

A Check Mystery.

In the whole of my long and eventful experience as a tracker of criminals there is one failing which has puzzled me more than any other thing in connection with the men whom I have been fortunate enough to hunt down, and that is the extreme carelessness shown by the cleverest of scoundrels. A man will plan out a crime with the utmost subtlety and ingenuity, providing for well-nigh every contingency, and altogether showing himself to be a Napoleon of criminality, but all the same, by sheer carelessness or want of foresight, he will leave one glaringly obvious clew which brings his house of cards to the ground and delivers him into the clutches of the law. It is the history of such a scheme, ruined by such an oversight, that I will set down in the lines that follow.

One morning I was instructed by my chief at headquarters to go to the office of John Pennythorpe, in Golden Square, to inquire into a forgery case. I at once took my steps to the office named, and, after a short delay, was shown into Mr. Pennythorpe's room.

He was a genial-looking, clean-shaven man of some 35 years, and he rose to greet me with a smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Blake," he said, as he motioned me to a chair. "I am glad that you have come so promptly, for there has been some bother over a check of mine."

I prepared to listen to the details, and he continued: "Last Monday I received from the bank the usual paid checks which they are in the habit of returning to me every month. There were fifteen in all, most of them for small sums. One of them, however, was for no less an amount than £500, and directly I looked at it I knew that it was a forgery."

"The signature and the body of the check were apparently in my own handwriting, but as I had not drawn anything like such a sum for months past, I knew of course, that the business was a fraud. I at once communicated with the managers of the bank and also with Scotland Yard."

"You seem unnecessarily agitated," I remarked, after a pause, "for after all the bank, I presume, will bear the loss and not yourself. In the case of forgeries the bank is always liable."

"Quite so, quite so," he returned. "I myself do not lose a penny, but what agitates me is the knowledge that I must have a forger near me, for nobody but a man intimate with me could have so gauged the amount of my account. It was just £550, so that after paying the amount of the check, only £50 remained. The bank has treated me very honorably, and has written already to say that my account has been credited with the £500 in question. My interest, therefore, in finding the forger is purely from the point of view of justice to the bank. Doubtless, if the scoundrel is discovered immediately, some of the money may be refunded."

"No doubt," I returned, quietly; "and now, perhaps you will be good enough to let me see the check, also a check bearing your genuine signature."

He took from a drawer in his table a couple of checks. "Here is the forged document," he said, "and here is the genuine one. Compare them, and you will detect absolutely no difference."

No. There was no noticeable difference. I scrutinized the forged check with the aid of my glass, but the magnifying process elicited absolutely nothing.

"This is the most strikingly clever forgery that I have ever come across," I said, after a pause. "I do not wonder that the bank people were deceived."

"Nor I," he made answer, "for upon my word I myself should have been taken in by so extraordinary an imitation. And now, if there are any details I can give you which may be serviceable, pray command me."

"First of all," I said slowly, "I should like to ask you where you usually keep your check book?"

"I am afraid," he answered, "that I have been rather careless in that respect. Its usual place is an exposed position on this desk."

"Who has access to this room?"

"I have only one clerk, and he comes and goes when he likes."

"Do you suspect him?"

"My dear sir," he answered, as he rose and paced the room, "it is impossible for me to say. He has always appeared thoroughly reliable."

"How long have you had the man?"

"Three years. He came to me with admirable testimonials. I do not think he could possibly be guilty."

"Would this youth be acquainted with the state of your passbook, so that he would be in a position to know how far he might go without over-drawing the account?"

"Oh, yes. You see, he usually goes to the bank for me, and checks the passbook with the returned checks. I have always had so much confidence in Jenkins that I have allowed him absolute control of my bank business."

"I see. Has he appeared to you lately to be in want of money?" He paused for a moment, and then said: "Well, yes; now I come to think of it, only a week ago he asked for an advance of salary."

"That may or may not mean any-

thing. A man may be hard up and desire an advance, and yet hesitate about a deliberate forgery. Have you any of his writing that I can look at?"

"Plenty. How will this suit you?" He handed me a note from the clerk, in which the latter made some unimportant communication. As I was something of a graphologist, I thought that doubtless the youth's calligraphy might give a clew to his character, but a shade of disappointment crossed my face as I scrutinized the letter. It was the stereotyped commercial hand which is the bugbear of the handwriting expert, and which gives absolutely no clew to the writer's tendencies. I tossed the paper from me, and said:

"That won't help us a bit. Is the young fellow here to-day?"

"Oh, yes. I could ring for him, and you could have a look at him without his knowing your business. Shall I do so?"

He rang the bell, and a tall, thin young fellow answered it. From a sign made by Mr. Pennythorpe I knew that this was the clerk in question, and I watched him narrowly while his employer gave him some instructions invented on the spur of the moment. When he was gone the other turned to me.

"Well," he asked, "what do you think of him?"

"He looks a simple, honest young fellow," I returned, as I rose to go; "but of course, appearances are not often reliable. My next move will be to go down to the bank and interview the cashier who paid the £500 over the bank counter."

Mr. Pennythorpe rose and held out his hand. "I am sure you will do your best for all of us," he said, as I took my leave.

Arrived at the bank I had to wait a few moments before I could see the manager, as he was engaged with a customer. At length, however, the visitor departed and I was ushered into his room.

"Glad to see you," he said, heartily. "I presume you have just come from Mr. Pennythorpe's office, as he wrote us that he was communicating with Scotland Yard?"

"Yes, I have seen Mr. Pennythorpe," I returned; "but the interview has elicited very little. He seems much agitated about the loss, although it is the bank's, I presume, and not his."

"Quite so," returned the manager, gloomily. "As you know, the law provides that in case of forgery the bank and not the customer suffers. As to the justice or injustice of that law I will not speak now. Our object is to find the culprit."

"Which may be far more difficult than you may think," I said. "I have always found cases of this kind the hardest to unravel. At least 50 per cent of modern forgers are never brought to justice."

"Let us hope," he replied, quickly, "that this case will belong to the other fifty."

"With all my heart," I said; "and now, if you will allow me, I should like to have a chat with the cashier who cashed the check in question, which I have brought with me from Mr. Pennythorpe's office."

The manager's face fell. "It is rather unfortunate," he said, "but Wilson, the clerk who paid over the money, is laid up just now with influenza. Still, you might go down to his house and interview him."

"What is his address?" I asked promptly. "I will go down there without a moment's delay."

The clerk, it seemed, resided at Clapham, and a few minutes later I was hailing a cab outside the bank.

"Fern Villa, Melthorpe Road, Clapham," I cried, and presently we were bowling along in the direction of the southwestern suburb.

During the journey I turned my thoughts to other subjects for I have always found it a good rule to give the brain a rest when on a hunt of this nature. To allow one idea to remain uppermost for any considerable time is almost ruinous to the performance of intelligent work.

After nearly three-quarters of an hour's drive the cab turned into a shady street made up of tiny houses, Fern Villa being the last on the right hand side. Here I alighted and rang the bell, having previously told the cabman to await my return.

A small, white-faced woman, whom I took to be Mrs. Wilson, opened the door gingerly.

"What can I do for you, sir?" she asked timidly.

"Is Mr. Wilson able to receive a visitor?" I asked. "I have just come from the London and Suburban Bank, the manager of which place tells me he is laid up. My business is important."

"The doctor is upstairs now, sir," she said quietly, "but he won't be long. Will you please walk in?"

I entered the tiny parlor and sat down. Presently I heard steps on the stairs, then a slam of the house door, which led me to think that the physician had taken his leave. This was the case, as Mrs. Wilson appeared almost immediately and informed me that if I would walk up her husband would see me.

"From the bank, sir?" he said anxiously as I entered. "I hope nothing is wrong."

"Nothing so far as you are concerned, Mr. Wilson," I returned cheerily. "I have merely come to ask you to be kind enough to give us a little help. I am Detective Blake, from Scotland Yard. I am given to understand that this check," here I produced the document, "was paid over by you to a certain individual some two weeks ago."

He rose in his bed and looked at the slip of paper. "Five hundred pounds, and signed by John Pennythorpe, payable to 'Self,'" he observed. "Yes, I have a very distinct recollection of taking in this check, because it happened to be the first I had cashed on my return from my holidays."

I brightened considerably.

"That is exceedingly fortunate," I remarked, "for your description of the man who cashed it may be of great assistance. I am sure you are able to describe him?"

He fell back and shut his eyes, as

though striving to aid his memory in that manner.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, "he was a rather tall, thin man, of some sixty years. He had a white beard, hair and mustache and wore gold glasses. His features, as far as I remember, were commonplace. I think he was dressed in a black frock coat and he wore no gloves."

"What makes you so certain about his not wearing gloves?" I asked quickly.

"Ah, that's the point which I am more certain about than any other. I am positive he wore no gloves, because I remember remarking how shocking his finger nails were bitten. There was hardly anything of them."

I jumped up so suddenly that he looked as though he thought me mad.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

"Whom?" I echoed. "On the contrary, everything's as right as can be. By Jove—the blackguard! Excuse me taking a hasty leave, Mr. Wilson, but, really, I think your information is more than sufficient. Good-by. Hope you'll soon be better; and thanks very much."

Rushing down the stairs, I bade Mrs. Wilson a hasty good afternoon, and, jumping into my cab, ordered the man to drive back to the bank where I had engaged him.

Curiously enough, the manager was just issuing from the building as we drove up.

"Mr. Venn," I said, speaking very quickly, "I think I have a clew. May I ask you to accompany me in this cab at once to follow the same up?"

He seemed rather surprised at my manner, but acquiesced without a word.

"Where are you going?" he asked, as the cab drove off.

"We are going," I answered, "to Mr. Pennythorpe's office. We shall find our man there, unless I am very much mistaken."

The cab set us down in Golden Square in twenty minutes, and we at once took our way to the room which I had quit that morning.

Pennythorpe was seated writing as we entered. He recognized the manager, and wished him good afternoon. Then he turned to me and said:

"Have you found a clew?"

"More than that," I cried. "I have found the man, John Pennythorpe, I arrest you, in the queen's name, on the charge of attempting to defraud the London and Suburban Bank to the sum of £500."

In my time I have seen many cases of moral and physical collapse, but never have I seen such an utter breakdown as took place in that little room on that afternoon. Pennythorpe seemed to shrivel up—his face blanched with terror—his eyes were well-nigh glazed, his knees shook. If ever guilt was written on a man's face, it was written on his face then. He clung to the table for support as he gasped out:

"The proof—what proof have you?"

"Quite enough," I answered coolly; "your disguise. Mr. Pennythorpe which represented you as a dignified old gentleman of 60, was doubtless exceedingly artistic, and would probably have insured your against detection had you taken the simple precaution of wearing gloves."

He looked rapidly at his hands, and I could see that he understood all and realized the clew which had tracked him. There was a long pause, at the end of which he turned to the manager, who had stood a silent spectator of the scene, and said brokenly:

"Mr. Venn, I admit the charge. I was at my wits' ends to know where to obtain a thousand pounds, and I hit upon the idea of obtaining 500 by this trick, the other 500, of course, coming to me in the ordinary way. I wrote and signed the cheque, and, disguised beyond recognition, I cashed it at the bank. There! I have confessed all now, and I trust you will not be too hard on a man who took a desperate step because his position was more desperate still." He broke down and sobbed.

The three of us then went to the police station, where Pennythorpe was given into custody.

The trial came on shortly afterward, but as the bank did not press the charge the prisoner escaped with a light sentence. His case is interesting in view of the fact that it furnishes one more proof of the carelessness of the most ingenious criminals, for had he taken the precaution to wear gloves on that fatal morning, the mystery of the "forged" check on the London and Suburban Bank would doubtless have remained a mystery until the end of time.

BEAUTY OF SAXON WORDS.

How beautiful does Ruskin, Who did so much to popularize art and harmony among the lower classes in England in "Sesame and the Lilies," express his idea of the true sphere of woman. He says: "What do you think the beautiful word 'wife' comes from? It is the great word in which the English and Latin languages conquer the French and Greek. I hope the French will some day get a word for it instead of their femme. But what do you think it comes from? The great value of the Saxon words is that they mean something. Wife means weaver. You must be either house-wives or house moths, remember that. In the deep sense you must either weave men's fortunes and embroider them, or feed upon them and bring them to decay. Wherever a true wife comes home is always around her. The stars may be over her head, the glow worm in the night's cold grass may be the fire at her feet; but home is where she is, and for a noble woman it stretches far around her, better than houses ceiled with cedar or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light for those who are homeless. This, I believe, is the woman's true place."

He fell back and shut his eyes, as

THE HOME.

TONICS FOR SPRING.

Delicate acid desserts or salads are especially wholesome and delicious at this season of the year, when almost every one feels the need of this kind of diet.

Pickles are by no means so deleterious to the health as some would have us believe. Used in moderation, they are necessary to some, and the old saying "One man's meat is another's poison," certainly applies here.

The best way of meeting the loss of appetite and languor so common in the spring, is with acid salads of good green herbs and of fruits used in desserts.

Lemons are in good supply at this season, and they make excellent puddings as well as pies. A properly prepared lemon sauce is one of the best accompaniments of an apple or a batter pudding. Valencia and other oranges, from the Mediterranean, are now sold at a low price, and nothing could be better for dessert, either with hot pudding or cold jellies. The variety is much larger than the popular-choice desserts would indicate, as about one-fourth of the peel of oranges or lemons should be used with juice; indeed, orange deserts are almost tasteless if made without grated peel. Only the reddish skinned ones have a sweet rind, and therefore are the only ones valuable in cookery. They are raised now in California as well as on the borders of the Mediterranean. Every scrap should be saved to be put in the dessert or to be candied or made into orange extract.

The bitter rinds of pale-skinned oranges, which usually have the sweetest pulp, may be used for kindling, and will prove as useful as kerosene, though not at all dangerous. They must be kept in a warm place where they can dry, and the odor given forth when they burn will make them pleasant as well as a desirable substitute for fuel. Only a few peels are needed to kindle a fire.

The strawberry pineapple is another cheap fruit which may be advantageously used in the spring. It makes a delicious hot dumpling or fruit fritter, and mixed with cocoanut or without, a good jelly or Bavarian cream can be produced. The juice of the pineapple has sometimes cured obstinate cases of indigestion.

Grape fruit is also a valuable tonic for breakfast food, and is served after the bitter skin and rind have been torn off.

FLLOWER NOTES.

Foxgloves are best planted away from scarlet flowers as their purplish pink spikes do not harmonize with that color. The pure white foxgloves are effective against a background of dark foliage, when planted in large clumps, having a stately effect. They remain in flower a long time. They can be planted in April and only ask a thinning out if too thick and an occasional stirring of the soil. The dwarf, otherwise known as the California sunflower, is a variety which well deserves a good word and a good place in the garden. Its foliage is clean and of an attractive dark green; its blossoms of a clear bright yellow, the hue of sunshine, and they are very double and about the size of a well grown dahlia. In fact they resemble the old form of that flower to a considerable degree. As a low hedge a row of dwarf sunflowers is literally "a blooming success," and we incline to give it preference over the zinnia for the purpose. It is difficult to think of sunflowers in presence of this compact, clean, bright faced double flower.

Mr. Meehan says that the common defect in flowering shrub bushes—that they get too strong at the top and weak at the bottom instead of forming shapely specimens—can be easily remedied by pruning in early summer. If the strong shoots which make the trouble are cut as near the ground as possible the sap which would now go into them goes into the weaker ones and in this way a uniformity of growth occurs throughout the whole. This is the only way to make shapely specimens. If left till winter and then simply sheared back, as is often the case, the top branches grow stronger than ever the next season and the bush is made worse than ever.

A correspondent of the Garden and Forest tells of some hollyhocks planted five or six years ago on land enriched by an old wood pile and since left to themselves. They have increased and multiplied in the rich soil, sending up many seedlings and grouping themselves in beautiful colonies. All shades of bloom are now seen from white through pale flesh tints to deep maroon, varied by buff and lemon tinted flowers. They have crowded out the weeds that disputed territory with them, and now own the soil. Hollyhocks are ideal flowers for such waste places.

The double zonal geraniums are almost entirely superseded nowadays by the semi-double forms, which have also replaced the single forms, which fade rapidly in the sun. The single forms, however, are good for winter house plants, giving large trusses of bright bloom. To produce the finest plants cuttings should be rooted in July in a compost of equal parts of sand, leaf mold and loam. As the pots fill with roots the plants should be shifted on till they are in six-inch

pots. The soil for the later shifts need not contain so much sand or leaf mold but should be rich. All flower buds should be removed as they appear and the points of the shoots be occasionally pinched in to keep a bushy habit. They may be allowed to begin to blossom in October and will then appreciate an occasional watering with weak liquid manure water. If properly handled there should be abundance of bloom during the winter and everyone knows how bright and gay the geranium is.

Meehan's Monthly says the wild English daisy, the "wee, modest, crimson tippet" flower, celebrated by Burns, is abundant in a wild state, and just as luxuriant in habit, in the vicinity of Victoria, B.C., as if in its English or Scotch home. No doubt it had escaped from cultivation in the first instance, and this shows how, sometimes, plants adapt themselves to a new environment and become as much at home as if in their own original habitat.

SOME WAYS TO COOK EGGS.

Tomato Omelet.—Drain half pint of canned tomatoes in a sieve, melt two ounces butter in a frying pan and add the tomatoes, seasoning with half a teaspoonful of salt, a quarter teaspoonful pepper, and the same of sugar. Cook for ten minutes. Beat six eggs until very light, add them to the tomatoes and stir a few minutes. Then let it rest for one minute. Fold the omelet over, slip it on a hot plate and serve.

Eggs in Cocottes.—Place a saucepan with two ounces butter, two tablespoonfuls fine-chopped white onions over the fire and cook for three minutes. Add half cupful fine-sliced mushrooms, cooking slowly for five minutes. Season with half teaspoonful salt, one-eighth teaspoonful pepper and one teaspoonful parsley. Cook two minutes. Remove and divide these fine herbs in six small earthen saucepans, called cooking over them a little salt and a little and put one in each saucepan, sprinkling over them a little salt and a little melted butter, bake in a hot oven till the white of egg is firm, and serve.

Egg Fondue.—Beat two eggs very light, add two tablespoonfuls milk and beat again, adding two tablespoonfuls grated cheese. Butter two small earthen saucepans, pour in the mixture and bake in a hot oven about five minutes.

Eggs with Cheese in Cases.—Butter some small china cases, put one raw egg in each one, sprinkle over a little salt and white pepper, a tablespoonful of grated cheese and a little melted butter and bread crumbs. Bake for a few minutes in a hot oven.

Egg Croquettes.—Chop fine three hard-boiled eggs, melt half tablespoonful butter, and half tablespoonful flour, stir and cook two minutes adding half cup milk, one-quarter teaspoonful salt, one-eighth teaspoonful pepper and one-quarter teaspoonful English mustard. Stir and cook two minutes, then add the chopped eggs, one teaspoonful chopped parsley and one raw yolk of egg. Stir a moment and spread the preparation on a dish to cool. Grate some stale bread and beat one egg in a soup plate till light. Divide the croquette mixture into nine equal parts, take each part separately in a spoon and dip it in the beaten egg. Then roll in the bread crumbs, lay it on a board, and with two table knives form into a cork-shaped croquette. When they are all formed, fry them in hot fat to a fine golden color and serve with the following sauce:

Anthony Sauce.—Boil a medium-sized white onion in water five minutes, remove the onion and chop it fine. Place a saucepan with half tablespoonful butter over the fire and add the onion, half a bayleaf and six whole peppers. Cook three minutes, adding half tablespoonful flour. Stir and cook two minutes. Then add one cupful canned tomatoes, one-quarter teaspoonful salt, one-eighth teaspoonful pepper and a pinch of sugar. Cook slowly ten minutes, stirring often. Then rub the tomatoes through a sieve, mix the yolk of an egg with two tablespoonfuls cream; add it to the sauce and serve.

"LOOK INDIAN" FOR IT.

When you drop a small object on the floor, "look Indian" and you're sure to find it. Here is the modus operandi:

Somebody dropped a stickpin in the hall the other day and had hard work to find it. She hunted high and low, and on her hands and knees, and with a candle specially procured for the purpose, but it was no use; the pin was very tiny and unperceivable, its value being that of association, rather than size or brilliancy. The somebody after a final shake of the rugs, was just about to give it up for her, when one of the children chanced to come along. "Why don't you look 'Indian' for it?" he asked. Before the somebody realized what was meant, down dropped the youngster on the floor, his head and his whole body lying sidewise, and just as close to the dead level as possible. In this position his eyes roved rapidly over the floor. "I have it," he shouted presently, and sure enough right in the middle of the floor, in so plain a place that it had escaped notice, was the missing stickpin. The youngster then explained that "looking Indian" meant putting the head to the ground in order to catch sight of the smallest object between oneself and the horizon. "They do it on the plains all the time," he said. "That's why they can always tell who's coming. But it works on houses just as well as on the plains. Why, we never lose anything in the nursery nowadays; we just 'look Indian' and find it right off."