

An Amateur Detective

Mr. Buston, wholesale wine and spirit merchant, had won success in many lines. Active and energetic in his ways, he had established a prosperous business and acquired a considerable fortune. A liberal subscriber and a rousing speaker, he had gained a position of some influence among the rank and file of the Conservative party. An infatuated Primrose Leaguer, he had attracted the notice of some of the smart people who patronize that home for lost souls, and was actually on nodding terms with several persons of title. Of all this he was very proud, as he might reasonably be; but there was something else of which he was far prouder. With him success in business, in politics and in the world of fashion was not half so delightful as success as a physiognomist and amateur detective. As he himself said, if there was anything upon which he prided himself it was his eye.

“Ah, I’ve a wonderful eye,” he used to say. “I can see through and through a man. The human face is an open book to me, and I’m never mistaken in what I read there. And it’s not the face alone that I read: I see through a man’s behavior. The rogue who tries to look honest; the criminal who tries to look innocent—none of them ever escapes my eye. Yes, sir, I’m a born detective; I never suspect a man without cause. If there were a few men in the police like me there wouldn’t be so many undiscovered murders, and if there were a few men in the world like me there wouldn’t be so many political humbugs about. Yes, sir, I can see through impostors and rascals of all descriptions, and it’s all my eye.”

Mr. Buston’s attention was first attracted to his remarkable visual organ by a very sensational adventure. Many years before, a bank cashier, after committing extensive embezzlements, absconded. The police made great efforts to trace him, but his flight was so skillfully conducted that they could follow the trail no further than Liverpool. It was believed that he had sailed thence to America, and careful inquiries were made there, but without result. Mr. Buston had never seen the man himself; the only idea he had of his appearance was derived from the portrait and description of him issued by the police. One evening the wine merchant was dining at rather a fast West End restaurant, when his attention was attracted to a gentleman who was dining with a lady at a neighboring table. To Mr. Buston’s eye the man had a sinister and yet a familiar look. He watched him closely, and soon came to the conclusion that he was disguised, the moustache being false and the blue glasses being worn not to protect, but to hide the eyes. Before Mr. Buston had watched him long the stranger observed him, and became obviously most uneasy under the examination. Soon, although he and his lady acquaintance had not finished their dinner, the stranger rose to go. As he did so, the truth flashed upon Mr. Buston’s mind. The person was none other than the absconding cashier. Following him to the street, Mr. Buston gave him in charge to the first policeman he met.

Naturally, Mr. Buston’s extraordinary acuteness in detecting the criminal in so complete a disguise and in so unexpected a quarter created considerable excitement and attracted much attention. At the trial he was complimented by the grand jury, the prosecuting counsel and the presiding judge, and laudatory notices of him appeared in several newspapers. The wine merchant, in fact, was a seven days’ hero.

This adventure, as has been said, attracted Mr. Buston's attention to his possession of a wonderful eye. Once aware of this valuable possession, he became filled with a violent and insatiable desire to use it. His business took up too much of his time to allow him to investigate every mysterious crime which occurred in the metropolis; still, in spite of its claims, he found opportunities to dip into any one of more than unusual interest. Too frequently in such cases he had to abandon his inquiries, not because they were proving fruitless, but because he could not spare the time necessary to make them fruitful, but on several occasions, when he happened to have leisure for a thorough investigation, he contributed greatly to putting the police on the right track.

And not only did Mr. Buston from time to time assist in investigating crimes—he was always on the lookout for criminals. Everywhere he went he kept his eye open for suspicious-looking individuals. If he happened upon anybody answering that description he would go much out of his way to follow him up, and discover where he lived and who he was. Sometimes this led to nothing, but occasionally the results were absolutely amazing.

That was the case once when Mr. Buston went to spend a day or two at Folkestone, where his friend and fellow wine merchant, Mr. Ginner, was staying. It was Mr. Buston's custom when about to enter a train to walk along the platform and keenly scrutinize the passengers, to see if among them he could find one whose appearance or bearing suggested suspicion. On the present occasion he was thus engaged when his eye fell upon a person who at once arrested his attention.

The individual was a tall, rather slight man, and was dressed in a rough, light-colored tweed suit and wore a pair of blue spectacles. In face he was rather good looking:—fairish moustache and side whiskers, nose slightly snub, a firm, determined mouth and a large strong chin. The suspicious things about him were the spectacles—ever since the cashier's arrest a suspicious circumstance with Mr. Buston—and his bearing, which to Mr. Buston seemed to be that of a man desirous of escaping observation.

Mr. Buston's detective instincts were at once aroused, and he resolved to follow the suspect up. Watching him keenly the wine merchant marked the compartment into which he entered. After waiting until the train was just about to start, Mr. Buston hurried up and jumped into the same compartment. The seat immediately opposite the suspect was by good luck unoccupied, and into it the amateur detective at once flung himself.

As soon as he was comfortably seated, the wine merchant fixed his keen gaze on the suspect. That person was pouring over a newspaper in such a way that Mr. Buston could not see his face. Until, therefore, a change of position should reveal his features, Mr. Buston had to be content with turning his attention to the suspect's belongings. These appeared to consist merely of a bundle of newspapers, a heavy stick, and a black bag. To the ordinary observer nothing could look more innocent than these; but Mr. Buston was not the ordinary observer, and to his mind they were full of suspicion. First of all, he noticed among the newspapers no other than the *Freeman's Journal*! Now to Mr. Buston, the possession of this Irish print was convincing evidence that its owner could not be respectable. Again, to his keen glance it was clear that the heavy stick was nothing more nor less than a sword-stick! And in some way or other, without

being able exactly to tell why, to his mind the black bag was most ominous of all. It suggested to him thoughts of treason, felonies, and murder!

For a long time Mr. Buston had to be content with studying these things, and drawing inferences from them; the stranger remained engrossed behind his paper without once allowing the wine merchant to get a glimpse at his face. At last, however, he lowered the paper, apparently to reflect upon what he had read, and Mr. Buston got a full view of his face. He gazed on it keenly and carefully, and what he read there agreed completely with what he had already guessed from the man's general surroundings.

“Ah, yes, coarse and brutal,” Mr. Buston said to himself, “capable of any crime; incapable of the slightest tenderness, fierce, overbearing and deceitful. Beastliness and ferocity are written in every line of your face so plainly and clearly that a child might read them. Whether or not you have as yet been guilty of a crime, it is not love of the right that prevents you from being a criminal. Yes, young man, I see in you not perhaps an actual felon, but a felon in posse—a man who may yet tread the scaffold.”

All the time that Mr. Buston was thus in his mind apostrophizing the stranger, he was gazing intently in his face. At first the stranger was so lost in thought that he did not notice the stare—a stare of mingled interest, contempt, and aversion. Suddenly he observed it, and the moment he did so he gave a violent start. For a second or so his face appeared flushed with fear or anger, the next moment it was hidden from his fellow passenger's view by the newspaper being again held up before it.

Mr. Buston was startled by this conduct. He had just concluded that the stranger was capable of crime—was it possible he was guilty of it? Recollections of the bank cashier entered his mind. If the stranger was not guilty of some offence, why did he tremble under Mr. Buston's scrutinizing gaze? If he was not afraid of recognition, why did he hide himself behind his paper? No wonder Mr. Buston was startled and excited.

The stranger kept his paper carefully before his face, and effectually prevented Mr. Buston from obtaining a glance at it until the train arrived at Folkstone. Then hurriedly rising to his feet he seized his stick and black bag and, before the train had quite stopped, jumped out on the platform and hurried away. But he was not quick enough to escape from Mr. Buston. The gentleman sprang out of the carriage after him and, without waiting to claim his luggage, started off on his track.

As soon as he was outside the station the stranger turned toward the Lees. Mr. Buston followed him at about a hundred yards. Before they had gone far the stranger turned round, apparently to see if he was followed, and observing Mr. Buston he quickened his already quick pace. Mr. Buston did the same. It was getting dusk and he did not want to let the stranger get far from him. They had been going so far along the main road. Suddenly, the stranger turned sharply down a side street. Mr. Buston hurried up, not to lose sight of his man. He arrived at the corner of the side street just in time to see the stranger turning the corner at the further end of it. He was running at his utmost pace.

This settled any doubt in Mr. Buston's mind. The stranger must be an escaped convict or an unapprehended criminal. The amateur detective, without a moment's hesitation, dashed down the side street. When he reached the street down which the stranger had turned that person had entirely disappeared. Mr. Buston rushed up it, glancing down all the cross streets as he ran, but not a trace of the fugitive was to be seen.

When he had gone about a quarter of mile Mr. Buston retraced his steps; as he did so, he carefully examined again all the side streets and all the spots where he thought the stranger might have taken refuge. But there were no signs of him. There were no houses fronting into this street, but along one side of it opened the back doors of a few villa residences. Mr. Buston tried all these to see if the runaway might have taken shelter there; but every one of them was duly locked.

Disappointed and annoyed, Mr. Buston returned to the station and claimed his luggage. Then he started off to this friend Mr. Ginner's lodgings. He found that gentleman awaiting him in no very amiable state of mind. Mr. Buston was nearly an hour late, and, as Mr. Ginner told him, "an hour's delay doesn't improve a dinner, as a rule!" Mr. Buston was full of his adventure, but he thought it better to keep his narrative of it until his friend had eaten and drunk; he would then receive a more sympathetic hearing.

When a plenteous dinner and a due allowance of port had restored Mr. Ginner's usual amiability, Mr. Buston imparted to him the strange experiences of the day. Mr. Ginner was intensely interested. When Mr. Buston had finished, his friend's air was very grave and impressive.

"Where do you say you lost sight of him?" he asked.

"At the corner of Cromwell and Castlereagh roads," answered Mr. Buston.

"And he had in his possession a *Freeman's Journal*?" asked Mr. Ginner.

"Yes, he had," replied Mr. Buston.

"And a black bag?" asked Mr. Ginner.

"Yes, and a black bag," answered Mr. Buston.

"And a swordstick?" asked Mr. Ginner.

"Yes, and a swordstick," answered Mr. Buston.

"And he wore blue spectacles?" replied Mr. Buston.

"Blue spectacles," replied Mr. Buston.

Mr. Glimmer shook his head impatiently.

“I mean,” he said, “he wore colored spectacles as if to disguise himself. Another question: Did he look like a dynamiter?”

Mr. Buston was startled.

“Well,” he said hesitatingly, “I never saw a dynamiter, but the fellow looked cruel and daring enough for anything. But why do you ask?”

Mr. Ginner deliberately filled himself a glass of port and drank it before he answered Mr. Buston’s question.

“Because,” he said, in a very impressive tone, “the house at the corner of Cromwell and Castlereagh roads, to the neighborhood to which you chased the man, belongs to nobody else than Mr. Kilpatrick, the Irish secretary!”

Mr. Buston lay back in his chair speechless with amazement, Mr. Ginner filled himself another glass of port, and then continued:

“You see now, I suppose,” he said, “the reason of my questions. Mark my words: the man whom you cleverly discovered to-day, and who behaved so strangely, is neither more nor less than a dynamiter sent over here to ‘remove’—that’s their phrase—the man they hate so bitterly—the gallant Kilpatrick!”

Mr. Buston thought deeply for a few moments. Then he rose to his feet in great excitement.

“By Jove, Ginner,” he exclaimed, “you have hit it. He can be nothing but what you say—the newspaper, the sword-stick, the black bag, the man’s fear of discovery, all point the one way. I thought he might be a criminal fearing detection—a mere forger or thief making his way to France, but your theory is far more credible and probable. In fact, so sure am I of its truth, that I’ll go this minute to the house and warn Mr. Kilpatrick of his danger.”

“No need to do that,” replied Mr. Ginner. “The chief secretary is not in Folkstone at present, I’m sure of that, because I met his housekeeper this very day, and she told me so. Mr. Kilpatrick only runs down here occasionally for a day or two, and usually few know he is here until he’s going or gone. He keeps his movements as private as possible, so as to give no information to the assassins who are always prowling after him.”

“Poor, poor fellow! What a life he leads,” said Mr. Buston. “Never sure but he may at any moment be murdered by some ruthless villain, such as the man I saw today. You know, Ginner, how good I am at reading the human face. Well, I tell you, if I ever saw murderer written on a man’s countenance I saw it in the face of the man I followed to-night.”

“I believe you,” said Mr. Ginner, very solemnly. “Still, Mr. Kilpatrick may be down here at any time, so the best thing you can do is to walk up to his house tomorrow morning and tell the housekeeper—she’s a nice little woman—what you saw tonight.”

It was by this time pretty late, so the two wine merchants, after a little conversation, took what they called a “night-cap” and went off to bed.

The next morning Mr. Buston came down to breakfast before his friend. While waiting for Mr. Ginner he glanced over the local paper. While thus engaged, his eye fell upon a paragraph which made him start. It ran as follows:

Attempted Burglary at Tara Hall.—Just as we went to press we learnt that an attempt was made last night to force one of the windows of the chief secretary’s house. Happily, the burglars failed in their object. Details wanting. We believe the right honorable gentleman is in London.

“Burglary, indeed!” exclaimed Mr. Buston, wildly excited. “Attempted assassination, attempted dynamite outrage—that would be more like the thing. By Jove! I can’t wait for Ginner. I must run up to Tara Hall and give them the information of what I saw at once. The ruffian who is on the noble Kilpatrick’s track is most likely still in Folkstone. If I give information now he may be caught.”

And, without waiting for his friend, Mr. Buston dashed off on his mission to justice.

He was just about half way to the Irish Secretary’s house when whom should he see but the very man he pursued the previous evening. The man saw him, too, and, instead of advancing toward him, stopped abruptly, and then turned hurriedly down a side street. With a face wild with excitement, Mr. Buston rushed after him. When the man saw he was being pursued he broke into a run, and the two men went tearing down the pavement at a break neck pace.

The stranger was younger and more agile than Mr. Buston, and, in spite of the latter’s utmost efforts, he was rapidly being distanced when the chase came to a sudden end. The stranger, to Mr. Buston’s delight, when turning a corner ran slap into a policeman’s arms. In a moment Mr. Buston was up to the spot.

“Wot’s hup?” the enforcer of the law asked Mr. Buston. “Wot’s he been a doing of?”

“He—he,” gasped Mr. Buston, who was sadly out of breath. “He’s the man who tried to break into Mr. Kilpatrick’s last night.”

“Eh?” asked the stranger, apparently much surprised. “What’s that?”

“O, I know you,” cried Mr. Buston, now recovered from the exertion of the race, “I followed you last night. I saw crime written in your face, so I shadowed you and traced you to Mr. Kilpatrick’s house, and—”

“You infernal idiot!” cried the stranger, as he removed his blue glasses. “I thought from the way you dogged me that you were an invincible. Look at me; look at me, I say! I am Mr. Kilpatrick!”—*London Truth*.

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