The Humiliation of the Butler.

He was an ideal butler—that is to say, an ideal specimen of a young butler, who might be confidently expected to ripen and mellow into the elderly family butler, beloved of English novelists.

His early years had been spent in the army; but a naturally sedate nature had softened the military swagger into a stately dignity of bearing. His information on ordinary and extraordinary subjects was extensive and edifying; his discretion was absolute.

To me he was an object of unfailing interest; my only regret being that as I was not intimate with the family he adorned, my opportunities of studying him were few. Therefore it was almost with joy that I heard he had been sent down to our little cottage hospital. Armed with a large bunch of grapes, I set out to visit him.

Mrs. Amble has been the Matron of our cottage hospital since the dark ages almost, and has a motherly regard for the neighbourhood.

"My child," she said, "that man is the plague of my life, and there's no knowing where he is this minute; but take my word for it, he's not within these walls. But he's me only patient just now, so have a cup of tea with me, and then you can look for him."

A cup of tea with Mrs. Amble is no trifle, and the evening was drawing in before I set out to find my butler. My hostess accompanied me through the garden, proud to show me her early peas, and to hear me extol her roses; then I struck off into the fields and looked about me. At the bottom of the field where our hospital's one cow lived her solitary life runs a placid river, feeling its contented way to Shakespeare's Avon. There I saw a fisherman. Could it be? Yes, it was, my butler! (I say mine, because to me belonged the discovery that he was a unique and flawless specimen.)

His boots bore witness that his sport had been pursued with more ardour than discretion—for an invalid—but his air was melancholy, his expression dismal. At my approach he balanced his rod daintily on the bank and came towards me. I ventured mildly to express my wonder at his occupation.

"Her Ladyship's suggestion—her Ladyship believes in fresh air."

"Oh!" I could think of nothing more original to remark.

"You see," he began confidentially, "her Ladyship thinks I'm in consumption; nothing will convince her that I'm not. Dr. Green, he don't think so; in fact, he says a sounder man never breathed. But her Ladyship don't put no faith in Dr. Green; so here I am."

"But what could make her think *you* consumptive?" I asked.

"Well, it's like this. I was a bit off colour a while ago. Between you and me, though I wouldn't like it to get about, me and Amos Hadland were having a bit of a spar in the harness-room. He's a likely lad, and I've taught him a bit; and you might say he got the least little bit the better of me that day. You know he's weight, has Amos; but he's no finesse—none at all. I don't mind telling you he punished me a bit; and consequently, as I said, I was a bit off colour for a few days. Now her Ladyship's very kind, not to say the least bit interfering, and she asked and asked till she found out how I'd been, but not what had made me bad. And not knowing any reason for it, and being a bit keen on consumption through having a bit of a hand in starting a place down south for consumptives, she jumps to it that that's what I've gone and got."

"It's hard lines for you, Jackson."

"Hard lines it is; and the worst of it is I'm to be sent to a hospital somewhere. I don't lay any money on hospitals, not my line at all, specially when a man's fit; but there! Her Ladyship's that set on me having consumption you'd thind her life depended on it." And he heaved a sigh that made me, the uninitiated, think that his lungs must resemble a blacksmith's bellows.

He thanked me for my visit, and the grapes, and as I left him beside the river he seemed to me a pathetic, almost a tragic, figure. One may, I suppose, be born with disease; one may achieve disease, but to have disease thrust upon one in such an arbitrary manner was, to my mind, melancholy in the extreme.

For some time my prince among butlers passed out of my ken; then, one sunny autumn day, I met him in the village street: but what a change was there! He had been wont to take his walks abroad along the middle of the road: his demeanour one of dignity tinged with benevolence, carrying with him a glow of pomp and mystery, reflected from the great house which he served. Could this hatless, strangely meek looking person hurrying along our apology for a pavement as though he were striving to take as little room as possible, be my old acquaintance? His melancholy salute convinced me, and I stayed to ask him how he did.

"I am cured, thank you," he remarked in a tone of dignified despair. "They wouldn't have me in no hospital, so her Ladyship sent me to the place that she helps to support. I did the open air cure."

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