

From *The European Mail*

## *A Female Detective*

A STRANGE, not to say sinister, character has recently passed away from among the dark dens of crime, which she haunted with unflinching persistence. This extraordinary woman was as peculiar in her appearance as in the nature of her avocations. Short, thick-set, with the arms of a prize-fighter, and features which might perhaps be compared with those of a bulldog, but certainly bore no resemblance to the ordinary countenance of "gentle women," this creature could not fail to inspire a sense of repugnance to those even who were disposed to admire her courage and acknowledge the utility of the services she rendered. There are but few persons, however, who were ever acquainted with the secret of her life. In Blackfriars there lives an artisan, much respected by his neighbors, whose voice is not without influence at election times, but who is also notorious for his republican, not to say revolutionary, views. Some years ago his children and wife were seized with scarlet fever. Helpless and alone, with all his family dangerously ill, the father rushed wildly about for assistance, and when the woman, whose appearance has been but faintly described, came forward and offered her services as a sick-nurse, he at once accepted her help. She was known in the neighborhood as an experienced nurse, and had often been recommended to poor patients by the parish doctor. The nurse subsequently confessed her real character. In a word she was a police detective. Nursing was but a pretext; it was an excellent excuse for gaining admittance into suspected households, and doubtless the police had their eyes on this republican. The female detective in question was not, as a rule, employed on political missions. Her chief duty was to discover criminals, and those of the lowest and most dangerous type. For this purpose her appearance was more an advantage than otherwise. No oath was too loud, blasphemous, or coarse for her to utter; there was no vulgar turn of speech that she ignored, and she was ever ready to greet the most revolting jokes with the heartiest laughter. Placing herself in relation with the parish doctor, she volunteered to nurse those families whose honesty was suspected by the authorities. As a nurse she disarmed all suspicion, and did not fail to take careful note of all she heard. Her manners were also apparently so loose and low that but little restraint was observed in her presence, and her reports forwarded to Scotland Yard were thus rendered all the more valuable. As a monthly nurse she welcomed into the world the children of notorious criminals who were ultimately destined to become her prey, while as a sick-nurse she extracted from her half-unconscious and debilitated fever patients the confession of some dark deed, and hints as to the whereabouts of confederates in crime. Such was the general plan of action observed by this extraordinary woman; but this was rather a slow process, and at times it was necessary to fall at once on the wrongdoer. On one occasion, for instance, the police received information that there was a gang of false-money makers in a certain street; but notwithstanding every effort they were unable to ascertain in which house the coiners worked. The services of the female detective were thereupon requisitioned, and she was despatched to the street in question to see what could be done. After walking up and down a little while she noticed a child come out of one of the houses, whose face indicated a kind disposition. Seizing hastily this opportunity the detective feigned illness, and begged to be taken indoors for a moment. Forgetful of her parent's warning, the child, in her excitement, seeing nothing but a woman apparently in great agony, at once, and without giving alarm, admitted the detective into the house. The sudden entrance thus obtained enabled the detective to hear the metallic sounds proceeding from the coiners' workshop before the latter were aware that any stranger was in the

house. They were not long in discovering their danger. Before the detective had time to leave the premises the chief of the gang rushed up from the cellar, where he was at work, and, in his fury, hurled a ladle full of molten lead at her head. Fortunately the poke bonnet that she wore saved her life; the burns she received were not fatal, though they destroyed her hair and its roots. The police arrived in time, on hearing the alarm, to arrest eighteen coiners. The chief, who was first aware of the surprise, was able to escape, but he was subsequently captured in France, and there sentenced to eighteen years' servitude in the galleys. It might have been imagined that if anything could make a woman abandon her particular calling it would be the loss of her hair; but with the detective it only increased her love of what she called the sport. She considered that it would now be more easy for her to dress as a boy, and in this, her favorite guise, she penetrated many a thieves' den. On one occasion, however, she was discovered. A brawny thief asked her to speak—that is to say, to give the passwords and to use certain slang expressions known only to the particular gang whom she was spying. This she was unable to do. The thief then inquired whether any one had seen her enter the house, and, on her answering in the negative, coolly informed her that she would never be seen to go out again. This was the signal for execution, and after brandishing an iron bar, he struck a terrible blow at the detective's head. She had just time, however, to dash her hand through a window-pane and spring a rattle, and the police stationed outside rushed in to the rescue. They found the detective lying insensible on the floor, with her skull fractured, and it has been her boast that this adventure cost her fourteen small pieces of bone extracted from the wound. Still undaunted, and so long as health lasted, the detective continued on the scent, encountering adventures on every step, always in danger, often indulging in hand-to-hand fights, and selecting indiscriminately for her foes both men and women, proving on either her skill in the "art of self-defence." She constantly received subsidies from Scotland Yard, and was armed with the magic whistle, rattle, and number, given her by the authorities, and which insured the assistance of every policeman, stranger or not, whose services she might find it necessary to call for. Sickness at last subdued this turbulent spirit, and the thieves on the Surrey side need no longer fear the visits of the female detective.

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