VARIOUS

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Содержание

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CHARLEY ROSS

On the 1st of July 1874, two little boys, brothers, were playing on the side of a public road near some villas at Germantown, a few miles from Philadelphia. The elder of the two, Walter Ross, was nearly six years of age; the younger, Charley Ross, was aged four years and two months. They were the sons of Christian K. Ross, a gentleman in business in Philadelphia, who lived in one of the villas at this pleasant part of the environs. His wife and some other children were at the time residing at Atlantic City on the sea-shore of New Jersey. Charley was a charming little boy, with a round full face, broad forehead, bright brown eyes, and light flaxen hair, curling in ringlets to the neck. Like all American children whom we have ever seen, Charley and his brother Walter were fond of candy, a sweetmeat of the barley-

sugar species, the taste for which led in the present case to a serious misadventure.

For several days in their outdoor sports, the two boys had been presented with a present of candy by two men who were driving in a kind of wagon or drosky, and who stopped for a moment to talk to them. These interviews produced a slight acquaintance with the men. When they drove past on the 1st of July, and as usual gave them candy, Charley asked them for a ride, and also whether they would not buy him some crackers, which they promised to do. The crackers were meant to be used as fireworks on the 4th July, the annual fête commemorative of American Independence. After driving on for a certain distance, the men returned and took them for a ride into the wagon. Walter asked them to go to Main Street to get the fire-crackers, but was told that he and his brother would be taken to Aunt Susie's store. This was a place which had no existence. So onward the two boys were driven, amused with talk, and supplied with fresh doles of candy. By-and-by, as Charley thought the men were driving rather far, he began to cry, and begged to be taken home. To pacify him, the men gave Walter some money to go into a cigar-store which had crackers exhibited in the window; he was to buy two packages of crackers and one of torpedoes, and come back to the wagon. While he was gone on this deceitful mission, the wagon drove off with Charley. When Walter came out of the store with his hands full of fireworks, he was not a little surprised to find that the wagon had disappeared. He looked about in all directions, but

could not see or hear anything of it. Finding himself deserted he cried loudly; a crowd gathered round him, and a kindly disposed person took him home.

On returning to his house in the evening, Mr Ross was distressed at the absence of little Charley, and alarmed from what Walter had to tell of the two men in the wagon. The only reasonable conjecture he could form was that the child had been stolen, though for what purpose he could not divine. Assisted by a nephew, he went off to make inquiries at different police stations; at none, however, could he hear any tidings to allay his anxiety. In the account given by Walter, he described the appearance of the two men, one of whom had rings on his fingers and wore gold spectacles; the horse and wagon were also described. Strange to say, no one knew who these men were. At taverns and livery-stables they and their equipments were unknown. The officers of police were at a loss what to make of the affair. For days Mr Ross continued the search for the child and his abductors. With his nephew he scoured the neighbourhood, telegraphed to various quarters, and advertised the loss in the newspapers. Hearing that there had been a band of gipsies in the neighbourhood, he supposed that they might have been concerned in the theft. Detectives were employed to visit the gipsy camp and make a rigorous search for the boy. The search was unavailing. The gipsies were apparently innocent of the crime.

Much public sympathy was felt for the father of the lost boy, and all were amazed at the possibility of a child being carried off

in a manner so totally inexplicable. Where could little Charley be? He and his captors had seemingly vanished from the face of the earth. The only rational supposition that could be formed was that Charley had been stolen by two scoundrels in the hope of getting a heavy ransom on his restoration. Yet, a crime of this kind, though common enough in Sicily, where the laws meet with no sort of respect, was next to unknown in Pennsylvania or any other northern part of the United States. If Charley Ross had been abducted for the sake of a ransom, it was the beginning of a new crime in this part of the world, and as such would send a shiver through society; for no child of any man in good circumstances would be safe.

The conjecture that little Charley was stolen with a view to being held in ransom, proved to be the right one. The abductors had the audacity to write to Mr Ross, July 3, that he might keep his mind easy about Charley; but that no powers on earth would get him unless good payment was offered for him. The letter was in affectedly bad writing and spelling, and was not dated from any place. Strange to say, it must, from the short time between posting and delivery, have been written in Philadelphia, in which city, by a reasonable inference, the two thieves were concealed. The authorities now made a more minute and vigorous search, and a watch was put on all the railway dépôts day and night. Barns, stables, sheds, and unoccupied houses were looked into, and the police went through all known haunts of vice and professional beggars and vagrants. The search was not confined

to the town and suburbs, but was extended up and down the Delaware and into the neighbouring states. Every canal-boat was carefully examined. To do the local authorities justice, they spared no pains to unravel this extraordinary mystery. The crime, as it now stood revealed, did not alone concern the bereaved father and his child; it concerned the whole community, and if allowed to go undetected, there might be no end to the felonious abduction of children.

On the day after receiving the letter of the 3d July, Mr Ross advertised that he would give a reward of three hundred dollars to any person returning his lost child. To this there came a startling response in a letter dated Philadelphia, 6th. It was as badly written and badly spelled as the preceding, and plainly intimated that the ransom to be paid for restoration of the boy was twenty thousand dollars – not a dollar less would be taken, and all the powers in the universe would fail to find out where he was. If Mr Ross was ready to negotiate, he was to say so by advertisement in the *Public Ledger*. On the 7th Mr Ross advertised that he would negotiate. At two o'clock the same day a letter in reply was received. What was now demanded was that Mr Ross should advertise in the *Evening Star* as follows: either, 'Will come to terms,' or 'Will not come to terms.' If the former, it would be understood that twenty thousand dollars would be given; if the latter, the negotiation was at an end, and Charley's blood be on his father's head. Here was an explicit and horrible threat that if the full ransom were not forthcoming the unfortunate child would

be murdered. It being conclusive that this, like the preceding letter, had been posted at Philadelphia, a watch was put on the letter-boxes, to discover who were the senders. This effort failed in effect. The thieves were evidently assisted by some unknown confederate, who posted the letters, and whom it was impossible to identify.

We have not space to go into the numerous details of what ensued, as given by Mr Ross in a volume which has lately made its appearance.[A] Referring persons deeply interested in the matter to the book itself, which will reward perusal, we proceed to say that the intercourse by letter and advertisement between the abductors and the bereaved father came to nothing. There were difficulties as regards the kind of notes in which the ransom should be paid; there were worse difficulties as to how the thieves could make the exchange of the boy for the money. In Sicily, where a brigand leaves his card with the superior magistrate of the district, things of this kind encounter no serious obstacle. It is different in the United States, as it is in England. In these countries, brigands are not on visiting terms with public authorities. The two rascals who stole Charley Ross could make nothing of him after they had got him. He was concealed with an extraordinary degree of skill, somewhere about Philadelphia; but the ingenuity which was displayed by his captors met with no recompense. It was evident from the universal clamour, that a repetition of tricks of this kind could not be carried on with any prospect of profit or security. The

whole newspaper world was up. Thousands of presses from New Orleans to the Saskatchewan, from New York to San Francisco, were flaming with stories and conjectures about the abduction of Charley Ross. In time, the newspapers of England caught up the theme. The hearts of parents in every part of the English reading world were acutely interested. What will strike every one as marvellous, is the impenetrable secrecy which shrouded the spot where Charley Ross was secluded. It was tantalisingly near at hand, yet nobody could find it out.

It may amuse our readers to know that from the universal excitement that was created, there sprung up a crop of pretended discoverers of the lost child. All that was needed to restore him to the arms of his loving parents was a little money. Some of the announcements were hoaxes. Some were bare-faced attempts at extortion. The effect of these despicable communications was to add poignancy to the sorrow that was already endured by the father and mother of little Charley. The credulity of the family was also painfully tried by information alleged to have been obtained through the medium of spirits. Unfortunately, no two mediums gave the same direction in which to look for the child. Their revelations were simply a piece of nonsense, though imparted with prodigious gravity.

Annoyed with pretenders of various classes, Ross and his nephew did not relax endeavours to unravel the mystery. They travelled about over the northern states, led on by communications from the two thieves, who had quitted

Philadelphia, and taken up new ground. It at length appeared to be conclusive that Charley's captors had gone to New York, and from rigorous investigations at the several hotels, it was almost certain that their names were Mosher and Douglas. They had, however, no child with them. Where he was stowed away, if still in life, no one knew. Going with professional zest into the affair, the New York police, greatly to their credit, under Superintendent Walling, made every effort to track the windings of the two desperadoes, who, from newspaper advertisements and bills stuck on the walls, saw that they were momentarily in risk of capture. New York, however, has about it holes and corners in which felons find temporary lurking-places, and when pursuit is keen there is water on two sides, with boats, in some of which there is a refuge from justice equal to that of the old Alsatia in Whitefriars. On the opposite side of the narrow channel on the east, lies Long Island, hilly and picturesque, and which, besides Brooklyn, possesses a large number of villas of wealthy citizens scattered about among gardens and pleasure-grounds. To this island, as charming a retreat of families from New York, as are the Highland borders of the Clyde for the citizens of Glasgow, we have to follow Mosher and Douglas, the reputed abductors of Charley Ross.

The two villains had exhausted their means. They had made nothing of the cruel capture we have been describing, and had indeed lost money by the transaction. Driven to their last shifts, they resolved to begin a career of house-breaking. As a

commencement, they broke into the villa of Judge Van Brunt of the Supreme Court of New York, situated near the water's edge, at a picturesque part of Long Island. The judge and his family were absent for the season, and the house being shut up, offered, as was thought, a good chance of effecting a burglary. In laying their plans, Mosher and Douglas were not possibly aware, that before closing his house, the judge furnished it with 'a burglar alarm telegraph, which conveys information of the slightest interference with any of its doors or windows into the bedroom of his brother,' who resided permanently in a house near at hand. The account of the attack may be given in the words of Mr Ross:

'On the morning of December 14, at two o'clock, this alarm-bell rang violently. Mr Van Brunt was at once awakened, and immediately called his son Albert, who was asleep. When Albert came down stairs the father said: "Go over and see what has sounded that alarm; I think the wind has blown open one of those blinds again;" an occurrence which had more than once before caused the bell to ring. The young man went, first taking the precaution to put a pistol in his pocket. Approaching his uncle's house, he noticed a flickering light through the blinds of one of the windows; he returned and told his father about the light, procured a lantern for himself, and went to arouse William Scott, the judge's gardener, who lived in a cottage close by, and who had the keys of the judge's house. On their way back, Scott and Albert ascertained that more than one man was in the house with

the light. They then awoke Herman Frank, a hired man; and after placing one man in front and another behind the judge's house, Albert returned to his father and reported what he had seen and done. His father, although seriously suffering from illness, after getting together the arms in the house, joined his son, and calling the gardener and hired man to him, said: "Now, boys, we have work to do, and must understand each other; we must capture those fellows if we can without killing them; but if they resist, we shall have to defend ourselves. Albert, you and Scott stand before the front door; Frank and I will take the rear; and whatever happens afterward, let us remain in the positions we first take up; because if we move around, we shall be certain in the dark to shoot one another instead of the thieves. Whichever way they come, let the two who meet them take care of them as best they can; if they come out and scatter both ways, then we will all have a chance to work." The party took their respective places; the night was pitch dark, cold, and wet. The watchers waited patiently for nearly an hour, while the burglars went through every room in the house, with the rays from their dark-lanterns flashing now and then through the chinks in the shutters. At length they came down to the basement floor and into the pantry. Through the window of this little apartment Mr Van Brunt could see distinctly the faces of the two burglars. He could have shot them down there and then in perfect safety to himself and his companions; but he wished to refrain from taking life until he could be certain that the robbers would shew resistance. He did

not wish to kill them in the house, nor in any other way than in self-defence.

'The elder Van Brunt, finding he was growing numb and weak from the effects of the cold damp air of the inclement night, determined "to push things," and standing in front of the back door, ordered the hired man to open it quickly. In trying to get the key into the keyhole, he made a noise which the quick-eared burglars heard. Their light went out immediately, and their footsteps were heard ascending the cellar stairs. Mr Van Brunt and his man moved towards the trap-door of the cellar, the lock of which had been broken. This was soon opened, and the body of a man started up, followed by the head of another. Mr Van Brunt cried out "Halt!" in response to which two pistol-shots from the cellar door flashed almost in his face, but without injuring him. He then fired his shot-gun at the foremost man, and a cry of agony followed. The other man fired at him a second time, and then ran towards the front of the house. There he dashed almost into the arms of the younger Van Brunt, at whom he fired two more shots, luckily missing him also; and before the pistol could be fired again his arm was struck down by a blow from Mr Van Brunt's shot-gun, which was shattered. Uttering a terrible cry the burglar now retreated; but before he had gone many rods, Mr Van Brunt sent a bullet into the would-be murderer's back. The desperate house-breaker staggered for an instant, and then fell dead.

'Meanwhile the other burglar, although mortally wounded

from the elder Van Brunt's first fire, continued to shoot in the dark until he was exhausted. The firing now ceased; the only thing positively known, after the second or third shot, being the gratifying fact that while none of the defenders of the judge's property was hurt, the two burglars were literally riddled with shot and bullets. One was stone dead, with his empty revolver under his head; the other lived until five o'clock – only about two hours. Several neighbours, aroused by the firing, came rushing to the place, and got there by the time the fight was over; one of whom was asked by the wounded man to give him some whisky. After tasting it, he pushed it away, and called for water, which he drank eagerly. He was then asked who they were, and where they came from. He replied: "Men, I won't lie to you; my name is Joseph Douglas, and that man over there is William Mosher." He spelled M-o-s-h-e-r-'s name, adding: "Mosher lives in the city (New York), and I have no home. I am a single man, and have no relatives except a brother and sister, whom I have not seen for twelve or fifteen years. Mosher is a married man, and has five children." Believing himself to be mortally wounded, he continued: "I have forty dollars in my pocket; I wish to be buried with it; I made it honestly." Then he said: "*It's no use lying now: Mosher and I stole* Charley Ross *from Germantown.*" When asked why they stole him, he replied: "To make money." He was then asked who had charge of the child; to which he replied: "Mosher knows all about the child; ask him." He was then told that Mosher was dead, and was raised up so that he

could see the dead body of his partner in guilt. He exclaimed: "God help his poor wife and family." To the question, "Could he tell where the child was?" he answered: "God knows I tell you the truth; I don't know where he is; Mosher knew." The same question was repeated a number of times to him; but he gave no further information, but said: "Superintendent Walling knows all about us, and was after us, and now he shall have us. Send him word. The child will be returned home safe and sound in a few days." He told his inquirers that they had come over in a sloop which was lying in the cove, and begged them not to question him any more, and not to move him, as it hurt him to talk or move. He remained conscious until about fifteen minutes before his death. Thus writhing in agony, lying on the spot where he had fallen, drenched with the descending rain, ended the purposeless and miserable life of one who aided in rending the heart-strings of a family unknown to him, and in outraging the feelings of the civilised world. So swiftly did retribution come upon his companion, that not one word escaped his lips: no message to his family – no confession of his terrible crimes – no prayer was he permitted to utter: suddenly, as by the stroke of lightning, was his soul ushered into eternity. Surely "the way of the transgressor is hard."'

That there might be no doubt about the identity of the two bodies, Walter Ross was sent for. He recognised one as having been the man who drove the wagon, and the other as having given him money to buy the crackers. Others identified them

as the men who had been seen driving away with the children. There could therefore be no doubt that William Mosher and Joseph Douglas were the real abductors of Charley Ross. The discovery was so far satisfactory; but where was the lost child? Mosher's wife was hunted up and questioned on the subject. 'She said her husband had told her that the child had been placed with an old man and woman, and was well cared for, but she did not know who were his keepers, or where he lived.' Disappointed in getting any useful information in this quarter, Mrs Ross's brothers offered by advertisement a reward of five thousand dollars for the return of the child within ten days. The child was not returned, and instead of any useful information on the subject, there was a repetition of miserable attempts at fraudulent extortion. At the same time, circumstances were elicited regarding the career of the deceased culprits Mosher and Douglas. It was ascertained that a person named William Westervelt, a brother of Mosher's wife, and a notorious associate of thieves, was concerned in the abduction. He, in fact, had been the confederate who posted the letters and otherwise assisted the two thieves. In September 1875, he was tried for being engaged with others in abducting and concealing the child; and being found guilty, he was sentenced to pay a fine of one dollar, the cost of the prosecution, and to undergo an imprisonment of solitary confinement for the term of seven years.

In the course of the trial, no fact was elicited respecting the place of detention of the child. From the day he was stolen,

July 1, 1874, till the present time, not a word has been heard of him. His distressed parents exist only in hope that he is still in the land of the living, and may yet be restored to them. If alive, he will now be about seven years of age. It would afford us immeasurable satisfaction if *Chambers's Journal*, which penetrates into all English-speaking quarters in the American continent, should happily help to recover the child who was lost, the helpless little boy, Charley Ross.

W. C.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER XXIV. – A DEATH-BLOW

I stood for a few moments watching my strange new acquaintance, rapidly widening the distance between us, then turned thoughtfully homewards again. The story I had just heard had given me something to think of besides my own happiness. Although poor Nancy might be a little too ready to rebel, how hard things had been for her! How much did I, and all women blessed as I, owe to such as Nancy. Well, there would be Philip to help me by-and-by. Surely we two might be able to do something, I thought, my cheeks uncomfortably hot with the consciousness that the existence I had been dreaming of savoured too much of ease and sunshine for two people who professed to desire the highest life. Robert Wentworth would tell me that, and so of course would Philip; and I was glad also to realise, as I did just then, that continued ease and sunshine would pall quite as much upon me as upon either of them. 'I was not to the manner born.'

I had reached the stile, and was absently stepping down on the other side of it, as I afterwards found, stepping so wide of the lower step as to involve an ignominious descent, when I was gently lifted on to *terra firma* by two strong arms.

'What makes you so careless to-night?' said Robert Wentworth.

'It was stupid,' I replied, realising the position; and adding: 'In truth, my thoughts were wool-gathering; and I had forgotten where I was.'

'Rather an awkward moment for forgetting where you were; wasn't it?'

'No; yes – yes; of course it was stupid,' I repeated.

'You are not generally so ready to plead guilty as that,' he replied smilingly. 'What makes you so preternaturally meek to-night? Have you just come off second-best in a wordy war with old Jemmy Rodgers?' Bending down to get a better look into my face, he went on with quite another tone and manner: 'What has happened, Mary?'

'Happened?' I repeated, hesitatingly. But why should I not tell him? I presently asked myself. He knew that Philip was expected, and that we were to be married; he knew that I loved Philip; and why should I any longer act like a foolish girl about it? So after a moment or two, I went on: 'That which you asked to be allowed to speak of in three months may be spoken now, if you will.'

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