

A Burglar Betrayed by His Dog

I.

William Cole, or "The Weasel," as he was styled by the fraternity, was, without doubt, the most daring, skillful, and expert burglar of his day. About thirty-five years of age, medium-sized, heavy-set, with dark hair and eyes, there was nothing peculiar in his appearance, had he not been a cripple. His right leg was shorter than the other by four or five inches, which compelled him to walk upon the ball of his left foot to make the length of the limbs equal. There was a calm resolution in the steadfast gaze of his dark, piercing eye, which bespoke the highest order of physical courage; and his well-knit frame, erect head, firmly poised upon a solid neck, evinced that he possessed great strength and powers of endurance. Either from design, or a fondness for novelty and change, he was here, there, and everywhere, apparently perfectly ubiquitous as to time or place; and as he made it a regular practice to take back and entrances, alley-ways, porches, halls, or any unusual method of going or coming, it was impossible for one man to track him without being detected. Upon making the discovery, he would hastily spin around upon the ball of his foot, and with flashing eyes, angrily exclaim:

"I have a dog to do my dogging, sir!" or, if in his humor, would "wind the fellow," which simply meant a complicated series of turnings, twistings, and doublings, which often brought him face to face with his panting and puzzled pursuer, when with a hearty, "Good-morning, sir," he would keep on so long as the whim lasted.

His plans once matured, his ingenuity and daring rose in proportion to the obstacles to be overcome, and the more complicated the locks, firmer the bolts, and careful the watch, the more certain appeared his success. He finished his work in such a masterly manner that not the semblance of a trace was left to operate upon. It was done, and there it ended. After some extraordinarily heavy "job," which demanded the most consummate skill and address in its execution, he would occasionally indulge in a half-laughing, mocking smile, as he watched the movements of a cordon of detectives around him, betraying his easy self-possession and total indifference, for he was proud of his prowess, and no doubt took a delight in baffling the entire police department. In this manner several months passed, and he leisurely sauntered about, evidently perfectly heedless of everything but the moment's enjoyment—the dread and hate of the virtuous and wealthy; the admired and petted of the low and abandoned.

Bill's dog, a small, half-blooded terrier, was as well-known as his owner. The appearance of one was a certain criterion of the other's approach, for they were never known to be separated during the day. He was the most faithful and affectionate animal to his master, and the surliest cur to strangers, that I ever remember to have seen. Every inducement in the shape of choice "tidbits" was indignantly rejected with a snarl; and any attempt to pat or caress him, by a sudden snap, which the experimenter, even should he escape being bit, was not apt to repeat. Bill's approving smile seemed to amply compensate for these minor sacrifices; and the surly brute was left undisturbed to his own meditations.

At the time of which I speak a large political convention was to be held; and anticipating the usual influx of thieves and pickpockets, a large extra police force was ordered upon duty. The

first night passed without any particular occurrence in our line. On the second, a large dry-goods firm had been robbed of nearly fifty thousand dollars. All were in commotion at the department. Ten thousand dollars reward had been offered, and every one was eager for the chance. Six police and four detectives were soon detailed to ferret out the case, I being appointed the leader.

Taking my chum, an old and experienced hand at the business, we hastened around to the store, orders having been already given that nothing should be disturbed until our arrival. After carefully examining the premises, separately, we met for consultation, and exclaimed as if with one voice: "The Weasel!"

There could be no doubt of it. His marks, to our well-trained and experienced eyes, were as plain and distinct as if we had witnessed him perform the job. The safe was lying on its side and forced from the bottom, but the porter on the same floor had heard no noise, and he knew that no noise had been made; it had been thoroughly ransacked, but nothing had been carelessly or hastily thrown about, or carried away to risk destroying—everything useless had been carefully replaced. No door was left ajar, or window open, so how the thief entered, or where departed, was equally mysterious; neither track nor finger-mark could be found—in a word, the safe being forced and the money gone was the only evidence whatever of a robbery having been committed.

"A weasel!" exclaimed a young Englishman, lately employed by the firm, in utter astonishment, evidently prepared for anything in this "blasted country," but the case in point. "Why, our weasels are—"

"This weasel, Mr. Morris," calmly replied the senior partner, "is as crafty and far more dangerous than your home animal. So, gentlemen, from all that I have heard of this daring villain, the case is hopeless?"

"Not exactly hopeless, sir," for I could see the strong man struggling against his sudden misfortune, "but I must admit extremely doubtful!"

"Your candor does you honor, sir. This loss, just at this time, proves very serious; and should you require in prosecuting your plans any pecuniary assistance—"

"Not one cent! We are paid should we fail, and in case of success your reward is munificent. Besides, there is not one among us who would not give half his pay to convict this man."

After a few cautionary remarks, we were about to leave; when, with a joyous bark, in rushed the burglar's dog. The thought flashed through my mind in an instant: "*He is on the trail of his master!*"

II.

SNATCH made a circuit of the room; and then suddenly darted to the door leading into the cellar, where he stood and whined most piteously.

"Jim, we have caught the Weasel with one of his own traps. Hurry up the men," I eagerly exclaimed, to my chum, who bounded away, elated at this sudden freak of fortune. "You must permit me to congratulate you, sir, for this dog will follow every step of his master; and will no doubt lead to the capture of the thief and his accomplices, and the recovery of the money."

"Young man, I see the hand of Providence in this," devoutly, replied the old man, the tears flowing down his checks.

By the time I had impressed the importance of the strictest silence upon those present, Jim and the men entered. Fastening a strong cord to Snatch's collar, who had torn up a foot or more of carpet around the door in his attempts to get out, and selecting three men to go with me, I ordered Jim and the others to arrest Bill Cole at all hazards.

"Not a word to any one, and keep the prisoner until I come, no matter what occurs." was my last order as we separated.

Bill was easily found, and arrested without the slightest show of resistance. He made a jest of the whole affair; nodding and bowing to his acquaintances, he fairly led the way, in place of being taken to headquarters for his preliminary examination. An *alibi* was proven, not only by undoubted and responsible parties, but by two of the regular policemen. With their confidence already shaken by his easy and off-hand manner he would certainly have been discharged on this last evidence, had it not been for my positive order to keep him, "no matter what occurs." As the time passed the prisoner began to exhibit more and more uneasiness.

Wrapping the end of the cord firmly around my hand, the door was opened, and we started from the office upon the trail. Passing through the cellar, we had to wait until the door was unlocked, for the thief had picked it on entering, and locked it after going out. We followed close under the shadow of the fence to the back-gate, through that into the alley, and down it, out upon the broad pavement. A cold shiver ran over me as the dog hesitated.

"What if he should lose the trail?"

The anxiety which followed, though it lasted but a few moments, cannot be expressed in words. With a quick, sharp bark, our eager guide crossed the street, and without pausing or slacking his gait, kept on in the direction of Cole's house. Positive that nothing could be found there, I was again about to give up in despair, when the dog abruptly turned the corner of a small street and stopped before a baker's shop. Beckoning to the men, who according to custom had fallen behind so as not to attract attention, to hasten up, we entered.

No one being in the small, dingy front shop, I quickly stepped to the back-door, and was about to enter when I was met by a small, shallow-complexioned man, who nervously attempted to force me back, at the same time anxiously remarking:

"The other room, if you please; this a bakery."

As his eye fell upon the policemen, who just arrived, he became livid, and fairly trembled with fear. Snatch, seeing an opening, made an attempt to rush by him, and added so to his fright as he recognized the dog, that he could but support himself by the door-knob. I never before or since saw such intense, abject fear as he exhibited. My course of action was plain: it was to extort a confession from him through his fears. Promptness was the word.

"Arrest him!" I thundered, in a loud tone, allowing him a moment to regain the slightest degree of self-possession. Roughly dashing door open, he was seized and forced into a corner.

"This is the crib, just as Bill described it," I remarked, glancing around; "ovens and all" was accidentally added.

At the word "ovens" the wretch became perfectly prostrated, and, uttering a groan, sank helplessly upon the floor. A few dippers of water from a bucket in the room, dashed into his face soon revived him, and he endeavored to speak, but his tongue refused its office.

"Where are the others?" I threateningly inquired, positive that this man was only used as a blind. "Out with them!"

"You may as well come out, Mac," whined the pitiful craven, with a gasp. "The jig is up; Bill has blowed, and they know everything."

To our utter astonishment and amazement one of the red-hot oven doors was slowly opened as the burly head of a Scotchman cautiously thrust forth.

"Four of 'e; the de'il," it suggested, calmly surveying us.

"Yes, and the house surrounded," I replied, not catching the gleam of the fellow's eye, which meant mischief.

"Well, I suppose I maun go," and, deliberately shutting the fiery door, he soon appeared from a trap in the top of the oven, which was covered with a large sheet-iron pan, filled with crackers. Accustomed to all kinds of trickery, our sudden surprise at these novel arrangements quickly subsided; and as his feet touched the floor, he was promptly seized and handcuffed to his trembling comrade, who uttered a sigh of relief as the spring snapped which bound them; the brute courage of the man imbued new life into his cowardly heart. I was impatiently waiting some other development, when the resuscitated baker briskly remarked:

'We are all, except old Sal, who knows nothing; let's jog along."

Strange as it may appear, the reaction from a state of the direst dread, and the presence of a—to him—protector, had actually made him joyous.

To make assurance doubly sure, two of us went over the premises, but found no one excepting an old negress, who was ordered to follow us. Leaving two men on guard, with a promise of speedy relief, we took our men and the woman to the Tombs, and seeing them securely locked up in

separate cells, hastened to headquarters. Calling the chief of police to his private office, I gave the details of our morning's work, which elicited highest praise and warmest congratulations.

"Nobly, bravely done, sir," he joyfully exclaimed; "you all deserve the thanks of the community. That scoundrel disgraced the department by his audacity. The rascal suspects something, and has tried every method to get discharged or communicate with his wife; even threatening vengeance upon all concerned in his arrest. I will remand him for trial till to-morrow, and then we will visit this bakery den."

"His wife must be arrested, sir," I remarked, as I tied Snatch firmly to the table-leg.

"Certainly certainly; by all means. Let us go." The basilisk glance of deadly and undying hate which Cole shot at me as I entered with the chief would have struck terror into any human heart. Like lightning, it was but a flash, and gone; yet his mission was accomplished. Years have elapsed, time and place changed—even death separates us, still I never recall it with out an involuntary feeling of dread.

"Cole, your case is set for to-morrow—"

"This is outrageous! infamous!" shouted the burglar, furiously. "Have I not proven an *alibi*?"

"Silence, sir; would you dictate my duty to me, you villain?" thundered the chief, thoroughly aroused. "To the Tombs with him; and if he opens his mouth, gag and handcuff him. The fellow has forgotten himself."

The words recalled the daring and now foiled burglar to his true position. He *had* forgotten himself.

"Irritated by his arrest, which he rightly supposed was on suspicion; his detention after proving an *alibi*; the positive refusal to take bail in any amount, or to hold any communication with him, and the increase of his anxiety, added to his guilty conscience, as the time crept slowly along, drove him mad with anger and suspense, overpowering his usual calm and masterly self-possession. Vague doubts and surmises began to intrude upon his mind. Calmly retracing every step and action of the robbery, his guarded visit to the bakery, return home, subsequent arrest, and other events, he felt reassured, and without any apparent effort settled down into the apathy of stone.

As he was rising to accompany the officers, Snatch, who had heard his master's voice through the thin partition, gave a joyful bark of reconnection. It was to Cole a death-knell. Hope departed, and conviction stared him in the face. With all the strength and ferocity of a roused lion, and lightning rapidity, he wrenched the shoe from his crippled foot, dashed all obstacles aside, leaped the stairs at a bound, and was rushing down the street with the speed of a deer before a hand or voice had been raised to stop him. If he gained but two squares he was as safe as if across the Atlantic; he would be miles away before we could track him a square. No one pretended to follow him, and my heart sank within me like lead.

The desperate burglar, no longer a cripple, bounded along with the ease of a panther, all hastening out of the way of the maniac, as they thought him. Nearing the second corner, he slackened his speed for the turn, shot around it like a meteor, and disappeared. Not until then was the spell broken which bound us. Sinking into a chair near the window, I gave up the last hope of ever capturing "the weasel;" and the knowledge of what he had done was but a poor balm for the bitter disappointment.

"Well, my men. I see that you agree with me, it is useless to follow this will-o'-the-wisp," said the chief. "The scamp was not even lame. Hereafter handcuff any and every one who are arrested on heavy charges, no matter who or what they are. Mr. Clerk, enter Cole's escape, and issue an order for his arrest on sight. Telegraph to the usual points. Now we will visit this magical oven. Holloo! what's this?" for several of the policemen, who continued looking out of the windows, suddenly started off on the full run.

Hastily looking out, I saw a large crowd collecting around "Cole's Corner," as it was long afterward called, and put out at the top of my speed after them, no doubt leaving our worthy chief to think us all demented.

Cole, in making the turn, had run into the midst of a returned ship's crew, who, in charge of the captain and mate, were on their way to the company's office to be paid off. It was impossible for him to slacken his high rate of speed, or to avoid them, as they met almost face to face. Goaded to the extreme verge of desperation as he was by the unforeseen accident, and being within a few paces of the place he was striving to gain, it is probable that he determined upon the suddenness of a furious attack, in hopes of escaping during the confusion.

This plan might have succeeded with almost any body of men but sailors—a "lark" is the haven of their delight—and as Cole bounded among them, savagely striking right and left, regardless of who he hit so that he gained the street, he was instantly surrounded by the merry gang, who made a ring, and enjoyed the fun hugely, cheering "the little bantam," as they called Cole, whenever he laid one of their comrades on his back.

Every second was of the utmost importance to the burglar. Had he been more collected, a few choice words, or some off-hand, witty remark would have opened the circle like magic; but foaming with rage, lost to every idea except escape, he cast his blood-shot eyes around for some weak point, and collecting all his remaining strength, was about to make a final effort to break through them, when the mate, rushing into the ring, struck him a blow which laid him cold and senseless upon the sidewalk. The infuriated man, who had his jaw-bone broken, would have stamped him to death, but was forcibly prevented by his men.

Several policemen, who had succeeded in working their way through the crowd, hastily explained matters, and bore the still inanimate body to the Tombs, followed by three rousing cheers for "the game little bantam" by the thoughtless and light-hearted crew.

Pondering upon the mutability of human events, and the fickleness of fate, I slowly retraced my steps to the office to keep my appointment with the chief.

Arriving at the bakery, we immediately entered the false oven. As we expected, it was fitted up as a workshop for manufacturing false keys, augers, and other burglarious tools. The furnace doors were of stamped sheet-iron, and kept red-hot by several jets of gas playing upon them. It was an ingenious cast of forethought, making the entrance from the top, as any one would suppose that the large pan of crackers which covered it had just been baked and were placed there to gradually cool off. In all other respects it had the appearance of a *bona-fide* oven, and would have never been suspected without some previous clue or information.

After completing our observations we began a search for the money, which was wrapped in a paper and carelessly thrown into the corner of a shelf, probably by Cole himself, without the slightest attempt at concealment.

At the trial everything was cleared up by the evidence of the baker, who turned State's evidence. The burglar invariably disguised himself in his wife's clothes, both in planning and carrying out his nefarious pursuit, while she, who bore a most remarkable resemblance to him both in size and features, personated his character. Although a splendid mimic, she still further carried out the deception by pretending to be sick or drunk; and after attracting sufficient attention to prove an *alibi* without doubt, would take a bed for the night at the place she had selected.

The Scotchman, who was an escaped convict, and a perfect master of his art, made the false keys and tools, while the baker and bakery were used as a "blind" to cover the entire proceedings. Cole was attacked with the brain-fever, and died in the Tombs four days previous to the trial, never having spoken to or recognizing any one after the mate's blow. His wife and the Scotchman were sentenced for the full term of the law. The baker, fairly frightened into honesty, took up his old trade, and I took charge of Snatch, who became quite a respectable dog, considering his morose and surly disposition.

Thus crime, like murder, no matter how carefully perpetrated or concealed, will out.

As in this instance, who for a moment would have supposed that this baker, meek and cowardly as a lamb, was engaged in one of the deepest and most skillfully laid schemes that ingenuity, craft and cunning could devise; or that Cole, after defying and escaping detection from all human sources, was left to be betrayed by the instinct of a lost dog. The words of the old merchant came distinctly before me!

Frank Leslie's Pleasant Hours, 1867