

No other way

A Short Story

(Written for "The Listener"
by P.H.)

THE rain, which had started to fall soon after dinner, still struck against my window in sharp little flurries; big drops of it dribbled jerkily down the pane; their progress resembling nothing so much as that of the cheerful reveller who knows he is slightly drunk. Every now and again a gust of wind would bump against the house and then sidle round it with a whining apology.

Altogether it was an extremely unpleasant night, I thought to myself as I sat at ease in front of a blazing log fire. Though even there I was not completely shut off from the storm, for an occasional shower would find its way down the wide, open chimney and hiss and crackle on to the fire in the most alarming manner.

This, however, only served to make me more comfortably aware of my security and I scarcely even bothered to raise my eyes from the book I was reading. It was a newly published work by an authority on pellagra, which I study more as a hobby than for any use which I might find for it. The G.P. of a little country village is hardly likely to have many cases of such a disease on his hands.

AS I say, then, I was seated before the fire and very pleasantly occupied with my book when I heard the nightbell ring. Mildly cursing the fate that had led me to adopt medicine as a career, I went out and opened the front door. A woman stood there in the streaming rain, twisting her hands together nervously, and as I could see that she was wet through I quickly motioned her inside, saying, "Come in, come in." She did so and I closed the door. "Now then," I turned to her, "what can I do for you?"

"It's Mr. Lazloa, sir," she began, "he's been ill all day and now he wants to see you. I think he's going to—to"

I was not surprised. Lazloa was an old man, the village eccentric and reclusive. Nobody knew where he had come from and most people were past caring, for he lived at Rose Cottage for more years than I could remember. I had been expecting this call for some months past and now that it had come I wasted no time. Hastily struggling into an overcoat I grabbed my bag and followed the woman out into the night. It was certainly very cold and wet. Even in the short journey to Rose Cottage the rain penetrated all the clothing with which I had attempted to protect myself. However, it is not part of a doctor's job to complain; I resigned myself with a sigh and went upstairs.

THE old man was lying on a bed near the window, staring out at the fury of the storm. He did not hear me enter and when I spoke he started convulsively.

"Well, sir—" I said. His head jerked round and his eyes stared up into mine. I could have sworn there was fear in them, but I may have been mistaken as his face changed when he saw who had spoken.

"Oh, doctor," he whispered. "It is you? I had thought—it was someone else."

The man obviously had not very long to go and I could do nothing for him. I sat down beside the bed.

"You were expecting somebody, then?"

"Oh, no." He shook his head, smiling. Then, after a moment's silence, he looked at me again. "You are a good man, doctor," he said quietly. "I am dying. No, no, please—" as I made a gesture. "I know it. I can feel it. It is no matter—death must come to everyone." He paused. "I am an old man and I have lived here a long time. You are, perhaps, inquisitive about my history? It is not very much. I will tell you."

"HAVE you ever been to Portugal, doctor? No? It is a beautiful country, full of beautiful hills and beautiful valleys. Everything there is a memory to me—the earth, the sky, the rivers, mountains, men and—women."

"Yes, and the women! Those perfidious creatures—do you know that they are, doctor? They are spiders, spinning a web to attract men and entangle them like flies! I know—I was caught in the web of one of them myself. I did not struggle—why should I? I did not then know the things I have learnt about her kind. I have no doubt but that she beautiful after the way of women—I know that she was much sought after in marriage. I sought her myself—I was young, gay, full of life. And then, poor fool that I was, the threads of her web closed about me. We were married."

"For a time we were happy with the happiness that springs from the heart and not the head. I loved her, if such a thing is possible. Oh, I was blind, how blind I was! I would have laid down my life for her, done anything for her. I did the one thing she asked of me. I took her to Lisbon."

HIS voice had been growing weaker and now it stopped altogether. His eyes were closed and I could distinguish no signs of breathing. Quickly I

reached for his pulse. At the touch of my hand he opened his eyes, smiled a little and shook his head.

"No, no," he said. "My time is not yet." He grew restless and his gaze returned to the storm. "You do not know Portugal so you cannot know Lisbon. I had a friend there, he was a clerk in an office. 'Friend,' did I say? That is wrong. He called himself my friend and I trusted him. But no man has a true friend—death is the only bond that unites us."

"I found work and though I was not happy I could see that she was. We lived in the same boarding-house as my friend, in whom I had such faith that often I left him alone with my wife. Dear God, what comedy it is to think of that! My wife! I can think of it only as a joke—yet how grim is the humour! You wonder why? It is an old tale and a simple one."

"One evening I returned from my work in the city earlier than usual, expecting to find my wife and my friend waiting for me. We were to have dinner together that night and go to a play afterwards. I opened the door and found them—not as I had expected to find them, and certainly not as they would have wanted me to find them. The web of the spider that had caught me had fastened upon another poor wretch and there he was, clasping her in his arms as I had done—as who knows how many others had done?"

I COULD not recognise the voice that was speaking now. It was a hoarse vicious croak, and the old man's face was contorted with the violence of his emotion. More as an effort to calm him than from any sense of curiosity I asked, "What did you do?"

"Do?" The head sank back on the pillows and an expression of tired pain came into his eyes. "There was only one thing to be done. I had loved her, but she must be with the man she loved. I could see no other way. So I left them there together, and I have not been back since."

"You left them—together?" I was so incredulous that any man could surrender the woman he loved so easily that I had forgotten I was there in a professional capacity. But now the slow, patient smile which he gave me and the suddenly altered expression of his face reminded me of my duty. I leaned forward and my ear was very close to his lips. If it had not been I would not have caught his last faltering words.

"Tradesmen's Entrance"

TRADESMEN'S ENTRANCE, the serial which starts from 1YA on Monday, December 1, is another success for that most versatile of Australian radio producers, George Edwards. As well as producing, directing and inspiring *Tradesmen's Entrance*, George Edwards plays the important parts of Jerrollds the butler, Mr. Haggett, the dismal gardener, and other minor roles.

His leading lady is his wife, whose professional name is Nell Stirling, and who is associated with her husband in nearly all his broadcasts. She plays the part of Ada, the unhappy little "tweenie" in the Filmore-Platter household.

Here, below, are some of the entertaining characters in *Tradesmen's Entrance*:



MR. JERROLDS, who rules the whole Filmore-Platter staff with a kindly benevolence... who helps everybody else out of their difficulties, but can't solve his own problems.



MRS. PHILLIP, the busy, gossiping cook with a heart of gold. She spoils a lot of gravies but she serves an excellent dinner somehow. There's plenty of excitement in her kitchen.



ADA, the silliest housemaid who ever whisked a duster. Always in trouble, always unhappy, she's the worry of Mrs. Phillip's and Jerrollds' life!



MR. HAGGETT, for whom the sun never shines, whose roses never bloom, whose lawns are always ruined. He's so miserable that he's as funny a gardener as ever grew a tulip.



MR. BURKETT, the plumber, who not only forgets his tools but often forgets himself as well.

"Yes, together—" I heard him murmur. "I saw to that—I killed them both."

Even now I am convinced that he died a happy man.