

The Burleigh Legacy

A Tale of an Amateur “Detective”

by Charles D. Gardette

I.

MY cousin, Phil Brentwood, was as good a fellow as ever lived—full of talent, courage, honor, and all the other virtues that cheer but not inebriate;—no, I don’t exactly mean that. However, the reader knows what I *do* mean, and so let it pass.

But Phil had a foible amounting almost to a monomania. He was, so to speak, an amateur felon. Not that he ever committed a crime “for the love of the thing,” or for any other motive. Oh, no! But he was exceedingly fond of perusing the court reports, and of revising and correcting, as it were, the plans and executions of celebrated robberies, arsons, murders, and the like, with the view of discovering their weak points—showing how and where the perpetrators failed to assure the successful accomplishment of their purposes and to elude subsequent detection. His ingenuity in these matters was wonderful, and he certainly would have made a remarkable leader of a band of outlaws, or a singularly adroit and infallible detective officer, had either of these antipodal careers been in his line. But, being a man of honor and virtue, and a gentleman of easy fortune and high social station, he remained simply a commentator—a philosophical censor, in a manner, of the criminal calendar, and a critical looker-on in the Vienna of outlawry.

Brentwood was a constant subscriber to and diligent reader of most of the “organs of justice” in the civilized world. He received the English police and judicial reports; the French *Gazettes des Tribunaux*; the Italian, Spanish, and German ditto; and all the similar journals of our own country. He knew the minutest details of every celebrated criminal trial that had attracted public attention during the past century, from the famous forgery on the Bank of England to the murder by Muller on the London and Essex Railway; from the highway robbery and extraordinary trial and execution of Lesurques in Lyons, to the La Pommerais poisoning case; from the Parkman-Webster mystery to the Deering murder.

And in each and every case he was ready to point out the causes of the failure, and the means by which these crimes might have been perpetrated with perfect impunity. To him, the motto that “murder will out” was simply absurd.

“Neither murder, nor robbery, nor any other crime,” he was wont to exclaim, “is necessarily more traceable than any action whatever, good or bad, committed in secret. The discovery of such things depends purely upon the incompleteness of their execution, the want of thorough preparation against every possibility of future treachery or suspicion. And such preparation is always practicable. There is not a single instance, my dear fellow, in the annals of crime, in which, had *I* been the criminal, I could not have taken such precautions as to defy all attempts at subsequent identification or discovery. Not one!”

And then he would mention some few cases, and proceed, *con amore*, to show just where the

perpetrator had failed to provide against a possible contingency, and how, if he had thus provided, his secret would have remained impenetrable to the end of time.

We—his other friends and myself—used to laugh at Phil a good deal, about this singular mania of his, and to predict that he would some day be brought to test his infallibility in one way or another, by which test he would be “weighed and found wanting.” None of us, however, ever really fancied such an occasion would arise, since Phil could never be guilty of crime himself, directly nor indirectly, nor ever be likely to be called upon to exercise his ingenuity in its official detection.

Nevertheless, an opportunity did occur of putting his constructive and detective powers to the proof, and a fortunate one it was to both of us. How it chanced, and what were its results, will be briefly related in the following chapters.

II.

Brentwood and I lived together, in bachelor style, upon a charming place about twelve miles from the city. An old-fashioned, many gabled stone house, hidden among a grove of gigantic pines and Spanish oaks, a quarter of a mile back from the public road, and surrounded by about sixty acres of lawn and woodland and pasture, (for we neither sowed nor reaped,) flower-gardens and orchards. Such was our homestead, and here, from April to November, we lived in free style, keeping open house, and entertaining a good deal of gay company, with an easy profusion warranted by our joint income of something over fifteen thousand dollars a year.

Our household consisted, besides ourselves, of our housekeeper, Mrs. Bunting, an elderly dame, who had lived in Philip’s family since her early girlhood; and four servants, to wit: cook, chambermaid, waiter, and groom, of African descent. There were, also, the Scotch gardener and his wife, who lived in the gate-lodge.

About the middle of each November, we were in the habit of closing up the principal portions of our country-house, removing the gardener and his spouse into the kitchen, making them custodians of the property, and taking Mrs. Bunting and the servants with us into town, we passed the winter months in a city residence belonging to me. Owing to a violent antipathy on Philip’s part to the “moving” nuisance, we carried nothing whatever from one house to the other except our household wardrobes. Furniture, plate, domestic articles and utensils of every description, were thoroughly duplicated in our two establishments. Therefore, when we left “Liberty Hall,” (such was the free and easy title we had bestowed on our rustic abode,) the furniture was carefully covered, the bedding piled in the storeroom, the china packed in the pantry, the plate locked up in the fire-and-thief-proof safe built into the library wall, the wines secured by bolt and bar in the vault—in short, everything of use or luxury properly disposed of in its appropriate receptacle, and we drove gaily to town in our tilbury and pair, followed by the gardener in the country-wagon with the trunks and boxes, and the servants, under the surveillance of good Mrs. Bunting.

In the early autumn of 186-, our aunt Burleigh died, leaving a very small estate, and a very large and valuable collection of antique silver and gold plate, breakfast, dinner, and tea-services,

salvers, urns, knives, spoons, pitchers, punch bowls, candlesticks, and so forth, to the amount of more than twenty thousand dollars. Her estate she left to her late husband's niece, a middle-aged spinster whom we had slight acquaintance with, but her plate to Philip and me conjointly, and in accordance with her last injunctions it was duly packed and sent to Liberty Hall, where it arrived in two strong, iron-bound chests, the very day after the announcement of her death.

After some consultation, when we moved to town that winter, we locked this precious legacy, together with our other plate, in our huge safe, after having made a gorgeous display of its splendors on our sideboard and tables during the balance of the season, where it had been the theme of enthusiastic admiration to our guests. Indeed, one of them, a Hungarian baron by the name of Ludowicz (or something like it, for I can not swear to the orthography of his name) was importunately anxious to purchase it, and repeatedly offered us thirty thousand dollars for it in gold, until he perceived that his insistence was offensive, and gracefully apologized. Baron Von Ludowicz, by the way, was an officer in the Magyar army of independence, as his letter of introduction to us, from a former college chum, then in Europe, had announced, and had lost his right arm in the service. He was, however, extraordinarily dexterous with his left arm, writing, driving, shooting, fencing, carving—in short, performing every function with singular address, aided somewhat by the stump of his mutilated arm, to which (it was severed just above the elbow) was affixed a light apparatus terminating in a steel hook of peculiar shape, which he used also as a rest in playing billiards, with remarkable grace and skill.

He was, in fine, an exceedingly agreeable and accomplished man, and Philip and I took to him immediately, so much so that we urged him to spend the winter with us in town. But he was forced to go to Washington on some private business with the Austrian Embassy, and could not accept our hospitality. He promised, however, to return to us early in the spring.

Among our summer guests had also been a cousin of ours, one Henry Haddon, whom we had invited chiefly out of charity and sympathy. He had recently lost his wife, and had been very unfortunate in business—he was a gold-broker, indeed, had swamped his whole capital, and it was hinted that in some of his financial transactions he had behaved in a discreditable manner. But we had little respect for gossip or scandal, and though we never liked Haddon, and would not, perhaps, have trusted him implicitly in pecuniary matters, yet now that he was in difficulties and under a cloud, we thought it a good thing to try and cheer him up a little, and give him time to collect his energies for a fresh tussle with life. We were somewhat hurt, however, as well as surprised, at the envious injustice of his observations on the subject of our aunt's legacy of plate. He said he thought it a shame in Mrs. Burleigh to have enriched us by such a monstrous collection of useless bullion, at the expense of her other and far nearer kindred. That if she had been a just woman, or a wise woman, or abenevolent woman, she would have sold or melted the plate, and divided the proceeds among her poor relations. There was himself, for example: ten or even five thousand dollars in gold would be a godsend to him just then, and he was as much our aunt's nephew as we were. It was scandalous, it was almost infamous, he said, to lock up such an amount of silver and gold in a chest where it was of no possible use, except to feed the pride of people who didn't want any such additional stimulant.

In short, he exhibited such an envious, ungrateful spirit, that we were forced to intimate, as gently as possible, that his further sojourn at Liberty Hall would be mutually unpleasant and

unprofitable, and he took himself off in an exceedingly sullen and revengeful mood.

We left the country that year on the 11th of November. December days approached, crept past, and Christmas was at hand. It was on the 19th, I think, of the last month, that Philip first broached the idea of going out and keeping the Christmas and New Year festival in jovial style at Liberty Hall.

“We’ll do the thing in style,” said he. “We’ll have evergreen-wreaths and holly and mistletoe, and the yule log, and games and all that sort of thing; we’ll have out the Burleigh plate and make a royal spread, and invite a chosen band of good fellows and ‘fayre ludydes,’ and have a regular old English jollification. What do you say, Herbert?”

Phil knew I should say “aye;” I generally did to his proposals, especially when they were of such an agreeable nature as this. So, after due consultation with good Mrs. Bunting, it was arranged that I should drive her out there the next day, and sending in the wagon for the servants, get things ready for the celebration, while Phil should attend to the invitations.

“I wonder whether the baron would or could come,” said he musingly.

“I’m sorry Haddon made such a brute of himself,” said I; “it would have been pleasant to have all our family together—all that is left of us, at least, on that day at the old place.”

“So it would,” echoed Phil; “but Haddon wouldn’t come, after what has passed, and, indeed, we couldn’t ask him; besides he’s disappeared, that is, he’s left the city, gone out west, somebody told me, a week ago; made a lucky hit, they said, in gold; seemed to have plenty of money all of a sudden; at any rate made his books straight and left.”

“Well, luck go with him! I wish him no ill, nor do you, I am sure, Phil.”

“Not I,” quoth Philip. “He’s welcome to all the luck in life.”

And we separated, each for his appointed task for the Christmas festivities.

The next morning, I bundled Mrs. Bunting into the tilbury, and started gaily for Liberty Hall, bowling along a hard, smooth turnpike, under a bright sun, and a bracing, but not uncomfortably cold breeze from the northwest, until in one hour and five minutes from the time of gathering up the ribbons, I turned gracefully (I am a tip-top driver) into the gates of our summer bachelor demesne.

III.

“And now, Mr. Herbert, for the plate,” said Mrs. Bunting. “It’ll want a deal of polishing, I’ll be bound. Them safes are always damp and musty.”

“Ours isn’t, Mrs. Bunting, as you know, in spite of your prejudice, old lady; but just call Archibald—”

“Why, he’s gone to town for the girls and Tom and Sam, sir, you know. You don’t need him; don’t you think I’m strong enough to pull them chests out with you? Lor, I could do it by myself.”

“Come on then, Mrs. Hercules,” cried I, and proceeding to the library I produced the slender brass key, went through the complicated maneuvers of unlocking the safe, threw back the heavy door, and entering the vault (for it was large enough to admit of entrance) prepared to push while Mrs. Bunting should pull forth the iron-bound chests of plate which stood, one on top of the other, under the shelves and other compartments along the walls. Getting behind them, and stooping down, I gave them a strong preparatory shove, so as to bring the chests further out from the wall, and nearer Mrs. Bunting’s grasp as she stood bending forward in the doorway.

What was my surprise and dismay, when the force I suddenly employed sent the upper chest violently forward and toppled it entirely off the under one upon the floor, where it struck with a hollow empty sound, and even turned over once again on end ere the momentum of my push was exhausted.

“Good God! It’s empty!” cried I, leaning back against the wall in panting amazement.

Mrs. Bunting fell on her knees, and shrieked, “Robbery! murder! thieves!” at the top of her voice.

Fortunately there was no one in the house but ourselves, and calming myself by a strong effort, I succeeded in quieting the terrified housekeeper’s clamor, with some difficulty, and got her seated, pale and breathing heavily, in an easy chair, while I made a further examination of the safe.

Not an article, that I could discover, was missing except the Burleigh plate. But that was all gone! Both chests were entirely empty! The lids had been fastened with a steel padlock and hasp. Both hasp and padlock had disappeared, having been apparently filed off with a fine sharp file. But otherwise, and here was the marvelous, the inexplicable part of the affair, no sign of violence whatsoever could I detect upon any portion of the vault or its fastenings. Walls, floor, ceiling, door, locks, all were intact. I then proceeded to examine the house, in order to discover if the robber or robbers had entered by violence. But there was no trace of fracture upon any portion of the premises.

“The villains,” said I to Mrs. Bunting, who had by this time recovered her senses, “have evidently entered quietly in the daytime, when the house was being aired, and Archibald and his wife temporarily absent about their work.”

The old lady agreed with me, and suggested several impracticable expedients for finding the thieves; but I decided that the first thing to be done was to return at once to town and inform Philip of our loss. Neither of us for a moment suspected the gardener. His fidelity and that of his wife were beyond all question. The other servants were equally out of the limit of suspicion, both from their characters and their constant presence with us in the city.

I therefore returned immediately to town, leaving Mrs. Bunting and the gardener's wife to lament together and speculate wildly over the matter, and finding Philip sitting down to dinner, sent the waiter away for prudence' sake, and told him the affair as briefly, yet fully, as possible.

Philip pondered a while in silence.

"Do you suspect anyone?" I asked.

"I do," said he, shortly.

"None of our people, surely."

"If you mean Mrs. Bunting or the servants, certainly not. I *know* they are not guilty," he replied, decidedly.

"So do I! But who then—?"

"Haddon!"

"By Jove! now I think of it, so do I!" I cried. "He was terribly cut up at not getting a share of that plate. He had lost all his money, and not a little of his character. He was full of hatred and envy against us. And then his becoming so suddenly flush, and clearing out so mysteriously the other day—"

"Exactly!" quoth Philip. "But still, I am exceedingly loth to believe; there is no proof, as yet, against him. I *won't* suspect without circumstantial evidence stronger than mere coincidence. Ring the bell, Herbert."

I did so. Tom, the waiter, appeared promptly.

"Tom," said Philip, "tell Sam to put the gray horse in the no-top wagon, and be at the door in twenty minutes. Mr. Herbert and I are going out to Liberty Hall."

In twenty-one minutes we were already turning the first street corner, at a pace that tried the fragile vehicle considerably, and quite astonished the good folks on the sidewalks.

IV.

"You're wrong, Herbert; this has been done at night!" said Philip, after a minute inspection of the safe and its contents.

"But, how could they get in? There's nothing forced, and—"

"Look here," interrupted Philip, showing me a small round spot on the lid of one of the plate-chests. "This is a drop of sperm from a candle. It could not have been here long, for it is still clean and smooth. The safe is perfectly well lighted in daytime by the opening of the door. The

robbery was done at night!”

“But, how did they get—?”

“We’ll see to that presently,” exclaimed Philip, again cutting me short. “Now look here again. Do you see this hasp, and this other? They’ve been filed or sawn off, with an exceedingly thin, sharp instrument, a watchspring, probably. Now, go to the tool-chest, and bring a small file, Herbert.”

I did so, and was about to hand it to him, when he said, “Just kneel down and try to file across the end of that hasp.”

I obeyed, but the hasp was so placed on the box that I found it exceedingly awkward to use the file—in fact, could not use it with any effect in my right hand.

“Try the other hand!” said Philip.

I did so, and although not at all ambidextrous, I found the filing much more conveniently accomplished in this way.

“You perceive!” said Philip. “These hasps have been filed with the left hand.”

“It would seem so,” said I musing; “but what of that? It only goes to prove that the robber was left-handed—”

“Or one-handed!” interrupted Philip.

“Ha!” cried I, a sudden thought striking me. “Can it be that you suspect the—?”

But Philip stopped me. “I only *know* the robber used his left-hand, at present,” said he. “Let us examine the house and I will tell you more, perhaps.”

“O, I did that thoroughly; doors, windows, every possible mode of entrance from basement to roof, I examined minutely.”

“Ah, you examined the roof?”

“Yes, and the trap-door. Not a sign of effraction.”

“And the chimneys? Did you think of them?”

“No, to tell the truth I didn’t. But no man—not even Barnum’s living skeleton—could get up and down our chimneys, since we had the heater put up and did away with the old-fashioned fire-places, Phil.”

“You forget the very chimney you are standing by at this instant!” exclaimed Philip, pointing to

the large deep, open hearth in the library.

“By Jove! so I did! What a head I have!”

“Not a detective’s head, at any rate,” said Philip, smiling. “Let us go up on the roof.”

We ascended to the loft, and stepping out on the many-peaked roof, crept cautiously along to the stack of the library chimney. It was the only one we had left in all its old-fashioned freedom, and yawned wide-mouthed, untrammelled by any modern ventilators or other draught-breeding apparatus, externally or internally, the only fire-place it fed being in the library, which was a one-story wing running out from the main building.

Philip put his hand up and felt along the chimney. Presently he withdrew it, and with it several fragments of brick.

“The fellow had his grappling hook in here,” said he, quietly. “That will do just now. Let’s go down again to the library.”

Down we went, and Philip once more examined the hearth and fire-place. We had had no fire in it that year, the autumn having been uncommonly genial. Looking up the chimney, there were evident streaks, in a zig-zag sort of way, crossing the surface of crusted soot, such as the heels and toes of a sweep might leave in ascending and descending. And on the floor (from which the carpet had been removed when we went to town) were two dark shadows, or grayish stains, which, though evidently brushed or wiped away with great care, yet bore a vague resemblance to the stamp of a grimy foot. Philip was perfectly satisfied with this part of his examination, and having, also, ascertained that the safe-door had been opened with a duplicate key or pick (this he did by finding the trace of oil in the lock-slit, where the burglar had lubricated his instrument to prevent possible noise), he next went to the shed where the garden ladders were kept, and inspected them one by one.

At length he called for Archibald.

“Archie,” said he, when the gardener came, “have you been using any soot or ashes for top-dressing this fall?”

“Nay, sir. I have na used any topdressin’ sin’ spring, seein’ there war naething to top-dress, Mr. Brentwood, as ye know, at sic’ a season.”

“And this ladder? Have yon had occasion to use this?” inquired Philip, pointing to a medium-sized one he had leaned against a post, apart from the others.

“Nay, sir, nay. I have used no ladder sin’ I picked the grapes fra’ the tall arbor by the garden-gate. The ladders have no been out o’ the shed, sir, sin’ that, to my ken.”

“This ladder, Herbert,” said Philip to me, “was used by the robber to reach and descend from the roof.” And he pointed to the dark stains on the rungs, evidently left by sooty feet, and quite

distinct from the ordinary earthy traces of the gardener's heavy brogans. "Now," added he, "I know nearly all I wish to, and can follow this villainy to its source, without much difficulty."

"And what is the exact extent of your knowledge or experiences, Phil? And how do you propose to act in consequence?" I asked, as we drove back to town the same evening; "for, you know, in such a matter," I added, "I leave the entire management to you. It's your forte, your hobby, and devilish lucky we are that it is so. So go ahead, and let me into the plan of operations."

"I know, my dear boy," said Philip, "in the first place, that this robbery was committed by a one-handed man—"

"Left-handed, you mean."

"I mean just what I say—one-handed. Did you not notice the marks on the ladder?"

"Certainly. They were foot-marks—"

"*And* hand-marks! There was the print of one hand—one only—and always the left—on the upright of that ladder, at regular intervals—"

"I didn't look at the uprights. But he might have only used one hand; the other might have been full of—"

"He used one hand and one hook! There were black rings half-way round the other upright, at alternate points with the corresponding hand-marks on the opposite one!"

"What a tremendously clever fellow you are, Phil!" I cried, enthusiastically. "Vidocq was a baby to you!"

"I know, in the next place," pursued Philip, "that this robber came down the chimney into the library; that he opened the safe-door with a key, or very ingenious pick, which in nowise injured the lock; that he filed off the hasps of the plate-chest, abstracted their contents, tied them into a strong bundle or package, and hanging them round his neck—"

"Round his neck! How on earth can you know *that!*" I exclaimed. "Come, Phil, draw it mild! It's good enough as it is!"

"Round his neck, or round his waist," persisted Philip, gravely. "The package scraped against the walls of the chimney as he climbed up—for he then escaped with his plunder by the same way he had entered. I saw the marks of its rubbing, distinct from those of his feet and hands, though you might not have noticed so minutely. Having reached the ground, he replaced the ladder in the shed, but forgot to erase the traces of its use, as he had erased, or thought he had erased, those on the fireplace and on the hearth. He then quietly walked off across the lawn and through the gap in the hedge, probably that which Archie omitted to replant last season—"

"Why not out of the gate?" I asked.

“Because Archie never forgets to close the gate at night, and he told us he had never found it open on any morning since we went to town. Had the robber gone out the gate he must have closed it after him, and the print of his touch would have been left on its white paint. You saw it was spotless. But this is of little consequence. He got off with his plunder, and we shall never recover the plate of good Aunt Burleigh again.”

“Why not, if we catch the robber?”

“Because he has certainly melted it, since, in its original form, he could never dispose of a single ounce without certain risk of discovery. But the bullion, or some of it, we may get back. At all events, we will try.”

“And how?”

“Simply thus: The robber is no common thief. We both know, or at least I know, and you suspect, who he is. It is the so-called Baron Ludowicz. Our Christmas jollification goes on as if nothing had happened. If he accepts the invitation, we have him quietly, and I’ll answer for the consequences. If he declines, you will immediately go to New York and Boston, and communicate with the detectives there for the purpose of cutting off his retreat across the water from any northern port, while I will take similar measures with those at Baltimore and Charleston. Not a soul knows of this affair beyond our household. I have already assured myself of the silence of Mrs. Bunting and our servants, as well as that of Archie and his wife. They will not say a word till they have my permission or yours. So the plan is simple.”

“But suppose the—suppose this Ludowicz be already gone—”

“He is not—or was not three days ago. Colonel Barker saw him in Washington, and he told the colonel he should remain there till the middle of January.”

“But that may have been a blind.”

“Possibly. But he is not a common thief, as I said before. He will not flee before the enemy is at least on his track, I think. Colonel Barker goes back by the night train to-night. I will see him and ask him to have an eye on the baron. If he be gone, it can’t be helped. We must take our chance. I think it is a very good one.”

And so we arrived at our town house, and each went his way as agreed upon, to further the consummation of our plan. Baron Von Ludowicz had not fled. He was still in Washington. He graciously accepted our invitation, but said he could only remain at Liberty Hall one day and night. We took our measures accordingly.

The day arrived, the country house was gay with guests, and none among them more brilliant and affable than Herr Baron Von Ludowicz.

Owing to the number of our company, we had two extra waiters at dinner, on Christmas day.

They were both black men, though a close observer would have thought their features more of the Caucasian than the negro type. But then their African descent might be tainted by a mixture of European blood. There is a good deal of that sort of thing in this country, spite of the howls about amalgamation.

Just before dinner, I invited the baron to play a game of billiards. While engaged in playing—the billiard-room being quite crowded with lookers-on— Philip, in handing me a fresh cue, managed to give an awkward and a pretty severe knock with the butt-end of it against the baron’s false fore-arm. The blow produced a strange jingling sound, as though several pieces of metal, iron or brass, had been suddenly jarred against each other. The baron changed color, and for an instant seemed confused and angry. Philip, however, excused himself most graciously, and cursed his awkwardness, and after a moment the game went on as though the occurrence was quite forgotten. One of the new waiters, however, who stood in the doorway, had the impudence to wink and nod his head in a free-and-easy manner to Philip, and he immediately left the room in pursuit of the man, who had already disappeared.

When the heavy courses of dinner were removed, and the wine and dessert circulated, and conversation became desultory and animated, Philip, taking advantage of a momentary lull, fixed the attention of our guests by saying:

“We had hoped, gentlemen and ladies, to have made a more gallant display of our hospitable treasures today; but an unexpected and most unfortunate accident has prevented.”

“What?” “What display?” “What accident?” “What do you mean?”

These and other eager queries were hurriedly asked around the board.

“I refer,” said Philip, looking, as if accidentally, at the baron, “to our aunt Burleigh’s plate. We had intended to do homage to the day by using it at our feast. But I grieve to inform you that— it has been—stolen!”

“Good God!” “Stolen!” “Mercy on us!” “What! all that splendid plate?” “Oh, Mr. Brentwood!” “Oh, Philip!” “Oh, Herbert!” And for a few moments there was a perfect fusillade of sympathetic exclamations of sorrow and amazement.

Philip’s eye still kept the baron in its focus, and my own glance was also covertly directed that way. When Philip uttered the word *stolen*, Ludowicz had grown a shade paler, and his lips quivered very slightly. But he instantly regained his composure, and as soon as the hubbub subsided a little, he said, in a voice of well-feigned regret and indignation:

“What an outrage! Infamous! My dear Brentwood, I am astonished you take it so calmly. That plate was worth at least thirty thousand dollars! I offered you that for it myself, more than once! And to lose it thus! Of course the robber will destroy it, melt it down. What an irreparable loss! And have you taken no steps—have you no suspicion? By heavens! I could not endure—I should have no peace until I had tracked the robber, and forced his plunder from him at my pistol’s mouth!”

“Ah! we don’t do things in such a tragic style here, baron!” said I. “That may do for Hungarian chivalry and romance. We are more practical and commonplace.”

“But what do you—what have you done?” asked Ludowicz, with much interest, apparently.

“Well, we have done what we could, haven’t we, Philip?” I replied, turning to Brentwood. Philip nodded.

“And have you found no trace? Have you discovered nothing of—”

“Of the thief?” said Philip, interrogatively, as the baron paused an instant, as if to find a word vile enough to express his abhorrence for the perpetrator of the robbery. “Oh yes, baron, we’ve found a trace—several traces, in fact. It’s a very curious robbery, indeed. For although the thief had to clamber on to the roof, scramble down a chimney and up again, open a burglar-proof safe, and file two heavy hasps and staples from the plate-chests, besides carrying the plate—no light burden—on his back, up chimney—though the fellow actually did all this, alone, (for there was only one robber, I am sure,) he was positively a cripple, after all. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, this dexterous burglar has only a single arm, and that the left one— the same, by the way, as our friend the baron here—quite a coincidence, I declare! I beg your pardon, baron, did you want any thing? John, attend to Baron Ludowicz!”

As Philip had gone on, rapidly describing the robber’s manner of proceeding, the baron had grown paler and more agitated, till, upon Brentwood’s mentioning the single arm and its coincidence, the Hungarian’s self-command completely deserted him, and he sprang convulsively up, as though about to rush from the room. But at this instant, in obedience to Philip’s brief signal, the two black men who officiated as extra waiters, and who had gradually moved to a position on each side of the baron’s seat, a little in his rear, swiftly stepped forward, and placing each a strong hand upon the distinguished exile’s collar, forced him suddenly back into his chair, while the taller of the two, speaking in a quiet voice, without the least negro twang in it, said:

“I arrest you, Baron What-you-call-it, for burglary and robbery!” And the other added, more sternly:

“And you’d better keep quiet, if you don’t want your head cracked!” for Ludowicz made a violent effort to shake off his captors’ hold, though without effect. The threat, and the slight touch of the pistol-butt that accompanied it, instantly produced their wanted result, and the felon sat with haggard face and trembling lips, cowering in the gripe of justice.

“Take him with you into the library, Mr. Nipps,” said Philip, and without any further attempt at resistance, the culprit slunk out between the two disguised detectives.

This scene occupied less than three minutes, during which the guests exhibited every phase of amazement, and confusion worse confounded reigned in the dining-room until the officers and their prisoner had closed the door behind them. Then began a fresh fire of questions and

exclamations, on flank, front and rear of Philip and myself.

“Pray sit down again, my friends; I entreat you to sit down,” cried Philip, “and I’ll tell you all about it.”

And order being thus presently restored, he gave them a succinct account of our discovery, and how it was made.

“I do not deny,” said he, in conclusion, “that I might have managed the baron’s capture in a less dramatic style, perhaps. But I really had a fancy for a tableau of this sort, as a kind of *bonne bouche* for our Christmas feast. And I should have had to put off this delightful social gathering, if I had managed the affair otherwise. Besides, Mr. Nipps and Mr. Fox, our detective friends, were quite anxious to do the burnt-cork business, and I did not like to disappoint their Thespian ardor. They proved first-rate actors—almost equal to the Bryants, I think, don’t you? Let us drink their healths, and then, if you like, we’ll have coffee in the drawing-room, and a game under the mistletoe.”

* * * * *

His worship, the Baron Ludowicz, passed that night in durance vile. Mr. Nipps gently unscrewed the patriot’s false arm, and in the hollow thereof, found a pleasing array of curiously delicate instruments, whose uses were not known to any licensed handicraft.

The next morning the irresistible blandishments of Mr. Fox seduced the baron to confide to that gentleman the secret depository wherein was bestowed the bullion, or the greater part thereof, arising from the melting down of the Burleigh plate, and the said bullion was duly made over to its legitimate owners, in the manner by law provided.

In like manner, Herr Von Ludowicz, whose name proved, more precisely, to be Ludwig Schlaats, underwent a certain legal ceremony, the result of which was to furnish him with a secluded residence for a term of years at the cost of the State.

In that peaceful retirement he still dwells, and has turned his singular talents in one-handed mechanics to account in the manufacture of doormats.

“Philip,” said I, about a fortnight after the breaking up of our Christmas jollity, “I really think we owe poor Haddon a sort of *amende honorable*. We suspected him wrongly, though he wasn’t aware of it, you know.”

“I didn’t suspect him longer than half an hour,” replied Philip. “Still, if we could do him a good turn—but he’s grown rich again and gone West, you remember.”

“Ay, but he’s grown poor again and has come back. I met him this very morning, and he feels quite badly about his conduct to us in regard to our aunt Burleigh’s plate. He said if he only had five thousand dollars now he could go into a really safe business, and drop ‘speculation’ forever.”

“Well,” said Philip, “if you choose, Herbert, we’ll set him up, to that extent, out of the Burleigh bullion.”

And so we did. But unless he sees this narrative, Haddon (who has done extremely well) will never know that we once suspected him of robbing us of our aunt’s precious legacy.

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