

Leaf the Nineteenth
The Broken Cent
by John Williams

(A Leaf from a Lawyer's Note-Book.)

(I am indebted to one of my friends for this incident, as well as for the other two which follow.
J.B.)

I NEVER was in a gambling-house but once in my life, and that was many years ago. I might have forgotten the circumstance, had it not been connected with an affair that made an indelible impression on my mind. It was in the year 1844, that professional business called me to the city of Baltimore, in the state of Maryland. I was engaged in a patent case, and expected to be there a week. One of the witnesses in the case was a young man named George Broughton, a particular friend of mine, so that the trip promised to be an agreeable one, as we were to travel and room together, during our absence from home.

It was a beautiful spring day when we started on our journey and reached Baltimore the same evening. We drove to Barnum's Hotel, and were soon installed in comfortable quarters. After supper, we strolled about the beautiful city; we could but admire its cleanliness, and the picturesque appearance of the streets. I remember very well, we were struck with the view of the city at night, from the elevation on which the Washington Monument is erected. It was a glorious moonlight night, and not a single cloud obscured the blue vault of heaven. Here and there, the sky was dotted with some large star, which shared the glory of the silvery moon. The air was balmy, and the city as calm and still as if we had been in a desert. We sat down on the parapet surrounding the monument, and turned our faces to the south. We both uttered an exclamation of admiration at the same moment. Before us lay no American city, but we were suddenly in Italy's classic land. There were the minarets, towers, steeples, villas, cupolas and domes, belonging to Florence or Venice, rather than a North American city. There was the same hazy atmosphere, the same bright sky, the same delirious feeling of "*dolce far niente*." George and I lingered over the scene for more than an hour, and it was only by an effort that we at last tore ourselves away. We returned to the hotel, and after a social cigar together, retired to bed.

The next day the trial commenced; it was a most, uninteresting case to the general reader, so I shall pass it by. I was very much fatigued when the court adjourned for the night, having been cross-examining witnesses the whole day. A good dinner and a glass of wine soon restored me.

After I had dined, I walked out on the balcony, and found George speaking to a stranger, whom he introduced to me as a Mr. Purcell, of Virginia. The latter was a gentleman about forty years of age, with a fine open countenance, and genial manners. He had arrived that afternoon at the hotel, and was on his way to New York. I entered into conversation with him, and found him to be an intelligent man, and a pleasing companion. We conversed on different subjects for some time, when Mr. Purcell suddenly remarked, turning to me:

"Mr. Mansfield, you are a lawyer, a member of a profession which is purely practical—tell me, do you believe in good and bad luck?"

“I scarcely understand your question,” I replied; “if you mean by it, do I believe that some persons are lucky and others unlucky in this world, I answer in the affirmative.”

“That is not exactly my meaning,” replied Mr. Purcell. “Do you believe that luck is governed by fixed laws?”

“Your question is a metaphysical one, and would involve a long argument, but why do you ask it?”

“I will tell you. I have visited Baltimore twice before in my life. The first time was about five years ago. Someone proposed that we should visit a gambling house. I had never been in one, and wishing to see a little of life, consented. We entered one in Old Town, and I risked a small sum—a five dollar bill, I think it was. I won—I placed the whole amount on another card and won again. I went on playing, and strange to say, won every time. At last the bank declined to play any more, and I left with \$10,000 in my pocket. Three years afterwards, I visited this city again. I had never entered a gambling-house since my first visit, but now I determined I would try my chance once more—it was more a motive of curiosity than anything else that impelled me, for I have really no passion for gambling whatever. Exactly the same thing took place. I first of all staked five dollars, and won every time. Again the bank declined to play any more, and I left this time with \$15,000 winnings.

“Certainly there is something strange in this,” replied George. “Have you ever been in a gambling-house since?”

“Never,” returned Mr. Purcell, “as I before told you, I have no love for gambling. But I have something further to confess, and here I am afraid I forfeit my claim in your eyes to the possession of common sense. I know you will think I am superstitious, when I tell you that I ascribe all my luck at the gaming table to the possession of this.”

And Mr. Purcell drew from his pocket a broken cent, bearing the date of 1815, which he handed to me to look at.

“You are jesting,” said I.

“No, indeed,” he returned. “I know it is contrary to common sense and reason, but I have tried the experiment over and over again at cards. When I have that cent in my pocket, I invariably win; when I am without it my luck is the same as other persons, sometimes I win and sometimes lose.”

“But that is purely a coincidence,” said Broughton.

“No, it is no coincidence, because it is invariable. I have tested it more than five hundred times.”

“Where did you get that cent from?” I asked.

“That is the most curious part of the whole story,” replied Mr. Purcell. “Some eight years ago, an old family servant of ours, a gray headed negro, sent for me in the middle of the night to visit him at his bedside. He had been ill some days with pneumonia, and our family physician had pronounced his recovery hopeless. I had always been the old man’s favorite, and of course obeyed his summons with alacrity. I found the negro fast sinking. The moment he saw me, he stretched out his hand to me and slipped this broken cent into mine. ‘This will bring you luck at cards, Massa Charles,’ he murmured. ‘Keep it for my sake.’ To please the old man, I put it into my pocket, but thought no more about it. He died that night. During the winter, we played whist almost every night at home to while away the time. The next time we played after this incident, an extraordinary vein of luck seemed to have fallen to my share, for I won every game. But even then I never thought anything about the talisman I possessed. The same thing occurred night after night—I could not understand my extraordinary good fortune, when one morning happening to feel in my waistcoat pocket, I found the cent. I then remembered what the negro had told me, and commenced a series of tests, which convinced me that this coin possesses all the virtues I have ascribed to it. The first time I came to Baltimore, I thought nothing about my talisman, although I always carry it in my pocket. It was not until I had returned to my hotel with my winnings from the gambling house that I remembered it—I then knew to what I owed my good fortune.”

Mr. Purcell spoke so earnestly, that I saw it would be no use attempting to combat the extraordinary delusion under which he labored. I contented myself with saying that it was very strange.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Mr. Purcell, “it is my intention to visit the gambling house again tonight—if you would like to accompany me I should be glad of your society.”

At first, I declined—I had lived forty years without entering a gambling house, and felt no particular desire to do so now—but George appeared disposed to go. The thought struck me that this Mr. Purcell might be a plausible sharper in the employment of some of the gaming-house keepers, to get victims into their dens. When I saw that my friend Broughton was determined to accompany Purcell, I altered my mind and resolved to go too, for I knew that I had a great deal of influence with my friend, that a word from me would prevent him from playing deeply. We sat a little while after supper and then started off. It was exactly ten o’clock when we left the hotel.

It was a glorious night; the moon was fast rising to the zenith, while the gorgeous Orion was sinking in the west. Near the moon was the regal Jupiter, a little further east the pale Saturn, and within a few degrees of the western horizon was the king of the long winter’s night, Sirius. I have always been a lover of the wonders of the heavens, but the recollection of the magnificent spectacle the sky presented on that eventful night is indelibly impressed on my memory. We proceeded along Market Street, over the bridge, and were soon threading the narrow thoroughfares in Old Town. At last we stood before a house in Bond Street, which our conductor informed us was the dwelling we sought. It was a long, low dark building, with but few windows, facing the street. It had the appearance from the outside of being unoccupied, and such at first was really my idea—but Mr. Purcell soon undeceived me, for he advanced to the door and knocked at it in a peculiar manner. The door was immediately cautiously opened by a negro, who scanned us carefully before he admitted us.

“All right, Sam,” said Mr. Purcell.

The porter doubtless remembered the Virginian, for he threw the door open and we entered. We had no sooner passed through an inner green baize door, than a flood of light burst upon us, proceeding from a chandelier, which served to illumine a staircase. Our conductor ascended the stairs and we followed. The flight was a short one, and we found ourselves in a long room, handsomely furnished, and brilliantly lighted. In the middle of this apartment was a table, on which were printed representations of thirteen cards. In front of the table sat the dealer, a flashy looking man with an impassible face and superabundance of jewelry. He had before him a spring box in which was placed a pack of cards, from which he kept continually taking the top one and placed it on one of two heaps. I knew nothing of the game, but learned that it was a faro table. A large number of persons surrounded the table, who, from time to time placed bank notes or checks on the cards painted on the cloth, and as a card was turned up, the dealer, either took the amount to himself, or paid an amount equal to that placed on the card; the point being decided by the fact whether the card turned up belonged to the dealer’s pile or the players. If my description of the game is meagre and unsatisfactory, my ignorance must plead my excuse, for as I said before, I knew nothing about the game. I only describe what I saw.

The moment Mr. Purcell entered the room, he was accosted by a stout red faced man, with a singular unprepossessing cast of countenance, who advanced and shook him cordially by the hand.

“I am glad to see you, Mr. Purcell,” said the proprietor of the gambling saloon, for such I afterwards found him to be. “Have you come to break us again?”

“I have come to try my luck,” replied Purcell.

The latter now advanced to the dealer, and handed to him a pile of notes, and received in exchange a number of red checks, which he informed me each represented five dollars. George Broughton bought a few white checks representing one dollar each.

They now commenced to play. I watched the game with much interest. Purcell placed a dozen or so of his red checks on the queen. After the dealer had turned a few cards, I saw that the Virginian had won, from the fact that an equal number of checks was placed beside his stake. Everyone supposed that he would now bet on another card, but he left his stake there—he won again. Purcell appeared to be entirely careless about the matter, not even looking at the table.

“Your card has won the third time,” said Mr. Emery, the proprietor of the saloon.

“Luck has not deserted me, it seems then,” was his only reply.

“You had better take down your funds,” said George Broughton whispering in his ear.

“O, no, I’ll let them be.”

“But the queen has won three times—and every body is betting against it.”

I glanced at the table and saw a large number of checks piled on the queen—but all of them were topped by a cent except the Virginian’s. This cent I afterwards learned, denoted that they played against the card winning the next time.

“You will certainly lose,” said Broughton, perceiving that his new friend took no notice of what he had said to him.

“I shall win,” returned the Virginian, with the utmost confidence.

And he did win, for again the queen was turned on the player’s side. I need not prolong the description of the scene; suffice it to say, that the Virginian won every time. He changed his check for those of larger denominations, and according to old gamblers, he played in the most reckless manner, but always with the same result. He soon absorbed the attention of the entire company. One man in particular—a thin, cadaverous looking individual, who I afterwards learned was an actor at the Charles Street Theatre, gazed on him with wonder and astonishment.

I began to get tired of it, and proposed to Broughton that we should return to our hotel. But he was fascinated, and did not want to leave. I then bade him good night. I felt the necessity of retiring to bed, as I had a hard day’s work before me on the morrow, and I left the gambling-house. I soon reached East Baltimore Street, and turned as I supposed, in the direction of my hotel. I continued to walk until I found myself in a very wide street which I did not remember to have seen before. A watchman fortunately passed me at that moment, and I inquired my way to Barnum’s Hotel; I then learned that when I left Bond Street I had turned to the right when I should have turned to the left, and by this means had absolutely been proceeding in an exactly opposite direction to the one I ought to have taken. The watchman, however, setting me right, I hastened to repair the mistake I had, made by quickening my steps. But with all the speed I made, I lost at least three-quarters of an hour by my want of knowledge of the points of the compass.

At last I reached Jones’ Falls. It is necessary that I should inform those unacquainted with Baltimore, that Jones’ Falls is a small stream of water, dividing the city into about two equal portions—that part on the eastern side of the Falls is called Old Town, while the western portion is Baltimore proper. The stream of water is crossed at the foot of every street by a bridge, there are Pratt Street bridge, Baltimore Street bridge, Fayette Street bridge, etc.

I stood on Baltimore Street bridge, and leaning over the parapet, paused a few minutes to admire the beauty of the scene. Before and behind me lay the sleeping city; to the right and left of me was the winding stream of which I have just spoken. The moon was shining on the surface of the waters, turning it into liquid silver, while a short distance off I could see the Fayette Street bridge—the moonlight enabling me to trace even the open ironwork of the parapet. It was such a clear beautiful night, the air was so soft, and the moon was so bright, that I was tempted to linger on the bridge, as I have said before—but I at last tore myself away, and was on the eve of leaving my resting place, when a sudden shriek made me start. It came from the Fayette Street bridge, and I immediately turned my eyes in that direction. What was my horror to see a man’s body

deliberately raised to the top of the parapet, and then thrown into the Falls. I was even near enough to hear the splash as the body fell into the water. There was one more shriek, the sound of running footsteps as the murderer crossed over to the western side of the city, and then all was still. I immediately ran as fast as I could down Front Street, in the direction of Fayette Street. I met a watchman on my way, and hurriedly told him what had occurred. He sprung his rattle, and we soon had plenty of assistance.

We commenced a strict search for the body, but without any result; the stream had doubtless taken it down the Falls. We then examined the place from which the man had been thrown over the bridge, but, excepting a pool of blood on the pavement, there were no evidences to be found. Two or three watchmen started in pursuit of the murderer, while the rest continued to search for the body. I remained with the latter for more than an hour, but we met with no better success than at first. Finding that nothing could be done until daybreak, I gave my name and address to one of the watchmen, and started for my hotel.

When I reached the hotel, I went directly to my chamber, and found that George Broughton had returned, and was already in bed and fast asleep. At first I felt half-inclined to wake my companion and tell him what I had seen, but then I thought it would be such a pity to wake him out of his sound sleep, and that the morning would do as well. I undressed myself and went to bed.

The terrible sight I had seen kept me awake some hours, and it was not until the first rays of the morning sun shone in my window that I fell asleep. How long I slept I know not, but I was awakened by a loud knocking at my chamber door. When I opened my eyes I found that it was broad daylight. I turned my eyes to my companion's bed and found that he was still fast asleep—in fact, George Broughton was always a sound sleeper, and I was not surprised that the knocking had not awakened him. I immediately rose up and opened the door. It was one of the waiters of the hotel, who informed me that two constables were below and wished to see me directly. I ordered them to be shown up to the chamber. The sound of voices awakened George, and he sat up in bed.

“What is the matter?” said he, rubbing his eyes.

“There are two constables down stairs, who want to see me. I have sent for them to come up here.”

“What in the world can constables want with you?” said Broughton.

“I will explain all by-and-by,” I replied, putting on a few articles of dress.

I had hardly finished a hurried toilet when the door opened and the two officers entered.

“Is there a Mr. George Broughton here?” asked one of the men, advancing into the middle of the apartment.

“That is my name,” said George.

“Is this your card?” asked the man, showing one of George’s visiting cards.

“Yes, that is my card—why do you ask?”

“It is an unpleasant business, sir; but we shall be compelled to search you.”

“I really don’t know what this means,” replied George—“but you are at perfect liberty to search my clothes—there they are on the chair.”

The officers began to examine the pockets of my friend’s clothes. From one they took a gold watch, from another a large quantity of bank notes and gold. As these things were brought to light, I could see a peculiar smile flit across the countenances of the officers.

“Does this property belong to you?” asked one of the officers.

“You are very inquisitive,” said George. “Why do you ask?”

“Only duty, sir. Of course you are at liberty to tell or not, as you think fit.”

While this conversation was going on, I stood as if thunderstruck. I immediately asked myself the question where did George get the watch and all the money from—for I knew that they did not belong to him.

“I have no objection to tell,” replied George, “although I do not recognize your right to ask me the question. That money and that watch belong to Mr. John Purcell, of Virginia.”

“Exactly,” said the officer, with a sagacious nod, and then, he added: “you were with him last night?”

“I was.”

“You left the gambling-house in Bond Street together, at one in the morning?”

“We did.”

“Then, sir, it is my painful duty to arrest you for the willful murder of Mr. John Purcell.”

“Good God!” cried George, starting from the bed; “what do you mean?”

“Simply what I say. You must accompany me at once to a magistrate’s office, and we shall want your company, Mr. Mansfield.”

I was dreaming. I did not know if I was asleep or awake.

“My company,” I stammered, “what can you want me for?”

“You are an important witness, sir. You are the only witness to the murder.”

“What! do you mean that the body I saw thrown over the bridge—” I hesitated to finish the sentence.

“Was Mr. Purcell’s,” replied the officer. “His body was found below Pratt Street early this morning. And on repairing to the scene of the tragedy we found Mr. Broughton’s visiting card on the pavement. It was overlooked in the search last night. We received information that Mr. Broughton was lodging at Barnum’s, and came here at once. I need not tell you that we have found corroborative testimony,” added the speaker, pointing to the watch and money which still lay on the table.

“Mansfield, you cannot believe me guilty,” said George, turning as pale as death.

“No, my dear fellow,” I replied, “I do not believe you guilty—in fact, I know it is utterly impossible that you could have committed this crime. I have no doubt an explanation at the magistrate’s office will set all to rights.”

George hurriedly dressed himself, and we proceeded to the nearest magistrate. We found several witnesses already assembled there, and the ease was at once gone into. The first witness called was the keeper of the gambling-house. He deposed that the deceased, accompanied by Broughton and myself, visited his saloon on the previous night, that the deceased won very largely, and partook of supper a quarter of an hour after I had left. He further deposed that the deceased drank a great deal of champagne during the meal, and soon after left the house accompanied by the prisoner.

Henry Dornton, a private watchman, was the next witness called, and deposed that he had seen the deceased in company with the prisoner going down Fayette Street together, about a quarter of an hour before the murder occurred. He identified them positively, because his attention was called to them by the fact that the deceased appeared to be intoxicated, and the prisoner was half forcing him along the street.

I was next witness called, and gave the statement with which the reader is already familiar. The constable was then called, who deposed as to the finding of the prisoner’s card on Fayette Street bridge, and the discovery of the property of the deceased in the pockets of the prisoner. Patrick O’Neal deposed that he was a porter at Barnum’s hotel, and that the prisoner returned to the hotel at half past one in the morning, and appeared to be very much out of breath, and somewhat excited. When it is remembered that I had previously stated that it was twenty minutes past one by my watch that I had seen the body thrown over the bridge, it can easily be surmised how this fact told against the prisoner.

This was the whole of the evidence. The magistrate then asked George if he had any statement to make. The poor fellow, who appeared utterly confounded at the mass of circumstantial evidence brought against him, replied in the affirmative, and made the following statement.

“The deceased, accompanied by Mr. Mansfield and myself, visited Mr. Emory’s establishment yesterday evening. The deceased won largely. At about a quarter past twelve, as near as I am able to judge, Mr. Mansfield bade us good night, stating that he wanted to get to bed, and left the gaming-house. Fifteen minutes after that we went down stairs to supper. The deceased partook largely of champagne and afterwards drank some brandy. After supper the proprietor declared that the bank would play no more that night, and we left the house. It was one o’clock when we turned the corner of Bond Street. The deceased was very much intoxicated and declared that he would not go home. I used every effort that I possibly could to induce him to proceed quietly along the street, but it was all to no purpose, he became more obstreperous every minute. At last, when within about a square of Fayette Street bridge he sat down on the steps of a dwelling, and declared he would not advance another step. Again I begged and entreated him, but in vain. I then tried to pull him along by force, but he grew very angry, so I desisted. I then told him he had better give me his money and watch, and he could return to the hotel when he pleased. To this he consented, and confided to my care nearly all his winnings. I then ran to my hotel and retired at once to bed. I knew nothing whatever about the murder having been committed until the constable informed me in the morning. This is all I know about the matter.”

“Mr. Broughton,” said the magistrate when he concluded, “I have but one duty before me. Your explanation may be satisfactory to a jury but truth compels me to say that it is not so to me. I now commit you to jail for the willful murder of John Purcell, there to await the action of the grand jury.”

I whispered a few words of comfort in my friend’s ear while the commitment was being made out but he shook his head and murmured the words, “my poor mother!”

Broughton was removed to jail, no bail being of course admissible in his case, and I went with a heavy heart to the U. S. Court to prosecute my patent claims. To my joy it was brought to a conclusion that day, the judge deciding in my favor some objection I offered which ruined my opponent’s cause. I was left at liberty to devote my whole time to my poor friend, for in spite of the evidence a doubt of his innocence never for a moment entered my mind.

When I returned to my hotel in the evening I sat down seriously to consider the case. I must confess I was appalled at the weight of circumstantial evidence against him. Every link seemed to be perfect. There was the motive for the deed, the possession of the property, and the damning fact of his card having been found on the scene of the tragedy, everybody of course supposing that in the struggle it had fallen from his pocket. How was I to meet facts like these? I felt certain that some one had followed Broughton and the deceased, and that when the former left Purcell, the assassin had attacked him almost immediately. But how to discover this person? It was but natural to suppose that the murderer was one of the visitors to the gambling house, and I saw that my first inquiries must be directed in that quarter.

The next morning I visited Mr. Emory’s establishment and had a long conversation with him, for to tell the truth, I suspected him very strongly. A few minutes’ conversation, however, convinced me that I was in error. He proved conclusively that he had never left the house on the night in question. I then interrogated him as to his visitors. He knew them, and gave me such a character

of them that I could not suspect them. I left his house no nearer a solution of the mystery than when I entered it.

My next visit was to Fayette Street bridge, and I made a most minute inspection of the place where the body had been thrown into the water. Here I met with a little more success, for wedged in some of the interstices of the iron work of the parapet I found a vest button. It was a peculiar round button of black jet, and I felt certain that it must either have come off the murdered man's vest or that of the assassin. To decide the former point, I immediately went to inspect the body of the deceased. One glance was sufficient to tell me that the vest button had never belonged to him, for his vest was a cloth one and the buttons were of the same material. A minute examination of the body also convinced me that he had been struck from behind. The wound it is true was on the right side, but the direction was such that it could not have been given in front.

This button, then, was the first clue I had to the real assassin. It is true it did not amount to much, for the chances of my finding the man who wore the particular vest with those buttons in a city of two hundred thousand inhabitants were very slight, to say nothing of the fact that hundreds of people might wear just such buttons. But still it was something, and I felt encouraged. In the afternoon I visited my poor friend in prison. I found him calm and hopeful. He was so conscious of his own innocence, that he felt it almost an impossibility that other people could believe him guilty. His greatest anxiety was on his mother's account. He entreated me to write to her and tell her the true facts of the case, for he felt unequal to the task. I promised to do so. We conversed together more than two hours, but I found that he could give no solution of the mystery.

"By-the-by, George," said I, as I was about to leave, "there is one thing that tells very much against you, and which I am at a loss to explain, and that is the fact of your visiting card being found on the spot where the murder was committed."

"I can explain that easily enough," he replied. "When I first saw Purcell we conversed together a few minutes, and finding him very agreeable, I introduced myself by handing him my card; he placed it in his waistcoat pocket, and in his scuffle with the assassin it must have fallen to the ground."

"Did anyone see you give him your card?"

"Certainly—a waiter was in the room at the time."

"If he can only remember the fact," I returned, "the chief link in the chain of evidence against you is broken."

"I am sure he will remember it, for he was handing a glass of water to Mr. Purcell at the very moment I presented the card."

"This is very encouraging," I returned.

Our conversation lasted a little time longer and then I bade him farewell. My first duty on my return to the hotel was to call the waiter to me. I found my friend was correct—he remembered

all about the card. For the next two weeks I devoted all my time in hunting up additional evidence. I will not detain the reader with an account of my proceedings. I used all the ruses so well known to our profession, but they every one failed. I could not obtain the slightest clue to the real perpetrator of the crime. I visited my friend almost every day, and endeavored to keep up his spirits by representing his case in a more favorable light than really existed, but he could not fail to gather from me that I had met with no decided success.

I began to grow very much discouraged, for unwilling as I was to admit the truth, I could not disguise from myself the fact that my poor friend must inevitably be convicted unless I could discover the real assassin, and of that there did not appear to be the slightest probability. George's mother had come down to Baltimore, and was staying at the same hotel with me. Every evening I had to report progress to her, and, as with her son, I was obliged to disguise my own dreadful forebodings.

One night, weary in mind and body, as I was passing the Charles Street theatre, my attention was attracted by a huge poster at the door. I do not know what impelled me, for God knows I was in no mood to seek amusement, but I entered the theatre, and paying the price of admission, took my seat in the parquette. The house was very full. I glanced at the bill and found that the first piece to be played was "The People's Lawyer," the principal part, that of Solon Shingle, being filled by a Mr. Denner. The performance was advertised to commence at a quarter before eight. It was now eight o'clock, and the curtain had not yet risen. The audience began to be very impatient, stamping, whistling and calling at the top of their voices. It was in vain that the orchestra continued to play. At last, at a quarter after eight, the drop curtain was moved on one side and the manager advanced to the footlights. The house became so quiet that you could have heard a pin drop.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the manager, "I have to throw myself on your indulgence. The piece has been delayed, owing to the absence of Mr. Denner. We expected him every moment, but we have just received information that Mr. Denner is ill. Under these circumstances Mr. Cowly at a few moments' notice has kindly undertaken the part. I have to bespeak for him your kind indulgence."

All American audiences are good natured, and this little speech was received with applause. One individual behind me did not, however, appear to be satisfied with it; for I distinctly heard him utter the word, "gammon." I turned round to him, and found myself face to face with a seedy-looking individual who was busily engaged chewing tobacco.

"You don't believe that statement to be true?" said I.

"I know it aint," he replied.

"Why?"

"Because I saw Denner myself at the Eutaw House, this afternoon."

"What do you suppose, then, is the reason he does not play?"

“He’s above it now.”

“Above it—how do you mean?”

“Why, you see, sir, this Denner is a great gambler, and he has had an extraordinary streak of luck lately, he’s broke half the faro banks in town.”

“What!” I exclaimed in a loud voice, starting from my seat, and drawing the attention of the entire audience on me. I became sensible of my ridiculous position, and sat down again.

“You seem mightily concerned, stranger,” said the man—“I repeat what I said before, this Denner’s been and broke half the faro banks in town lately; he is all the talk among the sporting men.”

“What kind of a looking man is he?” I asked, in as calm a voice as I could command.

“He’s a thin, lanky, slabsided sort of a man, with a face pale enough to make one think he had lived on tallow candles all his life.”

“Do you know where he lives?”

“Yes, he boards at the Western in Howard Street.”

I said no more, but in a few minutes left the theatre. I remembered that on the night of the murder I had noticed a pale, sickly-looking man gazing with a peculiar look on Purcell when he won so largely. If this Denner should prove to be the same man I felt certain that it must be he who had committed the murder. His extraordinary luck at gaming-houses must be owing to the possession of the broken cent which he had taken from his victim’s pocket, in all probability without knowing its value. I determined on a *coup de main*, and went to the police office and procured the services of two officers.

We started for the Western Hotel in Howard Street, and when we arrived there, I was delighted to be informed in answer to our inquiries, that Mr. Denner was in his room. I inquired the number, and stated that I would go there without being announced. I placed the officers outside the door, and told them not to come in until I clapped my hands. I dispensed with the ceremony of knocking, but opening the door entered the chamber. I found Mr. Denner all dressed, in the act of drawing on his boots, evidently preparing to go out. When he raised his head I could not prevent giving a start, for I recognized, not only that he was the man I had seen in the gaming-house, but that he wore a vest with buttons exactly resembling the one I had found—one of which was wanting.

“Mr. Denner, I believe,” said I.

“That’s my name,” said he, in a surly tone, “what do you want?”

“I want to see you on important business,” I answered.

“I suppose you come from the theatre—tell the manager I won’t come.”

“No, sir, I do not come from the theatre,” and I clapped my hands. The officers immediately entered the room. The actor turned very pale when he saw the stars, but he recovered himself almost directly.

“What means this intrusion?” said he.

“It means this, Mr. Denner,” I replied, “that on the 28th ult., you visited the gaming-house of Mr. Emory, in Bond Street.”

“Well, what then?” asked the actor, growing livid.

“That you followed Mr. Purcell and Mr. George Broughton—that when you saw the latter leave his friend, you rushed forward and stabbed the unfortunate victim of your avarice. You rifled his pockets, but found very little to reward your crime—you then threw his body into the Falls.”

“It is a lie!” said the man, but his countenance proved that I had told the truth, for it turned almost green and a convulsive quivering seized his limbs.

“It is the truth,” I returned, “and what is more, I hold the proof in my hands. Search him, officers,” I continued, turning to the latter; “you will find on his person a broken cent bearing date 1815, which I can swear belonged to the murdered man.”

“I have got no broken cent,” returned the assassin, doggedly.

“That we shall soon see,” was my reply.

The officers began to search Denner. From a corner of his waistcoat pocket they produced the broken cent with the date 1815. The accused gazed first at the officers and then at me with open mouth, and with wonderment and astonishment depicted in his face. It was evident that he did not know he possessed the cent.

“That is not all” I added—“when you dragged your victim to the bridge he was not dead, and struggled. In that struggle one of your vest buttons came off. Here is the button,” I continued, taking it from my pocket, and going up to him I pointed to the place where it was wanting, “and here is where it belongs.”

My *coup de main* was successful. The man thought I knew a great deal more than I really did, and at once made a confession. He was committed forthwith to prison. The next morning George Broughton was released. I shall never forget the meeting between mother and son to the last hour of my life. That same evening we all left for New York.

Denner's trial took place three months afterwards. He was found guilty and condemned to be hung. He evaded the sentence, however, by committing suicide. I never knew what became of the broken cent.

Leaves from the Note Book of a New York Detective: The Private Record of J. B. Ed. John Williams. Hartford: J. B. Burr, 1865.