

Thief Taking In London
From *Household Words*

Your wife discovers on retiring for the night that her drawers are void; her toilette-table is bare; except the ornaments she now wears, her beauty is unadorned as that of a Quakeress; not a thing is left; all the fond tokens you gave her when her pre-nuptial lover, are gone; your own miniature, with its setting of gold and brilliants; her late mother's diamonds; the bracelets "dear papa" presented on her last birth-day; the top of every bottle in the dressing-case brought from Paris by Uncle John, at the risk of his life, in February, 1848 (being gold) are off—but the bottles (being glass) remain. Every valuable is swept away with the most discriminating villainy; for no other thing in the chamber has been touched; not a chair has been moved; the costly pendule on the chimney-piece still ticks; the entire apartment is as neat and trim as when it has received the last finishing touch of the housemaid's duster. The entire establishment runs fanatically up stairs and down stairs; and finally congregates in my Lady's Chamber. Nobody knows anything whatever about it; yet everybody offers a suggestion, although they have not an idea "who ever did it." The housemaid bursts into tears; the cook declares she thinks she is going into hysterics; and at last you suggest sending for the Police; which is taken as a suspicion of, an insult on, the whole assembled household, and they descend into the lower regions of the house in the sulks.

X 40 arrives. His face betrays sheepishness, combined with mystery. He turns his bull's eye into every corner of the passage and upon every countenance on the premises. He examines all the locks, bolts, and bars, bestowing extra diligence on those which enclosed the stolen treasures. These he declares have been "Violated;" thus concisely intimating, without quoting Pope, that there has been more than one "Rape of the Lock." He then notes the non-disturbance of the other valuables; takes you solemnly aside, darkens his lantern, and asks in a mysterious whisper, if you suspect any of your servants, which implies that *he* does.—He then examines the upper bedrooms; and, in the room of the female servants he discovers the least valuable of the rings and a cast-off solver toothpick, between the mattresses. You have every confidence in your maids; but what can you think? You suggest their safe custody; but your wife intercedes, and the policeman would prefer speaking to his inspector before he locks anybody up.

Had the whole matter remained in the hands of X 40, it is possible that your whole troubles would have lasted till now. A train of legal proceedings—actions for defamation of character and suits for damages—would have followed, costing more than the value of the jewels, together with the entire execration of all your neighbors and every private friend of your domestics. But, happily, the Inspector promptly sends a plain, earnest looking man, who announces himself as one of the two Detectives of the X division. He settles the whole matter in ten minutes.—His examination in ended in five. As a connoisseur can determine the painter of a picture at the first glance, or a wine-taster the precise vintage of a sherry by the merest sip; so the Detective at once pounces upon the authors of the work of art under the consideration, by the style of performance; if not upon the precise executant, upon the "school" to which he belongs. Having finished the toilette branch of the inquiry, he takes a short view of the parapet of your house, and makes an equally cursory investigation of the attic window fastenings. His mind is made up, and most likely he will address you in these words:—

"All right, sir. This is done by one of the 'Dancing School!'"

“Impossible!” exclaims your plundered partner. “Why our children go to Monsieur Pattitoes, of No. 84, and I assure you he is a highly respectable professor. As to his pupils, I—“

The Detective smiles and interrupts.—“Dancers,” he tells her, “is a name given to the sort of burglar by whom you have been robbed; and every branch of the thieving profession is divided into gangs, which are termed ‘Schools.’ From No. 32 to the end of the street the houses are unfinished. The thief made his way to the top of one of these, and crawled to your garrett—“

“But we are twenty houses distant, and why did he not favor one of my neighbors?” you ask.

“Either their uppermost stories are not so practicable, or the ladies have not such valuable jewels.”

“But how did the thieves know that?”

“By watching and inquiry. This affair may have been in preparation for more than a month. Your house has been watched; your habits have been ascertained. They have found out when you dine—how long you remain in the dining room. A day is selected; while you are busy dining, and your servants busy waiting on you, the thing is done. Previously, many journeys have been made over the roofs, to find out the best means of entering your house. The attic is chosen; the robber gets in, and creeps noiselessly, or ‘dances’ into the place to be robbed.”

“Is there *any* chance of recovering our property?” you ask, anxiously, seeing the whole matter at a glance.

I hope so. I have sent some brother officers to watch the ‘Fences’ houses.”

“Fences?”

“Fences” explains the Detective, in reply to your innocent wife’s inquiry, “are purchasers of stolen goods. Your jewels will soon be forced out of their settings, and the gold melted.”

A suppressed scream.

“We shall see, if, at this unusual hour of the night, there is any bustle in or near any of these places; if any smoke is coming out of any one of their furnaces, where the melting takes place. I shall go and seek out the precise ‘garrettee’—that’s another name these plunderers give themselves—whom I suspect. By his trying to ‘sell’ your domestics by placing the ring and toothpick in their bed, I think I know the man.”

The next morning, you find all these suppositions verified. The Detective calls, and obliges you, at breakfast (after a sleepless night,) with a complete list of the stolen articles, and produces some of them for identification. In three months, your wife gets nearly every article back, except some of the gold; her damsel’s innocence is fully established; and the thief is taken from his ‘school’ to spend a long holiday in a penal colony.

Sometimes they are called upon to investigate robberies so executed, that no human ingenuity appears, to ordinary observers, capable of finding the thief. The robber has left no trail; not a trace. Every clue seems cut off; but the experience of a Detective guides him into tracks invisible to other eyes. Not long since, a trunk was rifled at a fashionable hotel. The theft was so managed, that no suspicion could rest on any one.—The Detective sergeant who had been sent for, fairly owned, after making a minute examination, that he could afford no hope of elucidating the mystery. As he was leaving the bed-room, however, in which the plundered portmanteau stood, he picked up an ordinary shirt button from the carpet. He silently compared it with those on the shirts which the thief had left behind in the trunk. It did not match them. He said nothing, but hung about the hotel for the rest of the day. Had he been narrowly watched, he would have been set down as an eccentric critic of linen. He was looking out for a shirt-front or waist-band without a button.—His search was long and patient; but at length it was rewarded. One of the inmates in the house showed a deficiency in his dress, which no one but a Detective would have noticed. He looked as narrowly as he dared at the pattern of the remaining buttons. It corresponded with that of the little tell-tale he had picked up. He went deeper into the subject, got a trace of some of the stolen property, ascertained a connection between it and the suspected person, confronted him with the owner of the trunk, and finally succeeded in convicting him of the theft. At another hotel robbery, the blade of a knife, broken in the lock of a portmanteau, formed the clue. The detective employed in that case was for some time indefatigable in seeking out knives with broken blades. At length he found one belonging to an under-waiter, who proved to be the thief.

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