

"Oh, Dick, Dick! what have I done?" cried the girl.

"Done," replied the police-constable in high dudgeon, "It's what you ain't done I'm complaining of. How do you think I'm ever going to get on in my profession if you won't help?"

"I assure you, Dick, I've done as you ordered me, but I've nothing to tell you. The Doctor locks himself into the laboratory as usual, and I haven't been called in to tidy it up for a good three weeks. He's never had a lady, nor any other visitor to my knowledge all the time. Are you sure you're not mistaken?"

"Mistaken! not likely," he replied, "I suppose you was born without gumption and it can't be helped, but just you attend to me." And then Mr. Tarrant proceeded to relate circumstantially how he had seen the lady come out of the side door, how her departure had been closely followed by the unexpected appearance of the Doctor at his elbow, and how the latter had then walked off in the same direction.

If Miss Phybbs had been a very faint-hearted coadjutor so far, in the detective business, yet she promised to be a very valuable assistant in the future. She wished no harm to the Doctor and his family, but her womanly curiosity was now thoroughly piqued. There was a slight flavour of scandal about Dick's story which was very titillating, her enquiries concerning the lady's dress were far more minute than her cousin was able to satisfy; and if Dick recognised that his theory of the Doctor carrying on a private school of anatomy was negated by the appearance of a lady on the scene, Miss Phybbs' ready brain had already built up another to take its place, in which, sad to say, a very indifferent construction was put upon her master's character; still, in spite of Mr. Tarrant's discovery they were, in reality, not one whit wiser than before. Polly had known that men occasionally used that stair for the purpose of visiting her master's laboratory. She knew now that a woman had also used it for the same purpose, and she knew no more. Why they came and what they came about, she and Dick were quite as ignorant of as ever. They talked the thing over, most exhaustively, during their walk. And while Miss Phybbs ran over the list of ladies who visited the house, endeavouring to put her finger upon the one likely to be guilty of such an indiscretion as secretly visiting her master, Mr. Tarrant arraigned the Doctor of every crime in the annals of the police, coin-brothering, forgery, burglary, etc., only to reject them one by one. At one time he suggested that he should at once lay what he persisted in terming his discovery before his superiors, but Miss Phybbs was decidedly opposed to that. Openly, she argued that it was useless, until they had pushed their investigations somewhat further, and arrived at something more definite. Inwardly, she believed herself upon the track of a domestic scandal which, though eager to get to the bottom of it, she had no wish should go beyond the family circle. And, moreover, would turn out a case with which the police had no concern, so when they eventually parted it was agreed between them that their lips should be sealed for the present.

The next day Constable Tarrant's duties called him to the head quarters of the police in the city, and while there, lounging about waiting for orders, he heard some of his superiors discussing a communication that they had received from Scotland Yard, relative to a considerable quantity of base coin, with which the Metropolis had suddenly been flooded, and of the fabrication of which they had so far failed to find the slightest clue. They described the coin as beautifully manufactured and all evidently the work of the same hands. "The constructors are passed masters of their craft and must be provided with very superior plant and machinery. There are probably two or three employed in the minting of it, but the issuing must comprehend a very extensive organisation. We need scarcely add to lay hold of the principals is of the greatest possible importance."

"I don't believe we have anyone here now on the smashing lay. At all events not such artists as these are described to be. We may have one or

two inferior ones about, but they would be in a very small way of business."

"No," rejoined one of his brother officers, thoughtfully, "I don't think such a lot as they speak of could be here without our knowing of it. Not likely but what they'd try to pass some of the stuff in a big place like this. What little bad money we've come across lately is of a very inferior manufacture, not calculated to deceive anybody who looked at it twice."

Richard Tarrant sucked all this in greedily. He had settled in his own mind that Dr. Lynden was offending against the laws, and that if Dr. Lynden was not so doing in one way he was in another was a fact fixed and incontrovertible in Dick Tarrant's head; if he was not carrying on that illegal school of anatomy then doubtless he was manufacturing bad silver by the bushel, and upon no other grounds than these did he once more decide in his own mind what was Dr. Lynden's secret occupation. But though both he and Polly kept watchful eyes upon the side door it was without result. It was a subject of much regret to Miss Phybbs that she had not been a little more punctual in keeping her appointment that afternoon, as she would then probably have caught a glimpse of that lady, and veiled though she might have been, Miss Phybbs confidently asserted that she would have known her again anywhere; but to recognise her from Dick's description was, she ruefully admitted, impossible. Yes, there is no doubt a pronounced taste in dress offers great facilities for identification. The famous Lord Brougham is said to have been constant to shepherd's plaid—a material scarce known to us in the present day—for his nether garments. There are men in London whose hats we could swear to, and confidently predict their presence in a house as we pass their head-gear on the hall table; and I can call to mind a well-known lady whose taste for bright colours was so conspicuous in her raiment, that people at Lord's and Hurlingham made appointments to meet in her vicinity, as a rendezvous, that, though movable, could be seen from afar. If only this unknown lady had but had a penchant of that description. As it was, neither Tarrant nor Polly Phybbs saw any probability of coming across the mysterious stranger unless she should again pay the Doctor a visit.

But there is something in luck, and, busy one morning in the heart of the city on some mission of Miss Lynden's, Polly could hardly withhold a cry of exultation upon catching sight of her master talking earnestly with a well-dressed woman who she had no doubt was the lady she was so anxious to catch sight of. She easily contrived to pass them, not closely, but near enough to obtain a good view of the latter's face. It was one she had never seen before.

"She may visit the master by the side door," sniffed Miss Phybbs, "but she's never come in at the front;" and her suspicions as to the respectability of the unknown became stronger than ever.

She turned back and repassed them, still contriving to keep unnoticed herself, which was all the more easy from the slow pace at which they were walking and the earnestness of their conversation. And Polly felt then that there was no fear of her not recognising the stranger in future.

A tall, well-preserved woman of forty, on a rather large scale; with an indolent grace in her movement that would have made her a striking figure in any drawing-room. She was richly but quietly dressed, and that she saw her now for the first time Miss Phybbs was certain, though she and the Doctor were apparently old acquaintances. Polly had neither time nor inclination to follow them, but remained satisfied with having succeeded in identifying the stranger. She determined on her way home to say nothing of her morning's adventure to Dick, believing that if she only got to the bottom of it, it would turn out to be a pretty scandal, which was no concern of the police.

CHAPTER X.—MRS. SEACOLE.

"It's eight o'clock, and the Crimean mail's in, and please, miss, Miss Nellie said I was to tell you that all's well," exclaimed Polly volubly, as she drew

back the curtains and threw up the blink of Miss Smerdon's room one bright May morning.

"The mail in!" cried Frances, as she bounded out of bed, plunged into her dressing-gown, and dashed off to Nell's room, to pick up such crumbs of comfort as that young sybarite might choose to drop from the snug depths of her couch; and perhaps at twenty, when thoroughly in earnest, to lie in bed and read love-letters is as entrancing an occupation as a maiden need hope for.

"Captain Byng is all safe," said Miss Lynden, "The return was all a mistake. Hugh says he had the closest possible shave of being killed and they thought at first he was so; he was stunned with a bullet, but is really only very slightly wounded, and doing well."

"Thank God," said Frances, "I almost wish now I hadn't written to him."

"Oh, Frances, Frances," rejoined Miss Lynden, laughing, "you're a little the oldest, and I used to think a good deal the wisest, but oh, my dear, you're a sad goose. Here you are in love with a man, and believe in your heart that he's in love with you, and just because he hadn't got the pluck to speak up before he left England, you regret that you've written him a very proper letter, to enquire after him on seeing that he was severely wounded. A very proper letter I dare swear it was—I shouldn't wonder if it began 'Miss Smerdon presents her compliments to Captain Byng, and begs to enquire—'"

"Stop, oh stop, you tease; it wasn't a proper letter, and that's the reason."

"Oh, never mind the reason. I know all about that. I ought to be shocked, but I'm only very glad you were a sensible girl."

"Now tell me what Hugh says, at least as much as may reach the public ear."

"Thank Heaven he's safe; tiresome boy, he says so little about that terrible night, and I do feel so proud of him. His letter's full of nothing but dog hunting, divisional races and all that sort of thing. I'm sure to read it, the Crimea seems to be a most lovely climate, and they're all having the greatest possible fun out there. It's hard to realise from his letter that they are actually fighting and that men are being killed day and night. But now run away. I must really get up and dress. I will read you all the gossip of my letter at breakfast, at present I've hardly read it myself."

Frances Smerdon walked off to her own room echoing her friends' reflections.

"Yes," she murmured, "that's just what the best of them do, when the work is serious; they make light of it and also of any grief that may come to them. There was poor Algie Barnard, at Cowbridge, last year, they said he threw the steeple-chase away by his bad riding; he made no reply but fainted in the weighing-room, and then they found he had broken two ribs, and that the muscles of his right arm had been laid open in a fall he'd got on the far side of the course. Tom makes light of it, but I've very little doubt his wound is serious." And then Miss Smerdon proceeded to dress, and rack her memory in the meantime for every record in which injuries to the head had terminated fatally; and as her experiences in that way were principally connected with the hunting field, by the time she had remembered two concussions of the brain, one case of paralysis, and another of permanent affection of the spine, she had brought herself to a very low and contrite spirit with which to join the breakfast table. Could she but have seen the object of her solicitude in the course of that day, I think she would have almost grieved to think so much womanly pity had been wasted upon him.

If a Crimean winter can be as hard and disagreeable as an English one—and with the exception of one particular in the matter of fogs, it can quite match it—the country rejoices in one glorious superiority as regards climate. Winter does not linger there all through the spring and half way through the summer as it does in England, but once got done with, it breaks into genuine spring; not such a conglomeration of wet and bitter east winds as usually signalises the advent of the season with us, but bright skies, balmy breezes, and all the delights that the poets sing of—and

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