

The Citadel

BY A. J. CRONIN

BOSTON

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BOOK I

I

LATE ONE OCTOBER afternoon in the year 1921, a shabby young man gazed with fixed intensity through the window of a third-class compartment in the almost empty train labouring up the Penowell valley from Swansea. All that day Manson had travelled from the North, changing at Carlisle and Shrewsbury, yet the final stage of his tedious journey to South Wales found him strung to a still greater excitement by the prospects of his post, the first of his medical career, in this strange, disfigured country.

Outside, a heavy rainstorm came blinding down between the mountains which rose on either side of the single railway track. The mountain tops were hidden in a grey waste of sky, but their sides, scarred by ore workings, fell black and desolate, blemished by great heaps of slag on which a few dirty sheep wandered in vain hope of pasture. No bush, no blade of vegetation was visible. The trees, seen in the fading light, were gaunt and stunted spectres. At a bend of the line the red glare of a foundry flashed into sight, illuminating a score of workmen stripped to the waist, their torsos straining, arms upraised to strike. Though the scene was swiftly lost behind the huddled top gear of a mine, a sense of power persisted, tense and vivid. Manson drew a long breath. He felt an answering surge of effort, a sudden overwhelming exhilaration springing from the hope and promise of the future.

Darkness had fallen, emphasizing the strangeness and remoteness of the scene when, half an hour later, the engine panted into Blaenelly, the end township of the Valley, and the terminus of the line. He had arrived at last. Gripping his bag, Manson leaped from the train and walked quickly down the platform, searching eagerly for some sign of welcome. At the station exit, beneath a wind-blown lamp, a yellow-faced old man in a square hat and a long nightshirt

of a mackintosh stood waiting. He inspected Manson with a jaundiced eye and his voice, when it came, was reluctant.

"You Doctor Page's new assistant?"

"That's right. Manson. Andrew Manson is the name."

"Huh! Mine's Thomas; 'Old Thomas' they mostly call me, dang 'em! I got the gig here. Set in—unless you'd rayther swim."

Manson slung his bag up and climbed into the battered gig behind a tall, angular black horse. Thomas followed, took the reins and addressed the horse.

"Hue-up, Taffy!" he said.

They drove off through the town, which, though Andrew tried keenly to discern its outline, presented in the slashing rain no more than a blurred huddle of low grey houses ranged beneath the high and ever-present mountains. For several minutes the old groom did not speak, but continued to dart pessimistic glances at Andrew from beneath the dripping brim of his hat. He bore no resemblance to the smart coachman of a successful doctor, but was, on the contrary, wizened and slovenly, and all the time he gave off a peculiar yet powerful odour of stale cooking-fat.

At last he said: "Only jest got your parchment, eh?"

Andrew nodded.

"I knowed it." Old Thomas spat. His triumph made him more gravely communicative. "Last assistant went ten days ago. Mostly they don't stop."

"Why?" Despite his nervousness, Andrew smiled.

"Work's too hard for one thing, I reckon."

"And for another?"

"You'll find out!" A moment later, as a guide might indicate a fine cathedral, Thomas lifted his whip and pointed to the end of a row of houses where, from a small lighted doorway, a cloud of steam was emerging. "See that! That there's the missus and my chip petato shop. We fry twice a week. Wet fish." A secret amusement twitched his long upper lip. "Reckon you might want to know, shortly."

Here the main street ended and, turning up a short uneven side road, they boggled across a piece of waste ground, and entered the narrow drive of a house which stood isolated from the adjacent rows behind three monkey-puzzle trees. On the gate was the name BRYNGOWER.

"This is us," said Thomas, pulling up the horse.

Andrew descended. The next minute, while he was gathering

himself for the ordeal of his entrance, the front door was flung open and he was in the lighted hall being welcomed effusively by a short, plump, smiling woman of about forty with a shining face and bright bold twinkling eyes.

"Well! Well! This must be Doctor Manson. Come in, my dee-ar, come in. I'm Doctor's wife, Mrs. Page. I do hope you didn't have a tryin' journey. I *am* pleased to see you. I been out my mind, nearly, since that last awful feller we had left us. You ought to have seen him. He was a waster if ever I met one, I can tell you. Oh! But never mind. It's all right now you're here. Come along, I'll show you to your room myself."

Upstairs, Andrew's room was a small camsteiled apartment with a brass bed, a yellow varnished chest of drawers, and a bamboo table bearing a basin and ewer.

Glancing round it, while her black button eyes searched his face, he said with anxious politeness: "This looks very comfortable, Mrs. Page."

"Yes, indeed." She smiled and patted his shoulder maternally. "You'll do famous here, my dee-ar. You treat me right and I'll treat you right. I can't say fairer nor that, can I? Now come along before you're a minute older and meet Doctor." She paused, her gaze still questioning his, her tone striving to be off-hand. "I don't know if I said so in my letter but, as a matter of fact—Doctor 'asn't been too well, lately."

Andrew looked at her in sudden surprise.

"Oh, it's nothing much," she went on quickly, before he could speak. "He's been laid up a few weeks. But he'll soon be all right. Make no mistake about that."

Perplexed, Andrew followed her to the end of the passage, where she threw open a door, exclaiming blithely:—

"Here's Doctor Manson, Edward—our new assistant. He's come to say 'ow do."

As Andrew went into the room, a long fustily furnished bedroom with chenille curtains closely drawn and a small fire burning in the grate, Edward Page turned slowly upon the bed, seeming to do so by a great effort. He was a big, bony man of perhaps sixty with harshly lined features and tired, luminous eyes. His whole expression was stamped with suffering and a kind of weary patience. And there was something more. The light of the oil lamp, falling across the pillow, revealed one half of his face expressionless and waxen. The left side of his body was equally paralyzed and his left hand,

which lay upon the patchwork counterpane, was contracted to a shiny cone.

Observing these signs of a severe and far from recent stroke, Andrew was conscious of a sudden shock of dismay. There was an odd silence.

"I hope you'll like it here," Doctor Page remarked at length, speaking slowly and with difficulty, slurring his words a little. "I hope you'll find the practice won't be too much for you. You're very young."

"I'm twenty-four, sir," Andrew answered awkwardly. "I know this is the first job I've had, and all that—but I'm not afraid of work."

"There, now!" Mrs. Page beamed. "Didn't I tell you, Edward, we'd be lucky with our next one?"

An even deeper immobility settled on Page's face. He gazed at Andrew. Then his interest seemed to fade.

He said in a tired voice: "I hope you'll stay."

"My goodness gracious!" cried Mrs. Page. "What a thing to say!" She turned to Andrew, smilingly and apologetic. "It's only because he's a morsel down to-day. But he'll soon be up and doing again. Won't you, ducky?" Bending, she kissed her husband heartily. "There now! I'll send your supper up by Annie whenever we've 'ad ours."

Page did not answer. The stony look on his one-sided face made his mouth seem twisted. His good hand strayed to the book that lay on the table beside his bed. Andrew saw that it was entitled *The Wild Birds of Europe*. Even before the paralyzed man began to read he felt himself dismissed.

As Andrew went down to supper his thoughts were painfully confused. He had applied for this assistantship in answer to an advertisement in the *Lancet*. Yet in the correspondence, conducted at this end by Mrs. Page, which had led to his securing the post, there had been no mention whatsoever of Doctor Page's illness. But Page was ill; there could be no question of the gravity of the cerebral hæmorrhage which had incapacitated him. It would be months before he was fit for work, if, indeed, he were ever fit for work again.

With an effort Andrew put the puzzle from his mind. He was young, strong, and had no objection to the extra work in which Page's illness might involve him. Indeed, in his enthusiasm, he yearned for an avalanche of calls.

"You're lucky, my dee-ar," remarked Mrs. Page brightly as she bustled into the dining room. "You can have your bit of snap straight off to-night. No surgery. Dai Jenkins done it."

"Dai Jenkins?"

"He's our dispenser," Mrs. Page threw out casually. "A handy little feller. An' willin' too. 'Doc' Jenkins some folks even call him, though of course he's not to be compared in the same breath with Doctor Page. He's done the surgery and visits also, these last ten days."

Andrew stared at her in fresh concern. All that he had been told, all the warnings he had received regarding the questionable ways of practice in these remote Welsh Valleys, flashed into his recollection. Again it cost him an effort to be silent.

Mrs. Page sat at the head of the table with her back to the fire. When she had wedged herself comfortably into her chair with a cushion she sighed in pleasant anticipation and tinkled the little cowbell in front of her. A middle-aged servant with a pale, well-scrubbed face brought in the supper, stealing a glance at Andrew as she entered.

"Come along, Annie," cried Mrs. Page, buttering a wedge of soft bread and stuffing it in her mouth. "This is Doctor Manson."

Annie did not answer. She served Andrew in a contained, silent fashion with a thin slice of cold boiled brisket. For Mrs. Page, however, there was a hot beefsteak and onions with a pint bottle of oat-meal stout. As the doctor's wife lifted the cover from her special dish and cut into the juicy meat, her teeth watering in expectation, she explained:—

"I didn't have much lunch, Doctor. Besides, I got to watch my diet. It's the blood. I have to take a drop of porter for the blood."

Andrew chewed his stringy brisket and drank cold water determinedly. After a momentary indignation his main difficulty lay with his own sense of humour. Her pretense of invalidism was so blatant he had to struggle to conquer a wild impulse to laugh.

During the meal Mrs. Page ate freely but said little. At length, sopping up the gravy with her bread, she finished her steak, smacked her lips over the last of the stout, and lay back in her chair, breathing a trifle heavily, her round little cheeks flushed and shiny. Now she seemed disposed to linger at table, inclined to confidences—perhaps trying, in her own bold way, to sum Manson up.

Studying him, she saw a spare and gawky youngster, dark, rather

tensely drawn, with high cheekbones, a fine jaw and blue eyes. These eyes, when he raised them, were, despite the nervous tensiety of his brow, extraordinarily steady and inquiring. Although Blodwen Page knew nothing of it, she was looking at a Celtic type. Though she admitted the vigour and alert intelligence in Andrew's face, what pleased her most of all was his acceptance, without demur, of that scanty cut from the three-days-old heel of brisket. She reflected that, though he looked hungry, he might not be hard to feed.

"I'm sure we'll get on famous, you and me," she again declared genially, picking her teeth with a hairpin. "I do need a bit o' luck for a change." Mellowed, she told him of her troubles, and sketched a vague outline of the practice and its position. "It's been awful, my dee-ar. You don't know. What with Doctor Page's illness, wicked bad assistants, nothin' comin' in and everythin' goin' out—well! you wouldn't believe it! And the job I've 'ad to keep the manager and mine officials sweet—it's them the practice money comes through—what there is of it," she added hurriedly. "You see, the way they work things in Blaenelly is like this: the Company has three doctors on its list, though mind you Doctor Page is far and away the cleverest doctor of the lot. And besides—the time he's been 'ere! Nearly thirty years and more; that's something, I should think! Well, then, these doctors can have as many assistants as they like,—Doctor Page has you, and Doctor Lewis has a would-be feller called Denny,—but the assistants don't ever get on the Company's list. Anyway, as I was sayin', the Company deducts so much from every man's wages they employ at the mines and the quarries, and pays that out to the listed doctors according to 'ow many of the men signs on with them."

She broke off under the strain of her illiteracy and an overloaded stomach.

"I think I see how the system works, Mrs. Page."

"Well, then!" She heaved out her jolly laugh. "You don't have to bother about it no more. All you got to remember is that you're workin' for Doctor Page. That's the main thing, Doctor. Just remember you're workin' for Doctor Page and you and poor little me'll get on a treat."

It seemed to Manson, silent and observant, that she tried at the same time to excite his pity and to establish her authority over him, all beneath that manner of breezy affability. Perhaps she felt she had unbent too far. With a glance at the clock, she straightened

herself, restored the hairpin to her greasy black hair. Then she rose. Her voice was different, almost peremptory.

"By the way, there's a call for Number 7 Glydar Place. It come in the back of five o'clock. You better do it straight away."

II

ANDREW WENT OUT to the call immediately, with a queer sensation, almost of relief. He was glad of the opportunity to disentangle himself from the curious and conflicting emotions stirred up by his arrival at Bryngower. Already he had a glimmer of a suspicion as to how matters stood and of how he would be made use of by Blodwen Page to run the practice for his disabled principal. It was a strange situation, and very different from any romantic picture which his fancy might have painted. Yet, after all, his work was the important thing; beside it all else was trivial. He longed to begin it. Insensibly he hastened his pace, taut with anticipation, exulting in the realization—this, this was his first case.

It was still raining when he crossed the smeary blackness of the waste land and struck along Chapel Street in the direction vaguely indicated by Mrs. Page. Darkly, as he traversed it, the town took shape before him. Shops and chapels—Zion, Capel, Hebron, Bethel, Bethesda; he passed a round dozen of them—then the big Cooperative Stores, and a branch of the Western Counties Bank, all lining the main thoroughfare, lying deep in the bed of the Valley. The sense of being buried, far down in this cleft of the mountains, was singularly oppressive. There were few people about. At right angles, reaching up a short distance on either side of Chapel Street, were rows and rows of blue-roofed workers' houses. And, beyond, at the head of the gorge, beneath a glow that spread like a great fan into the opaque sky, the Blaenelly Hæmatite Mine and Ore Works.

He reached 7 Glydar Place, knocked breathlessly upon the door, and was at once admitted to the kitchen, where, in the recessed bed, the patient lay. She was a young woman, wife of a steel puddler named Williams, and as he approached the bedside with a fast-beating heart he felt, overwhelmingly, the significance of this, the real starting-point of his life. How often had he envisaged it as,

in a crowd of students, he had watched a demonstration in Professor Lamplough's wards! Now there was no sustaining crowd, no easy exposition. He was alone, confronted by a case which he must diagnose and treat unaided. All at once, with a quick pang, he was conscious of his nervousness, his inexperience, his complete unpreparedness, for such a task.

While the husband stood by in the cramped, ill-lit stone-floored room, Andrew Manson examined the patient with scrupulous care. There was no doubt about it, she was ill. She complained that her head ached intolerably. Temperature, pulse, tongue, they all spoke of trouble, serious trouble. What was it? Andrew asked himself that question with a strained intensity as he went over her again. His first case. Oh, he knew that he was overanxious! But suppose he made an error, a frightful blunder? And worse—suppose he found himself unable to make a diagnosis? He had missed nothing. Nothing. Yet he still found himself struggling towards some solution of the problem, striving to group the symptoms under the heading of some recognized disease. At last, aware that he could protract his investigation no longer, he straightened himself slowly, folding up his stethoscope, fumbling for words.

"Did she have a chill?" he asked, his eyes upon the floor.

"Yes, indeed," Williams answered eagerly. He had looked scared during the prolonged examination. "Three, four days ago. I made sure it was a chill, Doctor."

Andrew nodded, attempting painfully to generate a confidence he did not feel. He muttered. "We'll soon have her right. Come to the surgery in half an hour. I'll give you a bottle of medicine."

He took his leave of them and with his head down, thinking desperately, he trudged back to the surgery, a ramshackle wooden erection standing at the entrance to Page's drive. Inside, he lit the gas and began to pace backwards and forwards beside the blue and green bottles on the dusty shelves, racking his brains, groping in the darkness. There was nothing symptomatic. It must, yes, it must be a chill. But in his heart he knew that it was not a chill. He groaned in exasperation, dismayed and angry at his own inadequacy. He was forced, unwillingly, to temporize. Professor Lamplough, when confronted by obscurity in his wards, had a neat little ticket, which he tactfully applied: P.U.O.—pyrexia of unknown origin—it was noncommittal and exact, and it had such an admirable scientific sound!

Unhappily, Andrew took a six-ounce bottle from the recess be-

neath the dispensary counter and began with a frown of concentration to compound an antipyretic mixture. Spirits of nitre, salicylate of sodium—where the dickens was the soda sal.? Oh, there it was! He tried to cheer himself by reflecting that they were all splendid, all excellent drugs, bound to get the temperature down, certain to do good. Professor Lamplough had often declared there was no drug so generally valuable as salicylate of sodium.

He had just finished his compounding and with a mild sense of achievement was writing the label when the surgery bell went *ping*, the outer door swung open, and a short, powerfully thickset red-faced man of thirty strolled in, followed by a dog. There was a silence while the black-and-tan mongrel squatted on its muddy haunches, and the man—who wore an old velveteen suit, pit stockings, and hobnail boots, with a sodden oilskin cape over his shoulders—looked Andrew up and down. His voice, when it came, was politely ironic and annoyingly well-bred.

"I saw a light in your window as I was passing. Thought I'd look in to welcome you. I'm Denny, assistant to the esteemed Doctor Lewis, L.S.A. That, in case you haven't met it, is the Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries, the highest qualification known to God and man."

Andrew stared back doubtfully. Philip Denny lit a cigarette from a crumpled paper packet, threw the match on the floor, and strolled forward insolently. He picked up the bottle of medicine, read the address, the directions, uncorked it, sniffed it, recorked it and put it down, his morose red face turning blandly complimentary.

"Splendid! You've begun the good work already! One tablespoon every three hours. God Almighty! It's reassuring to meet the dear old mumbo-jummery. But, Doctor, why not three times a day? Don't you realize, Doctor, that in strict orthodoxy the tablespoonfuls should pass down the oesophagus three times a day?" He paused, becoming, with his assumed air of confidence, more blandly offensive than ever. "Now tell me, Doctor, what's in it? Spirit of nitre, by the smell. Wonderful stuff, sweet spirit of nitre. Wonderful, wonderful, my dear Doctor! Carminative, stimulant, diuretic, and you can swill it by the tubful. Don't you remember what it says in the little red book? When in doubt give spirit of nitre—or is it *pot. iod.*? Tut! Tut! I seem to have forgotten some of my essentials."

Again there was a silence in the wooden shed, broken only by the drumming of the rain upon the tin roof. Suddenly Denny laughed,

a mocking appreciation of the blank expression on Andrew's face.

He said derisively: "Science apart, Doctor, you might satisfy my curiosity. Why have you come here?"

By this time Andrew's temper was rising rapidly. He answered grimly: "My idea was to turn Blaenelly into a health resort—a sort of spa, you know."

Again Denny laughed. His laugh was an insult, which made Andrew long to hit him.

"Witty, witty, my dear Doctor. The true Scots steam-roller humour. Unfortunately I can't recommend the water here as being ideally suited for a spa. As to the medical gentlemen—my dear Doctor, in this Valley they're the rag, tag, and bobtail of a glorious, a truly noble profession."

"Including yourself?"

"Precisely!" Denny nodded. He was silent a moment, contemplating Andrew from beneath his sandy eyebrows. Then he dropped his mocking irony; his ugly features turned morose again. His tone, though bitter, was serious.

"Look here, Manson! I realize you're just passing through on your way to Harley Street, but in the meantime there are one or two things about this place you ought to know. You won't find it conforms to the best traditions of romantic practice. There's no hospital, no ambulance, no X rays, no anything. If you want to operate you use the kitchen table. You wash up afterwards at the scullery bosh. The sanitation won't bear looking at. In a dry summer the kids die like flies with infantile cholera. Page, your boss, was a damn good old doctor, but he's finished now, bitched by Blodwen, and'll never do a hand's turn again. Lewis, my owner, is a tight little money-chasing midwife. Bramwell, the Silver King, knows nothing but a few sentimental recitations and the Songs of Solomon. As for myself, I'd better anticipate the gay tidings—I drink like a fish. Oh! and Jenkins, your tame druggist, does a thriving trade, on the side, in little lead pills for female ills. I think that's about all. Come, Hawkins, we'll go." He called the mongrel and moved heavily towards the door. There he paused, his eyes ranging again from the bottle on the counter to Manson. His tone was flat, quite uninterested. "By the way, I should look out for enteric in Glydar Place, if I were you. Some of these cases aren't exactly typical."

Ping! went the door again. Before Andrew could answer, Doctor Philip Denny and Hawkins disappeared into the wet darkness.

It was not his lumpy flock mattress which caused Andrew to sleep badly that night, but growing anxiety about the case in Glydar Place. Was it enteric? Denny's parting remark had started a fresh train of doubt and misgiving in his already uncertain mind. Dreading that he had overlooked some vital symptom, he restrained himself with difficulty from rising and revisiting the case at an unearthly hour of the morning. Indeed, as he tossed and turned through the long restless night, he came to ask himself if he knew anything of medicine at all.

Manson's nature was extraordinarily intense. Probably he derived this from his mother, a Highland woman who, in her childhood, had watched the northern lights leap through the frosted sky from her home in Ullapool. His father, John Manson, a small Fifeshire farmer, had been solid, painstaking, and steady. He had never made a success of the land, and when he was killed in the Yeomanry in the last year of the War, he had left the affairs of the little steading in a sad muddle. For twelve months Jessie Manson had struggled to run the farm as a dairy, even driving the float upon the milk-round herself when she felt Andrew was too busy with his books to do so. Then the cough which she had unsuspectingly endured for a period of years turned worse and suddenly she surrendered to the lung complaint which ravages that soft-skinned, dark-haired type.

At eighteen Andrew found himself alone, a first-year student at St. Andrews University, carrying a scholarship worth forty pounds a year, but otherwise penniless. His salvation had been the Glen Endowment, that typically Scottish foundation, which in the naïve terminology of the late Sir Andrew Glen "invites deserving and necessitous students of the baptismal name of Andrew to apply for loans not exceeding fifty pounds a year for five years provided they are conscientiously prepared to reimburse such loans whenever they have qualified."

The Glen Endowment, coupled with some gay starvation, had sent Andrew through the remainder of his course at St. Andrews, then on to the Medical Schools in the city of Dundee. And gratitude to the Endowment, allied to an inconvenient honesty, had sent

him hurrying down to South Wales—where newly qualified assistants could command the highest remuneration—to a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year, when in his heart he would have preferred a clinical appointment at the Edinburgh Royal and an honorarium of one tenth that sum.

And now he was in Blaenelly, rising, shaving, dressing, all in a haze of worry over his first patient. He ate his breakfast quickly, then ran up to his room again. There he opened his bag and took out a small blue leather case. He opened the case and gazed earnestly at the medal inside—the Hunter Gold Medal, awarded annually at St. Andrews to the best student in clinical medicine. He, Andrew Manson, had won it. He prized it beyond everything, had come to regard it as his talisman, his inspiration for the future. But this morning he viewed it less with pride than with a queer, secret entreaty, as though trying to restore his confidence in himself. Then he hurried out for the morning surgery.

Dai Jenkins was already in the wooden shanty when Andrew reached it, running water from the tap into a large earthenware pipkin. He was a quick little whippet of a man with purple-veined, hollow cheeks, eyes that went everywhere at once, and the tightest pair of trousers on his thin legs that Andrew had ever seen.

He greeted Manson ingratiatingly:—

"You don't have to be so early, Doctor. I can do the repeat mixtures and the certificates before you come in. Mrs. Page had a rubber stamp made with Doctor's signature when he was taken bad."

"Thanks," Andrew answered. "I'd rather see the cases myself." He paused, shaken momentarily from his anxiety by the dispenser's procedure. "What's the idea?"

Jenkins winked. "Tastes better out of here. We know what good old *aqua* means, eh, Doctor, *bach*? But the patients don't. I'd look a proper fool too, wouldn't I, them standin' there watchin' me fillin' up their bottles out the tap."

Plainly the little dispenser wished to be communicative, but here a loud voice rang out from the back door of the house forty yards away.

"Jenkins! Jenkins! I want you—*this minnit*."

Jenkins jumped like an overtrained dog at the crack of the ring-master's whip. He quavered: "Excuse me, Doctor. There's Mrs. Page callin' me. I'll . . . I'll have to run."

Fortunately there were few people at the morning surgery, which

was over at half-past ten, and Andrew, presented with a list of visits by Jenkins, set out at once with Thomas in the gig. With an almost painful expectancy he told the old groom to drive direct to 7 Glydar Place.

Twenty minutes later he came out of Number 7, pale, with his lips tightly compressed and an odd expression on his face. He went two doors down, into Number 11, which was also on his list. From Number 11 he crossed the street to Number 18. From Number 18 he went round the corner to Radnor Place, where two further cases were marked by Jenkins as having been seen the day before. Altogether, within the space of an hour, he made seven such calls in the immediate vicinity. Five of them, including Number 7 Glydar Place, which was now showing a typical rash, were clear cases of enteric. For the last ten days Jenkins had been treating them with chalk and opium. Now, whatever his own bungling efforts of the previous night had been, Andrew realized with a shiver of apprehension that he had an outbreak of typhoid fever on his hands.

The remainder of his round he accomplished as quickly as possible in a state dithering towards panic. At lunch, during which Mrs. Page dealt exclusively with a nicely browned sweetbread, which she explained merrily, "I ordered it for Doctor Page but he don't seem to fancy it somehow," he brooded upon the problem in frozen silence. He saw that he would get little information and no help from Mrs. Page. He decided he must speak to Doctor Page himself.

But when he went up to the doctor's room the curtains were drawn and Edward lay prostrate with a pressure headache, his forehead deeply flushed and furrowed by pain. Though he motioned his visitor to sit with him a little Andrew felt it would be cruelty to thrust this trouble upon him at present.

As he rose to go, after remaining seated by the bedside for a few minutes, he had to confine himself to asking: "Doctor Page, if we get an infectious case, what's the best thing to do?"

There was a pause. Page replied with closed eyes, not moving, as though the mere act of speech were enough to aggravate his migraine.

"It's always been difficult. We've no hospital, let alone an isolation ward. If you should run into anything very nasty ring up Griffiths at Toniglan. That's fifteen miles down the Valley. He's the District Medical Officer." Another pause, longer than before. "But I'm afraid he's not very helpful."

Reinforced by this information, Andrew hastened down to the

hall and rang up Toniglan. While he stood with the receiver to his ear he saw Annie, the servant, looking at him through the kitchen door.

"Hello! Hello! Is that Doctor Griffiths of Toniglan?" He got through at last.

A man's voice answered very guardedly. "Who wants him?"

"This is Manson of Blaenelly. Doctor Page's assistant." Andrew's tone was overpitched. "I've got five cases of typhoid up here. I want Doctor Griffiths to come up immediately."

There was the barest pause, then with a rush the reply came back in a singsong intonation, very Welsh and apologetic. "I'm powerful sorry, Doctor, indeed I am, but Doctor Griffiths has gone to Swansea. Important official business."

"When will he be back?" shouted Manson. The line was bad.

"Indeed, Doctor, I couldn't say for certain."

"But, listen . . ."

There was a click at the far end. Very quietly the other had rung off. Manson swore out loud with nervous violence. "Damn it, I believe that was Griffiths himself."

He rang the number again, failed to get a connection. Yet, persisting doggedly, he was about to ring again when, turning, he found that Annie had advanced into the hall, her hands folded upon her apron, her eyes contemplating him soberly. She was a woman of perhaps forty-five, very clean and tidy, with a grave, enduring placidity of expression.

"I couldn't help but hear, Doctor," she said. "You'll never find Doctor Griffiths in Toniglan this hour of day. He do go to the golf at Swansea afternoons mostly."

He answered angrily, swallowing a lump that hung in his throat.

"But I think that was him I spoke to."

"Maybe." She smiled faintly. "When he don't go to Swansea I've 'eard tell he do say 'e 'ave gone." She considered him with tranquil friendliness before turning away. "I wouldn't waste my time on him if I was you."

Andrew replaced the receiver with a deepening sense of indignation and distress. Cursing, he went out and visited his cases once more. When he got back it was time for evening surgery. For an hour and a half he sat in the little back-shop cubicle which was the consulting room, wrestling with a packed surgery until the walls sweated and the place was choked with the steam of damp bodies. Miners with beat knee, cut fingers, nystagmus, chronic arthritis.