

Antony Warren, Esquire

by Thomas Waters

I HAVE already stated that the name of Antony Warren, Esq., of Barnsbury Park, Islington, was strongly underlined in the book of Private Instructions to Detective Officers kept at Scotland Yard, and that I had been marked out for the duty of attending in a double sense to that gentleman's incomings and outgoings. The incidents related in "One Night in a Gaming-House," as officially reported by me, caused that notice, if I may so express myself, to be doubly underlined. Could it be really true that a gentleman who frequented "Harmonic Meetings" at taverns to hear himself sing "Alice Gray" and "Banks of Allan Water," could be not only a gamester upon an extensive scale when a fat pigeon was to be plucked—there was nothing surprising in that—but Chairman, Director, Committee of Direction, Secretary, and Treasurer of the Sahara Railway Company, expected to pay, in next to no time, twenty per cent. interest on a capital of two hundred thousand pounds, in shares of three pounds each, receivable by instalments; the King of Monboddo having graciously granted the concession under his own royal hand and seal? The African Sahara being a dead level throughout there would be no tunnels, deep cuttings, gradients, to swallow up the shareholders' money, &c. &c. Was he also the projector, president, and joint-gérant with Monsieur Ilfautvivre of the Submarine Tunnel connecting Dover and Calais, to be carried along upon the summits of primary rocks, to be had for asking at Terra del Fuego, Cape Horn, and to be sunk, when shipped and brought over to the Manche, at regular distances of two hundred kilometres; a project favourably reported upon by the "Fonts et Chaussées" of France, and heartily commended by the great French Emperor: Capital, five millions sterling, in two-pound shares, in order to interest the peoples of the two great western nations in a magnificent undertaking destined to render indissoluble the moral tie which united them by a material, indestructible link of granite and iron. There were other companies of not quite such splendid promise and proportions of which he was suspected to be the Corporation Sole; by one of which minor fry—a company organized for the purpose of reconverting sawdust into deal and mahogany boards—he had, it was hoped, incautiously brought himself within the provisions of the statutes applicable to obtaining money under false pretences.

I was, if possible, to catch this slippery eel, but the difficulty was to discover with what bait he might be successfully hooked. He was not to be had by letters addressed to Wentworth Fitzstephen, Esquire, Director of the "Sahara," requesting a personal interview, the applicant being desirous of investing a large sum therein, but required information upon some of the minor points, which he should be glad to receive from the Chairman-Director himself. The reply was ever a printed prospectus, and perhaps a few lines, signed by a clerk, stating that he was directed to enclose prospectuses, and that any further information required would be forwarded in writing by himself, the clerk. It was a rule of the company which could not be departed from—not to grant personal interviews with applicants for shares, such verbal intercourse often leading to misconceptions which it was desirable to avoid.

I could never discover whether this multifarious Corporation Sole was ever present in the person at either of the places where money for the purchase of shares could be received by letter or otherwise, and a receipt in due course given for the same.

Of course it was not difficult to discover that the clerks who received the letters and answered them were frequent visitors at Barnsbury Park. But that proved nothing. There were three of them—poor devils—whose salaries, small as they might be, could not be jeopardized by indiscreet disclosures. But that proved nothing as to the identity of Antony Warren, Esq., Wentworth Fitzstephen, Esq., Marmaduke Neville, Esq., and Reginald Herbert, Esq. There was the rub.

I did not expect that those conglomerate gentlemen's enterprises were wonderfully great successes in the swindling line. Perhaps a cool thousand a year, after paying rent of offices, salaries of clerks, advertisements, printing, and other incidental costs, might be realized; not more, quite probably not so much. The business management was in a legal sense admirably managed, the advising lawyer must have been a knowing one in the art of steering a crazy barque through the rocks, shallows, quicksands of Acts of Parliament. There was nothing which fell legitimately within police cognizance, except it might be some transactions arising out of the sawdust and deal-boards' scheme, and to the hundreds of small sufferers—with not many exceptions his dupes were foolish people who had saved up a few pounds, and hoped to become capitalists after a few years by Sahara and sawdust investments—the only advice we could give was that they had better apply to an attorney: about as valuable counsel in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases, as recommending a hungry man without a spare shilling in his pocket to go and dine at the London Tavern. The attorneys, at that stage of the swindle, if heavily fee'd, could have done little or nothing. No doubt by and by the pear would be rotten ripe, but when that day came round, or was dawning, where would Messrs. Wentworth, Fitzstephen, Herbert, be found? They would have taken the wings of the morning and flown to one of the Alsatias of the world—there are more Alsatias than I should care to enumerate—in which case the crowd of small-fry creditors might go whistle.

Such a scheme of scoundrelism, however cleverly concocted, is pretty sure to break down somewhere. It may be drawn up by the astutest of attorneys, settled, in A and B cases, of course, by ablest counsel, but a fatal flaw will somehow or other show itself when and where it is least expected. It so fell out in the case of Mr. Antony Warren.

Of course, although the facts of this narrative are as near as possible literally correct, the title I have given to the Bubble Companies concocted by the Barnsbury Park gentlemen are fictitious. I mean them only as generic designations of some of the vilest systematizations of fraud that ever disgraced a Christian country. Another name applicable to them in favourable seasons, when the mania of speculation seizes upon the commercial classes, is Legion. There are no mushrooms, none of the gourd tribe which spring up, expand, and perish as do the funguses which suddenly appear and sun themselves for their brief day in the atmosphere of the Money Market.

Antony Warren, Esquire, was destined to be brought to grief by a very mean missile hurled by a very feeble hand, resembling in a small way the grandiose stuff which I have somewhere read of the death of Charles XII. of Sweden. "A petty fortress and a humble hand," is, I think, one of the lines.

A young gentleman of, we will say, the name of Jennesson, a native, I suppose, of the south of England—far north he never could have been, at all events after cutting his eye-teeth—was a fanatic in the cause of science. Analytical Chemical Science—it was *the* motive power—the

embodied Eureka—would be the regenerator of the world! He once wrote a paper, read in the Social Science Congress, demonstrating the wastefulness of peeling potatoes previous to boiling, or sending them as they do in Ireland to table in their jackets. In the one case, however careful the operator, much of the valuable part of the esculent was necessarily severed with the skin, and consequently lost. In the other, as everybody knew, the mealiest portion of the potato adhered to the skin, and was equally lost to human nutrition. The true mode to cleanse potatoes was to place them in a tub filled with water, and well scrub them, the best instrument, he believed, for the purpose being a birch broom. Great applause. Mr. Jenneson's paper ordered to be printed. Now, I don't even think this anecdote is literally true, though I know men who would go before a magistrate and make oath of its verity. I dare say there is a substratum of truth in the statement. He wrote, I dare say, some pompous nonsense, which was read in the Congress, and in consequence expanded into a full-blown philosopher.

Mr. Jenneson, apart from science, was by no means a fool, though candour obliges me to admit that in one characteristic of the donkey tribe, obstinacy, he was supereminent, which was very unfortunate for the three gentlemen rolled into one, who are the heroes of this paper. Mr. Jenneson—Mr. Edward Jenneson, I think—was a draper's assistant, and had *not* a soul above sarsnet, calico, or buttons. He knew on which side, business or philosophy, the world's bread is buttered. He had finished his time, was an expert in his vocation, and ardently desired to establish himself as a general haberdasher and linendraper in his native town. The sequel to which achievement would be his marriage with Miss Emily Rowden. There was but one obstacle—one that it would require many tedious years to surmount. To set up in business, with a fair chance of making it a successful business, a capital of one thousand pounds was required. Mr. Edward Jenneson, who had been an orphan for more years than he could recollect, had but six hundred pounds, all told. Though a philosopher he was not a Platonist, and the notion of waiting a dozen years or so, before it would not be insanity to wed Miss Rowden, was insupportable, distracting!

He was in that state of mind when the flaming prospectuses of the Sawdust reconstituted Deal and Mahogany Boards' Scheme, promising almost fabulous pecuniary advantages, met his eye and fixed it. He could see nothing absurd in such a proposal. The particles of dust were the constituent parts of the board, temporarily disintegrated, &c. &c. The philosophy of the thing was plain to the meanest capacity. Let fools laugh. The discoveries and application of steam, of gas, of electricity, were once laughed at. Mr. Edward Jenneson was quite struck with the idea. It opened up a vista, in which the draper and haberdasher's shop figured, but at the threshold, as it were, of a prospect disclosing much more splendid objects than even that, for the moment, highly desirable object of ambition. He would communicate at once with the representative of the company. He did so; received a courteous answer; a lengthened correspondence ensued; the end of which was that the Chairman-Director appointed an interview with the possessor of six hundred pounds, just then most particularly wanted by Mr. Antony Warren. Mr. Edward Jenneson came special to London for the all-important interview, and met Mr. Herbert at Peele's Coffee-House, Fleet-street. The conference was a lengthened one. When it really comes to the point of positively paying over five or six hundred pounds in hard cash for a heap of small oblong bits of paper, which—however immense may be their prospective—are of not the slightest present value, fears and doubtings shake the soul, however ingenuous that soul may be of the individual about to part "it would be for months, it might be for ever," with such a lot of genuine money. This appears to have been emphatically the case with Edward Jenneson. The

explanations required were given with abundant fulness. Nothing could be more assuring. Myrrh and manna glided from those “Alice Gray” lips. Like the Princess in the fairy tale, Mr. Herbert seemed to drop pearls and diamonds every time he opened his mouth.

True, quite true; but Mr. Edward Jenneson was a practical man. His favourite philosophy was that which teaches by examples. The idea that if he parted with his precious capital, the haberdasher’s shop and Miss Rowden might, by the remotest possibility, become a dissolving view—was frightful, harrowing. Now, could Mr. Herbert show him, in strict confidence, of course, a specimen—a piece of deal-board which had actually been made out of sawdust. Mr. Herbert reflected. It was at the time, as I afterwards knew, a matter almost of life and death to him to clutch that six hundred pounds, and he was too keen an observer of human character not to see that having once propounded so very reasonable a request, you might as well by expostulation induce a pig in London streets to keep in the way he should go, as expect Mr. Edward Jenneson to hand over the cash till he had with his own bodily eyes seen a specimen of the wonderful manufacture.

Mr. Herbert consequently and graciously relaxed the rigid regulations of the company for the second time. He would show him, in a few hours, a specimen of the manufacture, at the same time warning him that the process was not quite complete. There were certain roughnesses—irregularities upon the surface of the sawdust planks, which, though not precisely a defect as to saleable value, were unsightly, and would, no question, be remedied. This was quite satisfactory to our practical philosopher. He knew that no great invention was at first perfect, worked quite smoothly, and was prepared to make any allowance for such trifling shortcomings, which there could be no doubt, as Mr. Herbert said, would be speedily remedied. The result was the exchange of five hundred pounds in Bank of England notes, for some printed scraps of paper and a piece of deal-board about three feet long, and of somewhat peculiar surface. Mr. Herbert discharged some rather peculiar obligations, pressing upon him at the time, with the notes, and Mr. Edward Jenneson, having carefully locked up his deal-nugget—it was not to be shown to the general public on any account—waited with a radiant countenance upon his beloved *fiancée*, and assured her that the business and the wedding would be, before long, two accomplished delightful facts; hinting at, at the same time, that far greater glories in the business line would not make themselves long waited for.

Should any reader imagine that human credulity has a limit which such an audacious swindle would overstep, I beg to refer him to the case of Westaway *versus* Gilpin, tried at a western spring assize in 1849, when facts precisely similar to those I have just related were deposed to on oath; and the jury gave a verdict for the simpleton tricked out of his money.

More than a year passed away; nothing was heard of the sawdust scheme; nothing of Mr. Herbert, except that at Christmas, Edward Jenneson received a box of prunes (fact!) with Mr. Herbert’s compliments. The prunes were part of a first consignment of that valuable fruit to a company formed for the purpose of importing prunes, grapes, &c., upon a gigantic scale. When Jenneson mentioned the circumstance, I really thought he was bamboozling me, the thing seemed so utterly incredible. It was, however, a laughable truth. Precisely the same incident occurred in the case of a General Wine Importing Company, not long since wound up, with no assets. A young man at Winchester invested one hundred pounds in that company, and in return received a box of prunes as a complimentary Christmas present.

Edward Jenneson became very fidgety, irate. Miss Rowden, too, was incessant in her inquiries as to how and where he had placed out the five hundred pounds, which it was known he had obtained of the executors under his father's will; hinting, with growing distinctness, as days, weeks, months rolled on, that she doubted the wisdom of continuing an engagement with a young man who refused her his confidence even in the days of courtship.

Edward Jenneson was getting desperately savage. How could he tell his beloved that he had invested his precious capital, with the exception of one hundred pounds, in that d—d deal-board? His own faith in it was horribly shaken. The more he contemplated, studied it, the darker grew his misgivings. But that such a fact would presuppose the end of the world—for a globe in which such stupendous wickedness *could* be perpetrated ought to be destroyed by fire, if ever globe did—he could almost swear that three feet of board had never been sawdust, but had grown in the natural way, as other deal boards did, in a Norwegian forest. He had seen several such “specimens” in timber-yards since: the unevenness of the surface, and all that humbugging stuff, was caused, they said, by the twisting and shrinking of the wood whilst drying. Should it really turn out that that oily-tongued villain had swindled him, the vengeance he would take should be something exemplary—to break the heart of a man, the back of a monster. But he could not, would not believe it. He would write again to “The Board,” requesting, in a strictly categorical form, to know what progress, if any, had been made in realizing the prospectus of the Sawdust Company; where the works were situated, and how soon it was expected that the Company would commence operations as “Timber Merchants on a Magnificent Scale.”

The answer arrived in due course. Difficulties—unforeseen difficulties—had arisen in the process of conversion. It was fully expected, however, that they would be ultimately surmounted. In say three years, at the latest, a dividend on the capital subscribed might be hoped for with considerable confidence; though, of course, there were chances of the failure of the most promising enterprise, which must be looked fairly in the face, and must have entered into the calculations of every prudent shareholder when he determined to embark in the speculation; for a speculation, in its widest sense, the project in question certainly was, &c., &c.

Mr. Edward Jenneson assured me, upon his word as a man, that the bare reading of the letter gave him the English cholera—though it was winter time—to such a degree that he was confined to his bed for three weeks, and at one time his life was considered to be in danger. He, however, recovered; but as to whether that was a mercy or the reverse, he had his doubts. He was no sooner declared to be convalescent, than he was knocked over again—smashed (morally) by another letter. He allowed me to take a copy:—

“4, Belvidere Terrace.

“SIR,—A report has been widely circulated, and which papa firmly believes to be correct—although it really seems incredible—that you have given five hundred pounds (nearly the whole of the money to which you were entitled under your father's will) for a piece of deal-board, a sack of sawdust, and a box of prunes! I don't quite understand it, but that, it seems to me, is what it amounts to. Five hundred pounds for a piece of deal-board, a sack of sawdust, and a box of prunes! (I remember the prunes, and that they were bad and mouldy.) Anyone capable of such an act of lunacy requires a keeper, not a wife. If, therefore, you cannot refute the report in the only way in which it can be effectually refuted, by laying before papa documentary evidence that you

have invested your capital in proper securities, I must decline continuing my acquaintance with a man so utterly incapable of taking care of himself, much less of a wife and family. Yours, &c.,

“E. ROWDEN.

“P.S.—I will not give up all hopes—I should be grieved to do so (but the prunes perplex me)—that you will be able to prove the report in question to be a ridiculous hoax. Should that be so, I shall again subscribe myself, yours faithfully, till death,

“E. R.”

As soon as poor Jenneson had sufficiently recovered from this second shock, to collect his ideas, and reason upon them, he cast about in his mind to remember who it could be that had set such a damnable report a-going—had sufficient knowledge of the transaction to so travestie, burlesque it! He was not long in hitting upon the delinquent—Tom Rogers. It could only be Tom Rogers, whom, upon the occasion of a birthday banquet, he had partially, perhaps wholly (for he had but a confused remembrance the next morning, he remembered *that*, of what had passed between them towards the small hours of the morning). The treacherous villain! However, it was of no use to swear and go on. The time might come when he should give Tom Rogers a Roland for his Oliver.

Not very likely, it soon appeared. Jenneson not being able to place the required documentary evidence before “Papa,” the engagement between the young people was peremptorily put an end to; the young lady being mortifyingly acquiescent in “Papa’s” decision. One reason why was not long to seek: Edward Jenneson, who had then fully regained his health, was out for a walk, when he met that villain Tom Rogers and Emily Rowden walking lovingly together arm in arm!

This was the crowning stroke, and Jenneson resolved to leave his native place forthwith, shake the dust off his feet, proceed to London, get his money back from that smooth-seeming scoundrel, Herbert, and be in some way thoroughly revenged upon him. Besides the one hundred pounds remaining of the legacy, he had about seventy pounds of his own savings by him; and one hundred and seventy pounds would go a considerable way in law, and he would expend it to the last farthing in exposing the swindler. (Mr. Edward Jenneson had fully made up his mind by that time that the supposed conversion of sawdust, like thousands of other conversions, was all flam.) But first, upon reflection he determined to apply to Scotland-yard for the aid of the Detective Police. Their services if obtainable there—would be cheaper, of course, and probably more effective in the way of exposure, at all events, than those of an attorney.

Arrived at Scotland-yard, Mr. Jenneson and his grievances were handed over to me. I was concerned for the young man—laughable, in a certain sense, as was his lugubrious story. (A great deal of what I have related it is necessary to explain was gurgled out, as it were, over a convivial glass, when we were vainly waiting at the Peacock for Antony Warren, Esq., who appeared to have got sick of singing “Alice Gray,” &c., at a most inopportune time.)

“Well, Mr. Jenneson,” said I, “something may turn up—to use a very silly phrase—that may enable you to trounce Herbert. Have you that piece of deal-board?”

“Well, curse it, yes! But what can that avail, except to show what an egregious ass I have been?”

“I don’t know that that is all it will prove. To obtain money by a simple, naked lie, is not criminally punishable—the simple, naked lie, not being, in the eye of the law, a false pretence within the meaning of the statute. The judges have so decided upon the principle that they cannot be expected to become the guardians, the custodians, of all the simpletons in the kingdom. Pardon me, Mr. Jenneson. I merely speak in a general, impersonal sense. But a lie to which is appended a corroborative circumstance, *is* a false pretence in the eye of the law. Whether a piece of deal-board, pretendedly manufactured out of sawdust, will be held to be a sufficient corroborative circumstance, I cannot say. Judges and juries, I have found, always strain a legal point to convict a person of whose moral guilt no doubt can be entertained. Of course you are aware that you will be terribly laughed at. The whole thing is so absurd—so ludicrous—impossible, I was going to say—”

“I don’t care about its being impossible!” interrupted Jenneson; “it’s true! and I don’t care one brass farthing if all London—all created men, women, and children—were laughing at me at the same moment, so that I can be revenged upon the scoundrel who so audaciously diddled me. I’ll follow him like his shadow, till I do find an opportunity of tripping his heels up.”

“Very well, we’ll see what can be done. You are sure you would recognise him if you saw him?”

“Should I recognise myself in a glass? I should know him amongst ten thousand, however disguised.”

“And you would not hesitate to give him into custody, at any risk of after-consequences to yourself?”

“Hesitate! It would be the happiest moment of my life. I should like—shouldn’t I like—to snap on the handcuffs, chain his legs. Oh!”

“Handcuffs are not generally used in such cases. Well, meet me at the tavern I told you of—the Peacock, near the Angel, Islington, on Thursday evening. Can you blow a good cloud?”

“Certainly I can!”

“I can, also. We will place ourselves in an obscure corner of the room, and with the help of a screen of smoke shall not be readily recognised by our gentleman, till you are quite sure he is the right man. Should Mr. Antony Warren be, as I believe, your Mr. Herbert, we shall then have him. There will be an exposure at all events, at a Police Office, the circumstances will be ventilated in the newspapers; and the career of a successful swindler will be cut short, if no other punishment befall him. Good day! Be punctual!”

As I have stated, Mr. Antony Warren suddenly left off attending the free-and-easy at the Peacock, when his company there was very anxiously desired. As to calling at Barnsbury Park, and asking under a pretence to see Mr. Warren, it was labour thrown away. He was always on the Continent—in the country—anywhere but at home. I grew weary of waiting upon Mr. Warren, having besides matters of graver importance to attend to. Not so, Edward Jenneson. A staunch sleuth hound he, and for full two months he watched night and day—with but few hours’ intermission for absolutely necessary rest—about the house in Barnsbury Park.

Patience and perseverance were at last rewarded. He called at my lodgings one evening when I was out, and drove about in a cab like a madman to find me for a couple of hours. At last we met.

“Thank God! thank God!” he exclaimed, his not very strong eyes lit into fiery passion by excitement. “I have found the villain at last. He left home in a brougham, and is now with a number of his acquaintances at the Mitre Tavern, De Beauvoir Town. They have a supper there. Come, do not let us lose one precious minute!”

“You are sure the man you saw leave the house in Barnsbury Park is your friend Herbert?”
“Positive? Sure as I am of my own life!” “All right; have with you then!”

We were quite in time. Antony Warren, Esquire, was secured and taken off to a lock-up. Jameson was also present; and I saw looks of intelligence exchanged between the worthy pair. The charge of obtaining five hundred pounds by false pretences was regularly taken, and signed by Edward Jenneson.

The next day Antony Warren, Esquire, was taken before the magistrate at Worship-street: but no Edward Jenneson put in an appearance. The matter had no doubt been “squared;” probably by Jameson: and Jenneson having got his money, was perfectly satisfied with the result. We, however, asked for a remand, which, after some demur, was granted, and the upshot was, such an exposure was made that the swindling concerns conducted by Warren were broken up a wholesale system of fraud blown to the winds—that particular ramification of it, I should say; the system itself being immortal, and flourishing at this day with renewed vigour, in multitudes of forms.

I did not again hear of Edward Jenneson, and cannot therefore say whether he did or did not return to his native town, and, with the help of his recovered five hundred pounds, cut out Tom Rogers. Very likely.

I had not, however, seen the last of Antony Warren, Esq. He had been obliged to leave Barnsbury Park, and though small gambling sustained him for a time in outwardly decent circumstances, he gradually sank lower and lower even in the swindlers’ “social scale,” and at last fell into the black gulf of recognised felony, which lies at the foot of all such downward careers of life. By means of a false character, furnished by one of his former and still floating pals, he obtained a situation as clerk in a city merchant’s house. The salary was a low one, but Warren having neither wife nor children, might have regained respectability and comfort but for his unconquerable craving for unhealthy excitement—the excitement of betting and gambling. In one of the “emergencies” sure to occur in such pursuits, Mr. Warren borrowed about thirty pounds of his employer’s money, which he had received as town collecting clerk. Of course he fully intended to return it, that is always so in the case of a first felony, directly a slice of luck should put it in his power to do so. That slice of luck did not come to him in time. The fraud was discovered: and Antony Warren, alias Bamford, under which real name he was recognised—having pleaded guilty—and it being his first proved offence, he was summarily convicted by the Lord Mayor, and sentenced to three months’ imprisonment with hard labour. Liberated from prison at the expiration of his sentence, unable with a blasted character to obtain employment, he had recourse to the desperate expedient of forging a cheque, in the name of the City firm by

whom he had been employed, upon the Union Bank of London. He was an excellent penman, and had by him more than one specimen of the firm's signature. He had also, with prevision, it may fairly be presumed, of one day finding occasion for their use—purloined previous to the discovery of the thirty pounds' fraud—several printed cheques from his employer's cheque book. The first cheque for fifty-five pounds odd, which he got a waiter at His Lordship's Larder, Cheapside, to change for him, was successful. The second, for a larger sum, which he had the audacity to present himself, settled him for life. He was arrested, sent to trial, convicted and sentenced to penal servitude for twenty years. I myself saw him at Portland. Jenneson, as it chanced, was in the same gang.

THE END

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