

THE MAN OF SCIENCE.

XIII.

Then Doctor Crump arrived. Grummet had met him not a hundred yards from the vicarage gate. He was a large, rather heavy-looking man, with a clean-shaven face and a double chin. He was dressed in a grey morning coat (he always affected grey), with a chequered black and white tie.

"What's the trouble?" he said, entering and staring without a shadow of surprise at the Angel's radiant face.

"This--ahem--gentleman," said the Vicar, "or--ah--Angel"--the Angel bowed--"is suffering from a gunshot wound."

"Gunshot wound!" said Doctor Crump. "In July! May I look at it, Mr--Angel, I think you said?"

"He will probably be able to assuage your pain," said the Vicar. "Let me assist you to remove your coat?"

The Angel turned obediently.

"Spinal curvature?" muttered Doctor Crump quite audibly, walking round behind the Angel. "No! abnormal growth. Hullo! This is odd!" He clutched the left wing. "Curious," he said. "Reduplication of the anterior

limb--bifid coracoid. Possible, of course, but I've never seen it before." The angel winced under his hands. "Humerus. Radius and Ulna. All there. Congenital, of course. Humerus broken. Curious integumentary simulation of feathers. Dear me. Almost avian. Probably of considerable interest in comparative anatomy. I never did!----How did this gunshot happen, Mr Angel?"

The Vicar was amazed at the Doctor's matter-of-fact manner.

"Our friend," said the Angel, moving his head at the Vicar.

"Unhappily it is my doing," said the Vicar, stepping forward, explanatory. "I mistook the gentleman--the Angel (ahem)--for a large bird----"

"Mistook him for a large bird! What next? Your eyes want seeing to," said Doctor Crump. "I've told you so before." He went on patting and feeling, keeping time with a series of grunts and inarticulate mutterings.... "But this is really a very good bit of amateur bandaging," said he. "I think I shall leave it. Curious malformation this is! Don't you find it inconvenient, Mr Angel?"

He suddenly walked round so as to look in the Angel's face.

The Angel thought he referred to the wound. "It is rather," he said.

"If it wasn't for the bones I should say paint with iodine night and morning. Nothing like iodine. You could paint your face flat with it. But the osseous outgrowth, the bones, you know, complicate things. I could saw them off, of course. It's not a thing one should have done in a hurry----"

"Do you mean my wings?" said the Angel in alarm.

"Wings!" said the Doctor. "Eigh? Call 'em wings! Yes--what else should I mean?"

"Saw them off!" said the Angel.

"Don't you think so? It's of course your affair. I am only advising----"

"Saw them off! What a funny creature you are!" said the Angel, beginning to laugh.

"As you will," said the Doctor. He detested people who laughed. "The things are curious," he said, turning to the Vicar. "If inconvenient"--to the Angel. "I never heard of such complete reduplication before--at least among animals. In plants it's common enough. Were you the only one in your family?" He did not wait for a reply. "Partial cases of the fission of limbs are not at all uncommon, of course, Vicar--six-fingered children, calves with six feet, and cats with double toes, you know. May I assist you?" he said, turning to the

Angel who was struggling with the coat. "But such a complete reduplication, and so avian, too! It would be much less remarkable if it was simply another pair of arms."

The coat was got on and he and the Angel stared at one another.

"Really," said the Doctor, "one begins to understand how that beautiful myth of the angels arose. You look a little hectic, Mr Angel--feverish. Excessive brilliance is almost worse as a symptom than excessive pallor. Curious your name should be Angel. I must send you a cooling draught, if you should feel thirsty in the night...."

He made a memorandum on his shirt cuff. The Angel watched him thoughtfully, with the dawn of a smile in his eyes.

"One minute, Crump," said the Vicar, taking the Doctor's arm and leading him towards the door.

The Angel's smile grew brighter. He looked down at his black-clad legs.

"He positively thinks I am a man!" said the Angel. "What he makes of the wings beats me altogether. What a queer creature he must be! This is really a most extraordinary Dream!"

XIV.

"That is an Angel," whispered the Vicar. "You don't understand."

"What?" said the Doctor in a quick, sharp voice. His eyebrows went up and he smiled.

"But the wings?"

"Quite natural, quite ... if a little abnormal."

"Are you sure they are natural?"

"My dear fellow, everything that is, is natural. There is nothing unnatural in the world. If I thought there was I should give up practice and go into Le Grand Chartreuse. There are abnormal phenomena, of course. And----"

"But the way I came upon him," said the Vicar.

"Yes, tell me where you picked him up," said the Doctor. He sat down on the hall table.

The Vicar began rather hesitatingly--he was not very good at story telling--with the rumours of a strange great bird. He told the story in

clumsy sentences--for, knowing the Bishop as he did, with that awful example always before him he dreaded getting his pulpit style into his daily conversation--and at every third sentence or so, the Doctor made a downward movement of his head--the corners of his mouth tucked away, so to speak--as though he ticked off the phases of the story and so far found it just as it ought to be. "Self-hypnotism," he murmured once.

"I beg your pardon?" said the Vicar.

"Nothing," said the Doctor. "Nothing, I assure you. Go on. This is extremely interesting."

The Vicar told him he went out with his gun.

"After lunch, I think you said?" interrupted the Doctor.

"Immediately after," said the Vicar.

"You should not do such things, you know. But go on, please."

He came to the glimpse of the Angel from the gate.

"In the full glare," said the Doctor, in parenthesis. "It was seventy-nine in the shade."

When the Vicar had finished, the Doctor pressed his lips together

tighter than ever, smiled faintly, and looked significantly into the Vicar's eyes.

"You don't ..." began the Vicar, falteringly.

The Doctor shook his head. "Forgive me," he said, putting his hand on the Vicar's arm.

"You go out," he said, "on a hot lunch and on a hot afternoon. Probably over eighty. Your mind, what there is of it, is whirling with avian expectations. I say, 'what there is of it,' because most of your nervous energy is down there, digesting your dinner. A man who has been lying in the bracken stands up before you and you blaze away. Over he goes--and as it happens--as it happens--he has reduplicate fore-limbs, one pair being not unlike wings. It's a coincidence certainly. And as for his iridescent colours and so forth----. Have you never had patches of colour swim before your eyes before, on a brilliant sunlight day?... Are you sure they were confined to the wings? Think."

"But he says he is an Angel!" said the Vicar, staring out of his little round eyes, his plump hands in his pockets.

"Ah!" said the Doctor with his eye on the Vicar. "I expected as much." He paused.

"But don't you think ..." began the Vicar.

"That man," said the Doctor in a low, earnest voice, "is a mattoid."

"A what?" said the Vicar.

"A mattoid. An abnormal man. Did you notice the effeminate delicacy of his face? His tendency to quite unmeaning laughter? His neglected hair? Then consider his singular dress...."

The Vicar's hand went up to his chin.

"Marks of mental weakness," said the Doctor. "Many of this type of degenerate show this same disposition to assume some vast mysterious credentials. One will call himself the Prince of Wales, another the Archangel Gabriel, another the Deity even. Ibsen thinks he is a Great Teacher, and Maeterlink a new Shakespeare. I've just been reading all about it--in Nordau. No doubt his odd deformity gave him an idea...."

"But really," began the Vicar.

"No doubt he's slipped away from confinement."

"I do not altogether accept...."

"You will. If not, there's the police, and failing that, advertisement; but, of course, his people may want to hush it up. It's a sad thing in a

family...."

"He seems so altogether...."

"Probably you'll hear from his friends in a day or so," said the Doctor, feeling for his watch. "He can't live far from here, I should think. He seems harmless enough. I must come along and see that wing again to-morrow." He slid off the hall table and stood up.

"Those old wives' tales still have their hold on you," he said, patting the Vicar on the shoulder. "But an angel, you know--Ha, ha!"

"I certainly did think...." said the Vicar dubiously.

"Weigh the evidence," said the Doctor, still fumbling at his watch.

"Weigh the evidence with our instruments of precision. What does it leave you? Splashes of colour, spots of fancy--muscae volantes."

"And yet," said the Vicar, "I could almost swear to the glory on his wings...."

"Think it over," said the Doctor (watch out); "hot afternoon--brilliant sunshine--boiling down on your head.... But really I must be going. It is a quarter to five. I'll see your--angel (ha, ha!) to-morrow again, if no one has been to fetch him in the meanwhile. Your bandaging was really very good. I flatter myself on that score. Our ambulance classes

were a success you see.... Good afternoon."