

The Wolf In Sheep's Clothing

The Antiquity Of That Sheep's Skin And Its Pious Usefulness—A Large Loss Of Silks, Satins, Laces, And Other Goods—A Consultation— A Long Study—The Various Characters Of Several Clerks, What They Did, And How They Killed "Spare Time"—Influence Of The City On Morals—New York Central Park—A Most Wonderful Series Of Thefts—The Matter Inexplicable At First, Grows More Subtle—A Gleam Of Light At Last—A Bright Italian Boy Plays A Part—A Lady Followed—More Light—An Extemporized Servant Of The Croton Water Board Gets Inside A Certain House—Sarah Crogan And I —How A House In Nineteenth Street Delivered Up Its Treasures—"William Bruce," Alias Charles Phillips—A Very Strange Denouement—A Meek Man Transformed; His Rage —A Delivery Up, With Accompanying Jewels—A "Widow" Not A Widow Removes—What Sarah Crogan Thought.

by George McWatters

IT is an astonishing thing to a detective, and ought to be to every person of sense, it seems to me, that after the experiences of ages "the-wolf-in-sheep's-clothing" still keeps on deluding people. Everybody ought by this time to know the animal, and everybody does, in a sense; but everybody has heard of him, and seen him somewhere along the path of life, and either been bitten by him, or sorely frightened, or something of the sort. Yet forever he is playing his wiles with success with everybody; and his sheep skin is the same one he has used over since historic time began, and perhaps long before that. But I did not take my pen to descant upon the blunders and stupidities of my fellow-mortals, or to adorn this page with a lecture on morals and hypocrisies, but to tell a tale in which, perchance, a "moral" will be better "painted" by the facts it discloses than by my discursive pen.

I was called upon one day by the confidential clerk of a large mercantile house in this city, and informed by him that he had been sent by one of the partners of the house, —the other partners being abroad, one in Europe, and one in the South, —in regard to the matter of extensive robberies from their store; and it had been thought best that I should be made acquainted with the chief facts before visiting the house— as they supposed, of course, he said, I should wish to. I told him (and here, for sake of brevity, let me give him a name, which is correct only in the initial letters—Charles Phillips)—I told Mr. Phillips that his policy was quite right, and that I would listen then and there to his story. He went on to recount that, probably for a long while, the house had been robbed of various kinds of goods, but that of late, particularly, they had been greatly annoyed by missing large quantities of the highest priced goods: their best silks, satins, laces, etc., which, being costly goods, amounted, as nearly as they could calculate, —in one month's loss, too, —to some eighteen hundred dollars; "and of course," said he, "the loss may be more, for perhaps we do not know all we have lost. He told me of plans which he and the partner at home had devised to find out the thief or thieves, and the watch that had been set, all to no avail. He had a different opinion about it, he said, from the partner, who thought some of the clerks must be the guilty parties; and it did seem so, sometimes, he said, for the store was well watched nights by a trusty watchman, whom he himself had watched as well, and felt confident that he could have no confederates: and, besides, the things taken were not usually in reach of customers—only the clerks could get at them. So he thought his employer excusable, perfectly, for his suspicion that some of the clerks must be the thief. Yet for his part he could not believe it,

inasmuch as he had known all the clerks so long, —five years, a majority of them, and the rest of them, save three, who had been but from two to six months in the house, for from one year up to three and four; and he thought he knew all about them, and could not allow himself to suspect any one of them. But, nevertheless, his employer, who could not in his own mind fasten suspicion upon any specific person, had fully made up his mind that some of the clerks were guilty, and they were now going to wake up the matter, if possible, and “bring things to a focus,” as he expressed it.

I listened to what Mr. Phillips had to say, and inquired how many clerks there were in the establishment, when he informed me that, aside from himself, there were thirty-seven.

“Thirty-seven?” said I; “and you are not able to say that any one of these is more innocent or less guilty than another, eh?”

“No.”

“Well, then, we’ve a job on hand which may last for a good while, and require not only time, but patience, and a good deal of money to work out; for we might hit on the thief the first thing, but we might not be able to identify him till we had been through with all the rest, and satisfied ourselves of their innocence, you see, and it may cost your house more than it would to suffer the losses, and let accident, perhaps, hereafter disclose the guilty party.”

“I have talked this very point over with Mr. Redding,” (the partner), said he, “and he says the firm must go to any necessary cost to find the thief, and put a stop to peculations; that the house cannot, in fact, long do business at this rate of loss, and he’s made up his mind to go into the matter thoroughly, and when he gets *his* head set, there’s no moving him. The house must go ahead in this business, and let you have your way about it.”

I learned from Mr. Phillips that *many* of the goods taken were of a peculiar kind, but after all, not to be readily identified, if the private marks of the house were removed; “and any thief,” said he, “shrewd enough to steal from our store, at the rate the thefts have been going on for the last few weeks, is wise enough, I dare say, to leave nothing of a story-telling nature on the goods. He’s probably removed our private marks at his earliest convenience.”

After our conference was over, and I had agreed to call at the store the next day, in the capacity of a wholesale customer “from Buffalo,” and Mr. Phillips was gone, I set myself to work at some theory in the case, and found myself quite baffled at every point. I had not facts enough yet in my possession to form an opinion; and as I prided myself in those days, more than I do now, on my unerring skill in detecting a thief by his countenance, I resolved to theorize no more till I had gone through the house, and scrutinized each clerk’s face. But that night I talked the matter over with certain of my brother detectives, for it was evident that there was work enough to be done, if we wished to save time, for several of them. Each of my men thought the matter could be easily solved. Some of the clerks were, of course, the thieves, and they only needed to be “spotted” for a few nights at once, and sure as fate the guilty one would be brought to light ‘twas agreed; but it didn’t prove so easy a job, after all.

The next day I called upon Mr. Redding, it having been understood between me and Mr. Phillips that he was not to recognize me before the clerks, until after I might have been presented to him by Mr. Redding, and then only cursorily. I handed Mr. Redding a note which I had prepared, and as he did not know me personally, and was a little taken aback at what I said in the note, I giving him sundry orders and directions therein, his strangership to me was quite evident to the clerks who chanced to be about when we met. Mr. Redding showed me all the distinction that I required, and himself showed me through the establishment. It was a long list of goods, indeed, that which I prized, in every department; and we took our time, in order that I might have the amplest opportunity to study each clerk's face, which I did to my satisfaction, but to no certainty as to which one if any was the thief. I thought that either my usual sagacity had fled me, or else that the clerks were a singularly honest set of young men, and withal exceedingly well chosen and clever.

I was at times tempted to suspect one or two of them; but I could not tell why, and came to the conclusion at last that this temptation resulted rather from my anxiety to "spot" some one, than from good judgment; and I concluded that part of the business without having arrived at any conclusion whatever as to the guilty parties. After this Mr. Redding called his chief confidential clerk, Mr. Phillips, into the counting-room, and we quietly talked over the matter. At Mr. Redding's request, Mr. Phillips produced such a list as they had been able to make of the goods lost, which amounted in all to quite an astonishing sum; but of these things they could inform me of nothing which was very peculiar in its nature—nothing the like of which other stores had not. But I finally requested to see some of the richest silks, such as those they had lost, and was taken by Mr. Redding to see them. I have a pretty accurate eye for forms and colors, and I paid special attention to a piece of silk, the like of which I had never seen, and the cost of which was more than that of any other piece in the store. It was a heavy silk—would stand alone, and had in it "ribs," after the fashion somewhat of a twisted column, the pattern of which was perhaps borrowed from a column in the court of some old convent, such as I had often seen in Italy, where for a year I was occupied in that country ferreting out some scamps who had fled there from Philadelphia, and who were badly wanted to settle sundry accounts. With the association of the "ribs" and the column, I was not likely to forget that piece of silk. But other houses had the like, and I might not be able to identify the piece as coming from Mr. Redding's store, if I should chance to come across it in some retail store, at the pawnbroker's, or anywhere else. Yet it might prove a clew, and I put my faith in it; with what result, will be seen further on, for I cannot mar my narrative by introducing it here.

It was quite evident to me that the thief must be some one or more of the clerks; and I could not, on inquiry into the habits of the clerks, so far as Mr. Redding understood them, or in any way, fix upon any one of the clerks as more likely than another to be the thief. These young men had been well selected; were smart fellows, each in his way. Indeed, Mr. Redding thought that, on the whole, his house had the best set of clerks of all the houses in the city, and although he was convinced that some one or more of them (and he as well as I inclined to the notion that there must be two at least) were guilty, yet he said he would gladly give a thousand dollars if the guilt could be fastened upon somebody without the store; for the house had always treated its clerks as if they were the partners' own children in many respects, and given the clerks rather better wages than they could get anywhere else, and some unusual privileges. They had nearly all been long with the house, and I thought that Mr. Redding seemed to suffer as much from the fear that some

of the clerks would prove to be the guilty party, as from the loss of the goods themselves. In fact, he confessed that he felt “chicken-hearted” about the matter, as he expressed it; but his partners’ interests as well as his own must be looked to, and so he was resolute.

I returned to my office, and set about immediate preparations on the work. I was going at it that night, and I saw that there was no other way than to take matters coolly, and work systematically. I sent for some of my men, having apprised Mr. Redding that it would “cost something” to work up the case, and that to do it within any conscionable time I must set several men at work. He had given me quite a wide range for expenses, saying that it would not do to be guilty of any laches in the business for want of means; because, at the rate they were losing property, with all their eyes open at that, they would soon have to give up business.

I set my men to keeping their eyes on certain of the clerks whose places of residence and names Mr. Redding had given me. He had not procured the streets and numbers of all of them, but was to do so next day. The clerks designated were carefully watched and followed, to find out how and where they spent their nights, for it was my conjecture, that whoever stole the goods was under the influence of some demon passion; that he either gambled, and was deeply in debt, and stole the goods and sold them, or that some wily woman had him in her power, or some fiend of a man was driving him on in crime; and it was necessary first to find out all about where these young men spent their time out of the store.

I took my own place in the work, and having been so much about the store that day, it was necessary that I disguise myself, as I did; and I took my station on Broadway, near the store, and waited for the young men to sally forth, directing my men to the boarding-places of some of the clerks, with as accurate descriptions of them as I could give.

I had not long to wait before some of the clerks passed me, and I selected two, whom I followed. Darkness was just coming on. They stopped on a corner to lay out their programme for the evening, and concluded to not go home to tea, but to go to a restaurant, where I followed them, and remained there till they left; and when they came out they went up Broadway, and stopping before a billiard saloon, seemed to be debating the question whether they would go up or not; but finally they went up the stairs, and I remained behind a few minutes, and then followed them. Somehow, as I entered the room, and my eye fell upon the face of one of them, something seemed to tell me that he was the guilty fellow. The young men had already commenced a game, and were busy with the bewitching balls. I lounged about, and finally got a partner for a single game. The young men did not bet—only played for sport, and at a seasonable hour left, not however, till I, having observed that they would soon depart, had gotten down on to the pavement before them. When they came down, they set off together, walked some distance together, turned down a side street, and on the corner of it and another street bade each other good night. One of them went on to his boarding-house, and so I suppose did the other.

The next night I gave my particular attentions to those same young men. They went over to the Bowery Theatre, and like sensible fellows, too, had seats in the pit, in which part of the house I also secured a place. They seemed to enjoy the play greatly, and one of them threw a quarter of a dollar on the stage in lieu of a bouquet, in testimony of his appreciation of the splendid

representation of a mock Richard the Third by the leading actor, and I fancied that perhaps I had found out the young man's leading passion—his besetting sin.

When they left the theatre they proceeded to an alehouse, and after taking a mug apiece of somebody's "best pale ale," sallied out, and wended their way together homeward, till they came to the parting-place again; and I followed the one whom I did not pursue the night before, only to be led on a long distance up into Hudson Street, when the young man applying his night-key to the door of a very respectable-looking house, entered and vanished. I had begun to make up my mind that this sort of work would not do; that these clerks were but like ten thousand others, who, wearied by their day's work, sought recuperation in slight dissipations, and, perhaps, questionable pleasures, such as billiards, and comedies, and ales give. But I followed up some other of the clerks, reporting every day to Mr. Redding or to Mr. Phillips very ill success. The latter was particularly anxious to have me "go on, and make thorough work of it" and as the days went on I became much attached to him.

My men, too, brought me their accounts daily, with as little success towards the desired end as I myself had, and we were frequently on the point of giving up the job. We concluded that perhaps several of the clerks were engaged in this robbery; that they might have formed a secret society among themselves, and that they probably had a safe place to send their goods to, and a skilful "receiver," who would pay them perhaps half price for the goods, but we could find nothing to sustain this hypothesis. Two or three of the clerks were quite literary in their tastes, and belonged to some debating club, I forget the name now, but it was quite an institution at the time, and thither my men had followed them, and quite fallen in love with the spirited manner and eloquent speech-making of one of the clerks. Of course they followed these wherever they went, and nothing could convince them that these young men were guilty. One of the clerks was an inveterate theatre-goer. He went every night to one theatre or another; but my men found out that he usually had passes, and was, to some extent, a dramatic critic, furnishing the reporters of sundry papers with notes, and that in this way he probably got his passes, and so did not in this way waste much of his slender salary. He neither smoked nor drank liquor, and seemed to be always alone, careless of companionship; so he was dropped as "not the man." Another of the clerks had, it was found, a strange fancy for old books and antique engravings. He spent, evidently, as little money on his person as would suffice to dress neatly and well enough for his position, and put all he could have into old books and engravings; and we found that he was well known by all those strange men, who in these days mostly collect in Nassau Street, and live among the rubbish and dirt of old, and for most part, worthless books, driving keen bargains, giving little, and asking much for some rare old folly of a book, or some worthless volume in which some lord of the blood, or some royal sovereign of literature, like Johnson or Addison, had chanced to write his name. The young clerk had a business man's as well as an artist's eye for these things, we found, and was said, by the old book-men, to make such excellent assortments of engravings, etc., which he bound together, as to be able to realize in their sale quite an advance on the original purchase. And so we found merit instead of crime in him, and felt very sure that he could be "counted out." But we had some singular experiences. One of the clerks, as did indeed three of them, boarded in Brooklyn. This one was a Sunday-school teacher, but he came over to New York one Sunday night to attend a religious meeting, and being particularly followed that night, he was found going into a disreputable "ladies' boarding-house." Some of the clerks were Sunday-school teachers, especially certain of them who were middle-

aged, and married; but we discovered, in our scrutiny of these clerks, that these older ones especially, had a habit of taking their country customers and friends to see the sights of the city at night, and that in order to beguile these persons, in other words, to “show them proper attentions,” they were not scrupulous about forgetting their Sunday-school teachings, and taking these customers into the most questionable dens in the city. In those days the vulgar phrase “seeing the elephant” was more common than now, and included participation in all sorts of small and impure vices. In my opinion, this greed for trade, which impells the competing clerks of different houses to show every possible attention of this kind to the young men (as well as old, for often the old are worse than the young) who come to the city to buy goods, has led to the downfall, the moral and financial ruin, of thousands who would otherwise have led honorable, and perhaps noble lives. But things in this respect are better now a days than they were many years ago in New York. The great advance which the fine arts have made in this country, even within the last ten years, has had much to do with this improvement. The theatre is “a thing of beauty” and attractive in comparison to what it used to be; and everywhere scattered throughout the city are many matters of the higher arts to attract and interest the stranger or frequent visitor even, and so in a measure keep him out of harm’s way. The Central Park has been a great educator of the city people out of vices, and has an elevating influence upon country people coming to the city, many of whom “luxuriate” in a visit to it, instead of “dissipate,” as in years ago, in the dens of the crowded city; for in winter even, when the cold is intense enough to make ice, joyous nights are spent in skating on the Park pond, or in beholding the witching gayeties of the accomplished skaters.

But the days went on, —I almost daily conferring with Mr. Redding, or his accomplished chief clerk, Mr. Phillips, whose sagacity and inventive genius pleased me greatly. He would have made—in fact was, in one sense—one of the most shrewd and capable of detectives. There was no avenue for the slightest suspicion which his keen brain could not discover when Mr. Redding seemed disposed to give up in despair, as from time to time I faithfully reported to him the empty results of my own and my men’s constant watching, or drew on the house, on different occasions, for current expenses. Mr. Phillips stimulated him to further endeavor, feeling, as he said, and as an honest man, in his capacity, could not well but feel, that the responsibility on his part was morally as great as if he were the pecuniary sufferer, and he continued to bravely and nobly work in the interest of the house. But constantly the peculations went on; and so mysteriously were they conducted, that I believe it would have required no great amount of argument to convince Mr. Redding that invisible hands took part in the thefts; that the spirits of some old merchants, perhaps (not having forgotten their greed of gain in the other world), were the authors and doers of this wickedness; for he was half inclined to belief in modern spiritualism, and the partner who was in Europe was an avowed spiritualist, his daughter, a sickly young lady of eighteen or twenty years of age, being a “medium.” It was partly for her health’s sake that the father had taken her to Europe. Mr. Redding was confounded, as from time to time, something more of much value, often of great value, was missed. Finally he took up his lodgings for a few nights at the store, with an inside and an outside watchman, and with an ugly watchdog for a companion; but this did no good, for valuables were still missed, and what was the most perplexing thing, were apparently taken in the night. Mr. Redding became sensibly weak, looked haggard, was restless and nervous, and his family physician ordered him to suspend work. Mr. Redding had great pride about this matter, and all the clerks were put under an injunction of secrecy in regard to the losses, and I have reason to think they faithfully respected

the mandate. This secrecy was suggested as a matter of pride as well as prudence, for Mr. Redding would not have had his brother merchants in the city know of the troubles in his house for anything. It would have led, he thought, to the financial injury of the firm.

Finally, Mr. Redding was taken sick, and remained at home for three days. On the second day he sent for me, and showed me an advertisement he had caused to be put in the Herald, calling for twenty clerks of experience in the dry goods business, etc. "None need apply who cannot produce the best certificates of character, and come recommended by all parties in whose employ they may have ever been." He named a box in the Herald office as the place of address, and he already had sent his servant to the Herald office, and when I arrived was opening one of over fifty letters received. He showed me the advertisement and responses with an air of pride.

"I have made up my mind that our salvation is in a change of clerks," said he. "The innocent and guilty must go alike. I will first dismiss twenty, —fortunately, we make our contracts with clerks in such way that I can do this, —and after twenty new ones are worked in, and know our modes of doing business, I will dismiss all the rest, and fill their places with new men. What do you think of my new plan?"

I told him that, as a *dernier resort*, it was probably wise, but that fruitless though had been our work heretofore, I nevertheless wanted to try further; and I proposed that he go on and make the acquaintance of the new applicants privately, examine their credentials, and get ready to receive them, if wanted, in due time; but that so great and sudden a change of clerks could not but tend to confuse his customers, especially as many of their clerks had been with him for years, and they would inevitably take many of the customers with them; while he could not be sure that the newly-incoming clerks would bring him any trade at all. There was a wildness in Mr. Redding's eyes that day, which looked to me precursory of insanity, and I felt that anything like full espousal of his plan would excite him, and perhaps hasten the wreck of his intellect. But Mr. Redding got better, and reappeared at his store, and he told me when I next met him thereafter, that he had no heart to turn away some of his clerks who had been so long his companions, and he found it impossible to select the first twenty for decapitation.

Mr. Redding communicated his plan to Mr. Phillips, and the latter, with his usual sagacity, opposed it, suggesting several reasons, among which was one which weighed much with Mr. Redding, to the effect that he could be no surer of the honesty of the new clerks than of that of the old, and that it was by no means certain that like losses were not being suffered in other houses, and that some of these new clerks might have been dismissed under like circumstances to those which suggested the dismissal of his own clerks, and he added, "If you were to dismiss the clerks, you would be obliged, in honor, to give each one of them the best commendation for faithfulness in business, and you could not conscientiously refuse to add, 'for honesty and integrity.' "

"No, no; I could not do less; that is true," said Mr. Redding; "and perhaps the new comers would bring certificates from employers situated just as we are. I had not thought of that."

There was the greatest respect on the part of the under clerks manifested towards Mr. Phillips, and I doubt not that if he communicated this matter of the proposed change, and his opposition to

it, to them, that he won upon their gratitude and regard still further. Mr. Phillips was indeed a model man in every respect. He had not only great business tact, but he had the refined manners of a cultivated gentleman, and was evidently considerable of a literary man withal, and was, I was told, a very happy public speaker. He was, as I have before observed, a man of ready expedients, of fertile inventive genius, and it was difficult to see how the house could well get on without him. But as the difficulties of the situation increased, Mr. Phillips began to evince much wear and tear of mind, and he told Mr. Redding, that though his contract called for two years more of service (it had been three years before), he thought he should be compelled to ask that the contract be rescinded, and he would withdraw from business for a while and get rest.

Mr. Redding would hear nothing of this; but, of course, he could not oblige, nor would it have been expedient if he could, Mr. Phillips to remain, and so, to cheer him up, and secure his inestimable services longer, he agreed to advance his salary from the beginning of the next month by fifty per cent., and insisted that Mr. Phillips should give up the old contract, and enter into a new one to that effect. This was an unexpected turn of affairs for Mr. Phillips, and of course stirred his deepest gratitude, and he entered with renewed vigor into the matter of the detection of the thieves—himself offering, as he did, to forego the pleasures of his nights at home, in the bosom of his charming family, and occupying a couch, at the store with the watchman. But this lasted only a week, for the robberies were no less frequent during that week than before; and Mr. Phillips began obviously to experience something of the despair which had afflicted Mr. Redding when he slept at the store. Mr. Phillips abandoned this course, and retired again to his home for his nights' lodgings, "giving up all hope," as he expressed it, and sorely vexed that he had entered into a new contract on any terms.

Mr. Redding, waiting for his partner, who was at the South, to return, and greatly tried that he could get no word from him, had resolved, finally, to carry out his plan of dismissing, all the clerks, and obtaining new, when the partner suddenly came back, and being made acquainted with the state of things, and feeling that Mr. Redding had not pursued the wisest course, undertook to manage affairs himself, by making each clerk responsible for all the goods within such and such spaces, or in such and such lines of wares. This scheme worked well for a few days; but the clerks revolted at it, as one after another suffered losses, and his partner became as much perplexed as was Mr. Redding. It was evident now that if one clerk was to be suspected of creating the "losses" which occurred in his department, several were to be suspected, and the partner finally coincided with Redding and Mr. Phillips, who had finally given his judgment in favor of the plan of thorough change, and they proceeded to put their plan in execution, by dismissing ten clerks at first, and employing ten new ones in their places, which was done.

The parting with some of the ten was quite affecting; but each bore from the house the best possible written commendation, and all were able, as I was afterwards told, to secure good situations in other houses. But Mr. Redding and his partner, seconded by Mr. Phillips, wished me to continue my investigations as I had opportunity, and settled with me up to the time, and I must add, generously, thanks to Mr. Phillips, who suggested that though we were all foiled, I was entitled to more than I charged, for I had, he said, actually kept the house on its legs by the moral support I had given Mr. Redding and him.

I tried to dismiss the matter from my mind, but the chagrin I felt at having actually discovered nothing kept it constantly in memory, although I was as constantly perplexed with other and pressing business. I had by no means given up the matter finally, however; for I had known too many cases before, where the desired knowledge or evidence came only in accidental, or some most unlooked-for ways, and that a long while after it was most wanted, to give up all hope of solving this problem; and finally, some three weeks from the time to which I last refer, light began to dawn. I was on a hurried mission in a Fourth Avenue horse-car, on my way to the New Haven depot at 27th Street, in order to identify, if possible, a man there held in temporary custody, as the man whom I was seeking, charged with the commission of a crime in New Jersey, when two ladies entered the car at 8th Street. Both of them would have been elegantly dressed, only that they were “over-dressed,” and sparkling besides with an abundance of jewelry, which suggested vulgar breeding and sudden accession to wealth.

The car was already full, and as no one else stirred, —mostly travellers with their bags, on their way to catch the train Boston-ward, —I rose, and made place for one, which was immediately taken, with a bow of grateful recognition of my courtesy, for a wonder, by the better looking of the ladies. I do not know whether there is such a thing as magnetic attraction or not in the world, but sure it is that somehow I felt that lady to bear some important relation to my business before I observed her dress particularly, and nothing could have been further from my then present memory than that dress, and at first I could not at once call to my mind where I had seen anything like it; but suffice it that on slight inspection I discovered it to be of the same pattern with the one I had seen at Mr. Redding’s store, with the twisted-column “ribs.” I felt that, perhaps, here was a clew at last to the whole matter, but I was on business of equally great importance. The ladies, perchance, might be going out on the next train, but probably not. They might stop short of 27th Street, and I *must* go there, and what should I do? I surveyed the passengers, stepped to the front platform, and cast a look at a man there, and saw nobody whom I could address, and we were making more than usually rapid progress up.

I had half resolved in my mind to send word up by the driver to 27th Street, and get him to stop, by giving him a dollar, and run into the station-house, and say I would be up before long, and to follow the ladies myself, when, at the next crossing, there came on to the rear platform of the car as bright a black-eyed boy, of Italian parentage, I saw at once, as could have well been found in the city. He had with him a basket, in which he carried some valuable toys for sale. I took a fancy to the lad, and asked him how old he was. “Thirteen,” was the reply, though he did not look over ten years of age. I asked him if he wished to earn five dollars that afternoon. His eyes sparkled, as he replied, “Yes.” I inquired of him where he lived, the number of his house, his name, that of his parents, and so forth, and took them all rapidly down on my diary.

“Now,” said I, “here’s my card. I am one of the officers of the city, and could find you out in any part of the city in the darkest night, and I want to make an officer of you for a little while” (and the boy looked up with proud wonder). “I will take your basket; you can come for it to-morrow to my office, and here are two dollars for you to begin with. I will give you the three dollars to-morrow, and you may bring your father along with you, if you like. I should like to see him, and may be, if you do well in the matter I am going to tell you of, he’ll let you go to live with me, where you can make a great deal of money.”

I had hit the right chord, and the boy was all ears. In a low voice I told him of the two ladies in the cars, sent him to look at them, without their seeing him eye them, and come right out. I told him that I wished him to follow them, keeping at a distance behind, not let them suspect him, and if they separated, to follow the larger one (the lady with the peculiar silk dress), and if she stopped in stores or houses, to wait till she came out, and not give up watching her till he was sure she had stopped for the last time that day, and was at her home, and to take the number and street, so as to be able to go and point out the place to me. “Could he do this nicely, and not be suspected?”

The little fellow’s pride was all aroused. He knew he could do it “all right,” and he would follow her into the night, he said, if necessary. Then I told him where I lived, and put the number on the back of my card, and told him if he got hungry or benighted to come and stay over night at my house. The little fellow had probably never been treated with such distinction before, for the tears came into his eyes. I had hardly got my arrangements with him made when the bell announced that somebody wished to get out at 22d Street, and forth came the two ladies. I clapped his cap over the boy’s eyes, that the ladies might not get a glimpse at those wonderful “orbs” of his, and took him on to the next street, when I let him off, with the injunction to “stick to it, and give me a good report.” I had told him to use his money for rides in the omnibuses or cars, if necessary, and I would pay him; and this seemed to make him still prouder.

I felt that that boy, whose name was Giuseppi Molinaro, —or what would be plain Joseph Miller, in English, —would do his duty. The wares in his basket, which I held, were worth considerable more than two dollars, and I was sure he would come back to me, and that he had too much pride to come back with a poor report; and I went on to 27th Street, and fortunately identified my man there. Had I sent up word by the driver, as at first I thought to do, the fellow would have been let go, and would have soon been in Connecticut, beyond our reach. A search, which revealed a peculiar scar on his left thigh, the result of a successful combat with a couple of officers years before, revealed the villainous bank robber and wily scoundrel in the general way, beyond question, and notwithstanding he almost made me believe, by his protestations of innocence in spite of my fine memory of forms and countenances, that I had not known him eight years before. He, being properly taken care of, I returned to my home, thinking that the boy might come there in the night, as he did, and with an excellent report. The little fellow had followed instructions to the letter, and I indulged him in a detailed narrative of his exploits, which he gave with all the spirit of his race. The ladies had led him a long chase, but fortunately they had only resorted to cars and omnibuses, had not taken hacks, and he had managed to keep them in sight; and, to cut the matter short, he had tracked the lady in the peculiar silk evidently to her own home.

I may properly stop here to say that Giuseppi’s experience that day gave him such impulse in the way of a detective’s life that he finally became an officer, and is to-day one of the most efficient young men in his calling to be found anywhere in this or any other country. Indeed, he has become rich in his profession—a thing not usual with detectives.

I had half suspected that these over-dressed ladies might be traced into a house of ill-fame, —not that they looked altogether like prostitutes of the most “respectable” class, but there was enough

in appearance to warrant a suspicion, —and I had rather dreaded such a result of affairs, because such people are so facile in the expedients of lying, etc., that if that which the lady wore were indeed the very dress-pattern stolen from the store, it would be difficult to trace it into the hands of the thief. But the boy had followed the lady into the respectable quarter of 19th Street, near 8th Avenue, and I felt at loss. I wanted him to stay, and go with me early in the morning to the place, but he could not. He said his father might punish him, although he brought home five dollars and should tell him his story. So I went home with him, and told his parents, —he interpreting in parts, —what the boy had done, and what I wanted. Mr. Molinaro was a very respectable looking man, and followed the business of an engraver on wood, as well as that of a lithographer also, and I took such an interest in the family as in time brought the boy quite exclusively under my charge.

Giuseppi returned home with me, and very early the next morning, before but a very few in the city were stirring, he and I had taken notes of the house in 19th Street. It was an easy matter, some two hours thereafter, to learn from the nearest grocery-man, and a druggist in the vicinity, the name and character of the occupants of the house in question, and before two days had passed I had seen Mr. William Bruce, —said to be an operator in Wall Street, —the gentleman who occupied the place, enter and depart twice from that house, and had recognized in him an old acquaintance. But I had not possession of facts enough to warrant my making complaint against him, and so I proceeded to Mr. Redding's to burnish my memory as to the kind of articles which had been stolen from the store, keeping the secret of my special desire from Mr. Redding. His partner, together with the faithful clerk, Mr. Phillips, had gone to Cincinnati, to settle with some house which had just failed, owing them quite an amount, and would not be back under two days or so, and I had not the advantage of Mr. Phillips's assistance in instructing me in what style of goods had "been taken; but I got as good descriptions from Mr. Redding as he could give me, and the next morning found me at the house on 19th Street, properly arrayed, with tools and all, in the character of a servant of the Croton Water Board, wishing to examine all the pipes, faucets, etc., in the house.

Sarah Crogan, as she gave me her name, —a buxom, laughing Irish girl, —heard my story, and let me in. I told her to tell the mistress that I should be up stairs after examining matters in the basement; when she informed me that her master, Mr. Bruce, had gone off travelling somewhere, and that her mistress went off the afternoon before, to spend the night with a lady friend, —perhaps the one with whom I had seen her in the horse-car, —so I took things easy; and with a good deal of joking and merrymaking with Sarah, managed to go all over the house, and flattered Sarah with showing me a great deal of her mistress's wardrobe, which was splendid indeed. (I confess I thought of it with some degree of envy, when I reflected what poor dresses, in comparison, a certain handsome and honest woman, who was the mother of my own dear children, was obliged to get along with.) And better than all, I identified, on some unmade-up dress-patterns, two of what I took to be, and what proved to be, of the peculiar cards which Mr. Redding's house attached to its goods, with secret cost-marks in ink. I had no difficulty in securing these without exciting Sarah's suspicion, and having made all the research I cared to, left the house, not without, however, taking a cosy lunch with Sarah in the basement, and flattering her, to such a degree, with the hope of future attentions from me, that she agreed not to say anything about the pipe-repairer's having been there. Finding a pair of scissors in Mrs. Bruce's bedroom, I had made a few sly clippings from some of the unmade-up goods, and

encountering the peculiar silk dress, hanging in a large closet with a dozen more of other styles, I had jokingly shut myself in, in a frolicsome way, with Sarah, long enough to make a clipping from a broad hem in the inside of a sleeve of the dress. I felt quite satisfied that Sarah would say nothing of the Scotchman's having been there, for I assumed the role of a Scotchman with her, which was by no means a bad dodge, as Sarah was a North-of-Ireland lass, and no Catholic.

Duly in another garb, I was at Mr. Redding's, and told him my story. I took him into his private office, and told him to be perfectly reticent, —to say nothing to anybody, not even to his partner, or to his faithful clerk, Mr. Phillips, when they should have returned, until I should see him again; “for,” said I, “the thief was one of your old clerks, and Mr. Phillips's heart is so kindly and soft, and he evidently thinks so much of the man, and will be so overcome with astonishment, that his sympathies may become aroused to the extent of interceding for him, or giving him a timely hint to ‘clear out.’”

Mr. Redding could not comprehend this, but promised to obey me, upon my saying to him that it was better always that there should be just as few to keep a secret as possible, however tried and trusted any might be.

I knew that I should have to take things by storm, so, accompanying myself with a policeman, in the proper badge and dress, I called on Mrs. Bruce the next day, and sending for her, she came to the parlor, when I told her that I had business with her husband, and asked where I could find him. She produced the card of “William Bruce, Dealer in Stocks, etc., 64 Walt Street,” from a little pile in a basket near at hand, which I took, and rising, thanked her, and started for the door, as if about departing, my friend doing the same; but reaching the door, I closed it. A slight pallor had been discernible upon Mrs. Bruce's face, on her entry into the room, evidently caused by the sight of a policeman, and it deepened as I closed the door, and said, —

“Mrs. Bruce, I am here with my friend, as an officer of the law, to search your house. Your husband is not what his card purports here, as you well know, but he is a clerk in the employ of”—(naming Mr. Redding's house), — “and is a thief. The most of your splendid wardrobe, which I had the pleasure of inspecting in your absence day before yesterday, is the result of his thefts; and I am here prepared to take possession of it—preferring to do so quietly rather than make any noise in the neighborhood. I do not suppose that you have a guilty knowledge of his crimes. He probably does not tell you of them, —and I have no desire to do you any harm, or him either, —but the firm must have back their property, or as much as they can get; and as I see you possess a great deal of rich jewelry, I shall ask you to put the most of that into my hands till your husband can settle with the firm.”

She was perfectly stupefied through all this; declared that she had no belief that Mr. Bruce was any other man than he pretended to her to be; said she had had letters from his sisters living in Pennsylvania, and that she believed he was an honest man, and would gladly give up to officers of the law anything in her possession, if it could help him, to do so.

The upshot of the matter was, that several large trunks left that house that day, filled with rare goods and wares, and under the charge of the Mayor's clerk (for I had arranged .it with her that she might name anybody to take charge of the goods). Sarah helped pack the trunks, and

rendered us great aid, all unconscious that I was the pipe-repairer, her *quasi-lover*, —until just as I was leaving, catching her alone, I whispered something in her ear, which brought her astoundedly to her senses. She clasped my hand with a convulsive “squeeze,” and looked unutterably into my eyes, quite as tragically as a fashionable lover, with her heart just a little broken for the twentieth time might have done, and said “Silence!” in response to my utterance of the same word.

The goods were taken to a proper place of deposit, and Mr. Redding was sent for, and succeeded in identifying some of them as surely having been in his store, —the un-made-up ones in particular, —and a peculiar shawl, of great value, only three of which his house had imported, and he knew where the other two had been sold. Mr. Redding was very anxious to have me proceed at once to unmask the clerk; but I told him that I preferred to await, for some reasons, till the return of his partner, and that just as soon as he returned I wished him to send me word, and a carriage to take me, and say nothing at all to his partner till I arrived. Two days elapsed and the message came. I was fortunately at home, and took the carriage instantly, and was off for the house. I found that the partner and Mr. Phillips had returned but an hour before from a very successful trip to Cincinnati, and Mr. Redding and they were in the counting-room congratulating themselves on their success.

“Well, Mr. Redding,” said I, “I suppose it is time to tell you my story. I am ready—“

“Stop,” said he; “and turning to his partner and Mr. Phillips, he said, “I’ve some good news to tell you, also. Our friend here has been successful at last, and discovered the thief, and we’ve got back many of the goods. Go on, and tell us the story, for I don’t know yet myself who the thief is.”

The partner and Mr. Phillips looked in wonder into our and each other’s eyes, and simultaneously said, “Yes, yes, let’s hear; and first,” said Mr. Phillips, “let us hear the scoundrel’s name, if you have it, and then the rest of the story.”

“Ah, yes, sir,” said I, “that *is* the point first. His name, Mr. Phillips, is ‘William Bruce, dealer in stocks, etc.’ (so his card says), ‘64 Wall Street.’“

Mr. Redding and the partner looked confused at the announcement (for I had told Mr. Redding that it was “an old clerk” of his), and Mr. Phillips, for a second, looked confused for another reason, which confusion was somewhat deepened, when I turned directly upon him, and said, —

“But Mr. Bruce has an alias, another name, and that is Mr. *Charles Phillips*; and you, sir, are the scoundrel you inquired for!”

Phillips turned pale as a ghost, and tried to say something, but his voice failed.

“Mr. Phillips,” said I, “the house in 19th Street has delivered up its treasures. They are all in my possession, together with your mistress’s pearls, diamonds, and watches, and everything valuable which she, as your ‘wife,’ would permit me and the officer to take, and you are now my prisoner, without the slightest possibility, on your part, of escape from the full penalties of the law; and

now I propose to send a carriage at once for 'Mrs. Bruce.' She, I am sure, don't know of your guilt, and would be happy to encounter her returned husband here in the person of Mr. Charles Phillips, the time-old, confidential clerk of this house."

Phillips reached out his hands imploringly to me, and begged that I would not send for "Mrs. Bruce,"—said he was justly caught, and was ready to confess all, without our going to the trouble of a trial, and then commenced crying like a girl—hysterically.

The astonishment of Mr. Redding and his partner can better be imagined, perhaps, than portrayed here. I never saw such a change come over a man as that which Mr. Redding evinced. All his old strength seemed to come back to him at once. He was inflexible and severe. He said but few words, and these always to the purpose. His disgust for Phillips was something sublime. "O, you pious hypocrite!" said he; "you d—est of all 'whited sepulchres' that ever disgraced our common humanity! I am more angry that I have been so deceived by your pious villainy, than for all the anxiety and sickness you have brought upon me. But, in your own pious cant, as you have meted it to others, 'so shall it be meted unto you,' you thief, libertine, and saintly class-leader!"

Mr. Redding's partner, on the other hand, was differently affected. He cried, and said to Phillips, "O, Charles Phillips, how could you? I know you must have had dreadful temptations. It was all that woman: she spurred you on."

Phillips was silent for a moment; and I, who believed the woman innocent of any knowledge of his crimes, waited anxiously to hear what he would say in reply; and the hardened man had the magnanimity to not shield himself behind the woman, but said, "O, no; she knows nothing of my guilt. She has not prompted me to it directly, but it was to support and to please her that I, without her knowledge, pursued my career of crime. I am the wickedest 'whited sepulchre,' as Mr. Redding calls me, that ever walked Broadway, or disgraced the inside of a church. But I have got my punishment, in part, now, and I am ready, if you demand it, to suffer the penalties of the law; but for my wife's and children's sake, I could wish that I could compromise with you, and go away from New York forever." (His family resided in Brooklyn.)

To cut the tale short, I will only add, that Mr. Redding unbent, in the course of a day or two, sufficiently to let Phillips off, on his promise to go at once to New Orleans, where he had relations, and never show his face again in New York.

The goods were returned—made and unmade dresses, and all; and the jewelry amounted to nearly enough to cover the best estimate of the losses which we could make. Phillips made a full confession of how he did things. He was sly and wily, and easily abstracted such goods as he desired, and doing them up himself, sent them off by the porter, when sending out other packages. One of the porters remembered to have gone many times with packages for Mr. or Mrs. William Bruce; and he also, he said, sent packages to various hotels, to impossible names, and marked on the corner, "To be called for;" and being able to describe the goods, if any query arose as to the propriety of giving the package to him, always succeeded in getting it. It was thus he managed.

The house, at my suggestion, very generously furnished Mrs. Bruce with three months' support, out of compliment to her giving up the goods without resistance, and in order to give her time to turn about and find something to do; for, though unmarried, by legal formula, to Phillips, as Mr. Bruce, she supposed herself his legal wife under the laws of the State, and was by no means a bad woman. Indeed, she was a good woman at heart; and after in vain trying to get together a little private school, as the widow of William Bruce, —for she insisted on being called Mrs. Bruce, —she turned to dressmaking, and did very well; and being a fine-looking, indeed, a showy woman, succeeded, in the course of two years after Phillips's flight, in winning the affections of a much older man than Phillips, but a wealthy and honest one; and was duly, and this time, with much ceremony, married.

I did not meet Sarah Crogan again for over five years from the time I last saw her at 19th Street; but she had not forgotten the Croton Water Company's man. She had married meanwhile; but she vowed that it came "nare breakin' her heart, so it did," when she discovered that the "bould officer of the law" was her sweetheart of a day or two before, and had but "thricked" her into letting him go all over the house, "like a wild rover!"

McWatters, George. *Knots Untied: Or, Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Life of American Detectives*. Hartford: J B Burr and Hyde, 1871. (848 pages)