

*An Important Capture*  
*As Told by a Present-Day Detective*  
by Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.

I don't wonder. (It's a weather-beaten, battle-scarred veteran in the police service who is talking—a man of middle-age, with little of external sign to tell of the wondrous executive ability—the mighty forces, moral and physical—that dwelt within the ordinary work-a-day frame.) I don't wonder the man was never suspected of being shaky. I certainly should have missed him if the merest accident had not pointed him out to me. (He spoke of a man then recently committed to the penitentiary of King's county,—one of the grandest looking, handsomest, and most *manly* bearing men I ever saw, a specimen of whose curious and cunning workmanship in metals stands upon the desk before me as I write.)

You will call to mind how the merchants and bankers had been startled by the appearance of bank-notes of large denominations, taken at first by the banks themselves, and afterwards found to be counterfeit. Theretofore our bankers, upon the appearance of a counterfeit, had been able to point out, to the average perceptive faculties, such faults in the base paper as would insure its rejection on the second presentation; but with this issue it was different. The imitation was so nearly perfect that they could only recommend to a too trustful public: "*Take no notes of that description.*" But this did not offer a cure. All notes of that class might be called in and cancelled, only to make way for the forthcoming of a new class of issue. The one thing absolutely needful was to find the man, or the men, who had thus succeeded in making a counterfeit that had deceived even the receivers at the banks, and who, having done that thing once, might do it again and again, if their wings could not be clipped. Finally, it was given into my hands to search out and apprehend the counterfeiters. I accepted the commission on the sole condition that I should have entire command—that no man should be so empowered or privileged as to be able to move across my path. To this end I went to Washington, and after a close consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury, and with others concerned, I returned to New York, and sat down to quiet repose and reflection in my own private apartments.

Upon the table or desk-top before me were half-a-dozen genuine legal tenders of the "green-back" family, and three counterfeits. The work of the rogue had been done in a masterful manner, most assuredly; and as I sat there and contemplated the printed proofs of sinful handicraft, remembering the characters of the skilled engravers of the legally organized companies whom I had consulted, I made up my mind that the rascal whom I sought was, to begin with, a gentleman, polished and accomplished, and evidently moving in upper circles when he pleased.

At first we had thought that the counterfeiters must have become possessed of a true plate or plates of the government printer; but the microscope told us that the plate of the counterfeiters was altogether new, though the maker thereof had evidently taken his first impression directly from a genuine note.

I will not recount my failures, though a few of them were results of trials that might be interesting. Suffice it under that head to say that I was led to follow more than one clew that offered me brilliant prospect—one in particular, by which I was led to apprehend two men and

one woman, whom I was obliged afterwards to set free, though I did then, and do now, verily believe them to be accomplished forgers and counterfeiters.

I had been at work about two months, and was beginning to fear that my labor was to be in vain, when a certain item fell under my eye which not only gave new direction to my thoughts and energies, but which lifted my heart into a sphere of bright hopefulness. It was an item in the telegraphic budget of one of our New York dailies—an item of information from over the water—to the effect that a certain notorious counterfeiter, whose accomplishments in his particular line of evil doing had long been the terror of English bankers, was supposed to be on his way to this country. I read that item—read it the second and third times—and then leaned my head upon my hand and thought. And I paced up and down my room and thought. In the end my plan was made and elaborated. I went to the office of the telegraph company, and having made sure that I could operate through the line with entire secrecy, I telegraphed to an officer of the detective force in London with whom I was intimately acquainted, and whom I had entertained and escorted while on a visit to this country only a year previously. I asked him to give me, as quickly as possible, positive information, if he could, of the whereabouts of Tom Godfrey, otherwise called the “Chevalier of Westerham.” I sent my telegram on Thursday forenoon. On Saturday morning the answer came. The officer had been out of town on official business. With regard to Tom Godfrey he was able to answer emphatically: That individual had been apprehended on board the steamer just as she was ready to sail, and was at that moment held in durance awaiting further testimony, which might be several weeks in coming.

That was all I wanted, and better than I had even hoped. I sent a simple word of thanks to the London inspector, and asked him to keep the *Chevalier's* name out of further print on his side as long as he could. At his own expense he returned to me a response: “*Done as you request.*”

My next move was to make sure of the time—or probable time—of the arrival of the steamer in which Godfrey had attempted to sail. She would not be in before the expiration of six days. Next I took the Fall River line for Boston—taking that route simply because I wished to get out at Middleborough, where I had a cousin whose assistance I very much needed,—without whose help, in fact, my scheme might have fallen through. He was a cousin of my wife, his name Edgar Poole; a man of eight-and-twenty years; of medium height and size; a form of manly perfection, made up of thew and sinew in such proportion as to yield the utmost amount of physical power; nerves like steel; courage undaunted; wit keen and quick; and about as handsome as men are made. The dear fellow had only been at home three weeks, or thereabouts, having been for the seven years last past in China, acting as a sort of handy-man for Consul King (Capt. Edward—bless his memory!). He greeted me happily, and while the women were preparing breakfast (for I alighted at Middleborough just at day-break) I explained my business. I told him what was up—told him of my correspondence with the London inspector, and of the result, and then informed him that I wished him to return with me to New York; to remain concealed in my apartments until the arrival of the steamer, at which time I should send him on board from Sandy Hook, and have him land in New York as the veritable Tom Godfrey, Chevalier of Westerham.

If there had been a lurking fear that Ed. might refuse, all doubt was banished before he had spoken in reply. His face told the story. The work pleased him. He was eager for it. Said he, when it had been settled that he would do as I wished:

“Nothing could suit me better. I should like to be the means of giving those rascals up to justice; for of all the methods of robbery of the day I regard the counterfeiting of the nation’s money as the most wicked. It is setting free the demon of robbery in the dark, and the widow and the orphan are as liable to be victims as any one. And I can work to advantage. I am not known in New York. I doubt if there is a man there, outside your own family, who could recognize me for other than the man I shall claim to be.”

Our plans were arranged, as far as we could then and there do, and on Sunday morning I was back in New York, where Edgar joined me on the following day.

On the last day of the week I gave my cousin in charge to a pilot who had promised to get him on board the steamer from the Light Boat off Sandy Hook. He would take him with himself, and had no doubt of success. And he succeeded to the utmost of our wishes. The steamer was signaled on Monday morning, and Edgar boarded her with the pilot. Never mind about the questions asked and answered. As a last resort my agent had a commission from government in his possession, but he was not called upon to use it. The captain, as fortune would have it, entered into the spirit of the business with real interest, and as soon as he understood the points, he promised to give his whole influence to the furtherance of our plans. He furnished Edgar with copies of most of the papers which had been thrown out in the mail-bag for the reporters in the boat of the Associated Press, and in two of them—both London dailies—was found an item to the effect that the “*Chevalier of Westerham*” had taken passage in the steamer; for it will be remembered that the vessel had cleared when the rogue was apprehended, so no note of the apprehension could be sounded in season to be caught by the passengers.

I laugh aloud even now when the remembrance of that scene at the pier-landing spreads its comical picture before me. I stood upon the pier where I could see all the movements after the ship had found her berth, and I observed a commotion among the Bohemians. The eager-faced, pushing, utterly irrepressible gatherers of news were making for the steamer. They had found an item in the “*Globe*” that interested them. I slipped on board to see the show. The captain was true as steel. The question thrown at his head—pricked into his ear—gently insinuated to his understanding—and mostly whispered in careful tone and manner by the knights of the quill, was: “*Where, O! where is THE CHEVALIER OF WESTERHAM?*”

The captain was very reticent. “Evidently,” he said, “such passengers as do not seek publicity do not desire it. If the gentleman you seek is on board you will be most likely to gain information from him, or of him, at his hotel when he shall have landed.”

I heard one persevering scribe ask the commander, plumply, if the man “Tom Godfrey, otherwise known as the Chevalier of Westerham,” was not on board his vessel. The captain very politely answered that he had been very busily engaged with sailing his ship during the voyage, and had consequently enjoyed no opportunity of making the acquaintance of his passengers.

And so the gentlemen of the press went away without positive information, —or, at least, so an outsider would have decided; but, bless you! *They* had gained all the information they sought.

They *knew* that the chevalier was on board; all they had to do further was to lie in wait for him. And they did it.

During the afternoon Edgar Poole, for the first time acting as Tom Godfrey, took a coach, and was driven to one of the most quiet and least obtrusive of the up-town hotels, where he registered his name as “GODFREY WESTERHAM, ESQ., *Sussex, England.*” His first visitor was a member of the Press. The Bohemian found our hero clad in a plain and unpretending suit of black broadcloth, his only article of jewelry, beside a simple watch-chain of gold, being a diamond stud in his shirt-front, —a stone of modest size and of pure water.

And others of the same calling were admitted; and of each all the stranger begged the same favor:—That no publicity should be given to his personality. “I have come simply to see your country, and to enjoy myself if I can,” he said. And to such as were inclined that way he extended the hospitality of his sideboard. Evidently, he was set down for a gentleman, and a generous-hearted companion, let his hidden life be what it might. And so more than one of his guests put it in print. Something after this fashion wrote one of them:

“GODFREY WESTERHAM, ESQ., just arrived by steamer from England, and now stopping at —— House, is a fair type of the genial, well-bred English gentleman. He had come among us for the purpose of——” &c., &c.

Another gave a glowing tribute to the gentleman’s character for social and generous qualities, and appended a genealogical record of his family, by which it would appear that the founder of his house came over with the Conqueror, and that he was a younger brother, with a knight baronet at the head.

That my plan was working I very soon discovered. On the evening of the day on which the articles above referred to appeared I was in at the Rotunda of the Astor House, where I observed two gentlemen who, I very well knew, were not only professional blacklegs of the higher order, but adepts in every art and science of money-yielding villainy. They had a copy of a New York daily between them, and were enjoying something which they had read therein, and a little patience, with care and adroitness, enabled me to gather the gist of their conversation: They were making merry at the excessive verdancy of the reporter who had given the fictitious genealogy of the Chevalier of Westerham. *They knew him!* And I knew them! That was an important point to score.

I might extend my story to a great length by giving the various incidents and comical passages that resulted, in one way and another, from my cousin’s escapade; but I will make short work of it, and briefly state the prime result. And that result, be sure, was a surprise to the pair of us. I do not give true names, because the chief culprit has almost completed the term of his punishment; and, moreover, because he has near and dear friends living and holding high and responsible place in society. However, the man was apprehended, arraigned, tried, and sentenced, under an assumed name, as the court itself very well knew at the time.

It was on Sabbath evening, of the week following Edgar's assumption of his new character, and near ten o'clock, when he entered my presence with a look upon his face that startled me. He had the appearance of a man who had just escaped a pursuing ghost.

"Ed., what is it?" I asked.

He sat down and breathed awhile, and finally replied by asking a question in return:

"Tell me first: What is the exact and particular business between yourself and J. B. Spoorleigh?"

He alluded to a matter that I had simply hinted at in his hearing, which, in brief, was this:

The Mr. Spoorleigh alluded to was one of the wealthiest of the solid and reliable men of our city. He had built up his colossal fortune in mercantile business—trading in his own ships between Christian lands and the far Orient, or Antipodal climes—and had now retired from all business save such as was unavoidable with the possession of wealth, and the disposition to do good. Mr. Spoorleigh had two children—both daughters, the youngest of which, eighteen years of age, and unmarried, named Anna, was at home, the joy, the sunlight, the chief blessing of his declining days. And Anna had made the acquaintance of a certain Arthur Vandyke, representative of one of the oldest Manhattan families, and possessed of wealth. She had not only made his acquaintance, but had listened to his protestation of love, and a demand of her hand in marriage; and her own feelings may be judged of from the fact that she had referred him to her father.

And the father had come to me. He had a dread of Arthur Vandyke. He could not explain it; he could not tell me where it originated; he only knew that sight of the man made him shudder. And yet Vandyke moved in the first circles; was of the legitimate aristocracy; came of the very best of the old Patroon stock, had been polished in Europe, and was, withal, one of the handsomest men of his day and generation. Said the dear old father to me:

"If that man is what my fears foreshadow, I would rather lay my child in her grave than consign her to his keeping; and yet I know not one thing of fact against him, nor can I find a friend who does. Dear sir, it is in the line of your business to look down into men's private lives. Look down into that man's life for me. Do not—O! do not let my sweet child be mated with dishonor."

I promised Mr. Spoorleigh that I would do my best; and I had done it. For a full month I had had the case in my hands, and had left no stone unturned beneath which there could be possibility of finding a clue; but I had found nothing. In fact, Vandyke's character appeared to be above reproach; but in my mind, as in the old merchant's, there had grown a feeling of deep and abiding distrust. The man had a hidden life, I was sure, though no fruit might have been yet borne in testimony. And thus, with the case of J. B. Spoorleigh, the business stood at the time of which I now speak; and I told the story to my cousin plainly and directly.

"Well," said he, after thinking awhile upon the conclusion of my narrative, "it is fortunate that I regarded Arthur Vandyke as a friend of yours, and as above possible suspicion. He called upon me at my hotel chamber this afternoon, sending up by a hall-boy a sealed envelope bearing my address under my assumed character. I broke the seal, and within found this card."

He handed it to me, and it bore, written in pencil, this significant legend:

*“If you travel sub rosa, I am with you.”*

When I had read, Edgar went on:

“I asked the boy if he knew the man who had sent him with that envelope, and from his affirmative reply I gathered that his knowledge had come by the merest chance. At a party given by a public and popular man at a neighboring large hotel this boy had been sent to fill up a required quota of servants for the main hall and coat-room, and there he had learned to know the name of the man in question—*Mr. Arthur Vandyke.*”

Of course, I started at this, and my cousin must have known why; but he simply nodded at my earnest repetition of the name, and continued:

“I had the man sent up, and, sure enough, he proved to be Arthur Vandyke. And yet, notwithstanding the mysterious card, I did not think him a rogue. I believed he had come in some way to suspect my true character, and had now come to haze me preparatory to enjoying a laugh with you. The result was that I met him coolly and with undisguised unwillingness; and the very bearing I was led to assume for the purpose of keeping him at a distance—in fact, my very fear that he might discover that I was your cousin, just home from China—helped me in my course far more than any cunning of duplicity could have done. In short, he was convinced that I was the veritable Tom Godfrey, of Westerham, and when assured that he was earnest and honest, I seemed to admit the fact. Then he gave me his confidence so far as to ask me if I was open to the pursuit of a *rich thing*, even at a little personal risk. At this point I began to play my part as I had assumed character for it, and so well did I succeed that before he left he had given me his secret entire. I may say that the large package of new, crisp Bank of England notes which you borrowed of Winslow & Co. for me, I exhibited to him as specimens of my own skill, and gave him to understand that I had come over, partly to get away from Bow Street atmosphere for a time, but more especially to turn over about fifty thousand pounds sterling of that handsome paper. How his eyes sparkled when he saw those notes! He handled them and counted a portion of them, and did not dream that they ever saw the vaults of Threadneedle Street. He hinted very strongly that he would like to take a few of them away to compare the work with his own. And there and then he let drop these words: *‘For I have engraved every line and dot of our best plates with my own hand.’*”

“However, I told him I dared not suffer a scrap of that paper to leave me then. If he would bring some of his paper, or if he would take me to his own quarters, we might make some exchange, or enter into some arrangement, satisfactory, if not advantageous, to both parties. And before he left he arranged that he would come to me tomorrow evening at ten o’clock, and bring with him a quantity of his own manufacture. Not a doubt troubles him touching my character.”

Our further conversation at that time need not be given. Of course, it was arranged that two or three spectators should be admitted to a convenient closet to witness the exhibition of the morrow evening.

Never mind the feelings which stirred within me after my visitor had gone. I was surprised,—I may say astounded,—but I had seen too much of such life to lose sleep, or borrow trouble. On the following day I called three reliable, circumspect men of our corps to my assistance, and they helped me to search out the tracks of Arthur Vandyke for the past few weeks. We had no trouble in tracing him hither and thither, and before night I had fixed upon two places—one on a dingy court leading out from West Broadway, and the other up town—in one or both of which evil work might be carried on.

On the following evening my three assistants accompanied me to my cousin's room, where, at the proper time, we found safe and comfortable hiding in a large clothes-press. At the appointed hour Vandyke came. There had been, up to that moment, the shadow of a lingering thought that Edgar's Vandyke and the Vandyke of my knowledge might be different persons; but the first glimpse of the gentlemanly face and form, which I gained through a small hole at the top of the door, told me that the skeleton of my friend Spoorleigh's domestic circle was before me. If the thought of a possible slip in the business had troubled me, I was to be happily disappointed. Vandyke not only took from his pocket, and opened and spread out upon the table before them, a large quantity of the very counterfeits which had caused so much trouble, but, acting under directions from me, Edgar drew from him, quietly and adroitly, while they looked over the notes, information that the workshop of his gang was "down town;" and he said enough to assure me that the den of the West Broadway court was the place.

I will not attempt to describe Vandyke's terror and surprise when I laid my hand upon his shoulder. I think in that moment his suffering was keener than at any aftertime. After that, when he had become calm, he called upon a wondrous fount of self-sustaining power within, and took as the decree of Fate that which he could not escape.

We visited the place near West Broadway that same night, and by putting "*the Chevalier*" in advance, we gained admission to the very "*iniquitum iniquitorum*" of the counterfeiters, (so my sergeant, Tim. Cotter, called it,) where we found the whole outfit and equipment of the counterfeiting gang, with two men and a woman on the premises.

I will only say further, that the gang was broken up, the business stopped, and the counterfeiters duly tried and sentenced; and I may add, that Mr. Spoorleigh had no more to fret and worry on account of Arthur Vandyke's attentions to his daughter. How the lady herself took it I cannot say.

I cannot close, however, without a single remark upon what, with some men, seems to be an inborn, insane disposition to this species of evil-doing. There was no earthly need that Arthur Vandyke should forge or counterfeit for the purpose of comfortable, and even luxurious, living. To my certain knowledge he was the possessor of more than fifty thousand dollars, left him by his father; but he could not live honestly. The evil he did was a passion with him, which he could not resist.

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