

The Cool-Blooded Gold Robber, and the Way He was Tracked

A Sudden Call—Great Consternation At The —Bank In Wall Street—Ten Thousand Dollars In Gold Stolen—A Hard, Insoluble Case —“Try,” The Soul Of Success—Banks Compelled To Greatest Cautiousness—No Esprit De Corps Among Money-Changers—The Way I “Created” Detectives—Rag-Pickers Made Useful Above Their Calling—An Up-Town Carriage House, And Its Treasures—A Laughing Coachman—A Present—Complicated Evidence Unraveled— An Old Office-Woman Involved In The Mystery— A Bit Of Fun Furnishes The Desired “Key”—“Smouching,” And What Came Of It— Extending My Acquaintanceship—The Thief Found—A Wall Street Broker— Studying Him—His Clerk Wiled Away—Good Use Of Theatre Tickets—The Scheme Of Identification; A Plot Within A Plot—The Broker Worsted—He Struggles Within Himself ; Grows Pale—How He Executed The Robbery—The Terrible “Force Of Example “ Sometimes—The Thief Becomes A Member Of The Common Council —A Salutory Warning To Other Thieves.

by George McWatters

“SIR, can you come right down at once to the—Bank?” (It was and is in Wall Street.)
“Mr.—(the president) wants to see you if possible,” exclaimed a messenger, one day, less than ten years ago, as he bolted into my office in great haste; and this was the opening to me of a case in which I did, perhaps, more hard work than I ever performed in working out any other case.

“No, I can’t go now; don’t think I can get there today. I’ve too much to do; but what’s the trouble?”

“O, dear, I can’t tell you that. I only know that Mr. —, the president, is greatly excited, and he told me to be sure to bring you now; to hunt after you if you were not here, and bring you at any rate.”

“Well, if it is so urgent a matter, I must run down there for a minute—say that I’ll be there in a half hour, if possible; if not, in an hour, say. I’ve documents here that *must* be finished and sent off before I stir,” said I; and an hour or so brought me to the bank, between four and five o’clock of the afternoon. It was closed, of course, for banking purposes, but the watching janitor hardly waited for ordinary ceremony before I was half-dragged into the entrance-way. The president at once took me to the private or directors’ room, and told me that a half hour before sending for me they had missed a bag containing ten thousand dollars in gold, that every search had been made for it, and that one of the clerks thought he recollected something having been said by somebody that day about that bag. He even thought somebody had taken it up or out in his presence, but his impression was like a dim recollection of things passed twenty years ago, and this was all the president could say about it. The making up of the books, balancing accounts, etc., had kept the clerks after banking hours, as usual, and he had sent for me as soon as

possible, thinking that I might devise some theory to account for the lost gold, and that promptness was the best course.

I asked if there had been much business done there that day, and I found that they had been unusually occupied. I learned the location of the bag in the big safe, and saw that no thief could have come slyly in and got to the safe without being detected, so numerous were the clerks, some of whom were constantly behind the desks, back of which the thief would, have to go. There was no clerk whom the president dare suspect. They were all well tried young men, in whom every confidence had heretofore been reposed, and who had ever proved worthy of the trust placed in them. Besides, none of them, except at noon, when they had gone out to lunch, not singly, but two together at least, had been out of the bank since morning, and it was sure that the bag was in the safe that, morning. In fact, it had then been brought there from the vault, with other moneys; so that to suspect any one, rendered it necessary to suspect another in concert with him. Moreover, if one had been in concert with a thief, who had come in to receive the bag, he could hardly have taken the bag out without some one's noticing him.

With these reflections and my examinations, I candidly told the president that it would cost too much to work up the case on any theory which I could conceive of; that his only hope was in waiting for something to be disclosed by accident, perhaps; but that he probably would never hear of the money, or know any more about the matter than he now knew, unless this suspicion of mine should happen to be correct (but how could we be sure of that?), namely, that the abstraction of this gold was the work of some bold thief, who, having studied the place, and giving himself a clerkly style, had suddenly dropped in when the bank was full of customers and the clerks much occupied, and passed himself off for one of them for a few seconds, taken the bag, and walked off with it as coolly as he came in.

But the president, and I too, after surveying matters again, conceived that an impossibility—"almost"—still there *was* the barest possibility that such might have been the fact. But if it were, how get a clue to the thief? How ever identify one dollar, or rather a single one of the ten dollar pieces? (for it was all in ten dollar pieces, in rolls: a heavy bag to snatch and carry away unperceived). There was a serious difficulty in that.

Of course I made the minutest inquiry as to the style of the bag, and was shown three or four which were said to be exactly like it, and took down upon my diary a copy of the special marks upon these. But I kept thinking all the while that it was folly to do this; and I dismissed reasoning upon the subject, and thought I might as well "trust luck" as to refuse to, especially as the president, in his urgency, said if I would "scour the city thoroughly," he would pay me so much a day for my time, for a given number of days, and that if I found any of the money I might have half of it besides. I told him his offer was hardly acceptable professionally; that I had my certain charges for my work by the day, dependent in amount a little upon the nature of the case, and that that would satisfy me; and that although I had about as much confidence in finding out the thief, or discovering the money, as I would have in labelling a plank "Philadelphia," and throwing

it into the bay at ebb tide, with the expectation it would float directly to the “City of Brotherly Love,” and land itself duly; yet I would try.

“Well, that’s all I can ask. ‘Try,’ that’s the word,” said the president; “and allow me to say that I know that means something with you, and I cannot say why I feel a confidence that you will succeed, for everything seems to be against us. Yet I do feel that success in part, at least, will be yours. We shall hear where that money has gone to, even if we cannot secure a dollar of it. But there must nothing be said outside of the bank. I cautioned the clerks before you came; for in my whole life I have never been more ashamed of anything than of this loss, whether it is the theft of one person, clerk, or what not, or another: and if it should be the fact that this is only one of those bold robberies which have sometimes taken place, I should feel more chagrined than ever.”

So I was to keep the matter a profound secret, at any rate; which is the reason why I may not at least introduce a name or two, which I should, for some reasons, be pleased to make public.

It is not a wise thing for a bank to make known to the public a loss of the kind. It looks like negligence in the conduct of its affairs. The public, too, would be disposed to think, even when the truth is told, that the statement is intended to cover the fact of a greater loss, or that a defalcation for example, instead of a robbery, has taken place. There is nothing like an *esprit de corps* among banks. Each acts for itself,—mercilessly, as regards every other bank,—unless, perhaps, when some question of a proposed general tax, which may be thought too high, is mooted; and each must look out for its reputation for soundness with scrupulous care.

Time went on, and, engrossed in other affairs, I paid but little heed to this, comparatively, though I did “try.” My first step was to visit several of the rag-gatherers and purchasers about the city, and offer a large reward to each of them should he chance to become possessed of a peculiarly marked bag (which I described), in such a manner as to be able to trace its history into his hands. In this way I made “detectives” of quite a number of persons. I suspected that the thief would, of course, destroy the bag, yet I thought it possible that, in the flush of his success, he might throw it by, and that with other things—old papers perhaps—it might get to the old rag and paper men’s hands. Besides, I visited certain points where thieves resort, and certain gambling saloons, with the intent of seeing if anybody there was peculiarly “flush” with gold, and I secured the assistance of certain brethren of the profession to the same end. But I could learn of nobody who seemed to have had a “windfall” of late, and it was so long before I got the slightest report from any of the rag-men, that, when I did, I suspected that the money would be dissipated, or so “scattered to the four winds,” even if it led to the fastening of suspicion upon somebody, that I had but little impulse to pursue the matter.

But finally, a dealer in rags sought me, saying that he had come across the bag in question, he thought, but that it was not in his possession, and he had not thought it best to try to get hold of it till I had seen it. It was in an up-town carriage-house, the latter belonging to one of the old aristocracy, and he suspected the bag belonged to the

coachman. He had been called into the house, in the prosecution of his business, to buy several bags of old rags, paper, etc., and as the rags, old clothes, etc., were promiscuously thrown together into the bags, without reference to color or quality, it was difficult to put a price upon them; the white ones predominating, the housekeeper would not sell them for the price he would give for unassorted rags, and so the bags were taken to the carriage-house, to be assorted and weighed there. While engaged with the stable-man and one of the servant girls in running over the rags, his eye happened to light upon a bag tied with a string, and hanging on a peg, which he saw, by a peculiar mark, must be like the one I had described to him so long before; and he asked the stable-man what was kept in that bag hung, up so nicely, and got the reply that it held some of the coachman's knickknacks; and he thought best to make no further inquiries then; but, putting his hand upon it, he found it held several things which "felt hard, like iron;" and this was all he knew about it, save that he, at the time he felt of it, took occasion to examine the marks upon it further, and felt assured that it was just the bag in question. He was quite enthusiastic over his discovery, and wished me to go at once, and look for myself.

But I could not leave that day, and making an appointment with him for the next day, met him as agreed, and proceeded to the carriage house. Fortunately we got in, without being under the necessity of asking to have the gate opened, as we watched an opportunity when the carriage was about being driven out. My friend the rag-man engineered the *entree* under my instructions, referring to his having assorted rags there a day or two before, and easily got on the good side of the coachman, while I looked after the bag, which my friend had told me where to find without trouble. I made up my mind instantly that that was the bag in question, and sitting down lazily on a box in the carriage-house, got into a good-natured talk with the coachman. It was easy to be seen that he was an innocent enough fellow, and could never have been guilty of the robbery, or of complicity therein. But I was at a loss to know how to approach him on the subject of the bag. At last I got up and walked about, and surveying the things,—various carriages, light buggies, harnesses, etc., in the barn, which the coachman was pleased enough to hear me compliment on their order and neatness, etc.,—I at length listlessly approached the bag, and taking hold of it, said, "Well, that's a funny mark—coat of arms, I 'spose?" giving the coachman a slight wink.

He laughed in his easy-going way, and said, "You're disposed to joke, I see. No, that's not *my* coat of arms; I could not afford it—he! he! he!—but it's my bag, I confess."

"I've got one just like it at home," said I; "pretty good bag to wear. I wonder where a fellow could get another like it?"

"I don't know. I got that off a heap of rags, in a cart that was standing on the corner here one morning, two or three weeks ago,—gave the boy six cents for it. Don't know where you could get another."

"What will you take for it?"

“He! he! *hee!*” exclaimed the coachman, bursting with laughter, as if I had said a comical thing. “Why, do you take me for a rag-dealer? he! he! he! I wouldn’t sell it for nothing; but do you want it much?”

“O, no, not much, but I should like it? want it badly enough to pay you for it—what you’ve a mind to ask.”

“Wal, I’ll give it to you. I thought that morning I wanted it to put screws and bolts in, but I’ve got a nice stand here since, and I can throw ‘em in the drawer,” as he pointed out the “stand,” and proceeded to take down the bag and pour the bolts, etc., into the drawer, and handing the bag to me, said, “Here, I’ll make you a present of this ‘ere thing,—he! he! hee!” I took it, of course, and thanked him.

Having got the bag into my possession, I asked him if he ever saw the man before of whom he bought the bag.

“ ’Twasn’t a man, but a boy, that goes by here, every few days, with a cart.”

“Would you know him anywhere you might see him?”

“Yes, he’s got a curious look about him that everybody would remember.”

“You’ve seen him often?”

“Yes. I have seen him go by here ever so many times within a year.”

“Well, I want to find him; and can I hire you to go with me to-day and pick him out? I’ll take you among the rag-pickers, and I will pay you well.”

“He! he! *hee!* That’s funny that you want to find that nasty-looking chap. Yes, I’ll go with you now,—in ten minutes, if ‘tain’t too fur.”

“We can go in an hour; but perhaps ’twon’t be the best time to find him. He may be out, and we shall not know whom to inquire for; and if we get on track of anybody that we think is he, may be you’ll have to go again tomorrow. They’ll tell us when he’ll be apt to be found at home.”

“I’d know him by his dog, say nothing of himself,” interposed the coachman. “Yes, I’ll go;” and the coachman got ready, and we started off for Sixty-second Street, where there were then a number of low houses, occupied by rag-pickers. I thought I would go up instead of down in the city, as the coachman said the loaded cart of the rag-man was headed that way. We took a Fourth Avenue car, and had not gone more than halfway to our point of destination, when the coachman, who was standing on the platform, having given his seat to a lady, violently pulled the bell, and called to me: “See here, mister” (for I had given him no name as yet), “here’s the very fellow we’re after;” and I got out with

him, and he ran to catch the rag-man, whom we had just past, and I came up as he had stopped him.

“This is the man, and that’s the tarnal striped dog I told you of. See here” (to the rag-man); “this man wants to see you.”

The rag-man looked at me with wonder and some expression of fear. “Let him see me, then, if he wants to,” he muttered; “no *great* sight, I guess.”

“Yes, I wished to see you a minute,” said I; “and I wanted to talk with you. I won’t hinder you long, and will give you twenty-five cents an hour for the time I hinder you. Here, take that to begin with,” slipping a new twenty-five cent piece of silver into his hand. The rag-man’s eyes glistened, and he looked up with an air of mingled surprise and gratitude.

“Your route” (for all these fellows have routes of their own, which they observe with as much honor among themselves as bakers and milkmen, never trespassing on each other),—“your route lies, when you go up, along such and such streets?”—naming some.

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, did you ever see this man before?” pointing to the coachman.”

He eyed him carefully, and replied, “Pears to me I have; but I dunno.”

“Well, did you ever see this bag?” I asked, taking it from my pocket, and handing it to him.

He looked at it but an instant, and said, “Yes; and I guess that’s the man that give me six cents for it; yes, that *is* the man.”

“Well, my good fellow,” said I, “I want to find out where you bought it. That’s what I hunted you up to inquire about. I want to find the man that sold it to you.”

The ragman’s memory was good, and he told me where he got the bag. It was among the last things he purchased the day he sold it to the coachman; and there was something about it peculiar, in this, that the rag-man, grumbling a little at the price he had paid for a few pounds of rags,—some few cents,—the old woman of whom he bought them threw that in, and told him to “go ‘long.”

I dismissed the coachman, offering to pay him for his time, but he would take nothing; and I went on with the rag-man and his striped dog. But it was slow work, and we had some distance to go; so I assisted him in getting his cart and dog housed in a livery stable on our course, and took the cars, and soon found the old woman, a gatherer up of old odds and ends, living in Bayard Street, just out of the Bowery. She traded a “good deal,” she said, “with William, here” (the rag-man), “off and on.”

I brought the matter of the bag to her notice. She remembered it well; and the next thing was to ask where she got it. That she could tell me, too. She had a daughter living in a building in Pine Street, below William, and it was she who sold it to her mother, with a lot of old rags and papers. "It comed to me," said she, "in the pile I had from her."

On inquiry, I found that the purchase had been made, as near as I could calculate, about three days after the robbery. I employed the old woman to go down to introduce me to her daughter, whom I found to be a very good, honest woman, who got a living by cleaning down-town offices, while her husband did a little private watching, now and then, and helped "along shore" a little.

The woman being introduced to me by her mother, who said I was an old friend of hers (as I had asked her to; for I had given her some slight hint of why I wanted to learn where the daughter got the bag, and had paid her beforehand for her time in waiting on me), made ready reply to my queries.

"Yes, yes; now I do remember," said she, scratching her forehead in a peculiar way with her stubbed fingers, where I got that; it was that sassy brat in ——'s office gin it to me."

"Where's that?"

Her reply gave me the number of a broker's office in Wall Street, and things began at once to shape themselves in my mind. If I had not been a detective, I might have been surprised; but it was easy now to form an intelligible theory. I did not know this man, and made no inquiries about him or the woman; but I asked her how the boy came to give it to her.

"He ain't a young boy," replied she; "he's full-growed, and has got whiskers,—side whiskers,—but he's full of old Ned, and acts like a boy, poking fun all the while; and I call him a boy. Well, he gin it to me one night,— let's see,"—and she went over the list of names of offices where she had worked, and said, "Yes, it was Friday,"— fixing a time just the day after the robbery. She was there, it seems, just after business hours were over, to clean the room. Her day there was Saturday, generally, instead of Friday, and she went three times a week usually, and washed and mopped. Being a jolly woman, she was bantering with the "boy" (clerk), as she called him, who had staid to lock up after her. The clerk had thrown some old papers upon her, which he gave her to carry off, and she'd made a wad of some of them, and thrown them back to him; and so they had "smouched" each other,— as she termed that sort of play,—when just as she was going out, the clerk seized this bag from under the counter, and threw it, rolled up, at her head. She seized it, and said, "Thank you; this will do to bile puddings in; I'll take it."

"Take it, Sarah," said he; "and we'll call it quits for now," as she left the office.

That was her circumstantial account. I was glad, of course, to find her memory so clear. There was no mistaking that evidence. The next step was to make the acquaintance of that boy, or clerk; and to do so, I went next day into the broker's office to get some

money changed. The clerk was in; and after doing my business, I got into some conversation with him,—for I had taken an early hour when I knew there would be few customers in. I found him apparently an excellent young man, good-hearted, intelligent, and honest, I thought. His employer was not in; but I called at a later hour of the day, having watched the premises, and seen the clerk go out on some errand, and got some money changed by the broker; and I studied him as well as I could. He was a wiry man, of medium size, with much determination in his face, indicated particularly by one of those protruding chins, which disclose not only force of character, but the ability to do mean, desperate things.

My mind was made up that the broker was the man who stole the money—such was my fixed opinion; and now how to trap him. The clerk was an honest young man; of that I was quite satisfied. The broker could not, I thought, be doing a large business, and his face did not indicate that liberality which would allow his giving his clerk (and he had but one, in his little basement den of an office) a large salary, and I made up my mind that the first step was to get the clerk out of that office into some other place, by giving him a larger salary.

At this juncture of affairs I sought the president, and told him that I had traced the matter into a Wall Street broker's office; but did not at that time tell him where: that there was a clerk in the office who was evidently a very nice and efficient fellow, and that I wanted to get him out of there as the next step; that he was surely a good penman, and probably a first-rate bookkeeper; and he must find a place for him, and I would try to get him out.

To this the president quickly consented, and told me to call next day, and he would have some place or other for him, among some of his friends. We discussed what a clerk probably got a year in such a place; and decided that two hundred dollars more would be bribe enough for him. "And I'll do better than that for him, if necessary," said the president. "Now tell me who this broker is, if you please."

I declined to tell him then, for I wished to get my evidence a little more certain. I called the next day as he told me, and found that he had been active, and had secured three or four places for the young man, should I find it necessary to get him into one. I lost no time in coming upon the young man that day, as he went out to his customary lunch, and walked along with him, managing to address myself to his jocose nature, and we sat beside each other on stools at the restaurant. I went out with him, and a part of the way to his office with him too, when, stopping suddenly, I said,—

"I must go another way; hope to meet you again;" and drawing my handkerchief suddenly from the outer breast pocket of my coat, as if to wipe my mouth, flirted out with it some tickets, three of them to Wallack's Theatre, with which I had prepared myself for the purpose. These were "complimentaries," with which I was not infrequently supplied, in view of some services I had once rendered Mr. James Wallack, in a matter involving no small amount of jewels, etc.

I picked up the tickets as they fell to the pavement, and, said I, "This is providential for you, perhaps. I see you like fun; there's a good comedy on to-night; would you like to go?" handing him one of the tickets. "And here's another; maybe you'd like to take your lady."

"Ho, ho!" said he, "that's generous; but I won't take but one, for I haven't any lady to take."

"Well, give one to some friend, and take him along;" but he declined, and the upshot of the matter was, that he agreed to meet me at the Metropolitan that night, and go with me. I told him to keep his tickets, and bring along any friend. But he came alone, and I was glad of it. The play was excellent, and between acts we discussed it. I fancied I had gotten well into his good graces before it was over; and when it was, we walked out, and along Broadway together, and stopped once or twice and "lemonaded." The young man was temperate, as I was glad to find—all the better witness—and before he reached home that night, I managed to find out all about his salary, etc., and had told him that a young man of his parts ought to have a better place. He felt so too, of course; but said it was hard to find, as he had no friends to help him. Unfortunately, he said, all his relatives in New York were of the medium class of people in money matters; and his father, who was a Methodist minister, and had some influence with his people when living, had died some five years before, and these church people had pretty much forgotten them.

I found that, from the latitude the president had given me, I could offer the young man a salary that astonished him. He said he could leave his employer at any time, with one day's notice, for there were calls every day for employment by clerks. Suffice it that in four days from that time I had the young man installed as bookkeeper in a house where he got nearly double his former salary. Besides, in my going about with him, I had fished out facts enough in the career of the broker, his old employer, to convince me that he was all I had taken him for.

Finally, I went back to the president, and told him whom I suspected, and what my evidence was, and that I had not yet said anything to the young man about the bag or about him; and we arranged it that the young man should be invited to his house by me the next night; which was done, and he accompanied me. The president had prepared a room for a private conference, and after I had introduced the young man to the president, and informed him that he, and not I, was his benefactor, to whom the young man expressed his gratitude, I took up a paper from off the table on which I had placed it, and under which I had slyly tucked the bag. I had gotten the young man seated near the table. As I lifted the paper, and noticed the bag with its peculiar mark on it, I said to the president, —

"Beg pardon, Mr.—, but this singular device excited my curiosity;" and I took up the bag and looked at it. "Allow me to ask what it is."

“O,” said he, “it’s a sort of private coat of arms. ‘Tis a little curious, isn’t it?” and he commented on it; and I, as a matter of politeness, passed it to the young man, asking, “Did you ever see anything like it before?”

“No, not that I know of.” said he; “and yet there’s something familiar to me about this bag,” and he turned it over. “No, I never saw this device upon anything!” and he laid it down, and the conversation dropped on that point, and we fell into conversation about his old employer, the amount of his business, his habits, and so forth, and it was easy to see that he had no great respect for him. Finally I led on to the matter of having seen the jolly scrubber there, the woman Sarah, to whom he had given the bag; and finding she proved to be all right, I said to him, “Sarah gave me that bag, and that bag got you your present place, through the kindness of Mr. —— here.”

The young man looked astonished, with a question in his eye, as if asking me to explain.

“Well, I will explain. You remember one day (fixing the time), that, after office hours, when she came there to scrub, you and she got into a frolic, and threw things at each other?”

“O, yes,” said he, “very well; and I hauled the bag out from under the counter, and threw it at her.”

“Just so; that’s her story too. And now I wish to ask you if you knew how that bag got under the counter?”

“Why, certainly. Mr.—” (his employer, the broker), “took it out of his pocket a day or two before, and tucked it under there.”

“What was his condition that day? that is, what was his health?”

“O, that was one of his nervous days, and he was much excited.”

“What did he place this bag with there—what’s there?”

“There’s a shelf there; and the day I gave it to Sarah, I had been putting some papers there, and pulled it out, and remembered it.”

“Then he wouldn’t be apt to see it, to remind him of its being there?”

“No, sir, not unless he stooped down to get something there.”

It was evident to me, then, how the broker had forgotten it. We managed to make inquiries enough to satisfy ourselves that the broker was much excited at that time, and that he about the same time had made purchase of some building lots in “East New York,” on Long Island, for he speculated in real estate somewhat, and was a pretty close man, and “rich enough,” as the young man thought.

We had obtained all the evidence we were likely to, and the young man and I left, he being in ignorance of how and to what end we had gotten that bag there. The next step was to get at the broker. We examined into his real estate and found the young man right in his judgment—the broker was well off. We laid many plans; and he wanted to secure the money, and it wouldn't answer to do things by halves. Our broker was a desperate man, but a nervous one, and I thought the best way was to take the lion by his mane. So, stalking into his office,—I being well armed,—I invited him into his little back room, having placed the president near the office, to come in a minute after me. I engaged the broker in conversation for half a minute, and then suddenly pulling out the bag, asked him (nodding my head towards the other little front room where the new clerk was); and saying, “No noise, unless you are disposed to make it,” I asked,—

“Did you ever see that before, sir?”

He reached his hand for it, turning pale.

“No, I never saw it.”

“Do you know whose it is?”

“No, I don't,” half stammering, but with an air of decision. Luckily, just at this time, the president stalked in.

“Here's a man who will tell you whose it is,” said I; and holding it up to the president, I asked, “Whose is this bag?”

“Mine,” said he; “but the gold that was taken with it was the Bank's,” as he eyed Mr.—the broker, sternly; “and you are the man who took it.”

“I protest,” said the broker, “that I never saw that bag before;” but his manner showed guilt.

“Well,” said I, “that's a question of evidence. Excuse me for a moment, and be calm;” and I stepped to the door, and nodded to the old clerk to come in. He came, and the broker's astonishment was evidently great.

“Did you ever see that before ? and where did you first see it?” I asked of the clerk.

“In Mr. —'s” (the broker's) “hands.”

“Where did he take it from, and what did he do with it?”

The young man told his simple story; and I told him we would relieve him, and away he went, still ignorant of the theft, but probably wondering what it all meant.

I then said to the broker, "You are most thoroughly caught. That young man is only one of our witnesses, and he does not know of your theft yet. You are surrounded on all sides, and I advise you to send your clerk out on business, and settle up matters here at once. We want the money back, and pay for our time."

There was a momentary struggle in the broker's heart. He was very pale, and his firm set chin quivered for a moment. He evidently took in the whole situation of affairs; but I thought I would not leave him wholly to his unaided reflections, and I remarked, for it was all clear now of course, how the thing had been done: —

"From the hour that you personated a clerk, and coolly walked behind the desk and took the money, you must understand that you were known—recognized; but we needed further proof to convict you. The bag has supplied that," (and I saw, as I spoke, that a light went over his countenance, as if some purpose of his soul had suddenly changed). "Had we followed you up at once, and found this gold, we could not have identified it; and we have followed you, therefore, with tireless patience, and would have pursued you for a year yet. You see your condition. We do not wish to prosecute you criminally, unless you force us to do so. You may have stolen the money under a pressure, or in some hour of temptation, which would never come again. We want our money and pay for our time, as I have said; and we do not propose to delay at all. Do you understand me?"

The broker quivered for a moment. There was a struggle of pride in his soul which he gratified with an oath, which I will not repeat here, condemning his folly and himself to the "bottomless pit," and then he sank back in his chair, and tears filled his eyes.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I give it up. You are very lenient. That gold has cursed me every day. I was a madman that day. Had been drinking a little. It was only one stout glass of brandy, though, for I seldom touch a drop" (which I know to be true). "I had a month before read a story in a London paper which —sent me" (naming a well-known broker of Wall Street, who had gone to Europe on business), "narrating the like exploit of a bold thief. I found myself often thinking of his daring, and that day the fiend got hold of me. It was but the work of a moment. I was near the — — — Bank. I stepped in, and saw many there; stuck my hat in here" (within his vest, a small slouched hat); "and before I knew it, the thing was done. There's my confession. Do with me what you please. I have often resolved to restore the money; but I have as often failed, for fear that somehow I'd get found out."

"Well, we are satisfied," said I; "and all we want is what I have asked."

"Of course it shall be done; but for God's sake you must forgive me, and forever conceal my name, for I never can do such a thing again. I have suffered too much from it."

"The matter has been concealed from everybody except the clerks in the bank, who are pledged to secrecy; not even your own clerk knows that any money has been lost, and

nobody but Mr. —” (the president) “and me has any suspicion of you. We wanted to get the money more than we wanted you.”

“I am ready to settle now,” said he.

But he had not on hand all the money we wanted; but before two hours were over proper deeds, in due legal form and execution, conveyed to the president, in personal mortgage, at least five times as much as was needed to make up the deficit in cash. This proved the most lucrative job for me which I ever “worked up,” and the bank got back all its money, with interest thereon.

It only remains for me to say, that that broker became an “altered man” in some respects. I did not like his countenance, and I did not believe his expressions of penitence fully. There was a dark, bad “streak” in his nature, I thought; but he has committed no more robberies, I suspect, unless they were done in his capacity of member of the Common Council; to which body he was afterwards elected, having left Wall Street, and entered upon other than the broker’s business, and turned a ward politician. But let not other thieves, therefore, nourish hope from the example of his good (or bad) fortune.

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