

*A Novel Ticket-of-Leave; or, A Mistaken Identity*

“No two things are alike.” Such is the dictum of science. “Nature,” say the wise men, “resembles the charms of Cleopatra, which custom cannot stale, so infinite is their variety.” Even in so humble a thing as a flock of sheep there is a personal identity, and the shepherd of Salisbury Plain will vow to you that he can discriminate between the countenances of each member of his woolly family, and particularize their features. So with the herdsman and his drove, the trainer and his stud. But why pursue the theme? Why dwell upon these flocks *qui passent et ne se ressemblent pas*? Is it to prove that these resemblances are mere fallacies, and have no real existence; that they ought to be classed with Sir Thomas Browne’s “vulgar errors?” No; but to lament that whereas each member of a flock of sheep, of a herd of oxen, or a stud of horses, carries his individuality so markedly, the privilege is not more extended in the genus *homo*. I solemnly aver that the number of cases of mistaken identity which have lately come to my knowledge is not only astounding, but exceedingly embarrassing; I may add, too, *quorum magna pars fui*; which, being translated, means, in which I have formed a no inconsiderable portion of the quorum. It is no pleasant sensation to know that your “counterfeit presentment” is walking the earth; in fact, it is monstrously unpleasant. The other day I felt a heavy hand placed rapidly upon my shoulder, in the most unceremonious and familiar of ways, accompanied with an equally unceremonious and familiar exclamation: “Why, Perkins, old boy, *how* are ye? Haven’t seen ye for an age! Glad to see you again in London! How are all the folks at Nottingham?”

How far this familiar stranger would have gone on in this fluent strain of amity I know not. It was time to stop his exuberance of friendship, and acquaint him with the fact that my name was not Perkins; that I had not come from Nottingham; and, I fear, added, in the bitterness and irritation of the moment, that I had never been to Nottingham, and never wished to go there. “Oh, nonsense, Perkins! I’m not going to be knocked off in that style. How are Mrs. Perkins and the chicks?” “I tell you again, sir, you are mistaken in your man; my name is not Perkins.” “It may not be Perkins now, but it was three months ago; and whatever your new name may be, I am not going to be turned off in this way. Not Perkins! Why, you can’t get rid of that mole on your cheek with your new name; and as to your wig, old fellow, there never was but that shade of red I ever saw. Come, where shall we dine?” “I must plainly tell you, sir,” I replied to my would-be friend, “you are carrying your pleasantries too far; and if you do not leave me at once, I will give you in charge of the police.” The fellow, evidently chagrined, left me to chew the cud of bitter reflection. “Well, well,” were his parting words, “it can’t be Perkins after all; Perkins was a jolly good fellow, and this chap is—” He had by this time got out of hearing. What an unpleasant rencontre this! I thought to myself. Then again the subject took another aspect. What if the real, the true Perkins, should ever be persecuted by *my* friends as I have been by one of his?

And this leads me on to another incident in the same category, which occurred still more recently, and might have led to very deplorable results. In fact, I am not sure that the end is yet. I had business out of town for a day or two, and returned punctually at the appointed hour. Whom should I meet on the platform of the terminus but Tom Cridlins! Now Tom is a great gossip, and an immense favorite with the ladies. He frequents the theatres and the operas, conversaciones and balls, and retails all the news and scandal of the day to his fair friends. Well, I met him

accidentally at the terminus; in an instant he was full of apologies and excuses. “Hope, Sam, done no mischief; didn’t mean it, didn’t mean it, ’pon honor; deuced sorry, hope it’s all over.” “Why, what’s the matter?” “Didn’t know you’d gone out of town, you sly dog. I understand it all. Called at Mrs. Sam’s yesterday; told her—didn’t do it intentionally—saw you at the opera Monday night with Countess Tarascona; magnificent woman; saw at once made mistake. Why didn’t she tell me you’d gone out of town? wouldn’t have breathed a word. ’Pon honor, accidental.” “Opera, Tom! I wasn’t at the opera; I have been out of town since Monday morning; you’re mistaken.” “Capital joke, that. Why, Sam, think I’m ’flicted with colorblindness? No, my boy, nothing blinds me but friendship; wouldn’t have said a word had known you didn’t want it.” Need I say what a miserable vista was opened up before me? A jealous wife’s jealousy accidentally inflamed in this innocent manner, and even Tom Cridlins incredulous. These men of the world won’t believe in—in anything.

“Tom,” I said, seriously, “this is very unfortunate; but you were never more mistaken in your life. I have not been at the opera for weeks.” Oh that wicked twinkle of his eye! “Well, my boy, I don’t want to believe you were there; disbelieve anything you like; only—” “Tom, I can stand this no longer; I must not be played with; you *must* admit that I was not at the opera. I can bring the whole village of Cudgleton to prove an *alibi*.” “Glad to hear it, for peace of home’s sake. Mrs. Sam took it very ill, can assure you; sorry, ’ceedingly sorry; but really the countess *is* a magnificent woman.” “Who the devil cares *now* about the countess? I affirm that I have been at Cudgleton from Monday 4 P.M. till this morning 10 A.M. Left by express, and just arrived.” “There’s the bell, Sam; must say good-bye; remember me to your wife; purely accidental; ’ceedingly regret it; believe every word you say—will back it ’gainst all odds; remember me to your wife, and tell her *I believe you, my boy*.”

“Believe me, my boy!” and that’s how Tom Cridlins left me,—light-hearted and gay-spirited, after having kindled a torch which Acheron itself could not quench.

I returned home. Of course Mrs. Sam was *prepared* to receive me. In vain I protested; in vain I insisted that Tom Cridlins was laboring under an illusion; I had brought him to confess as much. “Oh, then, you have seen him today; planning and scheming, I suppose, to get up a pack of contradictions. I understand; but you are not going to deceive me. Natural evidence is better than got-up evidence, and I shall prefer to take Mr. Thomas Cridlins’s first statement to his second. There are some things better fresh, and testimony I take to be one of those things. Whatever you and Mr. Cridlins may choose to concoct, for the future I shall believe what I please to believe.”

And so on till bedtime. Would that I could say we had had it out even then! At midnight we were only in the thick of it; and to acquire renewed vigor for future assaults, Mrs. Sam prudently fell asleep.

But what a time for me! Oh that I could reverse the hand of the clock eight-and-forty-hours, or push it on until this trouble had blown over! Plague on that man, whoever he is, that looked so like me! Why was he at the opera? why was he there with a fine woman? Cridlins saw nothing of the Countess Tarascona—only seen her once—and his foolish head jumps to the conclusion it must be the countess. Ass that he is! Why isn’t he honestly employed, like other people, instead

of idling about on his five thousand a year, philandering and making mischief? He can scarcely count the fingers on his hand, yet he can create a devil of a row between man and wife!

Two o'clock struck. I had fallen into a distempered doze; still it was somewhat soothing. With the waking reflection came back, not quite so excited. After all it might have been worse. I remember reading of a Bishop of Siena who had a sovereign antidote against every attack of despondency.

“When I am disappointed or vexed, or embarrassed or dissatisfied,” he said, “I look round upon the world and notice how many hundreds and thousands are worse off than myself, and the result invariably is, that grumbling and vexation take wings and fly away, and contentment and cheerfulness return and nestle in my bosom.”

What, thought I, as I lay awake,—what if, instead of this conjugal *contretemps*, I had been wrongly seized for theft and murder, and unable to prove an *alibi*? Such cases have been. Such cases *have* been! Why, they have taken place by scores—are taking place, and will to the end of the chapter. And my imagination vividly portrayed the mental agonies of the innocent convict. Memory ransacked the dusty tomes of history to supply fresh food for meditation, fresh fuel to feed my horror. Does not Pliny cite innumerable instances? Had not the twin brothers of Ephesus just cause to exclaim, each to his unknown counterpart, in the anguish and bitterness of his spirit, “Oh, Dromio, Dromio, wherefore art thou, Dromio?” Does not the “Newgate Calendar” teem with cases of men’s lives perjured by false witnesses, or sacrificed to a false tissue of circumstances? Did not Richard Coleman and Clinch and Mackley suffer death for crimes of which they were subsequently proved to be guiltless, simply because each was mistaken for the “right man,” who was not, and never is, in the “right place.” Was not Hoag tried at New York, in 1804, for bigamy, through a similar misconception? And did not Redman in 1822, and Robinson in 1824, just escape the gallows by a hair’s-breadth? And were not these instances enough to scarify any man’s imagination, and shiver his every nerve? My “counterfeit presentment” was evidently wandering about somewhere. What sort of a character was he? Did he belong to the dangerous classes? was he a respectable member of society or an impostor? was he cunning and clever, and capable of swindling? was he cold-blooded and resolute, capable of murder? was he passionate and revengeful? was he anything and everything that could lead a man into a violent scrape?

No wonder the perspiration ran off my brow as my brain scudded through the chapter of probabilities and revealed a long gloomy vista of perils. I bethought me of the police. Should I make known that my “counterfeit” was abroad “stalking the world around?” Should I seek the protection of Scotland Yard, and warn them if they heard of a robbery or a murder, or some other villainy or felony committed by a man answering to my description, that *I* was not the culprit? To be forewarned is to be forearmed; to tell them this might save loss of time, and spare a world of trouble, inconvenience, and annoyance. Beside, was it not exactly what my late friend Richter had done? Ah! by-the-bye, you didn’t know Richter—thereby hangs a tale. Richter, poor fellow, is dead now; but there is a moral attached to his life, and we, whose eidola are walking the earth, may as well extract it.

Richter was a wealthy *rentier*, living in Vienna; and a thorough Austrian by birth, education, and nature. Quiet, inoffensive, kindly; there was nothing striking about him in person or position. He never meddled with that firebrand—politics; he had never troubled the most immaculate government of the imperial and royal apostolic Kaiser with unseasonable and unreasonable comments on its virtues or defects; he had never violated that most sacred thing, the concordat; had never offended lord or prince; had hated Hungary, and had always wished Venice at the bottom instead of on the surface of the sea. He was a peaceable citizen, obedient to the decrees of his sovereign, and pursued the even tenor of his life with well-balanced footstep, inclining to nothing that was likely to lead him or his neighbor into the dark and dreary desert of trouble and vexation. Nevertheless the Nemesis of envy marked him for her own; and he was pointed at during the latter part of his life as one who could set the vast army of spies and detectives formed and disciplined by that arch-policeman, Metternich, at absolute defiance.

It was the custom of Herr Richter of an afternoon or morning—as anyone might who had nothing better to do—to stroll up and down the principal thoroughfares of Vienna, gaze into its splendid shops, and admire the beauty and the becrinolined silks and satins, muslins and grenadines, of the stately dames of that ancient and quaint city. One day—it was in the summer of 1849—Herr Richter was *flâning* along the Kätner Strasse, and, impelled neither by curiosity nor covetousness, but that indefinable something which often directs our course and shapes our conduct without our consciousness, stopped before the “Storr and Mortimer” of the Hapsburg capital. Why did he thrust himself in amongst that band of ragged *gamins*, who, with gaping mouth and burning eyes, were devouring the splendors of the plate-glass window, and wistfully wishing that that glittering heap of rings and chains, brooches and necklaces, cassolettes and lockets, bracelets and eardrops, emeralds, diamonds, pearls, rubies, turquoises, etc., were theirs? Why did he mingle with them? He could not have told you, nor can I. Only he was there, and it was evident his heart, too, was overflowing, like Mr. Pickwick’s, with the milk of human kindness. “Poor fellows!” such was his train of thought, “you can never get any of these treasures, though you should toil for a century;” and then turning away, he muttered aloud, still continuing his train of thought, “Any of them might be mine in a moment if I chose.” Was he speculating on the iniquitous force of the Austrian guild laws, or the false system of political economy in vogue in Austria? was he pondering over the mysteries of *meum et tuum*, or endeavoring to solve that profound problem, “*La properties c’est le vol?*”

Possibly yes, possibly no; but just at that moment a strong hand was laid on his shoulder. “One word with you, if you please,” said a low musical voice, imperative yet polite.

The invitation was irresistible. With the utmost complacency Herr Richter retired with the gentleman who accosted him underneath one of those huge gateways, *porte-cochères*, which form the entrance of the old Vienna houses. The stranger then took a paper from his pocket, and looking intently, now at its contents, now at the features of Herr Richter, opened the conversation in a curt and peremptory manner:

“Sir, I am under the painful necessity of requesting you to follow me.”

Herr Richter, incensed, grows restiff.

“Pray, sir, who are you that dare—” and without finishing the sentence he threw himself into an attitude of defence, if not defiance.

“Had you not better give less trouble?” coolly asked the stranger. “Am I to call assistance?”

Rapidly the truth dawned upon the Herr. The stranger, though clad in the ordinary attire of a *bourgeois*, belonged to that mysterious body, dreaded by every section of the community, since it received its orders, so it was universally believed, directly from the cabinet, or a joint committee of the holy alliance itself. Yes, he must be an agent of the secret police.

Herr Richter, however, is not hurried off to the star chamber where political offenders are dealt with, but is conducted to the Scotland Yard of Vienna—the headquarters of the *gendarmerie*—the central station for criminal suspects. In Austria it is safer to be classed with common thieves and felons than to be suspected of meddling with politics. So the Herr’s mind was materially relieved; though ignominious his fate, on perceiving his destination he scarcely felt enraged at the indignity offered him.

When they had arrived within the gloomy precincts of the gaol barracks, things began to explain themselves. There was evident satisfaction, not to say exultation, on the faces of the officials. The captor was specially gratified; and waving his warrant, as though it were an honorable trophy, over the head of his unfortunate prize, he exclaimed—

“I’ve captured him at last; I’ve found him and caught him, this prince of pickpockets!” and he enacted the passion of triumph so perfectly that he jeered at and derided in true Teutonic fashion his safe and sound victim in the most cold-blooded and insolent manner.

“As I was passing down the Kätner Strasse,” continued this self-gratulatory detective, “I saw him looking into a goldsmith’s shop, noting every article in the window, and heard him muttering to himself, with a most complacent air, ‘Any one of them could be mine in a moment if I chose.’”

A superior officer was then called, and the description in the warrant being read over, there could be no doubt as to the identity of the prisoner with the most active and desperate thief in Vienna. The personal appearance of Herr Richter tallied exactly with the written portrait in the possession of the Polizer-Haus; type and antitype could not be more exact.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed the alarmed captive, “I the greatest thief in Vienna! I am Herr Richter, a gentleman, a man of property, rich enough to purchase twenty jewellers’ shops. I beg you to be careful how you proceed further.”

“Don’t excite yourself,” retorted the commissioner, “we *shall* be careful enough. You won’t catch us giving you an opportunity of escape.”

“*Donnerwetter!*” ejaculated the now infuriated *rentier*; “this is too much of a good thing. Just send round for my banker and he will tell you who and what I am. I’ll sue you, sir—I’ll sue you, sir, as sure as you are born,” repeated the Herr, growing more exasperated every moment.

The superintendent, like most men of his profession, was well versed in physiognomy, and could read the features of the human face and interpret their varied expressions. "This is not feigned anger," he said to himself.

The banker was sent for, and identified the prisoner as his friend Herr Richter. As a matter of course the wealthy gentleman escaped the grasp of the Philistines.

On leaving the beetle-browed gateway of the police barracks the Herr breathed freely again, rejoicing that matters had turned out no worse in that empire of suspicion and caprice. He moved along through the principal thoroughfare of the Austrian capital, pondering over his recent unpleasant adventure. At length he called a cab to take him to his club, where he might drown the indignity of the morning in a bumper of Tokay or Johannisberg, and invite oblivion by devouring a good dinner. Hardly, however, had he placed his foot on the step than he was forced deep down into the vehicle by a mysterious personage at his back, who, whispering to the driver, "To the police station!" enters the cab also. Speechless and aghast as though a spectre were the intruder, the unfortunate Herr Richter looked wildly at his compulsory companion.

"Sir," said the spectre—

"I know all you are going to say," feebly remarked the desperate Richter, cursing his fate.

"*Of course* you know," sneered the spectre at his side, who, however, is no spectre, but a jolly-looking individual in the prime of manhood. "*Of course* you know." And with this he dives his hand into his pocket, and drags forth the fatal warrant.

"All right!" groans out the inevitable captive, with whom despair was fast degenerating into recklessness. "All right, you need not take the trouble to read every trait. I have read the account myself. It is very correct, wonderfully correct, terribly correct."

"For a gentleman of your profession," observed the portly detective, "you are really very civil. Half a dozen such as you would marvellously improve the manners of our modern *chevaliers d'industrie*. I say, old boy," continued the pleasant thief-catcher, poking the unresisting Herr in the ribs, "you ought to think it over, and exert yourself to instil a little politeness into your tribe. It's a large section of the community, you know. If you get out again, think over my advice."

The only reply of Herr Richter was a faint, helpless smile.

Arrived at the station, a general shout of laughter greeted the captor and the captured.

The latter seated himself in a chair, and, composing his thoughts for a desperate harangue, thus addressed the commissioners present:

"Gentlemen, here I am again, and here I am resolved to remain. As it is, I should not be safe anywhere else a quarter of an hour until arrested and taken to the station by *all* your detectives one after the other. Calculating from today's experience, and forming a moderate estimate of the rate of locomotion at which I could proceed under the circumstances, it would take me a

fortnight to get home and bury myself from the now hated gaze of mankind. You will therefore have the kindness to let me keep you company and make the personal acquaintance of each member of your force, who will then, I hope, be able to recognize me when he sees me in the streets.”

The commissioner-in-chief regretted that he could not assent to the Herr’s proposition. “Impossible! it would never do, my dear sir,” he informed the astounded Richter, “for a civilian, even a man of your respectability and appearance, to know all the detectives; the state itself would be endangered. However,” he added very graciously, “I will give you a certificate, under my hand and seal, that you are not the man you have been taken for; and this will make, I hope, as far as lies in my power, the *amende honorable*.”

“A ticket-of-leave?”

“*Comme vous voulez.*”

Poor Richter surrendered unconditionally, glad, like the Bishop of Hereford, “that he could so get away.” Never from that hour did he lose sight of that precious “ticket-of-leave,” the prison release of the Austrian Scotland Yard. He always carried it about with him as a kind of amulet to charm away the too active *agens de police*. In his last will and testament he inserted a special clause, ordering that the old leather sheath, containing the official permit, should be placed in his coffin.

“Who knows how many a fix it may yet help me out of?” was written in the margin with his own hand.

Why should not I, then, do like Herr Richter? thought your humble servant, as he still lay awake. If ever the dastardly hand of a peeler be laid on my shoulder, such shall be my first step. Pshaw! why should I not take time by the forelock? why should I not go that very morning to Scotland Yard and acquaint the commissioners that my counterfeit was at large, and might commit some fearful atrocity, some terrible crime, and so beg for a ticket of recognition—a ticket-of-leave?

Alas! whilst I was putting on the breastplate and buckling on my armor against imaginary foes, I had forgotten the real danger that encompassed me. Whilst I was congratulating myself on the ingenious dispensation I was to obtain from the police, I forgot that I had not yet obtained a dispensation from the partner of my joys and sorrows who was calmly reposing by my side. Calmly reposing, I say, for nothing seemed to disturb her. There are natures, it appears to me, whose repose nothing *can* break, and it is exactly that class of natures which can most easily and effectually disturb the peace of others. It is a mighty faculty, and was possessed, *à merveille*, by Mrs. Sam.

When she woke I meekly broached my idea of police protection, thereby intending by a side-wind to establish my spotless innocence before her. Granted the necessity of police protection, the corollary would be that the story of the opera and the countess was all a myth. Mrs. Sam let me run the whole tether of suggestion with surprising complacency. I almost felt I was triumphant.

“Mr. Samuel ——, you may be guilty of whatever folly you please; it is nothing strange to you,” she began in her most stately and cutting manner; “but if you think of bamboozling me and throwing me off the scent, you have mistaken your woman. The herring to trail across my path must be stronger flavored than the one you have in hand if you would turn me from the pursuit. Justice I am resolved to have, and will sift the matter to the bottom. It is not yet time to get up, and I wish to finish my sleep. After breakfast, with your kind *permission* (oh the agony of that irony!) we will together call on the countess. She, perhaps, may be able to explain.”

I knew the countess had left town; but I did not dare to say so, and hypocritically assented to Mrs. Sam’s proposal. She was furious when she learnt that the countess was from home. “How long had she been from home?” “A fortnight,” was the testimony of the butler. “Has she not been in town since?” “No.” “Was she not in town on Monday?” “Certainly not.” How freely I breathed as this witness gave his involuntary and corroborative evidence in my favor. Mrs. Sam turned round upon me with an incredulous smile. “I condone it this time,” she graciously observed as we descended the steps, which reminded me very forcibly of the verdict of the Cornish jury—“We find the prisoner *not* guilty, only we advise him not to do it again.”

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