

## *The London Detective*

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### Revelations by an Ex-Member of the Craft

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#### How the Doubtful Cases are Worked Up

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A writer in *Chambers' Journal* gives an account of a conversation which he held with a retired member of the detective force who had attained the crowning glory of every English detective[’s] ambition—the ownership of a public house. During this conversation many of the secret workings of the system were explained by examples, some of which are the following:

#### HOW ARRESTS ARE MADE.

In answer to a question about disguises, the sergeant said: “Not I; never used any disguise; I went out just as I was—plain clothes, of course. No: disguises is all bosh. When I wanted my man, I always knew where to put my hand on him. In fact, I had only to go to his house of call at a certain time, beckon him out, and he would come with me as a lamb. Did I ever have any cases of resistance or assault? Not many. If they were saucy, I used to put the hand-bolts on them; and if I thought they intended a blow, I gave them one for themselves first. I can give you an instance how I used to manage my obstropolous gents. I took one, not more than 50 miles from here, in a place where he was well-known, but not for the thief he was. I ordered him to carry his box before me to the station. He refused, till I told him if he did not do as I told him I would hire a cab, chain him behind, hand-bolted, put the box inside, and walk leisurely on the pavement behind him, giving all his townspeople who asked questions their full of answers. He knew I would keep my word, and he trotted before me to the terminus with his box on his head as quiet as—well, as a lamb.”

#### “THE MARKS ON THE WINDOWSILL”

“A message arrives at the post office from Mr. Greene Jones, saying his premises had been broken into and certain monies or properties stolen. The chief sends myself and another detective to the place. After a few moment[s’] survey we glance at each other in a peculiar way, whereupon the proprietor of the stolen property looks uneasy and perturbed. ‘Well, officers, what do you make of it? The marks are plain enough, are they not?’ My mate—you know Driver, sir?—whistles, and swings from one hand to the other the polished holly stick he always carries with him. I kneel down—Driver having made his inspection first—and examine some marks on the windowsill. ‘That,’ said Mr. Jones, ‘was evidently done with the chisel found in the garden.’

“I thought that it was *rather* too strong that he should talk to *us*, who knew what was what, like that, but determined to be even with him by and by. So I went on asking him a lot of tom-fool questions. After a bit he said, ‘Well, what’ll you take to drink?’ My mate said that he thought a toothful of rum—Driver is partial to rum—wouldn’t poison him, while I gave a name to brandy hot. I remember it quite well. He asked us into a little room behind the shop. His wife was there, nursing a young child—an infant, in fact—and she looked, poor thing, awful down in the mouth. The husband hadn’t been long in business, and we knew that business had been queer with him for some time. He had to send out for the stuff, which he did by a little slatternly servant girl.

While he was away talking to the girl, my mate was led to pump the missus, but I stopped him, for I saw how the land lay as clear as mud. She began, however—uneasily, I could see—to talk of it herself, saying it was strange that they had heard no noise, that the servant always slept at her mother’s, and so on. When her husband returned, followed soon after by the girl, he had in the hot water and mixed the grogs,—stiff ones they were, too, though it were only about noon. By the time we had all three finished our second tumblers, our man got maudlin, first sniveled over his losses, and then talked big, all in a breath, as the saying is. This was more than I could stomach, though I had had his grog; so, when my mate and I went out, Driver being in front—‘I suppose,’ said he, ‘you have an idea who did this?’

“‘I can give a shrewdish guess,’ said I.

“‘Aye! I have heard you detectives are clever chaps, and know a man’s *work*, as you call it, by the way he goes about the job.

Now, who do you suppose did this?’

“‘*You!*’ said I looking him full in the face.

“‘You should have seen his countenance change, sir,—first as white as that pipe, then red as that bar-curtain; and all for a minute. I never saw such a thing. Had I wanted proof of the truth of what I had said, ’twas written there in red and white.

“‘What!’ he blurted out, trying to gulp down a something that seemed to stick in his throat. ‘Me! How dare you say such a thing?’

“‘I dare say anything that I know is true. You asked me a plain question, and I gave you a plain answer.’

“‘Calming down a bit, when he saw I was not cowed or taken aback at all, he says; ‘Do you think I should be such a born fool as to rob myself?’

“‘That’s another plain question; so, if you want another plain answer, here it is. Not yourself, exactly, but your creditors. That’s about the breadth of it.’

“‘Then he began to bluster again, in the midst of which I left him, and walked after Driver, who said: ‘What were you a jawing with the cove about? ’Twas his own crack.’

“‘Right you are,’ said I, ‘and what’s more, I told him so.

“‘You see, sir,[’] said the detective in explanation, [“]the marks on the windowsill were all made from the inside!’”

HOW STOLEN PROPERTY IS DISPOSED OF.

It will astonish the unsophisticated reader to learn that the proceeds of a robbery are often not recovered because it would not pay to recover them. A detective is sent for, the day following a burglary. He receives a description of the spoil. He knows by what channel—as we shall presently show—intelligence may be conveyed to the present holder of the booty that the person robbed will give so much for the restoration of his valuables. But where nothing is offered, the plate goes to the limbo of the melting pot. With watches, the rogues melt the case, and, having erased names and number on the works, put them into fresh cases. Rings or bracelets they denude of stones, which they dispose of on the continent, or even reset at home; except in some cases, when they send them as they are, if bearing no name, crest or mark, to the richer colonies. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that the wife of a very high official had a bracelet offered to her in one of the first shops in Melbourne that had been stolen from her house in Park Lane, London, but 15 months before.

Even banknotes, though stopped, can be got rid of; and there is plenty of machinery for doing so. A stranger lost sundry Bank of England notes for £50 each in a certain provincial town. Notice was given to the branch Bank of England in the same place of the loss, the number of the notes being also supplied to the district manager. Now, Bank of England notes, when once paid into Threadneedle Street, are never reissued, even if they have only left the bank new the same day. No fear was felt of their getting abroad again, if they once went “home”; so a duplicate list of the lost notes was forwarded more leisurely to town. In about six weeks, news was sent down to the provincial town to the effect that the notes had reached home. The police next set about tracing the notes. They had been paid by a bank in the provincial town to their city agents. The country bank had received them from a professional gentleman, and they had been paid to him by a tradesman in a large way of business, who had been long suspected by the police of being a buyer of stolen notes. There the clue abruptly stopped, and could be pursued no further. The tradesman said he could not tell from whom he had had the note. Invited by the police to attend before the magistrates, he repeated the same tale. Asked particularly by the magistrates’ clerk if he took so many £50 notes in a day that he could not tell whence they came, he replied generally, that he often took £50 notes without indorsing them, and this must be one; and he positively could not tell how the note had come into his hands, except that he knew it must have come in the regular course of trade. And so it ended.

Now, if this had been a man in a small way of business, he could not have got off by such an excuse. The police were morally sure the tradesman had bought the £50 note, but they could not prove it. The vastness of his business protected this man; whereas the petty trader, being unable to urge such a plea, would have been caught and trounced.

#### HOW INFORMATION IS OBTAINED.

A detective, charged with working up a case, saunters down into a well-known locality. He has not proceeded far before he sees a slouching, shambling hulk of a fellow standing listlessly in a doorway, sucking a pipe.

“Want anyone?” he smirks.

“Oh!” says Stimpkins, “is that you Stepping Sam? Haven’t seen you for quite a while.”

“No; I’ve been in the country, hop picking. Want anyone?”

“Hop picking, aye? They didn’t make you sign the pledge, did they?” said Stimpkins, glancing meaningly over his shoulder at the faded sign of the Setting Sun.

“Not the leastest bit,” retorts Stepping Sam with a hideous leer.

“Come across then.”

As they enter the bar of the Setting Sun, Mrs. Lockerby, the landlady, graciously courtesies and smirks at Stimpkins, and begs to know what he will take this morning.

“What’s it to be, Sam?” says Stimpkins.

“Some of yer best cream’s my pison,” is the hoarse rejoinder of Stepping Sam, who [l]ittle knows the truth of the latter part of his reply.

“Poison yourself with whatever you like,” answers Stimpkins; “it will save Calcraft a job[.]”

“Very well, sir,” says Mrs. Lackerby; “you must drop in some other time and taste some beautiful whisky I’ve bought—Just your palate sir.” Then, as Stimpkins and his companion dive into an inner room the landlady mutters to a frouzy woman who is drinking at a sloppy counter. “Allus like to keep in with them nasty perleece.” Then emphatically: “Allus treats them. *It pays.*”

There ensues a little general conversation, during which Sam repeatedly endeavors to edge in his oft recurrent question: “But do you want anyone?” always to be evaded by Stimpkins, whose invariable reply to a question is to imitate the Quaker in the story, and ask another.

After much verbal sparring of this kind, Stimpkins remarks casually, and as though it were a matter of the supremest indifference to him: “There was a crib cracked up the hill last night.”

“So I heard. Scuppy Joe the Scoolar was a reading of it in the paper. It said the perleece were on the track.”

“Ah!” says Stimpkins, with unconcern.

A pause, and then Stimpkins, looking at Sam, whose shifty eyes rest anywhere except on the detective’s countenance, says: “Do you know anything, Sam?”

“Not a dous,” cries Sam, with a sigh, as though he heartily wished he did.

“Because—but that’s nothing, of course, if you know nothing.”

“I might get to know,” retorts Sam, uneasily, toying affectionately with the glass crusher. “What would it be worth?”

“A flim, Sam.”

Whereat, with upturned nose, Sam cries out: “I don’t know nothing, nor can’t get to know nothing.” He then looked doggedly over the detective’s head at a daub on the opposite wall, and folds his arms [tightly] over his chest, as though to intimate to his *vis-a-vis*, that he is determined to keep all he does know securely locked up in the safe repository of his faithful breast.

“Two, then,” says the detective, sharply, after a moment’s thought. “That *or* nothing.”

“Square,” says Tom.

Of course the culprit is found, and this is what is called “honor among thieves.” In this way have mothers betrayed their sons, wives their husbands, and men their brothers.

*The Appleton [WI] Crescent*, November 19, 1870