

## CHAPTER IX. - JIMMY.

With the exception of myself, Jimmy Moggridge was no doubt the most silent of the company that met so frequently in my rooms. Just as Marriot's eyebrows rose if the cane chair was not empty when he strode in, Jimmy held that he had a right to the hearth-rug, on which he loved to lie prone, his back turned to the company and his eyes on his pipe. The stem was a long cherry-wood, but the bowl was meerschaum, and Jimmy, as he smoked, lay on the alert, as it were, to see the meerschaum coloring. So one may strain his eyes with intent eagerness until he can catch the hour-hand of a watch in action. With tobacco in his pocket Jimmy could refill his pipe without moving, but sometimes he crawled along the hearth-rug to let the fire-light play more exquisitely on his meerschaum bowl. In time, of course, the Arcadia Mixture made him more and more like the rest of us, but he retained his individuality until he let his bowl fall off. Otherwise he only differed from us in one way. When he saw a match-box he always extracted a few matches and put them dreamily into his pocket. There were times when, with a sharp blow on Jimmy's person, we could doubtless have had him blazing like a chandelier.

Jimmy was a barrister--though this is scarcely worth mentioning--and it had been known to us for years that he made a living by contributing to the Saturday Review . How the secret leaked out I cannot say with certainty. Jimmy never forced it upon us, and I cannot remember any paragraphs in the London correspondence of the provincial papers coupling his name with Saturday articles. On the other hand, I distinctly recall having to wait one day in his chambers while Jimmy was shaving, and noticing accidentally a long, bulky envelope on his table, with the Saturday Review's mystic crest on it. It was addressed to Jimmy, and contained, I concluded, a bundle of proofs. That was so long ago as 1885. If further evidence is required, there is the undoubted fact, to which several of us could take oath, that, at Oxford, Jimmy was notorious for his sarcastic pen--nearly being sent down, indeed, for the same. Again, there was the certainty that for years Jimmy had been engaged upon literary work of some kind. We had been with him buying the largest-sized scribbling paper in the market; we had heard him muttering to himself as if in pain: and we had seen him correcting proof-sheets. When we caught him at them he always thrust the proofs into a

drawer which he locked by putting his leg on it--for the ordinary lock was broken--and remaining in that position till we had retired. Though he rather shunned the subject as a rule, he admitted to us that the work was journalism and not a sarcastic history of the nineteenth century, on which we felt he would come out strong. Lastly, Jimmy had lost the brightness of his youth, and was become silent and moody, which is well known to be the result of writing satire.

Were it not so notorious that the thousands who write regularly for the Saturday have reasons of their own for keeping it dark and merely admitting the impeachment with a nod or smile, we might have marvelled at Jimmy's reticence. There were, however, moments when he thawed so far as practically to allow, and every one knows what that means, that the Saturday was his chief source of income. "Only," he would add, "should you be acquainted with the editor, don't mention my contributions to him." From this we saw that Jimmy and the editor had an understanding on the subject, though we were never agreed which of them it was who had sworn the other to secrecy. We were proud of Jimmy's connection with the press, and every week we discussed his latest article. Jimmy never told us, except in a roundabout way, which were his articles; but we knew his style, and it was quite exhilarating to pick out his contributions week by week. We were never baffled, for "Jimmy's touches" were unmistakable; and "Have you seen Jimmy this week in the Saturday on Lewis Morris?" or, "I say, do you think Buchanan knows it was Jimmy who wrote that?" was what we said when we had lighted our pipes.

Now I come to the incident that drew from Jimmy his extraordinary statement. I was smoking with him in his rooms one evening, when a clatter at his door was followed by a thud on the floor. I knew as well as Jimmy what had happened. In his pre-Saturday days he had no letter-box, only a slit in the door; and through this we used to denounce him on certain occasions when we called and he would not let us in. Lately, however, he had fitted up a letter-box himself, which kept together if you opened the door gently, but came clattering to the floor under the weight of heavy letters. The letter to which it had succumbed this evening was quite a package, and could even have been used as a missile. Jimmy snatched it up quickly, evidently knowing the contents by their bulk; and I was just saying to myself, "More proofs from the Saturday," when the letter burst at the bottom, and in a moment a score of smaller letters

were tumbling about my feet. In vain did Jimmy entreat me to let him gather them up. I helped, and saw, to my bewilderment, that all the letters were addressed in childish hands to "Uncle Jim, care of Editor of Mothers Pets ." It was impossible that Jimmy could have so many nephews and nieces.

Seeing that I had him, Jimmy advanced to the hearth-rug as if about to make his statement; then changed his mind and, thrusting a dozen of the letters into my hands, invited me to read. The first letter ran: "Dearest Uncle Jim,--I must tell you about my canary. I love my canary very much. It is a yellow canary, and it sings so sweetly. I keep it in a cage, and it is so tame. Mamma and me wishes you would come and see us and our canary. Dear Uncle Jim, I love you.--Your little friend, Milly (aged four years)." Here is the second: "Dear Uncle Jim,--You will want to know about my blackbird. It sits in a tree and picks up the crumbs on the window, and Thomas wants to shoot it for eating the cherries; but I won't let Thomas shoot it, for it is a nice blackbird, and I have wrote all this myself.--Your loving little Bobby (aged five years)." In another, Jacky (aged four and a half) described his parrot, and I have also vague recollections of Harry (aged six) on his chaffinch, and Archie (five) on his linnet. "What does it mean?" I demanded of Jimmy, who, while I read, had been smoking savagely. "Don't you see that they are in for the prize?" he growled. Then he made his statement.

"I have never," Jimmy said, "contributed to the Saturday , nor, indeed, to any well-known paper. That, however, was only because the editors would not meet me half-way. After many disappointments, fortune--whether good or bad I cannot say--introduced me to the editor of Mothers Pets , a weekly journal whose title sufficiently suggests its character. Though you may never have heard of it, Mothers Pets has a wide circulation and is a great property. I was asked to join the staff under the name of 'Uncle Jim,' and did not see my way to refuse. I inaugurated a new feature. Mothers' pets were cordially invited to correspond with me on topics to be suggested week by week, and prizes were to be given for the best letters. This feature has been an enormous success, and I get the most affectionate letters from mothers, consulting me about teething and the like, every week. They say that I am dearer to their children than most real uncles, and they often urge me to go and stay with them. There are lots of kisses awaiting me. I also get similar invitations from the little beasts themselves. Pass the Arcadia."