

## *A Capture in Canada*

I AM not Mr. Pollaky of Paddington Green, neither am I Inspector Webb, nor Detective Bull of the City force; my status in society is that of a banker's clerk. I hold an appointment in a Midland Counties firm, which I entered upon five-and-twenty years ago. I had reached what is termed the "ripe middle age," when some months since the even current of my life was interrupted by the following event.

The establishment with which I have been so long associated is well known, and has gained a reputation by the quiet, respectable character of its business transactions. It does not indulge in speculative ventures, and hence has escaped many of the misfortunes and missed no little of the agitation which some banking firms have had to encounter. Occasionally we have been startled by the presentation of a bad note, a forged check, and other cunningly devised schemes of well-practised swindlers to impose on our simplicity and credulity, which circumstances have forced us into the excitement of judicial investigations. Thus from time to time, I was brought in contact with some of the most celebrated detectives of the day. I still remember the feelings of admiration with which I witnessed the skill and sagacity of such men as John Forrester, Leadbeater, the Bow Street officer, Inspector Whicher, and other police officers, in tracking and detecting a swindler. At that period I little dreamt that my quiet life would be disturbed by an eventful episode, such as I am about to relate.

On the morning of the 28th September, 186- , I was at my post as usual, when a message from the bank manager summoned me to his presence. I saw at a glance, on entering the room, that something had happened. My chief informed me that a customer of the bank, whom, for obvious reasons, I will call Mr. Hooker, had absconded. I was aware, not only that he was under an engagement to liquidate a considerable claim we had against him, but that he had recently fixed a day for the fulfilment of his promise, assuring us that he should be in the immediate receipt of a large sum of money, which would enable him to pay his debt, and leave a balance to his credit in our hands. The statement of his expected funds was no fiction, — he duly received them, — but instead of appropriating his newly acquired wealth to the honest discharge of our claim, he clandestinely left his home, and before the intelligence of his departure had reached us, he was half-way to Canada. The manager's indignation at the fraudulent conduct of an individual whom he had believed to be an honorable man, and had trusted as such, did not surprise me. Neither was I astonished when he told me that he would do all in his power to punish the absconding debtor, if means could be adopted to discover and arrest him in his flight.

It was a matter for anxious deliberation. Ultimately, acting on an impulse I could not control, I proffered my services to go in pursuit of the defaulter. They were accepted. The same evening, in company with one of our directors, I left by the mail train for Liverpool, reaching that place some little time after midnight. The object of this journey was to endeavor to ascertain, through the Liverpool detectives, when and by what ship Mr. Hooker had sailed, as well as his destination, in order that we might arrive at a conclusion as to the propriety of my crossing the Atlantic in pursuit.

Early the following morning we were at the head-quarters of the detective police. We related the nature of our mission, and the services of one of their most efficient officers were placed at our

disposal. He was evidently well known at all the shipping offices. In something less than an hour he furnished us with every information we could obtain in Liverpool. He ascertained that Hooker had sailed for Quebec seven days previously in the Canadian mail-packet ship Belgian, and had booked through to Montreal; and he added the still more important facts that the delinquent had with him his wife, his sister-in-law, and two children, and, further, that he was in possession of a roll of banknotes at the time he secured the berths.

Had he gone alone, I doubt whether I should have had the courage to proceed farther; but the fact of his being encumbered with the ladies, the children, and a large quantity of baggage, was a set-off against his seven days' start, and considerably altered my views. With such a drag on his movements, I felt there was a hope of success, and at once accepted the responsibility of following him. A berth was secured on board the China, of the Cunard line, and on Saturday, the 30th of September, 4.30 P.M., I found myself afloat, and the docks of Liverpool becoming fainter and fainter. Fortunately the weather was extremely fine; and as we steamed down the Mersey the scene and the event was one of unusual interest to me.

The interior of a first-class mail-packet just starting on her voyage and its animated appearance have often been described. I need only say there were over two hundred passengers on board, and that my immediate companions were a French gentleman, a Spaniard and his wife, a Scotch physician (who was in a state of complete prostration three fourths of the voyage), a shipbuilder from St. John's, New Brunswick, and his two daughters, the chaplain of the ship and his wife, and Mr. Tucker, an intelligent man from Philadelphia, who, during the voyage, gave me much valuable information, and introduced me to some Canadian merchants on board. These gentlemen subsequently rendered me great assistance in the prosecution of the object I had in view.

One of the most agreeable interludes of our voyage occurred during our detention at Queenstown for the mail-bags. A delay of the mail-train enabled us to pay a visit to the lovely Cove of Cork. We landed at the pleasant quay, ascended Lookout Hill, and partook of the hospitality of the Queen's Hotel. The jaunting-cars, nigger minstrels, mendicants, men-of-wars' men, yachtmen, hawkers, occupied the foreground, whilst the Cove itself was studded with vessels, amongst which some of our iron-clads and gunboats were conspicuous. The view was bounded by the islands of Spike and Haulbowline and the famous lighthouse that marks the entrance to the harbor.

It was about 4.30 A. M. on the following day week when I was aroused from sleep by the report of a cannon close to our saloon. The first idea that I had on awakening was, that we had struck upon a rock, but my neighbor informed me it was a salute we were firing on entering Halifax harbor. We had made one of the quickest passages on record ; for before five o'clock A.M. on Monday, the 9th of October, we arrived at Halifax, being only seven days and twelve hours from the time of our departure from Queenstown. I proceeded to Boston, where I remained one day. I left that city for Montreal. I reached the St. Lawrence Hall Hotel in that place at ten A. M. on Thursday the 12th of October. I confess that the three hundred miles of night travelling, following so closely on the voyage out, caused me great bodily fatigue, and I suffered much from mental depression.

As I sat alone that morning, some three thousand miles away from home and as far distant from any friend, I began seriously to reflect whether I had not undertaken a task of too great magnitude; I was weak enough to regret having left the shores of England upon what now appeared so Quixotic an undertaking. It was too late for regret, and I immediately dispelled my doubts by action. My first step was to collect my credentials and call upon the solicitors whose advice was to guide my future proceedings. Messrs. Roberts & Roe are one of the most eminent firms of *avocats* in Montreal. On making the acquaintance of the senior partner, I felt that I stood in the presence of a gentleman of no ordinary ability, — one, whose verdict would go far to decide whether my mission would be stamped with “success” or indorsed with “failure.” I related to him as briefly as possible the circumstances which brought me to him; I handed him the power of attorney, and, being desirous of securing his unlimited confidence, I also exhibited to him my letter of credit and introduction to the eminent Canadian house, Messrs. Gillespies’, Moffatt, & Co. When I had finished my recital, Mr. Roberts took a few moments for reflection. I watched him narrowly, and I fancied I read distinctly in his countenance that his honest conviction was adverse to my cause. I found that such was the fact; for, addressing me very deliberately, he said, “I fear your case is hopeless, and that your journey will be a fruitless one.” He explained to me the law of Canada in reference to such cases, and pointed out, that even if I found Hooker, which was in his opinion doubtful, I could only treat him as a debtor; I could not touch either his person or his goods; that I might bring an action against him for a common debt, with the consolatory thought that after I had spent some weeks in litigation and obtained judgment, Mr. Hooker would run across to the United States and snap his fingers at me and my judgment. Mr. Roberts was kind enough to say he could not but admire the spirit which had been evinced by our bank in taking such prompt and energetic action in the matter, and expressed a wish that other large mercantile firms in England would adopt a similar line of conduct, which would prevent Canada, and more particularly Montreal (from its proximity to the United States), becoming the resort of so many swindlers from the mother country.

Naturally I felt for the moment cast down by the revelation of the “hopelessness of my case,” and for an instant I contemplated relinquishing all further proceedings; but happily, in a few minutes, this feeling vanished, and I became as it were fortified with unusual strength and energy. I was enabled calmly to reflect upon the formidable difficulty I had to encounter, and instead of abandoning my mission, I resolved to prosecute it to the utmost. I told the legal adviser that my first step must be to discover the fugitive, and next to give him into “pretty safe” custody, until I could come to a satisfactory settlement with him, —disregarding for the time all the terrors of the Canadian law on the question of false imprisonment. At this period I was introduced to the junior partner of the firm, who subsequently undertook the management of the affair, and by his advice I shut myself up in my hotel, in case Hooker should see me and abscond whilst the *avocat* undertook to send during the day to all the hotels to examine the books of arrivals. After a wretched time of inactivity I again sought my solicitors to ascertain the result of the search. It was altogether unsuccessful. I subsequently found that had the official to whom the duty had been intrusted exercised an ordinary amount of vigilance, he would have been able to have furnished me with most welcome intelligence. His search, however, had been a very superficial one, and I was consequently compelled to return to my hotel sadly disappointed, and wearied both in body and mind.

The following morning I was introduced to the Chief of the Montreal detective police, Mr. O'Leary, a remarkably acute and intelligent Irishman. He regretted that for a day or two he could not give me much personal assistance, as he was engaged in several important criminal cases at the assizes, which were then being held in Montreal. I briefly put him in possession of the facts of my mission, and he consoled me with the assurance that, if Hooker were there or in the neighborhood, he should have no difficulty in finding him. As I was deprived of the detective's active assistance, I resolved to take a line of action of my own. I suggested to Mr. Roe that we should make inquiries at the offices of the Canadian Mail Steam-Packet Company, in one of whose ships (the Belgian) Hooker and his family had sailed from England. Mr. Roe acceded to my suggestion, and accompanied me at once to the office, where I was introduced by him to Mr. Allan, the principal partner in the firm. My object was to ascertain whether, from the official list of the passengers by the Belgian, they could furnish me with any information as to the arrival of the fugitive either in Quebec or Montreal. Mr. Allan at once communicated with the officials at Quebec, where the passengers had landed.

I was employed during Friday in visiting my solicitors and the detective officers, as well as in making inquiries at banks, post-office, and smaller hotels, but without acquiring the least information likely to prove serviceable.

At an early hour the next morning I started out with a conviction that if Hooker were in Canada I should obtain some [clue] to his whereabouts before night. This presentiment did not mislead me, for before three o'clock I effected his "capture" and had him closeted in my solicitor's office in Little St. James's Street, with O'Leary and a brother detective in close attendance.

I will record the events as they occurred that day, which was one of much anxiety and excitement.

When I reached Mr. Allan's office, I was informed by the head clerk that a letter had been received from their establishment at Quebec in reply to their inquiries, containing some important and satisfactory information.

It is true they had lost all traces of the fugitive on his landing at Quebec, and consequently could not have rendered any assistance but for a singular coincidence which occurred a few days previously at Toronto. The purser of the Belgian had occasion to visit the City of the Lakes, and whilst there he saw and had recognized Hooker as one of the passengers. The latter believed himself to be perfectly safe, and, not having the slightest idea that any one was in pursuit of him, he invited the purser to take some refreshment, and then voluntarily entered into conversation about himself and family, mentioning, among other things, that his wife, sister-in-law, and children were at the Montreal Hotel in Montreal, where he intended shortly to join them. The purser returned to Quebec, and, fortunately for me, was at the office when the letter of inquiry from Montreal was opened. He immediately communicated the above facts to Mr. Allan.

I hastened with the welcome intelligence to my solicitors. It was difficult to decide upon the best course to adopt. If any direct inquiry were made, Mrs. Hooker would probably communicate with her husband and prevent his return; after a short consultation we decided to leave the matter in the hands of O'Leary, the detective. I went for him at once, and fortunately found him at the

chief office of police. As I have previously stated, he was a sharp-witted Irishman, of gentlemanly bearing. After deliberately reading the letter which had been intrusted to me by Mr. Allan's clerk, he took my hand in his own, and, grasping it warmly, he said in his native accent, "My dear sirr-h — it's all right — lave it to me."

On our way to Montreal House he informed me that he knew, and had the greatest confidence in, the landlord, from whom he could obtain every information without exciting any suspicion. We entered the house by the public bar, and of course were at once the object of that curiosity which is invariably manifested when a detective officer appears in company with a stranger in a public place of that description. The character of O'Leary was too well known for any one to venture upon a remark beyond an inquiry as to the state of his health, and what he would drink? One cadaverous-looking Yankee put the latter question to me, but as I was a stranger to him I politely declined to take anything.

I soon discovered that I had committed rather a grave sin, for the Yankee appeared much irritated at my refusal, and advised me if I were going to New York, never to decline such an offer if it were made to me in that city, or, said he, "I guess it will be the worse for you." On turning to O'Leary, I found him carelessly glancing at the names in the arrival-book of the hotel. Suddenly he closed the book, took it in his hand, and gave me a sign to follow him into an inner office. When the door was closed he opened the book, and putting his finger on Hooker's signature, inquired if that was the man. I replied in the affirmative. The landlord was then admitted into our council, and a cautiously whispered conference took place. The landlord informed us that Hooker's wife and children were up stairs in the apartment above us, and that he had stowed large quantities of baggage in an adjoining room. At that moment Mrs. Hooker was expecting her husband by the first train from Toronto, after which they intended leaving, but where they intended to go he had no idea. O'Leary advised me to change my quarters from the St. Lawrence Hall Hotel to Montreal House, and keep a watchful eye on the movements of the family, so as to be ready to confront the husband on his arrival. I hastened to the hotel, removed all traces of my address and railway tickets from my luggage, and entered my name on the arrival-book of the Montreal Hotel as Mr. V. Robinson, from Boston. I lounged about the place with a view to picking up any stray piece of information I could. I heard amongst other things that Hooker had lodged his money in the Merchants' Bank. I thought this of sufficient importance to communicate to my solicitor at once. On my return I was somewhat startled by the announcement that Hooker, who had just arrived, was then sitting down to dinner in the public room. There was evidently no time to be lost, as he had ordered his bill, and would leave in half an hour. I knew my only chance consisted in playing a bold game. With the "hopelessness of my case" ringing in my ears, I had not the courage to confront him myself; and yet in half an hour he would be gone. It was just a question of finding O'Leary and bringing him on to the scene of action in those thirty minutes. There was no vehicle at hand. I ran hastily to the head office of the police, and found to my dismay that O'Leary was not there, nor was there any one who knew where he could be found.

I retained the services of the chief officer present, secured a cab, and went at full gallop to O'Leary's private residence, where we were fortunate enough to find him. He immediately entered the cab, and we returned to Montreal House, whilst I related to him all that had occurred since I last saw him. As I told him we should probably find our man quietly taking dinner, his

face lighted up with pleasure, and he exclaimed, "It's one of the most beautiful little affairs I have been engaged in for some time past!" I feared that his zeal might get the better of his discretion. I again explained to him the full nature of the case, — that I could not legally give him into custody, and my only chance of recovering any portion of the money with which he had absconded from England was to frighten him into some concession before he could procure legal advice; O'Leary appeared delighted with the prospect of his game, — and requesting me to "lave it entoirely in his hands," assured me that in case he were obstinate he would terrify him out of his life. Ere we reached the hotel I was wrought up to a high pitch of excitement; the time for decisive action had arrived. Preceded by the landlord, and in company with the two detectives, I ascended the principal staircase at the top of which was the entrance to the dining-saloon.

The door was open, thus affording us a view of some twenty of the guests, and, among them, of the man in search of whom I had crossed the Atlantic. He was sitting with his back to us, his wife and sister-in-law being on each side of him. He appeared in high spirits, and was chatting with the various guests at table, little dreaming who was standing at the open door, prepared to denounce him, if necessary, as a fugitive swindler from England. I pointed him out to O'Leary, who calmly remarked, "That's enough," and then as a second thought struck him, he added, with a spice of his Irish humor, — "But we'll let him finish his dinner first, for he seems to be enjoying it so much." In accordance with so odd a request, we allowed him a few minutes' grace; he was then touched on the shoulder by the head waiter, and informed that a gentleman was waiting to see him. Still unsuspecting, he arose from his seat and came towards us with a smiling countenance. O'Leary met him, and with a slight inclination of the head, said, "Mr. Hooker, from England, I believe?" "Yes," was the apparently firm reply. I thought I could discover an anxious nervous twitching in his face, betraying an undercurrent of guilty consciousness, and a fear that he had not escaped pursuit, as perhaps only a few minutes previously he was flattering himself he had.

I was standing a little in the rear of O'Leary, and thus was partially hidden from observation. Stepping on one side and extending his hand towards me, O'Leary said, "Allow me, Mr. Hooker, to introduce you to a gentleman from England, with whom, I believe, you are well acquainted!"

Making an effort to appear calm and unconscious of danger, the swindler deliberately disowned all knowledge of me. Looking at me, and then turning to O'Leary, he replied, "I do not know the gentleman. He is a perfect stranger to me."

I was unprepared for such a barefaced disavowal from a man with whom I had so often and so lately transacted business. For a moment I felt staggered by this fresh evidence of guilt. At length I stepped forward, and said, "Mr. Hooker you know the — Bank, and you know me as the cashier of that establishment; and you know, too, perfectly well, the nature of the business which has brought me to Canada in search of you."

These words, uttered with all the menace and determination I could throw into them, had a marked and striking effect on the conscience-stricken man to whom they were addressed. His courage instantly forsook him. He trembled as if stricken with ague. Uttering all sorts of miserable excuses for his conduct, he requested that we would retire to a private room with a view to an explanation and settlement. I readily acceded to this, and now felt somewhat hopeful

of bringing the business to a satisfactory conclusion. I soon discovered that in this I was fated to be disappointed; for, shortly after we were closeted, he again assumed a bold appearance, and seemed disposed to justify his conduct rather than make any reparation for what he had done. His principal anxiety appeared to be to avoid exposure before the inmates of the hotel; this afforded me an opportunity for suggesting a movement I was anxious to effect, viz., an adjournment to the office of my legal advisers. Taking his arm in mine, and requesting the detectives to follow closely, we left the hotel. After we reached Mr. Roe's office, nearly two hours were expended in vain attempts to induce the delinquent to accede to some equitable terms of settlement.

He at first appeared very penitent, and, in the midst of his tears, declared that it was his intention, as far as lay in his power, to act honorably to every one; he begged, again and again, to be allowed to return to his wife, who, being ignorant of the state of affairs, would be suffering great anxiety from his prolonged absence. He seemed so sincere in his protestations that Mr. Roe suggested that I should accede to his request. This was a moment of great difficulty to me. I did not wish to be unnecessarily severe, neither did I wish to act in opposition to the advice given me by Mr. Roe. Still, I felt sure I should be losing some of the vantage ground I had gained through the day, if I released him whilst matters were in their present position. At last I said, "I have a duty to perform, and I cannot shrink one step therefrom. You absconded from England, and, having incurred expense in finding you, I cannot, and will not, release you until you have given me some material guaranty that the funds which you have deposited in the Merchants' Bank, in this city, shall not be touched until you have made a satisfactory settlement with me."

My determination had the effect of again making him change his tactics. He upbraided me for bringing two detectives to his hotel, threatened vengeance against me for having been given into their custody, and asked me, indignantly, what I required.

An idea flashed across my mind. I confess it was a piece of strategy, and, conceived as it was in a minute, I could hardly hope that my prisoner would fall into the trap I wished to lay for him.

I replied, "You are anxious to get back to your family, and I am equally anxious to terminate this painful interview. I will release you on the following conditions: you shall draw a check for the funds (with the exception of a few pounds for your immediate use) which you have placed in the Merchants' Bank, payable to your order and my order jointly, and deposit the same with my solicitor. As a man of business," I continued, carelessly, "you are aware that I shall not be able to touch this money without your indorsement to the check."

I confess I did not draw his particular attention to the fact that he would be equally helpless without my signature. Neither could he have given one moment's consideration to this feature in the transaction, or he certainly would not have so readily acceded to my terms. He appeared lost to every idea but that of his present escape; he immediately drew up the check, which he signed, and handed to Mr. Roe.

I was now as anxious to get rid of him as I had been a few hours previously to effect his capture. It was necessary to have the check "initialed" at the bank, which would place such an embargo on his funds as would prevent the possibility of his tampering with them by other means. It was Saturday afternoon, and a half-holiday. Hurrying away as quickly as we could, we proceeded to

the Merchants' Bank. It was closed. After some little delay, we gained admission by the private door. The clerks were leaving, and informed us that no further business could be transacted until Monday. Monday would be too late; the full nature of my compromise with Hooker would be laid before him by a legal authority, and, perhaps, was at that moment being divulged to him. Steps might be taken to remove his funds from my grasp. He, too, would be told of the "hopelessness of my case," and would, doubtless, set me at defiance. I felt that if we failed now, I should never recover one shilling of the money; that I should have to return to England beaten and disappointed, with a heavy bill of costs to add to the amount of which my firm had already been swindled.

With desperation I urged my solicitor forward, and we soon found ourselves in the interior of an inner office, where one of the chief tellers and a junior still remained. Fortunately for me and those whom I represented, the principal was a friend of my solicitor. The cashier had his hat on, the junior was in the act of placing the last huge ledger in the iron safe, when he was stopped by Mr. Roe. "One minute," he exclaimed to his friend the cashier; "I will not detain you long, but in that ledger you will find an account opened, within the last few days, by a Mr. Hooker from England. He has just given me a check for nearly the whole amount, payable to the joint order of himself and this gentleman," pointing to me. We do not require the cash, but simply to have the check accepted by the bank."

The cashier, anxious to oblige his friend, opened the ledger, turned to the account, attached his initials to the check, and returned it to us. The thanks we tendered him were neither few nor cold; and, as we hastily left the bank, Mr. Roe warmly congratulated me on the success of my plot. I was too overpowered to say much myself. Begging him to take especial care of the check, and under no circumstances to part with it without my authority, I left him, promising to see him on Monday morning. I wandered down Notre Dame Street in a state of complete abstraction and bewilderment. I was overjoyed at the result of the day's proceedings, the exciting events of which had passed so rapidly in succession, that I could scarcely realize the agreeable change which during the last few hours had taken place in the aspect of my Canadian adventure. Of one circumstance I have a vivid recollection. I sat down to dinner that evening with a heart full of thankfulness; and, for the first time since I landed in America, I really and truly enjoyed the viands which were placed before me.

Although I had virtually brought Mr. Hooker to a strait which would compel him to accede to my own terms of settlement, still he evinced, at times, more obstinacy than ever; and it was not until that day week that I finally closed with him.

It was early on the morning of Saturday, the 21st of October, that I sought an interview with Mr. South, the solicitor who had been consulted by Hooker. Fortunately for me he was a highly respectable man. He had, on one or two occasions, intimated his contempt for his client; also, that he was heartily sick of the transaction. I told him that I had fully made up my mind to leave Montreal that night by the mail-train for Quebec, and to take passage in the North American, which would sail from the latter place on the following morning for England. "If," I said to him, "your client does not accept my terms, I will take his check back with me, make a bankrupt of him, — his assignees shall indorse the check *per procuracion*; and the whole of the funds will then be sent out to England for the benefit of his estate."

His reply was satisfactory. "I admit," he said, "that the terms you propose are such as my client ought to accede to. He will be here shortly. I will inform him of your ultimatum; and if he still remains obstinate, I shall decline to have anything further to do with him. Will you call on me again at twelve o'clock?"

I kept the appointment punctually. The guilty man was there too, and quite crestfallen. Under the heavy pressure that had been brought to bear upon him he had at length given way. He accepted my terms, — indorsed the check; and in a few hours, with a draft for the "salvage" money, drawn by the City Bank of Montreal on Messrs. Glyn & Co., of London, safe in my possession, I was steaming rapidly towards Quebec.

I landed in England on Thursday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November. Notwithstanding the "hopelessness of my case," I *had* effected my "capture in Canada," and was enabled to report the same personally at head-quarters in less than five weeks from the date of my departure.

*Every Saturday A Journal of Choice Reading from Foreign Current Literature*, September 4, 1869