

A "Clever Job"

How He Worked Up the Rome Murder Case.

A CHINESE DETECTIVE STORY.

A Bit of Detective Work Which Would Do Credit to Inspector Byrnes—The Details of a Mysterious Crime Which Were Unraveled by the Smart Detective.

One of the most familiar figures in Mott street, the abiding place of the Chinese population of New York, is Foo, the Chinese detective. He is known to be an indefatigable worker in ferreting out crimes, and his record is a remarkable one. The story of the Rome murder case, in which Detective Foo brought the murderer to justice after the American detectives had failed, has never been given to the public in detail before.

On Monday, July 6, 1885, the little city of Rome, N.Y., was thrown into a fever of excitement by the discovery that a murder of the most brutal kind had been committed there. On the preceding Wednesday Wong Sing Lee, a very popular and successful Chinese laundryman had in the morning chatted with a number of friends and customers. Late in the afternoon his laundry, a pretty little cottage standing just off the main avenue of the city, was closed, and a notice on the wall in English read:

Gone to New York. - SING LEE.

As the washerman was in the habit of visiting the metropolis every month to buy Oriental delicacies and to visit friends, nothing was thought of the occurrence. On Sunday his neighbors began to grow suspicious that something was wrong; on Monday the action of some dogs around the premises and a strange odor confirmed these suspicions and induced the citizens to make a forcible entry into the house. They broke open the front door, and from the hall saw at a glance the evidences of a terrible crime. Everything locked had been burst apart, and its contents thrown over the floor; every bundle had been turned inside out, and all the pillows, cushions and mattresses cut open and thoroughly ransacked. On the side of the bed lay the body of the luckless laundryman. A blow with a sharp knife had killed him, as the body lay naturally; there were no indications anywhere of a struggle. The assassin, whoever he might be, had been determined to murder [t]his man, as a dozen other stab wounds, each as wide and deep as the first, disfigured the surface of the body. Neither money nor any jewelry could be found with the most diligent search, demonstrating that robbery had been added to the butchery.

SPREADING THE NEWS.

The police were immediately notified and the news telegraphed to the Chinese authorities in New York city. The former detailed two of their best members to work on the case, while the latter with equal promptness, sent its famous Detective Foo, with instructions to spare no expense or trouble in hunting down the murderer or murderers. The Chinese Vidocq arrived in Rome forty-eight hours after his Caucasian rivals had set to work. They pooh poohed the idea that he could be of any use to them, and proceeded in their labors as if he were a nonentity. He, however, set to work upon his own account. The police, aided by the reporters, made the following discoveries: On Tuesday, June 30, a foreigner dressed in new and handsome clothes, had stopped at Ogdensburg, and on the evening of the same day a similar, if not the same person, had been seen in Sing Lee's cottage talking with the latter in a strange dialect; on the next evening he was seen at the Rome depot; the conductor on the evening northern express said that about that date a person answering the description given was a through passenger on his train to Montreal; in the laundry a strange shirt was found stained with blood, and a shirt of a peculiar pattern belonging to a customer was missing. Sing Lee on June 30 had shown, accidentally, a large roll of new bank notes which he had obtained the day before at the local bank.

THE DETECTIVES AT WORK.

Armed with these clews, the American detectives worked rapidly, and a week afterwards a Chinaman in Burlington, Ia., for the murder. He was partly identified at that place by witnesses brought on from Rome, but when he disclosed his defense he proved so perfect an alibi by prominent citizens of Burlington that the magistrate honorably discharged him from arrest. The crestfallen officers returned to their own state, and the awful crime seemed to be one of those mysteries which would never be cleared and its perpetrator punished.

In the meantime Detective Foo had left no stone unturned. Dissatisfied with the police work done, he made a second and far more searching investigation. He found two boys who had seen a stranger iron a shirt in the laundry on Tuesday evening, and induced a surgeon to re-examine the wounds on the corpse. The doctor pronounced them to have been inflicted by a left handed man. Foo jotted down in his note book about this time the following:

The assassin is a Chinese laundryman, who speaks, reads and writes English; who has dressed in European clothes a long time and who is left handed. He killed Lee, not for robbery, but to put him out of the way and to get some documents. He committed the robbery partly for the sake of the money, but chiefly to throw the officers off the track. He is therefore intelligent. To strike the blows required strength, great coolness and knowledge of the body. He is probably a professional assassin.

At the headquarters he scrutinized the opium outfit and found traces of blood on the needle, tray, pipe and box. The murderer, therefore, was a confirmed morphine fiend.

The detective then wrote a circular letter to all the Chinese friends and relatives of the murdered man, asking if they knew of any quarrel, affray, law suit, business trouble or love affair in which the latter had been involved. Within three days he had secured the most important clew in the case. Lee had been and was to be the chief witness in a bitter litigation in Montreal between two Chinese merchants. Not only was his testimony of the greatest weight, but he had in his possession letters and documents which threatened to strip one of the litigants of his fortune and to place him behind the gratings of the state prison. From Montreal, therefore, the blow had been struck, and from Montreal, in all probability, the murderer had come to commit his crime.

QUESTIONING RAILROAD MEN.

Foo thereupon questioned every conductor and brakeman who had been on duty on the trains between Rome and Montreal. One conductor remembered that a man who might have been a Chinaman or Japanese was a southward passenger in the morning, but had alighted at a way station. Two brakemen of another train recalled that a man of similar appearance had boarded their train in the afternoon and had come, they thought, to Rome. The detective took the next train northward and alighted at the station named by the conductor and brakemen. The village was some distance away and there was no one around by the stationmaster. He recalled no Chinaman who had got off the train, but said that some time after the cars had passed a foreigner had stopped at his home and inquired of his wife where a certain Chinese laundry in the town was and that she had directed him accordingly. Foo secured from the station master the address of the laundry. He found it without difficulty, but met at first with a cold reception from the proprietor. A half hour's conversation changed the humor of the host, and when the story of the murder is all its details had been told to him his wrath and horror knew no bounds.

His tongue now loosened and he became a valuable witness. A Chinaman speaking the Quantung language with a strong Foo-Chow accent had called on the day in question ostensibly to talk business. He had said that he came from Montreal where he was a clerk and the cousin of a rich merchant there named Hong, (the very litigant against whom Lee's testimony would have been ruinous), that he was on his way south, but hoped to return withing a month. Then the laundryman described the stranger so thoroughly that any hearer could have identified him among a thousand men.

Foo thanked his informant and proceeded directly to Montreal. Here, among the railroad employees, he found a baggage man who had seen a Chinaman, dressed in European clothes, leave on a very early train Tuesday morning, for the south, and return on the following Thursday or Friday. His description tallied exactly what the five or six already secured. The next step was

to interview the merchant who was at law with Hong. He was naturally deeply interested, and the moment the detective presented his credentials from the celestial authorities in New York, sent out for all his intimate friends. In the meantime he served a superb dinner to his visitor and plied him with questions unceasingly. When the guests had all arrived, Foo stated the facts briefly, and asked which of Hong's friends and relatives wore European clothes. Five were immediately named amid great excitement, but none corresponded to the descriptions given in New York state and none had left Montreal a single day at the time of the murder.

A KNOT TO UNRAVEL.

Here was a dilemma. The clew seemed to have led nowhere. The detective was puzzled a moment, and then read the personal description furnished him by the laundryman in the railroad village. As he began, his auditors glanced at one another, and long before he had finished, all exclaimed, "Fong Ah Yu." He gave a sigh of relief; he had discovered who the murderer was. But where was the assassin to be found? Foo now resolved to take the bull by the horns. He issued a circular to every Chinaman in Montreal and the vicinity, reciting the details and offering a reward for the capture of the murderer. He then swore out a warrant, and with a policeman went straight to Hong's place of business. Here they stoutly denied all knowledge of Fong Ah Yu's whereabouts, and protested that he had left for New York the week before. Something, however, made the detective insist upon a thorough search. This was done and resulted in discovering the criminal concealed in a blind room in the cellar of the establishment. The capture was immediately telegraphed to New York and the Chinese legation at Washington. Within forty-eight hours the indefatigable Foo had secured the clothes worn by his prisoner and the stolen shirt, and had discovered the tradesmen who had sold the knife with which the homicide was committed and the shirt which was found in Lee's cottage. Four days after the extradition papers having been received Fong Ah Yu was transferred to the American authorities. At the following session of the Oneida county oyer and terminator he was convicted of the crime and will soon pay its penalty. Detective Foo received \$3,000 reward from the Chinese authorities.

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