

RHODA ROBERTS.

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CHAPTER XXI.

FOLLOWING UP THE CLUE.

Nothing whatever had come of Mr. Carlyle's mission to London. It had been a complete failure. The old retired officer whom the detective had purposed seeing in regard to the identification of the photograph of Trethyn's agent with that of the man who had been for a short time on the staff at Scotland Yard, and probably for a much longer time intimately acquainted with the internal arrangements of the Hobart Town prisons, was dead and buried months before ; or, at least, so the detective's information ran. Nor could any of the people in that Home of Officialism and Cunning aid the detective. Not one of them seemed to remember two Graingers at Scotland Yard, or was able to recognize the agent of Trethyn in the photograph submitted to them as an old brother officer. So, disappointed and foiled, Mr. Detective Carlyle had to return to Trethyn.

As we have seen, once back in the parish again, the detective had set up as a shoemaker, a calling he was well acquainted with, having, years before his entrance into the force, worked at that trade. In this role he was free to move in and out amongst the people, and thus to gather much information in regard to his case. But he had learnt nothing special, nothing bearing upon the mysterious death of the late squire, or upon that other mysterious circumstance of the escape of Edward Trethyn. He had, however, chiefly through talk with Seth Roberts and Rhoda, come to two important conclusions which he hoped would enable him to unravel some of the mysteries attending these circumstances—first, that Edward Trethyn was not drowned in the Avon, and secondly, that the Robertses knew something of the mystery of his escape, and probably where the fugitive was now hiding.

Of course, neither Seth nor Rhoda had told the cobbler this in so many words, but the detective, hidden un-

der the cobbler's disguise, had gleaned it all from their words and manner. What struck him as remarkable was the shyness with which they would talk on the subject, and how eager they were to evade it whenever it was broached. This, and a score of other little things, too little for any but an accurately observant man such as the detective to notice, were all markedly indicative to Mr. Carlyle of hidden knowledge, and upon then he had formed his own conclusions.

But that was about all that the detective had gained by his new role, and he had therefore determined to go back into what, in speaking to Superintendent James, he playfully called civilized life. So he had doffed his leather apron, removed his wig with the bald patch, and his false beard, taken off his brass-rimmed spectacles, transferred his small business gratis to another, and gone back to his old lodgings. There he was himself again, and not even the shrewdest in Trethyn could have recognized in the person of the handsome gentleman who had returned to old Mother Hill's rooms the once apparently decrepit cobbler.

Not many days after his return chance threw him in the way of the agent.

"Good morning, sir," he said politely.

Stephen Grainger stopped, looked, and was instantly filled with astonishment.

"Good morning," he replied ; "you back in Trethyn ?"

"Yes, here I am," said the detective, "turning up again like a bad penny."

"I thought you had left the neighbourhood," still amazedly went on the agent.

"So I did, but I've returned."

"Humph ! Surely not come photographing again ?"

"Why not ?" queried the detective, readily.

"Why ? Look at the weather. See how heavy it is. You could never use your camera in this."