

DOCTOR JACK

By St. George Rathborne.

(Continued.)

"I am ready, driver," entering the vehicle.

"Where will monsieur go?" asks the man, with a leer, closing the door—the glass is down.

"To the office of the prefect of police," comes the astounding answer. "Le diable!" ejaculates the Jehu, staggering back, "then it is not to the Mabille gardens?"

"You have my orders—drive on."

"Oui, monsieur." Scrambling to his seat, his mouth is in a pucker as of a man trying to whistle, but unable to make a sound, until several blocks have been passed over.

There probably does not live a Jehu in New York who does not know where the mayor's office is, since they get their licenses there. In Paris every driver can tell you exactly where the prefect of police may be found—even the daily habits of this high and mighty functionary are well known to them.

Hence it is that Jack's driver has no difficulty in taking his patron to the building where he will be apt to find the head of the greatest police force of modern times at work—for Monsieur le Prefect has a holiday very seldom, and at certain hours is always to be found in his office.

Jack knows himself where he is going—he has not spent weeks and even months in Paris without learning a few things, though as yet it has never been his fortune to meet the prefect of police save in a social way.

Leaving his vehicle in a quiet street, he enters a door—it belongs to no public house, and is one of the private ways for reaching the elevated office of the head officer.

On the way he passes two quiet men who look at him closely, and then silently bow, pointing onward. In this manner he finally reaches an ante-room, where he finds several officers gathered—they look like the aids of a general waiting either to deliver reports or receive orders, which is really the case. One of them steps forward, looks him in the face, and says:—

"You are Doctor Evans?"

"Yes, I would see the prefect," replies Jack.

"He is expecting you—pass through yonder door, and you will find him," is the astounding answer Doctor Jack receives—he can hardly believe his ears, for not to a single soul has he mentioned his intentions with regard to paying a visit to this place—surely the secret police of Paris must have supernatural power to be able to read one's very thoughts.

Filled with wonder and awe—he is not the first one who has been thus amazed by the power of these men—Jack does as directed, opens a door, and enters a room, where he finds the prefect engaged in writing.

"One moment, Doctor Jack," calls the officer, never raising his eyes from his work, and the American has another shock.

His coming is known, just as though he were some high official, and his business of a great public importance, instead of a private affair, interesting to few besides himself.

He watches the prefect, notes the high character and shrewdness of the man as indicated by his countenance, and wonders what success he will have here, for the mission that has taken Doctor Jack to the office of the prefect of police is something of a haphazard one, and he cannot even wager on the result, but depends in a great measure on his luck to take him through.

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At length the bell is sounded—an official enters the room, and the paper is handed to him with a few low words—the man makes a military salute, and is gone.

"Now, Monsieur Jack, I am at liberty to pay attention to you. If I mistake not you come here to tell me a story and ask a favour."

"Monsieur, it is apparent to me, from what I have seen and heard, that much of my story is already known to you," remarks Jack, at which the prefect smiles and answers:—

"Our system is much the same as under the regime of Napoleon. We watch our borders, scan the passports of all strangers, and make it our business to find out who they are, whether they came from, and why they enter France. The moment you set foot on French territories enquiries began to be made, and as a result I know much about you—something I knew when you were here before, but since then Doctor Jack has seen strange things. I have half an hour to spare—it happens to be a lax time with me. If it pleases you, I would like to hear your story."

It does please Jack immensely—he sees he has a splendid opportunity to gain his point, and anxious not to lose it, begins. First of all he tells of the adventure in Constantinople, and as all the world loves a lover, especially a Frenchman, he soon sees that Monsieur le Prefect is interested in Aleck Morton.

Then he skips to Paris, and relates the event that has had so strong a bearing on his late career in Spain—his looking in upon a secret council of Carlists in company with the Duke Arroyo. After this he goes to the Pyrenees, and tells of the bear hunt in company with Don Carlos. Then comes the visit to Barcelona, the flower girl, struggle in the street, and the mystery of the nun who nursed him.

Jack speaks modestly of his own share in these events—he never could be a boaster, and is apt to make the description of a scene too tame because of his extreme diffidence.

Rapidly he sketched his advent in Madrid, the meeting with Mercedes, and the bull-fight. Then comes the little affair in the Museo del Prado, a mention of Avis, and the fact that she is the sister of his friend Aleck, in captivity among the Turks. He lightly describes all that took place in Madrid, and then reaches the railroad journey toward Paris, dwelling on the heroism of Larry, while just mentioning the fact that he had a little excitement in keeping back the mob of Carlists meanwhile.

When he finishes, to his surprise, this wonderful French official, who has the interests of the whole republic in his keeping, reaches out and shakes hands with him most heartily.

"Mon Dieu! I love such a man as you, Doctor Jack—you are brave, and you would conceal it. Better and better—the brave are always modest. But you cannot expect to keep this light hidden under a bushel. Our Parisian papers published a long account of the grand bull-fight, telling all the particulars of your heroism. Ah! my good man, Doctor Jack for twenty-four hours was the hero of Paris—every American was proud that you belonged to New York. As for the little affair beyond Logrono—I have had a full account of it from a secret agent who was in the next compartment to yours, and I am proud to know the man who performed such prodigies of valour during that night."

Jack turns very red in the face—he knows the prefect not only has a comprehensive idea of the past, but must guess his secret of the future—even his love for Avis. He keeps in mind what has brought him here—does the wonderful official know this?

"Monsieur, I came here to ask a favour," he says, and, as he expects, the other smiles.

"I can guess it, Doctor Jack. You would have me assist you by detaining the pasha."

"I may be asking too much—" begins Jack when the other interrupts him.

"As a man, I would assist you with every pleasure in the world—as the prefect of police in the city of Paris, I must be more cautious. True, France and America, sister republics, are joined hand in hand in ties that I trust shall never be broken; but we are also at peace with Turkey, and it would be a serious matter to offend officially one so high in authority as Abdallah Pasha—complications have arisen from even a smaller thing than that, which have threatened the peace of all Europe."

"Not for the world would I cause you trouble, Monsieur le Prefect. I was foolish to think you could give me assistance, not that I shall ever doubt your goodness of heart, but I see how more clearly that you have an official character to sustain."

Doctor Jack reaches out his hand for his hat, as if to go, when the other lays a finger on his arm, looks into his face, and says:—

"Patience, Doctor Jack. I have still ten minutes left, and we may find a way out of this trouble yet."

CHAPTER XVIII.

His words give the American new hope, and he once more settles down to listen to this man who can help him so much.

"How long would you have the Pasha detained?" asks the Frenchman.

"One day would be good—two better," is the quick reply of Doctor Jack.

To be continued.

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