

How I Became A Detective

ON the romantic Fox River—called the Pish-ta-ka in the original Potawatamie languages— and about thirty-eight miles northwest of the city of Chicago, is located the beautiful village of Dundee. It has probably at this writing a population of three thousand inhabitants, and is one of the brightest and most prosperous towns of Illinois.

The town was originally settled by a few sturdy people, the hardy Scotch, as its name would indicate, as also that of the splendid little city of Elgin, but five miles distant and who occupied to some extent the outlying farms; so that the place and community, while never accomplishing anything remarkable in a business way, has had a steady, quiet growth, has lived its life uninterruptedly and peacefully, and possesses the pleasantest evidences of steady prosperity and constant, quiet happiness.

If this would be easily observed by the visitor, its beautiful location would attract greater still attention.

Before you, looking up-stream, you would see at your feet the rapid river which has just leaped the great dam from which the mills and manufactories are fed, and, above this, stretching and winding away into the distance like a ribbon of burnished silver, it would still be seen, gliding along peacefully with a fair, smooth bosom, wimpling fretfully over stony shallows, or playing at hide-and-seek among the verdure-covered islands, until the last thread-like trail of it is lost in the gorges beyond. To the right, just beyond this little basin which holds its part of the village, rise huge hills from which here and there issue forth beautiful springs, while now and then a fine roadway, hewn out between, leads to the Indian Mounds and the splendid farms beyond. To the left, over the opposite portion of the village, the eye ranges over a succession of elevations dotted with handsome residences and embowered by graders, with the hills and the uplands beyond, as well as the highway, or “river road,” threading along in and out of sight among the tree-covered bluffs; while, facing about, you will see the river moving peacefully along, until lost in the valleys and their forests below.

The town rests there on the banks of this beautiful stream, and between the guardian hills upon either side, like twin nests where there is always song and gladness.

In the time of which I write, however, all this was different; that is, the town was different. The river ran down like a silvery ribbon from among the islands just the same; the splendid hills were all there crowned with fine forests as they are now; but the town itself did not contain probably over three hundred inhabitants all told, the business portion only consisting of a few country stores, a post office, a blacksmith-shop or two, a mill, and two small taverns able to accommodate a few travelers at a time, but chiefly depending for their support upon the custom of the farmers who straggled into the village on rainy days, “election time,” or any other of the hundred and one occasions which mark out events in the lives of back-county people.

There was then one rough bridge across the river, built of oaken beams and rude planks in a cheap, common fashion; and at either end of this were clustered, each side of the street, all the stores and shops of the place, save one.

That shop was my own; for there I both lived and labored, the “One and Original Cooper of Dundee.”

This shop was the farthest of any from the business center of the village, and stood just back of, and facing, the main highway upon the crest of a fine hill, about three hundred yards distant from the bridge. It was my home and my shop.

I had straggled out here a few years before, and by industry and saving had gradually worked into a comfortable business at my cooper’s trade, and now employed eight men. I felt proud of my success because I owed no man, had a cheery little home, and, for the early days when it was pretty hard to get along at all, I was making a comfortable living.

My cooper-shop and house were one building—a long one-story frame building with a pleasant garden about, some fine old trees near, and always stacks of staves and hoop-poles quite handy. At one end we lived, in a frugal, but always cheery way, and at the other was the shop, where, as nearly all my hands were German, could be heard the livelong day the whistled waltz, or the lightly-sung ballad, now in solo, now in chorus, but always in true time with the hammering of the adz and the echoing thuds of the "driver" upon the hoops as they were driven to thier places.

This was my quiet, but altogether happy, mode of life in the beautiful village of Dundee, in the summer of 1847, at which time my story really begins; but, to give the reader a better understanding of it, I will have to further explain the existing condition of things at that time.

There was but little money in the West, which was then sparsely settled. There being really no markets, and the communication with eastern cities very limited, the producer could get but little for his crops or wares. I have known farmers in these times “hauling,” as it was called, wheat into Chicago for a distance of nearly one hundred miles, from two to five streams having to be forded, and the wheat having to be carried across, every bag of it, upon a farmer’s back, and he not then able to get [but] three shillings per bushel for his grain, being compelled to take half payment for it in “truck,” as store goods were then called.

There was plenty of dickering, but no money. Necessity compelled an interchange of products. My barrels would be sold to the farmers or merchants for produce, and this I would be compelled to send in to Chicago, to in turn secure as best I could a few dollars perhaps, and anything and everything I could use, or again trade away.

Not only did this great drawback on business exist, but what money we had was of a very inferior character. If one sold a load of produce and was fortunate enough to secure the entire pay for it in money, before he got home the bank might have failed and the paper he held have

become utterly worthless. All of these things in time brought about a most imperative need for good money and plenty of it, which had been met some years before, which had been met some years before where my story begins, by several capitalists of Aberdeen, Scotland, placing in the hands of George Smith, Esq., also an Aberdonian, sufficient funds to found a bank in the Great West.

Milwaukee, then a city of equal importance with Chicago, was chosen as the point, and the Wisconsin Legislature, in 1839, granted a charter to the institution, which was known as The Wisconsin Marine and Fire Insurance Company, which, in its charter, also secured banking privileges.

But a few years had elapsed before the bills of this institution gained a very wide circulation throughout the Northwest. Branch agencies were established at Chicago and various points in the West, as also an agency for the redemption of the bills at Buffalo; and at the time of which I write, Chicago, having taken rapid strides to the front, had in reality become the central office, although the Wisconsin organization and Milwaukee headquarters were still retained.

Many reasons obtained to cause these bills—which were of the denominations of one, two, three, five, and ten—to be eagerly sought for. The company were known to have large and always available capital at command; its bills were always redeemable in specie; and with the personal character of George Smith, who stood at the head of the concern, there was created an almost unequalled public confidence in it and its management. In fact, the bills soon became known far and wide as “George Smith’s money,” and “as good as the wheat,” the farmers would say.

Smith himself was a Scotchman of very decided and even erratic character; and the old settlers of Chicago and the West have many an interesting incident to relate of his financial career. One, serving for many, to give an idea of the peculiarities of the man, and showing how he gained a great reputation in those times and that section, is as follows:

The almost immediate positivity of “George Smith’s money” caused considerable envious feeling; and the officers of several other western banking institutions sought as far as possible by various means to prevent the encroachment upon their business.

At one time a small bank near the central part of Illinois, in order to assist in the depreciation of this particular money, began the policy of refusing to receive the Wisconsin Marine and Fire Insurance Company’s bills at par, which for a time caused in certain sections considerable uneasiness among the holders of those bills.

The quiet Scotchman in Chicago said never a word to this for some time, but at once began gathering together every bill of this bank he could secure. This was continued for several weeks, when he suddenly set out alone and unattended for Central Illinois, being roughly dressed and very unpretentious in appearance.

Reaching the place and staggering into the bank, he awkwardly presented one hundred dollars in the Fire and Marine bills, requesting exchange on Buffalo for a like sum.

The cashier eyed him a moment and then remarked sneeringly:

“We don’t take that stuff at par.”

“Ah! ye dinna tak it, then?”

“No,” replied the cashier; “‘George Smith’s money’ is depreciating rapidly.”

“Then it’s gaun down fast, is it?” responded Smith, reflectively.

“Oh, yes; won’t be worth fifty cents on a dollar in six months!”

“It’ll be worth nae mair than fifty cents? An’ may yours be worth a huner’ cents on a dollar, *noc?*”

“Certainty, sir, always. If you should happen to have ten thousand dollars’ worth about you at the present time,” replied the cashier, as he gave the stranger another supercilious look, “you could get the gold for it in less than ten seconds.”

“Then,” said the travel-stained banker, with a very ugly look in his face, as he crashed down a great package upon the counter containing twenty-five thousand dollars in the bills of the opposition bank, “Mister George Smith presents his best respects tae ye, and would be obleeged tae ye if ye wad gie him the specie for *this!*”

This shrewd stroke of business policy had its legitimate effect. The bank in question could not instantly redeem so large a sum, and opposition of an unfair character in that and other directions, through the notoriety given this practical humiliation, was effectually ended.

In countless other ways this early Western finances established credit and compelled respect, until, as I have said, “George Smith’s money” was as good as the gold throughout the entire western country, and this fact, in time, caused it to be taken in hand by eastern counterfeiters.

This brings me again to the main part of my story.

Just afternoon of a hot July day in the year mentioned, a gentleman named H.E. Hunt, then keeping a small general store in, and now a wealthy merchant at Dundee, sent word to my shop that he wished to see me immediately at his place.

I was busy at work, bareheaded, barefooted, and having no other clothing on my body than a pair of blue denim overalls and a coarse hickory shirt, my then almost invariable costume; but I

started down the street at once, and had hardly reached Hunt's store before the proprietor and myself were joined by a Mr. I.C. Bosworth, then another storekeeper of a village and now a retired capitalist of Elgin, Illinois, the place previously referred to.

"Come in here, Allan," said Mr. Hunt in a rather mysterious manner, leading the way to the rear of the store, while Bosworth and myself followed; "we want you to do a little job in the detective line."

"Detective line!" I replied, laughing; "why, my line is the cooper business. What do I know about that sort of thing?"

"Never mind now," said Mr. Bosworth, seriously, "we *know* you can do what we want done. You helped break up the 'coney men' and the horse-thieves on 'Bogus Island,' and we are sure you can do work of this sort if you only will do it."

Now the reference to breaking up the gang of "coney" men and horse-thieves on "Bogus Island," calls for an explanation.

I was actually too poor to purchase outright a wheel-barrow-load of hoop-poles, or staves, and was consequently compelled to cut my own hoop-poles and split my own staves. In the pursuit of this work I had found a little island in the Fox River, a few miles above Dundee, and but a few rods above a little post-town of Algonquin, where poles were plentiful and of the best quality, and one day while busy there I had stumbled upon some smoldering embers and other traces indicating that the little island had been made quite common use of [.] There was no picnicking in those days—people had more serious matters to attend to—and it required no great keenness to conclude that no honest men were in the habit of occupying the place. As the country was then infested with coin-counterfeiters and desperate horse-thieves, from the information I gave, the sheriff of that county (Kane) was able to trace the outlaws to this island, where subsequently I led the officers who captured the entire gang, consisting of men and women, securing their implements and a large amount of bogus coin; while, in honor of the event, the island ever since has been known as "Bogus Island."

Upon this faint record Messrs. Hunt and Bosworth based my claim to detective skill, and insisted on my winning new laurels, or at least attempting to do so.

"But what is it you wish done?" I asked, very much preferring to return to the shop, where my men and their work needed my attention.

Mr. Hunt then explained that they were certain that there was a counterfeiter in the village. They both felt sure he was one, although they had no other evidence save that the party in question had been making inquiries as to the whereabouts of "Old man Crane."

Old man Crane was a person who from general reputation I knew well. He lived at Libertyville, in the adjoining county of Lake, not more than thirty-five miles distant, bore a hard character generally, and it was suspected that he was engaged in distributing for eastern counterfeiters their worthless money. Nearly every blackleg that came into the community invariably inquired for "Old man Crane," and this fact alone caused the villagers to give him a wide berth. Besides this fact, but recently counterfeits on the ten-dollar bill of the Wisconsin Marine and Fire Insurance Company's bank had made their appearance, and were so well executed as to cause serious trouble to farmers and country dealers. Pretty positive proof had come to light that Crane had had a hand in the business; and the fact that a respectable appearing man, a stranger well mounted and altogether mysterious, and also well supplied with money, had suddenly shown himself in the village, to begin quietly but searchingly making inquiries for "Old man Crane," seemed to the minds of my friends to be the best of evidence that the stranger was none other than the veritable counterfeiter who was supplying such old reprobates as Crane with the spurious ten-dollar bills on George Smith's bank.

But this was curious business for me, I thought, as protested against leaving my work for a will-'o-the-wisp piece of business, which, even should it happen to prove successful, would pay me nothing, I said: "Now, see here, what do *I* know about counterfeiting?"

"Oh, we *know* you know enough about it!" they both urged anxiously.

"Why," said I, laughing at the absurdity of the idea of turning detective, "I never saw a ten-dollar bill in my life!"

And neither had I. There I stood, a young, strong, agile, hard-working cooper, not exactly green, perhaps, — for I consider no man verdant who does well whatever he may have in hand, — barefooted, barehanded, dressed, or rather, almost undressed, in my hickory and denims, daring enough and ready for any reckless emergency which might transpire in the living of an honest life, but decidedly averse to doing something entirely out of my line, and which in all human probability I would make an utter failure of. I had not been but four years in America altogether. I had had a hard time of it for the time I had been here. I had *heard* of all these things I have mentioned concerning banks and money, but I had positively never seen a ten-dollar bill!

A great detective I would make under such circumstances, I thought.

"Come now, Allan," urged Mr. Hunt, "no time is to be wasted. The man is down there now at Eaton Walker's harness-shop, getting something done about his saddle."

"But what am I to do?" I asked.

"Do?—Well!—*do* the best you can!"

I suddenly resolved to do just that and no less; although I must confess that, at the time, I had not the remotest idea how to set about the matter.

So I began by strolling leisurely about the street for a few minutes, and then, villager-like, sauntered into the saddlery shop.

Eaton Walker, a jolly, whole-souled, good-hearted fellow, was perched upon his bench, sewing away, and when I entered merely looked up from his waxed-end and nodded, but made no remark, as my being in his place was a very common occurrence.

There was the usual quota of town stragglers loafing about the shop, and looking with sleepy eyes and open-mouthed at the little which was going on about the place.

I passed, as I entered the shop, a splendid horse hitched outside. It was a fine, large roan, well built for travelling; and in my then frame of mind I imagined from a casual glance that it was a horse especially selected for its lasting qualities, should an emergency require them to be put to a test. The owner of the animal, the person who had caused so much nervousness on the part of Messrs. Hunt and Bosworth, was a man nearly six feet in height, weighed fully two hundred pounds, was at least sixty-five years of age, and was very erect and commanding in his appearance. I noticed all this at a careless glance, as also that his hair was dark, though slightly tinged with gray, and his features very prominent. His nose was very large, his mouth unusually so, and he had a pair of the keenest, coldest small gray eyes I have ever seen, while he wore a large, plain gold ring on one of the fingers of his left hand.

I made no remark to him or to any person about the place, and merely assumed for the time-being to be a village loafer myself. But I noticed, without showing the fact, that the man occasionally gave me a keen and searching glance. When the work had been completed by Walker, I stepped outside and made a pretense of being interested, as any country gawky might, in the preparations for the man's departure; and was patting the horse's neck and withers as the stranger came out with the saddle and began adjusting it, when I carelessly assisted him in a free-and-easy country way.

There were, of course, a number of people standing about and a good deal of senseless chatting going on, which the stranger wholly refrained from joining in; but while we were both at work at the saddle, he said, without addressing me, but in a way which I knew was meant for my ears: "Stranger, do you know where old man Crane lives?"

I took my cue from the manner in which this was said, and followed it to the best of my ability. I was now as certain as either of my friends that the man was a blackleg of a dangerous order, whatever his special line of roguery might be. We were both busy at the saddle on the side of the horse where there were fewer loungers, and being close together, I replied in the same tone of voice:

“Cross the river to the east, take the main road up through the woods until you come to Jesse Miller’s farmhouse. Then *he* will tell you; but if you don’t want to ask”—and I put considerable meaning into this—“hold the road to the northeast and inquire the direction to Libertyville. When you get there you will easily find the old man, and he is as good as cheese!”

He then said in the same cautious voice as before:

“Young man, I like your style, and I want to know you better. Join me over the river in some ravine. I want to talk to you.”

“All right,” I rejoined, “but you better let me go ahead. I’ll have to go up to the shop first and put on my boots and hat. I’ll be as quick as I can, and will start on first. Then you follow on, but not too closely. I’ll be up in some of the gorges, so we can talk entirely by ourselves. But I’ll tell you the truth, stranger,” said I, rather indifferently, “upon my word, I don’t care very much about going, because I’ve already lost too much time at the shop today.”

He had by this time finished saddling his horse, but he continued adjusting and readjusting things so as to gain time to say what he wished; and to my intimation that I cared very little about leaving my work, he responded:

“Don’t fail to join me. *I’ll make it worth something to you!*” He then added flatteringly: “You’re as good a man as I’ve met lately.”

I then moved forward to fasten the reins, and he edged along towards me, asking carelessly: “Do you know John Smith, of Elgin?”

“I know all about the Elgin John Smiths, I replied. “Do you mean the gunsmith?”

“Yes,” he answered tersely.

“Well I know John,” I continued; “that is, he has repaired my rifle and shotgun several times; but he might not remember me [—] I never had much talk with him.

“He’s a square man,” replied the stranger. “*I’m* his uncle. I came up from Elgin this morning. Smith didn’t know just where Crane lived. He told me that he traded here and that the boys were over here a good deal, so I would be likely to find somebody here who could readily direct me to his place.”

“Well,” I said rather curtly, “we’ve talked too much already. It won’t do. I’ll join you over the river soon.”

With this I carelessly walked away towards my shop, and at some little distance turned to see the stranger now engaging Eaton Walker in conversation with an evident purpose of gaining time.

“Well,” I thought, as I hastened on, “there’s no doubt now. This man is certainly a counterfeiter. John Smith is always loaded down with it. He gets it from old Crane; and this man at Walker’s is the chief of the gang traveling through the West to supply these precious rascals. But then,” it suddenly occurred to me, “what business of mine is all this? Good gracious! I’ve got a lot of barrels to make, my men need attention, and everything is going to the old Harry while I am playing detective!”

But having got this far my will had been touched, and I resolved to carry the matter through, whatever might be the result. While putting on my hat and boots hastily, Hunt and Bosworth came in, and I quickly related what I had learned.

Looking down from the hill, we could see the stranger slowly moving across the bridge, and as I was starting in the same direction my friends both urged:

“Now, Pinkerton, capture him sure!”

“Oh, yes,” I replied, “but how am I to get at all this?”

“Why, just get his stock, or some of it, and then we’ll have him arrested.”

“Oh, yes,” said I, “but, by thunder! [It] takes money to buy money! I’ve got none!”

“Well, well, that’s so,” remarked Mr. Hunt; “we’ll go right down to the store. You drop in there after us, and we’ll give you fifty dollars.”

All this was speedily done, and I soon found myself over the bridge, past the horseman, and well up the hill upon the highway.

It was a well-traveled thoroughfare, in fact, the road leading from all that section of the country into Chicago; but it was in the midst of harvest-time, and every body was busy upon the farms. Not a soul was to be seen upon the road, save the stranger and myself, and almost a Sabbath silence seemed to rest over the entire locality. The voices of the birds which filled the woods in every direction were hushed into a noon-day chirping, and hardly a sound was to be heard save the murmuring of the rills issuing from the sides of the hills and from every nook in the gorges and glens.

I confess that a sense of insignificance stole over me, originating doubtless from the reflection caused by this silence and almost painful quiet; and I could not but realize my unfitness for the work before me. There I was, hardly more than a plodding country cooper, having had but little experience save that given me by a life of toil in Scotland and my trip to this country, and no experience of things in this country save that given me by a life of toil in Scotland and my trip to this country, and no experience of things in this country save that secured through a few years of

the hardest kind of hard work. For a moment I felt wholly unable to cope with this keen man of the world, but as I was gaining the top of the hill I glanced back over my shoulder, and noticing that the horseman was following my instructions to the letter, I reasoned that, for *some* cause, I had gained an influence over this stranger, or *he* thought he had secured such a one over me, as would enable me, by being cautious and discreet, to obtain a sufficiently close intimacy with him to cause the disclosure of his plans and possibly ultimately result in his capture.

I had now reached the top of the hill, and taking a position which would permit of my being seen by no person save the horseman, I waited until he had approached near enough for me to do so, when I signaled him to follow, and then struck into the woods over a narrow trail about two hundred yards to a beautiful little opening on the banks of a purling brook, leaping down the descent towards the river from a limpid spring a few feet above the spot I had chosen for the interview.

But a few moments elapsed before the stranger, dashing in over the trail in fine style, leaped from his horse with a great deal of dexterity for a man of his age, and carelessly flinging the bridle-rein over the limb of a small sapling, passed me with a smile of recognition, proceeded to the spring, where he took a long, deep draught, and then returning to where I was seated upon the velvety greensward, threw himself carelessly down upon the ground beside me.

There we two lay—the stranger with his keen, sharp eyes, and his altogether careless, but always attentive manner, closely regarding me and looking me over from toe to tip; while I assumed an equal carelessness, but was all intent on his every movement. I saw the handles of two finely-mounted pistols protruding from the inner coat-pockets, and I did not know what might happen I was wholly unarmed, but I was young, wiry, powerful, and though I had nothing for self-protection save my two big fists and my two stout arms, I was daring enough to tackle a man or beast in self-defense at a moment's warning.

After a moment's silence, he said:

“Well, stranger, I'm a man of business from the word 'go.' What's your name and how long have you been around here?”

“My name's Pinkerton. I've been here three or four years, coopering some, and harvesting some; but coopering's my trade. You'd have seen my shop if you had come up from the hill. I manage to keep seven or eight men going all the time. But times are fearfully hard. There's no money to be had; and the fact is,” said I, looking at him knowingly, “I would like to get hold of something better adapted [for] getting more ready cash out of—especially if it was a good scheme—so good that there was no danger in it. But what's *your* name and where did you come from?” I asked abruptly.

He scarcely heeded this, and, Yankee-like, replied by asking where *I* came from before locating in Illinois.

“From Scotland,” I replied, “from Glasgow. I worked my way through Canada and finally found myself here with just a quarter in my pocket. What little I’ve got has been through hard work since. But, my friend,” said I smiling, “the talk is all on one side. I asked *you* something about yourself.”

“Well,” he said, still looking at me as though he would read me through and through, “they call me ‘Old man Craig.’ My name is Craig—John Craig, and I live down in Vermont, near Fairfield; got a fine farm there. Smith, down here at Elgin, is a nephew of mine; and old Crane, over at Libertyville, and myself, have done a good deal of *business* together.”

“Oh, yes,” said I nodding, “I understand.”

“But, you see,” resumed the counterfeiter, “this part of the country is all new to me. I’ve been up to Crane’s house before, but that was when I came up through the lakes to Little Fort,* and when I got through with my visit there I always went into Chicago on the ‘lake road.’”

“And of course you both stopped at the Sauganash,” I said meaningly.

“Certainly we stopped there,” replied Craig musingly.

“I *know* that Foster’s a man that can be depended on,” I remarked with considerable meaning upon the word “know.”

“He’s a square man, Foster is,” rejoined the counterfeiter; “and, Pinkerton, I believe you’re the right sort of a man too. I sold Foster a big pile the last time I was in Chicago.” And then quick as thought he said, looking me in the eyes: “Did you ever ‘deal’ any?”

“Yes, Mr. Craig,” I replied, “but only when I could get a first-class article. I frequently ‘work off’ the stuff in paying my men Saturday nights, when traveling through the country, and on the merchants here in Dundee, who have all confidence in me. But I wouldn’t touch anything like it for the State of Illinois, unless it was as good in appearance as the genuine article. Have you something really good, now?” I concluded indifferently.

“I’ve got a ‘bang up’ article,” said the stranger, quietly.

“But I don’t know *what* you’ve got,” I persisted “I thought you were going over to old Crane’s?”

“Well, so I was, Pinkerton; but I believe you’re a good, square man, and I don’t know but I had as soon sell to you as him.”

“I think you had better see Crane,” said I indifferently. “He’s probably expecting you, and as it’s afternoon now, it would be a good idea for you to make the best time you can there.”

“How far is it?” he asked.

“Oh, thirty-five miles or thereabouts, and as you’ve got a good horse, you can make it by dark or before.”

He rose as if undecided what to do, and without making any further remark at the time, took his horse to the spring and watered it.

He then returned, and again throwing himself down beside me, remarked carelessly:

“But I haven’t yet showed you what I’ve got. Here are the ‘beauties;’” and he whipped out two ten-dollar bills, counterfeits on the Wisconsin Marine and Fire Insurance Company’s money.

I looked at them very, very wisely. As I have already said, I had never seen a ten-dollar bill in my life; but I examined them as critically as though I had assisted in making the genuine bills, and after a little expressed myself as very much pleased with them.

They were indeed “beauties,” as the old rascal had said, and in all by subsequent detective experience I have hardly seen their equal in point of execution and general appearance. There was not a flaw in them. To show how perfect they had been made, it is only necessary to state that it was subsequently learned that several thousand dollars in these spurious bills had been received unhesitatingly at the bank and its different agencies, and actually paid out and received the second time, without detection.

“Come now, Pinkerton, I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” continued Craig earnestly; “if you’ll take enough of this I’ll give you the entire field out here. The fact is Crane’s getting old; he isn’t as active as he used to be; he’s careless also, and, besides all this, he’s too well known.”

“Well,” said I thoughtfully, “how much would I have take?”

“Only five hundred or a thousand,” he replied airily.

“On what terms?” I asked.

“Twenty-five per cent, cash.”

“I cannot possibly do it now,” I replied, as though there was no use of any further conference. “I haven’t anywhere near the amount necessary with me. I *want* to do it like thunder, but when a man can’t do a thing he can’t, and that’s all there is about it.”

“Not so fast, my man; not so fast,” answered the old rogue reassuringly. “Now, you say these lubberheads of merchants down at the village trust you?”

“Yes, for anything.”

“Then can’t you make a raise from them somehow? You’ll never get such another chance to do business with a square man in your life; and you can make more money with this in one year than any one of them can in ten. Now, what can you do, Pinkerton?”

I assumed to be studying the matter over very deeply, but, in reality, I had already decided to do as the man wished; for I knew that Messrs. Hunt and Bosworth would be only too glad to have the matter followed up on so closely. Finally I said: “I’ll do it, Craig; but it won’t answer for you to be seen hanging about here. Where shall we meet, and when?”

“Easy enough,” said he, grasping my hand warmly “I won’t go over to old Crane’s at all. If he wants any of the stuff after this, he’ll have to come to you. I only let Smith have about one hundred dollars in the bills, and that out of mere friendship, you know. When he wants more, I’ll make him come to you too. Now, I’ll go right back down there, and you can meet me at Smith’s this evening.”

“Oh no; no you don’t, Craig!” I answered with an appearance of deep cunning. “I’m willing to take the whole business into my hands, but I don’t propose to have every Tom, Dick and Harry understand all about the business from the beginning. I’ll find my own customers,” I concluded, with a protesting shake of my head.

“Well, that *is* best. You’re right and I’m wrong. Where’ll we meet?” he asked.

“I’ve a capital place,” I replied. “Do you know where the unfinished baptist Church and University are, down at Elgin?”

“Let me see,” he said, smiling. I ought to know. I’m a splendid Baptist when I’m in Vermont—one of the deacons, as sure as you live! Are they up on the hill?”

“Yes, the same,” I answered. “It’s a lonesome enough place to not be likely to meet anybody there; and we can arrange everything in the basement.”

“All right,” he acceded, laughing heartily, “and the next time I write my wife, damn me if I don’t tell her that I dedicated the new Baptist Church at Elgin, Illinois!”

I joined this little merriment at the expense of the Elgin Baptist Church; and then Craig, who had begun to feel very cheerful and friendly, went into quite a lengthy account of himself and his mode of operations.

As before stated, he said that he was located in Fairfield, Vermont. This location was chosen from the ready facility it offered for getting into Canada, should danger at any time present itself. He owned a large and fine place, and was legitimately engaged in farming, was wealthy, and had

been a counterfeiter for many years, keeping two first-class engravers constantly employed, and he warmly invited me to visit him, should I ever happen that way, although it was morally certain at that time, to him as well as myself, that it would be a very long time before I began travelling for pleasure, and I received all this for what it was worth, but fervently promised him a call while mentally observing: "Ah! [My] man, if everything works right, maybe that call will come sooner than you were expecting it!"

What chiefly interested me, however, was what he told me concerning his mode of operations.

He said that he never carried any quantity of counterfeit money upon his person. This twenty dollars which he had shown me was the largest sum he ever had about him. This was simply and only a sample for use, as it had been with me. Should he be arrested not one piece of paper which would not bear the most rigid inspection, although he had always upon his person about two thousand dollars in genuine money, chiefly in eastern bank bills. No person, understanding the condition of things at that time, could be persuaded to condemn a stranger in a new country and unfamiliar with its money, for having twenty dollars of spurious money in so large a sum as two thousand dollars.

I asked him why he did not pad his saddle with the bills and carry them with him, in this manner, for convenience. I made this inquiry, more than anything else, to draw from Craig his manner of supplying parties, and I was successful, for he immediately replied:

"No, that wouldn't do. To begin with, the horse would sweat the pad and badly discolor the bills, and, in the next place, somebody might be as curious as yourself, and rip open the saddle. Oh, no, no; I've got a better scheme than that. I've got a fellow, named Yelverson, as true as steel and as shrewd as a man can be made. He follows me like a shadow, but *you* will never see him. He is never seen by any living person with whom I have business. I simply show my samples and make the trade. I receive the money agreed from the buyer, and then tell him that I *think* he will find the specified sum of money in a certain place at a designated time.

"He goes there, and never fails to find the bills. But Yelverson is not seen in the transaction, and, in the meantime, I have hidden my samples, as well as the money received by me, which *might* be marked, so that if there should be any treachery, nothing could be proven against me. I have a good deal of Canada trade, and it is all effected in this manner. Old John Craig is never caught napping, young man!"

The last remark was evidently made by the counterfeiter to give me to understand that though he had given me, or pretended to give me, very freely, his valuable confidence, that he was not a man to be trifled with in any particular, and I fully believed this of the man already.

I was satisfied that he had a good deal of the honor which is so frequently referred to as existing between thieves. There is no doubt but that this man always kept his word. In that sense he was honorable. This kind of honor was a necessity to his nefarious business, however, and I fail to

perceive, as many sentimentalists do, where the criminal deserves credit for being honorable when that particular quality is only used for the worst purposes, and is as much required by the criminal as the bread he eats.

It was now fully half-past one o' clock, and I suggested to the counterfeiter that we conclude our interview, as some stragglers might happen that way.

"You will be on hand, Pinkerton?" asked Craig as he rose from the grass.

"There's my hand on it," said I quietly.

"And you'll bring enough money to take five hundred?"

"I'm certain I can raise that much," I replied. "But see here. Don't you come down to the village again. It will cause talk, and couple you with myself in the village gossip in a way that won't do for me at all."

He agreed with me in this, and I then directed him to take what was called the "upper road," past General McClure's old place, and having got this well fixed in his mind, agreed to meet him at the designated place in Elgin, at about four o'clock, bade him good-bye and took my departure.

I hastened towards the village, and saw on my way, just as I was descending the brow of the hill, my counterfeiter friend well along the upper road, halting his horse to wave me a good luck or a good-by, as it might be taken, to which I merely nodded a reply, and then made all possible speed to Mr. Hunt's store, where I quickly reported the result of my interview to Messrs. Hunt and Bosworth.

They were very gleeful over my success in working into the confidence of the counterfeiter, but both were rather apprehensive that the money *was* in the man's saddle, that Yelverson was a myth, and that possibly we had lost an opportunity of securing either. But I felt pretty certain that Craig would be on hand at Elgin according to appointment, and securing the required amount of money, one hundred and twenty-five dollars, and a bite of lunch, I set out on foot for Elgin. The place was only five miles from Dundee, and five miles for me then was as nothing; so that, a few minutes before four, I was within the deserted structure.

I looked into every conceivable corner and cranny, but could discover the counterfeiter nowhere.

I passed outside and looked in every direction, but still he was not to be seen. Tired and worried about the whole matter, I retired within the basement, and had been sitting upon one of the loose timbers there but a few minutes, brooding over the loss of my day's work, and disgusted with the whole business, when Craig suddenly entered and smilingly greeted at me.

"Why, helloa, Pinkerton, you're ahead of time."

“I told you I would be here,” I replied.

“Well, did you bring the money with you?”

“Certainly I did. Here it is,” said I, counting out one hundred and twenty-five dollars as carelessly as though accustomed to handling comfortable sums of money.

He looked it over more carefully than suited me exactly. The act seemed to hold a faint trace of suspicion, but he found it to be eastern bills and correct in every particular.

“Coopering must be pretty profitable work?” he remarked with a light laugh.

“Oh, fair, fair,” I answered, indifferently. “Does pretty well when one can do some other quiet business along with it.”

“Oh, I see,” he said pleasantly. “Now, Pinkerton, you go outside for a few minutes, and keep a sharp lookout, lest somebody may be watching. Remain outside four or five minutes, and if you see no one by that time, come back.”

I went out as directed, but I could not but feel that I had placed myself in the man’s power completely, as far as giving him a fair opportunity to abscond with my friends’ money was concerned, and though a new hand at this kind of bellows, I determined to be as keen as he was shrewd. So, instead of leaving the building altogether, for the time mentioned, I started off for a little distance, and, quickly returning up through a small ravine, took a position near an open window, just in time to observe my Baptist friend from Vermont placing something beneath a wide, flat building-stone in one corner of that portion of the basement where we had been together.

This much seen, I got away from the place as speedily as I could, and at once sought a small eminence near the building, and made a great pretense of keeping a close watch on the locality.

While thus occupied, I observed, out of the corner of my eye, that Craig had appeared at one of the entrances and was closely watching my movements. Apparently satisfied at last, he gave a low whistle, attracting my attention, of course, when he motioned me to join him.

As I entered I told him that I had looked everywhere, but was unable to see any person about.

“That’s all right,” he replied pleasantly, and then looking at me in a quizzical sort of way, asked:

“Pinkerton, what would you think if I told you that Yelverson had been here during your absence outside, and left the five hundred in my bills?”

“Well, I don’t know,” I answered; “I’d *almost* think you’d got old Nick working along with you!”

“Perhaps I have, perhaps I have,” he returned quietly “Look under that stone over yonder.”

I went to the place indicated, and, lifting the stone which from outside I had seen him busied with, I picked up a neatly-made package.

“I *think* you will find what you bought inside it,” remarked Craig.

I opened the package, and found that it contained fifty ten-dollar bills. They were the counterfeits, but, as I have already stated, they were most handsomely executed.

I make this open confession to my readers:

For a moment the greatest temptation of my life swept over me. A thousand thoughts of sudden wealth and a life free from the grinding labor which I had always known, came rushing into my mind. Here in my hands were five hundred dollars, or what professed to be, every one of them as good as gold, if only I chose to use it. The purchasing power of five hundred dollars then, the use which could be made of it, the large gain which would accrue from its judicious investment, were one and all ten times what they are now. What would it not purchase? Why, to my mind then it was a great fortune!

All this and more pressed upon me with such weight—the first and last time in my whole life—that with the struggle in my memory, while I have always been unshaken in my determination to never lose sight of a criminal when it once becomes my duty to pursue him, I can never think of one undergoing the first great temptation to crime whether he has resisted or fallen, without a touch of genuine human sympathy.

I am satisfied that this showed in my face somewhat, but was taken by him to indicate cupidity and eagerness at the prospect of large profits as his “wholesale agent” in that section, and soon after probably stood me in good service.

We sat down upon one of the timbers and chatted pleasantly for a time, during which he informed me that Yelverson had at once returned to Smith’s, where his horse was stabled, and ere then was on his road toward Chicago, where he, Craig, should rejoin him on the next day, after passing the night at his nephew’s.

My thought was to get the two together and nab them both, if it were in my power. I saw that I had no possible opportunity to do this in Elgin, for, according to Craig’s statement, Yelverson was well on the road to Chicago out of all danger of pursuit; and even should I cause Craig’s arrest, from what I already knew of his character and habits, his conviction on my unsupported evidence would prove difficult.

Accordingly, while sitting there and chatting away with Craig, all these things were playing back and forth like a swift shuttle through my mind, with the following result.

“Look here, Craig,” said I, “if you wouldn’t be in too big a hurry about getting back home, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I believe I could make arrangements to buy you out altogether.”

“Well, now, that’s a god idea, Pinkerton,” returned the counterfeiter thoughtfully, but evidently pleased at the proposition.

“How much have you got?” I asked.

“I haven’t any,” he answered with a sly look. “Yelverson has about four thousand dollars in the stuff, I believe.”

“All right,” I replied, “Craig or Yelverson, it’s all the same so I get it. Now I’ve been thinking that I could take a trip out to Naperville, in Du Page Country, and St. Charles, Geneva, Batavia, Aurora, and Oswego, in this country, and work off the greater part of what I’ve got, and while at Oswego see Lawyer Boyd, who, I am certain, will take a share with me.”

“How long will this take you?” inquired Craig.

“I can’t tell,” said I; “not more than three or four days at the outside, I think.”

“Well, try and see what you can do. I would like to sell my horse and my entire outfit too, and go back to the lakes if I can.”

“All right, Craig,” said I. “I’m pretty sure that I can buy everything. I’ll try hard, and think that if I can see Bill Boyde, at Oswego, there’ll be no doubt about our being able together to take everything you have.”

“Good-by, then” said the counterfeiter, shaking my hand warmly. “I’ll spend the night with Smith, go into Chicago tomorrow, and wait there at the “Sauganash” for you four or five days. But, mind you, be discreet!”

With this we parted, Craig going over the hills into [missing page]

[missing page] that the little cooper-shop, my good wife, and our plain, homely ways, were, after all, the best things on earth and, altogether, better than any other sort of life or attainments possible for man to secure.

Prompt to my promise, I was up betimes the next morning; and, after a hasty breakfast, secured a horse, and was soon rapidly cantering off in the direction of Elgin, where I arrived by the time

the villagers of the little town were stirring about their several avocations. I proceeded directly to the house of John Smith, the gunsmith.

Before I had reached the same, my spirits were measurably raised to observe, sitting there upon the rough porch shaded with roses and honeysuckles, the veritable gentleman from Vermont who had given us all so much uneasiness.

He was smoking his pipe and enjoying the morning as composedly as any man well could, and, as I approached, looked up with a pleasant smile of greeting.

He advanced quickly to the gate, and grasped my hand heartily, saying quietly:

“Helloa, Pinkerton, what’s up?”

“Only myself,” I answered jokingly.

“Have you got started out on your trip this early?” he inquired.

“Yes, I believe if anything’s worth doing, it’s worth doing quickly and thoroughly. I’m on my way down the river to take in the towns I mentioned yesterday. I’ll see Boyd tomorrow, get back as quick as can, and meet you at the ‘Sauganash, in Chicago.”

“You’ll do, you’ll do,” said Craig encouragingly.

“I just thought I’d call on my way, shake hands with you, and show you I was at work carrying out my part of the agreement.”

“Glad you stopped; glad you stopped. Make as good time as possible, for I want to get through here and get back east. The church interests always languish while I am away,” he added laughing.

And so, with a cheery good-by, we again parted.

I rode away ostensibly for St. Charles, but, after getting some little distance from Elgin, took a detour, and, riding through the little post-town of Udina, reached Dundee some time before noon.

The information secured through this little ruse satisfied both myself and my Dundee friends that dependence could be placed upon meeting Craig in Chicago. This was what I most desired; for, alone in the country, and not knowing what secret companions he might have near him ready to spring to his aid at the lifting of his finger, made an attempt at his capture, with my then inexperience, simply foolish and something not to be thought of.

Three intervening days were passed in frequent consultations with Messrs. Hunt and Bosworth, very little attention to my casks and barrels, and a good deal of nervous plotting and planning on my own part; and before daybreak on the fourth morning I had caught the last glimpse of the little village of Dundee, nestling like a bird by the gleaming river, and as speeding my horse at a brisk pace over the winding highway toward Chicago.

I arrived in that then thriving, but little city, during the early forenoon, and my first move was to procure warrants for the arrest of both Craig and Yelverson, as I had high hopes of now being able, by a little good management, to get the two men together; and I easily secured the services of two officers, one of whom I directed to follow and watch the movements of Craig, which would undoubtedly, if there was any such person as Yelverson, bring the two men together. My idea was to then wait until they had separated and were so situated that immediate communication would be impossible, and thus capture Yelverson; while, after this had been effected, myself and the second officer would attend to Craig. But, as fine as all this looked in a plan, it was doomed, as the reader will observe, to prove *merely* a plan.

After all these arrangements were perfected, I went to the Sauganash Hotel. The officers were merely constables, and one was stationed outside the house, to follow Craig wherever he might go, or whoever might come in contact with him, should he be observed to meet any person with whom he might appear to have confidential relations; while the other officer was located inside the hotel, to cause Craig's arrest whenever the proper time arrived.

I wanted to bring things about so that I could capture the men with the money upon them, or in the very act of passing it; but circumstances and my own youth and inexperience were against me.

I had been seated in the office of the hotel but a few minutes when Craig entered, smoking a cigar. He saw me instantly, but several minutes elapsed before he saw fit to approach me, and I observed by his manner that he did not wish me to recognize him. He sauntered about for a time, apparently like one upon whose hands time hung heavily, and, finally securing a newspaper, dropped into a seat beside me.

Some minutes elapsed before he in any manner recognized my presence, and then he said, with his attitude such that no one could imagine him otherwise that deeply engaged with his paper:

“Have you got the money?”

“Yes,” I replied, quite as laconically.

“Well, I've an even four thousand now. The horse is sold; so you pay me one thousand dollars, and in the course of an hour I will see that you have the package.”

“Craig,” I said, “Lawyer Boyd, from Oswego, is here with me, and you know those lawyers are sticklers for form. Now, he don't want to pay the money until we see the bills.”

“Why, he has seen what you had, hasn't he? *You* know that old John Craig's word is as good as his money, and that's as good as gold!” he replied with some warmth, and evidently nettled.

“If it was wholly my own affair, Craig, you *know* it would be different. You know I would trust you with ten times this sum,” I replied reassuringly; “but I've placed myself in this damned lawyer's power in order to keep my word like a man with you, and he insists like an idiot on having the thing done only in one way.”

“Well, I'll think the matter over, and see you here a half-hour or so later,” returned Craig.

We then adjourned to the bar, and partook of sundry drinks; but I observed, without showing that I did so, that Craig was very careful in this respect. We soon parted, and I must confess that I began to have a presentiment that matters were beginning to look a little misty. I could not imagine what the outcome would be; but that Craig had become suspicious of something, was certain.

I could not of course then know, without exposing myself, what was done, or how Craig acted, but I afterward learned that he seemed perplexed and doubtful about what he should do. He started out rapidly in the direction of the lake, suddenly halted, returned, started again, halted again, and then walked aimlessly in various directions, occasionally giving a quick look back over his shoulder as if to determine whether he was being followed.

Whatever he might have thought about this, at last he returned to the hotel with the air of a man who had determined upon something, and entered the office.

Not making any move as though he desired to see me, I soon moved toward him, and finally said:

“Well, Craig, are you going to let me have the money?”

He looked at me a moment with a puzzled air of surprise, the assurance of which I have never since seen equaled, and replied quietly:

“What money?”

I looked at him in blank amazement, and finally said: “The money you promised me.”

With a stolidity that would have made a Grant or a Wellington, he rejoined:

“I haven't the honor of your acquaintance, sir, and therefore cannot imagine to what you allude.”

If the Sauganash Hotel had fallen upon me, I could not have been more surprised, or, for the moment, overwhelmed.

But this lasted but for a moment. I saw that my fine plan had fallen to the ground like a house of straw. Yelverson had not been located; probably no counterfeit money could be found upon Craig; and there was only my own almost unsupported evidence as to the entire transaction, as the reader has been given it; but I also saw that there was only one thing to do, and that was to make Mr. Craig my prisoner. I therefore said:

“All right, John Craig; you have played your game well, but there are always at least two at a really interesting game, and I shall have to take you into custody on the charge of counterfeiting.”

I gave the signal to the officer, and Craig was at once arrested: but he fairly turned the tables upon me then by his assume dignity and gentlemanly bearing. Quite a crowd gathered about, and considerable sympathy was expressed for the stately, gray-haired man who was being borne into captivity by the green-looking countryman cooper from Dundee.

Not a dollar in counterfeit money was found upon Craig, as I had feared. He was taken to Geneva, in Kane County, lodged in jail, and, after the preliminary examination, admitted to bail in a large sum. While awaiting the arrival of friends to furnish the required bonds, he was remanded; and it was soon noticed by the frequenters of the place that Craig and the sheriff, whose apartments were in the jail building, had become very intimate. He was shown every possible courtesy and favor possible under the circumstances, and the result was that the community was suddenly startled to learn that the now famous counterfeiter had mysteriously escaped—leaving, it was said, the sheriff of Kane County considerably richer in this world’s good for that unfortunate occurrence.

This was the outcome of the matter; but though this great criminal, through the perfidy of an official, had escaped punishment, the affair was worth everything to the Wisconsin Fire and Marine Insurance Company in particular, and the entire West in general—it having the effect for a number of years to drive counterfeiters entirely from our midst.

But I cannot resist relating, in connection with the termination of the case, another incident characteristic of George Smith.

With all his business success, like Dickens’ “Barkis he became considerably “mean,” and finally obtained the *sobriquet*, among his friends and acquaintances, of old “Na!” on account of the abruptness and even ugliness with which he would snap out his Scotch “na!” or no, to certain applicants for banking or other favors.

As soon as I had got Craig safely in jail, Messrs. Hunt and Bosworth who had expended nearly one hundred and fifty dollars in the matter, saw that they had nothing left for their pains save the counterfeit five hundred dollars, and that even was deposited in the hands of the Kane County Court clerk; so it devolved upon me to go into Chicago, see George Smith, and get from him, if possible, so much money as had been expended, and a few dollars for my own services.

So I took my trip, after a vexatious delay was admitted to the presence of the mighty banker, and tersely stated my errand.

He heard me all through, and then remarked savagely:

“Have ye nae mair to say?”

“Not anything,” I replied civilly.

“Then I’ve just this tae speak: ye was not authorized tae do the wark, and ye have nae right t’ a cent. I’ll pay this, I’ll pay this; but mind ye, noo,” and he shook his finger at me in no pleasant way, “If ye ever do wark for me agin that ye have nae authorization for, ye’ll get ne’er a penny, ne’er a penny!”

In fact, it was hard work for the close-fisted Scotchman to be decently just in the matter, and I am certain the incident has been of service to me during these later years in causing prudence in all such undertakings.

The country being new, and great sensations scarce, the affair was in everybody’s mouth, and I suddenly found myself called upon, from every quarter, to undertake matters requiring detective skill, until I was soon actually *forced* to relinquish the honorable, though not over-profitable, occupation of a cooper, for that of a professional detective, with the result and a career of which the public are fully acquainted; all of which I owe to “Old John Craig” and this my first detective case.

*The city of Waukegan, in Little County, Illinois, was called “Little Fort” by the early settlers.

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