

A Story of Detection.

MY EMPLOYMENT is that of a carver in stone. Many years ago, soon after I had learnt my business, the firm in whose employ I was undertook the erection of a gentleman's mansion, and I was sent to execute the ornamental work. The village near to where the mansion was built was on the shore of an estuary in the bay of Morecambe, not far from a market town whose name I need not give. As my work would keep me from home several weeks, a good lodging was a most desirable thing; but although I tried to get accommodation in a private house, I failed, and was forced to lodge in the village inn, the Lord Admiral.

Among those who were in the habit of frequenting the aforesaid holstery was a man of singular habits and odd temper. His home was about a mile from the village, on the side of a lane leading to a couple of farms. His house like himself, was a queer one. Originally it had been built for the storage of corn, the produce of fields at a distance from the farmstead. Somehow, it had ceased to be needed for that purpose; so its owner turned it into a dwelling-house and as such it was now occupied by the aforesaid strange man. It was divided into three apartments on the ground floor, one of which, a very large one, was set apart and used as a kind of museum, its occupant being a stuffer of birds and small quadrupeds. When he had no work of this sort for other persons, he worked for stock, and this large room was his warehouse.

He was a man of ill temper and loose habits, and for some time had borne a dubious character. When people were asked why he was suspected they could not give a satisfactory reply. "He lives," they said, "without doing work equal to his expenditure, which looks bad." As I got to know him I found that he had an unamiable temper; was morose, sour and at times passionate. He was also fond of display, given to betting, and, like all such, led a loose, uneven life, oftener loitering about than at work. So I did not wonder that well meaning people did not like him.

He mostly came on wet nights to the Lord Admiral. As we became acquainted he invited me to look over his collection of birds and quadrupeds. I was pleased with what I saw. He had, indeed, a good collection, and, as well as I could judge, had done his work well. He had also a good assortment of butterflies and moths, and in a corner, close to the ceiling, he had what he called a butterfly breeding box, which, he said, belonged to his son, a young man of my own age, also given to bird stuffing amusements.

But I was most taken up with two animals which differed from the rest. One was a beautiful dog, and the other a lusua nature—a lamb with the rudiments of a fifth leg, and some other characteristics which I have forgotten. The old man said he had stuffed both for their original owners, who had somehow failed to take them away. They were placed at one end of the room, one in each corner, away from the window, and close to the wall, where, except in strong daylight, they could not be easily seen. The connection of these particulars with my story will be seen in the sequel.

I had been in the village about six weeks when the neighborhood was aroused and alarmed one morning by the report of the robbery of a jeweler's shop in the market town already referred to, that had been effected during the preceding night. Much valuable property had been taken. This robbery had been effected in such a way as led to the belief that a gang of practiced thieves had done it. The prevailing question was, "Do the robbers live among us, or have they come from a distance?" This query was still going from mouth to mouth when we were startled, astounded indeed, by the report of a second robbery of the same premises, and on the night following, by the breaking into and purloining of a provision warehouse in our village. Were I writing fiction, I would not have made the robbers pay so soon a second visit to the jeweler's, as such an act would have been deemed preposterous; but I am reiterating what really occurred, and so am forced to say what I have said.

The jeweler had been so taken up with efforts to find out the thieves, and regain his first loss, that he had not placed additional guard over what was left, besides he was sure, he said, that thieves would not think of revisiting him for a long time. As for the provision dealer, he said in my hearing that he had no fear of his place being entered, as he believed robbers would not care to touch property so bulky and of such inferior value as his.

But he had reckoned without his host, for he had lost a fine ham, a large lot of tea, a deal of spices, a few boxes of cigars, and indeed a portion of most of what he dealt in. The excitement and

alarm occasioned by these robberies were great and widespread.

Two batches of detectives, one from Lancaster and the other from Kendal, came to our village to see what they could find out. They were not short of questions, I mind, but they took care what sort of questions they answered. It was easy to see that one of their aims was to make it appear that they believed the robbers came from a distance, in order to put the thieves off their guard, for their own opinion was the opposite of this.

No event, however serious, can keep hold of people's minds beyond a certain time; and these robberies were beginning to give place to some other subject, when the next act in the drama began to be played. It was on a Friday afternoon, about a month after the robberies. The day was wet and wild; and as my work was the outdoor carving of stones which had been placed in position in the rough was unable to go on with it, and so had to return to my quarters. I had got my dinner, and had just called for a pint of ale, with my pipe, when an elderly, ill-dressed man came in, and sitting down on a bench beside me, said in broad Lancashire accent: "I'll sup we tha lad, if tha dosen't care;" on which he lifted my mug to his lips and drank freely. I had not got over my surprise when he, wiping his mouth with his hand, gave me a history of the past day or two. The account was this: he had been a gentleman's gardener, near Lancaster, over twenty years; had a capital place, but had not had sense enough to keep it, which was more than his master would put up with; so he was discharged.

"This wor day afore yesterday," he said; "an' I've drank for very vexation ever sin', trampin'" as I drank; an' so here I am wi' a dry math an' wi'out a apenny i my poket. Doesta think," he concluded, "a con raise a penny or tipence among th' company?"

I gave him a trifle; others did the same; so having thus "raised the wind," he at once called for bread, cheese and ale, and made a good meal.

During the time the gardener had been talking to me, the landlord had been within hearing. So, accosting the old man while he was eating his dinner, he said, "You are a gardener, I understand?"

"I am," was the reply. "Well," said the landlord, "I've a garden which needs fettleing. I have not time to attend to it myself; and as it is time the seed was in, I'll employ you if you are willing. I'll find you plenty to eat and drink; you can have a bed as well; and if you please me, I'll not see you leave without a few shillings in your pocket. What say you?"

"I say agreed," replied the gardener, rising to his feet and grasping the landlord's hand. "I'll not begin to-morn, however; but I'll look rand, an' get riddy for Monday morn."

This proposal was satisfactory, wherefore the gardener was made happy.

Shortly afterward we had an addition to our company by the incoming of the old bird-stuffer, whom I shall henceforth call the naturalist—as this designation was the one which pleased him—his son, the butterfly breeder, and two other men whom I had not yet seen. These—the strangers—first looked hard at the company; but the naturalist, giving them a significant nod, which seemed to say "All's right," they settled down and called for a glass of rum apiece.

By this time the gardener had finished his dinner, when, putting his arms on the table and his head on his arms, he fell or seemed to fall asleep. The rain, which continued to come down, compelled me to still abide under cover; so, placing my chair in a corner and putting my head against the wall, I tried to get a nap also. The naturalist and his companions were now the only persons in the room besides the gardener and me.

I cannot tell half nor quarter of what was said by first one and then another of the four persons; nor did I understand some of the phrases which they used—"Bruce" and "Wonder," "flax" and "stuffing" were words often employed by them. I recollected that "Bruce" was the name of the dog, and "Wonder" that of the lamb in the museum before spoken of; and the other terms, I judged, referred to the materials with which they were stuffed; but I could not see why they should speak in so low a tone as they did when they spoke of them.—Once or twice they referred to a bird by some slang phrase. But after events made this clear enough.

By-and-by the weather took up, when the men, draining their glasses, got up and went away. The moment they were gone the gardener roused up, took a memorandum book out of his pocket and began to write therein. He then asked me if I knew who the men were, and what was their occupation, and if I understood any of the words they had uttered in the lower tone of voice. I gave him what information I could. "But," I said, "both they and I believed you were asleep."

"It is well to go into dreamland at

times," he said, and then added: "Did you say the old man kept a museum? Have you seen it? Do you think I could get a look at it?"

The questions were put one after the other in quick succession, as though he were eager and anxious about something. I said "Yes" to each; but I was surprised at the good English in which he now spoke and at the refinement which marked his manners. Still I could make nothing of it.

I pass over the next few days, as they brought forth no new incident. The gardener had stuck to his contract with the landlord, and I had been enabled to get on with my work. The four men did not again visit us; but as I went on with my carving I saw first one and then another of them pass my place. And once I saw them in earnest conversation in a retired lane.

After supper, one night, I took the gardener to the barn-like habitation of the old naturalist. As we went along he asked me to take particular notice of the dog and the lamb; "for," said he, "I was struck with the questions one of the men put as to whether Bruce and Wonder could take in any more 'cotton' or 'flax.' And it is just possible," he continued, "that he has a way of taking out the stuffing after the skin has become set and hard—a thing worth knowing, I should think."

When we got to the house, the old man came to the door, closing it after him. Being asked if he would allow the gardener to see his collection of preserved animals, he at first seemed perplexed, and saying, "I'll ask my son," he went in, leaving us outside. Shortly he returned and said: "It is not convenient to enter the room to-night, as it is being cleaned and the contents rearranged; but if your friend will come to-morrow night, and come alone, he shall see over it."

We agreed and came away. I was at a loss to account for the condition imposed, but my companion was set up with the arrangement.

Next night came, and the gardener set off on his errand. I was all impatience for his return. But when he came back he seemed unwilling to relate the result of his adventure, simply saying, "I'm in no humor for talk to-night; I'll relate what I've seen and said, to-morrow."

My friend had got on well with his gardening. His potatoes and onions, his turnips and carrots had been got in; and it was clear that if the next two days should prove fine he would finish the job on the Saturday night.

On Friday night he came to me in the kitchen, in a corner of which I was reading, and asked me to take a short walk with him. I got up and went. The night was fine, but dark. We walked in the direction of the museum. He asked me if I could keep a secret for a day or two. Replying in the affirmative, he said he had a strong suspicion that the old naturalist or his son was no better than he should be; that he was sure he or they knew more about the late robberies than other folks, and that he believed if he had a few shillings which he could call his own, he could come at the truth, and concluded by asking me to lend him a sovereign for a few days. I agreed, for I began to feel an unaccountable curiosity growing within me.

We had not walked far before we met the naturalist's son, apparently by appointment; for my companion told him that I had promised him a loan, and that therefore, he would be at his father's house next day and make a purchase.—We parted and came home.

About the middle of Saturday afternoon he set off, and in less than an hour he came back, bearing a tolerably sized parcel. Giving me the signal as he passed me, I joined him in the back yard. He said: "I'm on the track of the thieves, I believe. Last night, but one, on reaching the house, and while looking over the museum, the old man said that his son was rather short of money; but having exchanged a frame of moths and a few birds for a lot of provisions, if I would buy some of the latter, I might sell them at a profit; or they would keep me in eatables for a while, and the sale would relieve his son. I agreed to buy if I could raise the money. Now, I am not without cash, but it would not have done to say so; hence I agreed to ask you for a loan. Well, I've got a lot of things to-day dirt cheap, which I really believe belong to one of the late robbers. I go hence to-morrow on the sly, but on Monday you may look for my return." Giving me a playful dig in the side he left me. His absence during the night and the day after surprised the landlord, but I said nothing.

I was all impatience until Monday came. It came at last. I was busy at my carving when I heard a well known voice hail me from below. On looking down from my stage whom should I see in the road beneath, smiling all the face over, but my old friend the gardener in a policeman's uniform. The truth flashed through me in a moment. I went down. Grasping my hand he said: "The secret's out, you see! Come along with me and see the upshot."

I was about to witness a denouement I had not looked for. Up the road were a couple of policemen. My old companion was the chief, being a sergeant of police. He led the way to the museum and was first to enter.

"Good morning, old friend," he said on encountering the naturalist. "I come to take away a few more parcels of your cheap provisions."

I saw that the old gardener was detected in the speaker, and that the game was seen to be up. The old man's son rushed to the door and scrambled off, only however to fall into the clutches of one of the officers who were on the watch. The old man was utterly helpless and almost beside himself. Sinking into his chair he cried out: "I am not the thief; the thieves are there," pointing to the door, and meaning I could see his son and confederates, although they were not present.

We went into the museum. The first thing the old gardener—as I shall still call him—did was to take hold of "Bruce," while he desired one of his comrades to lay hold of "Wonder." On moving them, a noise of loose metal was heard.

A moment's examination sufficed to reveal the secret. In the off-side of each animal, in the soft part an orifice had been made by cutting the skin in such a manner as would enable the operator to replace it with a little care. A part of the stuffings had been removed leaving a vacancy just like a throstle's nest. This was filled with jewelry—watches, guards, ear-rings and finger-rings. A further examination of the museum revealed other and as singular hiding places; for example, a game-cock was found put out of sight; on taking hold of it, a noise of clinking metal was heard. On lifting up the feathers over the crop, a small hole was seen, out of which rolled, when the bird was shaken, a number of trinkets.

Nearly all the proceeds of the two robberies of the jeweler were recovered, one watch and a guard only being absent. And some of the property of the provision dealer was found stowed away in the breeding box, though most of it had been used or sold.

I scarcely need say that the parcel sold to "the gardener" was a part of it, and had to do with the detection. The sergeant, informed me that he had been induced to assume the character which he had so well enacted entirely on speculation. While making a survey of the neighborhood, a few days before he began to play his part, he had observed the backward state of the landlord's garden; and believing that he would readily catch at a chance of getting it finished in a cheap way, and being a good gardener, he had hit upon the scheme which had answered so well. He had believed that the robbers were not far from the locality of the public house, and might come there now and again, and so could he lodge there without being known or suspected he might come at all that he desired. And as he had hoped so it did come to pass.

The naturalist, who it came out, had long been a receiver of stolen property, and his son, whose first burglaries these were, got each five years' penal servitude: one of the other men—who came from a distant town and were old hands was likewise convicted and punished; but the fourth, for some forgotten reason got off. My friend came in for the good reward offered in the case; and for the part which I had taken in the affair, the jeweler gave me a gold pencil-holder which I treasure as a memento.

An Englishman's Architectural Whim.

An eccentric Englishman built a house in the Quarter Tivoli for the residence of himself, his wife and eight children, which is the talk of Paris. It is circular, and has neither door nor window externally. The approach to it is from the ground floor on to the roof by means of a ladder, which is moved up and down by machinery similar to that of a drawbridge. There is only one floor, and that contains eighteen apartments, more or less small dimensions, looking into the centre, which is lighted from above by a glazed cupola.—One stove for all these rooms is in the middle, and in summer its place is to be occupied by an exquisite parterre of flowers. A circular balcony, opened to all the apartments, surrounds this space. The motive of this oddity is of course, only known to the author of it, but everybody can see that two points are gained by it—immunity from the taxes on doors and windows, and a perfect preventive of any attempt at burglary.

Answer This.

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