

Coiners and Forgers

by Thomas Waters

We left Liverpool for London early on the evening of the same day—my more than usually sourly-sullen stepfather, Thurston, and myself perched upon the roof of the “Eclipse,”—the equally sour and sullen second officer and Fleetwood upon that of the “Telegraph”—both fast coaches, and rival racers as far as Birmingham. As a measure of ordinary precaution, the handcuffs were not removed from the wrists of either of the prisoners. All went well till we neared the small town of Warrington, when the “Telegraph,” which we had passed a few minutes before, put on a spurt, came up with us at a sharp turn of the narrow road, the coaches became in some way interlocked, and over ours went, pitching the outside passengers upon the hard road with stunning violence. I did not, however, though sorely bruised, lose myself; nor did my stepfather, whose first anxious thought was for his prisoner,—not particularly to ascertain if his bones were broken, or if he had jumped this bank and shoal of time from the roof of the “Eclipse,” but to assure himself whether his person was safe—whether dislocated or dead was, considered from a Bow-street detective point of view, a matter of minor importance.

Mr. Thurston was quite safe, though not sound apparently, as he moaned dismally. Assistance presently arrived from the Black Bear Tavern; a stout pull at the brandy-flask enabled us all to get on our legs without much assistance, and having shaken ourselves, to walk on to the Black Bear—limpingly some of us, but no bones were broken. We had been more frightened than hurt. This seemed at least to be the case with all of us till we reached the tavern, when Thurston suddenly manifested alarming symptoms. His injuries must have been internal; for though he writhed, twisted, groaned in a frightful manner, not the slightest external hurt, scarcely an abrasion, could be perceived. Supported to bed, he piteously prayed my stepfather to relieve him of the handcuffs, which request was sternly refused till a medical man should have certified that the sufferer was not shamming Abraham.

“I will go for a doctor myself,” said my father. “The nearest I am likely to meet with is a mile away, I am told. I will, however, endeavor to be here with him in half-an-hour from this at furthest. You,” he added, speaking to me, “will remain in this room with Mr. Thurston.”

The wary officer then left the room; we heard him go downstairs, and out of the house. It was certain he had gone out, for we heard him call loudly outside to some one, asking when the “Eclipse” would be ready for another start.

The afflictive paroxysms under which Thurston was writhing and tossing ceased with miraculous suddenness. He rose half up in his bed, and hearkened with breathless eagerness to my father’s heavy, departing footfall; he then lay back on his pillow for a few minutes, silent and thoughtful. Rousing himself with a start, remembering he had no time to lose, he exclaimed, in a tone not of entreaty but of command:

“Youngster, bring me the brandy-flask. Quick! Place it in my hands. I must have a good pull now, and take the rest with me.”

The peremptory tone of the fellow startled me somewhat, indicating as it did the possession of power to enforce compliance with his wishes, whatever they might be. I, however, replied, with as much calm unconcern as I could assume:—

“If you required brandy, Mr. Thurston, you should have asked the officer who has just left, for some. For myself, I dare not presume to—”

“D—n the officer who has just left,” he fiercely interrupted. “You shall hand me the brandy—the key of the cupboard is in your pocket. And you shall, moreover, help me—passively help me; I require no active assistance—to make my escape. You have done such a service to far guiltier criminals in the eye of the law than I am. Listen young man,” he went on to say, with hot vehemence; “listen, young man. I closely twigged your maneuvers on board the *Washington* with John Watson; saw you scribble something on a small scrap of paper, which you slyly slipped into his hand. I noticed all that followed, and your active, clever agency in achieving success. It did you credit. There is stuff in you to make a score of such officers as your father and his comroge if they could make a joint-stock contribution of their brains. Now, mark me, young man. Do as I ask, and your secret is safe. Fire should not burn it out of me. Refuse—dare to hinder me from getting away—and many days will not have passed before you are caged in Negate, charged with the high crime of aiding and abetting the escape of a felon whom the Government are especially desirous of bringing to justice. You too—who are, I understand a cadet-constable—to have acted in that way! Transportation for the term of your natural life is the very mildest sentence that would be passed upon you for a crime which might be visited with death. Now, then, will you hand me the brandy?”

The fellow’s words struck me all of a heap. Whether or not his exposition of the criminal law of England as affecting the offence of which, acting in a spirit of Quixotism, I had been guilty, was exactly correct, it was quite evident that, the criminating circumstances being provable by Thurston—confound him!—I had got myself into a very serious predicament.

I hardly knew how to decide; but the instinct of self-preservation,—which is, we know, the first law of nature,—prevailed, as it ever does. I gave Thurston the brandy-flask. Having indulged in a long pull thereat, he sprang off the bed, as light, active as ever, nothing of the slightest consequence ailing him, and requested me to adjust his cloak so that the handcuffs and the flask held between his palms might not be observed. I did so, mechanically as it were, like one in a dream. “You had better,” said he, “feign sleep. Most chaps of your age would feel drowsy after being pitched off the top of a coach and recovered with brandy. It will be supposed I took the opportunity of escaping while you slept. Good-bye! I know the country here about very well, and have little doubt of getting clear away if I only pass unchallenged out of the tavern. Good-bye, lad, once more. If it should ever be in my power to pay you back this good turn, depend upon it I will.” He spoke throughout in a quivering, earnest whisper,—boldly as the words read. The situation was certainly an unnerving one. Success would altogether depend upon his being recognized or not by anyone below as the handcuffed prisoner. It must be remembered that I could not have removed the iron-cuffs except with a file, not having the key; and I had no file.

Thurston just managed to turn the door-handle with his fettered hands, without letting fall the flask. Softly—a cat could not tread more softly—he crept out; crept down a back stair. I counted

the moments as they flew upon the dial of my watch. Ten minutes passed: still no noise, no bustle below. The fellow had escaped; at all events, for a time.

I sat, lay, walked upon tenterhooks till my stepfather returned; notwithstanding which, I was snoring heavily when he entered the room, shook me roughly, and asked me what the devil had become of the prisoner? I at length said, staring wildly about, that I didn't know (which was true enough), got heartily cursed for a sleepy, blubber-brained booby, and ordered to assist in the attempt to be immediately made to recapture the vanished cashier.

The search was not very eagerly pressed. All men, my stern stepfather not excepted, are frail; and one especial weakness of his was a strong aversion, not so much to *being* done—though that tried his amiable temper—as being laughed at for having suffered himself to be done. In the John Watson case, moreover, more serious penalties than being laughed at might be incurred. Was it not excusable, then, remembering that the firmest-footed man is apt to stumble upon slippery paths, that he should not be so solicitous as he would otherwise have been to secure the babbling cashier's presence in London? I most decidedly think so. All the money and effects found in Thurston's possession had been secured for the plundered firm. What more, as commonly reasonable men, could they desire? The subject was never alluded to by him; but my own opinion is, that when he left the Black Bear to go in real or pretended search of a doctor, my father was still undetermined to give or not to give the cashier a chance of snatching the key of the fields. Hence his refusal to remove the handcuffs. Should Thurston be seized when attempting to leave the house, the unlocked handcuffs would prove that the officer in whose actual charge the prisoner was had not connived at the escape, whilst locked handcuffs would not hinder the wearer from making smart way to a place of safety. At all events, the fellow was gone, handcuffs and all—very happy riddance for both of us.

When I again saw William Thurston, five years or thereabouts subsequently, I had yet greater reason to rejoice that in consequence of the overturn of the "Eclipse" coach he was for once enabled to give his captors the go-by.

Those five years or thereabouts had been spent by me more as an amateur desultory detective than as one having real, important business on hand with which the responsible heads of the Bow-street Police Department could confidently entrust me.

My twenty-first birthday reached, it behooved me to address myself to the business of life with resolute, sustained zeal and vigor; and this the more necessarily that I was thrown entirely upon my own resources, My stepfather had been mortally wounded a twelvemonth previously, by the notorious burglar Amos Layton, into whose London lair, in Wych-street, he had rashly ventured alone, with a warrant to arrest him for a robbery with violence at Wanstead House, Essex (Wellesley Pole's magnificently-decorated mansion). Had Layton been alone, like my brave relative,—a braver man, cooler in presence of peril, I have never seen,—there would not, I think—though Layton had plenty of bulldog pluck—have been much doubt of the issue. Unfortunately, Layton had two of his miscreant gang within whistle-call. The odds were too great; and after fighting his desperate way out of the house, the murdered officer, when he had staggered as far as the Strand, fell senseless on the pavement. Two days afterwards he died.

Layton was not taken at that time; but he ultimately died, as he used when in drink to boast to his associates he should, “with his shoes on.” That is to say, he was hanged at the Old Bailey in, if I rightly remember, the year 1827, for a burglary at the house of Ms. Peters, an aged, highly respected habitant of Walworth, who expired a short time afterwards, of the shock caused by being awoke in the dead of night by a craped ruffian standing over her with a pistol in his hand, demanding to know where her money was to be found.

I did address myself with sustained vigor to the real business of life, and with such fair success as to gain me the confidence of our chiefs. A stronger proof of this could not be given than their entrusting me, still young as I was, though possessed of remarkable physical strength, and one of the best wrestlers out of Cornwall, with the important but very perilous task. of ferreting out the haunts of a skillfully organized confederacy of coiners, their modes of business, the channels through which they contrived to circulate such vast quantities of spurious coin, and bring, not the poor devils caught passing their wares purchased of agents at a price which left the manufacturers a tremendous profit, but the principals themselves, who were believed to be men of capital, and acting in conjunction with a body of similar swindlers established in Hamburg.

The information which could be furnished for my guidance was of the scantiest kind. Not one of the wretches who had been convicted of passing the worthless coin—coin at all events that was struck from the same dies, and which could be easily distinguished from the coarser work of less skilful scoundrels (the “milling,” most difficult of all coining processes, was skillfully executed and by machinery, not by hand)—could, though quite willing, and eager to do so for the high rewards promised, give the slightest clue that might lead to the discovery of “the plant,” nor could personally identify one of the direct agents of the confederacy, much less one of its chiefs.

The mischief, too, was assuming frightful dimensions. There was no doubt whatever that the same gang, emboldened by success, had started a new and profitable branch of money manufacture, the forging of bank-notes, and were already doing a first-rate business in that line, their operations being chiefly confined to the issue of country notes, at that time forming a large proportion of the circulating medium, and payable at the London agents of the banks. This plan had its peculiar advantages. The great, almost insuperable, difficulty was avoided of producing a passable imitation of a Bank of England note. Not only was the watermark a stumbling-block in the way, but the fine engraving could only be executed by first-rate artists, whilst country bank-notes, for the most part, could be accurately imitated by comparative bunglers. Then in counties, or provincial towns, such notes chiefly circulated amongst persons but little skilled as a class in such matters; and who, though they might look askance at a Bank of England note, rarely thought of doubting the genuineness of one of their *own* bank. It was reported to the office that no less than twelve hundred, possibly more, one-pound-notes of the Leeds Old Bank had found their way into circulation in less than two months.

Great alarm naturally prevailed, and it was determined to spare no effort that might present a chance of reaching the concoctors of so gigantic a system of fraud. The belief was that the seat of manufacture, if such a phrase may be used, was somewhere in Whitechapel, but nothing had been positively ascertained in that respect.

“I have sent for you, Clarke”—(of course, this is a *nom de plume*)— “I have sent for you, Clarke,” said the chief clerk at Bow-street, “in order to advise with and employ you in hunting down the audacious gang of coiners and forgers who have hitherto so provokingly baffled all our efforts. First, however, it may be well to remark, lest you should be too much puffed up with vanity, that you have been selected for this service, principally, I do say solely, because you are not much known as a Bow-street officer. Your face cannot be familiar to the frequenters of police and other courts, whilst our old hands are, I have no manner of doubt, as well known personally to these audacious swindlers as to ourselves. Your hands will not be tied,” continued the clerk; “you can choose your own mode of action, take your own time, but must not let the grass grow under your feet. Remember to be cautious, wary, discreet, as well as bold, for the service required may involve personal danger. Honest, zealous endeavor will be liberally rewarded, even though unsuccessful; but should you succeed, you will be a made man in your vocation. Now go and consult the officers who have already done their best and failed to put salt upon the cunning rascals’ tails. They have orders to withhold nothing from you, and you will report progress, or no progress, to me daily, oftener if need be, by letter.”

Day after day passed fruitlessly away. Three weeks were gone, and I had not even begun to make progress. Of course, I took especial care not to have personal communication with the passers of bad coin who were apprehended for that offence.

Only one utterer of forged notes, John Martell, could be traced, and he either knew nothing, or would not betray his employers. It was hoped that the near prospect of the gallows would loosen his tongue, but this hope, rather than expectation, was frustrated by his acquittal upon a technical plea—a variance in the indictment. I, however, took care to see the fellows and retain as accurate memory-portraits of them as I could.

It was by doing so that I first obtained a chance of getting at the heart of the mystery. I was walking leisurely along Old Compton-street, Soho, when a gentlemanly-looking man, but who the dullest detective would, at a glance, perceive was “made up,” came bustling out of one of the best houses in the street, and was passing, when his eye caught mine, causing him to start, shrink as it were, with surprise, and it seemed alarm. He was himself again in a moment, and quickly proceeded on his way.

“Surely,” mused I, “that face is not unfamiliar to me. Where can I have seen it?”

The place he had come out of was a gold and silver refiner’s shop, on the door of which was a large brass plate, inscribed with the name of Scobell. There was a considerable quantity of plate, battered gold and silver coins, and foreign bank-notes in the window, over which was painted the words, “Scobell & Co., late Parke, established in 1803.” Evidently a highly respectable concern. The “made up” gentleman I had seen leave the shop had, probably, been there to dispose of some piece of plate. The question returned who was he, where had I seen him? I went into a tavern “to smoke upon it”—an expedient I had before adopted, in cases of personal puzzlement, with success. It was so on this occasion. “William Thurston, as I’m alive!” exclaimed I aloud, before my first pipe was half consumed. “William Thurston! I thought he was in the States. Certainly, a foolhardy man not to be there, or somewhere else, beyond the reach of British justice. I shall not, however, make or meddle with him; such fellows, who will so tempt their fate, are safe to meet with it sooner or later, and generally when least expected. William Thurston will fall, or be

pushed over the precipice, upon the brink of which he chooses to walk, without any agency of mine.”

Though I so reasoned and resolved, I found myself oftener walking along Old Compton-street, Soho, than I had been in the habit of doing. The refiner’s shop had some occult attraction for me. I never passed it without peering in through the window, and curiously watching the old wizened, grey-haired man, perched upon a stool inside a counter, and doing nothing, that I ever saw, except pore over an old newspaper through silver-rimmed spectacles. There did not appear to be much business attached to the concern established in 1803. A quiet business, at all events; chiefly transacted, perhaps, by means of parcels and letters. Very likely.

One day, about noon, nine or ten days after I had seen William Thurston leave the shop, I, peering in as usual, was really startled, though certainly there was no tangible reason why I should be, to see that worthy in close conference with the white-haired man—Mr. Scobell himself, perhaps. So absorbed were they in the subject under discussion, that though in hastily, awkwardly withdrawing sidelong-wise out of their sight the handle of my umbrella struck sharply against the protective wire-netting fastened to the lower part of the window, neither looked round nor seemed to hear the grating ring of the blow.

As before remarked, I felt no wish to act spy upon William Thurston’s movements, and yet so strongly was my curiosity excited by merely seeing him in conversation with a respectable tradesman or tradesman’s assistant, that, without reasoning about it for a moment, I at once made myself ready for unobservedly dogging his steps when he should leave the shop. It was easy to prevent him from recognizing who was following, should he turn round and cast his eyes in my direction.

I had on a long Spanish cloak, much worn at that time; by turning up the fur-collar of which the lower part of the face might be completely hidden, especially if one had a “comforter” round one’s neck, as, it being cold and rainy, happened to fit the case with me. If, in addition, the hat were well pulled down over the eyes, and the open umbrella dexterously managed, recognition, except by the closest scrutiny, was impossible.

I had to wait a considerable time for the appearance of friend Thurston. His business with the gold and silver refiner was no doubt serious, important. Might it possibly have reference to the balance forthcoming on that plate hurriedly thrown a few nights since into the crucible! Such transactions had taken place with firms quite as respectable and long-established as Scobell and Co., late Parke.

At length Mr. Thurston emerged into the street—bright, rubicund, jubilant, spite of the wretched weather—and walked jauntily away, I following. He walked directly on, took abort cuts through passages, till he reached the Crown Tavern, in the Curtain-road, Shoreditch, which he entered, with me still close at his heels, made some inquiry I did not distinctly hear, and satisfied with the reply—“Yes, some time; about half-an-hour,”—ordered two hot brandies, and walked into the coffee-room. Determined to follow up the game which I surmised to be a-foot, whatever that game might prove to be, I, though with hesitation, went, into the coffee-room.

Good heavens! The man whom Thurston was shaking hands and laughing with was John Martell, that fellow charged with uttering some of the forged notes, and who had escaped conviction through a legal flaw in the indictment. Here was a discovery, or at least, to speak soberly, a clue which might lead to important discoveries.

Quickly ensconcing myself in the next high partition-box to that in which they were seated, and consequently completely hidden from view, I listened eagerly to their at first distinctly audible conversation, relating principally to the weather and kindred topics. By-and-by, more interesting subjects engaged their thoughts and tongues, as was evident by their subdued, whispering tones, rendering it impossible for me to hear a word they were saying.

They drank freely, very freely; but the liquor had no effect in the way of unguarding their tongues. Long practice in that discipline, wherever it was possible they might be overheard, had perfected a strong habit, which indulgence could not loosen. I have observed the same thing in many persons.

It was quite dark when they rose to go away.

“You will not see Jane tonight, I suppose?” said Thurston, as they were leaving the room.

“No; not till tomorrow night. I must call on the parson, you know.”

“Ah! yes, to be sure. Good night.”

I had been in doubt which it would be wisest to mark down, Thurston or Martell. Those few words decided me. Jane was probably a daughter of Thurston, and a strict watch kept over his place would no doubt put me in the way of tracking Martell to *his* haunts. I would continue to attend upon Thurston.

John Martell was a good-looking, youngish man; he would have been handsome but for the searing hand of early and excessive intemperance.

Thurston lodged at No. 19, Lower-road, Islington, where he passed under the name of Warren. This I learned from a beer-boy, who had just delivered a pot of ale at No. 19.

“Nobody of the name of Chilton lives at No. 19, sir. Only one gentleman lodges there; his name is Warren; and there is a Mrs. Warren and two grown-up gals, whose names is Rogers, not Warren. You might have seen Mr. Warren go in a few minutes ago,” added the boy, with grateful acceptance of the sixpenny-piece I tendered; “or perhaps the gentleman you want is one of them—and there are lots—that come to see Mr. Warren. Shall I go and ask, sir?”

I thanked the lad, declined his offer, and went my way.

So then William Thurston was determined to get hanged! One touch-and-go escape from the iron clutch of criminal justice had been no warning to him! That is, I am sorry to say, a too common case. Well, if Wilful would to water, Wilful would drench; nothing surer than that. And now to

follow up the promising start I had made. That was the pressing question. Handle the unhatched egg gently, warm it into life with watchful care. Certainly; but how—how to set about the process? Lie low, completely out of sight, and sing small, or, better still, not sing at all for a time. To be sure, only a fool would do otherwise. Yet that would be merely waiting for an opportunity which might never come. If I were worth my salt as a detective I ought to *create* an opportunity of snatching success. But the first step toward that desirable end; in what direction to take that? Clearly by watching John Martell on the morrow evening, when he left No. 19. Something might come of that.

At my post in barely sufficient time. Martell, when parting with Thurston at the Crown Inn, Curtain-road, had used the words, “Tomorrow night;” and though, not to throw away a chance, I was on the watch by half-past six, I had not been so three minutes when a hackney-coach drove up to the door of No. 19, out of which presently came Mr. John Martell, dressed in holiday costume, conducting a gaily-attired and as far as I could judge from a distance and by the uncertain light, a handsome young woman. “Drury Lane Theatre—Box Entrance,” said Mr. Martell, stepping into the hack, which the next minute drove off.

Decidedly a handsome woman was Miss Jane Rogers, one of Thurston’s stepdaughters: a very handsome young woman, especially by gaslight and attired as ladies in the dress-circle of a theatre are required or expected to be. And either I was much mistaken, or there was a latent fire in those gleaming black eyes of hers, which, if stirred by anger, jealous anger—and I should think a dissipated, vulgar *roué* as his appearance betokened Martell to be, was a likely fellow to give occasion to jealous anger—would pour forth consuming lava. There was a remote chance in that, and it was imperative to neglect nothing that promised the semblance of a chance.

After setting down Miss Jane at No. 19, Lower-road, Islington, Mr. John Martell drove to a house of ill-fame. I was not, consequently, able to track him to his own home that night. The next evening the stars were more propitious. He visited Miss Jane Rogers, remained a short time only, and walked home to his lodgings in John-street, Minories—a respectable place let out in lodgings by a tailor and his wife, who kept a shop, and dwelt on the basement-floor.

Mr. John Martell’s alias in John-street, Minories, was William Steevens. People I inquired of, — he was seeking a situation at the West End, and I had been deputed to make strict inquiries respecting his character, &c.—said he was known to be a gay spark, who spent money freely, and was perhaps a little too fond of the company of ladies. However, it was a long lane that had no turning, and it was thought he would tie-up soon with the daughter of the landlord of the Jolly Butchers, Whitechapel-road. She was a smart wench, might make a good wife, though a bit of a shrew, and would have lots of tin, which made them wonder why he was looking out for a situation. Steevens passed some hours there almost every evening, but kept himself a good deal to himself and the young woman, not liking, it seemed, to mix with the general company.

I could easily understand that. His first, but I was strongly of opinion not his last, appearance in the Old Bailey dock had naturally increased his repugnance to mix with general society. But courting the pretty daughter of the landlord of the Jolly Butchers, with a view to speedy marriage! That now looked like a winning-horse, if well jockeyed. What would fire-eyed Miss Jane have to say to that? and sure as death she knew all about the gang of coiners and forgers—could

blow them to Lucifer with a breath. But first to positively ascertain if the report were true that Steevens, alias Martell, was *boná fide* engaged to Mary Hawkins, daughter of Joel Hawkins, whom I knew by reputation to be quite as jolly and much redder than the Jolly Butchers swinging and creaking outside his well-frequented hostelry.

Quite true! I peeped beneath a lifted cornet of the green dwarf-curtain drawn across a small window in the partition which divided the inner from the outer bar, and I saw quite enough in that brief glance to prove to me that both meant getting married as quickly as possible; the girl influenced, it may fairly be supposed, by misplaced affection, the man by desire of both maid and money. The license, I ascertained, had been applied for. That grave fact placed beyond a doubt, I wrote and posted to Miss Jane Rogers, 19, Lower-road, Islington, the following epistle:—

“A devoted friend and admirer of Miss Jane Rogers—who has for some time past watched the goings on of Mr. Martell with eyes, he candidly admits, sharpened by jealous envy—begs to inform the beloved of his soul, that the villain whom she has in the unsuspecting innocence of her own heart believed to be an honorable man, is about to be married to the daughter of Joel Hawkins, the landlord of the Jolly Butchers tavern, Highstreet, Whitechapel. The license has been bespoken: this fact can be verified at Whitechapel Church. The young woman’s name is Mary Hawkins. He marries her in the name of Steevens, which is that he goes by in the locality. He is generally at the Jolly Butchers from seven till nine in the evening, philandering with the pretty Mary. May the writer of this hope, though he has never till now told his love in words, not having been blest with the opportunity of doing so—permission to hope, this is all he asks—that when time shall have caused Miss Jane Rogers to forget, not only the shameful outrage itself, but the scoundrel who has subjected her to it, that he will be allowed to make himself known to the beloved of his heart, and cast himself and all which he possesses at her feet.

“A line—one blessed line only—addressed A.W., Saint Martin’s-le-Grand Post-office, would be esteemed a favor to be humbly grateful for throughout life. This evening Martell, otherwise Steevens, will certainly be at the Jolly Butchers, in company with, it is said, very pretty Mary Hawkins, in the inner bar.”

Having posted this precious stuff, which I felt sure would do its work, with my own hands, I was satisfied that mischief was afoot, and could scarcely fail of taking the turn which would lead to the success of the difficult enterprise with which I had been entrusted.

I was early that evening in the smoking-room adjoining the bar of the Jolly Butchers, feeling something like one who had fired a train, and impatiently awaits, himself in safety, the thunder-blast.

Martell also came early. He and Mary had been billing and cooing for perhaps half-an-hour, when suddenly the door of the common room was flung wide, and in the opening stood the fine figure of Jane Rogers, drawn up to its full height, and her dilated eyes shooting flaming daggers as she glared at us innocents, and fiercely demanded if Mr. Steevens—if Mr. Martell was in the house.

“In the inner bar, miss,” said one of the company, pointing with his pipe. “They are in there, miss.”

“Miss” was in there too in a jiffy; and the hurricane of abuse, rage, astonishment, terror, which burst forth was really deafening. Mary was as nothing in the hands of the terrible Jane, who literally seized her by the hair of the head, and was dragging her forth as if to summary execution before the astounded father or Martell could effectually interfere. I did not wait to witness the end of the fray. It was not my game to speak with Miss Jane just then. The humble, adoring lover ought not to see his charmer when passion transformed, if it assuredly did not dim, the brightness of her beauty.

“A. W. would hear from J. R. on the morrow.” This was the curt acknowledgment of my eloquent epistle.

A. W. did hear from the beauteous virago on the morrow. The note, a brief one, contained an assignation, which I did not fail to keep. And upon my word, so well did I play my part—I have often thought my true destiny was the stage—that the infuriated young woman really imagined that after handing over, with her help, Martell and Co. to the tender mercies of the hangman, I should only be too happy if graciously permitted by her to encircle my own neck with another kind, but often as fatal a noose as that peculiar to the finisher of the law. She was, as I have said, eaten up with passion; the passion of jealousy, of revenge—vengeance insatiable. She went direct to the point. Martell, counting no doubt that her strong love would shield him from any fatal consequence, flatly refused to give up Mary Hawkins and her money. “Since he will wed the minx,” exclaimed the amiable Jane, “Jack Ketch shall give the groom away, if he cannot the bride.” She still however hesitated to utter the irrevocable words which would seal the doom of the coiners and forgers; though she had gone much too far to recede with safety, even to herself. I felt quite confident of the issue.

At last an appointment was arranged when all would be settled, the decisive words spoken; the conditions being that her vengeance and my (pretended) love should be gratified as soon as the hanging and marrying ministers could perform their functions.

Shortly before the appointed hour, I received a note changing the venue. Instead of 19, Lower-road, Islington, I was to meet her at a house in Whitechapel.

So convinced was I of the woman’s sincerity of rage, her rabid thirst of vengeance, that a thought of treachery did not for a moment cross my mind. I have often since wondered at such blind confidence on my part.

The house was a roomy, desolate one—contiguous to other decaying, untenanted, equally desolate houses. The man who admitted, ushered me high upstairs into a dreary apartment, said the “lady” would be there almost immediately, and left me in the black darkness, taking with him the candle with which he had lighted me and himself up the rotting stairs. I heard him turn the key of the door, and, for the first time, a thrill of fear shot through me. Had Jane Rogers and John Martell been reconciled? If so, the safety of the gang would imperatively require that I should be quietly put out of the way. Whilst greatly agitated by such reflections, the key again turned in the

door, and a man with a lantern in his hand entered the apartment. He was William Thurston! Holding the lantern aloft, close to my face, he exclaimed: "It is as I feared, Henry Clarke. You have madly suffered yourself to be lured to destruction—though she intended honestly at first—by Jane, one of the daughters of my termagant, wicked wife, to whom, from the day our marriage, I have been a bond-slave. Jane and Martell were married this morning. A sufficient number of the gang will be here in about an hour to quietly settle scores with you. There is but one resource. I promised not to fail you in the hour of need, and I will not. Bad as I may be, I am not all bad. Look, here is a coil of rope. We must descend from the narrow window. Have you a sufficient force of officers within call?"

"Not within call. In half-an-hour a quite sufficient force will be assembled."

"That must do. The next point is, whether there is a reasonable assurance that, should I enable the authorities to break up the confederacy of ruffians with whom I have in a manner been compelled to associate, I shall be allowed to leave England in freedom?"

I said that there could be no doubt that he would. He believed, trusted in me; and we were soon safe on *terra firma*, though the descent by the slippery rope, easy enough I dare say to sailors, was both painful and perilous.

An hour afterwards, the plant at Scobell and Co.'s, Old Compton-street, Soho, and the more extensive one in Whitechapel, were seized. A few only of the gang escaped. Martell, Simonds, and Curtis were hanged at the Old Bailey; the others variously sentenced to transportation and imprisonment. William Thurston embarked with all speed for America. I never heard what became of Jane Rogers, though I made frequent inquiries.

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