T4FG2G:

A DETECTIVE EXPERIENCE

I THINK it's best, since the story I am to tell is like to be a long one, to work as close as I can to the facts. It is the longest case I ever was on, and one of the sharpest, and if I can remember to stick to my text, and not go cruising round from Dan to Jerico—or Beersheba, one of the two—I think I can make out a story that you won't get tired listening to. Some of my friends tell me a good parson was lost to the world when I turned policeman. Well, anyhow, here's a straight yarn this time, if I know how to spin it, and I'll do my best, I promise you.

It happened in the winter of 185-, —a desperate cold winter, as perhaps you may remember—that there were so many burglaries downtown, and so much complaint about the "inefficiency of the police"—that used to be the cry—that the chief put some of us "specials" at work on regular night duty. There were several squads, five picked men in each, under the command of a sergeant, and our duties were to see that the patrolmen kept their beats, for one thing: but mainly to try to nab some party of burglars at work— catch enough to frighten the rest. I tell *you*, it was cold work! I often thought that I should like to haul one of those old grumblers that was always complaining about the inefficiency of the police out of his bed, where *he'd* be all cuddled up under the blankets, and start him out on a beat in a northeaster. Guess he'd step into a cellar, once in a while, for a hot "tod" *too*. It's such a deal easier to find fault, with the thermometer at "temperate," than to do patrol duty at "twenty degrees below."

Speaking of "hot tod," though, I'd rather have hot *coffee* anytime—and that brings me back to the story, with a short turn, and "sarve me right."

My party was out one night—a little, fine, tingling snow blowing like old Bor'as himself—and we'd just been together into Mike's for some coffee—he kept near the foot of Warren then—and we'd coaxed him to keep open for us that night. We came out together, and was just a-going to scatter round a little, when, looking up street, I saw a gaslight stop flickering, and gradually go out. I knew that meant mischief, so I sent three men round the blocks into Chambers Street, to come out above and head off the rascals, and I and the rest of us sneaked up, quietly, right toward 'em. We met the patrolman on the way—the thieves had followed him, and turned off the gas right behind his back— and we told him to follow us. We worked along slowly, to give the other men time to get round, and came smack upon the villains, all seven of us together, including the patrolman, just as they were about to enter a large silk house—wholesale—on business. The fellows saw there was no use making a muss, at least, I mean they appeared to think so; but just as we were a-going to march them off, one of them gave a yell, and they all made a dash to get off. Only one got loose, however, and as the man that had him made a rush at him with his "billy," the villain turned on him, and gave him a sudden blow with something that *cut;* we could hear the dull *gash* into poor Kinner's body. I don't suppose you ever heard *that* sound. Well, in the rush that followed, the other prisoners struggled like good uns, but they couldn't get out of it; but Leon—that was the name of the man that gave the blow; Kinner said he knew him—he got off, running like a deer; and I after him. The storm was so furious, though, that I couldn't keep him in sight; and I couldn't track him, for the wind swept the pavement clean of snow. I beat the alarm as I went along, and hoped some patrolman would stop him; but after running a dozen blocks, without seeing a single patrolman, I concluded that it was useless to try

that chase any further, in the teeth of a northeast snow-storm, and though I was sorry to give it up, I had to let him go. I went then right to the City Hall, and there I found the rest of my party; prisoners safe; but poor Kinner—they'd brought him in half dead, with a horrid gash down his left cheek and neck! The blood was flowing—well, I'll skip that. He was attended to, of course.

Now you may bet that we were bound to catch this Leon—Louis Leon, he was called—a French rascal, a regular galley-bird; he'd lived and worked in London some time, and had been in this country several years, and had always been lucky, never caught, though we all had been on the lookout for him. Kinner had spotted him once at the races, from a description. Now Kinner was a first-rate fellow, and we vowed we'd revenge him, swore we'd have Leon, dead or alive, before Kinner got well.

I won't take time to go into details; but we "turned up" every "crib" in town where we thought there was any chance of finding him, and spent two weeks, three of us, doing our best.

One morning we were sitting over the fire at the Hall, talking over the matter, when one of the men says to the other,

"I say, John, you remember how them two fellows tried to get away with a rush that night when we were fetching 'em in? Well, one of 'em, just as they started, sung out to the other, *'Current wheat!'* or something that sounded like that. Did you hear it?"

"Yes," says John; "I remember hearing 'em say something in Dutch or French, but I didn't think anything more of it, because I didn't understand what they meant. Sergeant [turning to me], you've been across the pond: did you ever hear any lingo that sounded like that?"

I'd been trying to think, from the moment I first heard them repeat the words. The "wheat" sounded Frenchy to me, and presently *huit* came into my head; and then the "current" changed into *quarante.*

"Listen, boys!" said I. "Was it anything like this?" and I gave them "*quarante huit!*" quick and loud.

"*That's* it!" say they; "that's it, exactly! What does it mean?"

"Well," says I, "that's French for *forty-eight;* and, if it means anything, it means that this is the number of some den where they were to meet if they got away."

Number 48 was tried pretty thoroughly for some days, but no luck. You see we didn't have to search 48 Fifth Avenue, nor 48 Madison Square; we knew what streets to look in. Well, after 48 was served out, all there was left of that guess was to turn it round and make 84 of it, and try that. We had felt sure, all along, that Leon was too "fly" to live at any common resort of "cracksmen." We should have to look for him in some quiet place—perhaps in a very respectable neighborhood. We had tried the 48 in many streets where you wouldn't think of looking for a thief. Well, the long and the short of it is, that at 84—call it Yellow Street; there may be respectable people living there now—we found a house that answered our purpose. Our way was

to make inquiries of the right kind of people in the neighborhood—old women, for example—as to whether that house was to rent, who lived there, etc.; different questions, you know, to different folks, as the Yankee peddler said when he was asked what prices he got for his clocks: "Different prices," said he, "according as I find fools." We found out, from these inquiries, that the parties that lived in that house-no one knew their names—went in and out at all times, day and night, but especially at night; that there was an old man and a young man and a woman living there, besides boarders or visitors.

It would take too long for me to tell how we made sure that Leon lived there. It is enough to say that a journeyman tailor (one of our men) hired a room across the way, and settled the matter in less than three days. We found out that Leon was at home one night, and three of us made them a visit. It was rather too bad to get into a burglar's house with skeleton keys, but we did; we got in, found Leon asleep with his woman, and the old man—the girl's father—in the next room. I turned my dark-lantern full in his face, and, says I,

"Wake up, my boy! Some friends come to see you!"

He turned over, wide awake in an instant, and he knew us. I can't give his words, for they were a strange mixture of French and English; but the amount of it was that his fate had come at last, and he might as well give up to it peaceably. The woman got up and sat on the bed crying; the old man was secured, and one of my men was searching the house while Leon dressed.

"Vill you 'ave some eau de vie?" said he; "some good brandy, mon ami?"

"No, I thank you," said I.

"Bien! but you will smoke the *cigar* vit me. I get you one tres bon cigar!" and he went to his closet. Lucky for me that I tip-toed behind him. I was just in time to see him reach out his hand for a revolver that lay on the shelf, when I brought my "billy" down *whack* on his arm, just above the elbow, and broke it. What with his pain and the surprise, and his anger at having his pretty little plan spoiled, his face *wasn't* particularly amiable when he turned round on me. I asked him afterward if he intended to shoot me?

"Certainment, mon ami," said he; "of course I shoot you, to get avay."

After this little affair we got our prisoners off to the station house quietly enough, though the young woman wept some—and a surgeon was sent for to mend my rough work. The house was searched, with no results, except some jewelry that, I believe, was recognized by a lady uptown; but on searching Leon there were found some documents that proved to be of considerable value.

If you please, I'll light a fresh cigar—not one of the Leon brand-and give you the rest of the story. If I'm not mistaken, the best of it is to come.

In the collar of Leon's coat we found two papers. One was a small piece, old and dirty, containing the address of a house or store, some kind of place, in a street in Philadelphia: I knew

it was there, for I recognized the name of the street—I've lived there. It had been so long between the folds of the cloth that the perspiration had soaked into it.
The other paper was a letter, written on very thin paper-a half sheet—and was tucked in on the other side of the collar, opposite the place where I found the address. This piece had evidently been just sewed in. Here it is—see what you can make of it:

"3—k1bh—m45h4—r3bq—r4f—y2—1—s44q—t4fg2—q21x2f, ht2—f3sth—y1b. = 3—k1bh—1—c13f*, &*—1—x21q2f, h4—y1w2—1—h21y*4r—htf22.* = H4—qf3j2—3b— *5xgh2f P45bhm. = 3* —gtlxx— n2—3b—h4kb—3b—htf22—k22wg. = Kf3h 2—h4—y2 —kt2f2 —h4—y22h—t3y.

"lqqf2gg—T2bfm—Xib32f, Xibg3bsn5fst."

It *is* all Greek to you, I presume; but it is easy enough to make it out if you go to work in the right way. Now such puzzles always please me. If I had thought that the letter contained nothing worth knowing I should have tried to understand it, just for the fun of it. As it was, for both reasons I went to work, and could read it all in about two hours.

It isn't anything to boast of, though; for the cipher is perfectly simple. It didn't take an extra smart head to plan *that* out. I've *seen* puzzlers, though—some that took all my spare time for weeks.

You think it doesn't look easy? Why, just look here: See the number of *figures* there are, and notice, too, that 5 is the highest. Now there isn't a word, even the shortest, but what has a figure in it; some more than one. And now tell me what five different letters there are in the alphabet, one of which *must* be in every syllable. "The *vowels,"* of course. And so you see what a *start* we have: a—1, e—2, i—3, 0—4, u—5; and one or more of these in *every word.*

If you like I'll give you an idea of how I went on. It won't take long to show you how to begin; and the farther you get the easier it grows.

Printers say that e is the commonest letter in the language. Now look through and see how many 2's there are. Don't that help prove that my first guess about the vowels was a good one?

Now, in the next place, *the* is the commonest *word* in the language, and we have learned the last letter of it—it's a "2." So let's see if we can find any word of three characters ending in 2.

There's only one, and that's in the second line"ht2." Strange, rather, that there's no more; but businessmen often leave out short words. This is a "the," we may be sure; for no one could well write a letter without at least *one*" the"; and as this is the only combination of the kind, and as it ends in e (2), why, this *must* be "the." So *h* stands for *t,* and *t* for *h:* at least, this is a fair guess, and we can prove it by substitution.

Now *th* is a common combination at the beginning and end of words. Let's see if we can find an *ht* anywhere. The first one we come to is "htf22." Now substitute, and leave out the *f,* and we have *th.ee;* and you can't *help* putting an *r* in the vacancy, and making *three* of it. So we learn that *f* stands for *r.*

Very well. Now we have a, e, i, o, u, t, h, and r; and we can use these to find more. Let's look for a word with one or more of these in it.

There's one in the second line, "f3sth," in which the *s* is the only one we don't know. Substituting, and leaving out *s*, we have ri.ht. Isn't this *right,* plain enough? And so *s* stands for *g.*

One link more in the chain! Read along till you come to "s44q," which equals *goo.,* or, fuller, *good.* Easy, you see. Well, since *q* stands for *d,* that's an important gain, for there are a great many *d*'s in words. You can find plenty of them in this letter.

Now, besides the vowels, we have the letters which stand for t, h, r, g, and d. With these you can go on, and make out the rest without any trouble.

The letter amounts to this: Henry Lanier, of Lansingburg, wants Leon to find for him "the right man," of whom to buy a *pair* of matched horses, and a leader, so that he can make a team of *three.* He wants them to use in *Ulster County.* Lastly, he says he is coming to New York in three weeks, and asks Leon to write to him, appointing a meeting somewhere with the horse dealer.

Perhaps you think that I didn't get paid for my trouble, deciphering this letter. Well, you may think differently, after you have heard me through.

Mr. Lanier, to whose remarkable ingenuity we owe this doubly mysterious letter, thought himself *very* smart, undoubtedly; he didn't imagine that anyone, even with the letter deciphered, could understand *his* game. But he betrays himself, in this way: The words "pair," "three," and "Ulster County" are underscored in the original; but of what use to emphasize them? Why not say that he wanted to buy three good horses; and, especially, of what possible use can it be to add that the horses are to be used in *Ulster County*? Moreover, why write an ordinary business letter about buying horses in *cipher*?

The mystery of all this is more easily understood by me than it would be by you; for I happen to know, as do the police generally, and many outside of the police, that "horses" is the "flash" term for *counterfeit bills*. So then, my translation of the strange letter is, that Mr. Henry Lanier, of Lansingburg—a noted resort of counterfeiters by the—way—wants to meet a party in New York who will get up for him the plates from which to print counterfeits on the Ulster County Bank, and I suspect, from his emphasis of "pair" and "three," that he wants the denominations of 2's and 3's.

Now it is desirable that this horse-trade be interfered with. We can easily prevent the success of this particular plan; but this is not enough. We want to catch Lanier and his gang-for there are always several of them working together; and we want, besides and particularly, to catch them in such a way that we can *prove* them counterfeiters, and place them where they can do no more injury to the public.

My plan to accomplish this-a plan which was approved by the authorities-was to induce Leon to reply to Lanier, informing him that "the right man" would meet him at a place named, and would

deal with him personally, “no third parties or go-betweens,” on this business. I proposed to personate one of the “horse-dealing” fraternity; to work for him in procuring plates, and to lead him just far enough to make him indictable and convictable as a maker of counterfeit money; and *then* to nab him and as many more as I could entangle with him.

You doubt the *fairness* of the plan. Well, it is a debatable question; but you remember the “bogus baby case”—Mrs. Cunningham’s “blessed baby”—which was managed by the District Attorney; that is *authority* for this kind of cheating.

My plan was a good one, though I say it; but would Leon help me in the first step, namely, writing to Lanier to come and meet “the right man?” He might and he mightn’t; probably the latter. However, I could only try him, and I did. By this time he had taken rooms at the Egyptian Hotel, commonly called “the Tombs,” and there I made him a visit. He seemed glad to see me, and talked as kindly with me as if I had not been the cause of his carrying his right arm in a sling.

“I’m sorry I had to do it,” said I.

“It is all right,” he replied; “if you not break the arm, I shoot you, *sure*!”

After an exchange of compliments, he praising my pluckiness in arresting him, and I, in return, doing justice to his acknowledged character as being the most successful of “cracksmen,” I told him of my having read the letter, and hinted at having Lanier & Co. more completely in my power than was true. I advised him to shorten his own term of imprisonment by acting as our decoy duck in bringing the counterfeiters into our hands.

“Now,” said I, “*you’re* foul,’ and nothing but ‘squeaking’ on them can prevent your having the extreme penalty of the law. You’re sure of being convicted on both counts, the burglary and the assault with intent to kill, and together they will send you up (to Sing Sing) for a century or so; and besides, we’ve got the Lansingburg gang ‘foul,’ *too*; we’ve surrounded them completely. Now, it will give us some trouble to get them, but if you will help us, it will *save* us trouble, and, in return, we’ll do all we can to shorten your time.”

His black eyes glistened as he looked up in reply:

“I have my character! I *never* ‘squeak!’ You catch Lanier how you please. *Moi*, I hold my *honneur*!”

It was a capital illustration of “honor among thieves.” I couldn’t but admire his principles; and I couldn’t stir him, not an inch. Arguments, inducements, promises, were all thrown away, and I left him a little disheartened. Leon had made up his mind to endure his imprisonment to the uttermost minute, and would have staid in prison for the remainder of his life rather than expose his friends.

Well, I went home and considered. I smoked a bunch of cigars over my considerations, and they seemed like to *end* in smoke, when, on feeling in my vest pocket for a match—I am careless enough to carry them there—I pulled out a little dirty scrap of paper, which, on being opened,

proved to be *that address*—one of the papers I found in Leon's coat collar. I had forgotten it entirely; but here it was, and I brightened up at once with an indefinite assurance that this would help me somehow. The more I looked at it the more I feared that its evident age would make it worthless; and yet I knew I should not rest satisfied till I had turned over this stone, and made the most of what might be under it.

So down to Philadelphia by next train: find the place—French milliners: go to a Philadelphia detective, an old friend, and inquire about them: he says they haven't been "spotted": I tell him of my job, and what I want: my plan, to enter their store without their knowledge, if possible, and see what there is to be seen: he agrees to help: watch the place: on Sunday, when they are gone to Mass—store locked—we get in by backdoor: examine thoroughly: find, in a box in the cellar, silks, ribbons, laces that my friend pronounces stolen, the description of just such goods having been left with the police: he is *positive* that these are stolen: overhaul their writing desk—lock a simple one—secret drawer, of course: find *letters from Leon*, addressed to *his* "*dear sisters*": that's enough: have got the sisters under my thumb, and a new hold on Leon: my friend promises to keep mum for a while: I take the ambrotypes of the milliners, which I find on their table, and one of the letters; and—back to New York next morning.

Now I repeat my visit to Leon.

"My good friend," I say, "do you recognize these pictures, these letters?"

"*Mon Dieu! Mes soeurs!* How you get these? What have they done? *Sacré nom de Dieu!* What is all this? *Tell* me, my friend!"

This was just what I wanted.

"Well, Leon," said I, "you see that your good luck has left you. I've 'got you foul,' every way. I've been through your sisters' place in Philadelphia, and have got *them* under my thumb. Their fate depends on you. Now let's make a bargain. You serve me, and I'll serve you. Will you talk?"

"Yes; it is easy to talk."

"Well, in the first place, you don't want your sisters tried and sentenced as receivers of stolen goods-"

"No! *Mon Dieu!* My *sisters!* It is all that I have in the world!"

"Well," said I; and then I went on and told him the whole story, from finding the address in his collar to searching his sisters' premises.

"D-n it!" says he, "I had been lucky so long that I had grown careless. I had forgotten that the address was left there."

"Now," said I, "you see that I have them in such a way that I can hold them or let them go. Which shall I do?"

He said nothing for a few minutes; then,

"I agree!" says he. "You give me your word not to do harm to my sisters, and I give you Lanier."

"Very well," said I; and we shook hands over the bargain. As he was rather particular, I went so far as to kiss the Book with him.

And now, by your leave, I will try to bring my story to an end.

Leon's letter to Lanier was written on a scrap of paper—the flyleaf of a book—in pencil, and amounted to this, as near as I can remember:

"*Tombs*. I'm caught at last; but did your errand before I got nabbed. On the 13th, at eight in the evening, corner of Broadway and Canal, lower, west, 'the right man' will wait for you: short man, light, drab hat with a weed, dark clothes, spotted cravat: sign—you say 'Montreal'—he, 'Canada.' He is A 1 on horses. This is mailed by a sure hand. Good luck. Can't write more.

"L.L."

This was written in cipher, like the other. Leon assured me that Lanier did not know his handwriting, and that the cipher would convince him that the letter was all right. I felt rather scary about sending it, fearing that Lanier had read the newspaper report of Leon's arrest, and would be doubtful of my letter's genuineness, and so keep away; but I concluded to send it. Lanier proved to be just the man I judged him to be from his making use of such a simple cipher for his correspondence; he had that second-rate cunning which is always planning and scheming, and paid such particular attention to little things as to overlook, entirely, the grand points of a risk.

I was at the corner of Broadway and Canal at the time, dressed, of course, for my part in the play; and at eight, precisely, a little bit of a fellow came out of the drugstore, and ran up to me.

"Hullo! Charley," says he, "when did you leave *Montreal*?"

"How are you?" says I; "glad to see you. I left Montreal three weeks ago, but I've been traveling sometime since then in *Canada* West."

Well, the result of our conversation—and we had a long one, at a private room in an eating-house was, that I should get him two plates—2's and 3's, on the Ulster County Bank—he to meet me every few weeks, to see if the engraving suited him, and to pay the current expenses. I was a journeyman in an engraving office, and could get up just the nicest kind of plates. Of course I didn't forget to speak of Leon, and to congratulate Lanier that our matter had been settled before he was caught. I needn't go into particulars; but I flatter myself that I left nothing undone.

And now began the work. I tried at various engravers to find the necessary "rollers"—I don't know as you understand the process of banknote engraving; if you don't, it's really too late now to go through all that—and, as I expected, the most desirable rollers were in the hands of the most honest engravers. I had to prove to them who I was before I could get what I wanted, but when they understood what lay I was on, they were very glad to help me. I got just the patterns I wanted and a good man to work for me. At the end of three weeks I met Lanier again and showed him my progress, and he paid me down the first installment of the necessary funds. So it went on, slowly, for nearly three months—note engraving is slow work—Lanier more and more pleased as the job went on. Another man came with him, sometimes, and I was introduced to a third who lived in the city, and I found out all sorts of news, a little at a time, news that I made good use of afterward. Finally, the plates were completed, and I got about six thousand dollars' worth struck off to be ready for a last meeting when our little arrangement was to terminate, and I was to give up the plates and the six thousand, and receive my pay in full. The meeting was to be at the rooms of Green, Lanier's city friend. He had rooms in a lodging-house in Frankfort Street. I had been told that I might meet some ladies—which I didn't like at all, but couldn't well object to—and true enough I found two there, Green's wife and Lanier's mistress. Quite a nice little party we made, Green, Lanier, and Farley—who came with Lanier from Lansingburg, and myself and the two ladies. Four gentlemen who had not been invited were waiting outside to come in—four good fellows, all ready for my signal. Well, as soon as I had passed over the plates and bills, and got my pay, we sat down to supper, and a jolly one it was. As it was to be the last my friends would have in some time as good I let them enjoy it, and I was the more willing since the mixture of brandy and roast duck, and Champagne, and oysters, and claret, and brandy again, and so on, was making my men an easier prey. It was a very miscellaneous kind of a supper, in dishes, glasses, and manners. The women got as merry as a fiddler's elbow; Mrs. Green even admitted to me, very confidentially, that she really didn't know whether she was "afoot or a-horseback." It was a wild kind of a time, I tell you.

But what a change came over the spirit of that dream when I quietly unlocked the door and in walked my waiting friends! I won't attempt to describe the scene. You may imagine men red with liquor turning pale with fright, dropping their glasses and staggering to their feet, eyes staring, jaws dropped, almost stupefied with terror: women clutching hold of the men and shrieking: and then, oaths and blows and bottles flying—I got this cut over my eye in that scrimmage—and a general row-de-dow. But it was soon over; we were too many for them; and in less than half an hour we had them all under lock and key.

All there is left to tell now, is, that those three men, and one more that I caught up to Lansingburg, are now at Sing Sing. Leon's there too.

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