

BUSINESS NOTICE

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E. A. STRANG

IT WILL OUT OR, A GREAT MYSTERY.

CHAPTER III. I confess that I was considerably startled by this fresh proof of the practical nature of my companion's theories.

"How in the world did you deduce that?" I asked. "Deduce what?" said he, reticently. "Why, that he was a retired sergeant of marines."

"I have no time for trifles," he replied brusquely; then, with a smile, "Excuse my rudeness. You broke the thread of my thoughts; but perhaps it is as well. So you actually were not able to see that man was a sergeant of marines?"

"No, indeed." "It was easier to know it than to explain why I know it. If you were asked to prove that two and two made four, you might find some difficulty, and yet you are quite sure of the fact. Even across the street could see that great blue anchor tattooed on the back of the fellow's hand. That smacked of the sea. He had a military carriage, however, and regarded it as a matter of course. There we have the marine. He was a man with some amount of self-importance and a certain air of command. You must have observed the way in which he held his head and swung his cane. A steady respectable, middle-aged man, too, on the face of it. All facts which lead me to believe that he had been a sergeant."

"Wonderful!" I ejaculated. "Commonplace," said Holmes, though I thought from his expression that he was pleased at my evident surprise and admiration. I said just now that there were no criminals in the room, and that I am wrong—look at this! He threw me over the note which the commissioner had brought.

"Why," I cried, as I cast my eye over it, "this is terrible!" "This is the letter which I read to him."

"My Dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes—There has been a bad business during the night at 3 Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road. Our man on the beat saw a lighted candle in the morning, and as the house was an empty one, suspected that something was amiss. He found the door open, and in the front room, which is full of furniture, discovered the body of a gentleman, well dressed, and having cards in his pocket bearing the name of Mr. Drebrer, Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A. There had been no robbery, nor is there any evidence as to how the man met his death. There are marks on the floor, which seem to me to be no wound upon his person. We are at a loss as to how he came into the empty house; indeed, the whole case is a puzzle. If you are unable to come I shall give you fuller details, and would esteem it a great kindness if you would find time to call on my opinion. Yours faithfully, 'TOBIAS GREGSON'."

"Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders," said Holmes, "and he and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. They are both quick and energetic, but conventional—shockingly so. They have their own ideas, and are too. They are as jealous as a pair of professional beauties. There will be some fun over this case if they are both put upon the scent."

"I was amazed at the calm way in which he replied." "Surely there is not a moment to be lost," I said. "Shall I go and order you a cab?"

"I am not sure about whether I shall go. I am the most incurably lazy devil that ever lived in shoe leather, and that is, when the fit is on me, for I can be spry enough at times."

"Why it is just such a chance as you have been longing for."

"My dear fellow, what does it matter to me? Suppose I unravel the whole matter, you may be so kind as to give me a testimonial, and I will pocket all the credit. That comes of being an unofficial personage."

"But he begs you to help him." "Yes, he knows that I am his superior, and acknowledges it to me; but he would not own it to any third person. However, we may as well go and have a look. I shall work it out on my own hook. I may have a laugh at them, if I find they have developed like a cat."

"He hustled on in a way that showed that an energetic fit had superseded the apathetic one."

"Get your hat," he said. "You wish me to come?" "Yes, if you have nothing better to do."

"A minute later we were both in a hansom, driving furiously for the Brixton Road, and in a few minutes we were in a foggy, cloudy morning, and a dun-colored veil hung over the house-tops, looking like the reflection of a lead-colored sky."

"My companion was in the best of spirits, and prattled away about Cremona fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati. As for myself, I was silent, for the dull weather and the melancholy business upon which we were engaged depressed my spirits."

"You don't seem to give much thought to the matter in hand," I said, at last, interrupting Holmes's musical dissertation on the violin.

"No data yet," he answered. "It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment."

"You will have your data soon." I remarked, pointing with my finger to the Brixton Road, and the house, if I am not very much mistaken."

"So it is. Stop, driver, stop!" We were still at a distance from the house, but he insisted upon our alighting, and we finished our journey upon foot.

No. 3 Lauriston Gardens were an ill-omened and minatory look. It was one of four which stood back some little way from the street, two being occupied and two empty. The latter looked out with three tiers of vacant, melancholy windows, which were blank and dreary, save that here and there a "To Let" card had developed like a cat's paw upon the bleared panes. A small garden sprinkled over with a scattered eruption of sickly plants separated each of these houses from the street, and was traversed by a narrow pathway, yellowish in color, and consisting apparently of a mixture of clay and gravel. The whole place was very slopy from the rain which had fallen through the night. The garden was bounded by a three-foot brick wall with a fringe of wood rails upon

and carried out. As they raised him, a ring tinkled down and rolled across the floor. Lestrade grabbed it up and stared at it with mystified eyes.

"There's been a woman here," he cried. "It's a woman's wedding-ring." He held it out, as he spoke, upon the palm of his hand. We all gathered round him and gazed at it. There could be no doubt that that circle of plain gold had once adorned the finger of a bride.

"This complicates matters," said Gregson. "Heaven knows, they were complicated enough before!" "I observed Holme," I simplify things," he observed. "There's nothing to be learned by staring at it. What did you find in his pockets?"

"We have it all here," said Gregson, pointing to a litter of objects upon one of the bottom steps of the stairs. "A gold watch, No. 97,163, by Barrard, of London. Gold Albert chain, very heavy and solid. Gold ring, with Masonic device. Gold pin—bull-dog's head, with rubies as eyes. Russian watch, No. 10,000, by the same maker. J. Drebrer, of Cleveland, corresponding to the E. J. D. upon the linen. No purse, but a good deal of money to the tune of seven pounds thirteen. Pocket edition of Boccaccio's 'Decameron,' with name of Joseph Stangerson upon the fly-leaf. A letter—one addressed to E. J. Drebrer and one to Joseph Stangerson."

"At what address?" "At the Exchange, Strand—to be left till called for. They are both from the Guion Steamship Company, and refer to the sailing of their boats from Liverpool. It is clear that this unfortunate man was about to return to New York."

"How did you make any inquiries as to this man's address?" "I did it at once, sir," said Gregson. I have had advertisements sent to all the newsagents, and one of my men has gone to the American Exchange, but he has not returned yet."

"How did you word your inquiries?" "We simply detailed the circumstances, and said that we should be glad of any information which could help us."

"You did not ask for particulars on any point which appeared to you to be crucial?" "I asked about Stangerson."

"Nothing else? Is there no circumstance on which this whole case appears to hinge?" Will you not telegraph again?"

"I have said all I have to say," said Gregson in offended voice. "Sherlock Holmes checked to himself, and appeared to be about to make some remark, when Lestrade, who had been holding this conversation for many weeks, reappeared upon the scene, rubbing his hands in a pompous and self-satisfied manner. "Mr. Gregson," he said, "I have just made a discovery of the highest importance, and one which would have many more or less possible, and a careful examination of the walls."

To Be Continued. GUN TO FIGHT BALLOONS. A New Idea in Ordnance Which Has Been Evolved by the United States War Department.

A balloon gun, or rather a gun to demolish balloons, is the latest evolution in artillery, and as in the case of so many of the world's death dealing contrivances it comes from that supposedly most unwarlike of countries the United States.

The gun has just been completed, having been constructed by a firm of ordnance-makers, from plans drawn at the Rock Island Arsenal. It is purely an experiment, and if it proves efficient others like it will be built.

The U. S. War Department has been for some time investigating the problem of fighting balloons, inasmuch as the latter are destined unquestionably to be an important factor in the warfare of the not-distant future.

The balloon gun is mounted on a wagon and so placed upon "universal" bearings as to be aimed instantly at any point from zenith to horizon. After the manner of the machine weapon, it throws a continuous stream of projectiles like water turned on from a hose, and no gas exposed to its discharge for any length of time.

The projectiles are conical and of solid steel, having no bursting charge, and weigh a pound apiece. A hollow conical stanchion, fitted with a floor of the wagon supports the gun, the arrangement being such that when it is aimed directly upward the projectile is aimed directly upward. Its effective range is

A MILE AND A QUARTER. Military experts whose opinions deserve respect express the belief that the next war between any two great powers, will evolve the perfected fighting-balloon—perfected, that is to say, in the point of its projectile, and its engine of destruction. Already there has been devised a so-called aerial torpedo, which bears about the same relation to the future war-balloon that is borne by the Whitehead torpedo to the modern torpedo-boat.

This aerial torpedo is a small balloon which carries a suspended bomb, and about thirty pounds of dynamite or other high explosive done up in a suitable package. In its neck it has a small metal cylinder containing a simple electrical contrivance which will produce a spark at any time for which the instrument is set in advance.

The balloon and force of the bomb being ascertained the little balloon may be floated over a fortress or armament camp, and, if its mechanical apparatus has been set correctly, the spark will at the proper moment set fire to the gas in the balloon, causing the latter to explode and to drop its deadly load.

It has been ascertained by recent experiments in Germany that shrapnel can be used against balloons with great effect at moderate ranges, and the War Department contemplates making similar trials with its new balloon gun, in which each balloon will be loaded with a quantity of shrapnel. This will involve the destruction of a good many gas bags which cost money, but it is deemed worth the expense.

It is not passed at liberal expenditure of cash where military knowledge was to be secured. Millions of dollars' worth of guns have been set up, and have been destroyed at the proving grounds to find out how many times the former could be fired without losing their usefulness and what shocks could be withstood by the latter.

THE NEW BLUSH. How ruthlessly scientists rob us of all romance nowadays. When one remembers how much havoc has been wrought by the blush, it is not a little disillusioning to be told that it is only caused by excess of blood in the brain which dilates the blood vessels, and that by the use of certain drugs, which should be nameless, the modern maiden of whom it is not often to be said that "a delicate blush mantled her cheek," may flush quite prettily on occasion.

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