

Introduction

BY THE EDITOR

Some years ago I was traveling in the South. By some misadventure I missed the train at Augusta, Georgia, and was compelled to spend a night in that rather slow town. I patronized the best hotel in the place, and after having partaken of an early supper I thought I would go and explore the city until bed-time.

Half an hour, however, was amply sufficient to see all the lions of the place, and at the end of that time I returned to my hotel, wearied and ennuied.

I listlessly entered the reading room which was also the bar-room; and taking up a paper that had been issued in New York four days previously, composed myself to read the shipping intelligence. Not that I had the remotest interest in that species of news, but it was the only part of the paper I had not perused.

While thus engaged, a slight cough drew my attention from the arrivals and departures and raised my eyes. Seated at the further end of the room was an individual I had not noticed before. He was a man, I suppose, between forty and forty-five years of age. There was something very peculiar in his features which immediately arrested my attention, I do not know how to describe it, but it gave me the idea that he possessed in an eminent degree the power of analysis. This impression was further increased by his movements. They were quick; and it was plainly to be perceived that he did not allow the slightest circumstance to escape him. I am not naturally inclined to make friends with strangers, but there was something in the man which attracted me to him. I drew my chair more closely to his, and commenced a conversation.

“A pleasant evening,” said I.

“You are right, sir,” he replied; “it is very pleasant indeed, considering the time of year. One would expect to find it hotter than it is so far down South.”

“I should judge from your remark you do not reside in Augusta,” I ventured.

“No, I am from New York.”

At that moment the door of the bar-room opened, a young man entered, and walking up to the bar asked for a glass of ale.

“I will wager anything,” said the stranger to me, “that the young man who has just entered, has, a few minutes since, robbed his employer’s till.”

“How in the world do you know that fact,” I asked. “He appears to be a very respectable young man.”

“As far as dress goes, certainly, but I’ll bet two to one he has just taken some money out of the till. If my supposition is correct, he will pay for his glass of ale with a piece of gold.”

The stranger was right; the clerk, for such I judged him to be, threw down a five dollar gold piece in payment. The bar-keeper, however, had not time to give him change before a policeman hurriedly entered and arrested the young man. He was at once taken before a magistrate.

“Did you ever see that young man before?” I asked as soon as the excitement occasioned by this little episode had subsided.

“Never in my life;” replied the stranger.

“How in the name of all that is extraordinary could you tell that he had robbed his employer, and that he would pay for his glass of ale with a piece of gold?”

“Simply by observation and analysis. When that young man entered the room I noticed three things. First, that he glanced nervously at the door after it was closed on him. Secondly, that he took in every person at a glance; and Thirdly, that he held something clutched tightly in his hand. There must have been a reason for all these three things. The most probable reason for glancing at the door as he came in was the fear of being pursued. If he was afraid of being pursued he must have done something contrary to law. He examined every person in the room for the same reason; he did not wish to be recognized by any one he knew. The something he clutched in his hand was more probable to be money than anything else, and the fact that his fingers were not bulged out, showed that it must be a single piece, how natural then to suppose that it must be gold. The chain was immediately formed; he had taken the piece from the till; he was afraid it might be marked, and he wanted to get it changed as soon as possible. It was evident by his anxious manner that he thought he might be suspected, and hence his anxiety to get rid of that which might compromise him.”

“But is it possible that you could make out all that chain of reasoning during the time he took to walk from the door to the bar?”

“Certainly; it is merely a matter of education. By educating the powers of observation it is perfectly astonishing how they may be developed. It is only of late years that this species of knowledge has been perfected. Perhaps I have done more towards detecting crime than any other living man.

“Indeed! then you have made a profession of it.”

“For twenty years.”

“Is it possible? Will you forgive my inquisitiveness if I ask you your name?”

“My name is James Brampton, known among thieves and rogues as J.B.”

“What! James Brampton, the famous detective officer?”

“The same at your service. Even now I am tracking a defaulter, who has made off with a large amount of funds from one of the New York banks. I have traced him as far as this place, and I have but little doubt that I shall ultimately capture him. I have traced him as far as here by means of a Provence rose.”*

I was delighted to meet Mr. Brampton. His name had been prominently before the public in many instances. He was a man of extraordinary sagacity, and had succeeded in discovering the perpetrators of crime, where to ordinary men all clue appeared to have been lost. His faculty in this respect was evidently owing to his keen observation, his acute mental analysis and determined perseverance. No difficulty daunted him: in face his powers seemed to increase in proportion as the case was enveloped in mystery. He was a man of great courage, and, what is still better for his profession, extraordinary coolness.

With the assistance of a cigar and a good bottle of sherry I soon became quite at home with him.

“I suppose you have kept a record of the cases in which you have been engaged.”

“The more important ones.”

“Have you any objection to have them published?”

“I have concluded to retire from business in two or three years time. I shall have no objection to have them published then. My detective experience embrace every species of adventures, and I assure you that *every word is true!* I have a MS. book of the principal cases in which I have been engaged, which I shall be happy to place at your disposal to publish when I retire from my present occupation.”

“I am much obliged to you,” I answered, “and accept your offer with gratitude. Might I ask you one question?”

“Certainly, a hundred if you like.”

“Did you embrace your present profession from choice?”

“I may say I embraced it from choice and necessity combined, but let us light a fresh cigar and I will give you a history of my first case.”

We drew our chairs closer to the table, and he told me the following story, which I repeat exactly in his own words without making the slightest addition or alteration.

I was born in New York city. My father was a respectable merchant, and he bestowed upon me the best education that money could produce. He wished me to embrace the medical profession and for that purpose sent me to read with a physician who lived in a village on the Hudson River. This physician was a particular friend of his.

I liked the study of medicine pretty well and remained several years in the physician's office. But a terrible accident happened to my father, in fact, he was burnt to death, and he left his affairs so embarrassed, that my mother could not afford the means for me to complete my medical studies. I therefore determined to seek for some more remunerative employment.

I was one day seated at home in my mother's house, when a servant girl entered and informed me that a gentleman wanted to speak with me. I told the girl to show him up.

A moment afterwards a young man entered the room whom I immediately recognized as an old schoolmate of mine John Millson.

I shook hands with him cordially, and was really delighted to see him.

"Brampton," said my friend, "I am in great distress of mind, and have come to you for assistance."

"My dear fellow," I replied, "I will do anything in the world for you in my power. What is it?"

"Have you read the papers this morning?"

"Certainly."

"Then you doubtless read about the murder committed in Williamsburg yesterday. A young lady, Miss Emily Millwood has been arrested on suspicion."

"I certainly read the account in the papers," I replied, "and it seemed to be a case which admitted no doubt."

"I know the evidence is very strong against Miss Millwood," replied Millson, "but if you knew Emily as well as I do, Brampton, you would be morally certain that she is incapable of this act."

The young man spoke with such warmth that I looked at him somewhat curiously.

"Why, Millson, this Miss Millwood is no relation of yours, is she?" I asked.

"Well, the fact is, Brampton, we are engaged to be married. I have known her from a child. Her heart is pure and noble. She could not injure a worm much less murder her aunt and benefactor."

"Well, my dear fellow, what can I do in the matter?"

“I want you to help me to prove Emily innocent. I remember at school how you used to point out all mysteries almost intuitively. The moment I heard you were in town, I determined to apply to you, for to tell you the truth I would rather trust the case in your hands, than in those of the best detectives in New York.”

“You are very complimentary, Millson—but you know I am a perfect amateur in such matters, and I would strongly advise you to consult some one who makes a business of ferreting out crime.”

“Then you refuse to assist me?”

“Not at all. I will do my best if you insist upon it. I assure you I feel great interest in the matter, and will proceed at once to Williamsburg.”

Millson then entered into particulars from which I gathered substantially as follows:

Mrs. Weldon, an old inhabitant of Williamsburg, lived in a small frame house at the further end of Grand street, at the time very sparsely built up. A niece and a servant girl were the only persons residing with her. The former appeared very much devoted to her aunt, and attended to her wants with filial assiduity. The domestic had lived with Mrs. Weldon for five years and was considered a good servant.

Mrs. Weldon was a widow lady of ample means in the shape of an annuity which was to close with her death. She was rather miserly in her disposition, and accustomed to hoard money. Her husband at one time lost a considerable amount by the breaking of a bank, and since then no one could persuade her to have anything to do with any bank. It was supposed that this hoarding propensity was known only to the niece, Miss Millwood, and the servant girl, Hannah.

On the morning of September 14th, 1840, the inhabitants of Grand street were electrified by the report that Mrs. Weldon had been discovered murdered in her bed; and that strong proofs of guilt existed against Miss Millwood.

Such was the substance of the information given me by my friend Millson. He then bade me good-bye, promising to call the following day to learn the result of my enquiries.

I hurried through my breakfast and proceeded at once to Williamsburg to visit the scene of the crime. I found the apartment in much the same condition as it was when the body was first discovered.

Mrs. Weldon occupied the front bedroom on the second story—and in all probability was sleeping when the deed was committed. She had been discovered lying on the floor of the chamber with a fearful wound in her left side that had evidently penetrated the heart. The bed and carpet were stained with blood.

The servant girl had been the first to discover the crime and had given the alarm. All doors and windows were fastened *on the inside*, for Hannah had given the alarm from the window.

An examination was made of the premises. This resulted in the apprehension of Miss Millwood as the perpetrator of the deed. In the pocket of her dress which hung on the back of a chair a large sum of money was found, together with some old fashioned jewelry which was known to belong to the deceased. But there was even more damning evidence than this. In her trunk, a sharp pointed knife was found, smeared with blood, and which exactly fitted the wound by which the deceased had come to her death. This trunk was found locked, and the key in the pocket of the accused with the valuables.

I examined the chamber occupied by the deceased at the time of her death. A few minutes convinced me that *the young lady was innocent*. My reasons from this conclusion were these. The wound was too deep to have been inflicted by the hand of a woman, and whoever struck the blow must be left handed. While searching the chamber, I found on the floor a vest button, it was rather peculiar being made of blue porcelain. I put it in my pocket.

I then went to see Miss Millwood, and having been admitted to her by an order from her attorney, I explained my business and stated that I had been engaged by John Millson. I found her a very pretty girl, but very delicate and frail. After conversing a little while with her on the subject, I asked her to tell me all she knew about the matter.

“I know but little, Mr. Brampton,” she replied. “My aunt retired to bed early that night. I had a head-ache, and about two o’clock took a cup of tea. I grew very sleepy and went to bed. I slept all night without waking. In fact I was asleep when the officers of justice entered my room.

“Did you sleep more soundly than usual?”

“Now you remind me of it, I did indeed. I scarcely ever remember to have slept so soundly before, and even when awakened I was unaccountably drowsy.

“Who gave you the tea you drank the night before?”

“The servant, Hannah.”

“Do you suspect she could have committed the deed?”

“Impossible! A better servant, or one more kind to my aunt could not be found than she is.”

After a little longer conversation I bade her adieu. I must confess I was all at sea. I felt perfectly convinced of the young lady’s innocence but I was no nearer the discovery of the real perpetrator of the crime than before. I next determined that I would visit the servant Hannah. She was confined as a witness.

I found a good-looking girl, about twenty-two years of age. Her countenance was an open one, but there was an expression of deceit around her lips that I did not like. I have not much faith in physiognomy, so I put it down for as much as it was worth.

Hannah's story was satisfactory enough. She stated that on the night of the murder she retired to bed about eleven o'clock at night, and had heard no noise in the house. She got up early in the morning as was customary with her, and on entering her mistress's bed-chamber had discovered the fearful tragedy. She had at once opened the window and screamed out "murder." She also testified to the great affection Miss Millwood entertained for her aunt, and it was her opinion that the latter *was entirely guiltless of the crime imputed to her!*

I found this girl Hannah was what is called a *smart* girl. She gave her answers readily and without any hesitation—almost too much so to please my fastidious taste.

I had already said it was no woman who had committed this deed—this, of course, precluded the possibility of Hannah being the guilty party. The question then arose if neither of the women committed the deed, WHO WAS THE MURDERER? Then I must acknowledge I was completely at fault. All the doors and windows being fastened inside precluded the idea of the house having been entered from without.

I felt annoyed at being baffled, and started to walk to the ferry as night was fast approaching. I had not preceded many steps down Grand street, when my eyes were attracted by the gleaming show bottles of a drug store.

No saying is truer than that great events spring from little causes. The fact of my eye having caught the glass of a druggist's show bottles in all probability saved an innocent person from dying on the scaffold. I naturally glanced in the window and saw a cigar box. The druggist then sold cigars. I thought I would like to smoke one, so I entered the store.

Two or three people were inside imbibing soda water. The owner of the store and a customer were conversing about the recent murder.

"There can be no doubt about Miss Millwood's guilt," said the druggist, "but Lord! I should have thought she would have been the last person in the world to have done such a deed as that; she is such a nice spoken young lady."

"You know her, them?" asked the customer.

"Certainly, I know them all. Why only the very evening of the murder, the servant girl, Hannah, was in my store.

I picked up my ear, but no further conversation passed between them. The customers were soon all served and I was the only one left. I immediately accosted the druggist.

"You stated just now that Mrs. Weldon's servant girl Hannah was in your store on the night of the murder. May I ask you what she bought?"

"Let me see," ventured the druggist; "it was morphine—she stated that she had the tooth-ache."

I said no more, but left the store. I had not the first clue—it was a faint one to be sure, but I felt certain that Hannah knew more about the murder than anyone else. I remembered Miss Millwood’s extraordinary drowsiness in the night in question, and to this I added the fact, she had partaken of a cup of tea prepared by Hannah, and that the latter had purchased morphine that same evening at the drug store. But then my first conviction rushed into my mind, *no woman had committed the deed*. The first link of the chain was found, however, and I was hopeful. I resumed my walk towards the ferry determined to sleep on it.

During that memorable walk down Grand street something else attracted my attention. It was a tailor’s shop, outside of which various garments were exposed for sale. Amongst them I noticed some vests, the buttons of which struck me; *they were made of blue porcelain*.

I began to examine the things as if I wanted to purchase. An obliging shopman came outside to try to sell.

“What do you ask for one of those vests,” I demanded.

“Two dollars,” was the reply.

“They are something new, are they not?” I inquired.

“Quite new; we have not sold more than two or three of them. We have not had them in the shop more than three or four days.

“I saw a man with one yesterday,” I said.

“You mean Bill Holsley, the hostler at the Eagle Tavern.”

“Yes, that was the man,” I returned. “Good evening, I don’t think I will buy one to-night.”

To make my way to the Eagle Tavern was the work of a very few minutes. I asked to see the hostler, and was directed to the stable.

I approached it with a cautious step and peeped in the door. The [h]ostler was cleaning down a horse *with his left hand*. By and by, he turned round, and he wore the famous vest, *with the middle blue porcelain button wanting*. I knew I stood in the presence of the murderer.

I determined on practicing a *ruse*. I suddenly advanced, and seizing him by the arm, exclaimed:

“William Holsley, I arrest you for the willful murder of Mrs. Weldon. Your confederate Hannah has made a full confession.

The murderer turned deadly pale: his limbs shook and his countenance betrayed the most abject fear.

“I will confess all,” he exclaimed.

He was immediately removed to jail and that night made a full confession as follows:

He had been engaged to be married to Hannah, and was only waiting until he earned enough money to support a wife. Hannah, who it seems was a thoroughly bad woman, was tired of the delay, and proposed to him that they should rob her mistress. It was finally agreed that Hannah should drug Miss Millwood's tea with a powerful opiate, and after she was asleep she let in Holsley.

They then decided it would be better "to put the old woman out of the way," and throw the guilt on the niece. Holsley committed the deed, and after having robbed their victim they proceeded to Miss Millwood's chamber, and placed a portion of the money and the old fashioned jewelry in the pocket of her dress which hung on the back of a chair. They then took from her pocket the key of her trunk and unlocking it placed the instrument with which the deed had been committed under her clothes. This done, they re-locked the trunk, and replaced the key from where they had taken it. Holsley left the house, and Hannah fastened the door after him. The deed was skillfully planned, and had Hannah only been concerned, a guiltless party might have suffered; but Holsley was by no means a courageous man and wanted presence of mind.

They were both tried, found guilty, and in two months from the committal of the deed, Holsley was hanged, and Hannah condemned to the State Prison.

Six months after this occurrence, I one day received an invitation to a wedding. It was that of Emily Millwood and her faithful lover. I have seen them quite lately, they are as happy as it is possible to be, and have a fine family of children to add to their felicity.

Such was my first experience as an amateur detective, and although I could not lay claim to any great sagacity in unraveling the mystery, my success made a great sensation, and I received overtures to join the detective force, which was then being organized in New York for the first time. I was out of employment, I liked the business, I accepted the offer and became a detective police-officer, which calling I have before told you, I have followed for twenty years.

Mr. Brampton here finished his story; it was now late and we retired to bed.

The following morning we each departed on our respective businesses.

I heard no more of Mr. Brampton until a month or two ago when I received by Adams Express Co., a MS. Book, and the following note:

New-York, Jan., 6th 1864.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have decided to retire from my profession, and herewith forward you a history of some of the principal cases in which I have been engaged. You are at liberty to publish them as soon as you please. I wish it to be distinctly understood, that, with the exception of some of the names being

altered *every word is true*. Of course I shall leave it to you to render them fit for publication. You know I am not much accustomed to composition for the press, and they may require considerable alteration to render them ship shape.

Yours, very truly,
JAMES BRAMPTON,

To Dr. John B. Williams.

Having thus received permission to publish the contents of the MS. Book, confided to me, I now present them to the public, hoping they will be as much interested in their perusal as I have been.

*The reader will find in one of the leaves the full particulars of the part this Provence rose played in this particular case, so I need not repeat the explanation given me by Mr. Brampton.

Leaves from the Note-Book of a New York Detective: The Private Record of J. B. Ed. John B. Williams, M.D. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1865.

Part of this introduction was previously published as the story "The Porcelain Button" (*The Schenectady* [NY] *Reflector*, February 25, 1859).