



BY HAWLEY SMART.

Author of "Breezie Langton," "At Fault," "Tie and Trick," "Long Odds," "Without Love or Licence," &c., &c.

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#### CHAPTER XIII.—THE LADY OF THE ROSES.



ALTHOUGH Dr. Lynden had been a comparatively short time in Manchester, he had achieved a considerable social status there amongst the better and more refined circles. A suave, courteous gentleman who had evidently seen much of the world, and could talk well on most of the leading topics of the day, his knowledge of foreign politics was regarded with profound respect by his intimates. His forecasts of the strange events of that stormy period had proved wonderfully correct, and what Lynden thought of things was a question constantly asked by the leading business men there to whom the war was excessively repugnant. Some few objected to it on moral grounds, and still fewer on the conviction that the game was not worth the candle; that the struggle was unnecessary; that we were pulling the chestnuts out of the fire to serve the French, and that Russia would willingly have undertaken to do nothing that would interfere with our interests if we would only have kept out of the quarrel; but to the bulk of the Manchester men the war was distasteful, as it always is to men who get their living by trade. The extension of business is not brought about by the winning of battles. War must of necessity be paid for by the nations indulging in it, and has never yet conduced to the acquisition of riches, which is after all the main object of all manufacturing industries, or for the matter of that of most other employments in this world.

In the very beginning of the trouble the Doctor had prophesied that it would all end in war. When people pooh-poohed him and said it was ridiculous to suppose that we should ever take part in another European war—that in these days of advanced civilisation it was preposterous to think that we should have resort to such a barbarous way of adjusting our differences, the Doctor replied:

"It's just that belief that you will never engage in another European war that will bring it about. That is Russia's idea also. As for civilisation—it exercises very little restraint on the passions when roused. Human nature never changes, and asserts itself in defiance of civilisation whenever it comes to the crucial test. Your rulers think you will not fight; but the nation is on the boil, and will have it so. Yes, there will be war, and not a little one, you will see."

Not only had the Doctor's prognostications proved correct upon that occasion, but either his foreknowledge or his information about the march of events was singularly accurate. He took the keenest interest in the struggle in front of Sebastopol. He had carefully studied the best maps it

was possible for him to procure; while his knowledge of our numbers in the Crimea, of what reinforcements we had under orders to join the army in the field, and of what our garrisons in the Mediterranean consisted was remarkable. Not only was he a close reader of the daily papers, but it was pretty certain that information concerning the war reached him from other quarters. He was always willing to discuss the situation in the Crimea with Miss Smerdon and his daughter.

"Ah, yes," he said one afternoon when he came in for his cup of tea, "the drama progresses apace. With the fall of Sebastopol will end the first act. That we should take that, is necessary to our insular pride; and, even if we wished it, it is hardly likely that the Russians would allow us to re-embark. The French, I see, have taken the Mamelon—do you know what that means? That is preparatory on the part of our Allies, to a request that we will take the great Redan, which, it is said, they find a thorn in their sides. Yes, it is probable that the curtain will fall on the first act before the end of the month. And then, ah, then—where next? We shall have dealt Russia a blow at the extremity of her empire, but we cannot get at the heart. Napoleon tried that—and a pretty mess he made of it. We have no Napoleons now."

Dr. Lynden had usually been singularly accurate in his prognostications concerning the siege, and he was so far right that a general assault on the place was imminent, but what never occurred to him, any more than it did to many of the chiefs actually present before Sebastopol, was that the attack might fail. The siege had already lasted seven months and it was not to be supposed when the Allies did deliver an assault it could be anything but a *coup de grâce*. Why, even in this affair of the Mamelon, the Zouaves had reached the ditch of the Malakoff, and it was believed, had they been properly supported, could have taken that work. Oh no, the first act must be very nearly over.

"You think," asked his daughter, "that the final assault will take place before June is over?"

"Yes," replied the Doctor. "The trenches are a perpetual drain upon our army, that can be endured but little longer, while the Russians have left thousands by the wayside on that terrible march across the Steppes; but men, when, as in their case, they believed their ruler to be both their king and their God, they'll be always ready to die for him."

Miss Smerdon's first impulse on the receipt of Byng's letter had been at once to return home, but when she found that Nellie abstained from questioning her on the subject she reflected that her mother would be scarce likely to show such reticence, and so came to the conclusion that she had best stay where she was for the present. The

Crimean war exercised a great influence over people's minds at that period, and to a romantic girl like Frances with a special interest in the welfare of one of the actors in the drama, became a positive fascination. She heard somewhat more quickly, to say nothing of more directly, through Nellie, of what was taking place there; and then at Twmbarlwm there would be nobody to explain the intention of the siege operations so lucidly as the Doctor. Even Polly Phybbs had at times her scrap of information to give concerning it, derived from letters received from her brother, and there was no piece of intelligence from the —th but what was worth listening to, in the opinion of the two girls.

There is nothing like the common bond of hopes and fears, to draw people of different grades together. Miss Smerdon's heart at that time yearned towards anyone who had near and dear belongings in the Crimea. This caused her to unbend somewhat towards Polly Phybbs, and once more her thoughts travelled in the direction of Blue Beard's chamber. True, she was mainly absorbed in the war, but for all that her mind at times would wander to other things. Again, she talked the subject over with Polly, and found that young woman now quite as curious as herself about it. But Phybbs while carefully listening to all Miss Smerdon's views of the mystery avoided any mention of her own suspicions. Still the result of their joint curiosity was that, while Frances was perpetually teasing the Doctor to be allowed a sight of the laboratory, Phybbs was constantly hovering about its door, prepared to take instant advantage of finding it open. The Doctor was much too keen an observer not to become speedily aware of this; he further was not long in discovering that a rather bullet-headed young policeman was also taking unwonted interest in the side door of his house, keeping his eye on it, indeed, in such clumsy fashion as caused Dr. Lynden to give way to a fit of silent laughter.

"Oh, dear," he muttered, "these provincial police don't seem to have acquired the very elements of their profession or they never could have set such a young num-skull as that to keep watch over me. I wonder what it is they suspect me of. It does not much matter, they have guessed wide of the mark, I have little doubt. That girl Phybbs too is always lurking about the door of the laboratory; well, she would make nothing of it if she got inside; it would take an agent of the French secret police to do that, and even he might come, and give me but a few hours' notice of his visit. True, I have done it before successfully, but I don't like living under surveillance. Phybbs, my good girl, you're an excellent servant, and I don't mean to part with you. My charming Miss