

“ ‘Do you intend?’ I asked him, ‘to pay the insurance?’

“ ‘I shall be obliged to do so,’ replied the General.

“ ‘I think not, for I have no doubt, from the circumstances attending the loss, that the ship was set on fire with the intent to defraud the company of the insurance.’

“ ‘But how shall we prove that? and what shall I say to Mr. Blank, when he makes application for the money?’

“ ‘Say nothing,’ I replied, ‘but hear quietly what he has to say.’

“Some few days after this conversation, Mr. Blank came up to Boston, and presented himself to General Arnold Wells at the insurance office. Mr. Blank was a man very careful of his personal appearance, and of punctilious demeanor. He powdered his hair, wore clean ruffles and well-brushed clothes, and had a gravity of speech becoming a person of respectable position. All this demanded civil treatment, and whatever you might think of him, you would naturally use no harsh language toward him. He had a defect in his left eye, so that when he spoke he turned his right and sound eye to the person he addressed, with a somewhat oblique angle of the head, giving it something such a turn as a hen who discovers a hawk in the air. General Arnold Wells had a corresponding defect in the right eye.

“I was not present at the interview, but I have heard it often described by others who were. General Wells came out from an inner office, on the announcement of Mr. Blank’s arrival, and fixed him (to use a French expression) with his sound eye, looking at him seriously, but calmly. Mr. Blank looked at General Wells with *his* sound eye, but not steadily—rather as if he sought to turn the General’s right flank.

“They stood thus, with their eyes cocked at each other, for more than a minute before either spoke, when Mr. Blank thought best to take the initiative.

“ ‘It is a pleasant day, General Wells, though rather cold.’

“ ‘It is, as you say, Mr. Blank, a pleasant though rather cold day,’ replied the General, without taking his eye down from its range.

“ ‘I should not be surprised, General,’ continued Mr. Blank, ‘if we should have a fall of snow soon.’

“ ‘There might be more surprising circumstances, Mr. Blank, than a fall of snow in February.’