

THE WRONG SILK HAT.

I.
My brief visit to the Russian capital was over, and I had taken my seat in the train that was to convey me to Berlin.

So far as I could judge there were but few passengers. My compartment had but two besides myself—a good looking, well dressed young lady, with white teeth and large dark eyes, who sat opposite me, and a tall, gaunt man with a long, strong face.

This gentleman alighted at Pskov, the first station we stopped at, and as no one took his place the young lady and I had the compartment to ourselves.

Pulling my travelling cap over my eyes, I composed myself for a nap. I had no idea how long I had been sleeping, when a long, shrill scream from the engine awoke me and made me half open my eyes. What I saw made me open them wide. My fair companion, who occupied the corner opposite to mine, was holding in her hand my silk hat, which I had carefully placed on the seat by my side when I had donned my travelling cap.

The girl did not seem in the least disconcerted by being caught in the act. On the contrary, she smiled bewitchingly, as she noted my amazement, and said, with perfect self-possession:—

"Ze hat drop from ze seat, Mistare Tollemache. Monsieur will pardon ze liberte I have take to pick him up."

"Don't mention it," I stammered, for the fact that she had addressed me by name increased my bewilderment. "It's very kind of you to take the trouble, but—I don't remember ever having had the pleasure of seeing you before—and yet you seem to know me!"

"Only by name. Is not monsieur's name on his portmanteau?" she queried.

"Ah, yes! Of course," I jerked out. I had quite forgotten that my name was inscribed in large letters on this part of my impediments. As my address was also written in full on the label which was attached to it, my travelling companion, who had evidently been making good use of her eyes, most likely knew that also.

At Vilna I left the compartment and repaired to the refreshment buffet. As I emerged from the latter three minutes later I noticed a small group of people at one end of the platform. Having plenty of time, I strolled leisurely towards it. As I approached the group I was surprised to see that my late vis-a-vis was not only the centre of attraction, but that she was also the object of special attention on the part of the three policemen who formed an important part of the group.

Evidently she was under arrest.

At this juncture the porters called upon the passengers to resume their seats.

"What is her offence? Do you know?" I asked the porter who closed the carriage door after me.

"Who knows? Nihilist, I expect!" was the laconic reply as he hurried on.

No incident worth mentioning marked the remainder of the journey to London. I was met at Holborn Viaduct Station by my younger brother, who had formerly lived for a couple of years in Russia, and who on that account took a special interest in my visit thither and was anxious to hear how I had fared.

I remained in the house all next day, leaving my locum tenens to attend to my patients, for I was a West-end practitioner. On the second day after my return I was consulted, amongst others, by a clergyman. As soon as I had got rid of him my caretaker entered and respectfully in-

formed me that my visitor's conduct was "very suspicious."

"While Jane was taking you his card, sir," she said, "I happened to cross the hall. I could scarcely believe my eyes; the man had had the impudence to take your hat off the stand."

I thanked the good old creature, but thought no more about the incident until a few hours later, when, having occasion to go out, I found that my brother had left his hat on one of the pegs of the hat-stand. As my own was missing I concluded he had taken mine by mistake (we both wore the same sized hat.)

II.
My brother Albert called on me again that same evening. Almost his first words were:—

"I find I took your hat by mistake the night before last."

"So I perceived, but it's of no consequence," I returned. "I suppose you've brought mine back?"

"No. It's a perfect wreck. Not fit to put on."

"Why, what have you been up to?"

"? Nothing. A semi-lunatic knock-

ed it off my head yesterday."

"Indeed! There seems to be a

dead set on our hats," I cried. Where did this happen?"

"In Regent's Park."

"In Regent's Park?"

"Yes. There were very few people

about, and the place seemed unusu-

ally quiet. This just suited my

mood, for I wanted to think over

something I had been reading. I

walked on, scarcely noticing where I

was going, until I found myself

standing on the edge of the orna-

mental water near the western gate.

"I was roused from my reverie by

the approach of two men, who were

talking very loudly and gesticulating

like lunatics. One of them, who

seemed the more excited of the two,

was a short, strongly-built man,

with broad chest, long arms, and

somewhat short legs. His swarthy

skin, black ringlets, rough black

beard and moustache bespoke him a

southerner. The other man was taller

and fairer, and looked like a Pole

or a Russian Jew.

"They halted quite close to me,

as they spoke in an unknown tongue

I could not follow the discussion. So

excited and absorbed were they in

their argument that they seemed to

be scarcely conscious of my presence,

and they came so close to me that

by stretching out my hand I could

have touched one of them.

"In fact, their proximity was too

close to be pleasant, and I was on

the point of moving when my

my hat was suddenly knocked off my

head and sent rolling down the bank

to the water's edge. The more ex-

cited of the two disputants had

caught it with his cane, which he

had been flourishing by way of em-

phasizing his words.

"A voluble outpouring of words,

which I supposed was a profuse apol-

ogy, accompanied by expressive ges-

tures, followed. Then, ere I had

time to speak, the short, dark man

rushed down the slope after my hat.

Thereupon the other man—the taller

and fairer one—planted himself in

front of me and, taking up his par-

able, poured forth a torrent of apol-

ogues in broken English, of which

only the following was intelligible:—

"A thousand pardons, monsieur.

... Mine friend is desolated at ze

catastroph. Pity he get so

excited, for zen he know not what he

do."

"So it appears," I remarked,

coldly, for I felt annoyed.

"I fear mine friend is a little bit

wrong here," continued the tall stran-

ger, touching his forehead signifi-

cantly.

"I accepted the apology though

not with very good grace, I fear.

Next minute the other man came up

with my headgear—or yours, rather—

which presented a woful appearance.

It was not only out of shape, but

was wet and limp, owing to its hav-

ing touched the water. The two men

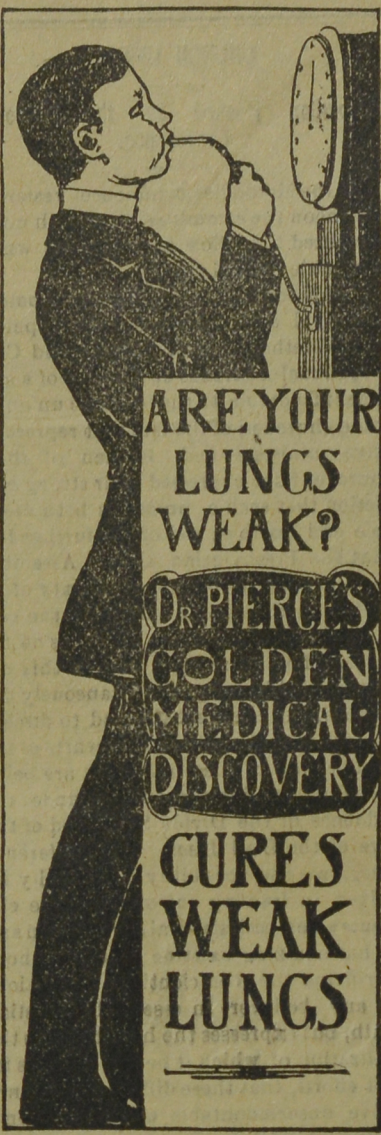
exchanged a hurried confabulation.

Then the taller turned to me and

said:—

"Monsieur will allow us to com-

pensate him."



"At the same time he handed me a sovereign. The little dark man expressed, by many nods and gesticulations, his approval of his comrade's proceeding. I hesitated, but they were importunate and would not be denied. So I yielded a few minutes later we parted."

I then told my brother of the special interest my clerical visitor of the previous day had taken in the hat which he had left in my hall. He seemed amused, and made some humorous remarks on the strange adventures of the two silk hats. Then we dropped the subject, and fell to discussing politics.

(To be Continued.)

THE SMALL-POX QUESTION.

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Royalty Traveled Common Road.

The Duke of Connaught, the recently appointed first inspector-general of the forces, has traveled no royal road to that distinction. It is close upon 54 years ago since—to use his father's phrase—"a little boy glided into the light of day," and was received with jubilation by his sisters. "We are just as many as the days of the week," was the cry. So it was that the Duke got his first fond-name of "Sunday." This, as Prince Albert wrote to Stockmar, "was out of well-bred courtesy to the new-comer." To his mother it seemed "a singular thing that this so-much-wished-for boy should be born on the old Duke's 81st birthday." She prayed that "that, and his beloved father's name, might bring this poor little infant happiness and good fortune." She was to live to see the full-grown man in the enjoyment of both. The "William" in the Duke's font-names came from his other godfather, then the Prince of Prussia, and afterwards the German Emperor. "My name," Prince Albert explained, "the Queen insisted on retaining by way of coda." It is curious to remember that, a month or so before this auspicious event, the command of the army had been under consideration. After the Duke, who was to fill that office? "The Queen and I," the Queen's husband wrote to the field-marshal commanding-in-chief, "have been considering your proposal to join A.G. and Q.M.G. into one chief of the staff, with a view to facilitate the future assumption of the command-in-chief by myself." In the Prince's modest estimation every general officer with experience in the field would do better than himself who had not had the advantage of such experience. Moreover, most important duties connected with the welfare of the sovereign, which could only be performed by himself, would be left unperformed. And, on the whole, he felt that he must discard the tempting idea of being placed in command of the British army.

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