

## CHAPTER XII

### THE DOCTOR'S PRESCRIPTION

THE Honourable Jane Champion stood on the summit of the Great Pyramid and looked around her.

The four exhausted Arabs whose exertions, combined with her own activity, had placed her there, dropped in the picturesque attitudes into which an Arab falls by nature. They had hoisted the Honourable Jane's eleven stone ten, from the bottom to the top in record time, and now lay around, proud of their achievement and sure of their "back-sheesh."

The whole thing had gone as if by clock-work. Two mahogany-coloured, finely proportioned fellows, in scanty white garments, sprang with the ease of antelopes to the top of a high step, turning to reach down eagerly and seize Jane's upstretched hands. One remained behind, unseen but indispensable, to lend timely aid at exactly the right moment. Then came the apparently impossible task for Jane, of placing the sole of her foot on the edge of a stone four feet above the one upon which she was standing. It seemed rather like stepping up on to the drawing-room mantelpiece. But encouraged by cries of "Eiwa! Eiwa!" she did it; when instantly a voice behind said, "Tyeb!" two voices above shouted, "Ketээр!" the grip on her hands tightened, the Arab behind hoisted, and Jane had stepped up, with an ease which surprised herself. As a matter of fact, under those circumstances the

## The Doctor's Prescription 125

impossible thing would have been *not* to have stepped up.

Arab number four was water carrier, and offered water from a gourd at intervals; and once, when Jane had to cry halt for a few minutes' breathing space, Schehati, handsomest of all, and leader of the enterprise, offered to recite English Shakespeare-poetry. This proved to be:

"Jack-an-Jill  
Went uppy hill,  
To fetchy paily water;  
Jack fell down-an  
Broke his crown-an  
Jill came tumbling after."

Jane had laughed; and Schehati, encouraged by the success of his attempt to edify and amuse, used lines of the immortal nursery epic as signals for united action during the remainder of the climb. Therefore Jane mounted one step to the fact that Jack fell down, and scaled the next to information as to the serious nature of his injuries, and at the third, Schehati, bending over, confidentially mentioned in her ear, while Ali shoved behind, that "Jill came tumbling after."

The familiar words, heard under such novel circumstances, took on fresh meaning. Jane commenced speculating as to whether the downfall of Jack need necessarily have caused so complete a loss of self-control and equilibrium on the part of Jill. Would she not have proved her devotion better by bringing the mutual pail safely to the bottom of the hill, and there attending to the wounds of her fallen hero? Jane, in her time, had witnessed the tragic downfall of various delightful Jacks, and had herself ministered tenderly to their broken crowns; for in each case the

Jill had remained on the top of the hill, flirting with that objectionable person of the name of Horner, whose cool, calculating way of setting to work — so unlike poor Jack's headlong method — invariably secured him the plum; upon which he remarked: "What a good boy am I!" and was usually taken at his own smug valuation. But Jane's entire sympathy on these occasions, was with the defeated lover, and more than one Jack was now on his feet again, bravely facing life, because that kind hand had been held out to him as he lay in his valley of humiliation, and that comprehending sympathy had proved balm to his broken crown.

"Dickery, dickery, dock!" chanted Schehati solemnly, as he hauled again; "Moses ran up the clock. The clock struck 'one' —"

*The clock struck "one"?* — It was nearly three years since that night at Shenstone when the clock had struck "one," and Jane had arrived at her decision, — the decision which precipitated *her* Jack from his Pisgah of future promise. And yet — no. He had not fallen before the blow. He had taken it erect, and his light step had been even firmer than usual as he walked down the church and left her, after quietly and deliberately accepting her decision. It was Jane herself, left alone, who fell hopelessly over the pail. She shivered even now when she remembered how its icy waters drenched her heart. Ah, what would have happened if Garth had come back in answer to her cry during those first moments of intolerable suffering and loneliness? But Garth was not the sort of man who, when a door has been shut upon him, waits on the mat outside, hoping to be recalled. When she put him from her, and he realised that she meant it.

he passed completely out of her life. He was at the railway station by the time she reached the house, and from that day to this they had never met. Garth evidently considered the avoidance of meetings to be his responsibility, and he never failed her in this. Once or twice she went on a visit to houses where she knew him to be staying. He always happened to have left that morning, if she arrived in time for luncheon; or by an early afternoon train, if she was due for tea. He never timed it so that there should be tragic passings of each other, with set faces, at the railway stations; or a formal word of greeting as she arrived and he departed, — just enough to awaken all the slumbering pain and set people wondering. Jane remembered with shame that this was the sort of picturesque tragedy she would have expected from Garth Dalmain. But the man who had surprised her by his dignified acquiescence in her decision, continued to surprise her by the strength with which he silently accepted it as final and kept out of her way. Jane had not probed the depth of the wound she had inflicted.

Never once was his departure connected, in the minds of others, with her arrival. There was always some excellent and perfectly natural reason why he had been obliged to leave, and he was openly talked of and regretted, and Jane heard all the latest "Dal stories," and found herself surrounded by the atmosphere of his exotic, beauty-loving nature. And there was usually a girl — always the loveliest of the party — confidentially pointed out to Jane, by the rest, as a certainty, if only Dal had had another twenty-four hours of her society. But the girl herself would appear quite heart-whole, only very full of an evidently

delightful friendship, expressing all Dal's ideas on art and colour, as her own, and confidently happy in an assured sense of her own loveliness and charm and power to please. Never did he leave behind him traces which the woman who loved him regretted to find. But he was always gone — irrevocably gone. Garth Dalmain was not the sort of man to wait on the door-mat of a woman's indecision.

Neither did this Jack of hers break his crown. His portrait of Pauline Lister, painted six months after the Shenstone visit, had proved the finest bit of work he had as yet accomplished. He had painted the lovely American, in creamy white satin, standing on a dark oak staircase, one hand resting on the balustrade, the other, full of yellow roses, held out towards an unseen friend below. Behind and above her shone a stained-glass window, centuries old, the arms, crest, and mottoes of the noble family to whom the place belonged, shining thereon in rose-coloured and golden glass. He had wonderfully caught the charm and vivacity of the girl. She was gaily up-to-date, and frankly American, from the crown of her queenly little head, to the point of her satin shoe; and the suggestiveness of placing her in surroundings which breathed an atmosphere of the best traditions of England's ancient ancestral homes, the fearless wedding of the new world with the old, the putting of this sparkling gem from the new into the beautiful mellow setting of the old and there showing it at its best, — all this was the making of the picture. People smiled, and said the painter had done on canvas what he shortly intended doing in reality; but the tie between artist and sitter never grew into anything closer than a pleasant friendship, and it was the noble owner of the

staircase and window who eventually persuaded Miss Lister to remain in surroundings which suited her so admirably.

One story about that portrait Jane had heard discussed more than once in circles where both were known. Pauline Lister had come to the first sittings wearing her beautiful string of pearls, and Garth had painted them wonderfully, spending hours over the delicate perfecting of each separate gleaming drop. Suddenly one day he seized his palette-knife, scraped the whole necklace off the canvas with a stroke, and declared she must wear her rose-topazes in order to carry out his scheme of colour. She was wearing her rose-topazes when Jane saw the picture in the Academy, and very lovely they looked on the delicate whiteness of her neck. But people who had seen Garth's painting of the pearls maintained that that scrape of the palette-knife had destroyed work which would have been the talk of the year. And Pauline Lister, just after it had happened, was reported to have said, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders: "Schemes of colour are all very well. But he scraped my pearls off the canvas because some one who came in hummed a tune while looking at the picture. I would be obliged if people who walk around the studio while I am being painted will in future refrain from humming tunes. I don't want him to scoop off my topazes and call for my emeralds. Also I feel like offering a reward for the discovery of that tune. I want to know what it has to do with my scheme of colour, anyway."

When Jane heard the story, she was spending a few days with the Brands in Wimpole Street. It was told at tea, in Lady Brand's pretty boudoir. The

duchess's concert, at which Garth had heard her sing "The Rosary," was a thing of the past. Nearly a year had elapsed since their final parting, and this was the very first thought or word or sign of his remembrance, which directly or indirectly, had come her way. She could not doubt that the tune hummed had been "The Rosary."

"The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,  
Are as a string of pearls to me;  
I count them over, every one, apart."

She seemed to hear Garth's voice on the terrace, as she heard it in those first startled moments of realising the gift which was being laid at her feet — "I have learned to count pearls, beloved."

Jane's heart was growing cold and frozen in its emptiness. This incident of the studio warmed and woke it for the moment, and with the waking came sharp pain. When the visitors had left, and Lady Brand had gone to the nursery, she walked over to the piano, sat down, and softly played the accompaniment of "The Rosary." The fine unexpected chords, full of discords working into harmony, seemed to suit her mood and her memories.

Suddenly a voice behind her said: "Sing it, Jane." She turned quickly. The doctor had come in, and was lying back luxuriously in a large arm-chair at her elbow, his hands clasped behind his head. "Sing it, Jane," he said.

"I can't, Deryck," she answered, still softly sounding the chords. "I have not sung for months."

"What has been the matter — for months?"

Jane took her hands off the keys, and swung round impulsively.

"Oh, boy," she said, "I have made a bad mess of

my life! And yet I know I did right. I would do the same again; at least — at least, I hope I would."

The doctor sat in silence for a minute, looking at her and pondering these short, quick sentences. Also he waited for more, knowing it would come more easily if he waited silently.

It came.

"Boy — I gave up something, which was more than life itself to me, for the sake of another, and I can't get over it. I know I did right, and yet — I can't get over it."

The doctor leaned forward and took the clenched hands between his.

"Can you tell me about it, Jeanette?"

"I can tell no one, Deryck; not even you."

"If ever you find you must tell some one, Jane, will you promise to come to me?"

"Gladly."

"Good! Now, my dear girl, here is a prescription for you. Go abroad. And, mind, I do not mean by that, just to Paris and back, or Switzerland this summer, and the Riviera in the autumn. Go to America and see a few big things. See Niagara. And all your life afterwards, when trivialities are trying you, you will love to let your mind go back to the vast green mass of water sweeping over the falls; to the thunderous roar, and the upward rush of spray; to the huge perpetual onwardness of it all. You will like to remember, when you are bothering about pouring water in and out of teacups, 'Niagara is flowing still.' Stay in a hotel so near the falls that you can hear their great voice night and day, thundering out themes of power and progress. Spend hours walking round and viewing it from every point. Go to the

Cave of the Winds, across the frail bridges, where the guide will turn and shout to you: 'Are your rings on tight?' Learn, in passing, the true meaning of the Rock of Ages. Receive Niagara into your life and soul as a possession, and thank God for it.

Then go in for other big things in America. Try spirituality and humanity; love and life. Seek out Mrs. Ballington Booth, the great 'Little Mother' of all American prisoners. I know her well, I am proud to say, and can give you a letter of introduction. Ask her to take you with her to Sing-Sing, or to Columbus State Prison, and to let you hear her address an audience of two thousand convicts, holding out to them the gospel of hope and love, — her own inspired and inspiring belief in fresh possibilities even for the most despairing.

"Go to New York City and see how, when a man wants a big building and has only a small plot of ground, he makes the most of that ground by running his building up into the sky. Learn to do likewise. — And then, when the great-souled, large-hearted, rapid-minded people of America have waked you to enthusiasm with their bigness, go off to Japan and see a little people nobly doing their best to become great. — Then to Palestine, and spend months in tracing the footsteps of the greatest human life ever lived. Take Egypt on your way home, just to remind yourself that there are still, in this very modern world of ours, a few passably ancient things, — a well-preserved wooden man, for instance, with eyes of opaque white quartz, a piece of rock crystal in the centre for a pupil. These glittering eyes looked out upon the world from beneath their eyelids of bronze, in the time of Abraham. You will find it in the museum

at Cairo. Ride a donkey in the Mooskee if you want real sport; and if you feel a little slack, climb the Great Pyramid. Ask for an Arab named Schehati, and tell him you want to do it one minute quicker than any lady has ever done it before.

Then come home, my dear girl, ring me up and ask for an appointment; or chance it, and let Stoddart slip you into my consulting-room between patients, and report how the prescription has worked. I never gave a better; and you need not offer me a guinea! I attend old friends gratis."

Jane laughed, and gripped his hand. "Oh, boy," she said, "I believe you are right. My whole ideas of life have been focussed on myself and my own individual pains and losses. I will do as you say; and God bless you for saying it. — Here comes Flower. Flower," she said, as the doctor's wife trailed in, wearing a soft tea-gown, and turning on the electric lights as she passed, "will this boy of ours ever grow old? Here he is, seriously advising that a stout, middle-aged woman should climb the Great Pyramid as a cure for depression, and do it in record time!"

"Darling," said the doctor's wife, seating herself on the arm of his chair, "whom have you been seeing who is stout, or depressed, or middle-aged? If you mean Mrs. Parker Bangs, she is not middle-aged, because she is an American, and no American is ever middle-aged. And she is only depressed because, even after painting her lovely niece's portrait, Garth Dalmain has failed to propose to her. And it is no good advising her to climb the Great Pyramid, though she is doing Egypt this winter, because I heard her say yesterday that she should never think of going up the pyramids until the children of Israel, or who-

ever the natives are who live around those parts, have the sense to put an elevator right up the centre."

Jane and the doctor laughed, and Flower, settling herself more comfortably, — for the doctor's arm had stolen around her, — said: "Jane, I heard you playing 'The Rosary' just now, such a favourite of mine, and it is months since I heard it. Do sing it, dear."

Jane met the doctor's eyes and smiled reassuringly; then turned without any hesitation and did as Flower asked. The prescription had already done her good.

At the last words of the song the doctor's wife bent over and laid a tender little kiss just above his temple, where the thick dark hair was streaked with silver. But the doctor's mind was intent on Jane, and before the final chords were struck he knew he had diagnosed her case correctly. "But she had better go abroad," he thought. "It will take her mind off herself altogether, giving her a larger view of things in general, and a better proportioned view of things in particular. And the boy won't change; or, if he does, Jane will be proved right, to her own satisfaction. But, if this is *her* side, good heavens, what must *his* be! I had wondered what was sapping all his buoyant youthfulness. To care for Jane would be an education; but to have made Jane care! And then to have lost her! He must have nerves of steel, to be facing life at all. What is this cross they are both learning to kiss, and holding up between them? Perhaps Niagara will sweep it away, and she will cable him from there."

Then the doctor took the dear little hand resting on his shoulder and kissed it softly, while Jane's back was still turned. For the doctor had had past experience of the cross, and now the pearls were very precious.

So Jane took the prescription, and two years went by in the taking; and here she was, on the top of the Great Pyramid, and, moreover, she had done it in record time, and laughed as she thought of how she should report the fact to Deryck.

Her Arabs lay around, very hot and shiny, and content. Large backsheesh was assured, and they looked up at her with pleased possessive eyes, as an achievement of their own; hardly realising how large a part her finely developed athletic powers and elastic limbs had played in the speed of the ascent.

And Jane stood there, sound in wind and limb, and with the exhilarating sense, always helpful to the mind, of a bodily feat accomplished.

She was looking her best in her Norfolk coat and skirt of brown tweed with hints of green and orange in it, plenty of useful pockets piped with leather, leather buttons, and a broad band of leather round the bottom of the skirt. A connoisseur would have named at once the one and only firm from which that costume could have come, and the hatter who supplied the soft green Tyrolian hat — for Jane scorned pith helmets — which matched it so admirably. But Schehati was no connoisseur of clothing, though a pretty shrewd judge of ways and manners, and he summed up Jane thus: "Nice gentleman-lady! Give good backsheesh, and not sit down halfway and say: 'No top'! But real lady-gentleman! Give backsheesh with kind face, and not send poor Arab to Assouan."

Jane was deeply tanned by the Eastern sun. Burning a splendid brown, and enjoying the process, she had no need of veils or parasols; and her strong eyes faced the golden light of the desert without the aid of

smoked glasses. She had once heard Garth remark that a sight which made him feel really ill, was the back view of a woman in a motor-veil, and Jane had laughingly agreed, for to her veils of any kind had always seemed superfluous. The heavy coils of her brown hair never blew about into fascinating little curls and wisps, but remained where, with a few well-directed hairpins, she each morning solidly placed them.

Jane had never looked better than she did on this March day, standing on the summit of the Great Pyramid. Strong, brown, and well-knit, a reliable mind in a capable body, the undeniable plainness of her face redeemed by its kindly expression of interest and enjoyment; her wide, pleasant smile revealing her fine white teeth, witnesses to her perfect soundness and health, within and without.

"Nice gentleman-lady," murmured Schehati again; and had Jane overheard the remark it would not have offended her; for, though she held a masculine woman only one degree less in abhorrence than an effeminate man, she would have taken Schehati's compound noun as a tribute to the fact that she was well-groomed and independent, knowing her own mind, and, when she started out to go to a place, reaching it in the shortest possible time, without fidget, fuss, or flurry. These three feminine attributes were held in scorn by Jane, who knew herself so deeply womanly that she could afford in minor ways to be frankly unfeminine.

The doctor's prescription had worked admirably. That look of falling to pieces and ageing prematurely — a general dilapidation of mind and body — which it had grieved and startled him to see in Jane as she sat before him on the music-stool, was gone com-

pletely. She looked a calm, pleasant thirty; ready to go happily on, year by year, towards an equally agreeable and delightful forty; and not afraid of fifty, when that time should come. Her clear eyes looked frankly out upon the world, and her sane mind formed sound opinions and pronounced fair judgments, tempered by the kindness of an unusually large and generous heart.

Just now she was considering the view and finding it very good. Its strong contrasts held her.

On one side lay the fertile Delta, with its groves of waving palm, orange, and olive trees, growing in rich profusion on the banks of the Nile, a broad band of gleaming silver. On the other, the Desert, with its far-distant horizon, stretching away in undulations of golden sand; not a tree, not a leaf, not a blade of grass, but boundless liberty, an ocean of solid golden glory. For the sun was setting, and the sky flamed into colour.

"A parting of the ways," said Jane; "a place of choice. How difficult to know which to choose — liberty or fruitfulness. One would have to consult the Sphinx — wise old guardian of the ages, silent keeper of Time's secrets, gazing on into the future as It has always gazed, while future became present, and present glided into past. — Come, Schehati, let us descend. Oh yes, I will certainly sit upon the stone on which the King sat when he was Prince of Wales. Thank you for mentioning it. It will supply a delightful topic of conversation next time I am honoured by a few minutes of his gracious Majesty's attention, and will save me from floundering into trite remarks about the weather. — And now take me to the Sphinx, Schehati. There is a question I would ask of It, just as the sun dips below the horizon."