The Woman in White

Wilkie Collins

Epoch Two

The Story Continued by Eliza Michelson, Part I

THE STORY CONTINUED BY ELIZA MICHELSON, Housekeeper at Blackwater Park.

I am asked to state plainly what I know of the progress of Miss Halcombe's illness and of the circumstances under which Lady Glyde left Blackwater Park for London.

The reason given for making this demand on me is, that my testimony is wanted in the interests of truth. As the widow of a clergyman of the Church of England (reduced by misfortune to the necessity of accepting a situation), I have been taught to place the claims of truth above all other considerations. I therefore comply with a request which I might otherwise, through reluctance to connect myself with distressing family affairs, have hesitated to grant.

I made no memorandum at the time, and I cannot therefore be sure to a day of the date, but I believe I am correct in stating that Miss Halcombe's serious illness began during the last fortnight or ten days in June. The breakfast hour was late at Blackwater Park— sometimes as late as ten, never earlier than half-past nine. On the morning to which I am now referring, Miss Halcombe (who was usually the first to come down) did not make her appearance at the table. After the family had waited a quarter of an hour, the upper housemaid was sent to see after her, and came running out of the room dreadfully frightened. I met the servant on the stairs, and went at once to Miss Halcombe to see what was the matter. The poor lady was incapable of telling me. She was walking about her room with a pen in her hand, quite light-headed, in a state of burning fever.

Lady Glyde (being no longer in Sir Percival's service, I may, without impropriety, mention my former mistress by her name, instead of calling her my lady) was the first to come in from her own bedroom. She was so dreadfully alarmed and distressed that she was quite useless. The Count Fosco, and his lady, who came upstairs immediately afterwards, were both most serviceable and kind. Her ladyship assisted me to get Miss

Halcombe to her bed. His lordship the Count remained in the sitting-room, and having sent for my medicine-chest, made a mixture for Miss Halcombe, and a cooling lotion to be applied to her head, so as to lose no time before the doctor came. We applied the lotion, but we could not get her to take the mixture. Sir Percival undertook to send for the doctor. He despatched a groom, on horseback, for the nearest medical man, Mr. Dawson, of Oak Lodge.

Mr. Dawson arrived in less than an hour's time. He was a respectable elderly man, well known all round the country, and we were much alarmed when we found that he considered the case to be a very serious one.

His lordship the Count affably entered into conversation with Mr. Dawson, and gave his opinions with a judicious freedom. Mr. Dawson, not over-courteously, inquired if his lordship's advice was the advice of a doctor, and being informed that it was the advice of one who had studied medicine unprofessionally, replied that he was not accustomed to consult with amateur physicians. The Count, with truly Christian meekness of temper, smiled and left the room. Before he went out he told me that he might be found, in case he was wanted in the course of the day, at the boat-house on the banks of the lake. Why he should have gone there, I cannot say. But he did go, remaining away the whole day till seven o'clock, which was dinner-time. Perhaps he wished to set the example of keeping the house as quiet as possible. It was entirely in his character to do so. He was a most considerate nobleman.

Miss Halcombe passed a very bad night, the fever coming and going, and getting worse towards the morning instead of better. No nurse fit to wait on her being at hand in the neighbourhood, her ladyship the Countess and myself undertook the duty, relieving each other. Lady Glyde, most unwisely, insisted on sitting up with us. She was much too nervous and too delicate in health to bear the anxiety of Miss Halcombe's illness calmly. She only did herself harm, without being of the least real assistance. A more gentle and affectionate lady never lived—but she cried, and she was frightened, two weaknesses which made her entirely unfit to be present in a sick-room.

Sir Percival and the Count came in the morning to make their inquiries.

Sir Percival (from distress, I presume, at his lady's affliction and at Miss Halcombe's illness) appeared much confused and unsettled in his mind. His lordship testified, on the contrary, a becoming composure and interest. He had his straw hat in one hand, and his book in the other, and he mentioned to Sir Percival in my hearing that he would go out again and study at the lake. "Let us keep the house quiet," he said.

"Let us not smoke indoors, my friend, now Miss Halcombe is ill. You go your way, and I will go mine. When I study I like to be alone. Good-morning, Mrs. Michelson."

Sir Percival was not civil enough—perhaps I ought in justice to say, not composed enough—to take leave of me with the same polite attention. The only person in the house, indeed, who treated me, at that time or at any other, on the footing of a lady in distressed circumstances, was the Count. He had the manners of a true nobleman—he was considerate towards every one. Even the young person (Fanny by name) who attended on Lady Glyde was not beneath his notice. When she was sent away by Sir Percival, his lordship (showing me his sweet little birds at the time) was most kindly anxious to know what had become of her, where she was to go the day she left Blackwater Park, and so on. It is in such little delicate attentions that the advantages of aristocratic birth always show themselves. I make no apology for introducing these particulars—they are brought forward in justice to his lordship, whose character, I have reason to know, is viewed rather harshly in certain quarters. A nobleman who can respect a lady in distressed circumstances, and can take a fatherly interest in the fortunes of an humble servant girl, shows principles and feelings of too high an order to be lightly called in question. I advance no opinions—I offer facts only. My endeavour through life is to judge not that I be not judged. One of my beloved husband's finest sermons was on that text. I read it constantly—in my own copy of the edition printed by subscription, in the first days of my widowhood—and at every fresh perusal I derive an increase of spiritual benefit and edification.

There was no improvement in Miss Halcombe, and the second night was even worse than the first. Mr. Dawson was constant in his attendance. The practical duties of nursing were still divided between the Countess and myself, Lady Glyde persisting in sitting up with us, though we both entreated her to take some rest. "My place is by Marian's bedside," was her only answer. "Whether I am ill, or well, nothing will induce me to lose sight of her."

Towards midday I went downstairs to attend to some of my regular duties. An hour afterwards, on my way back to the sick-room, I saw the Count (who had gone out again early, for the third time) entering the hall, to all appearance in the highest good spirits. Sir Percival, at the same moment, put his head out of the library door, and addressed his noble friend, with extreme eagerness, in these words—

"Have you found her?"

His lordship's large face became dimpled all over with placid smiles, but he made no reply in words. At the same time Sir Percival turned his head, observed that I was approaching the stairs, and looked at me in the most rudely angry manner possible.

"Come in here and tell me about it," he said to the Count. "Whenever there are women in a house they're always sure to be going up or down stairs."

"My dear Percival," observed his lordship kindly, "Mrs. Michelson has duties. Pray recognise her admirable performance of them as sincerely as I do! How is the sufferer, Mrs. Michelson?"

"No better, my lord, I regret to say."

"Sad—most sad!" remarked the Count. "You look fatigued, Mrs. Michelson. It is certainly time you and my wife had some help in nursing. I think I may be the means of offering you that help. Circumstances have happened which will oblige Madame Fosco to travel to London either to-morrow or the day after. She will go away in the morning and return at night, and she will bring back with her, to relieve you, a nurse of excellent conduct and capacity, who is now disengaged. The woman is known to my wife as a person to be trusted. Before she comes here say nothing about her, if you please, to the doctor, because he will look with an evil eye on any nurse of my providing. When she appears in this house she will speak for herself, and Mr. Dawson will be obliged to acknowledge that there is no excuse for not employing her. Lady Glyde will say the same. Pray present my best respects and sympathies to Lady Glyde."

I expressed my grateful acknowledgments for his lordship's kind consideration. Sir Percival cut them short by calling to his noble friend (using, I regret to say, a profane expression) to come into the library, and not to keep him waiting there any longer.

I proceeded upstairs. We are poor erring creatures, and however well established a woman's principles may be she cannot always keep on her guard against the temptation to exercise an idle curiosity. I am ashamed to say that an idle curiosity, on this occasion, got the better of my principles, and made me unduly inquisitive about the question which Sir Percival had addressed to his noble friend at the library door. Who was the Count expected to find in the course of his studious morning rambles at Blackwater Park? A woman, it was to be presumed, from the terms of Sir Percival's inquiry. I did not suspect the Count of any impropriety—I knew his moral character too well. The only question I asked myself was—Had he found her?

To resume. The night passed as usual without producing any change for the better in Miss Halcombe. The next day she seemed to improve a little. The day after that her ladyship the Countess, without mentioning the object of her journey to any one in

my hearing, proceeded by the morning train to London—her noble husband, with his customary attention, accompanying her to the station.

I was now left in sole charge of Miss Halcombe, with every apparent chance, in consequence of her sister's resolution not to leave the bedside, of having Lady Glyde herself to nurse next.

The only circumstance of any importance that happened in the course of the day was the occurrence of another unpleasant meeting between the doctor and the Count.

His lordship, on returning from the station, stepped up into Miss Halcombe's sitting-room to make his inquiries. I went out from the bedroom to speak to him, Mr. Dawson and Lady Glyde being both with the patient at the time. The Count asked me many questions about the treatment and the symptoms. I informed him that the treatment was of the kind described as "saline," and that the symptoms, between the attacks of fever, were certainly those of increasing weakness and exhaustion. Just as I was mentioning these last particulars, Mr. Dawson came out from the bedroom.

"Good-morning, sir," said his lordship, stepping forward in the most urbane manner, and stopping the doctor, with a high-bred resolution impossible to resist, "I greatly fear you find no improvement in the symptoms to-day?"

"I find decided improvement," answered Mr. Dawson.

"You still persist in your lowering treatment of this case of fever?" continued his lordship.

"I persist in the treatment which is justified by my own professional experience," said Mr. Dawson.

"Permit me to put one question to you on the vast subject of professional experience," observed the Count. "I presume to offer no more advice—I only presume to make an inquiry. You live at some distance, sir, from the gigantic centres of scientific activity—London and Paris. Have you ever heard of the wasting effects of fever being reasonably and intelligibly repaired by fortifying the exhausted patient with brandy, wine, ammonia, and quinine? Has that new heresy of the highest medical authorities ever reached your ears—Yes or No?"

"When a professional man puts that question to me I shall be glad to answer him," said the doctor, opening the door to go out. "You are not a professional man, and I beg to decline answering you."

Buffeted in this inexcusably uncivil way on one cheek, the Count, like a practical Christian, immediately turned the other, and said, in the sweetest manner, "Good-morning, Mr. Dawson."

If my late beloved husband had been so fortunate as to know his lordship, how highly he and the Count would have esteemed each other!

Her ladyship the Countess returned by the last train that night, and brought with her the nurse from London. I was instructed that this person's name was Mrs. Rubelle. Her personal appearance, and her imperfect English when she spoke, informed me that she was a foreigner.

I have always cultivated a feeling of humane indulgence for foreigners. They do not possess our blessings and advantages, and they are, for the most part, brought up in the blind errors of Popery. It has also always been my precept and practice, as it was my dear husband's precept and practice before me (see Sermon XXIX. in the Collection by the late Rev. Samuel Michelson, M.A.), to do as I would be done by. On both these accounts I will not say that Mrs. Rubelle struck me as being a small, wiry, sly person, of fifty or thereabouts, with a dark brown or Creole complexion and watchful light grey eyes. Nor will I mention, for the reasons just alleged, that I thought her dress, though it was of the plainest black silk, inappropriately costly in texture and unnecessarily refined in trimming and finish, for a person in her position in life. I should not like these things to be said of me, and therefore it is my duty not to say them of Mrs. Rubelle. I will merely mention that her manners were, not perhaps unpleasantly reserved, but only remarkably quiet and retiring— that she looked about her a great deal, and said very little, which might have arisen quite as much from her own modesty as from distrust of her position at Blackwater Park; and that she declined to partake of supper (which was curious perhaps, but surely not suspicious?), although I myself politely invited her to that meal in my own room.

At the Count's particular suggestion (so like his lordship's forgiving kindness!), it was arranged that Mrs. Rubelle should not enter on her duties until she had been seen and approved by the doctor the next morning. I sat up that night. Lady Glyde appeared to be very unwilling that the new nurse should be employed to attend on Miss Halcombe. Such want of liberality towards a foreigner on the part of a lady of her education and refinement surprised me. I ventured to say, "My lady, we must all remember not to be hasty in our judgments on our inferiors— especially when they come from foreign parts." Lady Glyde did not appear to attend to me. She only sighed, and kissed Miss Halcombe's hand as it lay on the counterpane. Scarcely a judicious proceeding in a sick-room, with a patient whom it was highly desirable not to excite. But poor Lady Glyde knew nothing of nursing—nothing whatever, I am sorry to say.

The next morning Mrs. Rubelle was sent to the sitting-room, to be approved by the doctor on his way through to the bedroom.

I left Lady Glyde with Miss Halcombe, who was slumbering at the time, and joined Mrs. Rubelle, with the object of kindly preventing her from feeling strange and nervous in consequence of the uncertainty of her situation. She did not appear to see it in that light. She seemed to be quite satisfied, beforehand, that Mr. Dawson would approve of her, and she sat calmly looking out of window, with every appearance of enjoying the country air. Some people might have thought such conduct suggestive of brazen assurance. I beg to say that I more liberally set it down to extraordinary strength of mind.

Instead of the doctor coming up to us, I was sent for to see the doctor. I thought this change of affairs rather odd, but Mrs. Rubelle did not appear to be affected by it in any way. I left her still calmly looking out of the window, and still silently enjoying the country air.

Mr. Dawson was waiting for me by himself in the breakfast-room.

"About this new nurse, Mrs. Michelson," said the doctor.

"Yes, sir?"

"I find that she has been brought here from London by the wife of that fat old foreigner, who is always trying to interfere with me. Mrs. Michelson, the fat old foreigner is a quack."

This was very rude. I was naturally shocked at it.

"Are you aware, sir," I said, "that you are talking of a nobleman?"

"Pooh! He isn't the first quack with a handle to his name. They're all Counts—hang 'em!"

"He would not be a friend of Sir Percival Glyde's, sir, if he was not a member of the highest aristocracy—excepting the English aristocracy, of course."

"Very well, Mrs. Michelson, call him what you like, and let us get back to the nurse. I have been objecting to her already."

"Without having seen her, sir?"

"Yes, without having seen her. She may be the best nurse in existence, but she is not a nurse of my providing. I have put that objection to Sir Percival, as the master of the house. He doesn't support me. He says a nurse of my providing would have been a stranger from London also, and he thinks the woman ought to have a trial, after his wife's aunt has taken the trouble to fetch her from London. There is some justice in that, and I can't decently say No. But I have made it a condition that she

is to go at once, if I find reason to complain of her. This proposal being one which I have some right to make, as medical attendant, Sir Percival has consented to it. Now, Mrs. Michelson, I know I can depend on you, and I want you to keep a sharp eye on the nurse for the first day or two, and to see that she gives Miss Halcombe no medicines but mine. This foreign nobleman of yours is dying to try his quack remedies (mesmerism included) on my patient, and a nurse who is brought here by his wife may be a little too willing to help him. You understand? Very well, then, we may go upstairs. Is the nurse there? I'll say a word to her before she goes into the sick-room."

We found Mrs. Rubelle still enjoying herself at the window. When I introduced her to Mr. Dawson, neither the doctor's doubtful looks nor the doctor's searching questions appeared to confuse her in the least. She answered him quietly in her broken English, and though he tried hard to puzzle her, she never betrayed the least ignorance, so far, about any part of her duties. This was doubtless the result of strength of mind, as I said before, and not of brazen assurance, by any means.

We all went into the bedroom.

Mrs. Rubelle looked very attentively at the patient, curtseyed to Lady Glyde, set one or two little things right in the room, and sat down quietly in a corner to wait until she was wanted. Her ladyship seemed startled and annoyed by the appearance of the strange nurse. No one said anything, for fear of rousing Miss Halcombe, who was still slumbering, except the doctor, who whispered a question about the night. I softly answered, "Much as usual," and then Mr. Dawson went out. Lady Glyde followed him, I suppose to speak about Mrs. Rubelle. For my own part, I had made up my mind already that this quiet foreign person would keep her situation. She had all her wits about her, and she certainly understood her business. So far, I could hardly have done much better by the bedside myself.

Remembering Mr. Dawson's caution to me, I subjected Mrs. Rubelle to a severe scrutiny at certain intervals for the next three or four days. I over and over again entered the room softly and suddenly, but I never found her out in any suspicious action. Lady Glyde, who watched her as attentively as I did, discovered nothing either. I never detected a sign of the medicine bottles being tampered with, I never saw Mrs. Rubelle say a word to the Count, or the Count to her. She managed Miss Halcombe with unquestionable care and discretion. The poor lady wavered backwards and forwards between a sort of sleepy exhaustion, which was half faintness and half slumbering, and attacks of fever which brought with them more or less of wandering in her mind. Mrs. Rubelle never disturbed her in the first case, and never startled her in the

second, by appearing too suddenly at the bedside in the character of a stranger. Honour to whom honour is due (whether foreign or English and I give her privilege impartially to Mrs. Rubelle. She was remarkably uncommunicative about herself, and she was too quietly independent of all advice from experienced persons who understood the duties of a sick-room—but with these drawbacks, she was a good nurse, and she never gave either Lady Glyde or Mr. Dawson the shadow of a reason for complaining of her.

The next circumstance of importance that occurred in the house was the temporary absence of the Count, occasioned by business which took him to London. He went away (I think) on the morning of the fourth day after the arrival of Mrs. Rubelle, and at parting he spoke to Lady Glyde very seriously, in my presence, on the subject of Miss Halcombe.

"Trust Mr. Dawson," he said, "for a few days more, if you please. But if there is not some change for the better in that time, send for advice from London, which this mule of a doctor must accept in spite of himself. Offend Mr. Dawson, and save Miss Halcombe. I say this seriously, on my word of honour and from the bottom of my heart."

His lordship spoke with extreme feeling and kindness. But poor Lady Glyde's nerves were so completely broken down that she seemed quite frightened at him. She trembled from head to foot, and allowed him to take his leave without uttering a word on her side. She turned to me when he had gone, and said, "Oh, Mrs. Michelson, I am heart-broken about my sister, and I have no friend to advise me! Do you think Mr. Dawson is wrong? He told me himself this morning that there was no fear, and no need to send for another doctor."

"With all respect to Mr. Dawson," I answered, "in your ladyship's place I should remember the Count's advice."

Lady Glyde turned away from me suddenly, with an appearance of despair, for which I was quite unable to account.

"HIS advice!" she said to herself. "God help us—HIS advice!"

The Count was away from Blackwater Park, as nearly as I remember, a week.

Sir Percival seemed to feel the loss of his lordship in various ways, and appeared also, I thought, much depressed and altered by the sickness and sorrow in the house. Occasionally he was so very restless that I could not help noticing it, coming and going, and wandering here and there and everywhere in the grounds. His inquiries about Miss Halcombe, and about his lady (whose failing health seemed to cause him sincere anxiety), were most attentive. I think his heart was much softened. If some

kind clerical friend—some such friend as he might have found in my late excellent husband—had been near him at this time, cheering moral progress might have been made with Sir Percival. I seldom find myself mistaken on a point of this sort, having had experience to guide me in my happy married days.

Her ladyship the Countess, who was now the only company for Sir Percival downstairs, rather neglected him, as I considered—or, perhaps, it might have been that he neglected her. A stranger might almost have supposed that they were bent, now they were left together alone, on actually avoiding one another. This, of course, could not be. But it did so happen, nevertheless, that the Countess made her dinner at luncheon-time, and that she always came upstairs towards evening, although Mrs. Rubelle had taken the nursing duties entirely off her hands. Sir Percival dined by himself, and William (the man out of livery) make the remark, in my hearing, that his master had put himself on half rations of food and on a double allowance of drink. I attach no importance to such an insolent observation as this on the part of a servant. I reprobated it at the time, and I wish to be understood as reprobating it once more on this occasion.

In the course of the next few days Miss Halcombe did certainly seem to all of us to be mending a little. Our faith in Mr. Dawson revived. He appeared to be very confident about the case, and he assured Lady Glyde, when she spoke to him on the subject, that he would himself propose to send for a physician the moment he felt so much as the shadow of a doubt crossing his own mind.

The only person among us who did not appear to be relieved by these words was the Countess. She said to me privately, that she could not feel easy about Miss Halcombe on Mr. Dawson's authority, and that she should wait anxiously for her husband's opinion on his return. That return, his letters informed her, would take place in three days' time. The Count and Countess corresponded regularly every morning during his lordship's absence. They were in that respect, as in all others, a pattern to married people.

On the evening of the third day I noticed a change in Miss Halcombe, which caused me serious apprehension. Mrs. Rubelle noticed it too. We said nothing on the subject to Lady Glyde, who was then lying asleep, completely overpowered by exhaustion, on the sofa in the sitting-room.

Mr. Dawson did not pay his evening visit till later than usual. As soon as he set eyes on his patient I saw his face alter. He tried to hide it, but he looked both confused and alarmed. A messenger was sent to his residence for his medicine-chest, disinfecting preparations were used in the room, and a bed was made up for him in the house by his

own directions. “Has the fever turned to infection?” I whispered to him. “I am afraid it has,” he answered; “we shall know better to-morrow morning.

By Mr. Dawson’s own directions Lady Glyde was kept in ignorance of this change for the worse. He himself absolutely forbade her, on account of her health, to join us in the bed-room that night. She tried to resist—there was a sad scene—but he had his medical authority to support him, and he carried his point.

The next morning one of the men-servants was sent to London at eleven o’clock, with a letter to a physician in town, and with orders to bring the new doctor back with him by the earliest possible train. Half an hour after the messenger had gone the Count returned to Blackwater Park.

The Countess, on her own responsibility, immediately brought him in to see the patient. There was no impropriety that I could discover in her taking this course. His lordship was a married man, he was old enough to be Miss Halcombe’s father, and he saw her in the presence of a female relative, Lady Glyde’s aunt. Mr. Dawson nevertheless protested against his presence in the room, but I could plainly remark the doctor was too much alarmed to make any serious resistance on this occasion.

The poor suffering lady was past knowing any one about her. She seemed to take her friends for enemies. When the Count approached her bedside her eyes, which had been wandering incessantly round and round the room before, settled on his face with a dreadful stare of terror, which I shall remember to my dying day. The Count sat down by her, felt her pulse and her temples, looked at her very attentively, and then turned round upon the doctor with such an expression of indignation and contempt in his face, that the words failed on Mr. Dawson’s lips, and he stood for a moment, pale with anger and alarm—pale and perfectly speechless.

His lordship looked next at me.

“When did the change happen?” he asked.

I told him the time.

“Has Lady Glyde been in the room since?”

I replied that she had not. The doctor had absolutely forbidden her to come into the room on the evening before, and had repeated the order again in the morning.

“Have you and Mrs. Rubelle been made aware of the full extent of the mischief?” was his next question.

We were aware, I answered, that the malady was considered infectious. He stopped me before I could add anything more.

“It is typhus fever,” he said.

In the minute that passed, while these questions and answers were going on, Mr. Dawson recovered himself, and addressed the Count with his customary firmness.

"It is NOT typhus fever," he remarked sharply. "I protest against this intrusion, sir. No one has a right to put questions here but me. I have done my duty to the best of my ability—"

The Count interrupted him—not by words, but only by pointing to the bed. Mr. Dawson seemed to feel that silent contradiction to his assertion of his own ability, and to grow only the more angry under it.

"I say I have done my duty," he reiterated. "A physician has been sent for from London. I will consult on the nature of the fever with him, and with no one else. I insist on your leaving the room."

"I entered this room, sir, in the sacred interests of humanity," said the Count. "And in the same interests, if the coming of the physician is delayed, I will enter it again. I warn you once more that the fever has turned to typhus, and that your treatment is responsible for this lamentable change. If that unhappy lady dies, I will give my testimony in a court of justice that your ignorance and obstinacy have been the cause of her death."

Before Mr. Dawson could answer, before the Count could leave us, the door was opened from the sitting-room, and we saw Lady Glyde on the threshold.

"I MUST and WILL come in," she said, with extraordinary firmness.

Instead of stopping her, the Count moved into the sitting-room, and made way for her to go in. On all other occasions he was the last man in the world to forget anything, but in the surprise of the moment he apparently forgot the danger of infection from typhus, and the urgent necessity of forcing Lady Glyde to take proper care of herself.

To my astonishment Mr. Dawson showed more presence of mind. He stopped her ladyship at the first step she took towards the bedside. "I am sincerely sorry, I am sincerely grieved," he said. "The fever may, I fear, be infectious. Until I am certain that it is not, I entreat you to keep out of the room."

She struggled for a moment, then suddenly dropped her arms and sank forward. She had fainted. The Countess and I took her from the doctor and carried her into her own room. The Count preceded us, and waited in the passage till I came out and told him that we had recovered her from the swoon.

I went back to the doctor to tell him, by Lady Glyde's desire, that she insisted on speaking to him immediately. He withdrew at once to quiet her ladyship's agitation, and to assure her of the physician's arrival in the course of a few hours. Those hours

passed very slowly. Sir Percival and the Count were together downstairs, and sent up from time to time to make their inquiries. At last, between five and six o'clock, to our great relief, the physician came.

He was a younger man than Mr. Dawson, very serious and very decided. What he thought of the previous treatment I cannot say, but it struck me as curious that he put many more questions to myself and to Mrs. Rubelle than he put to the doctor, and that he did not appear to listen with much interest to what Mr. Dawson said, while he was examining Mr. Dawson's patient. I began to suspect, from what I observed in this way, that the Count had been right about the illness all the way through, and I was naturally confirmed in that idea when Mr. Dawson, after some little delay, asked the one important question which the London doctor had been sent for to set at rest.

"What is your opinion of the fever?" he inquired.

"Typhus," replied the physician "Typhus fever beyond all doubt."

That quiet foreign person, Mrs. Rubelle, crossed her thin brown hands in front of her, and looked at me with a very significant smile. The Count himself could hardly have appeared more gratified if he had been present in the room and had heard the confirmation of his own opinion.

After giving us some useful directions about the management of the patient, and mentioning that he would come again in five days' time, the physician withdrew to consult in private with Mr. Dawson. He would offer no opinion on Miss Halcombe's chances of recovery—he said it was impossible at that stage of the illness to pronounce one way or the other.

The five days passed anxiously.

Countess Fosco and myself took it by turns to relieve Mrs. Rubelle, Miss Halcombe's condition growing worse and worse, and requiring our utmost care and attention. It was a terribly trying time. Lady Glyde (supported, as Mr. Dawson said, by the constant strain of her suspense on her sister's account) rallied in the most extraordinary manner, and showed a firmness and determination for which I should myself never have given her credit. She insisted on coming into the sick-room two or three times every day, to look at Miss Halcombe with her own eyes, promising not to go too close to the bed, if the doctor would consent to her wishes so far. Mr. Dawson very unwillingly made the concession required of him—I think he saw that it was hopeless to dispute with her. She came in every day, and she self-denyingly kept her promise. I felt it personally so distressing (as reminding me of my own affliction during my husband's last illness) to see how she suffered under these circumstances, that I

must beg not to dwell on this part of the subject any longer. It is more agreeable to me to mention that no fresh disputes took place between Mr. Dawson and the Count. His lordship made all his inquiries by deputy, and remained continually in company with Sir Percival downstairs.

On the fifth day the physician came again and gave us a little hope. He said the tenth day from the first appearance of the typhus would probably decide the result of the illness, and he arranged for his third visit to take place on that date. The interval passed as before—except that the Count went to London again one morning and returned at night.

On the tenth day it pleased a merciful Providence to relieve our household from all further anxiety and alarm. The physician positively assured us that Miss Halcombe was out of danger. "She wants no doctor now—all she requires is careful watching and nursing for some time to come, and that I see she has." Those were his own words. That evening I read my husband's touching sermon on Recovery from Sickness, with more happiness and advantage (in a spiritual point of view) than I ever remember to have derived from it before.

The effect of the good news on poor Lady Glyde was, I grieve to say, quite overpowering. She was too weak to bear the violent reaction, and in another day or two she sank into a state of debility and depression which obliged her to keep her room. Rest and quiet, and change of air afterwards, were the best remedies which Mr. Dawson could suggest for her benefit. It was fortunate that matters were no worse, for, on the very day after she took to her room, the Count and the doctor had another disagreement—and this time the dispute between them was of so serious a nature that Mr. Dawson left the house.

I was not present at the time, but I understood that the subject of dispute was the amount of nourishment which it was necessary to give to assist Miss Halcombe's convalescence after the exhaustion of the fever. Mr. Dawson, now that his patient was safe, was less inclined than ever to submit to unprofessional interference, and the Count (I cannot imagine why) lost all the self-control which he had so judiciously preserved on former occasions, and taunted the doctor, over and over again, with his mistake about the fever when it changed to typhus. The unfortunate affair ended in Mr. Dawson's appealing to Sir Percival, and threatening (now that he could leave without absolute danger to Miss Halcombe) to withdraw from his attendance at Blackwater Park if the Count's interference was not peremptorily suppressed from that moment. Sir Percival's reply (though not designedly uncivil) had only resulted in making matters

worse, and Mr. Dawson had thereupon withdrawn from the house in a state of extreme indignation at Count Fosco's usage of him, and had sent in his bill the next morning.

We were now, therefore, left without the attendance of a medical man. Although there was no actual necessity for another doctor— nursing and watching being, as the physician had observed, all that Miss Halcombe required—I should still, if my authority had been consulted, have obtained professional assistance from some other quarter, for form's sake.

The matter did not seem to strike Sir Percival in that light. He said it would be time enough to send for another doctor if Miss Halcombe showed any signs of a relapse. In the meanwhile we had the Count to consult in any minor difficulty, and we need not unnecessarily disturb our patient in her present weak and nervous condition by the presence of a stranger at her bedside. There was much that was reasonable, no doubt, in these considerations, but they left me a little anxious nevertheless. Nor was I quite satisfied in my own mind of the propriety of our concealing the doctor's absence as we did from Lady Glyde. It was a merciful deception, I admit—for she was in no state to bear any fresh anxieties. But still it was a deception, and, as such, to a person of my principles, at best a doubtful proceeding.

A second perplexing circumstance which happened on the same day, and which took me completely by surprise, added greatly to the sense of uneasiness that was now weighing on my mind.

I was sent for to see Sir Percival in the library. The Count, who was with him when I went in, immediately rose and left us alone together. Sir Percival civilly asked me to take a seat, and then, to my great astonishment, addressed me in these terms—

"I want to speak to you, Mrs. Michelson, about a matter which I decided on some time ago, and which I should have mentioned before, but for the sickness and trouble in the house. In plain words, I have reasons for wishing to break up my establishment immediately at this place—leaving you in charge, of course, as usual. As soon as Lady Glyde and Miss Halcombe can travel they must both have change of air. My friends, Count Fosco and the Countess, will leave us before that time to live in the neighbourhood of London, and I have reasons for not opening the house to any more company, with a view to economising as carefully as I can. I don't blame you, but my expenses here are a great deal too heavy. In short, I shall sell the horses, and get rid of all the servants at once. I never do things by halves, as you know, and I mean to have the house clear of a pack of useless people by this time to-morrow."

I listened to him, perfectly aghast with astonishment.

"Do you mean, Sir Percival, that I am to dismiss the indoor servants under my charge without the usual month's warning?" I asked.

"Certainly I do. We may all be out of the house before another month, and I am not going to leave the servants here in idleness, with no master to wait on."

"Who is to do the cooking, Sir Percival, while you are still staying here?"

"Margaret Porcher can roast and boil—keep her. What do I want with a cook if I don't mean to give any dinner-parties?"

"The servant you have mentioned is the most unintelligent servant in the house, Sir Percival "

"Keep her, I tell you, and have a woman in from the village to do the cleaning and go away again. My weekly expenses must and shall be lowered immediately. I don't send for you to make objections, Mrs. Michelson—I send for you to carry out my plans of economy. Dismiss the whole lazy pack of indoor servants to-morrow, except Porcher. She is as strong as a horse—and we'll make her work like a horse."

"You will excuse me for reminding you, Sir Percival, that if the servants go to-morrow they must have a month's wages in lieu of a month's warning."

"Let them! A month's wages saves a month's waste and gluttony in the servants' hall."

This last remark conveyed an aspersion of the most offensive kind on my management. I had too much self-respect to defend myself under so gross an imputation. Christian consideration for the helpless position of Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde, and for the serious inconvenience which my sudden absence might inflict on them, alone prevented me from resigning my situation on the spot. I rose immediately. It would have lowered me in my own estimation to have permitted the interview to continue a moment longer.

"After that last remark, Sir Percival, I have nothing more to say. Your directions shall be attended to." Pronouncing those words, I bowed my head with the most distant respect, and went out of the room.

The next day the servants left in a body. Sir Percival himself dismissed the grooms and stablemen, sending them, with all the horses but one, to London. Of the whole domestic establishment, indoors and out, there now remained only myself, Margaret Porcher, and the gardener—this last living in his own cottage, and being wanted to take care of the one horse that remained in the stables.

With the house left in this strange and lonely condition—with the mistress of it ill in her room—with Miss Halcombe still as helpless as a child—and with the doctor's

attendance withdrawn from us in enmity—it was surely not unnatural that my spirits should sink, and my customary composure be very hard to maintain. My mind was ill at ease. I wished the poor ladies both well again, and I wished myself away from Blackwater Park.