

*The Odd Glove,*  
*or*  
*Tricks Upon Travelers*  
by Jeremiah Gyngoo

LATE IN THE FALL of '54, business took me down to New Orleans, in company with Thomas Bigbee, an old friend and former schoolmate, who was now on his way to his home in Mobile. The weather was extremely cold, but the comfortable cabin of the palatial steamer Montezuma, with the luxuries afforded by the attentive officers on the boat furnished us with the means of enjoying ourselves as well as travelers can enjoy themselves away from their own firesides. Men who voluntarily coop themselves up together for a week's imprisonment are very apt to seek amusement from each other, and it was not long before a disposition to become social began to manifest itself among the passengers. Tom and I occupied a stateroom near the ladies' cabin, and it was with the occupants of the neighboring rooms that we first struck up an acquaintance. One of them was a middle-aged gentleman, named Merton. The other, a gaily dressed, dashing little fellow, who introduced himself as Frank Cherrate, of St. Louis. I took a dislike to this young man when I first saw him. It may have been his blue dress coat with brass buttons that prejudiced me against him. This article of dress I have always abominated, for it gives the wearer (to my eye) the appearance of a gambler; and of all animals in the world, I think the professional gambler is the most despicable.—But Cherrate's lively conversation and agreeable manners partially dispelled my prejudices, and we four speedily became close travelling companions. I was pleased to observe that young Cherrate carefully avoided the card tables in the forward part of the boat, and spent his time principally by the stove, with us, in the after part of the cabin. But this might have been done [I privately argued] with the view of playing a deeper game than that of poker. He had heard Mr. Merton casually mention that he had ten thousand dollars in his trunk, and it *might* be that he was all the time "playing his cards" to gain possession of this treasure. The moment after entertaining this thought, I felt half ashamed of myself, for in honest truth, my estimate of Frank Cherrate's character was formed only upon the fact that he wore a blue dress coat with brass buttons. He *appeared* to be all frankness and honesty; his face was remarkably intelligent and pleasing in expression; and each hour's acquaintance with him served to impress me with a more favorable opinion of him. I pretended to be an excellent judge of human nature, but I must confess that this young fellow's character puzzled me greatly.

Well, the sequel of my narrative will prove to the reader how near I came to guessing the truth.

As I was saying, it was not long before a disposition showed itself on the part of the passengers to become sociable. On the second day out from St. Louis this inclination led to a general sociability. Desiring to be very particular and truthful in my narrative, I must add that only one man in the crowd kept aloof from the rest—a gentleman in a black suit and white choker, long dark hair and bushy whiskers, who sat day and night at a side table near his stateroom, peering through a pair of green spectacles into the pages of a dilapidated work that looked as if it might be a Hebrew work written in the time of Moses. In every crowd you will find one or two just such unsociable characters as this gentleman, whom some of the passengers set down as a Mormon Elder, whilst others asserted that he must be Baron Von Humbolt himself, or some other distinguished foreigner on his travels. Curiosity led us to examine the passenger list, when we

discovered that the studious stranger's name was Dr. Herman Blukerwissel, and that his destination was New Orleans. Although he always sat right at our elbows, when Cherrate, Merton, Bigbee and I were conversing, yet not a word did we ever succeed in eliciting from our dull neighbor. We at length concluded that he did not understand our language, and so ceased our endeavors to draw him into conversation.

But my gracious! If I stop on the road to describe every passenger on the boat, I perceive it will be a tedious journey to the end of my narrative, which principally concerns Mr. Merton and his ten thousand dollars, Cherrate and his blue dress coat with brass buttons, and Tom Bigbee and his pair of extraordinary gloves. It is on these gloves that the interest of my story "hangs." They were of a peculiar make, and excited our admiration one night as we were seated around the stove. After they had been sufficiently examined by us all, Tom put them, as he thought in his coat pocket. It happened, however, that one of them fell upon the floor.—Cherrate quickly picked it up, saying, "You have dropped one," and obligingly stuck it in Tom's pocket for him, instead of handing it to its owner. At least we *supposed* he had put it in the pocket with the other; although subsequent events convinced me that Mr. Cherrate had merely *pretended* to do so and that he had retained the odd glove for a vile purpose then only known to himself.

That night Mr. Merton's ten thousand dollars were stolen from his state room!—His trunk had been broken open during the night, and the little box containing his treasure and a quantity of papers had been abstracted.

Merton discovered his loss early next morning. Wild with excitement, he immediately spread the intelligence throughout the boat. The hubbub created was immense; and every man and woman aboard suggested a plan for ferreting out the thief. Frank Cherrate proposed that Merton's state room should be searched, as some clue might have been left there by which to detect the robber.

The room *was* searched, and a clue *was* found—in the shape of AN ODD GLOVE that had been left behind by the thief. It was one of those gloves that Tom Bigbee had been seen to wear the evening before—Merton rushed into the cabin with this evidence of Tom's guilt, and exclaimed—

"There stands the thief. Bigbee is the owner of this glove, and I charge him with the theft of my money!"

Tom's amazement may be imagined on being thus accused. My own astonishment was no less. I had known him from childhood, and was confident that a more honorable, upright man never trod the earth.

"Impossible!" I indignantly cried.

But the excited loser of the money could not be induced to withdraw the charge.—No one but himself, he said, had been permitted to enter his state room since he had taken possession of it. Somebody *had* entered it without his knowledge during the preceding night, and stolen the money. The thief had fortunately left a clue to his identity. He had seen the glove in Bigbee's possession before the robbery, and he now demanded that his trunks should be searched.

“Don’t be too hasty,” eagerly interposed Frank Cherrate; “There may be other gloves of the same kind as Mr. Bigbee’s, and if that gentleman can produce his pair, I claim that your suspicions are unjust.”

Tom instantly examined his pockets thoroughly, but fruitlessly. He found but *one* glove and the exact mate of the one found in Merton’s state room.— Filled with wonder and chagrin, my mortified friend gave up his keys, and requested that his trunks should be immediately searched.

The keys were not needed, for his trunk in the state room was found unlocked.— The lid being raised, the first object that presented itself to view was the missing box. The papers were in it, not a cent of the stolen money.

It was plain to my mind that the real thief had adopted a cunning plan for throwing suspicion off his own shoulders upon my friend Tom. The glove must have been stolen from him for the very purpose to which it was applied and the box and papers put into his trunk with the view of fastening the guilt upon poor Tom. Unfortunately, not a soul on board, excepting myself, knew Tom Bigbee, and it was already the opinion of the majority that he had stolen the money. We were rapidly approaching Memphis, and the captain politely notified us that he considered it his duty to hand Bigbee over to the authorities of that city. Whatever was to be done must be done quickly.— Poor Tom, crushed in spirit and now listless, could not assist me with a single suggestion. His sensitive nature would not survive the disgrace of confinement in a common jail. At any hazard I must prevent it. Who *could* the real thief be?

My thoughts naturally reverted to the incident of the previous evening, when Frank Cherrate picked up Tom’s glove and appeared to replace it in his pocket. He *must* have retained it then with the design now developed. And this morning how eagerly this same flashy young gentleman offered the suggestion that a search should be made for its mate, under the pretense that he wished to clear my friend of suspicion! And the hypocritical interest that he took such pains to exhibit? I was now certain that Frank Cherrate must be the criminal.

I called the passengers together, asserted my honest belief in the innocence of my friend Tom Bigbee, and requested that each would permit his room to be examined. This privilege was cheerfully accorded by all, Frank Cherrate being the first to give his consent. His state room I searched myself, and I assure the reader that I ransacked every nook and corner of it—but the missing money was not found! The fellow had laid his plans well.

Meanwhile the steamer neared the levee at Memphis. As her bow touched the shore, two police officers jumped aboard and demanded that a guard should be stationed at the gangway to prevent the egress of anyone to the land. The captain requested an explanation of this measure when one of the policemen answered:—

“Excuse me, captain; we won’t detain you long. A telegraphic dispatch was received at the Chief’s office this morning, informing us that one John Brown, a notorious rascal, had escaped from the Missouri Penitentiary and taken passage for New Orleans on your boat. We’ve come to nab him. Here’s his description in full.” And the officer showed the dispatch.

“All right,” said the Captain. “And while you are about it, you will find another bird aboard for your cage.”

“How so?”

“Well, only a young gentleman who has been appropriating ten thousand dollars that happens to be the property of another person.”

“Wheugh! Here’s a go!” exclaimed one of the bird catchers. “Maybe now it’s the same chap wot we are arter.” And the two officers entered the cabin.

Tom didn’t answer the description in the dispatch, and so at least he avoided the imputation of being an escaped convict; but he was nevertheless duly ironed and confined in a state room whilst the officers proceeded to scrutinize the countenances and general appearance of the other passengers.

Troubled, feverish and perplexed, I went out on the guards near the ladies’ cabin to breathe a little fresh air. Happening to glance downward, I saw a dark figure with a carpetbag in hand leap from the lower deck to a flatboat near the stern of our boat. In my state of mind, I was ready to grasp at anything that might possibly lead to an explanation of the mystery enveloping this affair of my friend, even though my conduct should excite nothing but ridicule. It struck me that the man with the carpetbag adopted a curious and an unnecessarily dangerous mode of effecting a landing from the steamer, for, by waiting ten minutes, he could get ashore on the gangway. I then noticed that there was no other witness of the man’s proceeding than myself. It was singular, to say the least of it, that he should go ashore in this sneaking manner, just at a time when the police were particularly desirous that not a soul should leave the boat. Indeed, it looked very suspicious. I examined the man more closely, and as he turned his head for a moment towards the boat, I recognized the features of our demure and studious fellow passenger, Dr. Herman Blukerwissel, booked for New Orleans.

*For New Orleans!* Why, then, was he getting off in this secret way at *Memphis*?

I darted into the cabin. The policemen were about taking Tom ashore, having given the search for John Brown as “a bad job.”

“Stop! Stop!” I yelled; “I’ve found him.”

“Found *who*?” asked one of the officers.

“The robber! the thief; the rogue! The d—d rascal!” I answered, greatly excited. “Quick, quick! There he goes, up levee! I saw him escape from the stern of the boat!”

The officer did not fully comprehend what I meant, but concluding that a man would not attempt to escape without having concealed motive for doing so, they followed me in pursuit of the gentleman in black.

We had a long chase; for the fellow, upon seeing us, ran like a quarter horse. But at length we had the satisfaction of securing him, just as he was dodging into a cellar on front street.

Having brought him aboard the steamer, into the presence of all the passengers who had watched our race with interest, the policemen produced their description of John Brown, the escaped convict, and found it to fit Dr. Blukerwissel, in respect to height and weight, but not otherwise. The Penitentiary bird had short sandy hair, no beard, and could be identified by a scar on the lower part of his right cheek. The Doctor, on the contrary, wore very long black hair and whiskers, that hid all of his features excepting a pair of gray, piercing eyes, which shone through their prison like a cat's eyes in the dark. He was interrogated as to his object in leaving the boat so slyly; but to none of the questions did he deign a word in reply—merely shrugging his shoulders, as much as to say, "I don't understand you."

Many of the strangers now expressed their sympathy for the distinguished foreigner, and insisted that the officers should release him from further annoyance. Nevertheless, I demanded that the carpetbag should be examined. "All the other passengers' baggage had been searched, and why not this man's?"

"Well," acquiesced the officers, "go ahead. *You* may search it, if you wish, *We* won't have anything to do with it."

I broke open the carpetbag and emptied its contents upon the floor. The first article that made its appearance was the ancient Hebrew work hereintofore mentioned; the next lot proved to be a small lot of ragged linen, principally "dickeys;" and, finally, to my great gratification, the astonishment of spectators generally, and the excessive delight of the most interested spectator, Mr. Merton, out popped twenty-five double eagles pieces each.

"My money! My ten thousand dollars!" shouted Merton, crazy with joy, as he hastened to gather up his lost treasure.

The excitement consequent upon this discovery having partially abated, the next object of interest, naturally enough, *the thief*—the proprietor of the carpetbag. Upon looking around for this interesting individual, however, it was discovered that he had taken "French leave of the company." The scamp, observing that we were deeply absorbed in the contemplation of the contents of his carpetbag, had improved the opportunity to "make himself scarce," and thus avoiding any further nonsensical queries as to the manner in which he happened to gain possession of Merton's money.

Everybody—including the policemen—rushed out upon the guards, in hopes of catching a glimpse of the Doctor's "retiring form." An interesting scene on the Levee presented itself to our admiring view. Two men were floundering in the mud, (there is a *little* mud on the Memphis Levee) with a circle of delighted loafers yelling—"Go it, Black Coat!" "Hold on to him, Blue Coat!" and similar encouraging remarks calculated to keep up the spirits of the combatants. The wallowing had not continued long before blue coat and black coat lost their distinguished colors,

and the loafers were forced to designate their respective favorites as “Long Legs” and “Little One.”

The two police officers, with their accustomed promptness, rushed boldly down to the scene of the conflict, just as both parties appeared to be pretty well tired out, and brought them aboard of the Montezuma. One of the prisoners proved to be Frank Cherrate, and the other——

“Who is that chap?” asked policeman No. 1.

“That’s Dr. *Blukerwissel*,” answered Cherrate, spitting out a stream of Memphis mud. “Here’s his wig and his whiskers,” he added, presenting a mass of hair thickly coated with the soil of Tennessee.

No wonder that the distinguished foreigner was *un*-distinguishable, for in the place of his heavy beard was now substituted a mass of dirty back mire. Frank Cherrate seized a sponge and wiped the fellow’s face clean enough to show a deep scar on his right jaw.

“John Brown, by all that’s wonderful,” exclaimed policeman No. 2.

For the first time since his entrance upon the boat, Mr. Brown opened his mouth and spake; and thus spoke he:—

“Well, I guess I’ll have to come. I’m a gone community.”

Sure enough, it was the veritable John Brown, himself, who, in the assumed character of a sedate bookworm, had managed to avoid exposing himself to the passengers, as he most certainly would have done had he spoken three words. The fellow’s caution, however, was overbalanced by his cupidity. His continued proximity to us four, (Merton, Cherrate, Bigbee and myself) enabled him to hear all our conversation, whilst he pretended to be deeply absorbed in his studies. He thus discovered that Merton was the possessor of \$10,000 dollars in gold, and the temptation to appropriate it to his sole use and benefit was too great for him to resist;— “pertikkerly as that ’ere business was precisely in his line, you know,” as he playfully remarked when giving us an account of the affair. “I was thinkin’ of some plan for gettin’ hold of those dibbs last night,” he continued, “when this ’ere Tom Bigbug was exhibitin’ of his gloves; and when I saw him drop one of ’em, and this ’ere Frank Cahoot pick it up and put it in his pocket for him, thinks I here’s a caper. So I just jerked it out of his pocket, you know, and made good use of it, you know. I wouldn’t have thought of doin’ such a trick if I hadn’t had a reputation to preserve, you know,” and the jolly rascal grinned benignly upon the assembled company.

My friend, Tom Bigbee, was speedily divested of his iron bracelets, which were forthwith applied to the more appropriate purpose of ornamenting John Brown alias Dr. Blukelwisser’s brawny wrists.

In due time we steamed away from Memphis, and I will venture the assertion that a merrier set than were cooped up aboard of the palatial “Montezuma” during this memorable trip, never floated on the Mississippi. Tom’s spirits soon revived under the genial example of his fellow

passengers, who, each and all, seemed to vie with each other in attempts to make my old friend forget his predicament.

As for poor Frank Cherrate—*ahem!* I am positively ashamed to admit to the attentive reader of this truthful sketch, that my boasted knowledge of human nature was at fault for once in this case. But then you know, Sir or Madame, that Frank, on our first acquaintance, wore a blue dress coat with brass buttons! Don't forget that fact. Yet I am constrained to acknowledge that a close intimacy of four years (which intimacy began aboard the "Montezuma" and subsequently ripened into the firmest friendship) has only served to increase my admiration of my young friend's character. I confidently aver that a more noble and generous heart never beat, than that which throbs beneath Frank Cherrate's vest.

With gratification I must add, that since the events above narrated, Frank has never worn a blue dress coat with brass buttons!

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