

One Night in a Gaming House

by Thomas Waters

THE last paper (“Richard Watson,”) though the last of my “Detective Experiences,” cannot be, I find, the last printed narrative in this book. More copy is required, and I again examine my notes in search of adventure—successful adventures—as before said, I ignore my failures as a rule—successful adventures, enterprises, *ruses*, whatever you may choose to call them, likely to interest or amuse the reader. First, I select the story which I entitle “One Night in a Gaming House.” In writing out my notes, I of course much amplify them from memory, with more or less correctness. Memory, the warder of the brain, is not always strictly faithful at my age.

There is a very respectable tavern, as thousands know, called the *Peacock*, not many doors distant from the Angel, Islington. There used to be perhaps there is now, a free-and-easy sing-song meeting there every Thursday evening. Very dull and stupid are, to my taste, sing-song, free-and-easy assemblages. The guests are there to hear themselves sing, as they fondly imagine they are doing when moaning forth their doleful strains[.] One vocalist at the Peacock greatly amused me. He was a stalwart coal merchant, a grim wiry fellow, of immense calibre, with a face resembling a coarse piece of very brown holland, crumpled up and stiffened by having been starched and put away damp. That gentleman always sang, with a voice suggestive of a coarse nutmeg-grater rubbing upon a grindstone, and a hurdy-gurdy, “I’d be a butterfly,”—always concluding amidst great applause. I mention this in order that it may be understood I did not go to such meetings from choice.

I attended by special order—not constantly, but whenever I had leisure and nothing of more importance demanded my presence elsewhere. A slippery gentleman of the name of Warren—Antony Warren—used to frequent the Peacock on those evenings, confident that he would be called upon to sing “Alice Gray” and the “Banks of Allan Water.” This gentleman the people at Scotland-yard strongly suspected to be something worse than a common cheat of the first magnitude in the lower line of predatory life. That he was well known to be. His manner of effecting the trick at cards known as *sauter la coupe*,—the legerdemain (now re-baptized Presdigiteur) of of which the Premier Baron of England, De Ros, was not many years ago convicted, in a court of law,—was first-rate. But card-cheating—the people with whom he played being usually half-a-crown the rubber, sixpenny point gamesters—would not keep up Antony Warren, Esquire’s, establishment in Barnsbury Park. Three servants, a boy in buttons, and a pony chaise could not be maintained upon such small gains as that small cheating would net. We had our own ideas upon the subject—by we, I mean in this case, the Scotland-yard chiefs—we had our ideas upon the subject, and an order was booked in the Diary of Instructions to Constables, that Clarke was to look after Antony Warren, a common cheat, but suspected of being a villain of a much higher class.

Well, I *did* watch, when occasion served, Antony Warren, Esquire. I first observed that he courted the company—assiduously courted the company of three young men, whose

names I afterwards ascertained to be Henry Turle, Ernest Sherry, and Sidney Sherry. I scrutinized these young men minutely, and soon made up my mind as regarded *them*. Antony Warren, Esquire, was, in seeking to strike up an intimacy with them, sowing his seed upon very stony ground. At least, I judged so; but it was as well to watch, if only for the sake of the young men themselves. They interested me. One, Henry Turle,—of course, he like all others, came to hear himself warble—did not in the least resemble his two young friends. A dark-complexioned, small-featured, good-looking chap enough—and sang a very good song,—exceedingly good—refreshingly good, when contrasted with that dreadful “I’d be a Butterfly!” Ernest Sherry’s was, however, *the* song of the evening, whenever these young men chanced to drop it. His “Lost Child” was really first-rate. I have never heard it sung so well “upon any stage.” It was some compensation for the stifling smoke of the sing-song room. The other young man, Sidney Sherry, appeared to be in some sense a martyr, going there to hear his brother and Henry Turle sing—a kind of family obligation, for, as I afterwards heard, Sidney Sherry and a sister or cousin of Henry Turle were about to contract matrimony. That might or might not be, and was at all events no business of mine. The young men were, I noticed, very abstemious, seldom exceeding a glass of ale each; and the youngest, Sidney, though not a singer—at least, I did not hear him sing—a handsome chap enough, like his brother, knew how many beans made five, if ever young or old man did, or I was greatly mistaken. Then, what could Antony Warren, Esquire, mean by so persistently waiting, as it were, upon those young men? they, quite evidently, knowing nothing about him.

Several months passed. I had made my observations, collected and collated certain *data* regarding Antony Warren, Esquire. Those observations, that collection of facts—shadowy facts, some of them—decided me to call upon Mr. Henry Turle. The two Sherrys were with him.

“Mr. Henry Turle!” said I, plunging at once *in media res*, “Mr. Henry Turle; I am a detective-officer: my name is Clarke—Henry Clarke!”

“Detective be hanged,” rejoined Mr. Henry Turle. “What do I care about detectives?”

“Personally, nothing. That is beyond question. But you are from Taunton, Somersetshire?”

“Yes; and what of that?”

“This of that. When a sister or cousin of one of these young gentlemen passed in her bridal tour through Taunton, the bridegroom introduced to his bride one Martin Lobb, a young man of good expectations?”

“Yes, yes. Well?”

“That young man and you, Mr. Henry Turle, became fast friends?”

“Yes. And again I ask, what then?”

“Mr. Antony Warren, a loose sort of person, hanging about the skirts of Somersetshire society, happening to be at the hotel where the young married, couple stopped, contrived in some way to introduce himself to them and to you ?”

“Right again. But what of this?”

“You will presently understand. Mr. Martin Lobb has since come into a large sum of money—over fifteen thousand pounds. Soon after he obtained actual possession of the legacy he came to London, where he had no acquaintance except yourself,—a fact known to Mr. Antony Warren. That chevalier d’industrie also knew, through you, that Mr. Lobb had not only large funds at his disposal, but had a strong passion or propensity for gaming. And you, knowing that, but not knowing, not suspecting, what an irredeemable rascal he is, viewing him merely as an agreeable fellow, who could sing ‘Alice Gray,’ &c., thump the table with both fists in applause of your friend Mr. Ernest Sherry’s ‘Lost Child,’ introduced or re-introduced him to Mr. Lobb. I have, however, more than once fancied that this young gentleman,”—motioning towards the youngest of the trio,—“that this young gentleman reckoned up Antony Warren, Esquire, more accurately.”

“I never liked the man,” said Mr. Sidney Sherry; “never felt the slightest confidence in him.”

“So I imagined. The upshot is, Mr. Turle, that, thanks to your introduction or re-introduction, Antony Warren, Esquire, has already eased your friend Mr. Lobb of ten out of his fifteen thousand pounds.”

“Good God! Is it possible?”

“Not only quite possible, but perfectly true. But never mind that. Let the dead bury their dead. Our concern is with the future. One remarkable feature in the case, so far as I have hitherto been able to spell it out, is that this Antony Warren is himself the dupe as well as tool of a knot of scoundrels of, it may be, a deeper dye than himself. Well, tomorrow evening, as I understand, the swindle is to be consummated. There is to be play upon a magnificent scale; the end of which will be, that your friend Lobb will be completely cleared out. Now, you can help me to prevent this, and at the same time confer an immense benefit upon a credulous, most unfortunate, well-deserving widow, whom the prince of swindlers, by whom your friend Lobb is being victimized, has reduced from comparative opulence to penury.”

Mr. Henry Turle would gladly assist me, most gladly, if he could see how he could do so effectually.

“I will tell you how. It is necessary that I and a few friends of mine—one will do—should be present at the gaming-table tomorrow evening. One person will be there who is particularly ‘wanted’ by the police, and who has successfully dodged them for the last six months or more. I do not mean the ‘Alice Gray’ gentleman, though his name, strongly underlined, is in our Detective List. Now, though we in a general way are familiar with

the haunts of these fellows, we are not sure—are never sure—of being able to drop upon them *quietly*, at the right time. They are old birds whom it is very difficult to snare, cleverly as you may spread your nets. We know the house—the ‘hell,’ I should say—where the final ruin of your friend Lobb is to be accomplished. But it is almost impossible that we—we detectives I mean—can surprise and seize them in the fact of swindling play. We knock at the door; a livery servant answers through the door—opening permitted by a chain. We cannot give the *mot d’ordre*, the password,—he makes some agreed-upon communication with a bell, to the people at play, then lets you in; and by that time, for any good you can do, it would have been as well to remain out. Now, Mr. Lobb *must* have the password for tomorrow night, and I wish you to bring him here to speak with me; here, or at any other place you may appoint. I don’t want to be seen spying about Jermyn-street. It is somewhere near that classic spot he lodges, I know; for although neither Mr. Lobb nor the persons with whom he is at present linked in discreditable fellowship know me personally, there are plenty of fellows about there who do; and it might be soon made known to the swindlers who propose plucking him of his last feathers that Clarke, the detective, was on the watch and close at their heels.”

Mr. Turle and his young friends, who were plainly much concerned for their friend, heartily agreed to my proposition. Mr. Turle went off at once to seek Lobb. I was to await his return with, if possible, that four-fifths-plucked and extremely-green goose himself.

Mr. Turle was gone about three hours, and I was becoming impatient, when a cab drove up to the door, and I was presently introduced to Mr. Martin Lobb. A genteel, placid, wine-and-watery-looking individual was young Mr. Lobb. He had weak, grey eyes. Grey eyes when keen and clear are the infallible index of a keen, clear intellect; when weak and quivery, the equally infallible indication of nervous flexibility, so to speak, of a flexile will, to be moulded as wax by stronger minds. That is my experience, at all events.

I knew at once not only with whom I had to deal, but how to deal with him.

“Mr. Lobb, you have heard from your friend Mr. Turle that I am Clarke, the detective-officer. You have, I happen to know, been cheated out of about ten thousand pounds by a person calling himself Antony Warren, and another equally estimable gentleman who goes by the name of Richards. There are others in the gang, but Richards is the villain-in-chief. Do you, Mr. Lobb, so far agree with me?”

“I cannot say that I do. Certainly, I have had a terrible run of ill luck; but the tide, however strongly it may set against you—a common occurrence—as suddenly turns. I feel persuaded that I shall have my revenge tomorrow evening.”

“So do I; but not after the mode and fashion which you contemplate. If I and a friend of mine be not present at the play tomorrow evening, you, Mr. Lobb, will be a shelled peascod; that is to say, your pockets will be to let, and not worth hiring—those of Richards full to bursting with the last instalment of your spoils.”

“I know no one of the name of Richards. Really this—”

“Tut! You may not know the name. The rascal has a thousand, more or less; but you know the man. I will give you his portrait, in words only, but that will be sufficient: He is about my own height; his hair is sandy-red, his whiskers (pussy-cat whiskers) of a pale sand-colour. He is slightly pock-marked; but the distinguishing characteristic (for there are thousands of men with sandy-red hair and light sand-coloured whiskers in London) is that he has a small, hairy mole on his right cheek, which he is every moment rubbing.”

“Winthrop, as I’m alive! the prince of good fellows!”

“Winthrop, eh? That is his present name *de ieu* is it? Now, I want your help, your hearty help, to bring one of the most infamous scoundrels in the world to book—to justice I would say, but that I fear is out of the question. Justice, I fear, will never be dealt out to him till the day of Final Judgment for all of us. But to book he may, you assisting, be brought; and that you may render me the more willingly that hearty help, I will tell you a short story. It will not detain us long:

“Frank Jameson is the real name of the man whom you know as Winthrop. This is his history in little: He was a railway clerk in Exeter, and speedily acquired the reputation of a very *smart* young man—smart in the American sense of the word. This reputation enabled him to surprise the confidence, as it were, of a number of simple persons who had money to place, or gamble with. Of course, Mr. Jameson promised exorbitant interest for the money placed—certainty of success to those who confided in him to make their bets in horse-racing. He is no common rascal, this Jameson *alias* Winthrop. I will give you a proof that he is not: You may remember the Derby when a horse called Cossack won, many years ago, I think in 1848 or 1849. He had prophesied that Van Tromp would win (confidently prophesied), assuring the people whom he persuaded to back Van Tromp (making him the medium for effecting their bets) that he knew, from private confidential information, that Van Tromp had been made safe to win; and when the news arrived by telegraph that Cossack had won (Van Tromp was second or third, if I remember rightly), great was the consternation amongst the small betting folk in Exeter who had intrusted their ‘little goes’ to his judgment and discretion. It had been arranged that the ‘settlement’ should take place at the Red Lion, Exeter, two or three days after the race. Well, the betters met, as agreed, and with very wry faces we may be sure. In came Jameson, bright and smiling: ‘Gentlemen, I need not tell you that Van Tromp has not won the Derby. Of course I need not. Well, gentlemen, I heard that Van Tromp would *not* win four days before the race came off—private information of course. I kept dark naturally, having other men’s moneys to account for. So I quietly hedged every bet, and went the whole hog upon Cossack. The sum total of it all, gentlemen, is that your forty-two pounds have become ninety-six pounds, and that here is the tin.’ Now, Mr. Turle, Mr. Sherry, that was all flam. The money entrusted to him was lost; and we (I mean Scotland-yard and Company) are perfectly satisfied in our own minds that a money-parcel (one hundred and nine pounds in sovereigns) forwarded to a wealthy miller of Exeter, which by some accident never reached its destination, furnished the ninety-six pounds.

“This throwing a sprat to catch a salmon—a rather large sprat, by the way—succeeded; and the end was, other dodges helping, that Frank Jameson so ingratiated himself with the people of Exeter that he ultimately left that city in possession of, as far as can be clearly ascertained, about five thousand pounds, entrusted to him for investment. The thing seems incredible, but for all that is unquestionably true. Of this, under the circumstances, immense sum, two thousand three hundred pounds were entrusted to him by a widow (Mrs. Polding). She had a large family, and was anxious to purchase a business in London—a tavern business. Jameson knew of one that would precisely suit her. Of course he did. A business worth double, treble that sum, but which he, having peculiar facilities, could obtain for the cash the widow had at her command. Luckily, we have his handwriting in a hastily-written note, which proves he received this money for that distinct purpose, and that the tavern business to be purchased was no other than that of the Saracen’s Head, Snow-hill.

“*Litera scripta manet,*’ the written thing remaineth; and if we could only catch the scoundrel, he is, we hope, done for. Arrived in London, he associated himself with sharpers, blacklegs of every hue and pattern; is thought to be rich, but somehow always evades the pursuit of the police. It is only very lately, by-the-by, that we have been put upon his trail; and even now we must go very warily to work, it being doubtful whether he has or has not brought himself within the clutch of the criminal law. Of his moral delinquency there cannot, however, be the slightest doubt; and now, Mr. Lobb, to make an end of a perhaps tedious story, am I to have your assistance in the effort I am anxious to make to get back the money Mrs. Polding has been swindled out of, and a portion, at least, of the ten thousand pounds of which you have been eased by Winthrop and Company?”

Certainly: Mr. Lobb would place himself in my hands!

“All right! This, then, is how we will shape it. You will see Antony Warren tomorrow morning?”

“Yes! no doubt of that. I have an appointment with him.”

“Of course you have! Very well. Two cousins of yours—John and Thomas Beadon—you knew John and Thomas Beadon?”

“Of course I did. They went off to Australia.”

“Just so; and are just returned with no end of gold dust.”

“Dear me! I am so glad.”

“So am I. Well, now, just listen. You must inform your friend Warren of that, to him, very important fact, and hint that it might not be undesirable to have John and Thomas Beadon present tomorrow evening. You may put it how you please. You are safe to win back all, or nearly all of your losses, of course. Mr. Antony Warren has assured you of

that a hundred times; and possibly, you know, they may recoup themselves for the sums regained by you—sure to be regained, we well understand that—by a clever dive into the Australian diggings.”

“I think I understand—but—”

“You *must* understand, Mr. Lobb, thus far. That either you are a pauper the day after tomorrow—or that you confer on me the means of being quietly present at the projected sheep—(very silly sheep)—shearing tomorrow evening. You must excuse my frankness.”

“I will give you the password. It is ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’”

“Good! Another item! Play very high. Stake all you possess. Of course they must produce corresponding sums. Myself and friend, when you are settled with—but don’t let that alarm you, shall play tremendously high, too. You must hint that to Warren and Co.—they will come prepared. So shall we; and now, Good-bye. Stick to the text I have written out for you, Mr. Lobb, or you are a ruined man. Be steadfast, and you may go back to Somersetshire rejoicing; and the sooner you *do* go back, take my word for it, the better. This world of London is a dangerous place for ingenuous youths like you.”

“I should like to make one in the game tomorrow evening!” said Mr. Ernest Sherry—
“very much like to make one.”

“Well, you look like one that I should like well enough with me when there was rough work going on. But better not. You, your brother, and Mr. Turle have never been, I am pretty sure, in a gaming house since you were born. The matter will, in all probability, come before a Police Court—be published in newspapers. It will be better, therefore, that your names should not in any way be mixed up therewith. Again, ‘Good-bye!’ Be firm, Mr. Lobb—trust implicitly in Clarke, the Detective Officer, and all will be well; as we know by a great authority, that “all’s well that ends well!””

I knocked, as instructed by Mr. Lobb, four times at the door of the house in Jermyn-street. First, rat-tat! the postman’s knock; next, a single tap; then the furious *tintimarre* of a full-plush flunkey attendant upon a countess; concluding with the modest double knock of a gentleman.

The door was immediately opened as far as the tether of chain permitted. Our cards were presented. “Very well,” said the porter, first glancing at them by a lamp he held in his hand. “Very well; I shall say you have called.”

“Uncle Tom’s Cabin.”

“All right, gentlemen. You are expected, I know; but we must be cautious. The infernal detectives try on so many dodges.”

“So I have heard. They ought to be strangled, every mother’s son of them.”

“Right you are, and I should like to pull the cord. Wouldn’t I—. The first floor, gentlemen. Door on the left.”

A very pleasant party—pleasant people. One of them Mr. Winthrop, *alias* Jameson, with respect to whose identity there could be no possible doubt. Dear me, with what flattering condescendence he welcomed in Messrs. John and Thomas Beadon—two of the most recent gold importations from Australia. Really, if we had been his own brothers, returned home after a long expatriation, he could not have been more cordial, overflowing—or, as the French say, effusive.

It is very fascinating, that high play. Those rolls of bank-notes, heaps of gold; vast sums, the possession of which depends often upon the mere turning of a card, strongly excite one. It did me, at all events, upon that particular occasion.

It was quite two o’clock in the morning when Mr. Martin Lobb was finished with. He played with Antony (Alice Gray) Warren, Esquire, and though he was permitted to occasionally win—continuous, unbroken success would be a stupid blunder—the end was that Mr. Martin Lobb was stripped to his skin. Several times he looked at me—and I wished him further for doing so—as if doubtfully expectant that I should in some miraculous way arrest his descent into the black gulf of ruin down which he felt himself to be else hopelessly falling. I gave no sign—not likely; and I fancied he had some doubt as to whether I was or was not confederate with the plunderers.

“That gentleman,” said I, when the silly fool had been completely cleaned out; “that gentleman, Mr. Dod—”

“Mr. Lobb!”

“Well, Lobb or Dod, it comes to the same thing. The gentleman has had a run of ill-luck. But ill-luck turns as suddenly as it sets in. I and my friend here should like to take a turn. Only we cannot stop beyond about six o’clock. The *Star of the South* will lift anchor at Gravesend at ten. She dropped down the river yesterday. So let us have a game or two for something worth winning.”

“With all my heart,” said Winthrop. “You Australian gentlemen ought to have plenty of gold-dust. But—excuse me, I mean nothing personal to you—they sometimes trade (I mean in the betting, playing line) upon that reputation. I never toss with gentlemen whose game is—heads I win; tails you lose. Name your stakes; post them, and my friend and I will cover them, never fear.”

I took out of my breast pocket a thick roll of Bank of England notes. Only the outside ones, it is true, were genuine flimsies; but if all had been the real thing, I should have placed a decent fortune upon the table.

“Now then, Mister What’s-your-name, show your tin. We will post stakes, and play at any game you like for the entire lot. We’ve been drinking a little too fast; but it will be strange, for all that, if a couple of cockneys can come over us.”

“Perhaps not; but we’ll have a shy. Warren, shell out what you have got. Ah! Well, here’s a pretty good sum. Cover it, and then we’ll settle how we shall play. Unlimited loo you perhaps would like!”

“Yes; unlimited loo. Anyone can play at that.”

“And here, Frank Jameson, is my trump card,” added I, producing a pistol. “No nonsense. The first letter of my name is Clarke, the detective. I have detected you, at all events. This gentleman is a brother detective. There—there—it’s of no use to bluster and stamp. We impound all this money. Two thousand three hundred go to the Widow Polding of Exeter; the rest to this plundered greenhorn, Mr. Lobb.”

“Damnation!” screamed Jameson. “What the devil! Am I dreaming?”

“Oh dear, no. You are known to be one of the most wide-awake gentlemen alive. Be cool, my fine fellow. Tragedy is mere farce when played by such gentlemen as you and your friend Warren—whose real name by the way is Bamford, Cornelius Bamford, before me.

“To speak very seriously, Mr. Frank Jameson, a very wise discretion has been allowed me in this matter, the circumstances being peculiar. If you agree, under your own hand, to reimburse the Widow Polding, and give me legal power to otherwise distribute this heap of money, in equitable proportion amongst those whose substance you have devoured, you may for the present escape a-sentence of penal servitude for life. I don’t think—thanks to your hope of clearing out the rich Australians—there are very many sovereigns and notes of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England to be found at your lodgings.”

“I’d see you —— first!” foamed Jameson, who was perfectly beside himself with rage; and no wonder. Warren, pale as paper, and trembling in every limb, said nothing. “I’d see you —— first. Give us our money. Keep what we’ve won of this fool Lobb tonight, if you like; though that’s a robbery.”

“That is your final decision. Very well. Now Benson, the handcuffs! Quick! The gentleman is becoming violent. No nonsense, now. There. Not the first time, I warrant, that your hands have been locked together prayer-fashion. Your friend sets you an example: submits quietly as a lamb. Now let’s be off.”

The reader will have understood that this was to a great extent, though not altogether, *bounce*. Such things are often done by the Detective Police; but, I need hardly say, could never be tried on except when they are dealing with notorious rascals.

The treatment was perfectly effective with our two handcuffed friends. After a few minutes' survey of the situation, recognising the certainty that under no circumstances would he ever get possession of the impounded money—and there being, I felt morally sure, more than one black business which might come to light were he and his friend subjected to the scrutiny of a Police Court, gibbeted in newspapers—Mr. Jameson struck.

“Well,” said he, with a savage scowl, “what must be, must be. I will give up the money; sign what you like. Warren will do the same.”

“All right. How true it is that ‘discretion is the better part of valour.’”

Some caution was required in settling the affair; but it was at last satisfactorily arranged, at about ten in the morning, in Mr. Phelps the attorney's office—upon emerging from which, Frank Jameson did me the honour to say, I was the most infernal thief that ever stepped in shoe-leather, and he only wished—

“That you may some day be able to do Clarke as brown, as uncommonly brown, as he has done you. Well, it's a natural, if not altogether a pious aspiration; and if you don't die till it's fulfilled, it's my opinion you'll live to a fine patriarchal old age. Good-bye, Jameson: Farewell, Warren. We have passed an unusually pleasant evening together—very. And I have no doubt the evening's amusement will bear the morning's reflection. There, don't look thunder and lightning. There's a milk shop close by, kept by a widow. Farewell again. The best of friends must part.”

Waters, Thomas. [Pseud.] [Attrib. William Russell.] *Autobiography of a London Detective*. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1864