(From Chambers' Journal.)

A Cast of the Net.

THE STORY OF A DETECTIVE OFFICER.

CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED.

Having finished my explanation, we both got into the wherry, and I asked the man if he would like a good long job, which might perhaps last all night.

"The longer the better, governor," he says, "if the pay is accordin'."

"The pay will be accordin'," I answered; "and so you are engaged."

The first thing I made him do was to round that oyster-smack, for the tide had risen enough to take us round her. I showed no light, but we went inside her twice; and the fellow on the watch was very sharp, so he was leaning over the side when we came round the second time, and I could say quite quiet-like, "I am in this boat now—watch the river." That was quite enough: he knew he would not now have to look to the *Anchor* for signals.

After this there began what I believed was the most disagreeable sort of patrol I ever had. There was a time when I used to envy the Thames police; but I can't say I ever did after that night. We were obliged to be in motion almost continually, because we did not know from which side of the river the paper might come, and we weren't quite sure that it would come at all, especially on that night; and I don't know, speaking from my own experience, that there is anything more trying to the spirits than the pulling backwards and forwards and loitering about on the river Thames in a raw October night with a small thick rain falling. Twice we landed and went once to the *Smack* and once to the *Anchor*. I couldn't grudge the men a glass of hot grog; in fact I was obliged to have some myself, even if I missed my capture through it.

It grew later and later; the flashes of lightning still came at long intervals; but the lights on the shore went out, and excepting the gaslamps which burnt at street-corners, ferries, and wharfs, all was dark. The traffic on the river had long ceased, no shouts or rattle of wheels came from the shore; and the rain still falling, it was, I give you my word, most horribly miserable, dull and sloppy beyond description. Twelve o'clock had struck, and one, and perhaps half an hour beyond it I had cautioned my companions to speak very low; so the boatman only whispered when he said: "It's as quiet as it is likely to be governor, if you've got anything to run. I have just seen the police galley creep along on the other side; I seen her under that lamp. Now's your time."

He thought we were smugglers! Perhaps he didn't care if we were thieves. I told him to be patient; when at that very instant, just as we were creeping along under the lee of a coal-barge, a wherry shot very silently by, right in front of us, going across the stream, and not six feet from our bows. In her sat the sulky ferryman; I knew him at a glance, dark as it was. "Pull after that wherry," I said.

"Peter Tilley, my lad," I continued, turning to Peter, "the time's a coming, I think."

"I'm precious glad of it," says Peter; "for I'm catching a cold in my head every minute I sit in this confounded boat; and it's all soaking wet where I'm sitting."

Our man pulled on. He was a very strong fellow, as I have said, and we could have overtaken the other boat directly, but this, of course, I did not want. I knew where to look for the old scamp, and sure enough after a few strokes across the stream, he bent to the left and ran under the bows of the Dutch trader.

All was dark and silent as the grave aboard the ship. But that didn't deceive the old boatman, nor did it deceive me. I stopped our boatman in the shade of the next vessel, if you can call anywhere a shade, when it was all pitch dark. We had not been there a minute before I heard a slight noise—it was impossible to see anyone unless he stood between you and the sky—and then I could tell by the sound that a man had dropped into the wherry. There was no need to tell me what man it was. With an almost noiseless dip, the ferryman dropped his sculls into the river again, and rowed on, we still after him. I took it for granted he was going to the other side of the ferry; but he suddenly bore off to the right, and rowed on for some little time, then, striking in between two vessels, he went straight for the land.

"Where is he going to?" I whispered.

"To the landing at Byrle's wharf," says the boatman, in the same tone.

So he was; and it appeared that this landing-place was at the farther side of the wharf, that is to say, lower down the river

To be Continued.

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