

heroically, as a forlorn hope in a lost cause, offered to "go and see"; and going, said, "Miss Nightingale; and is Dr. Vereker expected in to tea?" without varnish of style, or redundancy of wording. But Sally lent herself to this insincere performance, and remained in the hall until she was called on to decide whether she would mind coming in and waiting, and Dr. Vereker would perhaps be back in a few minutes. All this was part of the system of insincerity we have hinted at.

So was the tenor of Sally's remarks, while she waited the few minutes, to the effect that it was a burning shame that she should take up Mrs. Vereker's time, a crying scandal that she should interrupt her knitting, and a matter of penitential reflection that she hadn't written instead of coming, which would have done just as well. To which Mrs. Vereker, with a certain parade of pretended insincerity (to make the real article underneath seem *bona fides*), replied with mock-incredible statements about the pleasure she always had in seeing Sally, and the rare good fortune which had prompted a visit at this time, when, in addition to being unable to knit, owing to her eyes, she had been absorbed in longing for news of a current event that Sally was sure to know about. She particularised it.

"Oh, it isn't *true*, Mrs. Vereker! You don't mean to say you believed *that* nonsense? The idea! Tishy—just fancy!" Goody Vereker (the name Sally thought of her by) couldn't shake her head, the fulness at the neck forbade it; but she moved it cosily from side to side continuously, much as a practicable image of Buddha might have done.

"My child, I've quite given up believing and disbelieving things. I wait to be told, and then I ask if it's true. Now you've told me. It isn't true, and that settles the matter."

"But whoever could tell you such *nonsense*, Mrs. Vereker?"

"A little bird, my dear." The image of Buddha left off the movement of incredulity, and began a very gentle, slow nod. "A little bird tells me these things—all sorts of things. But now I *know* this one's untrue I should never *dream* of believing it. Not for one moment."

Sally felt inclined to pinch, bite, or otherwise maltreat the speaker, so very worthless did her offer of optional disbelief seem, and, indeed, so very offensive. But her inclination only went

the length of wondering how she could get at a vulnerable point through so much fat.

"Tishy quarrels with her mother, I *know*," said she. "But as to her doing anything like *that*! Besides, she never told me. Besides, I should have been asked to the wedding. Besides," etcetera.

For, you see, what this elderly lady had asked the truth about was, had or had not Lætitia Wilson and Julius Bradshaw been privately married six months ago? Probably, during æons and epochs of knitting, she had dreamed that some one had told her this. Or, even more probably, she had invented it on the spot, to see what change she could get out of Sally. She knew that Sally, prudently exasperated, would give tongue; whereas conciliatory, cosy inquisition—the right way to approach the elderly gossip—would only make her reticent. Now it was only necessary to knit, and Sally would be sure to develop the subject. The line she appeared to take was that it was a horrible shame of people to say such things, in view of the fact that it was only yesterday that Tishy had quite settled that rash matrimony in defiance of her parents would not only be inexcusable but wrong. Sally laid a fiery emphasis on the only-ness of yesterday, and seemed to imply that, had it been a week ago, there would have been much more plausibility in the story of this secret nuptial of six months back.

"Besides," she went on, accumulating items of refutation, "Julius has only his salary, and Tishy has nothing—though, of course, she could teach. Besides, Julius has his mother and sister, and they have only a hundred and fifty a year. It does as long as they all live together. But it wouldn't do if Julius married." On which the old Goody (Sally told her mother after) embarked on a long analysis of how joint housekeeping could be managed if Tishy would consent to be absorbed into the Bradshaw household. She made rather a grievance of it that Sally could not supply data of the sleeping accommodation at Georgiana Terrace, Bayswater. If she had known that, she could have got them all billeted on different rooms. As it was, she had to be content to enlarge on the many economies the family could achieve if they consented to be guided by a person of experience—*e.g.*, herself.

"Of course, dinner would have to be late," she said, "because of Mr. Bradshaw not getting home till nearly eight. They would have to make it supper. And it might be cold; it's a great saving, and makes it so easy where there's one servant." Sally shuddered with horror at this implied British household. Poor Tishy!

"But they're *not going* to marry till they see their way," she exclaimed in despair. She felt that Tishy and Julius were being involved, entangled, immeshed by an old matrimonial octopus in gilt-rimmed spectacles—like Professor Wilson's—who could knit tranquilly all the while, while she herself could do nothing to save them. "It might be cold!!" Every evening, perhaps—who knows?

"Very proper, my dear." Thus the Octopus. "I felt sure such a nice, sensible girl as Miss Wilson never would. That is Conrad." It really was a sound of a latch-key, but speech is no mere slave to fact.

"And I was really quite glad when Dr. Prosy came in—the way the Goody was going on about Tishy!" So Sally said to her mother when she had completed her report of the portion of this visit she chose to tell about. On which her mother said, "What a dear little humbug you are, kitten," and she replied, as we have heard her reply before, "We-e-ell, there's nothing in that!" and posed as one who has been misrepresented. But her mother stuck to her point, which was that Sally knew she was quite glad when Dr. Vereker came in, Tishy or no.

Whatever the reason was that Sally was quite glad at the appearance of Dr. Prosy, there could be no doubt about the fact. Her laugh reached the cook in the kitchen, who denounced Craddock the parlourmaid for not telling her it was Miss Nightingale, when it might have been a visitor, seeing no noise come of it. Cook remarked she knew how it would be—there was the doctor picking up like—and hadn't she told Craddock so? But Craddock said no!

"Mrs. Shoosmith again—the everlasting Mrs. Shoosmith!" exclaimed the doctor. It was very unfeeling of them to laugh so over this unhappy woman, who was the survivor of two husbands and the proprietor of one, and the mother of seven daughters and five sons, each of whom was a typical "case," and

all of whom sought admission to Institutes on their merits. The lives of the whole family were passed in applications for testimonials and certificates, alike bearing witness to their chronic qualifications for it. Sally was mysteriously hard-hearted about them, while fully admitting their claims on the public.

"That's right, Dr. Conrad?"—Sally had inaugurated this name for herself—"Honorina Purvis Shoosmith. Mind you put in the Purvis right. Now write down lots of diseases for her to have." Sally is leaning over the doctor's chair to see him write as she says this. There is something in the atmosphere of the situation that seems to clash with the actual business in hand. The doctor endeavours, not seriously enough, perhaps, to infuse a flavour of responsibility.

"My professional dignity, Miss Nightingale, will not permit of the scheme of diagnosis you indicate. If any disorders entirely without symptoms were known to exist, I should be delighted to ascribe the whole of them to Mrs. Shoosmith. . . ."

"Don't be prosy, Dr. Conrad. Fire away! You told me lots—you know you did! Rheumatic arthritis—gout—pyæmia . . ."

"Come, I say, Miss Sally, draw it mild. I never said pyæmia. Anæmia, perhaps. . . ."

"Very well, Anne, then! We can let it go at that. Fire away!" The doctor looks round his own corner at the rows of pearls and the laugh that frames them, the merry eyebrows and the scintillating eyes they accentuate. A perilous intoxication, not to be too freely indulged in by a serious professional man at any time—in business hours certainly not. But if the doctor were quite in earnest over a sort of Spartan declaration of policy his heart feels the prudence of, would that responsive twinkle flutter in his face behind its mock gravity? He is all but head over ears in love with Sally—so why pretend? Really, we don't know—and that's the truth.

"Wouldn't it be a good way to consider what it is that is really the matter, and make out the statement accordingly?" He goes on looking at Sally, scratches himself under the chin with his pen, and waits for an answer.

"Good, sensible, general practitioner! See how practical he is! Now, I should never have thought of that!"

"Well, what shall we put her down as? Chronic arthritis—spinal curvature—tuberculosis of the cervical vertebræ?"

"Those all sound very nice. But I don't think it matters which you choose. If she hasn't got it now, she'll develop it if I describe it. When I told her mother couldn't get rid of her neuritis, she immediately asked to know the symptoms, and forthwith claimed them as her own. 'Well, there now, and to think what I was just a-sayin' to Shoosmith, this very morning! Just in the crick of the thumb-joint, you can't 'ardly abear yourself!' And then she told how she said to Shoosmith frequent, where was the use of his getting impatient, and exclaimin' the worst expressions? Because his language went beyond a quart, and no reasonable excuse."

"Mr. Shoosmith doesn't seem a very promising sort? He's a tailor, isn't he?"

"No; he's a messenger. He runs on errands and does odd jobs. But he can't run—I've seen him!—he can only shamble. And his voice is hoarse and inaudible. And he has a drawback—two drawbacks, in fact. He is no sooner giv' coppers on a job than he drinks them."

"What's the other?"

"His susceptibility to intoxicants. His 'ed is that weak that 'most anythink upsets him. So you see."

"Poor chap! He's handicapped in the race of life. As for his wife, when I saw her she was suffering with acute rheumatism and bad feeling—and, I may add, defective reasoning power. However . . ." The doctor fills in blanks, adds a signature, says "There we are!" and Mrs. Shoosmith is disposed of as an applicant to the institution, and will no doubt reap some benefits we need not know the particulars of. But she remains as a subject for the student of human life—also, tea comes—also, which is interesting, Sally proceeds to make it.

Now, if the reserves this young lady had made about this visit, if her pretence that it was a necessity arising from a charitable organization, if the colour that was given to that pretence by her interview with the servant Craddock—if any of these things had been more or less than the grossest hypocrisy, would it, we ask you, have been accepted as a matter of course that she should pull off her gloves and sit down to make tea with a mature

knowledge of how to get the little lynch-pin out of the spirit-lamp, and of how many spoonfuls? No; the fact is, Sally was a more frequent visitor to the image of Buddha than she chose to admit; and as for the doctor, he seized every legitimate opportunity of 'cello practice at Krakatoa Villa. But G.P.'s cannot call their time their own.

"The funny part of Mrs. Shoosmith," said Sally, when the pot was full up and the lid shut, "is that the moment she is brought into contact with warm soapy water and scrubbing-brushes, she seems to renew her youth. She brings large pins out of her mouth and secures her apron. And then she scrubs. Now you may blow the methylated out and make yourself useful, Dr. Conrad."

"Does she put back the pins when she's done scrubbing?" the doctor asks, when he has made himself useful.

"She puts them back against another time, so I have understood. I suppose they live in her mouth. That's yours with two lumps. That is your mother's—no, I won't pour it yet. She's asleep."

For the fact is that the Goody, anxious to invest herself with an appearance of forbearance towards the frivolities of youth, readiness to forego (from amiability) any share in the conversation, insight into the *rappports* of others (especially male and female *rappports*), and general superiority to human weakness, had endeavoured to express all these things by laying down her knitting, folding her hands on her circumference, and looking as if she knew and could speak if she chose. But if you do this, even the maintenance of an attentive hypodermic smile is not enough to keep you awake—and off you go! The Goody did, and the smile died slowly off into a snore. Never mind! She was in want of rest, so she said. It was curious, too, for she seldom got anything else.

It would have been unfeeling to wake her, so Dr. Vereker went and sat a good deal nearer Sally, not to make more noise than was necessary. This reacted, an outsider might have inferred, on the subject-matter of the conversation, making it more serious in tone. And as Sally put the little Turk's cap over the pot to keep it warm, and the doctor knew perfectly well that the blacker the tea was the better his mother liked it, this lasted until that

lady woke up with a start a long time after, and said she must have been asleep. Then, as Cook was aware in the kitchen, some more noise came of it, and Sally carried off Mrs. Shoosmith's certificate.

"You know, Dr. Conrad, it makes you look like a real medical man," she said at the gate, referring to the detention of the doctor's pill-box, which awaited him, and he replied that it didn't matter. King, the driver, looked as if he thought it *did*, and appeared morose. Is it because coachmen always keep their appointments with society and society never keeps its appointments with coachmen that a settled melancholy seems to brood over them, and their souls seem cankered with misanthropy?

The doctor had rather a rough time that evening. For among the patients he was going to try to see and get back to dinner (thus ran current speech of those concerned) there was a young man from the West Indies, who had come into something considerable. But he was afflicted with a disorder he called the "jumps," and the doctor's diagnosis, if correct, showed that the *vera causa* of this aptly-named disease was alcohol of sp. gr. something, to which the patient was in the habit of adding very few atoms of water indeed. The doctor was doing all he could to change the regimen, but only succeeded on making his patient weak and promise amendment. On this particular evening the latter quite unexpectedly went for the doctor's throat, shouting, "I see your plans!" and King had to be summoned from his box to help restrain him. So Dr. Vereker was tired when he got home late to dinner, and would have felt miserable, only he could always shut his eyes and think of Sally's hands that had come over his shoulder to discriminate points in Mrs. Shoosmith's magna-charta. They had come so near him that he could smell the fresh sweet dressing of the new kid gloves—six and a half, we believe.

But although he liked his Goody mother to talk to him about the girl who had christened her so, he was tired enough this evening to wish that her talk had flowed in a less pebbly channel. For she chose this opportunity to enlarge upon the duties of young married women towards their husbands' parents, their mothers especially. Her conclusion was a little unexpected:

"I have said nothing throughout, my dear. I should not dream

of doing so. But if I had I trust I should have made it clearly understood how I regarded Miss Lætitia Wilson's conduct."

"But there wasn't any. Nobody contracted a private marriage."

"My dear Conrad! Have I said that any one has done so? Have I used the expression 'private marriage'?"

"Why—no. I don't think you have. Not to-day, at least."

"When have I done so? Have I not, on the contrary, from the very beginning told you I should take the first opportunity of disbelieving so absurd and mischievous a story? And have I lost a moment? Was it not the first word I said to Sally Nightingale before you came in, and without a soul in the room to hear? I only ask for justice. But if my son misrepresents me, what can I expect from others?" At this point patient toleration only.

"But, mother dear, I don't *want* to misrepresent you. Only I'll be hanged if I see why Tishy Wilson is to be hauled over the coals?"

A suggestion of a proper spirit showed itself. "I am accustomed to your language, and will say nothing. But, my dear Conrad, for you are always my son, and will remain so, whatever your language may be, do you, my dear Conrad, do you really sanction the attitude of a young lady who refuses to marry—public and private don't come into the matter—because of a groundless antipathy? For it is admitted on all hands that Mrs. Julius Bradshaw is a person of rather superior class."

"She's Mrs. Bradshaw—not Mrs. Julius. But what makes you suppose Tishy Wilson objects to her?"

"My dear Conrad, you know as well as I do that is a mere prevarication. Why evade the point? But in my opinion you do wisely not to attempt any defence of Lætitia Wilson. It may be true that she has not laid herself open to misconstruction in this case, but the lack of good feeling is to all intents and purposes the same as if she had; and I must say, my dear Conrad, I am surprised that a professional man with your qualifications should undertake to justify her."

"But Miss Wilson hasn't *done* anything! What are you wiggling away at her for, mother dear?"

"Have I not expressly said that she has done nothing whatever?"

Of course she has not, and, I hope, never will. But it is easy for you, Conrad, to take refuge in a fact which I have been scrupulously careful to admit from the very beginning. And 'wiggling away!' What language!"

"Never mind the language, mother darling! Tell me what it's all about." Tired as he is, he gets up from the chair he has not been smoking in (because this is the drawing-room) to go round and kiss what is probably the fatty integument of a very selfish old woman, but which he believes to be that of an affectionate mother. "What's it all about?" he repeats.

"My dear Conrad! Is it not a little unfeeling to ask me what it is all about when you know?"

"I *don't* know, mother dear. I can do any amount of guessing, but I don't *know*."

"I think, my dear, if you will light my candle and ring for Craddock to shut up, that I had better go to bed." Which her son does, but perversely abstains from giving the old lady any assistance to saying what is in her mind to say.

But she did not intend to be baffled. For when he had piloted her to her state apartment, carrying her candle, under injunctions on no account to spill the grease, and a magazine of wraps and wools and unintelligible sundries, she contrived to invest an elucidation of her ideas with an appearance of benevolence by working in a readiness to sacrifice herself to her son's selfish longing for tobacco.

"Only just hear me to the end, my dear, and then you can get away to your pipe. What I did *not* say—for you interrupted me—did not relate so much to Miss Lætitia Wilson as to Sally Nightingale. She, I am sure, would never come between any man she married and his mother. I am making no reference to any one whatever, although, however old I am, I have eyes in my head and can see. But I can read character, and that is my interpretation of Sally Nightingale's."

"Sally Nightingale and I are not going to make it up, if that's what you mean, mother. She wouldn't have me, for one thing——"

"My dear, I am not going to argue the point. It is nearly eleven, and unless I get to bed I shan't sleep. Now go away to your pipe, and think of what I have said. And don't slam your

door and wake me when you come up." She offered him a selection to kiss, shutting her eyes tight. And he gave place to Craddock, and went away to his unwholesome, smelly habit, as his mamma had more than once called it. His face was perplexed and uncomfortable; however, it got ease after a few puffs of pale returns and a welcome minute of memory of the bouquet of those sixes.

But his little happy oasis was a very small one. For a messenger came with a furious pull at the night-bell and a summons for the doctor. His delirium-tremens case had very nearly qualified its brain for a P.M.—at least, if there were any of it left—by getting at a pistol and taking a bad aim at it. The unhappy dipsomaniac was half-shot, and prompt medical attendance was necessary to prevent the something considerable being claimed by his heir-at-law.

Whether this came to pass or not does not concern us. This much is certain, that at the end of six months which this chapter represents, and which you have probably skipped, he was as much forgotten by the doctor as the pipe his patient's suicidal escapade had interrupted, or the semi-vexation with his mother he was using it as an anodyne for.