savage a game that he was never given his international cap. He was well-grown, five foot nine perhaps, with square shoulders, an arching chest, and a quick jerky way of walking. He had a round strong head, bristling with short wiry black hair. His face was wonderfully ugly, but it was the ugliness of character, which is as attractive as beauty. His jaw and eyebrows were scraggy and rough-hewn, his nose aggressive and red-shot, his eyes small and near set, light blue in colour, and capable of assuming a very genial and also an exceedingly vindictive expression. A slight wiry moustache covered his upper lip, and his teeth were yellow, strong, and overlapping. Add to this that he seldom wore collar or necktie, that his throat was the colour and texture of the bark of a Scotch fir, and that he had a voice and especially a laugh like a bull's bellow. Then you have some idea (if you can piece all these items in your mind) of the outward James Cullingworth.

But the inner man, after all, was what was most worth noting. I don't pretend to know what genius is. Carlyle's definition always seemed to me to be a very crisp and clear statement of what it is NOT. Far from its being an infinite capacity for taking pains, its leading characteristic, as far as I have ever been able to observe it, has been that it allows the possessor of it to attain results by a sort of instinct which other men could only reach by hard work. In this sense Cullingworth was the greatest genius that I have ever known. He never seemed to work, and yet he took the anatomy prize over the heads of all the ten-hour-a-day men. That might not count for much, for he was quite capable of idling ostentatiously all day and then reading desperately all night; but start a subject of your own for him, and then see his originality and strength. Talk about torpedoes, and he would catch up a pencil, and on the back of an old envelope from his pocket he would sketch out some novel contrivance for piercing a ship's netting and getting at her side, which might no doubt involve some technical impossibility, but which would at least be quite plausible and new. Then as he drew, his bristling eyebrows would contract, his small eyes would gleam with excitement, his lips would be pressed together, and he would end by banging on the paper with his open hand, and shouting in his exultation. You would think that his one mission in life was to invent torpedoes. But next instant, if you were to express surprise as to how it was that the Egyptian workmen elevated the stones to the top of the pyramids, out would come the pencil and envelope, and he would propound a scheme for doing that with equal energy and conviction. This ingenuity was joined to an extremely sanguine nature. As he paced up and down in his jerky quick-stepping fashion after one of these flights of invention, he would take out patents for it, receive you as his partner in the enterprise, have it adopted in every civilised country, see all conceivable applications of it, count up his probable royalties, sketch out the novel methods in which he would invest his gains, and finally retire with the most gigantic fortune that has ever been amassed. And you would be swept along by his words, and would be carried every foot of the way with him, so that it would come as quite a shock to you when you suddenly fell back to

earth again, and found yourself trudging the city street a poor student, with Kirk's Physiology under your arm, and hardly the price of your luncheon in your pocket.

I read over what I have written, but I can see that I give you no real insight into the demoniac cleverness of Cullingworth. His views upon medicine were most revolutionary, but I daresay that if things fulfil their promise I may have a good deal to say about them in the sequel. With his brilliant and unusual gifts, his fine athletic record, his strange way of dressing (his hat on the back of his head and his throat bare), his thundering voice, and his ugly, powerful face, he had quite the most marked individuality of any man that I have ever known.

Now, you will think me rather prolix about this man; but, as it looks as if his life might become entwined with mine, it is a subject of immediate interest to me, and I am writing all this for the purpose of reviving my own half-faded impressions, as well as in the hope of amusing and interesting you. So I must just give you one or two other points which may make his character more clear to you.

He had a dash of the heroic in him. On one occasion he was placed in such a position that he must choose between compromising a lady, or springing out of a third-floor window. Without a moment's hesitation he hurled himself out of the window. As luck would have it, he fell through a large laurel bush on to a garden plot, which was soft with rain, and so escaped with a shaking and a bruising. If I have to say anything that gives a bad impression of the man, put that upon the other side.

He was fond of rough horse-play; but it was better to avoid it with him, for you could never tell what it might lead to. His temper was nothing less than infernal. I have seen him in the dissecting-rooms begin to skylark with a fellow, and then in an instant the fun would go out of his face, his little eyes would gleam with fury, and the two would be rolling, worrying each other like dogs, below the table. He would be dragged off, panting and speechless with fury, with his wiry hair bristling straight up like a fighting terrier's.

This pugnacious side of his character would be worthily used sometimes. I remember that an address which was being given to us by an eminent London specialist was much interrupted by a man in the front row, who amused himself by interjecting remarks. The lecturer appealed to his audience at last. "These interruptions are insufferable, gentlemen," said he; "will no one free me from this annoyance?" "Hold your tongue – you, sir, on the front bench," cried Cullingworth, in his bull's bellow. "Perhaps you'll make me," said the fellow, turning a contemptuous face over his shoulder. Cullingworth closed his note-book, and began to walk down on the tops of the desks to the delight of the three hundred spectators. It was fine to see the deliberate way in which he picked his way among the ink bottles. As he sprang down from the last bench on to the floor, his opponent struck him a smashing blow full in the face. Cullingworth got his bulldog grip on him, however, and rushed him backwards out of the class-room. What he did with him I don't know, but there was a noise like the delivery of a ton of coals; and the champion of law and order returned, with the sedate air of a man who had done his work. One of his eyes looked like an over-ripe damson, but we gave him three cheers as he made his way back to his seat. Then we went on with the dangers of *Placenta Praevia*.

He was not a man who drank hard, but a little drink would have a very great effect upon him. Then it was that the ideas would surge from his brain, each more fantastic and ingenious than the last. And if ever he did get beyond the borderland he would do the most amazing things. Sometimes it was the fighting instinct that would possess him, sometimes the preaching, and sometimes the comic, or they might come in succession, replacing each other so rapidly as to bewilder his companions. Intoxication brought all kinds of queer little peculiarities with it. One of them was that he could walk or run perfectly straight, but that there always came a time when he unconsciously returned upon his tracks and retraced his steps again. This had a strange effect sometimes, as in the instance which I am about to tell you.

Very sober to outward seeming, but in a frenzy within, he went down to the station one night, and, stooping to the pigeon-hole, he asked the ticket-clerk, in the suavest voice, whether he could tell him how far it was to London. The official put forward his face to reply when Cullingworth drove

his fist through the little hole with the force of a piston. The clerk flew backwards off his stool, and his yell of pain and indignation brought some police and railway men to his assistance. They pursued Cullingworth; but he, as active and as fit as a greyhound, outraced them all, and vanished into the darkness, down the long, straight street. The pursuers had stopped, and were gathered in a knot talking the matter over, when, looking up, they saw, to their amazement, the man whom they were after, running at the top of his speed in their direction. His little peculiarity had asserted itself, you see, and he had unconsciously turned in his flight. They tripped him up, flung themselves upon him, and after a long and desperate struggle dragged him to the police station. He was charged before the magistrate next morning, but made such a brilliant speech from the dock in his own defence that he carried the Court with him, and escaped with a nominal fine. At his invitation, the witnesses and the police trooped after him to the nearest hotel, and the affair ended in universal whisky-and-sodas.

Well, now, if, after all these illustrations, I have failed to give you some notion of the man, able, magnetic, unscrupulous, interesting, many-sided, I must despair of ever doing so. I'll suppose, however, that I have not failed; and I will proceed to tell you, my most patient of confidants, something of my personal relations with Cullingworth.

When I first made a casual acquaintance with him he was a bachelor. At the end of a long vacation, however, he met me in the street, and told me, in his loud-voiced volcanic shoulder-slapping way, that he had just been married. At his invitation, I went up with him then and there to see his wife; and as we walked he told me the history of his wedding, which was as extraordinary as everything else he did. I won't tell it to you here, my dear Bertie, for I feel that I have dived down too many side streets already; but it was a most bustling business, in which the locking of a governess into her room and the dyeing of Cullingworth's hair played prominent parts. Apropos of the latter he was never quite able to get rid of its traces; and from this time forward there was added to his other peculiarities the fact that when the sunlight struck upon his hair at certain angles, it turned it all iridescent and shimmering.

Well, I went up to his lodgings with him, and was introduced to Mrs. Cullingworth. She was a timid, little, sweet-faced, grey-eyed woman, quiet-voiced and gentle-mannered. You had only to see the way in which she looked at him to understand that she was absolutely under his control, and that do what he might, or say what he might, it would always be the best thing to her. She could be obstinate, too, in a gentle, dove-like sort of way; but her obstinacy lay always in the direction of backing up his sayings and doings. This, however, I was only to find out afterwards; and at that, my first visit, she impressed me as being one of the sweetest little women that I had ever known.

They were living in the most singular style, in a suite of four small rooms, over a grocer's shop. There was a kitchen, a bedroom, a sitting-room, and a fourth room, which Cullingworth insisted upon regarding as a most unhealthy apartment and a focus of disease, though I am convinced that it was nothing more than the smell of cheeses from below which had given him the idea. At any rate, with his usual energy he had not only locked the room up, but had gummed varnished paper over all the cracks of the door, to prevent the imaginary contagion from spreading. The furniture was the sparest possible. There were, I remember, only two chairs in the sitting-room; so that when a guest came (and I think I was the only one) Cullingworth used to squat upon a pile of yearly volumes of the British Medical Journal in the corner. I can see him now levering himself up from his lowly seat, and striding about the room roaring and striking with his hands, while his little wife sat mum in the corner, listening to him with love and admiration in her eyes. What did we care, any one of the three of us, where we sat or how we lived, when youth throbbed hot in our veins, and our souls were all aflame with the possibilities of life? I still look upon those Bohemian evenings, in the bare room amid the smell of the cheese, as being among the happiest that I have known.

I was a frequent visitor to the Cullingworths, for the pleasure that I got was made the sweeter by the pleasure which I hoped that I gave. They knew no one, and desired to know no one; so that socially I seemed to be the only link that bound them to the world. I even ventured to interfere in the details of their little menage. Cullingworth had a fad at the time, that all the diseases of civilisation

were due to the abandonment of the open-air life of our ancestors, and as a corollary he kept his windows open day and night. As his wife was obviously fragile, and yet would have died before she would have uttered a word of complaint, I took it upon myself to point out to him that the cough from which she suffered was hardly to be cured so long as she spent her life in a draught. He scowled savagely at me for my interference; and I thought we were on the verge of a quarrel, but it blew over, and he became more considerate in the matter of ventilation.

Our evening occupations just about that time were of a most extraordinary character. You are aware that there is a substance, called waxy matter, which is deposited in the tissues of the body during the course of certain diseases. What this may be and how it is formed has been a cause for much bickering among pathologists. Cullingworth had strong views upon the subject, holding that the waxy matter was really the same thing as the glycogen which is normally secreted by the liver. But it is one thing to have an idea, and another to be able to prove it. Above all, we wanted some waxy matter with which to experiment. But fortune favoured us in the most magical way. The Professor of Pathology had come into possession of a magnificent specimen of the condition. With pride he exhibited the organ to us in the class-room before ordering his assistant to remove it to the ice-chest, preparatory to its being used for microscopical work in the practical class. Cullingworth saw his chance, and acted on the instant. Slipping out of the classroom, he threw open the ice-chest, rolled his ulster round the dreadful glistening mass, closed the chest again, and walked quietly away. I have no doubt that to this day the disappearance of that waxy liver is one of the most inexplicable mysteries in the career of our Professor.

That evening, and for many evenings to come, we worked upon our liver. For our experiments it was necessary to subject it all to great heat in an endeavour to separate the nitrogenous cellular substance from the non-nitrogenous waxy matter. With our limited appliances the only way we could think of was to cut it into fine pieces and cook it in a frying pan. So night after night the curious spectacle might have been seen of a beautiful young woman and two very earnest young men busily engaged in making these grim fricassees. Nothing came of all our work; for though Cullingworth considered that he had absolutely established his case, and wrote long screeds to the medical papers upon the subject, he was never apt at stating his views with his pen, and he left, I am sure, a very confused idea on the minds of his readers as to what it was that he was driving at. Again, as he was a mere student without any letters after his name, he got scant attention, and I never heard that he gained over a single supporter.

At the end of the year we both passed our examinations and became duly qualified medical men. The Cullingworths vanished away, and I never heard any more of them, for he was a man who prided himself upon never writing a letter. His father had formerly a very large and lucrative practice in the West of Scotland, but he died some years ago. I had a vague idea, founded upon some chance remark of his, that Cullingworth had gone to see whether the family name might still stand him in good stead there. As for me I began, as you will remember that I explained in my last, by acting as assistant in my father's practice. You know, however, that at its best it is not worth more than L700 a year, with no room for expansion. This is not large enough to keep two of us at work. Then, again, there are times when I can see that my religious opinions annoy the dear old man. On the whole, and for every reason, I think that it would be better if I were out of this. I applied for several steamship lines, and for at least a dozen house surgeonships; but there is as much competition for a miserable post with a hundred a year as if it were the Viceroyship of India. As a rule, I simply get my testimonials returned without any comment, which is the sort of thing that teaches a man humility. Of course, it is very pleasant to live with the mater, and my little brother Paul is a regular trump. I am teaching him boxing; and you should see him put his tiny fists up, and counter with his right. He got me under the jaw this evening, and I had to ask for poached eggs for supper.

And all this brings me up to the present time and the latest news. It is that I had a telegram from Cullingworth this morning – after nine months' silence. It was dated from Avonmouth, the town

where I had suspected that he had settled, and it said simply, "Come at once. I have urgent need of you. CULLINGWORTH." Of course, I shall go by the first train to-morrow. It may mean anything or nothing. In my heart of hearts I hope and believe that old Cullingworth sees an opening for me either as his partner or in some other way. I always believed that he would turn up trumps, and make my fortune as well as his own. He knows that if I am not very quick or brilliant I am fairly steady and reliable. So that's what I've been working up to all along, Bertie, that to-morrow I go to join Cullingworth, and that it looks as if there was to be an opening for me at last. I gave you a sketch of him and his ways, so that you may take an interest in the development of my fortune, which you could not do if you did not know something of the man who is holding out his hand to me.

Yesterday was my birthday, and I was two and twenty years of age. For two and twenty years have I swung around the sun. And in all seriousness, without a touch of levity, and from the bottom of my soul, I assure you that I have at the present moment the very vaguest idea as to whence I have come from, whither I am going, or what I am here for. It is not for want of inquiry, or from indifference. I have mastered the principles of several religions. They have all shocked me by the violence which I should have to do to my reason to accept the dogmas of any one of them. Their ethics are usually excellent. So are the ethics of the common law of England. But the scheme of creation upon which those ethics are built! Well, it really is to me the most astonishing thing that I have seen in my short earthly pilgrimage, that so many able men, deep philosophers, astute lawyers, and clear-headed men of the world should accept such an explanation of the facts of life. In the face of their apparent concurrence my own poor little opinion would not dare to do more than lurk at the back of my soul, were it not that I take courage when I reflect that the equally eminent lawyers and philosophers of Rome and Greece were all agreed that Jupiter had numerous wives and was fond of a glass of good wine.

Mind, my dear Bertie, I do not wish to run down your view or that of any other man. We who claim toleration should be the first to extend it to others. I am only indicating my own position, as I have often done before. And I know your reply so well. Can't I hear your grave voice saying "Have faith!" Your conscience allows you to. Well, mine won't allow me. I see so clearly that faith is not a virtue, but a vice. It is a goat which has been herded with the sheep. If a man deliberately shut his physical eyes and refused to use them, you would be as quick as any one in seeing that it was immoral and a treason to Nature. And yet you would counsel a man to shut that far more precious gift, the reason, and to refuse to use it in the most intimate question of life.

"The reason cannot help in such a matter," you reply. I answer that to say so is to give up a battle before it is fought. My reason SHALL help me, and when it can help no longer I shall do without help.

It's late, Bertie, and the fire's out, and I'm shivering; and you, I'm very sure, are heartily weary of my gossip and my heresies, so adieu until my next.

II. HOME, 10th April, 1881

Well, my dear Bertie, here I am again in your postbox. It's not a fortnight since I wrote you that great long letter, and yet you see I have news enough to make another formidable budget. They say that the art of letter-writing has been lost; but if quantity may atone for quality, you must confess that (for your sins) you have a friend who has retained it.

When I wrote to you last I was on the eve of going down to join the Cullingworths at Avonmouth, with every hope that he had found some opening for me. I must tell you at some length the particulars of that expedition.

I travelled down part of the way with young Leslie Duncan, whom I think you know. He was gracious enough to consider that a third-class carriage and my company were to be preferred to a first class with solitude. You know that he came into his uncle's money a little time ago, and after a first delirious outbreak, he has now relapsed into that dead heavy state of despair which is caused by having everything which one can wish for. How absurd are the ambitions of life when I think that I, who am fairly happy and as keen as a razor edge, should be struggling for that which I can see has brought neither profit nor happiness to him! And yet, if I can read my own nature, it is not the accumulation of money which is my real aim, but only that I may acquire so much as will relieve my mind of sordid cares and enable me to develop any gifts which I may have, undisturbed. My tastes are so simple that I cannot imagine any advantage which wealth can give – save indeed the exquisite pleasure of helping a good man or a good cause. Why should people ever take credit for charity when they must know that they cannot gain as much pleasure out of their guineas in any other fashion? I gave my watch to a broken schoolmaster the other day (having no change in my pocket), and the mater could not quite determine whether it was a trait of madness or of nobility. I could have told her with absolute confidence that it was neither the one nor the other, but a sort of epicurean selfishness with perhaps a little dash of swagger away down at the bottom of it. What had I ever had from my chronometer like the quiet thrill of satisfaction when the fellow brought me the pawn ticket and told me that the thirty shillings had been useful?

Leslie Duncan got out at Carstairs, and I was left alone with a hale, white-haired, old Roman Catholic priest, who had sat quietly reading his office in the corner. We fell into the most intimate talk, which lasted all the way to Avonmouth – indeed, so interested was I that I very nearly passed through the place without knowing it. Father Logan (for that was his name) seemed to me to be a beautiful type of what a priest should be – self-sacrificing and pure-minded, with a kind of simple cunning about him, and a deal of innocent fun. He had the defects as well as the virtues of his class, for he was absolutely reactionary in his views. We discussed religion with fervour, and his theology was somewhere about the Early Pliocene. He might have chattered the matter over with a priest of Charlemagne's Court, and they would have shaken hands after every sentence. He would acknowledge this and claim it as a merit. It was consistency in his eyes. If our astronomers and inventors and law-givers had been equally consistent where would modern civilisation be? Is religion the only domain of thought which is non-progressive, and to be referred for ever to a standard set two thousand years ago? Can they not see that as the human brain evolves it must take a wider outlook? A half-formed brain makes a half-formed God, and who shall say that our brains are even half-formed yet? The truly inspired priest is the man or woman with the big brain. It is not the shaven patch on the outside, but it is the sixty ounces within which is the real mark of election.

You know that you are turning up your nose at me, Bertie. I can see you do it. But I'll come off the thin ice, and you shall have nothing but facts now. I'm afraid that I should never do for a storyteller, for the first stray character that comes along puts his arm in mine and walks me off, with my poor story straggling away to nothing behind me.

Well, then, it was night when we reached Avonmouth, and as I popped my head out of the carriage window, the first thing that my eyes rested upon was old Cullingworth, standing in, the circle of light under a gas-lamp. His frock coat was flying open, his waistcoat unbuttoned at the top, and his hat (a top hat this time) jammed on the back of his head, with his bristling hair spurting out in front of it. In every way, save that he wore a collar, he was the same Cullingworth as ever. He gave a roar of recognition when he saw me, hustled me out of my carriage, seized my carpet bag, or grip-sack as you used to call it, and a minute later we were striding along together through the streets.

I was, as you may imagine, all in a tingle to know what it was that he wanted with me. However, as he made no allusion to it, I did not care to ask, and, during our longish walk, we talked about indifferent matters. It was football first, I remember, whether Richmond had a chance against Blackheath, and the way in which the new passing game was shredding the old scrimmages. Then he got on to inventions, and became so excited that he had to give me back my bag in order that he might be able to slap all his points home with his fist upon his palm. I can see him now stopping, with his face leaning forward and his yellow tusks gleaming in the lamplight.

“My dear Munro” (this was the style of the thing), “why was armour abandoned, eh? What! I’ll tell you why. It was because the weight of metal that would protect a man who was standing up was more than he could carry. But battles are not fought now-a-days by men who are standing up. Your infantry are all lying on their stomachs, and it would take very little to protect them. And steel has improved, Munro! Chilled steel! Bessemer! Bessemer! Very good. How much to cover a man? Fourteen inches by twelve, meeting at an angle so that the bullet will glance. A notch at one side for the rifle. There you have it, laddie – the Cullingworth patent portable bullet-proof shield! Weight? Oh, the weight would be sixteen pounds. I worked it out. Each company carries its shields in go-carts, and they are served out on going into action. Give me twenty thousand good shots, and I’ll go in at Calais and come out at Pekin. Think of it, my boy! the moral effect. One side gets home every time and the other plasters its bullets up against steel plates. No troops would stand it. The nation that gets it first will pitchfork the rest of Europe over the edge. They’re bound to have it – all of them. Let’s reckon it out. There’s about eight million of them on a war footing. Let us suppose that only half of them have it. I say only half, because I don’t want to be too sanguine. That’s four million, and I should take a royalty of four shillings on wholesale orders. What’s that, Munro? About three-quarters of a million sterling, eh? How’s that, laddie, eh? What?”

Really, that is not unlike his style of talk, now that I come to read it over, only you miss the queer stops, the sudden confidential whispers, the roar with which he triumphantly answered his own questions, the shrugs and slaps, and gesticulations. But not a word all the time as to what it was that made him send me that urgent wire which brought me to Avonmouth.

I had, of course, been puzzling in my mind as to whether he had succeeded or not, though from his cheerful appearance and buoyant talk, it was tolerably clear to me that all was well with him. I was, however, surprised when, as we walked along a quiet, curving avenue, with great houses standing in their own grounds upon either side, he stopped and turned in through the iron gate which led up to one of the finest of them. The moon had broken out and shone upon the high-peaked roof, and upon the gables at each corner. When he knocked it was opened by a footman with red plush knee-breeches. I began to perceive that my friend’s success must have been something colossal.

When we came down to the dining-room for supper, Mrs. Cullingworth was waiting there to greet me. I was sorry to see that she was pale and weary-looking. However, we had a merry meal in the old style, and her husband’s animation reflected itself upon her face, until at last we might have been back in the little room, where the Medical Journals served as a chair, instead of in the great oak-furnished, picture-hung chamber to which we had been promoted. All the time, however, not one word as to the object of my journey.

When the supper was finished, Cullingworth led the way into a small sitting-room, where we both lit our pipes, and Mrs. Cullingworth her cigarette. He sat for some little time in silence, and then

bounding up rushed to the door and flung it open. It is always one of his strange peculiarities to think that people are eavesdropping or conspiring against him; for, in spite of his superficial brusqueness and frankness, a strange vein of suspicion runs through his singular and complex nature. Having satisfied himself now that there were no spies or listeners he threw himself down into his armchair.

“Munro,” said he, prodding at me with his pipe, “what I wanted to tell you is, that I am utterly, hopelessly, and irretrievably ruined.”

My chair was tilted on its back legs as he spoke, and I assure you that I was within an ace of going over. Down like a pack of cards came all my dreams as to the grand results which were to spring from my journey to Avonmouth. Yes, Bertie, I am bound to confess it: my first thought was of my own disappointment, and my second of the misfortune of my friends. He had the most diabolical intuitions, or I a very tell-tale face, for he added at once —

“Sorry to disappoint you, my boy. That’s not what you expected to hear, I can see.”

“Well,” I stammered, “it IS rather a surprise, old chap. I thought from the... from the...”

“From the house, and the footman, and the furniture,” said he. “Well, they’ve eaten me up among them... licked me clean, bones and gravy. I’m done for, my boy, unless...” — here I saw a question in his eyes — “unless some friend were to lend me his name on a bit of stamped paper.”

“I can’t do it, Cullingworth,” said I. “It’s a wretched thing to have to refuse a friend; and if I had money...”

“Wait till you’re asked, Munro,” he interrupted, with his ugliest of expressions. “Besides, as you have nothing and no prospects, what earthly use would YOUR name on a paper be?”

“That’s what I want to know,” said I, feeling a little mortified, none the less.

“Look here, laddie,” he went on; “d’you see that pile of letters on the left of the table?”

“Yes.”

“Those are duns. And d’you see those documents on the right? Well, those are County Court summonses. And, now, d’you see that;” he picked up a little ledger, and showed me three or, four names scribbled on the first page.

“That’s the practice,” he roared, and laughed until the great veins jumped out on his forehead. His wife laughed heartily also, just as she would have wept, had he been so disposed.

“It’s this way, Munro,” said he, when he had got over his paroxysm. “You have probably heard — in fact, I have told you myself — that my father had the finest practice in Scotland. As far as I could judge he was a man of no capacity, but still there you are — he had it.”

I nodded and smoked.

“Well, he’s been dead seven years, and fifty nets dipping into his little fish-pond. However, when I passed I thought my best move was to come down to the old place, and see whether I couldn’t piece the thing together again. The name ought to be worth something, I thought. But it was no use doing the thing in a half hearted way. Not a bit of use in that, Munro. The kind of people who came to him were wealthy, and must see a fine house and a man in livery. What chance was there of gathering them into a bow-windowed forty pound-a-year house with a grubby-faced maid at the door? What do you suppose I did? My boy, I took the governor’s old house, that was unlet — the very house that he kept up at five thousand a year. Off I started in rare style, and sank my last cent in furniture. But it’s no use, laddie. I can’t hold on any longer. I got two accidents and an epileptic — twenty-two pounds, eight and sixpence — that’s the lot!

“What will you do, then?”

“That’s what I wanted your advice about. That’s why I wired for you. I always respected your opinion, my boy, and I thought that now was the time to have it.”

It struck me that if he had asked for it nine months before there would have been more sense in it. What on earth could I do when affairs were in such a tangle? However, I could not help feeling complimented when so independent a fellow as Cullingworth turned to me in this way.

“You really think,” said I, “that it is no use holding on here?”

He jumped up, and began pacing the room in his swift jerky way.

“You take warning from it, Munro,” said he. “You’ve got to start yet. Take my tip, and go where no one knows you. People will trust a stranger quick enough; but if they can remember you as a little chap who ran about in knickerbockers, and got spanked with a hair brush for stealing plums, they are not going to put their lives in your keeping. It’s all very well to talk about friendship and family connections; but when a man has a pain in the stomach he doesn’t care a toss about all that. I’d stick it up in gold, letters in every medical class-room – have it carved across the gate of the University – that if a man wants friends he must go among strangers. It’s all up here, Munro; so there’s no use in advising me to hold on.”

I asked him how much he owed. It came to about seven hundred pounds. The rent alone was two hundred. He had already raised money on the furniture, and his whole assets came to less than a tenner. Of course, there was only one possible thing that I could advise.

“You must call your creditors together,” said I; “they can see for themselves that you are young and energetic – sure to succeed sooner or later. If they push you into a corner now, they can get nothing. Make that clear to them. But if you make a fresh start elsewhere and succeed, you may pay them all in full. I see no other possible way out of it.”

“I knew that you’d say that, and it’s just what I thought myself. Isn’t it, Hetty? Well, then, that settles it; and I am much obliged to you for your advice, and that’s all we’ll say about the matter to-night. I’ve made my shot and missed. Next time I shall hit, and it won’t be long either.”

His failure did not seem to weigh very heavily on his mind, for in a few minutes he was shouting away as lustily as ever. Whiskey and hot water were brought in, that we might all drink luck to the second venture.

And this whiskey led us to what might have been a troublesome affair. Cullingworth, who had drunk off a couple of glasses, waited until his wife had left the room, and then began to talk of the difficulty of getting any exercise now that he had to wait in all day in the hope of patients. This led us round to the ways in which a man might take his exercise indoors, and that to boxing. Cullingworth took a couple of pairs of gloves out of a cupboard, and proposed that we should fight a round or two then and there.

If I hadn’t been a fool, Bertie, I should never have consented. It’s one of my many weaknesses, that, whether it’s a woman or a man, anything like a challenge sets me off. But I knew Cullingworth’s ways, and I told you in my last what a lamb of a temper he has. None the less, we pushed back the table, put the lamp on a high bracket, and stood up to one another.

The moment I looked him in the face I smelled mischief. He had a gleam of settled malice in his eye. I believe it was my refusal to back his paper which was running in his head. Anyway he looked as dangerous as he could look, with his scowling face sunk forward a little, his hands down near his hips (for his boxing, like everything else about him, is unconventional), and his jaw set like a rat-trap.

I led off, and then in he came hitting with both hands, and grunting like a pig at every blow. From what I could see of him he was no boxer at all, but just a formidable rough and tumble fighter. I was guarding with both hands for half a minute, and then was rushed clean off my legs and banged up against the door, with my head nearly through one of the panels. He wouldn’t stop then, though he saw that I had no space to get my elbows back; and he let fly a right-hander which would have put me into the hall, if I hadn’t slipped it and got back to the middle of the room.

“Look here, Cullingworth,” said I; “there’s not much boxing about this game.”

“Yes, I hit pretty hard, don’t I?”

“If you come boring into me like that, I’m bound to hit you out again,” I said. “I want to play light if you’ll let me.”

The words were not out of my mouth before he was on me like a flash. I slipped him again; but the room was so small, and he as active as a cat, that there was no getting away from him. He was on me once more with a regular football rush that knocked me off my balance. Before I knew where I

was he got his left on the mark and his right on my ear. I tripped over a footstool, and then before I could get my balance he had me on the same ear again, and my head was singing like a tea-kettle. He was as pleased as possible with himself, blowing out his chest and slapping it with his palms as he took his place in the middle of the room.

“Say when you’ve had enough, Munro,” said he.

This was pretty stiff, considering that I had two inches the better of him in height, and as many stone in weight, besides being the better boxer. His energy and the size of the room had been against me so far, but he wasn’t to have all the slogging to himself in the next round if I could help it.

In he came with one of his windmill rushes. But I was on the look-out for him this time. I landed him with my left a regular nose-ender as he came, and then, ducking under his left, I got him a cross-counter on the jaw that laid him flat across his own hearthrug. He was up in an instant, with a face like a madman.

“You swine!” he shouted. “Take those gloves off, and put your hands up!” He was tugging at his own to get them off.

“Go on, you silly ass!” said I. “What is there to fight about?”

He was mad with passion, and chucked his gloves down under the table.

“By God, Munro,” he cried, “if you don’t take those gloves off, I’ll go for you, whether you have them on or not.”

“Have a glass of soda water,” said I.

He made a crack at me. “You’re afraid of me, Munro. That’s what’s the matter with you,” he snarled.

This was getting too hot, Bertie. I saw all the folly of the thing. I believed that I might whip him; but at the same time I knew that we were so much of a match that we would both get pretty badly cut up without any possible object to serve. For all that, I took my gloves off, and I think perhaps it was the wisest course after all. If Cullingworth once thought he had the whiphand of you, you might be sorry for it afterwards.

But, as fate would have it, our little barney was nipped in the bud. Mrs. Cullingworth came into the room at that instant, and screamed out when she saw her husband. His nose was bleeding and his chin was all slobbered with blood, so that I don’t wonder that it gave her a turn.

“James!” she screamed; and then to me: “What is the meaning of this, Mr. Munro?”

You should have seen the hatred in her dove’s eyes. I felt an insane impulse to pick her up and kiss her.

“We’ve only been having a little spar, Mrs. Cullingworth,” said I. “Your husband was complaining that he never got any exercise.”

“It’s all right, Hetty,” said he, pulling his coat on again. “Don’t be a little stupid. Are the servants gone to bed? Well, you might bring some water in a basin from the kitchen. Sit down, Munro, and light your pipe again. I have a hundred things that I want to talk to you about.”

So that was the end of it, and all went smoothly for the rest of the evening. But, for all that, the little wife will always look upon me as a brute and a bully; while as to Cullingworth – well, it’s rather difficult to say what Cullingworth thinks about the matter.

When I woke next morning he was in my room, and a funny-looking object he was. His dressing-gown lay on a chair, and he was putting up a fifty-six pound dumb-bell, without a rag to cover him. Nature didn’t give him a very symmetrical face, nor the sweetest of expressions; but he has a figure like a Greek statue. I was amused to see that both his eyes had a touch of shadow to them. It was his turn to grin when I sat up and found that my ear was about the shape and consistence of a toadstool. However, he was all for peace that morning, and chatted away in the most amiable manner possible.

I was to go back to my father’s that day, but I had a couple of hours with Cullingworth in his consulting room before I left. He was in his best form, and full of a hundred fantastic schemes, by which I was to help him. His great object was to get his name into the newspapers. That was the basis

of all success, according to his views. It seemed to me that he was confounding cause with effect; but I did not argue the point. I laughed until my sides ached over the grotesque suggestions which poured from him. I was to lie senseless in the roadway, and to be carried into him by a sympathising crowd, while the footman ran with a paragraph to the newspapers. But there was the likelihood that the crowd might carry me in to the rival practitioner opposite. In various disguises I was to feign fits at his very door, and so furnish fresh copy for the local press. Then I was to die – absolutely to expire – and all Scotland was to resound with how Dr. Cullingworth, of Avonmouth, had resuscitated me. His ingenious brain rang a thousand changes out of the idea, and his own impending bankruptcy was crowded right out of his thoughts by the flood of half-serious devices.

But the thing that took the fun out of him, and made him gnash his teeth, and stride cursing about the room, was to see a patient walking up the steps which led to the door of Scarsdale, his opposite neighbour. Scarsdale had a fairly busy practice, and received his people at home from ten to twelve, so that I got quite used to seeing Cullingworth fly out of his chair, and rush raving to the window. He would diagnose the cases, too, and estimate their money value until he was hardly articulate.

“There you are!” he would suddenly yell; “see that man with a limp! Every morning he goes. Displaced semilunar cartilage, and a three months’ job. The man’s worth thirty-five shillings a week. And there! I’m hanged if the woman with the rheumatic arthritis isn’t round in her bath-chair again. She’s all sealskin and lactic acid. It’s simply sickening to see how they crowd to that man. And such a man! You haven’t seen him. All the better for you. I don’t know what the devil you are laughing at, Munro. I can’t see where the fun comes in myself.”

Well, it was a short experience that visit to Avonmouth, but I think that I shall remember it all my life. Goodness knows, you must be sick enough of the subject, but when I started with so much detail I was tempted to go. It ended by my going back again in the afternoon, Cullingworth assuring me that he would call his creditors together as I had advised, and that he would let me know the result in a few days. Mrs. C. would hardly shake hands with me when I said goodbye; but I like her the better for that. He must have a great deal of good in him, or he could not have won her love and confidence so completely. Perhaps there is another Cullingworth behind the scenes – a softer, tenderer man, who can love and invite love. If there is, I have never got near him. And yet I may only have been tapping at the shell. Who knows? For that matter, it is likely enough that he has never got at the real Johnnie Munro. But you have, Bertie; and I think that you’ve had a little too much of him this time, only you encourage me to this sort of excess by your sympathetic replies. Well, I’ve done as much as the General Post Office will carry for fivepence, so I’ll conclude by merely remarking that a fortnight has passed, and that I have had no news from Avonmouth, which does not in the very slightest degree surprise me. If I ever do hear anything, which is exceedingly doubtful, you may be sure that I will put a finish to this long story.

III. HOME, 15th October, 1881

Without any figure of speech I feel quite ashamed when I think of you, Bertie. I send you one or two enormously long letters, burdened, as far as I can remember them, with all sorts of useless detail. Then, in spite of your kindly answers and your sympathy, which I have done so little to deserve, I drop you completely for more than six months. By this J pen I swear that it shall not happen again; and this letter may serve to bridge the gap and to bring you up to date in my poor affairs, in which, of all outer mankind, you alone take an interest.

To commence with what is of most moment, you may rest assured that what you said in your last letter about religion has had my most earnest attention. I am sorry that I have not got it by me to refer to (I lent it to Charlie), but I think I have the contents in my head. It is notorious, as you say, that an unbeliever may be as bigoted as any of the orthodox, and that a man may be very dogmatic in his opposition to dogma. Such men are the real enemies of free thought. If anything could persuade me to turn traitor to my reason, it would, for example, be the blasphemous and foolish pictures displayed in some of the agnostic journals.

But every movement has its crowd of camp followers, who straggle and scatter. We are like a comet, bright at the head but tailing away into mere gas behind. However, every man may speak for himself, and I do not feel that your charge comes home to me. I am only bigoted against bigotry, and that I hold to be as legitimate as violence to the violent. When one considers what effect the perversion of the religious instinct has had during the history of the world; the bitter wars, Christian and Mahomedan, Catholic and Protestant; the persecutions, the torturings, the domestic hatreds, the petty spites, with ALL creeds equally blood-guilty, one cannot but be amazed that the concurrent voice of mankind has not placed bigotry at the very head of the deadly sins. It is surely a truism to say that neither smallpox nor the plague have brought the same misery upon mankind.

I cannot be bigoted, my dear boy, when I say from the bottom of my heart that I respect every good Catholic and every good Protestant, and that I recognise that each of these forms of faith has been a powerful instrument in the hands of that inscrutable Providence which rules all things. Just as in the course of history one finds that the most far-reaching and admirable effects may proceed from a crime; so in religion, although a creed be founded upon an entirely inadequate conception of the Creator and His ways, it may none the less be the very best practical thing for the people and age which have adopted it. But if it is right for those to whom it is intellectually satisfying to adopt it, it is equally so for those to whom it is not, to protest against it, until by this process the whole mass of mankind gets gradually leavened, and pushed a little further upon their slow upward journey.

Catholicism is the more thorough. Protestantism is the more reasonable. Protestantism adapts itself to modern civilisation. Catholicism expects civilisation to adapt itself to it. Folk climb from the one big branch to the other big branch, and think they have made a prodigious change, when the main trunk is rotten beneath them, and both must in their present forms be involved sooner or later in a common ruin. The movement of human thought, though slow, is still in the direction of truth, and the various religions which man sheds as he advances (each admirable in its day) will serve, like buoys dropped down from a sailing vessel, to give the rate and direction of his progress.

But how do I know what is truth, you ask? I don't. But I know particularly well what isn't. And surely that is something to have gained. It isn't true that the great central Mind that planned all things is capable of jealousy or of revenge, or of cruelty or of injustice. These are human attributes; and the book which ascribes them to the Infinite must be human also. It isn't true that the laws of Nature have been capriciously disturbed, that snakes have talked, that women have been turned to salt, that rods have brought water out of rocks. You must in honesty confess that if these things were presented to us when we were, adults for the first time, we should smile at them. It isn't true that the Fountain of all common sense should punish a race for a venial offence committed by a person long since dead,

and then should add to the crass injustice by heaping the whole retribution upon a single innocent scapegoat. Can you not see all the want of justice and logic, to say nothing of the want of mercy, involved in such a conception? Can you not see it, Bertie? How can you blind yourself to it! Take your eyes away from the details for a moment, and look at this root idea of the predominant Faith. Is the general conception of it consistent with infinite wisdom and mercy? If not, what becomes of the dogmas, the sacraments, the whole scheme which is founded upon this sand-bank? Courage, my friend! At the right moment all will be laid aside, as the man whose strength increases lays down the crutch which has been a good friend to him in his weakness. But his changes won't be over then. His hobble will become a walk, and his walk a run. There is no finality – CAN be none since the question concerns the infinite. All this, which appears too advanced to you to-day, will seem reactionary and conservative a thousand years hence.

Since I am upon this topic, may I say just a little more without boring you? You say that criticism such as mine is merely destructive, and that I have nothing to offer in place of what I pull down. This is not quite correct. I think that there are certain elemental truths within our grasp which ask for no faith for their acceptance, and which are sufficient to furnish us with a practical religion, having so much of reason in it that it would draw thinking men into its fold, not drive them forth from it.

When we all get back to these elemental and provable facts there will be some hopes of ending the petty bickerings of creeds, and of including the whole human family in one comprehensive system of thought.

When first I came out of the faith in which I had been reared, I certainly did feel for a time as if my life-belt had burst. I won't exaggerate and say that I was miserable and plunged in utter spiritual darkness. Youth is too full of action for that. But I was conscious of a vague unrest, of a constant want of repose, of an emptiness and hardness which I had not noticed in life before. I had so identified religion with the Bible that I could not conceive them apart. When the foundation proved false, the whole structure came rattling about my ears. And then good old Carlyle came to the rescue; and partly from him, and partly from my own broodings, I made a little hut of my own, which has kept me snug ever since, and has even served to shelter a friend or two besides.

The first and main thing was to get it thoroughly soaked into one that the existence of a Creator and an indication of His attributes does in no way depend upon Jewish poets, nor upon human paper or printing ink. On the contrary, all such efforts to realise Him must only belittle Him, bringing the Infinite down to the narrow terms of human thought, at a time when that thought was in the main less spiritual than it is at present. Even the most material of modern minds would flinch at depicting the Deity as ordering wholesale executions, and hacking kings to pieces upon the horns of altars.

Then having prepared your mind for a higher (if perhaps a vaguer) idea of the Deity, proceed to study Him in His works, which cannot be counterfeited or manipulated. Nature is the true revelation of the Deity to man. The nearest green field is the inspired page from which you may read all that it is needful for you to know.

I confess that I have never been able to understand the position of the atheist. In fact, I have come to disbelieve in his existence, and to look upon the word as a mere term of theological reproach. It may represent a temporary condition, a passing mental phase, a defiant reaction against an anthropomorphic ideal; but I cannot conceive that any man can continue to survey Nature and to deny that there are laws at work which display intelligence and power. The very existence of a world carries with it the proof of a world-maker, as the table guarantees the pre-existence of the carpenter. Granting this, one may form what conception one will of that Maker, but one cannot be an atheist.

Wisdom and power and means directed to an end run all through the scheme of Nature. What proof do we want, then, from a book? If the man who observes the myriad stars, and considers that they and their innumerable satellites move in their serene dignity through the heavens, each swinging clear of the other's orbit – if, I say, the man who sees this cannot realise the Creator's attributes without the help of the book of Job, then his view of things is beyond my understanding. Nor is it

only in the large things that we see the ever present solicitude of some intelligent force. Nothing is too tiny for that fostering care. We see the minute proboscis of the insect carefully adjusted to fit into the calyx of the flower, the most microscopic hair and gland each with its definite purposeful function to perform. What matter whether these came by special creation or by evolution? We know as a matter of fact that they came by evolution, but that only defines the law. It does not explain it.

But if this power has cared for the bee so as to furnish it with its honey bag and its collecting forceps, and for the lowly seed so as to have a thousand devices by which it reaches a congenial soil, then is it conceivable that we, the highest product of all, are overlooked? It is NOT conceivable. The idea is inconsistent with the scheme of creation as we see it. I say again that no faith is needed to attain the certainty of a most watchful Providence.

And with this certainty surely we have all that is necessary for an elemental religion. Come what may after death, our duties lie clearly defined before us in this life; and the ethical standard of all creeds agrees so far that there is not likely to be any difference of opinion as to that. The last reformation simplified Catholicism. The coming one will simplify Protestantism. And when the world is ripe for it another will come and simplify that. The ever improving brain will give us an ever broadening creed. Is it not glorious to think that evolution is still living and acting – that if we have an anthropoid ape as an ancestor, we may have archangels for our posterity?

Well, I really never intended to inflict all this upon you, Bertie. I thought I could have made my position clear in a page or so. But you can see how one point has brought up another. Even now I am leaving so much unsaid. I can see with such certainty exactly what you will say. “If you deduce a good Providence from the good things in nature, what do you make of the evil?” That’s what you will say. Suffice it that I am inclined to deny the existence of evil. Not another word will I say upon the subject; but if you come back to it yourself, then be it on your own head.

You remember that when I wrote last I had just returned from visiting the Cullingworths at Avonmouth, and that he had promised to let me know what steps he took in appeasing his creditors. As I expected, I have not had one word from him since. But in a roundabout way I did get some news as to what happened. From this account, which was second-hand, and may have been exaggerated, Cullingworth did exactly what I had recommended, and calling all his creditors together he made them a long statement as to his position. The good people were so touched by the picture that he drew of a worthy man fighting against adversity that several of them wept, and there was not only complete unanimity as to letting their bills stand over, but even some talk of a collection then and there to help Cullingworth on his way. He has, I understand, left Avonmouth, but no one has any idea what has become of him. It is generally supposed that he has gone to England. He is a strange fellow, but I wish him luck wherever he goes.

When I came back I settled down once more to the routine of my father’s practice, holding on there until something may turn up. And for six months I have had to wait; a weary six months they have been. You see I cannot ask my father for money – or, at least, I cannot bring myself to take an unnecessary penny of his money – for I know how hard a fight it is with him to keep the roof over our heads and pay for the modest little horse and trap which are as necessary to his trade as a goose is to a tailor. Foul fare the grasping taxman who wrings a couple of guineas from us on the plea that it is a luxury! We can just hold on, and I would not have him a pound the poorer for me. But you can understand, Bertie, that it is humiliating for a man of my age to have to go about without any money in my pocket. It affects me in so many petty ways. A poor man may do me a kindness, and I have to seem mean in his eyes. I may want a flower for a girl, and must be content to appear ungallant. I don’t know why I should be ashamed of this, since it is no fault of mine, and I hope that I don’t show it to any one else that I AM ashamed of it; but to you, my dear Bertie, I don’t mind confessing that it hurts my self-respect terribly.

I have often wondered why some of those writing fellows don’t try their hands at drawing the inner life of a young man from about the age of puberty until he begins to find his feet a little. Men are

very fond of analysing the feelings of their heroines, which they cannot possibly know anything about, while they have little to say of the inner development of their heroes, which is an experience which they have themselves undergone. I should like to try it myself, but it would need blending with fiction, and I never had a spark of imagination. But I have a vivid recollection of what I went through myself. At the time I thought (as everybody thinks) that it was a unique experience; but since I have heard the confidences of my father's patients I am convinced that it is the common lot. The shrinking, horrible shyness, alternating with occasional absurd fits of audacity which represent the reaction against it, the longing for close friendship, the agonies over imaginary slights, the extraordinary sexual doubts, the deadly fears caused by non-existent diseases, the vague emotion produced by all women, and the half-frightened thrill by particular ones, the aggressiveness caused by fear of being afraid, the sudden blacknesses, the profound self-distrust – I dare bet that you have felt every one of them, Bertie, just as I have, and that the first lad of eighteen whom you see out of your window is suffering from them now.

This is all a digression, however, from the fact that I have been six months at home and am weary of it, and pleased at the new development of which I shall have to tell you. The practice here, although unremunerative, is very busy with its three-and-sixpenny visits and guinea confinements, so that both the governor and I have had plenty to do. You know how I admire him, and yet I fear there is little intellectual sympathy between us. He appears to think that those opinions of mine upon religion and politics which come hot from my inmost soul have been assumed either out of indifference or bravado. So I have ceased to talk on vital subjects with him, and, though we affect to ignore it, we both know that there is a barrier there. Now, with my mother – ah, but my mother must have a paragraph to herself.

You met her, Bertie! You must remember her sweet face, her sensitive mouth, her peering, short-sighted eyes, her general suggestion of a plump little hen, who is still on the alert about her chickens. But you cannot realise all that she is to me in our domestic life. Those helpful fingers! That sympathetic brain! Ever since I can remember her she has been the quaintest mixture of the housewife and the woman of letters, with the highbred spirited lady as a basis for either character. Always a lady, whether she was bargaining with the butcher, or breaking in a skittish charwoman, or stirring the porridge, which I can see her doing with the porridge-stick in one hand, and the other holding her *Revue des deux Mondes* within two inches of her dear nose. That was always her favourite reading, and I can never think of her without the association of its brownish-yellow cover.

She is a very well-read woman is the mother; she keeps up to date in French literature as well as in English, and can talk by the hour about the Goncourts, and Flaubert, and Gautier. Yet she is always hard at work; and how she imbibes all her knowledge is a mystery. She reads when she knits, she reads when she scrubs, she even reads when she feeds her babies. We have a little joke against her, that at an interesting passage she deposited a spoonful of rusk and milk into my little sister's car-hole, the child having turned her head at the critical instant. Her hands are worn with work, and yet where is the idle woman who has read as much?

Then, there is her family pride. That is a very vital portion of the mother. You know how little I think of such things. If the Esquire were to be snipped once and for ever from the tail of my name I should be the lighter for it. But, *ma foi!* – to use her own favourite expletive – it would not do to say this to her. On the Pakenham side (she is a Pakenham) the family can boast of some fairly good men – I mean on the direct line – but when we get on the side branches there is not a monarch upon earth who does not roost on that huge family tree. Not once, nor twice, but thrice did the Plantagenets intermarry with us, the Dukes of Brittany courted our alliance, and the Percies of Northumberland intertwined themselves with our whole illustrious record. So in my boyhood she would expound the matter, with hearthbrush in one hand and a glove full of cinders in the other, while I would sit swinging my knickerbockered legs, swelling with pride until my waistcoat was as tight as a sausage skin, as I contemplated the gulf which separated me from all other little boys who swang their legs upon tables. To this day if I chance to do anything of which she strongly approves, the dear heart can say no more

than that I am a thorough Packenham; while if I fall away from the straight path, she says with a sigh that there are points in which I take after the Munros.

She is broad-minded and intensely practical in her ordinary moods, though open to attacks of romance. I can recollect her coming to see me at a junction through which my train passed, with a six months' absence on either side of the incident. We had five minutes' conversation, my head out of the carriage window. "Wear flannel next your skin, my dear boy, and never believe in eternal punishment," was her last item of advice as we rolled out of the station. Then to finish her portrait I need not tell you, who have seen her, that she is young-looking and comely to be the mother of about thirty-five feet of humanity. She was in the railway carriage and I on the platform the other day. "Your husband had better get in or we'll go without him," said the guard. As we went off, the mother was fumbling furiously in her pocket, and I know that she was looking for a shilling.

Ah! what a gossip I have been! And all to lead up to the one sentence that I could not have stayed at home this six months if it had not been for the company and the sympathy of my mother.

Well, now I want to tell you about the scrape that I got myself into. I suppose that I ought to pull a long face over it, but for the life of me I can't help laughing. I have you almost up to date in my history now, for what I am going to tell you happened only last week. I must mention no names here even to you; for the curse of Ernulphus, which includes eight and forty minor imprecations, be upon the head of the man who kisses and tells.

You must know, then, that within the boundaries of this city there are two ladies, a mother and a daughter, whom I shall call Mrs. and Miss Laura Andrews. They are patients of the governor's, and have become to some extent friends of the family. Madame is Welsh, charming in appearance, dignified in her manners, and High Church in her convictions. The daughter is rather taller than the mother, but otherwise they are strikingly alike. The mother is thirty-six and the daughter eighteen. Both are exceedingly charming. Had I to choose between them, I think, *entre nous*, that the mother would have attracted me most, for I am thoroughly of Balzac's opinion as to the woman of thirty. However, fate was to will it otherwise.

It was the coming home from a dance which first brought Laura and me together. You know how easily and suddenly these things happen, beginning in playful teasing and ending in something a little warmer than friendship. You squeeze the slender arm which is passed through yours, you venture to take the little gloved hand, you say good night at absurd length in the shadow of the door. It is innocent and very interesting, love trying his wings in a first little flutter. He will keep his sustained flight later on, the better for the practice. There was never any question of engagements between us, nor any suggestion of harm. She knew that I was a poor devil with neither means nor prospects, and I knew that her mother's will was her law, and that her course was already marked out for her. However, we exchanged our little confidences, and met occasionally by appointment, and tried to make our lives brighter without darkening those of any one else. I can see you shake your head here and growl, like the comfortable married man that you are, that such relations are very dangerous. So they are, my boy: but neither of us cared, she out of innocence and I out of recklessness, for from the beginning all the fault in the matter was mine.

Well, matters were in this state when one day last week a note came up to the Dad saying that Mrs. Andrews' servant was ill, and would he come at once. The old man had a touch of gout, so I donned my professional coat and sallied forth, thinking that perhaps I might combine pleasure with business, and have a few words with Laura. Sure enough, as I passed up the gravel drive which curves round to the door, I glanced through the drawing-room window, and saw her sitting painting, with her back to the light. It was clear that she had not heard me. The hall door was ajar, and when I pushed it open, no one was in the hall. A sudden fit of roguishness came over me. I pushed the drawing-room door very slowly wider, crept in on tiptoe, stole quietly across, and bending down, I kissed the artist upon the nape of her neck. She turned round with a squeal, and it was the mother!

I don't know whether you have ever been in a tighter corner than that, Bertie. It was quite tight enough for me. I remember that I smiled as I stole across the carpet on that insane venture. I did not smile again that evening. It makes me hot now when I think of it.

Well, I made the most dreadful fool of myself. At first, the good lady who (as I think I told you) is very dignified and rather reserved, could not believe her senses. Then, as the full force of my enormity came upon her she reared herself up until she seemed the tallest and the coldest woman I had ever seen. It was an interview with a refrigerator. She asked me what I had ever observed in her conduct which had encouraged me to subject her to such an outrage. I saw, of course, that any excuses upon my part would put her on the right track and give poor Laura away; so I stood with my hair bristling and my top hat in my hand, presenting, I am sure, a most extraordinary figure. Indeed, she looked rather funny herself, with her palette in one hand, her brush in the other, and the blank astonishment on her face. I stammered out something about hoping that she did not mind, which made her more angry than ever. "The only possible excuse for your conduct, sir, is that you are under the influence of drink," said she. "I need not say that we do not require the services of a medical man in that condition." I did not try to disabuse her of the idea, for really I could see no better explanation; so I beat a retreat in a very demoralised condition. She wrote a letter to my father about it in the evening, and the old man was very angry indeed. As to the mother, she is as staunch as steel, and quite prepared to prove that poor Mrs. A. was a very deep designing person, who had laid a trap for innocent Johnnie. So there has been a grand row; and not a soul upon earth has the least idea of what it all means, except only yourself as you read this letter.

You can imagine that this has not contributed to make life here more pleasant, for my father cannot bring himself to forgive me. Of course, I don't wonder at his anger. I should be just the same myself. It does look like a shocking breach of professional honour, and a sad disregard of his interests. If he knew the truth he would see that it was nothing worse than a silly ill-timed boyish joke. However, he never shall know the truth.

And now there is some chance of my getting something to do. We had a letter to-night from Christie & Howden, the writers to the Signet, saying that they desire an interview with me, in view of a possible appointment. We can't imagine what it means, but I am full of hopes. I go to-morrow morning to see them, and I shall let you know the result.

Good-bye, my dear Bertie! Your life flows in a steady stream, and mine in a broken torrent. Yet I would have every detail of what happens to you.

IV. HOME, 1st December, 1881

I may be doing you an injustice, Bertie, but it seemed to me in your last that there were indications that the free expression of my religious views had been distasteful to you. That you should disagree with me I am prepared for; but that you should object to free and honest discussion of those subjects which above all others men should be honest over, would, I confess, be a disappointment. The Freethinker is placed at this disadvantage in ordinary society, that whereas it would be considered very bad taste upon his part to obtrude his unorthodox opinion, no such consideration hampers those with whom he disagrees. There was a time when it took a brave man to be a Christian. Now it takes a brave man not to be. But if we are to wear a gag, and hide our thoughts when writing in confidence to our most intimate – no, but I won't believe it. You and I have put up too many thoughts together and chased them where-ever{sic} they would double, Bertie; so just write to me like a good fellow, and tell me that I am an ass. Until I have that comforting assurance, I shall place a quarantine upon everything which could conceivably be offensive to you.

Does not lunacy strike you, Bertie, as being a very eerie thing? It is a disease of the soul. To think that you may have a man of noble mind, full of every lofty aspiration, and that a gross physical cause, such as the fall of a spicule of bone from the inner table of his skull on to the surface of the membrane which covers his brain, may have the ultimate effect of turning him into an obscene creature with every bestial attribute! That a man's individuality should swing round from pole to pole, and yet that one life should contain these two contradictory personalities – is it not a wondrous thing?

I ask myself, where is the man, the very, very inmost essence of the man? See how much you may subtract from him without touching it. It does not lie in the limbs which serve him as tools, nor in the apparatus by which he is to digest, nor in that by which he is to inhale oxygen. All these are mere accessories, the slaves of the lord within. Where, then, is he? He does not lie in the features which are to express his emotions, nor in the eyes and ears which can be dispensed with by the blind and deaf. Nor is he in the bony framework which is the rack over which nature hangs her veil of flesh. In none of these things lies the essence of the man. And now what is left? An arched whitish putty-like mass, some fifty odd ounces in weight, with a number of white filaments hanging down from it, looking not unlike the medusae which float in our summer seas. But these filaments only serve to conduct nerve force to muscles and to organs which serve secondary purposes. They may themselves therefore be disregarded. Nor can we stop here in our elimination. This central mass of nervous matter may be pared down on all sides before we seem to get at the very seat of the soul. Suicides have shot away the front lobes of the brain, and have lived to repent it. Surgeons have cut down upon it and have removed sections. Much of it is merely for the purpose of furnishing the springs of motion, and much for the reception of impressions. All this may be put aside as we search for the physical seat of what we call the soul – the spiritual part of the man. And what is left then? A little blob of matter, a handful of nervous dough, a few ounces of tissue, but there – somewhere there – lurks that impalpable seed, to which the rest of our frame is but the pod. The old philosophers who put the soul in the pineal gland were not right, but after all they were uncommonly near the mark.

You'll find my physiology even worse than my theology, Bertie. I have a way of telling stories backwards to you, which is natural enough when you consider that I always sit down to write under the influence of the last impressions which have come upon me. All this talk about the soul and the brain arises simply from the fact that I have been spending the last few weeks with a lunatic. And how it came about I will tell you as clearly as I can.

You remember that in my last I explained to you how restive I had been getting at home, and how my idiotic mistake had annoyed my father and had made my position here very uncomfortable. Then I mentioned, I think, that I had received a letter from Christie & Howden, the lawyers. Well, I brushed up my Sunday hat, and my mother stood on a chair and landed me twice on the ear with

a clothes brush, under the impression that she was making the collar of my overcoat look more presentable. With which accolade out I sallied into the world, the dear soul standing on the steps, peering after me and waving me success.

Well, I was in considerable trepidation when I reached the office, for I am a much more nervous person than any of my friends will ever credit me with being. However, I was shown in at once to Mr. James Christie, a wiry, sharp, thin-lipped kind of man, with an abrupt manner, and that sort of Scotch precision of speech which gives the impression of clearness of thought behind it.

"I understand from Professor Maxwell that you have been looking about for an opening, Mr. Munro," said he.

Maxwell had said that he would give me a hand if he could; but you remember that he had a reputation for giving such promises rather easily. I speak of a man as I find him, and to me he has been an excellent friend.

"I should be very happy to hear of any opening," said I.

"Of your medical qualifications there is no need to speak," he went on, running his eyes all over me in the most questioning way. "Your Bachelorship of Medicine will answer for that. But Professor Maxwell thought you peculiarly fitted for this vacancy for physical reasons. May I ask you what your weight is?"

"Fourteen stone."

"And you stand, I should judge, about six feet high?"

"Precisely."

"Accustomed too, as I gather, to muscular exercise of every kind. Well, there can be no question that you are the very man for the post, and I shall be very happy to recommend you to Lord Saltire."

"You forget," said I, "that I have not yet heard what the position is, or the terms which you offer."

He began to laugh at that. "It was a little precipitate on my part," said he; "but I do not think that we are likely to quarrel as to position or terms. You may have heard perhaps of the sad misfortune of our client, Lord Saltire? Not? To put it briefly then, his son, the Hon. James Derwent, the heir to the estates and the only child, was struck down by the sun while fishing without his hat last July. His mind has never recovered from the shock, and he has been ever since in a chronic state of moody sullenness which breaks out every now and then into violent mania. His father will not allow him to be removed from Lochtully Castle, and it is his desire that a medical man should stay there in constant attendance upon his son. Your physical strength would of course be very useful in restraining those violent attacks of which I have spoken. The remuneration will be twelve pounds a month, and you would be required to take over your duties to-morrow."

I walked home, my dear Bertie, with a bounding heart, and the pavement like cotton wool under my feet. I found just eightpence in my pocket, and I spent the whole of it on a really good cigar with which to celebrate the occasion. Old Cullingworth has always had a very high opinion of lunatics for beginners. "Get a lunatic, my boy! Get a lunatic!" he used to say. Then it was not only the situation, but the fine connection that it opened up. I seemed to see exactly what would happen. There would be illness in the family, – Lord Saltire himself perhaps, or his wife. There would be no time to send for advice. I would be consulted. I would gain their confidence and become their family attendant. They would recommend me to their wealthy friends. It was all as clear as possible. I was debating before I reached home whether it would be worth my while to give up a lucrative country practice in order to take the Professorship which might be offered me.

My father took the news philosophically enough, with some rather sardonic remark about my patient and me being well qualified to keep each other company. But to my mother it was a flash of joy, followed by a thunderclap of consternation. I had only three under-shirts, the best of my linen had gone to Belfast to be refronted and recuffed, the night-gowns were not marked yet – there were a dozen of those domestic difficulties of which the mere male never thinks. A dreadful vision of Lady Saltire looking over my things and finding the heel out of one of my socks obsessed my mother. Out

we trudged together, and before evening her soul was at rest, and I had mortgaged in advance my first month's salary. She was great, as we walked home, upon the grand people into whose service I was to enter. "As a matter of fact, my dear," said she, "they are in a sense relations of yours. You are very closely allied to the Percies, and the Saltires have Percy blood in them also. They are only a cadet branch, and you are close upon the main line; but still it is not for us to deny the connection." She brought a cold sweat out upon me by suggesting that she should make things easy by writing to Lord Saltire and explaining our respective positions. Several times during the evening I heard her murmur complacently that they were only the cadet branch.

Am I not the slowest of story-tellers? But you encourage me to it by your sympathetic interest in details. However, I shall move along a little faster now. Next morning I was off to Lochtully, which, as you know, is in the north of Perthshire. It stands three miles from the station, a great gray pinnacled house, with two towers cocking out above the fir woods, like a hare's ears from a tussock of grass. As we drove up to the door I felt pretty solemn – not at all as the main line should do when it condescends to visit the cadet branch. Into the hall as I entered came a grave learned-looking man, with whom in my nervousness I was about to shake hands cordially. Fortunately he forestalled the impending embrace by explaining that he was the butler. He showed me into a small study, where everything stank of varnish and morocco leather, there to await the great man. He proved when he came to be a much less formidable figure than his retainer – indeed, I felt thoroughly at my ease with him from the moment he opened his mouth. He is grizzled, red-faced, sharp-featured, with a prying and yet benevolent expression, very human and just a trifle vulgar. His wife, however, to whom I was afterwards introduced, is a most depressing person, – pale, cold, hatchet-faced, with drooping eyelids and very prominent blue veins at her temples. She froze me up again just as I was budding out under the influence of her husband. However, the thing that interested me most of all was to see my patient, to whose room I was taken by Lord Saltire after we had had a cup of tea.

The room was a large bare one, at the end of a long corridor. Near the door was seated a footman, placed there to fill up the gap between two doctors, and looking considerably relieved at my advent. Over by the window (which was furnished with a wooden guard, like that of a nursery) sat a tall, yellow-haired, yellow-bearded, young man, who raised a pair of startled blue eyes as we entered. He was turning over the pages of a bound copy of the Illustrated London News.

"James," said Lord Saltire, "this is Dr. Stark Munro, who has come to look after you."

My patient mumbled something in his beard, which seemed to me suspiciously like "Damn Dr. Stark Munro!" The peer evidently thought the same, for he led me aside by the elbow.

"I don't know whether you have been told that James is a little rough in his ways at present," said he; "his whole nature has deteriorated very much since this calamity came upon him. You must not be offended by anything he may say or do."

"Not in the least," said I.

"There is a taint of this sort upon my wife's side," I whispered the little lord; "her uncle's symptoms were identical. Dr. Peterson says that the sunstroke was only the determining cause. The predisposition was already there. I may tell you that the footman will always be in the next room, so that you can call him if you need his assistance."

Well, it ended by lord and lacquey moving off, and leaving me with my patient. I thought that I should lose no time in establishing a kindly relation with him, so I drew a chair over to his sofa and began to ask him a few questions about his health and habits. Not a word could I get out of him in reply. He sat as sullen as a mule, with a kind of sneer about his handsome face, which showed me very well that he had heard everything. I tried this and tried that, but not a syllable could I get from him; so at last I turned from him and began to look over some illustrated papers on the table. He doesn't read, it seems, and will do nothing but look at pictures. Well, I was sitting like this with my back half turned, when you can imagine my surprise to feel something plucking gently at me, and to see a great brown hand trying to slip its way into my coat pocket. I caught at the wrist and turned

swiftly round, but too late to prevent my handkerchief being whisked out and concealed behind the Hon. James Derwent, who sat grinning at me like a mischievous monkey.

“Come, I may want that,” said I, trying to treat the matter as a joke.

He used some language which was more scriptural than religious. I saw that he did not mean giving it up, but I was determined not to let him get the upper hand over me. I grabbed for the handkerchief; and he, with a snarl, caught my hand in both of his. He had a powerful grip, but I managed to get his wrist and to give it a wrench round, until, with a howl, he dropped my property.

“What fun,” said I, pretending to laugh. “Let us try again. Now, you take it up, and see if I can get it again.”

But he had had enough of that game. Yet he appeared to be better humoured than before the incident, and I got a few short answers to the questions which I put to him.

And here comes in the text which started me preaching about lunacy at the beginning of this letter. WHAT a marvellous thing it is! This man, from all I can learn of him, has suddenly swung clean over from one extreme of character to the other. Every plus has in an instant become a minus. He’s another man, but in the same case. I am told that he used to be (only a few months ago, mind you) most fastidious in dress and speech. Now he is a foul-tongued rough! He had a nice taste in literature. Now he stares at you if you speak of Shakespeare. Queerest of all, he used to be a very high-and-dry Tory in his opinions. He is fond now of airing the most democratic views, and in a needlessly offensive way. When I did get on terms with him at last, I found that there was nothing on which he could be drawn on to talk so soon as on politics. In substance, I am bound to say that I think his new views are probably saner than his old ones, but the insanity lies in his sudden reasonless change and in his violent blurts of speech.

It was some weeks, however, before I gained his confidence, so far as to be able to hold a real conversation with him. For a long time he was very sullen and suspicious, resenting the constant watch which I kept upon him. This could not be relaxed, for he was full of the most apish tricks. One day he got hold of my tobacco pouch, and stuffed two ounces of my tobacco into the long barrel of an Eastern gun which hangs on the wall. He jammed it all down with the ramrod, and I was never able to get it up again. Another time he threw an earthenware spittoon through the window, and would have sent the clock after it had I not prevented him. Every day I took him for a two hours’ constitutional, save when it rained, and then we walked religiously for the same space up and down the room. Heh! but it was a deadly, dreary, kind of life.

I was supposed to have my eye upon him all day, with a two-hour interval every afternoon and an evening to myself upon Fridays. But then what was the use of an evening to myself when there was no town near, and I had no friends whom I could visit? I did a fair amount of reading, for Lord Saltire let me have the run of his library. Gibbon gave me a couple of enchanting weeks. You know the effect that he produces. You seem to be serenely floating upon a cloud, and looking down on all these pigmy armies and navies, with a wise Mentor ever at your side to whisper to you the inner meaning of all that majestic panorama.

Now and again young Derwent introduced some excitement into my dull life. On one occasion when we were walking in the grounds, he suddenly snatched up a spade from a grass-plot, and rushed at an inoffensive under-gardener. The man ran screaming for his life, with my patient cursing at his very heels, and me within a few paces of him. When I at last laid my hand on his collar, he threw down his weapon and burst into shrieks of laughter. It was only mischief and not ferocity; but when that under-gardener saw us coming after that he was off with a face like a cream cheese. At night the attendant slept in a camp-bed at the foot of the patient’s, and my room was next door, so that I could be called if necessary. No, it was not a very exhilarating life!

We used to go down to family meals when there were no visitors; and there we made a curious quartette: Jimmy (as he wished me to call him) glum and silent; I with the tail of my eye always twisted round to him; Lady Saltire with her condescending eyelids and her blue veins; and the good-

natured peer, fussy and genial, but always rather subdued in the presence of his wife. She looked as if a glass of good wine would do her good, and he as if he would be the better for abstinence; and so, in accordance with the usual lopsidedness of life, he drank freely, and she took nothing but lime-juice and water. You cannot imagine a more ignorant, intolerant, narrow-minded woman than she. If she had only been content to be silent and hidden that small brain of hers, it would not have mattered; but there was no end to her bitter and exasperating clacking. What was she after all but a thin pipe for conveying disease from one generation to another? She was bounded by insanity upon the north and upon the south. I resolutely set myself to avoid all argument with her; but she knew, with her woman's instinct, that we were as far apart as the poles, and took a pleasure in waving the red flag before me. One day she was waxing eloquent as to the crime of a minister of an Episcopal church performing any service in a Presbyterian chapel. Some neighbouring minister had done it, it seems; and if he had been marked down in a pot house she could not have spoken with greater loathing. I suppose that my eyes were less under control than my tongue, for she suddenly turned upon me with:

"I see that you don't agree with me, Dr. Munro."

I replied quietly that I did not, and tried to change the conversation; but she was not to be shaken off.

"Why not, may I ask?"

I explained that in my opinion the tendency of the age was to break down those ridiculous doctrinal points which are so useless, and which have for so long set people by the ears. I added that I hoped the time was soon coming when good men of all creeds would throw this lumber overboard and join hands together.

She half rose, almost speechless with indignation.

"I presume," said she, "that you are one of those people who would separate the Church from the State?"

"Most certainly," I answered.

She stood erect in a kind of cold fury, and swept out of the room. Jimmy began to chuckle, and his father looked perplexed.

"I am sorry that my opinions are offensive to Lady Saltire," I remarked.

"Yes, yes; it's a pity; a pity," said he "well, well, we must say what we think; but it's a pity you think it – a very great pity."

I quite expected to get my dismissal over this business, and indeed, indirectly I may say that I did so. From that day Lady Saltire was as rude to me as she could be, and never lost an opportunity of making attacks upon what she imagined to be my opinions. Of these I never took the slightest notice; but at last on an evil day she went for me point-blank, so that there was no getting away from her. It was just at the end of lunch, when the footman had left the room. She had been talking about Lord Saltire's going up to London to vote upon some question in the House of Lords.

"Perhaps, Dr. Munro," said she, turning acidly upon me, "that is also an institution which has not been fortunate enough to win your approval."

"It is a question, Lady Saltire, which I should much prefer not to discuss," I answered.

"Oh, you might just as well have the courage of your convictions," said she. "Since you desire to despoil the National Church, it is natural enough that you should wish also to break up the Constitution. I have heard that an atheist is always a red republican."

Lord Saltire rose, wishing, I have no doubt, to put an end to the conversation. Jimmy and I rose also; and suddenly I saw that instead of moving towards the door he was going to his mother. Knowing his little tricks, I passed my hand under his arm, and tried to steer him away. She noticed it, however, and interfered.

"Did you wish to speak to me, James?"

"I want to whisper in your ear, mother."

“Pray don’t excite yourself, sir,” said I, again attempting to detain him. Lady Saltire arched her aristocratic eyebrows.

“I think, Dr. Munro, that you push your authority rather far when you venture to interfere between a mother and her son,” said she. “What was it, my poor dear boy?”

Jimmy bent down and whispered something in her ear. The blood rushed into her pale face, and she sprang from him as if he had struck her. Jimmy began to snigger.

“This is your doing, Dr. Munro,” she cried furiously. “You have corrupted my son’s mind, and encouraged him to insult his mother.”

“My dear! My dear!” said her husband soothingly, and I quietly led the recalcitrant Jimmy upstairs. I asked him what it was that he had said to his mother, but got only chuckles in reply.

I had a presentiment that I should hear more of the matter; and I was not wrong. Lord Saltire called me into his study in the evening.

“The fact is, doctor,” said he, “that Lady Saltire has been extremely annoyed and grieved about what occurred at lunch to-day. Of course, you can imagine that such an expression coming from her own son, shocked her more than I can tell.”

“I assure you, Lord Saltire,” said I, “that I have no idea at all what passed between Lady Saltire and my patient.”

“Well,” said he, “without going into details, I may say that what he whispered was a blasphemous wish, most coarsely expressed, as to the future of that Upper House to which I have the honor to belong.”

“I am very sorry,” said I, “and I assure you that I have never encouraged him in his extreme political views, which seem to me to be symptoms of his disease.”

“I am quite convinced that what you say is true,” he answered; “but Lady Saltire is unhappily of the opinion that you have instilled these ideas into him. You know that it is a little difficult sometimes to reason with a lady. However, I have no doubt that all may be smoothed over if you would see Lady Saltire and assure her that she has misunderstood your views upon this point, and that you are personally a supporter of a Hereditary Chamber.”

It put me in a tight corner, Bertie; but my mind was instantly made up. From the first word I had read my dismissal in every uneasy glance of his little eyes.

“I am afraid,” said I, “that that is rather further than I am prepared to go. I think that since there has been for some weeks a certain friction between Lady Saltire and myself, it would perhaps be as well that I should resign the post which I hold in your household. I shall be happy, however, to remain here until you have found some one to take over my duties.”

“Well, I am sorry it has come to this, and yet it may be that you are right,” said he, with an expression of relief; “as to James, there need be no difficulty about that, for Dr. Patterson could come in tomorrow morning.”

“Then to-morrow morning let it be,” I answered.

“Very good, Dr. Munro; I will see that you have your cheque before you go.”

So there was the end of all my fine dreams about aristocratic practices and wonderful introductions! I believe the only person in the whole house who regretted me was Jimmy, who was quite downcast at the news. His grief, however, did not prevent him from brushing my new top-hat the wrong way on the morning that I left. I did not notice it until I reached the station, and a most undignified object I must have looked when I took my departure.

So ends the history of a failure. I am, as you know, inclined to fatalism, and do not believe that such a thing as chance exists; so I am bound to think that this experience was given to me for some end. It was a preliminary canter for the big race, perhaps. My mother was disappointed, but tried to show it as little as possible. My father was a little sardonic over the matter. I fear that the gap between us widens. By the way, an extraordinary card arrived from Cullingworth during my absence. “You are my man,” said he; “mind that I am to have you when I want you.” There was no date and

no address, but the postmark was Bradfield in the north of England. Does it mean nothing? Or may it mean everything? We must wait and see.

Good-bye, old man. Let me hear equally fully about your own affairs. How did the Rattray business go off?

V. MERTON ON THE MOORS, 5th March, 1882

I was so delighted, my dear chap, to have your assurance that nothing that I have said or could say upon the subject of religion could offend you. It is difficult to tell you how pleased and relieved I was at your cordial letter. I have no one to whom I can talk upon such matters. I am all driven inwards, and thought turns sour when one lets it stagnate like that. It is a grand thing to be able to tell it all to a sympathetic listener – and the more so perhaps when he looks at it all from another standpoint. It steadies and sobers one.

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