The Two Chiefs of the Detective Force

by M. Claude

From the Memoirs of M. Clacde, Chief of the Detective Force Under the Second Empire

IN 1867, the year of the Exposition—of the interview of the two Emperors and the King of Prussia—the sun of Austerlitz shone for the last time in the heaven of the Second Empire.

Napoleon III., inviting Europe to his *fêtes,* was startled in the midst of his theatrical glory by the spectre of Maximilian. The Prussians returned to their country, their hearts bitter with envy. All Europe was dazed by the splendor of the Paris of 1867.

One day I was walking in the cylindrical departments of the Exposition, on the lookout for the numerous pickpockets who ran over from London with a view to picking every well-lined pocket in gay and festive Lutetia.

After having strolled through the numerous and splendid *cafés* of all nations, conducted by schemers gathered together from the four quarters of the world, I struck the department reserved for German industry.

In this there was but a gigantic tube of metal stretched on planks, its open mouth grinning at the sun.

It was the Krupp gun. Somehow or other the sight of this cannon plunged me into a profound reverie. Scarcely had it been placed in position than it became the subject of a joke to the Parisians—they treated the Krupp gun as the armament of another age.

They laughed at a cannon that was loaded at the breech, and pretended that it was a great toy from Nuremberg that the good King William had sent as a gift to his dear little cousin, Napoleon.

In quitting this department I jostled against a gentleman. This person had observed me whilst I was indulging in my sad reverie.

After having designedly gazed at me, as I learned by the first words he uttered, I set myself to study him in turn.

He was a great big man, with the face of a drayman, red-bearded, and with immense shoulders and long legs. Every look, every gesture, proved him to be an inhabitant of Great Britain.

“Sir,” he said to me, “excuse me for trespassing upon you; but I have only this mode of making myself known, since time presses, and I have, as a stranger, a great need of both your advice and your aid. You will excuse me, I am sure, when you learn that I am of the same profession as yourself. I am here in a strange country to endeavor to do that which you manage with so much credit to yourself and to your profession. My name is Druscovitch, I am attached to the detective police of England. I came from London here, in my capacity as chief of the English police, with

a view to arresting the numerous —to me—well-known pickpockets who are infesting your Exposition. Should you feel inclined to doubt my identity, here is my card."

And the big Englishman, with his long fingers, handed me his card, upon which I read, in great letters, his name and rank.

In returning him the card, I said:

"Be good enough to say how I can be of service to you, after having told me how you came to recognize me."

"Certainly," replied the Englishman. "In London, at Scotland Yard, we possess not only the photographs of distinguished robbers, but also of the most distinguished police officers. Hence, my dear sir. your features are distinctly engraven upon my memory."

"Nothing can be clearer," said I, in my most amiable tone. "And now please tell me what it is you require of me?"

"I want you to make known to me the bandits of your country who despoil the English visitors, and in return I will gladly point out the brigands of my country who despoil the French."

At that particular moment this meeting with Mr. Druscovitch was for me an interposition of Providence. Had I not received numberless complaints from visitors to the exposition, denouncing the detective service because of its inability to protect the public from the depredations of these brigands.

Among other complaints was one from an Englishman, which referred to a notorious English pickpocket who, in league with a very beautiful English woman, his accomplice, had despoiled him of a pocketbook containing over ten thousand francs.

I ascertained through my agents that the victim found the young lady attendants in the various *cafés* in the building so very attractive that he spent most of his time in roving from one to the other of these establishments, and, having been deeply fascinated by a young and beautiful English girl attached to the English *café,* to whom he gave a most elaborate and costly luncheon, he found himself, the meal over, minus his ten thousand francs.

It was with a view to recovering this identical pocketbook that I was now prowling through the Exposition Buildings.

I repeat that, in the difficult task imposed upon me, this meeting with the chief of the English detective force was a veritable stroke of luck. Between colleagues there is confidence, and I did not hesitate to tell Mr. Druscovitch my object in visiting the Exposition.

My colleague, in order to cement our union, which was based upon mutual professional interest, invited me to breakfast with him in the English restaurant where the robbery had been committed.

“Come with me,” he said. “I think I have got your female robber. Her name is Palmer, a very pretty girl, with hair as yellow as the gold she so skillfully extracts from the pockets of the unwary.”

In return for the service Mr. Druscovitch was about to render me, I begged him to be *my* guest; but he refused with considerable decision, saying that in the English restaurant his feet would be on his native heath, and that he could permit no foreigner to offer him hospitality on such hallowed ground.

We entered the *Café Anglais*. Many of my readers will remember the first circle or ring of buildings around the Exposition of '67. It was composed of a series—as varied as it was interminable—of *cafés,* representing every civilized nation on the surface of the globe. From the dusky Moor to the fair Englishwoman, one passed through these attractive *salons,* rendered dangerously alluring by the very beautiful young girls who acted the *rôle* of Hebe.

The *café* in which these goddesses mustered in greatest force was the *Café Anglais*. Not one of the barmaids in this establishment returned to their native country at the close of the Exposition, and two of them were added to the harem of Abdul-Aziz.

I am fain to confess that I never beheld so many rosy, fresh and beautiful girls together as in this celebrated restaurant; it was a perfect bouquet of healthful beauty.

Scarcely were we—Druscovitch and I— seated at the table, when he drew my attention to the buffet at which six girls were engaged in serving champagne.

“The handsomest of that lot,” he said, “the last girl is Miss Palmer. I suspect that she has taken the ten thousand francs. When the place thins a little I shall call her over to me. It is well that she should relate her past career to you. From her past you can augur as to her future.”

I ventured to express my astonishment that a lady of such unsavory reputation would be permitted to a position such as she now held.

“Happily, or unhappily,” said Druscovitch, “criminals in England are not, like yours, subjected to eternal repudiation. When they have finished their term society definitely acquits them. Infamy only lasts, for them, during their incarceration. A robber with us is not pointed at as a robber; he is as you and I are. You will see this practically illustrated when I shall presently invite Miss Palmer to a seat at our table.”

We had arrived at the end of our repast, formidable as is every English meal, and were about to enjoy our champagne, when my obliging colleague made an imperative sign to the Venus of the bar.

Instantly she quitted the nymphs, obeying the gesture of my colleague as a soldier obeys the word of command. Upon another sign from Druscovitch she seated herself beside me, after having filled a glass of champagne.

She was indeed a very superb woman. Her great eyes, almost black, fringed with long lashes, gave to her dreamy physiognomy a strange charm. Her aquiline nose was perfect in its shape. Her large mouth was guarded by lips as vividly red as the ripest cherry. Her figure was one that the Venus de Milo need not have been ashamed of.

In a few words she gave me a brief *résumé* of her past career. On this I need not dwell, as it does not concern this narrative.

Her grace was singularly seductive, and she threw so much expression into her words, and so much delightful pantomime into her gestures, that when her arm touched mine I could almost feel her quiver.

As for my colleague, he remained cold—deaf, I might say, to the vivid and frank recital of the beautiful creature, as became a chief of police; I, on the contrary, faithful to my *rôle* of the stranger, to which I willingly yielded myself, the better to study this curious and fascinating creature.

When she had finished her recital, she emptied her glass of champagne which I had just filled, and, having placed it on the table, declared she felt unwell, consequent upon the concentrated emotions which she had experienced during the recital of her misfortunes.

Placing her hand to her forehead, she complained of the heat, and begged of me to open the window against which I was sitting, our table giving upon the Exposition Park.

I hastened to rise and to do her this very small service, for which the beautiful English girl thanked me with an almost overwhelming effusiveness.

On perceiving that the buffet was surrounded by strangers, claiming her presence and attention, she quitted us.

With a particularly gracious air, she said to me and, with a ravishing smile:

"Good-evening, sir. *Bon soir,* monsieur."

Scarcely had she left us when a man—an ill-looking dog enough—suddenly entered, and in an agitated manner addressed the chief of the English police.

Druscovitch heard him without moving a muscle; then, rising, he exclaimed:

"Pardon, colleague, but I must leave you. A most important matter has been told me by my detective. We shall meet tomorrow. You will be surprised to learn" — here he leaned over and put his lips to my ear, while he paid for the *déjeûner*— "that this Palmer is still a pickpocket. She is only attached to the bar in order to signal her confederates what pigeon is to be plucked. It is she who has robbed your Englishman. The matter on which I am now summoned concerns another robbery, which will concern you as much as it concerns me. Tomorrow you shall learn all, if not this evening. *Au revoir,* my dear *confrère!*" And my colleague, without giving me time

to ask what the affair might be in which I was equally concerned with himself, had gained the extremity of the hall.

I turned my eyes toward the buffet where the beautiful Englishwoman was enthroned; but I found that she, as well as my colleague, had disappeared. At first I paid no attention to this coincidence—this in spite of the inherent suspicion in my character.

It was only when I regained the galleries of the Exposition that I recalled, with a certain aversion, the hang-dog face of the detective.

“The English police,” I said to myself, “must be very hard up for agents when they employ inspectors who so strongly resemble criminals.”

I did not pause over this thought; it inspired me with no suspicion. I knew that the English police was in its rudimentary state, as was our own in the time of Vidocq.

A quarter of an hour after leaving the *Café Anglais*, still moved by the recollection of the beautiful English girl, and still charmed with my new acquaintance with the chief of the London detectives, I stopped opposite a jeweler's stand, and being struck by a remarkably cheap scarf-pin, put up by the proprietor as a “decoy duck," I placed my hand in my pocket for my purse. My purse, with a pretty large sum of money, had gone!

I no longer doubted that the beautiful English girl was still a pickpocket. It was during the moment that I raised the window to give her air that, leaning heavily against me, she had helped herself to my purse.

The crimson of shame was on my brow. I bit my lips in bitter rage in thinking that this cool and deliberate thief, this pretended chief of the London police, with his skillful accomplice, was at that moment engaged in laughing at me.

Without doubt, this pickpocket, who must have been a thorough expert, had made a wager to rob a French police officer for the national pride of the thing. Had he not said to me on leaving, that the affair in which he was intrusted equally affected myself?

These words were but a sarcasm, a defiance flung by this mystifying bandit to his mystified dupe.

These two pickpockets had only robbed me for the sake of art, but they robbed all the *cafés* in the Exposition for the sake of robbing.

They wound up their nefarious designs by easing me, and the contents of my purse added to the 300,000 francs of which it is calculated they relieved the Exposition.

Frank Leslie’s Pleasant Hours, 1885 vol. 37 p. 102