

Mark Stretton

by Thomas Waters

A FIRE suddenly burst forth late one winter evening in the stables attached to a large house on Wimbledon Common, then in the occupation of David Stretton, Esquire, a retired merchant of large wealth. I happened to be not far off, and, as in duty bound, hastened to afford what assistance I could. By great exertions and good fortune, the fire was confined to the stables, which were totally consumed; and being, like most Yorkshiremen, pretty skilful in the management of horses, I succeeded in saving two very valuable fillies, which, frenzied by the flames, and plunging wildly, could not be brought out till, with considerable difficulty and danger, I had managed to blind them to the red glare of the conflagration.

There could be no doubt the fire was accidental—a groom had let fall an open lighted lantern upon a heap of loose straw; and being satisfied upon that point, I was about leaving, when I was told that Mr. Stretton wished to speak with me.

Obedying the summons, as a matter of course, I, in two or three minutes, found myself in the presence of David Stretton, Esquire, an aged invalid, very nearly used up by the fret and fever of nearly fifty years of successful trade. Mr. Stretton was by no means of a niggardly disposition, as the present he made me gave twenty golden proofs. The fillies I had mainly helped to save were not only of great value, but his especial pets; and he would not, he said, for any sum, that they should have been injured, much less burned to death. Besides the master of the house, there were in the drawing-room two gentlemen whom I had noticed at the fire, and a Miss Clara Vignolles, Mr. Stretton's niece.

This lady was plain in features, which were somewhat coarsely marked by small-pox, and could not, I guessed, be much less than thirty; but there was an expression of sweetness, of mild good nature about her clear brown eyes and placid mouth, which was pleasing at first sight, and would, I was quite sure, improve upon acquaintance.

Miss Vignolles was, I observed, an object of sedulous attention to the elder of the two youngish gentlemen, whom I heard addressed as Monsieur Morny. I supposed him, from his name, to be a Frenchman, and from his fierce moustache, a *militaire*—moustaches in those days not being such common civilian appendages as now. Indeed, a gentleman with the heroic baptismal name of Achilles, which I afterwards knew to be his, could not have properly been any thing else. A tall, well-set-up personage was M. Achilles Morny. His face was a hard, handsome one; his complexion a swarthy saffron; and his dark eyes were full of light—*not* light from heaven, was clear to my practised ken at a glance.

Mr. Stretton, the younger man, and Mr. David Stretton's nephew, was unmistakably of home growth. His complexion was as fair as that of his cousin, Miss Vignolles; his eyes and hair bright brown, like hers: the *ensemble* of his countenance presenting a much more striking contrast to that of M. Achilles Morny than even the difference of contour and color, in its aspect of intense nervousness, dejection, timidity, which, in an Englishman of sufficiently vigorous physical health, could not but strike the beholder with surprise. He looked me sharply in the face, upon

hearing my name mentioned by his uncle, and as quickly withdrew his gaze; a slight color flushing his fair, pale face as he did so. Had I been professionally engaged in any affair with which Mr. Mark Stretton was ever so slightly connected, I should have felt a curious interest in those symptoms of a mind disturbed: as it was, they excited but a momentary curiosity, and vanished from my memory, till revived by subsequent events. M. Achilles Morny did not honor me with the slightest notice, which, as matters turned out, was fortunate.

Five or six months had slipped away, and I was passing along Half Moon Street, Piccadilly, when my attention was challenged by a violent uproar in the first-floor of No. 11 in that street. Up flew one of the windows, giving egress to volleys of glass and crockery, flung out upon the pavement by a woman, who whilst doing so, screamed "Murder! murder!" with might and main.

I hurried to the street door, and, knocked peremptorily till it was opened by the landlady, a Mrs. Parkins, whom I knew to be the widow of a naval officer, eking out a scanty pension by letting furnished lodgings. She explained that the furious hub-bub going on upstairs was merely a violent quarrel between a foreign gentleman and his wife who occupied the first-floor. The lady, who was of a very jealous temperament, suspected her husband of an intrigue with a Miss Vignolles—

"Vignolles! Vignolles!" I interrupted; "the name seems familiar to me."

"The husband, Monsieur Morny—"

"Morny! Vignolles!—I remember now. Excuse me. Pray proceed."

"From what I can make out," resumed Mrs. Parkins, "the husband, in changing his dress for dinner, left a note in the waistcoat he put off, which Madame Morny, chancing to pounce upon, found to be from a Miss Vignolles, and at once gave way to a torrent of invective rage, accompanying the same by smashing every breakable thing of value upon the floor, or by hurling it out of the window."

This explanation was given during a partial lull in the marital storm, which again broke forth with augmented fury and renewed cries of "Murder! On *m' étrangle!* Murder! Help!" &c., &c.

Remarking that I was bound to ascertain personally the cause of those frantic outcries, I ascended the stairs two or three at a time; the landlady, meanwhile, securing the door with bolt and chain against the intrusion of the mob, rapidly collecting outside.

I passed into the back first-floor room, which communicated by folding doors with the front apartment. The violence of the altercation going on prevented my entrance from being noticed, and I paused to ask myself whether I had a legal right to interfere. I saw that not only a furious conflict in words was going on, but a bodily struggle for the possession of a note, which, as I came upon the scene, the gentleman was on the point of wresting from the lady's clutch. This was not the kind or degree of violence to justify cries of murder; and I was about to make a movement in retreat when the man turned round by the swing of his successful effort to secure the paper, and brought within my view the reflection of his face in a chimney-mirror, which at

the same moment revealed my presence to him. I at once recognized the M. Morny I had seen at Wimbledon Common.

Fiercely confronting me, he asked who I was, and what I did there?

“I am a police-officer; and I am here because I heard cries of murder, which issued from this room.”

The lady, a fine creature, in a frenzy of rage, rushed by him towards me.

“A police, are you?” she exclaimed. “My God! that is what I wish. This man is a wretch—a monster! He is trying to seduce—”

“Silence !” thundered M. Achilles Morny, catching her by the arm, and swinging her away with such force that she fell over an ottoman on the floor. “Silence, fool!” he added with deadly malignity of tone, as he seized and raised her; “or, by all the devils, thou shalt repent of it!”

Fear quelled the woman’s rage, and she burst into tears.

“And now, sir, will you begone,” said M. Achilles Morny, turning fiercely upon me, “or must I kick you from my apartment?”

“If the lady is willing to declare upon oath that she is in fear of personal violence at your hands, I will take you to the nearest police-station at once.”

“You take me to the police-station, you cursed English dog!”

“Do you, madam, apprehend further personal violence from this man?” I asked.

“No—no—no,” sobbed the woman; “I was violent—wrong. It is a man-and-wife quarrel. Go away—go!”

“And quick! in one moment!” shouted the husband; “or, thunder of hell, I shall help you downstairs! Like this, do you see? Ah, the devil!”

He had seized my arm to help me downstairs, and was unpleasantly surprised to find himself tripped up and sprawling on his back. I laughed, and walked away. In the passage below I found Mrs. Parkins awaiting me. She said Monsieur and Madame Morny had resided in her house about six weeks only, and that such scenes as I had witnessed, though not always so violent, were of frequent occurrence. What was she to do? I could only advise her to get rid of such undesirable lodgers as quickly as she could, and then left the house, outside of which a small crowd of curious idlers were still assembled.

Extraordinary! *very* extraordinary! thought I, that such a person as this Morny appears to be should have obtained a footing of intimacy in Mr. David Stretton’s family! The wife’s suspicion, that he is engaged in an intrigue with Miss Vignolles, must be the coinage of her own jealous

brain. The supposition was simply absurd. Far likelier that the lady calling herself Madame Morny was her pretended husband's mistress, and that the handsome Frenchman was wooing Miss Vignolles for his wife. A pity if that were so; but certainly no business of mine.

M. Achilles Morny could not forgive the outrage I had inflicted upon his personal dignity; and, chancing to see me about a week afterwards, as he—much the worse for wine—was leaving Crockford's Club house, St. James's Street, he seized the opportunity of taking a little pleasant revenge. He had recognized me by the glare of the gas-lamps before I noticed him, and, suddenly shaking off his companion's arm, he sprang down the club house steps, and, with arms a-kimbo, hurtled full at me, with the intention of tumbling me upon the sloppy pavement (it had been raining all day), or, better still, into the roadway slush, by accident, as it were. He nearly succeeded too—would have done so, entirely to his own satisfaction, I have little doubt, but that he was half-drunk. As it happened, I just managed to step back clear of his rush, and, unable to check himself, he went headlong across the pavement, slipped, stumbled, fell into a heap of slush-mud, and, quite unable to regain his feet, wallowed helplessly therein, till picked up by his friend and one of Crockford's porters.

The mud and slush-soused spectacle which he presented was so irresistibly ludicrous, that the volleys of abuse he sputtered at me were quite powerless to check the malicious merriment it excited; and it seemed that the man must have gone mad with rage had not Mr. Mark Stretton, whom I had not at first recognized, compelled him, with the porter's help, to reenter the club house.

I had not gone far when I was overtaken by Mr. Stretton, junior.

"May I ask Mr. Waters," said the young man, abruptly, "where he became acquainted with Monsieur Morny? and how he has contrived to make an enemy of that gentleman?"

"My acquaintance with M. Morny is of the slightest," I answered; "it happened that I witnessed a disreputable scene between him and his wife. That is all."

"He has no wife," was the rejoinder, "Would to God he had! You must mean Adele St. Ange, a fine brunette, some thirty years of age."

"Yes; a fine brunette, as you say, but not, I think, so old as that."

"Mademoiselle St. Ange bears her age well." Having said that, Mr. Mark Stretton was silent for a minute or two, looking me in the face the while with anxious inquisition:

"You have a reputation, Waters," he resumed, abruptly, "for singular acuteness and daring in your profession."

"I am sometimes fortunate. Quite as often the reverse."

"I have vital need of the services of a sagacious, resolute man. Yet I see not," he added, checking himself,— "yet I see not how any degree of skill or resolution could help me!"

“At all events, it’s ill talking in this wretched weather. Some other time, perhaps, goodnight.”

Another faint gleam of light was thus thrown over what I could well believe was a very gloomy business. Achilles Morny must, in some way, have got young Stretton in his toils—most likely by pillaging him at the gaming-table—and was now making use of that evil influence to obtain the hand of amply-dowered Clara Vignolles. Else what meant, “He has no wife—would to God he had?” It might be, too, that Mark Stretton himself, loved his lady cousin! No, that was not likely. She was four or five years his senior, and young men seldom get crazed by charms of which thirty winters, to say nothing of smallpox, have marred the bloom and beauty. The affair would no doubt run its course without, or in despite of my assistance, should it be asked, for, to its natural termination—a mercenary marriage, desertion by the foreign husband, followed by years of unavailing regret and bitter self-reproach on the part of the wife. A trite story, old as rascaldom, common as woman’s faith and folly.

I erred in supposing that my aid would not be required in a matter which seemed quite out of my line. It was near upon the close of that year’s autumn when my attention was caught by the following paragraph in a morning paper, copied from *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal*:

“DEPLORABLE ACCIDENT. —We deeply regret to announce that Mr. David Stretton, of Bellevue House, Wimbledon Common, near Loudon, who had been, for some time past, residing at Clifton for the benefit of his health, fell, on Tuesday evening, at near dusk, from the lofty cliffs which beetle over the Avon. He was watching the play of the fading light upon the Leigh Woods opposite, from the very edge of the precipice. Some portion of the ground gave way suddenly beneath his feet, and, unable to spring back, the unfortunate gentleman toppled over with a loud cry, and fell headlong down the face of the cliff. This, it will be seen, is the account given of the fatal accident by Monsieur Morny, a French gentleman, the only person within sight or hearing of the deceased when the catastrophe occurred. The lamented gentleman’s large property is said to be bequeathed to his nephew, Mr. Mark Stretton, and his niece, Miss Clara Vignolles, in equal portions. The verdict was, of course, “Accidental death.”

I need not dwell upon the vague doubts, suspicions, which, knowing what I did of M. Morny, arose in my mind as I ran over the above paragraph; and I turned eagerly to the report of the proceedings at the inquest, which, considerably condensed, was given in another column. Only one witness besides M. Achilles Morny had, I found, been examined—a Mr. Leonard Bayton—who deposed that when it was quite dark he heard not one cry only, but several, of horror and despair, it seemed to him, from about the spot where the accident must have occurred. He hurried in the direction of those cries, but could see no one, and after searching about for some time he resumed his way homeward. This evidence had passed without remark; in fact, the only pertinent question put to the witness Morny was this by one of the jurymen: “How, if it was dark at the time of the accident, could the deceased have been watching the play of light upon the Leigh Woods?” Before M. Morny, “who was much agitated, Mr. Stretton having been his intimate and attached friend,” could answer, the coroner, referring to his notes, said the witness Morny had stated it was dusk, not dark, when the catastrophe occurred. This explanation must have been held to be satisfactory, as a verdict of accidental death was at once and unanimously agreed to. Strange! passing strange!

Late in the, following week a hurriedly-scrawled note, directed to me, was delivered at Scotland Yard. It was signed "Mark Stretton," and expressed an urgent request that I would write at once to Bellevue House, Wimbledon Common, stating where he, Mark Stretton, could see me privately on the morrow.

I lost no time in posting a reply, appointing the Fox Tavern, Kingsland Road, as the place, and two P. M. as the hour of meeting. Arrived there, he was to ask for Charles Smith, and would be shown into a private room.

I had been at the rendezvous about ten minutes when a hack-carriage drove up, and Mr. Mark Stretton presently entered the room.

I started with uncontrollable surprise. Mark Stretton was the spectre of his former self. The paper upon which I am writing was not whiter than his face, his eyes glared with unnatural fire, and his whole frame shook as with ague. I had ordered brandy-and-water, and as he dropped into a chair, I pushed the untasted glass towards him. He emptied it without a word, and at a gulp. The strong spirit partially restrung his nerves, and he said, huskily,—

"Walters, I am in a fearful strait! Will you stand by me?"

"Be calm, Mr. Stretton," I replied; "and when I am informed of the nature of the fearful strait you speak of, I will frankly state whether I can stand by you to any useful and just purpose."

"You refuse to commit yourself! I feared so, and— I care not! you shall know all! It can, at worst, but hasten the inevitable catastrophe. Have you seen in the papers," he added, with quivering eyes and tongue,— "have you seen in the papers an account of the death of—of—"

He broke off abruptly, bursting into a passion of tears.

"You were about asking me, Mr. Stretton, if I had read in the newspapers an account of your venerable uncle's death? I *have* done so, and have formed a strong opinion upon the case."

"And that opinion is—*must* be—that the verdict lied; that my uncle was foully murdered!"

"That is going too far. Permit me, however, to ask if M. Achilles Morny is a suitor for the hand of Miss Vignolles, and if that suit was opposed to the wishes and will of your deceased uncle?"

"Yes—yes—yes!" cried Mark Stretton, springing to his feet, and striking the table with his clenched fist at each iteration. "Clara, infatuated simpleton! engaged herself to Morny several months since. That engagement became known to my uncle just four days before the 'accident' at Clifton; and he emphatically declared in Morny's presence that he should, at once, so alter his will that Clara, if she fulfilled her pledge, should not have a farthing."

"How, then, happened it that Morny was walking amicably with your uncle upon the evening in question?"

“That was a lie of Morny’s! They were not, could not be, walking together. I have no more doubt than of my own life, that Morny, seizing a favorable moment, stole behind, or treacherously accosted my uncle, and after a struggle, brief but desperate, of which the cries were heard by Bayton, hurled his victim over the cliff, unseen by any eye save God’s.”

“Unseen by any eye save God’s! There can be no proof, then, to justify the terrible conclusion at which you have arrived! And let me ask, Mr. Stretton, how it happened that you did not present yourself before the inquest, and contradict Morny’s sworn assertion, that your uncle was an attached and constant friend, with whom he was amicably conversing a few moments only before the deceased fell over the cliff?”

“I *dared* not,” replied Mark Stretton, with a shudder, and relapsing into nervous weakness; “I should not now,” he added, “dare confide the truth to you, but that I am resolved, come what may,—shame—infamy—an ignominious death to myself,—that Clara Vignolles shall never wed the murderer of her good, kind uncle.”

I do not understand! You are threatened with shame, infamy, an ignominious death, if you but hint a suspicion that your uncle met with foul play! Who is it that can menace you with such tremendous penalties? Morny?”

“No other. Waters, my life—my innocent life—innocent in purpose, if not in deed—is in his power! A word of his would consign me to the gallows! You start back amazed—repulsed—indignant! But, at all events, you will listen in a candid spirit to what I have to say before condemning, abandoning me?”

“Certainly I will; and, if you please, let the solution you have volunteered of this confounding business be as explicit as possible.”

“I will be thoroughly explicit. You are aware that my late uncle was never married, and that I and Miss Vignolles have been, for many years, the acknowledged heirs of his wealth. One wish dear to his heart was, that I should marry my cousin Clara, in order that the property might not be divided. Neither of us was desirous of carrying out our uncle’s wish, or whim, in that particular; and as to myself, I, with the perversity common to spoiled youth, must needs fall in love with a young lady who had nothing but a pure mind and a charming person to offer in exchange for money-riches.”

“To which exchange your uncle peremptorily objected, and the course of true love ran awry as usual. I understand.”

“You are, to some extent, mistaken. My uncle did not insist upon carrying out his own will in that particular; but having a high respect for the lady—whose name had best remain unspoken—he stipulated that the constancy of my attachment should be tested by time and absence—say a twelve month—to be passed by me in the United States of America—New York principally—in which city important matters of business remained unsettled, which my presence there might help to wind up. I sailed with a light heart,” continued Mr. Stretton, “from Liverpool, in the New York liner ‘Napoleon,’ and after a pleasant voyage, reached my destination in health and safety.

The commercial affairs I had to settle occupied me some five or six months, during which period I had an abundance of idle time on my hands, whilst awaiting instructions from England as to how I should deal with certain cases and propositions. That fatal leisure led me to the hells of the Empire City, where I met, and soon became intimate with, M. Achilles Morny, a Belgian born, of French extraction, who had come to North America in search of reputedly wealthy relatives, whose progenitors had emigrated to Lower, or French Canada, in the time of Louis XV. If he succeeded in clearly tracing his ancestry amongst the simple ‘habitans’—of that I know nothing—he altogether failed in levying money-contributions upon them, which, of course, was his sole object in seeking them out. Disgusted by his ill-success, M. Morny came to New York, with the hope of better luck at the gaming-tables of that wealthy city. He was again disappointed, being, in fact, but a sorry gamester, and utterly unfitted to cope, if only from the excitability of his temperament, with the cool, clever Yankees. I, myself, won considerable sums of him; and, at last, he was fairly done-up, reduced to his last dollar, and he asked me for the loan of means to enable him and Adele Saint Ange—whom I then supposed to be his wife—to return to Brussels. The request was readily granted, and he was set up upon his ‘blacklegs’ again; he being, as I had often heard hinted, and now fully believe, an arrant cheat, though generally an unsuccessful one.”

“There are more cheats of that class than outsiders would readily believe,” I remarked, whilst Mr. Stretton moistened his fevered lips.

“Morny,” continued Mr. Stretton, “Morny had gained sufficient experience to refuse risking the loan he had obtained of me in the New York hells. The simpler folk of Montreal and Quebec would, he hoped, be less difficult to fleece. He proposed, therefore, to return to Europe *via* Canada, and suggested that I might accompany him upon so exciting a pleasure trip as far as Quebec, as I should have nothing to do till letters reached me from England, which could hardly be under two months. I at once agreed to do so. A feeling of reticence,” Mr. Stretton went on to say, “disinclined me to travel in my own name with Monsieur and Madame Morny; but the excuse I made to them was, that my uncle might be angry if he should hear that I had been amusing myself in Canada, when I ought to have been patiently awaiting instructions in New York. The name I assumed was that of Matthew Skinner—the initials being the same as those marked on my linen. The Mornys suggested no objection, and we set off together in high spirits. Our first halting-place was Montreal. I did not join with Morny in his forage among the small deer of that city; not, certainly, deterred therefrom by any scruple of conscience, but because the *ennui* which had driven me to gaming in New York, was banished by the novel and picturesque aspect of the city and its motley population, and I required no coarser stimulant. I tire you, perhaps, with these details?”

“Not at all, sir. Pray tell your story in your own way.”

“Arrived at Quebec, on the Saint Lawrence, at which place the Mornys were to embark for Antwerp, and where we remained three weeks, the old feeling of lassitude came back upon me with as much force as ever, and after ‘doing the heights of Abraham, the scene of Wolfe’s victory, half-a-dozen times over, I was fain to seek such excitement as the Quebec hells might afford. Accursed infatuation! miserable imbecility!” he added, with a burst of passion, “to which

I owe it that I have since been the vassal of a man I hate and loathe—the bond-slave of my uncle’s murderer!”

I remained silent, and Mr. Stretton, soon sufficiently mastering his emotion, resumed:—

“The play-den which Morny and I chiefly frequented was an apartment on the first-floor of Le Coq, a tavern in the lower town, so close upon the edge of a quay, that a quaint balcony built out, as it were, from the room in which play was carried, on, projected over the Saint Lawrence. This balcony was a favorite smoking-place in fine weather for the gamblers during intervals of active play, or when fevered by the vicissitudes of the game. The frequenters of Le Coq were chiefly second or third-rate merchants, ship owners, sea-captains, and the stakes, as a rule moderate. Amongst other Quebec notabilities, of a minor degree, was one Aimé Bontemps, the son of a ship owner. He was a slight young man, of excitable temperament, sudden and quick in quarrel, whom losses, if all considerable, lashed into ungovernable fury. Few, in consequence, liked to play with him, and the less so as he was known to be as ready with pistol as with tongue. One Sunday evening—I had by that time cast off all English habits of reverence for Sabbath and home sanctities—one Sunday evening I dropped in at Le Coq, where I found Bontemps, Morny, and a stranger, whose name I afterwards knew to be Leroux. Morny and Leroux seemed to be in a very dismal mood; they had, I found, been playing at hazard with Bontemps, and had lost considerably. That which quenched them had, of course, lent him fire, and he bouncingly challenged Monsieur l’ Américain—I had given myself out to be a citizen of the Union—to recover his friend Morny’s losses. I, too, was in rollicking spirits, having in the course of the afternoon imbibed a considerable quantity of wine, and unhesitatingly accepted the challenge. The game was to be simple hazard; that is to say, as you well know, an even bet upon the color, red or black, of card turned up alternately by each player. It was my first turn to call and placing a twenty-dollar note upon the card, I cried, ‘Rouge!’”

“One might soon lose a fortune, Mr. Stretton, at such play as that.”

“True, and Bontemps, though a rash gamester when the fit was on, hesitated to accept it. He did so, however, reassured, probably, by my flustered, not to say intoxicated, condition, which even at so blind a game gave promise of victory to the more sober player. ‘Rouge!’ I won. The play flew on with fiery speed, its rapid alternations of gain and loss, together with the stimulants we swallowed, exciting us almost to delirium. Night fell, and, declining candles, the table was removed to the balcony, and we played on by the quite sufficient light of the brilliant Canadian moon and stars. Morny and Leroux watched us with eager interest, especially when, after about two hours’ play, Fortune declared decisively on my side. I had not only won back all that Leroux and Morny had lost, the whole of the money Bontemps had brought with him to Le Coq, but he was indebted to me over £100. Still fast and furious the cries of ‘Noir!—rouge!rouge!—noir!’ succeeded each other. Bontemps’ curses mingling with my triumphant laughter, till he was in my debt quite £300. ‘Malediction!’ he exclaimed, starting up and glaring at me with blood-shot, fiery eyes, ‘you must be in league with the devil!’ I laughed derisively, and shuffled, the cards afresh. This was too much for the hot-blooded young man. ‘Cheat! rascal! villain!’ he shouted, and struck me with his open hand upon the cheek, ‘you have robbed me!’ It required but such an outrage to completely madden me. I sprang upon him with a scream of rage—struck, seized, pinioned him, and, with an exertion of maniacal strength, hurled him over the balcony into the

deep, swift river beneath. I saw the body cut the water, and disappear beneath the glittering surface; then the sudden revulsion—the flashing consciousness that I was a homicide—quelled in a moment both strength and rage; my brain reeled, and I fell upon the floor in a swoon. The next seven or eight hours are a blank to me, except so far as memory recalls the chaotic images of a fevered, drunken dream, from which I awoke to find myself whirling along in a close carriage in company with Madame Morny. The first words she uttered instantly recalled the shame and horror of the preceding night, and I listened with a beating heart to what she had further to communicate. I had killed Bontemps: there was no doubt about that; his body had been picked up by some boatmen after it had been about two hours in the water. Meanwhile Morny, aided by Leroux and Jean Pipon, landlord of Le Coq, had borne me away to a place of concealment till a carriage could be secretly hired to convey me over the Canadian frontier. I was now on my way thither, and had left Quebec close upon four hours. Having been only known in Canada as Mr. Skinner. Madame Morny thought there was but little danger of my apprehension, if I kept as much as possible indoors till her husband joined us, when it would be prudent not to delay our departure for England. This was the substance of her communication, with this addition—that the money upon the table which I had won had been employed by Morny to purchase the connivance of Pipon and Leroux at my escape. We reached New York in safety, and about ten days afterwards Morny joined us there, bringing with him a printed bill, offering a large reward for the apprehension of Matthew Skinner, supposed to be a native of Baltimore, in the United States; and a long statement, cut out of a Quebec newspaper, giving the examination of Achilles Morny, Jean Pipon, and Antoine Leroux, before the Quebec magistrate, touching the death of Aimé Boutemps. The handbill I have mislaid, if I ever had it in my own possession; the extract from the newspaper I have brought with me. Read for yourself.”

I did so, with growing disquietude—the evidence given by the three men differing widely from Mr. Stretton’s own version of the affair; and unquestionably, if true, fixing him with the crime of wilful murder.

“My account of the dreadful occurrence is strictly correct,” said Mr. Stretton, perceiving the bad effect the reported evidence produced upon my mind. “Morny, it is true, persists that his testimony was softened in my favor, but he is a prince of liars and traitors.”

“My experience has generally enabled me to distinguish the tone and language of candor and truth from those of fair-seeming guile and falsehood, and I may say that I believe you—or, at least, that my belief strongly inclines that way. Were it not so my duty would be a plain and very painful one, the death of Bontemps having taken place in a British possession.”

“I knew I incurred that danger. Do you think,” he added, in a low, shaking voice—“do you think that, supposing I voluntarily surrendered myself to the Quebec authorities, and the witnesses persisted in their evidence as set forth in the Quebec newspaper, that I should be convicted of the capital offence?”

“There can be no doubt that you would. Still, *magna est veritas*—and I perceive, or fancy I do, a slight gleam of light, indicating that the dark cloud may have a silver lining.”

“For God’s” sake do not mock me with false hopes! What, except conviction for the minor offence of manslaughter, can I hope for? And why do you so intently scrutinize the piece of newspaper?”

“A suspicion—surmise rather—glanced across my mind, which, for the present, I must keep to myself. What may be the title and the exact date of the newspaper from which the report has been cut?”

“*The Quebec Gazette*. The date of the—the—of poor Bontemp’s death was August 14th, last year. Why do you ask these questions?”

“For my own satisfaction. How was it that Morny did not bring you the whole newspaper?”

“I do not remember to have heard: but say, again, why these questions?”

“Be calm, young man, be calm. It is probable that I am mistaken in the surmise or hope which has dawned upon my mind. Miss Vignolles, I presume, does not even now share, your opinion of M. Achilles Morny?”

“Very, very far from it. His address and speciousness have fascinated, enthralled her; and I dread every day to hear that he has induced her to privately wed him under some lying pretext or other. Privately, of course, to avoid the scandal of marrying whilst her uncle was scarcely cold in his bloody shroud.”

“M. Morny has, I suppose, fleeced you handsomely since your return from America?”

“Enormously. In truth, he has treated me like a slave.”

“Exactly. You have not made a confidant of the young lady you spoke of?”

“I have not even seen her since my return to England. Homicide as I knew myself to be, I *dared* not, Mr. Waters. It would have been another and worse crime to have continued an intimacy which would have damned the future of an amiable girl, by linking it with that of one whose life is forfeit to the law, and which dread penalty may at any hour be enforced. I have rather permitted her to think me capricious—false; another heavy addition to the burden of shame and grief which bows me to the dust. But I will cast it off,” he continued, vehemently, “if life goes with it, sooner than Clara shall be the scoundrel’s victim! The horrible secret stifles, kills me—I’ll be poisoned with it no longer! At the worst, it will be but the sacrifice of a year or two, more or less, of shameful, hateful life!”

“Those are sounding sentences, Mr. Stretton, very easily uttered. Much more easy to say than to act out the resolution they express. Will you be here again at seven this evening?”

He would dine at the Fox and await my return.

It was so settled, and I went my way.

It would have been imprudent on my part to have prematurely excited the hopes of Mr. Stretton, with reference to the printed statement alleged to have been cut from a Quebec newspaper. The more, however, I reflected upon the subject, the stronger my suspicions grew. In the first place, I had noticed that the lines of the newspaper column were precisely parallel on both sides of the slip of paper: now, it is rare indeed that half a column can be cut out of a newspaper without running into and shearing off some portion of the matter on the other side. This, in addition to the curious circumstance that Morny had not brought the complete newspaper to Stretton at New York, suggested the possibility that so wily a gentleman might have concocted the pretended report, got it printed on a slip resembling a portion of a newspaper column, indifferent matter being furnished for the other side, which would, in such a case, be struck off with perfect evenness. Anyone who had a sufficient interest to serve might easily do this, and I was now off to confirm or dissipate my suspicions, by examining the files of newspapers at the North and South American Coffee House. The handbill Morny could also easily have managed. It was at all events worth while to make inquiry.

The file of Quebec papers I found to be imperfect, especially so about the time of Bontemps' death; and I was informed by a waiter that the missing numbers had been stolen by some undetected visitor. Achilles Morny, for a thousand! was my instant conviction, and I will tell the reader why. Neither of the English Quebec papers on the file was printed with the same type as the slip which I held in my hand, containing the report. Moreover, the files of the French journals published at Quebec, and those of Montreal, had been plundered of the same numbers, or nearly so; and the New York journals made no mention whatever of the catastrophe at Le Coq. This last fact was not, however, of so much importance. Moreover, in an affair, involving such tremendous issues, it, upon further reflection, occurred to me, that as I was bound to make assurance doubly sure, it would be well, if I could not find the missing papers in London, to send direct to Quebec for them. The worst was, that in those slow old days I could not receive a reply in less than three months. There was, however, no pressing urgency for obtaining the papers, except that in the mean time Achilles Morny might espouse the niece of the venerable gentleman whom, Mr. Stretton believed, the said Morny had murdered. Was it certain, too, that the completest demonstration of Morny's turpitude, in falsely accusing her cousin of such a crime, would induce Miss Vignolles to break off the match? By no means certain. The gloze an artful scoundrel might put upon his motives in the matter—for example, a wish to drive his friend and her relative from the society of gamblers and blacklegs, by compelling him to acutely feel the possible consequences of such base companionship—would, perhaps, impose upon the weakness and credulity of a plain woman on the shady side of thirty, in love with a specious, handsome man. Too probably I feared. Besides, I had another arrow in my quiver, which, if critically used, would—might, I should say—prove a fatal one.

“I have nothing, at present, to say, Mr. Stretton, in answer to your look of anxious inquiry,” said I, pressing the proffered hand of the terribly agitated young gentleman, “except that the faint gleam of cheering light I spoke of, has widened—brightened, since I left you. It will be useless to press me for more than that at present. However, take heart and courage; to do so, whatever may happen, will do you no harm. Above and before all, Mr. Stretton, keep a strict, constant watch upon your cousin, Miss Vignolles, and inform me—if you decide to place yourself in my

hands—without an hour's delay, and without committing yourself, remember, with M. Morny, if there is any likelihood of this abominable marriage taking place.”

Mr. Stretton promised to do so, adding, that he placed implicit confidence in me: and with a lighter heart than beat in his bosom when he arrived at the Fox, he left the tavern.

I could not, with all my diligence, find the missing papers in London, and wrote, therefore, to Quebec for them.

I called, not long after my interview with Mr. Stretton, on Mrs. Parkins, in Half Moon Street, Piccadilly. Her quarelsome lodgers had not left; though, since she had ascertained (how she did so, I never knew) they were not man and wife, she had given them peremptory notice to quit without delay. The truth was, the Mornys paid well; and Mrs. Parkins dearly loved—herself remaining severely immaculate; provably so, if need be—to dabble with marriage and other correlative mysteries. This, I apprehend, was the solution of their long stay at No. 11. This by the way.

I had a long conversation with Mrs. Parkins, which afforded me many interesting items concerning the Mornys; an especially interesting one being, it struck me at the moment, that not very long before they engaged her apartments, they had been travelling in Scotland, as man and wife. Before leaving, I had, to a great extent, made a confidant of Mrs. Parkins, who had undertaken, upon certain distinctly understood conditions, to carry out my instructions. The next day I forwarded her an old *Times* newspaper, which contained a *résumé* of a celebrated case, the decision in which confirmed the law or custom of Scotland, according to which any single man who acknowledges a single woman to be his wife, becomes, *ipso facto*, that woman's husband.

Five or six weeks passed away before I again saw Mr. Stretton. He sought for me at Scotland Yard. I chanced to be there, and we were soon engaged in anxious consultation. Miss Vignolles, he informed me, had definitely promised to marry Achilles Morny on that very day week, and would listen to no remonstrances on her cousin's part against that disgraceful, fatal step. “The villain himself,” he added, “defies, mocks me,—and—and you were right, Waters; I have *not* the nerve to deliberately face the scaffold when it looms distinctly in view, bravely as you have heard me mouth of doing so.”

“A very human weakness, the avowal of which shows courage. By-the-by, were not M. Morny and Adele St. Ange travelling together in Scotland at the beginning of the summer?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“For my own satisfaction, I again tell you, sir. Where is the marriage to take place?”

“At Bellevue House, by special license.”

“Is M. Achilles Morny in the habit of addressing Miss Vignolles by letter.

“Yes, frequently.”

“Could you manage to procure me—of course, without the lady’s knowledge—a sight of some of these missives?”

“I could; *will* by tomorrow, if you desire it.”

“Some one or other of them may be of service. I have nothing more to say at present, Mr. Stretton, except that you may rely upon me to the full extent of my resources, zealously exerted.”

The next day I received a packet of letters, the love-missives of M. Morny addressed to Miss Vignolles. What a specious, artful rascal they showed him to be! But though exceedingly warm, impassioned—that is to say warmth, passion, were, to a certain extent, successfully simulated—I was disappointed at not finding some disparaging allusion to Adele St. Ange. I had hoped that Miss Vignolles might have expressed some jealous contempt of that lady, the reply to which would have blown the ardent passion of St. Ange to consuming flame. As it was, I did not see that I could make effective use of them. Still, as I was going to see Mrs. Parkins, it might be as well to take the two fiercest of them with me.

Mrs. Parkins was punctual to the appointment, and informed me that our clever scheme, promising as it looked, had completely broken down. She had apprised Mademoiselle St. Ange that M. Morny was certainly about to marry Miss Vignolles—an announcement which, as we had calculated, threw the lady into a frenzy of rage. Better still, when the mental tempest had in some degree subsided, and St. Ange could listen to reason, she was elated beyond measure to hear, to read for herself in the *Times*, that if, when she was travelling in Scotland with M. Morny, he had only once introduced her as his wife to witnesses that could depose to that fact, she was his lawful wife to all intents and purposes.

“*Mon Dieu!*” she exclaimed, “he did so, once, twice, twenty times, and notably in Glasgow, at—”

M. Morny’s loud rat-tat at the street door checked her speech, and Mrs. Parkins made a hasty retreat.

A loud, fierce altercation ensued between the “happy pair,” which gradually grew milder till their voices could no longer be heard below. After having dined, M. Morny left the house, as was his wont, but looking more lifted up, Mrs. Parkins thought than usual. He was hardly gone when the first floor bell rang. Mrs. Parkins answered it, and found the lady seated at dessert, her eyes flashing with exultation.

“My good Mrs. Parkins,” said she, “I wish to say to you that Morny, whom, with all his faults towards me, I still regard with tenderness, has convinced me that we never passed as man and wife in Scotland; he, the cunning rogue, having been at the time quite aware of the droll law which prevails there. I cannot, therefore, be his wife. It is a great misfortune for me; and it is time, I have reflected, that our unfortunate *liaison*, which upon its discovery so justly scandalized you, should cease.”

“He has your consent then, Madame, to marry Miss Vignolles?”

“*Hélas*, yes! What, after all, could I do? Achilles will be very rich; and he has promised me a moderate sum to re-establish myself as a *modiste* in Brussels. It is the best part for both of us.”
“I remarked,” continued Mrs. Parkins, “that it was probable the English lady’s fortune would be strictly settled upon herself.”

“No—no—no!” rejoined St. Ange, with a burst of scornful triumph; “not one penny will be settled upon herself! She adores Achilles—he is her god; and she will joyfully surrender to him, not only her mature person, but her immense riches. Poor fool!” and again she laughed viciously.

“You think then, Madame, that the marriage will be an unhappy one?”

“My word of honor, no!” replied St. Ange; checking her vivacity, and speaking with pretended seriousness. “My word of honor, no; only it does seem silly for a wife to reserve nothing for herself out of so large a fortune. Nevertheless, Achilles will be a kind husband; which is lucky for her, as she will be quite at his disposition. Her rich cousin, too, Mr. Mark Stretton, is Morny’s slave.”

“Mr. Mark Stretton!”

“Yes, my good woman, Morny’s slave; but that is a subject upon which I must not say another word. Enough that it is true—perfectly true. But we shall not be too cruel with either of them. That is to say,” again attempting to repress her rampant insolence of triumph, “that is to say, Morny will be kind towards his wife, and have consideration for Mr. Stretton. Enough now, Mrs. Parkins. I wished to make you to quite understand that the Scotch story I told you was pure imagination, that is all. We leave your lodgings early on Wednesday next. Good evening!”

“I left the room,” added Mrs. Parkins, “in a manner stunned, feeling that some dreadful mischief was on foot; but of what nature exactly I could not comprehend.”

“It is so plain, nevertheless, that he who runs may read its meaning. Adele St. Ange convinced Morny, much against his will I dare say, by the case reported in the *Times*, that according to the custom of Scotland (though I myself have strong doubts whether that custom applies in the case of two aliens) she was his lawful wife. He believing that, a compromise took place. St. Ange is to permit the solemnization of Morny’s marriage with Miss Vignolles, in order that he may get her fortune, which chiefly, I understand, consists of personals, into his hands. That prime purpose effected, the duped Englishwoman will be abandoned. Morny, with his legal wife, St. Ange, as he and she believe her to be, will be off to the Continent, to avoid the penalty attached to bigamy, still keeping his fearful hold upon Mr. Stretton. That is about the essence of the programme agreed to, depend upon it.”

“Gracious Heaven! And will you be able to defeat the infamous plot?”

“I do not think I shall. Time, I fear, will beat me. I shall, however, do what I can; and do you, if you please, in the mean time, keep me instantly informed of any movement on the part of your precious lodgers.”

A disastrous, most afflicting turn of affairs this! However, as I had, as usual with me, been gradually worked up by the swayings of conflicting action into taking an entirely personal interest in the affair—almost as much so as if Mr. Stretton and Miss Vignolles had been my brother and sister—I resolved, and to a certain extent succeeded, in neither losing heart nor hope.

Finding, after much cogitation, and viewing the matter in every possible light, that I was about at the end of my tether, I bethought me of consulting a shrewd old lawyer of my acquaintance; the chiefs of the force refusing, as a rule, to give directions or advice in cases involving tangled questions of law, and in which police interference is not indisputably recognized.

One of the results of that long and very depressing consultation was, that I found myself wandering about the docks the following morning, in search of ships which hailed from Quebec. They would be numerous, and if my conjecture was well founded as to the newspaper forgery, some one amongst their crews would surely be able to tell me whether or not Aimé Bontemps, the son of a man of position in that city, had been, the year previously, murdered by drowning.

The search was a tedious one, and for a long time only so far successful that no one from Quebec that I met with had ever heard of a gentleman being flung out of the balcony window at Le Coq, and drowned. At last, I was directed to the Old Ship Tavern, Wapping, where I should be sure to find Jean Philippe, skipper of the brig Marie, a Quebec man, who knew everybody there.

I found Jean Philippe, but, unfortunately, he was very muzzy with liquor, and in that mulishly-cunning mood of mind common to many persons of his class when in such a condition, which renders it impossible to elicit a plain answer to a plain question. Such men always fancy you are pumping them for some concealed, selfish purpose, and wonderful is the fence with which they dodge and evade your queries; and to aggravate the annoyance, this fellow believed himself to be a humorist.

“Do you know a M. Bontemps and his son, Aimé Bontemps, at Quebec?”

“Suppose I do, and suppose I don’t; what then?”

“Can you tell me if the son, Aimé Bontemps, is dead or alive?”

“Well, one or the other he is sure to be.”

“Was Aimé Bontemps drowned during the autumn of last year?”

“Was Aimé Bontemps drowned during the autumn of last year? I should say, being as he was a wild sort of young fellow, he was hanged the spring before.”

This last repartee elicited a roar of applause from the company, one of whom whispered to me that I had better see Jean Philippe early the next morning, when he would be sober, and readily afford me any information I required.

I acquiesced in that suggestion, and was leaving the Old Ship Tavern, when Jean Philippe hiccuped out, "I say, Mister Detective, you see I've fathomed you, old fellow. I say, what odds will you bet that Aimé Bontemps was drowned when the Yankee pitched him out of Le Coq into the river, or what will you take that young Bontemps only had a good ducking? Eh? Come now."

"I shall bet nothing either way, but will do myself the pleasure of seeing you early tomorrow."

I had not, the reader will have observed, said a word about "Yankee" or "Le Coq" in Jean Philippe's hearing, and the shadow of a doubt no longer rested on my mind as to the trick played upon Stretton by Achilles Morny.

Still, positive evidence thereof was indispensable. I went in quest of Jean Philippe early the next morning, and found that the Marie had sailed with a fair wind on the previous afternoon, about two hours after I left him.

This was exasperating, and that exasperation was increased twenty-fold when, upon my return home, I found a note from Mr. Stretton, to the effect that it was all over with him and his sacrificed cousin, Clara. Morny, in consequence of a hint he had received that an attempt would be made to prove him a married man according to the law of Scotland, had cast off all reserve, insisted that his marriage with Miss Vignolles should take place the very next day, and threatened, in the event of the slightest delay or demur, to forthwith denounce him, Mr. Stretton, as a murderer. Mademoiselle St. Ange had, moreover, been brought to Bellevue House, and had solemnly assured Miss Vignolles that no such pretended Scotch marriage had ever taken place. "Clara fully believes her, and urged alike by her liking for Morny and her fears for me, yields to the scoundrel's overbearing insistence; further declaring, that if I should be mad enough to voluntarily surrender myself to justice, her marriage should not in consequence be delayed for one hour. Thus you see, that if I could summon up resolution—which, God help me, I cannot do—to brave a shameful death, the fearful sacrifice would be made in vain! Hopelessly beset as I am, I have a kind of superstitious reliance upon you. The accursed ceremony will commence at eleven o'clock. Will you see me before then?—M. S."

Mrs. Parkins, thought I, must have been babbling about that Scotch dodge; but there is no time for reproaches or regrets. I must see the lawyer again.

I arrived at the Bellevue House at a little after ten the next morning. My ring at the garden-gate was answered by Mr. Stretton, himself, who had watched for me from a window. He looked an image of despair, agonized by self-reproach.

"Clara," he gasped, rather than said, "persists in her determination to marry Morny. Still, wonderful as is the ascendancy he has acquired over her, she would, I am positive, after what has passed during the last twenty-four hours, but for her fears for me, insist, at least, upon delaying the ceremonial. Ha! here they come!"

I looked from the window of the apartment to which Mr. Stretton had stealthily conducted me, and saw an open barouche-and-four approaching, in which were seated Achilles Morny and Mademoiselle St. Ange!

“What!” I exclaimed, “he has the effrontery to bring that woman with him!”

“Yes, he asked Clara’s permission to do so; so that if there should be an attempt to forbid the marriage, under the pretence that the bridegroom had been married in Scotland, Mademoiselle St. Ange will be upon the spot to rebut the calumny.”

“I see. M. Morny is armed at all points then.”

“Yes; and yet it seems to me, Waters, that your eyes sparkle as with a courageous hope.”

“You are right: a courageous, but far, very far from a confident hope. Such,” I added, affecting a stilted style of speech which would put a stopper upon prosaic questioning, “such, for example—excuse me for hazarding such a similitude—as Ivanhoe, though conscious of the justice of his cause and determined to do his duty, must have felt when he rode into the lists of Templestowe to encounter his redoubtable antagonist, Brian de Bois Guilbert. *Espérance*, nevertheless. I am not easily beaten when I am morally sure that right is on my side. As, however, the possibility of success, in this instance, requires that my onslaught should be sudden, unexpected, you must place me where I shall be out of sight, but within hearing, till the parson’s first words give the *laissez aller*, which will launch me full tilt against M. Achilles Morny.”

Mark Stretton stared, and, I saw, fancied I must have been drinking: he, however, said nothing, which was just what I wanted; and softly led the way to the drawing-room, where the marriage ceremony was to take place. I could perceive no place of concealment therein, and we were still debating the matter, when footsteps quickly approaching necessitated decision, and I vanished behind a high cabinet piano. The footsteps proved to be those of a servant bringing a message from Miss Vignolles to her cousin. She wished to speak with him forthwith, and he, of course, at once obeyed the summons.

It was not so bad a place of concealment after all, except for my legs, and they were pretty well concealed by two large lyre-shaped pedals: only a person stooping down could possibly see them. If, indeed, any of the company came round the piano—why, then, like the theatrical machinist, not being able to snow white, I should be obliged to snow brown!

At last the tedious watch-hands marked the hour of eleven, and a few minutes after the bridal party entered the room, and seated themselves. The bride, starting back upon the brink of the precipice, sobbed woefully; a manifestation of feeling which the soft, but stern, low tones of M. Achilles Morny rebuked, and *registered*.

A few painful minutes passed, and then entered the Reverend Mr.— and his clerk. The company stood up, and the clergyman commanded the doors to be thrown open: that was done, and the ceremony began.

“Dearly beloved—”

“It is needless,” said I, stepping to the front—“it is needless to read further. I am a police-officer, and the bridegroom, Achilles Morny, is wanted.”

Amazement, consternation, could never, I suppose, have been more vividly depicted than by the faces and attitudes of all assembled there.

The clergyman was the first to speak, “What,” he asked, “is the meaning of this? If you—”

“Ha! ha!” interrupted Morny, who had by then recognized me— “it is that *scélérat*, Waters! He that will have it I was married in Scotland! Adele,” he added, stepping towards the woman, who, for decency’s sake, stood some distance apart, “Adele, thou wilt—”

Affecting to misunderstand his movement, I seized him by the collar. “Dare to stir, sir, and I will handcuff you!” and I took a pair of handcuffs from my pocket.

The fellow was dumfounded, and I went on. “I arrest you, Achilles Morny, for felony—for robbing Mr. Mark Stretton of several thousand pounds by threats of accusing him of a capital crime.”

“My God!”

The fellow’s eye quailed beneath mine; the hue of his face was that of a corpse; I felt doubly sure that I was right.

“That accusation, Achilles Morny, you supported by a forged newspaper—. Ah! I you force me to it, then!”— and, after a short struggle, I clasped the iron cuffs upon his wrists.

“You the while knowing well that Aimé Bontemps was and is alive and well! But we waste words. Come along, and at once;” and I pushed him towards the door with much greater violence than I should have used had it not been my cue to stun, confound him. I succeeded.

“Mercy! mercy!” he screamed, bursting away from me, and casting himself at the feet of Miss Vignolles, who, like her cousin, seemed stricken into stone.—“Mercy, Clara! I swear to you by all that is holy, sacred, by my love, my devotion, to you, that I intended,—our union once consecrated,—to admit, to proclaim, that Aimé Bontemps was not drowned, and is alive and well! Yes, I swear that—”

“That will do, M. Achilles Morny,” I interrupted; “and in recompense of your volunteered confession, I will relieve you of the handcuffs.”

“Thunder of hell! Then you did not know that—that—”

“Right! I did *not* know, till you confessed it, that the newspaper paragraph was a forgery; and but for your candid avowal, we should have been scarcely able to detain you more than an hour or two. You have saved us trouble, now come along.”

The volley of cursing rage which my words elicited was really something awful, and feeling as I did how extremely painful the scene must be to Miss Vignolles I bore Achilles Morny away by sheer force.

When he was taken before a magistrate the next morning some slight evidence was given, and a remand requested, which, as a matter of course, was granted. Mr. Stretton’s solicitor, who had shaped the charge as one of obtaining money under false pretences—it being perfectly competent to him to prefer the graver charge of felony at a future period—the solicitor for the prosecution did not, I say, object to the prisoner being admitted to bail. Bail was accordingly granted, and strange as it may seem to those who have never been behind the scenes of a Police Theatre, responsible tradesmen, who had never before heard of Achilles Morny, came forward to bail him in very heavy recognizances.

This was much the wisest course. Mark Stretton had almost deserved the suffering and loss he had undergone; and for Miss Vignolles’s sake it was desirable that Morny should flee the country, which he very speedily did. As to the alleged crime at Clifton, not the faintest proof thereof could have been obtained. Perhaps, too, after all, Mark Stretton’s suspicion was unfounded. If not, we may be sure that the crime, though unseen by human eyes, was witnessed by Him who said, “Vengeance is mine: I will repay.”

Waters, Thomas. [Pseud.] [Attrib. William Russell.] *Diary of a Detective Police Officer*. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1864.