

tibia, and it's bad enough to call for immediate attention if he wants to save his leg. You're lucky, my man!" he resumed, addressing the navy, "for there's a physician right here to hand. A good one, too," he added with a smirk and bow to the horrified Thurso, "to judge from his knowledge of hemiplegia. Doctor, will you look over the case? I've all the appliances here for bone-setting."

The constables respectfully made way for the Earl. The suffering man on the stretcher ceased to groan and turned on him blood-shot eyes that held the dumb appeal and trust of a hurt dog. The look went through Thurso like a white-hot iron. He stood inert, nerveless.

"Excuse me, sir!" said the chemist timidly, "but I think there's no time to wait. The man is in great pain and—"

Thurso's first impulse was to declare that he was no physician and that the chemist had been mistaken in thinking he had claimed to be one. But there, on the counter, lay the half-written prescription to give him the lie. There, too, at his side, were three officers of the law—of the law that he had transgressed in usurping the right to practice medical lore. His brain went blank. The navy, reading bewilderment in his glance, broke out again in a series of nerve-wracking moans. The constables looked stolidly expectant.

For the moment, Thurso's craving for the drug that had led him into such a predicament turned to a loathing. He felt like an animal in a trap.

"Wait!" he gasped, his voice harsh and lifeless. "I—I must get my medical chest."

"There's no need of—" began the chemist; but Thurso was gone. Snatching up his half-finished prescription he was out of the door, shouldering his way through the crowd that parted respectfully for him, gained his cart, and with one leap was on the seat and driving down the High Street like mad.

Nor did he pause nor look back until he turned the sweating horse over to a groom at his own gate.

Maud came back to the tea-table, dropped into a chair next Lily and waited till she could speak to her.

"He has gone back to Windsor to get some more," she said. "He would not listen to me. He is frightfully angry with us."

Lady Thurso just nodded, and then, since whatever private tragedy was going on the public comedy had to be kept up, she devoted herself again to a hostess's duties.

Meantime the tinkle of drawing-room philosophy went on round her, and she joined in it with that facility that was always hers.

"Yes, it is quite certain we must have some fad which for the time being we take as the most serious thing in the world," she said to Lady Swindon, who had come down the river from Cookham. "Two years ago, do you remember, it was no hats, and that was followed by the simple life."

Lady Swindon laughed.

"I know, and we gave that up because it proved to be so frightfully complicated," she said. "One had to provide two sorts of lunches and two sorts of dinners every day, one for the simple life people, who ate lentils and all the most expensive fruits, but no meat, and one for the complicated life, which didn't mind what it ate as long as there was beef. Swindon always ate both, to show he wasn't bigoted either way. Besides, one really couldn't afford it. And what is the next fad, darling Lily? You always are half through a fad before anybody else has heard of it."

"Deep breathing I have tried," said Lady Thurso, "but it takes too long. You see, you can't talk as you are deep breathing, whereas you could when you were eating lentils. Perhaps it will be Christian Science, though, do you know, I think the real thing is too serious and sensible, and the spurious thing too silly ever to become a fad? But ask Maud to tell you about Mr. Cochran and the typhoid up in Caithness."

"I will. And where's Thurso? Isn't he here?"

"Oh! yes, but tea-time isn't his hour. Tea, Theodosia?"

Theodosia had truly American ideas about being introduced. It was her custom to make all her guests formally known to each other, and she expected the same treatment.

"Kindly introduce me, Lily," she said.

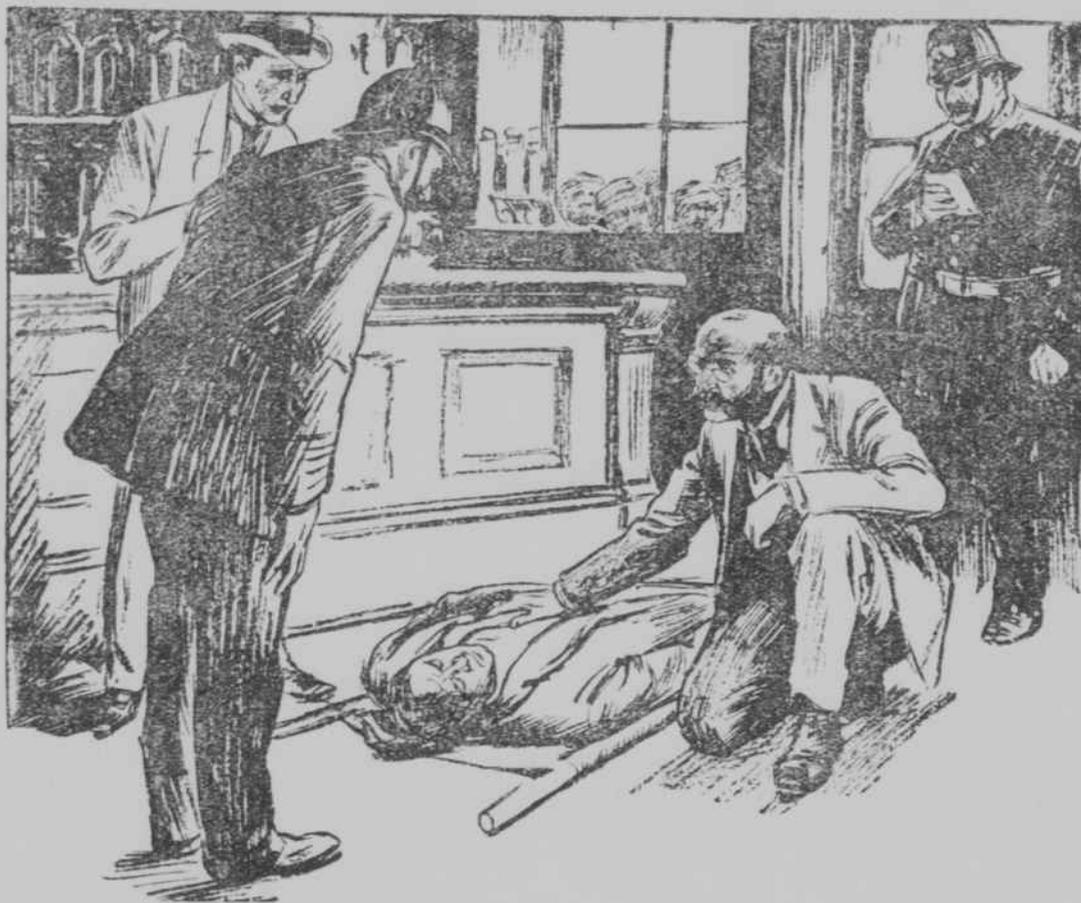
"Lady Swindon, my cousin, Mrs. Moreton."

"Very happy to make your acquaintance, Lady Swindon," said she, "and don't you think that Lady Thurso's place down here is just the cunningest you ever saw? Why, look at that yew hedge! It must have been planted before the flood to have grown like that. But, then, all she has is just perfect, isn't it? My! I never saw such a beautiful black pearl as that you're wearing. It looks as if it came straight from the Marquis of Anglesea's tie."

"Oh! no, I inherited it," said Lady Swindon, rather icily.

"That's what comes of being an Englishwoman," said Theodosia. "You inherit things and we've got to buy them. Silas and I and Lord Thurso drove to Windsor this afternoon. Do you know my husband? Ah! he's talking to Count Villars over there. But we had the loveliest time; I never saw Windsor before, and fancy inheriting that! But I'm afraid Lord Thurso is sick; he called at a chemist's and bought some medicine to be sent back here at once. I guess he pined for that medicine. Has he come out here? No, I don't see him. I guess he's taking it now. Lily, I think your husband is the loveliest man!"

Lily got up; the whole situation was beginning to get on her nerves most terribly. Theodosia, with her frightfully middle-class



"Doctor, will you look over the case?"

manner, was on her nerves; it was on her nerves, too, that Lady Swindon should think that Theodosia was a typical American, whereas she was a parody, the parody with which Europe (only she would have called it Eu-rope) is most familiar. And Lady Swindon, for all her "darling Lily," was one of those true friends who like knowing your weak points. Theodosia, as she was aware, as she got up to talk to other of her guests, was a weak point; mention of Thurso's medicine was a weak point; Theodosia touched them all with the unerring instinct of the true bungler. And with the courage that wants not to know the worst, which is so much superior to the cowardice that thinks it is brave when it asks to know the worst, she deliberately moved out of ear-shot.

Lady Swindon justified her position as a true friend. The fads which she had been so eager to hear about were quite dismissed. She proceeded in the spirit of true inquiry, which wants to know.

"What a nice afternoon you must have had!" she said. "To see Windsor for the first time is delightful, is it not? And to have Lord Thurso as a companion is delightful at any time. But he is not ill, is he?"

"He seemed hungry for that chemist," said Theodosia, "and he seemed just starving to get back here. I'm told you have a speed limit for motors over here, but if we didn't exceed it I don't see the use of your having one."

Now Lady Swindon was not malicious; she was also a great admirer of Lily's. But she could not resist her hideous instinct to know, to be abreast of things, which in London ensures a greater success than other and more agreeable qualities give.

"Dear Thurso," she said, "he has such dreadful headaches. No wonder he wanted his medicine, if he had one."

"Silas used to have dreadful headaches," said Theodosia. "They arose from dyspepsia, to which he is a martyr. But opium always unmartyred him."

"Ah! opium," said Lady Swindon.

"Yes. Why, there's Count Villars. Count Villars, I haven't set eyes on you since lunch. May I introduce you to Lady Swindon?"

Villars bowed.

"I think we were introduced some years ago," he said. "How are you, Lady Swindon? You have come down from Cookham?"

Lady Swindon got up, turning her back on Theodosia.

"Yes, and I am just going back there. How clever of you to remember where we live! Take me to my boat, will you? Let us walk round the garden first."

They strolled a few yards down the path between the two tall herbaceous borders before she spoke.

"And you are staying here?" she asked. "How do you find Lily? I am sure you walked together last night after dinner, and joined old memories on to the present."

But she had met her match this time.

"Yes, dear lady," he said, "we found that the two needed no link. We had always been excellent friends, and found that we remained so. As always, I adore her; as always, she receives my adoration from her infinite height. The Madonna still smiles on her worshipper. He asks no more."

For the moment she was startled from her role of earnest inquirer.

"Indeed, I thought you had once asked more," she said. "We all supposed so."

"There is no limit to what people of brilliant and vivid imagination may not suppose," said he.

She could not help smiling; his refusals to give direct answers were always so very silken.

"And the truth always exceeds one's imagination, does it not?" she said. Then she sank her voice.

"And Thurso," she went on. "How do you think he is?"

Villars looked at her in bland surprise.