

Introduction
The Difference Between English And French Detectives
by Thomas Waters

THESE experiences will point their own moral; but in order that Englishmen, accustomed to the law-governed action of the police of this country, may not suspect me of indulging in fanciful exaggerations to serve a political or personal purpose, a few preliminary remarks seem to be required explanatory of the essentially distinct functions exercised by a French *mouchard*, (secret police agent,) and an English detective officer.

It is true that they are alike agents of the public force, and that their common mission is to frustrate or detect offences against the person and against property. But there the resemblance ends. The English officer is not required to watch the political tendencies of the dwellers in his district—to report which newspaper, citizen Gros-Ventre subscribes to, or whether the print-portrait purchased by Jacques Bonhomme for four sous was one of Napoleon, Henri, or Barbés. The city commissioner would stare if my lord mayor directed him to furnish an exact list of the names and pursuits of the individuals usually invited to Professor —’s reunions, with a sketch of the under-current of conversation which prevailed thereat; and Sir Richard Mayne would conclude that Lord Palmerston had been suddenly smitten with insanity, if the noble premier were to request him to ascertain how the account of a distinguished member of the parliamentary opposition stood at his bankers. And these are amongst the every-day duties of the French Detective Police! It was so under the rule of the elder Bourbons, of the constitutional monarchy, the republic, and the same system, only far more vigorously applied, prevails under the Napoleonic *regime*. The pecuniary embarrassments of the illustrious poet of Macon, were known in all their details to the president’s minister of the interior, long before M. de Lamartine published them to the world, and when, four or five weeks before the coup *d’etat*, we were ordered to strictly watch M. Thiers, the generals Cavaignac, Lamoriciere, Bedeau, Changarnier, and some fifty or sixty “men of action,” so that at any moment they might be pounced upon, not one of us felt the slightest surprise. It was so entirely within the routine of our vocation.

Yes, multifarious, all-embracing are the duties of the French Secret Police, involving strict surveillance of the operations of the millionaire as of the mendicant, of ladies of the *beau monde* and of the *demi-monde*. Is a proof wanted? I give a patent one. Soon after the famous 2nd of December, it was determined to reduce the 5 per cent. Rentes to 4 1/2 per cent., a measure which it had been found impossible to carry into effect whilst France had a Chamber of Deputies. The decree appeared in the *Moniteur*, accompanied by a notification that holders of 5 per cent. scrip, who should decline to accept 4 1/2 per cent. scrip in exchange should have, during six days, the right of demanding the liquidation of their rentes at par, of the Bank of France. Well, on the first day there was a great pressure on the Bank for the liquidation of the 5 per cent. rentes at par. Authority was alarmed for the result. Quick!—the Prefect of Police! A number of police functionaries presented themselves at the Bank, who keenly, ostentatiously scrutinised each audacious applicant for payment—carefully noted down his name, occupation, and address, and the sum obtained! Ah! it was marvellous how quickly that simple expedient stopped the run for the “*métalliques*.” To the terrified imagination of the fundholder, the choice seemed to be between Cash with Cayenne, and 4 1/2 scrip with safety. The decision could not be doubtful; the

operation was thoroughly successful, affording (see *Moniteur*) another touching proof of the perfect confidence reposed by France in her saviour.

This was, no doubt, an affair of the “Haute Police,” but the system ramifies to the bottom of the social scale. Why is it that enrolment in the ranks of the gendarmerie is so eagerly sought after, especially in the rural communes? The pay is wretched, the fatigue and peril confronted by those brave, devoted men, immense. True, but as a great amends, they exercise vast personal and practically irresponsible authority and influence. The cultivator, and the village artisan have always a welcome for the gendarme. The best wine, or cider, as the case may be, the whitest bread, the richest cheese, is always placed before him. Quite natural that it should be so! Is he not officially present at all their festivals—at saint-day, wedding-day *fetes*, at the Guinguettes, to see that the right tunes are played, the right songs sung, the right toasts given? And cannot he, in those monthly reports of his, designate this one as favourably, the other as unfavourably disposed towards the Government! Sacred Blue! I should think so! The crowning distinction between the English and French detective remains to be noticed. No French police, or other public officer, can be prosecuted for any offence or crime committed in the real or pretended discharge of his functions, except by the especial permission of the supreme authority in Paris. Need there more be said to prove that the French people are practically ruled, as, bread is supplied at their tables d’hôte—à discrétion.

One word more, and I proceed to transcribe, without further preface, my first amateur experience as a detective. I am not, never have been, a politician, in the usual meaning of the term, and though I left France in a hurry about eight years ago, and would not wish to return thither at present, for any sum expressible by less than half-a-dozen figures at the least, I am not a political proscriber, nor a fugitive from civil or criminal justice, though I quite agree in sentiment with a celebrated advocate of Paris, that if anyone accused me of stealing L’Arc de l’Etoile or the Palais Royal, the first thing I should do would be to run away—if I could. I have served, it will be seen, Louis Philippe, General Cavaignac, and Louis Napoleon, and the real motive of my flight from France was—But I may not lengthen the first chapter of my book by anticipating the catastrophe of its last.

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