

CHAPTER III

THE space of but a few weeks had wrought a great change in the establishment of W. Brown, Chemist. It was cleaner for one thing, including Lizzie, who in deference to the new young manager's firmly expressed opinions, had washed. At least she had washed her face and hands, and was expected to keep on doing so at frequent intervals. This *prima facie* evidence was not altogether satisfactory to the new manager, for it was impossible to discover with any certainty whether her operations had been more extensive. He bided his time.

John's resources and those of his uncle had been pooled, and an alarming amount had been spent on new labels and decorative trifles. As the winter had gone, the surplus stock of cough mixture was re-labelled as a specific for hay fever; the chilblain cure became a remedy for gnat bites, and many other marvellous transformations unknown to any *pharmacopœia* were made. Mr. Brown protested, but was always gently overruled, and after hovering round anxiously many days, and exclaiming at the money which was coming into the till, was finally content.

It was a great shock when his nephew had the front of the shop repainted, and a greater when some three hundred empty bottles were filled with tap water, coloured with cochineal, scented with vanilla, and sold at half-a-crown each as an infallible wash for the complexion, guaranteed to give the bloom of youth to the feminine cheek of any

age. They sold, too. Other sidelines were subtly boomed. When a thin person came into the shop, somehow, there came into evidence a large bottle of a food calculated to fatten; when a stout one entered, there was the reducing mixture quite ready to the hand and eye. And both were made from precisely the same ingredients, nothing differing but the label!

Mr. Brown ventured at first on mild protests.

"My dear boy, I know you are doing wonderfully, but is it quite *right*? These things cannot possibly have any effect."

"We aren't robbing anybody, uncle, except the people who sell us the tap water. That reminds me; we are very nearly through the hair-restorer. They seem to like the scent I put in; it is selling very well."

"Your advertisements are so seductive, John. I must say that. But I am really rather uneasy. My dear boy, the stuff is nearly all water, and so is what you are selling in the little bottles for removing superfluous hair."

"Now look here, uncle, did you ever succeed in selling anything better? Why, there are two things which would make the fortune of any man. One is to make hair grow where it refuses, and the other to stop it growing where it insists on doing so. You never sold anything to make a hairy man bald, or a bald man hairy. I don't believe there is a specific even to make thin people fat, or fat ones thin. They've got to have faith, and that's what I'm giving them with the tap water and the cochineal, and the vanilla essence and all the rest of it. That and the statements on the labels. It's a wonderful thing, *faith*. I wish I had it."

Mr. Brown sighed, finding the modern rush of life over-swift. His hopeful nephew busied himself preparing indigestion pills of crushed bread, tinged with bitter aloes.

"They won't believe it is doing them any good unless it is infernally nasty. . . . You look tired, uncle. Suppose

you go and take a walk in the park? Come back in time for supper."

In the intervals of the rush of customers John went into the back kitchen.

"You are looking much cleaner, Lizzie, but I am not at all sure that you wash all over?"

"Lor', Master John, the things you say!"

"After the shop is locked up to-night, Lizzie, it is my particular desire that you go to your room, take off all your clothes—*all* your clothes, remember—and wash yourself very thoroughly indeed. After which you may wrap some sort of a gown about yourself and come to my room, as I wish to talk to you about your future."

Lizzie gazed at him blankly.

It must have been one in the morning when Mr. Brown roused from sleep, candle in hand, poked his head out of the doorway and peered up the deserted passage. Almost simultaneously, the tousled head of John and the light of another candle appeared a little further down.

"I thought I heard a noise," said Mr. Brown.

"Very probably," answered John. "It's a noisy district."

"You ought to be asleep, my boy."

"I am engaged," announced John suavely, "in some experiments of a very interesting nature to which I must give my attention. Everything is perfectly all right, and you had better get back to bed, or you will be losing your night's rest, and that is bad for you."