

[From an English Magazine]

## *Chase With an American Detective*

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Crime is universal. It is the great pioneer and colonist. Cramped in old and dense population, its restless instincts impel it to wild and far off adventure. From the flight of Cain to the exodus of British convicts, the men of sin have been founders of nations. They hew[ed] down the wilderness, throttle[ed] the vipers and slew the savages. Then came better and more timid folks, to establish order and religion; and in the course of time the original knaves are canonized, and sounding degree are traced to them. Just such a transaction is taking place in America, the young Asiatic for the old world's unworthy and disaffected subjects. The enterprise of the country is a legitimate development of these classes: so likewise in its aggressiveness, its speculation, its recklessness. The new elements is gaining the ascendancy, at least in the older settlements, but a great deal of crime exists, though it is exercised in new and curious modes. Prior to the present civil war, there existed no paper currency in the United States. Thousand of corporations, more or less responsible, issued promises to pay, and the monetary insecurity thus engendered gave license to all descriptions of forging and counterfeiting.

I was sitting in the office of my journal one evening, when Detective Ballagan came in. He had promised to notify me of the first good "case" of which he might have charge, and at the present he was on the track of a notorious offender by the name of Jules Ingraham, a native of Martinique. This man had been chief clerk in the largest produce house of the West India Islands, where he had swindled to the amount of fifty thousand dollars, and had escaped to New York. He had brought with him blank bill heads and drafts of every business firm in the tropics, and had deposited these at a hotel on the quay. After a year of prodigious success, he was caught in Missouri, and sentenced to five years imprisonment.

His discharge marks a singular adjustment of time to crime. Within twelve hours after the forger received his documents, the place of deposit was in ashes. He renewed his guilty career immediately—obtained five thousand dollars within a week and escaping to Canada, threatened to plunder every American banker from Portland to Galveston. He was believed to be dwelling now on the frontier; and the bankers of all the American cities had subscribed funds for his apprehension and conviction at [whatever] cost. A woman to whom Ingraham was attached had been seen at Albany, going westward. It was probable that she and the forger were not far apart, and Ballagan wished me to proceed northward with him that same afternoon, that he might keep close upon their trail.

We followed by rail the windings of the palisaded Hudson, threaded the rich valley of the Mohawk, and at Rome, an ambitious little town of Western New York, heard by telegraph of a new feat of Ingraham's at Watertown, on the falls of the Black River, near the foot of Lake Ontario. He undoubtedly meant to dwell without Federal jurisdiction, appear periodically in the states, and after each offence, escape across the St. Lawrence. There was, I believe an extradition treaty embracing the crime of forgery; but the formalities of law, and the jealousies of Canadian and state officials, practically annulled it.

Ballagan was shrewd and bold; and he determined to entrap Ingraham, if possible; but, in the failure of intrigue, to seize and kidnap him anywhere upon foreign soil. The reward would be large; and the detective had taken me along with him, that I might give the capture a newspaper notoriety, and so challenge the generosity of the bankers.

We were armed with fowling pieces, and meant to hunt and fish along the lake border. Ballagan began to watch the telegraph stations, and I to play the guiltless young sportsman, among the frontier girls and gossips. Neither of us had seen Ingraham, but we carried his photograph. It represented a small, thoughtful, grizzle haired man, addicted to cigars and an eye glass. I thought I could recognize the original if I saw him, but I had qualms as to the repute to be derived from their catching.

The detective's first precaution was to forward a description of the felon to every revenue officer upon the American bank of the St. Lawrence. The functions of these did not embrace State crimes, of which forging was one, and they were therefore charged to detain Ingraham for debasing the currency—national offence.

After three days of provoking ill success, we traced the forger's female accomplice to Cape Vincent, a paltry American village at the junction of the lake and the river. Here she had mysteriously disappeared; neither the return mail nor the Canadian ferry, nor any of the border steamers, had taken her aboard, the conclusion of Ballagan was prompt and sagacious—she had met the forger himself, and he had spirited her away. The river here was seven miles broad, and divided by many islands. Ingraham may have located himself upon one of these, and by means of a row boat made his passage to either mainland. We acted upon the surmise at once, hired oarsmen, and a [bateau], and beat up and down the channel for many leagues. For a week our efforts were futile: there were a few farm houses along the frontier islands, but we were satisfied that Ingraham harbored in none of them and the configuration of the coast was such that the exploration promised to be interminable. In the meantime the rogue attempted a third forgery at Ogdensburgh, fifty miles distant, and the press teemed with complaints of the police system and of Ballagan.

It was on the twelfth day of our adventure that the detective, sick of care and exposure, made over to me the boat and outfit. The watermen rowed me at dawn to a cove either Wolfe's Island, the largest of the group; it was a lonely place, removed from wither channel of the river, visible from neither mainland, and out of sight of every sail and habitation. I made fast my line at three hundred yards; the burnished boat skimmed the surface like a star; the rower never tired nor slacked, and before nine o'clock I had a score of pickerel, not one weighing less than six pounds. I was now reminded of breakfast; the island was at hand, and as we pulled along the shore to find a landing, a turn in the coast revealed a comfortable frame dwelling, set against a ridge of thick timber, and flanked by a smooth beach. Smoke curled from its chimney, a boat bordered the strand, and a dog arose up and howled as our oars awakened him. Directly a man and woman appeared at the door; the former walked down to the skiff, and leaping into it skulled rapidly away, without saying a word. The woman received us shyly, but hospitably. She gave my man the use of fire and kettle, and while he cleaned and prepared the fish, I strolled into the yard to regard the premises. The wood grew tall and tangled close to the house; the dwelling was almost without furniture, neither cattle, nor sheep, nor poultry inhabited the barn; and the only sound to

break the general hush were those of wild birds careering overhead, or the water splashing upon the sands. A turn in the edge of the cedars brought me to a path, which I pursued curiously, until it stopped at a brink of a pool or inlet, where a raft was moored to the shore. A similar channel environed the dwelling. I concluded that it stood upon a small, separate island, and had for this reason escaped our previous notice.

The woman was watching me from a window as I returned. She was handsome, but not prepossessing—a fine animal face, a little desolate, perhaps, and strangely out of place in this bleak, secluded country. She was indisposed to converse, admitted that she had lived here but a little while, and at length, weary with ennui, took a yellow covered novel from a shelf, and read in uneasy silence, eyeing me at intervals. The scene was oddly composed; a painting it would have been unpardonable—the bare floors and walls, the solitary lawn and water, and this fine, fashionable, and sensual woman reading a loose novel amid the ruins. I took down the few books from the shelf—Hunt’s Merchant’s Magazine, a pile of shipping lists, a manual of bookkeeping, a lot of business dictionaries, a treatise on commercial law—an odd library, surely, for this wilderness. Revolving these things in my mind as I ate, I made a second abortive attempt to engage madam’s attention, and at last bade her good bye.

“Row me to the Canada shore,” I said to the waterman, “we will spend the night with the British lion.”

I landed at a hamlet near the city of Kingston, and proceeding to a tidy tavern, stretched myself beneath a window and essayed to read a newspaper. Dullness and fatigue induced drowsiness. I was halfway into a dream, when the entrance of somebody disturbed me. A person in a gray coat had taken up the journal and was perusing it by the aid of an eye-glass. His side and back were turned toward me, but I thought I recognized him as the surly occupant of the dwelling on the cove. He was small, lithe, and gentlemanly; and after a while he took a billet from his pocket, folded it, and lighting a cigar, threw away the remnant of the paper. A commotion of some description now attracted him to the exterior, and before I could compose myself to sleep again, the noise in front grew fierce and boisterous. I found the stranger wrangling with a knot of boors who had lately lost some horses, and were disposed to regard all unknown persons as thieves. He was calm and polite, and having abashed them somewhat, withdrew to his vessel, and pushed into the stream. As he stood in the [bateau] and faced me for the first time, the conviction flashed upon me that this man and Jules Ingraham were one.

The photograph in the possession of Ballagan could have been taken for no other face. The small, thoughtful, grizzle-haired man regarded me; there were the eye-glasses and the cigar, and as, with a quick heart, I recalled each shade and feature, the fine lady on the gloomy island came to my memory; she was the creature of Jules Ingraham; the bare dwelling was his retreat; the mercantile books his aids to felony; the man before me was the forger.

Another clue at once suggested itself—the billet with which he lighted his cigar. I entered the bar-room tremulously, and took the remnant from the floor, the blood gushed to my face at the first word:

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The paper was a blank bill of exchange, one of many with which the culprit had operated! I waited no longer, but summoned my waterman and relieving each other at the oars, we reached Cape Vincent at about dusk.

It was not without remorse that I confided my discoveries to Ballagan, I regret that it was my destiny to make them. The law had its paid agents, of whom I was one. My meditations might not be soothed on bleak nights to come by the thoughts of a miserable man whom my officiousness had consigned to a cold prison cell.

But now the facts were in my possession; it was criminal in me to withhold them. I laid them before the detective as he lay in bed, leaning his powerful neck and head upon a muscular arm, and his small, secretive eyes grew black and expressionless, and he listened like one deaf. It was his professional way of expressing satisfaction.

“You must take the ferry to Kingston immediately,” he said. “I will dictate a telegram and a placard; the one must be dispatched and the other printed at once upon your arrival. Write:

“ ‘To all British officials and residents on the St. Lawrence:

“ ‘I, Pepin Peti, of Fort Erie, Canada West, have lost eight prime horses. The thief is known to be a small, grizzle-haired, intelligent person, near sighted, and wearing a gray coat; was last seen near Kingston, and is believed to dwell on or near Wolfe Island. I will pay a thousand dollars for his detention. He will doubtless attempt to land between Kingston and Montreal.’ ”

That night the trains in the Grand Trunk railway carried handbills to every river side village; the Canada shore was guarded as securely as the American shore had already been. Horse thieving was not less heinous than murder, where livestock constituted the sole riches of the people; they would watch for Jules Ingraham like savages nourishing a *vendetta*. He would have but three alternatives: take to the forest at the peril of being devoured by panthers; to drift upon the broad Ontario and perish by storm or hunger; or to follow the current of the river among the thousand renowned isles, daring the passage of the rapids, until overtaking some European bound vessel in the Gulf, he might bid farewell to the New World. I slept little during the night and sought the quay an hour before daylight, that I might take the first ferry to Cape Vincent. The steamer had not come in; and as the air was very cool, I resorted to the furnace of a tow boat just firing up alongside of the wharf; the deck hands were gathered at the window, peering toward the American shore.

“What are you expecting, boys?” I asked.

“The ashosiation for the purtection of property in hosses,” said a grimy engineer, “has gone off the island to burn out a hoss-thief. They’ve been suspectin’ him for a week; to-night a fellow from Fort Erie bro’t positive proof. We are looking out for a blaze.”

In a few moments the sky in mid-horizon was lighted up; the woody outlines of the island were revealed flickeringly; shadows of flame were reflected across the broad, dark current, and soon we made out a black object advancing in the glare; it was a ferry-boat and the first man to step ashore was Ballagan.

“Our friend has escaped,” he said, “he has left me a curious paper by his lady, who unfortunately, has no dwelling at present, and I have given her shelter in the jail.”

I took the note in my hands; the writing was clear and beautiful, as if engraved, it read as follows:

“To the Detective stopping at Cape Vincent:—I would respectfully suggest that you are doing yourself and me a wrong, not to say injustice. If you capture me you make, say, three thousand dollars: give me fair play one week, and I will make myself a hundred thousand and you twenty thousand. This is an honest proposition; consider it! I know that Canada and the States are alike shut to me, but I still live, and I will never be taken alive.

INGRAHAM”

Thus, friendless, hungry and at bay, he moved forever northward, toward the cold gulf, till, having entered the romantic territory of the “Thousand Isles,” we lost all traces of him. Our voyage through this most picturesque sea of archipelagoes was rendered thrice entrancing by the adventure which had developed it. There are said to be literally a thousand islands clustering in the broad neck or estuary of the St. Lawrence.

Many of them can scarcely afford a foothold for a bird; others support a miniature tree; some support huge masses of rock, piled in eccentric forms, and holding in their crevices the palms of climbing vines; a few are very large and heavy with turf and wood-land; and all are as verdant as spring.— Here in winter, the drift ice heaps up crags and monuments, and the floes and field ice crush up in spring as if they would bear the ice away to their arctic home; the wild birds bring forth their young upon the surface, the cold grows warm and vital breath, the striped and spotted snake lies among the debris, charming the sparrow and the blue-jay; and the Wolfe passing from land to land, halts here in the dead midnight to howl.—Not a human being tenants the Thousand Islands; they are sprinkled here and there in wondrous irregularity, the deep river winds in and out among them as if lost of tarrying, and the tourist passing by is reminded of some tableaux in a melodrama, too beautiful and unexpected to be real.

In pursuit of Ingraham, we explored every islet of this region. We found a hundred traces of him, for he was ever flitting to and fro—now the echoes of his rifle, when the fugitive had passed like an apparition. One day at sunset we saw him, a ragged, haggard, hatless being, standing upon a rock not larger than a man’s hand, with the waters churning around him, and his [bateau] at his feet. He was sharply outlined against the red sky, and he stood in an attitude of despair, leaning wearily upon his rifle.

I thought of the Wandering Jew, or the last Indian of his race, halting on the brink of the Pacific. Suddenly he beheld us; gnashing his teeth and lifting his clenched hand, he jumped into his

vessel and skulled off like the wind, we lost him in the darkness and saw no more of him for several days.

Two weeks had now been consumed in this singular pursuit.

One day at Alexandria-Bay, we received a dispatch from a station far down the river; Jules Ingraham had been seen near the head of the first rapid; he had foiled us, and with a long start was making his way toward the Gulf of the St. Lawrence. Every stroke of his oar was a new hope to him; in ten hours he would pass the American boundary line, and then our difficulties would be multiplied tenfold.

Ballagan acted with his usual decision; we took the steamer, and pursued on with all the energy of steam and current. It was midnight when we reached the head of the rapids, and we knew it was forbidden to descend them in the darkness, the vessel halted at a quay and waited for the morning.

It was a grand steamer—"a floating palace"—and having walked with Ballagan up and down the cold promenade deck, listening to the roar of the waters, I wearied of his impatience, retired to my sumptuous state-room.

I was soundly dreaming, my heart was back among the Thousand Islands, and our wild search was all forgotten, when raps upon my state-room door brought me to my feet. It was Ballagan, and I knew from his blank, sphinx-like countenance that something was about to come.

"Come out at once," he said, in a deep, unimpassioned monotony. "Help me to launch the boat; you are to go on the water with me. No flinching! for, by the great American eagle, your life isn't worth a rush light."

A premonition of danger crept coldly upon me. I marked in the gray dawn from the windy deck the surging of the rapids tossing their foamy hairs into the sky, blending the sprays in the white cataracts of the mist, and dashing upon black rocks, imperfectly revealed, as if meaning to wrest from them their everlasting bases. The whole wide St. Lawrence was a fierce, tumultuous torrent, boiling, churning, clamoring.

"Do you see something stealing along the margin yonder?" asked Ballagan. "I have remarked it for an hour."

I took his proffered glass, and recognized distinctly an approaching [bateau], and a wild figure in a gray coat, skulking in the stern, it was Jules Ingraham. He was making for the Canada shore, for he seemed to have an intuition of his proximity to the rapids; and ever and anon, as he advanced, his face was turned to regard the steamer distrustfully.

"Crouch here by the gunwale," said Ballagan; "when I give the word, run out the lines of the [bateau]. I shall have the oars; take your rifle in the bow. Be cool and steady, and obey my orders."

No soul was astir upon the vessel; we watched the guilty man with our hearts in our eyes. It required no effort of his to drive the [bateau] toward us, for the velocity of the current impelled it at a racing pace. At each instant the dawn grew brighter; at each instant the victim grew nearer. We marked him with the naked eye at length; a face like that of a wild beast, half furtive, half ferocious, and gaunt with hunger and anxiety; his grizzled hair, uncovered, shadowed his savage beard, and his inflamed eyes glared cavernously from their dark, deep sockets; his clothes were rent and stained; his feet were scarred and bare; and yet with all this wretchedness, the attitude of the man was that of pride and defiance; it was the consciousness of deserved misery, for which he could not apologize, and which he had determined to endure.

The wharf to which we were moored kept him out of view of the rapids till he had drifted directly beneath us, and then the danger broke suddenly upon him. He seemed stricken dumb, and the oars quivered in his fingers. At the same moment Ballagan called out to me to loose my line. The boat dropped like a bolt; we clambered down as hastily. The detective seized the scull, while I crouched with the rifle in the bow, and pushing away in a trice, we had almost collided with Ingraham's boat before he was aware of our presence.

It was a pause of a second. The wretch gave one fierce glance at the shore, the steamer, and the cataract, and then, with the impulse of despair struck out boldly for the rapid.

He had not the strength of Ballagan, but he was a better hand with the oar. Both men worked with the energy of death. The one to overtake and capture before the sluice had pulled them in, the other to intimidate, perhaps, by a semblance of engulfing both, or failing, to make that semblance a dreadful reality.

I still had hope, for we glided yet smoothly upon the current. It must be that we were gaining upon Ingraham; he dare not perish with his crimes upon his head; he meant to turn and submit; there was still time to escape the cataract. Should I stop his career with the rifle? I lifted the bright barrel with murder half way in my heart; my nerves were taught as wires; I could have dropped him dead at his helm as readily as one wings a crow. He saw my glance down the groove and his face froze my blood; it was mine reflected—all the agony of man's nature pleading for life, life, life.

“Do not fire, my boy!” cried Ballagan between his teeth. “I will take him alive or die with him.”

On, on, and on we galloped—the two oarsmen with black faces wrenching the waters apart, and I could hear the hard breathing of both till the roar of the river absorbed all sound. So quickly ran my thoughts, that I likened the sound of the water to human speech; they seemed to be shrieking, “Drowned, drowned, drowned, drowned!” and the cry rang out so sonorously thrilling that I caught myself repeating, wondered if each drop of water had not identity, and the waves a community of intelligence, and every cataract a like ambition, and that ambition, now—my death?

Still I saw everything. There was a rocky island covered with trees just in the edge of the rapids; that was our last salvation, if the boat passed it there was nothing left for hope. Already the spray

was lapping us; the waters hoarse and thirsty, I looked at Ballagan, with dry, mute eyes, but saw no mercy there.

“Pray, my boy,” he said, “pray for both of us and hold fast! I am going down the flood.”

The island passed us at a wink. I felt the boat lifted boldly, and the earth seemed to lift and crush it as we fell. Again we vaulted aloft. I noticed in the crowded deck of the steamer, one woman praying with clasped hands, and another had swooned; the planks of the [bateau] were bent like withes of straw, the waves gushed from stem to stern; I was lifted from my feet and hurled against Ballagan, but he stood at the oar like a rock; I saw through my drenched eyes the forger as rigidly fixed—his vessel moved like a winged thing rather of the air than of the elements, and even in this time of despair, his face was dark and haughty.

Something stood amid the stream as I gazed—black, jagged rocks, and we were hurled upon them. The craft seemed to be crushing us as we struck; it rose vertically, and the foam gushed in at the bow. I knew that this was all.

Once more I marked the white waste of the waves, the vanishing islands, the flitting banks and trees, and dwellings, and as a soft vision of home blinded my wet eyes—I called upon One mighty to save, and clutched the cold planks—and knew no more.

A thunderbolt apparently awoke me; and a terrible weight was pressing upon my chest. I was lying in the bottom of the boat, now half filled with water, and Ballagan was holding me fast with his feet. I could scarcely see his face for smoke. He had fired and the bullet had broken the oar of the felon fairly at the junction of shaft and paddle. In a twinkling he leaped for the second oar, but ere he could employ it, the [bateau] collided, and he met Ballagan at the gunwale, knife in hand. The detective clutching the rifle, struck him a powerful blow, which stretched him prostrate like a dead man.

The hunt was over; the felon was captive at last, and as we headed his launch for the shore, our own went down in ten fathoms of water.

Jules Ingraham was duly indicted upon four bills of forgery; but the hardships of his frontier exile had been too great for his feeble constitution. He died in the dock, cool and self-reliant to the last.

Ballagan earned money enough to retire from the police body; he has found his quietus in the late civil war.

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