

CHAPTER XXXI. - THE PERILS OF NOT SMOKING.

When the Arcadians heard that I had signed an agreement to give up smoking they were first incredulous, then sarcastic, then angry. Instead of coming, as usual, to my room, they went one night in a body to Pettigrew's, and there, as I afterward discovered, a scheme for "saving me" was drawn up. So little did they understand the firmness of my character, that they thought I had weakly yielded to the threats of the lady referred to in my first chapter, when, of course, I had only yielded to her arguments, and they agreed to make an appeal on my behalf to her. Pettigrew, as a married man himself, was appointed intercessor, and I understand that the others not only accompanied him to her door, but waited in an alley until he came out. I never knew whether the reasoning brought to bear on the lady was of Pettigrew's devising, or suggested by Jimmy and the others, but it was certainly unselfish of Pettigrew to lie so freely on my account. At the time, however, the plot enraged me, for the lady conceived the absurd idea that I had sent Pettigrew to her. Undoubtedly it was a bold stroke. Pettigrew's scheme was to play upon his hostess's attachment for me by hinting to her that if I gave up smoking I would probably die. Finding her attentive rather than talkative, he soon dared to assure her that he himself loathed tobacco and only took it for his health.

"By the doctor's orders, mark you," he said, impressively; "Dr. Southwick, of Hyde Park."

She expressed polite surprise at this, and then Pettigrew, believing he had made an impression, told his story as concocted.

"My own case," he said, "is one much in point. I suffered lately from sore throat, accompanied by depression of spirits and loss of appetite. The ailment was so unusual with me that I thought it prudent to put myself in Dr. Southwick's hands. As far as possible I shall give you his exact words:

"When did you give up smoking?" he asked, abruptly, after examining my throat.

"Three months ago,' I replied, taken by surprise; 'but how did you know I had given it up?'

"Never mind how I know,' he said, severely; 'I told you that, however much you might desire to do so, you were not to take to not smoking. This is how you carry out my directions.'

"Well,' I answered sulkily, 'I have been feeling so healthy for the last two years that I thought I could indulge myself a little. You are aware how I abominate tobacco.'

"Quite so,' he said, 'and now you see the result of this miserable self-indulgence. Two years ago I prescribed tobacco for you, to be taken three times a day, and you yourself admit that it made a new man of you. Instead of feeling thankful you complain of the brief unpleasantness that accompanies its consumption, and now, in the teeth of my instructions, you give it up. I must say the ways of patients are a constant marvel to me.'

"But how,' I asked, 'do you know that my reverting to the pleasant habit of not smoking is the cause of my present ailment?'

"Oh!' he said, 'you are not sure of that yourself, are you?'

"I thought,' I replied, 'there might be a doubt about it; though of course I have forgotten what you told me two years ago.'

"It matters very little,' he said, 'whether you remember what I tell you if you do not follow my orders. But as for knowing that indulgence in not smoking is what has brought you to this state, how long is it since you noticed these symptoms?'

"I can hardly say,' I answered. 'Still, I should be able to think back. I had my first sore throat this year the night I saw Mr. Irving at the Lyceum, and that was on my wife's birthday, the 3d of October. How long ago is that?'

"Why, that is more than three months ago. Are you sure of the date?'"

"Quite certain,' I told him; 'so, you see, I had my first sore throat before I risked not smoking again.'"

"I don't understand this,' he said. 'Do you mean to say that in the beginning of May you were taking my prescription daily? You were not

missing a day now and then--forgetting to order a new stock of cigars when the others were done, or flinging them away before they were half smoked? Patients do such things.'

"No, I assure you I compelled myself to smoke. At least----'

"At least what? Come, now, if I am to be of any service to you, there must be no reserve.'

"Well, now that I think of it, I was only smoking one cigar a day at that time.'

"Ah! we have it now,' he cried. 'One cigar a day, when I ordered you three? I might have guessed as much. When I tell non-smokers that they must smoke or I will not be answerable for the consequences, they entreat me to let them break themselves of the habit of not smoking gradually. One cigarette a day to begin with, they beg of me, promising to increase the dose by degrees. Why, man, one cigarette a day is poison; it is worse than not smoking.'

"But that is not what I did.'

"The idea is the same,' he said. 'Like the others, you make all this moan about giving up completely a habit you should never have acquired. For my own part, I cannot even understand where the subtle delights of not smoking come in. Compared with health, they are surely immaterial.'

"Of course, I admit that.'

"Then, if you admit it, why pamper yourself?'

"I suppose because one is weak in matters of habit. You have many cases like mine?'

"I have such cases every week,' he told me; 'indeed, it was having so many cases of the kind that made me a specialist in the subject. When I began practice I had not the least notion how common the non-tobacco throat, as I call it, is.'

"But the disease has been known, has it not, for a long time?'

"Yes,' he said; 'but the cause has only been discovered recently. I could explain the malady to you scientifically, as many medical men would prefer to do, but you are better to have it in plain English.'

"Certainly; but I should like to know whether the symptoms in other cases have been in every way similar to mine.'

"They have doubtless differed in degree, but not otherwise,' he answered. 'For instance, you say your sore throat is accompanied by depression of spirits.'

"Yes; indeed, the depression sometimes precedes the sore throat.'

"Exactly. I presume, too, that you feel most depressed in the evening--say, immediately after dinner?'

"That is certainly the time I experience the depression most.'

"The result,' he said, 'if I may venture on somewhat delicate matters, is that your depression of spirits infects your wife and family, even your servants?'

"That is quite true,' I answered. 'Our home has by no means been so happy as formerly. When a man is out of spirits, I suppose, he tends to be brusque and undemonstrative to his wife, and to be easily irritated by his children. Certainly that has been the case with me of late.'

"Yes,' he exclaimed, 'and all because you have not carried out my directions. Men ought to see that they have no right to indulge in not smoking, if only for the sake of their wives and families. A bachelor has more excuse, perhaps; but think of the example you set your children in not making an effort to shake this self-indulgence off. In short, smoke for the sake of your wife and family, if you won't smoke for the sake of your health.'"

I think this is pretty nearly the whole of Pettigrew's story, but I may add that he left the house in depression of spirits, and then infected Jimmy and the others with the same ailment, so that they should all have hurried in a cab to the house of Dr. Southwick.

"Honestly," Pettigrew said, "I don't think she believed a word I told her."

"If she had only been a man," Marriot sighed, "we could have got round her."

"How?" asked Pettigrew.

"Why, of course," said Marriot, "we could have sent her a tin of the Arcadia."