No. 12, Lowndes Square

by Thomas Waters

The failure of Justice in the remarkable case of Sheen, or Shea, the child-slayer, excited, it will be remembered, feelings of uncontrollable surprise and anger in the minds of the British community. Sheen, who kept a raffish public-house in Saint Gile's, London, cut off, in a fit of drunken rage, literally cut off, his child's head. He was arraigned for the murder, and ultimately acquitted—the popular notion being that he escaped conviction in consequence of having been indicted in a wrong name. This was a misconception. The result was a gross blot in the records of English criminal practice; but not quite so bad as that. Mike Sheen was indicted by the name, if I remember rightly, of Michael Shea, and a true bill for willful murder was returned by the grand jury. The prisoner pleaded not guilty; and Mr. Adolphus, the then Old Bailey counsel par excellence, objected that the accused's name was Mike Shea, as set forth in the verdict of wilful murder returned by the coroner's inquisition. In those days a judge had no power to amend any clerical error in an indictment; and Mr. Burbage, junior counsel for the Crown (his leader, Mr. Alley, being absent for the moment), consented, the Recorder concurring, that Shea should be tried on the inquisition. Mr. Adolphus saw his chance and seized it. In his seemingly careless, off-handed way, he said, that if that were to be done, it would be necessary to take a formal verdict of acquittal under the bill found by the grand jury. The Recorder acquiesced; the formal verdict was given, and recorded, as of course, by the clerk of arraigns. The prisoner was then charged as Mike Shea, upon the inquisition; Mr. Alley, who had returned into Court, was about to open the case for the Crown, when Mr. Adolphus objected that the prisoner had been already tried for the alleged crime, and acquitted—his plea, in technical phrase, being that of "Autrefois acquit." This was a bombshell—the well-known inflexible rule of English law being that no one can be put in danger, that is tried twice, upon the same charge. A great wrangle of words followed; but the fact that, through the adroit management of Mr. Adolphus, the prisoner had, upon the face of the record, been acquitted of the murder of the child could not be disputed. At last, the prisoner was put back, and the proceedings adjourned till the morrow, when Mr. Justice Littledale would be on the bench. The plea was accordingly argued before that grave dignitary. Mr. Adolphus tendering proof that the Mike Shea then in the dock was the Michael Sheen who had been legally acquitted of the crime for which it was sought to again put him in danger. Mr. Justice Littledale retired to consult with his learned brother Judge Bailey, though he himself had, unfortunately, no doubt whatever that the prisoner must be discharged. Mr. Justice Bailey proved to be of the same opinion; and it was announced by the Bench that the great principle involved, that no one could be put in danger by the Crown twice for the same offence, was too sacred to be tampered with. The prisoner was therefore discharged from the dock, amidst a hurricane of groans, vells, and curses.

Sheen's technical acquittal did not, however, place him out of danger. It was hoped that he would be caught in the commission of some crime which, if of infinitely less moral turpitude than murder, would confer the right to hang him. Bow-street detectives were ordered to keep a sharp look out upon the fellow, a duty zealously performed by myself and others without material result. Once I felt sure that we had him on the hip. A Mr. Truman, of Sheffield, lost his purse whilst pushing his way with the crowd to the pit of the Little Haymarket Theatre. His pocket had, no doubt, been picked; and one of our fellows fancied he had observed Sheen

amongst the people waiting outside the theatre till the doors opened. This did not appear very likely, Sheen's tastes not being at all theatrical. The fact was, however, ascertained to be as the officer had stated. A man, calling himself Wilford, who had just returned from New York, where he had made the acquaintance of a near relative of Sheen's, had called upon the latter about eleven in the forenoon; treated the general company, Sheen in particular, most liberally; was loud in praise of the States; and urged the landlord, especially as certain circumstances must render his continuance in the cursed old country unpleasant, to emigrate, accompanying him, Wilford, who intended to stay in England about a month only. Sheen was delighted at meeting with such a seemingly respectable, sympathizing friend; and finally accepted Wilford's offer to treat him to the play. At the close of the performance, Wilford left Sheen, saying he should sleep at the same hotel—Sheen did not remember the name, but thought it was the Blue Boar—where he had put up on arriving in London. He had not been again seen up to that time by Sheen; and on inquiry at the Blue Boar, Holborn, and half-a-dozen other Blue Boars, no such person as Mr. Wilford was described to be could be heard of.

Sheen savagely, and with some reason, complained that he should be suspected of picking a stranger's pocket, and have his house searched, merely because he chanced to be one of a crowd of people waiting for admission at the doors of a theatre, and was sternly told that though lawcraft had withdrawn his neck from a richly-deserved halter, he must not expect to meet with the consideration due to even ordinary ruffians. Sheen, it is right to state, always asserted that he was not guilty in intention of killing the child; that he was, in short, insane at the time, from the influence of drink, and was not master of himself or conscious of what he was doing. This, I dare say, was partially true.

Mr. Truman's loss was a rather heavy one,—his purse, a leathern bag, having contained fifteen ten-pound Bank of England notes, besides gold and silver. Of only seven of these notes could the number be ascertained. These he had taken a few days previous to the robbery, in change for a cheque, at Child's banking-house, near Temple-bar. I accompanied him thither, obtained the numbers, and gave formal notice at the Bank of England that they had been stolen. Two or three hours after that had been done, a respectable-looking man presented himself at the office in Bowstreet; said his name was Wilford; that having called that morning at Sheen's, he was induced by what was there told him to inquire upon what grounds the police suspected him of having picked some gentleman's pocket.

The case being in my hands, I shortly replied that his having been seen near the gentleman who was robbed at the time when the robbery must have been committed, and in company with the notorious Sheen, fully justified such quiet inquiry as had been made; and that having given that worthy a false address, supposing Sheen, with whom he had been drinking and gambling, did not really know where he (Wilford) might be found, did not tend to allay suspicion. Mr. Wilford indignantly denied that he had given Sheen a false address. He told him that he lodged at the Golden Cross, Charing-cross. Sheen, whom he had only called upon because he had promised a relative of his established in New York to do so, must have misheard, misunderstood him.

"The Golden Cross, Charing-cross! Why that is where Mr. Truman himself, the gentleman whose pocket was picked, is staying. I have been there several times to speak with him, but did not, that I remember, see you."

"Nor do I recollect having seen *you* there," was the sharp retort; "the one circumstance being just as important, it strikes me, as the other. At all events, you now know where I am to be found. This is all I have to say, except," added he, swelling and strutting like a turkey cock as he marched out of the office, "except that Bow-street officers are a set of cursed impertinent fellows, if you are a fair sample of the pack."

The man's bounce did not impose upon me. I had not so neglected opportunities of discerning character, slight as the indices might be, as not to mark my gentleman's quivering furtiveness of aspect, brazen as was the mind mask he assumed.

If he had nothing to fear with respect to the robbery of Mr. Truman, which was doubtful, some other ugly secret was assuredly shut up in that bosom of his; but not so closely that some flashes of a disturbed conscience did not at times gleam through the chinks of his shrunk soul.

Forty-eight hours had not passed before it appeared certain that we had made no mistake in suspecting him and his accomplice Sheen of having eased Mr. Truman of his purse. One of the ten-pound Bank of England notes which had been stopped was paid into Sir Peter Pole's bank by Wingrove and Company, spirit merchants, and a highly respectable City firm. We received immediate notice from the bank; and I found that Wingrove's town traveller had taken it in payment of Sheen, whose name appeared upon the back of the note, in the handwriting of the clerk, who said, but that I suspected to be an error, that Sheen, himself unable to write, had specially requested the agent to do so. At all events, that trick would not much avail. He no doubt believed that the numbers of the stolen notes were unknown; but with true roguish cunning prepared for a defence by being able, should the note be stopped and traced to him, to prove that he himself had insisted that it should be set forth on the back of the note of whom and when the clerk had received it. Sheen must have known perfectly well that, if not asked to do so, the clerk, a man of business, would have taken the common precaution of being able to identify the note as that received of Sheen for Wingrove and Co. The utterer of the stolen security would have to show how he obtained its possession, or the inference of guilt would be irresistible. Of a surety we had the child murderer on the hip at last.

Mr. George Perkins (Mr. Wingrove's clerk) went at once with me to Sheen's house. That person was at home; and to my surprise, said coolly, in answer to my intendedly staggering query, "Of whom did you receive the ten-pound Bank of England note you paid to this gentleman yesterday?"

"I received that same note of my friend Wilford. I gave him change for it—ten gold sovereigns."

"Of your friend Wilford? And pray where may that friend be met with just now?"

"At the Golden Cross, no doubt. He has not left this more than a quarter of an hour. Oh, it's no use trying to frighten me, my crowing cockerel of a Runner, about that same note. Bedad! if I had not been sure it was the *rale* thing, the divil a bit would Mike Sheen have insisted upon having his own name wrote on the back of it. I should like mighty well to have a sackfull of them."

"This one will, I hope, provide you with board and lodging during the term of your natural life. Don't be covetous. And now please to come with us to the Golden Cross, Charing-cross; I must speak with your friend Wilford."

"With all the pleasure in life. I am ready."

The man's confident bearing puzzled me; yet the case seemed to be quite clear. Too much so. I should have been better pleased with a little dash of doubt; to have perceived some rotten twig upon which Sheen and his friend Wilford might be calculating upon to save themselves from destruction. The note was unquestionably one of those the numbers of which were known and advertised, and it was admittedly changed for Wilford by Sheen; both of whom, there could be no reasonable doubt, had seen the advertisement, and knew themselves to be suspected of the robbery! Curious! I did not feel so certain as at first of having bagged the game.

Mr. Truman was at the hotel, and him we first spoke with. He at once identified the note, and pointed out his initials, J. T., written very small, at one corner on the back. The waiter conducted us to Mr. Wilford's apartment. That individual, who was dining luxuriantly, seemed surprised, but not in the least alarmed, at seeing us, begged us to be seated, and blandly asked to be informed of the purport of such a visit.

"Sheen here," said I, "declares that he changed this note for you. Is that so?"

"Let me look at it, and I will tell you. Oh, I do not want you to part with its possession for one moment. I only wish to see the back. Yes," said Wilford, after examining the back of the note through a gold eye-glass; "yes, that is the note Sheen changed for me. There are two sets of initials on it; at least I suppose J. T. are initial letters; and mine, R. W., are written in yet tinier characters on the opposite comer. There is also, you observe, the name of William Williams written in full just above that of Mike Sheen."

"This is one of the notes of which this gentleman, Mr. Truman, was robbed the other evening in the pit passage of the Haymarket Theatre. You—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Officer—Clarke, I believe, is your name—excuse me, Mr. Clarke, but really that is a little too audacious a—a fib, to use a mild word. There really seems to be a conspiracy to involve me in some absurd charge of robbing this Mr. Truman. Permit me to tell you—and you also, Mr. Truman—to your face, that I was in possession of this note quite twenty-four hours before you lost, or pretended to lose, your purse in the crowd at the Haymarket playhouse."

"That is an audacious lie!" exclaimed Mr. Truman, with heat. "An abominable, infamous lie! It was safe in my purse when I left the hotel for the theatre."

"We shall soon see who is the liar," said Wilford, rising and ringing the bell. It was answered by the head-waiter.

"Mr. Williams," said Wilford, "please to look at that note in the officer's hand, and say if you know anything about it?" Wilford's tone and manner as he put the question, were bold enough;

but his glance was restless, eager, and he shifted his gold eye-glass from one hand to the other with nervous, impatient tremor.

"This note," said Mr. William Williams, after a close and rather prolonged scrutiny of his own signature; "this note appears to be—I have, indeed, no doubt it is—that which I changed for this gentleman, Mr. Truman, on the first day of his arrival here; and not long afterwards, being myself in want of change, I obtained gold for it of this gentleman, Mr. Wilford. These letters, J.T., were on it when I gave Mr. Truman the change. He himself pointed them out to me. Both dates are correctly given in this memorandum-book."

"It is false!" shouted Mr. Truman, in a towering rage. "I remember perfectly well that you gave me change for a ten-pound Bank of England note, but not this note, which I received—and kept separate, with six others from the rest—at Child's Bank. These seven notes were pinned together, with a private memorandum containing the address of the person for whom, being in London, I changed the cheque."

The waiter, a very respectable person, shrugged his shoulders, quietly remarking that he had changed but one note for Mr. Truman, and this was the note. "My name is on the back; I cannot be mistaken. I have no more to say," added Mr. William Williams, "and have duties to discharge elsewhere."

"You can now appreciate the value of Mr. Truman's blustering assertions, which I have no doubt he would not have hesitated to confirm on oath. It is thus men's characters—lives—are often sworn away by unscrupulous, reckless ruffians!—to—"

"Do you dare call *me* a reckless ruffian?" roared Truman. "By the God that made me, I have a mind to—"

"Keep the peace, Mr. Truman," interposed I. "In my own mind, there is not a shadow of doubt that you believed the note you changed with the waiter was not one of those you received at Child's. Such mistakes *will* sometimes occur. Mr. Perkins had, I presume, better take the note?"

"Certainly not," exclaimed Mr. Truman, whose positiveness seemed to be confirmed rather than shaken by what he heard. He evidently believed that the waiter was a co-conspirator with Sheen and Wilford. "I will not be swindled in this barefaced manner. I insist upon an investigation before a magistrate. I charge both Mr. Wilford and the murderer Sheen with felony; and have a mind to include waiter Williams in the charge."

"You will do so at your own peril," I remonstrated. "The charge will be dismissed at once."

"I also warn you," said Wilford; "but such fellows as you need no warning," he added, with a contemptuous laugh. "Braggarts and bullies almost invariably display a wise discretion when the pinch comes."

This taunt was unendurable; and was meant, I felt sure, to be unendurable by the choleric Sheffield gentleman, who fiercely insisted upon Sheen and Wilford being taken into custody.

"Since the 'gentleman' insists upon it," said Wilford, "you, Mr. Clarke, had better take us off to Bow-street without further delay. The magistrate is still sitting, I presume?"

"Yes; and the case will, I dare say, be heard and decided at once."

The case, such as it was, did not last more than ten minutes. After hearing the evidence of Mr. Williams, the magistrate dismissed it without hesitation; and, in doing so, administered a severe rebuke to Mr. Truman for giving people into custody upon so untenable a charge.

"A jury would," added the magistrate, "mulct you in heavy damages for slander and false imprisonment."

This was pleasant hearing for the plundered man, who resolved to wash his hands at once and forever of the detestable business. He was not permitted to so wash his hands very easily. Before he could leave town, where he was detained till he should receive an important letter from America, writs were served upon him at the instance of Wilford and Sheen, with whom he was fain to compromise by the payment of one hundred pounds down, exclusive of costs, which could not, however, have amounted to more than a trifling sum. A rather dear visit to the Haymarket Theatre that!

This was not all. There really seemed no end to Mr. Truman's London troubles and perplexities. He sent for me in a great hurry one day, to inform me of a fresh misfortune that had befallen him. This was the new story:— Two letters from New York, reposted to him from Sheffield, and delivered at the bar of the hotel on the morning of the day he visited that infernal theatre, he could nowhere find. He remembered being in a hurry at the time, opening and reading them at the bar, and then thrusting them into his leathern purse or bag; but his impression was, that upon returning, two or three hours afterwards, to the hotel, he had taken them out of his purse or bag, and locked them up in his portmanteau. There, however, they were not; and it was possible they went with the bank-notes. That loss did not much signify, as the letters were of no use to anyone but himself; but, as the Father of Mischief and Mystery would have it, the letter he had been waiting for, and which it was stated in one of the former letters from New York would contain the address of a certain lady resident in London, whom it was very important he should see, had been delivered that very morning at the bar, placed by the barmaid in the rack, and now could nowhere be found. It was, the young woman said, a ship-letter, and had been reposted at Sheffield. No question, therefore, that it was the one he had been waiting in London for. Its disappearance caused him to look for the two before received, and he had made the discovery that they also were missing.

Letters from New York! thought I. That is the place Sheen's friend Wilford reports himself to be last from. The fellow seems to be strangely mixed up with these losses.

"Did you observe, Mr. Truman," I said, aloud, "if any one saw you open and read the two first letters, and afterwards thrust them into your cash-bag?"

"I cannot remember that I did. Several persons were passing to and fro. Ah! yes, by Jove! I do remember that that fellow Wilford, whom I did not then know by name, scarcely by sight, was close by, and himself reading a letter. But what of that, after all? Letters are not bank-notes."

"True; and these letters you say are of no use to anyone but yourself?"

"Of no use whatever; but the inconvenience of losing them—the last one especially—is great. I must write to New York for the lost address. It will be three months, perhaps more than that, before an answer can be received, and the affair required prompt attention."

"And you do not even know the lady's name. It is unfortunate; but I do not see that anything can be done, police-wise, in the matter. Stay. I will try and quietly ascertain if Mr. Wilford has been seen about the bar this morning."

"The letter," said I, "addressed to Mr. Truman, and delivered at this bar, cannot be found, it seems? It is very awkward."

"It is awkward," replied the bar-lady. "I cannot imagine who can have got it; but it certainly could not have gone without hands."

"Do you remember who has been at the bar this morning?"

"At post time?"

"Yes."

"Several commercial gents. Mr. Wilford,—but he never misses being here when country letters are delivered. He himself had two American ship-letters this very morning. We have inquired of him, but he knows nothing about the missing one."

"Humph!"

The letter could *not* be found. There was no help for it. Mr. Truman wrote immediately to New York, and left for Sheffield the next morning, in a very bad humor with the world in general and London in particular.

Within a fortnight, several of the other advertised notes turned up, which fact I instantly communicated to Mr. Truman. That much exasperated gentleman refused at once to have anything more do with the abominable business. As for coming up to London for the purpose of prosecuting the holders or passers of the stolen notes—which merely meant being bullied by magistrates and fleeced by attorneys—catch him doing so! The robbers had got his money, and the devil give them joy of it!

I need hardly say that I hugely suspected Robert Wilford, not only of picking Mr. Truman's pocket, but of the abstraction of that gentleman's New York letters, some sinister use of which—

notwithstanding Mr. Truman's assertion that they were of no value to anyone but himself—I had little doubt such an ingenious gentleman could make.

Soon after Mr. Truman left London, Wilford shifted his quarters from the Golden Cross to the White Horse, Fetter-lane, but continued to pass much of his time at Sheen's, in low debauchery, guzzling, card and skittle-playing, &c. &c. His street appearance did not in the faintest degree indicate the man's habits. He was rather a handsome fellow; always well and appropriately dressed; and his carriage and manners, when upon his good behavior, were those of a respectable, fairly-educated man of the world. Why on earth such a man should seek companionship with Sheen was a strong stimulant to detective zeal, and I very soon transferred my attentions from Sheen to him. The contemned, the justly contemned publican was, I felt satisfied after a while, innocent of actual robbery in the Truman case, though be might have been compelled by inexorable circumstances to wink at his friend's crime and afterwards aid him in passing the plunder. Of this, however, I was by no means sure.

The potman, Peter Mings, and I—(Mings afterwards kept the Grapes, in St. Martin's-lane, or, rather, the Grapes kept him and a large progeny—a very decent fellow, by the way)—the potman and I were colleagues, in the same sense that a colonel and corporal are comrades, and he let me into a few of the Sheen-house secrets.

In the first place, Wilford was not going back to New York, whilst the relative of Sheen in that city was himself coming over. There were wheels within wheels, turning faster and faster, the potman said; and his opinion was that if something warn't done, and quickly too, to put a spoke in 'em, the biggest blackguard of the 1ot, Wilford, would be safe to come uppermost.

By "the lot," my tapster friend meant Wilford, Sheen, and Amos Fletcher, Sheen's New York relative, who had arrived from the Empire City, and was lodging with Wilford at the White Horse, Fetter-lane.

Peter Mings having called at my lodgings to assure himself with his own eyes that my metamorphosis into a hackney coachman would pass muster, expressed intense admiration of the make-up. Totally impossible, he was quite satisfied, for anybody to suppose such a respectable old Jarvie could be Clarke, the young and uncommon downy Bow-street Runner. Five was the hour at which the party would want the coach, and I must be sure to be in good time, or he would have to get another conveyance, as dinner would be on the table at No. 12, Lowndes-square, a nobby place, at six exactly. I said there was no fear of my being late, and Peter went his way in high feather. Success in our little game, if the stakes in issue were anything like the amount I believed them to be, would suffice to make him, with the brewer's and spirit merchant's help, landlord of the Grapes and husband of Susan, the pretty barmaid at the Crown, Newport Market.

Left alone, and having two hours good to spare, I, as a cautious general always should on the eve of a decisive battle, again carefully considered the field of action, and calculated the chances of victory or defeat. The position was a peculiar one. A haze hung over it which might, no question, unduly magnify the relative importance of some circumstances and obscure that of others.

It had come to my knowledge, completely by the clever agency of Mings, that Robert Wilford and Amos Fletcher had been of late in the habit of visiting, at 12, Lowndes-square, Chelsea, a middle-aged widowed lady, of the name of Parkinson, who, with two nieces, lived there in very good style. So far Mings; and even but so far, the information, collated with incidents already known to the reader, suggested matter for a hot (Detective) brain to work upon. But by working on my own hook, I already knew something more. Mrs. Parkinson's head housemaid, Mary Saunders, who had once been in the service of Messrs. Swan and Edgar, Leicester-square, was, being an attractive girl, sweetheart to one of the assistants, Paul Corbyn, whom I had a sort of speaking acquaintance with, arising from having helped him out of a spree-squabble, which would else have caused his appearance on the Monday morning at Bow-street, instead of at his employers establishment. Now Paul Corbyn was a young gent of "expectations;" that is, he was sole son and heir to a well-to-do hackney-coach proprietor in Berwick-street, Soho. I forget whether or not Shillibeer and buses were or were not then in existence. The old folk were averse to their son "demeaning" himself by taking a housemaid to wife, pretty as she might be. They had consequently refused to see Mary Saunders; a source of mortification to that damsel and irritation to Paul Corbyn, as he himself, over a social glass, had told me. This as usual awry course of true love led me, when spelling over, letter by letter, the Truman, Wilford, Sheen, and Fletcher puzzle, to certain conclusions. One, which I imparted to Mings, was, that I should like to be hackney-coachman to the party when next they visited at 12, Lowndes-square; a matter easily arranged. Another possibility I did not communicate to Peter was, that I might convert Mary Saunders into a potent auxiliary in running the game to earth, supposing, of which I had very little doubt, that something in the way of legitimate sport should turn up. Paul Corbyn, I knew, never paid his personal services to his charmer except when it was her Sunday out. This would not be till the following Sunday week; and it being Monday when I was to first officiate as coachman, I had close upon a fortnight to play out any little subsidiary game. The progress of that game will explain itself.

Two splendid swells were Robert Wilford and Amos Fletcher, when dressed out in full fig for dinner at 12, Lowndes-square. "No. 12, Lowndes square, Chelsea," said Mr. Wilford, in reply to the interrogative touch of my hat, as I closed the coach-door; "12, Lowndes-square, Chelsea; fourth door on the right. Drive sharp; we are rather late." No sign, not the slightest, of recognition. "All right." Sheen, looking very sad and seedy, was standing at the door. He was evidently thrown out of the hunt.

My coach, by-the-bye, was a glass-coach, so called in those primitive times; and means a hired vehicle which no outward sign or figure denoted to be a hired vehicle; did not ply for casual hire, and was engaged for a day, afternoon, or evening, as the case might be. The regular hackney coachmen, when so employed, donned a sort of neutral livery. I had done so.

The glass-coach was in the coachhouse, the horses carefully put up, and I, upon the invitation of the hospitable housekeeper, a crummy dame upon the shady side of fifty, was about sitting down to tea, when Mary Saunders came flouncing into the room, in a somewhat flushed, excited state: "The dinner, cook, must be put back *another* hour! First, six—next, seven—and now eight! We shall come to having dinner at midnight by and by. Them Passmores from Southampton are arrived in town, and will be here not later than half-past seven. So, as I say, dinner is put off for them till eight o'clock. And what a lot there will be: I'm sure I and Anne shan't be able to wait

upon them all, especially with Stephen laid up with the rheumatics! In fact, I never undertook to wait at table at all, or to dress the young ladies, though I don't so much mind that; but I'm fairly worn off my legs—I am, indeed!" This last paragraph was addressed confidentially to me, the housekeeper having bolted to see "cook" the moment she heard that dinner was again postponed. I improved the opportunity. (Mary was really a very nice girl. Paul Corbyn, my fine fellow, you might go further and fare worse.) This parenthesis was of course a mental one.

"Sarvants, miss, the very best of 'em, is imposed upon almost always. Sarvice, miss, as I says to my son, who don't consider things as I does—not having so much experience you see, miss, of the world as we old 'uns have—'Sarvice, Paul,' says I, 'is no *heritage*.' No more it ain't, miss. Uncommon nice tea!"

"Have you a son of the name of Paul?" asked the highly colored damsel—Nature's paint! it could not have been bought in Bond-street at any price—"have you a son of the name of Paul?"

"I have, miss—wuss luck,—I was a goin' to say;—but I won't—no, certainly not. He've a took up, miss, as I've heered by a friend who I put on the watch, with a sarvant-gal somewhere in Chelsea. Leastways, my friend supposes so, having met 'em together here three or four times on Sunday afternoons. A coarse-featured, squabby creetur, my friend says. Black hair, coarse as whip-cord, gipsy-skin, and greasy heels—I can't abide greasy heels, in gals or 'osses—(Mary Saunders was fair as alabaster; her hair a silky auburn, her foot and ankle of the prettiest, neatest pattern). I am surprised at Paul. Excuse me, miss; I see you can't make out why a stranger should talk to you about his son wagaries. Or course you can't. The thing is, I was thinking that if so be it had been such a young 'ooman as you, now, that Paul Corbyn had took up with, I shouldn't mind."

"Do you—do you"—palpitated the damsel—the words upheaved from her sensitive bosom—"do you live in Berwick-street, Soho?"

"We do indeed. Occupies all the Mews there, miss. Seven hacks and four glass coaches a'most al'ays goin'! Not a bad ketch, Paul."

"Perhaps, Mr. Corbyn," exclaimed the damsel, bridling, with a complacent glance at an opposite mirror, "perhaps, Mr. Corbyn, the young person—the—h-em—the servant whom your son keeps company with may not be the coarse sort of individual described by your friend. Quite the reverse, perhaps. How do you know," she added, with a yet rosier blush and a merry giggle, "how do you know that he has not fallen in love with her himself? she being, it may be, pretty as I am. Now don't," she added, first glancing round to see that the coast continued clear, "don't try to keep it up any longer. You are come to see Mary Saunders with your own eyes; and so—there!—and there!—Oh, I say! Good gracious! Did you ever?"

Upon my word, those daughter-in-law kisses—"There! there! "—threw me for the moment quite off my balance, making me oblivious that I was between fifty and sixty. I recovered the sedate gravity of that age with some difficulty.

"Like son, like father, my dear. You shouldn't be surprised. It runs in the family. The old 'ooman, you'll find, wont be any harder to make it up with than Andrew Corbyn hisself. But mum must be the word—even to Paul, my dear, for a time—for various reasons. Only for a short time—say a fortnight."

I then explained that I had a double motive in coming to Lowndes-square in the character of one of my own coachmen. The first she had herself discovered; the second was, that it behooved me to find out who the gentlemen really were I had drove down, and what their business really was with Mrs. Parkinson and her nieces.

"It's a secret, my dear," I added; "and it's of great consequence I should get to the bottom of it. Very great consequence to you and Paul, my dear, also. If one on 'em aint a goin' to marry a rich lady, as he gives out, I am booked for a heavy figure, I am."

"Borrowed money, eh? Dear me! But I don't think there's much doubt. I'm afraid Mr. Truman will marry—"

"Truman—Truman!" I blurted out. "What do you know about Mr. Truman?"

"How strange you talk. Wern't you asking about Mr. Truman, the youngest of the gents you drove down?—though there aint much difference, judging by looks, between him and Mr. Fletcher."

Truman! Ah, ha! I was fly in a moment. That slight glimpse beneath Master Wilford's cards fully explained the disappearance of the New York letters from the bar of the Golden Cross; but what particular game he was playing it was necessary to discover if I was to make sure of the odd trick.

"Mary," said I, "excuse my freedom. It seems to me that I have known you ever so long; that the parson must have said grace, and made you and Paul better and worse months ago. But this is it, my dear. I *must*—you shall know more of the whys and wherefores soon—I *must* find out all about these slippery coves, unbeknown to themselves, you understand."

The reappearance of the housekeeper interrupted our colloguy.

"Mr. Harrison, the lawyer, is expected every minute," said she. "You must get tea ready for him in the green-room. Mr. Harrison is one of the old school," added the housekeeper, addressing me; "he takes dinner about one or two, and has only tea here when he comes about this time."

"I knew there was something more than common going on today," said Mary. "The dinner wasn't put off till eight o'clock for the Passmores. Not a bit of it. Mr. Truman and his friend are in a hurry to get the settlements done, and I shouldn't a bit wonder if the licenses have been brought down today, and—"

"A still tongue shows a wise head," interrupted the housekeeper, severely. "Least said is soonest mended. Always bear that in mind, particularly when a stranger is present."

Mary, hearing that, rose hastily, and left the room with an air and look at me becoming an engaged young woman whose father-in-law that was soon to be occupied the whole of the mews in Berwick-street, Soho, and kept seven hackney and four glass coaches almost always going.

And here I may remark over my tea with the housekeeper, before Miss Mary Saunders returns, that I don't consider there was anything immoral, professionally speaking, in passing myself off as Andrew Corbyn. I was quite sure the real Andrew and his old 'ooman would not prove obdurate. My little ruse was merely affording the pretty damsel a foretaste of the good fortune, as she considered it, which awaited her in the near future. I must, however, admit that in a detective training school a professor of moral philosophy would be rather a hindrance than a help to the proficiency of the pupils.

"Mr. Sims"—my jarvie name—"Mr. Sims," said Mary, as she re-entered the room, "Mr. Truman wishes to speak with you. I will conduct you to him."

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Corbyn," said Mary, as soon as we were out of hearing; "Mr. Truman has not asked for you; but as he, Fletcher, Mrs. Parkinson, Harrison, the lawyer, and I suppose the young ladies, will be confabbing together presently in the breakfast-room, I thought you might like to hear, as I should myself, what they are up to."

"My dear girl—"

"Don't speak so loud, or better don't speak at all, and tread softly."

Mary Saunders led me through the breakfast or green-room, an apartment opening upon a conservatory through a door of stained glass. The chandelier was already lit, and no one in the thickly-shrubbed conservatory could possibly be seen from the room, whilst every object in the room would be seen distinctly visible to whoever was concealed there. By leaving the door ajar, as Mary and I ascertained by experiment, I should be able to hear every word—the slightest whisper—uttered within. The device was admirable. There was also a way out of the conservatory into the garden—a great convenience—should such a movement on my part become desirable.

The important business which brought Mr. Harrison to 12, Lowndes-square occupied a considerable time, the hitch being a tearful, sobbing reluctance on the part of the nieces to sign certain documents laid before them. They appeared to be timid young persons—gentle, amiable, no doubt—but not at all handsome. The overbearing vehemence of Mrs. Parkinson finally prevailed: the papers were signed, sealed; which done, the Misses Benson retired. A supplementary deed was then produced, securing to Mrs. Parkinson seven thousand pounds, to be paid over to her in equal shares by Truman and Fletcher the day after their union with the nieces. Mrs. Parkinson, it also appeared, would soon change her name to that of Passmore.

The curtain had risen upon the last scene of the play. I held the conspirators in the hollow of my hand.

It was near two o'clock in the morning before the merry party broke up. Pulling up at the door of the Bow-street police office, whither I had taken the liberty of driving Messrs. Wilford and Fletcher, who during the drive had been in riotous spirits, I exclaimed:

"Now, gents, here we are, with friends to welcome us. Please to dismount."

"Eh! What the devil!" exclaimed Wilford, starting up in terrible alarm. This is not Sheen's!"

"Not exactly. I thought a change of scene might be of service. Now, Mr. Wilford—now Mr. Fletcher—no nonsense."

The search of the persons and luggage of the culprits afforded more than sufficient evidence to convict them of a felonious conspiracy to obtain possession of the persons and property of Isabella and Cathering Benson. Those young persons (orphans) had been bequeathed about fifteen thousand pounds each, by Mr. Silas Benson, of New York, who had emigrated to America in early youth. Their aunt, Mrs. Parkinson, was appointed their guardian; and the young ladies were to be placed in possession of the legacies on the day they married with her consent. Wilford and Fletcher had both been in Mr. Silas Benson's employ, and by some means had made themselves perfectly aware of the disposition of his property and other particulars, the knowledge of which was essential to the successful carrying out of their nefarious scheme. They, for example, knew that a relative and partner of the deceased Benson, who was well acquainted with Mr. Truman, of Sheffield, intended writing to that gentleman, with whom the firm had had extensive business transactions, requesting him to call on Mrs. Parkinson, whose address he would not for a few days be able to obtain, and look after the interests of the two orphan girls. It was as Truman's son that Wilford, with the aid of the letters he purloined, successfully imposed himself and his friend Fletcher upon the aunt.

The license which had been procured two or three days previously, authorized the union of Robert Truman, otherwise Robert Wilford, with Isabella Benson. The plot was frustrated but just in time, and, as Mings admitted after the transportation of the two scoundrels, by information given him on the sly by Sheen, who, whilst they were at large, was afraid or ashamed to betray their plot.

Mary Saunders had not long to wait for a husband. The genuine Andrew Corbyn was so mightily tickled by the account which appeared in the papers—the young woman's own evidence as given before the magistrate—of the vivacious part he had been made to play in the affair, that he and his old 'ooman called the same day he read it to see her, took as fatherly a fancy to her as I had simulated, set his son Paul up in the drapery business, and himself gave him the pretty housemaid to wife. I was invited to the wedding, but was prevented from attending by a sudden call elsewhere. I frequently saw them afterwards, and am still friends with both, as well as with their sons, daughters, and grandchildren.

The only legal cognizance taken of Mrs. Parkinson's conduct in the matter was an application to the Court of Chancery to deprive her of the trusteeship of the nieces' fortunes. It was unopposed; and Mr. Truman, senior, as suggested by their relative at New York, appointed in her stead.

I never directly again heard of either the Trumans or the Bensons, and cannot, therefore, positively say that either of the young ladies became a Mrs. Truman. I think I remember that when, many years after, I was passing through Sheffield, the landlord of the inn at which I stopped for a short time told me he thought the maiden name of one of the Mrs. Trumans was Benson, and that she had a maiden sister living with her.

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