

The Man Who Liked Dickens

by Evelyn Waugh

Although Mr. McMaster had lived in Amazonas for nearly sixty years, no one except a few families of Shiriana Indians was aware of his existence. His house stood in a small savannah, one of those little patches of sand and grass that crop up occasionally in that neighbourhood, three miles or so across, bounded on all sides by forest.

The stream which watered it was not marked on any map; it ran through rapids, always dangerous and at most seasons of the year impassable, to join the upper waters of the River Uraricoera, whose course, though boldly delineated in every school atlas, is still largely conjectural. None of the inhabitants of the district, except Mr. McMaster, had ever heard of the republic of Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil or Bolivia, each of whom had at one time or another claimed its possession.

Mr. McMaster's house was larger than those of his neighbours, but similar in character—a palm thatch roof, breast high walls of mud and wattle, and a mud floor. He owned the dozen or so head of puny cattle which grazed in the savannah, a plantation of cassava, some banana and mango trees, a dog, and, unique in the neighbourhood, a single-barrelled, breech-loading shotgun. The few commodities which he employed from the outside world came to him through a long succession of traders, passed from hand to hand, bartered for in a dozen languages at the extreme end of one of the longest threads in the web of commerce that spreads from Manáos into the remote fastness of the forest.

One day while Mr. McMaster was engaged in filling some cartridges, a Shiriana came to him with the news that a white man was approaching through the forest, alone and very sick. He closed the cartridge and loaded his gun with it, put those that were finished into his pocket and set out in the direction indicated.

The man was already clear of the bush when Mr. McMaster reached him, sitting on the ground, clearly in a very bad way. He was without hat or boots, and his clothes were so torn that it was only by the dampness of his body that they adhered to it; his feet were cut and grossly swollen, every exposed surface of skin was scarred by insect and bat bites; his eyes were wild with fever. He was talking to himself in delirium, but stopped when Mr. McMaster approached and addressed him in English.

"I'm tired," the man said; then: "Can't go any farther. My name is Henty and I'm tired. Anderson died. That was a long time ago. I expect you think I'm very odd."

"I think you are ill, my friend."

"Just tired. It must be several months since I had anything to eat."

Mr. McMaster hoisted him to his feet and, supporting him by the arm, led him across the hummocks of grass towards the farm.

"It is a very short way. When we get there I will give you something to make you better."

"Jolly kind of you." Presently he said: "I say, you speak English. I'm English, too. My name is Henty."

“Well, Mr. Henty, you aren’t to bother about anything more. You’re ill and you’ve had a rough journey. I’ll take care of you.”

They went very slowly, but at length reached the house.

“Lie there in the hammock. I will fetch something for you.”

Mr. McMaster went into the back room of the house and dragged a tin canister from under a heap of skins. It was full of a mixture of dried leaf and bark. He took a handful and went outside to the fire. When he returned he put one hand behind Henty’s head and held up the concoction of herbs in a calabash for him to drink. He sipped, shuddering slightly at the bitterness. At last he finished it. Mr. McMaster threw out the dregs on the floor. Henty lay back in the hammock sobbing quietly. Soon he fell into a deep sleep.

“Ill-fated” was the epithet applied by the press to the Anderson expedition to the Parima and upper Uraricoera region of Brazil. Every stage of the enterprise from the preliminary arrangements in London to its tragic dissolution in Amazonas was attacked by misfortune. It was due to one of the early setbacks that Paul Henty became connected with it.

He was not by nature an explorer; an even-tempered, good-looking young man of fastidious tastes and enviable possessions, unintellectual, but appreciative of fine architecture and the ballet, well travelled in the more accessible parts of the world, a collector though not a connoisseur, popular among hostesses, revered by his aunts. He was married to a lady of exceptional charm and beauty, and it was she who upset the good order of his life by confessing her affection for another man for the second time in the eight years of their marriage. The first occasion had been a short-lived infatuation with a tennis professional, the second was a captain in the Coldstream Guards, and more serious.

Henty’s first thought under the shock of this revelation was to go out and dine alone. He was a member of four clubs, but at three of them he was liable to meet his wife’s lover.

Accordingly he chose one which he rarely frequented, a semi-intellectual company composed of publishers, barristers, and men of scholarship awaiting election to the Athenaeum.

Here, after dinner, he fell into conversation with Professor Anderson and first heard of the proposed expedition to Brazil. The particular misfortune that was retarding arrangements at that moment was the defalcation of the secretary with two-thirds of the expedition’s capital. The principals were ready—Professor Anderson, Dr. Simmons the anthropologist, Mr. Necher the biologist, Mr. Brough the surveyor, wireless operator and mechanic—the scientific and sporting apparatus was packed up in crates ready to be embarked, the necessary facilities had been stamped and signed by the proper authorities, but unless twelve hundred pounds was forthcoming the whole thing would have to be abandoned.

Henty, as has been suggested, was a man of comfortable means; the expedition would last from nine months to a year; he could shut his country house—his wife, he reflected, would want to remain in London near her young man—and cover more than the sum required. There was a glamour about the whole journey which might, he felt, move even his wife’s sympathies. There and then, over the club fire, he decided to accompany Professor Anderson. When he went home that evening he announced to his wife: “I have decided what I shall do.”

“Yes, darling?”

“You are certain that you no longer love me?”

“Darling, you know, I adore you.”

“But you are certain you love this guardsman, Tony whatever-his-name-is, more?”

“Oh, yes, ever so much more. Quite a different thing altogether.”

“Very well, then. I do not propose to do anything about a divorce for a year. You shall have time to think it over. I am leaving next week for the Uraricoera.”

“Golly, where’s that?”

“I am not perfectly sure. Somewhere in Brazil, I think. It is unexplored. I shall be away a year.”

“But darling, how ordinary! Like people in books—big game, I mean, and all that.”

“You have obviously already discovered that I am a very ordinary person.”

“Now, Paul, don’t be disagreeable—oh, there’s the telephone. It’s probably Tony. If it is, d’you mind terribly if I talk to him alone for a bit?”

But in the ten days of preparation that followed she showed greater tenderness, putting off her soldier twice in order to accompany Henty to the shops where he was choosing his equipment and insisting on his purchasing a worsted cummerbund. On his last evening she gave a supper party for him at the Embassy to which she allowed him to ask any of his friends he liked; he could think of no one except Professor Anderson, who looked oddly dressed, danced tirelessly and was something of a failure with everyone. Next day Mrs. Henty came with her husband to the boat train and presented him with a pale blue, extravagantly soft blanket, in a suède case of the same colour furnished with a zip fastener and monogram. She kissed him good-bye and said, “Take care of yourself in wherever it is.”

Had she gone as far as Southampton she might have witnessed two dramatic passages. Mr. Brough got no farther than the gangway before he was arrested for debt—a matter of £32; the publicity given to the dangers of the expedition was responsible for the action. Henty settled the account.

The second difficulty was not to be overcome so easily. Mr. Necher’s mother was on the ship before them; she carried a missionary journal in which she had just read an account of the Brazilian forests. Nothing would induce her to permit her son’s departure; she would remain on board until he came ashore with her. If necessary, she would sail with him, but go into those forests alone he should not. All argument was unavailing with the resolute old lady, who eventually, five minutes before the time of embarkation, bore her son off in triumph, leaving the company without a biologist.

Nor was Mr. Brough’s adherence long maintained. The ship in which they were travelling was a cruising liner taking passengers on a round voyage. Mr. Brough had not been on board a week and had scarcely accustomed himself to the motion of the ship before he was engaged to be married; he was still engaged, although to a different lady, when they reached Manáos and refused all inducements to proceed farther, borrowing his return fare from Henty and arriving back in Southampton engaged to the lady of his first choice, whom he immediately married.

In Brazil the officials to whom their credentials were addressed were all out of power. While Henty and Professor Anderson negotiated with the new administrators, Dr. Simmons proceeded up river to Boa Vista where he established a base camp with the greater part of the stores. These were instantly commandeered by the revolutionary garrison, and he himself imprisoned for some days and subjected to various humiliations which so enraged him that, when released, he made promptly for the coast, stopping at Manáos only long enough to inform his colleagues that he insisted on leaving his case personally before the central authorities at Rio.

Thus, while they were still a month's journey from the start of their labours, Henty and Professor Anderson found themselves alone and deprived of the greater part of their supplies. The ignominy of immediate return was not to be borne. For a short time they considered the advisability of going into hiding for six months in Madeira or Tenerife, but even there detection seemed probable; there had been too many photographs in the illustrated papers before they left London. Accordingly, in low spirits, the two explorers at last set out alone for the Uraricoera with little hope of accomplishing anything of any value to anyone.

For seven weeks they paddled through green, humid tunnels of forest. They took a few snapshots of naked, misanthropic Indians; bottled some snakes and later lost them when their canoe capsized in the rapids; they overtaxed their digestions, imbibing nauseous intoxicants at native galas; they were robbed of the last of their sugar by a Guianese prospector. Finally, Professor Anderson fell ill with malignant malaria, chattered feebly for some days in his hammock, lapsed into coma and died, leaving Henty alone with a dozen Maku oarsmen, none of whom spoke a word of any language known to him. They reversed their course and drifted down stream with a minimum of provisions and no mutual confidence.

One day, a week or so after Professor Anderson's death, Henty awoke to find that his boys and his canoe had disappeared during the night, leaving him with only his hammock and pajamas some two or three hundred miles from the nearest Brazilian habitation. Nature forbade him to remain where he was although there seemed little purpose in moving. He set himself to follow the course of the stream, at first in the hope of meeting a canoe. But presently the whole forest became peopled for him with frantic apparitions, for no conscious reason at all. He plodded on, now wading in the water, now scrambling through the bush.

Vaguely at the back of his mind he had always believed that the jungle was a place full of food; that there was danger of snakes and savages and wild beasts, but not of starvation. But now he observed that this was far from being the case. The jungle consisted solely of immense tree trunks, embedded in a tangle of thorn and vine rope, all far from nutritious. On the first day he suffered hideously. Later he seemed anaesthetized and was chiefly embarrassed by the behaviour of the inhabitants who came out to meet him in footman's livery, carrying his dinner, and then irresponsibly disappeared or raised the covers of their dishes and revealed live tortoises. Many people who knew him in London appeared and ran round him with derisive cries, asking him questions to which he could not possibly know the answer. His wife came, too, and he was pleased to see her, assuming that she had got tired of her guardsman and was there to fetch him back; but she soon disappeared, like all the others.

It was then that he remembered that it was imperative for him to reach Manáos; he redoubled his energy, stumbling against boulders in the stream and getting caught up among the vines. "But I mustn't waste my strength," he reflected. Then he forgot that, too, and was conscious of nothing more until he found himself lying in a hammock in Mr. McMaster's house.

His recovery was slow. At first, days of lucidity alternated with delirium; then his temperature dropped and he was conscious even when most ill. The days of fever grew less frequent, finally occurring in the normal system of the tropics, between long periods of comparative health. Mr. McMaster dosed him regularly with herbal remedies.

“It’s very nasty,” said Henty, “but it does do good.”

“There is medicine for everything in the forest,” said Mr. McMaster; “to make you well and to make you ill. My mother was an Indian and she taught me many of them. I have learned others from time to time from my wives. There are plants to cure you and give you fever, to kill you and send you mad, to keep away snakes, to intoxicate fish so that you can pick them out of the water with your hands like fruit from a tree. There are medicines even I do not know. They say that it is possible to bring dead people to life after they have begun to stink, but I have not seen it done.”

“But surely you are English?”

“My father was—at least a Barbadian. He came to British Guiana as a missionary. He was married to a white woman but he left her in Guiana to look for gold. Then he took my mother. The Shiriana women are ugly but very devoted. I have had many. Most of the men and women living in this savannah are my children. That is why they obey—for that reason and because I have the gun. My father lived to a great age. It is not twenty years since he died. He was a man of education. Can you read?”

“Yes, of course.”

“It is not everyone who is so fortunate. I cannot.”

Henty laughed apologetically. “But I suppose you haven’t much opportunity here.”

“Oh yes, that is just it. I have a great many books. I will show you when you are better. Until five years ago there was an Englishman—at least a black man, but he was well educated in Georgetown. He died. He used to read to me every day until he died. You shall read to me when you are better.”

“I shall be delighted to.”

“Yes, you shall read to me,” Mr. McMaster repeated, nodding over the calabash.

During the early days of his convalescence Henty had little conversation with his host; he lay in the hammock staring up at the thatched roof and thinking about his life, rehearsing over and over again different incidents in their life together, including her affairs with the tennis professional and the soldier. The days, exactly twelve hours each, passed without distinction. Mr. McMaster retired to sleep at sundown, leaving a little lamp burning—a hand-woven wick drooping from a pot of beef fat—to keep away vampire bats.

The first time that Henty left the house Mr. McMaster took him for a little stroll around the farm.

“I will show you the black man’s grave,” he said, leading him to a mound between the mango trees. “He was very kind to me. Every afternoon until he died, for two hours, he used to read to me. I think I will put up a cross—to commemorate his death and your arrival—a pretty idea. Do you believe in God?”

“I’ve never really thought about it much.”

“You are perfectly right. I have thought about it a great deal and I still do not know ... Dickens did.”

“I suppose so.”

“Oh yes, it is apparent in all his books. You will see.”

That afternoon Mr. McMaster began the construction of a headpiece for the Negro’s grave. He worked with a large spokeshave in a wood so hard that it grated and rang like metal. At last when Henty had passed six or seven consecutive days without fever, Mr. McMaster said, “Now I think you are well enough to see the books.”

At one end of the hut there was a kind of loft formed by a rough platform erected up in the eaves of the roof. Mr. McMaster propped a ladder against it and mounted. Henty followed, still unsteady after his illness. Mr. McMaster sat on the platform and Henty stood at the top of the ladder looking over. There was a heap of small bundles there, tied up with rag, palm leaf and rawhide.

“It has been hard to keep out the worms and ants. Two are practically destroyed. But there is an oil the Indians know how to make that is useful.”

He unwrapped the nearest parcel and handed down a calf-bound book. It was an early American edition of *Bleak House*.

“It does not matter which we take first.”

“You are fond of Dickens?”

“Why, yes, of course. More than fond, far more. You see, they are the only books I have ever heard. My father used to read them and then later the black man ... and now you. I have heard them all several times by now but I never get tired; there is always more to be learned and noticed, so many characters, so many changes of scene, so many words ... I have all Dickens’s books except those that the ants devoured. It takes a long time to read them all—more than two years.”

“Well,” said Henty lightly, “they will well last out my visit.”

“Oh, I hope not. It is delightful to start again. Each time I think I find more to enjoy and admire.”

They took down the first volume of *Bleak House* and that afternoon Henty had his first reading.

He had always rather enjoyed reading aloud and in the first year of marriage had shared several books in this way with his wife, until one day, in one of her rare moments of confidence, she remarked that it was torture to her. Sometimes after that he had thought it might be agreeable to have children to read to. But Mr. McMaster was a unique audience.

The old man sat astride his hammock opposite Henty, fixing him throughout with his eyes, and following the words, soundlessly, with his lips. Often when a new character was introduced he would say, “Repeat the name, I have forgotten him,” or, “Yes, yes, I remember her well. She dies, poor woman.” He would frequently interrupt with questions; not as Henty would have imagined

about the circumstances of the story—such things as the procedure of the Lord Chancellor’s Court or the social conventions of the time, though they must have been unintelligible, did not concern him—but always about the characters. “Now, why does she say that? Does she really mean it? Did she feel faint because of the heat of the fire or of something in that paper?” He laughed loudly at all the jokes and at some passages which did not seem humorous to Henty, asking him to repeat them two or three times; and later at the description of the sufferings of the outcasts in “Tom-all-Alone’s” tears ran down his cheeks into his beard. His comments on the story were usually simple. “I think that Dedlock is a very proud man,” or, “Mrs. Jellyby does not take enough care of her children.” Henty enjoyed the readings almost as much as he did.

At the end of the first day the old man said, “You read beautifully, with a far better accent than the black man. And you explain better. It is almost as though my father were here again.” And always at the end of a session he thanked his guest courteously. “I enjoyed that very much. It was an extremely distressing chapter. But, if I remember rightly, it will all turn out well.”

By the time that they were well into the second volume, however, the novelty of the old man’s delight had begun to wane, and Henty was feeling strong enough to be restless. He touched more than once on the subject of his departure, asking about canoes and rains and the possibility of finding guides. But Mr. McMaster seemed obtuse and paid no attention to these hints.

One day, running his thumb through the pages of Bleak House that remained to be read, Henty said, “We still have a lot to get through. I hope I shall be able to finish it before I go.” “Oh yes,” said Mr. McMaster. “Do not disturb yourself about that. You will have time to finish it, my friend.”

For the first time Henty noticed something slightly menacing in his host’s manner. That evening at supper, a brief meal of farine and dried beef eaten just before sundown, Henty renewed the subject.

“You know, Mr. McMaster, the time has come when I must be thinking about getting back to civilization. I have already imposed myself on your hospitality for too long.”

Mr. McMaster bent over his plate, crunching mouthfuls of farine, but made no reply.

“How soon do you think I shall be able to get a boat? ... I said how soon do you think I shall be able to get a boat? I appreciate all your kindness to me more than I can say, but ...”

“My friend, any kindness I may have shown is amply repaid by your reading of Dickens. Do not let us mention the subject again.”

“Well, I’m very glad you have enjoyed it. I have, too. But I really must be thinking of getting back ...”

“Yes,” said Mr. McMaster. “The black man was like that. He thought of it all the time. But he died here ...”

Twice during the next day Henty opened the subject but his host was evasive. Finally he said, “Forgive me, Mr. McMaster, but I really must press the point. When can I get a boat?”

“There is no boat.”

“Well, the Indians can build one.”

“You must wait for the rains. There is not enough water in the river now.”

“How long will that be?”

“A month ... two months ...”

They had finished Bleak House and were nearing the end of Dombey and Son when the rain came.

“Now it is time to make preparations to go.”

“Oh, that is impossible. The Indians will not make a boat during the rainy season—it is one of their superstitions.”

“You might have told me.”

“Did I not mention it? I forgot.”

Next morning Henty went out alone while his host was busy, and, looking as aimless as he could, strolled across the savannah to the group of Indian houses. There were four or five Shirianas sitting in one of the doorways. They did not look up as he approached them. He addressed them in the few words of Maku he had acquired during the journey but they made no sign whether they understood him or not. Then he drew a sketch of a canoe in the sand, he went through some vague motions of carpentry, pointed from them to him, then made motions of giving something to them and scratched out the outlines of a gun and a hat and a few other recognizable articles of trade. One of the women giggled, but no one gave any sign of comprehension, and he went away unsatisfied.

At their midday meal Mr. McMaster said, “Mr. Henty, the Indians tell me that you have been trying to speak with them. It is easier that you say anything you wish through me. You realize, do you not, that they would do nothing without my authority. They regard themselves, quite rightly in most cases, as my children.”

“Well, as a matter of fact, I was asking them about a canoe.”

“So they gave me to understand ... and now if you have finished your meal perhaps we might have another chapter. I am quite absorbed in the book.”

They finished Dombey and Son; nearly a year had passed since Henty had left England, and his gloomy foreboding of permanent exile became suddenly acute when, between the pages of Martin Chuzzlewit, he found a document written in pencil in irregular characters.

Year 1919 I James McMaster of Brazil do swear to Barnabas Washington of Georgetown that if he finish this book in fact Martin Chuzzlewit I will let him go away back as soon as finished.

There followed a heavy pencil X, and after it: Mr. McMaster made this mark signed Barnabas Washington.

“Mr. McMaster,” said Henty. “I must speak frankly. You saved my life, and when I get back to

civilization I will reward you to the best of my ability. I will give you anything within reason. But at present you are keeping me here against my will. I demand to be released.”
 “But, my friend, what is keeping you? You are under no restraint. Go when you like.”

“You know very well that I can’t get away without your help.”

“In that case you must humour an old man. Read me another chapter.”

“Mr. McMaster, I swear by anything you like that when I get to Manáos I will find someone to take my place. I will pay a man to read to you all day.”

“But I have no need of another man. You read so well.”

“I have read for the last time.”

“I hope not,” said Mr. McMaster politely.

That evening at supper only one plate of dried meat and farine was brought in and Mr. McMaster ate alone. Henty lay without speaking, staring at the thatch.

Next day at noon a single plate was put before Mr. McMaster, but with it lay his gun, cocked, on his knee, as he ate. Henty resumed the reading of Martin Chuzzlewit where it had been interrupted.

Weeks passed hopelessly. They read Nicholas Nickleby and Little Dorrit and Oliver Twist. Then a stranger arrived in the savannah, a half-caste prospector, one of that lonely order of men who wander for a lifetime through the forests, tracing the little streams, sifting the gravel and, ounce by ounce, filling the little leather sack of gold dust, more often than not dying of exposure and starvation with five hundred dollars’ worth of gold hung around their necks.

Mr. McMaster was vexed at his arrival, gave him farine and passo and sent him on his journey within an hour of his arrival, but in that hour Henty had time to scribble his name on a slip of paper and put it into the man’s hand.

From now on there was hope. The days followed their unvarying routine; coffee at sunrise, a morning of inaction while Mr. McMaster potted about on the business of the farm, farine and passo at noon, Dickens in the afternoon, farine and passo and sometimes some fruit for supper, silence from sunset to dawn with the small wick glowing in the beef fat and the palm thatch overhead dimly discernible; but Henty lived in quiet confidence and expectation.

Some time, this year or the next, the prospector would arrive at a Brazilian village with news of his discovery. The disasters to the Anderson expedition would not have passed unnoticed. Henty could imagine the headlines that must have appeared in the popular press; even now probably there were search parties working over the country he had crossed; any day English voices might sound over the savannah and a dozen friendly adventurers come crashing through the bush. Even as he was reading, while his lips mechanically followed the printed pages, his mind wandered away from his eager, crazy host opposite, and he began to narrate to himself incidents of his homecoming—the gradual re-encounters with civilization; he shaved and bought new clothes at Manáos, telegraphed for money, received wires of congratulation; he enjoyed the leisurely river journey to Belem, the big liner to Europe; savoured good claret and fresh meat and spring vegetables; he was shy at meeting his wife and uncertain how to address ... “Darling, you’ve been much longer than you said. I quite thought you were lost ...”

And then Mr. McMaster interrupted. “May I trouble you to read that passage again? It is one I particularly enjoy.”

The weeks passed; there was no sign of rescue, but Henty endured the day for hope of what might happen on the morrow; he even felt a slight stirring of cordiality towards his gaoler and was therefore quite willing to join him when, one evening after a long conference with an Indian neighbour, he proposed a celebration.

“It is one of the local feast days,” he explained, “and they have been making piwari. You may not like it, but you should try some. We will go across to this man’s home tonight.”

Accordingly after supper they joined a party of Indians that were assembled round the fire in one of the huts at the other side of the savannah. They were singing in an apathetic, monotonous manner and passing a large calabash of liquid from mouth to mouth. Separate bowls were brought for Henty and Mr. McMaster, and they were given hammocks to sit in.

“You must drink it all without lowering the cup. That is the etiquette.”

Henty gulped the dark liquid, trying not to taste it. But it was not unpleasant, hard and muddy on the palate like most of the beverages he had been offered in Brazil, but with a flavour of honey and brown bread. He leant back in the hammock feeling unusually contented. Perhaps at that very moment the search party was in camp a few hours’ journey from them.

Meanwhile he was warm and drowsy. The cadence of song rose and fell interminably, liturgically. Another calabash of piwari was offered him and he handed it back empty. He lay full length watching the play of shadows on the thatch as the Shirianas began to dance. Then he shut his eyes and thought of England and his wife and fell asleep.

He awoke, still in the Indian hut, with the impression that he had outslept his usual hour. By the position of the sun he knew it was late afternoon. No one else was about. He looked for his watch and found to his surprise that it was not on his wrist. He had left it in the house, he supposed, before coming to the party.

“I must have been tight last night,” he reflected. “Traucherous drink, that.” He had a headache and feared a recurrence of fever. He found when he set his feet to the ground that he stood with difficulty; his walk was unsteady and his mind confused as it had been during the first weeks of his convalescence. On the way across the savannah he was obliged to stop more than once, shutting his eyes and breathing deeply. When he reached the house he found Mr. McMaster sitting there.

“Ah, my friend, you are late for the reading this afternoon. There is scarcely another half hour of light. How do you feel?”

“Rotten. That drink doesn’t seem to agree with me.”

“I will give you something to make you better. The forest has remedies for everything; to make you awake and to make you sleep.”

“You haven’t seen my watch anywhere?”

“You have missed it?”

“Yes. I thought I was wearing it. I say, I’ve never slept so long.”

“Not since you were a baby. Do you know how long? Two days.”

“Nonsense. I can’t have.”

“Yes, indeed. It is a long time. It is a pity because you missed our guests.”

“Guests?”

“Why, yes. I have been quite gay while you were asleep. Three men from outside. Englishmen. It is a pity you missed them. A pity for them, too, as they particularly wished to see you. But what could I do? You were so sound asleep. They had come all the way to find you, so—I thought you would not mind—as you could not greet them yourself I gave them a little souvenir, your watch. They wanted something to take home to your wife who is offering a great reward for news of you. They were very pleased with it. And they took some photographs of the little cross I put up to commemorate your coming. They were pleased with that, too. They were very easily pleased. But I do not suppose they will visit us again, our life here is so retired ... no pleasures except reading ... I do not suppose we shall ever have visitors again ... well, well, I will get you some medicine to make you feel better. Your head aches, does it not ... We will not have any Dickens today ... but tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. Let us read *Little Dorrit* again. There are passages in that book I can never hear without the temptation to weep.”