

## A STROKE<sup>1</sup>

BY GEORGE MANNING-SANDERS

A SQUINTING fisherman was bending over a tubby old man who sat on the grass, with his back against a boat.

The villagers came hurrying to see what was the matter.

'Oh, it 's James; and the old rogue is drunk, eh?' said a laughing woman.

'No, that he 's not,' said the squinting man. 'For just now I did see him walking along quite steady; but of a sudden he stood stock-still and flopped down like a sack of shavings. I ran to raise him up, but it was as if all sense and power had gone from him; he could neither stand nor speak, so I sent a boy up along to fetch his daughter down to him.'

'How 's things then, James, boy?' a fisherman bellowed encouragingly.

But the sitting man made no reply, nor gave any sign that he had heard. His puffy face was expressionless; his small blue eyes stared vacantly across the sea.

'I've always reckoned that James did carry too much flesh for a man of seventy-three years,' croaked a lean old woman; 'he 's most like having a fit now, and when it 's past he 'll die off sudden. See how greeny he 's going, and how his lips and whiskers do tremble!'

'It 's the color reflecting from off the boat is tinting him so,' said a young woman; 'and if he 's anyways ill or like to die, he should be lifted and carried into shelter out of this blistering sun heat.'

The squinting man shook his head knowingly. 'If it had been any other man than this mischief-making old James that had fallen, I'd have had him taken straight away into my cottage yonder; but James has a funny sort of temper, and I did n't want to be mixed up in any unpleasantness. That 's why I sent word to his married daughter, Rebecca, that he do share house with — he may give heed to her.'

The group murmured agreement. An old sail was brought and spread across oars to make a shade for James, and his dented bowler hat was tilted protectingly on his bald forehead. A woman brought a cup of tea and held it patiently to his unresponsive lips. The group discussed the flaws of the old man's character, and recalled all the sudden and peculiar ailments that had seized men in the parish. And so the time passed pleasantly till the tiny boy came back from his errand.

'Well,' demanded the squinting man, 'is that Rebecca coming?'

'No, she is not — she 's gone to Saint Nicholas feast and taken the childer with her.'

'Then you should have gone to her man, Bob, across at the farm where he labors; he 's a tender-hearted chap; he'd have come down for to take charge of James.'

'I did that — I went seeking Bob, but he'd just gone off to town with a horse and wagon to fetch back a load of patent manure.'

'Well, neighbors, here 's a pretty

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fine go,' said the squinting man. 'I reckon the best thing is for us to bear James up over the hillside, for when a man is so far gone, either in obstinacy or illness, he's best in his own home.'

'Aye, let's do it now and have done with it,' said a fisherman.

A handbarrow was brought, the limp James was laid on it, and eight men bore him slowly over the sands toward his home. But as they began to climb the steep cliff path, James, being head down, recovered, and said feebly, 'Hullo — hullo, what's doing then, eh — what game is this?'

The barrow was lowered, and James, sitting up stiffly, tried to get off it. But he could not move his feet, and fright came into his small eyes, and his puffy face seemed to shrink. 'There's something wrong with my legs,' he whimpered; 'they're like a thing gone dead, just as if they did belong to some other man.'

'Come on — we'd best get him up to his own place,' said the squinting man; 'for if he does perish here afore our very eyes, we'll all be bothered and questioned by Crowner at his inquest.'

So the hurrying bearers began to carry the whimpering James up to the cottage. But when they stood panting before the bright blue door, they found that it was locked.

'Break it open,' said James from the barrow.

'No fear,' said the squinting man; 'for if we do, Bob will look to us to mend it — or maybe give him a new door.'

'Rebecca is due to come back at dusk — leave me snug in the shade of the bushes,' said James.

The bearers considered the suggestion.

'It looks like rain blowing in from the sea,' counseled the squinting man, 'and if we do leave him exposed to the elements one of us will have to bide

nigh him. And if aught happens amiss to James, Crowner may say we should have done this or that. The right and proper place for a stricken man is safe inside his own four walls. How about them windows?'

None of the windows was unfastened. They scraped away the brittle putty from a frame and, lifting out the pane of glass, unlatched the window. The smallest man of the company was about to climb in to see if he could open the door, when the squinting man held him back. 'Do no such thing,' said he; 'for if you do the like and there's aught of gear and ornaments missing from the cottage, there'll be talk that we made free with 'em. We want to do all that's right and proper for James, poor soul, but we don't want to be mixed up in any unpleasantness. What about those three chairs so handy by the window — he'd rest very cosy there, till his kindred come back from their jollifications.'

This scheme being approved, James was squeezed through the little window and poised on the three chairs. Then the pane of glass was scrupulously replaced, and the bearers dispersed as rapidly as they could.

At dusk Rebecca came back with a child sleeping in her arms and another dragging at her skirts. The eldest child unlocked the door, and then Rebecca sent him into the little parlor to fetch a box of matches from the mantelpiece. There followed a tinkle of breaking china, and the child rushed back headlong to his mother, scattering matches about the kitchen.

'God save us,' cried the weary Rebecca, 'don't stand there jibbering and gaping, but speak up and own to what it is you've a-broke. If it's that china man and woman I'll give you such a lacing that —'

'It's a ghost, and it's laying on three chairs,' cried the frightened child.

Holding a candle in one hand and a poker in the other hand, Rebecca went to the parlor door, the terrified children peering closely behind her. 'Why, it's only Father,' she said in loud relief, 'that's taken more beer, seemingly, than he can carry.'

The accusation brought home to James the full sense of his calamity. 'I'm struck,' he wailed, 'in the prime of my old age. I've been hit by the Lord God of Hosts for my sins. He has made my two legs to be like two mighty oak trees that's been riven and blasted by a fork of lightning, and I do lie in fear of instant death.'

'You don't take me in so easy — you drink-soaked old rip,' cried Rebecca shrilly; 'and it's no use your mouthing Scripture in the hope that I'll be sucked in by it either, because I won't. I know better than to believe the Lord would take any sort of interest in your legs. Get up to once, I say, or I'll fetch you a scat with this poker that will drive all such rigs clean out of your headpiece forever.'

'It took me down to cove, and the boys did bear me up over the cliff like one that was dead and gone, Rebecca,' said the old man pathetically. 'I've had a stroke, and it's sapped the power out of both my legs, and I feel death moving slow but sure across me.'

The children began to cry then, and Rebecca, quieting them, ran to fetch her husband from the public house on the highroad. She brought him into the cottage, and he smelt so strongly of horses, artificial manure, and beer that the children began to sneeze.

'I hear tell that you're as good as gone around land,' said Bob shyly, holding a candle perilously near his father-in-law's whiskers.

'Aye, I'm nigh done for, boy,' said old James mournfully; 'and if there's anything left over from the high words

that you and me have shared together, I forgive you all that freely.'

'Have you any pain vexing you at all?'

'I have not, boy; the Lord has spared me such.'

Husband and wife left James in the dark parlor, and when they had sent the children up to bed with a hunk of bread each they considered together, over a pot of tea, what was best to be done.

'A doctor should see him, by rights,' said Bob.

'It would only be a waste of money, because either he's shamming wickedly, or else he's going dead slowly, from the legs upward.'

Bob drank tea noisily and pondered. 'Well, it's easy to see if he's sham-mocking.'

'How?'

'Give me a big needle, woman, and I'll soon come to the rights of this as well as any doctor could.'

Rebecca gave her husband a rusty darning needle, and he went in to the old man on pretense of making him more comfortable. And soon he came back to his wife, grinning and wiping the needle on his coat.

'It's true what he do say, Rebecca — every word of it. For I've a-pricked his two legs here and there, fine and deep, without as much as a squeak or a start from him.'

'Then he's like one dying by inches,' said Rebecca sorrowfully, 'and most likely he'll go out with the tide. What time does the water ebb this night?'

'Don't know for certain, but some time atween midnight and daybreak for sure.'

'He's been a good father, except for his bad old ways and his religion,' said Rebecca, wiping her eyes. 'Still, there it is, and I only wish he'd lasted out a few days longer; then he'd have drawn his old age pension. For though he's

insured for funeral expenses, ten pound don't go far.'

'Should be fifteen to do it all proper,' said Bob, yawning; 'and it's a great shame that a man's last box and the bit of soil he do rest in should cost so much. I'll have a black serge suit and a stiff white shirt out of it, mind.'

'Yes, and I'll have a coat of some nice softish cloth, with a hat and a feather to match.'

In the midst of their estimation they remembered the old man lying helpless in the other room. 'There's like to be a Crowner's Court held over him to-morrow,' said Bob importantly; 'so we'd best bring down our brass-knobbed bed and lay him on it, and set a clean night-shift upon him — all in readiness.'

They toiled to get the iron bed to pieces, and carried it and a feather mattress down the crooked stairs into the little mouldy-smelling parlor. James felt rather proud that all these unusual labors were being done for him. He gave helpful advice as to the arrangement of the room. He was undressed, and washed, and laid on the bed, and then he asked for food and drink. They brought it to him, and after he had eaten with small appetite they left him in darkness and went overhead to lie on old clothes laid upon the floor.

Rebecca was too excited to sleep. She kept turning from side to side, thinking actively on how she would spend that ten pounds. 'And it's happened nice and handy, Bob,' she was saying over and over again, till her awakened husband asked why. 'Because to-morrow is market day, to be sure, and we can go into the town cheaper on the motor bus. I might so well take in the childer and rig 'em up in black clouts. Yes, and I'll get fairy cakes and raisin wine too. We don't want to do it overgrand, but we don't

want anyone saying that we skimped father's burying.'

Many times the weary farm laborer dropped off to sleep, only to be awakened by his restless wife asking advice as to where she should buy the fairy cakes and the splits that should be thickly buttered and liberally spread with strawberry jam. 'And after all, Bob, a man only dies once, and if poor father's bit of insurance money don't do it comfortable we'll not grudge a few extra shillings from what we've put by, eh?'

'That's so, for nothing looks so poor as a mean burying,' said Bob sleepily; 'and there must be slices of cold ham, and bottles of beer in plenty, for such helps to pass the time away.'

In the morning, just as the first dismal light of dawn was in the room, Rebecca, who had not slept at all, arose from the hard resting place, and went downstairs softly. She opened the parlor door and stood looking in upon her father. The old man's mouth was wide open; he breathed heavily in regular sleep.

Rebecca went back and awoke her husband with the news. 'There's no hurry — it's a bit early for him to have gone yet; wait an hour more,' said Bob irritably.

But two hours later James was not only alive, but he was eating his breakfast with some amount of relish. 'It's what they do call a flash in the pan, but he's almost sure to fail and collapse on a sudden once for the day,' said Bob, as he prepared to set off to his labor.

'Then I'll lock the cottage up safe, and I'll take the childer in to the town, and buy all that's needful,' said the greatly excited wife; 'and I'll go first thing to the insurance agent and ask him for to pay me the ten pounds in coin.'

'No fear, he won't do no such thing

— he 'll not do that unless you show a signed doctor's certificate to prove that old James is gone.'

'Then I 'll have to rip the leather bag out from the feather mattress, and borrow enough money from it to make a funeral that won't shame the living or the dead.'

'That 's the talk — and don't forget the bottled beer,' said Bob, as he went, whistling cheerfully, toward the farm.

In a great flurry of haste Rebecca made her preparations, and soon she and the children, all dressed in their best, were running along the highroad toward the place where the motor bus stopped. And she told everyone she knew just why she was going into the town, and she invited many people to come to her father's funeral in four days' time. In the town she became so interested in the shopping that they missed the last bus home, and so they had to walk, heavily laden with parcels, ten miles through the starlit night.

They came, almost dropping with fatigue, to their home, and saw both the downstairs windows brightly lit. James was singing hymns noisily in the parlor, and Bob was crouched sulkily over the kitchen fire.

'Suppose that 's poor father's last spasm, what they call,' said Rebecca, scattering parcels on the kitchen table.

'No fear — he 'll never die. For a doctor that 's staying down to cove, he

heard of the accident and he came up; and he says James's legs are useless to ever again bear weight, and that he 's like to live all the longer from having to keep himself steady.'

The weary Rebecca sat down and began to cry; the tired children began to howl; and old James, thinking this expressed sympathy for him, began to sing hymns more loudly.

'Anyway, a great blasting stroke like that would have killed off most men,' said Rebecca, drying her cheeks; 'and as for this nice food — why, we 'll be able to eat it ourselves now, without sharing it out to those gluttons that do trapes around to fill their ugly kipes at every burying. The black clouts will always come handy, too, if ever they should be needed.'

Bob began to laugh and slap his thigh. 'Aye, James has done the Government proper, missis, for he 's like to go on drawing his ten shillings a week pension till he 's as old as the hills.'

'I 'll be bound he will — for father is very willful when his mind is set on a thing,' cried Rebecca cheerfully.

Soon the husband and wife were eating ham and bread, the children were gorging fairy cakes, and old James was munching splits heavily buttered and liberally spread with strawberry jam. And they all began to feel that they were feasting because of the triumph of life over death.

## LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

### *How Jesus Looked*

At the last session of the French Academy remarkable new evidence concerning the personal appearance and activities of Jesus was brought to light. Dr. Robert Eisler of the University of Vienna has for some time contended that the old Russian version of Josephus's *Jewish War* contained a mutilated but essentially authentic account of the life and death of Jesus. He had pointed out that the descriptions of Christ's physical appearance in Greek and Latin texts refer to 'Josephus the Jew' as their source.

The Russian version of Josephus also gives a 'most unpleasant picture of John the Baptist, saying that 'his face was that of a savage, his body was hairy all over, and where it was not covered with the man's own hair he had pasted oxhides to it.' Curiously enough, the description of Jesus in the same version lacks this malicious touch, although the author saw no reason for calling Him the Son of God or an angel. From reasonably authentic sources Dr. Eisler has at length collected enough material to be able to piece together a reconstruction of the original passage as Josephus wrote it. The fact that he gained the ear of the cautious French Academy, and of such scholars as MM. Theodore and Salomon Reinach, challenges attention. Here is Dr. Eisler's version:—

'At that time also a man came forward, if one may call a man one whom His Disciples called the Son of God. His being and His figure were quite human, a man of middle size, with a stooping back and a long face, a prominent nose, and with brows which grew

together, so that those who saw Him would get frightened; with very little hair, but parting it in the middle of His head, according to the habit of the Nazarenes (who were not allowed to cut their hair, and therefore tried to master it in this way). His looks were quite simple; only His pose was more than human, because He performed wonders through some invisible power.

'Considering, however, His quite ordinary nature, I for one shall not call Him an angel. His name was Jesus, and He was nicknamed the Messiah. By the Gentiles He was believed to be a soothsayer, but some of our people said of Him that He was our first law-giver, Moses, and had risen from the dead and was now showing forth many cures and acts. Others, however, said He was the envoy of God.

'But He opposed Himself in many things to the Law. He did not observe Sabbath, according to our ancestral law. Not that He did anything shameful or criminal Himself, but through His words He instigated everything. And many from our folk followed Him and accepted His teaching, and many souls became wavering, believing the Jewish tribes would cut themselves free from the hands of the Romans.

'Now it was His habit to stay most of the time on the Mount of Olives, before the city, and there He also avouched His cures to the people.

'And there gathered themselves to Him one hundred and fifty slaves, and of the populace a crowd. But when they saw His power, that He could accomplish everything He would by a magic word, they urged Him that He