

## PAUL VARGAS---A MYSTERY.

MY STORY concerns a man whom I saw but thrice in my lifetime; or I should rather say, saw during three brief periods of my lifetime. We were medical students together. His name—I do not change it—was Paul Vargas.

He was a tall, dark-haired, pale-faced young man, strikingly handsome after his own peculiar style. His nose was aquiline and well-formed; the broad forehead betokened great intellectual power, and the mouth, chin, and strong, square jaw all spoke of strength of will and resolution. But had all these features been irregular and unpleasing, the eyes alone would have redeemed the face from plainness. More luminous, eloquent, expressive eyes I have never seen. Their dark beauty was enhanced by a distention of the pupil, seldom met with when the sight is perfect, as was Vargas'. They possessed in a remarkable degree the power of reflecting the owner's emotions. Bright as they always were, they sparkled with his mirth, glittered with his scorn, and when he seemed trying to read the soul of the man he looked at, their concentrated gaze was such as few could bear with perfect ease.

I can not say he was my friend. Indeed, I believe he had no friends, and I think I may add, no enemies. He was too polite and obliging to make foes, although there was usually a calm air of superiority about all he said and did, which at times rather nettled such an unlicked lot of cubs as most of us were in those days.

Yet, if we were not bosom friends, for some months I saw a great deal of Paul Vargas. He was an indefatigable student, and as if the prescribed course of study was not enough for him, was engaged during his leisure hours on some original and delicate experiments, conducted simply for his own pleasure. Wanting some one to assist him, he was good enough to choose me. Why, I never knew. I flatter myself it was because he thought me cleverer than my fellows; but it may have been he thought me duller and less likely to anticipate or forestall his discoveries.

All our fraternity looked upon Paul Vargas as abnormally clever, and when the closer intercourse began between us, I found at first no reason to differ from the general opinion. He seemed to have all the works of medical and surgical authorities at his finger-ends. He was an accomplished linguist. Let the book or pamphlet be English, French or German, he read it with equal ease, and moreover, had the valuable knack of extracting the gist of the matter, while throwing aside any worthless lumber which surrounded it. From my average intellectual station I could but admire and envy his rapid and brilliant flights.

He had resolved to become a specialist. He poured out the vials of his scorn on the ordinary practitioner—the marvelous being who, with equal confidence, is ready to grapple with fever, gout, consumption, blindness, deafness, broken bones, and all other ills and accidents which afflict mankind.

"It is absurd!" he said. "As well expect the man who made the lenses for that microscope to make the brass work also—as well ask the author of this treatise to print and bind it. I tell you one organ, one bit of the microcosm called man, demands a life's study before the cleverest dare to say he understands it."

Certainly the organ selected by Vargas for his special study was the most complex and unsatisfactory of all—the brain. Any work, new or obsolete, which treated upon it—anything which seemed to demonstrate the connection between mind and body, he examined with intense eagerness. The writings and speculations of the veriest old charlatans were not beneath his notice. The series of experiments we were conducting were to the same end. I need not describe them, but something of their nature may be guessed, when I say it was long before the time when certain persons endeavored to persuade the world that scientists were fiends in human shape, who inflicted unheard-of tortures on the lower orders of animals, solely to gratify a lust for cruelty.

One night I found him in a strange, preoccupied mood. He did his work mechanically, and I could see that his thoughts kept straying away. We finished earlier than usual, and for awhile he sat opposite to me in silence. Then he raised his eyes and asked me a question.

What the question was I have never been able to remember. I have racked my brain again and again, but have never recalled the purport of it. All I know is, it was, from a scientific point of view, so supremely ridiculous that I burst into a peal of laughter.

For a moment Paul Vargas' eyes positively flamed. Feeling that our relations were not friendly enough to excuse the indiscretion on my part, I hastened to apologize. He was himself again directly, and with his calm, superior smile on his lips, he assured me I had done nothing which demanded an apology. He then changed the conversation, and during the remainder of my stay talked as rationally and instructively as the most methodical old lecturer in the schools.

He bade me good night with his usual politeness, and sent me away glad that my ill-timed mirth had not offended him. Yet the next morning I received a note saying he had decided to discontinue that particular series of researches in which I had given him such invaluable assistance.

I was somewhat nettled at this summary dismissal. Vargas asked me to his rooms no more, and he was not the man to call upon uninvited. So, except in the schools and in the streets, I saw nothing more of him.

It was predicted by those who should know best that Paul Vargas would be the scholar of the year. I alone dared to doubt it. In spite of his great talents and capacity for work, I fancied there was that in his nature which would defeat these high hopes. There was something wrong—something eccentric about him. In plain English, I believed if not mad then, he would end his days in a madhouse.