

One of My Clients

AFTER a practice in the legal profession of more than twenty years, I am persuaded that a more interesting volume could not be written than the revelations of a lawyer's office. The plots there discovered before they were matured,—the conspiracies there detected

“Ere they had reached their last fatal periods,”—

The various devices of the Prince of Darkness, —the weapons with which he fought, and those by which he was overcome,—the curious phenomena of intense activity and love of gain,—the arts of the detective, and those by which he was eluded,— and the never-ending and ever-varying surprises and startling incidents,—would present such a panorama of human affairs as would outfly our fancy, and modify our unbelief in that much-abused doctrine of the depravity of our nature.

To illustrate, let me introduce to you “one of my clients,” whom I will call Mr. Sidney, and with whom, perhaps, you may hereafter become better acquainted. His counterpart in personal appearance you may find in the thoroughfare at any hour of the day. There is nothing about him to attract attention. He is nearly forty-five years of age, and weighs, perhaps, two hundred pounds. His face is florid and his hair sandy. His eyes are small, piercing, and gray. His motions are slow, and none are made without a purpose. Intellectually he is above the average, and his perceptive faculties are well developed. The wrinkles in his lips are at right angles with his mouth, and a close observer might detect in his countenance self-reliance and tenacity of will and purpose. But with ordinary faculties much may be accomplished; in this sketch, let us see how much in two particulars.

His first entrance into my office was in the spring of 1853. He handed me a package of papers, saying, if I would name an hour for a professional consultation, he would be punctual. The time was agreed upon and he withdrew. On examination of his papers, I found that his letters of introduction were from several United States senators, judges of Supreme Courts, Cabinet officers, and governors, and one from a presidential candidate in the last election. Those directed specially to me were from a senator and member of Congress, both of whom were lawyers and my personal friends, men in whose judgment I placed great confidence. They all spoke in the highest terms of Mr. Sidney's integrity, ability, and energy, and concluded by saying I might implicitly rely upon his judgment and be governed by his counsels.

What man of the masses can this one be, thus heralded by the authorities of the nation, and what his labor, so commended by the rulers? I glanced at him mentally again. Perhaps he is laboring for the endowment of some great literary or benevolent institution, for the building of a national monument. No. Perhaps he has some theory that thousands of facts must prove and illustrate; or it may be he is a voracious gatherer of statistics. The last is the most probable; but the more I mused, the more the fire burned within me to know more of his mission.

I awaited impatiently his coming. It was on the stroke of the hour appointed. The object of that interview may not with propriety be stated, nor the results described; but it may be said that that hour was the most intensely exciting of any of my professional life, causing the blood to chill

and boil alternately. The business was so peculiar, and connected with men so exalted in position, and conducted with such wonderful ability and tact, that now, years after, scarcely a day passes that my mind does not revert to those hours and do homage to those transcendent abilities by which it was conducted, till I sometimes think the possessor of them was an overmatch for Lucifer himself. My eyes were for the first time opened to the marvelous in his department of knowledge and art; and the region of impossibility was materially circumscribed, and the domain of the prince of the powers of the air extended *ad infinitum*. Into those regions it is not my present purpose to delve.

After a business acquaintance of several years with Mr. Sidney, I have learned that he was formerly a rich manufacturer, and that he was nearly ruined in fortune by the burning of several warehouses in which he had stored a large amount of merchandise that was uninsured. The owners of these storehouses were men of wealth, influence, and respectability. Alone of all the citizens, Mr. Sidney suspected that the block was intentionally set on fire to defraud the insurance offices. Without any aid or knowledge of other parties, he began an investigation, and ascertained that the buildings were insured far beyond their value. He also ascertained that insurance had been obtained on a far greater amount of merchandise than the stores could contain; and still further, that the goods insured, as being deposited there, were not so deposited at the time of the fire. He likewise procured a long array of facts tending to fix the burning upon the “merchant princes” who held the policies. To his mind, they were convincing. He therefore confronted these men, accused them of the arson, and demanded payment for his own loss. This was, of course, declined. Whereupon he gave them formal notice, that, if his demand were not liquidated within thirty days, never thereafter would an opportunity be afforded for a settlement. That the notice produced peculiar excitement was evident. *Yet the thirty days elapsed and his claim was not adjusted.*

From that hour, with a just appreciation of the enormity of the offence which he believed to have been committed, he consecrated his vast energies to the detection of the crime. His whole soul was fired almost to frenzy with the greatness of his work, and he pursued it with a firmness of principle and fixedness of purpose that seemed almost madness, till he exposed to the world the most stupendous league of robbers ever dreamed of, extending into every state and territory of the Union, and numbering, to his personal knowledge, over seven hundred men of influence and power, whose business as a co-partnership was forgery, counterfeiting, burglary, arson, and any other crimes that might afford rich pecuniary remuneration.

I will not now stop to describe the organization of this band, which is as perfect as that of any corporation; nor the enormous resources at its command, being computed by millions; nor the great respectability of its directors and State agents; nor the bloody oaths and forfeitures by which the members are bound together; nor the places of their annual meetings; nor a thousand other particulars, more startling than anything in fiction or history. Nor will I enumerate the great number of convictions of members of this gang for various offences through Mr. Sidney’s efforts. Prosecuting no other parties than these,—thwarting them in those defenses that had never before failed,—testifying in open court against the character of their witnesses, who appeared to be polished gentlemen, and enumerating the offences of which they had been guilty,—and harassing them by all legal and legitimate means, he gathered around him a storm that not one man in a thousand could have withstood for an hour. Eleven times was food analyzed that had

been suspiciously set before him, and in each instance poison was detected in it; while in hundreds of instances he declined to receive from unknown hands presents about which hung similar suspicions. Numerous were the infernal machines sent him, the explosion of some of which he escaped as if by miracle, and several exploded in his own dwelling. Without number were the anonymous letters he received, threatening his life, if he did not desist from prosecuting this band of robbers. Yet not for one moment swerved from his purpose, he moved unharmed through ten thousand perils, till at last he fell a victim to the enemy that had so long been hunting his life. On no one has his mantle fallen.

His sole object in life seemed to be the breaking up of this villainous gang of plunderers, and he pursued it with a genius and strength, a devotion, self-sacrifice, and true heroism, that are deserving of immortality.

Not long before his death, while one of the directors of this band was confined in prison at Mr. Sidney's instigation, awaiting a preliminary examination, he sent for Mr. Sidney and offered him one hundred thousand dollars, if he would desist from pursuing him alone. Mr. Sidney replied, that he had many times before been offered the like sum, if he would cease prosecuting the directors, and that the same reason which had inclined him to reject that proposition would compel him to refuse this. Whereupon the director offered, as an additional inducement, one half the money taken from the messenger of the Newport banks, while on his way to Providence to redeem their bills at the Merchants Bank, and also the mint where they had coined the composition that had passed current for years through all the banks and banking houses of the country, and which stood every test that could be applied, without the destruction of the coin itself, which mint had cost its owners upwards of two hundred thousand dollars. All of which Mr. Sidney indignantly rejected. And it was not till the year after his death that the coin became known, when it was also reported and believed that a million and a quarter of the same was locked up in the vaults of the — Government.

The United States government sought Mr. Sidney's services, as appears of record. Those high in authority had decided on his employment, a fact which in less than six hours thereafter was known to the directors, and within that space of time five of them had arrived in Washington and paid over to their attorney the sum of thirty-five hundred dollars for some purpose, —the attorney being no less a personage than an honorable member of a supreme court. The service desired of Mr. Sidney he was willing to perform, on the condition that he should not be called upon to prosecute any other parties than those whose conviction he had sworn to devote his life.

As a detective, Mr. Sidney was unequalled in this country. Vidocq may have been his superior in dissimulation, but in that alone. He certainly had not a tithe of Mr. Sidney's genius and strength of mind and moral power to discern the truth, though never so deeply hidden, and to expose it to the clear light of day.

“His blood and judgment were so well commingled,”

that his conclusions seemed akin to prophecy.

But it is not as a detective that Mr. Sidney is here presented. This slight sketch of this remarkable man is given, that the reader may more willingly believe he possessed, among other wonderful

powers, one that is not known ever to have been attained to such a degree by any other individual, namely:—

The power of discerning, in a single specimen of handwriting, the character, the occupation, the habits, the temperament, the health, the age, the sex, the size, the nationality, the benevolence or the penuriousness, the boldness or the timidity, the morality or the immorality, the affectation or the hypocrisy, and often the intention of the writer.

At the age of thirty-five, the genius of Mr. Sidney as a physiognomist, expert, and detective, remained wholly undeveloped. He was not aware, nor were his friends, of his wonderful powers of observation, dissection, and deduction. Nor had he taken his first lesson by being brought in contact with the rogues. How, then, did he acquire this almost miraculous power?

After he had ascertained the names of the directors and state agents of the band, he collected many hundred specimens of their handwriting. These he studied with that energy which was equaled only by his patience. In a surprisingly short time he first of all began to perceive the differences between a moral and an immoral signature. Afterwards he proceeded to study the occupation, age, habits, temperament, and all the other characteristics of the writers, and in this he was equally successful. If this be doubted by any, let him collect a number of signatures of Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans, and Americans, or, what is still better, of Jews of all nations, and at least in the latter instance, with ordinary perceptive faculties, there will be no difficulty in determining the question of nationality; a person with half an eye need never mistake the handwriting of a Jew. Many can detect pride and affectation, and most persons the sex, in handwriting, how much soever it may be disguised.

“The bridegroom’s letters stand in row above,
Tapering, yet straight, like pine trees in his grove;
While free and fine the bride’s appear below,
As light and slender as her jasmynes grow.”

Why, then, should it be strange, if remarkable powers of observation, analysis, and patient and energetic study should accomplish much more? In this department the Government had afforded Mr. Sidney great facilities, till at last he would take the letters dropped during the night in the post office of a great city, and as rapidly as a skillful cashier could detect a counterfeit in counting bank bills, and with unerring certainty, he would throw out those suspiciously superscribed. “In each of these nine,” he would say, “there is no letter, but money only. This parcel is from the W—— Street office. These are directed to men that are not called by these names: they are fictitious, and assumed for iniquitous purposes. Those are from thieves to thieves, and hint at opportunities,” and so on.

Traveling over the principal railways of the country without charge, entertained at hotels where compensation was declined, Mr. Sidney was in some instances induced to impart to his friends some of that knowledge which he took much pains to conceal, believing that by so doing he should best serve the great purposes of his life. Whether he desired this remarkable power to be kept from the rogues, or whether he thought he should be too much annoyed by being called upon as an expert in handwriting in civil cases, or what his purpose was, is not known, and probably a large number of his intimate friends are not aware of his genius in this.

On one occasion he was in a Canadian city for the first time, and stopped at a principal hotel. When about to depart, he was surprised that his host declined compensation. The landlord then requested Mr. Sidney to give him the character of a man whose handwriting he produced. Mr. Sidney consented, and, having retired to the private office, gave the writer's age within a year, his nationality, being a native-born Frenchman, his height and size, being very short and fleshy, his temperament and occupation; and described him as a generous, high-toned, public-spirited man, of strong religious convictions and remarkable modesty: all of which the landlord pronounced to be entirely correct.

The hotel register was then brought, and to nearly every name Mr. Sidney gave the marked character or peculiarity of the man. One was very nervous, another very tall and lean; this one was penurious, that one stubborn; this was a farmer, and that a clergyman; this name was written in a frolic; this was a genuine name, though not written by the man himself,—and that written by the man himself, but it was not his true name. Of the person last specified the clerk desired a full description, and obtained in it in nearly these words:—

“He, sir, was not christened by that name. He could never have written it before he was thirty. He has assumed it within a year. The character is bad,—very bad. I judge he is a gambler by profession, and—something worse. He evidently is not confined to one department of rascality. He was born and educated in New England, is aged about thirty-nine, is about five feet ten in height, and is broad shouldered and stout. His nerves are strong, and he is bold, hypocritical, and mean. He is just the kind of man to talk like a saint and act like a devil.”

The little company raised their hands in holy horror.

“As to age, size, nerve, etc.,” said the landlord, “you are entirely correct, but in his moral character you are much mistaken”; and the clerk laughed outright.

“Not mistaken at all,” replied Mr. Sidney; “the immortality of the signature is the most perspicuous, and it is more than an even chance that he had graduated from a state's prison. At any rate, he will show his true character wherever he remains a year.”

“But, my dear sir, you are doing the greatest possible damage to your reputation; he is a boarder of mine, and”—

“You had better be rid of him,” chimed in Mr. Sidney.

“Why, Mr. Sidney, he is the *clergyman* who has been preaching very acceptably at the —— Church these two months!”

“Just as I told you,” said Mr. Sidney; “he is a hypocrite and a rascal by profession. Will you allow me to demonstrate this?”

The landlord assented. A servant was called, and Mr. Sidney, having written on a card, sent it to the clergyman's room, with the request that he would come immediately to the office. It was delivered, and the landlord waited patiently for his reverence.

“You think he will come?” asked Mr. Sidney.

The landlord replied affirmatively.

Mr. Sidney shook his head, and said,—“You will see.”

A short time after, the servant was again ordered to make a reconnaissance, and reported that there was no response to his knocking, and that the door was locked on the inside. Whereupon Mr. Sidney expressed the hope that the religious society were responsible for the board, for he would never again lead that flock like a shepherd. It was subsequently ascertained that the parson had in a very irreverent manner slipped down the spout to the kitchen and jumped from there to the ground, and, what is “very remarkable,” like the load of voters upset by Sam Weller into the canal, “was never heard of after.”¹

“Individual handwriting,” says Lavater, “is inimitable. The more I compare the different handwritings which fall in my way, the more I am confirmed in the idea that they are so many expressions, so many emanations, of the character of the writer. Every country, every nation, every city has its peculiar handwriting.” And the same might be said of painting; for, if one hundred painters copy the same figure, an artist will distinguish the copyist.

Some years since, a certain bank placed in my hands two promissory notes for large amounts, purporting to be signed by a Mr. Temple and indorsed by a Mr. Conway, and which both maker and indorser pronounced forgeries. Both notes were written on common white paper, and were purchased by the bank of a certain broker at a time when it was difficult to make loans by discount in the usual manner. Before the maturity of the notes, the broker, who was a Jew, had left for parts unknown. He left behind him no liabilities, unless he might be holden for the payment of the notes above specified, and several others signed and indorsed in the same manner in the hands of other parties. Several attempts had been made by professional experts to trace resemblances between the forgeries and the genuine handwriting of said Temple and Conway, as well as the broker, but all had reluctantly come to the conclusion that the signatures were as dissimilar as well could be. The cashier was exceedingly embarrassed by the fact that Mr. Conway was one of the directors of the bank, and he was presumed to have been so familiar with his signature as to be incapable of being deceived.

After a most diligent investigation and the expenditure of much time and money, and after skilled experts and detectives had given up in despair of ascertaining either the whereabouts of the Jew or anything further till he could be produced, the holders of this paper had settled down quietly in the belief that the broker was the guilty party and that all further effort was useless. At this point of time, when all excitement had subsided, these notes came into my possession. I immediately telegraphed to Mr. Sidney, and it was with great joy that I received the reply that he was on his way. At three o'clock in the morning I met him at the railroad station. He complimented me by saying that there was not another man living for whom he would have left

¹ There is a curious story connected with this “clergyman,” which may yet appear in the biography of Mr. S.

the city of —— on a similar message. I thanked him, and we walked to the office. Before arriving there, I had merely informed him that I desired his services in the investigation of a forgery that baffled our art. He demanded all the papers. I produced the forged notes, several genuine checks and letters of Mr. Temple and Mr. Conway, and several specimens of the handwriting of the broker.

Long as I live I can never forget the almost supernatural glow that came over his features. I could almost see the halo. No language can describe such a marked and rapid change of countenance. His whole soul seemed wrapt in a delightful vision. I cannot say how long this continued, as I was lost in admiration, as he was in contemplation. I spoke, but he seemed not to hear. At last his muscles relaxed, and he began to breathe as if greatly fatigued. He wiped the perspiration from his brow, and said, as if to himself,—

“Sure!”

I asked what was sure. A few minutes elapsed, and he said more loudly,—

“As sure as you are born,”—without seeming to have heard my inquiry.

I proposed to state what could be proved, and the suspicions that were entertained of the cashier. He objected, and said,—

“I take my departure from these papers. Mr. Temple is aged thirty-eight, a large, well-built man, full six feet high, strongly nerved, bold, proud, and fearless. His mind is active, and in his day he has been a professor in a college. He fares well and is fashionably dressed. I think he is not in any legitimate business. He is a German by birth, though he has been in this country several years. He is somewhat affected and immensely hypocritical. I think he is a gambler and dealer in counterfeit money. He certainly is not confined to one department of rascality. This is not the name by which he was christened, if indeed he was christened at all. He could not have written it in his youth, and must have assumed it within a year and a half.” (Exact in every known particular.)

“Mr. Conway I at first thought an attorney-at-law, but he is not. I reckon he administers on estates, acts as guardian, and settles up the affairs of the unfortunate in trade as their assignee, in connection with his business of notary and note-shaver. He is aged fifty-six, was born and educated in New England, and is probably a native of this city. He is tall, lean, and bony. His nerves are not steady, and he is easily excited. He probably has the dyspepsia, but he would not lose the writing of a deed to be rid of it. The remarkable feature of his character is stinginess. His natural abilities being good and his mind strong, he must therefore be a man of means, and I think it matters little to his conscience how he comes by his wealth. At the same time, he has considerable pride and caution, which, with his interest, keep him honest, as the world goes. If he were not an old bachelor, I should think better of his heart, and he would be less miserly.”

“The Jew’s signature is the most honest of the three. Timidity is the marked character of the man. He could not succeed in any department of roguery. It is physically, as well as mentally and

morally, impossible for him to have had any connection with the forgery. He would be frightened out of his wits at the very suggestion of complicity.”

“And so, Mr. Sidney,” said I, “you know all about these parties and the particulars of the forgery?”

“Nothing whatever,” he replied, “save by these specimens of their handwriting. I never heard of the forgery, nor of these men till this hour.”

To which I replied,—

“I cannot believe that you can give such a perfectly accurate description of them (saving their moral characters, of which I know little) without other means of knowledge. It *must* have been that you knew Temple to be a German, Conway to be the most penurious old bachelor in town, and the broker the most timid. And *how*, in the name of all that is marvelous, *could* you have known Conway to be afflicted with dyspepsia?

“Then,” answered Mr. Sidney, “you are not prepared to believe one other thing, more strange and paradoxical than all the rest. Listen! These notes are forgeries both of the maker and the indorser. And who do you think are the criminals?”

“The Jew?”

“No.”

“The cashier?”

“No. But ’as sure as you are born, these notes are in the handwriting of Temple and Conway, and the signatures are not only genuine, but they are forgeries also: for both had formed a well-matured and deliberate design of disputing them before placing them on paper. And, sir, from my notion of Conway’s character and temperament, as expressed in his handwriting, I venture the assertion that I can make him own it, and pay the notes. He shall even faint away at my pleasure. Temple is another kind of man, and would never own it, were it ten times proved.”

A meeting of the directors of the bank was to be holden at nine o’clock of the same morning. None of them knew Mr. Sidney, or were known by him. It was arranged that he should meet them, Mr. Conway included, and exhibit his skill, and if he should convince them of his power of divination, he should discuss the genuineness of the signatures of the supposed forgeries.

For several hours he was on trial before the board with a very large number of specimens of handwriting of man of mark, and he astonished them all beyond measure by giving the occupation, age, height, size, temperament, strength of nerve, nationality, morality, and other peculiarities of every one of the writers. His success was not partial, it was complete. There was not simply a preponderance of evidence, it was beyond a doubt. The directors did not question the fact; but how was it done? Some thought mesmerism could account for it, and others thought it miraculous.

The first experiment was this. Each director wrote on a piece of paper the names of all the board. Eleven lists were handed him, and he specified the writer of each by the manner in which he wrote his own name. He then asked them to write their own or any other name, with as much disguise as they pleased, and as many as pleased writing on the same piece of paper; and in every instance he named the writer.

As an example of the other experiments, take this one. The superscription of a letter was shown him. He began immediately:—

“A clergyman, without a doubt, who reads his sermons, and is a little shortsighted. He is aged sixty-one, is six feet high, weighs about one hundred and seventy, is lean, bony, obstinate, irritable, economical, frank, and without a particle of hypocrisy or conceit. He is naturally miserly, and bestows charity only from a sense of duty. His mind is methodical and strong, and he is not a genius or an interesting preacher. If he has decided upon any doctrine or construction of Scripture, it would be as impossible to change him as to make him over again.”

The company began to laugh, when one of them said,—

“Come, come, Mr. Sidney, you are disclosing altogether too much of my father-in-law.”

And now the supposed forged notes were handed him. He gave the characteristics of the signatures very nearly as he had before done in the office, but more particularly and minutely. He analyzed the handwriting,—showed the points of resemblance, where before none could be discerned,—showed that the writing, interpreted by itself, was intended to be disguised,—explained the difference between the different parts of the notes,—pointed out where the writer was firm in his purpose, and his nerves well braced, and where his fears overcame his resolution,—where he had paused to recover his courage, and for a considerable time,—where he had changed his pen, and how the forgery was continued through several days,—what parts were done by Temple, and what by Conway,—

“Till all the interim
Between the acting of the dreadful thing
And the first motion.”

was brought so vividly and truthfully to mind that Mr. Conway fell to the floor as if dead. The cashier, relieved from a pressure that had for weary months been grinding his very soul, burst into tears. A scene of strange excitement ensued, during which Mr. Conway muttered incoherent sentences in condemnation of Temple and then of himself,—now with penitence, and then with rage. Recovering his composure, he suggested the Jew as the guilty party. Mr. Sidney then dissected the handwriting of the Jew, and demonstrated that there was as great a difference between his chirography and a New Englander’s as between the English and Chinese characters,—showed how the Jew must have been exceedingly timid, and stated the probability that he had left the city not because he had taken any part in the forgery, but because he had been frightened away. Then turning to Conway, he gave him a lecture such as no mortal before ever gave or received. The agony of Conway’s mind so distorted his body as made it painful in the extreme to all beholders. “His inmost soul seemed stung as by the bite of a serpent.” When at last Mr. Sidney turned and took from his valise a small steel safe, which Conway recognized as his

own, “the terrors of hell got hold of him,” and his anguish was indescribably horrible. The little safe had been by some unknown and unaccountable process taken from a larger one in Conway’s office, and as unopened. Neither Mr. Sidney nor the directors have ever seen its contents; but in consideration that it should not be opened, Mr. Conway confessed his crime in the very form of Mr. Sidney’s description, paid the notes before leaving the bank, and *remains a director to this day*. As is often the case, the greater criminal goes unwhipped of justice.

Mr. Sidney, besides the faculty I have described, had acquired another, less wonderful perhaps, but still quite remarkable, and which was of incalculable assistance to him in the prosecution of his Herculean labor. He was a most rare physiognomist. And by physiognomy is here intended, not simply the art of discerning the character of the mind by the features of the face, but also the art of discovering the qualities of the mind by the conformation of the body,—and still further, (although it may not be a legitimate use of the word), the power of distinguishing character, mental and moral, the capacity, occupation, and all the distinctive qualities of a person, by his figure, action, dress, deportment, and the like: for Sterne said well, that “the wise man takes his hat from the peg very differently from a fool.”

The ancient Egyptians acquired the greatest skill in this science; and Tacitus affirms, not without reason, that their keen perception and acute observation, essential in communicating their ideas in hieroglyphics, contributed largely to their success. Certainly, few better proofs of the existence of the science have been furnished than that given by the Egyptian physiognomist at Athens in the days of Plato. Zopyrus pronounced the face of Socrates to be that of a libertine. The physiognomist being derided by the disciples of the great philosopher, Socrates reproved them, saying that Zopyrus had spoken well, for in his younger days such indeed had been the truth, and that he had overcome the proclivities of his nature by philosophy and the severest discipline.

Pliny affirms that Apelles could trace the likeness of a man so accurately that a physiognomist could discover the ruling passion to which they were subject. Dante’s characters, in his view of Purgatory, are drawn with accurate reference to the principles of physiognomy; and Shakespeare and Sterne, particularly the latter, were clever in the art; while Kempf and Zimmermann, in their profession, are said seldom to have erred as physiognomists. Surely it is a higher authority, and more practical, which saith, “A wicked man walketh with a forward mouth; he speaketh with his feet; he teacheth with his fingers.—A man is known by his look, and a wise man by the air of his countenance.” And yet again, “The wickedness of a woman changeth her face.”

If it be true, as Sultzer declares, that there is not a living creature that is not more or less skilled in physiognomy as a necessary condition of its existence, surely *man*, with all his parts fitly joined together, should be the most expert; and there are circumstances and conditions, as well as qualities of mind and body, which will conduct him more surely along the pathway of his research, and direct him onward towards the goal of perfection. Consider, then, the characteristics of Mr. Sidney, the circumstances by which he was surrounded, and the school in which he was taught, in order to determine if there were in him the elements of success.

Chiefest among the essential qualities is to be named his astonishing strength of nerve. No danger could agitate him, however imminent or sudden. No power could deprive him of his imperturbable coolness and courage. Perils seemed to render his mind more clear and his self-reliance more firm. (And yet I have heard him say, that there was among the band of criminals before mentioned one woman of greater strength of mind and nervous power than any person he had ever seen, whom alone of all created beings, whether man or devil, he dreaded to encounter.) Had not Mr. Sidney been potently armed, he must, without doubt or question, have become almost a monomaniac; for, secondly, he was for years enraged almost to madness that his entire estate had been swept from his grasp, as he believed, by the torch of the incendiary; and he was to the last degree exasperated, and with a just indignation, that the merchant-princes who he supposed had occasioned his impoverishment yet walked abroad with the confidence of the community, and were still trusted by many a good man as the very salt of the city. Nevertheless, Mr. Sidney, solitary and alone, had arraigned them before a criminal tribunal. He was therefore driven to his own resources, and there was no place in his nature, or in the nature of things, for the first retrograde step. All his vast energies were thenceforth consecrated to, and concentrated in, the detection of crime. And from the time that he was refused payment for his loss, so far as my observation extended, he seemed to have been governed by no other purpose in life than the extermination of that great gang of robbers which he subsequently discovered. Add to these incentives and capabilities his extraordinary perceptive faculties and power of analytical observation, together with his wonderful patience, and it must be granted that he was qualified to discover in any incident connected with his pursuits more of its component parts than all other beholders, and had greater opportunities than almost any other man by which to be informed *how* it is that “the heart of a man changeth his countenance.”

If I remember rightly, it was some two years after our acquaintance commenced that I became aware of Mr. Sidney’s proficiency as a physiognomist, and it was then communicated, not so much by his choice as by a necessity, for the accomplishment of one of his purposes.

The object of Mr. Sidney’s visit to the city of P——, at that time, was nothing less difficult than the discovery and identification of an individual of whom no other knowledge or description had been obtained than what could be extracted from the inspection, in another city, of a single specimen of his handwriting in the superscription of a letter. So much from so little. Within three days thereafter, with no other instrumentalities than what were suggested by Mr. Sidney’s expertness in deciphering character in handwriting and his proficiency as a physiognomist, the result was reached and the object happily attained. In the prosecution of the enterprise, it was important, if not essential, that I should believe that the data were sufficient by which to arrive at a correct conclusion, and that I should confide in Mr. Sidney’s skill in order that there might be hearty cooperation.

My office was so situated, that from its windows could most advantageously be observed, and for a considerable distance, the vast throng that ebbed and flowed, hour after hour, through the great thoroughfares of the city. For the greater part of three consecutive days I sat by Mr. Sidney’s side, watching the changing crowd through the half-opened shutters, listening incredulously, at first, to the practical application of his science to the unsuspecting individuals below, till my derision was changed to admiration, and I was thoroughly convinced of his power. As my friends of both sexes passed under the ordeal, it was intensely bewitching. Hour after hour

would he give, with rapidity and correctness, the occupation and peculiarity of character and condition of almost every individual who passed. This was not occasional, but continuous. The marked men were not singled out, but all were included. He was a stranger, and yet better acquainted with the people than any of our citizens. And this was the manner of his speaking:—

“That physician has a better opinion of himself than the people have of him: he is superficial, and makes up in effrontery what he lacks in qualification. The gambler yonder, with a toothpick in his mouth, has of late succeeded in his tricks. The affairs of this kind-hearted grocer are troubling him. Were we within a yard of that round-shouldered man from the country, we should smell leather; for he works on his bench, and is unmarried. Here comes an atheist who is a joker and stubborn as a mule. There goes a man of no business at all: very probably it is the best occupation he is fitted for, as he has no concentrativeness. The school mistress crossing the street is an accomplished teacher, is very sympathetic, and has great love of approbation. That lawyer is a bachelor, and distrusts his own strength. This merchant should give up the use of tobacco, and pay his notes before dinner, else he will become a dyspeptic. Here comes a man of wealth who despises the common people as is miserly and hypocritical; and next to him is a scamp. I think it is Burke who says, ‘When the gnawing worm is within, the impression of the ravage it makes is visible on the outside, which appears quite disfigured by it’: and in that young man the light that was within him has become darkness, and ‘how great is that darkness!’”

Of some qualities of mind he would occasionally decline to speak until he could see the features in play, as in conversation. Some occupations he failed to discover, if the arms were folded, or the hands in the pockets, or the body not in motion. It is not my purpose to specify any of the rules by which he was governed, though they differed materially from those of Lavater, Redfield, and others, nor the facts from which he drew his conclusions, but simply to give results.

I selected from the crowd acquaintances of marked character and standing, and obtained accurate descriptions of them. Of one he said, “He is a good merchant, and has done and is doing a large business. He carries his business home with him at night, as he should not. He has been wealthy, and is now reduced in circumstances. His disaster weighs heavily upon him. He has a high sense of honor, a keen conscience, and is a meek, religious man. He has great goodness of nature, is very modest and retiring, has more ability than he supposes, and is a man of family and very fond of his children.”

Another he accurately described thus: “He is a mechanic, of good mind, who has succeeded so well that I doubt if he is in active business. Certainly he does not labor. He is very independent and radical,—can be impudent, if occasion requires,—gives others all their rights, and pertinaciously insists upon his own.” Here the mechanic took his hands from his pocket. “Hold! I said he was a mechanic. He is not,—he is a housepainter.”

I desired to be informed by what indications he judged him to be a painter. He replied, that he so judged from the general appearance and motions, and that it was difficult to specify. I insisted, and he remarked that “the easy roll of his wrists was indicative.”

After obtaining similar correct descriptions of men well known to me, I spied one whom I did not know, and who was dressed peculiarly. I inquired his occupation, and Mr. Sidney, without

turning a glance towards me, and still gazing through the half-opened shutters, replied, "Yes! you never saw him before, yourself. He is a stranger in town, as is evident from the fact of his being dressed in his best suit, and by the manner of his taking observations. Besides, there is no opportunity in these parts for him to follow his trade. He is a glassblower. You may perceive he is a little deaf, for the curvature of his motions also indicates his occupation."

Whether this description was correct or not I failed to ascertain.

Mr. Sidney contended that any man of ordinary perceptive faculties need never mistake a gambler, as the marks on the face were as distinct as the complexion of the Ethiopian,—that, of honest callings, dealers in cattle could be the most easily discovered—that immorality indicated its kind invariably in the muscles of the face,—that sympathetic qualities, love and the desire of being loved, taste and refinement, were among the most perspicacious in the outline of the face.

A man of very gentlemanly appearance was approaching, whom Mr. Sidney pronounced a gambler, and also engaged in some other branch of iniquity. His appearance was so remarkably good that I doubted. He turned the corner, and immediately Mr. Sidney hastened to the street and soon returned, saying he had ascertained his history: that he was in the counterfeiting department,—that his conscience affected his nerves, and consequently his motions,—that he was a stranger in town, and was restless and disquieted,—that he would not remain many hours here, as he had an enterprise on hand, and was about it. I remarked, that, as the contrary could never be proved, he was perfectly safe in his prophesy, when Mr. Sidney rose from his chair, and, approaching me slowly said, with great energy,—

"I will follow this man till it *is* proved."

The next day but one, I received a note from Mr. Sidney, simply saying, "I am on his track." He followed the supposed counterfeiter to Philadelphia, where he ascertained that he had passed five dollar bills of the —— bank of Connecticut. Mr. Sidney obtained the bills the gambler had passed to compare with the genuine. Failing, however, to find any of the same denomination, he presented the supposed counterfeits to a broker skilled in detecting bad bills, and was surprised to be informed that they were genuine. At Baltimore, he repeated the inquiry at the counter of a well-known banker relative to other similar bills, and received the same response. So again in Washington, Pittsburg, Chicago, and several other cities whither he had followed the suspected man, and invariably the reply of the cashier would be "We will exchange our bills for them, sir." In some western cities he was offered a premium on the bills he had collected. At St. Louis he obtained a known genuine bill of the bank in question, and in company with a broker proceeded to examine the two with a microscope. The broker pronounced the supposed counterfeits to be genuine. In the meantime the gambler had left the city. Two days after, Mr. Sidney had overtaken him. So great were his excitement and vexation that he could scarcely eat or sleep. In a fit of desperation, without law and against law, he pounced upon the suspected man and put him in irons. He beat a parley. It was granted, and the two went to the gambler's apartments in company. In a conversation of several hours, Mr. Sidney extracted from him the most valuable information relating to the gang he was so pertinaciously prosecuting, and received into his possession forty-seven thousand dollars in counterfeits of the aforesaid bank, some of which I

now have in my possession, and which have been pronounced genuine by our most skillful experts.

It would seem gratifying to all lovers of science to be informed that the practical knowledge acquired by Mr. Sidney had been preserved, and that at least the elementary principles of the arts in which he became so nearly perfect had been definitively explained and recorded. I am not aware, however, that such is the fact, but am persuaded that his uniform policy of concealment has deprived the world of much that would have been exceedingly entertaining and instructive. That this knowledge has not been preserved is owing mainly to the fact that he considered it of little importance, except as a means for the accomplishment of his purposes, and that those purposes would be most effectually achieved by his withholding from the common gaze the instrumentality by which they were to be attained. That he intended at some future period to make some communication to the public I am well assured, and some materials were collected by him with this view; but the hot pursuit of the great idea that he never for an hour lost sight of would not allow sufficient rest from his labors, and he deferred the publication to those riper years of experience and acquirement from which he could survey this whole past career.

It may be comforting for all rogues to know that he had left behind no note of that vast amount of statistical knowledge which he possessed, whether appertaining to crimes or criminals in general or in particular, or more especially to the band of robbers,—and that with him perished all knowledge of this organization as such, and the names of all the parties therewith connected. They also have the consolation, if there be any, of knowing that he was sent prematurely to his grave by a subtle poison, administered by unknown hands and in an unknown manner and moment, and that he died in the firm faith of immortality.

The Atlantic Monthly, December, 1862