(*From Chambers' Journal.*)

A Cast of the Net.

THE STORY OF A DETECTIVE OFFICER.

CHAPTER III.—CONTINUED.

I was glad when he was gone, and I had the room, as I may say, to myself; so I sent my plate away, called for a little drop of rum and water (the only thing you could get fit to drink at the *Anchor*,) and lighting my pipe, sat with my feet on the fender, to have a good smoke and a good hard think. I had sat there perhaps half a dozen minutes, and had fairly settled down to my thinking, when a low voice said:

"Mr. Nickham!" My name! It was a very low voice which spoke, but the roar of an elephant couldn't have startled me more. In an instant it flashed upon me that my disguise was seen through and all my plans understood. Robinson Crusoe was not so staggered when he saw a footprint on the sand, as I was on hearing these two familiar words. I turned round, and there was that miserable rough that I thought had been asleep, standing and making signs to me. He was a regular rough, and no mistake, with short hair, an ugly handkerchief twisted round his neck; His nose had been broken at some time or another, and he looked a complete jail-bird. 'Mr. Nickham!"

It was he that spoke; no mistake about it this time; and he put his hand up to the side of his mouth to keep the sound straight.

"Who are you?" said I; for you know I didn't like to answer to the name at once, in case he wasn't certain.

"My name is Wilkins—Barney Wilkins," said the man. "But you won't recollect me by that p'raps; though I've been through your hands, sergeant: but I giv some other name then. You got me twelve penn'orth for ringin shofuls."

He meant that he had been sent to prison for twelve months for passing bad money. I wasn't surprised to hear it; he looked fit for that or anything bad. But if he got it through me, why he should speak to me now was beyond my comprehension.

"I knowed you directly I see you, sergeant," he says, coming nearer, but speaking in the same hoarse whisper as at first, "and though you're a tight hand, you're fair and square, and acted as such by me when you copped me. You are down here on business—you're after some rare downy cards. Now ain't you sergeant?"

"If you know," I said, "what do you ask me for? And if you thing I am what you say, you don't suppose I shall tell you my business, do you?"

"Sergeant," he says, coming nearer still, 'you fought a man in the street, last night, and giv him a through good licking You was the only man there as would take the part of a poor gal as wasn't doing harm to nobody, and I respect you for it, sergeant, I do. The gal was my sister—my young sister, as has been like a child to me, and was so tidy and pretty that I was proud on her, and hoped—Well, sergeant, whatever we are, we all have our feelings; and Sergeant Nickham, I'll do you a good turn. Look here!" With this, he crept quite close and put his mouth almost to my ear. I watched him carefully, being much puzzled by his actions, yet I had seen such unexpected things occur in the police that I was quite ready to hear of something of consequence from him. 'You are down here about that Bank paper, what is said to be all got back, but which you know it isn't. You are on the right parties, and it does you credit; but you'll never get them nor the paper without me.'

He stopped here, to see what I would say, but though I was ten times more surprised than ever, I kept my countenance, and only said:

'Well?' In point of fact I didn't know what *to* say.

'I've been used bad, Mr. Nickham,' he went on. 'I've had a lot of trouble and risk about that there paper. I got it from B——, and took the money for it to him, honest; and have been as near took with it in my possession as anything. Twice the slops (he meant the police, 'slops' is what we call 'back slang,' a rough sort of spelling the words backward)—twice they have come into my place when the stuff was there. Once I was sitting upon it done up like bundles of rabbit-skins. Now he gives me (the party wot I am down on) he gives me five pounds, and I can't get no more out of him. And you see there ain't no reward out.'

'No, not regularly, Barney,' I said; 'but there's no doubt at all that any man coming forward would be very handsomely considered by the Bank people.'

'He might be, if he'd got anybody like you to speak for him,' says Barney. 'But you know, Mr. Nickham, that I am wanted for a lot of things by the bobbies, and I have been through the mill so often, that without I've got a friend I don't half like touching 'em again. But you're fair and square, and you licked the fellow last night; and I'm told you can box better than ever Tom Sayers could; and if that's so I'll trust you. And this here man won't give me more than five pounds; and he has settled with a regular fence, a sort of Dutch-Yankee skipper, what pretends to command one of them traders out there.'

'Yes, yes,' I said; 'the man I fought last night. I know him.'

To be Continued.

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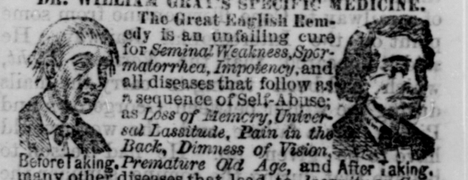

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