

Vernon Coleman's latest novel is called *Dr Bullock's Annals*. It is a black comedy set in Victorian England. The free PDF extract below is the whole of the first month's entries. The book is available as a paperback and an eBook on Amazon.

# **Dr Bullock's Annals**

A Revealing and Sometimes Shocking Account of a Year in the Life of a  
Young Victorian Doctor

**Vernon Coleman**

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## **Dedication**

To Antoinette: you are, and always will be, the reason my heart beats. You are my world and everything else is just decoration.

## **Foreword**

Everything in 'Dr Bullock's Annals' is historically accurate. By today's antiseptic and rather puritanical standards, the book is a lifetime beyond politically incorrect. And it is, perhaps, worthwhile remembering that the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of staggering inequality. While Lord Durham reckoned that £40,000 a year was a moderate income, 'such as a man might jog along with', skilled shirt-makers were lucky to be paid 2s 6d for 70 hours work. Remember, please, that these were rollicking, rude and frequently barbarous times.

Vernon Coleman, Devon 2020

## January 1<sup>st</sup> 1853

Yesterday, on the last day of the Year of Our Lord 1852, I completed the fifth year of my Apprenticeship with Dr Hildebrand Challot, Apothecary, Barber Surgeon and until today the only professional medical man in the village of Muckleberry Peverell.

This morning, at six, I awoke Dr Challot to remind him that my Apprenticeship has been completed. He awakened for just long enough to confirm that I am now a fully licensed practitioner, Surgeon and Apothecary and entitled to call myself Doctor John Bullocks.

I am, in consequence of my having completed my full Apprenticeship in all the healing arts, as dignified under the terms of our agreement, legally entitled to perform all those activities associated with the noble profession of Medicine. I am licensed to dispense medicaments, operate on the sick (or, indeed, the well), remove gangrenous limbs, extract teeth, shave away unwanted hair on the scalp, face or other body parts and facilitate extreme Purgings of the bowel. I am allowed to do all these things without supervision and, most vitally, am entitled to charge a fee for my services as a Surgeon-Barber and for what medicaments I might consider essential. Naturally, the fees I charge have to be accounted for and Dr Challot takes three quarters of my regular earnings.

In a way, my life will not change notably. It is true that I am now officially entitled to practice without supervision but I have been practising without supervision for a good while.

Indeed, I have been running the Practice pretty much by myself since Dr Challot first succumbed to the gout, the dropsy and a deeply troubled liver and prescribed for himself more or less permanent Bed rest with six meals a day, unlimited supplies of porter and mead and the constant attentions of two nurses who are permanently by his bedside or, more often within the bed, warming the cockles of his heart and, no doubt, other parts.

Dr Challot is a short, roundish fellow, no more than five feet four inches in height in his boots. He is as bald as the proverbial coot and wears a thick beard which is, he claims, a leftover from the Crimean War but he was never close to the Crimean War. Indeed, he wasn't alive when it was fought. He wears the beard because he is a constitutional lusk and far too lazy to shave. For as long as I can remember it has been a motto of his to put off until tomorrow anything you cannot be bothered to do today.

After confirming my elevation in professional status, Dr Challot kindly presented me with my own Leech pot containing what he claims are 24 fine river Leeches. He took the pot from the cupboard beside his and handed it to me, with all the pride and delicacy that might be afforded by the Archbishop of Canterbury handling the Royal Crown, to celebrate the conclusion of my indentureship.

The pot and contents stank something fearful, and at first I thought he had used it in lieu of his chamber pot (which as is usual had not been emptied for several days) but on examination I could see that it was the foul looking Leeches which were responsible for the unpleasant stink. I suspect that the Leeches were brought in by Osbert Gibbon, a pot boy from the Peacock Inn who, I know for a fact, collects the Leeches he sells to us from the stagnant pond adjacent to the cesspit at the Everard Blossom's stinky farm. Osbert is a professional liar, a Thief and a rascal on his good days and although he is but 14-years-old, he already has signs of the pox, caught I have no doubt from one of the Barmaids at the Peacock, neither of whom are better than they ought to be and both of whom are reputed to be willing to blow the goundsils with any man who can spare one and a half farthings. They both have suppurating sores on the lips that are visible to all and sundry and there are doubtless matching sores present on those lips which are not so immediately on show.

On close examination of my graduation gift, I could see that at least four of the Leeches were dead and putrefying, and it is not my intention to begin my work as a fully qualified Doctor by using putrefying Leeches so I fed them to the cat which did not seem to mind the putrefaction and ate them with relish, smacking his lips with apparent delight.

Dr Challot, customarily never entirely sober, was not too drunk to remind me (as though it were necessary) that according to the terms of the Apprenticeship which my naïve but well-meaning father signed for me when I was 16-years-old, I am obliged to work as his practice Assistant for ten more years or until one of us dies. If I wish to leave this employment I must pay Dr Challot a penalty of 30 guineas. The chances of my ever acquiring 30 guineas are about as remote as the chances of Queen Victoria summoning me to the Palace and begging me to stick three brace of my putrefying Leeches upon her Royal personage.

As Dr Challot spoke, I tried to work out whether or not he had acquired an additional chin. Several editions of that notable feature had already been published and it seems that there has not yet been an end to it. If Dr Challot had been blessed with friends I suspect that even they would have agreed that despite his shortage of stature there was probably too much of him.

Five years ago my father handed over 100 guineas for me to be indentured. This which was the sum total of his savings and when he died two years later there was not one penny left to me. I have no doubt that my father meant well but I would have much preferred it if he had not Apprenticed me but had merely handed me the 100 guineas. Still, one road is as good as another when you have no particular destination in mind.

As an Apprentice, I received free board and lodging. My board consisted of a small room in the attic which I shared with a large and ever expanding family of rodents and my keep, shared with the cat, was a barely edible diet of Turnip soup and stale bread. I once worked out that in five years I had drunk 1,478 bowls of Turnip soup.

My circumstances have now changed considerably for during the period of my Assistantship I will be entitled to keep one quarter of the fees collected for my labours when treating existing patients of the practice. In theory, one third of the remaining three quarters will go for the purchase of medicaments and for the upkeep of the surgery premises, and the other two thirds will go to Dr Challot to be spent on essentials such as wine, beer and the two gorbellied and ever-drunken strumpets who he ambitiously describes as Professional Nurses when making up patients' bills. There is a clause in the contract which gives me the right to keep all the fees which are paid in relation to the care of new patients and all fees paid in respect of new treatments which are my own invention. I suspect that Dr Challot would have smiled when this clause was inserted for, since there are no other Doctors in the village of Muckleberry Peverell, all existing citizens are already, ipso facto, patients of Dr Challot's practice.

And the chances of my inventing a new treatment seem as remote as the aforesaid likelihood of my being invited to attend Buckingham Palace with my new pot of Leeches tucked under my arm.

All things considered, I would have doubtless been much better off if I'd taken a job as a school master. My cousin, Archibald Pikelet, who took a degree at Oxford after three years of idleness, and who is now employed as a master at a small school in Somersetshire, receives 75 guineas every quarter day and is provided with a free cottage in the school grounds. He also receives free victuals and all the fuel, candles and tea he requires. He has his own gardener, cook, usher and valet – all paid for by the school. He is responsible for teaching just 12 boys and has an assistant master to help him with essential beatings and with his modest and undemanding chores. Oh, that my father's aspirations for me had concentrated on a career in teaching rather than in medicine.

Still, looking on the bright side, even if I am unable to dream up any new treatments, or find any new patients, I will now be comparatively rich, for during the period of my

Apprenticeship I was (in addition to my board and keep as mentioned above) paid an honorarium of three shillings a month from which I was expected to purchase all my clothing. I should now be considerably better off than I am at present. And I will, at least, be able to avoid any more of the meals prepared by Mistress Swain.

Mistress Swain, the resident housekeeper, boosting servant, cook, slut and Butler is a large, rather shapeless woman. I have no idea of her age and my best guess is that she is somewhere between 30 and 90 years of age. She is, I suspect, one of those women who has always looked old. She probably looked 40 when she was 20, not because she had had responsibilities thrust upon her but because of some inner and ungodly forces. Dr Challot once told me that she keeps her husband's pickled head in a box by her Bed and puts it on the pillow at night but I have no knowledge of the truth or otherwise of this allegation for she has her own room in the attic and I have never even seen the door opened, let alone ventured therein.

Dr Challot pays Mistress Swain nine shillings a week, plus two frocks and one coat a year though I don't think she has received the frocks or the coat since I was first Apprenticed. She also gets her lodging and her victuals but she has to find her own tea, sugar and gin. She has one afternoon free every month, to do with as she wishes, and the whole of every Mothering Sunday, from dawn to dusk, is her own. I was surprised when I learned how much she receives for I have never thought Dr Challot to be a generous man, nor a spendthrift one, and these are moderately better terms than I would have expected from him. A weekly income of nine shillings is very close to the sort of sum an established male servant might expect. Come to think of it I have heard some complaints from male servants that female servants are, in many cases, getting paid sums which are close to their own emoluments.

At Last Christmastime, for a treat, Mistress Swain made an iron potful of Turnip soup. She claimed that she had added a small carrot to the soup but I saw no sign of this in the portion with which I was supplied. And I could not tell the difference by taste though to celebrate the season, the Turnip soup had a sprig of mistletoe floating in it. The stupid woman clearly did not have the sense to know that the mistletoe plant is poisonous. I removed the mistletoe and flung it to the ground but since some of the berries appeared to have been crushed into the soup, I was too timid to drink the concoction and lay that night in such acute hunger that before retiring for the night I ate two tallow candles. Despite this, during the night my stomach rumbled with such anguish that I crept downstairs to the consulting room where I ate three ounces of the liquorice powder and glucose which we use for pill rolling, and all the rancid milk-meats, cocoa butter and gelatine mixture which we use when manufacturing Suppositories and Pessaries. I would have eaten a bowl of stale pap, made from bread and sour milk, but by the time I'd scraped the green off the pap there was almost none of it left. I hunted around for more candles but there were none. Remembering that Mistress Swain, who occasionally toyed with the principles of cleanliness, sometimes had soap in the kitchen I scraped mutton tallow from the wooden sink in the kitchen and ate that.

When I got up the following morning, I expected to find the stupid woman dead at the Table, poisoned by the damned mistletoe berries, but she was snoring loudly. She later told me that she and Dr Challot had drunk every drop of the soup and had much enjoyed it. I regard this as additional evidence that neither of them is human.

'What about the mistletoe?' I asked her.

'Oh, we shared that between us,' she replied. 'The little white berries were especially juicy – rather tart, we both thought, but very juicy. We enjoyed them so much that I went out in the snow and picked another sprig from one of the trees in the orchard.'

Both Dr Challot and Mistress Swain consume large quantities of Alcohol (in his case anything which has inebriating qualities and in her case ale and ale alone) and I can only assume that it was this which preserved them from the deadly effect of the mistletoe parasite.

My determination, were it ever to be asked for, would be that they are both so pickled that they are immune to poison of any kind. I suspect that if I were to feed them a diet of arsenic and strychnine they would both flourish.

Half an hour after eating the putrefying Leeches, the cat was violently sick on the carpet in the consulting room. Fortunately, the pool of vomit was nicely contained in one area and it was easy to step over it.

## January 2<sup>nd</sup>

This evening I moved my person and my scant belongings into what I am assured is the best bedroom at the Peacock Inn. If it truly is the best then I am glad not to have the worst. Still, I have no real complaints. The bucket which catches water from the hole in the roof is large enough to require emptying no more than once a day even in moderately heavy downpours. I have taken the room as my own on a permanent basis.

‘So, you’re a proper Doctor now then!’ said Henry Youngblood, the Publican. For a moment I thought he was being polite but he laughed in a plainly sneery sort of way. Travellers who have not met him before often complain that he says everything with a sneer and it is believed by some that this is in part because he has had a facial palsy for some years now and in consequence has a lop sided appearance which is accentuated strangely when he smiles. However, it is also true that he sneers a good deal and I had absolutely no doubt that he was sneering on this occasion. He is a raw, cruel brute of a man.

I do not much like Mr Youngblood and look forward to the day when he develops an ailment which requires a serious Purgings. He is an elderly and corpulent fellow, in his 60s, with mutton chop whiskers and no hair whatsoever upon his head. There is hair inside his skull aplenty for he has a bushel of hair growing from each of his ears but none, not a single hair, appears to have the strength or the courage to emerge from his scalp. On Sundays and at Christmas he wears a wig which he bought second hand at an auction. The wig, which he claims cost him two shillings, came from the estate of the widow of a judge and when Youngblood wears it, he always behaves as though he has acquired the former owner’s legal brain. The wig is one of those grey curly ones which judges wear when they are sitting in court. It looks mighty strange on the head of a Publican.

‘That I am, sir,’ I answered, with an attempt at modesty which I confess I did not feel. I was very proud of my new status.

‘Stranger things have happened, eh?’ he said, addressing the remark to his wife.

‘I expect they have,’ Mistress Youngblood replied meekly. She looked at me, as though apologising for her husband, smiled and blushed lightly. I glanced at the Publican to see if he had noticed the smile and the blush but Youngblood would not notice if the roof fell upon his head.

Mistress Youngblood is a handsome, full-figured, well-shaped woman in her 30s and as unlike her husband in nature as chalk is to cheese. She has dancing brown eyes and wears her hair up from her neck in a style which shows off that feature to its best extent. She has a gentle, kindly nature but her husband can be a violent man, especially when he has over-indulged in his own ale. If he considers that she has failed to laugh heartily enough at his witticisms, he is likely to give her what he calls a ‘good slapping’. She has a black eye more often than not.

‘Name three!’ said Youngblood, slapping his thigh at what he clearly regarded as a good jape at my expense. ‘Name three stranger things that have happened!’

I smiled thinly, as though I found his witticism sharp, but I held my tongue and silently decided that when he needs to be purged I will add double or even triple mustard to the

mixture and I will not warm the brass nozzle before the insertion. Youngblood is, like all bullies, a veritable coward and I am certain that when I have my brass nozzle a foot up his rear and I am pumping away with the Purging Fluid the damnable fellow will lose not a little of his arrogance.

‘Got you there, eh?’ he said, looking at his wife. ‘That was a good one, eh? A good one?’ He guffawed unpleasantly, and I felt a shudder of distaste in my bosom as I thought of his unfortunate lady, as delicate a Maiden as was never rescued by a Lancelot, having to spend long, dark nights lying underneath such an unwholesome brute. Mistress Swain once told me that Youngblood had bought his Wife from a tinker. He had, according to Mistress Swain, paid two shillings and half a pig for her.

‘Let me know if you’d like a good Purging,’ I told Mr Youngblood. ‘I’m having a special offer this coming week – a double Purging and a mustard Enema for half the price of a single purge.’

The creaky dotard is always looking for a bargain and so looked surprisingly enthusiastic. I live in hope. Little does the oaf know that I would pay him for the joy of ramming the nozzle of my biggest and best brass Enema syringe up his posterior.

‘I’ll throw in a close shave,’ I offered, hoping to persuade him to accept my offer.

But he was not to be persuaded and stalked off without a reply.

Mistress Youngblood led me upstairs to my room. She was wearing a skirt of glaucous green and a shallow blouse of mummy brown and she lifted her skirts as she mounted the steep and narrow staircase, giving me a generous view of her stockinged ankles and calves. I fancied she lifted the skirts a few inches higher than was absolutely necessary. She may no longer be in the first blush of youth but I swear she has the daintiest calves and the ripest Arse in the whole of England. As we mounted together I was reminded, that Mistress Youngblood’s buns may not be freshly baked but there are none superior in the county. Moreover, she is a woman who knows well how to take advantage of her assets.

Customers in the bar regularly drop small coins from the change they receive so that they can enjoy the good view down the apparently depths of Mistress Youngblood’s seemingly bottomless cleavage when she bends down to help me pick up the coins.

My new room, so very different to the squalid attic room which was my home at Dr Challot’s, is well-served with furnishings which though maybe not new are stoutly made and serviceable. There are curtains for the windows, and the room contains a four poster Bed with velvet curtains which, although they could do with a wash, were made with good material and have been neatly darned. The Bed is, I am assured, filled with oatflight, the chaff of oats, which makes a lighter and more comfortable filling than sawdust or straw and is preferable to the down, feathers, wool and horsehair often used since it is reputed to be less popular with bedbugs or mice. There are two horsehair stuffed Chairs in the room (one which is comfortable and the other which is not and which I shall save for visitors), a small Davenport which I shall use as a writing desk and which comes together with ladder back Chair which has one leg shorter than the other three, a Washstand with Bowl and Jug, a Pine Table and a Wardrobe made of Walnut. The Jug has a crack near the spout but Mistress Youngblood assured me that the vessel serves perfectly adequately as long as it is not filled too generously. There is a fireplace, which has a surround decorated with rather flamboyant blue and white tiles. Mistress Youngblood assured me that the chimney draws well and will be kept lit from the first day of October until the last day of March. The tiles, I am told, are Dutch and come from a town called Delft of which I had not previously heard. Mistress Youngblood told me, with some pride, that the tiles cost one shilling and a halfpenny for the six, so heaven only knows how much it cost to put them over the whole of the hearth. I have no idea why anyone would do this.

I am to pay six shillings a week in rent, five shillings a week for victuals and nine pence a week to have my linen laundered.

‘Are there many rats?’ I asked.

‘None up here,’ replied Mistress Youngblood firmly. She spoke with such certainty that I believed her. ‘Not so much as a mouse. We keep three cats and never have to feed them.’

I was deeply impressed by this. In Dr Challot’s grubby establishment, I rarely went to Bed without having to heave a rat or two off my pillow and shake their droppings off my coverlet.

‘Will you be conducting medical examinations in your room?’ asked my landlady.

‘Oh, I don’t think so,’ I replied. ‘Well, that is to say I hadn’t actually planned to do so. But if you have no objection...’

‘No, no, I would have no objection,’ said Mistress Youngblood. ‘It would be very convenient to have a medical man in the house – available at any time for our customers.’ She fluttered her eyelashes and lowered her voice. ‘Especially such a young one, and such a good looking one too.’

I found myself blushing.

Is there hope for me here, I wonder? I dare not even suppose. She is a magnificent looking woman and an excellent cook to boot

Moving my belongings from Dr Challot’s attic room and taking them across to the inn, was no great a burden for all that I owned was easily wrapped into a bundle made within my spare shirt. If I had tied the shirt bundle onto a stick I would have been able to provide a good interpretation of Dick Whittington, though I was content to travel without the companionship of Dr Challot’s cat.

‘I suppose you think you’re too good for us now that you can call yourself Doctor,’ snarled Mistress Swain upon my departure. I was sorely tempted to give her a good crack on the side of her exceedingly fat head but I had my hands full with my shirt parcel under my left arm and my new Leech jar in my right hand. ‘The Publican’s Wife will have you in her Bed within a week,’ she bawled as I hurried away.

When I had unpacked my bundle and placed my new Leech jar on the Table, I went downstairs and ordered supper.

I ate a plateful of Neck and Breast of Venison, half a Ham pie, a roasted Udder which I did not take to, and two slices of cold Tongue. The landlady, Mistress Youngblood, offered me a pheasant but she said it had been hung for a week too long and she thought it would take an hour to pluck out the maggots. I was too hungry to wait. I also had a large slice of saffron cake. With my meal I drank two quarts of the best ale and afterwards a large glass of malmsey. I had never drunk malmsey before, it being a drink previously too much of a price for my purse, but I fancy I could acquire a fair taste for it.

I was relieved not to be asked for any payment since I had but a fourpenny piece in my pocket. I overheard the landlord, Mr Hector Youngblood, tell his Wife that since I am now a qualified medical man I shall soon be rolling in money. I also heard Mistress Youngblood express the thought that if her husband was correct I would make a good match for one of their Daughters. They have three Daughters and it is good to have been alerted to this crafty plan for the three young women are not ones to give a tight-trousered fellow a pain in his groin.

The eldest Daughter, who is called Ursula, looks as if she has been training hard to become a prize fighter. She is reputed to have once knocked out a travelling tallow salesman with a single blow to the ear. He had mistaken her for one of the Barmaids and had offered her a three penny piece for services above and beyond the pouring of ale. The word in the village was that she was not entirely averse to the concept of a subsidised coupling and was offended not by the nature of the offer but by the size of the payment he had proposed. The tallow salesman remained unconscious for two hours and when he left the inn the following

morning, and called at the surgery to obtain an order for candles, he asked me why the Church bells were ringing so loudly on a Thursday morning. I told him that the bells were not ringing but he complained that he could hear them very well.

The second oldest Daughter, called Faith, is said to be generous with her favours and is known in the village to be a trollop. It is said around here that a man in Muckleberry Peverell doesn't have to go to Church to have Faith since she can be readily had for the price of a pint of ale.

The youngest Daughter is a simpleton known as Elsa who does little but eat and drink.

When the Landlord's Wife had left, I placed my bundle on the Bed and explored my new accommodations.

I was pleased to find a pot provided for night-time comforting and relief. I was less pleased to see that the pot, which had been recently well-used, had not been attended to by the Chambermaid and stank almost as much as my leeches.

### January 3<sup>rd</sup>

I was woken by a Chambermaid bringing in kindling and coals for my fireplace. I stayed in Bed for I have no Nightshirt and did not wish to frighten the girl.

'Are you awake, sir?' she shouted in a voice which would have woken the dead.

'I am,' I replied. She was a weedy little thing with long butter-coloured hair and very pale skin as though she spent very little time out of doors. I was surprised she had so much voice in her. 'What's your name?'

'My name is Nell, sir. But everyone calls me Nellie. Shall I bring your hot water for shaving, sir?'

I said that this would be splendid.

I had, in truth, not expected to be given hot water for washing or shaving. At Dr Challot's I had been accustomed to shaving in cold water. I always filled my own jug last thing at night, and in the winter it was often frozen solid by morning. It was on account of this that last wintertime I grew myself a beard from mid-December until late February.

When the girl had scurried out to fetch the water, I leapt out of Bed and pulled on my trousers in order to preserve the niceties of my person. I was, I confess, more than a little conscious of my new status as an Apothecary and Surgeon.

'Shall I ask the boot boy to attend to your boots, sir?' Nellie asked when she returned.

I said that this would be a good idea although when she took away my boots I did fear for a moment that I might never see them again. The boot boy, who is reputed to live on a diet of dry toast and mead, supplemented by scraps he takes from plates returned to the kitchen, is not a being to be trusted with a man's life let alone his boots.

I had hardly finished shaving when the girl reappeared with a laden tray upon which lay enough food for a coach party of eight. I have no idea how the girl managed to carry it. There was no towel in the room so I dried my face on a corner of one of the Bed curtains. The material smelt of bad Tobacco and cheap scent. I hate to think how much Rogering and Prigging has been done in the Sheets which appear not to have been changed since the Michaelmas before last.

When I checked my new Leech jar I was dismayed to see that the lid had slipped off and half of the remaining Leeches had gone. I searched the Bed and found two under my pillow but of the rest there was no sign. I also noticed that the Leech jar has a crack in it from top to bottom. In truth it was not the generous gift I originally thought it to be.

I made a mental note to demand new Sheets and a towel from Mistress Youngblood while she and her rogue of a husband are still of the belief that I will soon be wealthy, a ready

husband for one of their well-used Daughters, and keen to be of assistance to their fuddled clientele.

‘What’s this?’ I demanded, examining the contents of the tray which the girl had lain down on my Table. It seemed scarcely possible that so much food had been brought for one person’s fast breaking.

‘It’s your breakfast, sir,’ said the Maid. ‘The landlord said that if you need more you’re just to shout. He also said to tell you that the brewer has put extra yarrow into the ale.’

The tray contained a plate of cold ham and beef, a roast cow’s tongue, a roast udder, three Cambridge sausages and two fried eggs, half a pigeon pie and a whole roast mallard. To wash it all down there was a quart tankard of yarrow enhanced ale.

Midway through my meal, young Dick the boot boy appeared with my boots.

‘I’ve given them a light wipe, sir,’ said Dick, who is as big a Ruffian as Osbert the Ostler’s boy, and, like him, a master of snide remarks and behaviour. I suspect the two of them must be related for I swear they both have rancid Blood in their damned Veins. ‘But I didn’t dare give them too hard a rubbing in case they fell apart,’ he added, somehow managing to sound obsequious and offensive at the same time. He held up the two boots with one hand and with the other drew attention to the fact that one of the soles had become quite detached from the upper leather. He flapped at the sole with his fingers.

‘Stop that!’ I said. ‘You’ll damage the damned things yet further.’

He sniggered in an unpleasant sort of way and stopped flapping at the sole.

It occurred to me, for the first time, that my new status as a medical practitioner was not going to protect me from people like Dick, Osbert and the blackguard Youngblood.

‘I appear to have mislaid my best boots,’ I lied, feeling myself redden.

‘I can lay my hands on a nearly new pair for you, sir,’ he said. ‘Nice boots fit for a gent like yourself. And they look about your size.’

‘And how much would this nearly new pair of boots cost me?’

‘Sixpence.’

I rummaged in my trouser pocket and found a fourpence piece. ‘I’ll give you fourpence if they fit me,’ I told the young Varmint.

He picked up my battered boots, hurried out and returned less than a minute later clutching a nearly new pair of black leather riding boots. They were the best looking boots I’d ever seen and I tried them on with some eagerness. They were a little loose but nothing that a few Sheets of Newspaper couldn’t remedy. He held out his hand and I dropped in the four pence piece. The coin disappeared into his trouser pocket with alarming speed. The new boots were an excellent exchange for my old ones and four pence. Stupidly, it did not occur to me to wonder where the boy had obtained a pair of boots of such good quality.

When I had finished as much of my breakfast as I could force down, Nellie the Maidservant returned to collect the tray. I’d left half the pigeon pie and most of the cow’s tongue. I had, however, succeeded in emptying the bucket of ale.

‘I hope you weren’t cold last night, sir,’ said the Chambermaid adopting a strange manner which I suspect she may have thought seductive. ‘I used to have an arrangement with Mr Parkins who had this room before you.’

‘What sort of an arrangement?’ I asked, not for a moment expecting the answer I received.

‘For two pence a night I slept in his Bed and kept him warm,’ she told me. ‘For more than just the warming he paid me another penny. I could provide the same service for you, sir. I could keep you warm every night except Saturdays.’

‘What happens on Saturdays?’ I asked. I noticed for the first time that she had unfastened the top three buttons of a filthy chemise. Her chest, quite devoid of dumplings, was as flat as a hymnal book cover.

‘The Reverend Standorf’s Wife goes to stay with her mother in Lower Leatherwallop at weekends and so I keep him company on Saturday nights. He gives me a shilling if I’m extra obliging.’

I stared at her in astonishment. I fear my mouth gaped open in fly catching mode. The Reverend Standorf is as prim and proper as the proverbial Maiden aunt. He likes to present himself as a thorough man, honest and reliable whichever way you slice him. I had long harboured some doubts about the man but I never suspected he enjoyed such a secret life.

‘That cannot be true!’ I said.

‘It’s as true as I’m standing here,’ insisted the girl, with a surprising air of defiance. She thought for a moment. ‘I can prove it to you!’

‘How?’

‘He has a third nipple and currently a large bite mark on his thigh,’ she replied. ‘He likes to be bitten,’ she explained with a shrug.

‘I can’t possibly know if that’s true!’ I insisted.

‘You’re supposed to be a Doctor, aren’t you?’

‘I am a Doctor!’ I replied, not liking the use of the word ‘supposed’.

‘Then find a way to persuade him to undress,’ she said. ‘You’ll see that I’m right!’

‘Which thigh?’ I asked. ‘Left or right?’

She thought for a moment and touched her own left thigh. ‘This one,’ she said.

‘The left?’

‘If that’s the left one.’

‘You don’t know which is which?’

She shook her head.

‘How old are you?’ I demanded, quite shocked by this revelation. I could not help but think she looked too skinny to provide any warmth, even for a Clergyman.

‘I’ve been told I am eighteen, sir. But I am well taught and neither Mr Parkins nor the Reverend Standorf has never made complaints. The Reverend Standorf, in particular, who is an unusually demanding man with quirks, has always expressed himself well satisfied.’

I looked at her in astonishment. I did not think she was as old as she claimed. She didn’t seem like any fizgig I’d ever met but did seem surprisingly experienced for her age. It occurred to me to hope, for his sake, that the Vicar used a good, solid tortoiseshell condom rather than one of the flimsy linen ones.

I told the young dollymop that if I felt cold I would request a copper warming pan. ‘Can you read?’ I asked her out of curiosity, wondering in which direction her learning lay.

She shook her head. ‘No one ever took the trouble to learn me.’ She seemed subdued and I fancied there were tears in her eyes. ‘The landlady charges an extra four pence a night for a warming pan,’ she replied, struggling for defiance. ‘You’d save tuppence if you had me keep you warm instead of a warming pan.’

‘I will buy myself a flannel Nightshirt,’ I retorted, quite shocked.

As I went downstairs, about to leave the Inn on my way to Dr Challot’s home to see whether anyone was ailing, dying or in need of shave, I heard a commotion in the snug.

‘I left the damned things outside my bedroom door to be cleaned,’ shouted an angry looking fellow in smart breeches and a dark purple frock coat. I could not help noticing that his feet and calves were shod only in white silk stockings. There are few things more comical than a fellow dressed as a gentleman from the knees up but having only white silk stockings from the knees down – especially when the right stocking has a large hole in the heel as this had. The pistol poking out of the man’s coat pocket was rather less comical.

‘Can’t imagine where they’ve got to, sir,’ wheedled the landlord. ‘Maybe burglars climbed up a drainpipe and stole them?’

‘I’ll shoot the bastard Thief when I catch up with him!’ said the man, laying a hand upon the butt of his pistol. He didn’t shout but said it in a very flat, dull sort of way which made it considerably more frightening than if he had shouted. However, I have to say that apart from an acute shortage of boots, he looked to be a rollicking sort of fellow; the sort of chap who might have been the life and soul of the party under rather different circumstances.

Suddenly, I felt a hand tugging at my coat. I looked down and there stood Dick, the boot boy.

I knew immediately what had happened, of course. The little Varmint had stolen this fellow’s boots and sold them to me. I was about to box his ears when I realised that I needed to do something about the boots I was wearing. I stepped back away from the doorway into the snug. I immediately felt Dick lift my left boot into the air. I looked down and saw that he was using a rather deadly looking penknife to lever the heel off the boot. When he had done this he put the knife and the boot heel into his trouser pocket. I stared at him uncomprehendingly for a moment before I realised why he’d done what he’d done.

‘I’ll fix it back on for you tonight, sir,’ whispered Dick. And with that he was gone. I stepped out of the shadows and limped and hirkled back into the hallway where the man in the white, silk stockings saw me.

‘Halt, sir!’ he cried, in a voice that was not easy to ignore. He strode over to where I was standing. ‘Are those my boots, you Varmint?’ he demanded.

‘They are not, sir!’ I replied, with more bravado than I felt. ‘And I resent your tone and the implication. I am a medical man, sir, not a boot thief.’

‘They look damned fine like my boots,’ said the man.

‘Do your boots have a heel missing?’ I demanded.

‘Of course they don’t! They were purchased just last week from Jermyn Street in London. Brand new boots! They cost me six guineas the pair. And the heels were nailed on damned tight, sir.’

Marvelling in part at the very idea that someone might spend six guineas on a pair of boots and in part on the fact that the six guinea boots were now on my own feet, I lifted my left foot into the air and showed him the place where the heel should have been. ‘I lost the heel three days ago,’ I told him. ‘I have not yet had the time to have my damned boot-maker make the necessary repair.’

‘Hrmph,’ said the bootless fellow without much interest or any sympathy.

‘I saw a fellow galloping off with a spare pair of boots hanging from his saddle,’ I said. ‘Perchance he was the Thief and they were your boots.’

‘How long ago was this?’

‘Half an hour or so,’ I said.

‘Which way did he go?’

‘He took the road to the West,’ I said, surprised at my own skill at telling a tale. It occurred to me that if things went awry with medicine I could perhaps tread in the footsteps of Mr Defoe, Mr Dickens and Mr Thackeray and fashion myself a living out of words. I had recently been much taken with the weekly instalments of Mr Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* and as a boy had been a keen reader of Mr Defoe’s tales. I had for several months been a keen reader of Mr Dickens’s monthly serial entitled *The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (which He Never Meant to Publish on Any Account)* though I confess I had it in mind that I might have been able to invent a more palatable title.

‘Ye gad, sir, this is a vile place, a vile place!’ complained the fellow with stockinged feet. ‘What is the world coming to when a man cannot leave his boots outside without having them stolen?’ He looked down at his feet. ‘How can I chase the fellow with no boots?’

‘Maybe we can find an old pair for you to wear,’ said Mr Youngblood. ‘I’ll call for the boot boy.’

‘I found this pair, sir,’ said Dick, appearing as though by magic, and holding up my old pair of well-worn boots. ‘I was going to take them home for my father who has been walking unshod for six months but I can let you have them, sir. Tuppence a boot, sir?’

‘There’s your explanation, sir,’ said the landlord. ‘The Thief what stole your pair left this sorry pair behind.’ He paused for a moment. ‘Maybe it was merely a case of mistaken identity,’ he suggested. ‘It must be said that in the dark one pair of boots can look much like another.’

Five minutes later the stranger, with my old raggedy boots on his feet, was on his horse chasing after the imaginary miscreant. And Dick, the crafty rascal, had another fourpence in his pocket.

‘Do you know who that was?’ asked Mr Youngblood in an awed whisper as the stranger disappeared in a flurry of dust, shouting over his shoulder that he would never return to an establishment which allowed a decent man’s boots to be stolen.

‘I have no idea,’ I replied. ‘Other than that he appears to be considerably upset.’

‘That was Paul ‘Two Pistols’ Hanham,’ whispered the landlord. He crossed himself, something I have never seen him do before. The name meant nothing to me. ‘The Highwayman,’ explained the landlord. ‘They say he has killed seven men in robberies and another two in duels.’

I gave silent thanks that one pair of black leather boots looks much like another and hurried out of the Inn.

It was a bengy day with swullocking weather as far as the eye could see and as the ice-cold air hit my face, I closed my eyes and unsuccessfully attempted to suppress the expression of the wind that lay within. Indeed, it did not escape my knowledge that the wind within was as strong as the wind without. I was conscious that I was as full with food as a rich tinker’s goat and suddenly found myself feeling rather discombobulated. It was doubtless the result of my trying to cram such an unusually large breakfast into a stomach shrunken by an unbroken diet of Turnip soup. And I had a suspicion that the pigeon pie may not have been quite as fresh as it might have been. Suddenly, my head was spinning like a top and before I knew what was happening, my legs failed me and I fell backwards onto the cobbled courtyard. I have seen men succumb in this way after treating themselves too generously to ale and spirits but I knew this could not have been the case, my having consumed no more than a quart of ale at breakfast time, and that doubtless watered down.

The damnable notching I sustained on the tegument over the Occiput bone at the back of my head did not feel too serious but I nevertheless Bled like a stuck pig at a country fair. The Bleeding soaked into the back of my shirt and collar and was not abated without I put on my hat. The damned thing, which I purchased from Jauncy Withergow’s widow, is too tight by a size and usually mortally uncomfortable but the tightness ensured that it suppressed the Bleeding most effectively. I fear I shall have to keep my hat on until nightfall. This is not a good start to my first day as a qualified medical man.

When I got to Dr Challot’s, I noticed that the pool of cat vomit had finally disappeared and although the carpet appeared damp it was definitely clean. I congratulated Mistress Swain on having found the time to remove the obnoxious hazard.

‘Oh, I didn’t clean it up,’ she replied haughtily. ‘He doesn’t pay me enough to clean up cat sick. I was going to use it to thicken up the Turnip soup but next door’s dog came in and licked it all up.’

I was not sure whether or not the reference to the Turnip soup was meant in a jocular fashion and I am fearful relieved not to be taking any more meals in Dr Challot’s house.

‘I see you started the drinking early in the day, like himself upstairs,’ said Mistress Swain, turning her head and holding her nose with her fingers as though to indicate that my breath offered evidence of over-indulgence.

Not for the first time I considered the woman a dire hypocrite for she is a committed maltworm and I have never known her to be truly sober. Most evenings she sleeps in a Chair beside the kitchen fire because she is too inconvenienced by Alcohol to be able to drag herself up the stairs. I always gave thanks when she slept downstairs for she snores like a snuffling sow and her attic room was directly next to my own.

‘I took a little refreshment with my breakfast, that is all,’ I told her haughtily, and regrettably started with a severe dose of the Hiccups. It is difficult to remain dignified when with the Hiccups, so I asked the wretched woman if there had been any patients calling or sending for assistance.

‘There’s one in the dining room, biting his hat sitting awaiting your arrival,’ Mistress Swain told me coldly. ‘Plus the Leech man from Allenstein and Marienwerder called in but he said he’d come back in two days.’

Alenstein and Marienwerder is a company of well-known Leech suppliers. Their Leech jars are always decorated with a coat of arms above which are the words ‘Suppliers of Fresh Leeches to the Aristocracy’. The aristocratic customers who purchase their Leeches are not named.

Suddenly, I remembered that two days earlier I had promised to make a contraceptive pessary for Mistress Wiltshire. Her husband, who is an able seaman in Her Majesty’s Navy, had been at sea for two years and is due to return home within a week. Mistress Wiltshire is not keen to have more children and requested that I make a pessary which she could rely upon to protect her from what she calls Conjugated Consequences. He is apparently not enthusiastic about condoms though the ones made out of tortoiseshell are said to be most effective.

Using a new recipe, which I had based on a foundation recipe obtained from a recent edition of the ‘Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal’, I had prepared a pessary from glycerine and cocoa butter. I had added nutmeg, Tobacco and ground orange peel to the glycerine and cocoa butter and then, acting on a whim I had added a little senna, some soap shavings and a good portion of gentian root. I had also added a good portion of duck fat and ear wax to help give the pessary a better shape and form.

I must admit that I was well pleased with the finished product which, at 150 grains, was rather larger than usual but impressively formed. I’d rather hoped that Mistress Wiltshire might return wanting one or two pessaries if her husband had an extended shore leave.

‘Did Mistress Wiltshire call in to collect her pessary?’ I asked.

‘She called in but wouldn’t take it,’ said Mistress Swain. ‘She said it was bigger than her husband’s lobcock and that she’d never get it inside of herself. I must say I sympathised with her. I’ve seen some lobcocks in my time but I’ve never seen one with the girth or length of that thing. It was bigger than those parsnips we had the Christmas before last.’

‘I made it specially for her!’ I protested. ‘It took me half a day to prepare.’

‘Well, she didn’t want it; said she wouldn’t have it inside her.’

‘I hope her husband puts a pudding in her!’ I snapped crossly, wondering what the devil I could do with the unwanted pessary.

Mistress Swain leant forward, peering at me as though something about me seemed strange but she couldn’t quite work out what it was. Eventually, the bit of her brain that wasn’t soaked in gin started to function and she asked me if I were intending to remove my hat.

I haughtily told her that I would remove my hat when I found myself in the company of a lady and instructed her to send the Patient in to see me.

Feeling rather pleased with my witty retort, I hurried into the consulting room which, in theory, I share with Dr Challot. In practice, he is rarely in a fit mood to tear himself away from his Bed in order to do any consulting. During the last twelve months I doubt if he has been in the consulting room more than half a dozen times though he will emerge occasionally to remove limbs (an activity which he enjoys) or attend aristocratic patients (who appear on our doorstep but irregularly).

‘Why are you limping?’ demanded Mistress Swain, speaking to my back as I headed for the consulting room. I ignored her. She obviously hadn’t noticed that one of my new boots had no heel attached.

The Patient awaiting me was our local Constable, a bearded fellow in his 40s called Tobias Blomfield. He looked tired and full of anxiety. He is a determined valetudinarian, a large man but a shy and surprisingly gentle sort of fellow.

Constable Blomfield used to be a carrot and mangle salesman until he was appointed to his current post; a position he obtained partly on account of his having large fists and partly on account of the absence of any other applicants. His Wife is a midget and well-known local egg-cracker.

‘I’ve been counting them as best I can, Doctor,’ said Mr Blomfield. ‘And I reckon as I’ve only got 23 left. I’ve been eking them out, withholding them you might say, but my Wife is threatening to go elsewhere for satisfaction. She says the baker’s boy has offered to give her all the diddling she requires. Do you know how it might be possible to get some more? I have a little money saved and I am willing to pay.’

Puzzled, I asked him what the devil he was talking about.

It took some time to drag the story out of him but it appeared that he had attended a meeting organised by a certain Reverend Cedric Cadwallader, and had subsequently read a religious tract written by the man’s wife, Henrietta Cadwallader. As a consequence he had come to believe that a man can only cleave the pin 300 times in his lifetime and that a man who puts himself about and distributes his oats too freely will run out of orgasms at an early age.

The Constable confessed that since he heard the news, he’d been counting off his orgasms on a sort of ‘cleave pinning calendar’ as recommended by Mistress Cadwallader. He produced a piece of paper on which he had made a large number of pencil marks.

‘They add up to 277,’ he told me. ‘So I’ve only got 23 left. I had to estimate how many I’d used up when I was younger because in those days I didn’t know there was a limit.’ He shook his head rather sadly. ‘When I was a lad I was dung reckless,’ he confessed.

I stared at him, astonished and bewildered.

‘I reckon I must have used up more than two thirds of my allotment with my sister Elspeth,’ moaned Mr Blomfield. ‘I cleaved the pin a good deal with her.’

I was a trifle startled at this admission.

‘She was three years older than me,’ continued Mr Blomfield. ‘And she had appetites but didn’t want to do it with her boyfriend because she wanted to be a virgin when she married.’

‘A virgin?’ I said, surprised. ‘How can she have been a virgin if you were diddling her regularly?’

‘Well if she’d not done it with him she’d be a sort of virgin wouldn’t she?’

‘I suppose...,’ I began.

‘Anyway, I used up a good many then, when I was still too young to appreciate what I was doing,’ continued the Constable. ‘Of course, I didn’t know about the Reverend Cadwallader in those days.’

‘Cadwallader?’

‘The Reverend Cadwallader. The gentleman I mentioned. He’s a preacher and a Reformed Baptist, a great gentleman and a fine orator. I heard him speak at a chapel in Longton. He

travels about the country with his message. They say he speaks somewhere every single evening.'

'And what precisely did he say?'

'He warned that man has only an allotted capacity for loving and that a man who is licentious will run out of his orgasms before he is 30 years of age. He says he has met men who were fully spent before they were 20-years-old.'

'Oh, that's all nonsense,' I told him, naively believing that he would accept my reassurance at face value. 'There are no limits.'

'No, no, it isn't so,' he insisted. 'Mr Armstrong has medical support. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a small leaflet. He unfolded the paper and handed it across the desk to me. At the top of the leaflet was printed the name 'Reverend Cadwallader', accompanied by an engraved drawing of a stern looking fellow with huge mutton chop whiskers and cold, hard, fanatical eyes that seemed to burn right through my skull.'

The heading at the top of the leaflet was printed in thick, black type.

'Your Joys are Numbered'

The rest of the leaflet was made up of a stern warning to boys and men.

I turned the leaflet over. On the other side there was the same name and the same scary looking engraving of the fellow's face but this side of the leaflet was taken up with supporting quotes from half a dozen medical practitioners and a dozen or so men and women who told their dernful stories in crisp paragraphs.

'No Man or Woman can Afford to Ignore the Warnings of the Reverend Cadwallader,' wrote Doctor Merridew of Wimpole Street. 'The Body is Limited in Many Ways and a Man's Very Manhood is At Risk Unless He Heeds the Reverend Cadwallader's Warning.'

A Doctor O'Hearn of Manchester wrote an almost identical note of support, adding that only by following the advice of the Reverend Cadwallader could a man hope to preserve his Virility.

'I ran out of my Manly Pleasures when I was just 22 years of age,' said a doleful Mr J.K. of Huddersfield. 'Now I will never know the Joy of Fatherhood.'

'As a boy I was too free with my God Given Strengths and now I am bereft,' said Mr P.R. of Chelsea.

'My husband sowed his oats in Foreign Fields and now there is no Seed remaining for Crops at Home,' said Mistress H.L. of Derbyshire.

There were many more similar testimonials.

'You've got to help me Doctor,' said Mr Blomfield, when I handed the leaflet back to him. 'Do you think there might be a remedy available?' He seemed distraught as he carefully folded the leaflet and put it back into his pocket.

'What does the Reverend Cadwallader recommend?'

'He says that a man can only refresh his strength by joining his Church.'

'Well that doesn't sound too high a price to pay.'

'You have to attend his meetings once a week for a year and then, at the end of a twelve month, you regain another 25 orgasms,' said Mr Blomfield.

'And is there a donation to be made?'

'Oh yes, of course. The pastor says the Lord expects a minimum donation of five shillings a week. It's for the furtherance of the Lord's work and the Reverend says it's also a penance.'

I did the sums in my head. 'So if you give him five shillings a week for a year you can resume satisfactory relations?'

Mr Blomfield nodded.

'That's 13 Sovereigns for a very limited enhancement!'

'A large sum,' said Mr Blomfield miserably.

'And you believe this nonsense?'

‘Oh yes,’ said Mr Blomfield. He seemed rather shocked that I had asked the question.

‘Does the Reverend have many supporters?’

‘The night I attended, the hall was packed. People were standing in the aisles.’

‘Are his meetings always that busy?’

‘Oh yes. I’m sure they are. I spoke to a man from Stratford. He had travelled around the country following the good Reverend. He said there were always big crowds wherever he spoke.’

Cynically, it seemed to me this scaremongering preacher had created a rather profitable market for himself. He had found a way to scare his congregation and a way to promise them the redemption for which he had aroused a yearning. I had little doubt that his warnings proved effective simply because those in his congregation accepted the Reverend’s dire prognostications. If a man is told that he is going to be impotent then impotent he will probably be.

‘Can you suggest anything a little cheaper?’ asked the Constable.

‘It’s all nonsense,’ I said, pointing to the leaflet. ‘There’s no scientific validity to the fellow’s claims.’

‘I’m afraid you’re wrong, Doctor,’ said Mr Blomfield, with certainty but appropriately apologetically. ‘Read what all those Doctors have to say! They wouldn’t tell lies, would they? They’re Doctors!’

I confess I didn’t quite know what to say to this. I was pretty certain that it would not be difficult to find Doctors eager to promote any cause, however implausible, if they were encouraged in their deceit by the prospect of a handsome, five guinea fee. I was pretty certain that Dr Challot, for example, would endorse horse shit as a remedy for rheumatism if someone gave him two shillings and a bottle of gin.

I spent some time trying to convince the Constable that the Preacher was talking rubbish, since if what he’d been told were true then every other man would probably be impotent before he wed. Suddenly, Constable Blomfield took a half Sovereign out of his waistcoat pocket and held it up for me to see. The half Sovereign glittered in a small ray of sunshine and I swear I could see the young Queen Victoria winking at me in an unexpectedly seductive way. ‘Come and hold me!’ was the message I received. ‘Put me in your pocket.’

And it occurred to me that I really ought to do what I could to help alleviate the poor fellow’s anxieties. I reminded myself that it is, after all, a Doctor’s duty to do everything he can to make the path easier for his patients as they stumble along life’s rocky road.

‘I would be very happy to pay for treatment,’ murmured Mr Blomfield. ‘There must be a remedy you Doctors know of; a remedy you use yourselves perhaps?’ He winked conspiratorially.

‘Ah,’ I said, nodding my head, as though in understanding. ‘Maybe there is a remedy I can provide for you.’

The poor fellow’s eyes lit up as hope surged in to push aside the despair.

I paused before saying more and looked about me as though nervous that we were being overheard. I leant forward until I was no more than a foot away from him. ‘You must swear not to tell a soul about this. If you go about talking, gossiping and boasting I will have every rancid fool in the county queuing at my door.’

‘I understand, Doctor,’ he nodded, with a very serious look on his face.

‘I can give you a special remedy to enable you to cleave the pin a good deal more,’ I whispered.

‘How much more?’ he asked. ‘How many times more?’

I mumbled a bit at that because I didn’t have the foggiest idea what to say, though it occurred to me that the fellow would be happier if I gave him some certainty.

‘Another 100 times,’ I told him. ‘The treatment I’m going to give you will ensure that you can do it another 100 times.’

His eyes lit up. And then he frowned. ‘What happens after that, Doctor?’

‘When those 100 orgasms have run out you will need to return for another treatment.’

He nodded.

‘You understand?’

‘Oh, yes, Doctor, I do. I understand. I will count them.’

‘You will need to keep a record lest you forget. Can you write?’

‘I can make a mark on a paper.’

‘Then make a mark every time you cleave the pin. Can you count?’

‘Only up to five, sir.’ He held up a hand.

‘Bring the paper to me when you think you’ve used up your number and I’ll do the counting for you.’

‘Thank you, Doctor.’

‘And next time I will have to charge you a full Sovereign.’

‘Right you are, Doctor.’

‘The treatment I’m about to give you is an expensive one and the ingredients are rare. I would usually have to charge five Sovereigns. In London they would pay 20 Sovereigns for this remedy. I dare say I could find patients prepared to pay as much as a full 50 Sovereigns for the chance to cleave the pin another 100 times. That’s a mere half a Sovereign per cleaving.’

‘This half Sovereign is all I have,’ muttered Mr Blomfield. ‘I had to sell my cow and my eldest Daughter to raise that.’

‘Your eldest Daughter is the one they call Violet?’

‘That’s the one, sir.’

‘How much did you get for her?’

‘A florin.’

‘Just two shillings?’

‘Aye. Two shillings.’

‘To whom did you sell her?’

‘To a fellow who works on a farm,’ replied Constable Blomfield. ‘I never caught his name. He seemed a nice enough young fellow though he had a wall eye, no teeth, a gammy leg and, to be honest, was not right at the front of the queue when God was handing out brains.’

‘Violet was a virgin?’

‘Oh yes, sir. Apart from myself, of course.’

‘Of course.’

‘And her brothers,’ he added.

‘Naturally.’ I nodded but frowned. I knew the girl. She was a nicely plumped creature of seventeen or so. It seemed too small a price by far. The farm labourer might not have been right at the front of the queue during the handing out of brains but Blomfield had been diddled. I thought it reprehensible that a father should sell off his Daughter for such a miserable sum. The girl must have been mortified to know that she was valued so low.

‘You think I could have got more?’ asked Constable Blomfield.

‘You could have asked for half a crown,’ I told him. ‘Perhaps as much as three shillings.’ I thought for a moment. ‘Mind you, Jake Aldborough sold his Wife for one shilling and sixpence and was glad to get that.’

‘She was an old woman.’

‘Nearly 40,’ I agreed.

He nodded. 'An old woman,' he repeated. 'And she was fat, ugly and fierce-some bellicose. I would have thought her expensive at a shilling and not much of a bargain at half a groat.'

Poor Blomfield, clearly annoyed that he could have perhaps sold his Daughter for more money, looked glum for a moment before brightening a little. 'I have two younger Daughters,' he said, more to himself than to me. 'They're both much prettier. And I daresay I could get a good price for the Wife.'

'You're not going to sell your Wife are you?'

'I don't think I'll sell her unless I have to,' he said. 'She keeps a good house and is a fair decent cook.' He thought for a moment. 'Yes,' he said, 'she's a fair decent cook. And a good warm body with well sized dugs.'

He didn't say anything about loving her or feeling any affection for her. I got the impression that if I'd offered him five shillings in cash, there and then, he'd have sold me what was left of his family without a blink.

'What sort of treatment will it be?' he asked. 'Is it Medicine to drink? I don't like pills.'

'A suppository,' I told him.

I have no idea why I said this.

I could have made up a bottle or medicine, rolled him a pill or prepared a powder in a sachet. But somehow a suppository seemed more appropriate. And I admit now I think I liked the idea of giving the uncaring wretch something he would have to stick up his arse.

Also I knew I had something handy which I could give him now. This would mean that he would not have to wait for the treatment and I would not have to wait for the half a Sovereign.

'What's a suppository?' he asked with bright innocence.

'You stick it up your nancy,' I told him.

'Up my nancy hole?'

I nodded. 'Up your nancy hole.'

'Can't you give me a bottle of green medicine? Like that stuff you gave me for my sore throat?'

'It has to be a suppository,' I told him firmly.

'How far up must it go?' he asked. His voice was a little higher pitched and shakier than it had been and he had not yet seen the size of the suppository I had in mind.

'A full finger length,' I told him sternly. 'More than a finger length would be better. Put it well in and keep pushing. The further up it goes the nearer it will be to the base of your tallywag.'

He nodded as though this made good sense to him. I was pleased it seemed to make good sense to one of us.

'You can get your Wife to put it in if you prefer,' I told him. 'Do you have a billy club?'

'Oh, yes, Doctor!' he replied, taking a nice and smooth piece of mahogany a foot or so long out of what must have been an especially lengthened trouser pocket. He fondled it lovingly.

'Splendid! Your Wife can use that to push the suppository into place,' I told him. 'Just make sure she ties a long piece of strong string to the handle of the billy club.'

He stared at me, uncomprehendingly.

'So that it doesn't disappear with the suppository,' I explained. 'She can pull the billy club out with the string if she lets go of it.'

He looked at me, and then down at the billy club which he no longer seemed to regard with quite the same affection as a few moments earlier. It heartened me to think that the Wife he had been prepared to sell so cheaply would have such fine entertainment.

'Do I need to tell her what the suppository is for?'

‘That’s up to you. But why not? If she’s been feeling deprived she’ll surely be enthusiastic about the procedure.’

Constable Blomfield nodded, realising that this made sense.

‘Just give me the half Sovereign,’ I told him sternly.

He handed me the coin. I bit the edge of it to check it was real, and slipped it into my waistcoat pocket. I then opened the drawer in my desk and took out the pessary which Mistress Wiltshire had rejected and which I had now arbitrarily renamed a suppository. After all, there is no difference between the one and the other except the purpose and the destination.

Constable Blomfield stared at the suppository as though he couldn’t believe his eyes. ‘It’s huge!’ he said at last. ‘It’s bigger than a good sized parsnip.’ There were tears forming in his eyes as he looked at the device.

‘It’s beautifully shaped, firm but soft and pliant,’ I told him. ‘You or your Wife will have no difficulty in getting it into place.’

I wrapped the suppository in brown paper, tied a string around it and handed it to him. ‘You and your Wife can make the beast with two backs 100 times with what’s in that package!’

‘Will it work only with the wife?’ he asked anxiously. ‘I do sometimes like to roger the Maid. And there’s my two Daughters as well, of course.’

‘It’ll work with anyone,’ I promised him. ‘Except perhaps Mistress Swain!’ I added, in jest.

He stared at me, looking terrified.

‘It was but a joke,’ I explained. ‘I didn’t intend you to take it seriously.’

The poor fellow looked relieved. He held the package tentatively, as though nervous of its power, and then he left.

I wished I could have been a fly on the ceiling of their bedroom when his Wife struggled to force the suppository into its new home.

When Constable Blomfield had gone, anticipating a certain soreness but also doubtless looking forward to a few weeks of active satisfaction, I took the half Sovereign out of my pocket and examined it. What a pity it was, I thought, that I would have to hand it over to Dr Challot and receive just a quarter of its value in return.

Suddenly, I remembered that according to my contract I did not have to pay Dr Challot any of my earnings which came from new patients or from new remedies which I had invented.

The half a Sovereign was mine. It was the first gold coin I had ever owned.

And, moreover, if I sold another of the suppositories the next coin would be mine too.

I would have danced around the room if I’d had a partner.

As it was I hurried off to the Peacock Inn to celebrate my new found wealth with a bottle of malmsey and a large eel and pigeon pie – with the eels nicely spitchcocked. I may not have had a dancing partner but I swear I danced all the way to the Inn. Or, rather, I danced as well as a man can dance when one of his boots has no heel.

The first thing I did when I got there was to tell Dick to put the heel back onto my boot. After it had been done, however, I was so accustomed to limping that I felt curiously unbalanced. Still, I had no real cause to complain. I had half a guinea in my pocket and a new pair of boots on my feet.

Most important of all, I had succeeded in getting through the day without being shot by ‘Two Pistols’ Hanham.

## January 6<sup>th</sup>

With some considerable reluctance, I climbed the staircase to the first floor and knocked on Dr Challot's bedroom door.

'Who is it?'

'It's me,' I replied. 'Dr Bullock.'

'What the hell do you want?'

'There's a Patient downstairs who is something of a puzzle,' I said.

'What's wrong with her?'

'That's the problem,' I admitted. 'I don't know.'

'What do you mean you don't know?' demanded Dr Challot, sounding exasperated. My employer is an impatient man, easily roused and nicely ripened, I fear, for a seizure. He has no great affection for work and if he ever wrote his autobiography it would be called 'But not Today'. However, the world of literature is likely to be spared such a tome for he is barely able to make a cross in lieu of a signature and if he is required to write a note he merely scratches the pen around and across the parchment as though the squiggles he makes have a meaning. 'All Doctors' handwriting is illegible,' he remarks if anyone wonders what his meaningless hieroglyphics might mean.

'I haven't been able to make an accurate determination,' I admitted.

'Come in and stop shouting through the damned door,' bawled Dr Challot suddenly. 'I can't abide people who shout through doors.'

When I entered the room all was much as I had expected.

Dr Challot was sitting up in Bed with a tray of food remnants on his lap and two dollymops lying one each side of him. Although Mistress Swain makes regular meals, Dr Challot does not always eat them – sometimes preferring to have his meals sent in from a nearby pie and ale house. The pies are reputed to be made with horse meat but Dr Challot seems to find them tasty enough – and preferable, no doubt, to another bowl of Mistress Swain's interminable Turnip soup.

The dollymop on his left, a redhead called Fanny Church who is the ratcatcher's eldest Daughter, was picking at a huge piece of overcooked beef with her fingers. The other trollop, the one on his right, a brunette called Kitty Fisher, was picking pieces of crust from a pie. She too was eating with her fingers. Both of them were quite naked as far as I could tell and seemed not in the slightest put out by my presence. Dr Challot refers to them as nurses but as far as I am aware they have neither qualifications nor experience in that particular area of expertise and their professional skills lie in other directions.

'What the devil do you want, damn your hide?' demanded my employer who was, I realised, sporting a brand new wig. Either that or he had a ferret sitting on the top of his head. 'What do you mean you can't make a determination? I thought you were supposed to be a Doctor. Aren't you now a Doctor? Didn't I give you a Leech jar to celebrate your licensing as a practitioner?'

'Yes, indeed you did. And thank you for the Leech jar. It was very welcome.'

'And the Leeches. There were Leeches in it. Good Leeches – still got plenty of suck in them.'

'Indeed so, the Leeches are splendid,' I lied. Dr Challot had not been downstairs for some time and so would not have been aware of the cat's unfortunate experience.

'So what do you want, damn you? It better be important, you can see I'm busy having my breakfast. And when I've eaten, these two nurses will expect a good diddling.' The dollymops duly giggled at this.

'I'm afraid I am really not sure what's wrong with Mistress Maitland,' I confessed. 'I haven't been able to make a determination.'

‘Augusta Maitland? She is the patient you are talking about?’

I nodded.

‘What the devil do you want a determination for?’

Suddenly, without any provocation on my part, Dr Challot plucked a roast potato from a plate on his tray and hurled it at me. I ducked and the potato hit the wall behind me with an unpleasant squishy sort of sound. Dr Challot laughed and the two women snickered. They sounded like a pair of horses whinnying.

‘I read a book in which the author claimed that a Doctor should always make an accurate determination before treating a patient,’ I told him. ‘I believe that in London the fashionable Physicians now refer to it as ‘calling up a diagnosis’.’

‘Of course, you must always make a determination!’ exploded Dr Challot, who has a deep rooted suspicion of London Physicians, an even deeper rooted suspicion of fashion and a muggle man’s loathing of all things scientific. ‘But it doesn’t matter a damn whether it’s the right determination or not. If your patients think you don’t know everything they’ll think you know nothing. Where do you think we would be if patients thought we didn’t know what was wrong with them?’

‘But I really don’t know what is wrong with Mistress Maitland,’ I protested. ‘What if I say that she has one thing when in reality she has another quite different thing?’

‘What damned difference does it make, what you say she has? It’s the treatment that matters, and the treatment will doubtless be much the same whatever the devil you tell her.’ He held up three fingers because he is determinedly innumerate as well as illiterate. ‘What treatments are there? Name them, damn your ignorant hide!’

‘Bleeding, Purging, Cupping and Herbing with elixirs, powders, melt wafers and rolled pills,’ I said instantly, for I had learned my lessons well and knew all the treatments as well as any Doctor. I confess I felt rather insulted to be tested like this; particularly in front of a pair of bangtails. Not that they were listening. With Dr Challot occupied in talking, they were far too busy filling their grubby faces with food from the breakfast tray.

‘Exactly!’ Dr Challot used his now redundant fingers to pick up another potato. This one he popped into his mouth. ‘So what’s this damnable mystery woman complaining about?’

‘She says she feels weak and that she’s noticed some swelling in her lower limbs.’

‘Do you mean her legs?’

‘Yes, sir, her legs!’

‘Well damned well say what you mean when you say it. I don’t want any of that fancy twaddle in this practice, do you hear me? An arm is an arm, a leg is a leg and the head is the head. That’s your basic anatomy for you.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Dr Challot turned to Kitty. ‘What do you call the frayed bits at the end of your legs?’

She looked at him and frowned as if he’d asked her to recite the Lord’s Prayer in Latin. ‘I didn’t do any schooling, sir,’ she said.

‘I know you didn’t. What do you call the frayed bits at the end of your arms?’

She looked at him and frowned. He lifted his hands in the air and wiggled his fingers. ‘These things! The bits that you use to hold onto the cockhead as you’re preparing to give it a good suckle!’

‘My fingers?’

‘Exactly right. So what are the frayed bits at the end of your legs called?’

‘I know, I know!’ said Fanny, leaping about so excitedly that she fell out of bed. ‘Those are her toes.’

‘That’s my girls,’ said Dr Challot. He put a hand on one of Kitty’s breasts. ‘And this? What’s this?’

‘That’s one of my dairy queens, sir!’ she replied proudly.

Dr Challot, still clutching Kitty's well-formed dug, turned to me. 'These girls know as much as you do!' he cried with a pleasant cackle. 'Anatomy is very simple. Where did you get this complicated 'lower limb' stuff from?'

'I read it in a book, sir.'

'Another book! A book again! Is that all you can do with yourself? Read books? What the devil have you been reading books for? You don't see me reading books, do you?'

'No, sir.'

Dr Challot, was given his training by his well-ripened uncle, an idle, pox-ridden fellow who was renowned, among other things, for being proudly illiterate. As far as I am aware, Dr Challot himself has never read a book of any kind, thick nor thin.

A wise uncle of mine once told me that if you don't know what you don't know then you don't know anything and if my uncle knew of what he spoke then Dr Challot knows nothing. He does have a very small collection of books on the shelf in his consulting room and this he calls his library. Both volumes in his library are nicely bound in leather but I cannot see that they offer much in the way of help to a medical man. One book is a Bible and the other is a copy of the 1839 edition of Bradshaw's Railway guide. Dr Challot used to point to them with pride, describing them as his professional library, though I never saw him even touch them, let alone open them. Indeed, there would be little point since he cannot read. He always asks me to read the flyers left by Leech Drummers, usually saying that he had mislaid his pince-nez. He certainly has no Latin. When Sir Benedict Ponsonby, the Physician and a rich, evil, snooty bastard if ever there was one, sends along prescriptions to be made up, Dr Challot never makes any effort to study them but just makes up one of his favourite mixtures, or rolls up a dozen pills. (Sir Benedict, like all Physicians, is allowed to charge for making a determination but is not allowed to prepare or dispense medicines.) To be fair, Dr Challot can tell from Sir Benedict's dog Latin scrawl when he's supposed to make up a bottle of medicine and when he's supposed to prepare a supply of pills or a wafer, but the rest of it is as much of a mystery to him as it would be to a blind man.

Even if Dr Challot could read, he wouldn't be able to see what he was looking at because he's as blind as a bat. A few years ago he bought a pince-nez from a traveller but he won't wear the thing because he says he's worried he will wear it out if he uses it too often. He won't even wear the pince-nez when he is treating patients and this has led to some confusion, disappointments and embarrassments. For two years he insisted on treating Squire Ludwig Drinkwater as pregnant because the fellow was so fat that he had grown what appeared to be massive dugs and had acquired a huge belly which hung down so far that his delicacies were well hidden and quite out of sight. 'Face facts! You're a woman and you're pregnant!' he bawled at the poor fellow and would not be dissuaded from this conclusion.

'Where did you find this book of yours?' demanded Dr Challot.

'I bought a stone and a half of assorted volumes from the Carter,' I replied. 'He got them from a house sale and though it's true that the greater number of them are Bibles, mostly well bound in good leather it has to be said, there was one book on anatomy among them. It was nicely printed on good paper and therefore obviously of good quality and reliable.' I hesitated. 'I thought a row of books would be impressive if displayed upon a shelf or in a cabinet.' For two months I had kept them in a box in my room in the attic but now they resided on the davenport in my room at the Inn.

'Baaa,' said Dr Challot, dismissively. 'Books are la-di-da nonsenses and the cause of most of the troubles in the world. What did you pay for them?'

'Tuppence for the stone and a half,' I replied.

I learned some years ago that you can buy books much more cheaply if you buy them by weight rather than by title. Hector Nodorf, a Carter and Rag Dealer who has premises no

more than half an hour's drumble distance from Muckleberry Pevrell, sells vast quantities of books by the pound. He buys his stock from the libraries of landed gentry who have died.

'And from where did you get a spare tuppence to waste on books?'

'I gave Phineas Turner, the Saddler a shave and a good Purgin,' I explained.

'Don't forget my sixpence!' said Dr Challot immediately. He may be illiterate but he can work out how much he is owed in but a moment. He knew that if I had earned two pence from the Saddler then his share of the fee would be sixpence.

'I won't,' I promised.

'Madness,' muttered Dr Challot to no one in particular. 'You've learned nothing, have you? Still, books will doubtless make good burning if we run low on logs. Are they thick books? Lot of pages?'

'Some of them are,' I agreed. 'The Bibles are very thick and should produce good heat.'

'That's good then. Not so bad.' He thought for a moment. 'And you could be right at that. A row of books could give us a flavour of good learning.' Dr Challot picked up a piece of gammon which he had suddenly spotted and stuffed it into his mouth. 'Maybe I should buy a pound or two of books from Nodorf. Have you had Mistress Maitland unclot her?'

'Not fully, no. I have examined those parts of her extremities which can be reached but there were no symptoms in those parts of her that remained clothed and so...'

'Ye Gods, you're a bone brained knucklehead!' interrupted Dr Challot. 'Have you learned nothing from my tutelage? The woman will think you a very poor Doctor if you haven't laid your hands on her parts – especially the nether parts. What sort of charge can you make if the woman retains all her clothing and returns home from a visit to her Doctor with her stays still buckled as tight as they were when she left home? She will think you a very poor excuse for a medical man. She must bare all and have good cause to blush before you can venture a determination.'

Abashed, I promised that I would do this.

'Balderdash and bodkins, you goose, you half-witted booby! Undress her, poke her about a bit and then just give her a damned good six pence worth of Purgin.'

'But she wants to know what I think is wrong with her!'

'Bloody cheek of the woman,' roared Dr Challot. 'Do I have to get myself out of Bed and attend to the damned practice myself? The world has gone to pot. Patients wanting to be told their determinations? Whatever next? Tell her that you know but that it'll be another half a guinea if you are required to tell her. Tell her that patients have a right to expect their Doctor to keep his secrets safe.'

I headed for the door.

'And mend your damned head and stop limping,' added Dr Challot. 'Patients aren't impressed if they see their Doctor limping about like a sailor with the woodworm. They'll think that if you can't fettle yourself, you can't be much of a Doctor! Eh, sir? Eh? What do you say to that?'

I didn't say anything. I was busy limping down the stairs and trying to fit my damned hat back onto my damned head to stop the damned Bleeding. The boot boy had used nails which were half an inch too long when putting the heel back onto my boot and I was in agony when I walked. Moreover, all the excitement had caused the Bleeding on my head to start again and I feared that I'd lost so much Blood that I was beginning to feel slightly light headed.

I hope that my hat is not too badly stained with Blood. A new one will cost three shillings and sixpence, a sum I cannot possibly afford.

As recommended, I insisted that Mistress Maitland remove all her clothing (a task which took a good half an hour) and subject herself to a damned good inspection. She blushed and tittered a good deal. When I had finished, I gave her a bottle of Purgin medicine and a bottle of the dark green medicine to polish her emptied bowels.

Before she left, still blushing, she asked if she should return for another examination to check that the medicine had worked its wonders.

When I told Mistress Maitland that she could send a Maid for two more bottles of the medicine she seemed curiously disappointed. I fear she does not understand that apothecaries make their money by providing medicines and not by examining their patients. The fact is that we can make just as much money simply by repeating a prescription.

## **January 9<sup>th</sup>**

Baron Biddulph of Bloxwich rode his black steeplechaser around Muckleberry Peverell today, and in celebration of his birthday gave half a groat to every fourth poor person in the village. Since he is a skinflint who pays wages so low that most of his employees can barely afford to eat, this is hardly an act of Christian charity. The custom, an annual event, invariably manages to cause much discomfort and unhappiness.

I happened to be standing in the street as he rode past and he threw me half a groat which I instinctively reached out and caught.

Startled, and not a little insulted, I tossed the half-groat piece to Pippin Babberly, a professional mute who worked for several local undertakers as a silent mourner and who was standing on my left in hopeful expectation. He had not received a coin.

Unfortunately, the fellow who was standing next to Babberly, an unemployed fellow with a dozen children and only two wives to look after them, who had also been left out of the Baron's largesse, punched Babberly on the nose and grabbed at the half-groat.

Babberly managed to hold onto the coin but suffered a black eye and a broken nose.

I set the nose for him and charged him half a groat since I knew he had the money. I told him it served him right for fighting.

He complained that he was no better off than he had been at the start of the day.

I pointed out that he was also now no worse off than he had been and that he was, indeed, better off in that he would now not acquire the head thumping megrim he would have doubtless ended up with after spending the half-groat on cheap gin.

## **January 16<sup>th</sup>**

I have been invited to dinner with Mr Ephraim Gengolphus. The invitation was something of a surprise for I am not accustomed to being sent invitations to dine with the local gentry.

Mr Gengolphus is a huge, crude brute of a man who owns a large farm and is a man of some influence in the area. His lady Wife, Mistress Verity Gengolphus, is a pleasant enough woman and a very effective breeding machine. Ephraim and Verity have been married for 11 years and according to Dr Challot, Mistress Gengolphus has been pregnant for ten of those years. The couple have had 14 children (including one set of twins) and all of the children have been named after members of the Royal Family. Unfortunately, since the couple have had more children than Her Majesty has produced, they have had to duplicate some of the names. So, they have produced three Vickys, five Berties, an Alice, two Alfreds, one Helena, a Louise and an Arthur. Of these, just two Berties, one Vicky and a Helena have survived. It is well-known that Mr Gengolphus has, for some years, been angling for a baronetcy and I suspect he believes that by advertising his loyalty in this way he will achieve his ambition more speedily. Every time a child is born and christened, Mr Gengolphus sends a note to Buckingham Palace to apprise her Majesty of the latest show of respect. Still, ambition is a

natural and largely laudable phenomenon: even borborygmi aspire to become clamorous eructations or merry expressions of flatulence.

Sir Newton Poppleford and Lady Lettice Poppleford were the other guests, along with their Daughter Miss Phyllis Poppleford, who is an accomplished harpsichord player and who rides to hounds. She looked far gone with child but she told everyone that she was cursed with a good deal of wind as a consequence of eating an uncomfortable surfeit of melons. I heard Mistress Gengolphus whisper to her husband that if the girl's blessing were truly the wind then she will in due course surely produce the devil of a fart.

Sir Newton is short, rotund and so red faced that he looks for all the world like an overripe tomato about to burst his skin and fire flesh and seed in all directions. His wife, Lady Lettice, is exceptionally tall and as thin as a sapling. She is habitually stooped as though bent over by a strong wind, or some other force of nature.

Miss Phyllis, who could never be owned to be pulchritudinous, and who has the features and the personality of a permanently bereaved sow, has recently become engaged to be married to Mr Staple Fitzgaine-Bickenhall, a neighbouring farmer whose estates are extensive and who also has a large house in London. Mr Fitzgaine-Bickenhall is 63-years-old, exceedingly short (no taller than a 12-year-old child) and the possessor of very poor eyesight. According to Mistress Swain, whose knowledge of such matters is extraordinarily precise, he is not believed to be the origin of the afore-mentioned swelling which, if not a result of eating too many melons, may well have been a consequence of one of Miss Poppleford's many close but transient friendships with hunting folk around the county. Mr Fitzgaine-Bickenhall was not present, having travelled to Devon to purchase a new bull.

We started dinner with two fine boiled cods and fried sole in oyster sauce. We were then served sirloin of beef accompanied by pea soup and orange pudding. This was followed with a wild duck each and a forequarter of lamb with salad and mince pies. We finished the meal with Plumb Cake and other tasty pulpatoons. We started dinner at 3 p.m. and were still eating at 6 p.m. We then rested for an hour before having supper. At half past six Mr Gengolphus said he felt peckish and so he ate a whole rabbit to himself. The rabbit had been basted in beef fat.

'I am once more with child,' announced Mistress Gengolphus quite suddenly.

'Is there any way to stop them coming?' asked Mr Gengolphus. 'We think we have a sufficiency now. We thought quite a lot of them would die off but too many have survived. We must breed very healthy ones. I asked Sir Richard Lovelace, my neighbour, if he knows of anything we can try. He and his Wife have six and haven't had a fresh one for five years. I wondered if he was perhaps being served by one of the kitchen Maids but he says not; he says he now buggers his Wife and that's put a complete stop to the births. He and his Wife say they both find it a perfectly satisfactory solution. Unfortunately, my Wife, Mrs Gengolphus, has the piles which rather get in the way of such a solution. The infants came forth by the front passage but the back passage seems to have suffered in sympathy.'

At this point I realised why I had been invited to dinner.

'It is doubtless all the pushing,' said Lady Poppleford. 'As a gal I was taught never to push but whenever I gave birth I was always encouraged to push. They shout at one to do it and so somehow one feels obliged.'

'I blame the first two,' said Mr Gengolphus. 'The more recent ones have been fired out with some speed.'

'Mr Gengolphus is unusually well built in the conviviality department and so gaining an entry to the tradesman's entrance would be unduly painful even without the piles,' added Mistress Gengolphus. 'I have known very few better endowed gentlemen than my husband, though my grandfather was exceptionally well built in that region and when young I did once

pleasure a donkey at a Hunt Ball, but that is quite a different kettle of fish, of course. Would you like more veal, Doctor?’

‘Just a little,’ I replied.

‘Another sausage?’

‘That would be splendid, thank you.’ I turned to her husband. ‘I could let you have some linen condoms,’ I suggested.

‘Tried ’em,’ he replied, pulling a face and shaking his head. ‘We bought half a dozen from a tinker but they were too damned tight, uncomfortably so, and we wore always ’em out before completion.’

‘Mr Gengolphus is very vigorous,’ explained his wife.

I suggested a tortoiseshell sheath might be a sturdier alternative.

‘Oh, I tried one of them,’ said Mr Gengolphus now pulling a face as though he’d bitten into a lemon. ‘My lady Wife wasn’t too taken with it and nor was I.’

‘It reminded me of the fat candle I used to pleasure myself with when I was a girl,’ said Mistress Gengolphus. ‘It was very cold and unyielding. The Vicar used to supply me with altar candles in return for certain favours.’

‘It was like paddling with me riding boots on,’ complained Mr Gengolphus. ‘Have you ever tried one of those tortoiseshell things yourself?’

I confessed that I had not. I took a bite of one of Mistress Gengolphus’s delicious sausages and turned to her. ‘I could maybe try to subdue your piles by the application of a selection of Leeches.’

‘Do you think that would work?’ she asked, her voice full of hope.

I said I would return the following morning with my Leech jar.

We had been told that Vigo Mountjoy had been hired to play the harp after dinner but there was considerable disappointment when Mr Mountjoy took a Jew ’s harp out of his waistcoat pocket and proceeded to attempt to entertain us with a variety of tunes on what we all agreed was a rather sorry looking little instrument. Mistress Gengolphus told us that when she had hired him she had expected he would bring the full sized version. He said he did not have a large harp and would not know how to play one if he was offered one.

‘Size is everything,’ she said, when dismissing Mr Mountjoy and refusing to pay him.

Miss Phyllis Poppleford then entertained us by playing a harpsichord which was found in an attic room and brought down for the purpose. Owing to her ‘wind’ she had to sit side saddle on the stool. The playing was not a great success and Miss Poppleford, who burst into tears, said she thought that the harpsichord had been badly affected by damp and was not playing the required notes in the appropriate order.

## January 17<sup>th</sup>

I visited the Gengolphus residence with my pot of Leeches and found that Mistress Gengolphus had prepared for my visit by discarding all of her clothing in the area of concern. When I entered the drawing room she bent herself over the arm of a chaise longue with her voluminous veins offered freely for observation.

I applied three Leeches and although they initially seemed reluctant to take advantage of the offered refreshment, I am pleased to say that with a little encouragement they eventually set to work with laudable enthusiasm. When they had finished their work Mistress Gengolphus invited me to test the aperture. She was quite upset when I demurred, pointing out that I thought it might be considered a breach of professional etiquette.

‘My husband won’t be in the slightest put out,’ she assured me. ‘Besides, he is out riding and won’t be home for hours. I really would be grateful if you would check that your Leeches have done their work properly.’

I said that I had two other visits to make which were urgent (this was not true) and assured Mistress Gengolphus that I was confident the Leeches had done sterling work and that both she and Mr Gengolphus would be well-satisfied. There is no law which says that a Doctor is ethically or morally bound to have sex with a Patient if she requires him to do so. Indeed, Dr Challot taught me that there are only two rules which a Doctor must obey. The first is that when visiting a Patient in their home you should get your fee before leaving. The second is that in the consulting room a Doctor never hands over the medicine until he has the patient’s money in his pocket.

Mistress Gengolphus was, however, quite put out by my refusal to accommodate her request and when I left she ordered me to send in one of the footmen.

‘The tallest one would be best,’ she said, still lying over the chaise longue with her fulsome Arse on display. ‘His todger is quite long but conveniently slender and although usually disappointing would make a suitable testing rod on this occasion.’

I told the tallest footman that his mistress required his services. He seemed neither surprised nor delighted by this information.

When I returned home I decided that my frowsty room needed more books to give it (and me) much needed gravitas.

## January 22<sup>nd</sup>

This morning, in my search for additions to my library, I visited the local marine store, so-called because the proprietor, Hector Nodorf, specialises in selling the jetsam which sailors bring back from their travels.

When I arrived, Mr Nodorf had just finished repainting the sign over his shop. His emporium is now called ‘Hector’s Junk Shop’.

I asked him why he had changed the name.

‘Sailors always bring me odd lengths of old rope to sell,’ he replied. ‘And they call the bits of old rope ‘junk’. So, since that’s what I sell most of, I changed the name of the shop to suit.’

‘Have you stopped selling books?’ I enquired, rather disappointed.

Mr Nodorf assured me that he still had books for sale and so I bought a bundle of assorted tomes, sight unseen, weighing fourteen pounds.

When I got the books back to my room and unwrapped the packaging, I discovered that there were two copies of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by that insufferable fellow Bunyan and a ten volume set of works by Pope (a writer whose work I find very dull). Six of the books were identical editions of *Tom Jones* by Fielding. I have read this, and excellent though it is, I see no need to have six copies of the same tale so I gave one copy to Nellie, the Maid, who was excited. It is, she says, the first book she has ever owned.

I have promised her that when I have time I will teach her to read.

## January 28<sup>th</sup>

I had a strong discussion about the values of my profession in the Inn this evening.

The landlord Mr Youngblood, Cedric Potter, a local solicitor and Everard Blossom, a farmer, were all complaining about the poor quality of medical care available in the area.

Since Dr Challot and I are the only Apothecaries and Surgeons in Muckleberry Peverell, I naturally found this assertion rather offensive.

Potter is an unnaturally short, fat fellow who seems to spend his days drinking and pissing. Unlike most people, who tend to alternate the two activities, he tends to do the two at the same time wherever he happens to be. He dowses himself with cheap perfume and thinks this hides the smell of piss but the two stinks together merely create a more obnoxious stink than either alone. He is the only solicitor in the area and is solemnly dedicated to hypocrisy. He insists that his housekeeper preserve the niceties by putting two layers of white pantaloons onto the legs of his piano but is reliably reputed to have deflowered far more than his fair share of local virgins.

Blossom owns a farm with cattle and sheep and although he must be rolling in money he is as mean a fellow as I have ever met. He holds up his trousers with twine instead of a belt and his Wife and Daughters have to darn their own clothes. And it is reputed that none of them has had anything new for a decade. When I had to examine Mistress Blossom last month, I could not help noticing that her five layers of underclothing were all heavily mended. Her stays were grey and several of the whalebone struts were snapped.

Blossom, who is as big a rogue as can be found in the county, loans his eldest Daughter to Potter on alternate Wednesdays and in return Blossom is allowed to put 100 sheep on one of Potter's unused fields. Heaven and the girl alone know what Potter gets up to with the girl for his belly hangs down over his nether regions and I doubt if he has had a clear view of anything below his waist for a good ten years.

Mistress Swain, who is a bubbling cesspool of local gossip, claims that Potter, a renowned lallygagger, has offered to marry the other Daughter, the younger and least noisesome girl, if Blossom gives him the freehold to the field his animals occupy, together with another of a similar size which he is known to covet since it has a stream through a corner of it. The stream has never been known to dry up. Blossom is keeping the younger Daughter a virgin in the hope that this arrangement can be completed. I pity any poor Maiden who finds herself permanently trammelled in such a way. The younger Blossom girl is as not as pretty as the older but she is as wide as she is tall and as round as a pumpkin, and Potter has a renowned fancy for plump girls.

'You're no more a man of science than the charlatans and quacks who sell bottles of tonic in the market on Saturdays,' said Potter.

'You're right there,' agreed Blossom, nodding agreement. 'The medicine you practice is no more than black magic. Your remedies are crude, unreliable and downright dangerous.'

'I'd rather die at home than go into a hospital,' said Potter who must have been feeling well to make such a brave, bold claim.

'If you cure someone it's just by good luck,' said Youngblood who was already lion-drunk and had to hold onto the bar to stop himself falling over.

'Mind you,' said Potter, with a smirk, and a nod in my direction, 'I will say one thing for him.'

The other two looked at him and then at me.

'He gives a good shave!' said Potter.

The three of them laughed as if it were the funniest thing anyone had ever said.

I pointed out to the ungrateful Potter that I did not remember him complaining that Doctors were useless when he was plagued by the Boils last September. I reminded him that without the Gunpowder pills I had prescribed he might still be suffering the torment of Job, with pus oozing from so many noxious imposthumes and boil heads that he appeared to be full of the stuff.

I would not mind so much but on his behalf I spent a messy two hours making up pills out of Gunpowder and butter. The damned pills have to be rolled afresh by hand and the rolling

requires much care. The previous time I prepared Gunpowder pills, I failed to clean my hands properly before lighting a cigar and suffered badly in consequence. I had been given the cigar by Ladram Ackroyd, whose piles I had annihilated with the handle of my second best bone saw brush. The resulting small explosion left me with scorched fingers, no right eyebrow and a greater respect for the need for safety when handling Gunpowder pills. I remember that Dr Challot, who heard the explosion and came downstairs to see what had happened, laughed so much that he puddled on the surgery floor. Mistress Swain refused to clear up the mess, claiming that it was outside her responsibilities and for a while I thought it would be left to me to find a mop. Fortunately, the cat, which has Catholic enthusiasms but no sense of taste, cleaned up the mess with relish and seemed to take an unexpected fancy to the mixture.

‘The boils would have probably gone without your pills!’ responded the thankless Potter, overfull of courage and phlegm now that his body has emptied itself of the pus.

I told him firmly that the next time he needed medical help he could take the choice of seeing Dr Challot or ride six leagues to see Dr Montgomery, the fool of an Irish quack whose favourite and only remedy (which he recommends for every disorder imaginable) is the eating of two large Spanish onions.

‘Eat two large Spanish onions and call in tomorrow if you are not cured,’ Montgomery tells all his patients.

The ones who dare to return and complain that they are still not cured will be told to go away and eat another two large Spanish onions.

I fear the man is a rogue and I strongly suspect that he has some sort of financial ‘arrangement’ with the local greengrocer. Either that or he has simply heard that onions are fashionable in London society.

(Montgomery is one of those practitioners who are forever leaping on some new medical fashion. Two years ago he offered to make determinations by studying navels. This so-called science is known to its enthusiasts as omphalomanancy, though it is a branch of medicine which I believe should be defined under blatant quackery. Montgomery also practices gyromancy. He forces his patients to walk round in circles until they fall down and subsequently makes his determinations according to where they land when they fall. Finally, I have heard it on good authority that he also listens to the intestinal gurgling of his patients – a practice which he dignifies with the name gastromancy.)

I pointed out to the ungrateful Potter that medical science does not stand still and that the Gunpowder remedy, which was fashionable until a month ago, has already been surpassed by a more sophisticated solution to the problem.

Hercules Tomkins, a Drummer who brought a new range of bone saws around for my inspection, confided that a Doctor he visits in Lichfield has had great success with a boil remedy which consists of rendered leaf lard to which has been added beeswax and burgundy pitch. Our practice already has three perfectly good bone saws but I was so delighted with this new remedy that I promised that we would buy a fourth on his next visit. I also gave him a good, close shave with a newly honed razor and scissored his hair so that he can more easily put a mustard Poultrice onto the ringworm which marks his scalp. The wise fellow rarely removes his hat. I also persuaded Mistress Swain to give him one of her disgusting and infamous bow wow mutton pies. This one was, I believe, made with a mongrel which was found dead in the street after being seen eating a rancid rodent.

The Drummer afterwards declared it to be the tastiest pie he’d eaten in a quarter. ‘Rich and full of flavour!’ was his verdict. I’m not surprised it was ‘rich’ for the damned dog had been dead for a week when Mistress Swain picked it up to turn into a pie.

Potter, who is a sly fellow, as everyone knows and as befits one in his scurrilous profession, asked me for details of the new remedy to which I was privy. Naturally, I was not fool enough to tell him.

Potter, who suffers from boils several times a year, was subdued by my refusal to tell him about this new remedy and although he did not apologise I could tell that he was regretting his previous remarks. He bought another round of drinks without having to be reminded that it was his turn.

I had thought that Youngblood might have been a little less caustic in his observations since I live under his roof and he must know that I will, when Dr Challot gets round to paying what he owes me, hand over ready cash for my room and board. But Youngblood is always drunk after six of an evening and he and Blossom, the fool of a farmer, were joined as brothers by their cocky intemperance and unjust contempt for my profession.

I stood my ground like a proud Englishman and argued, foursquare and unrelenting, that the care of the sick has in this century attained new heights and that modern scientific medicine is so advanced that it is difficult to see how and where any improvements could possibly come. I stated firmly that patients and Doctors will look back upon 1850 as the day when scientific medicine reached an unsurpassable peak. I told them we are now living in the future.

None of this was an exaggeration.

We are, without a doubt, living in an unprecedented time of scientific and social progress. It is difficult to see what is left to be invented or how man can progress further, both in general terms and in my own chosen field of speciality, the world of medicine. From now on I rather think that any so-called progress will simply be change for the sake of it, rather than in serious hope of offering any improvement. How can you make a better Leech than the ones we currently have at our disposal?

## **January 29<sup>th</sup>**

I spent some time preparing an inventory of the advantages of modern, scientific medicine and produced the following pieces of indisputable evidence in support of my claim:

Good Surgeons can perform amputations so quickly that it is difficult to imagine that it will ever be possible to remove limbs more speedily. I myself once managed to remove a leg, above the knee, in just five seconds under a minute and a half. The leg had been fractured and if left in place would have been a painful encumbrance. With a wooden stump and a pair of crutches, the man was up and about less than six months later. It is reputed that a Dr Benson, who has a large practice in Whitechapel, once succeeded in removing a man's leg in 31 seconds. Here is plain evidence that surgery has almost reached the peak of the possible – though I accept that the sub 30 second amputation is probably not far away. Those cynics who complain that medicine is not a science should know that every Barber-Surgeon I have ever met is well aware of the value of a sharpened blade when performing amputations. The best men can now boast a post-amputation survival rate approaching 50% which was unheard of just a decade ago. I met Dr Benson once. He showed me how to sharpen my knives by stropping them on the sole of my boot. He also amused and delighted a group of us by removing his frock coat and allowing us to examine it. The coat was so crusted with old Blood and dried material that when Dr Benson removed it, he was able to stand it by itself in a corner of the room. Dr Benson wields both saw and knife so speedily that he has on three separate occasions removed the fingers from assistants who have failed to move out of the way with sufficient enthusiasm. Unfortunately, he has had cataracts and the palsy for two years now and his surgical skills are not what they once were. My own surgical skills are locally regarded as excellent and I can think of no better evidence of this fact than that both our village butchers regularly pay me to cut up the carcasses of cows, pigs and sheep.

In our practice, three out of five patients who have major surgery are still alive 48 hours after their operation. It is true that half of those will die in the following week but it is clearly absurd to expect this success rate to be improved upon very significantly.

Specially designed mouth gags for stifling the screams made by patients in the operating theatre are so effective that folk in the next room are sometimes quite unaware that an operation has taken place at all. In primitive days, Surgeons used to hit their patients on the head with a wooden mallet in order to quieten them and keep them subdued. Such methods are now confined to practices in very rural areas. These days more sophisticated practitioners quieten their patients with Alcohol and Laudanum and ensure that they keep still by employing the services of three or four strong assistants. As Mistress Standorf mentioned, I have heard of Surgeons experimenting with chemicals such as Ether and Chloroform to quieten patients but both these substances are toxic and may result in the Patient dying at the conclusion of a successful operation. What's the point in being able to amputate a leg in less than a minute if the Patient is killed by the drug used to put him to sleep? Only publicity seekers use these dangerous substances. It is much safer and more sensible to use well-trying, traditional remedies. By putting a dozen or more Leeches onto a patient's body before surgery, it is possible to remove the volume of Blood so significantly that Bleeding after surgery is dramatically reduced. There is no doubt that the Leech, not the dog, is man's best friend. Drummers regularly bring round fresh Leeches in addition to Poultices and Plaisters. If Leeches aren't available, it is possible to remove Blood from the system by the process of scarification – using small blades to cut into the skin. The latest equipment available is a spring loaded Scarifier which contains no fewer than 16 blades. Dr Challot always recommends removing three pints of Blood from a Patient before surgery. When this has been done, the amount of Bleeding after the operation is very much reduced.

It is now increasingly uncommon for more than three patients to be put into one Bed in provincial hospitals. For the payment of a small extra fee it is sometimes possible for patients to have a Bed entirely to themselves. In most Poor Hospitals, the Sheets are changed every month regardless of whether they are stained with Blood, pus or other bodily substances. This seems an optimum arrangement. Changing the Sheets more frequently would be a bitter inconvenience for staff and patients and of no value to anyone except, possibly, the local laundresses.

It is perfectly possible to stop Bleeding after surgery. Post-surgical Bleeding can be ended by cauterizing a wound with a hot iron or by pouring boiling oil onto it. Both these methods work extremely well. It is impossible to see how any other remedy could be more effective or less troublesome to the Patient who is, in any case, often unconscious by the time this procedure is performed.

We now have several powerful drugs which can be used to help patients. Digitalis, taken from the foxglove, is effective against the dropsy. Mercury is of inestimable value to those who have carelessly over-indulged in the bedrooms of whores and who now wish to rid themselves of the unbidden consequences. Laudanum, a tincture of opium, is such a wonderfully effective medicine, useful in the treatment of almost all ailments, that it is impossible to consider it ever being surpassed as a universal remedy. Many Doctors now recommend that everyone above the age of 12 take a regular daily dose of Laudanum in order to help them stay healthy. A good dose of Laudanum will eradicate pains, coughs, sleeplessness, nervousness and scores of other conditions. It seems to work particularly well, and to be more palatable, when mixed with other substances including musk, amber, belladonna, usky, gin, brandy and cayenne pepper. One major advantage of Laudanum is that patients find it immensely palatable. I myself have a number of patients who swear by it, take it daily and say that they wouldn't be without it. All this from something as simple as the opium poppy! (I have heard some critics suggest that the opium products are addictive. What

utter nonsense!) We can now prepare safe and effective medicines in many different forms. Medicines should look frightening, stink to high heaven and taste like pus from the devil's pox. Most Doctors have a favourite brew which they make by the gallon and give for a wide variety of ailments.

Using cloves, hops, senna, gentian root or orange peel we can produce medicines in single dose vials. Since powders in individual doses can be difficult to take (unless placed on rice paper and turned into wafers) we make hand-rolled pills containing useful herbs, using cocoa butter, glycerine, liquorice, glucose, gelatine, ear wax or saliva to hold the ingredients together. The mixture is rolled into a tube, cut into sections and hand rolled into pills of varying sizes. The pills so made can be varnished or covered in gold leaf.

Excellent and efficacious plasters and Poultices can be made using a wonderful paste made with linseed, olive oil and lead oxide. The paste is put onto chamois, leather, silk or sheepskin and cut to size. A good Poultice will be solid when cold but flexible at body temperature. Poultices can be used a dozen times or more.

We can now give patients an Enema with a jet of water powerful enough to strip the rectal mucosa clean of all toxic materials. The Patient sits on a brass nozzle and with the aid of a hand or foot operated pump and a few yards of flexible tubing, the Doctor squirts several gallons of water into the lower reaches of the intestinal tract within seconds. It is possible to purchase portable Enema sets which have ivory fittings and can be carried in a smart mahogany case.

Hearing aids used to be clumsy, ugly things made out of cows' horns. Modern conversation tubes are much more elegant and can be made out of ivory or silver. To avoid unpleasant odours and stop themselves being infected with fleas, it is now possible for Doctors to buy a hearing tube which is one and a half yards long. Who would have dreamt of such a thing a decade ago? The single tube monaural Stethoscope, invented by a French fellow called Laennec, is now widely used by Doctors. Dr Challot has two of these devices. One is small enough to fit into a silver clip inside his hat. The other is about three feet long, and I am allowed to use it when I am required to listen to the chest of a Patient who is infested with fleas. (I confess I cannot hear much through this piece of equipment but some of my patients live in hovels where the clothes and bedding are visibly jumping with fleas and the inability to hear is acceptable in those circumstances.) Even if nothing can be heard through the Stethoscope, the instrument helps give the Doctor an aura of scientific knowledge. Many of my patients regard the Stethoscope as a treatment. More than once, a Patient who has been Stethoscoped has sat up, cured, within seconds of my placing the far end of the instrument on their chests.

Surgical tools are infinitely better made than they were just a few years ago. Most Doctors now carry a pocket set of matching knives. I have seen sets sold in a leather covered case lined with velvet. Large amputation knives are so well made and hold a sharp edge so well that they are invariably borrowed by the cook and disappear into the kitchen. It is possible to buy a bone saw with ebony handles, and most Surgeons who use a bone saw will use a bone brush to clean away the bone dust from the teeth of the saw. It is possible to buy ear scoops, for removing wax from the ears, which are made from the finest silver. Catheters designed for opening venereal strictures affecting the flow of fluid down the channel from the bladder are also made from silver and sold in telescopic form so that they can be more easily fitted into a Doctor's bag.

## January 30<sup>th</sup>

I took my list of medical improvements to the public bar this evening and started to read it to my three critics of yesterday evening.

Sadly, however, I was no more than half way through the list before my three companions took to drowsing. Potter was soon snoring and sounded like a pig who has consumed two peck of over-ripe apples. I woke them all by announcing that I was offering to buy another round of drinks, together with pickled eggs for all, on sole condition that they now agreed with me that medical care had never been better, that Doctors are more effective than at any time in history and that it is pretty well impossible to see how and where any serious improvements in health care could possibly be made.

To my delight, my proposal was met with enthusiasm and shouts of approval. I woke the Barmaid, who had also nodded off, and ordered the drinks and pickled eggs for all, the sum for which to be put on my rapidly bloating account. After three more rounds of mead and pickled eggs I felt weary and headed for my bed.

As I headed out of the bar and into the corridor on my way up to my room, I found myself face to face with Mistress Youngblood who was returning from the kitchen. 'Your defence of modern medicine was most convincing,' she whispered. In the public bar I could hear her husband and two travellers wrawling about the appalling state of English roads. Mistress Youngblood put her hand on my arm and I felt a physical thrill throughout my body. The woman, although of mature years, is zaftig and extremely attractive, surprisingly winsome even, and was wearing a very low cut bodice which exposed her milky white dumplings to my admiration and caused much surprised stirring in my loins. 'I do so very much admire a man with a loud intellect and the ability to express himself with distinction,' she murmured.

And with that she was gone, disappeared completely as though magicked away by one of those Music Hall performers who draw rabbits and doves from their headgear. And as she hurried off, I fear I heard her laughing merrily to herself. The woman is a tease and has no respect.

I ascended the stairs to my room and cursed myself for being a slow-witted nincompoop. I should have done what Dr Challot would have done: taken the woman in my arms, dragged her up the stairs, whipped out my twig and berries and taken her without further ado. Her husband was too drunk to have heard her cries, if there had been any, and her protests would in any case have been inspired only by natural modesty and inevitably short-lived.

When I reached my room, alone and without comfort, I discovered that the damnable Maid had not replenished the fire and nor had she filled the scuttle. The room was as cold as a witch's dugs. I undressed quickly, pulled back the curtains around my Bed and climbed between the Sheets hoping to find the Warming Pan had been placed in position. Still not having a Nightshirt (for I had not found the time or the spare groat to buy one) I clambered into Bed in the suit given to me on my birth. I was startled when I discovered that the Bed was already partly occupied. My first thought was that the rogue Youngblood had rented out my Bed to a Drummer but my suspicion was entirely unfounded for a little exploration showed that the Maid who had previously offered to do the blanket hornpipe with me was sprawled akimbo. She was quite naked and fast asleep. When I tried to push her off the mattress and through the curtains she complained bitterly without waking and so I left her where she lay. Not being possessed of any linens for protection from the pox I suspect she carries within her quim, for despite her years she is assuredly more bangtail than Maiden, I eschewed the very modest temptation and eventually went to sleep myself.

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