

A DETECTIVE ON DETECTIVE STORIES.



He was an expert in crime. There was no doubt about that. But he regarded it not from the point of view of the criminal, habitual or otherwise. His was the vantage-ground of a member of the detective force at headquarters, and he was of rank in this calling—a skilled man, with admirable patience, a knowledge of men and matters, a cool courage and a ready wit which had many times saved him. The rules of the service prevent my naming him, and he would not himself like it. Our conversation had turned on detective stories and some glaring legal absurdities which I had remarked in one of the tales I had picked up for a railway journey.

My friend stretched himself still more luxuriously in the club chair, hugely enjoying his after-dinner cigar and a lengthened moment of leisure, and proceeded to reason with me on my fondness for reading that class of literature. "Not," he said, "that I suppose you would call those stories literature any more than I would call them true accounts of a detective's methods."

"Every man to his trade. I don't believe they are entitled to be called literature, not even when they are written by Conan Doyle. Not that my opinion is worth much on the subject; still, I feel pleased he has stopped writing them. You should know best about their other side, for I am friendly enough to be aware of your experience and your constant success in a difficult branch. That is for your private ear; publicly, I shall feel bound to say that New Scotland Yard is an utter failure in the more delicate line of rogue-catching. It's a genial fashion of the newspapers."

"I know it is, and I don't mind it. No matter; if we don't go hunting about for criminals with a microscope, nor write essays on the varieties of tobacco ash, we get our men much more frequently than the public choose to imagine."

"You don't read detective stories?" I said, with a touch of malice, for I thought I had him.

"Have I time?" he said reproachfully. "I have seen some of them, and they have given me an amount of amusement which

their authors didn't intend when they wrote them—at least, not in that direction."

"For instance?" I said inquiringly.

"They magnify crime too much; they make it *grand*. Now I read a story the other day in which the mystery turned on the proceedings of a gang of coiners. There were three of them in the gang, two men and a young woman, and they were described to have taken a big country house, say, in Kent. Here they had fitted up a hydraulic press with a chamber big enough to hold a man, which was used for stamping. Now the whole thing is impossible. The hydraulic press will never be heard of in that business, because it is useless. Coining is a mighty small and ill-paid occupation, and is only done in one way. It has gone down to very small dimensions in this country. The chief coiners here—it is a curious story, and you may hear it—were a family named Kelly. They all died in prison—father, mother, and son."

"And what of them?"

"They made a discovery which put them in the front rank. It was how to make false money ring. I won't tell you what the secret was. It is not a very great secret, but you would put it in a paper, or perhaps try the game on yourself—"

"Thanks. Have another cigar?"

When this was well lighted he went on.

"It's a certain substance which is cheap enough and readily got. All that is needed apart from the various moulds to enable hundreds of pounds' worth of bad money to be made is an ordinary crucible. That is easily got. The chief and most difficult things to get are the moulds, of which no mention is made in this famous story. They are made of plaster-of-Paris, and are subsequently baked and pass through another process, after which they can be filled with the metal in a molten state. Clamps are used to keep the two heads of the moulds together, and when these are released the coin is ready for the milling process—you know, that which gives the serrated edge to the coins."

"Could the press not have been used as a stamper to press the coins out of metal?"

"They would not need a die stamper of that size. Besides, there are a great many substantial reasons why a stamp could not be used. No, it could not be used to compress the alloy. The truth is the author did not study his facts."

"Well, but apart from that, the idea is feasible enough?"

"I fail to see its feasibility. Take another point. You have a powerful hydraulic press fitted up in a private house in the country, and nobody takes any notice of it or is aware of its existence. Why, such a thing would not have been there for twenty-four hours in a small country place without everybody knowing of it. Workmen must have been employed for some time to fit it up, and they must have lodged close by. Gossip, my friend, is a great institution. It's been the key to the convict establishments to many a clever criminal. Nobody knows how great is gossip, and how useful to society, as does the detective."

"You forget the London correspondent, but go on."

"Note this, that here are two men working a powerful hydraulic press, and yet neither of them has sense enough to put a collar right on one of the working parts, and has to call in an engineer for the purpose. Mind you, I don't say the story is not a good one. All I say is that the author has no practical knowledge of the subject. Besides, there is the money to be disposed of. It is no easy thing to get rid of bad coins. There is a regular procedure involved. It is notorious that the man who makes the money never passes it unless under very rare circumstances. The business is in the hands of a very low class, and is not a flourishing means of living, I assure you. The trade is dying out. Ever since Inspector Brennan set himself to stamp it out it has been dying down every year. About twenty-five years ago he cleared the country of the best of the gangs. It was a noticeable thing that at that time the trade ran in certain families, of which the Kellys I mentioned were the biggest operators. Each group had its own little secret of making the coins; but they were all a very low class. The care that has to be taken of the coins is very great. Each has to be wrapped in tissue paper so that it will not 'rust.' The chief place of 'parting,' as they call it, with it is, and was, Seven Dials. It's a most instructive fact that none of those engaged in the trade were ever very successful. I have never found that they were ever able to hire a house, and few have got beyond one room, and a miserable one at that."

"A great deal is often made in these stories of forged notes. I believe that is a more difficult art even than coining?"

"It is. The great difficulty is to get the paper, and certainly bank-note forgers have displayed great ingenuity in getting over that trouble. We have not had many cases

lately, and they have been mostly forgeries on foreign banks. It is only recently that Dombroski was sentenced at Winchester to ten years for the offence, and there have been others from time to time; but in our own country note-forgery is largely defeated by the use of special paper, which only one firm is allowed to make, and if a note is not of that paper, it can be detected even by the most inexpert. It is many years ago since Austin succeeded in forging a Bank of England note, and since then we have been free from that class of forgeries."

"Your reference to a Russian rouble-note forger reminds me of another detective story in which the forger leaves his trade and takes to stealing the plans of a new torpedo which is going to play Rule Britannia among the enemy's ships next war."

"I fancy I remember the story; you sent it me when I made the capture of that foreigner," referring to an arrest of a man wanted abroad, which had attracted the attention of two nations to his captor.

"Yes, that was the case. If you will recollect, the plans were hid in an iron rod, painted to resemble a malacca cane, such as I carry when I can afford to brave the risks of the weather, owing to having hopes of possessing sixpence next day wherewith to pay a hat ironer. They were taken away in the cane, photographed, and brought back, and left in the office umbrella-stand. I thought the idea rather smart."

"Now I didn't, nor would you if you had thought for a minute. Just imagine what the plans for a torpedo of that sort would be like. I am reminded that the writer himself lays stress on their minutiae, and yet he would pack them into the inside of a sham malacca cane. They would be too bulky to go near the inside. It is too absurd to be thought of seriously. Those stories, to me, always fail in one crucial point, and that spoils them for my enjoyment."

"But look at the romance, my dear sir; think how able all these criminals are!"

"That is another thing. All the high falutin' about crime and criminals is so much wasted breath. I have told you before that there is no romance about crime. It is a very rare occasion indeed in which a man of any education whatever has been engaged in ordinary crime. What has attracted them has been such things as embezzlement and trifling forgeries. These are chiefly done by clerks led away by betting and drinking."

"Don't they join the criminal classes after their first experience?"

"I should say not. As far as I have observed, they very often rejoin the ranks of

honest citizens and do well, probably not where they made their lapse from honesty, but elsewhere, free of old surroundings. It is quite different with the man who has been a common thief. I really think you never can reform him. He goes back to his old games as soon as he is released, in spite of prison-gate organisations. I have known many cases where men just out after a seven years' sentence have been back in prison within a week. A moment's carelessness, after his first spree with his old comrades, and he is back again."

"That is rather a striking notion about men of education. Nearly all the detective-story law-breakers are rather romantic, intelligent persons, and, of course, now I think of it, you don't hear of them in real life."

"Very seldom indeed, and then it is impressed on your memory by the fuss the newspapers make about it."

"Still, there have been many cases."

"Yes, but they have always been in the direction of swindles. A man with a decent education may be engaged in bigger things, so to speak, when he does take up crime; often he swindles very meanly, but it does not follow that he escapes."

"Any real story on the point?"

"Yes, I can give you one of a clergyman and his son. The Rev.—well, after all, never mind his name. It's enough to say he was the rector of a church in Brixton. He was committed the first time for stealing money from collecting boxes. He was caught more than once, and then, plunging deeper, he forged a name to a cheque, for which he got a long sentence. Then his smartness came in. Soon after going into prison he managed to ingratiate himself with the prison doctor, and the doctor—how, I really don't know—consented to be a party to an attempt to get him freed. The parson induced the doctor to bring in some sheep's liver. He then complained of blood-spitting, managing the symptoms by chewing the liver, and the doctor ordered him to the hospital. There he pretended to be very ill indeed, and the doctor wrote to the authorities, representing the man as dying and not having many hours to live. He recommended that he should be released at once and conveyed home to die, the doctor offering to attend him to the bosom of his family. It was done, and the parson taken carefully home. As soon as he arrived there he turned on the doctor and demanded £20 as the price of his silence. He pointed out how easily he could ruin the doctor, and perhaps benefit himself by doing so, and the doctor weakly yielded. That parson, sir, bled the doctor dry, till the poor

man died broken-hearted. It was a smart trick, but an ungrateful one."

"What happened to the smart parson?"

"It was another case of clever tricks. He went to Islington and started in the money-lending line. There he became known to ladies as ready to lend money on their jewellery without their husbands knowing of it. A great many, naturally, have objections to going to the ordinary pawnshop. The rev. gentleman raised his money by putting everything into the pawnshop and letting it remain there. Pawn-tickets expire in time. He would be pressed to return the articles, and then he wrote something in this strain—

"Dear Madam,—If you again annoy me with regard to the article to which you refer I shall be under the painful necessity of disclosing the whole of our intimacy to your husband."

"Yes, that was what you would call a mean swindle."

"You see, none of them would say a word for fear of what the old villain might write to their husbands. His son turned out in a similar way. I had him in custody myself. And as a contrast, if you like, I will tell you how I caught him. He was a collector for a sewing-machine company. He was found to have been cheating the firm and was discharged, but managed to keep a book, and still went on collecting. He was a most slippery customer, and I had great difficulty in catching him. I got him finally through a woman he had collected money from, and who was not afraid, as so many of them are, to assist the police. I saw her and arranged with her that she should tell him to call at one o'clock another day because her husband was in the country, and she would not have money till he returned. Now the trick with those fellows is to go to the place before the time appointed; they never keep the exact time. This woman was equal to the occasion. He called at eleven o'clock, and I turned up at twelve. But the woman knew what she was about, for she seemed surprised at his calling so soon, reminded him that she said her husband would not be there before one, and told him to come back. I thought I had lost my man, but he had been taken in, and the woman showed him into the little front room, and ostensibly called her husband downstairs. I had nothing to do except put the handcuffs on. It was marvellous how that man collapsed when I appeared. Both father and son were in the dock together."

"By the way, what sort of man was this criminal parson in appearance?"

"Tall, with a fine figure and a beautiful



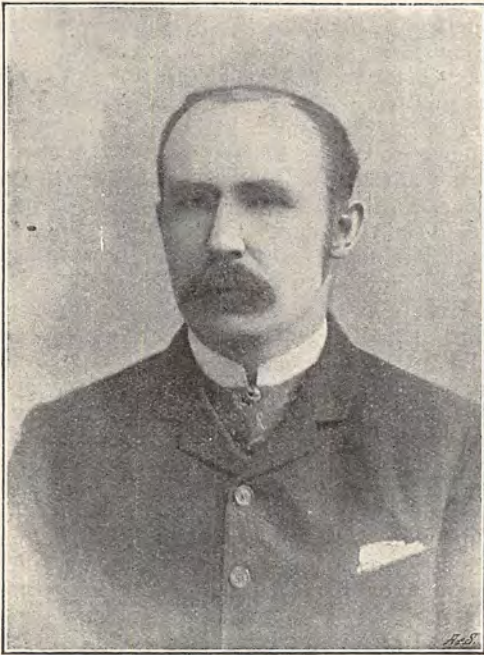
SIR EDWARD BRADFORD, C.B.

(From a photograph by Elliott & Fry, Baker Street, W)



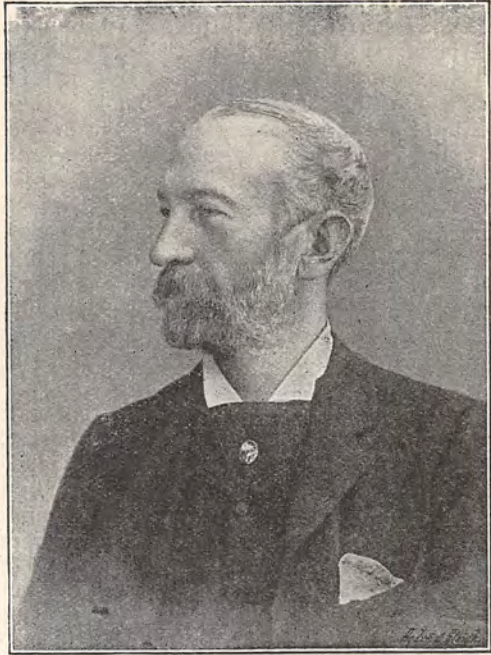
INSPECTOR SWEENEY.

(From a photograph by A. & G. Taylor, Queen Victoria Street.)



CHIEF-INSPECTOR MELVILLE.

(From a photograph by A. & G. Taylor, Queen Victoria Street.)



DR. ANDERSON.

(From a photograph by W. G. Moore, Upper Sackville St., Dublin.)

SOME SCOTLAND YARD OFFICERS.

voice—a clever man and a good preacher, the sort of man women like to hear. He could look very pleasing when inclined, to smooth his own way to roguery, and could produce a good impression before he spoke.”

“Well, he seems to have had a curious warp in him and apparently some versatility.”

“There is another thing for which little or no allowance is made by detective story writers, and that is the specialisation of crime. It is a most noticeable fact that criminals generally keep to the same line. I knew one man, a fellow named Amos, whom I had under observation for years. I have followed that man and his wife for a whole day, from nine in the morning till eight at night, when I knew they had nothing in their pockets and were hungry, thinking they would have done a little shoplifting. But no. They would stand outside shops where goods were displayed and look at them or gaze in windows, yet they never touched a thing. They were watch-snatchers, and I captured them red-handed at the end of the day, and the man got ten and the woman seven years. It has always struck me as strange that they should have gone about a whole day hungry and yet never attempted to steal handkerchiefs or clothing, of which they could have readily disposed, to buy food. They just stuck to their one line. There are few all-round felons. All try to strike a special line.”

“It’s the nature of things, I suppose. Everybody is a specialist now.”

“Yes; and there is another fact in the nature of things which knocks spots out of the detective story as a transcript from life. It is that crime is nearly always as low and squalid as the criminal. Their ways are as nasty as their lives, and no magazine would admit the true story of crime into its pages. It’s a story of wretchedness, worry of mind, and often disease of body. I have seen them by the thousands, and I know. I assure you there is no man so much to be pitied as the criminal, no matter whether he is successful or not.”

My detective friend expressed himself with emphasis and some indications of disgust. “Not that there have been no exceptions—notable exceptions—but that is the general rule. Crime is not romantic, but squalid. I did know a case where an element of romance might be imagined. It was that of a man who robbed the mails between Ostend and Dover. He devoted time, money, and address to the job. It occupied him two or three years. He travelled frequently during that time, as an independent gentleman, between London and Ostend and Paris. He was friendly and chatty, and in time became

well known to the people who were in charge of the strong boxes. He managed to sound them, and was enabled to rob the mails of a large sum. He was almost immediately suspected, and in the end arrested.”

“The result—penal servitude, I suppose?”

“A curious point of law arose about the case. It was made a plea that it could not be proved where the crime was committed, whether in English or Belgian waters, and the question of jurisdiction was raised. The same plea could have been raised in Belgium, and the man, had it been successful, would have got off. He got seven years. He lived, I found, in good style, kept a ten-roomed house, and had a fine library.”

“And what on earth was he?”

“He had been trained as an engineer. Very soon after being out of his time he turned to crime, mixing up with some of the worst characters. It was long before he was found out, for he performed his exploits, principally burglaries, at a distance from his home.”

“You did not say how he was arrested. I should like to hear how so able a man was trapped.”

“You should know that in England we only take account of facts. The law won’t allow us to imagine much, and, I think, rightly, because I am sure the result would be disastrous. This man was suspected and watched. There was nothing more romantic or mysterious about it than that. He was watched for months very close, for the booty had not turned up. He was traced to a firm of jewellers in a big way in the City. They were a firm about which I don’t wish to say anything. They were known to the police, and it was arranged that the man should call there at a certain time. When he did call, and was making his purchase, he was arrested and was in actual possession of the bulk of the proceeds of the robbery. It was no more than that, but it was effective enough.”

“It would not read so prettily as some of the elaborate arrests of which I have read.”

“I dare say not. There was one story I was rather struck with, because it fitted together. Mr. Springfield was the author, and he gets his mystery by causing a secretary guilty of forgery to attempt to poison his employer. The employer drinks the poison, but is unharmed, while the secretary dies. The employer has a fad for collecting curios, and has some poison used by Indians somewhere to poison their arrows. It is pretty harmless taken into the stomach, but fatal in a wound. The secretary puts it into a glass of port, and in getting it out of the jar has some enter a wound on his hand and dies.”

"Yes, that is not an improbable mystery, which would work up into a pretty story, and the post-mortem would reveal the facts."

"It is facts we have to deal with all the time. We must not hearsay or fancy, and it is always 'from information received' unless the prisoner is there. All the favour is shown on the side of the accused—a marked contrast to the state of things in France, where the *jugé d'instruction* makes it his business to drag the very inside out of an accused man. They go further and hear everything. It is good enough evidence if 'a woman told me that a woman told her.' But there is no

room for romance in our system. It fits crime, for in that also there is no room for romance. We have no parrots trained to steal jewellery, and have not to trace the thief by the marks of a bill on a wooden match. I think there is no reason to complain because of that. We are as successful as most men, and crime is year by year going down in amount. I am afraid if it was all on the lines of the detective story it would be going up."

Whereat my friend departed the smoke-room to resume his duties, whether in or out of the New Central Offices it was no business of mine to ask.

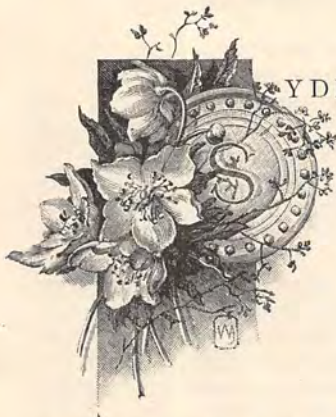
W. E. GREY.



THE GREAT THIRD WAVE.

BY ETHEL S. TURNER.

"Infinite passion and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn."



SYDNEY "West End" — speaking socially, not geographically — begins with Darlinghurst.

Certainly, the great gaol stands there too, and detracts somewhat, but the big houses shrink away from it har-

bourwards, and in the intervening streets flourish the long monotonous terraces of shabby houses indigenous to all the great cities in the world.

But it is only one of the shabby terrace houses this story has for stage; only in one of the small mean streets that the great third wave rolled up.

Here a "Dress and Mantua-maker" displayed her brass sign; there a nurse; Madame Somebody, a clairvoyant, occupied one end house, and a glove and feather cleaner the other. Of the three middle houses, one bore the name of a music teacher—piano, violin, organ, singing, theory, and the banjo; one was quite without a distinctive label, and one said, "Lodgings to Let."

Not even "Rooms Vacant" or "Apartments"—simply "Lodgings."

There was only a back room empty at present. The sitting-room and front bedroom had been occupied for nearly six months.

It was a common-looking little sitting-room; and even an easel with a sketch on it, a draped pot holding a palm, and Japanese nicknack or two, failed to banish the impression the red-stained sideboard and wildly-floral carpet left on the observer.

The sofa was of shiny horsehair, as might be expected, but there was a fleecy rug flung over it, to make it comfortable for the man who lay there.

A wreck of a man, with restless, miserable eyes and sunken cheeks.

On a hassock beside him, a pale, childish-looking woman, with Pompilia's "patient brow and lamentable smile," was sitting, altering the bodice of a dress.

She had the skirt on—a black lace one, with a narrow flounce at the hem—and a light shawl lay across her shoulders and bare soft arms.

The man was watching her with all his heart in his eyes, and she knew it, and dare not look up.

Snip, snip went the scissors. She was picking the long sleeves carefully out, and replacing them with short puffy ones. In the afternoon, when she had worn the dress at a Government House Garden Party, the collar had been high; now it was taken off, and the lace turned down to show the amount of neck and chest ball etiquette requires.

"Meg," the man said passionately, "you are too tired to go—you shall not!"

She held her head on one side, as if examining her work critically.

"Not at all bad. Wilf, this is the most