

The Confidential Clerk

The Innocent Often Suffer With The Guilty— The Detectives' "Keys"—Regrets— Leonard Savage, A Young Man Of New Hampshire, And His Family Stock— Richard Brooks, A Wealthy New York Merchant— His Visit To Young Savage's Father— Results—Partial Biography Of Mr. Brooks, In Wall Street And Elsewhere—A Slave To Fortune —A Father's Pride—Mr. Brooks's Fearful Dream —Mr. Brooks In The Old Home Of His Childhood—How A True Man Treats His Wife—Family Aspirations—The Love Of Young Men—Country And City Temptation—A "New Suit," And A Trip To The Mountains—A Surprising Present—A Happy Season—A Fearful Change Comes— The Terrible Results Of An Unjust Judgment—One Of The Strangest Things Ever Known—A Catholic Penitent An Actor In The Scenes—Remorse—Unravellings In An Unexpected Way—A Speedy Voyage To Europe To Restore The Wronged To His Right Place.

by George McWatters

It is one of the misfortunes of a detective's life, that he learns to be suspicious of the innocent as well as of the guilty; and, like other men, detectives sometimes err in their judgment, and the innocent suffer, not only under unjust suspicions, but sometimes the penalty of offences of which they are not guilty, through the force of "circumstantial evidence" which is brought to bear upon them. Indeed, in the eye of the law, circumstantial evidence is frequently of more weight than the direct testimony of alleged eye-witnesses, for the latter may falsify, but circumstances do not create themselves, and do not often occur simultaneously or in combination. There can be no "conspiracy" among them, as between living witnesses. They have no prejudices to express, no animosities to gratify, and we usually attach to them the greatest importance. Indeed, they are the keys usually, by which the detective unlocks the mysteries of the case which he may be called on to work up.

But notwithstanding all this, they are not always to be relied on; and when the innocent suffer from the misuse of these keys, or the misinterpretation of their significance, the officer who uses them must feel more keen regrets, if not remorse, than if he had been misled by the statements of living men, inasmuch as it is his duty to himself and his calling, as well as to his fellow-men, to draw wise and just conclusions from the circumstances of which he gets possession; and in what I am about to tell, I would be most gratified if I could make partial amends, publicly, of the result of an error of mine and others, by using the names of the party wronged. But the whole matter was known only to a few, some of whom are dead, others of whom are in business with the party wronged; and there are one or two more whose sympathy for the innocent wronged man, has, since the discovery of his innocence, only added to the high esteem in which they held him. And it were not wise for him that I give publicity to what was known to so few, and is to-day practically forgotten by them. As I may not give the proper names, I will, for convenience, coin them, while I give the important facts in the luckless and unhappy case.

Leonard Savage was a bright boy, brought up in a town in Grafton County, New Hampshire, and born of one of the best of the old stocks of that State—a stock which had had its important representatives at the bar, on the bench, in Congress, in the pulpit, in the profession of medicine, in journalism (at Boston); in short, in every department of life, not to overlook farming, in which its representatives had always excelled. Leonard had been prepared for Dartmouth College, whither he was expecting, on the opening of the next scholastic year, to go, and with bright prospects; for at the preparatory school he excelled all his mates in some branches, and was their peer in the rest, when, in the summer of 184—, a relative of his, an elderly gentleman, and a New York banker, visited the White Mountains for recreation, with his family, and called on Leonard's parents on his way.

This gentleman, whom we will call Richard Brooks, for the sake of a name, was born in New Hampshire, and, indeed, was raised there, at a place about twenty miles from Leonard's father's, the two being about the same age. He had visited his native spot, where he had not been before for twenty-five years, the day or so before coming to Mr. Savage's house. At his native place he found but few faces he recognized, and all his relatives were either dead or had "moved to the West, or the South." "Nothing left there," said he, "of mine, save the sleepers in the graveyard, and the mouldering monuments over them." He became so mournful that he felt unlike proceeding at once to the mountains; and calling to mind the joys of his early days, when he and Mr. Savage, who were devoted friends as well as relatives, used to interchange frequent visits, even over that long distance of twenty miles, —longer in New Hampshire, over hills and mountains, than fifty miles would be in our western prairie States, or even along the line of the Hudson River, in New York, —he set his heart upon a visit to Mr. Savage, who, he learned, was still living in the old spot, though for fifteen years he had not heard from him, so absorbed had Mr. Brooks been by the exciting life of a Wall Street dealer, and with some operations which had called him more or less to Europe.

Early in life he had gone to Georgia (the southern portion of it, Fort Gaines, I believe), in a small mercantile business, which grew upon his hands into something quite important, where he married a wealthy planter's daughter, and was able, through this alliance, to enlarge his sphere of business, which eventually became very great, and was scattered over a large district.

Mr. Brooks's early New England training had well disciplined natural capacities of no mean kind, and given him advantages as a business man at the South, equaled but by very few if any. His rise was rapid. Visiting New York on his bridal tour, his lady formed certain acquaintances there, which led her, southern born though she was, to desire New York as a home. She constantly urged Mr. Brooks to dispose of his, or rather their scattered business and interests in the South, preserving only her plantation for a winter resort, when they liked (but which, by the way, they never occupied after they came to New York: for the glitter of fashionable life so enthralled Mrs. Brooks, that she spent no winter farther south than Washington). Year after year she persisted, and Mr. Brooks eventually arranged his business and removed to New York, easily managing to get an interest in a prosperous mercantile house as silent partner.

In this he embarked a large share of his money; and finding that he needed more active life, he put most of the rest of his property into a manufacturing concern, of some department of which he took charge. The latter prospered moderately; but the “moral delinquencies,” as they were modestly called, of one of his mercantile partners, who controlled the use of the funds, brought the house to ruin, and Mr. Brooks saved only some fifteen per cent of his investment out of the wreck. Putting his manufacturing business upon a good footing, he thought to be content with that; but he must have more money. The associations he and his family had made in New York must be sustained, and it required more money than his manufacturing business brought him to keep up the style he desired.

He was dejected for a while; but having had more or less experience in stocks and in Wall Street, through his brokers, however, in other times, he turned his attention to the study of matters in that street, and came to the conclusion that he as well as another was entitled to succeed there, —and in the end he was not mistaken. Taking the funds saved from the mercantile ruin, though they were small, he went into Wall Street and formed a partnership with an experienced broker, who saw that he could make the large and influential acquaintanceship of Mr. Brooks available. The latter’s rise was steady, and somewhat rapid. Everything he touched turned to gold, and he became one of the most fortunate of brokers and speculators. Eventually the establishment of the Bank of —, the most active of the projectors of which Mr. Brooks had been, called him to the post of bank president, in which post he displayed rare abilities. But his financial cares so multiplied—he was called to engage in so many operations all over the land, in fact, — that he became a slave to his own fortune, and never left the city, save to go where business called him, — sometimes West, but more frequently South. His family went to Saratoga, or the White Sulphur Springs of Virginia, or where else they pleased, to pass a few weeks of the summers, but he could never “find time.” So it was that he had not visited his native hills for so many years, and had almost forgotten the playmates of his boyhood, and with them his dear old relative and friend, Mr. Savage.

It can easily be conjectured that when he found himself again with the most intimate friend of his childhood, in the very house (though it had been much repaired and changed since he had seen it) where he had spent so many days, and even weeks, in each of several years of his early life, the old affections came back to him, with emotions intensified by the very fact that so much that was dear had so long been buried from his sight, and memory almost, in the mad whirl of business in which he had won his successes. In short, the latter’s brilliance only served to make more bright and vivid the sweetness and riches of the old memories; and to attempt to draw the picture here which Mr. Brooks made for me when I first formed his acquaintance, of his sadness and his happiness at that meeting with Mr. Savage, would be preposterous for me, for he painted it in words which then brought tears to my eyes.

He spent a few days with Mr. Savage, and they rode about over the familiar hills; on cloudy days tried the trout brooks, but without their early success; wandered off to old farm-houses where they used to “attend parties,” and to and from which they used to escort the girls; and, in fact, lived over their young days together quite gleefully. But it

was not alone for old memories' sake that Mr. Brooks lingered there. He had made an observation the minute he arrived at Mr. Savage's which constantly impressed him. Mr. Brooks had only a family of daughters living. He had lost two sons, —one in the South and one in New York, —the latter of whom having grown to nineteen years of age he had set his heart upon, had educated him at Columbia College, and was about to send him to Germany to add to his education, intending him for the bar, or for financial business, as the son might decide on his return, when the young man, one day, was run over by a horse, which, breaking away from his carriage, dashed across the sidewalk unexpectedly to everybody near, and injuring several persons slightly or severely, so crushed and trampled upon young George, the son, that after months of intense suffering, from internal wounds especially, he died.

Mr. Brooks had never been fully his old self after the death of his son; and though some years had passed since the mournful accident, Mrs. Brooks was frequently awaked at night by her husband's talking in his dreams about, and often as if with, George. So he, too, frequently fell asleep in his chair after a weary day's work, and muttered in his sleep about George; and on one occasion, after being awakened from what was to Mrs. Brooks evidently a fearful dream, in which she stood over him and witnessed his agony for a moment before she aroused him, he, in response to her importunity, related the dream, the substance of which was, that while, when he first fell into a drowse he was enjoying visions of rural life and domestic felicity, in the midst of which George, sitting in an easy-chair, and caressed by a young maiden, or perhaps his youthful wife, was revealed to him.

So blissful were these visions (which of course to him were realities), that he had just resolved to abandon the sickening struggle of business, go to the country and lead a quiet life, when all at once the scene changed! and down through the very centre of the beautiful panorama of bliss, came, half-wrapped in clouds, a hideous-faced, naked demon, bearing a great bag of gold in each hand, one marked "100,000," the other "1,000,000," as if to tempt him to longer continue in the money-getting service of Satan, and to peril his soul the more! and what added to the horror of all was, that just then George was represented as leaving his seat of bliss, seizing his hat, and rushing down into the lower plane, grasping at imaginary bags of gold which just eluded his clutch, his face covered with the greed of gain; and it gave him the greatest pangs to see his darling boy fall from so high an estate to one so low. It was while in the agony of these pangs in which he wildly threw up his arms, as if struggling to get up and go forth to save George, that Mrs. Brooks awakened him.

It was, as it will be seen, a terrible blow to Mr. Brooks, the death of that son, who, he confidently hoped, would take and fill, or more than fill, his place in business. He doted upon him more, perhaps, than he otherwise would have done had he not been the only son in a family of half a dozen children. The daughters would need his aid and counsel, and of this the father thought much. It was an unspeakable and irremediable loss to Mr. Brooks. He had frequently thought to adopt some young man, or dreamed that some of his daughters might marry some man after his own heart; but looking around, he never found a young man for adoption who suited him.

He had relinquished the hope that he might yet encounter somebody to his tastes when he came to Mr. Savage's home; and when the fresh, fair, well-formed, keen, but gentle-eyed, and firm of lip, Leonard, with his fine, bared brow, ran out with his father and family to greet the just-arrived relations, who sent word of their coming the day before, Mr. Brooks's eyes gathered new lustre to themselves as he looked upon him, and discovered the strong resemblance of Leonard to his favorite child George; and the impression then made upon his mind was deepened as Mrs. Brooks, taking her husband aside an hour after their arrival, spoke to him in low words, and with tears in her eyes:—

“Have you not noticed how like our dear George is Leonard Savage? I noticed it the instant I met him, and I can't keep my eyes off from him; and he acts just as George used to, too,” she added.

Mr. Brooks told her that he had remarked the resemblance; “but,” said he, “please do not tell him, or the family, or our girls of it, for I have already resolved to study the young man while I am here, and I shall not pay him too much attention. I wish to see him as he usually is. I wish you would watch him carefully, too, without letting him know it.”

Mrs. Brooks, of course, consented to her husband's sensible wishes (and wives should never consent to unsensible ones), and they watched Leonard with great care, only to become more and more attracted to him day by day. Sometimes Mr. Brooks and he took the old horse and carriage and rode away long distances together. During these journeys Mr. Brooks was sounding the mind and character of Leonard, talking to him of the world and the men in it; of what he had seen and learned in Europe; of the modes of doing business in New York; of his old acquaintances, some of whom had achieved honors and fortune, and how they had lived; others of whom had made shipwreck of themselves, earlier or later in life, and so on, only to find that Leonard had a wondrously appreciative and grasping mind, and seemed to be perfectly well-grounded morally. The personal beauty, too, of Leonard, and his excellent colloquial powers, charmed Mr. Brooks.

He found himself, after a few days, wholly in love with Leonard, and as his wife's judgment of the young man corresponded with his own, he felt increased confidence in Leonard; for Mr. Brooks was one of those men who, fortunate in the possession of noble and sensible wives, know how to appreciate them. Mr. Brooks always told his wife his important business, and never took any great step, when there was time enough to do so, without consulting her. But men who do business in Wall Street are sometimes called on to act on the instant, in matters which involve hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The Brooks family remained several days at Mr. Savage's, and not only convinced themselves of Leonard's perfect goodness and great capacities, but of the worthiness of the whole of Mr. Savage's family; and it can readily be conjectured that, at this early time even, Mr. and Mrs. Brooks, who had a daughter of the same age as Leonard, and other daughters a little younger, might have looked forward to an alliance for one of them with a young man so good and of so much promise in the world. The children, too, of Mr. Brooks became fond of “cousin Leonard,” as, in their caprices, they called him, and attached to the whole family, especially to old Mr. Savage, their father's time-old friend,

who was one of those straightforward, severely honest, intelligent, but at the same time fun-loving, jocular persons, whose magnetism is contagious, and makes everybody around them “feel better.”

A day or two before his departure from Mr. Savage’s for the mountains, Mr. Brooks took a long ride with Leonard, in which he talked much with him about life, its cares, toils, and struggles, its successes and disappointments; the value of the education of the schools, and that of the arena of business, etc., and finally told him how he had been considering him, and what projects he had been forming in his mind for him business-wise. Mr. Brooks shed many tears as he told Leonard of his resemblance to his own dear George, and Leonard, too, was greatly affected, and could hardly utter a word.

Leonard was unwilling to give up his proposed collegiate course; but Mr. Brooks assured him that he was already superior in scholarship to the great majority of the country’s most successful business men, and pointed out to him how many brilliant young men of real merit there are in the legal profession (to which Leonard inclined), as well as in the medical and clerical, who can make but poor shift in the world; who do not succeed; and he pointed out to him the advantage of stepping at once into an established business, where the course of his life would be free from the heart-racking trials and tortures through which these men are compelled to pass.

Mr. Brooks told Leonard that he would place him in business, where an honest course would be sure to win him great fortune in the end; that he had profound confidence, from what he had seen of him, in his moral nature, and that he would, in short, take him at once into business with him, give him a small interest and a salary besides, till he arrived at age, and then, if all things proved, as he believed they would, would give him a large interest in his business. “Besides,” he said, “meanwhile my house shall be your home, and as much yours as if you were really my boy.”

Leonard was overwhelmed with Mr. Brooks’s kind offers, and expressed his fears that he had not the capacity to fill the place Mr. Brooks wished him to occupy. But Mr. Brooks would not hear to this at all; and finally Leonard said he could take no such important step without consulting his father and mother, which only seemed to increase Mr. Brooks’s respect for him; and it was arranged that that night Mr. and Mrs. B. and Mr. and Mrs. S. and Leonard should have a conference, either sending the “girls” and “children” off to bed early, or managing to take a walk by themselves. Night came, and it was very beautiful. Mr. Brooks proposed that Mr. S. and wife, and himself and wife, should take an evening stroll over to an old farm-house, where lived some goodly neighbors, and make them a parting call, and told Leonard to “come over” at such a time.

On their way home they stopped under some grand old trees, where there were rude seats for the accommodation of travellers, and there, in the moonlight, talked over the matter. Mr. Savage was surprised at Mr. Brooks’s generous offers. He hardly knew what to do. He had hoped that Leonard would go to college, and finally determine to enter the ministry. This was his highest ambition for him. His own brother Leonard, after whom the young man was named, was a minister of much promise, but who became ill early in

his ministry, and died after a long period of sickness and infirmity, at the age of twenty-nine.

Mr. Savage had looked to his son fondly to “do his unaccomplished work,” as he expressed it (his brother’s), for Mr. Savage was of that class of men who feel that their families—their “name”—must do about so much “work for the Lord in His vineyard,” at any rate, and he was loath to have Leonard relinquish collegiate education. He said he was not rich, but could provide comfortably enough for Leonard; and besides, he had a great dread to have Leonard go so far from home, especially to New York, so young. He had never been in New York, but he had often visited Boston, and felt that a city was not the place for young men. But Mr. Brooks told him that New York contained the best, as well as the worst people in the world; that idleness was the bane of young men, either in town or city, and referred him to many young men whom they knew in their boyhood, and of whom Mr. Savage had told him on that visit, that they had made wreck of themselves in the country, some having gone down to drunkards’ graves, etc.; that Leonard would, at once, have all he could do, and perhaps more; that he would directly enter upon a stern, and not a little laborious life, but that his great success would be sure; that he would watch over Leonard with a father’s care, etc.

Mrs. Savage cried, and Mr. S. persisted in his objections. Finally, Mr. Brooks told him that if he would give his consent, he would watch Leonard carefully, and that if he discovered the least thing to excite his suspicions that Leonard was in any way unfitted for the course of life in which he wished to place him, he would send him back to his father, and that, in the meanwhile, Leonard would have earned some money for himself, and that then he would not be too old to go to college; “for,” said he, “a year’s trial will decide all.”

This was a new suggestion to Leonard, and he caught at it, and added his importunities to Mr. Brooks’s; for he saw the brilliant prospect before him if he proved himself capable, and it was Mr. Brooks’s own proposal that he go on trial. So, after much further conversation, Mr. and Mrs. Savage consented, and the parties returned to the house.

Mr. Brooks was so delighted that he could hardly contain himself, and insisted that Leonard should go with him and his family next day to the mountains. To this Leonard demurred, for he knew that fashionable people resorted there, and he had not, he said, a proper suit of clothes. He was having some made preparatory to going to college, but they were not done. Mr. Brooks gently laughed at this; told him he was well enough dressed now; that it was not his clothes, but him, that he wanted with him.

But it was finally arranged that Leonard should visit Boston, and provide himself with a ready-made suit, and follow the family in two or three days. Mr. Brooks, knowing a certain clothing-house in Boston, told Leonard to go there, and nowhere else; and after Leonard had selected his suit, judge of his surprise, when the clerk, asking his name, in order to make out the bill, presented it to Leonard, subscribed, “Payment received in full,” as Leonard was drawing his wallet to pay for the goods.

“But what does this mean?” said Leonard, as, taking the bill, he handed the clerk the money, which was refused.

“I am not able to tell you more than that I had orders to hand you the bill receipted, and to refuse any money you might offer,” said the clerk, as he started to go to do something needing then to be done.

“But stop, sir,” said Leonard; “I cannot receive this compliment from your house. I must know what it means.”

At this point one of the proprietors, seeing that Leonard was confounded, stepped up, motioned the clerk away to his duties, and said, —

“Allow me to ask what is the trouble?”

“No ‘trouble,’ indeed,” said Leonard, “but this: I’ve bought a suit of clothes, for which I wish to pay, and the clerk won’t let me, and has given me the receipted bill.”

The proprietor reached out his hand for it, looked at it for an instant, and said, —

“Is this your name?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then the bill seems to be correctly made out.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, I am one of the proprietors of this house, —would you prefer *me* to receipt the bill, rather than that it be done in our name by a clerk—is that it?”

Of course Leonard was astonished at the query.

“Why, no, sir,” said he; “I suppose this is as correct as it can be, as far as the signature is concerned, but I am astonished that you won’t take my money.”

“Well, we do refuse to, and shall be greatly obliged to you if you will take the suit along with you. You will have no trouble in the future about it, and I am not at liberty to explain the matter to you. All I can say is, it is all right; we are satisfied, and should be glad of your custom when you wish anything in our line.”

Leonard left the store confused, unable to conjecture what it meant, for he had no suspicion of the fact, afterwards disclosed to him, a year from then, that Mr. Brooks had written a private letter to the house, enclosing a draft on a New York bank, telling the house to let such a young man, whom he accurately described, and who would he there in a day or two, have the goods, and they could settle the difference between amount of

draft and cost of goods thereafter. Of course he enjoined entire secrecy: hence it was that the proprietor was “not at liberty to explain.”

Mr. Brooks intended this as a pleasant surprise upon Leonard, but it didn't prove so. He was more or less harassed by it till he came to know the facts. He was one of those independent, self-reliant souls, who rather go without this or that than receive it from patronizing hands: and as he did not even suspect this as Mr. Brooks's work, and as old Mr. Savage, when Leonard came to tell him of the occurrence, was equally unsuspecting, Leonard was a little vexed.

Mr. Brooks had been so long away they did not conceive that he had acquaintances in Boston; and moreover they knew that he had not been near the post office of the village while he was there, or had they suspected him they would have thought of that, and been puzzled. But Mr. Brooks had been wary, and without going to the post office himself, sent his daughter out to walk, and deposit the letter, and told her to say nothing about it, and to show its superscription to no one.

Leonard followed the family in his new but plain suit, for he had not been extravagant. His fine form needed no adornment, and the visitors at the mountains that season hardly knew which to admire the most, his frank, handsome face, his Apollo-like form, or his gentle, kindly manners. Of course Mr. Brooks was very proud of him, and was never so happy as when talking to the people he met of the prize he had found “up among the granite hills.” He spoke of Leonard as his “clerk,” and was, in short, a particle silly in the expression of his pride over Leonard; and Mrs. Brooks was not far behind him. So that the gossiping portion of the visitors to the mountains, when they met, began to whisper it about that it was “easy enough to be seen” that Mr. Brooks was arranging an alliance for his daughter, and they were very sure it was the next to the oldest; and before the Brookses left the mountains, these gossipers were certain of it; and, as they observed the quiet, modest, and reserved appearance of the beautiful Isabella, they construed her silence into her non-concurrence with the supposed plan, and Mrs. Brooks overheard some of them bewailing the condition of her daughter, declaring it was “too bad to compel a girl to marry against her will;” that although Leonard was so beautiful, and all that, yet it was not right to compel the girl to marry him, and the Brookses “ought to be ashamed of it.” Little did they know what at the same time was going on in Isabella's heart, and as little foresaw what the future, not years distant, was to develop in the happiness and joy of the Brooks and Savage families. Ah, and much less could they then have conjectured of the terrible reverses—the inexpressible sufferings, which were to come to some, indeed all, of those then happy households.

The season over, Mr. Brooks and family returned to New York, making but a day or two's call at Mr. Savage's, where it was arranged that Leonard should follow them in a month, and then set out for Boston, where Mr. Brooks called on the clothing-house, and received the balance due on his draft.

“That young man,” said the proprietor, who had had the conversation with Leonard, “is a splendid fellow to look upon, and I liked his manners. I've thought ever since he was here

I would like to get his services in our store—if I could. Do you think he could be induced to come to Boston? We'd do well by him—give him a fair trial—he would have nothing to complain of.”

“Then you like him? What struck you most in his appearance?”

“Well, he's intelligent and handsome, that everybody can see; but what I liked most, was his honest, open face. I think he's perfectly reliable—a thing I can say of but few of the clerks our house ever had.”

Mr. Brooks was delighted with this estimation of Leonard by a shrewd, keen-sighted business man, and replied,—

“You've judged the young man rightly, I think: but you cannot secure his services. A business is already provided for him. Were it not for that, I might try to get him into your employ.”

Soon after Mr. Brooks left the store; and, of course, the first thing he told Mrs. Brooks on entering the Revere House, where they were stopping, was what the merchant had said about Leonard, and the daughters all heard it too.

But I must cut this part of the story short, for I find my personal regard for Leonard is leading me to dilate upon those points which are not so exactly connected with the detective's business; and I have gone over the substance of Mr. Brooks's narrative to me of the past, in such detail, in order to give the reader some adequate notion of the intensity of the grief which came upon the Brooks family, and to show how the extremest innocence and the most lofty honor may sometimes suffer under false charges,—the designs of the base and vile for their own mean ends: or, as in this case, through the conspiracy of circumstances, the solution of which necessarily involves the innocent sometimes.

Leonard went to New York in due time, and was taken into Mr. B.'s family as a member, and duly installed in Mr. B.'s business, first as clerk, Mr. Brooks advancing him little, by little, as he saw fit.

A year rolled round, and Leonard visited his country home, and Mr. Brooks had no occasion to “release” him in that he loved him; and all the family loved him; and there was one of them who more than loved him, Isabella; but so gentle and undemonstrative had she been, that Leonard did not know it; and he regarded all the girls as his sisters, and was kind, and gentle, and cheerful to them all alike. Still, sometimes he thought he “liked” (for he never thought of “love” towards any of them, save in the kindly, friendly sense), Isabella, in particular, the best.

When he returned there was rejoicing in the Brooks' house, and all went on smoothly. These things proceeded till Leonard became of age, and Mr. Brooks at once took him into full partnership, giving him outright an interest sufficient to make him wealthy. Leonard

had not forgotten his love of books, and occupied most of his leisure hours at his happy home, reading to the family. Thus he was storing his mind, and fitting himself for greater usefulness.

So fashionable a family as the Brookses, had necessarily been called into society much, and had given many parties themselves, but they gradually lost their interest in those things after Leonard came; and as Mr. Brooks saw the advantage of which his reading and studential habits would be to his daughters, he encouraged their more quiet life. In short, Leonard became indispensable to that household, and lived there as a brother and a son, to whom they all had come to look up, till his twenty-fourth year, when, going a little into society, and meeting various ladies, whom he admired, he began to conceive the thought of marriage; but he found none who, in comparison with the young ladies at home, he thought equal to them, especially to one of them, the gentle Isabella, who was also a very good scholar, and had studied a great deal since Leonard became a member of the family. He dwelt upon the matter very much. Isabella was almost a sister, indeed. He felt a delicacy about revealing his affections; but at last he did, and the tears of Isabella revealed her only too great.

They made their story known to Mr. and Mrs. Brooks, who, in their gladness, would have had them marry the very next day. Mr. Brooks said that any delay under the circumstances was absurd; that he did not care for formalities, and wanted to make no show. But Mrs. Brooks's pride took another direction. She wanted time to make a great wedding, and Mr. Brooks yielded. The wedding came, and passed all happily, and Leonard Savage and Isabella Brooks were united for a happy life, to be checkered, however, by great misery to them both. They remained with Mr. Brooks's family for a year, when they moved into a new house which Mr. Brooks had erected meanwhile, and given to Isabella, and time went on; children were born to them, and happy grandparents lived over their lives again in the smiles of their loving grandchildren.

Meanwhile Mr. Brooks changed his business somewhat, and founding a bank, he became president of it, and along with him went Leonard, as chief clerk, his property, now sufficient for his support in style, being invested in various paying stocks. He went more as a companion for old Mr. Brooks, than to fill a position for the sake of its salary; and as Mr. Brooks had a dear friend, who, in his old age had become ruined in Wall Street, it was arranged that he should be cashier so long as he might desire, or might live, and that Mr. Savage should succeed him, if he so desired. But Mr. Savage was Mr. Brooks's confidential clerk in all respects, and was intrusted with everything.

All things went on happily and smoothly for a year and a half, till a certain fatal day arrived. The day before, Mr. Savage, who, in all the long time he had been with Mr. Brooks, never drew out at any time from the concern but a portion of his dues, told Mr. Brooks that he had become embarrassed a little through the decline of a certain stock, which was sure, however, to come up again, and that he wanted a thousand dollars for current expenses; and unwilling to sell any stock he held, and not willing to ask anybody else to loan him, was obliged to ask of him a favor. Mr. Brooks smiled at the matter, gave him the money at once, and in a manner of half reproof, and half joke, said, "Leonard,

what made you think I'd lend you money? I won't, never. Take that as a birthday present *from* me, to reverse the order of things, for to-morrow is my birthday." Leonard took the money, considering it a loan, which he should make up in a week.

The next day was a fatal one to the happiness of that house, and the one to which all I have written here has been pointing. It was noon. Mr. Brooks was out of town, the cashier had gone to his dinner, and so the clerks, and all but an old negro messenger, who had been with the house since its establishment, and he was dozing away in his accustomed seat, when a man entered the bank with a draft for two thousand dollars, and something over (I forget the exact sum); was in haste, or such was Mr. Savage's story; got it cashed by Mr. Savage, who acted as teller in the teller's absence, and cashier too, and made an entry in the books, and slipped the draft, as he declared, into the proper drawer, preparatory to its being duly filed, according to the custom of the bank. That night the entry was found in the books, but no draft to correspond was found. Mr. Savage was confounded; the old cashier said an unkind word to him about carelessness, and the bank closed without the matter being settled.

Next day the cashier brought the thing to Mr. Brooks's notice before Mr. Savage came in; and the old cashier presumed, on his intimacy with Mr. Brooks, to say that the affair "looked bad." The illness of one of Mr. Savage's children delayed him an hour or two beyond the usual time of arriving at the bank, and this added to Mr. Brooks's uneasiness, not knowing the cause. Moreover, there flashed into his mind, what had been forgotten for nearly thirty years, the mournful history of the latter life of a man in the South, whom he once knew, and who, in the midst of happiest surroundings, and after having enjoyed everybody's confidence for a period of over forty years, proved at last a villain.

Mr. Brooks deemed this man's name coming back, as it did,—he knew not how,—to memory, as a sort of providential presentation of light upon the matter in question; and, by the deep degree of his affection for his son-in-law, his suspicions became intense, as he afterwards explained it. By the time Leonard Savage got to the bank, Mr. Brooks was in the mood to believe almost anything of him. He remembered, too, that he was embarrassed the day before, and he had given him a thousand dollars. How did he know but he wanted more thousands? What had he done with his money?

When Mr. Savage arrived, Mr. Brooks, with a frown on his face, invited him into the directors' room, shut the door, and asked him to explain about that draft. Mr. Savage told him the whole simple story, quietly; expressed his great regret at his stupidity; said he knew he must have—in fact, he knew as well as he knew anything—put the draft in such a place: that it was drawn by such a bank in the country (a familiar one, often doing business with them); was all right, etc., and that he and the clerks had hunted high and low, and it was not to be found the day before. Mr. Savage was secretly annoyed at Mr. Brooks's pertinacity in the matter, and he finally said,—

"Father Brooks, of course I propose that the bank shall not lose the money. The other bank will, of course, recognize the fact of having given the draft; and now, as the draft is paid it is all the same to us if it is lost."

“Yes, yes,” said Mr. Brooks; “that’s all well enough. I wonder why I’ve not thought to send word to the other bank, and find if they have issued such a draft on us.” This very suggestion piqued Mr. Savage’s pride awfully, but he suffered the affront silently; and as the conversation closed, Mr. Savage said, “And, father, even if it were a forged draft, I should tell you to have it charged to me, against my stock and dividends. The bank shall not lose for my laches.”

This suggestion about a forged draft struck Mr. Brooks unpleasantly. “What if it should prove that the bank has made no such draft on us that day?” asked Mr. B. of himself, as he and Mr. Savage parted; and he immediately despatched a messenger to the country to find out the facts, who returning, said the bank had issued no such draft. Mr. Brooks’s suspicions became strong that Mr. Savage, for some inscrutable reason, had done wrong. He did not care for the money, but his confidence was shaken in him. He would pay the sum withdrawn, and get rid of Mr. Savage as easily as he could. This was his purpose; but he bethought him, that perhaps somebody could unravel the mystery; *perhaps*—but he did not believe it—somebody had deceived Mr. Savage with a forged check; but, ah! where had that gone. “Perhaps,” Mr. Savage had thought—well, he could not solve it for himself, knew not what to think; and after pondering over it, came to our office (for I then had a partner). He revealed his case to me,—told me the whole history which I have related, and far more, and said he had grown ten years older within the past two weeks. He had said nothing yet to his wife about it, and thought he never should.

I told him it looked to me that Mr. Savage was an honest man, and had been imposed upon with a forged check; that possibly, by some connivance with the old negro messenger, the forger had repossessed himself of that check; but that that was the most unlikely thing in the world. I tried to conceive various ways to account for it, even to supposing that Mr. S. was mistaken as to having put the draft in the drawer, but had tucked it, unthinkingly, into his vest pocket, and had lost it. But to all I could suggest, he had a ready reply; and I told him that I thought I’d better examine the premises, the drawers, and so forth; and we arranged a private examination,—he and I being alone in the bank,—which was made.

I saw that if the drawers were full,—and it appeared that on that fatal, day much business had been done, and the drawer was probably full,— a paper might get out over the back end and fall on the floor, and so get lost; but this suggestion was answered to my satisfaction,— the greatest search had been made for the paper on the afternoon of the day it was said to have been presented, etc., and my theory was thus precluded. After a few conferences, I finally yielded to Mr. Brooks’s opinion, that Mr. Savage was guilty of having taken the money, and trumped up the silly story, for his defence; and yet it was all so absurd an act in one situated as was he.

A while after, Mr. Brooks had a serious talk with Mr. Savage, who was allowed to pay the bank the loss, and matters were so arranged that the clerks thought that the check had indeed been found, though they did not see it; but Mr. Brooks’s confidence in and respect for Mr. Savage was gone, and the poor old man’s grief was terrible. “Not one honest man in the world,” he used to mutter; “even if you educate him yourself, and nurture him in

your own bosom, and give to his keeping your dearest child, and your wealth and all, he'll deceive you."

Mr. Brooks caused Mr. Savage to give up his place: and told him that he wanted his daughter and their children to visit him as before, but hoped he should never see *him* at his house, and if he did visit there, he trusted he would take care not to meet him. And Mr. Savage, whose feelings, under the circumstances, can perhaps be better conceived than described, seeing the old man's wretchedness, withdrew from his sight quietly, simply saying, "It is awful—I am innocent—perhaps something will convince you, some day, that I am."

"No, no," said old Mr. Brooks; "I have no such hope: there is no room for hope; you have deceived me in your character, and I am fast breaking down."

Mr. Savage went to his home an almost broken-down man himself. For a long time he kept all from his wife; finally, he told her; and she, against his advice, went to implore her father, now inexorable in his opinion. He cried over his daughter, but would not yield his opinion.

Mr. Savage became quite low in health, and it was finally thought best, by his physician, that he should take a sea voyage,—go to Europe to spend a year or two; which he did, leaving his wife and children at home. He made his will, and arranged everything as if he might never return. The physicians could not determine exactly what was his malady, but thought change of conditions and travel would do him good. They did not know that it was wounded affection—affection for his dear old father-in-law, whom he really loved and adored—that was secretly undermining his health; for he could not tell them his story.

Two years had passed since that unhappy day, of the presentation of the draft, when there came a letter to Mr. Brooks, purporting to be from a Catholic clergyman, who gave his name, saying that a dying penitent had confessed a presentation of a forged draft on his bank for two thousand dollars at about such a time—day of the month he could not recollect,—and that he was ready to make restoration, to the extent of his ability, with funds left in his hands for the purpose. He could restore twelve hundred dollars, and asked Mr. B. if such a check had been drawn on his bank at such a time, as the penitent was not in the most vivid state of memory at the time of confession, and talked of two or three banks at the same time.

Here is light! thought Mr. Brooks; and he lost no time in seeking out the priest, and getting from him all he could disclose; and when the priest,—who would not give him the man's name, on account of certain relatives of the forger's, who were respectable people,—Mr. Brooks remembered that Mr. Savage's meager description of the man, who he alleged presented the check, was like the priest's, Mr. Brooks began to suffer remorse. "Yet, where is the check?" he constantly asked himself; and with this he settled his conscience as frequently as it was disturbed; and saying nothing to his wife about this, —to whom not till months after the fatal day he had told his story, —thought over the

matter by himself. He did not receive the money from the priest, but caused him to put it in the bank, told him to act as its trustee, and that by and by he could come to some conclusion. He told the priest that there was alleged to have been a draft for two thousand dollars drawn at that time; and he learned from the priest that the man who confessed to drawing a forged order was skilful with his pen, and capable, probably, of forging successfully. And with this all, Mr. Brooks was constantly in trouble of mind.

Finally, it had been resolved by the bank to get a heavy safe, in addition to the one in the vault, for its increasing business; and when the position it was to occupy was selected, it was seen that the old desk must be removed. In placing the safe in its position, the old floor broke down on the part nearest the wall,— for the banking rooms were in an old building,—and it became necessary to repair the floor. The safe was rolled out in the middle of the room, and the floor, or a portion of it, taken up. It was found that for nearly nine inches from the side of the room the floorboards had nothing to rest on, and consequently broke down with the weight of the safe. They were not thick and stout enough, and the reckless joiners, in laying the floor, had saved themselves labor in slighting their work. But the floor had served its purpose well enough till that day. On tearing off the broken ends of the floor, several papers were found between them and the ceiling of the room below, —the basement offices, —and small bits of sealing-wax, short strings, a few cents, and such things.

The bank men and clerks looked at the papers, and one of them, taking up a paper of peculiar color, and folded, said, “What’s this?” and carelessly opened it. “Why, this is a draft on our bank by the Bank of —; cashed, too, I reckon; how came it here?”

Fortunately Mr. Brooks was looking on the scene. The old cashier was sick at home, the person in his place occupied, and the clerk who found the paper a new comer. “Let me see that,” said Mr. Brooks, and reached his trembling hand for it, took it, and turned away; looked at it; put it in his pocket, and went into the directors’ room; cried till he was weak; and finally, coming out, said he was sick, and must go home; had a carriage ordered, and was soon at home, revealing to his wife what, together with the confession of the dying penitent, he considered the full proof of Mr. Savage’s innocence.

The color of the draft, which had proven a little dark in the mean while, however, was like that before and then still used by the country bank in its check blanks, and was all right. It flashed upon him that the forger had gotten possession of one of these, done his work, deceived Mr. Savage, —and all was clear but as to *how* the check got there, —a mystery in some part never to be solved. But next day Mr. Brooks observed, what had never occurred to him before as remarkable, yet which he remembered to have carelessly noted every day of his life, that the base-board above the floor had shrunken away from the latter for the space of nearly a quarter of an inch; and he found that the broken ends of the floor boards revealed that they but barely reached under the base board, so short were they. The draft, found folded, had somehow slipped out of the drawer, and got on to the floor; and perhaps, in somebody’s haste that fatal day, had chanced to be hit with the toe of a boot severely enough to be cast under the base board, into the receptacle where it was found.

Mr. Brooks's remorse was great. He would have hurried to Europe, to see his son-in-law, and bring him back, if he could possibly have then left New York, but he could not; and he did the next good thing. He would not trust to the slow process of the mail, —for where his son-in-law was at the time his daughter, who had been made acquainted with the facts, could not tell. He was last heard from at Rome, but was about to depart for some other place—Vienna, I believe. So Mr. Brooks wrote the most tender letter, imploring forgiveness, and together with one from Mr. Savage's wife, sealed it up very securely, selected a messenger, who was no other than the old cashier's, his friend's, son, and fitting him out, bade him make haste to find Mr. Savage, give him the letters, and bring him home.

The messenger left for Europe by the next steamer from Boston, and going directly to Rome, traced out Mr. Savage from there, and found him at last in Athens, Greece, an enfeebled, prematurely old man. He had suddenly changed his purpose to go to Austria, and set out with a party from Rome to Greece.

Mr. Savage was so overcome with joy that he was thrown into a fit of sickness, which lasted for some three weeks; but he recovered to his old status of late, and before he arrived in New York—his anxiety having gone, and his happiness at the prospect of soon being restored to the arms of the old man, whom he so loved, with all suspicions removed from his character, and his innocence proclaimed—he had grown to be quite like his old self in appearance, though yet unusually thin.

I will not attempt to describe the meeting between him, his father and mother-in-law, and his wife, for these were all at his own house, in a private room, when he arrived from the steamer, —Mr. Brooks feeling that he could not meet him there, as he wished to in his heart, for he would be overcome, had written him a note by the coachman, telling him where he would find him. Mr. Brooks's recital of that scene, which he told me more than once, was the most touching story I ever listened to; would that I had the power of pen to reproduce it; but I have not, and I will not depreciate it by the attempt.

During the messenger's absence Mr. Brooks had sought me, told me the story of the confession and the finding of the note, and would have scolded me a little I felt, because I did not think of the shrunken base board, —which I now think I noticed, —if he too had not overlooked that in the examination, although he had in fact noticed it nearly every day that the rooms had been occupied by his bank.

The still unravelled mystery of how the check got out of the drawer and under the base board, sometimes puzzles me; but it is no stranger, after all, than many things I have known. There can be no doubt of Mr. Savage's innocence in the matter. The twelve hundred dollars, with some interest thereon, was finally paid over by the priest; but Mr. Brooks took care that Father received, in a way mysterious to him, and for his own use, a much larger sum; so grateful was he for the restoration to his home of his innocent son-in-law, whom he had so deeply, yet naturally enough under the circumstances, wronged.

This case, I hardly need add, served to increase my caution in the examination of my future “work,” though I thought I was as wary and careful as a man could well be before.

McWatters, George. *Knots Untied: Or, Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Life of American Detectives*. Hartford: Burr, 1871.