

## SWEETHEARTS.

BY A. CONAN DOYLE.

IT is ill for the general practitioner who sits among his patients both morning and evening, and sees them in their homes between, to steal time for one little daily breath of cleanly air. To win it he must slip early from his bed and walk out between shuttered shops when it is chill but very clear, and all things are sharply outlined, as in a frost. It is an hour that has a charm of its own, when, but for a postman or a milkman, one has the pavement to one's self, and even the most common thing takes an ever-recurring freshness, as though causeway and lamp and signboard had all wakened to the new day. Then even an inland city may seem beautiful, and bear virtue in its smoke-tainted air.

But it was by the sea that I lived, in a town that was unlovely enough were it not for its glorious neighbor. And who cares for the town when one can sit on the bench at the headland, and look out over the huge blue bay and the yellow cimeter that curves before it! I loved it when its great face was freckled with the fishing boats, and I loved it when the big ships went past, far out, a little hillock of white and no hull, with topsails curved like a bodice, so stately and demure. But most of all I loved it when no trace of man marred the majesty of nature, and when the sunbursts slanted down on it from between the drifting rain clouds. Then I have seen the farther edge draped in the gauze of the driving rain, with its thin gray shading under the clouds, while my headland was golden, and the sun gleamed upon the breakers and struck

deep through the green waves beyond, showing up the purple patches where the beds of seaweed are lying. Such a morning as that, with the wind in his hair, and the spray on his lips, and the cry of the eddying gulls in his ear, may send a man back braced afresh to the reek of a sickroom and the dead drab weariness of practice.

It was on such another day that I first saw my old man. He came to my bench just as I was leaving it. My eye must have picked him out even in a crowded street, for he was a man of large frame and fine presence, with something of distinction in the set of his lip and the poise of his head. He limped up the winding path, leaning heavily on his stick, as though those great shoulders had become too much at last for the failing limbs that bore them. As he approached my eyes caught nature's danger signal, that faint bluish tinge in nose and lip which tells of a laboring heart.

"The brae is a little trying, sir," said I. "Speaking as a physician, I should say that you would do well to rest here before you go farther."

He inclined his head in a stately old-world fashion and seated himself upon the bench. Seeing that he had no wish to speak I was silent also, but I could not help watching him out of the corner of my eyes. For he was such a wonderful survival of the early half of the century, with his low-crowned, curly-brimmed hat, his black satin tie, which fastened with a buckle at the back, and, above all, his large, fleshy, clean-shaven face, shot with its mesh of wrinkles. Those eyes, ere they had grown dim, had looked out from the box-seat of mail coaches, and had seen the knots of navvies as they toiled on the brown embankments. Those lips had smiled over the first number of "Pickwick," and had gossiped of the promising young man who wrote them. The face itself was a seventy-year almanac, and every seam an entry upon it, where public as well as private sorrow left its trace. That pucker on the forehead stood for the Mutiny, perhaps; that line of care for the Crimean winter, it may be; and that last little sheaf of wrinkles, as my fancy hoped, for the death of Gordon. And so, as I dreamed in my foolish way, the old gentle-



man with the shining stock was gone, and it was seventy years of a great nation's life that took shape before me on the headland in the morning.

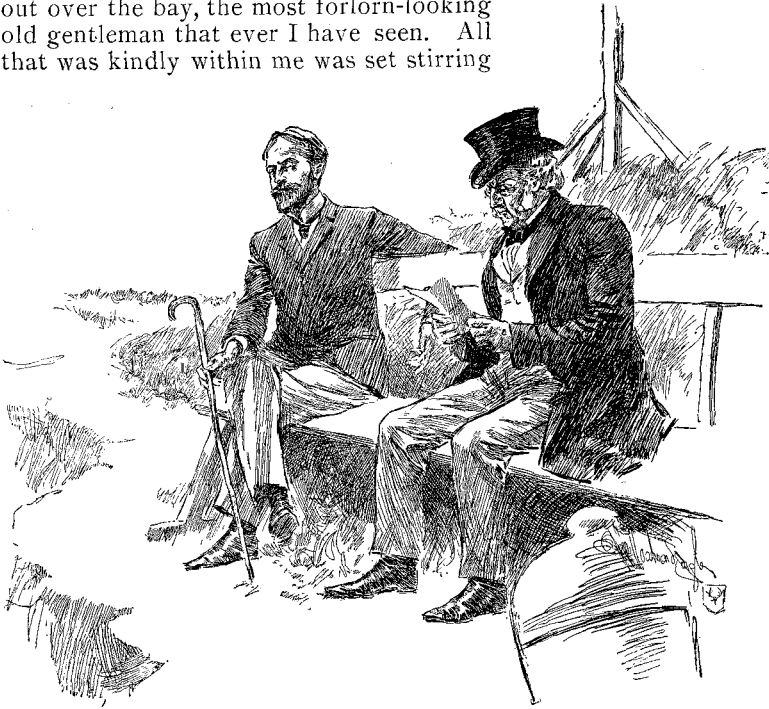
But he soon brought me back to earth again. As he recovered his breath he took a letter out of his pocket, and, putting on a pair of horn-rimmed eyeglasses, he read it through very carefully. Without any design of playing the spy I could not help observing that it was in a woman's hand. When he had finished it he read it again, and then sat with the corners of his mouth drawn down and his eyes staring vacantly out over the bay, the most forlorn-looking old gentleman that ever I have seen. All that was kindly within me was set stirring

cheek and chin were marred by a day's growth of gray stubble, and his large, shapely head had lost something of the brave carriage which had struck me when first I glanced at him. He had a letter there, the same, or another, but still in a woman's hand, and over this he was moping and mumbling in his senile fashion, with his brow puckered, and the corners of his mouth drawn down like those of a fretting child. So I left him with a vague wonder as to who he might be, and why a single spring day should have wrought such a change upon him.

So interested was I that next morning I was on the lookout for him. Sure enough, at the same hour I saw him coming up the hill, but very slowly, with a bent back and a heavy head. It was shocking to me to see the change in him as he approached.

"I am afraid that our air does not agree with you, sir," I ventured to remark.

But it was as though he had no heart for talk. He tried, as I thought, to make some fitting reply, but it slurred off into a mumble and silence. How bent



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by that wistful face, but I knew that he was in no humor for talk, and so, at last, with my breakfast and my patients calling me, I left him on the bench and started for home.

I never gave him another thought until the next morning, when, at the same hour, he turned up upon the headland, and shared the bench which I had been accustomed to look upon as my own. He bowed again before sitting down, but was no more inclined than before to enter into conversation. There had been a change in him during the last twenty-four hours, and all for the worse. The face seemed more heavy and more wrinkled, while that ominous venous tinge was more pronounced as he panted up the hill. The clean lines of his

and weak and old he seemed—ten years older at the least than when first I had seen him! It went to my heart to see this sweet old fellow wasting away before my eyes. There was the eternal letter, which he unfolded with his shaking fingers. Who was this woman whose words moved him so? Some daughter, perhaps, or granddaughter, who should have been the light of his home instead of — I smiled to find how bitter I was growing, and how swiftly I was weaving a romance round an unshaven old man and his correspondence. Yet all day he lingered in my mind, and I had fitful glimpses of those two trembling, blue-veined, knuckly hands, with the paper rustling between them.

I had hardly hoped to see him again.

Another day's decline must, I thought, hold him to his room, if not to his bed. Great, then, was my surprise when, as I approached my bench, I saw that he was already there. But as I came up to him I could scarce be sure that it was indeed the same man. There were the curly-brimmed hat and the shining stock and the horn glasses, but where were the stoop and the gray-stubbed, pitiable face? He was clean-shaven and firm-lipped, with a bright eye, and a head that poised itself upon his shoulders like an eagle on a rock. His back was as straight and square as a grenadier's, and he switched at the pebbles with his stick in his exuberant vitality. In the buttonhole of his well-brushed black coat there glinted a golden blossom, and the corner of a dainty red silk handkerchief lapped over from his breast pocket. He might have been the eldest son of the weary creature who had sat there the morning before.

"Good morning, sir, good morning!" he cried, with a merry waggle of his cane.

"Good morning!" I answered; "how beautiful the bay is looking."

"Yes, sir, but you should have seen it just before the sun rose."

"What, you have been here since then?"

"I was here when there was scarce light to see the path."

"You are a very early riser."

"On occasion, sir, on occasion!" He cocked his eye at me as if to gauge whether I were worthy of his confidence. "The fact is, sir, that my wife is coming back to me to-day."

I suppose that my face showed that I did not quite see the force of the explanation. My eyes, too, may have given him assurance of sympathy, for he moved quite close to me and began speaking in a low, confidential voice, as if the matter were of such weight that even the seagulls must be kept out of our counsels.

"Are you a married man, sir?"

"No, I am not."

"Ah, then you cannot quite understand it. My wife and I have been married for nearly fifty years, and we have never been parted, never at all, until now."

"Was it for long?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. This is the fourth day. She had to go to Scotland. A matter of duty, you understand, and the doctors would not let me go. Not that I would have allowed them to stop me, but she was on their side. Now, thank God, it is over, and she may be here at any moment."

"Here!"

"Yes, here. This headland and bench were old friends of ours thirty years ago. The people with whom we stay are not, to tell the truth, very congenial, and we have little privacy among them. That is why we prefer to meet here. I could not be sure which train would bring her, but if she had come by the very earliest she would have found me waiting."

"In that case——" said I, rising.

"No, sir, no," he entreated. "I beg that you will stay. It does not weary you, this domestic talk of mine?"

"On the contrary."

"I have been so driven inward during these last few days! Ah, what a nightmare it has been! She was very good in writing, but still it was dreadful. Perhaps it may seem strange to you that an old fellow like me should feel like this?"

"It is charming."

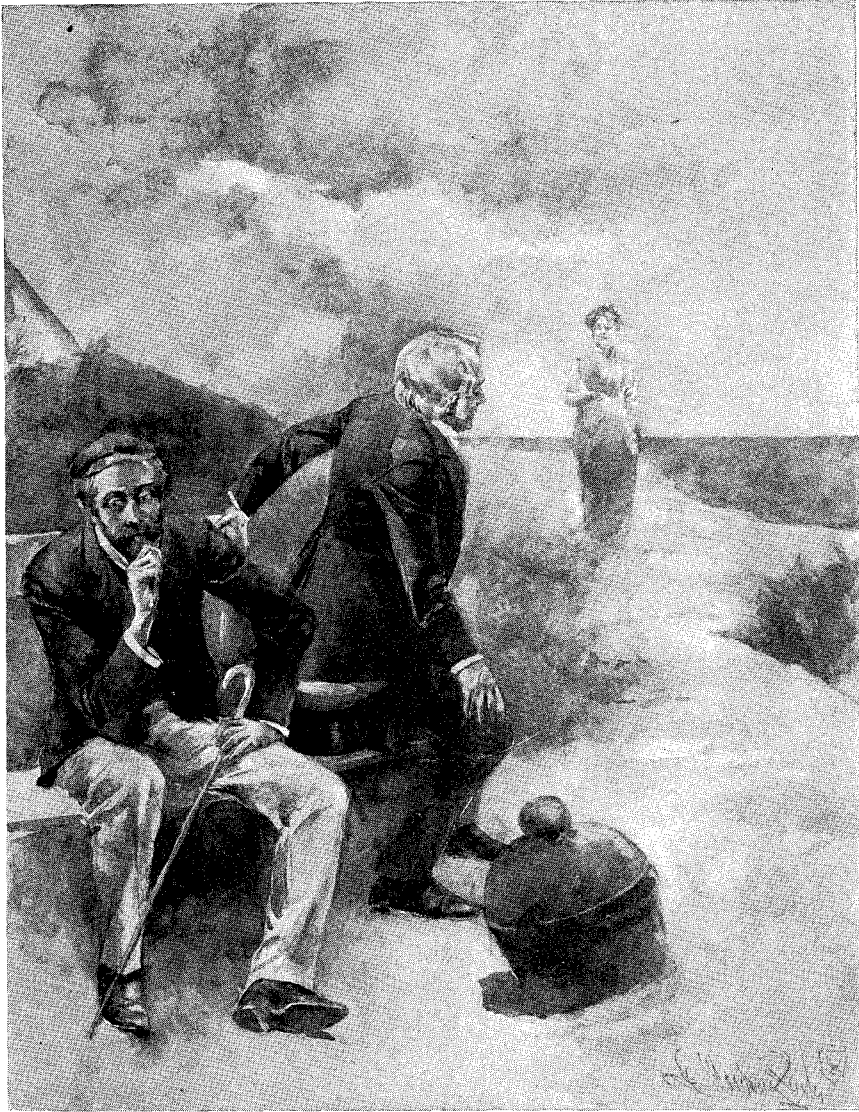
"No credit to me, sir! There's not a man on this planet but would feel the same if he had the good fortune to be married to such a woman. Perhaps, because you see me like this, and hear me speak of our long life together, you conceive that she is old too." He laughed heartily, and his eyes twinkled at the humor of the idea.

"She's one of those women, you know, who have youth in their hearts, and so it can never be very far from their faces. To me she's just as she was when she first took my hand in hers in '45. A wee little bit stouter, perhaps, but then, if she had a fault as a girl, it was that she was a shade too slender. She was above me in station, you know—I a clerk, and she the daughter of my employer. Oh, it was quite a romance, I give you my word; and I won her, and, somehow, I have never got over the freshness and the wonder of it. To think that that sweet, lovely girl has walked by my side all through life, and that I have been able——"

He stopped suddenly, and I glanced round at him in surprise. He was shaking all over, in every fibre of his great body. His hands were clawing at the woodwork and his feet shuffling on the gravel. I saw what it was. He was trying to rise, but was so excited that he could not. I half extended my hand, but a higher courtesy constrained me to draw it back again and turn my face to the sea. An instant afterward he was up, and hurrying down the path.

A woman was coming towards us. She was quite close before he had seen her—thirty yards at the utmost. I know not if she had ever been as he described her,

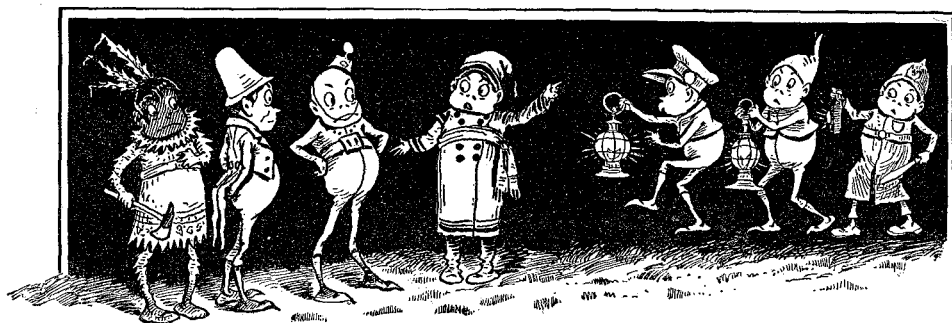




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or whether it was but some idea which he carried in his brain. The person upon whom I looked was tall, it is true, but she was thick and shapeless, with a ruddy, full-blown face, and a skirt grotesquely gathered up. There was a green ribbon in her hat which jarred upon my eyes, and her blouse-like bodice was full and clumsy. And this was the lovely girl, the ever youthful! My heart sank as I thought how little such a woman might appreciate him, how unworthy she might be of his love.

She came up the path in her solid way, while he staggered along to meet her. Then, as they came together, looking discreetly out of the farthest corner of my eye, I saw that he put out both his hands, like a child when its little journey is done, while she, shrinking from a public caress, took one of them in hers and shook it. As she did so I saw her face, and I was easy in my mind for my old man. God grant that when this hand is shaking, and when this back is bowed, a woman's eyes may look so into mine!



## PALMER COX'S BROWNIES ON THE STAGE.

BY BEN TEAL.



HAVING invaded about all the other civilized and semi-civilized kingdoms of the earth, making friends wherever they went, the Brownies—Mr. Palmer Cox's Brownies—are soon to invade the stage. About a fortnight hence there will be produced at the Park Theatre in Philadelphia a wonderful Brownie play. Two weeks later it will be transferred to the Hollis Street Theatre in Boston, and two weeks later still it will be brought to the Fourteenth Street Theatre, New York, for an indefinite stay.

The Brownies have been pretty near the stage before. Some little time ago, Mr. Cox, with Mr. Malcolm Douglass as his musical collaborator, made them into a little cantata for children, which was produced with great success in the Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, on Mr. Thomas A. Edison's lawn at Llewellyn Park, New Jersey, and in other places. But

these were in the nature of amateur performances; and now the Brownies are to be permitted to play a real play, a grown-up play, as it were. Seeing how engaging the little cantata had proved, Mr. Cox, again in conjunction with Mr. Douglass, set to work on a more ambitious production; and the result is "Palmer Cox's Brownies," a musical spectacle in three acts and nine scenes.

It is a rather interesting fact that as soon as word of Mr. Cox's design got abroad, children in all parts of the country, and by the thousands, began to send him suggestions regarding the treatment of the play and the disposition of the characters. One little girl implored him not to "kill off the Dude." Another, after much more or less useful advice, added, "If you are ever without money, and have no friends, dear Mr. Cox, you can come to my home." A third begged him to send her "a real live Brownie." "I would rather have one than a doll," she wrote, in straggling letters. "If you will give me the Dude, I will learn to sew his clothes."

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