

Among the "Sharks."

Adventures of a Fall River Wanderer—

His Valuable Experience in New York—

The Bond Operator

by George McWatters

A PART of Officer McWatters' duty, when connected with the Railroad and Steamboat Squad, was to advise and protect strangers in the city. He, of course, encountered many a curious country chap, making his *debut* in the great Metropolis. One of the most comical, if not the most valuable things Officer McWatters could possibly do for the delectation of readers in general, would be to write out his multifold experiences with strangers in the city, and put the whole into book form, entitled, for example, "Afloat in the Sea of Iniquity, Waifs Gathered There." The following is taken from the New York Mercury of some years ago.

Officer McWatters, whose urbanity and politeness is proverbial, was accosted yesterday forenoon, by a young man who had just stepped off of the Fall River boat, who inquired of him to know the way to the Park.

"What park?" politely queried the officer.

"O, I don't know,—any park where I can sit down a while, and see something of New York!"

"Better take a stage and go to Union Park. Everything clean, quiet, and orderly."

The officer assisted the young man into the stage, which soon sat him down in Union Park. The Park never looked lovelier. Children and drums, nurses and baby-wagons, small boys and fire-crackers, lovely maidens with books of poesy, the water-basin and the flowing fountain, the green trees and the luxuriant shade, all were but parts of a perfect whole, which Mr. Jasper Gray, the young man in question, enjoyed hugely.

Mr. Gray is a native of that enterprising village known as Fall River, and he had come to New York to see the sights. The senior Gray had warned him to look out for the "sharks;" and with a promise that he would do so, and about one hundred and sixty dollars in his pocket, the young man left his home, to sojourn several weeks in and about the Metropolis. Mr. Gray's idea of "sharks" was, that of some huge braggadocio, who would fiercely assault him late at night, demand his money or his life, or assume some other equally disagreeable mode of placing him in a dilemma. He had no idea that under the bright sun of midday, and in the grateful shade of the trees of a public square, the shark was looking and watching for a victim; but so it was.

As he cast his eye towards the fountain, his gaze rested upon a little child playing on the greensward, now rolling on the grass, and again approaching dangerously near the water's edge. Once thinking that the child might fall in, he sprang from his seat, and caught the little fellow by

the arm, and delivered him into the hands of his nurse. A few moments after this occurrence an elegantly-dressed young lady came up to the seat upon which he was sitting, and begged leave to thank him for having so kindly cared for her little brother, whom, she declared, he had saved from falling into the water.

“Nurse has gone home with the darling, now; but I could not feel to leave you without expressing my gratitude for your kindness,” said the lady, whose eyes shone with brilliancy through the thin gauze veil, filling Mr. Jasper Gray with the most undefinable feelings.

He replied awkwardly to her many complimentary expressions, but finally became animated, and began, as all slightly verdant people are apt to do, to speak of himself, his connections, the town he came from, how he came to leave, what his father told him, how much money he had, and a hundred other equally as interesting matters. The lady was interested. She grew animated as Mr. Jasper Gray proceeded; and as he alluded to the one hundred and sixty dollars with which he had been provided on leaving home, her interest seemed to have reached its height. She declared he must accompany her home to see pa and ma, and receive their thanks for having saved little Charlie’s life.

Really, this was too much; but the young lady insisted, and Mr. Gray at length yielded to her solicitations, happy in the thought that he had not only escaped the “sharks,” but had fallen into the most pleasant of experiences with the most respectable of people. The mansion into which our hero was inveigled was one of the first class. The furniture was of rosewood and brocatelle, and the lace curtains swept the floor with their magnificent dimensions. Elaborately carved chandeliers were suspended from the ceiling, costly mirrors and valuable paintings decorated the walls, and marble-top tables and a splendid piano lent their attractions to the room. Bouquets of choice flowers shed a rich fragrance about the place, giving it an air of elegance and enchantment. Here Mr. Gray spent the afternoon. An elderly-looking personage played mother, and thanked him a thousand times for saving Charlie. Pa would soon be home, and he would be equally grateful. Cake and wine were served. The youth was in a perfect sea of delights. The wine raised his spirits, and evil thoughts entered his heart. He cast longing and loving glances upon the fair Florino of the mansion, and the elderly matron adroitly withdrew. More wine was served, and the young man was in a fit condition to sing with Burns,

“Inspiring bold John Barleycorn,”

so bravely did the ruddy fluid lift him up.

What followed must be left to the imagination of the reader. Suffice it to say, that the Fall River wanderer, when in the full flush of the Paradise of which the wine had led him to believe he was the sole master, was suddenly confronted by an enraged father, who desired simply to know who he was before he killed him on the spot, and by a sobbing mother, who declared he had betrayed the confidence she had reposed in him; and last, but not the least important, the beautiful being, whose dishevelled hair and disarranged toilet told a woful story, standing before him, a mute upbraider of his crime. Such a combination of revenge, despair, and injured innocence, as the trio presented, very nearly, but not effectually, sobered Mr. Gray, and left him in a peculiarly muddled condition, in which, with true Yankee simplicity, he felt for his pocket-book, as the

most available and only method of settling the accumulated difficulties under which he found himself laboring.

It is a credit to his instinct, that the production of the pocket-book aforesaid produced the desired result. The mother was compromised by the payment of one hundred dollars, and Mr. Gray was allowed to depart. He of course sought for his now-made friend, Officer McWatters, for consolation and advice in his emergency, and seventy dollars of the amount was recovered last evening, and Mr. Gray was admonished to expect the “sharks” in any and every possible garb, from the rollicking gutter-man of the Five Points to the extensively got-up denizens of the Fifth Avenue or the Astor.

But we ought, perhaps, to add here an incident of Mr. Gray’s experience among the “sharks” of another kind than that alluded to in the foregoing portion of his history. Not willing to trust himself further alone in the city, and wishing to make his visit to New York as profitable as possible to himself in the sight-seeing way, he begged Officer McWatters to permit him to go around with him on his business tours. The complacent McWatters, who was never known to deny any one anything proper to be asked, and which he could give, permitted the bore to accompany him for a day or two. Among the early sights thereafter seen by the young man, was one, which frightened him so thoroughly, that the wonder is his hair did not turn white on the spot. He declared, after he recovered his self-possession, that he “ wouldn’t be hired to live a week in New York for all Old Vanderbilt’s pile.”

Officer McWatters had occasion to cross Wall Street, on a hasty errand of business down into Beaver Street, accompanied by his *attaché*, Mr. Gray, when they came suddenly into the midst of a great excitement. A dandily-dressed, rakish-looking young man was just breaking out of a crowd, and running with hands full of papers and a bag. Officer McWatters instantly “twigged” the nature of the trouble, and put chase after the fellow, unceremoniously leaving Mr. Gray in the midst of the turbulent and excited crowd. The fleeing young scamp, who had just snatched a package of United States bonds and a money bag from an old messenger of some house, who was on his way to make a deposit, was a little too fleet for Officer McWatters, and gained on him a little; but, turning a corner, was fortunately impeded in his flight by another policeman, who chanced to have his pistol about him, and brought it to bear on him. The bold “Bond Operator” (as such villains, who were quite plenty in those days, were called) thought discretion the better part of valor, surrendered, and got his dues, we believe, at last.

Mr. Gray was in fearful plight over losing Officer McWatters, and it was some time before he found him again, meanwhile getting jostled about among the large and fierce crowd of excited Wall Streeters, whom the interesting occasion hurriedly brought together. He quite lost heart for sight-seeing in that adventure, and was, at last, only too glad to “get out of the infernal city,” and went home a wiser man, we presume, than when he first landed in the city from the Fall River boat.

McWatters, George. *Knots Untied; or, Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Life of American Detectives*. Hartford: J. B. Burr and Hyde, 1871.

