

*Richard Watson*

by Thomas Waters

IN the paper entitled “A Detective in the Bud,” I incidentally mentioned that my first police experience was obtained in aiding the escape from England of one Watson;—the last was in myself escaping, considerably damaged and with much difficulty, from another Watson,—who, as I limp along the streets, I should (were it not that I brim over with the milk—cream, rather—of human kindness) devote at every broken stumble to the Infernal Gods. And much the rascal,—sitting, sipping, smoking in the Isle of France, I could swear, at this very moment, under the shade of a Calabash-tree, as I have read in a song that some great poet did (Moore, I think) would care for that! He had become remarkably fond of cribbage, the villain; it had grown to be a passion with him. *It is* so just now with me; and *wouldn't* I like to give him one for his nob? The cream of human kindness would not curdle at that. Certainly not! On the contrary, it would smoothly overflow, to the extent of sixpence at the very least, upon the next *misérable* I might chance to meet.

Enough of preface to a very *misérable* story, viewed in relation to myself. How the mischief I could have been induced to engage in such an enterprise will ever remain a mystery to me. But the wariest of men do very silly things at times. I accept that consolation for what it is worth.

Richard Watson, it is pretty generally known, was held by those who firmly believed they knew him to have been from his youth upwards a model individual. A Hogarth “Good Apprentice,”—imposture, to culminate in a Lord Mayoralty. Pious, too. Oh! saintly pious! hymn-books, homilies, were his delight. Story-books he never opened— that is to say, was never seen to open; and he was presented with a gold watch, when but nine years of age, by an enthusiastic old lady, for having accurately reckoned up how many times a certain word—I forget what word—was mentioned in the New Testament. “The child’s the father of the man;” and it is only fair to admit that till I had been disastrously intimate with the man, I had no conception, though we lived in the same street and went for several years to the same schools, what an unutterable young hypocrite and villain the child must have been. The shadow of the abominable father, projected backward over the son, may cause me to view the boy Watson in a blacker light than he deserves. That may be the case; but I don’t think so. At all events, the model boy grew up to be a model man; and it was at one time confidently asserted, and I believe with truth, that a statue—the cost of which was to be defrayed by a general subscription of all classes—commemorative of his genius, his virtues as a Christian, Citizen, Merchant Prince; not only as a “man and a brother,” in the large, universal, sense—but, individually, as a son, husband, father, uncle, nephew, cousin—all through the category of kinship, was to be erected in some conspicuous spot adapted for the display of such lying Effigies in stone, granite, marble, or bronze, as the case may be. Yes; I blush purple, when I make the admission,—I verily believe that if the statue scheme had been set on foot before the gigantic bubble burst, I myself should have given my half-crown. Had I done so, that half-crown would now be running in molten silver through my veins.

The gigantic bubble *did* burst, suddenly, too; and, good Heaven! with what an awful crash! It seemed that the end of the (City) world was come! How well I remember how the dark whisper

rose—gradually swelling into loud, fierce savage tones—accompanied by frightful maledictions—that Richard Watson, the eminent bill-broker, gigantic railway shareholder, director of companies innumerable, chairman of bank-boards, was *gone*—not only in a commercial, but in a literal sense; had, in vulgar parlance, *sloped* to America it was presumed, carrying off with him an enormous amount of plunder, but leaving his family behind as a model legacy to an ungrateful country.

The failure, as all will remember who remembered Richard Watson himself, was for an awful amount; the ruin entailed upon hundreds of families appalling. The exasperation of the swindled creditors was, of course, extreme—wild, frantic! Not a penny in the pound would be realised. I participated in that passionate exasperation, having myself been a loser to the tune of eight hundred pounds.

This loss was the hook with which the father of mischief caught me. A committee of creditors was appointed—by whom it was determined to beat the rascal naked through the world; and that done, bring him home, and shut him for life in a model prison. He had gone to America—to New York; that could not be doubted. And who so well fitted to ferret out the villain and bring him to condign punishment as Henry Clarke, the detective, who had himself lost eight hundred pounds by the unmitigated scoundrel. It was at once agreed that I was the right man for the service; and a deputation, consisting of the chairman of the committee, called upon me to ascertain if I would undertake the business—the terms being all my expenses out of pocket to be paid in any case; and, should I succeed in bringing the villain back, my own debt of eight hundred pounds to be paid in full, with two hundred over, making the pleasant round sum of one thousand pounds. I, after very brief deliberation, accepted the mission, provided the Commissioner consented; and there was no doubt of that. The agreement was drawn up in due form—signed by the highly respectable chairman of the committee; and I sailed in the *Hibernia*, for New York, on the 3rd of June, 1858.

I had no difficulty in finding Richard Watson in the Empire City. He was living in luxurious style at the Astor; and a note from me was placed in his hands—for I thought it best to treat him with personal consideration—to put sugary salt upon his tail, so to speak, in order to render the capture of his wily birdship more certain and easy; he being shielded with that most invulnerable of all armour—abundance of money.

O’Connell used to say he could drive a coach-and-four through any Act of Parliament which could be framed. I can easily believe that, provided the coach be a gold coach. At least, I know that if I had a heavy balance, to be drawn for at pleasure, in an American Bank, and there were a score of British detectives at my heels, to claim me under the Extradition Treaty, I should, mentally—physical demonstration is quite superfluous when the game is won before the deal has gone round—I should mentally snap my fingers in their faces.

I was rejoiced, therefore, when Richard Watson ordered the black help to say he was quite ready to see Mr. Clarke; and more rejoiced still when, rising as I entered the room from a luxurious chair, placed before one of the most luxurious spreads I have ever seen, he said, in a placid, meek, humble way, placing his outspread hand upon that peculiar region of the body where a heart (by a violent assumption) is always supposed to beat, he said, “Mr. Clarke, I appreciate the

delicacy, the forbearance, with which you propose to execute the unpleasant duty with which you are charged. I shall give you no trouble. In proof of that, I have to inform you that *The Morning Star*, Captain Morgan (a three-masted ship), leaves New York for Bristol tomorrow; that all my effects, valuables, moneys—except a trifle for current expenses—are on board; and that I intended embarking in her for England. I should not like, in my present mood of mind—a very humble, self-abhorrent mood, Mr. Clarke—to encounter the rude boisterousness of a mail-steamer; rude, but innocent boisterousness, which would barb the fiery arrows of an accusing conscience. You will, perhaps, not object to that arrangement; your object, of course, simply being to get me back to England; there to receive my deserts. No, no; not my deserts! I may have to endure stripes, many stripes; but punishment equal to my sins, my crimes, this world *cannot* inflict. That will require the afflicting-rod of the Almighty! Oh, Mr. Clarke, Mr. Clarke! I am a miserable sinner—a miserable sinner! And I am glad that your arrival has put it out of my power to shrink from the duty of returning to England, and making my deluded, swindled creditors the only and very poor amends in my power—very poor amends, Mr. Clarke. But there is one sting, Mr. Clarke—one sting which pierces to the marrow—my wife and children—my innocent wife and children! To think of the shame, the ruin, the disgrace I have brought upon them! Ah! there—there, Mr. Clarke, is the serpent-sting—the worm which dieth not!” And the reprobate sinner sobbed as if his cursed old leather heart—a force-pump apology of a heart—was going to break. I was positively quite moved; intimated my perfect willingness to sail with him in the *Morning Star*, and in every way consistent with my duty forbear to press heavily upon him. He thanked me, with tears in his eyes; said he would at once despatch a note to Captain Morgan, requesting him to prepare accommodation for another passenger. “Need I,” added that humbug of the first-water—“need I say that Mr. Clarke, the additional passenger, is a detective officer? But perhaps I ought,” he added, preparing his pen for an additional paragraph to his note. “Perhaps I ought. It is my duty to drink the cup of humiliation to the very dregs.”

“Write nothing of the kind, Mr. Watson. There is not the slightest reason that you should. No one on board the *Morning Star* need know that you are not returning to England for your own pleasure or business.”

“Bless you, sir! bless you, Mr. Clarke!” said the humbled man, fairly brimming over in bucketfuls. When I think of it—but never mind; at least, it’s of no use minding. “Bless you, Mr. Clarke! you are very kind, and I am unworthy of kindness.” He then folded, sealed, and despatched the note.

I have never since then, and I never completely shall recover my self-respect. That fellow (we went, as I said, to school together) must have early, looking through me, discerned the soft part, which he moulded as so much dough. I, too—Clarke, the detective—who, hundreds of people will tell you, can at any time see a hole through a millstone with both eyes shut. I am very glad I was obliged to leave the force—very. I could never have stood the “pious Mr. Richard Watson” chaff.

I partook of refreshment, rather heartily, indeed, with the specious villain; and he at times seemed for a moment or two to forget the deep damnation of his position, and soar into cheerfulness; but at the instant the spectre Memory confronted him the hilarious smile was checked—he was again the humbled, repentant, remorseful sinner.

We went together on board the *Morning Star* by six o'clock next morning. Indeed, Richard Watson had made it a special request, asked as a particular favour, that I would not leave him for a minute. He was afraid of himself; that he should waver in resolution; seek to evade the retribution—a fearful, but salutary retribution—due to his crime and flight! That ever a sensible man, and a detective, should have been so humbugged, soft-sawdered by such flimsy balderdash as that, will, I repeat, be a mystery to me as long as I live. Perhaps in the human economy a man's brain may be temporarily softened for a few hours, now and then. I cannot tell how else it could have happened.

The *Morning Star* was a splendid ship, Captain Morgan a jovial sort of fellow, no more resembling the dried-up skin-and-bone, nasal Yankee skippers one meets with in Liverpool, than a ripe peach does a withered applejohn. He was, however, time-touched as to complexion; and no one could be on the deck with him ten minutes without recognising a hardy, skilful sailor of service. There was a good deal of sly humour, too, in the expression of Morgan's face. I noticed it when I first stepped upon deck and was introduced to him by that son of Satan, Richard Watson, though I couldn't understand the sly, merry smile which glittered in his sharp, gray eyes at the moment, I soon did—very soon.

"I am shaking hands," said I, "with an Englishman?"

"Yes," replied Captain Morgan, "I was brought to bed in Newport, Monmouthshire—once, I believe, a Welsh, but long since an English, county. I have not, however, seen England for the last twenty years, and it may be another twenty before—. Now then, look alive there," he added, checking himself, and speaking as he walked forward to the men at the capstan: "look alive, or you'll be an hour bringing the anchor home."

An odd remark, thought I, that: "it might be another twenty years before—" he could not possibly mean before he again saw England! There cannot be much danger for such a ship as this in a summer voyage across the Atlantic? Ah yes; he meant before he again saw Newport. Of course. I then went below to see about my berth and traps. Richard Watson had already disappeared.

I went on deck again in about an hour, and found the ship making splendid way, through a rough sea, at the rate of nine knots, Captain Morgan said. I remained above for a considerable time, and was holding on by the main chain to windward, for the deck sloped and was as slippery as the slate roof of a house, when the captain—who, like the rest of the seamen, kept his feet without holding on to anything, in a marvellous way to me—said, after a moment's look in my face:—"You had better go below, Mr. Clarke. Let me assist you. The ship is a little too lively just now for a landsman."

The captain helped me into my berth, which was a second-story one; that is, built above another, in the skipper's own cabin. It was a very nice affair; as much so at least as a confined, and in summer stifling, hole can be: soft bedding, and damask curtains drawn before the opening.

Heavens! how ill I was! never surely before did vessel play such a dreadful game of pitch and toss. All my rancour revived against Richard Watson, who was quietly reading a newspaper, and

no more affected by the ship's motion than the table at which he sat. Never mind. It was always the end which crowned the work. *He* was on his way to very pleasant pastures, and the thousand pounds were safe as if already in my pocket. Good Lord! how that Hope, which is forever telling flattering tales, is given to lying!

At length the demon of sea-sickness, having done his very worst, was pleased to permit me to fall asleep: a dozy unrest, that is to say, much due no doubt to the brandy-and-water I had sipped, and sometimes swallowed in desperate gulps, in the hope it would relieve the dreadful nausea under which I was suffering. I did not exactly sleep, though my eyes were closed, and my senses steeped in a sort of half-conscious forgetfulness. That state of animal being must have lasted some hours; and when I at last awoke, the good ship was evidently steady enough, pretty upright upon her keel. The nine knot breeze—gale I should have called it—had gone down, and it was night. But what is this noise of roaring merriment in the cabin, close to and below me? I almost fancy myself at a Wapping rendezvous of sailors, as I often had been, upon detective duty, listening to one of their grindstone choruses, and half-stifled the while by thick clouds of tobacco-smoke. Evidently there is a bacchanalian revel in progress. Surely—but no, it's impossible that the voice roaring out—

“When the jolly, jolly grog's afloat,

Fal the ral, the ral, the ral, the ral, the ray:

Begone dull care, shove off the boat,

Fal the ral, the ral, the ral, the ral, the ray.”

—“One for his nob!—

“When the jolly,” &c.

—it is absurd to imagine that voice can be that of the stricken sinner, Richard Watson. It passed the bounds of credibility that such a deeply contrite Christian should be playing cribbage, and enlivening the intervals of the game by shouting vulgar sea-songs! A hot qualm, nevertheless, swept through my still inconstant stomach, as the conviction forced itself upon me that I was really wide awake, and the voice was unmistakably that of Watson. A terrible apprehension tugged at my heart, knocked at my ribs, as the captain's enigmatical, unfinished sentence—“it may be another twenty years before”—recurred to me. A cold sweat broke out in every part of my body. Could it be possible that Clarke, the celebrated detective, had been—

“Fifteen, two—”

Heaven and earth! That voice *was* Watson's! *I would* draw aside the curtain, though I so dreaded to realize the horrible suspicion which had flashed like lurid lightning across my brain, that I more than once withdrew my hand, stretched forth to draw back the concealing curtain.

“We pirates lead a jolly, jolly life,

Fal the ral—”

The rattle of the rings, as I pushed aside the curtain and poked forth my head, caught the ear of that sublimest of scoundrels, who looked up and burst, as he saw me, into a loud guffaw.

“Ah ! my noble Detective,” he shouted, “you’ve woke up at last, have you? Here’s your health, old fellow, and hoping you may live till you die.—Gentlemen,” continued the audacious villain, addressing Captain Morgan and two others, the first and second mate of the *Morning Star*, as I afterwards knew, with whom he was playing at four-handed cribbage,—“Gentlemen, allow me to introduce to your particular notice the celebrated individual, whose head and shoulders, have, as we sailors would say, just hove in sight. Don’t, gentlemen, be misled by appearances. It is true he looks, just now, like a chap who has lost a sovereign and found sixpence; but, gentlemen, as our copybooks tell us very truly, ‘Favour is deceitful and Beauty is vain;’ for as sure as you live, that individual member of society, who doesn’t seem to be quite sure whether he is asleep or awake, is the celebrated Clarke, English detective, sent to New York upon a special mission to secure the person of my noble self, and convey me to England and the Millbank Penitentiary, whereas he himself is now *en route* for the Isle of France in the Indian Ocean. Aint it delicious!” roared the rascal, echoing the applauding shouts of his fellows. “Aint it delicious though!—I say, old fellow,” added the horrid reprobate, “don’t turn all the colours of the rainbow, but leaving your damnable faces, come down out of that and take a hand with us. We have some capital cigars. O, you wont? Another time, eh?—All right. Now, Captain Morgan—it’s your deal!”

Was there ever such a dreadful sell? And I! But words are vain: the situation paints itself.

Watson had heard of my arrival within ten minutes of my stepping upon the New York Quay. To take wing and fly to another State would involve the loss of the cargo of the *North Star*, which he had chartered for the Mauritius, where he intended to settle; he supposedly having relatives there, whom he had not indeed heard of since he was a boy, but to whom he intended introducing himself as a childless widower, who was desirous of leaving his own bones where his mother got hers. He could not have readily here obtained a passage out, except by specially chartering a ship; beside which consideration, there was another. Arriving out as the owner of a cargo worth many thousands of pounds, and upon which a handsome profit would without doubt be realized, his perfect respectability would not be questioned for a moment. No suspicion that he was an adventurer, a fugitive, would be entertained. English newspapers rarely reached the Mauritius, and if they did, no one would imagine that Thomas Norton—the name of his mother’s first husband—was the absconded bankrupt and swindler, Richard Watson. The “honour” of the officers of the *Morning Star*, who alone beside myself knew who he really was, might be depended upon.

The pressing question then was, how to avoid being arrested at my instance, by virtue of the warrant from the Home Office with which Richard Watson could not doubt I was armed; and, after some hesitation, he, confident in his genius for gammon, humbug, determined upon trying on the dodge which so completely succeeded with me. I again say, that I have not since thoroughly regained my own self-respect. The specious scoundrel had, moreover, a keen sense of the ludicrous, and the idea of nabbing the famous detective sent specially out to nab *him*, tickled

that sense amazingly. All this, and much more, he told me on our voyage out to the Isle of France.

Yes, to the Isle of France; to the Indian Ocean. That was a hard, literal fact.

“Upon my word, Clarke,” said the exasperating villain one day, when I, who was never given to show my teeth if I couldn’t bite, had become to all appearance acquiescent,—“Upon my word, Clarke, I think you will live to bless me for pioneering you to the eastern seas. Your frame, my dear fellow, evidently requires recruiting: the detective, vulpine intellect is no doubt as keen as ever, but the sword of the spirit would by its very sharpness have before long cut through and destroyed the scabbard of flesh, but for the strengthening influence upon the latter of a lengthened sea-voyage. Then, you will have an opportunity of visiting the scenes depicted in the immortal pages of Bernardin St. Pierre; where Paul and Virginia, you know, were pleasant in their lives and lovely, and in their deaths not divided, the corpse of the young lady having been, if I remember rightly, washed on shore, after she had refused, which I have always thought very silly of her, to be saved by a black man. The climate, too, is delicious; the—”

“Cease your chaff, Richard Watson; I am in no humour for it. You have won the first game, but the rubber is not played out.”

“I understand. Who, if not stone-blind, would *not*, when flashed upon by those clear, detective eyes, which never yet failed to pierce through the thickest mask of imposture? Now, Clarke, *don’t* fly off in that way. Remember Job, that patient man, who—”

“The devil fly away with Job and you too!”

“Mr. Clarke, the devil could *not* fly away with Job. Excuse me, but really your education in a scriptural sense appears to have been sadly neglected, whilst as to myself—”

“Who are, excuse *me*, the most consummate—. Bosh! What’s the use of talking?”

“Well, of use sometimes, my dear Clarke,—as, for example, at the Astor, when *I* talked with *you*. Bless the man, he’s off again! Now, let us talk *business*. When you made the remark, quite worthy of your proved sagacity—Lord! don’t wince so at trifles!—I say, when you made the remark that the rubber was not played out, and that consequently it was upon the cards that you might win the two next games—by-the-bye, you lost the game yesterday evening by stupidly pairing when our opponents wanted just six holes— you meant that you might win the two next games, the Mauritius being now a British possession, the governor a British general. That being so, it follows in rigorous sequence that the Home Secretary’s warrant to arrest Richard Watson, you yourself being able to prove that Thomas Norton is really Richard Watson, will be enforced by the British governor. The logic is irresistible, supposing the facts to be as stated, which, however, as to one all-essential item, does not happen to be the case.”

“What all-essential item? But I neither know nor care to know what you mean.”

“Yes, my dear Clarke, you *do* care to know what I mean. Candour is one of the highest virtues. Believe me, it is. I possess it in a high degree—fact, as I am about to prove to you; but not being a marketable commodity, I have as a rule kept it concealed in a napkin. Hypocrisy, now,—which the great moralist teaches is the homage which Vice pays to Virtue—and I love to do homage to Virtue,—hypocrisy, I say, I have found to be a much superior article to deal in; and this avowal in itself is, you must admit, a conclusive proof of my real possession of the virtue concealed in a napkin—”

“For Heaven’s sake, Mr. Watson, let’s have no more of this nauseating stuff. You think it very clever, I dare say; I don’t, and it’s cursed aggravating besides.”

“Aggravating, yes; that may be, under the peculiar circumstances. Clever, no. The spontaneous outpouring, my dear Clarke, of long pent-up sincerity, stifled under the conventionalism of a corrupt civilization—”

“Oh, humbug! Talk of *sea*-sickness indeed!”

“Now, now. Let us, as I said, talk business. You, by virtue of the Home Secretary’s warrant, think it quite likely you will be able to put salt upon the tail of even such an old bird as I am, in the Isle of France. Just so; but then, my dear Clarke, I doubt you will be able to produce that warrant.”

“Not produce the warrant! You have stolen it then?”

“No, no; not stolen it. That is a vulgar phrase. The wise ‘convey it call.’ You know Shakspeare, of course. What I mean is, that I do not think it is producible.”

“I will soon see to that,” I replied, in a white heat of rage, bolting off to the cabin as I spoke. Sure enough, every paper, every letter I possessed had been taken from my valise. I had no means, none whatever, of proving that I was an English detective officer; but slightly of use as that would be. What was to be done—what could be done? I was in the toils, that was quite clear; and to free myself, it was imperative to make terms, to knock under, in fact. Needs must when a certain black gentleman drives.

“Mr. Richard Watson,” said I, rejoining him upon deck, “you have won the rubber! I acknowledge myself beaten. That being so, and as I suppose you have no particular grudge against me personally, there can be no objection to speaking the first vessel bound for Europe we may meet, and sending me on board of her?”

A strange expression glinted over the fellow’s dark face. Some new idea had suddenly, as it seemed, surged up to the surface, from the dark depths of the scoundrel’s soul.

Still the fellow was not all bad. If he could reconcile my safety with his own, he would do so gladly. If not, why then—



“Mr. Clarke,” said he, after walking about the deck for perhaps ten minutes,—“Mr. Clarke, let us understand each other. I am in a peculiar position. It would have been well for both of us if you had reached New York one day later than you did. However, we must make the best of the case as it stands. You cannot arrest me when the *Morning Star* reaches her destination. That is quite clear. But you may damage my character there: give out that my name is Watson, not Norton; that I am really the fraudulent stockbroker, &c. Now, that would be very unpleasant.”

“No doubt of it, Mr. Watson. Why not then prevent the possibility of my saying anything that may suggest suspicion of your real character by, as I said, speaking the first homeward-bound ship, and packing me off to Europe?”

“Well, yes; but there are breakers ahead. I am, it is true, now safely on my way to the Isle of France; but there are, I say, breakers ahead even in that direction. I am desirous, after the storms and toils of life, to settle quietly down in my Indian home, sit under my own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make me afraid. The prospect is a charming one, but, like all charming prospects, it may be suddenly and disastrously darkened, blotted out. I must guard against that. I must confess to the commission of a grievous error, of a stupid oversight. In the flurry of triumphant exultation at having outwitted the famous London Detective, it did not cross my mind that it was almost equally important as escaping from New York to keep my destination unknown to you. It would have been best to have sent you back to New York with the pilot when off Sandy Hook. Tush! What a fool I am to prate in that way! You would know where the ship had cleared for; and if you had not been told before, the pilot would have let it out, and the Yankee Customs people would have had no objection to inform you of where the *Morning Star* would finally bring up.

“No,” said Watson; “this blunder having been committed, there really was, there really is, no absolute security to be obtained but by—the observation will sound unpleasantly—but by consigning Mr. Detective Clarke to a watery tomb, a sea sepulchre.—There, now, don’t fly into fits and look as if you were going to fling me to the fishes first. I was merely stating the case from a strictly logical point of view. There is no intention of acting upon that deduction of strict logic. None whatever. I myself have a strong objection—I do not say an insuperable objection—to extreme measures. A foolish feeling it may be, but all men have their weaknesses. Captain Morgan, besides, would, I have no doubt, object decidedly to such a proceeding, however indispensable to self-safety I might consider it. The question thus arises as to the most effectual alternative. I suppose,” added the scoundrel, in whose eyes, spite of the jocular, bantering air and tone he assumed, I thought I discerned the shadow, the fluttering, unconfirmed shadow as I may express it, of a tiger-purpose hesitatingly shaping itself into form in his soul, “I suppose Mr. Clarke will have no objection to pledge his word and honour that, under no circumstances, however pressed by temptation, he will disclose, will let fall a hint, that Richard Watson has replanted his roof-tree in the Mauritius?”

As Watson uttered these last words, Captain Morgan came on deck. One keen look in that blithe face showed me that in no conceivable case would Morgan lend himself to the commission or permission of the crime of murder. That instinctive conviction decided me as to how I ought to act.

“Captain Morgan,” I exclaimed, “a word with you. This man, Richard Watson, threatens, in pretended jest, but the threat is real enough,—will grow to be real, at all events, before we reach the Isle of France—threatens to have me flung to the fishes, in order that he may the more certainly escape paying the penalty of his crimes.”

“A very natural desire,” laughingly replied the captain; “few people like to pay such penalties. As to flinging you to the fishes,” added Morgan, looking sternly at Watson, “that is all flam. He knows that well enough. I would go a long way to serve Richard Watson, for, whatever he may be to others, he has been a fast friend to me, but not the length of murder, nor one step on the road; he knows that quite well.”

Watson protested, in indignant language, that he had merely jested, and I must have known such was the case. He, for all that, insisted that I ought, as the price of being saved from any further annoyance, to pledge my word and honour not to divulge the name of his place of refuge. Morgan thought so too; and feeling there was something dangerous in Watson, against which, circumstanced as I was, it might be impossible to effectually guard, I gave the required pledge. That pledge or promise extended to not mentioning Watson’s name to any person in the Isle of France. As some set-off, Watson, counselled to do so by Morgan, promised to hand me my eight hundred pounds on the day I should re-embark for England. Whether this might have been for other motives than any affecting myself I know not, neither can I say, what disinclined the captain of the *Morning Star* to speak too closely a homeward-bound ship—We passed sufficiently near perhaps a dozen vessels with whom it would have been easy to communicate. The names of the ships and other trifling, unimportant intelligence interchanged, but it was not once asked if a passenger for Europe could be received on board. Such persistence in keeping me a close prisoner as long as possible was, I could have no doubt, due to Mr. Richard Watson, and him only. He was fast loading me with obligations, which I much feared I should never find an opportunity to requite.

The *Morning Star*, with my unfortunate self on board, arrived safely at the Isle of France. Richard Watson realized largely by his speculative cargo, and at once established himself as a commercial magnate of the first rank. He was very friendly, very civil to me, in outward appearance, though there was a lurking devil in the fellow’s green-grey eyes that never slumbered. He feared and hated me with all the ferocious yet shrinking malignity of an utterly unprincipled, sensual, coarse coward. It had been agreed that I should return to America in the *Morning Star*. Several opportunities presented themselves of leaving for Europe in other vessels, but Watson declining to hand over the eight hundred pounds till I left in the *Morning Star*, which was undergoing extensive repairs, I supplanted my mind to remain till she sailed, feeling sure meanwhile that he had some sinister design in so detaining me. I said so more than once, and distinctly warned him that any attempt at foul play, which I should, with Morgan’s help, who was as one with me to that extent, be pretty sure to baffle, would at once absolve me from my promise to keep silence as to his antecedents.

Full five weary months limped tediously away before the *Morning Star* had completed her repairs and embarked her cargo. I had no doubt Watson purposely delayed her departure. The beautiful climate, cheapness of luxuries, fine tropical scenery, correctly enough described by Saint Pierre, did not in the least reconcile me to compelled inaction. I was eating my heart away

with baffled rage. And Richard Watson, who had as easily put off the devil-may-care, rollicking, reprobate character which he had assumed on shipboard as he had previously disencumbered himself of the sleek, sanctimonious disguise which he had worn in England, had been for some time developing into a new state of moral, or rather immoral being. The perils in his path, instead of completely clearing away, loomed into daily more menacing shapes. There were strange whispers afloat concerning him; and, though French Creole society is not particular to a number of shades, he was not received with that respectful cordiality which he had at first experienced. Perhaps one or more of the officers of the *Morning Star* had babbled of matters they had been heavily bribed and had sworn to conceal. Then he did not appear to suspect of treachery; me he certainly did. Destitute of the slightest spark of honour himself, he could not bring himself to believe that such a sentiment was strong enough to resist the impulses of resentment—of pecuniary temptation. The idea had obtained possession of his mind that I had despatched one or more letters through the Post-office to England. Such an expedient, but for my promise, was open to me; and had I done so Mr. Richard Watson might at a very early day find himself in the close custody of a French Police-officer. Such an apprehension was no doubt disquieting, and Mr. Richard Watson, under its influence, had become intensely savage, morose, gloomy. He talked the matter over from time to time with Skipper Morgan, who felt confident, and told him so, that I should keep my word, in spirit as well as literal fact. Besides, there was the sum of eight hundred pounds at stake. Would anyone in my social position fling that up for the gratification of a feeling of revenge? Nonsense! Mr. Watson was scaring himself with shadows!—Mr. Watson was not so sure of that! However, time would show.

The cure for all that natural inquietude would seem to be an easy one. Richard Watson, *alias* Thomas Norton, had but to embark with his ill-gotten wealth for some other part of the world, leaving no trace behind, and he might sleep in spite of thunder—of the thunder of this world at all events—not perhaps of that which rolls, reverberates, in dreams.

But there were difficulties in the way of doing so—obstacles of his own creation. In the first flush of exultation consequent upon his safe arrival in the Isle of France, his warm reception by his mother's family, who could not sufficiently honour their rich English relative, he had purchased a large, indeed a splendid estate, which chanced to be put up for sale, and to re-dispose of it so soon would not only appear to be a strange act of caprice, but involve great pecuniary loss. Then Mr. Richard Watson liked the climate—the Isle of France society. It was, in short, a sensuous Paradise from which he would not willingly be driven.

And some time before the five months elapsed, it suddenly turned out that the fraudulent bankrupt was perfectly safe, so far as personal safety was concerned, in the Mauritius. By some recognised interpretation of a clause in the treaty of cession by France to England, it is held that the British Governor cannot deport, under any pretence whatever, anyone who owns a portion, however small, of the soil. This discovery was made by Richard Watson, as I understood, by a casual conversation with a Creole lawyer. The worst peril which appeared to threaten Watson had vanished—was, in fact, no peril at all. But English creditors might give powers of attorney to their agents, who could proceed against Richard Watson in the Civil Courts for the recovery of their debts. The contingency might, however, be provided against by one of those colourable transactions which are common to all countries. The estate was pretendedly sold—that is, it was legally transferred to a maternal relative of Watson's, who could not of himself have raised one

hundred pounds for the purchase of the fee-simple of his own salvation. The transaction was moreover, as I gathered from Captain Morgan, perfectly safe for Watson himself. The relative, if he ever wished to do so, would not be able to cheat Watson out of the property. It was only the fraudulent bankrupt's English creditors that the simulated sale would be potent to defraud. It was also arranged that any occasional ventures which the newly-imported capitalist might engage in should be carried on in another name. This was easily understood. "But why the mischief," exclaimed I, after hearing it all explained by Captain Morgan—"why the mischief then, Watson's business being squared, doesn't he hand over my eight hundred pounds and let me be off? I have honourably fulfilled my part of the bargain."

"You have, Clarke: I never for one moment doubted that you would. But you see, Watson, who I must admit does not much care to part with money when not law-obliged to do so, does not see the necessity—and we had only about an hour ago hot words upon the subject—the absolute necessity, under the changed aspect of things in general, of shelling out that eight hundred pounds."

"I thought so. Well, that piece of scoundrelism absolves me from my promise, at all events. I shall at once write out the whole history of the Watson-Norton swindle, transmit it to the Governor, and ask for an audience. There is a brig, a French vessel, in the harbour—*L'Eclair*, I think, is her name, which will clear in a few days for one of the French ports. I shall have no difficulty in obtaining a passage in her; and when I once see old England again, won't I—that's all, won't I—"

"You would play old Harry with Watson if you could, I have no doubt of that; and small blame to you, remembering how you have been served. But I don't see how you can do him any real mischief. Upset his already tottering position in society here—tumble him into the mire of contempt! Yes, for a time; but money—money, Mr. Clarke, is a splendid sponge with which to wipe out the records of peccadilloes from the slate of life. The notion of driving a very rich man from society is simple nonsense. I am only a rough seaman, not much used to land-folk's ways; but I know that must be true. So let that hare sit, as we used to say in Monmouthshire. Still, you have got him upon one tack. Hark," cried Morgan, stopping suddenly—"hark! No, it can't be Watson's sneeze in the next room. I myself saw him off, a quarter of an hour since, to Le Bocage, his nephew's dwelling. Well, now, how about this? You have one cable that won't part; which is, that if he don't down with the dust as to the eight hundred pounds, you could, upon getting to England, put Watson's wife and family up to coming out here. Now that, between you and me, would be wormwood, gall, brimstone, hell-fire. That's the point, Clarke, you've got to steer by, and I hope you will weather the fellow—I do really—I don't like his ways in many things. Says you: 'Look here, Richard Watson, you're all safe from the creditors. That's made, I understand, all safe. Blow high, blow low, you'll ride safe and easy at anchor, as regards *them*. But about Mrs. Richard Watson and the kids? Why, they'd be out here, it stands to the reason of things, if I once let on about you in England. But here it is again: You hand over them eight hundred pounds, and I solemnly promise never to say that I have seen you, and Captain Morgan will go bail that I keep my word.'"

"Much obliged to you, Captain Morgan; but I must pursue my own course. There is an *esprit de corps* in the Police Force, quite as strong as that which pervades the ranks of men armed with a

bayonet instead of a baton. I shall not betray my trust for eight hundred, nor thrice eight hundred pounds. The promise I gave, under duress—upon honour—I have fulfilled. I am not now subject, or liable to be subject, to such duress; and, though not at all pretending to superhuman virtue—I have indeed no doubt that my figure in the sublime scale of transcendental morality is a low one—I being released from the pledge I gave, never will renew it. You sail three days hence. Whither?”

“Don’t ask foolish questions. For No Man’s Land, if you must know. You don’t mean to be a passenger?”

“No, I think not; but I do think, Captain, that the sneeze you heard was Mr. Richard Watson’s. He was listening, be sure of it.”

“That may be, certainly. Well, mind your con: there are breakers ahead and around, and I wish you well.”

I had lodged during the greatest portion of those five months at a superior kind of chaumière, or cottage, just without the South Barrier. I suppose all French towns have barriers, and the Mauritius is emphatically French. The occupiers of the cottage were Jean and Fanchette Quesnel. They were decent people enough, and tenants of Richard Watson. The cottage and grounds adjoining formed part of his recently purchased estate. It was a very modest domicile. The second floor—it happened to have two storeys did that cursed chaumière—the second floor, where I slept, was not more than about twelve feet from the ground—twelve feet, too much.

I sat up till the small hours of the morning, writing out the statement or memorial which I the next morning intended forwarding to the Governor. Jean and Fanchette Quesnel were very quiet, exemplary folk; but on that night there seemed to be a strange stir below. There was, or my ears deceived me, the tread of stealthy steps. I could now and then, too, hear voices—subdued voices; and though it was more than half-past two by my watch when I finished writing, there were still voices whispering below—I fancied so at all events. The wind, perhaps! It might be so. The vague apprehension by which I was possessed gave possibly a significance to those sounds not properly belonging thereto. True; but before lying down in my clothes—yes, certainly in my clothes—I would look heedfully to the priming of my pistols.

To the priming! Yes! And the loading of the pistols must be looked to. By heaven and earth! there were no bullets in the barrels. They had been withdrawn! By Richard Watson’s emissaries; there could be no question of that. I had carefully reloaded the pistols; and as nothing better could be done, I would just lie down, and keep my eyes wide open.

I had half dozed off when the creaking of the crazy door awakened me. Four negroes stole in, gazed eagerly in the direction of the pallet upon which I lay; and behind them, the door being at last wide opened, I perceived the face of Richard Watson. The negroes were armed with knives and pistols. There could be no doubt as to what was intended; and, though the blood seemed to retreat from my heart, I endeavoured to nerve myself for the encounter. The window was open: I took note of that fact, thinking the distance to the ground could not be more than about eight feet. It was twelve feet, as I had occasion to know.

On came the creeping, black assassins—each with a pistol in one hand, a knife in the other. Now, Henry Clarke, if you would save yourself, you must be swift and deadly. I *was* swift and deadly. I lay apparently fast asleep. The slight unclosing of my eyelids, which showed me the assassins with sufficient distinctness, did not intimate that I was wide—ay, very wide awake. They close upon me! In half a minute—in much less than half a minute—those hired knives will do their work! Bang! Bang! I have fired close in the faces of two of the negroes! I do not wait to clearly ascertain the precise effect of the fire. I hear screams—the fellows stagger back; and amidst the smoke, bewilderment, and confusion, I leap out of bed—out of the window! My right leg is broken! My left [ankle] cruelly strained! I am crippled—lost! Yes, but for God’s gracious providence. Captain Morgan, for some reason which he never divulged to me—possibly it was a vague surmise—(yet that could hardly be, or he would not have been at the spot in the very nick of time)—Captain Morgan believed that Watson intended to relieve himself of me, for good and all, that night; but he hardly knew how to act decisively, and prowled round the chaumière with three armed seamen, undetermined with respect to the right course to pursue. Break into the cottage, seize Watson and the blacks! That would be a desperate move. No, he would wait and watch.

The report of my pistols brought him and his men to the rescue. What passed I only knew from after-report, and Morgan was shy of speaking upon the subject. The result was that I was borne off to the harbour, berthed on board the *Morning Star*, carefully attended by the ship’s surgeon, and finally arrived in London, *via* New York, in good bodily health, but a cripple. “*Sic transit gloria Clarke.*”

Mrs. Richard Watson was dead; had died some two or three months before I reached England. The sons and daughters have probably joined their father. The creditors made no further stir in the matter. *Cui bono?* And, of course, I lost my eight hundred pounds.

I regularly subscribe to *L’Orient*, a weekly newspaper printed in the French language, in the capital of the Isle of France, and always eagerly peruse its domestic news and *faits divers*. Surely, some of these days I shall light upon a paragraph setting forth in large type, with a mourning border, that the eminent English capitalist, and liberal patron of all good and generous works, Thomas Norton, Esquire, has met with a lamentable, fatal accident—fallen over a precipice and broken both his legs (I should be content with that), or have hanged, drowned, or shot himself! I don’t think I should care to go so far as that. The legs—both legs though—would satisfy me. Well, there’s the story. My first paper was on “A Detective in the Bud!”—I think this should have been headed, “A Detective Done.”

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