

AT "THE POINT."

DR. GEORGE HALL was at "The Point" slowly getting well after a severe experience with yellow fever—Don't fancy that I am going to inflict a romance built on the horrors of that scourge; the thing has been written out, done in every possible way. But Dr. Hall, aged twenty-seven, having no particular interest in living, and having always felt a curious fascination in the disease, went South among the very first who volunteered. He satisfied his curiosity and enthusiasm fully.

He took common-sense care of himself. He did not consider suicide heroic. He ate and drank and slept just as wholesomely as he could, but he never spared his strength. He worked patiently, faithfully, intently. The fever passed him by day after day, week after week, though he cared as little about living as a sane man could. Perhaps for just that reason, not fearing death, death took revenge by leaving him.

At last—I say at last, though it was only August, the time had dragged so like an eternity—just as the little town had begun to believe that the curse had burned itself out, partly for want of fuel, the young Yankee doctor's professional sense told him that his turn had come. He made his final arrangements, lay down and gave himself up, and three weeks later went North—on a mattress.

I think he had a little disappointed sense of weariness in having to take up his life again. But he did that, as he did everything else, without the least unnecessary fuss over the inevitable.

And so he was at The Point, very gaunt, very yellow, as ugly a specimen of humanity as a straight, well-made young man can be.

Every sea-port has its "Point." Chester Point had been baptized something fantastic and inappropriate, and was just as sandy and rocky after as before. It had always remained "The Point" in the mouths of the old town dwellers, and came to that shortly with most of the new-comers. A great barn-like hotel had been built, but it had never been a financial success. It had a curious look of unfinished disrepair, and its empty corridors and galleries were about as forlorn as a habitable house could be. Still a few people came back year after year—people who loved the sea or solitude, or had need of quiet, and must secure what they wanted inexpensively. They kept up a feeble life about the place, but it was not a cheerful, not to say gay, resort.

It would have been hard for Dr. Hall to tell what had brought him here. Some one told him to come, perhaps; and, in his utter prostration of mind and body, for the first time in his life, perhaps, he did what he was told unquestioningly.

He had an attendant at first, and took his meals by himself; but as he became more humanized in appearance he dismissed the man, and went down to the general table.

The first time he entered the long hall, there was a noticeable hush among the guests congregated there. He thought it was his ghastly look, and was as impatient about it as if it had been a personal injury. He did not know he was a hero, and that the hush was a tribute to him in that character.

The man who had cared for him had been one of his own patients, who had come North with him. With unbounded faith in, and gratitude to, the savior of his life, the ignorant, good-hearted fellow was never tired of sounding the praises and relating the exploits of the invisible invalid. Hall would have been a good deal amazed at some of the things credited to him.

Perhaps he had over-estimated his strength; perhaps the little flash of temper had been too much for him. There was a little rush toward him of the nearest waiters, and he sat blindly down in the first chair.

A glass was pushed within the hand that rested on the table.

"Drink!" a cool, imperative voice said, and he obeyed.

The wine revived him at once. He turned to thank his neighbor. It was a woman, thin, pale and weary-eyed. She simply bowed in acknowledgement and went on with her meal.

She was eating very little. He got through a very robust programme in very business-like style, and then he turned to her again.

"I shall pair your order. Eat!"

A quick, surprised smile, an amused one, too, ran over her face and transfigured it for the instant.

"And be merry, for to-morrow"—and then she stopped and looked frightened.

"Not a bit of it," he said heartily. "Clearly you are not professional or you would see that I am on the up grade instead of the down."

They left the table then and went up the stairs together. He had to call on a waiter, and she stood at the top and looked distressed, but undemonstratively, till he was beside her.

They went out on the veranda together.

"As I have no one to do the honors, I must present myself. I am Dr. George Hall, of Clairview, Connecticut."

"And I am Irene Roberts, of New York; a public school teacher when I am well enough."

He turned and gave her one full, level look. She was thin, almost to attenuation; her face was colorless, and the heavy hair growing low on the broad forehead made the pallor of her skin the more noticeable. Her eyes were hollow and sad, but after all she did not look like a sick woman.

"Overworked and overfretted, but with the endurance of three men yet," he said to himself. And then he made some trifling remark about the sand or water, or something else, just to hear her voice again.

She talked without animation, a monotonous contralto—one of those voices that keep one expectant.