

## *The First Case*

I COULD not help admiring the “Doctor.” He was one of the handsomest men I ever saw—tall, compact, clear-cut, with a mild and amiable face, and a perfect dresser; always looking as though he had—to use a very original phrase—just stepped out of a bandbox. He sat with his legs under my mahogany, or black oak, and sipped Amontillado, and ate broiled woodcock, precisely as though they were his daily fare. The doctor would not, perhaps, have been considered exactly the associate for a man in my position, the head of a first-class commercial house—barring all egotism—but I would have defied anyone, by his looks, to have named his profession.

In two words, the doctor was a professional detective, and, in the line of his business, had just done me a service which the amount of money I had given him did not pay for, and I had extended the civility of an invitation to dinner, at my own house, for several reasons, one being that I thought him a quiet and entertaining gentleman, and another, that he had, by his penetration and good management, unveiled a matter that had troubled me very seriously for some weeks—not so much by the loss of money involved, as from the fear lest the discovery should inculcate some of my confidential employees in the counting-house, not one of whom, when the affair first occurred, could I look on with suspicion, or think of as guilty, without a feeling of intense pain, all of them having been many years with me, and endeared by faithful service. Before I go on with my main narrative, perhaps it would be well to tell how I came to employ the doctor on my own behalf. Although having no connection with the tale, it will show how wise heads—as they think themselves—can be bothered with a simple thing when unused to the business.

From the day that I first came into our house, as a partner, I have always attended to the cash and banking business myself, all moneys, checks, drafts, etc., passing through my hands or accounted for to me. In three-and-twenty years’ experience, I never had an error but which, on careful revision, could be rectified, nor had any moneys ever been lost or stolen.

You may judge, therefore, of my surprise when, one day—it had been a very heavy cash day—on making up my account, I found myself two thousand three hundred and fifty-seven dollars short. There was no such amount entered in any way that I could possibly have made an error in, and nothing in all my transactions upon which to base my deficit. I had but one place in which to put my money during the day, and that was in a drawer of my desk, a solid, old-fashioned structure, attached to the building, and put up when the office was built, forty years before. Had the desk been one of the modern, flimsy affairs, I might have thought that somebody could have spirited the money out in some way, but even the idea of a false key did not harmonize with the old-fashioned lock and solid wood. I always locked the drawer, and carried the key in my pocket, and was rarely out of the office during the day, except half an hour for lunch, and then there were never fewer than three or four persons in the same room. At night, I invariably removed every dollar to the safe, so that any appropriation of funds must be made in the daytime.

This was the state of the case the day that I was two thousand three hundred and fifty-seven dollars short. I went through every pocket and available place on my person, though I knew that I never put any money about me, and then closed my account with the deficit, making up my mind not to speak of it that day, but to consider it until the morrow, before I asked advice. The morrow

came, and, utterly discomposed, I admitted to myself my inability to straighten it, and called in for advice Mr. Conway, our old and confidential bookkeeper, in whose judgment I had great reliance. Mr. Conway did not, like the famous Dutch squire, weigh the two accounts, and give judgment in favor of the heaviest, but he did almost as well. He footed up the column of figures three or four times, counted my cash balance as often, looked at me over his spectacles, and told me the account was wrong—two thousand three hundred and fifty seven dollars short. That's all the satisfaction there was from Mr. Conway. After this, pledging him to secrecy, I thought it better to consult nobody else, but watchfully wait events, charging the amount, as I was bound to do, to myself personally.

How much, for days, this matter troubled me, I cannot relate; but, like all things else, after two weeks had gone by, and no elucidation had come to me, it began to wear away, when one day I was amazed and horrified to find another deficit of nine hundred and eighty-four dollars. This time, I remembered some of the very missing bills, and knew that they had been taken from my drawer, and yet I had not left the key in it one moment while I was absent from the room, and all day there had been present at least two persons besides myself; and there had been also people coming and going all the time, but these were separated from me and the clerks by a railing, so that it was impossible for any person calling on business to approach nearer to my desk than fifteen feet. This time, I consulted with my partners, and, after numerous theories—all of which fell to the ground—we concluded to call in the aid of some reputed, able, detective officer; and, having applied in the proper quarters for such a person, we were recommended to Mr. Peter Schlidorg, a gentleman, who, by the wink he gave me after I had told him the whole story, and the assertion that "We'll fix this job up in half an hour," convinced me that he would achieve nothing. Mr. Schlidorg commenced his operations by glowering upon my employees, one by one, and looking into my money-drawer, and handling the money lovingly, so that I somewhat feared that he meant to confiscate it as part of the evidence; and ended by settling upon poor old Conway, who, he mysteriously informed me, was the guilty man, but could give me no reason for it save that Mr. Conway could not look him in the eye; for which I did not blame Conway, for a more rascally, unpleasant eye I never beheld in mortal man. I had some trouble in getting rid of Mr. Schlidorg, which was only accomplished by bribing him off, and submitting to his hints that there must be something wrong in myself, inasmuch as I was not willing that the investigation should proceed.

I then thought I would play my own detective, and, having put my money in the drawer, as I always did, watched the movements of everyone with the closest circumspection, although appearing not so careful as usual. Before going to lunch, each day I counted the money, and again when I returned; but no result, until one day, on making up my daily accounts a little before three o'clock, I found myself one thousand one hundred and thirty-two dollars short. I almost jumped in astonishment from my seat, for the abstraction must have occurred within three-quarters of an hour, and with myself in the room all the time. This was staggering and serious, and I at once lost faith in myself. Here were four thousand four hundred and seventy-three dollars gone, and not the shadow of a clue. After another consultation with my partners, it flashed across my mind to hunt up one B—, who in his day had been celebrated as a detective, but of whom I had not heard for years, and if he were still alive, to submit the matter to his judgment. The Directory gave me his address, and in an hour I was with him. B— was interested, but he had retired from business; rheumatism was the only thing he detected, and that

to his sorrow. He, however, would recommend me to a gentleman who, if he would take the job, could unravel it, if it were to be unraveled by human skill, and he gave me a letter to the doctor, or Robert Blaisdell, M.D., as he strangely directed the envelope. Before I went to bed that night, I found Blaisdell, and not only engaged him, but, as I could see, interested him, and he agreed to meet me the next morning at the office, and so conduct himself that there would be no suspicion of his business.

He was there promptly, and opened matters in the hearing of the clerks by talking coffee, and proposing to sell a cargo of Rio to arrive. He never appeared to look at any of my people, but, with his pencil, as he was supposed to be computing quantity and price, asked several questions, and in a few moments communicated to me his belief that the clerks were all right. That was a relief. I opened the drawer, freely handling the money, and giving him every opportunity to see its working. He was bothered. I saw that by his face. He asked me if the clerks could be sent out and we could be alone for half an hour. Yes, at lunchtime, in an hour, all would go but Mr. Conway, and I would contrive an errand for him. Blaisdell went away, and returned at that time, and we were alone.

“This thing is done by somebody outside of your clerks, sir, but by whom or how puzzles me. Let me examine that drawer,” said Blaisdell. “Have you any mice about?”

There had been a stray one seen once in a while.

“Because you know such things have been as mice using the soft paper of banknotes to make their nests. No,” he continued, after close examination of the drawer—“no mice,” and he drew the drawer completely out, and peered back into the opening. “It seems to go chock up against the wall, and to fit too close for even a mouse to get in.”

I examined, and found he was right; but in a moment I saw his face lighten up, though I could not see at what. Again he peered into the depth that the drawer was taken from, and slipped it back quietly to its place. Then he got up absently, took a survey of the room, looked out of the window, and, saying, “I will be back in a few minutes,” walked into the street, and, returning in less than five, said:

“You had better go on to-day the same as usual, and, after business-hours, I shall want to come in here, with a friend of mine, and be entirely alone with him for a couple of hours.”

This, of course, I agreed to, and went on using my drawer the rest of the day, but all came right. At five o’clock I myself admitted Blaisdell and his friend, who looked to me like a locksmith, and left them. The next morning, at ten o’clock, Blaisdell handed me the key of my drawer, which I had left with him the night before, and, opening the drawer, said, pointing to a piece of white paper pasted in the bottom:

“You will please not disturb or touch that, but lay your money carefully upon it. I shall be in and out here every half hour or so, to see how the thing comes out.”

“How the thing comes out,” rather puzzled me, but, as I was in the doctor’s hands, I obeyed orders and said nothing.

Blaisdell came in and out, and talked coffee closely and knowingly, and I had some trouble, once or twice, to persuade myself that I was only going through the motions, and not really buying a cargo of Rio of him. All was quiet, and my accounts right, Blaisdell declining to lunch with me, saying, in an offhand way, that he would foot-up his freight-accounts, in my absence, if I would permit him to sit at my desk. In half an hour I was back, and the moment I entered saw a peculiar expression on Blaisdell’s face, an expression of intense listening. He did not get up from my chair, but put his finger on his lip. The office was perfectly silent, with the exception of the scratching of Conway’s pen—he always would use quills—when, suddenly, there was sharp noise and a struggling within my desk. Blaisdell jumped to his feet, excitedly, and called:

“The key! Quick! quick! By George, we’ve got him!”

I handed him the key in an instant, completely astounded, as was old Conway, for he tumbled right off his stool, and Blaisdell unlocked the drawer. It was not so easy to open it, for it took our combined strength. The first sight that met my eye, when that was done, was a human hand, which Blaisdell seized with a grip like a vice, and in an instant had a handcuff on it. I saw, at a glance, it was a hand without a thumb, and, at the same time, heard Blaisdell say:

“Why, it’s Thumby! I thought he was up the river.”

I was so dazed that I could hardly understand the thing, and stood looking like an idiot, while Blaisdell took up a heavy poker, clasped the other handcuff on it, and, placing it across the drawer, said, composedly:

“There’s your man, sir—Thumby Dick, one of the most accomplished burglars in this country. Shall we go round and see him?”

We went round and saw him, and, the moment I laid eyes on his face, I recognized him as a man who had been several times to see me in reference to a schooner, with fruit, we expected from the West Indies, professing that he wished to buy all the pineapples. This was the greeting between the doctor and Thumby Dick:

“This was a well-put-up job, Dick,” says the doctor; “but it’s played.”

“If I’d known you was on it, doc, I’d ’av struck the heap, and gone.”

“Yes,” scratching his chin; “but you didn’t want to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs, eh?”

“Come, take us out of this, doc; I’ve got nothing to say.”

And so Mr. Thumby Dick was taken out, and accommodated with his bracelets on the same side of the house, and told us the whole story. He had noticed the money-drawer when he first came to see me, his intention at that time being to tap the safe some pleasant evening. He knew the

next building well; it was a small drinking place in front, with a back room, and offices up-stairs. This back room he managed to hire, and with the nice eye of a mechanic—for the job showed skill—through the wall he went, right behind my desk. At night he had skillfully removed the rear of my money-drawer, and refitted it with four wooden pegs (which was Blaisdell's first clue, as he was examining the drawer), and so could noiselessly help himself during the day; for, even though I might open the drawer when he was in the act, I could not have detected him, unless I bent down and looked back to see the rear part out. Blaisdell and his friend, the locksmith-looking man, had skillfully fitted a spring trap at the bottom of the drawer, under the white paper, so that the crowding of the hand, in the act of grasping the money, sprung the trap, and took Mr. Thumbby prisoner—a mishap that he is now expiating at his old residence on the Hudson.

And this is the way I came to be dining with the doctor, all of which has nothing to do with my story.

So now, after telling (egotistically putting myself first) the affair of the money-drawer, I will let the doctor talk:

“Yes, sir; that's true—we do have odd things occur in our line. It has always been my rule not to work in a case with anyone else. I did not begin so; but I had so many mishaps through stupid people, who thought themselves smart, that I concluded I would rather take the chances of working everything out by myself. You can make some count on a knave; but a fool—you never know where to have him.”

“And how did you come to enter upon this business?” I queried.

“Ah! that was rather curious in itself. It arose from an accident, and, if you would like to hear it, I will tell you.”

“Of course, I would,” and, passing him the sherry, settled myself into a listening condition.

“Twelve years ago, I was in Boston. I had just graduated, and was endeavoring, in my effort to establish a practice, to see how near a man could come to starvation, and still keep alive. I had got as far away from home as possible, because I did not want any of my own people to see or know of my struggles, being content to fight patiently on until I had made a success, and then let them know how I had made it.

“I had but one relative, I may say only one friend, in all Boston; and that was Charley Drake. Charley was my cousin, and a clerk in a drug-store—a retail store—where he had plenty of close work, and very small pay. For him there was no such thing as rest. He slept in the store, and was liable to be called at any hour of the night, to make up a prescription, or retail a dose of castor oil. This may seem a trifle to some; but, to a man who has been going through the petty drudgery of a retail store from six in the morning until eleven at night, it is no small matter to be waked from his first sleep to mix and pound, and spread, and tie up a prescription—a task that requires quietness of head and repose of body.

“One morning, quite early, I stopped in his store, as it was my almost daily habit to do, to get some small matter I wanted. The proprietor came out, with a look of anxiety on his face, and greeted me with—

““Did you know that Charley is in trouble?”

““Trouble? No,” I said, “What trouble?”

““A wrong prescription he put up has killed a woman. I wish he’d killed himself, before it had happened in my shop. It will ruin me.”

“I looked contemptuously on the fellow, who only thought of his shop and his pocket, and made further inquires.

““Oh, it happened last night, about shutting-up time. The woman died within an hour; and Charley is under arrest, awaiting the verdict of the coroner’s jury.”

“I felt an utter disgust for this fellow; but I thought I would give him a parting shot before I left him. So I said:

““But why don’t they arrest you? They must look to you as principal.”

“It was almost amusing to see his expression of fright.

““Arrest me? What had I got to do with it? Why, I wasn’t even in the store when it occurred.”

“No—the sneak—he was asleep in his bed, while he put all the work and responsibility off on poor Charley. However, I contented myself with asking a few questions as to who the person was that had died, and when Charley had been arrested; and then I started to see him. I found him, in a very little time, in the custody of one of the coroner’s officers, awaiting the holding of the inquest, which would come off in an hour. As a matter of course, Charley was in intense mental agony, and it was only with difficulty I could get him to speak to the point. His mind wandered, and he was in a high fever. I got hold of his hand, and tried to calm him.

““Now, my boy,” I said, “this is no time for despairing. You must pluck up courage, and look the thing squarely in the face. All is not lost, as long as life is left. Tell me the whole story.”

““Well, it was about one o’clock, this morning, and I was waked out of a sound sleep to put up a prescription, and I put it up wrong. I was so sleepy, and had been so tired, when I went to bed! Oh, poor Nellie! What will she say to this?”

““No matter about Nellie now,” I answered. “If she’s the little woman I think she is, she’ll bear it nobly, and, no matter what the result, she won’t think less of you. Now, then, what was the nature of your mistake?”

““Oh, dear Cousin Rob, a very bad one! I put in three grains of atropia for three grains of assafœtida, and you know that one-sixth of a grain of atropia is a large dose. I knew it was a strange prescription; but, as it came from Dr. Barton Brewster, who knows what he’s about, and is a regular customer of our shop, I put it up, and gave it to the messenger. I was so glad to get to bed again, that I didn’t think about anything until about half an hour afterward, when the doctor himself waked me up, and asked to see the prescription. I hadn’t put it in the book yet, so I handed it to him. He took it to the night-lamp, read it, and handed it back, saying, very harshly:

“““Young man, just read that prescription again.”

““I did as he bade me, thoroughly awake by this time, and, to my horror, read three grains of assafœtida, instead of three grains of atropia.

““Dr. Brewster looked fiercely at me for a moment, and went off leaving me with the prescription in my hand, and saying: “You’ve killed a woman by your carelessness; you’ll have to settle it with the coroner in the morning.””

““Well; and they arrested you this morning?”

““Yes; about seven o’clock. The officer says it was good in Dr. Brewster not to give information against me until after daylight, since I might have got away in the mean time, if I had been of a mind to do so; which, no doubt, was the doctor’s idea. But, bless you, Cousin Rob! I didn’t think of running away. I couldn’t run away, if it was only for Nellie’s sake.’

““Nellie was a dear little girl, to whom Charley had been engaged for a year or two, and was likely to be for a few years more, as he was waiting, until he could get into business for himself, to marry her.

““I cast over the whole thing in my mind, and the first idea which struck me was, that Charley ought to have a lawyer present to watch the proceedings, and see that he had at least legal rights, where all would be prejudiced against him. No sooner thought, than I remembered that I had been able to do considerable professional service in the family of a young lawyer by the name of Sanford; in fact, I had been fortunate enough to snatch a favorite child of his almost out of the gripe of death. Sanford was, like myself, unable to make both ends meet, and, in telling me his inability to pay me then, hoped that I, or some of my friends, would endeavor to make professional use of him. This was just the time, and, before the inquest opened, I had Sanford on the spot, anxious to be of use.

““The evidence was very simple: The deceased boarded in the house where she died. Was a young girl, about nineteen. Had no relatives, and only one or two friends, in Boston. Nobody visited her but her physician, Dr. Brewster. She had not been very well for a day or two, and Dr. Brewster had prescribed, late the night before, and sent a boy to Marcelin’s drug-store for prescription. Prescription book produced by Marcelin, the proprietor of drug-store. Prescription read:

““R. Hydrarg. chloromite,

Ext. rhei aa ½ scruple,  
Assafœt. gr. iii,  
Pillules vi'

“It was written with a hard lead pencil, on an ordinary bit of white, unruled writing-paper.

“Then came Brewster’s evidence. He identified the prescription. When he found there was something wrong with Miss Selby, the deceased, he went to Marcelin’s, and saw Drake, who admitted to having put three grains of atropia in the prescription, instead of the same quantity of assafœtida.

“Then came medical evidence as to the effects of atropia, and the amount that should be given in a dose which made half a grain to each pill, when one-sixth of a grain should be enough.

“It all looked very bad for poor Charley, and I saw plainly that, in the present state of the case, Sanford could not help him any. There was only one question he asked Dr. Brewster, which seemed rather to bother the doctor, and was suggestive to me:

“‘Doctor,’ he said, ‘how was it that, when you suspected something wrong with Miss Selby, you left her for nearly half an hour with the ignorant people of this house, and went yourself down to Marcelin’s, instead of trying something to relieve the deceased, and sending a messenger to Marcelin’s?’

“Dr. Brewster said he wanted to be personally satisfied.

“‘And how was it, doctor, that, when you were personally satisfied, you contented yourself with using only simple remedies, such as sulphate of zinc, and did not call in other aid until Miss Selby was past all hope?’

“Dr. Brewster answered that he had acted to the best of his judgment, and he was not responsible to anybody, even if he had erred, which he did not. And so closed the inquest, and Charley was committed to stand his trial for manslaughter, his bail having been placed at ten thousand dollars. Of course, bail was impossible, and Charley was sent to prison, cheered into a little hope by Sanford and myself, but still nearly heartbroken. There either little Nellie Wilson, Sanford, or myself, visited him daily, and did our best to cheer him; but the prospect was dark, and the State Prison loomed up before. The day of his trial was approaching, and there was not a bit of evidence to submit in defense, save good character, and recommendations from former employers and from Marcelin, all of which was poor hope.

“One day business led me past the house where Miss Selby had died, and I do not know what induced the idea, but I thought I would go in. The only idea I had, in effect, was to see the messenger who took the prescription, and talk with him, though I knew him to be only an ignorant boy. I saw the landlady—it was a boardinghouse—who was a kind, motherly sort of a woman, and, after a little gossip with her, I got her interested in Charley’s case, as an orphan, and without a friend in the world but myself. Then I found that the old lady was troubled with a dyspeptic pain, which I undertook to cure, sending out for medicine on the spot, without



letting it cost her anything, and finally won upon Mrs. Bramble so, that, as I was going away, she said: ‘Now, doctor, why don’t ye come and take my little front reception-room, and put up a sign here? There ain’t no doctor anywhars around this neighborhood, and I’ll board ye very cheap, jist to have ye in the house on ’casion.’

“I laughed at the old lady’s proposition, and told her that I would think it over by next day; I did so, and saw that Mrs. Bramble’s house was much superior in appearance and location to the one I inhabited. The result was, I struck a bargain with the old lady, and moved immediately to her domicile. I hadn’t been there three days, when, one morning, Mrs. Bramble, who was very fond of gossiping in my room, said: ‘Doctor, I can’t help thinking all the time about that poor girl that was pisened upstairs. I haven’t had that room opened since the morning after she died. Seems to me as if’t might be haunted.’

“‘Yes!’ I responded.

“‘There war something strange, too, about her; and that doctor-man that came to see her so much.’

“‘Yes!’ I said again, pricking up my ears, and looking inquiringly at her.

“‘Thar was so much sneaking in and out, and coming at all kinds of queer times; and then they’d quarl, and, when he went away, she’d fret and cry so, that she’d be e’en a’most sick.’

“‘Hallo!’ I said to myself, ‘Here’s a new shape to this matter.’ And then I said to Mrs. Bramble, ‘Where did Miss Selby come from?’

“‘Well, that’s the strangest thing of all, doctor. She never would tell where she came from; and the most that she ever dropped was, that she was from New Hampshire; but then her name never was Selby in this world.’

“‘How do you know that, Mrs. Bramble?’

“‘Because every bit of her underclothes had another name rubbed out on ’em; and one day there came a man here, and asked for Miss Goodwin, and, when he was told that no sich person lived here, he insisted, and said he’d seed her come in here. Then, when this was talked of at tea-table, before Miss Selby, she get dreadful excited about it, though nobody said a word about her being the one that just come in before the man asked for Miss Goodwin.’

“The old lady was making some revelations here that stirred my curiosity; but I could not see how they could help Charley’s case, except that, if there was anything mysterious between the dead woman and the doctor, I might sift it out, and use it to soften his evidence against Charley, or, perhaps, force his interest to help the poor boy. ‘All’s fair in love and war,’ and so I took hold of the slender clue to trace out who Miss Selby, or Goodwin, might be. The last, I thought, was the true name, and, although it seemed absurd to enter upon the search, in such a way, I concluded to write to every postmaster in New Hampshire. I framed a letter, saying that there was something of great importance pending to a family by the name of Goodwin, somewhere in

that State, and requested each postmaster, if the name existed in his locality, to please to send me a list of members or the family, present and absent, especially the latter, and that, if the necessary information proved to be elicited through him, he should be well rewarded.

“This letter brought eleven responses, one of which was from a member of the Goodwin family, into whose hands the postmaster of the town of M— had put my letter. I had no sooner read this letter of Mrs. Sarah Goodwin, than I cried ‘Eureka!’ The very tone of it showed a mother seeking for her lost child, from the expression she put upon my asking for the names of the absent. She sought a daughter who had left her a year before, and the description, which I read to Mrs. Bramble, was recognized in a moment. Of course, Mrs. Goodwin must be sent for. Her daughter’s effects were still in the locked-up room, and they troubled poor Mrs. Bramble almost as badly as if they had been a ghost. I therefore wrote to Mrs. Goodwin that, if she would come to Boston, I could give her intelligence of her lost daughter. It was a sad pilgrimage to bring the mother on, but it was better than to have her child lost, without track, forever. In a few days Mrs. Goodwin arrived, and, in my room, I told her the sad fate of her child, and pleaded with her to tell me all she knew of Brewster. She did not know Brewster, had never heard the name; but, after urgent pleading, confessed that her daughter had left home with a man named Selby, that she had written to her declaring that she was married to Selby, and this was the last she had heard of her. I described the appearance of Selby, and the mother recognized it instantly. It was that of Brewster.

“Light seemed breaking on this affair in a new way. What if this Brewster, who was a legitimately married man, had found himself hampered with Miss Goodwin, perhaps, illegally, married to her, and consequently had taken advantage of Charley’s mistake—for it was clear that he had discovered it in time to save her if he had tried, or at least that was the conclusion Sanford and I had come to! This, indeed, was the defense we had designed to offer on the trial, bringing in medical evidence to support it. What if this were so, and we could bring it against Brewster on the trial, or, better still, get him to abscond for fear of the revelation! ‘All’s fair etc.,’ as I said before.

“Mrs. Goodwin went to the room of the poor, dead girl, which was opened for the first time since her death. There was no mistake. Everything was recognized; and the poor, brokenhearted mother was in agony. I had sent for Sanford, and he had arrived, and was shown directly to the room. Mrs. Bramble took the mother away to comfort her, and the lawyer and I discussed the situation. In the centre of the room was a table, one of those old-fashioned, wax-polished, mahogany tables, seen only once in a while. On the farther side of this sat Sanford, between myself and the window. While I was talking I glanced at the table, and presently my eye rested upon some scratches. Why I noticed them, indistinct as they were, I cannot tell; but my eyes would not leave them until at last I bent down close, and saw that they were the marks made by the sharp point of a hard pencil, through thin paper, and the very marks made by Brewster’s prescription on the night of Miss Goodwin’s death. The wax-rubbed table had taken the impression plainly; and there I read, while Sanford looked at me wonderingly, not only the prescription, now in the hands of the law, but the impression of another, almost identical, only substituting the word atropia for assafoetida. I was thunderstruck, and called Sanford round to my side of the table. He read it, and we looked in each other’s faces. The whole thing was as clear to me as day.

“I called up Mrs. Bramble and Mrs. Goodwin, and both read the marks. Quick work should now be made of the whole thing. The room was closed, but not until I had made most accurate copies of both prescriptions. Sanford went to police headquarters, and brought one of their principal men, while Mrs. Bramble, in her own name, sent off for Brewster to come directly to her on a matter of importance. He arrived just before Sanford’s return with the minister of the law, and seemed very much taken aback by meeting me, whom he remembered, at the inquest, as a friend of Charley’s. I said to him: ‘Doctor, there are some matters connected with the death of that lady upstairs, which I want cleared up, and I induced Mrs. Bramble to send for you, satisfied that you could enlighten me.’

“‘Enlighten you!’ he sneered. ‘What have you to do with it at all?’

“‘Oh!’ I said, carelessly, ‘I have taken an interest in Miss Goodwin’s death, as I have in Mr. Drake’s life.’

“The name of Goodwin staggered him, and he turned livid.

“‘Goodwin!’ he muttered. ‘I don’t know any Miss Goodwin.’

“‘Perhaps you would not know her mother,’ I said, as that lady entered the room, with Mrs. Bramble. Brewster staggered toward the window; I jumped between him and it, for I thought he intended to throw himself out.

“‘Perhaps, doctor, you don’t recognize these two prescriptions.’ I continued, showing the copies I had made. ‘Here is the one calling for atropia, which you exchanged for the other, when you called at the drugstore of Marcelin, and asked Drake to show you the original. The very same, doctor.’

“‘That’s a lie!’ he hissed. ‘I destroyed that.’

“‘Oh! Did you? Well, you see it has come to life again. However, I am glad you’ve confessed that you tried to destroy it. And now, doctor, my advice to you is to make a clean breast of this thing, and throw yourself on my mercy.’

“He caught at this like a cowardly wretch, and, as Sanford came in, he knew him, but did not know the man with him. He told the whole story. He had beguiled Miss Goodwin with marriage, which, of course, was bigamy, and was in daily dread of detection. He had plotted her death, and this plan had occurred to him the very evening of its execution. He knew the working of Marcelin’s store, and that, by changing the prescription, Charley could be made the victim, and himself exonerated. And then, as he finished, he said:

“‘And now, gentlemen, I have done; what do you intend to do with me?’

“‘Have you hanged,’ I said, calmly.

“‘Is that your mercy I threw myself on?’

“‘That’s too much mercy for a villain like you.—There’s your man, officer. We’ll go with you till we see him safe under lock. We don’t want to take any chances on that fellow.’

“And that was my first case, and my first arrest. The next morning I was sent for by the authorities, and coolly informed that Brewster had hanged himself the night before in his cell, so you see I only erred by pronouncing who should hang him. As to Charley, the district attorney arranged his business in a few hours, and he was a free man. Marcelin was very anxious to have him back; but I obtained for him a better place, in a larger store, with less work, more sleep, and larger pay.

“As to myself, a few days afterward I was sent for by the president of the B— Bank, who, having apologized for his strange proposal, told me that he had heard from Sanford the whole story of my amateur detective business, and he felt satisfied that if I would take in hand the matter of the robbery of their bank—it had lost eighty thousand dollars some weeks before—which the regular detectives could do nothing with, he was satisfied I could make something out of it. At all events, on his recommendation, the board of directors had told him to offer me five hundred dollars to try, whether I succeeded or not, and fifteen percent on all the money I recovered, if I succeeded. I laughed at the idea, and listened. Five hundred dollars was a great deal of money to begin on. It would be a long time before I would get such a sum as a medical fee. I was interested in the story of the robbery, and I took the job professionally. Two months later I closed it up, having recovered seventy-two thousand dollars of the money, and received my fifteen percent, ten thousand eight hundred dollars, less the five hundred dollars already paid. Out of this money I set Charley Drake up, elegantly, in business, and married him to Nellie; and put Sanford in the way of getting up, sending him since a large practice. I’m done, sir; hope I haven’t bored you with the account of my first case?”

*Appleton’s Journal of Literature, Science and Art, October 2, 1869*