

A COOL SCOUNDREL.

THE PECULIAR MANNER IN WHICH A BURGLAR
CRACKED A BANK.

My profession is not a popular one. There is considerable prejudice against it. I don't think myself it is much worse than a good many others. However, that's nothing to do with my story. Some years ago, me and the gentleman who was at that time connected with me in business—he's met with reversion since then, and at present isn't able to get out—was looking around for a job, being at that time rather hard up, as you might say. We struck a small county town. I ain't agoin' to give it away by telling where it was or what the name of it was. There was one bank there. The President was a rich old duffer: owned the mills, owned the bank, owned most of the town. There wasn't no other officer but the cashier, and they had a boy who used to sweep out and run their errands.

The bank was on the main street, pretty well up one end of it—nice snug place—on the corner of a cross street, with nothing very near it. We took our observations, and found there wasn't no trouble at all about it. There was an old watchman that walked up and down the streets nights, when he didn't fall asleep and forget it. The vault had two doors; the outside one was chilled iron, and had a three-wheeled combination lock; the inner wasn't no door at all; you could kick it open. It didn't pretend to be nothing but fire-proof, and it wasn't even that. The first thing we done, of course, was to fit a key to the outside door. As the lock on the outside door was an old-fashioned Bacon lock, any gentleman of my profession who chances to read this article, will know just how easy that job was, and how we done it. I may say here that the gentlemen in my line of business, having at times a great deal of leisure on their hands, do considerable reading, and are peculiar fond of a neat bit of writing. In fact, in the way of literature, I have found among 'em—however, this being digression, I drop it, and go on with the main job again.

This was our plan:—After the key was fitted, I was to go into the bank, and Jim—that wasn't his name, of course, but let it pass—was to keep watch on the outside. When anyone passed he was to tip me a whistle, and then I doused the glim and lay low; after they goes by, I goes on again. Simple and easy you see. Well, the night as we selected, the President happened to be out of town; gone down to the city, as he often did. I got inside all right, with a side lantern, a breakfast drill, a steel jimmy, a bunch of skeleton keys, and a green baize bag, to stow away the swag. I fixed my light and rigged my breast-drill, and got to work on the door just over the lock.

Probably a great many of your readers are not so well posted as me about bank-locks, and I may say for them that a three-wheeled combination lock has three wheels in it, and a slot in each wheel. In order to unlock the door, you have to get the three slots opposite to each other at the top of the lock. Of course, if you know the number the lock is set on, you can do this; but if you don't you have to depend upon your ingenuity. There is in each of these wheels small hole, through which you put a wire through the back of the lock when you change the combination. Now, if you can bore a hole through the door, and pick up those wheels by running a wire through those holes, why you can open the door. I hope I make myself clear. I was boring that hole. The door was chilled iron; about the neatest stuff I ever worked on. I went on steady enough; only stopped when Jim—which, as I said, wasn't his real name—whistled outside, and the watchman toddled by. By and by, when I'd got pretty near through, I heard Jim so to speak, whistle again. I stopped, and pretty soon I heard footsteps outside, and I'm blowed if they didn't come right up the bank steps, and I heard a key in the lock. I was so dumfounded when I heard that, that you could have slipped the bracelets right on me. I picked up my lantern, and I'll be hanged if I didn't let the slide slip down and throw the light right on to the door, and there was the President. Instead of calling for help, as I thought he would he took a step inside the door and shaded his eyes with his hand and looked at me. I knowed I ought to knock him down and cut out, but I'm blest if I could, I was that surprised.

"Who are you?" says he.

"Who are you?" says I, thinking that was an innocent remark as he commenced it, and a-trying all the time to collect myself.

"I'm the President of the bank," says he, kinder short; "something's the matter with the lock?"

By George! the idea came to me then.

"Yes sir," says I, touching my cap; "Mr. Jennings, he telegraphed to me this morning as the lock was out of order and he couldn't get in, and so I'm come to open it for him."

"I told Jennings a week ago," says he, "that he ought to get that lock fixed. Where is he?"

"He's been a-writing letters, and he's gone up to his house to get another letter he wanted for to answer."

"Well, why don't you go right on?" says he.

"I've got almost through," says I; and I didn't want to finish up and open the vault till there was somebody here."

"That's very creditable to you," says he; "a very proper sentiment, my man. You can't," he goes on, coming round by the door, "be too particular about avoiding the very suspicion of evil."

"No, sir," says I, kinder modest like.

"What do you suppose is the matter with the lock?" says he.

"I don't rightly know, yet," says I; but I rather think it's a little worn out on account of not being oiled enough. These 'ere locks ought to be oiled about once a year."

"Well," he says, "you might as well go right on, now

I'm here; I will stay till Jennings comes. Can't I help you? Hold your lantern or something of that sort?"

The thought came to me like a flash, and I turned round and says:—

How do I know you're the President. I ain't ever seen you afore, and you may be a-trying to crack this bank, for all that I know?"

"That's a very proper inquiry, my man," says he, "and shows a most remarkable degree of discretion. I confess I should not have thought of the position in which I was placing you. However, I can easily convince you that it's all right. Do you know what the President's name is?"

"No I don't," says I, sorter surly.

"Well, you'll find it on that bill," said he, taking a bill out of his pocket; "and you see the same name on these letters," and he took some letters from his coat.

I suppose I ought to have gone right on, then, but I was beginning to feel interested in making him prove who he was, and so I says:

"You might have got them letters to put up a job on me."

"You're a very honest man," says he, "one among a thousand. Don't think I'm at all offended at your persistence. No, my good fellow, I like it, I like it," and he laid his hand on my shoulder. "Now here," says he, taking a bundle out of his pocket, "is a package of \$10,000 in bonds. A burglar wouldn't be apt to carry these around with him, would he?" I bought them in the city yesterday, and I stopped here on my way home to-night to place them in the vault, and I may add, that your simple and manly honesty has so touched me, that I would willingly leave them in your hands for safe keeping. You needn't blush at my praise."

I suppose I did turn sorter red when I see them bonds.

"Are you satisfied now?" says he.

I told him I was, thoroughly; and so I was. So I picked up my drill again, and gave him my lantern to hold, so that I could see the door. I heard Jim, as I call him, outside once or twice, and I like to have burst out laughing, thinking he must be wondering what was going on inside. I worked away and kept explaining to him what I was trying to do. He was vey much interested in mechanics, he said, and he knowed as I was a man as was up in my business, by the way I went to work. He asked me about what ages I got, and how I liked my business, and said he took quite a fancy to me. I turned round once in a while and looked at him a setting up there as solemn as a biled owl, with my dark lantern in his blessed hand, and I'm blamed if I didn't think I should have to holler right out.

I got through the lock pretty soon and put my wire in and opened it. Then he took hold of the door and opened the vault.

"I'll put my bonds in," said he, "and go home. You can lock up, and wait till Mr. Jennings comes. I don't suppose you will try to fix the lock to-night?"

I told him I shouldn't do anything more with it now, as we could get in before the morning.

"Well, I'll bid you good night, my man," says he, as I swung the door to again.

Just then I heard Jim, by name, whistle, and I guessed the watchman was a coming up the street.

"Ah," says I "you might speak to the watchman, if you see him, and tell him to keep an extra lookout to-night."

"I will," says he, and we both went to the front door.

"There comes the watchman up the street," says he: "Watchman, this man has been fixing the bank lock, and I want you to keep a sharp lookout to-night. He will stay until Mr. Jennings returns."

"Good-night, again," says he, and we shook hands, and he went up the street.

I saw Jim, so-called, in the shadow on the other side of the street, as I stood on the step with the watchman.

"Well," says I to the watchman. "I'll go and pick up my tools and get ready to go."

I went back into the bank, and it didn't take long to throw the door open and stuff them bonds into the bag. There was some boxes lying around, and a safe as I should like to tackle, but it seemed like tempting Providence after the luck we'd had. I looked at my watch and see it was a quarter-past twelve. There was an express went through at half-past twelve. I tucked my tools on the top of the bonds, and walked out to the front door. The watchman was on the steps.

"I don't believe I'll wait for Mr. Jennings," says I. "I suppose it will be all right if I give you my key?"

"That's all right," says the watchman.

"I wouldn't go away very far from the bank," says I.

"No, I won't," says he; "I'll stay right here all night."

"Good-night," says I, and I shook hands with him, and me and Jim—which wasn't his right name, you understand—took the half-past twelve express, and the best part of that job, was, we never heard nothing of it.

It never got into the papers.

WHAT GROC COSTS.—The price paid in England for the national appetite for stimulants is awfully high. A writer in the *Times* of March 15th says:—

"The total expenditure upon intoxicating liquors of all kinds during the past ten years has been £1,364,818,357, or, in round numbers, £136,500,000 yearly. But if the brewers' corrections be made, it will give £143,600,000 as having been spent upon intoxicating liquors during each of the past ten years, or a total of £1,436,000,000—a sum nearly twice the amount of our national debt. And let it be borne in mind that these figures in no way include any of the indirect costs and losses which result from drinking. These will amount at the very least to another £100,000,000 annually, giving a total cost and loss to the nation from our drink expenditure of over £240,000,000 yearly." This sum is nearly double the value of the rental of houses and lands in the United Kingdom, which amounts only to £136,000,000.

A DREADFUL DISCOVERY.

(From the *Family Herald*.)

I was growing faint, but by the effort of the will I forced myself to speak and understand.

"Darling, I cannot tell you!" she murmured, her sobs echoing through the room.

"Mother," I said, "you are making me worse by keeping this from me, whatever it is. Speak! I implore you!"

She threw herself upon the bed, and, in a voice choked with emotion, replied—

"Mary, my poor girl, my darling child! Oh, how shall I tell you? Mary—you are—a—widow!"

I heard, when I could bear it, how it had happened. On recovering from his fit of insanity, my unfortunate husband had at once discovered that I had found out his awful secret. He had rushed wildly into the library and bolted the door. Alarmed at this action, Martin had followed him; but, ere reaching the closed door, the report of a pistol told him that he was too late. When they forced open the door they found—I cannot write it!

When I was getting stronger—the second shock, the news of his death, had thrown me back at once, and greatly endangered and retarded my recovery, and I had been removed to my mother's house in London—they told me the particulars of the tragedy. At the same time, from papers and diaries found in poor Charles's desk, light was thrown upon the terrible past.

He had, it seemed, inherited madness from his father, and while a youth, had actually been under restraint for some years. At twenty-one he quitted the institution, for they considered him cured. He took with him, as his servant and attendant, John Martin, a man skilled in the treatment of the insane, who had been employed in the institution, and to whom Charles had become attached. Shortly after this he inherited a large property, which just then fell to him as next of kin to an aunt who died intestate. He entered upon his estate, Kenton Park, and the large fortune attaching to it, and for one or two years enjoyed the blessings of a sound mind. It appeared, from the confessions of his journal, that at the end of that period he began to entertain apprehensions of the return of his old malady. Acting on this fear, he had caused the construction of the secret passage and the dreadful padded room. Martin, his confidential servant always, had superintended and directed the work. Foreign workmen had been engaged, and the work had gone on with the utmost secrecy. Martin had so managed that no hint of the secret had leaked out in the neighbourhood.

Soon after the completion of the passage and the room, poor Charles's dread apprehension was realised. He was attacked with a violent fit of insanity, lasting several days. Martin was, of course, his sole attendant. From that time the fit had recurred regularly. Premonitory symptoms always warned him when to expect the dreaded attacks. So invariably was this the case that he was able to preserve his secret successfully, and withdraw out of the sight and hearing of his fellow-creatures when the evil spirit entered into him and tortured him. For years he had lived thus, visiting, among his friends and neighbours, who received him with consideration and liking, taking short trips on the Continent, reading, studying, experimenting in chemistry, and then, at the warning of his dread master, going away to that fearful underground room and—But the rest cannot be even imagined.

Poor Charles! Poor, poor Charles! When I married you it is true, the first best love of my life lay beneath the ocean; but I nourished a deep and pure affection for you; and, when, in those pages of familiar writing, I read of the passionate love you bore me, I forgave whatever wrong you might have done in marrying me.

He had, it seemed, put away from him the idea of wedlock, as something that would be little short of a crime. He had kept this resolution firmly until—ah, the old, old changeless story!—his resolution had succumbed to temptation. Of his love for me, which had been sudden and very strong, and in eloquent confessions of which many pages were consumed, it is not for me to speak at length. Suffice it to say that it had overcome all his stern determinations.

Long before his marriage he had formed his plans for accounting for his absences when the fits were on him. He always meant to feign going away on business, and to seem to depart by a night-train. In the darkness of night, when all had retired to their rooms, he would be readmitted by Martin. From what was written about the terrible room—which I should never have discovered but for my having been led so strangely out upon the gallery just in time to perceive the light under the study door from Martin's lamp, as he went to pay one of his secret periodic visits to his master and patient—I gathered that it was accessible only from above. The skylight was removable, and allowed the admission of a ladder; and when my unhappy husband's condition rendered him dangerous to any that approached him, his food was conveyed through the same medium.

The story of my dreadful discovery is told. I was the sole heir of poor Charles's riches; but I never went back to Kenton Park. The house and estate were, at my desire, sold as soon as possible, the secret room and passage being previously closed up.

Martin I never saw after I was brought to London. But I received a long letter from him when I partially recovered from my severe illness, in which he begged my forgiveness for the share he had in the past wrong done me. He confessed that he had received very large wages while in the service of Mr. Disney, and had therefore been anxious to keep his place. But he assured me that, when his late master had first entertained the idea of marrying,