

Smerdon, too! I really must calm the fever in her blood. There is only one way to cure women of an attack of curiosity—gratify it. Ah, I will leave the secret portal open to-morrow and give you both the desired opportunity, and you will find nothing! Now this pudding-headed young policeman—the idea of watching my house must assuredly have been put into his head; he never would have conceived it of his own intelligence. Hum! I should rather like to know what crotchet it is that his superiors have got into their brains."

True to his resolve, the Doctor next morning after lounging into the drawing-room and announcing that he was going into the city, departed, leaving the door of the laboratory ajar—a circumstance speedily noted by Miss Phybbs. That young woman jumped at the chance, and determined to institute a thoroughly good search through the apartment, and see if she could lay her hands upon any slight feminine belongings, such as ladies do at times leave behind them—a glove, a handkerchief; she might even discover a note, letters, or something of that sort; also at the same time if there was anything to indicate the correctness of Dick's suspicions—that worthy having of late endeavoured to teach her what was the principal plant of a coiner's trade, as far as his somewhat imperfect knowledge on the subject extended. Bells might have rung that morning, but they would have rung unheeded, as far as Polly went, until she had finished her inquisition, but after giving an hour's harder work to her search than she had ever bestowed on the dusting of the room, she was fain to confess herself beaten. There was not the slightest vestige of anything that could convict the Doctor of receiving female visitors, or indulging in the manufacture of base silver.

"There is no proof of anything whatsoever. There is nothing but nasty jars and bad smelling bottles. Anyway my notion is better than Dick's. We do know a lady came out of that door—which is more than can be said about a bad half-crown."

Phybbs took care to let Miss Smerdon know that the forbidden chamber was open, and Frances could not resist taking a peep. A few minutes satisfied her. She was in search of nothing, and her idle curiosity was speedily gratified. Jars, bottles, and crucibles were only to be rendered interesting by the Doctor being there to explain what he did with them. Frances indeed was disappointed at not finding drawings of cabalistic figures, a skull or two, a stuffed alligator, a glass mask and all the usual paraphernalia with which the workshop of the alchemist or astrologer were garnished, according to the old plays and romances.

Dr Lynden, as an ordinary chemist, was a very commonplace person, but in those higher walks in which Miss Smerdon pictured him, he was to be regarded with profound respect and veneration. The Doctor's prescience with regard to events in the Crimea had lately induced Miss Smerdon to playfully express her belief that he was an astrologer, and that his prophecies were simply the reading of the stars.

"But," as she said to herself, "there was no telescope, and as for skulls, why, there wasn't even a skull cap."

She felt no further desire to enquire into the mystery of Blue Beard's chamber, unless by the special invitation of the Doctor himself. It was not likely that anything would have come from Constable Tarrant's self-imposed task if he had not been helped by the chapter of accidents. Dick was not at all the man calculated to shine as one of the sleuth-hounds of the law. He lacked not only the keen powers of observation, but the untiring watchfulness necessary for a detective. He was a rather stupid, indolent young man, whose idea of hard work was to superintend other people doing it, and especially did he prefer that the said hard work should conduce more or less to his benefit. He would speedily have wearied of keeping bootless watch and ward over that side door, but for one thing—notwithstanding his compact with Phybbs, Mr. Tarrant had communicated his suspicions to his superiors. They had listened to him half-dreadfully, for they had no faith whatever in his intelligence, but the senior of the two or three officers to whom his tale was told, had almost

derisively complimented him, and ordered him to persevere in his vigilance.

"There might be something in it," said Evans, one of the sharpest officers of the force, when Constable Tarrant had retired. "I don't suppose there is; it's hardly likely that a man like Doctor Lynden moving in the best of society in the place, should be running an illicit mint. Still," he continued with a grin, "we know the benefits of education and improved machinery. Your tip-toppers don't live in garrets and slums nowadays, but on first floors, and dress like swells. Now this gang are real clever, you'll admit that; Scotland Yard, you see, is dead beat about them, and say the mintage is quite inimitable."

His comrades nodded assent, listening evidently with much respect to Sergeant Evans' words.

"All this points to its being the work of tip-toppers. Now it's a curious thing that a man should take a house here, and build out a laboratory with a private stair communicating with the street. They say he's very clever, and all that; but his experiments in chemistry must be for his own amusement. Now there's one grain of truth in what Tarrant says, 'What does he want with a private door all to himself?'"

"Just so," said Inspector Fumard approvingly.

"If these smashers," continued the Sergeant, "are in Manchester, we must look for them in the least likely places. I'll see if I can make anything out of Dr. Lynden."

If the Doctor has anything to conceal, it will be well for him to take heed. Constable Tarrant he might laugh at, but it is a cat of a very different colour which is now watching the mouse-hole.

That Sergeant Evans should stand either lounging about or walking up and down like a sentry outside the Doctor's door was very unlikely; but before a week was out he had acquired some information about it which, though it puzzled the Sergeant, convinced him that the Doctor had certainly mysterious avocations. Evans' high position in the Manchester police enabled him to make enquires which would have been impossible for anyone not so situated. He discovered for one thing that the Doctor, besides carrying on an extensive correspondence, was in the habit of sending numerous cablegrams to Odesa. This of itself struck him as singular in a gentleman not engaged in trade. What might be the contents of those cablegrams the companies would not have told him if they could, but they did let him know that they were all couched in cypher, and how this could bear upon coining, the Sergeant was entirely at a loss to conceive.

Another discovery he made which was quite compatible with the Doctor being engaged in that illicit pursuit was, that a remarkably lady-like woman was in the habit of strolling from somewhere in the heart of the city out to the suburb wherein the Doctor lived, that though apparently never noticing the house, she never turned until she had passed it; and that her constant appearance had not attracted the attention of Police-constable Tarrant, could be due only to his gross stupidity. Another circumstance which speedily struck the astute Sergeant Evans was how singularly capricious this lady was in the rose she wore in her bonnet. She dressed so quietly that nothing but a trained eye would have detected this slight but constant variation in her head gear. The rose was sometimes red, sometimes yellow, sometimes white, but to Evans it was speedily as clear as noon day that these were perfectly understood signals to the Doctor. Whenever the rose was red, so surely as soon as the lady had strolled out of sight did the Doctor emerge from his house, and follow in the direction she had taken; that the pair met, walked and talked together the Sergeant easily ascertained, and that their interview invariably ended at the railway station from which the lady returned to town. On the occasions when the rose was of another colour he found that she usually returned from her walk to Manchester and the Doctor made no attempt to follow her. Sergeant Evans was puzzled, but this much did seem clear to him, that the Doctor was in close correspondence with some individual or individuals in town, which correspondence was deemed too important to be entrusted to

the post. That the gang of coiners they were so anxious to pounce upon were artists of the first force there was no doubt, but what was the object of this lady-like woman travelling perpetually up and down from London to Manchester merely to exchange a few words with the Doctor either in the streets or at the railway station. Had she carried back parcel or package with her, he could have understood that she was the medium by which the base coin manufactured by the Doctor was transmitted to his associates in town, but she carried nothing with her but a hand bag, and into that he had contrived to obtain a peep which convinced him that it contained nothing.

The Sergeant, in his own vernacular, was fairly "flummoxed."

CHAPTER XIV.—THE STORMING OF THE REDAN.

The eighteenth of June had passed and gone with a result that astonished the Allied army pretty nearly as much as it did Dr. Lynden. After the Quarries and the Mamelon nobody doubted but that when the assault did take place we should get in; and that it would take place very shortly was evident. That it would be a pretty tough piece of work it was quite clear. We might not perhaps get possession of the whole place in the first instance; only succeed, perhaps, in capturing the great Redan and the Malakoff; still, that we should be fairly beaten all along the line, and with nothing to show for the terrible loss of life incurred in the assault, except the cemetery taken by Eyre's Brigade, would have been credited by no one. A trophy, too, which, as the men of the left attack contemptuously remarked, they could have taken any night with two companies.

When the news was first flashed beneath the waters to England, you may judge the terror it struck to the heart of Nell Lynden and her friend. Those first head-lines in the papers spoke only of a general assault on Sebastopol. "Terrible Repulse; Frightful Losses." Bitter lines to women who had those near and dear to them in the Chersonese. Dr Lynden was always perfectly willing to talk over the successive events of the war with the two girls, but that his daughter had any personal interest in news from the Crimea he had persistently ignored. He had never alluded to her engagement—seemed, indeed, to regard it as a passing fancy which separation had effectually put an end to, and Nell was quite aware that in the event of the worst she would have to bear her sorrow by herself, that she need expect no sympathy from him. Though fond of his daughter, the Doctor was a hard and proud man, with an iron will under his suave and courteous manner, and he deeply resented the extreme coldness with which Hugh's relations had taken the announcement of the engagement. As for Frances Smerdon, he had no idea that she had any peculiar interest in the march of events. But the terrible list came at last, without any mention of the—th, and when the full accounts, and also a letter from Hugh came to hand, it turned out that the Regiment had been held in reserve, and not engaged at all that day.

"It is very singular," remarked the Doctor, "it upsets all calculation: the first act is not over so soon as I anticipated. Well, they are like cocks in a pit—bound to fight it out—they cannot run away. Singular, I am not clear that it is not the best thing that could happen to us. If the Allies did but know it this tremendous struggle at the extremity of her empire is the most exhausting thing for Russia possible. And when Sebastopol does fall—what next? Ah, then—if Russia could only obtain some compensating success elsewhere—take Paris, for instance, peace might be possible. After swapping queens, Miss Smerdon, one may offer to draw the game."

The siege dragged on. There was no particular action, but incessant skirmishes, and the list of trench casualties grew perfectly portentous. It was like a running sore on both sides, and cruelly weakening to the two antagonists. The lines of the Allies drew closer and closer round their foe, and it was evident to the keen observer that the Western Powers and the Muscovite must once more speedily close in the death grip. And with the early days