

Summary Je Trouve Bien

My father was born in Alexandria in 1892 to an Egyptian father and Italian mother. His father's family originated in Lebanon. His mother's family came from Naples, but hard times compelled them to move to Alexandria. He lived in Ramleh near Carlton Station. He graduated in medicine at Geneva University and undertook study tours of the Middle East. At an oasis he met Haj Kalil, priest, physician, philosopher and clan leader and was introduced into local ways of healing. That meeting influenced his approach to healing, leading to a belief that there are no diseases only patients.

Part 1 is a series of anecdotal case studies with rich descriptions of the people, landscapes and culture of the time. At the outbreak of WW1, he volunteered to help at a Serbian military hospital and describes a journey by boat from Pescara to Ragusa and by horse and cart to the hospital at Nish. After contracting typhus, he returned home to recover and then worked at the British military hospital in Cairo during the Dardanelle campaign. There he made friends with several British officers which led to his eventual move to England. Although he specialised in surgery, he also became experienced in dermatology through contact with leprosy. His reputation grew and after twice being kidnapped to treat injured criminals and families hiding leprotic members, he feared for his safety and decided to emigrate to England in the early 1920's.

Part 2 describes his rise to prominence in England by successfully treating patients whose own doctors were unable to cure. His approach to helping them was developed from a fusion of Levantine wisdom learnt from Haj Kalil, new scientific methods taught at Geneva University and researching psychotherapy techniques developed by Carl Jung. He would look for the causes, often in the subconscious or in lifestyle, rather than treat the symptoms. Also, his knowledge of tropical diseases helped to cure patients such as an equerry to a royal prince. Other prominent patients included Lord Beaverbrook, Doris Delavigne, Tallulah Bancroft and Anita Loos. He describes trips to Turkey and Albania at the special request of dignitaries who were trying to resolve inexplicable conditions. On his journeys back to the Middle East he carried out operations which would now be unacceptable in Western democracies. One anecdote describes how he inherited an unofficial Manet from a patient he cured. Apparently, Manet stayed as her guest on a trip to England and in return painted this picture for them, which had stayed in their house until the trustees past it on to him. Other gifts he received included copies of The Koran and The Arabian 1001 Nights.

Transcribed in October 2019 by author's son Leary Hasson. These memoirs were dictated over two to three years and were completed early 1978. He died in July 1979.

JE TROUVE BIEN

James Hasson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

INTRODUCTION

PART ONE

- I. Early Lessons in an Ancient Art
- II. 'Post Tenebras Lux'
- III. The Ways of Success and the Manner of Being
- IV. A Journey to Serbia
- V. Alexandrian Vignettes
- VI. A Detective Story
- VII. An Old Scourge
- VIII. A New Land

PART TWO

- I. Striking Up Again
- II. Beyond Their Skins
- III. The Inexplicable in Suffering
- IV. Max Beaverbrook and Friends
- V. Jewel Farm
- VI. Mahmoud – My Lucky Bet!
- VII. 'Le Médecin Malgré Lui'
- VIII. Sources of Inspiration

EPILOGUE

PROLOGUE

Dr. James Hasson, a Frenchman by birth, is a Doctor of Medicine from a reputable Swiss Faculty. He is a multi-linguist with a vast experience of medical experience in Egypt, England and on the Continent. He first practiced in Alexandria, where he made many friends during the First World War. He has entertained many with his narration of the oddities confronting a physician at that time. Some of these adventures are related in this book.

Dr. Hasson practised in England from the early Twenties. During the 1939-45 war he was appointed Consultant Physician to General de Gaulle's Forces in England and had many occasions to meet and exchange experiences with the many distinguished officers of these armies. Moreover, he entertained his friends lavishly at his home, Shenfield Mill, on the River Kennet.

At the end of the Second World War, he was awarded the Medal of Honour for Military Health by General de Gaulle's government. An honour equal to the medal he received twenty-five years previously from the Austrian Red Cross. Both were awarded, pro Patria et Humanitat, well within the finest traditions of the medical profession.

Dr. Hasson's first book, The Banquet of the Immortals, was published in 1948.

INTRODUCTION

In 1960 I bought our present home without seeing it. Somehow the advertisement on “Country Life” had attracted me deeply and, despite hearing that it had no proper kitchen, virtually no bathroom and an inadequate water supply, I made the decision. “Well, you are a sport!” exclaimed the Estate Agent. No doubt he had few other such clients.

We arrived from London to find a Georgian portico over which we saw the emblem of a unicorn and the motto, “Je Trouve Bien”. As a Frenchman by birth and an Englishman through choice, this represented a strange and wonderful welcome. It reflected my experiences simply and briefly.

Although the house was in need of much repair and redecoration, the panelling in the library was still intact so we built a fire there. With Andrée, my wife, on a stool, me on another and our four children – Frédéric, Lawrence, Françoise and Robert – on a bench between us, we discussed the prospects for the future. It seemed difficult to talk about the future, of the changes for us all in coming to this part of the West Country, without reflecting on the past – of our present home in Regents Park and my leaving the practice at Harley Street. Before I realised what was happening the children were asking for stories – my reminiscences really. When they were small I was quite good at developing a series of tales about a little blue fox but, now that they were in their teens, they were more interested in what I had been through and what I had achieved. It was fun to be drawn out by the children and they set me thinking.

My beginnings were modest, though sound, and through a great deal of hard work I graduated in medicine at Geneva in 1915. Even prior to that I had had some unusual adventures and subsequently I was to have more. Whether it was a difficult case, or a tight corner, or the imminence of personal loss, somehow I have always managed to emerge with something better than I had experience or possessed before. “Je Trouve Bien” could have been my motto from the earliest days. It has certainly proved true – be it with God’s help, a great deal of luck, my own efforts and the kindness of many friends and acquaintances.

These reflections are based upon the true stories I told my children. While we all have doubts about the future, I cannot tell you how important it is to hope and act in faith. “Je trouve Bien” is not possible without this and, in reflecting on my own past, I wish to share my thoughts in such a way as to encourage someone else to experience the same hope.

PART ONE

I. EARLY LESSONS IN AN ANCIENT ART

Imagine a mosque standing at the edge of a desert, its minaret gleaming white against an unsure sky. Surrounding the mosque is a small oasis of fig, date and banana trees against a backdrop of coronated palms. The front of the mosque is veiled by a magnificent climbing solandra studded with multi-coloured bougainvillea. The heavily scented air is alive with the chanting of a multitude of students in prayer. In the centre of the square facing the mosque is a large tourbeh, or tomb, which is reputed to contain mortal remains of a renowned saint. At this sacred spot many unhappy people claim to have found peace and a release from suffering through prayer.

This beautiful oasis, conjuring a vision of Haroud al Raschid and the Arabian nights, was the domain of a great man – Haj Kalil; a curious amalgam of priest, physician and protector. Originally the Haj had studied medicine in Constantinople but, after visiting the tomb of Mohammed, he also became a hodja. Eventually he settled at this monastery to practise his profession in accordance with his own personal philosophy.

After a short wait before the mosque I was ushered into the audience chamber where, for the first time, I set eyes on Haj Kalil – it was impossible not to regard him with awe. He was tall and handsome with very regular features, unswerving dark eyes and a small greying beard. A flowing robe of striped silk hung loosely from his shoulders and he was wearing a fez surrounded by a magnificent silk turban. His long tapering fingers were unmistakably those of a surgeon, whilst his manner and bearing were that of an aristocrat.

On each side of the room young Moslem priests muttered endless prayers, their nimble fingers running continuously over their amber sebhas. I later discovered that all of them had been blind since soon after their birth, all victims of trachoma. Even today, almost seventy years later, there are still over a million people suffering from this disease, although better hygiene and the advent of penicillin have greatly reduced its threat.

I was so enthralled with the scene that it was with a sudden sense of shock that I realised the great man was beckoning me to sit beside him. Despite my great trepidation and acute self-consciousness I managed to obey his unspoken command. During the sumptuous meal which followed he turned to me and said “I can sense something about you. Would I be correct in assuming that you wish to be a physician?”

“Yes Master,” I replied, “I shall be commencing my studies soon – in Geneva”.

He nodded gravely. “My son, I could demonstrate – if you so wish – the way in which I approach my patients. It will not be what they will teach you in Geneva but perhaps you may learn from it.” He turned his gaze onto a man seated some distance away. “Do you see that fellow?” he asked.

“The fat one?” I replied, immediately blushing at my apparent lack of manners.

“Yes – the fat one!” he laughed. “He is a celebrated physician from Beirut but he never fails to return here each year to learn the great truths of medicine... As if I – a mere student – were already a man of wisdom.

“But Master, you are famed for your wisdom.”

At these words he fell silent and his eyes seemed to fasten themselves to mine. After some time he said, "Many are physicians in name only – they are incapable of attaining wisdom."

We finished the meal in silence.

Alexandria at the beginning of the century was a place to know and love deeply. My home there was at Ramleh, within a stone's throw of the sea, and near a station which the British called Carlton. Our house was called Villa Carlton. My father had been a very capable book-keeper before he died from yellow fever at the age of thirty-eight. This left my mother a widow at an early age, with four small children to look after. She subsequently remarried and once again found happiness but the years between were very hard and a constant struggle.

I grew up with a strong desire to become a doctor. With a great deal of effort, and a little luck, I was accepted by the University of Geneva as a medical student. Three of my friends were also about to begin the university training when it was suggested that the four of us should undertake a tour of the Middle East before leaving for university. A tutor was engaged to accompany us and the trip was arranged. We set off for Alexandria in high spirits and hopeful of a pleasant holiday.

We landed at Beirut, off an Italian steamer, which was instantly surrounded by a swarm of feluccas. The crews of these tiny boats screamed belligerently for our patronage. Each hurled vituperation at his nearest neighbour and, simply to escape the din, our tutor hurriedly accepted the services of the closest boat. To the wily natives we were a gift from Allah, and I was soon to learn my first lesson in self-preservation.

Before exploring Beirut we needed local currency, so our tutor suggested we visit one of the roadside money-changers so familiar to travellers in the East in those days. We found six of them sitting cross-legged behind flimsy stalls in a nearby market-place. They sat at small deal tables covered with little piles of coins. Each of us patronised a separate money-changer and exchanged gold sovereigns for Turkish currency. I watched my money-changer examine my sovereign with a careful, critical eye. First he bit it and then weighed it in his hand. Finally, he tossed it onto a marble slab to test its ring. This seemed to satisfy him and he took some coins from a pile of silver pieces known locally as midjedish. Five of these were equivalent to one sovereign and he counted out four. He made up the difference in bishlicks, worth about a shilling each, which he took from a pouch inside his robe.

Soon afterwards we stopped to buy notebooks and I handed the shopkeeper a bishlick, which he examined very carefully, his eyes full of suspicion. After a few moments he threw the coin onto the counter. "Fausse-monnaie!" he spat in disgust. Being new to the game, I picked up the coin and offered him another. With hardly a glance at it he shouted the same words and the added "Ach! You dirty foreigners – you bring bad money to swindle an honest tradesman!" Somewhat startled I tried to placate him, pleading my innocence and inexperience. We finally succeeded in mollifying him and my friends showed him their coins. Many were found to be false and he advised us to go back to the money-changers – if they were still there – and challenge them. "Clearly," he said, "these fellows are rogues!"

Of course, by the time we returned to the market-place the money-changers had disappeared. Resigning ourselves to our losses, we changed some more money at a bank. A little while later we were sitting in a café, still discussing the affair, when an Arab entered. On seeing us he quickly turned on his heels and headed for the door. I

was certain it was his fellow who had cheated me and, without thinking, I set off after him.

Quickly catching up with him, I took him by his shoulders and accused him of cheating me,

“I have never set eyes on you in my life!” he protested.

“Don’t lie to me, thief – I want my money back!”

“Leave me, scum of the gutter, or I shall plunge this into your throat and think that you have never existed!”

With the blade of his kenjar flashing up to my face I beat a hasty retreat where, from a safe distance, I hurled abuse at him. By this time a large crowd had gathered around us, and my friends looked on in fearful silence. To my immense relief a policeman, complete with ancient rifle, arrived to see what the fracas was about. As I explained the facts to him the money-changer continually protested his innocence. The gendarme finally ordered us to accompany him to the local police station. Believing the standards of Turkish justice to be the same as that of the French or British, I thought that I had won the battle and that the matter would quickly be resolved in my favour.

The officer in charge of the police station was squatting on a straw mat, in the Ottoman fashion, the fingers of his right hand playing with the toes of his right foot. With his other hand he manipulated the long mouthpiece of a shisha from which he inhaled the fragrant smoke of Turkish tobacco.

The policeman explained the situation to his chief, after which the money-changer and I gave our respective versions of the story. His Excellency eyed us up suspiciously for two or three minutes as he continued to smoke and fiddle with his toes. Finally, in a slow pompous manner, he announced his verdict.

“Five bishlicks fine,” he said, not specifying who was to pay the money.

“He is a Christian and today is Friday,” squealed the money-changer, “let me kill him!”

I suddenly realised that the situation was not as simple as I had thought. “But Your Excellency – he cheated me!” I cried.

His Excellency the Law was unmoved. “I don’t care what he did, or didn’t do. Someone must pay the fine or you will both go to prison.” With an amused grin he looked up at me and added, “Not a very healthy place for a Christian!”

“I will not pay!” announced the grinning money-changer.

“But why should I be fined?” I pleaded, “I am in the right.”

“Then you will go to prison,” drawled the bored official.

So it turned out that the only way I could extricate myself from this delicate situation was to spend more money liberating a palpable rogue. It was my first experience of foreign soil

The following morning we left Beirut to continue our tour into countryside. How well I remember that day! We crossed the River Na hr El Kalb and approached the lovely Hills of Lebanon. It all looked as if nothing had changed for centuries. The flat-roofed houses built of mud and plaster still had no running water or sanitation, and even their occupants seemed changeless. I remember watching an old man collect salt from the arid desert, using a roughly fashioned wooden spade. The women and children chewed dried dates as they churned goat’s milk into butter. In

the centre of each small huddle of huts stood a communal well, with a primitive wooden bucket as the end of a long pole.

At a place called Alley, we struck up a conversation with a Lebanese family who offered us food and shelter for the night. There we saw a room fitted with layers of shelves stretching from the floor to the ceiling, all equipped with trays for the breeding of silk-worms. This was an industry brought to these parts thousands of years previously, probably by travellers on the overland trade route to China.

Our host, who had taken an interest in our journey, drew me aside later in the evening. "Near here," he said "there is a famous monastery where lives a truly holy man, He is a great physician – I have even heard it said that he has brought the dead to life!" Leaning forward, he raised a single finger, as if in warning. "If, as you say, you are going to become a physician, you would perhaps be wise to include this shrine on your itinerary!"

After two days walking, or rather climbing, we arrived at the crossroads our Lebanese host had said were near the monastery. Final directions were dispensed by a passing Bedouin, and shortly afterwards we arrived at the home of Naj Kalil.

My journey to the monastery had already proved colourful and exciting, but the Haj's personal synthesis of medicine, religion and philosophy was to prove even more fascinating.

I was very fortunate to see him at his work, and I remember well his handling of the case of a handsome middle-aged man bent nearly double with excruciating abdominal pains. This man had with him a parcel nearly ten inches thick of all the prescriptions that had been ineffective in helping him. Despite numerous cachets, tablets, powders and liquids, he still suffered unremitting pain from indigestion and heartburn.

The Haj asked the patient to list all the food he had eaten in the last two days, and a clerk took notes as he did so. He studied the patient for some time and then instructed him to follow a diet consisting solely of boiled eggs and milk for the next two days. He was to stay in bed and then return on the third day.

The patient returned at the appointed time, smiling happily and walking upright. The Haj then bade a servant bring in a muslin covered enamel bowl. The covering was removed and the patient invited to inspect the contents. A momentary look was sufficient to send the man reeling backwards – the stench was overpowering and the sight nauseating. The patient retreated to a safe distance, holding his nose.

"Ya Allah" he shouted. "What is this?"

"This" said Haj Kalil, "is similar to the food you ate in the two days before you came here. Nothing was added to it."

"Bismallah" exclaimed the patient. "No wonder I could get no better!...But what, then, was the use of all the drugs that have been prescribed for me?"

"Someone had to make an honest living," the Haj replied with a smile. "Now what do you think is going to be your treatment?"

"You have shown me the way, Master," replied the man. "May Allah multiply your wisdom!" Putting his hands into his pocket he drew out some gold coins and handed them to the Haj. "It is for those who cannot afford to travel here, Master," he said.

When the patient had departed, the Haj asked me what I thought of it all.

"It was certainly remarkable," I answered, "but couldn't the patient be induced to follow a strict diet by some other method?"

The Haj shook his head. "Surely he has been advised to do so many times before but has failed to continue with it. You must remember, young man, that some matches need a hard strike before they will ignite!"

I was intrigued by what I had seen and heard, so I asked the Haj to explain his general approach to illness and disease.

"The cause of most illnesses," he said "is error, and error must be seen and understood." He paused a moment and stroked his beard. "The effects of the basic cause must be removed. What I do is to remove obstructions so that healing can take place. I seek to find the basic cause so that its effect cannot materialise." He went on to develop his argument on a spiritual level: "I stand between the maladjusted and his transgressions and I achieve success when I liberate the sufferer from human error. I believe that, in the last extreme, the prayer of faith will save the sick man. Thus the physician must also become the priest. I am a physician and a priest but my power to heal is measured by my faith in God."

The foundations to this philosophy of medicine was that every human being is born with some sort of weakness and that it is usually this which leads him to the next world. A stress in the mind brings to the surface what we call an illness but this is really only the sufferer's tendency to weakness of some sort or another. This tendency, the Haj explained, is an invisible force, often undetectable, which needs a physical frame to demonstrate its presence. I wondered what all this meant and still give thought to it today.

Our visit to the monastery was not confined to the Haj's medical practice – none of my companions was going to read medicine. They were more interested in watching an arab band playing oriental airs and military marches. I was also intrigued by the sight of these handsome Bedouins – a fierce-looking crowd, in spite of their clean white burnouses and yellow sandals.

A few days later the Haj invited us to a parade involving more than a thousand mounted Bedouins, preceded by a mounted brass band playing that gorgeous Turkish March, 'Mashil Taamiira'. I could not help wondering why an army should be necessary in such a peaceful spot as this oasis on the edge of the desert. During dinner that evening the Haj explained that he often had to fight off maurauders who came down from the Horan Hills and, gathering at Beit el Din, frequently attacked the defenceless nomads or rich travellers on their way to the monastery.

"Are you always successful?" asked our tutor.

"Yes, always – thanks to Djerid!" the Haj replied.

"Who is Djerid?" I asked.

"Do not be impatient, Inshallah," said Haj Kalil, "you will be seeing him tomorrow when I review my troops. My spies tell me that bandits are once again massing in the hills.

Djerid turned out to be an enormous white camel, higher than any I had seen before. With that height and colouring he was sure to stand out in any battle. Apparently his size was matched by his ferocity, as he was often to be found chewing the mane of some horses he had killed during the fray.

Early the next morning we were awakened by the sound of a horn blowing reveille and leapt out of bed to see the army at practise. An empty space was reserved in the ranks for Djerid and soon he appeared, ridden by Haj himself. The Haj was wearing a flamboyant costume and carried a large naked sword which flashed in the morning sunshine.

And then there was Montaha, the Haj's beautiful fifteen-year-old daughter. She also wore a uniform and carried a sword, although her hair was completely concealed by a large black turban. We were told that she never missed a good fight,

and was always to be found at the side of her father where she fought with gallantry and distinction. The warriors moved in perfect unison, and when the order to charge was given, galloped off shouting their battle cry, "Djerid!" It was all so splendid and exciting that I longed to join in.

Thrilled by the review, I begged Montaha to find a way to take me with her to the battle which was expected on the following day. She reluctantly agreed and. When I returned to my tent that evening, I discovered some Bedouin clothing, a sword and a revolver under the canvas of my bed. With them was a note on scented paper which read: "Captain Bassiouni will call for you early in the morning and will place you where you should be able to watch the battle from a safe distance. I repeat – at a distance! Please obey the Captain's orders, otherwise your life might be put at risk."

Next morning I found myself placed at the rear of a battalion between two very fierce-looking Bedouins. I was mounted on a young camel of such a placid nature that I seriously wondered whether he could gallop at all. When we neared the battlefield and the troop sounded the battle cry, my mount allayed my doubts. Spotting a gap, he charged forward and I quickly found myself at the head of the charge. I echoed the deafening shout of the warriors with all the force of my voice. The enthusiasm was infectious and a transformation took place – I was no longer an educated young man about to train as a doctor, rather I was a wild young savage about to do battle with an unknown enemy! With the blood pounding in my veins, I rushed forward into the mêlée on the tide of this primitive excitement.

The maurauders – cowards as they usually are – took fright at our approach and turned their backs on our swords. Seeing the complete rout of the enemy I felt drunk with the pleasure of victory. It was a new and exhilarating emotion, not unlike the first nip of brandy after fasting.

Montaha came towards me, obviously concerned for my safety. When she was within a few feet of my side I began to sing the famous Turkish march, Mashii Taamiira, that I had heard played on the previous day. To my great delight soldier after soldier took up the song until the whole army had joined in. Montaha, fearing her father's reactions to my presence, murmured that I should hide myself away.

At dinner the Haj looked very serious. "Young man," he addressed me sternly, "I believe there was another young man with my army today, bearing a remarkable resemblance to you." He broke into a smile. "It's a pity you're leaving tomorrow for he was a cheerful fighter!"

When we went to say goodbye to the Haj the next morning, there was no further mention of the battle. He was smiling as he extended his hand to us in a gesture of friendly farewell. I promised that I would revisit the monastery whenever the opportunity arose and left with wonder and gratitude in my heart. This journey had taught me many things, but none more important than that all patients are, first and foremost, people – not simply examples of particular diseases: During my association with Haj Kalil I was to learn more medicine than in all my years of formal training.

II. POST TENEBRAS LUX

Soon after leaving the Haj I was admitted to the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Geneva. I clearly remember standing before the massive oak doors of the University and looking up at the portico with awe. Inscribed on it was the motto 'Post Tenebras Lux'. As I stood there gazing at the portico, I vowed I would do my utmost to make the most of the opportunity before me. Haj Kalil's parting advice to me had been, "sleep early and rise early, for Allah gave us the darkness to sleep and the daylight to work. Remember that the Devil invented artificial light." I determined to waste neither the daylight, nor the night.

Our training in medicine was certainly exacting. In Switzerland I am sure that they train doctors with the same careful precision as they make clocks and watches, and I responded to this conscientiously and with great enthusiasm. My first year was devoted to anatomy where our teacher would deliver stimulating lectures after which we would put the theory into practice in the dissection hall. It was not long before I was faced with the peculiar mixture of humour, tragedy, pathos and sheer fascination that goes to make up the life of a medical student.

One of the most shocking incidents occurred when a demonstrator by the name of Jules Duprés, whom I knew fairly well, was detailed to assist in the dissection hall. This was an enormous long forbidding room, where the bodies ready for dissecting were placed into shallow marble troughs and covered with black sheets. Jules drew back the sheet covering the cadaver we were to work on and he just dropped to the floor as if pole-axed. On his recovery the ghastly reason behind his fainting attack was revealed – he had recognised his own mother on the slab!

His parents had been separated for some time, and he had completely lost touch with his mother after she left the district. She took to drink and, some two years after he had last seen her, was admitted to the hospital under the assumed name of 'Madam Eugenie'. She died soon afterwards and, as the hospital authorities and police were unable to trace any relatives, they donated her body to the Department of Anatomy.

Poor Jules! He never recovered from the shock. The impact of the horrifying event was such that he was himself admitted to hospital and kept under constant observation. His distraught father came to visit him on several occasions but each time his son rejected him with the words, "It may have been your right to rid yourself of your wife but you had no right to take my mother from me!" Eventually Jules went completely insane, dying of his malaise shortly afterwards.

On the lighter side of the balance stood the Professor of Anatomy. One of his favourite tricks was to ask a student to step to the front of the class and enumerate all the muscles, nerves and circulatory components involved in the movements he had just made. Other movements were then requested and the same sort of explanation elicited. One day a girl student entered the lecture theatre a few minutes late. The Professor interrupted his lecture to ask her why she was late, paying little attention to her obvious embarrassment. She explained that she had just been to the lavatory. "Splendid!" cried the Professor. "Will you please describe for us the mechanism of defaecation or micturition, whichever you have just performed?" Amidst the anticipatory laughter the poor girl began to blush. Then, placing her hands over her stomach, she looked the Professor straight in the eye and said, "I'm very sorry, sir, but I think I need to go again!" Her reply raised a shout of laughter which resounded through the lecture theatre for several minutes.

Nevertheless, the poor girl was to have her revenge. One day the Professor asked her to draw a diagram of the male reproductive organs on the blackboard. As she was doing so he continued to lecture, only to be interrupted by peals of laughter from the audience. The cause of our amusement was the diagram on the blackboard.

"Why did you draw it like that?" the Professor gasped.

"I'm very sorry, sir," she way replied demurely, "but that's the only way I've ever seen it!"

Gustav, the First Assistant in Anatomy, once told us of how he had been for a stroll with the Professor in the par, only to find himself subjected to the same sort of treatment. They came across a gardiner raking the lawn and loading the debris into a wheelbarrow. The Professor caught Gustav by the arm rushed towards the gardiner. "Now Gustav," he said "here is an opportunity for you! Let us see if you remember your anatomy – describe the muscles involved in this fellow's movements!"

Gustav complained that the fellow was moving too quickly for him but the Professor merely scoffed. Just to prove that it could be done, he began himself to recite the Anticussis, Posticussis, rather in the manner of a schoolboy reciting a poem he had just learnt by heart. The gardiner, suddenly aware that he was the centre of attention, turned on the Professor. "What is so interesting about me that you should stare like that?" he asked truculently.

"Nothing!" replied Gustav on behalf of the Professor who was still reciting anatomy. "We were just discussing your movements."

"My movements!" exclaimed the indignant gardiner. "I'll give you my movements – take that!" In a flash he had gathered an armful of dead leaves and dropped them on the Professor's head. The Professor kept on reciting – Gustav fled.

Flabbergasted by the imperturbable Professor, the gardiner burst into laughter. Between guffaws he managed to shout, "Il fallait me le dire coquin que t'était pique!" (You should have told me that you were dotty, you rascal!) Absentmindedly, the Professor replied in the affirmative and wandered off in search of his assistant.

My studies absorbed me completely until, early in 1912, I received a letter from the Haj and Montaha asking me to spend a month of my summer vacation with them. When I landed on Beirut I was met by a fierce-looking Bedouin leading a pair of camels. He received me very warmly, and I recognised him as the chief of the Haj's

private army. After the usual salaams we are a hearty breakfast in a nearby café and set off for the monastery. We travelled through the night, arriving at the doors of the monastery the following evening. During the journey I asked him whether there was any interesting news.

“Yes, effendi,” he replied, we now have amongst us one who is the most hated creature in the world!”

This unfortunate creature turned out to be a little money called Zagazigu. Poor Zag was both despised and loved because of his enormous talent for teasing people. He would sneak into tents and steal the occupant’s purse which invariably would find its way into another person’s bedding. Before people became used to these pranks many a violent fracas would ensue. Another of his tricks was to pour salt into the drinking water, and he was also an expert on the art of collapsing tents. Everyone was very wary of him and, having been forewarned, I determined that the little devil was not going to play his tricks on me.

About three days after I arrive two students called at the monastery. These lads were making the journey to Beirut on foot and asked permission to spend a couple of nights at the monastery before they continued on. They were made quite welcome and given a small tent to sleep in, which they placed between the tourbeh and a small toolshed.

I awoke early the next morning to listen to the murmur of the wind, and to surprise the first kiss of the sun on the mountains. The muezzin began his call to early prayer and the scene was one of serene and inspiring beauty – except for Zagazigu! The scheming little brute was busy traipsing to and fro between the toolshed and the tent where the two buys were fast asleep. When he had finished whatever he had been doing he loped off in the direction of the kitchens, possibly in the hope of an early breakfast.

A short while later I was coming back from the ablutions pond, when I was almost knocked to the ground by the two students as they tumbled from their tent, grappling fiercely. Swearing, kicking, biting and scratching, they rolled past me and down the escarpment to the tourbeh, where they began to batter each other with amazing ferocity. With the assistance of a highly amused Bedouin, I managed to separate the combatants. One of them was bleeding profusely from the nose and forehead; and the other sullenly nursed a badly cut lip. Both seemed to be bleeding from the genitals.

When we had calmed them sufficiently I managed to find out what had precipitated the row. Apparently they had woken only to find a particular part of their anatomy covered in red paint – a very delicate and private part at that! Quite naturally each assumed that the other was the culprit and a fight broke out. The Bedouin examined the damage and, without consulting me, rushed to the toolshed and brought back a bottle of turpentine to remove the paint. This merely added fuel to an already raging fire!

A short while later the lads were brought before the Haj. They walked towards him with extreme difficulty, their legs stretched carefully apart. It was impossible not to laugh at them. In the face of this further embarrassment one of them again turned on his companion, protesting that the tin was hidden near his bed.

“No, my lord, it isn’t true!” protested his companion. “That viper hid the tin near my bed in order to incriminate me.”

“Be silent both of you!” laughed the Haj. “We already know who the culprit is...by the way, someone had better go and catch the little monster before he does any more damage.”

Obviously Zagazigu had been nosing around in their tent that morning, just to see what mischief he could get up to. Both lads were sleeping naked and the monkey had obviously noticed something which particularly caught his eye – something which, due to the brisk cold of the early morning, was a phenomenon not entirely rare! He then made his way to the toolshed where he picked up a tin of red paint and carried it back to the tent. Perhaps he wanted to transform the stiff flesh columns into barber’s poles but, whatever his motives, he certainly succeeded in causing both boys a great deal of discomfort. Even as they stood before the Haj, large angry blisters were beginning to form around the scrotum, pubes and penis of each boy. Without further delay the blistered organs were bathed in calamine lotion and both lads put to bed.

In the meantime, little Zag was condemned to ten strokes of a cane on his little red bottom, which became considerably redder as the punishment was meted out! He was then locked up for three days and put on a diet of a little bread and water. This punishment did not seem to dampen his spirits, however, for I can still remember him clinging to the bars of his cage, teeth bared as he screamed his farewell to the students.

The rest of my holiday passed peacefully and happily. I became very fond of Montaha and spent a great deal of my time with her, particularly helping her to build and repair the many dewponds which dotted the oasis. Montaha was quite an accomplished engineer and, under her direction, I also helped to construct a large reservoir for collecting the water deposited by the spring rains.

I also passed many hours discussing the meaning of life with Haj Kalil. He was a pessimist in all matters concerning the world. He believed that the world would one day be destroyed; not by bombs or soldiers, but by an invisible power which would render all males totally sterile. All men, animals, insects and plants would cease to bear offspring and the world would dwindle and die. One morning he drew me aside and said, “The outside world is no place for you James. Why don’t you come and live here with us when you graduate? I know that you and Montaha are very fond of each other. When you have finished your studies come back to us and take her for your wife. This little oasis is an island of love, where you may grow in spirit and bring up your children in the peace of Allah.”

These words expressed my every wish and I gratefully thanked the Haj for his unfailing kindness and understanding. I solemnly promised to return after taking my degree and make my home there. The Haj was delighted with my response and immediately ordered a feast to be prepared in my honour.

By that time I had already extended my visit to the monastery by an extra four weeks, and I barely had time to travel back to Alexandria to see my family before returning to Geneva for the September term. A few months later I received a long letter from Montaha, couched in the sweet and polite manner of the Arabic language – I believe that there is no language to match Arabic, even in the modern style for subtlety, beauty and wisdom.

She told me that they had written the story of Zag in the Book of Honour of the monastery. “Furthermore,” she continued, “I had to let you know, my dearest, that we had another stupendous trick from Zag after your departure. We recently had some visitors, including a Lebanese Maronite priest. The priest kept all his religious

objects in a large trunk in his tent. Three days after he arrived he found all of his things clogged in a mixture of glue and red paint at the bottom of the trunk. He was even more distressed to find that his silly black hat had been used as a mixing-pot for the disgusting mess!

You may well laugh as you read these details, my love, but the priest was really on the warpath – his claws bared and at the ready! He stormed around the entire oasis trying to catch poor Zag. In his trumpet-like nasal voice he even invoked the Almighty to take redress against the unfortunate creature. For over a week there was real pandemonium but no trace of Zag. Finally they sent out a search-party. To my horror they finally caught up with the poor thing and shot him!”

Her letter ended charmingly, “Please look after yourself, my dearest, and I pray God to keep you in good trim for next exam. We all send you our best wishes and I add prayers to induce you to come back to us soon.” Inside the fold of the rose-coloured paper I discovered a white pansy.

Alas, I was never to see Haj Kalil and his beautiful daughter again. Some time after I received this letter, the Turkish army in retreat from Jerusalem passed through the monastery, where they slaughtered everyone they found. The bodies of many Bedouins who had all too obviously fought to the death were later found strewn all over the place. The Tourbah of the Descent had been desecrated, and the main building of the monastery had been rased to the ground. There was not a trace of Montaha, nor her remarkable father. What happened to them I do not even dare to guess, and I have never fully recovered from this tragic loss.

Towards the end of my student days I found myself appointed assistant to Professor Megevand of the Medico-Legal Department. At that time I was running very short of money and, with my debts mounting up, there was some doubt as to whether I would be able to complete my studies. This doubt was soon dispelled when I met Claudette Dutremblay.

Claudette was a lovely young girl, a year younger than myself and also a medical student at Geneva. We got to know each other when we were required to complete a joint assignment and romance flourished. Within a few months we were planning to marry at the end of our studies. But, in the meantime, our financial situation was extremely insecure. It was then that Claudette hit upon the idea of writing degree theses for some of our less literate colleagues. Many of the students, whilst being excellent scientists, were nevertheless poor authors; for a modest fee Claudette and I would take their laboratory notes and turn them into presentable degree theses. We earner a good deal of money in this manner, although the extra burden of work imposed a demand too great for Claudette to satisfy. One day I returned to my room to find a pile of incomplete theses and a short note from Claudette. To my utter astonishment she had married a friend of mine; one Ali Anwar, a Turkish scoundrel with a lot of money and little honour. I was absolutely furious but refused to be bowed by the insult. I attacked the remaining unfinished work with a ferocious energy and quickly cleared the bulk of it. In the months that followed I tried to put Claudette completely out of my mind but, as often as not, found my thoughts creeping back to her. Little did I realise that she was to re-enter my life many years later under vastly different circumstances.

As I mentioned above, I had been posted to the Medico-Legal Department of the university. In this capacity I was called upon to perform a post-mortem on the body of a six-month old baby. Both parents were known to be heavy drinkers and accustomed to having frequent violent rows; sometimes these fights were of such ferocity that the neighbours were caused to complain to the police. The story so far was that the mother had found the child dead in her cot, with no apparent reason for the child's death. The police were informed by the attending doctor and, due to the couple's evil reputation, suspicions became aroused. The couple had been detained at the police station and, pending the result of the post-mortem, were likely to be charged with causing the death of the child through sheer neglect.

As the Professor had to leave for a conference in Zurich that morning, he simply made a brief external examination of the body and instructed me to perform the post-mortem proper. "Un autre drame de la misère," was his only comment. I agreed that poverty was probably at the root of it, as it was of so many tragedies in those days. Nevertheless, my task was only to discover the pathological cause of the child's death.

With the pathetic little body on the slab, I began my examination. I made notes on the external appearance of the body and then, armed with the post-mortem knife, I excised the thymus gland from the child's neck. It was at least three times the normal size. I weighed and measure it and continued the examination.

Quite naturally, the police were anxious to hear the results of the post-mortem before taking any action against the parents. Both they, and the parents, were relieved to hear that my report stated the cause of death to be suffocation due to an abnormally enlarged thymus gland, and definitely not as a result of foul play.

This case of Status Lymphaticus, as it is now known, was the subject of the thesis I wrote soon afterwards for my doctorate. The story of the baby attracted a great deal of public interest, largely as a result of the publicity given to it by the press. I was invited to give a lecture on the case, and in the audience was the brilliant young Swiss physician, Robert F., at that time First Assistant to Professor Bard, who held Chair of Clinical Medicine.

Immediately after the lecture, Robert congratulated me warmly on my work and subsequently we became firm friends. He was a tall dark-haired handsome man, with exceptionally blue eyes, a moustache and goatee beard. He always dressed very casually and live in a carefree manner. Robert read my thesis before I submitted it to the Faculty Examination Board and confidently declare that I need not worry about the result. Although I was not really worried about the examination, Robert's kind words eased my mind considerably and, when I was summoned to the Dean's office to hear the result, I was full of confidence.

The Dean told me that my thesis had been accepted, and offered me his congratulations. He asked what I had intended to do in the future.

"Try to make a decent living sir," I replied.

"Splendid!" he said. "But before you go, I feel I should offer you some advice, Hasson. I believe that there are three essential ingredients in any formula for success. The first is knowledge...I have to warn you that your many years of work at this university represent only the beginning of that knowledge," he paused and, as if underline his point, regarded me sternly for several moments, "you still have a great deal to learn. The second is savoir-faire...It is not enough to know what to do, you must also know how to do it!...with tact. Do you understand?" I nodded dumbly.

“Good! The final point is perhaps the most important – it is integrity...I think you have that already. Follow these prescriptions, young man, and your intelligence will take you wherever you wish to go.” He reached across his desk and offered me his hand. “Bonne chance, Doctor Hasson.”

III. THE WAYS OF SUCCESS AND THE MANNER OF BEING

In spite of his excellent qualifications and important position at the hospital, Robert F. had only managed to build a small practice. Even the little income such a small handful of patients might promise was probably halved by Robert’s attitude to money. He would only ever charge a modest fee for all his services and, even then, he would advise patients to call at the hospital should they wish to see him again. As this usually meant that they would have to pay nothing next time most people readily accepted his advice. Even in his private life Robert was a quiet unassuming man. He spoke very little – certainly never about himself – and he was terribly shy with women, although he enjoyed their company and they were usually more than prepared not to be shy with him! Nevertheless, Robert kept himself to himself. Apart from his housekeeper, Berta, I suppose I was the only close friend he had.

The fact that Robert employed Berta at all was itself something that mystified me for some time. As I came to know Robert better I soon realised that he could ill afford to feed and clothe himself, let alone employ a housekeeper. However, I later discovered that Berta had looked after Robert for most of his life. She may not have been his mother in name but, in every other respect, she certainly fulfilled that role. She stayed with Robert through simple love and loyalty.

The night of my interview with the Dean I had been invited to dine at Robert’s flat. When I arrived Berta drew me aside and whispered that she must see me alone to discuss the Doctor. She said that she was extremely concerned about him – would it be convenient if she called at my room later that evening? I told her to call at eleven. In the meantime the dinner was a great success, with Robert laughing and as cheerful as ever. When I left he seemed to be his usual serene self and I wondered what Berta was worried about.

“Monsieur James.” Said Berta, sitting on the very edge of one of my armchairs, “I came to tell you that the Doctor is not at all well and, what’s worse, if something isn’t done soon he may find himself out on the street!”

“But Berta, he looked well and happy this evening.”

“That sort of happiness won’t pay his bills, Monsieur James. He owes quite a lot of money to several tradesmen – they’re threatening to take him to court!” At this

point Berta burst into tears and as I tried to comfort her, she muttered something about needing my help.

“What do you want me to do, Berta?”

“I have a plan to help the Doctor,” she explained. “and with your help, and Marcel’s – he’s the butcher – I’m going to launch him into a better life.”

All that Berta would tell me of her plan was that she wanted me to make sure that Robert was in a certain square at an appointed time, three days later. Nevertheless, I had great faith in Berta and, as Robert was obviously in desperate trouble, I agree to help her out.

On the agreed day Robert and I were sitting on a bench in the garden of a square watching sparrows fighting for crumbs of our bread. I was engrossed with the action of a particular bird that had the entertaining knack of catching pellets of bread in mid-air, when Robert pointed out an old lady in a wheelchair. She appeared to be very ill, coughing fiercely and struggling for her breath almost to the point of collapse. True to form, Robert rushed across to the woman and offered his services. Suspecting that Berta’s plan had been put into action, I remained seated.

The old lady’s attendant explained, in a voice loud enough for all to hear, that her employer had been ill for a very long time and was unable to walk. After a few questions Robert wheeled the woman over to our bench where he lifted her from the chair and placed her next to me. He then pressed the phrenic nerve at the base of her neck and asked her to breathe in deeply. Within a few seconds her coughing ceased and, to the amazement of the small crowd that had gathered to watch the spectacle, the old lady actually stood up. She brushed aside those who rushed to her aid and exclaimed, “my God – I’m cured!” Pressing her face into Robert’s chest, she sobbed, “You are a miracle-worker, Doctor, your touch has cured me!”

Robert threw a puzzled glance at me and whispered, “Hystero-trauma?” He smiled at the old woman and gently tried to life her back into the chair. She would have none of it. “Miracle! Miracle!” she shouted. “This man must be a saint!” Meanwhile the ‘nurse’, apparently overcome with awe, knelt in silent prayer. Many of the onlookers asked for the doctor’s name and, by the evening, even the newspapers had taken up the story. Robert became famous overnight!

In the weeks which followed, Robert’s consulting rooms were absolutely crammed with prospective patients. The rich left their gold; the poor left their gratitude, but all received the same courteous treatment from Robert. O went to visit him one evening and found him apparently unchanged, as calm and smiling as ever. The only obvious changes were the twinkle in Berta’s eye and the improved quality of the food she served.

I remarked on the fact that he seemed to have become very busy of late. “Yes,” he replied, “but I’m damned if I can understand what’s happened. I suppose it’s a case of the Dean’s rule for success...I’ve had the knowledge for years and hope I still have – I guess I’m finally learning how to use it!”

During the next month or so we dined together less frequently. Robert was always busy. His awareness of his good fortune seemed to be taking its toll. He became increasingly less patient and rather curt. Others noticed the change as well, finding him less courteous and natural. He was becoming pompous and had started

to farm his poorer patients out to the junior hospital staff, complaining that he did not 'have enough time for those who could afford to reward talents, let alone beggars!' I much preferred the original Robert, whose humility was his greatest attribute.

Later that year I went to say farewell to him, as I was leaving Geneva for Serbia. I found him a completely changed man – arrogant and impatient. He asked me to sit, looked me straight in the eye and said, "You all laughed and criticised me when I was poor – but at least I was happy. For your information, I've learnt all about Berta's scandalous trick." He smiled and went on, "The butcher's wife!...Nevertheless it worked like a charm! There are others, you know, who have played their part in my metamorphosis...I wonder if the Almighty is trying me with success?...To see how I respond?"

Some years later I returned to Geneva and visited the Cantanol Hospital to see my old friend, Robert. He was busy lecturing so the matron took me along to see Professor Bard, with whom I chatted until Robert had finished. Robert rushed to greet me with the same warmth and enthusiasm of old. He insisted that I should lunch with him at his house.

How times change! I was driven, not to the old flat in Plain Palais, but to a magnificent house on the very fashionable Quai des Bergues, facing Lake Geneva. It was a scene of unparalleled beauty. The house itself stood in perfectly manicured gardens, surrounded by trees which stretched all the way to the shore of the lake, forming a perfect windbreak. Inside, the house was replete with furniture and pictures of the finest taste – apparently Robert's knowledge of the fine arts matched his immense medical knowledge! I looked around with growing admiration. Above the fireplace in his study were Perugino's 'Divine Twins', St. Jerome and St. Sebastian; a work that I was to see again much later in the Wantage Collection in England. In his sumptuous reception room hung the adorable panel of the 'Coronation of the Virginia', by Lorenzo di Credi. One hundred years previously, this picture had been the joy of Samuel Rogers. This poet and dilettante who, afflicted by immobility for most of his mature life, placed this painting opposite his bed. Thus he was able to see it first thing in the morning, at the sound of the Angelus; and last thing at night, when, with the bells announcing Vespers, he could read the inscription at the foot of the frame: Veni Coronaberis Corona Gratiarum (Come that I shall crown you with the Crown of the Graces).

In Robert's bedroom hung an original version of Fragonard's, La Fruite à Dessein, now in my possession. In a salon overlooking the lake was a La Vierge et L'Enfant of imposing size by the famous seventeenth-century French painter, Simon Vouet. This cultural and tasteful spectacle was completed by a magnificent library of rare books and first editions.

While we were at lunch I could not help but feel that my host expected me to question him about the complete transformation in his fortune but I remained silent. As I expected, he finally broached the subject himself, "Well, James, I daresay you have noticed some changes since you were last in Geneva?"

I smiled at him and nodded. He continued, "Berta's fiendish little trick worked out very nicely, didn't it?"

"La fin justifie les moyens!" I murmured.

"La fin justifie ler moyens." He echoed, as if in a dream. "The advice the Dean gave you, James – tell me, did you think I lacked any of those qualities when I didn't have enough money to pay my bills?"

"No, certainly not." I replied, "but you needed the initial push...and you were too proud to ask for it."

“It wasn’t because of pride, James, but because I was happy and amply satisfied with my lot. Things have changed now, though...thanks to Berta and the devil!”

The devil? I wondered what on earth he was talking about. It hardly seemed possible that he could mention Berta and the Devil in the same breath. He rose from his chair and walked over to the window where, for a few moments, he gazed down thoughtfully.

“How do you like my new Landau?” he asked.

“Well, I...its very nice.”

“Nice, eh? Do you know how much it cost?”

I hesitated, wondering what he was up to. It was a beautiful car and he drove it with considerable skill. That surprised me! I recalled that Robert was always falling off his bicycle, or running into things. In the old days Robert was terrified by cars. He turned from the window and stared at me, obviously waiting for an answer.

“I don’t really know – quite a lot I suppose?”

“Quite a lot you suppose,” he retorted in an almost mocking tone as he walked back to the table. “Well, James, the bloody thing cost a lot more than you’ll ever imagine...a great deal more!” He made an impatient gesture. “Ah, I don’t know!” Thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his trousers he walked back to the window where he exclaimed, “Yes I Do!”

“What’s the matter with you Roberts? What is it?”

“Well, just look at us! You look as if your body’s been starched along with your shirts...and I feel as if I ought to be going to a wedding. Oh, do you remember when we used to cycle everywhere?”

“Of course I do.”

“Well, we couldn’t do much cycling in these clothes! I don’t know...things seemed to be much easier then. Do you remember the university food? God, it was awful sometimes!”

“The soup would be pretty hard to forget!”

“Yes, but what about the spaghetti, though? Prodigious amounts – and only thirty centimes!” For a few moments Robert’s face lit up, but then it quickly collapsed into a mask of mournful despair. “I can’t do that anymore,” he said quietly.

“Can’t do what?”

“Oh, lots of things, James. My exalted position at the hospital won’t allow me to eat at a cheap café. I can’t just slip in for a quick bread-and-butter pudding anymore...no, my meals are nearly all business occasions these days. I can only dine with the right people, accept only the right invitations and discuss Count So-and-so’s liver over the soufflé.” He sighed deeply and stared into space. For a moment I wondered whether he had forgotten I was there, but then he looked up and said, “And what’s worse, James, I’ve managed to become as dishonest as the people I once despised.”

“No – surely not!”

“Well, it seems necessary – it’s part of the rules of the game that I’m playing. Each rich patient likes to believe that he’s the most important person in the world. I spend more time pandering to their pretensions than I do on treating them – not that there’s ever a great deal wrong with most of them.”

“But surely you’re exaggerating, Robert?”

“Ha! You’ve got a lot to learn. You should hear the smooth way my secretary puts off a rich patient who wants an early appointment!” Mimicking her voice, he went on, “I’m sorry, Madame, but it would be impossible for the doctor to see you today as he will be operating this afternoon’...Can you imagine me operating, James?”

I haven't touched a scalpel for years! It's all so stupid – so dishonest!" He moved back from the window and slumped into his chair, "I'm sorry, James, am I boring you?"

"Not at all," I replied. "Look, Robert, if it's worrying this much, it can only help to talk about it."

"Yes...but there's such a lot. Do you know that my pharmacist has started to gild the pills that I prescribe?"

"For God's sake!" I snorted.

"Exactly! When I asked why he was doing it, he replied, 'Tel medecin tel pillule'. Am I to suppose I'm made of gold?"

I was speechless but Robert sighed and went on, "I don't seem to have any control over things any more. Even the Supreme Conclave of the Professors of the Faculty have been swayed by an apparent success."

"In what way?"

"In their great wisdom they have decided that I am now a fit person to occupy the Chair of Clinical Medicine, which will be vacated shortly. Five years ago, that same Conclave rejected outright...Well, if I wasn't good enough for them then, I'm certainly not now!" He leant forward across the table, saying "I won't accept their offer, James. I want to go back to the way things used to be."

He was as good as his word. Shortly after our reunion he literally gave up all his riches to charity and simply disappeared. I eventually heard of his whereabouts when some friends of mine ran across him some years later. He was practising in a remote town on the Italian-Swiss border, with Berta still looking after him.

In 1950 I visited Switzerland for the first time in many years and I went in search of Robert and Berta. My search ended at a little cemetery not far from Locarne. Here I was shown two tombstones; engraved on one was, Ci-gît Robert F., l'ami des pauvres. P.P.L. ; and on the other Ci-gît Berta Katz, l'amie dévouée de tout les temps. P.P.E. It seemed to be a strange coincidence that Robert and Berta, inseparable in life, should have come to rest side by side after a brief but full life's work in the services of humanity. I gathered two bunches of wildflowers and laid them on the white marble.

Naturally I was anxious to learn how it was that my two friends had died at the same time, so I questioned the priest who had shown me the graves. He told me of how deeply the local people had admired Robert and were affected by his tragedy. His unassuming kindness and devotion had won their hearts. Robert had lived up on the hills in a humble chalet with his housekeeper but, although rich in humanity, he was far from rich materially. He treated all his patients equally, earning very little but spending even less. What money he did not need was given to those less fortunate than himself.

One evening, around midnight, he had been called to a nearby village to deliver a baby. After an easy delivery he cycled home at about three in the morning. On his arrival he was greeted by the sight of his home being devoured by flames. It was later thought that Berta must have been waiting up for him and fallen asleep in front of the fire. A spark must have set fire to the curtains and, eventually, the whole chalet was ablaze. Police, firemen and friends rushed to help but the fierce heat drove them back and it was impossible to rescue Berta. Robert, refusing to believe that nothing could be done for her, rushed into the flames, His desperate attempt to save her only resulted in his own death.

"It was his last unselfish act, Signore, and I cannot describe the sorrow of the entire village when we laid their remains to rest. All we really know of them was their names and to this day I have never been able to discover any relatives."

The priest said that he often repeated his memories of them to his parishioners, and they to their friends. My own children have often heard Robert's story – a story of real success. My only sadness is simply that I have never met a similar friend. My life was the poorer for Robert's death but his influence on me has been profound and I am deeply thankful for my memories of him.

IV. A JOURNEY TO SERBIA

My years as a student ended all too soon when, in March 1915, I graduated as a Doctor of Medicine. What a change when the fun and irresponsibility of studentship is over! It is exhilarating and awesome to step from the safe world of the lecture theatre, where a mistake is usually theoretical, to the world of medical practice where a mistake can be irrevocable. I felt both proud and humble, yet horribly unsure. But at least I had had some experiences of responsibility and mature relationships; I felt sure that this would stand me in good stead as I entered my chosen profession.

The first World War was getting into its stride and, on the fifteenth of May, 1915, I packed my few belongings into a valise and set off to a café where I was to rendezvous with a man named Paolo di Pietro. Since finishing at the University my circumstances had changed rapidly. I had been discussing the war with the French vice-consul to Geneva, and he pointed out that our Serbian allies were desperately short of physicians. When I expressed an interest in this situation, he arranged for me to meet with an official of the Serbian Embassy so that I could discuss any offer of assistance I might be prepared to make.

As a result of this I was enlisted into the Serbian medical corps and found myself bound for Serbia and the war. It was arranged that I should travel to Pescara on the Italian coast in the company of one of Paolo di Pietro, a trader carrying goods along the route from Geneva to Pescara. From there I would take a steamship to Ragusa, where transport would be waiting to take me to an army hospital in Nish.

As arranged, Paolo was sitting at a large marble table by the window. He leapt to his feet and, with both arms outstretched, rushed to greet me as if I were an old and dear friend. Begging me to sit, he ordered some coffees and explained that, although he was in a hurry to be off, there was always time to discuss business in comfort. As my mother was Italian and had taught me this beautiful language as a child, we conversed easily.

“Paolo,” I said, “Signor Christiani suggested that I travel through Italy with you. He gave me this letter for you.”

“Yes, yes, my friend,” he took the letter from me and tore it open. I could see that it contained some money as well as a note. “I’ve seen Christiani,” he continued. “He tells me that you are a fine young doctor wishing to go to Pescara...ah, yes, this is what he says in the note.”

I recounted my story to Paolo who, tentatively massaging the back of his right wrist, listened intently as I spoke. He was a sturdy stockily-built man, about ten years older than myself. A most striking feature of his appearance was his hands – they were huge and sunburnt, with long strong fingers encrusted with callouses. His chest was powerfully built with wide square shoulders. Unfortunately, his legs seemed to be unreasonably short by comparison with the rest of his body, this giving him the appearance of a lumbering Humpty Dumpty.

He assured me that he would be delighted to have my company on the journey. I received the impression that he was a kind generous man, the sort of person you would feel safe with in an emergency. Nevertheless, he insisted on seeing my medical diplomas and passport, which he examined quite circumspectly. Evidently satisfied he clapped his hands together and said. “Va bene, va bene, dottore. We leave at once – and in three weeks...no – two weeks! In two weeks you shall be strolling Pescars, admiring the beautiful girls!”

Paolo travelled by horse and cart, and it was lucky that I had very little luggage for the cart was piled high with large tins of olive oil, cheeses, pasta and cloth. Even on the seat I had to wedge myself in between assorted tins and bottles. As we travelled Paolo regaled me with tales of his adventures and accounts of many ambitious schemes for the future. He seemed to have a morbid fascination with surgery, pleading with me to tell him what grisly sights I had seen and – even more exciting! – done. Had I ever sawn off a man’s leg? Was it true that a person’s guts could be stretched for many metres?

Eventually, he tentatively showed me his own physical disability, a large painful lump on the back of his right wrist. I was quick to seize the opportunity. I asked him to stop the cart while I made a careful examination of this mysterious lump. For this consultation I put on an extremely serious face.

“How long have you had this problem?” I asked.

“For many years,” he replied, his voice becoming a little uncertain. “It comes and goes...it’s nothing, Dottore, don’t trouble yourself with it.”

“Hmm! I see!” I said, gravely examining the lump. “No, Paolo, I’m afraid something must be done about it.”

“What is it, Dottore? Is it something serious?”

“Paolo, my friend,” I said, clasping his hands in mine, “I’m afraid there’s only one thing for it.” His eyes grew wider and his mouth gaped open. Gently pushing his mouth shut with my forefinger I whispered, “Do you have a bible, Paolo?”

“B-b-bible?”

“Yes, my friend. Do you have a bible?”

“But why do you need a bible? Tell me, Dottore, what is wrong with me, eh? What is the trouble?” For several moments he sat staring at me, his face blank and immobile. Suddenly he twisted round and attacked a pile of boxes in the cart behind him. “I have a whole box of bibles,” he cried, “they sell very well!” In his eagerness to get at the bibles he overturned another pile of boxes and, together with several tins of olive oil, they cascaded over the edge of the cart. I couldn’t contain myself and I burst out laughing.

“Oh, Paolo, Paolo – you should see your face!”

Poor puzzled Paolo, bible in hand, gaped at me like a fish out of water. Still laughing, I took the bible from him. "Hold out your hand and flex your wrist," I ordered. He did so very slowly, as if in a trance. Before he realised what I was up to, I gave him a sharp crack on the back of the wrist with the book. This brought him back to life with a jolt. With an almighty oath

, he grabbed his injured wrist. To his astonishment both lump and pain had disappeared and, realising the joke I had played on him, he also began to laugh.

The lump on his wrist had been a large ganglion – a harmless and quite common complaint caused by a build up of fluid due to a slight degeneration of the tendon sheaths. An effective, although temporary cure is simply to burst the sac containing the fluid. I told him that it would probably recur within a few months but that he could resort to a bible himself on the next occasion. With Paolo much relieved at his new lease of life, we repaired the damage to the cart and continued on our way. I began to sing some Neapolitan songs I had learnt as a child and Paolo soon joined in with great gusto.

Three days of slow but pleasant travel brought us to the outskirts of Milan. The little inn where we spent that night belonged to a man named Farucchi – an enormous dark haired fellow with beetling eyebrows and very thick lips. I was delighted with this inn through what appeared to be a remarkable coincidence. The inn itself was quite unremarkable – a modest establishment with a tiny stable at the rear – but it nestled at the end of a narrow street called *Via Gerusalemme*. What made this interesting was the large wooden board hanging over the entrance to the inn which proclaimed this to be the *'Ristorante del Tasso'*. How many times had I read Torquato Tasso's beautiful poem, *Gerusalemme Liberata*, and marvelled at its style and grace!

During our supper of soup and pasta I questioned our host as to the origins of the name of the inn. Apparently the inn had belonged to his family for several generations and, as far as he knew, had always had that name but he was unable to say why this should be so.

Farucchi's daughter, Maria, served us at the table and I noticed that she was wearing a black bandage over her right eye. Every few minutes she would put her hand to the bandaged eye and rubbed it gingerly. I asked Farucchi what was wrong with her.

"Ah, my poor little angel Maria! For three months now she has complained that her eye burns and itches. I've taken her to the doctor many times, only to be given ointment or drops. They give relief for a few hours only, the next day Maria is rubbing her eye again." He lovingly looked across at his daughter. "She seems to be taking a long time to recover," he sighed.

Meanwhile, Paolo was busying telling everyone present that I was a famous young doctor from Geneva, giving an animated demonstration of how I cured his wrist. When Paolo revealed that I was travelling to Serbia to fight against the invaders, many people congratulated me and wished me well. Talk then turned to the war and whether or not Italy would join in, and on what side.

The next this I knew, Maria's mother was at my elbow, begging that I take a look at her daughter's eye. Presumably word had reached the kitchen that I was a doctor, and she had decided that this was too good an opportunity to be missed; particularly after Paolo's gross exaggeration of my abilities! I said that I would be delighted to give my opinion and do what I could. Maria was quickly fetched from the kitchen.

A quick examination quickly revealed that Maria was suffering from a form of conjunctivitis. I was about to say that there was nothing I could do that had not been done already when I noticed a ‘mal-directed’ eyelash. It was growing sideways instead of straight, and its persistent irritation. A pair of tweezers quickly removed the offending eyelash. I explained what had happened to her parents, and told them to watch the direction of the new lash. Should it not grow normally I suggested they have it destroyed by an ophthalmologist. Finally, I directed that Maria’s eye be washed thoroughly and asked her not to wear the bandage in bed.

The next morning I was just finishing my breakfast coffee when I was told that there were some people waiting at the door, begging to be allowed to see me. Apparently news of my success with Maria had travelled quickly.

First came an old man with double cataracts. There was nothing I could do for him, other than suggest that he have the cataracts removed by surgery. As first he was uncertain about having an operation, but I managed to convince him that only this could restore his sight. Then came two sisters, both elderly sisters. They brought some eggs and fruit with them, presumably to pay for their consultation. Again both suffered from cataracts but with the additional problem of glaucoma. Because of their declining eyesight these poor women could no longer work, and had been reduced to begging for enough food to keep themselves alive, I was so deeply moved by their generosity in the face of such a miserable plight that I gave them a sovereign each. Again, all I could suggest was surgical removal of the cataracts.

From Milan we continued south through Codogna and Piacenza, spending a night in each place. As we travelled on towards Parma, Paolo continued a harangue which had become all too familiar.

“Dottore – please listen to me?”

“Oh, spare me! I’ve listened to nothing else since we left Farucchi’s. Look Paolo, my job is to get to Nish on time, not to setup in practice along the way!”

“But I’m not asking you to do that – just to make a little money on the way. What harm can that do?” Raising his hands palms upturned, he smiled hopefully at me. “That’s all – just a little business on the way.”

“But I don’t need the money!”

“Dottore!” he implored. “Have charity! Many of these people never get to see a real doctor. You would be able to help them, no? Besides it would help to pay for our way!”

“I’ll think about it – no more,” I said, “but please stop nagging me.”

Paolo threw his hands up in mock despair. He had immediately seen the possibility of making extra money out of my skills, and simply could not understand my unwillingness to co-operate. His idea was that I should set up a temporary surgery in each of the villages we stopped at. The trouble with the scheme was really that my medical supplies were extremely limited, and only goodness knows what miracles Paolo’s advertising would have the peasants expecting of me. Nevertheless, his arguments did have some point. Many peasants, particularly in the smaller villages, received no proper medical attention whatsoever. Doubtless I would be able to do a great deal of good for them. My natural inclinations, however, went against the idea, despite Paolo’s entreaties.

Paolo had quite a lot of business to attend to in Parma so we spent three days there. I passed most of the time on the Palazzo della Pilotta which contains a superb collection of both Italian and other paintings. Besides this collection, there is a library holding many priceless manuscripts and a museum showing Roman and Etruscan pieces. I also visited the cathedral to see Correggio's magnificent fresco of the Assumption.

While we were there Paolo had to make a side-trip to a small village nearby. Although I could have remained in Parma, the prospect of a fair in the village induced me to accompany him.

We arrived just as dusk fell and Paolo hurriedly made his deliveries. The village was almost deserted except for the main square where villagers were dancing to very lively music. As Paolo was well-known hereabouts it was not long before both of us were drawn into the festivities.

The evening was an extremely pleasant one and rather went to my head. Having consumed far too much wine, I awoke the next morning to find Paolo shaking me by the shoulder. I had fallen asleep behind a small fountain and now felt very much the worse for wear. To the delight of the locals I was carried to the cart and dumped back into the back. I did not care how silly I looked – all I wanted to do was sleep.

My head cleared after a couple of hours, and I had just clambered onto the seat next to Paolo when I made a horrifying discovery.

“Paolo...my money! It's gone!”

“Surely not, Dottore. You must have misplaced it. Take another look.”

“No, Paolo – it's gone. I'm sure of it!”

The Serbian Embassy had given me money to pay for my travel and I had kept it knotted into a large handkerchief which I kept knotted around my waist. It was no longer there and had certainly been stolen. I begged Paolo to return to the village to see if we could recover it but he discouraged the idea.

“It would be no use, my friend,” he said. “There were many strangers there last night – any one of them could have taken it!”

“But we must go back – it's all the money I had!”

“It would be impossible to find the thief now. I'm sorry, Dottore, but it would be a waste of time.”

All the way back to Parma I silently cursed my bad fortune. All my money had gone! How was I going to get to Serbia now? I was surprised and angered by Paolo's apparent lack of sympathy. In the face of my calamity he remained quite unperturbed. He did try to cheer me up but his clumsy attempts only made me feel worse and, in the end, we travelled in thick silence. Later that night Paolo finally said what I had been expecting – “Now that you have no money, Dottore, you'll just have to do what I've been asking you to.”

For the next five days we remained on Parma whilst I treated patient after patient. Most of their complaints were quite simply to deal with, and I spent my time dressing wounds, lancing boils and dispensing simple medical advice. This pattern was repeated as we passed through Reggio and Modena and, by the time we reached Bologna, much of the money I had lost had been replaced.

Whilst in Bologna I managed to find time to visit the university. This was where the first authorised lectures in human anatomy were given, despite sharp objections from the Church. I was lucky enough to see the anatomical models carved in limewood by Lelli. Such models were necessary due to the difficulty and expense of obtaining actual human cadavers for teaching purposes. There were almost too perfect!

We moved on through Imola and Faenza, to Forli. By now it was hardly necessary for Paolo to 'drum up business', as he insisted on calling it. My reputation ran before us like a fire driven by wind. On some occasions we would arrive at a village to find a crowd already gathered in eager anticipation of our arrival. Unfortunately an incident in Forli was to prove my reputation greater than my abilities.

A child had been injured on the day before we arrived. She had fallen beneath the wheels of her father's cart, which then passed over her body. Apart from a few cuts and some severe bruising, she seemed to have come to little harm and the parents simply put her to bed. Within a few hours she had fallen into a coma and the desperate parents were unable to waken her. As we drew into the town the child's panic-stricken father leapt up onto the cart, begging me to help his little daughter.

Their home turned out to be little more than a hovel. The cramped rooms strove desperately to accommodate nine people – an old woman, the parents and six children. One of the rooms was used for cooking, eating and as a general living room. Here children spilled over each other and their poor grandmother, who sat uncomprehendingly in a tattered wicker chair in the corner. The injured child was in the bedroom – an almost imperceptible mound in a mass of scattered dirty bedding. She was extremely pale, with shallow laboured breathing and a weak intermittent pulse. It was far too late for my presence to have been of any assistance. The poor little child died within the hour, probably from severe internal haemorrhages. We left the dismal scene with the wailing of the mournful mother ringing in our ears.

Fortunately the death of this little girl was the only sad incident of the journey, as mostly it was carried out in an air of festivity and gaiety. We had accumulated a great deal of money in the meantime, almost twice as much as I had started out with – although I hardly ever saw the colour of it before Paolo whisked it away to pay for our greatly improved standard of living.

When we reached Loreto, however, I decided to put an end to our peripatetic practice. Loreto is famous throughout Italy as a place of pilgrimage for the infirm. There is a legend that, during the thirteenth century, a host of angels transported a house from the Middle East to Loreto for safekeeping. It is believed that this house had once been used by the Virgin Mary, and pilgrims flocked to its reputed site in the hope of having their afflictions cured through prayer and the grace of God. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to end my travelling clinic there. Besides, we had fallen behind schedule and I was anxious to reach the boat at Pescara before any further complications arose.

Paolo reluctantly agreed, and we made good time along the coast to Pescara. I left him sitting in a café while I rushed off to book my passage on the boat. We had arrived at a good moment, as a boat was due to leave that very evening and there would not be another for three days. As it was, I had already missed the boat I had intended to take, and any further delay would have been most frustrating.

I rushed back to the café to give Paolo the news but he was nowhere to be seen. As I stood there, wondering what could have become of him, the manager came across to me.

“Excuse me, signore, but your friend asked me to give you these when you returned.” He handed me my valise and a brown paper parcel with a note attached. In the parcel I found my handkerchief with the money I had presumed stolen. The note, written in Paolo’s awkward hand, read as follows:

Dear Dottore,

Here is the money I borrowed from you. I’m very sorry but it was the only way I could get you to use your skills on our journey and it did no harm. Please do not be angry with me! I greatly enjoyed our few days together and shall always remember them with affection. I am not good at saying goodbye, so I choose this method – I hope you will understand.

Goodbye, my friend, and take good care of Yourself. May God bless you

Paolo di Pietro

I never saw Paolo again, nor even heard any news of him. No-one seemed to know what had become of him, and I can only assume that he perished in the war. Or perhaps he emigrated and became a rich businessman in America! I would like to believe that he did.

“Doctor Hasson?”

I was standing outside the disembarkation building on the docks at Ragusa, wondering what I should do, when a seedy old fellow appeared at my elbow.

“Doctor Hasson?” he asked.

“Yes, I’m Hasson,” I replied. “What do you want?”

“I’ve been sent from the hospital to pick you up.” He said with obvious relief at having found his man. “Come along – I’ve already been waiting here for days.”

I was unceremoniously bundled into a rickety old post-chaise drawn by a pair of disconsolate-looking horses, and we set off for Nish immediately. Early in the journey I made several attempts to engage the driver in conversation but to no avail. He was a brusque surly fellow who could only imagine the occasional grunt in reply to my questions. For most of the trip he sat, stony-faced and silent, continually sucking on a large evil-smelling pipe. He would sporadically arouse himself sufficiently to deliver a disinterested reminder of his presence to the horses by flicking their ears with the reins but that was all.

A slow great drizzle drifted across silent meadows and descended upon us. Gradually it grew heavier and the mist blotted out the colours of the landscape. It was as if theatre was soaking into the substance of a water-colour – the various tints gradually faded and ran into each other forming an anonymous grey wash.

I found a dirty old grey blanket on the floor of the cart and wrapped it around my legs to keep them dry. It was quite cold, and suddenly I felt very lonely and a little afraid. What had I let myself in for? The days of laughter and sunshine I shared with Paolo seemed very far away, but my memories of them taunted me with their vividness. What was there to follow in their wake? Soldiers, wild-eyed and maimed – torn limbs and the slow agony of gangrene?

The old cart bounced its way over many miles as these disarming images gnawed at my spirits. But perhaps it would not be that way at all. No – this was to be an army hospital. Calm, orderly and efficient. I pulled the blanket up over my shoulders and settled into the corner of the cart to rest. Sleeping proved difficult due to the motion of the cart, and my legs were itchy. I needed a bath.

The post-chaise rattled endlessly on, lurching and groaning as it plunged into potholes and sent up great spurts of muddy water. The journey seemed interminable, with the rain and cold interspersed only by my fitful bouts of sleep.

The sudden realisation that the cart had stopped moving awoke me from a delicious reverie concerning hot baths and huge meals. We were standing outside a low grey building. There was an abominable stench in the air – the smell of death and decay, so thick that you could almost taste it. This, then, is the hospital, I thought. Then I noticed something that turned my stomach. Outside the main entrance to the hospital was a neat row of corpses!

I treated no wounded soldiers that day. Most of them were already dead, along with all of the doctors and most of the nursing staff. I spent the entire day and most of the night helping the matron and a young orderly drag about a hundred corpses from the wards to their communal grave.

Endemic typhus had swept through the hospital, proving far more lethal than the bullets and artillery of the enemy. Later that night I was completely exhausted and felt quite ill. My head ached fearfully and I could not bring myself to eat the meagre rations I was offered. Collapsing onto a straw mattress I fell asleep.

“Paolo! Paolo! Can you get me a drink of water?”

“Quiet now, Doctor. Lay back and rest. I’ll just go and fetch Matron.”

This reply had not come from Paolo as all but from a young woman sitting beside me. She rose from her chair and swept silently out of the room. For a few moments I remained confused, wondering where Paolo had got to, but gradually my mind cleared and I recalled my horrifying introduction to the hospital. Then the matron bustled through the door.

“Oh, Doctor Hasson!” she exclaimed. “I’m so pleased to find you awake at last. We were very worried about you for quite some time!”

“What has happened? How long have I been her?”

“You developed typhus, Doctor,” she replied. “You’ve been unconscious for the past twelve days.”

“Twelve day!” I gasped.

“Yes – but fortunately many people seem to be recovering. I think we’re over the worst of it, thank God! I must say that I was surprised by how quickly you succumbed to the fever!”

I remembered my itchiness in the cart and wondered if the old blanket had been infected with lice. “Well, Matron,” I said, “I’m not surprised that I caught it, but that I’m still alive! So many have died – why should I be lucky enough to live?”

“My dear Doctor Hasson,” she said with a demure smile, “perhaps it was because there were no doctors left alive to treat you!”

V. ALEXANDRIAN VIGNETTE

My brief stay in Serbia came to an end when I was sent home to Alexandria to convalesce following my illness. Before I had fully recovered the holocaust of the Dardanelles began and, throughout the period of fighting, I served at a British army hospital in Alexandria. During my few moments of leisure my thoughts would often turn to the kind of work I would like to undertake after the war. Eventually I decided to enter private practice, as this seemed the most likely way to satisfy my particular interests. Consequently when the war drew to a close I set up my own practice in Alexandria. Egypt is a fascinating country and medical practice in such a place offered a rich variety of incidents. In this chapter I would like to relate some of the interesting and typical events in the life of a surgeon at that time.

The Omdeh of the village of Manchayat Batash, near Mansoura, telephoned my rooms one afternoon begging that the doctor should come quickly. His youngest wife was about to give birth to her first child and, as he had been told that I was the man for the job, he was very keen that I should attend her. In order to do so I would have to make a journey of some one hundred and fifty miles, so my secretary told the Omdeh that my fee would be fifty guineas.

“Fifty guineas!” exclaimed the Omdeh. “Yes, I suppose that will be alright – he can take what he likes if he delivers me a son!”

My secretary explained that the sex of the child would make no difference to the remuneration of the doctor, and asked if he was clear about the fee. He replied that he was and, a little while later, I set off for Manchayat Batash with my assistant.

When we arrived I lost no time in examining the mother-to-be. She was a pretty little girl of about seventeen – a stark contrast to the Omdeh’s corpulent sixty, but such are the ways of the East! The confinement proceeded according to plan, and a few hours later I was able to present the Omdeh with a brand new son. This was the signal for much rejoicing and celebration. After having many tumblers of syrup pressed on me, I prepared to return to Alexandria and asked the Omdeh if he would care to pay my fee.

“Certainly, my friend,” he replied, and putting his hand into the copious pocket of his galabieh he drew out a five-pound note, which he pressed into my hand. I reminded him of our agreement.

“What? Fifty guineas!” he shouted. “It only took you a few minutes to bring the child into the world – that was only worth five pounds and I shall pay not a penny more!”

I was absolutely furious, but rather than start an undignified altercation, I simply dropped the money on the floor and walked out. The next morning I consulted my solicitor, and he assured me that there would be no difficulty in recovering my losses. He wrote to the Omdeh requesting that he settle my account without delay, but the latter replied that he would not pay a single penny. The lawyer then instituted legal proceedings against the Omdeh as a result of which I was awarded the full fifty guineas plus costs.

A year later, almost to the week, the Omdeh again telephoned with the same request. He readily agreed to pay the full fee on this occasion and apologised profusely for what had occurred before. I duly travelled to Manchayat Batash and delivered the young mother of another son. This time the Omdeh solemnly handed me ten pounds. “This is the second time, sir,” he said. “I am a good customer and you must remember that!”

Once again I consulted my solicitor, with exactly the same result. I did not expect to hear from the Omdeh again, but exactly a year later the inevitable call came. For the third year running I travelled to Manchayat Batash and delivered another son to the Omdeh and his wife. As usual the Omdeh refused to pay the full fee, and once again the legal machine ground out its inevitable verdict.

The next year brought a variation in the theme when the Omdeh himself arrived at my consulting rooms. I invited him to sit and quipped, “What? Are you expecting the baby yourself this time?”

“Not likely,” he replied wearily, “but rather than pay you all that money, I’ve decided to bring my wife to you.” He cocked his head to one side and looked at me with amused distaste. “Unfortunately she won’t hear of having any doctor but you. What a misfortune! There are thousands of doctors in Egypt but she only wants you.”

I visited the lady at her hotel and, two days later, delivered her fourth child – yet another son.

The Omdeh was so excited that he could not keep still. “Just imagine,” he cried, “four sons! Ya Allah! You’re the luckiest fellow for me...I am so pleased that I shall pay you the full twenty-five pounds!”

Here we go again, I thought. But as the Omdeh had chosen to vary the traditional format of our encounters, I decided it was now my turn. "Listen Omdeh," I said in a confidential tone. "I am so delighted to have brought you yet another son, that I wish to make a generous gesture." The Omdeh's eyes shone with delight and he began to chuckle. "I shall," I continued, "distribute the money you shall give me amongst your servants and thereby seal our friendship!"

The smile disappeared from his face, and he rose to his feet with a brow like a thundercloud. "So you wish to humiliate me you dirty little scoundrel!" he shouted. "My servants do not want your money! Just because I want to continue our little game, you dare to insult me...wait here!"

He rushed into his bedroom and returned with a large leather bag. Breathless, he counted out fifty gold sovereigns and placed them on the coffee table. I protested loudly that I had been sincere in my offer but he would hear none of it. If I refused to take the money, he said he would knock me to the ground. I scooped the coins from the table, collected my hat and case, and departed with inelegant haste. I hailed a cab and, on the drive home, I thought once more that surely this was the last time I would see the Omdeh. Once again, I was wrong.

Three weeks later, the Omdeh and his wife arrived at my consulting rooms. The Omdeh was in a repentant mood and, smiling all over his face, proceeded to present me with gifts of all types – dates, jam, mangoes, loukoum and so on.

"I have come to beg for the kiss of reconciliation, Doctor," said the Omdeh. "I hope you will accept my apologies for my rudeness of the other day." He rubbed his eyes, which were wet with tears, and waited for my reply.

"Very well, Omdeh, your sincerity has touched me." I rose, patted him on the back, and then kissed him on both cheeks. "Shall I give your money back?" I asked.

"No, no, please keep it."

I nodded my thanks and, smiling happily, the Omdeh and his wife departed with their retinue.

A circus is one of the most refreshing forms of entertainment and, during one Ramadan, a particular circus came to Alexandria. There were advertisements on all the main walls, tramways and shops – we could even go to see the famous Man-Woman for an extra piastre! This man made his living by exhibiting his long female-shaped breasts to the public.

It was on the recommendation of a local pharmacist that this twenty-year-old Egyptian came to see me. He wanted to have the body of a normal man, and asked if I could remove his breasts, both of which hung down to his waist. After a careful examination I was encouraging, but advised that it would be wiser to remove one breast at a time.

"How long will it take?" asked Ismail.

"Half an hour."

"And how much?"

I told him that he could give me what he wished but he insisted that he pay me normal charge. Unbuckling his money belt he emptied the contents, mostly copper with a few tiny silver coins, onto my desk. He spent several minutes counting the money – the whole amount was less than five pounds.

“If this isn’t enough,” he said, “I promise that I will give more exhibitions and, within a month, you can have the same amount again.”

I assured him that it would be enough. I took him to the hospital and the following day removed one of his breasts. There were no complications, and ten days later he left to rejoin the circus.

A month later, true to his word, Ismail returned, unbuckled his money belt, and emptied the contents onto the table. The second operation was completed a few days later and, with the exception of a pinkish line on both sides of his chest, there was nothing to remind Ismail of his strange anatomy. The patient was very pleased with the results and left to rejoin the circus, where he was given a new job in keeping with his altered condition.

I did not hear from him for some months and, when the next year’s Ramadan came round, I hoped he would still be with the circus and would visit me. I did not hear from him, however, and my inquiries at the circus met with no success. As time passed I gradually forgot all about him.

Eighteen months later, an extraordinarily dressed fellow appeared at my consulting rooms in a state of abject debility. He was dirty, unshaven, stinking and shouted at the top of his voice, “Give me back my back my bezzaz!”

My assistant and I then recognised the fellow as Ismail. Apparently the last two years had been tragic for him. When he had returned to Cairo he had showed off his bare chest to his friends. They were most encouraging and persuaded him to get married. As his mother had died shortly before this, he had inherited a few hundred pounds with which he bought a small house on the outskirts of Cairo, where he took pride in growing vegetables for sale. Soon he had found a wife; the fifteen-year-old daughter of the butcher. He was still only twenty-two, and all seemed set fair for the future.

One day he returned home from the market unexpectedly, and discovered his wife making love to a stranger. A fight broke out and my poor patient came off much worse for it. He retreated miserably, deserting his own home. He seemed to have experienced such mental anguish that he walked through Cairo like a ghost. He wanted to get away from it all so he hypnotically followed the railway line until he arrived in Alexandria a few weeks later. On the way he had slept rough and eaten what food he could find. It was little wonder that his condition was so appalling by the time he came to see me.

My assistant took him back to his own house, where he stayed for a couple of weeks – such was the traditional hospitality of the Egyptians! When Ismail came to see me he was shaven and clean but his mind appeared to be completely unbalanced. His speech was confused and he constantly repeated his one pitiful request – “Give me back my bazzaz!”

He was convinced that their removal had been the cause of his downfall. He remembered that when he was a child, someone had once told him that his luck was in his breasts and that, if he ever lost these, he would lose that as well. It was certainly the only case of this abnormality that I have ever seen but, in doing what the patient thought he wanted – and what seemed perfectly right to me – I made an error. His loss proved to be tragic and my skills only helped to bring it about. As a result I learned more about human nature – but how dearly!

Mansoor was a Sudanese docker employed on the quay in the Alexandria harbour. One day, while a crane was discharging cargo from a steamer, a box fell from the overladen net and struck him. Crying out in pain he dropped to the ground clutching the small of his back. Although there was nothing obviously wrong with him, he claimed that he could not straighten his back and was unable to walk. After some first-aid treatment for minor cuts and bruises, he was lifted and carried home. To go to a hospital was unthinkable – in those days the locals thought that hospitals were the ante-rooms of cemetery. It was a belief well-grounded on fact!

For the next nine months Mansoor was surrounded by his dreadfully pessimistic family and friends, as he walked doubled over or simply crouched on his bed. Neither doctor nor quack could persuade him to stand up straight. He was convinced that he had broken a bone in his spine and that this was immobilising him. The dock officials accused him of malingering in order to obtain larger compensation, his own family and friends began to doubt him, but all he really wanted was a cure.

The master of the ship concerned in the accident took great interest in Mansoor's case and eventually persuaded him to consult me. The patient arrived at me consulting rooms with all seven members of his family. Despite three or four of his relatives all telling me about his disability at the same time, I soon realised that I had an hysterion-traumatic patient on my hands. There was only one way to cure this man, and that was to play into his hands!

I massaged his back, asking him to tell me where he felt the most pain. Before he had the chance to answer I cried, "I can feel it! Here is the broken bone – when I removed it, Mansoor will be able to stand straight again!"

"Ah!" cried a smiling Mansoor to his bewildered family "Do you believe me now!"

While I was preparing for the 'operation', I asked my assistant to go to the nearest butcher and bring back a small piece of bone from a lamb cutlet. He returned a few minutes later with the bone wrapped in some blood-soaked cotton wool. I injected some anaesthetic into Mansoor's back, and made a very slight incision near the base of his spine.

"Gently, gently, ya Mansour," I whispered in the traditional bedside manner, "I'm getting near to that diabolical piece of bone...ah...yes, here it is – I've got it!"

I snatched the bone from my assistant and showed it to the patient. No sooner had Mansoor taken hold of it, when the change came over him. He slipped off the bed and ran to the waiting room, where he proudly displayed the bone to his astounded relatives. Two days later he was back at work.

About three months later I saw him again. Around his neck was a black cord from which was suspended a silk satchel containing the piece of bone. "It is my hegab," he said proudly. In Arabic this means a charm against the Devil. For him this was both the explanation and the cure.

One afternoon, as I was preparing to leave for home, two fierce-looking men appeared in the doorway of my office.

“You must come with us at once,” one of them said, “a man has been stabbed and requires your attention.”

“Where is he?” I asked.

“We cannot tell you that. There is a car waiting outside and we will take you there. Bring everything you need to attend to the matter – hurry!”

Unfortunately my Egyptian assistant had gone home, and I had no option but to collect my things and go with them. We travelled for about an hour, arriving at the bank of the Mahmoudieh Canal where a small dahabieh was moored. This was a small type of houseboat without an engine. I was escorted up the gangplank and given my instructions. I was not to utter a single word, nor to ask any questions of the wounded man. I was to examine him, give him the appropriate treatment and the leave.

“You will be adequately,” I was told, “but if you try any funny business, you’ll find yourself at the bottom of the canal.”

I entered the tiny cabin but found it too dark to see clearly. As my eyes gradually grew accustomed to the dingy light, I began to make out a figure stretched out on a rough bunk in front of me. I motioned for a light to be brought and put my case on a low table. One of the men covered the patient’s face with a piece of cotton cloth and then lit an old oil lamp. The man on the bunk was bare-chested, his sweat glistening in the soft light of the lamp. A deep ugly gash ran from right breast to his armpit and thick blood oozed sluggishly from the wound. He had obviously lost a great deal of blood, and his overall condition was so poor that I was in serious doubt of his recovery.

I called one of the men and gave him a prescription for artificial serum, stressing that it be brought as quickly as possible. In the meantime, I strove desperately to keep the patient alive with several injections of a heart tonic. When the man returned with the serum I was able to perform an intravenous transfusion.

The patient responded almost immediately and, over the course of an hour, gradually fought back into consciousness. When he finally came round I was dressing the wound, having inserted about thirty stiches. Instinctively, and forgetting my instructions, I asked the patient when the incident had taken place. Hardly had the words been spoken when I was dragged from the cabin, slapped about the face and then taken to a cabin on the lower deck of the boat.

“Since you do not choose to obey our instructions,” one of my attackers hissed, “we shall put you to death!”

With this threat still hanging over my head they threw me onto the deck and left, locking the door behind them. I sail on a pile of greasy rope and considered my position. It suddenly became clear that they had intended to do away with me all along; otherwise they would have blindfolded me on the way to the boat. Should they let me go now, I could ensure their arrest by leading the police straight to the boat. Even if they decided to move, they would soon be caught on the canal. You can imagine my despair at realising my end had come!

Whilst I was pondering this I heard a call of a muezzin in the distance; it gave me an idea. In fluent Arabic I began to recite the Moslem prayer, La Illah Elallah Woo Mohammed Rasoul Allah, and kept on repeating it, over and over again. “There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His Prophet.”

It had the desired result, for suddenly the door above me was thrown open and three ugly faces appeared.

“Are you a Moslem?” asked one of the men incredulously,

“And why not?” I replied. “La Illah Elallah Woo Mohammed Rasoul Allah!”

From beyond the men a voice cried, “Come up, Doctor, and speak with me.” I climbed the metal ladder and re-entered the little cabin to find that it was the patient who had called to me. His face was still masked and he was sitting up, leaning on some pillows. He blessed me for saving his life, and assured me that he and his fellows were not criminals, although he did not say what else they might be. He asked me to promise on the Koran that I would never mention what had taken place that evening. After I had done so he handed me twenty gold sovereigns and said, “Go on your way in peace, my friend, and may Allah teach you wisdom.”

It was not long after my kidnapping that an educated official from Cairo wrote to me seeking an appointment. He was subject to devastating and continuous headaches for which there appeared to be no cure. This had gone on for fifteen months, and he had had to give up his work as an accountant as a result.

Although his appointment was for 10.00a.m., he did not arrive until 4.00p.m., looking very pale and obviously in a great deal of pain. Apparently he had met an old friend who insisted that he first visit Sheik Bayoumi, the healer. His old friend had been wearing earrings because Sheik Bayoumi had told him they would cure his hiccoughs, which he had suffered from continuously for over a year. This friend reckoned that he had been cured as soon as the specially made earrings had been fastened to his ears. My patient agreed to visit the healer, only to be told that eunuchs never suffered from headache. The sheik went on to say that, if he visited the nearest barber, he would be cured within the hour. My patient had decided not to go to a barber but returned to his hotel and, with one of his own razors, performed the operation himself.

“You’re surely not serious?” I asked.

“I’ve rarely been more serious,” he replied, taking a handkerchief from his pocket. Wrapped in the handkerchief was his right testicle, in a mass of coagulated blood.

I took him straight to the clinic where I cleaned the wound and inserted a drainage pipe. After this I stitched up his scrotum and had him put to bed. After a few days he was able to return to Cairo.

As I did not hear from him for some time, I wrote asking after his health. “My health has never been better,” he replied. “My headaches have disappeared, as indeed have all my troubles, bar one. Whilst I can give the details of my cure to the male enquirers, what can I say to the many ladies who ask how I got rid of my headaches?”

In Egypt we used to get a vast number of infected wounds, which were always very difficult to cure with the limited antiseptics available. It was not uncommon to see unfortunate people with infected sores on their arms, legs, necks and faces which could last for months, possibly even forever. One such unfortunate man came to consult me. He told me that he had suffered from a generalised skin infection for years. He had tried everything, seen many doctors, but there was apparently

No cure for him. He made no secret of the fact that I was the last doctor he would consult before enlisting the aid of the unqualified.

I attempted to relieve his condition with aseptic fomentations and certain other measures but all to no avail. I finally had to admit defeat. Sadly he took his leave of me but, to my great surprise, he later visited me again. He had been completely cured! I asked him what had happened and he replied, "I went to see El Jahar."

I asked who El Jahar was. "Sir, he is a very clever Egyptian doctor who never went to school. I only went to him three times, and no I am cured!"

My professional interest was so aroused by this remarkable cure that, in the company of our mutual patient, I went to visit El Jahar. We ended up in the dark dingy corner of a little shop in the El-Mex district. In front of a low table sat an unshaven, barefooted man, wearing the traditional galabieh. He sat cross-legged on a green mat with a sebha in his hand, reciting softly from the Koran in front of him.

After the traditional exchange of greetings he served us coffee, and I enquired into his method of treating infection. From the shadows behind him he drew out a dark green object, which looked like a piece of Cashcaval, or Turkish cheese. With his knife he scraped some green mould from the cheese onto a plate, and then transferred it to a tiny brass mortar. He added what looked like waster and brown sugar and then stirred vigorously with a pestle. While he was doing all this he prayed: Bismallah El Rahman El Rahim (in the name of the God of Mercy). Finally, he poured the sticky mixture onto a little clay bottle. He explained that the solution should be allowed to stand for twelve hours, before being taken at the rate of one teaspoonful every two hours.

I smiled and put one or two tactful questions, never hinting at my incredulity. After a while I place fifty piasters in his emaciated old hand and left him with the patient, who had been watching in silent admiration all the while.

The following morning I described this strange visit to two of my colleagues at the hospital. We all laughed heartily, even contemptuously perhaps. How ignorant we were in those days! Now, many years later, and after the chance discovery of penicillin by Sir Alexander Flemming in 1929, I ask myself if this self-styled Egyptian healer had penetrated the mystery of the curative mould long before Sir Alexander did? Or was he just carrying on a form of treatment that had been handed down to him? Either would seem probable but, unqualified and unknown, El Jahar passed without notice into obscurity and may even have died in abject poverty!

VI. A DETECTIVE STORY

It has always been my custom to rise early in the morning. Although I have always advised patients to adopt a similar practice, to be perfectly honest, I doubt whether I do so from any motive of better health. I get up early because I have always done so – and because I like to! Consequently, when I do rise late, I am invariably in a bad temper. So it was when, late one morning, I was roused from a deep sleep by the shouting and clanging of the milk vendor. This man carried a large churn of fresh milk from door to door, yelling and banging a tin ladle against the side of the churn to attract his customers. He certainly was not attracting my custom, however, and, in a fine temper, I thrust my head through the open window and proceeded to acquaint him with this fact. After a short volley of insults during which I expressed my doubts as to his parentage he moved off down the road and mercifully out of earshot.

Generally it would not have been a wise policy to insult the milk vendor – goodness knows what you might find floating in the next day's delivery. Nevertheless, as our family kept a goat for milk, we had no business with the vendor at all – which was probably the reason he chose to habitually perform his antics beneath my bedroom window each morning!

At this time I was still living with my family at Villa Carlton which we rented from a young Egyptian lawyer who lived nearby. Surrounding the villa was a small but captivating garden where I spent much of my time at home. Jasmine of all varieties, bougainvillea and other tropical plants adorned its walls and, in the morning, the garden was alive with the song of dozens of birds.

I decided to take breakfast in the garden where I could relax in the sun and recover from my rude awakening. My youngest brother, who was about six years old at the time, also spent a great deal of time in the garden. He and his young friends would swim and generally mess about in the vasque, safe behind the secure garden walls. That morning his companions were the adorable twin daughters of our landlord. Unfortunately these delightful children were always swathed in bandages and were under strict instructions not to bathe in the pool. They were also made to wear hideous gloves which I could only presume were to stop the twins scratching themselves.

I was just finishing my coffee when I spotted one of the two little girls sitting alone in the middle of the lawn. She was sobbing gently but it was obvious that she was becoming more upset. I went across to see what the problem was and as I tried to calm her I noticed she had lost the bandage from her left forearm. The condition of her skin was shocking! Thick crusty flakes of eczematized skin covered her arm from the wrist to below the elbow. It soon became clear that she would not be content until the bandage was replaced so, hand in hand, we set off through the garden to find it. We soon discovered it trailing from the prickly branches of a small shrub and, a few minutes later, she was back playing happily with the others.

That evening the little girl's mother called at the villa to thank me for my assistance. My mother invited her to take some refreshments and, during the conversation which ensued, I learnt quite a lot about the illness afflicting these unfortunate children. Apparently they had suffered, almost from birth, with a form of generalised eczema which caused severe irritation and interfered with their sleep. A local dermatologist had assured the parents the 'they would grow out of it' but, in the meantime, they were being treated with calamine, together with small doses of a tranquilliser. The dermatologist had also specified a special diet which consisted mainly of fresh fruit and boiled milk. The girls were considerably underweight for their age – a condition I thought more likely to their diet rather than any underlying disease – and their mother was obviously very worried about them. However, as they were not my patients and I had not been asked to give an opinion, there was nothing I could do about the situation.

All this suddenly changed when, a few days later, the girl's father paid me a visit.

"Listen Doctor," he said, "my wife and I are very excitable people and all this trouble with our babies is making life very difficult."

"but why are you telling all this to me? Surely your own doctor ought..."

"No, no, my friend," he interrupted, "between you and me, Doctor, I don't think his treatment is doing any scrap of good. My wife and I are forever arguing about it...surely that can't be good for the children?"

"Well no, of course not – but what would you like me to do?"

"If you could just take a look at them, Doctor, and see if there is anything you can do!"

"Yes, of course," I replied. "If you think it might help. But you must realise that I am a surgeon, not a dermatologist – I can't promise you anything."

“I understand, my friend. But if will just take a look perhaps you might notice something that the others have overlooked...perhaps you could seek advice from your colleagues in Switzerland?”

I promised that I would give the matter some thought. In the meantime, my mother suggested that the children should come to stay with us for a few days, just to give the lawyer and his wife a breather. They agreed readily and a couple of days later the little girls were installed in my brother’s room. No-one was prepared for what was to happen next.

A few days later, to my complete surprise, I noticed a considerable improvement in the condition of the girl’s skin. The eczematized flakes were diminishing, with new healthy pink skin forming beneath them. I telephoned the father immediately to tell him of the improvement and arranged to meet him at my home that evening.

When I arrived back at the house that evening, I found not only the father but also the twin’s dermatologist waiting for me in the sitting room. As I entered they both leapt to their feet and began to congratulate me on my ‘remarkable achievement’. They kept on talking so excitedly that I was almost unable to get a word in edgeways. I tried to convince them that I had absolutely nothing towards helping the children but they would hear none of it.

“You are very modest, Doctor,” said the dermatologist, “but it is obvious that you have instituted a very effective cure.” He drew me to one side and, confidentially rubbing his hands, added: “I would be more than delighted if you would share your secret with me!”

Nevertheless it was true – I had done absolutely nothing! In fact, for the first few days the girls had been with us I had been kept so busy with my regular patients that I did not get the chance to examine them at all and that morning had been my first opportunity. I was as surprised as anyone that they had started to recover! The only explanation I could come up with was that, during their stay, the girls had been eating a normal diet. Perhaps that was all they had ever needed.

As the days passed the children gradually lost all trace of their former affliction. They put on weight very quickly and were transformed into normal healthy children. When they had fully recovered I decided to send them home, I told their parents to keep them on a normal diet and prescribed various tonics as an adjunct to their normal food. The lawyer was so grateful that he insisted we should pay no further rent on the villa but I refused to agree to the bargain. As far as I was concerned, given a normal diet, the little ones were recovering entirely of their own accord. I was pleased that the recovery had taken place and was content to leave things at that.

Of course that was not the end of the story. All the neighbours had heard of my so-called ‘miracle cure’ and. To my constant embarrassment, unnecessarily praised me whenever I passed. Patients displaying an enormous variety of skin complaint began to appear at my consulting rooms demanding a similar miracle for themselves. Even other physicians started to refer their more difficult cases to me. I was far from pleased with this situation as, to my mind, it promised more harm than good. It is difficult enough in the ordinary run of events for a physician to cope with

the patient's exaggerated expectations of him. Medicine cannot work miracles – and I must confess that physicians are themselves partly themselves to blame for the perpetuation of this myth – but this is certainly not true. But when, not only your patients, but also your colleagues have expectations in excess of your abilities, the difficulties are magnified. The road to success may be paved with gold but the fall from grace can be terribly swift and complete. Should you be left teetering on the edge of failure there is always someone waiting to help you over.

About a week after the twins had returned home I received another telephone call from the lawyer. He asked if I could come over to his house as soon as possible to take another look at his girls. When I arrived I found myself confronted by the same dermatologist I had encountered previously.

“Well, it appears, Doctor Hasson,” he said smugly, “that you haven't been as successful as you would have us believe.” He smiled obsequiously and directed my attention to the twins, who were sitting on the sofa. “Perhaps you would care to benefit us with your considered opinion?”

I went across to the girls and, after a swift examination, I could only conclude that the eczema was returning. “Have you been feeding them normally?” I asked the father.

“Just as you directed, Doctor, but – as you can see – it's done little good!”

“Perhaps, Doctor Hasson,” broke in the dermatologist, “you will leave the treatment of such cases to those best qualified to deal with them!”

“What good did you ever do them?” I retorted angrily. Turning to the father I asked, “Would you be prepared, Alyeffendi, to let them come back to my house so that I can carry out further investigations?”

He hesitated, “Well...I'm not really sure about that.”

“I would strongly advise you against any such procedure,” warned the dermatologist.

“Listen Alyeffendi,” I pleaded, “I have already managed to produce a great improvement in their condition – even if it was only temporary.” I turned and pointed at the dermatologist. “This man never has! Would you deny me the chance to find out what has gone wrong?”

“Well...no, perhaps not.”

“You had better succeed, Doctor Hasson,” the dermatologist said spitefully, “or I shall ensure that your future will be difficult.” He stared at me coldly for a few moments and then left the room.

“Thank you, Alyeffendi,” I murmured gratefully.

Thus I was placed in an extremely difficult position. If I could not discover the cause of the girls' relapse, the dermatologist would be sure to make it known that I had failed. He could go a long way towards ruining my career by claiming that I was no more than a charlatan, or trickster. On the other hand, I had no real idea of what was causing the eczema in the first place, let alone why there should have been a relapse. This time I really had to study their case from a scientific point of view.

It has often been said that a good physician must also be a good detective. Very often a correct diagnosis can only be reached as the result of the same process by which the detective solves a crime. One carefully searches out all the clues and, given due consideration, arrives as a judgement based on those facts. But facts, even the so-called scientific ones, may nevertheless be open to interpretation. Indeed, they

may themselves be the result of a particular interpretation. As a consequence the diagnosis may be in error. Why? Perhaps something that would point to a different diagnosis was correct but still the patient fails to respond to the prescribed treatment. All people are individuals and the diseases they suffer from can prove just as idiosyncratic despite their overall similarities. The physician, like the detective, is often faced with a puzzle which requires a great deal of patience and careful thought in its solution.

My puzzle over the twins' eczema was compounded when two days after returning to our villa all signs of the affliction simply disappeared. That night I went over the entire case time and time again but still could not find the answer. It certainly could not have been their original diet that had caused the trouble for they were eating quite normally when the last outbreak occurred. Why should it just disappear when they were staying with us? In the end I crawled into bed with this question still nagging at my brain.

The next morning I awoke early but instead of going downstairs I sat at my bedroom window still pondering this problem. Suddenly I was aroused from my thoughts by the brash clanging of the milk vendor. I poke my head through the window prepared to deliver the usual barrage of insults when the answer dawned on me.

"Hey!" I shouted. "Hey! Vendor! I want some of your milk!"

"Allah! Who is that I hear calling from above?" he cried in a tone of mock amusement.

"Don't play the fool – if that's possible – all I want is some of your milk."

"Who speaks?...Ah! It is the Great Doctor! What is it you are saying? You want some of my milk? Has your stinking goat finally run dry then?"

"No!" I cried. "But I still need some of your milk."

He bowed ceremoniously. "This is indeed a great honour, Sir. To think that my milk will line the Great One's stomach!"

"Just leave me some milk."

"Just leave me some money, my lord, and you will shall be done."

I emptied my water-jug into a basin and, along with some money, threw it down to him. With a few more jocular remarks he filled the jug and left it on the doorstep. I rushed downstairs to collect it and left it in the study while I bathed and shaved. Within twenty minutes I was on my way to the lawyer's house.

The lawyer himself opened the door and immediately displayed sign of concern at receiving such an early-morning call. I assured him that his children were quite well and that they were probably still asleep.

"I'm very glad to hear it," he said. "Have you had any breakfast yet?...No?...Well, come and take breakfast with me. Come along inside, dear Doctor – I'm sure that your presence will herald a joyful day!"

I was served with the traditional coffee, in which there is as much to eat as to drink, followed with buttered toast, honey and a boiled egg. As we ate he asked the reason for my visit.

"Listen, Alyeffendi," I said, "I have had an inspiration! I believe your daughters' trouble to be due to your milk."

"Milk?...How could that be?"

"Look – when your girls are with us and eating the same food that we eat, their condition improves, but when they return here the eczema returns with them." He nodded in agreement and I continued,, "Well, the only difference between our

food and your food is the milk! We drink goat's milk, but I'll bet that you get your milk from the vendor."

"Why, yes, we do!"

"Yes – and that's the cow's milk! So I have come to ask your permission to perform an experiment."

"An experiment?" he asked warily.

"Naturally there will be absolutely no danger to the children, Alyeffendi. All I want to do is feed one of them on cow's milk and the other on goat's. It's the only way to prove that cow's milk is the cause. Do you approve?"

"Certainly, Doctor...but you will keep me informed?"

"Of course, Alyeffendi, naturally!"

At first I was unsure as to which of the children should be given cow's milk but, as the risk involved was negligible, I finally decided by the toss of a coin. For the next week one of the girls was given cow's milk along with her normal food; the other received milk from the goat. I examined both girls three times daily, carefully noting all clinical signs. On the fifth day the child taking cow's milk developed a rash on her abdomen and chest. Over the next couple of days this rash gradually developed into the flaking eczema she had lived with for so long. Her sister's skin remained in perfect condition. The battle was won!

I sincerely believe that inspiration often takes place in the presence of danger. In this particular case my career had been threatened by a mysterious illness. I say that it was mysterious for, in those days, very little was known about the peculiar allergic conditions which could be produced by milk. Perhaps this curious event was the one which made the greatest impact on me during the course of my profession. From being a surgeon I had become interested in dermatology and I was to build a career on that interest. My concern with diseases of the skin was to lead to further curious adventures, some of which I shall relate in the following chapters. Nonetheless, this particular episode had yet another unpleasant consequence. From that time on the milk vendor took care to make even more noise than usual under my bedroom window – after all, I had caused him to lose yet another customer!

VII. AN OLD SCOURGE

By 1921 I was spending less and less time practicing surgery in order to deal with the increasing number of patients seeking my assistance for dermatological conditions. As my reputation in this field grew I came across many fascinating cases and perhaps the most important came to me via the stomach of an old friend.

One evening I was sitting on the balcony of the famous Sultan Hussein Club in Alexandria, absorbed in the activity of the human traffic bustling in and out of the Stock and Cotton Exchange below. Gradually I became aware that my name was being called. As I turned I discovered that the Governor of Alexandria was beckoning me to sit at his table. His Excellency was an old friend and ex-patient of mine; a tall imposing man, he was known for his scrupulous efficiency in all matters. Some even

went so far as to call him ruthless but this could only be because they did not know the real man.

“James, my old friend,” he said as I took my seat, “are you going deaf?”

“I’m sorry, Pasha – I was lost in thought.”

“Well, well, never mind. Listen, James, I’ve got a problem you may be able to help me with.”

“Of course, I’d be only too pleased to help, if I can. Is it a medical matter?”

“Well – yes and no.” He broke off to order drinks for both of us. “You must be aware,” he continued, “of how ignorant the natives are of modern medicine – how bloody superstitious they can be?”

“Yes?”

“Well, you know that new cook of mine? Got him about a year ago from that dreadful Greek shipping chap...Quite a find really...I can’t understand why he let him go?...You do know about my new cook, don’t you?”

I smiled and muttered that I had heard quite a lot about him – few people who talked to the Governor hadn’t!

“Of course, you do!” he exclaimed. “You dined with me last month, didn’t you?”

“A superb meal, as I remember, Pasha!”

“Naturally! He’s the best cook I’ve ever had. But anyway, back to my problem – or rather, his problem! Never mind what the natives think of medicine, this chap’s a Greek and yet he doesn’t seem to like doctors either.”

“An occupational hazard, I’m afraid – is there anything wrong with him?”

“Well, he’s got this terrible rash, you see – but he won’t let a doctor come within a mile of him.” In a most confidential tone, he added, “I don’t mind telling you, James, the sight of him’s almost enough to put you off your food!”

Coming from the Governor, this represented quite an admission. I shrugged and said, “Well, I’m afraid that if he won’t see a doctor, then he won’t get any better. If you’re really worried about the rash, all I can suggest is that you find another cook.”

“No! No!” he exclaimed, “I couldn’t do that! Best cook in Alexandria, No, no, impossible...have you ever tasted his chicken pilaff?”

I smiled inwardly. The Governor had few weaknesses but his stomach was certainly one of them. He leant forward and patted my knee. “No, James, I couldn’t possibly get rid of him...and that’s where you come in, old chap!”

The Governor’s plan was that I should lunch at the Residency during the following week. After the meal, the cook, whose name was Panayotti, would be summoned to receive our congratulations on the meal. This would give me the chance to take a quick look at him and perhaps diagnose his ailment. As His Excellency observed, that would be half the battle, at least.

In front of the Governor’s charming villa stood the customary pair of entrance lodges. The salamlick was for receiving male visitors’ the haremlick for female guests. The Governor’s secretary ushered me into the salamlick and introduced me to the other guests. Striding forward, the Governor welcomed me with a wink and a handshake. “I do hope you enjoy your lunch, James,” he said, “I can assure you that this chap is well worth the bother.”

The feast which followed certainly justified the Governor’s enthusiasm. Superb tiny roast quails in a delicious sauce followed by chicken pilaff and spicy roast

mutton. All this was crowned by a selection of Panayotti's famous pastries. After the meal, the Governor, as was the custom, poured water perfumed with rose essence into silver finger bowls so that we might wash. Coffee was served in the garden, where we reclined on cushions and low couches under the shade of a multi-coloured marquee.

"Now gentlemen, " His Excellency announced, "I thought you might like to congratulate my cook, Panayotti, on that truly splendid luncheon!" Without waiting for an answer he clapped his hands and Panayotti was ushered into the tent. Grinning and bowing, he accepted the hearty congratulations he was receiving but, as he turned to me, I felt an icy hand curl round my heart – leprosy! The man was a leper!

Panayotti was quick to register my look of surprised horror and quickly turned away. I sank back onto my couch. My God! All that food! All handled by a leper!

After I had recovered from the shock, I realised that I was faced with a problem. Should I tell the Governor that his cook was a leper, or should I keep quiet – at least until I had the chance to see Panayotti professionally? My difficulty was not eased by the fact that the Governor had two wives and several children, all being fed by the same leper. In the end I decided to remain silent. I told his Excellency that Panayotti required a much more extensive examination than had been possible at the luncheon and that it was imperative for this to take place as soon as possible. Consequently, it was arranged that Panayotti was to be brought to my consulting rooms that very evening. The Governor's valet was to accompany him; just to make sure that Panayotti arrived.

For the rest of the luncheon, it required a great deal of effort to bring myself to even touch the sweets and drinks brought to the tent. Still, I had little option but to pretend that all was well and to join in as cheerfully as I could.

Later that evening, Panayotti stood before me completely naked and ready for the examination. His leonine face, almost expressionless, was covered with nodules and there were leprous patches on his forehead and cheeks. His breath had the odour which only a leper possesses; his nose was blocked with lepromas. His back, chest and abdomen were tinted with large pink anaesthetised macules. How clearly was my initial diagnosis confirmed! The microscope slide onto which I had rubbed some of the mucus from his nose showed only too clearly the Hansen microbes in cigar-like croups which indicated, without doubt, that his condition was well-nigh hopeless.

"You knew you were a leper, didn't you?" I asked him. Silently he nodded. "Well, why on earth haven't you been to see a doctor?"

"I was afraid of losing my job, sir. I had to leave my last job because the master had become suspicious."

"Well, I'm afraid that you can't go back to the Governor now. I'll have to think of something to tell him."

In those days I had but little knowledge of leprosy and even less of its treatments, so I visited several libraries and borrowed as much relevant material as I could from my colleagues. A clever young Egyptian archaeologist gave me some Pharaohic manuscripts, some of which described forms of treatment for leprosy, then referred to as 'Al Gousam'. In one of the manuscripts, translated by another archaeologist called Mapero, it was indicated that a solution of one hundred parts of

sesame oil and one part of arsenic rubbed into the skin of the unfortunate sufferer was successful in most cases. My impression was that this was more likely to work in cases other than leprosy – syphilis, for instance – but in view of the urgency of the situation I decided to try the treatment on Panayotti.

It is an extraordinary feature of our lives that similar events in our experience seem to cluster into patterns. Something which may appear to be an isolated instance is often followed by instances of a similar nature. A week later I was on the tramway and, as the conductor handed me my ticket, I looked up into his face and recognised it as that of a leper. I threw away my ticket and jumped off the tram at the next stop. A few days later a Turkish friend, who was also a physician, invited me to a Turkish restaurant where the young waiter who set our table had a multitude of leprous nodules on his face. When I drew my friend's attention to this somewhat grisly spectacle he paled visibly, dropped the tumbler of Araki that he was about to drink and removed his napkin. We left.

Shortly after this I was called to the El-Mex district to examine a man who was suspected of having a strangulate hernia. This time I was not so taken aback when I recognised yet another leper. This was the fourth case of leprosy I had seen within two weeks. In the previous four years I had only ever seen one previous case. Perhaps there had always been cases of leprosy in the district but I just had not seen them; now that my eyes had been opened I was discovering lepers all over the place.

As for Panayotti, I felt that it is occasionally proper to tell a small lie. I wrote to the Governor saying that I had kept Panayotti in Alexandria for observation and treatment which had unfortunately been complicated by his having a heart attack. In my opinion the man would be unfit for further employment. I added that the patient's brother, in response to an urgent telegram, was sailing to Alexandria from Crete with the intention of accompanying Panayotti on his voyage back to his home. As I felt it unlikely that I should be seeing the Governor for some time, I hoped this might be the end of the matter.

I also wrote to a friend of mine in Paris, a professor at the St. Louis Hospital for Skin Disease, stating that I had discovered several cases of leprosy and asking for his help. I pointed out that I had collected six cases but was ignorant of any real treatment. I described the ancient treatment referred to in Pharaohic manuscripts and asked whether syphilis might have been confused with leprosy in those days. Twenty days later I received a parcel containing five hundred ampoules of amino-arseno-phenol, the basic preparation that had attracted Professor Erlich to the famous 606 Preparation in 1910, and which, for many years, was the most potent attack available for the *Treponema Pallidum*, the causal organism of syphilis. The Professor reckoned that, if arsenic was necessary, the preparation he had sent to me would be more than suitable.

In most human projects there soon appear the first stumbling block and mine was not long in cropping up. In Egypt leprosy was a notifiable disease and I was bound by law to notify the Health Authorities of any cases that came my way. I went to the Health Department and requested a private interview with the Head of the Department. I spoke quite frankly to him:

“What would you do with a leper, if I notified one?”

There was no hesitation in his reply. “Since most of these people come from upper Egypt, we would send them back home.”

“But what would you do if you knew of a cure?” I asked.

“We would be delighted, but, as the patients are so widely dispersed, it would be difficult to implement.”

“Suppose I tell you, here and now, that I’ve come across several cases of leprosy and that I would like to experiment with a possible treatment. Would you agree to keeping the patients in Alexandria so I could try the treatment?”

The answer was as I feared, “No! If you have a viable treatment, we shall try it!”

I left his office disheartened and miserable but with the fortitude that is born of despair. I was determined to try the treatment I had read about and to place my faith and hope in God. An effective cure might turn out to be impossible but I had to try to put some hope into the leper’s hearts and I did not care what the health authorities thought about it, nor what strictures they placed on me.

Nevertheless, this presented me with further difficulties. As I have said, leprosy was a new disease to me and I wanted to see my patients as a group in order to test the treatment. However, if the lepers arrived at my consulting room en masse during daylight hours, it was possible that they might be recognised for what they were. One leper amongst a crowd of healthy people might occasion the odd remark about his appearance but it would be unlikely that anyone would ever think leprosy. But a crowd of lepers would be a different matter altogether. Obviously I would have to treat them after dark. Within a week this plan had been put into operation and the twenty lepers now known to me arrived at my consulting rooms between 8.00 and 10.00p.m., in groups of two or three. Their common suffering drew them together and they would wait outside until all the others had been treated and then, in a huge bunch, they would vanish into the darkness.

Panayotti had also sent word to the Governor that he was returning home to Crete. He begged me not to divulge the nature of his illness to anyone, least of all to the Governor. I explained that he had little to worry about in this respect as the physician and his patient are bound by law to such confidences. He went to stay with a cousin, a grocer in the Souk El Seraphia, within an hour’s walking distance of my surgery. Three weeks later his brother came to see me one morning and told me that he and Panayotti were soon to leave Alexandria on a Greek steamer. I wished them well and promised to write to his physician in Crete to inform him of the nature of my treatment.

A few days later I received an invitation to the French Embassy in Cairo where there was to be a celebration for bastille Day. At the party I eventually found myself in a group surrounding the imposing figure of his Excellency the Governor of Alexandria and his ever-present secretary. I made a friendly gesture towards him but he showed no signs of recognising me and I get the uncomfortable feeling that I was being ignored. Then even the secretary turned his back to me. I was disturbed by this sudden lack of manners but, as there was nothing I could do about it, I simply turned on my heel and walked away.

Nevertheless, as the party drew to a close, the secretary approached me. His manner was quite cordial and he told me that His Excellency was very sorry not to have seen me. His Excellency had asked him to tell me that I would be hearing from him before I returned to Alexandria.

Sure enough, that very evening as I was dining at Shepherd’s Hotel, a waiter handed me a note. It was a request from the Governor for me to visit him at his hotel

the next morning. Unfortunately I had prior commitments, so I sent him my apologies saying that I was returning to Alexandria on the train that evening.

Apparently the Governor deemed my reply to be curt and this triggered off an extraordinary sequence of events. He saw fit to complain to the French Ambassador about my behaviour and what he described as my lack of courtesy towards him. Fortunately the Ambassador was kind enough to send a copy of this letter to me, and to express his wish that the matter might be settled by a frank discussion between the parties concerned. In my reply to the French Ambassador I said that I would be delighted to meet His Excellency if he required explanation of my behaviour, but only on the condition that the Governor would himself provide a similar explanation of his own behaviour towards me on the 14th of July. As a result of this offer I was to meet the Governor at the French Embassy in Cairo a week later.

I arrived at the embassy before the Governor and, in his absence, the Ambassador told me what the Governor was so upset about. Apparently, he believed that, after lunching with him, I had plotted to steal his Greek cook – and, what was worse, that I had actually succeeded! I was stunned – the very idea of it! Still, knowing the Governor as I did, I could well believe it.

His Excellency arrived shortly afterwards and, after drinks had been served, the Ambassador withdrew to leave is alone to bury the hatchet. His Excellency eyed me suspiciously for a few moments and then slowly drew a cigarette from a gold case. Silently I offered him my lighter, which he accepted with murmured thanks.

“James, why did you pinch my cook? This is hardly the action of a distinguished physician, even less that of a friend.”

“I didn’t pinch your cook!” I replied firmly.

“You didn’t, eh?”

“No, Pasha.”

“Well James, then I must tell you that my police have seen Panayotti entering your rooms every day for the past three weeks. What do you make of that, eh?”

“I can explain it – if I choose to.”

“Damn it all, James!” He crushed his cigarette angrily into an ashtray. “Even Panayotti had the small decency to write to me, trying to excuse his damned ungratefulness, but you...you haven’t any excuse!”

“I don’t need any excuses, Pasha, because I didn’t steal him. I wouldn’t want him as my cook anyway.” The latter remark obviously surprised the Governor so, taking advantage of his unaccustomed silence, I went on “If you insist I can give you all the facts – but, to be frank, I doubt whether you would really like to hear what I would have to say.”

The Governor was in no mood to heed any warning, “Tell me the truth here and now!” he shouted.

“very well, very well,” I replied, “but I must tell you I promised Panayotti that I would never tell you. Still, as you aren’t able to reach him any more, I suppose it can do no harm.”

“Get on with it then!” He crashed the palm of his hand onto the Ambassador’s desk, upsetting the ashtray. This outburst must have disturbed the Ambassador in the outer office. He gingerly entered the room and looked rather surprised to find me still sitting calmly in the face of the Governor’s wrath.

He asked whether his personal intervention might be of some assistance. I replied that I was very sorry that he had become involved in all of this but that, nevertheless, I wished to make it quite clear that I had not stolen the cook. My

actions in this affair, I explained, had been both loyal to the Governor and in accord with the principles of the medical profession.

“I want to hear the truth!” thundered the Governor.

“Please, James, tell him what he wants to know.”

Even so, I was not to be rushed. After toying awhile with my cuff-links, I looked the Governor straight in the eye and said, “Well then, Pasha, you have had in your service these past twelve months a man who is...a leper! A leper has been cooking the food for you and your friends!”

The blood drained visibly from the Governor’s face as he collapsed into an armchair. “A leper!” he cried weakly. “A leper!” The scoundrel never said anything about it to me!”

“Would you have employed him if he had?” I asked.

“Well, no, of course not.” He rose slowly from the chair. “A leper...so that’s why the miserable Greek was so keen to get rid of him. By Allah, if I could get my hands on Panayotti...I...I...”

“Calm down, Pasha. It’s too late anyway – he’s gone back to Crete. Come on now, sit down.”

He did as I requested but was obviously under great strain. For several minutes he held his head in his hands and large tears began to roll down his cheeks. After some time he looked up at me with a contrite expression, “I am so sorry, James. It was foolish of me to believe that you could ever do such a thing...please forgive me!”

“Never mind, Pasha,” I said quietly, “as you can see I was caught in a conflict of loyalties. Suppose I had told you right at the beginning, wouldn’t your wives and children – indeed, your whole entourage – wouldn’t they have all been terrified that they were on the way to becoming lepers?”

“But aren’t we anyway?”

“It’s not very likely – indeed I would go so far as to say that I would be absolutely amazed if you were. We now know that leprosy is not nearly so contagious as we once thought. Please do not worry yourself unnecessarily – but, if you’d like to be on the safe side, you could see that all the members of your family, including yourself, have a check-up. But don’t let them guess the reason in case they panic.”

He was obviously very relieved, “Yes, yes, my dear friend...could you make the examinations – please, don’t desert me now!”

“Of course not, Pasha.”

The Ambassador was deeply moved by the scene he had just witnessed. His face was as white as his starched pocket-handkerchief and he trembled visibly. He put his hand on the Governor’s shoulder and advised me to trust him.

It is amazing that leprosy is not nearly so contagious as our unreasoned fear of it. Despite my soothing words to the Governor I had myself, on several occasions, fallen prey to this irrational fear. Yet the spread of leprosy remains a baffling business. I know of a Turkish businessman with two wives and six children who all lived together on the ground floor of a building in the Gabbari district. Although the man had suffered from leprosy even before he married, none of his family ever contracted it. There was also the case of the son of a famous musician in Northern Italy, where he lived in extreme comfort, and yet, without any known contact with a leper, he contracted the disease. My own assistant, who introduced many leprous patients to me in Alexandria, only developed the disease some twenty years later, and

that followed a change in his occupation. I have had a great deal of contact with lepers myself but have never shown any signs of developing the disease. Why this mystery should be, I cannot understand.

My treatment of the lepers I had discovered in Alexandria began with my giving each of them an injection of amino-arseno-phenol every night. To my delight, some three weeks later seventeen of the twenty cases responded dramatically. I had taken photographs before the treatment began and I took more after three months. I sent these, together with reports on the treatment of each case, to the French Society of Dermatology in Paris. I suggested that my treatment might be tried by the Head of Service at the St.Louis Hospital. Without hesitation Professor Gougeret and the chief of the clinic adopted all my suggestions. They had several cases of leprosy from French North Africa and awaited the results with eager anticipation.

In the meantime, the local authorities in Alexandria got to know that I was treating lepers without notifying them. Not long afterwards, however, the results of my treatment were confirmed by the French Society of Dermatology and communicated to the world by Professor Gougeret. Thus the Egyptian authorities were more or less forced to withdraw any legal proceedings against me and I was permitted to continue with the treatment.

Later that year the French Society of Dermatology appointed me as a delegate to the International Conference on Dermatology, to be held in Strasbourg, where I was to read a paper. By that time many figures in the scientific world had confirmed the results of my treatment. Sadly we did not realise that with leprosy almost anything might work for a short period of time but was fairly certain to fail in the long run. My treatment was no exception!

After the initial remarkable recovery, all my cases gradually reverted to their original condition and no further treatment could induce an improvement, let alone a cure. I felt completely disheartened and in the very depths of despair when, completely out of the blue, I received an invitation to London to deliver another paper on my research into leprosy. Eventually this lecture was published by the Royal Society of Tropical Hygiene and Medicine. This lifted my spirits but did little to help those still suffering from this time-old scourge.

VIII. A NEW LAND

My first visit to England was in July, 1921, when I arrived at Croydon Airport in a monstrous collection of canvas, wood and wires named Goliath. By comparison with our present aircraft such a fragile Heath Robinson affair would not have required much of a David to destroy it! The journey from Paris had been quite an adventure but I was very relieved to have arrived in one piece.

The teeming rain was a typical English welcome but very soon I found the friend who had arranged to meet me. This was Captain R.D. of the Irish Guards

whom I had got to know in Egypt during the First World War. As we walked from the terminal I was amazed to see double-decker buses without tops. The passengers were apparently oblivious of the drenching they were receiving and just sat there like statues. R.D. noticed my amazement and laughed. I asked him if we were in the long dreary season or the short nasty one. He looked at me quite seriously for a few moments, then burst out laughing.

“Good old James!” he said, patting me on the back, “I see that you’ve already acquired our English sense of humour. But let me assure you that, if we only have two dreadful seasons instead of four you have on the bloody Continent, at least we have both beautiful girls and marvellous beer!”

We travelled up to Harrogate by train, the journey punctuated by our laughter, particularly when I reminded R.D. that it was he who had warned me about the English climate.

This visit to R.D.’s family in Yorkshire was one of the happiest times of my life. The scenery was glorious and the people bold in their simplicity but warm and generous in their welcome. I was taken off to grouse shooting parties and to places of historic interest, such as Bolton Abbey. I remember with heartfelt gratitude my host’s ability to put me completely at my ease. I avowed then that the British were most generous, the most polite and sincere race in the world. Today, after living in England for more than fifty years, I still believe this to be true. My first visit to England left me with great desire to return. It was not long before this was to come about - through rather exceptional circumstances!

One day I was running a bit late with my appointments when my Egyptian assistant came in and said that two men had been waiting for some considerable time. They said that they wanted to take me to a village not far from Alexandria, where one of their parents was critically ill. They assured me that I would be paid more than adequately, and that the journey would take no more than a couple of hours. They would not, however, give me any details of what was wrong with the patient.

After dealing with the remaining patients, I asked my assistant to prepare my cases. I then telephoned my parents to tell them of my change of plan, and went to the station with the two men. They bought the tickets and we boarded the train.

We had travelled for some time when I realised that we were well away from Alexandria. I asked one of the men how long it would take to reach our destination, to which he muttered something about being there soon. After another hour the men still showed no signs that we were nearing our destination. My nagging suspicion that I was being ‘taken for a ride’ grew into a frightening reality. I got to my feet and told the men that I had to visit the lavatory. One of them grunted acknowledgment and I slipped out of the compartment.

While I was sitting in the lavatory wondering what to do the train pulled into a small station. This was my chance! As the train shrugged to a halt I unbolted the door and peered down the corridor. There was no sign of my captors so I quietly crossed the carriage to the door, pulled the window down and...

“This is our stop, Doctor,” said a quiet voice directly behind me. The sharp point of what I guessed to be a knife pressed into the small of my back, and strong fingers curled around my upper arm. “Come along, sir,” the voice continued, “let us return to our compartment – quietly!”

Back in the compartment the other man sat and picked his teeth with a small piece of wood, grinning idiotically all the while. “Do not try anything foolish, Doctor,”

he said in an amused tone, “we do not wish to harm you...but, if you try to escape again, my companion might just forget that you are our honoured guest. You understand?...Yes, of course, you understand – you are not a stupid man.”

We finally left the train some twenty hours later near the frontier of the Sudan. At the station an old battered car was waiting to take us to a farmhouse a few miles beyond the town. Here I was ushered into a small room where I was allowed to wash. I was given a light meal and told to catch up on my lost sleep.

The next morning I was brought before the head of the family. After the usual salaams and hypocritical smiles, the master invited me to take breakfast with him. I ate what I could and then, in good Arabic, recited the usual Moslem prayer of thanks – El Hamd El Allah.

“You appear, sir,” said my host, “to speak our language quite fluently.”

“I was born in Egypt, and I love your country and its people,” I answered, remembering how once before my knowledge of Arabic had saved my neck.

“Good!” said my interlocutor. “This will greatly facilitate our discussion. I have a young son, aged nine, who suffers from leprosy. You are quite famous, Doctor – we have all read about your cure for leprosy in all the newspapers. Now I wasn’t you to cure my son and I shall keep you here until you do. If you succeed I shall reward you handsomely and you may go in peace.” His eyes narrowed, and leaning across the table he ran his podgy finger across my throat. “I shall sharpen my knife daily just in case you should fail. That is all! Bring Ali to the Doctor!”

Within seconds Ali was standing before me, frightened and in tears with his eyes cast downwards. It was shocking to see him, as he suffered from the worst form of leprosy – tuberosa. His entire face was covered with nodules and his nose was blocked with lepromas. His arms, hands and legs were similarly affected. I would need the mantle of Elijah to cure such an infection! Nevertheless, I concluded that it would be in my own interests to keep up appearances with the entire family and to be patient. I gently promised the old boy that I would do my best. He cheerfully accepted this promise and agreed that I could contact my family to let them know I was all right. I also had to ring my assistant to ask him to send the necessary medicines.

“Don’t worry,” said the father, “we shall take you to the English Hotel to telephone – but, I warn you, any attempt to escape will result in your death!”

The two men who had kidnapped me took me to the Thomas Cook Hotel which stood beside a quay on the River Nile. I telephoned my parents and, under orders, gave them a prepared cover-story, explaining that I would be unable to return home for some time. I also spoke to Ahmed, my assistant, asking him to prepare a parcel of amino-aseno-phenol, which a man would come and collect. My original ploy that Ahmed should post the ampoules, thus needing to be informed of my whereabouts, had been decided against and a man was sent to collect the parcel.

Three days later I began the course of injections, making sure that the boy’s father understood that it would take at least three weeks for the first results to appear. In the meantime I found myself with very little to do. I asked to be allowed to attend the mosque for the midday prayer, and this request seemed to please my hosts greatly. Security at the farm was greatly relaxed and the master’s young daughter, Asma, was detailed to accompany me to the mosque. When not at the mosque I spent my time playing cards with Asma and Ali or reading newspapers. I was also allowed

to take walks in the rich fields of the farm, with Asma sent along to keep an eye on me.

Gradually I became more aware that Asma was paying more and more attention to her looks. She would keep her hair regularly washed and often wore pretty dresses. She would draw my attention to interesting paragraphs in the paper and was constantly plying me with snacks and cool drinks. Her interest in the newspaper came from the fact that it was her daily chore to read the news to her father and elder brothers who were totally illiterate.

The first hopeful signs that the treatment was having an effect appeared after about three weeks when the boy's nodules began to diminish. A multitude of relatives and friends called at the house to satisfy their curiosity and disbelief. The congratulation poured in and the family was elated. I knew, however, that I could not hope for a complete cure for the young lad and that, rather than face his father's wrath, I had better make good my escape – and soon!

I had noticed that every time we went to the mosque there were several donkeys tethered to some nearby rubber trees. I presumed that they belonged to the Moslems at prayer in the mosque. One day as I was standing there thoughtfully looking at the donkeys Asma must have read my mind.

"I don't blame you for wanting to leave," she said, looking at me sadly. "Now that my brother is getting better there is no real reason for you to stay. Why don't you take one of the donkey's and go?"

"But what about your father," I asked. "Won't he be very angry if you let me escape?"

"He would kill me if he thought I had helped you to escape but he need never know...I'll tell him that you came back with me and he'll think you must have escaped later in the afternoon. That should give you plenty of time to get away."

"But, Asma, what if..."

But it was too late. Asma suddenly turned and fled down the road and out of sight. Poor Asma! I do believe that she was in love with me! I was quite sure there was no chance of her betraying me as her father did not usually get back from the fields until sunset. Still, I should get a move on, just in case.

From the ante-room to the mosque I borrowed a pair of worn-out slippers and a caftan that reached down to the floor. Over this I put a large dark vest and crowned this strange garb with an enormous turban.

I untied the donkey nearest the door of the mosque and climbed onto its back. It immediately took off at a great speed, causing my turban to slip down over my eyes. As I struggled to regain my vision I delighted in my good fortune – the donkey had seemed to sense the utter urgency of my situation and ran as fast as he could. Ten minutes later, however, it stopped outside a farmhouse and refused to go another step. I dismounted and tried to coax the donkey into action but it would not budge. Somewhat desperately I clambered back onto its back and suddenly it started to run again. My sigh of relief quickly turned to one of despair when I realised that it was taking me back to the mosque! Nothing I could do would persuade it to alter its course.

As soon as we reached the mosque it came to a dead halt. Once again I dismounted and berated the infuriating animal. Immediately I remounted he set off for the farmhouse again! By this time I was completely bewildered and confused.

When we arrived at the farmhouse for the second time the door opened and a lovely young girl stepped out. Looking rather surprised she said, "Who are you?...Why are you dressed as my master and riding his donkey?" What have you done with him?"

Here was nothing for it but to tell the girl the whole story. Fortunately she had been one of the people who visited Ali after the news of his cure and recognised me as the doctor who had been treating him. I explained that I had borrowed the donkey in order to reach Thomas Cook office by the river.

"But this donkey will be no use to you," she laughed. "It will only take you to the mosque and back – no further! You had better go the rest of the way by foot."

Exasperatedly, I had to agree with her. The girl seemed to be quite willing to co-operate and suggested that she would accompany me to the quay. But she was still anxious about her master. "What will he do with no donkey and no clothes?" she said.

"Like me," I replied, "he'll have to borrow a new outfit!"

She burst out laughing. "But my master is a colossus! He will never find the clothes to fit him."

"I'm well aware of that," I said, ruefully inspecting my borrowed outfit, "but don't worry about your master – he is a man of God!"

"What? That rascal a man of god! He spends his days beating his wives and animals...and he never give me a piastre to buy a sweet."

"In that case," I replied, "I have not the slightest concern for him. Come, let us go, I will give you many piastre."

Indeed, I did not realise that the donkey I had borrowed and the ridiculous clothes all belonged to the same man. I could picture him sitting naked and cross-legged, inspecting my small suit, tie and slippers; turning them inside out while reciting his Allah Akbar. Just imagine the old boy reflecting on the inscrutable ways of Allah who had metamorphosed his belongings in such a way, and lamenting the loss of his favourite donkey. Well, I thought to myself, I 'm sorry for you, old boy, but perhaps it will teach you not to beat your wives and animals. Besides, I was in enough trouble with his clothes! With one hand I clutched the unpredictable drooping pants nad, with the other I tried to contain the vast folds of the caftan. My greatly unstable turban, which lurched drunkenly from side to side, completed the hilarious spectacle.

The young girl looked at me, her arms akimbo, as if to indicate that she was ready to 'meet the challenge'. "You look like an escaped inmate – or worse!" she exclaimed.

"We are both young and so people will think we are escaped lovers!" I retorted.

"Ya Allah!" countered the girl. "People will run after us and possibly stone us. Here, let me fix your clothes."

After some minor adjustments to my looks we proceeded on our way, leaving the donkey behind. We were both in a strangely hilarious mood and the girl could not stop herself laughing at my appearance. Placing her arms around my neck she kissed me wetly on the forehead. In the meantime, I was struggling to keep my trousers up. They were suspended by four buttons attached to the lining of the caftan. Two of the buttons at the front were loose, thus threatening constant disaster.

We walked along together for a short while and then stopped at a water-melon cart to buy a large slice of this delicious fruit. Just picture the beautiful girl and I

walking along – she attacking one end of the melon with her perfect white teeth and I, struggling to keep my pants on, attacking the other!

Finally we reached Thomas Cook office by the quay. I met the manager, an Englishman, to whom I explained my situation. He promised to place me under the protection of the captain of the steamer and assured me that I would safely reach Cairo within two days.

I was taken to a room at the back of the office, while the girl sat on the pavement outside, insisting that she see me off safely. After a short wait a barber appeared to give me a shave and a hair-cut. I was then supplied with a second-hand European suit, a shirt and some sandals. The clothes belonging to the old boy at the mosque were parcelled up in brown paper and, together with a note of explanation and half a crown, were dispatched to the mosque.

Soon the steamer arrived and, before I could say goodbye to all my benefactors, the lovely girl who had helped me rushed up and pulled me face towards her, covering it with kisses. “God be with you!” she shouted as I made my way up the gangplank. Two days later I was back in Cairo where I caught a train for Alexandria and within three hours I was safely home.

I lost no time in informing the governor of my experience. He promised me that I would receive police protection but advised that I go into hiding until the whole affair was settled. Rather than do that I decided to realise one of my long-term ambitions. Ever since my first visit to England I had always wanted to return and settle there. This second kidnapping provided just the stimulus I required to put these plans into action and I booked my ticket. A few days later I boarded a steamer bound for Liverpool and bode farewell to Alexandria. Fourteen days later I landed in England, eagerly looking forward to a fresh start in a new land.

PART TWO

I. STRIKING UP AGAIN

I came to England full of hope, confidence and ambition. In North Africa I used to be consulted by the highest in the land, and even in Europe I was beginning to enjoy a considerable reputation. None of this seemed to cut much ice in England, however. Here I was virtually unknown and, although my English was passable, I was easily distinguishable as a foreigner. I have never known a people so charming in the xenophobia as the English, although there is nothing vicious or contemptuous about it. It is rather like the uncomprehending sympathy of a whole man for a cripple, coupled with a sort of conscious tolerance. One must be accepted in spite of one's nationality, not regardless of it. Here in England I had to make a fresh start and prove myself again.

Very soon I felt that the success I had dreamed of was utterly minor post at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases but, even so, I was homesick for those I knew best and for my own language. London, like any city, is a sorry place in which to be lonely and I was seriously thinking of returning home.

It became my habit to take an early morning walk in Hyde Park where I could pass a pleasant hour watching the ducks and swans on the Serpentine. This was my favourite time of day, and my favourite walk. A man can find his soul more easily in the midst of growing things than on endless streets of blind windows.

One cold bright morning I was standing by the Serpentine desperately searching my pockets for a match to light my cheroot, when I noticed a tall gentleman walking in my direction. He wore his impeccably tailored clothes with an easy assurance, and walked with the unconscious arrogance of the well-bred Englishman. I was very pleased to notice that he was smoking a pipe, so I asked if he could give me a light. He stopped dead, stared blankly at me for a few seconds, and then took a box of matches from his trouser pocket. Without saying a word he handed them to me. I lit my cheroot and tried to return the matches to him.

"No, no, old boy," he said cheerlessly. "You hang on to them – I've a spare box anyhow."

How British the gesture! I contentedly puffed on my cheroot as he disappeared in the direction of Marble Arch. I was about to resume my walk when I noticed a small piece of white paper near my feet. On further investigation this turned out to be two five-pound notes, folded together several times. I had little doubt that they had been dropped by the gentleman who had given me the matches, so I refolded them and set off after him.

Having walked all the way to Marble Arch without once catching sight of him, I took the money to the police station in Hyde Park. I explained what had happened to the constable on duty and gave a description of the man. The constable congratulated me on my honesty and I left confident that the police would find the gentleman concerned.

Three days later the same constable telephoned the hospital to tell me that they had been able to return the money to the gentleman concerned. Apparently he had requested my name and address, and the constable wanted to know whether he could release the information, I said that I had no objection to him doing so.

Two days later I received a letter from a Sir Richard.... Thanking me most graciously for the return of his money. He regretted that he had been so stupid as to drop the money, and ended by asking whether I would care to lunch with him on the following day.

Sir Richard turned out to be the Managing Director of one of the largest life assurance companies in London. When I met him in his office he asked where I would like to lunch but was far from satisfied with my casual reply that anywhere would do. "No, no," he said, in perfect French, "I know that the French have an extremely sensitive palate. We had better go to a French restaurant."

After an excellent lunch in a Soho restaurant, my host asked me about myself and what I was doing in England.

"So you have no job at the moment?" he enquired.

"Well, yes, I do – but it's only a part-time position at the hospital. I'm looking around for something a little better at the moment."

He looked at me thoughtfully for a few moments, almost as if he were summing me up. "I may be able to help you there," he said suddenly. "We are looking for another doctor to examine people who apply for life assurance. Would you consider such a post if I were to offer it to you?"

My reply required little consideration and I accepted the offer on the spot. A week later I received an official letter from the company confirming his offer and enclosing a cheque for six months salary in advance. By the end of the week I was installed in rooms at Cleveland Square and had already examined several life assurance candidates.

One day I received a personal note from Sir Richard concerning a new client. This was a young Englishman with large business interests in the Far East who had travelled back to London to arrange life assurance cover. Although this young man had already produced several medical certificates indicating that he was in excellent health, Sir Richard asked that I give him a particularly thorough examination as the sum involved was a massive fifty thousand pounds.

The client turned out to be a palish young man with an extremely pleasant manner. He was to return to Hong Kong at the end of the week and was concerned that I should complete my examination as quickly as possible so that he could get back to his business affairs. He seemed to be in fairly good shape and, in accordance with the routine procedure, I ended the examination by asking him pass a sample of urine for testing in the laboratory. Suddenly his attitude seemed to harden, and I was more than a little surprised when he simply refused to co-operate. I explained that it was absolutely essential that a sample of his urine be treated before the assurance cover would be granted. He replied that he had been to the lavatory immediately prior to visiting me, and said that it would be impossible for him to repeat the performance at such short notice.

"There's no need to go that far, old chap," I said "an encore would do just as well!"

This remark seemed to defuse the situation and he laughed, reverting to his former cheerful self. He suggested that he could bring a specimen to my office on the following morning. This aroused my suspicions even further and, assuming my best professional manner, I insisted that the specimen be passed in my presence, or not at all! Seeing no other way out of the situation he angrily requested a container and, after passing about a pint of urine, stalked out of the office.

First thing in the morning I received the results of the urine test. It came as little surprise to find that his urine contained a very high concentration of sugar and some acetone. The man was clearly a severe diabetic and, as insulin had not come into general use at that stage, unless his diet was very strictly controlled his life expectancy was very short indeed.

My report to Sir Richard advised quite definitely that it would be unwise to insure the life of this person. Sir Richard was extremely pleased with this report and I was summoned before the Board of Directors to receive their personal congratulations. As a direct result of this case I was appointed consultant physician to no less than fifteen insurance companies. Success was to hand at last!

At that time the building up of a practice was very largely a matter of personal recommendation. Any patient who had contact with a large number of potential patients was therefore something of a bonus. For instance, when I treated an employee at a beauty parlour, who had the misfortune of suffering from a form of eczema, this led to my being recommended to all her clients. A far more important step in my career came, however, when the Equerry to a Royal Prince made an appointment to see me.

At that time I used to treat several officers at the King Edward VII Hospital for Officers, where the matron, Sister Agnes, had become a close friend. One day, while we were taking tea at the hospital, the matron mentioned the Equerry to me, adding that she had spoken to the King and Queen about me. Their Majesties had made enquiries through their own physician and he had advised the Equerry to consult me.

When in attendance on the Prince at the many fashionable dinners and dances of that time, this Colonel always wore the blue tail-coat with gilt buttons which was the distinguishing dress of the male members of the royal household. His shining collars were always rather high but it had been noticed that they were creeping higher and higher. Eventually the Equerry ceased to appear in society altogether. In private he appeared with a large scarf wrapped around his neck, as he furtively scurried from one specialist to the next. He had even been to the 'quacks' and made several trips abroad, but all to no avail. All but the quacks had advised the surgical removal of a large wart-like tumour that had developed on the back of his neck. Colonel B. was very much opposed to this idea but, unless I could help him, he was about to enter a nursing home to have the operation performed.

When he came to see me I was immediately able to diagnose his problem as an example of a rare giant wart which was normally only to be encountered in the tropics.

"I see that you are fond of shooting from an elephant?" I said.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, slightly puzzled. "oh, well, yes – I used to do quite a bit of shooting in India. But how did you know?"

"That thing on your neck usually comes from prolonged contact with elephants...I don't suppose many English doctors have ever seen one."

"What...elephants?"

"No – that sort of wart!" I replied, "Anyhow I can get it off without resorting to the scalpel. How does that appeal to you?"

He looked at me rather suspiciously, obviously feeling that there was a catch somewhere. "How?" he asked. "Will it be painful?"

"Not at all," I assured him. "You won't even need a general anaesthetic."

I booked the Colonel into a nursing home and, a couple of days later, performed the operation. I injected some local anaesthetic into the area around the growth and then coagulated the pedicle with electro-cautery. A few days later, quite according to plan, the entire tumour fell from his neck like an over-ripe fig. I put it into a jar containing formalin and presented it to the patient, who seemed quite keen on keeping it as a memento. He left the nursing home quite satisfied with the treatment he had received, and very relieved to have lost his embarrassing

appendage. Soon afterwards he reappeared in society, accompanying the Prince as usual.

To this day I am still amazed how the news of this simple procedure sped along its devious pathways, finally to appear in the gossip column of the 'Evening Standard'. Colonel B. was so pleased with the result of my treatment that he took me to Buckingham Palace to meet all three Royal Princes. They were very interested on medicine and were quite anxious to hear all of the details of the celebrated case.

It was of course but a simple incident in the day-to-day life of a doctor and, had it not been clothed in the dignity arising from the social status of the patient, it would not have aroused any interest at all. Nevertheless it brought me many happy and intriguing experiences. My appointment book quickly filled with many exciting names, beginning to look like Who's Who and Burke's Peerage rolled into one!

Colonel V.R. Sparey was a very distinguished officer in the Ordnance Depot. I first met him in Alexandria in 1915, where we became firm friends, meeting quite often at the Sultan Hussein Club. After I had settled in England, the Colonel suggested that I should join his club. It was a very old-fashioned and authoritative institution, and I was rather concerned that they would not accept me. Nevertheless, the Colonel's recommendation proved sufficient and my application was approved. At the club I was privileged to meet many distinguished and important people – a great advantage to a young doctor trying to build a successful practice!

One day the club secretary approached me during lunch. He drew up a chair and sat beside me.

"Excuse me, Doctor Hasson," he said, "but I wonder if I might have a few words with you?"

"By all means, George, - what is it?"

"Well, do you remember Viscount D?...Well, apparently he had been very ill for the past few months – some sort of bother with his skin, I believe – anyway he's quite ill. I hope you don't think it's a cheek of me to ask, but – as a fellow member – would you be prepared to take a look at him. According to my information he's sinking fast!"

"Yes, of course," I answered, "but only on the condition that his usual doctor doesn't object."

That afternoon the Viscount's doctor telephoned to say that he had no objection whatsoever to my visiting his patient. In fact, he claimed, it would be rather a blessing, as he was leaving for the United States that evening and was a little worried about leaving his patient.

When I arrived I discovered the Viscount in bed. His morale was extremely low and he looked dreadfully ill. He had been confined to bed for over four months, wasting away to almost half his original weight. Almost his entire body was swathed in bandages and, judging by the number of jars in the room, he was completely covered in ointment. The atmosphere in the room was rank!

I decided that all of this ointment was probably doing him more harm than good. With a piece of cottonwool I wiped the grease from his face, which was taut with anxiety.

“Don’t worry unduly Lord D.,” I said soothingly, “you won’t die from your eczema just yet.”

“I’m not afraid to die, Doctor Hasson – I’m more frightened of living at the moment.”

“Oh, I think you might change your mind after we get you in a nice warm bath.”

I asked the nurse in attendance to draw a bath for the viscount.

“But, sir,” she replied horrified, “the Viscount’s doctor would never allow it! He’s given strict instructions that no water should ever touch his Lordship’s skin – he hasn’t had a bath for months!”

“Good Lord! Then it’s certainly about time he had one. I’m in charge of his treatment now and I say he’s going to have a bath!”

The nurse stormed out of the room, not wanting to be implicated in the dreadful crime of giving the patient a bath. Not having any alternative, I rolled up my sleeves, donned a white coat from my bag, and prepared to do it myself. At that moment Lady D. peeped round the door and on seeing me cried, “oh, darling, I’m so pleased you’ve decided to engage a male nurse – I’m just off to have my hair done – bye!”

I soon had the bath ready and, taking the patient in my arms, gently lowered him into the water. Carefully, I started to remove the layers of grease – tar, sulphur and zinc ointments – which were causing the dressings to adhere to his skin. A sigh of relief escaped from the Viscount’s lips and, during his forty minutes in the water, he seemed to cheer up considerably.

I put him back into his bed – newly made up with fresh sheets by the nurse who seemed to be thawing – where he shivered for a couple of minutes and then, closing his eyes, fell into a deep sleep. I asked the nurse to ensure that the Viscount slept as long as he liked without interruption. I promised to return the next morning with my assistant to perform some tests.

Next morning I found the Viscount sitting up in bed, cheerfully toying with his four months growth of beard.

“Do you still feel like dying?” I asked as my assistant took a blood sample.

“Oh, no, Doctor! I feel full of beans this morning.”

The tests performed on his Lordship’s blood and urine were to reveal that there was a total lack of magnesium in both fluids. I telephoned the nurse to find out whether his Lordship took aperients.

“Oh yes, Doctor Hasson,” she replied, “quite a lot every day.” She explained that the Viscount had always suffered from constipation but that, since he had been confined to bed, the condition became chronic. As a result his daily consumption of laxatives had soared dramatically. I immediately requested her not to give him anymore, but to ensure that he ate six good-sized potatoes every day. This would ensure that he received sufficient of the mineral without actually taking tablets, and also stimulate his bowels.

On this diet the Viscount’s blood and urine were soon reconstituted and, within fifteen days, he had completely recovered with barely a trace of eczema to be found. When his own doctor returned from America, he telephoned to offer his congratulations.

“how times change!” he exclaimed after I had explained my treatment to him. “In my day we were taught to treat eczema with ointment and lotions only – never water!”

As for the patient, whether it was the baths of the improved diet, I do not really know, but together they were sufficient to cure the heroic Viscount – for heroic he must have been to survive four months in bed without even a wash!

I continued to see the Viscount regularly and these visits marked, not only the beginning of a life-long friendship, but also my first real experience of a true British gentleman. During our many years of friendship, I assisted at the funeral of his wife, who died in an accident, and was also invited to the ceremony marking the retirement of his brother, a Bishop in Canada.

Finally his Lordship died in his sleep. A few days after his funeral I received a telephone call from a firm of solicitors asking me to attend a private meeting. At the meeting I was informed that Viscount D. had appointed me as sole heir and executor of his assets. The sum he left was not particularly large and after giving some to charity and some to the liquidators, I placed the remainder in trust. I had offered the entire legacy to the brother in Canada but he would not hear of taking it. The Viscount had ended his life, as I have said above, a true British gentleman.

A general practitioner from Windsor sent one of his patients to see me because she was suffering from a chronic itch he was unable to cure. All his prescriptions for ointments and lotions had failed to produce any improvement in her condition, and he was convinced that the trouble was of nervous origin, despite the fact that tranquillisers had not had any effect.

Lady T. duly arrived at my rooms. Although white-haired and nearing eighty, she was tall and stately, with a delightfully assured and relaxed manner. I asked to see the area of her skin which was most affected but she warned me that I would see nothing but a slight redness due to the scratching. She was quite right; there was little to see except some redness here and there. Looking round for an explanation of the symptom my eyes fell on her extravagant coat which, although obviously quite old, was particularly brightly coloured. I asked her if it had been dyed recently.

“Why, yes” she replied, “it’s funny you should say that because I remember that my itch started quite soon after the coat was returned from the dyers.”

Such a coincidence represents an opportunity for the observant clinician, and my suspicions were confirmed when the patient told me that she had been wearing the coat for some twenty years, having it dyed every two or three years.

“Lady T?” I announced confidently, “I will give you no prescriptions, no medicine, no tablets, pills or injections. All I want you to do is throw away that coat, and never wear it again.”

She was obviously a little crestfallen. “but why? What has my coat to do with my skin?”

“Quite a lot,” I replied. “I believe that your trouble is caused by the dye that colours your coat so brightly. I believe your skin is particularly sensitive to the dye.”

“If I do as you say, Doctor, what can I do with my skin in the meantime?”

“Nothing!” I replied. “I am quite certain that in a week or so your itch will have completely disappeared.”

Neither the patient nor her doctor were entirely convinced, but it was not long before they were forced to accept what I had said. A week later the G.P. telephoned to say that all appeared to be well with the patient. Lady T. was absolutely delighted, and invited me to tea at her home on the outskirts of Windsor.

The following afternoon a large old-fashioned Daimler arrived to collect me and, on my arrival, I found the G.P. on the doorstep. His warm welcome put me completely at my ease.

We had a very pleasant tea together, after which the doctor excused himself and left me alone with Lady T. She gave me a conducted tour of her lovely home and magnificent art collection. I was delighted to see her collection of the English School – Romneys, Lawrences, Gainsboroughs and Reynolds – but in the dining room I found a special surprise. There, alone on the wall, was a French picture – Manet's, 'Le Vin à L'Amitié'. I complimented Lady T. on possessing such a beautiful and important piece of work. She shared my pleasure and immediately told me the story behind the picture.

In the early 1880's her husband had invited Manet to spend a few days with them, after meeting the artist in Holland. When he arrived at Windsor, Manet told them that whilst waiting for his train at St. Lazare he had seen these two men at the bistro – one sitting at the table having his lunch; and the other, a porter, standing behind him. Both were celebrating their friendship with a glass of wine. It had given him the idea for a picture, and the title was obvious. He sketched the scene very accurately and brought the drawing to England.

After he had been with them for a couple of days he expressed a desire to obtain a canvas and paint the picture. Lady T's husband accompanied Manet to London, where they bought a couple of canvasses and paints. Four days later Manet had completed the picture which he gave to Lady T. in appreciation of her hospitality.

I was fascinated by this story as I was not aware that Manet had ever visited England, and there was no record of this particular painting. To me this was a real 'find'. I thanked Lady T. profusely for her kind hospitality and delightful company. Her chauffeur then drove me back to Cleveland Square.

Two and a half years later, I received the following letter:

Dear Sir,

We regret to inform you of the recent death of Lady T. Shortly before her death Lady T. intimated her desire that, upon her death, the picture above the fireplace in her dining room signed, Manet, depicting two foreigners drinking wine, should be given to her dear friend, Dr. James Hasson.

This letter does not, of course constitute an obligation to the Beneficiaries under the Will, but, under the circumstances, the executors wish to respect the last wishes of the deceased.

We shall correspond with you further upon this matter in the near future.

Yours Truly,

.....

I was absolutely delighted and rejoiced in my good fortune but, knowing the possible implications of a patient's bestowing a gift on their doctor, I decided to consult a colleague of mine who was at that time President of the General Medical Council. He questioned me as to the length of time I had known the patient, by whom

she was recommended and when I had last seen her. With my permission he checked these facts with Lady T's G.P. in Windsor. As a result of these enquiries he told me that I was free to accept the gift but claimed, that as a general rule, it was wiser not to accept gifts.

Back at Cleveland Square, I wrote the following letter:

Dear Sirs,

I am very sorry to hear of the passing of Lady T. Although I only met her twice, I admired her for her scholarship and kindness.

As for the picture in question, I would like to point out that it is the only picture known to have been painted by Manet in England, and that its existence is not even recorded. Lady T. informed me that the artist presented it to her personally. I believe that it could be of considerable value.

In these circumstances I feel that I should like to inform the trustees that they are absolutely free to withdraw their offer, should they wish to do so.

Yours Sincerely,
James Hasson.

I showed this letter to various friends and was called a 'bloody fool', and worse! For the next ten days I must admit that I was tempted to think to myself as a sentimental fool for parting with such a magnificent gift. On the morning of the eleventh day, I walked into my consulting rooms only to see the painting propped up against my desk. In an explanatory note accompanying the picture, the Executors thanked me for my kind though and honest opinion. The matter had been put before the Trustees and they had decided to respect the last wishes of Lady T. the picture has remained in my possession ever since.

And so, through unlikely connections and strange coincidences, I had begun to find my way in my chosen career in my adopted country. I had also found much to enjoy and admire in the world of art. All the pictures I have since collected have their particular stories, and I shall recount some of these in later chapters – along with my recollections of the many fascinating people I have encountered in a long and happy life in this country.

II. BEYOND THEIR SKINS

Throughout my professional career and even in retirement I have always remembered that there is a sense in which there are no diseases, only patients. Each one of us possesses sufficiently differing characteristics such as may well pose a particular problem in diagnosis and treatment, even though our similarities in other respects are taken for granted.

I did not set out to become a dermatologist but my initial work on leprosy seemed to lead me into this field, willy nilly. There – in our skins – we have a veritable kaleidoscope of variations and I soon learnt that skin troubles may be effective in curbing some more serious problems in the person's physical or psychological make-up. It is all the more important then, as a dermatologist, to pay attention to the whole person, and to differentiate between the presenting problem as opposed to the underlying problem.

One of my first experiences of this came in 1926 when I was asked to examine a retired Levantine businessman who was suffering from an acute eczematization of his hands. He had come to England with his wife and personal physician, and was staying in one of the more fashionable hotels in Kensington. Apparently he spent much of his time in Alexandria playing bridge, where he acquired the reputation of being the best bridge player in the town. One evening he did not appear to play because of an itch that had developed in his hands. Mr. B. was encouraged to consult me in England as one of his friends was convinced that he required specialist attention. Nevertheless, he wished to give his own physician a chance to cure the condition first. Very soon he appeared at his club with both hands bandaged and his itch had gone from bad to worse.

By the time he had come to England to consult me, the eczema had spread to his arms and he was suffering considerably from the irritation. His physician told me that he had prescribed tar ointment, Lassar's paste, zinc ointment, sulphur and other applications but all to no avail. On further examination I found that Mr. B's blood pressure was very high, and the tests on his urine showed that he excreted excessive albumin and cylindrical cells.

Armed with this information, I advised the patient that his eruption might be a blessing in disguise and that it would act as a safety valve while I made further investigations into the cause of his eczema. I impressed upon him the importance of putting up with discomfort for just a little longer, and I suggested that he should stop further applications to the skin until I had had a word with his physician. At that his wife, who sat at his side throughout the consultation, remarked that their physician had just gone to Scotland for a fortnight's holiday.

Fortunately she had the physician's address and I asked my secretary to contact him by telephone without further delay. When I explained the situation to him he expressed great hostility at being disturbed on holiday. He was quite rude and tried to give me the impression that he did not even remember the patient! I suggested to Mr. B. that he should write to his physician, asking him to call on him, as he was unable to stand the itch any longer.

The physician returned from his holiday soon after this and telephoned with me with a very conciliatory manner, wanting to know what all the fuss was about. He was somewhat taken aback when I told him the result of the urine test. As tactfully as possible I suggested a far more protective approach towards the patient and, remembering my telephone call to Scotland, I thought that another medical attendant should also be sailed in.

The physician ignored all my advice and advised a patient to go to a nursing home where he arranged for him to have X-ray treatment for his skin complaint. As a result of this the patient left the nursing home three weeks later apparently cured of his complaint.

That very evening he collapsed and died in his hotel. The safety valve that Nature had given him had been obliterated! A few weeks later his widow visited me and explained that she wanted to apologise for not following my advice; she was very sorry for any unpleasantness that had resulted from this sad sequence of events.

Of course, I did not explain to her how I had learnt the significance of such symptoms, nor how I had often with-held a prescription which might have cleared up the skin trouble. I have no doubt that such action on my part may have saved the lives of several patients. It has not always prevented them from being unwilling to pay my bill!

My dear friend, Robert once a memorable lecture to medical students in Geneva. "Gentleman," he said, "it is not always necessary to make use of the stethoscope, let alone the microscope, to trace the cause of inveterate illness, however far it has progressed. To the keen observer it is always in his grasp."

In these days we tend to put our faith in anything that comes out of a machine, Even diagnosis is often mechanised and I believe we are in danger of becoming slaves to the very machines we create. There is no substitute for clinical acumen and judgement. Machines make excellent servants but dangerous masters. Robert's emphasis on trained observation is as relevant today as when he gave the lecture more than fifty years ago.

Sir Henry C., a brilliant and distinguished surgeon, walked into my secretary's room one day in 1926 and begged for a minute or so of my time between appointments. He apologised profusely but explained that it was a matter of the utmost importance and urgency. When I saw him I noticed the paleness of his skin, his heavy eyes and his awkward staccato manner.

"James," he said, "I have come to take advantage of your skill and experience. For six months I have suffered from a severe itch which has made my nights unbearable. I consulted our old boy at the hospital but, in spite of all sorts of tests and whatnot, he could do nothing to alleviate my misery. All his tests proved negative, and all he could say that it was 'one of those things', and that I must have patience. Surely," he pleaded, "there must be some means of finding the cause?"

I examined him very thoroughly and, while doing so, the little repartee he had made at the club last weekend came into my mind.

The Hon. George B., a staunch bachelor for many years suddenly announced that he was about to take the matrimonial plunge. Sir Henry asked who the unfortunate Venus was.

“A beautiful young widow of thirty, Henry,” he replied, “and richer by the possession of two children. Yes, Henry, just think of it – what a fortunate fellow I am. Not only do I acquire a bride but two lovely children into the bargain – ready-made family, old chap!”

“You idiot!” retorted Sir Henry. “Had you told me of your extraordinary taste for ready-made families, I would have offered you my wife – she has four children!”

When the rest of the club heard of Henry’s offer they had the laugh of their lives. Sir Henry scorned the avenues where blood flows bluer and, when he was twenty-one, had married an Irish nurse. This lovely colleen, with bright blue eyes and an Irish temperament, had swept him off his feet. The marriage was fruitful for they had four splendid children within six years.

As a result of his research into the grafting of vines, Henry became world famous and it was not long before he was knighted. He took great interest in art and became quite rich by virtue of his wife inheriting over a quarter of a million pounds from an American uncle she had never met. He bought a magnificent Georgian mansion in Kent acquired a remarkable collection of old masters and rare objets d’art. He made full use of his fortune – a Bentley, butler, valet, cook, maids and so on. He knew of my own modest collection of paintings as he had often visited me at home, and often offered the invitation for me to visit him.

As I finished my examination, he looked up at me with a mixture of hope and despair on his face. I was silent for a moment or two and then said, “Henry, you’ve invited me several times to spend the weekend at your house so that I can admire your incredible Botticelli. I’m free this weekend and would like to take you up on your offer – what do you say?”

“But I have no Botticelli!” he replied, “what are you going to do about my bloody itch?”

“Botticelli or whatever old masters, they are all very beautiful. As for what I’m going to do about your itch, I’ll tell you that on the weekend.”

“You can be a funny sort of a chap, James. Yes – come down for the weekend by all means!”

The entrance to his home was palatially flanked by superb ornamental gates, and the balsam-like fragrance of the wisteria and jasmine adorning each side of the door was delightful. I was received by the butler and taken into the library, gloriously panelled with seventeenth century woodwork and possessing a lovely Chippendale fireplace. On the mantelpiece I recognised a piece of sculpture by the famous seventeenth century French sculptor, Germain Pilon. It was badly damaged and I mourned its present deformity wondering if it had been badly handled.

Henry offered me a drink and a cigar, excusing himself for a few minutes whilst he went in search of his wife. I was happy enough just to stroll around looking at his paintings. I was particularly impressed by a seventeenth century work, possibly by Mignard, representing Molière’s play La Mèdecin Malgré Lui, with the author in the title role of Sganarel. I was sure it was a unique picture as I know of no other work depicting Molière himself – how much the French Academy of Arts would have liked to possess it!

Henry returned with his wife, Maureen, and I was welcomed most warmly by her. She was very hopeful of my being able to do something about Henry’s itch and then we talked about their home. Eventually I asked how it was the statue by Germain Pilon had been damaged. As this juncture Henry walked out of the room, saying that Maureen would explain. In a very matter-of-fact voice she said, “Well,

Henry bought this thing for a thousand pounds but it was all dirty so I took it to the kitchen sink and tried to clean it with a brush and some soda. Unfortunately some pieces broke off...I tried to stick them back on but it didn't work. Anyway I couldn't leave it looking like that so I painted it that nice grey colour. I think it looks rather nice but Henry wasn't pleased at all!"

I did not reply but I thought, "what price ignorance?"

Shortly afterwards we were having tea on the verandah when I noticed several chips in the Sèvres china. Maureen noticed me looking at them and said, rather apologetically, "I am so sorry about my tea-set but they were damaged while I was washing them up one day. What can one do? Still, I don't suppose they were meant to always stay in a cupboard, were they? They were meant to be used."

When I suggested that Henry should show me his garden he seized the opportunity with obvious relief. We walked silently amongst the magnolias and dwarf azaleas towards some woodland. There the lilies of the valley in their thousands made me gasp with joy; their fragrance and beauty surpassed everything I had seen in the garden.

Quite suddenly Henry stopped in his tracks and apologised profusely for what he called his wife's 'immaturity'.

"That is why I came here, Henry," I replied. "I was in search of a clue to the cause of your itch, and I think that I may have found it."

"You're pretty clever, James. I thought you might find something. What is it?"

"Patience, Henry," I warned him, "everything in good time."

The dinner that evening was very formal but my hostess's dress was not exactly in the delicate taste that one might expect of her. It was an overpowering scarlet, and she had put a yellow rose in her corsage. It was only after Henry and I had finished our coffee and brandy in his study that we were able to talk in privacy. I told him that I believed the cause of his trouble was that he had become intolerant of his wife's behaviour. I explained that his wife was still the same girl with whom he had fallen in love so many years ago. She had given him everything that a woman could give to a man she loved. The marriage had certainly been fruitful – four sons and a quarter of a million pounds! I felt sure that Maureen would have preferred a more simple life without the luxury with which he had surrounded her, and in which, as I had realised, she had no interest.

"But a man of your calibre, Henry, should not allow intolerance to get the better of him. Do we not adore the God of tolerance, of charity and goodness? To deny him is to deny the existence of the sun that gladdens our hearts and warms our feelings."

I suggested, as far as his itch was concerned he should go away for a couple of months so that he would have ample time to consider the state of his marriage. Fortunately he had an open invitation to give several lectures in Canada, which he could take advantage of at any time.

"when do you think I should go?" he asked.

"The sooner the better!" I replied with feeling.

Three weeks later he sailed for Canada and I promised that I would visit his home frequently to see how things were getting along.

I received two letters from Henry during the first month of his absence but he did not mention his itch. I visited his family three times and all seemed well. Then I had the awful shock of reading about Maureen's accidental death in the newspapers.

Apparently she had been on her way to visit her son at his Sussex school when her car skidded on a wet road and she collided with a stationary lorry. She had been killed instantly. I immediately telephoned her housekeeper in Kent and told her that I would communicate with Sir Henry. This I did and a week later I met him at his home. It was heartrending to see his children all grieving for the mother they had lost.

The inquest revealed nothing out of the ordinary and the coroner returned a verdict of 'death by misadventure'. After the memorial service in London, Henry and I walked back to Cleveland Square in silence. When we arrived we were served tea and I handed Henry a cigar which he lit, his face pale and tense. After a few minutes I enquired about his itch. I wondered why he had not mentioned it in his letters.

"Because there was no improvement, James."

In a moment of disturbing premonition I then asked, "And what about it now?"

He looked up at me despairingly and replied in a low voice, "The whole thing disappeared at the very moment poor Maureen died."

"Are you sure?"

"I am absolutely certain," he replied. "I have checked and checked and rechecked the times – I can assure you that the itch disappeared the very moment Maureen was killed."

I remained silent for a minute or two and then, in a loud voice, said, "Well, Henry, what you have told me is certainly extraordinary. I cannot recall coming up against anything like it before, but I do know that the human brain remains largely uncharted territory. Anything is possible."

"But how can the brain communicate over such a distance?" he asked. We both remained silent. That evening Henry slept at my house and in the morning he looked even paler than usual.

At breakfast he said, "Maureen appeared to me in a dream last night and, as extraordinary as it may sound, my skin itched horribly while her apparition lasted. Look at these scratches, James!"

"After what you have told me, Henry," I said, "I can only say that it appears that sympathies and antipathies can travel long distances, and reach the subconscious via dreams. In my opinion dreams are due to the liberation of the soul from its daytime exertions."

I realised then that there must be some sort of perception of which we know nothing. Jung's account of the collective unconscious made me wonder if two minds, at a great distance, might have access to this great reservoir, if indeed it exists, and thereby be able to influence each other. Perhaps it will not be long before this mystery is explained by science. Whether it is explained or not, we can only marvel at the capacities of our faculties, and feel humble in our state of ignorance as to their use or abuse.

Tears were pouring from Henry's eyes and, a short while later, he left for his home in Kent in a pensive mood. I have remained pensive to this day what lies beyond our skins.

III. THE INEXPLICABLE IN SUFFERING

Some time during 1926 I was visited at my rooms in Cleveland Square by a tall aristocratic-looking gentleman. He had a handsome, if somewhat emaciated face, with very strong features. His clothes were not of the latest out and had obviously seen better days. He looked rather poor and I wondered whether nature or poor nutrition had given him his prominent cheekbones. His German accent also intrigued me, as did his surname, Unterklärbar – which translates into English as ‘inexplicable’. I wondered what the poor man had done in embryonic life to deserve such a name and I was soon to discover that his personal history was as ‘unterklärbar’ as his surname.

He must have sensed my thoughts about him because he looked at me very keenly and said, “As you have noticed, Herr Doktor, I was born in Germany. Nevertheless, I am a British subject and have been for many years. If you have the time to listen, I could tell you something of myself.”

Ernest Unterklärbar was born and educated in Germany. His father owned the famous Anglo-Deutsche Apotheke in Frankfurt and Ernest studied pharmacy in preparation to joining the firm. In 1909 he came to England to learn the language and because he was very interested in the English way of life. He enjoyed living in London and, having lived there for three years he decided to settle there and open a branch of the family firm. His father sent him five hundred pounds – a small fortune in those days – with which to set up the business and Ernest finally opened a pharmacy in Mayfair, calling it the Anglo-Deutsh Apotheke.

“I worked very hard to build up the business and stocked all the German pharmaceutical products. Soon I became the London agent for Hoechst, the Salvarsan manufacturers and exporters of most of the continental pharmaceutical products. So well did my business flourish that I built up an extensive clientele and received prescriptions from all parts of the British Isles. I took pride in the fact that these orders were all despatched the same day as they were received.” He smiled proudly, “You understand, Herr Doktor, I introduced some German business efficiency into this country. I attended to all important orders personally and, by 1914, I was the proud owner of a very prosperous and efficient business.”

Then the war broke out and, in a matter of weeks, most of his employees had volunteered for the Services. He was left with two lads and an elderly chemist to try to keep the business going. It was very hard work but he was determined not to give up his hard-won success without a struggle.

“one day in 1915,” he continued, “the year that British antipathy towards the Germans was at its height, fate decided to play one of its little tricks on me. I was walking through Hyde Park with an old German friend who was once a famous violinist. By then, poor chap, he was old and very deaf. I was in the habit of shouting into his ear and, to make things easier for him, I always used to shout in German. That afternoon we were being followed by a somewhat drab-looking individual in a nondescript suit but paid little attention to him. We were having a conversation

when, quite suddenly, this man confronted us and introduced himself as a plain-clothes policeman. He said that he had been watching us for some time and asked us to accompany him to the police station. As we had been talking in German, he thought that we were spies!”

Despite Ernest’s British passport he was eventually sent to a camp for Aliens, near Reading. His Apotheke was classified as enemy property and his bank account impounded.

I looked at Ernest and realised how his appearance confirmed his account of his misfortunes. I was aghast at how cruel war could be in its ramifications and I tried to remind him of more congenial times and assumed that after the war surely his property had been returned to him. Things had not worked out as I had hoped to hear.

Soon after he had been sent to the camp at Reading, he was informed by the Special Department of the International Red Cross that the German Government had confiscated his business and financial assets in Frankfurt.

“I wonder if you can guess why?” he asked. AS I offered no reply he continued, “Because I was a British subject!” He was silent for a few moments and the enormity of the injustice meted out to him was beginning to dawn on me.

After the war he had his freedom but little else; he was penniless. Even if his property in Frankfurt had been returned to him it would have been worthless owing to the devaluation of the Deutschmark. He had lived a hand-to-mouth existence hoping that something might be done about his property in England but he realised that the official machinery worked very slowly.

“But surely” I said, “something must have been done by now? What are your prospects for the future?”

Ernest reckoned that they were as gloomy as a room without windows! The British authorities had decided to lift the sequestration on his Apotheke but he could not get the money to pay the rent. All his apparatus and installations were still there but he had no materials and no staff. His relatives in Germany had lost everything too.

“How much do you require to make a fresh start?” I asked him.

He smiled wearily and shook his head. “I should need at least a hundred and fifty pounds for the rent and to buy the basic materials.”

“Can I be of any assistance to you?”

“Thank you, Herr Doktor, but it would be useless for I lost all confidence in myself. I honestly believe that, after what has happened to me, if I started in business as a hat-maker, the children of the future would be born without heads! Or if I tried shoemaking, they would be born without feet.”

I protested at the idea of his making shoes or hats but it was plain that he had lost a lot of his confidence. At that time he was working as a book-keeper at a boarding house in Notting Hill. He had to do all the shopping for the place as well, just for his board and a little spending money. His medical condition was almost forgotten in the discussion of his dismal history. He was concerned about the colour of his skin, which had become sallow and lax and he also suffered from insomnia and palpitations. On examining him I found some signs of wastage in the muscles but came to the conclusion that all he needed was a good meal and a good night’s sleep.

I gave him a prescription and asked if he would come to supper with me that night. He looked at me in amazement, “What do you want with a wreck like me?” he asked, but I managed to persuade him to come. He proceeded to empty his pockets of some silver and copper coins which he placed on my desk in a pathetic little pile. “I’m

so sorry that I am unable to pay you any more but this is all the money I have...nineteen and six.”

I told him that I did not wish to be paid a fee at all but, that if he wished to give me a little pleasure he could do so simply by having supper with me that evening.

After he had left my rooms I hailed a taxi and went to the address he had given me as that of the Apotheke. There, in the basement, I found the landlord having tea with his wife. As he seemed to be in a co-operative mood, I introduced myself as a personal friend of the unfortunate Unterklärbar and said that I wished to assist him. The landlord thought Ernest was an industrious and honest fellow and quite spontaneously offered to help him make a new start with his work. I gave him one hundred and fifty pounds towards the rent and the landlord added fifty pounds of his own. This ensured the rent for six months in advance and the receipt was made out in Ernest's name. I am quite sure that both of us experienced the same joy helping a fellow human on his way that night.

Nor can I forget the meal I had shared with Ernest that evening! It was obvious how much he enjoyed the wine and roast chicken and I wondered how long it was since he had really enjoyed a meal. When I gave him the receipt for his rent he was overwhelmed. Both of us were close to tears of relief and hope.

After this, Ernest and I became inseparable friends. I enjoyed giving him the formulae for special preparations for the skin and it was a great joy to see him build up his business for the second time. He remained fit and happy for many years and was a very successful pharmacist.

As a friend Ernest was certainly a kindred spirit, although, at times, much wiser and wittier than myself. When I was disturbed by the mystery of suffering and tragedy, I would often turn to Ernest and seek his advice. One night at dinner I mentioned the disastrous effect the sudden accidental death of his wife had had on one of my patients.

“The world is full of dramas like this one,” Ernest replied.

“But why should it be?” I asked.

“The origin, Herr Doktor, lies simply in the vice of intolerance on the part of one of the couple, or even of both. Intolerance could derive from a momentary or permanent state of antipathy for a person who possess our own weaknesses but who gets on much better than we do. It is certainly a morbid state of mind – greed or envy could be at the root of it all and even boredom can cause it. Too much poverty or too many riches can also cause it.” He broke off to take a sip of wine and then said, “I know of a legend which, if I may be allowed to narrate it without shocking the ladies might explain the origin of these things.”

I was quite intrigued by what I had heard so far, as were the others, so I encouraged him to continue. His tale was that, when God created the world of humans and animals, He thought there was no need for anyone to covet an opposite sex. Thus He made all creatures hermaphrodites, for He knew that all evil would derive from greed, envy and intolerance. This state of affairs lasted for several million years and no trouble was ever experienced. One day, however, Eve persuaded Adam to request the Almighty to alter His design. She felt that the male organ attached to her abdomen was nothing more than pendulous piece of soft flesh, resembling nothing so much as a turkey's crest. Adam was quickly persuaded that his female

organ was perfectly useless and that he would be well rid of it. Eve explained that this was because, in both their cases, the opposite organs had the same purpose. She suggested that, if only they could change when they felt like it and enjoy each other's organ, life would be really worth living.

Adam was very taken with this idea and asked for a meeting with the Creator. He pleaded their case intelligently and received a promise from God, who also warned him that they would experience many troubles as a result of this request. Two could play at the same game, and, when Adam wished for another wife, Eve would wish for another man. Domestic strife, divorce and misery would be their lot.

Eve was summoned by God. He warned her that she would become old and would find no male to tempt. She had reckoned with that already and told Him that the red Devonshire earth would make a satisfactory rouge for her lips and that the Cornish clay could be softened to a very delightful cream. When this was perfumed with the essence of flowers, it would provide an effective disguise for her wrinkles and a bait for a young lover.

When God pointed out that her children would only be half hers, whereas now they were totally her own, she parried by saying that children were all alike. When God suggested that she could experience neglect, desertion and sorrow, she denied this by arguing that there would be many other men to choose from. When the Almighty asked her about the experience of unrequited love she said, quite simply, that she would kill herself.

Despite these very unsatisfactory answers God realised that Adam and Eve were determined to be different in order to try to complement each other. So he divested them of the opposite organ with a final warning – “I do not envy you!”

For a moment or two we laughed, then I asked Ernest if he really believed that we were created hermaphrodite in the beginning. He thought there was still enough evidence in our present bodies to confirm such a proposition. Today this legend would seem to carry even more probability biologically and in our confusion over identity and relationships, Ernest's explanation of intolerance would be most appropriate.

In May 1937, the Association for the Development of French Spas invited me to spend two weeks at Evian-les-Bains in the Haute Savoie of France. The invitation was also extended to my wife, or anyone else I wished to take with me. Full board was offered at a famous international hotel, with treatment at the gymnasium including hydrotherapy. Unfortunately my wife was unable to come but she suggested that I take Ernest. He was in need of a holiday, as he looked pale and was complaining of palpitations and a complete change would obviously do him the world of good.

Our journey to Evian-les-Bains, on the western side of Lake Geneva, was almost as comfortable as the luxury we experienced at the splendid hotel. Ernest was especially appreciative of all that was offered and cheerfully reminded me of how his clients in London had to pay 1/6 for a bottle of water from the Lake – today's prices are very different and he would be appalled. As it was, due to the change in climate, good food, the beautiful surroundings and the activity in the gymnasium, he soon looked refreshed and healthy.

One evening, soon after our arrival, there was a ball and after an excellent dinner we retired to a secluded corner to watch and admire some lovely girls as they danced. When I was informed that a large quantity of mail had been forwarded to me from London, I took leave of Ernest and retired to my room to deal with it. An hour

or so later I came back down to say goodnight to him but he was nowhere to be found. After making some inquiries I was told that he had met a lady he used to know in Germany and had gone out into the garden with her.

Late the following morning I was thinking of taking a day trip across the lake to Switzerland and was just about to arrange it when Ernest appeared. He was in the company of a most charming young lady. He introduced me to her and so I came to meet Frau Grüber, a childhood friend of Ernest's. Their families had been neighbours and quite close friends. Her elder sister, Elsa, had been particularly attractive to Ernest but, despite his efforts, she did not seem interested in him. Margaret had herself married Arthur Grüber, who became a very successful businessman, but she had not borne him any children – hence her visit to the spa.

Margaret's meeting with Ernest had a marvellous effect on both of them and they spent a great deal of time together. A few days later Ernest told me that his luck had really changed for the better and that he had some important news. But first he had a story to tell me.

Apparently Ernest had returned to Frankfurt after the war to see if anything could be salvaged from the German end of the business. At that time Elsa was about to marry Zahnartz Herr Rudolf Einstuck, the local dentist. He was a large strong man of forty-two, successful and quite rich. As Elsa's father had died and her mother was partially paralysed, Ernest was asked to act in loco parentis. There was a lavish reception following the ceremony and the bridegroom and guests drank freely. Ernest was astonished by the contrast between the lovely blonde bride and her grotesque husband, who became more and more intoxicated. Eventually Einstuck became quite ill and disappeared. He was later discovered in bed with his elderly and rather ugly housekeeper. One of the female guests disclosed this to Elsa and suggested that she witnessed the ugly spectacle for herself. She did so and stalked from the room in a furious temper. Then she burst into tears and retreated to her own bedroom. She emerged to confront Ernest, who was himself very upset by the whole affair, and dragged him into her bedroom, locking the door behind her. It was after midnight when Ernest emerged, fully dressed and looking very pleased with himself. He tried to see Einstuck but found him sleeping soundly. The following day he sailed from Ostend and returned to England. For two months there had been brief communications from the Einstuck household but then it was as if an iron curtain had been pulled down around the whole affair.

Now that Ernest had met Margaret she was able to tell him that, none months after the fateful night, a girl was born into the Einstuck household – although the unfortunate husband had never consummated the marriage for the very reason that he was impotent. He had accepted with fatherly pride the arrival of his 'daughter' and was easily persuaded that he had been too drunk at his wedding to remember what had taken place afterwards. The child was christened Lotte.

Margaret had persuaded Ernest to go back to Frankfurt because Einstuck was long dead from a heart attack. His considerable fortune had been left to his wife and Lotte, who was now studying dentistry at university. Margaret was travelling back to Frankfurt on the following morning and Ernest was keen to accompany her. He intended to see his daughter and to ask Elsa to marry him. Of course, I was delighted with his news and wished him luck. I was sure that he deserved at least this much happiness after all his misfortunes and he promised to let me know how things turned out.

A few weeks after my return to England I was rather worried as I still had not heard from Ernest. We asked his landlady if there was any news of him and were surprised to hear that he had already returned to London and had given strict instructions that he did not wish to see or hear from anyone. This state of affairs lasted for six months, when one morning the maid rushed into the library and announced rather cryptically, "He's back!" She warned me that he looked somewhat different. I asked her to show him in – I had a strange foreboding that something must have gone wrong yet again.

A white-haired and very aged Ernest came in and made straight for his usual armchair, sitting down without a word. Eventually he told me about his return to Frankfurt. Margaret had left him at the railway station while she visited her sister's flat to tell Elsa of her meeting with him and his hopes of marrying her. Ernest took a room at the hotel and, twenty-four hours later, Herr Grüber arrived to tell him that Margaret had influenza and suggested that he should visit Elsa and Lotte on his own. He sent flowers and chocolates as a prelude to his visit but, when he got to Elsa's home an ogre-like woman informed him that both ladies had gone away and would not be back for some time. Coldly she handed him two letters; one from Elsa, one from Lotte. He crossed the road as if in a trance and called at the Grüber's, only to be told that they were both out for the day. Slowly the meaning of it all dawned on him. He read the letters. Elsa had written to say that she did not remember him and that, as there were many rogues after rich widows, she would call the police if he called again. Lotte's letter was just as shocking in its own way. She asked how a rogue like him could expect her to accept him in the place of her wonderful father and told him to go away.

By the time I had read these letters Ernest was crying and I was so appalled and distressed that I was virtually in tears myself. "L'injustice du sort!" I kept sobbing to myself. It was an exceptionally tragic turn-about caused by both Elsa and Margaret.

During one night, several years later, the final blow came and Ernest was found rigid and cold in the morning. I went to his inquest only to hear the coroner say that the death of Ernest Unterklärbar was as inexplicable as his name. He thought that Ernest had not a worry in his life, neither illness nor sorrow, and that he died, as he had lived, in peace. He ignored the fact that many inexplicable deaths are due to a broken heart, and I can assure you that Ernest's death was one of these.

I was always delighted when he was prepared to try his luck in life again and always horrified by the cruel experiences he had to suffer. Ernest did not give up – I believe he was released at the point where he could not have borne any more suffering. This timing is inscrutable and I cannot understand it, but then we know so little of the real purpose of this life we share. Unless we have very clear scientific indications, we cannot presume to know for certain the point at which a person should be freed from their suffering. We can only try to help them and share their load with them. Ernest's own reaction to the coroner's remarks would probably been:

**“Strike, Sorrow! Strike once more –
If you can find room to do so!”**

IV. MAX BEAVERBROOK AND FRIENDS

Early in 1927 the private secretary to a famous newspaper magnate telephoned my rooms in Cleveland Square and requested an early appointment for his employer. This was easily arranged, and on the following morning Lord Beaverbrook appeared before me. He was a man of small physical stature but it quickly became evident that his knowledge and intelligence were of the highest order. He was obviously a man who did not believe in wasting time or words.

He complained that he had long been suffering from a severe itch inside his anus. This had stubbornly resisted the application of various ointments and suppositories, and was driving him wild. During the day he was subject to an overwhelming desire to rub his backside against any convenient object, and at night he could hardly sleep at all. Naturally, this torment was wreaking havoc with his mental stability.

I asked him to remove his trousers and, after positioning him on a gynaecological table, examined his rectum with an anal speculum. Just beyond the anal sphincter I encountered several small patches of inflamed varicose veins, which confirmed my suspicion that he was suffering from haemorrhoids. As he dressed I explained that there nothing seriously wrong with him but that it would be necessary to have the veins cauterised.

“When can you do it?” he asked.

“Well, I could do it right now – if you like.”

He looked at me in silence for several moments and then asked, “Could you do it in my home? There’s a nurse there who could assist you...?”

I agreed quite readily and, half an hour later, myself, my assistant, Evans, and all the necessary equipment were on our way to Cherkley. On our arrival we set up shop in the kitchen. My assistant, Evans, prepared the portable gynaecological table and sterilised the equipment, whilst the nurse prepared the patient. His Lordship refused to be carried to the table and, with the agility of a much younger man, leapt up onto the table and placed his legs in position. I injected the appropriate area with a local anaesthetic, and after a few minutes set to work with the cauterising iron. The kitchen filled with the aroma of roasting pork but on this occasion it was his Lordship, not his dinner, that provided the fragrant aroma. I dressed the wound with cotton wool smeared with Vaseline and told the patient I had finished.

“Marvellous!” he cried. “It doesn’t itch anymore – you’ve cured me already!”

“You may not itch, my friend,” I retorted, “but when that anaesthetic wears off you’ll be very sore indeed!”

This time the patient did not object to being carried and he was taken to his bedroom where I administered a strong dose of analgesics. His Lordship was adamant that I should remain with him for at least twenty-four hours so, somewhat reluctantly, I sent Evans back to Cleveland Square with the onerous task of cancelling all my appointments. After washing I was served a superb luncheon – no doubt the one meant for Lord Beaverbrook – and when I returned the patient was fast asleep.

He remained asleep for the rest of the day and throughout the night. The following morning the nurse brought a cup of tea to my room and offered her congratulations. “Really, Doctor,” she said with a kind smile, “his Lordship is as happy as I have ever seen him – he’s dying to talk to you!”

“What about the itch?” I asked.

“He says that he’s too sore to feel it!”

When I went to see him he confirmed that the itch had disappeared. His temperature and pulse were normal and the wound itself look quite satisfactory. I promised to visit him daily and took my leave. By 10.00a.m., I was back at Cleveland Square, ready to resume normal duties.

In the days which followed I called on Lord Beaverbrook regularly. There was no ugly heritage to surgical intervention and the wound healed quickly and cleanly. After a week the patient could move freely once again and was able to resume his usual range of activities.

Following this success I became quite friendly with Max Beaverbrook. He would often call in at Cleveland Square and drive me to Cherkley, where he would usually be holding a party. His house was a continuous centre of attraction to the social world – writers, politicians, journalists, actors and actresses, even royalty; all gathered at Cherkley to while away many a pleasant evening.

It was at Cherkley that I was introduced to ‘Valentine’, the Viscount of Castlerosse, with whom I struck up a lasting friendship. Through him I became acquainted with the famous Doris Delavigne, whom many regarded as the most beautiful woman in England. She was later to become Lady Castlerosse, despite Max Beaverbrook’s many frantic attempts to put an end to the match. I regularly treated Miss Delavigne for a minor skin complaint, for which Castlerosse was eternally grateful. He would regularly send me expensive gifts of the finest Havana cigars. One day I rebuked him for spending too much money on me, to which he replied: “James, let me remind you that one cannot have money until one has spent it!” Alas, Castlerosse ate, drank and smoked to extravagant excess. Nemesis, jealous of Valentine’s success, contrived to carry him off much too early.

Max Beaverbrook recommended me to many of his friends and acquaintances, amongst whom was an actress by the name of Tallula B.

I sat at my desk and looked at my patient. She was a young, superbly dressed and quite debonair in attitude. With her sat a beautiful girl – about twenty years old, very pretty and quite composed. This was Tallula’s girlfriend. Clarissa.

“Well,” I said, addressing Tallula, “what can I do for you?”

She made no attempt to answer my question but kept her eyes fixed on a painting hanging on the wall before her. Finally, she focussed her gaze on me and said,

“What a beautiful picture that is! What does it represent, Doctor?”

The picture she referred to was the masterpiece by Tintoretto representing Christ at the pool of Bethesda. This pool was renowned in biblical days as possessing strong curative powers, particularly for diseases of the skin. The patient would be dipped into the water three times and would reappear cleared of all skin trouble. In the picture an almost totally naked man was lying beside the pool, patiently waiting for some generous person to pay the few coppers required for the attendant to lift him into the water. However, several hours passed and many newcomers were dipped in the water but none took any notice of the man. Finally Christ appeared on the scene and fully appreciated the situation.

“Chomer!” called Christ to the man on the ground. “Get up and go home – you need no dipping, you are cured!” Chomer stood up and looked at his now unblemished skin; it was as clear and healthy as the day he was born.

“Master! Master!” cried Chomer to our Lord, “You have cured me – thank you! You have my own and my family’s most grateful blessing. Thank you!” Thus I explained the significance of the picture to Tallula.

“Oh,, Doctor,” she sighed, “this is a good omen for me!” She went on to explain that, for several months, she had been suffering from an inveterate itch over most of her body.” But, although I itch terribly,” she added, “my skin shows no sign of anything but my own scratches!”

I measured her blood pressure, recorded her pulse rate and examined her eyes. Then I took a blood sample and asked her to visit the ladies’ room and bring me a sample of her urine. While she was out of the room I questioned Clarissa about the type of life Tallula led. As I had feared, Clarissa revealed that she consumed vast amounts of spirits and smoked almost continuously. She ate very little and, due to chronic insomnia, hardly slept at all despite many sleeping pills. Tallula returned to the room with her specimen and I asked her to make an appointment for the following morning, when I would have the results of her tests.

The next morning she arrived on her own and I decided to tell her the plain truth: “Miss B.,” I said sternly, “you may not die, but you will certainly kill yourself!”

“I don’t understand you, Doctor,” she replied.

“You are in total ruin as far as your health is concerned – your general condition is that of an old woman, not that of a young woman in the prime of her life.”

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“But I don’t look like an old woman,” she replied tartly.

“Not at the moment, perhaps, but it won’t take long. Do you know why we grow old like an old woman,” she replied tartly.

“Not at the moment, perhaps, but it won’t take long. Do you know why we grow old?”

“Well...no – not really.”

“Old age is due to wear and tear, Miss B., and you are wearing and tearing quite rapidly. Your itch is a warning signal, and if you continue to abuse your body in this manner, it would be more appropriate for you to call at the undertakers rather than coming to me!”

A rather dramatic change came over Tallula’s face – her usual look of cool assurance was replaced by one of sudden fear and, in an instant, the sophisticated worldly woman was transformed into an insecure little girl. The pent-up emotions of a lifetime poured from her in a torrent of blessed relief and release. I remained silent and let her talk it all out. Half an hour later it was all over, so I got to my feet and said, “I’m hungry, Tallula – would you care to lunch with me?”

“Oh, I’d love to, Doctor,” she replied, cheering up instantly. “But I warn you – I’m not a good eater!”

“But you are a good companion – come, let us go to the Hungaria!”

At the restaurant we were received with outstretched arms by the two managers, Bennini and Vecchi – they recognised the glamorous Tallula on sight, and me as an habitu . We sat, side by side, at a table in the corner. Tallula begged me to choose what I thought best for her, so I decided on globe artichokes with vinaigrette, a salad, and a large bottle of mineral water in place of wine. A quartet was playing soft Hungarian music, and we ate our meal with considerable relish. After the meal Tallula exclaimed that she had not eaten so well for months, nor had she felt so well. She was relaxed and happy. I dropped her at her door in Pont Street.

About an hour later I received a telephone call. It was Tallula. “Doctor,” she said, “I think you must have forgotten to give me a prescription.”

“A prescription?” I said, “Have you forgotten what you said to me at the end of our luncheon? You told me in no uncertain terms that you have never felt better.”

“Oh, Doctor Hasson, you are a darling,” she breathed. “I love you! Do you treat all of your patients this way?”

“Oh, no!” I replied. “All of my patients are different, and there is only one Tallula!”

“Oh, thank you! You have brought me back to life.”

About a week later Capt, Michael Wardell, the then manager of the ‘Evening Standard’, telephoned me to say what a miracle I had achieved with Tallula. She had promised him that she would not have any more late nights, nor ever touch a cigarette, drink or tablets again. Well, almost never. She continued to study her current role in the play, “Camille”, or “La Dame aux Camilles”, by Alexandre Dumas fils, and I was invited to watch the rehearsals. We often took tea together and even dined together on occasions. She kept all her promises and was transformed much for the better. I was sent a ticket for the premier of “Camille” by the impresario. I sat and listened. Was she a success? – a moderate one, yes.

Some time later I was introduced to a charming brunette who bubbled with intelligence and joie de vivre. This was Anita Loos, the novelist of world-wide fame, who had just published a book which caused a sensation at the time called Gentleman Prefer Blondes.

We became friends at once. This was her first visit to England and she told me that she was having a marvellous time. She had been to every party for the last three weeks and had been courted ad infinitum. I met her a day or two before her journey back to the United States, and during our conversation she asked if she could put a question to me – “a silly one, perhaps?” she said.

“Go on, Miss Loos,” I said.

“Well, Doctor, do you know of any cure for nymphomania?”

This question, coming as it did immediately after the extraordinary good time she had been having, came as a complete surprise to me. I deduced that she may have been a little bit bored with ‘too much of a good thing’.

“Suppose I tell you,” I replied, “then perhaps you’ll have no admirers at all!”

She smiled and said, “Yes, I suppose there’s that in it.”

After she had left the country, a friend of mine told me that he had asked her whether she still thought that gentlemen prefer blondes. Her stinging reply was: “No, nowadays gentlemen prefer each other!”

Funnily enough, a few days after this. A girl who had an appointment with me seemed to be faced with the same problem.

“Doctor, I am very unhappy and miserable. Six months ago I was courted by a very brilliant young man, and after a couple of months we were almost engaged. We met frequently and seemed to be very happy together. Quite recently there has been a drastic change in his behaviour which I simply cannot understand...the other day I discovered that he was madly in love with a young man of eighteen – he’s turned into a homosexual, Doctor! What can I do – is there any cure for him?”

As with Anita Loos, I was at a loss to give an answer but who would be surprised by these questions today?!

In this life nothing lasts for very long; except perhaps death, which is long enough to last forever. Friends and allies are changed and forgotten – even doctors are changed and forgotten! Max Beaverbrook had a penchant for doctors, and would change them almost as regularly as his socks. Thus, it was inevitable that Beaverbrook and I should go our separate ways – he in search of other gods, I for other people.

Years later, I received a letter from him; an invitation to spend the week-end with him at Cherkley. I accepted willingly enough but should have realised that Max very rarely acted without a reason – this time it was asthma! For some time he had been subject to sporadic violent attacks of asthma. He had already explored several avenues of hope in his attempt to overcome the disability but all to no avail. Rest-cures in the mountains, visits to the seaside and even a course of vaccinations had been tried and found wanting.

Nevertheless, he appeared to be in quite good health when I arrived, and immediately launched into an amusing rationalisation of his latest pet scheme. Apparently he had decided to take up poultry farming as a hobby. He spent a great deal of money erecting the appropriate buildings and populating them with quality birds. Imagine his chagrin when he was teasingly informed that there was a huge surplus of eggs in the country at that time! The taunt was real, but so was

Beaverbrook's response to it – characteristically, he tried to sponsor the consumption of eggs by basing all his menus at Cherkley on egg recipes.

At dinner that night I was faced with chicken soup clogged with egg noodles, followed by an hors d'oeuvre based on mayonnaise. The main course was veal cutlets – dipped into beaten egg, crumbed and fried – with mashed potatoes and grated hard-boiled egg. Dessert was a sort of tart with an egg-based sauce patissiere. Sunday's menu was little better, and there were several vacant places at dinner – headache had reached epidemic proportions!

During the night I was roused from my bed by his Lordship's nurse. She urged me to come along quickly as Lord Beaverbrook had succumbed to a severe attack of asthma. I rushed to his bedside. His breathing was extremely laboured and shallow, and he could only manage to wheeze the occasional word or two. Luckily, I always carried ampoules of adrenalin in my medical bag. I quickly administered an injection of the drug and this seemed to do the trick. Max's breathing returned to normal and he drifted off into a peaceful sleep, the crisis nipped in the bud.

Next morning I asked him when his first attack had occurred. "Oh God, James," he muttered, "I don't know – ask my nurse, she keeps a record." He rolled over onto his side and propped himself up on one elbow. "Hey, listen Jimmy, why can't I have that injection every time I get an attack?"

"No, no," I said, "in the long run that would do you more harm than good – it's an emergency measure only. I'll tell you what I'll do! I'll get the date of your first attack from the nurse, and arrange for you to take some skin tests. That way me might at least discover what you're allergic to."

When I went down to breakfast, the nurse joined me to discuss the details of his Lordship's case history. We were served with eggs à la coque, followed by omelette and mushrooms. "Good Lord," I protested, "does his Lordship eat the same stuff that we've been getting – eggs, eggs and more eggs?"

"Oh, yes, Doctor," she replied, "He's been very keen on eggs since he started the chicken farm – although he very rarely ate them before."

"Of course!" I cried. "It must be – it's the damned eggs!"

Later that afternoon I took my leave of Max, promising to return the following morning to perform a skin test. The results of this test later disclosed that Max was allergic to a particular protein in the egg albumen, which had produced his para-asthmatic attacks. As a result I warned him off eggs and the incidence of these attacks was dramatically reduced.

Max quickly wound up his venture into the chicken business. He lost quite a lot of money in the process but that was typical of the man. He had the disconcerting habit of throwing himself and his money into various schemes which he would then drop, like a child tiring of a new toy. At one stage he took a fancy to racehorses, lost considerable sums of money, and then sold the lot at another considerable loss. He did exactly the same when he tried his hand at building an art collection. It was a dreadful, but then, he had the money to afford it.

He was an enigma of a man – loved and feared, admired and detested – sometimes all at the same time! In my opinion those who despised him the most were usually the type one met at parties, whose conversation consisted entirely of the

belittling of the efforts of those more successful than themselves. His most cruel enemy was his prostate gland, which was eventually to cause his death.

What sort of a man was he? I knew him for more than twenty years and always found him an honest and courageous man. He was never the sort of evil man that many in some quarters would have us believe. He was certainly capable of behaviour appropriate to a spoiled child but so are many lesser men. He had his idiosyncrasies – but again, who hasn't?

V. JEWEL FARM

In moments of nostalgia and reverie I often look back on some of my past projects and readily admit that they could only be described as hare-brained! Yet I do not regret all of them; the motives that prompted them were always good and surely that is all that really matters. Besides which, during the course of such experiences we can often gain valuable insight into our own characters. Cold hard reason is left far behind when we act from the heart!

My first wife, Neith, and I knew absolutely nothing about farming but, during the early Thirties, we decided to try our hand at it. At the time we were living in a small cottage at Stanford Dingley and when the nearby Jewel Farm came up for sale we could not resist the temptation. We immediately bought the sixty-five acre property and set to work. Two young lads of fifteen, who lived with their parents in an adjoining village, came to work for us and the local Agricultural Committee was also helpful.

Neith threw herself in the project heart and soul, working tirelessly at the infinite variety of jobs involved in such a life from early morning to dusk. It did not seem to make a great deal of difference, however, and my reputation as the 'mad Frenchman' was greatly enhanced by the way I ran the farm.

For instance, on Saturdays we would go to Reading Market to watch the cattle and livestock sales. More often than not we would return to the farm followed by a cattle-truck full of animals that we had bought on impulse. Fortunately, or unfortunately in some eyes, we acted more like sentimental fools than business-like farmers. When we saw little sucking pigs cooped up in their tiny pens waiting for a new owner – usually a butcher – we bid for the lot simply to save them from slaughter.

We kept our builder continually on the alert, wondering if that 'crazy couple' would want yet another building put up in a hurry to house their latest silly fancy. As a result, buildings of all sorts popped up all over the place like mushrooms. A visit to the Crystal Palace for the Poultry Show was great fun and most of the prize birds eventually found their home at Jewel Farm. I was yet to learn that fine-looking cockerels soon fly high fences and fight to the death with neighbouring birds! There were some pitiful sights as a result of this, with maimed and dead birds littering the battlefield.

Around that time there were quite a few men in the village in the throes of a long spell of unemployment. These poor chaps lived in a state of real poverty and often called at the farm looking for work. The wages of an adult farm-worker then amounted to only some thirty to thirty-five shillings per week. We paid our two lads at this rate, as we knew that their earnings had to compensate for the parents who were not well enough to earn wages for themselves. I knew that their ill-health was primarily to starvation so I used to send them food every now and then.

On one occasion a Scottish friend send me two magnificent fourteen-pound salmon, all the way from Arran by express train. Neith was away at the time and, being on my own, I was at a loss to know what to do with this superb gift.

My thoughts turned to Arthur Grey, who had been unemployed for a long time and lived in a semi-thatched cottage. I say 'semi-thatched' because a freak storm had removed about half of the roof and the owner, who received the princely sum of 1/6d. per week by way of rent, could not afford to have the repairs carried out. Arthur lived in this squalid environment with his wife and three children.

I finally found him wandering along the side of the side of the road looking somewhat disconsolately at his old worn shoes. Perhaps he was escaping from the miserable atmosphere of his home, hoping to commune with nature and the happier creatures whose own daily sustenance was always assured. I called out to him and, as he looked up, I could still perceive the light of hope in his sad grey eyes.

"I've got a present for you, Arthur. Here's a salmon to take back to your family – I've no use for it while my wife's away."

His face broke into a grateful smile. "Oh, thank you, sir," he said, "I was just wondering whether God could provide for my family as He does for the birds. He must have picked up my thoughts, see! Thank you very much, sir."

The fish disappeared down the road with Arthur, leaving me to ponder the eternal injustice of the haves and the have-nots. But, strangely enough, the story did not end there. The following weekend I went to the Butcher's shop to cash a cheque. The Butcher greeted me with a broad smile.

"Good morning, Doctor Hasson. My word, we enjoyed that bit of salmon! It was the first time old Grandad had ever tasted salmon and he's been signing your praises ever since – 'That bloody Frenchman's not a bad chap after all'...sorry, 'scuse the French – anyway that's what he said after every mouthful, 'not bad at all!' It would've done your heart food to hear him, sir!"

"But how did you come to get my fish?" I asked.

"Well, you see, sir, Arthur's wife exchanged half the salmon you gave them for a piece of beef. From what I hear you're pretty popular down his way, as well!"

"But, why?" I asked, beginning to feel like Lady Bountiful.

"Well, sir, you see that was the first taste of meat that Arthur's kids have had since last Christmas. Their mum even had them reciting a prayer for you."

It is strange, or natural – depending on the way you look at it – that philanthropic activities tend to expand in several directions. Those deep feelings that had prompted Neith and myself to run our farm on humanitarian lines led us into many adventures with one of man's oldest and most faithful friends, the horse.

In those days the carting of goods from the stations into the towns was done by horse. On bitter winter days I often saw these poor animals pulling heavy loads to

all parts of the city. Coal merchants and other carriers often used horses which were declining in strength and, consequently, much cheaper to buy. I was finding it more and more difficult to contain my sorrow and anger over this kind of injustice.

One frosty winter morning in London I stopped a carrier and struck up a conversation with him. His mare was eighteen years old and he had bought her from the Great Western Railway stables for nine pounds as she was too old to go working for the railway. He was very matter-of-fact about the way that most of these unfortunate creatures were eventually sent to the continent for slaughter. I was silent for a moment or two. I swear that I heard the voice of my conscience saying, 'James, did you hear what he said? This horse is eighteen years old and has not even earned the right to spend the rest of her days in peace and contentment. Are you, fortunate fellow that you are, going to be an accomplice to such an inhuman state of affairs?'

I asked the carrier, "How much would you sell your horse and cart to me for, if I happened to be interested?"

He stared at me for a moment. "You can have them for sixteen quid the lot, if you're interested."

"Very well," I replied, "I'll settle for that price...but I'll give you an extra two pounds if you will take them to Paddington Station and have them sent to my address?"

"Right you are, sir, no trouble at all." He looked puzzled for a moment and said, "But you're not in the trade, are you? What do you want with the horse, particularly when you've got a car like that?...Perhaps I ought to be asking you to employ me, as well?"

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Any name you fancy, guv, but most round here call me Bill."

"All right, Bill, I will engage you and give you a cottage for as long as you remain in my services."

The next day, much to Neith's astonishment, the old mare was delivered to the farm. Her shoes were removed and she was set free in the lush grass and undulating fields of Jewel Farm. How she gambolled! She must have been experiencing real joy and unbounded happiness as she played about like a lamb, rushing here and there, throwing herself on the ground and leaping up again as fast as her old bones would allow her. It was infectious and, to those who watched, she was a joy!

Naturally she always had a trough full of water and every day she would come to me for the half a dozen lumps of sugar that were to be found in my hand.

So it was, for the next three years, that I approached carriers in London and bought their old horses so that they might find refuge and happiness on my farm. Soon afterwards the Great Western Railway officials, who had heard about the 'mad French doctor who collects old horses', contacted me regularly when they had horses for sale. Some of these animals were so stunned by the change that they gazed at the fields unmoved in spite of their lush food and freedom; perhaps they were just making sure that it was not simply a beautiful dream! Others had a kind of intuition which warned them that the miracle might not last, for I would see them stop what they were doing, raise their ears and listen carefully – as if expecting to be harnessed into further slavery.

Bill's joy at moving into his cottage with his old mother matched that of his mare. One of the sights I shall always remember is that of Bill and the mare conversing together in the morning. He was so kind and understanding with all the horses I bought. He would go to talk to them regularly, with lumps of sugar for those which still had teeth, or crushed oats for the others. The horses would always run towards him whereas they were shy of many other people, even children.

One morning, soon after he arrived, Bill came over to the house with a brace of pigeons that he had shot an hour or so earlier. He proudly presented them to Neith who passed them on to the cook. Shortly afterwards, I was in the vegetable garden when I caught sight of him. I asked him to help Neith collect some peas and he informed me that the birds had been interfering with the crop. He pointed out some pods that had been holed and launched into a colourful, yet spiteful, diatribe against the poor creatures that had perpetrated this innocent and minor offence. There were only about half a dozen damaged pods in all and, nestling at the foot of a plant was a dead blackbird. Apparently it had been caught in the net Bill had set up over the strawberry beds. Bill had killed it with the shotgun! I picked up the pathetic little bundle only to discover that it was still warm.

“Look, Bill!” I said, “you’ve suppressed a life for the sake of a strawberry or two, which might have proved to be too ripe and would have been thrown away, anyway. Do you think it was worthwhile? And these few pods of peas and broad beans holed by other birds – do you think it is fair to kill them for seeking a harmless delight? It is such a little thing to want! Suppose the law should condemn a man, or a child for such a trivial offence?”

He was extremely surprised by this and said, “I’ve never really thought about it, sir...atleast, not the way you put it.” Nothing more was said, but never again did I see Bill with a shotgun.

I found it quite baffling that so many of our old horses were found dead after a short period of happiness. I was so puzzled that I called in the Chief Veterinary Officer to examine their bodies. After a few weeks he came specially from Reading to tell me that he had found nothing wrong with their vital organs and nothing which could really account for their deaths, although there were some signs of premature senile conditions.

Somehow I was unable to accept this explanation, so I called in Bill. He considered the problem very seriously and then, with an air of great sagacity and mystery, said, “I think I know the reason for this but I would rather not tell you.”

In the end I had to ask Ernest if he could shed any light on the mystery. “My dear Herr Doktor,” he said, “one day you told me that a woman’s heart was a bottomless pit and that all the water of the seven seas could not wash away the single contaminated drop that had penetrated into it. So it is with a horse! They all have their single contaminated drop which they cannot wash away. Theirs’s is not the drop of sin but the drop of slavery which all the green grass of your farm cannot wash away.”

This seemed to be nearer the truth. My efforts to be the guardian to these animals could not cancel out the effects of their previous task-master’s demands. When one of them died we buried it with due ceremony; never did I allow their bodies to be disposed of for animal consumption. Before they died many of them would become lame due to rheumatism. The vet would order that they be placed in the stable with plenty of clean straw and water. It was touching to see how the others gathered around, as if to farewell their unfortunate companion.

The powerful appeal which animals have in our lives has often made me pause to wonder. Perhaps it is their sincerity which makes them so attractive. Even their ingenious attempts to obtain food, or favour, are sincere – this is the simplicity we had in childhood and have to relearn in adult life.

Bill lived with his mother in the cottage I gave him until she died. They had been very content there but then he disappeared to go back to his old trade. With his savings he bought an old horse and cart to rove the streets of London, delivering coal or parcels. Soon afterwards he wrote to me, excusing himself for 'letting me down', as he had put. He felt that he would have died of boredom, not unlike some of our old horses. "I believe," he added, "that early retirement is an over-rated blessing."

Obviously I did not make my farm either efficient or profitable but I certainly slept soundly at night. And apart from Haj Kalil, Ernest and my colleague, Robert, Bill made a very special impression on me. There was a protest from one of the family when I said this – they thought he was hardly in the same category as the other three, even though he was an admirable character.

I think that he did not match up to the other men; they were all men of integrity and, if a man is true to himself, he is very close to the God in whose image he was made.

VI. MAHMOUD – MY LUCKY BET!

The practice of medicine may have its disadvantages but it is rich in the opportunities it offers for an understanding of human nature. Through this it is possible to arrive at an understanding of one's own character and the position one holds in relation to other human beings. Medicine has its sad and tragic moments but there are also moments of great birth and comedy, where the doctor realises again and again how great is the gift of a sense of humour.

Humour can give us a perspective; a kind of yardstick by which to measure one's own performance and good fortune. In moments of great discouragement or rankling injustice, there is always the opportunity to remember the lesser fortune of another person.

As a calling, I believe that medicine fosters humility. From the day he qualifies, a doctor is treated as a person set apart; an oracle on human nature and its mysteries. To be fair, I must admit that the medical profession has tended to perpetuate this myth. Like the witch-doctors or primitive societies, we have our mumbo-jumbo and our esoteric symbols. Yet, if he is honest, a doctor must admit that days rarely pass when he is not brought up short by the realisation of just how little he knows. There are many occasions when he must stand aside, as powerless as the most inexperienced probationer, simply because he does not know why the patient is reacting in a certain way, or what the next manifestation will be. For centuries medical men have been treating the effects of disease; only now are we beginning to scratch the surface of the knowledge of the causes of malfunction. Medical science, as we know it, is but the tip of an iceberg. I was to be reminded of all this during a visit I paid to the Middle East.

My successful treatment of the Royal Equerry had prompted another request for help. A Charif, called Mustafa Pasha, had had typhus and had developed an abscess in his left mastoid bone as a consequence. An urgent telegram arrived at Cleveland Square requesting that I go to see him as soon as possible. I was able to make the necessary arrangements and, within a matter of hours, I was aboard the Orient Express.

As soon as I saw the Charif I realised that he was a very sick man. The abscess was extremely painful, and his doctors were in a dilemma whether to advise surgical drainage or to wait until nature effected the drainage in the more time-honoured fashioned. With every day that passed the situation was becoming more critical, and on the third day I was there the patient nearly died from the toxic effects of the abscess.

Against a background of incessant howling from the harem, the tenseness of the general situation and the open anxiety of the patient's family and household, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the Charif's doctors to maintain an air of professional calm and confidence. I think the poor physician in charge was only too glad to share his burden with a colleague and had jumped at the idea of sending for me. I did my best to encourage an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity but this was no easy task. In that part of the world a patient in danger of death is usually surrounded, in his bedroom, by his parents, family, many of his friends and even his servants. Such a congregation, in tears and showing all too clearly the signs of an untimely mourning, tends to leave the patient in little doubt that his end has come, and certainly do not contribute to his chances of recovery.

With the three golden rules of medicine in mind – to comfort always, to relieve often and to cure sometimes – I addressed a therapeutic homily to the patient. I told him that God, in His mercy, had caused this abscess to be formed in order to save the life of a good and God-fearing man. Therefore, I would wait a few more days before considering whether or not to use the surgeon's knife. I told him that his life was in no danger, and that his own doctors had handled the case with great skill and wisdom.

A wonderful calm seemed to settle on the household and things began to proceed much more smoothly. I was given a magnificent apartment in the Palace, two servants were placed at my disposal. I visited the patient almost hourly, for this is the custom in the East, and three days later the anxieties and fears of all were relieved. The patient awoke from a deep sleep to find that the abscess had discharged naturally, and surgical intervention was unnecessary.

I reassured all concerned and the patient sat up in bed, insisting on kissing me, and claiming that I was the Angel of Goodness sent by Allah to save his life. He made a complete recovery, but insisted that I should remain at the palace for at least a fortnight to superintend the remainder of his convalescence.

Such news travels quickly and widely in the East, and it was quite impossible for me to take a quiet stroll in any of the bazaars without being implored to advise and treat an number of potential patients. With the help of Mustafa Pasha/s chief physician, I was treating some thirty patients a day.

When I left England I had some fifty pounds in my pocket. I returned the richer by some eighty soft pieces of pure gold. For this I had operated on one case of double hernia, and one of very severe haemorrhoids. I also performed eleven circumcisions of boys aged nine to eleven, and even excised the labiae minor in three girls. Small girls are still circumcised by some Arab sects, both on religious grounds and in the cause of hygiene.

Before I left the Charif called me to his side. "Ya Daktoor," he said with great feeling. "Let me kiss you again for all you have done for me, and for the unfortunate people to whom you have given help and hope. You have saved my life, you are one of those blessed by Allah. I have a book and, since I know that you have great knowledge of our customs and religion, no less than that of your own, I want you to

accept it as a gift from me. You will see from the title that it has some relationship between yourself and those mysterious elements that unite man with man in an aura of understanding and charity.”

I accepted the book with thanks and excitement. It was written in the most remarkably fine Nasts'lik, and the signature was that of the famous Islamic poet of the early sixteenth century, Sultan Mahmoud. The title was Kiran As-Saidain, translated from the Persian to Arabic, and meaning, ‘the Conjunction of the Two Lucky Planets or Stars’. It contained two miniatures of fine quality from the Safairid School, showing a king receiving another king, or nobleman. The poet Mahmoud’s subject was the meeting of Sultan Muiss ud Diu Kaikkubad with his father, Nasir ud Diu Bughia Khan, the Sultan of Bengal, in A.H. 688.

The Charif watched my obvious enjoyment with a knowing smile. “This book,” he said “will write your own good fortune with the wisdom of Soulainan, the Magnificent, and may Allah keep you away from evil, ya Doktoor!” Whether Mustafa Pasha has been proved right or not is not for me to judge, but I have treasured this book and read it again and again.

Very soon after I returned to England I received a cable from Mustafa Pasha’s doctor saying that the Charif’s brother was travelling to London with his entourage and would be arriving in three week’s time. He requested that I should be available to attend to them, should the necessity arise.

I did not have to wait long before I was asked to visit a four year old boy at the Savoy Hotel, the little son of the Charif’s brother. The manager at the Savoy telephoned me at five o’clock in the morning, saying that he had some Eastern princes staying at the hotel and that, during the night, one of the children had passed some blood in bed. Apparently the child’s mother was hysterical and the manager begged me to come at once.

In a suite on the fifth floor I found the poor mother in quite a distraught state. The nanny, sisters and brothers of the patient were all present, all very distressed. The boy’s father was away in Switzerland for a couple of days.

The little dark-haired boy who was the centre of all this consternation was sitting on his mother’s lap, very bewildered and close to tears. I was shown the sheets, blankets and his nightshirt – all stained a deep pink. I took the boy in my arms and smiled at him. He smiled back at me. I looked round the group that gathered in the room and assured them that this did not look like a sick child to me. As I put the child down, I noticed a large plate on the bedside table which was also stained very red.

I remarked on this to the nanny, who said she had forgotten to remove it after the child’s supper that evening. I looked at the plate, prodded the mess, and finally tasted it. It was beetroot.

“Did the child have a lot to this stuff for supper,” I asked.

“Oh, yes, sir,” replied the nanny, “three whole plates of it!”

At this point I burst out laughing, realising with some satisfaction that this seemed to relieve the tense atmosphere of the bedroom. In Arabic I told the mother that the cause of the trouble was shwandar, or beetroot. I laughed again, kissed the boy and said to the mother, “Don’t worry, he just ate too much beetroot. By lunch-time he will have finished passing ‘blood’.”

I returned to my home where the telephone was ringing again. This time it was the boy’s father, calling from Switzerland. He had learnt of the panic by telegram, and was now in a considerable panic himself. Eventually I managed to

calm him down, reassuring him that the child was quite safe and that there was nothing to worry about. He and his family later visited me at Cleveland Square where they presented me with a magnificent gold watch, so delighted were they at the happy conclusion to their moment of drama.

My Persian patients were not all that dissimilar to some English patients of mine from a particular racing town. Not infrequently there is a humorous turn of events in the treatment of people's medical problems, and it is usually with a sigh of relief and a sense of delight that the patients themselves can enjoy this part of it too.

My initial contact with this racing town came when the wife of a dentist arrived for an appointment. For a week she had been experiencing some irritation when she was passing water. A local physician had diagnosed a slight inflammation of the bladder and prescribed diuretics. Unfortunately the condition appeared to be getting worse rather than better, and now required frequent changes in her underclothing. I examined her and took a smear for laboratory testing. She prattled on quite happily about the condition being, "only catarrh", by now I had other ideas. I was fairly certain of the diagnosis but, in view of the implications, I waited for the telephone report from the laboratory. This confirmed the diagnosis gonorrhoea.

Poor woman!, I thought. How on earth was I going to tell her? Why is it, that a husband's moment of indiscretion always ends up punishing the innocent wife, as well as the guilty party? With a tactful smile, and in a painfully sympathetic manner, I explained the situation.

"My God!" she exploded. "What am I going to do?"

"There, there," I said gently, "I can deal with your problem quite effectively."

"But you don't understand – I slept with my husband only 10 days ago!"

"But why should that concern you?" I asked.

"Well, he must have caught it too!"

"But, didn't he...Ohh! I see!...Well, that does put a different complexion on things. Has he complained of anything yet?"

"Yes," she replied, "only this morning he was telling me that he thought he'd caught a chill on his bladder."

I suggested that, before anyone else told him the truth, she advise him to come to see me. She asked if she could use the telephone and, from the adjoining room, I overheard the following:

"Hello darling...listen, remember this morning you were worried about your bladder?...mmm, yes...Well, look, I'm at Claridges with Cynthia – are you alright darling?...Oh, it's just that she had the same trouble last year...mmm...Well, apparently she went to a super specialist here in London and was cured in a day or two!...What's that? His name?...Hang on a minute while I ask her..."

As a result of this intrigue her husband arrived at my rooms on the following morning. I carried out my investigations with the results I fully expected. I told him the truth as kindly and tactfully as I could.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "I slept with my wife about a week ago."

This time I was not caught by surprise – well, not completely. "Do you know who you caught it from?" I asked.

"It must have been the wife of our jockey," he said. "What am I going to do, Doctor, I've also slept with the wife of a colleague of mine?"

I advised him to be very tactful and if they mentioned of a similar complaint, I suggested that he ask them to come to see me.

“Can I borrow your telephone, Doctor?” I must get in touch with Cynthia – that’s the jockey’s wife – and get her here as soon as possible.”

The next day Cynthia appeared at Cleveland Square as a patient. Very confidently, she told me that, although she had indulged in several affairs, she was sure that she caught the disease from her husband. She was very worried about explaining this to him, and wondered how to go about it. I suggested that she advise him to make an appointment with me and I would undertake to be as tactful as possible.

The following day that charade was carried a step further when the jockey telephoned to make an appointment, saying that he had some mild bladder irritation. The procedure was becoming almost monotonous by now but I carried it through in my best professional manner. My diagnosis of the jockey’s complaint was duly confirmed by the clinical tests.

“Oh Lord!” he sighed. “I’ve been sleeping with the stable girl – and she’s just taken the morning off to visit her doctor!”

By this time I was well-accustomed to the action of the play. Without waiting to be asked I indicated the telephone, and suggested that he advise her to come and see me as soon as possible.

She arrived the following morning, curious, timid and more than a little guilty. My examination and its results ran true to form and I explained the brutal facts to her.

“Yes, I know,” she replied, “I saw my own doctor yesterday. I only came here because a friend asked me to.” Suddenly she began to sob. “The trouble is you see, I slept with the husband of a friend the other day – not the one who asked me to come here – and, if he catches it he’ll see a doctor. Oh God, what’ll I do, sir?”

“If this person is so intimate with you,” I suggested, “why don’t you tell him that, as he’s the only lover, he must be suffering from the disease and should seek treatment immediately!”

I gave her the telephone and withdrew to the next room. Once again, I could not help overhearing part of the conversation.

“John, listen – we’re in a bit of trouble...I can’t explain over the phone. Can I see you this evening?”

The upshot of this telephone call was that the husband of the first patient I saw reappeared at my consulting rooms on the following day, asking to see me on a matter of some urgency. He explained that, in the racing world, every male slept with every female he possibly could get his hands on. He was sure that, at that time, many women had caught this damned disease – to say nothing of their retrospective husbands! They were all in need of treatment and he thought that they would all be willing to come to me. The problem, however, was how to keep everyone apart?

I suggested that the husbands should come early in the morning, one each day so that they would never meet. The wives, who seemed to prefer the cover of darkness, should come on different days after 5p.m. This plan seemed to meet his approval.

“After all,” he said somewhat enthusiastically, “the husbands should appreciate that their wives might like to go to the cinema occasionally!”

The story did not end there, however, nor develop quite as we expected. One of the husbands concerned became very suspicious of the frequent visits his wife was making to the cinema. He discussed the matter with a friend, who was also struck by the similar behaviour of his own wife. The more they talked it over, the more suspicious they became. Finally, they decided to hire a private detective to follow their respective wives and report their activities. When they discovered the address at which their wives called regularly they became even more perplexed; since it was the very address they both visited themselves, on other days. The climax came when, one evening, I found all of them on my doorstep! Fortunately they were all holding hands and roaring with laughter.

From that moment onwards things became much easier all round, as husbands and wives could come for treatment together. In those days before penicillin the treatment of such disease was quite a lengthy procedure, so I was thankful that my original plan had been superseded by a much more realistic one.

On the following Derby Day my assistant and I went to see the races – courtesy of two free tickets which had arrived anonymously in the mail. Hardly had we sat down when the jockey whom we had treated came over to offer us a big tip. “Put a sovereign or two on Mahmoud in the big one.” he whispered, before hurrying off in the direction of the saddling enclosure.

The wife of one of the dentist’s also appeared briefly, telling us to back Mahmoud. “He’s a certainty, Doctor, don’t be shy with your money!”

“Well,” said my assistant, “after all that, are we going to back Mahmoud, or not?”

“We most certainly are!” I replied. “I was going to back him anyway – I’ve got spot for that particular name...Here’s two sovereigns – go and back him to win!”

A few minutes later we were visited by another ex-patient and his well-known wife. Both greeted me effusively and advised me to back Mahmoud in the Derby. I felt the meeting was this merry, likeable crowd was far more exciting under these circumstances prevailing at my consulting rooms. I wondered whether the outcome of their prognosis of the race would be as accurate as mine had been on their personal conditions? I need not have worried – Mahmoud bolted home at 20/1!

VII. 'LE MÉDECIN MALGRÉ LUI'

The Hon. John R. and myself often lunched together at the Club or at the Cercle Français. He was a tall handsome man who dressed impeccably and would never be seen without a carnation in his buttonhole. He had been educated at Eton and Sandhurst and, as befits the son of a viscount, had the manner and bearing of a gentleman. At one of our weekly meetings, however, I noticed that he was paler than usual and appeared to be quite distracted. His speech was hesitant and he frequently repeated himself. Halfway through the meal he rose to his feet and apologised for having to make a telephone call. On his return he seemed to be even more subdued than before. Gently and tactfully, I enquired into his apparent malaise.

“Well, James,” he said, “I’m rather glad you asked me actually. I was going to broach the subject myself but I didn’t want to impose on you – I know how busy you are!”

“Never too busy to help a friend – what’s the problem?”

“Well, it’s father actually – I think he’s going mad! He’s been acting in the most peculiar manner this last week, fiddling with this and fiddling with that. I don’t know whether it’s because he’s bored now that he’s retired or whatever – but it’s damned worrying, I can tell you!”

“What do you mean by ‘fiddling’?” I asked.

“Well, he take things out of their showcases and plays with them on the floor – just like a child! A lot of those things are pretty valuable, James, and he keeps breaking them. Mother’s had to lock everything up and hide the keys! And now I ring home only to hear that he’s torn up some very expensive prints and thrown them into the bin – it’s too much!” He sighed and leant back in his chair to gaze at the ceiling.

“We’re desperately worried about it, James. Father’s usual doctor claims that it’s just a short disorientation of his mind and says that there’s no real treatment for it...Do you know that Roaslind’s left home?...Yes, the poor girl couldn’t stand it any longer and went up to the estate in Scotland. If something doesn’t happen soon, mother says she’ll leave the house herself! Is there anything you can suggest, James?”

“Hmm...well, perhaps there is. Look, John, I don’t have the time to see him at the moment but I’ve got an idea. Tell your mother and your father’s valet to unmatched all the socks in his wardrobe. Make sure that he gets a clean pair every morning but they must be unmatched, in colour, design and texture. Watch the result and keep me in touch.”

“But...I don’t understand – how is that going to stop him fiddling with things?”

“Oh, it’s won’t stop him fiddling – but at least it will be relatively harmless if it’s only his socks he does it with! Look, John, I had a similar case a few years ago and the system worked – please try it!”

“Very well,” he agreed, “anything for a bit of peace.”

Some days later, a relaxed and smiling John came to visit me at Cleveland Square.

“Well, James,” he said, “to my absolute amazement I do believe that your little trick is working! Father has kept himself locked in his room for the past two days trying to match up all his socks.”

Apparently his Lordship was quite furious in the first morning. He sent for his valet and the laundry-maid to have ‘words’ with them but they denied all knowledge of the affair. He calmed down a little when they offered to help him match up the socks and, by the afternoon, he had forgotten all about it. But the next morning he received another bundle of unmatched socks and that proved too much. He threw every pair of socks in his possession into the middle of the room and became thoroughly confused in his attempt to match them up again! I could just picture the Earl kneeling on the floor in his bare feet while he sorted through a mass of socks. This morning, the valet had reported that his Lordship, having fiddled and messed about with his socks all the previous day, went to bed early and slept soundly all night.

“This morning,” John continued, “he called my mother in and told her that he wants to go away for a rest – somewhere where people don’t have to wear socks! He’s taking Ross, his valet, and will certainly be gone by the weekend.”

On the Friday afternoon John telephoned to say that after three days of total silence, his father had threatened not to return until he,” was told the name of the person responsible for the outrage to his clothing. “Confession is good for the soul he chided the assembled household. No-one seemed prepared to repent of this sins, however, and so the Earl ordered his valet to place their cases in the car. When this dramatic gesture failed to produce any response the Earl stormed from the house and ordered the chauffeur to drive him to Victoria Station. At Victoria the Earl and his valet boarded a train and left for a destination unknown to the rest of the family. Perhaps peace would now return to Belgravia Square!

Just as John rung off Evans came into my office to tell me that someone else was trying to reach me on the telephone.

“Your line was busy, sir, so the switchboard put him through to me.”

I glanced at my watch, it was quarter to four and I wanted to catch the 4.15 train from Paddington to Reading.

“Good Lord, Evans, I’ve got to be at Paddington on twenty-five minutes – can’t you put them off?”

“I’ve already tried to,” he replied, “but he was pretty insistent about talking to you. His name’s Ali something-or-another, and he’s been trying to reach you all afternoon. Shall I have the call transferred?”

“No, no, it’s alright, I’ll take the call in your office. Could you put these papers in my case and then you can go.” Muttering to myself about the difficulties involved in getting away early on a Friday, I strode into Evans’ office and picked up the telephone. “Hello, James Hasson speaking.”

“James? Is that you?” queried the voice at the other end. Well who else would it be? I thought. Nevertheless, there was something oddly familiar about the voice but I could not place it. “Yes?” I replied.

“Mon cher James,” the voice went on, “je suis ton viel ami de Geneve. Te souviens-tu de Claudette Dutremblay?”

I most certainly did! The whole bitter episode of Claudette came flooding back to me. Suddenly I was very angry. To think that this scoundrel was actually speaking to me after all these years! I certainly was not going to give him the satisfaction of knowing that I still remembered him. “Who is that?” I replied sternly in English.

“Mon Dieu!” came the reply. “Is it possible that you – the linguist of linguists – can no longer speak your mother tongue?”

“Of course not!” I shouted. “And I remember who you are – you miserable worm! You’re the rogue who pinched my beautiful Claudette and ran off with her.”

“oh, James!” he laughed. “Surely you cannot still be angry with us. It was years ago – and, anyway, Claudette and I now have two beautiful little children.”

“Married or not, Ali, I would not trust you with a bent halfpenny. I am married myself and I warn you, Ali Anwar, if you try your Honolulu business on my wife, as you did with Claudette, I shall take my bistoury to you!”

“Come, come, mon cher James – how could you think such a thing? We are all adults now.”

“Once bitten, twice shy,” I replied. “Anyway, how is Claudette? Is she with you?”

“Yes, she is right here beside me. Would you like to have a word with her?”

“By all means,” I replied, “I think I deserve that much at least.” There was some clattering at the end of the line and I could hear muffled voices and some laughter. I was as surprised as Ali to find myself still angry with them, but whether it was because Claudette had left me for Ali, or because I was going to be late for my train, I could not say. I was also surprised by how much I was looking forward to hearing Claudette’s voice again, and my thoughts drifted back to the days before she left me. Suddenly, that very voice, still soft and pure, startled me from my reverie.

“Jimmy, mon petit,” she said in almost a whisper, “have you forgotten me already?”

“How could I forget you, Claudette – especially since you left me with all that work to finish.”

“Oh, James,” she laughed. “I’m terribly sorry about that, really I am. Did you ever manage to finish those theses?”

“Eventually – but no thanks to you!”

“Oh! Come now, Jimmy – be fair! I did an awful lot of work on them before I left. Which reminds me, you still owe me some money for the work I did!”

“Good Lord, Claudette! How could you poss...”

“Jimmy, mon pauvre petit,” she interrupted, “don’t be angry with me – I am only teasing you.”

“Ah, women!” I replied. “How can a man ever know when a woman is telling him the truth? I once heard it said that women will only tell the truth when they are sure it is not against their interests to do so.”

“James! How wicked of you to say such a thing of your little Claudette.”

“My Claudette?” I smiled and added, “Does Ali trust you as I once did?”

“Naturally!”

“Is he listening to our conversation?”

“Naturally.”

“Then he is a very wise man.” I said with a laugh.

Ali and Claudette insisted that I wait for them to call at Cleveland Square in person. I was reluctant to comply with their wishes, but Ali insisted that he had a very important message to deliver to me and that it could only be delivered in person. All that he was prepared to say over the telephone was that it concerned with a princess from somewhere near the Dalmation border. Somewhat reluctantly I agreed to wait for them. My wife received the usual Friday afternoon call to say that I would be late yet again.

A few minutes later they arrived in a taxi. As I showed them into my office I was astonished by the change in Claudette. I remembered her as a beautiful young woman but during the ensuing years she had really blossomed; elegant, composed and full of the assurance that natural beauty and grace endow. Ali was indeed a lucky fellow!

Ali and Claudette had visited England on several occasions and admired the country so much that they finally decided to settle here permanently. They set up a practice in London and, during the thirteen months they had been here, had become acquainted with my reputation as – in Ali’s words – “the greatest quack in London”.

“If all you have come here to do is insult me,” I said, “then I would remind you that I have a train to catch.”

Ali laughed and said, “Now, now, James, don’t be so touchy – wait until you hear what I have to say to you.”

Apparently an official at the Turkish Embassy discovered that Ali was acquainted with me. This official then requested Ali to approach me with a view to obtaining my professional services for an extremely important patient. In order to make this consultation I would have to travel to the continent immediately.

“And who is this patient?” I asked.

“A princess, no less!” Ali replied with a smile.

“And why does she want to see me?”

“Well, I’m not sure that she wants to see you at all, but her husband – the prince – certainly wants you to see her. They have been married for about ten years now and the prince desperately wants a son. Now, although the princess is able to conceive, she hasn’t been able to sustain the pregnancy. She has lost for the full term. She has lost several babies now; all after three months, almost to the day!”

“But surely she has been examined by her own doctors? Have they found nothing?” I asked.

“Absolutely nothing, James. As far as they are concerned she is in perfect health and they are totally mystified by the abortions.”

“How old is she?”

“Thirty.”

“Well, this does present a bit of mystery. I suppose the only way for me to attempt to solve it is by actually seeing the patient.”

Ali was quick to inform his contact at the Turkish Embassy of my willingness to accept the case. After some urgent consultations it was decided that Ali should accompany me on my visit and, with our travel arrangements hurriedly arrived at, we left London on the following Tuesday.

After travelling aboard the Orient Express and then taking a short trip by boat, Ali and I arrived at Durozzo on the Wednesday afternoon. At the quay we were met by a couple of officials from the palace and transferred to a Rolls-Royce, in which we travelled until late into the evening. We eventually arrived at Laybach.

We drew near a most beautiful almost Georgian mansion situated in the hills outside the town. The car swung into the drive and then my attention was riveted on the two guards who stood beside the massive front doors. These Goliaths of men were almost seven feet tall, of identical appearance with huge black eyebrows and moustaches to match! Later I was to be highly entertained by stories of their sexual exploits with the local beauties, and to be faced with having to remove a dagger from the unflinching back of one Goliath who had earned a certain husband's wrath. Once inside a valet directed us to splendid rooms where a cold supper and warm beds had been prepared for us.

The following morning I awoke to find a maid placing a breakfast-tray on a small table next to my bed. The room was drenched with the aroma of fresh coffee and hot rolls. Sunshine streamed into the room through open French windows. As I buttered my rolls I noticed that the plates were of beaten silver and the china of the finest quality.

At 8.30 a.m. a curious-looking but well-built youth appeared at the door. He turned to a masseur and guided me to a room containing a solid marble bathtub. After I bathed he rubbed my body down with a coarse towel and then massaged me with lightly perfumed oils. Following the most refreshing interlude I dressed and rejoined Ali in a fashionable drawing-room.

After a short wait a gaggle of gynaecologists, entered the room. Tiny cups of Turkish coffee were served and the full reasons for my visit were explained to me. One of gynaecologists, a Dr. Hamaheemoo, told me that the princess had been subjected to a vast array of treatments – both scientific and otherwise – in an attempt to bring pregnancies to the full term. None of them had worked. She had undergone four curettes, water cures, hormone treatments, thermal therapy and even fangoes (applications of curative mud).

“As you can see, we have tried everything possible, Doctor,” said Hamaheemoo.

After all that nonsense, I thought, it is a wonder that she is still able to conceive at all. “Perhaps if I could see the patient before we go any further?” I asked Hamaheemoo.

“Certainly, Doctor. I'll arrange for an examination at once.”

About an hour later I was shown into a magnificent bedroom suit where both the Prince and Princess were waiting for me. The Princess, and exceptionally beautiful young woman of about thirty, was dressed in a simple white gown and sitting up in the bed. After the usual formal introductions had been made I gave the Princess an extensive and thorough examination after which we withdrew to the sitting-room. I had been able to detect nothing abnormal in the course of the

examination, nor from consulting the case history prepared by Hamaheemoo and his colleagues.

“Well, there doesn’t appear to be anything obviously wrong with her,” I said to Hamaheemoo.

“As I said, Doctor Hasson,” he replied, “we have tried everything possible.”

“In that case, perhaps we should attempt the impossible.” Everyone in the room, apart from the Prince, laughed out loud. “What do you find so amusing?” I asked.

“The impossible, my dear Doctor, is the domain of God, not that o man,” said Hamaheemoo in a patronising tone.

“The perhaps we should knock at the door of God and ask Him to show us the impossible!” I retorted. “For how else are we to help this unfortunate woman?”

The Prince, who had been observing the activities very closely, joined into the conversation. “What are you driving at, Doctor Hasson?” he asked. “Have you discovered something my doctors have missed?”

“The ‘something’, Sir – if it exists at all – is only to be found inside the patient,” I replied.

“Are you suggesting that we open her up?” asked Hamaheemoo, aghast.

“I’m suggesting that I open her up, Doctor!”

I explained to the Prince and his advisors that I proposed to open the Princess’ lower abdomen and look for something, as yet unseen, which be the cause of the problem. I assured the Prince that the Princess would be placed at no risk as a result of the procedure, and that the whole operation would take less than thirty minutes. The Prince’s medical advisers set themselves firmly against this idea but the Prince was so desperate for an heir that he ignored their please and ordered that I proceed with the plan.

Three days later I performed the operation, with Ali acting as my assistant. I opened the abdomen and exposed the uterus and it’s supporting ligaments, together with both ovaries. There seemed to be nothing amiss with any of the organs, although the ligaments supporting the uterus were slightly shorter than normal. I massaged the uterus and its ligaments, slightly stretching the latter, and then closed the wound.

I explained what I had found and done during the operation to the Prince and his advisors, and suggested that the Princess not be allowed to conceive for the following two months. I then asked Hamaheemoo to keep me informed of the situation, and to inform me immediately of any pregnancy. The gynaecologists departed, decidedly dubious about my treatment of the patient.

A few days later Maritza now completely recovered sought me out when I was sitting alone on the terrace. She bought a piece of tapestry to work. We chatted about my journey across Europe, and about England. The quite suddenly she asked;

“Doctor, do you think you can cure me?” I faced her squarely, and said pointedly “Your case is very extraordinary. Did it ever occur to you that perhaps you yourself could spot the cause of the trouble?”

I had hardly finished when she stood up, flung her tapestry on the chair, and started to sob, “My God, what have I done? What have I said?”

She hurried away extremely distressed. My earlier suspicions were heightened.

Some twenty minutes later she returned calmer, and politely requested me to accompany her to her uncle’s house. She explained that he too was a doctor. Dr.

Larken met us at the door of his lodge, and received us most cordially, "I am indeed delighted to meet a colleague from England." He was a tall, dark-haired man of powerful build.

Indoors he explained that his niece Maritza had telephoned him in agitation saying "That devil doctor from England has guessed everything."

It was during the next two hours that I was entreated to keep concealed an abhorrence with which good doctors the world over fervently hope they will never be connected to.

Maritza, still only eighteen when she married the wealthy Anton Mikhailovich, had been persuaded by an old great-aunt that if she had children she would grow very fat, prematurely old, and consequently her husband would reject her for another woman. She had in anguish sought the help and connivance of her uncle Dr. Larken in her determination not to become pregnant.

He eventually with reluctance advised her to wear a tampon soaked in an irritant whenever she had sexual contact with her husband. Thus she remained non-pregnant for a long time, until perhaps one night when she omitted to use the tampon she then conceived.

She was so distressed by this that, threatening suicide, she prevailed upon her uncle to advise her as to how to get rid of the foetus. He tried to persuade her to allow the child to be born, but she adamantly refused to even consider the prospect. Eventually again with reluctance he prescribed her a tampon soaked in a solution of groundsel which irritated the opening of the uterus to the extent that at three months the foetus was rejected. By this method three pregnancies had been terminated. Her husband, desperate for a family heir, was completely unaware of what she was doing, and she was extremely fearful that he might find out. After he had had his say we eyed each other seriously. My thoughts raced, and my feelings were a mixture of distaste and growing apprehension. Was he seeking my connivance? Did he want me to agree to turn a blind eye to subsequent 'miscarriges'? Why should I be placed in this position? He acted infamously, flouting the strict medical ethical code. The moral issues involved flooded my conscience, pushing into the background my initial vexation about the potential jeopardisation of my own reputation and even my physical safety.

I rounded on him and poured my feelings, but his response was to assure me again of the hours of heartache these very moral issues had given him. He went on to earnestly entreat me to keep forever silent about what I now knew. "This is a professional secret" he called out urgently, "and you must keep it".

Maritza started to sob again, and Larken paced up and down, rubbing his hands. The suddenly he turned to me and said;

"Look, to be a good doctor is fine, but there are times when that doctor should also be wise. You could choose wisdom, or you could tell her husband". I pondered this theme and it tore me asunder. He stressed the danger involved should Anton Mikhailovich discover the truth. I momentarily recalled those two Goliaths at the front door and again weighed my own chances of a safe exit from the country! After further debate I eventually agreed to keep their secret, but won over Maritza to the idea that she should now consider producing an heir for her husband!

Back at the mansion I explained to Anton that I would like to see his wife at my consulting-rooms in London in about one month's time. He readily agreed, and seemed to share my faith that the next pregnancy would be successful.

The next day Ali and I took our leave and set off for London. During the journey Ali asked why I was so confident of a successful pregnancy.

“After all, James, all you did was open the abdomen. What good could that possibly do?”

“I really don’t know,” I replied, “but I can remember a very similar case at Geneva when we were students. Again, there seemed to be no reason for the continued abortions, and after an exploratory of her abdomen – during which nothing was found – the woman was sent home apparently without having been cured. Nevertheless, her next pregnancy was a complete success. No-one was able to explain this, and I still don’t understand it myself. I can only hope that the same things happen again!”

“Good luck then, James, but all I can say is that I’ll believe it when I see it!”

So will I, I thought rather pensively

Upon my return to London I heard some interesting developments in the case of the truant Earl. John telephoned to say that he had traced his father’s hideout. Apparently the family had divined his whereabouts from a letter the valet, Ross, had sent to the laundry-maid. As a result of this a family correspondence commenced between Belgravia and a small island in the vicinity of Elba. All this culminated in John paying a visit to the island a couple of months later.

When John disembarked from the small inter-island ferry he was directed to a small bungalow which the Early, Ross, and two local fishermen had built. It was simple but charming: rainwater was collected in a large concrete tank and piped to the interior of the house; the cooking – mainly fish – was done by Ross on a wooden box lined with cement and fired by twigs and driftwood. John’s biggest surprise, however, came when he saw his father and Ross. They were almost unrecognisable – bronzed and barefooted with long matted beards. Both were sitting on the ground in front of the bungalow silently knitting socks!

John returned to England a week later, having failed dismally in his attempt to induce the Early to come home. John’s mother was totally incensed – “Well, if he wants to play Robinson Crusoe for the rest of his life, he’s welcome to it! I’m certainly not going to beg him to come back.” So the Earl and his valet were left knitting socks and the remainder of the family went on with their own business.

It was at about this time that I received some good news from Hamaheemoo; the Princess had fallen pregnant and things were proceeding quite smoothly. This was the signal for an ever-increasing activity on the international telephone exchanges. For the first two months of the pregnancy Hamaheemoo called me weekly, but as the critical three-month stage approached the frequency of the calls increased dramatically. As the pregnancy went into its fourth month without any apparent cause for concern, he began to telephone me daily. As the pregnancy moved into its final stages I was contacted two or three times a day; not only by Hamaheemoo, but even the tremendously excited Prince. The telephone wires were beginning to run hot!

A couple of weeks before the baby was due the Prince requested that I attend the birth personally, and so I made the appropriate arrangements. Shortly before I left, I received another visit from John R.

“We’re extremely worried about my father, James,” he said, “It’s almost a year since he left and mother is frightened that he might never come back.”

“Yes – I can see that it would be a terrible strain.”

“Well, mother was wondering – seeing as you’re going that way – if you could call in at the island and see how he is. Perhaps you might be able to persuade him to come home?”

I readily agreed to his request and, on the following morning I telephoned the Countess to put her mind at rest. I told her that French sailors used to carry a very heavy anchor aboard their ships which they called the 'Anchor of Clemency'. This they would only use in times of extreme peril. "So Lady P.," I said, "I shall throw the Anchor of Clemency overboard and try to save the ship!"

My second visit to Laybach was an unqualified success. There were no complications and the Princess gave birth to a fine young son. The Prince was absolutely delighted. Even Hamaheemoo was full of praise for what I had done and constantly regaled me with questions as to the treatment I had so secretly and successfully followed. I reminded him of our previous conversations. "Remember, Doctor Hamaheemoo," I said, "I suggested that we call on the Almighty to show us the impossible."

"Yes, of course," he replied, "but surely you must have done something to the Princess?"

"All I did was to open the abdomen, Hamaheemoo. The Good Lord did the rest and it is to Him alone that all praise belongs.

I remained at the Palace for a few days following the birth of the child. During this time the Prince entertained me quite royally. He personally guided me on a tour of his many estates and made me the guest of honour at a banquet held to celebrate the birth of his heir. On the morning of my departure I discovered an extra trunk of luggage. It contained a profusion of gifts – silver, china, various objects d'art, and rolls of very fine cloth. All this was in addition to a very handsome cheque presented to me by the Prince.

As I promised my friend John, I interrupted my return journey to call at the island where the Earl was living in seclusion. I found him much as John described him some months earlier, and confessed my part in the plot concerning his socks. I pointed out that, I had been appointed le médecin malgré lui in a situation not unlike Moliere's comedy of the same name.

"Very well, Monsieur Sganarel," replied the Earl, "you are forgiven."

"But what about your family and staff who collaborated in the plot?" I asked.

"I shall travel back to London with you, Hasson, and confront them. They will all have to satisfy my conditions for a pardon by appearing before me dressed in unmatched socks or stockings, whereupon they may beg my forgiveness!"

Soon after his return to Belgravia the Earl's entire household – young and old, male and female – appeared before him, all repentant, and all wearing unmatched socks and stockings. The Earl was extremely delighted by this spectacle, kissed everybody and declared that they were all pardoned. In a moment of happy inspiration I shouted, "Ladies and gentleman, let us prepare a ball for the Earl's birthday at which we shall all wear unmatched socks or stockings!"

Everybody applauded the idea, and the Earl came forward, saying "You are ingenious, Hasson – I concede to your delightful suggestion. Let us all drink to the success of the ball!"

A month later a crowd of over two hundred guests thronged the floor of the ballroom at Belgravia, all wearing the requisite unmatched socks or stockings! When I left Egypt in the early Twenties someone had given me a cardboard box containing

three dozen glass bracelets, as worn in all Arab countries. They were all of different colour and design and I was to deliver them to an Armenian in Whitechapel. I had tried hard to trace the fellow but to no avail. I wrote to the lady in Alexandria, who had entrusted the parcel to me, and her reply was categorical – “Please give them away or keep them at your entire discretion!”

When the Ball of Unmatched Socks was being organised I finally thought of a use for them. I gave them to Lady p., who distributed them to the guests. It was the beginning of a short era of glass bracelets – they became all the rage! Millions were manufactured all over the world, but, like nearly everything else, the ‘all new, all nice’ proverb operated and, within a year, the fashion for glass bracelets became something of the past.

The ball was a tremendous success and over a thousand I came across a painting depicting Moliere in the role of Sganarel in “Le Médecin Malagré et Lui”. I was lucky enough to be able to purchase this painting, which I had first encountered in Henry and Maureen’s home some years earlier. I too had played the role of le Médecin Malgré Lui in advising her Ladyship to use unmatched socks to cure the Earl – it worked!

Some five months later after I had effected my much-acclaimed ‘cure’ on Maritza I had a letter post-marked Vienna. It was from two Professors of gynaecology who had been treating her before I was summoned. They reiterated their interest in the ‘cure’ as professionals in the field and entreated me to discuss it with them. This was no small embarrassment for me. The further ‘treatment’ in London had been a complete charade to keep Maritza’s husband innocent of her previous behaviour.

Subsequently in a very diplomatically worded letter I managed to persuade them to question me no further on this matter.

Another interesting addition to my store of vignettes for my friends was that about the Goliaths. Their names were Borias and Elias, and they were born three hours apart of different mothers but the same father also a Goliath, a serving officer in the Austrian army. His sexual prowess was thus widely heralded. By all accounts when Borias and Elias walked the streets of Laybach the local women used to fling wide their windows to get a better view, all desperately desiring these two magnificent specimens of manhood. One evening during my stay the husband of one besotted female waited until Borias passed by his window and in a torment of rage plunged a dagger in his back.

Such was the resiliance of this giant of a man that he came unaided all the way back to the mansion and calmly asked me if I would remove the offending weapon! The wound was two inches deep!

I took him to the kitchen and dressed what he laughingly termed ‘a scratch on the back’.

Before being employed in the Mikhailovich household the Goliaths had been employed in a monastery as gardeners, but the Mother Superior had been so alarmed at the effect they had on all the females of the establishment that she had no other recourse but to sack them.

VIII. SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

“Je Trouve Bien” has certainly proved true in my many encounters with great works of art; although one might be excused for thinking that my modest beginnings in Egypt could not provide a particularly auspicious start in the bizarre world of the art collector. I still smile to myself when I remember an encounter with a very attractive middle-aged woman who required my professional services. As I walked into her house I noticed a sketch of a dancing girl by Andre de Segonzac. My patient told me that it was of her that Segonzac had drawn it while she was performing at a famous night-club in Paris. The drawing was an absolute delight and I asked how much it would cost to buy. Unfortunately my patient was so accustomed to another sort of question that she assumed I was asking how much she charged for her services! It never occurred to her that I was more interested in the sketch than what it portrayed. What delicious irony and confusion – but who can ever forget a drawing by Segonzac?

My dear friend Ernest once shared an extraordinary discovery with me soon after Dunkirk. We were returning from a most refreshing break in Cornwall and had driven to Exeter from Looe. It was a very hot day and we were feeling thirsty

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Failed to locate the dealer or the statuette.

My delight in this sculpture of Houdon's surpassed my luck in finding it. The melange of childlike gaiety and simplicity of this piece is in wonderful contrast to his studies of maturity such as his portraits of Voltaire and George Washington. His sculpture of Anne-Ange was truly a gem of childhood portraiture. It reflected my own joy as I later watched my own children at similar ages. I become more aware of what Houdon saw and felt, and so my appreciation of his work deepened considerably.

My luck was not always the same, however, I can't remember many sessions at the auction rooms when I was not so fortunate, even though I knew what I wanted. During my early days in London an attempt to buy two small French tables landed me with far more than I had bargained for – socially as well as aesthetically! The tables were not of particular value but they were charming, elegantly designed, and I could easily visualise them in my home. I arranged my bid with the auctioneer's clerk and signed the order note for lots 171 and 172. The tables were valued at about thirty pounds the pair and I was later very pleased to hear that they had been purchased for me for only half this amount. I wrote a cheque and asked a taxi-driver to collect and deliver them to my home.

Half an hour later he telephoned my consulting rooms to ask if I had been pulling his leg.

“Pull your leg? How?”

“Well, Guv'nor, your two tiny tables are no more nor less than two damned great pennyfarthings. You need a pantehnicon, not a taxi!”

He had to explain what a pennyfarthing was, for I had no idea. After he had done so I telephoned the auctioneer's clerk to find out what had caused this confusion. Apparently I had placed my bid with the wrong clerk. There had been two sales that day and the tables I had wanted had gone for over sixty pounds. As it was I now possessed two pennyfarthings which were to be delivered within the next few days. I left instructions that they were to be placed in the basement of my house. The day they were delivered my housekeeper, Mrs Westerman, greeted me with hysterical Sevres vases, saying, “Here are your pennyfarthings!” I was flummoxed

Luckily there was a note attached to one of the vases which was addressed to the lady to whom they should have been delivered. It was a Grosvenor Square address. I telephoned the lady to explain what had happened and offered to deliver

them myself that very evening. She was very pleased to hear that they were safe but regretted that she had already returned the pennyfarthings to the auction rooms.

I repacked the vases very carefully and took a taxi to Grosvenor Square, calling in at a florist on the way to buy two bunches of tuberose. At the address the door was opened by Irwina Gonsales, a very young and astoundingly beautiful South American heiress. She was married to a Vice-Admiral in the U.S. Navy, some twenty years her senior, who was currently based in London. Her husband was a very busy man, spending a great deal of his time travelling in Europe, and as a result Irwina was frequently left very much to her own devices. The Vice-Admiral was currently at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid.

As I placed the flowers in the vases I noticed a copy of Burton's Arabian Nights lying open on the floor by a chaise-longue. "I see you are reading the Arabian Nights." I remarked.

"Oh, that!" she replied. "Yes, or at least I'm trying to read it but I just don't seem to be able to concentrate on it."

"Those stories are meant to be read aloud," I said, "perhaps you should find someone to read to you."

She smiled demurely and patted the chaise-longue beside her, saying, "Come on then, James, you read them to me. You tell me that you speak Arabic, at least you should be able to pronounce the names!"

I returned to my home at 4.00a.m. the following morning to a very anxious Mrs Westerman, who plied me with questions about my lateness. I told her that I was late, not for any professional reason, but because I had been very busy writing the story of the 1002nd Arabian Night! I do not think she understood what I was talking about; but at least not until it became my regular practice to read to Irwina several times a week.

About a month after my first meeting Irwina I was invited to stay at the Tatti near Florence, the home of a very famous art historian. When I told Irwina that I would be going abroad for a short while she smiled at me with a hint of malice and said, "But you still haven't finished reading the tale of the third night."

I replied that there would be plenty of time for reading upon my return. Nevertheless, when I arrived at Victoria to catch the Golden Arrow, I discovered that my Pullman coach had been usurped by a Senora Gonsales. She burst into laughter at my obvious surprise, saying, "But, James, you know full well that my doctor advised me to take a shirt break."

"And do you think there'll be much rest for you on this trip?" I enquired.

"Naturally," she said, holding up a familiar book. "I even know a kind friend who will be willing to read to me!"

Thus began our marvellous holiday in Europe. We first visited my friend at Tatti, making several excursions into Florence to see the Medici Chapel and Crypt, and also to hear a lecture on Battista Franca. From Florence we moved on to Rome where we visited the Vatican and Basilica. On our way back to London we stopped off at Venice and went to see the magnificent Tintoretto's at the Scuola. It was a wonderful holiday but as the train pulled into Victoria at the end of our journey I noticed that Irwina was crying. I asked her why she was upset. "We have been living on a cloud for the past few weeks," she replied, "but now we must return to earth."

"But, Irwina," I replied, "we can always escape this earth by reading the Arabian Nights together!"

Unfortunately I was never again to read to Irwina. Her husband returned from Spain soon afterwards and was posted back to the United States. Shortly after they left London I received a small parcel from Irwina. On the enclosed note she explained that she wanted to leave me a present by which to remember her – what could have been more fitting than the Sevres vase and inscribed copy of the Arabian nights that I discovered in the parcel?

I tried to keep in touch with her, but, as years passed, we gradually lost all contact. The last I heard of Irwina was an account of her death during the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbour, which I came across quite by accident in an old copy of an American newspaper.

It was my first wife, Neith, who drew my attention to the fact that Sotherby's were selling a ring reputed to have originally belonged to Joan of Arc. My interest in such a wonderful link with our past was intense, and I was determined to buy it. This time there was no confusion with the auctioneer's clerk and, as soon as I was able to take it home with me, I began to enquire into its presence in England. It was mainly due to the very hard work done by Cyril Bunt – a librarian at the Victoria and Albert Museum and old friend – that we were given a very comprehensive review of the history of the ring.

In the previous thirty years the ring had been sold twice at Sotherby's, realising a good deal more than one would of expected, simply because of its believably genuine association with Joan of Arc. In the catalogue of the Herman Oates Collection in 1929 it was described as "an iconographic ring, silver gilt with ridged bezel, engraved 'I.H.S.' and 'Maria' and, on the shoulders, 'I' and 'M' respectively. This ring is believed to have belonged to Joan of Arc and to have come through Cardinal Beaufort to Henry VI".

Despite the description, it was obviously of the utmost importance to establish the evidence of this link and not to leave it as a matter of acceptance by faith. In doing so, we could certainly say that the ring was French and that it was of the early fifteenth century. Further than this it could not be proved that it belonged to the Maid but Mr. Bunt considered the likelihood to be very great.

Henry Beaufort, Cardinal of England and Bishop of Winchester, was at Joan's trial, and stood by the pyre when she was burned in 1431. It seems strange that he might have had sufficient sympathy for the young girl to wish for a relic, but perhaps he wanted to bring the ring back to England in order to give it to someone who did have sympathy and compassion for the Maid. Undoubtedly the Dowager Queen of England, Catherine de Valois, was one such person, but the Cardinal would not have wanted to make a display of this gift, nor called attention to it by recording his action after her martyrdom. So it was not surprising that an exhaustive search of the contemporary inventories and other documents revealed no trace of the desired information.

Briefly, the previous owners of the ring included Herman Oates, one time curator of the then London Museum; and the painter Augustus John. It had been given to Augustus Jon by Lady Ottoline Morrell, a member of Cavendish-Bentinck family, and it is possible to trace a connection between this lady and Cardinal Beaufort.

Catherine de Valois, wife of Henry V, would certainly have valued the ring as a relic of a martyr of her native France. Henry V died in 1422 and she is believed to

have married Owen Tudor in 1424. She could have given it to her son, the Earl of Richmond, who later married Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII. Lady Margaret was the grand-niece of the Cardinal and half-sister to Margaret of Anjou who married Henry VI in 1445. It is not difficult then, to believe that the ring must have passed through the hands of Lady Margaret. Also, since her son, Henry VII, died before she did (1509) the ring could have been given to her granddaughter, Margaret Tudor. This Margaret and her husband had a daughter, also named Margaret, who married James IV of Scotland.

There were two sons of this union. One of whom was Charles Stuart, the Earl of Lennox, who married Elizabeth, the third daughter of Sir William Cavendish. From this point there is a direct Cavendish descent. Elizabeth's brother, Charles Cavendish, married the daughter of the Earl of Ogle. One of his sons – Henry – married Francis Pennithorne. They had five daughters, one of whom married John Holles, Duke of Newcastle. Their daughter was Lady Henrietta Cavendish-Holles and she married Edward, Lord Harley, in 1718. In due course, their daughter Margaret became Lady Margaret Cavendish, and it was she who married William, the Duke of Portland. His sister, Lady Ottoline Cavendish-Bentinck, married Philip Edward Morrell in 1902. She died in 1938 but, some years before her death, gave the ring to Augustus John.

This line of descent has a comforting air of probability about it. At no stage is there hiatus to break continuity of those whom we know to have been very closely associated with the ring.

In 1952 the French Authorities borrowed the ring for an exhibition at the Church of St. Joan at La Turbie; and again in 1958 for the celebration of the fifth centenary of the Rehabilitation of St. Joan in Rouen and Paris. Her ideals and her leadership may be reflected in many different works of art but do not doubt that her first ring, given to her on the occasion of her first communion, can be a very vivid reminder of the foundation on which she built her life.

A far more recent, through less romantic, link with France is represented in my collection by way of M. Payne Best's (née Van Rees) portrait of Charles de Gaulle. During 1942 the French general sat about half a dozen times for this painting at Connaught Hotel, and I came to acquire it quite by chance some fourteen years later. As I was Consultant Physician to the Free French forces during World War II, this portrait of de Gaulle gives me a particular pleasure – painted as it was, during the period I was in closest contact with him.

Any political or medical comments in the course of these reflections would seem to be inappropriate. Of course, de Gaulle was a giant – courageous, noble and genuinely intellectual; perhaps his greatest failing was his lack of patience! I can claim to have encouraged him to have yet more faith and trust in the British. When he was frustrated and very depressed during the 1940-41 period, he told me from the depths of his armchair that I would make a very good actor.

“But,” I said, “what I have to say is full of nonsense!”

“Exactly! That is why I like being with you. Everyone else is so serious and have such long faces. Comedy should be your line.”

“Yes, possibly,” I replied. “I read somewhere that comedians make very good diplomats.”

A few years later he chose to reward my services with the Medal of Honour of the Military Medical Service. As he presented it to me, he acknowledged how right I had been to trust the British. This decoration had been preceded by another of exactly the same order. The French Provisional Government had made their own decision and honoured me in the same way as de Gaulle. When I found out that he was proposing to give me this medal, I was advised to accept it without referring to the fact that I already had one. Although not of any aesthetic value, I was naturally very thrilled and proud to realise how the French Forces and de Gaulle had so appreciated my services during the war.

The portrait of de Gaulle was just one of a number of acquisitions I made in Bond Street; quite a few which I have unfortunately had to sell during the last few years. But it was an enormous privilege to meet and get to know the real experts in the art world. I remember with deep respect Albert Grimwade, who specialised in Silver at Christie's; David Carrut on old master, also at Christie's; Hans Gronau of Sotherby's who unfortunately died very young. At the other well-known galleries I found similar tradition of expertise and integrity. I was very fortunate to meet such people and learnt a great deal from them; their help and guidance during my collecting days was another source of inspiration.

The Wizard of Chelsea was an art expert in a class of his own. His real name was Felix Joubert and I met him in the early twenties. He was so good at reproducing objects d-arts that he often found it difficult to distinguish the genuine article from his own reproductions! He once told me an amusing story in this connection.

One day a priest from a well-known monastery in France walked into the office of the world-famous art dealer, Duveen. He nervously stated that he wished to have a word with Mr. Duveen on a most confidential matter. The clerk gave him a card on which he wrote his name – Father Aloysius – and took it to Mr. Duveen. Duveen's curiosity was roused by this unexpected visitor and he agreed to see him.

Father Aloysius explained that the cellars at his monastery were inundated every time it rained and that the roof was just about eaten away with dry rot. As a result, they had decided to sell their most valuable possession – the Reliquary of St. Andrew, a twelfth century chasse containing some of the relics of the saint.

By then Duveen was really interested and he asked where the reliquary was. "It is over in France," he replied the priest, "but if you are interested, you can either come over to the monastery or I shall bring it here. As you can imagine, the price for such a treasure is high – we are asking forty thousand pounds for it."

Duveen was eager to see it, so he made the journey to the monastery the following week. He was met by Father Aloysius who conducted him to the Prior, who was kneeling in prayer but rose to his feet to meet Duveen. He gave permission for Father Aloysius to take Duveen to see the reliquary – a truly magnificent chasse, ornamented with silver bas-reliefs depicting the life of St. Andrew on all four sides. Duveen had been doing his homework on this particular reliquary and was deeply impressed when he actually saw it.

Later that day he telephoned his son in London and instructed him to send a telegram to the tycoon P.P., offering him the reliquary. The following morning P.M. replied in the affirmative so Duveen gave the Prior a cheque for forty thousand pounds. Before he took the reliquary he promised to have a copy of it made so that its disappearance would not be noticed on those days when it was usually displayed at

the monastery. Duveen gave the undertaking that the copy would be as perfect as possible and that it would be made by the most skilled crafts men.

The skill of the Wizard of Chelsea was well-known so Duveen thought he was the obvious man for the job. Felix Joubert agreed to the task and, within two weeks had produced a perfect copy, flaws and all. The reliquary and its copy were duly delivered to Duveen's office. Duveen senior was away the time and his son left both objects on his father's desk. When he returned that evening Duveen naturally asked which was the original and which the copy but his son was unable to tell him. In the end Joubert had to be called in to distinguish them.

The original was then taken to P.M. personally by Duveen. The tycoon was very excited about his purchase and his public relations staff and the press were all agog to see and report this famous treasure. Many of P.M.'s friends and acquaintances were jealous of the find and reviled Duveen for not offering it to them first.

A year later, almost to the day, a very corpulent priest travelled to New York to see Mr. M., a very rich American tycoon. He repeated the offer he had made to Duveen a year earlier.

M's imagination was fired and he insisted on travelling back to France with the priest to see the reliquary for himself. At length they reached the monastery and the chase was brought up from the vaults. It exchanged hands for quite a considerable amount of money. The happy tycoon left the monastery with his prize having promised not to reveal his purchase for at least three years.

When he did announce his acquisition to the world, there was a furore in the press and P.M. enlisted Duveen to investigate the matter. Eventually it was discovered that both reliquaries were forgeries! The priest was a clever agent; he had persuaded the Abbot of the monastery to give him a free hand to raise the capital necessary for the repairs to the monastery. The American tycoon retired from the fray and lost his money but P.M. was able to turn the matter to his own advantage.

He was persuaded by friends that he had a case against Duveen and that he should have his money returned. However, money meant nothing to him so he suggested that he would forego any claims he might have if the government of a certain foreign country could be persuaded to bestow a highly coveted decoration upon him, just to enrage the American tycoon Mr. M. The matter was arranged and the decoration bestowed, thus putting P.M. one step ahead of his American rival.

Joubert's part in all of this was even more intriguing. I met him one day in the south of France, to where he had retired, and he agreed to tell me the whole story. Sadly he had become quite deaf by then but with the assistance of a hearing aid we were able to have a conversation. He was silent for a minute or two, and then decided to admit the reliquary Duveen had asked him to copy was actually from his own workshop, as was the one sent back to the monastery.

"But why didn't you tell Duveen that when he first approached you?"

"Why should I?" he replied. "We artists have our own code of honour and etiquette to preserve!"

"Did you make any other copies of the reliquary?"

"Yes – ten!"

I do not doubt that Joubert never sold a reproduction claiming it to be an original. All the reliquaries he sold were commissioned as copies for the monastery – I do not think we can stretch the benefit of the doubt to the clever priest though! Joubert took a keen delight in matching the craftsmanship of the masters of the past,

and even in surpassing it on occasions. I think he was justified in taking considerable pride in being able to do this, without ever setting out to trade as a rogue.

Joubert apart, it is to the masters of the past that I turn as the source of inspiration. This was especially true when, shortly after the Second World War the Goddess of Deceit entered my home and my first wife, Neith, and myself parted forever. The Christmas after my divorce was a bleak one. I was left lonely and desperate. Looking at my paintings for some consolation I suddenly remembered something that General de Gaulle had said to me. He had asked if I had a catalogue to my collection of fine art. At the time I thought that a catalogue was a cold and dreary thing, rather like a list showing the chemical breakdown of the human body – it is small comfort to know that a beautiful woman is 70% water! I decided that I would write a catalogue that Christmas, a catalogue with feeling and warmth – a loving guide to works I loved.

I walked into the chapel at Shenfield with paper, pencils and a bottle of champagne. I sat at a chair by a window looking out onto the Kennet and began to write. I do not remember touching the champagne, the subject was itself a sufficient stimulus. That night of labour represented the beginnings of my first book The Banquet of the Immortals, which was subsequently published in 1948.

Although I have collected pictures, sculpture, objets d'art for many years now, I can honestly say that I have always followed my own taste. Most of my pictures have been religious subjects, although the sculpture has been more varied and secular. The objets d'art have tended to be entirely Continental in origin, and the furniture more Continental than English. But if I were to choose an artist whose work has moved me most deeply, it would have to be Tintoretto.

Tintoretto's real name was Jacapo Robusti but he came to be known as the 'little dryer' in deference to his father's trade. Later in his life he was also given the nickname of 'Il Furiso'. I am in little doubt that it is his well-known passionate and impatient nature which appeals to me in his work. He could not accept for himself the kind of self-discipline which might lead to the poetry of inspiration being turned into the prose of execution. Rather, he wanted to make our senses leap as his did. He was convinced that he should paint himself, for himself, in his own way, time and beloved Venice.

A pupil of Titian for about ten days, he was also the object of his master's envy. Despite this he resolved to learn as much as he could from Michelangelo's gift for design and Titian's colour. When he was still quite young he discovered a method of combining the complex technicalities of form and light. By modelling his subjects in was an setting them into a bag, he could then illuminate them with a carefully positioned candle. Thus he could paint, not only the form of the figures, but also their natural shadows and highlights. This method served him well for many years until he was able dispense with it through sheer proficiency in his art.

Tintoretto is known to have been very proud that the Scuola di San Rocco contained many of his finest works, including his 'Crucifixion' and 'The Last Supper'. I was only nineteen when I saw them for the first time, and I remember the grandeur of the 'Crucifixion' affecting me so deeply that I knelt before it in prayer. For many weeks I was haunted by the sublime expression of our Redeemer on the Cross and deeply impressed by Tintoretto altogether. I promised myself that I would try to purchase one of his canvasses, should I ever have the opportunity. In 1948 Lord Rothermere's, 'The Raising of Lazarus' by Tintoretto was the fulfilment of this particular ambition. It almost broke my heart to have to part with it many years later.

Nevertheless, it is still to 'The Crucifixion' that I would turn, again and again – and, if I were aware of it, it would be the source of inspiration in the hour before my own death.

EPILOGUE

I came to grief with my wrist-watch this morning; the watch that E. gave me for my last anniversary. I don't remember what sort of anniversary it was, nor on what occasion. Anniversaries are many, often one too many. Not being able to remember is a blessing though, for otherwise I would run into another grief.

Yes, my unbuckled watch fell from my wrist into the bath water. When I fished it out, it was as silent as my memory of that anniversary. As time had been locked inside that soggy watch, my memories remain prisoners of a long, long life. Today I had to wear my other watch, the one my beloved mother gave me before I left

Alexandria for Saint Britannia. Of this anniversary my memory remains as fresh as a newly picked strawberry – the gift of a mother only dies when you die!

This wrist-watch was a cheap one made of unplated metal. The sort you had to wind daily. I can clearly remember my mother breaking the clay money-box with a large spoon and scooping up the piasters, meklas and milliemes that spilled onto the table. It cost my mother many privations and a lot of sweat to save that vile metal to buy me the watch. I can even remember the price she paid for it; it was stuck on the back of the watch, written on a circular piece of paper. 30/- said the indelible Indian ink. Yes, a mere 30/- and I wore it for over twenty years. Yes, but the thirty shillings were of the kind when the Libra really was a 'solido dennaro'.

I also concluded the last chapter of my adventures today. I knew that I could dictate no more, it was enough. Still, as I closed my eyes for a respite I felt something had started to fertilise my mind, bringing back the memories of over half a century ago. Dormant memories, waiting like a closed bloom for the sun to bring it into full flower, waiting to burst into an inner panorama of the past which was so dear to me.

The scene was my old home in Alexandria. My beloved mother was seated in her favourite armchair smiling at me. She had the same expression as when she cuddled me as a child, singing an enchanting lullaby to take me away to the spot where angels adorned my cradle.

My mother was a remarkable person. She was born in Milan to the name Ida Cavalieri. Her father and mother had a musical instruments business but hard times compelled them to emigrate to Alexandria. They had three sons and four daughters, all very attractive and musically gifted. My mother, the eldest, took up singing and soon became a highly successful actress. She had a beautiful soprano voice and sang in Lucia, Tosca and William Tell. It was during one of her performances at the Alhambra that she first attracted my father's attention. He was so taken with her rendering of 'Amor ti chiedo' that he virtually proposed on the spot. They were married and, like all newly-weds, hoped for the best.

During the first eight years of their marriage that had four children; myself, the eldest, Regina my sister, and my brothers Oscar and Alfred. Then the blow struck – my father, stung by the cruel mosquito, died of yellow fever within a few days.

For my mother there now began a long, long calvary. She took up the direction of life with a large family and very little money. I well remember the daily plateful of soup called cavolata, consisting as it did of cauliflower, celery, potato, tomato and a hard-boiled egg. On Sundays, through the addition of some bones from the butcher and a handful of macaroni, the soup became minestrone. When we grew older and there was not enough for us all, my mother often excused herself from the table on the pretext of having a headache or some such ailment. I was old enough to realise that this was really a 'white lie' in order to leave her portion for the children. We lived poorly but with such a devoted mother we never lost hope or faith.

The College des Freres became my place of daily toil and soon I excelled to the satisfaction of everyone. At the age of twelve I entered the Jesuites where I continued to work steadily. I succeeded in passing both sections of the Baccalareat with honours when I was sixteen. Father Collangettes took me back home after the prize-giving. I was laden with more than fourteen beautiful books and with the gilt crown bestowed on the best student. I must have looked like a Christmas tree!

A conversation took place between the Father Superior and my mother on the question of my future. My mother had the tact to say anything the Father suggested would be carefully considered but that she knew of my desire to be a physician.

“Very Well,” agreed the Father Superior, “we shall consider the possibility at the College and then let you know what we consider would be the best for him.”

After a short while my mother and I were invited to the College and, to my great delight, we were informed that they considered me fit for the profession of medicine. I was then directed towards Geneva where my petition had been received by the Council of the University; seconded, of course, by the Father Superior of the Jesuites. This was the beginning of the end of my struggles, and subsequently I was invited by the son of a rich businessman to take part in a tour of other countries in the Middle East. This eventually led to my encounter with Haj Kalil – a pivot on which my whole future was to develop.

How long this panorama lasted I do not know. When I lifted the lids covering my almost extinct eyes I sensed the presence of my secretary, who was calmly waiting to take some more dictation. After a minute or two of complete silence, I began giving her the details of my vision of the past. Through it I had rediscovered my long-forgotten boyhood and become aware of the injustice of the fate which had befallen my mother during the long cruel period of her widowhood, of her heroic stand in the face of great adversity and occasional moments of despair. She was my guardian angel and, if anyone wished to know how it was that I seemed to succeed in my profession almost from the beginning of my career, I would say that I owe it first to my mother, who guided me continuously. I used to enter into long correspondence with her, and part of a letter written by me in 1917 reads as follows: “Mother dear, I have persistently made my approach to the problems of my patients with care and understanding, as you taught me. But, my dearest of all, how many times I have encountered the unknown I did not count.”

I feel that I should leave my story here. My adventures appear to have given pleasure to my family and many friends. As far back as the deep dark nights of the blackout, people have tried to persuade me to publish these memoirs. In the event it has been a very uneasy and laborious task, for an unfortunate double operation has almost totally robbed me of my sight and I have had to dictate from my notes of over half a century ago read to me by my family. Most of my adventures and stories are authentic – a few are almost. If there were a roll-call today, most of my heroes would be silent but I believe that absentees still have a right to courtesy, if not charity, and so many of them will remain anonymous.

As for my adorable mother, I feel that, if ever I should return to this earth, then I shall ask my father to let me have back my own same mother.
