

(From Chambers' Journal.)

A Cast of the Net.

THE STORY OF A DETECTIVE OFFICER.
33

CHAPTER II.

By ten o'clock on the following morning, I had sketched out my plan, and more than that I was down at the water-side and looking after a lodging, for I never let the grass grow under my feet. I must say, however, that I very much dislike the east end of London, and especially the riverside part of it; everything was so dirty and miserable and crowded, that to a man of really decent tastes, like myself, it was almost purgatory to pass a day in it. And on this particular occasion, the weather changed the very day I went there; it was getting on towards late autumn (October in point of fact), and we had been having most beautiful weather; but this morning it came on to rain, a close, thick rain, and we didn't have three hours of continuous fine weather while I stopped in the east.

I was not likely to be very particular about my lodgings in one sense, though in another I was more particular than any lodger that ever came into the neighborhood, and after little trouble I pitched upon a public-house again, chiefly because my going in and out would attract less attention there than at a private house; so I secured a small second-floor back room at the *Anchor and Five Mermaids*, or the *Anchor* as it was generally called for shortness.

The great recommendation of the *Anchor and Five Mermaids* was that it was nearly opposite to Byrle & Co's, engineering shops, a ferry existing between the two places; this ferry was reached by a narrow lane, which ran by the side of the *Anchor*, and I could see that numbers of the workmen came across at dinner time. The *Anchor* stood at the corner, one front looking on the lane, the other upon the river; and once upon a time there had been, not exactly a tea-garden, but arbors or "boxes" in front of the house, where the customers used to sit and watch the shipping; but this was all past now, and only the miserable remains of the arbors were there; and it was as dull and cheerless a place as the tavern to which Quilp took Sampson and Sally Brass in the Old Curiosity Shop, of which, indeed, it reminded me every time I looked at it.

I always had a readiness for scraping acquaintance; in fact it is not much use of your being a detective if you can't do this; if you can't be jonnick with the biggest stranger or lowest rough, you are no use on that lay. I really must avoid slang terms; but "jonnick" means hearty and jovial; on a "lay" means being up to some game or business. Before the first dinner-time had passed, I had got quite friendly with two or three of Byrle's hands who came into the *Anchor* to have their beer; and I learned some particulars about the gat keeper, that helped me in my ideas.

Directly they had all gone back, I went over too, and the dinner-traffic having ceased, I was the only passenger. The ferryman did not like taking me alone but he was bound to do it; and he looked as sulky as if he was going to be flogged at a cart's tail. He was a tall boney-headed fellow, between fifty and sixty, I should say; and I noticed him particularly, because of an uncommonly ugly squint in his left eye. In accordance with my plan, I begin to talk cheerfully to him while he was pushing off from the shore; but he didn't answer me more than a growl. Then I offered him some chewing tobacco, which a "friend" just over from America had given me." Really and truly I had bought it within a quart of the *Anchor and Five Mermaids*, but he wasn't to know that. I can't chew; I hate the idea, but I put a piece of tobacco in my mouth, knowing how fond these waterside men are of the practice, and how friendly they get with one of the same tastes. To my surprise, he would not have it, and I was glad to pitch my plug into the river when he turned his head away. But confound these cock-eyed men! there is never any knowing where to have them. He had not turned far enough, I suppose, or I didn't make proper allowances for his squint; for, as I threw my plug away with a shudder—it had already turned me sick—I caught his plucky cross-eye staring full at me. I knew it was by the expression on his face; that was my only guide, for an astronomer could not have told by his eye in which direction he was looking.

The ferryman pulled well, however; and just as we got athwart the bows of a short, thick-looking craft—it is no use my trying to say what kind of a craft she was; I can't tell one from another—a voice hailed us. "Ay, ay," says the boatman, lifting his sculls; "do you want to go ashore, captain?" "Yes," returned the voice; and I looked up and saw a man leaning over the side of the vessel, and the boatman sending his wherry close under the ship, the stranger slid down by a rope very cleverly, and got in. Though the boatman had called him "captain," and though he was very clever with the rope,

he didn't look altogether like a regular sailor; he was a dark, full-faced man, with black eyes, a dark moustache, and curly, greasy-looking hair.

To be Continued.

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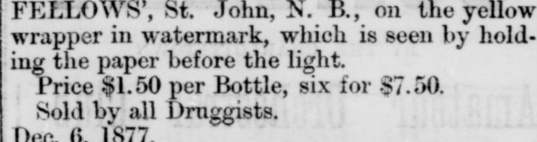
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