

## Jim Crow — Detective.

BY STANLEY EDWARDS JOHNSON.



WHEN my brother Randolph brought him down on the wing up in the pine woods of Maine, none of us suspected that he was destined to make us famous.

He seemed then to be quite a plain, ordinary crow; but he was very young, and as he was only injured in one wing, and that but slightly, we put him in a cage and clipped his tongue, hoping we could teach him to talk. Naturally he resented this kind of an introduction to civilization. At first he responded to our cajoling pokes only with a surly, half-frightened *caw*, ate his meals as if he thought they were drugged, and after they were over he would flutter back to his perch, ruffle up his feathers, and comfort himself with a look at the pine woods. But little by little our daily attentions — and especially our irresistible bill of fare — won him. He began to “take notice”; when we came with his food he would sway from head to foot from pure delight, his youthful lankiness rounded out to aldermanic proportions, his head assumed a self-satisfied pose, and when he had finished dressing his feathers after dinner — for we never could make him understand that it was the proper thing to dress before and not after that function — a sleeker, more elegant individual never walked in broadcloth.

For some time he showed no signs of his peculiar genius. He soon grew fond of his fetters, and when we broke away two slats from his cage and gave him his freedom, he returned to prison after a tour around the farm, strutting up and down, and wagging his head as much as to say that he owned the place and us into the bargain. From that time he had his bill in everybody's business. He used to flutter off to the woods — for his wounded wing was never as strong as the other — with our pins and buttons, and any small metal articles we left in his way, and Randolph

used to say his friends and country cousins must take him for a Klondike gold-digger. But he always brought them back. The trouble was, he brought back other things, too; at first only bits of wire, scraps of tin, tacks, and the like, which he would lay at our feet with a knowing cock of the head that seemed to ask protection for his hoard, but afterwards —! However, that came later.

He was a bright bird. He never learned to talk; he was much too busy to trouble himself with anything so frivolous as speech, but he had a sly way of listening and looking at us, as though he were laughing in his wing.

“Good reason why he won’t talk, the rascal!” said Randolph. “He don’t want to give himself away.”

At last we were forced to fear that this was true. Our pet was developing into a professional burglar. The hoard in our keeping grew and grew, and finally one morning when Jim, after an all-day trip, laid at our feet a silver thimble, our fears were confirmed. Whose it was we never could find out, and when at last we laid it away in trust with the rest of Jim’s hoard, we felt like thieves ourselves.

Apparently Jim rested on his laurels after that, for several weeks passed with no additions to our trust more alarming than a brass button or two, and we were beginning to breathe freely again, when one noon, after an absence of three days, Jim fluttered into the dining room, and with a triumphant caw let fall in mother’s lap a small key. An important key we judged it, for it was made of brass, flat and broad, and of peculiar workmanship, as though designed to baffle thieves; and we felt sure that Jim had captured it under great difficulties, for he seemed completely fagged, and slept during the whole of that day. But the next morning, after eating a heartier meal than usual, he was off again, leaving us to await developments in a shiver of apprehension.

This time three days elapsed before, one evening at sunset, we saw the wanderer circling homeward, the ruddy light gleaming upon some glittering object held in his bill. Instead of bringing his prize to us directly, he perched tantalizingly in the highest bough of the fir tree in our yard, refusing to be lured down even

by a tempting supper that we put out for him. When, finally, darkness drove him from his height, it was a tired but triumphant bird that descended and laid in mother's hand—a ten-dollar gold piece.

My brother was young enough still to believe in buried treasure. "Captain Kidd!" he cried in an awe-struck tone, examining the gold, which he expected would be a Spanish ingot.

But the momentary hope of wealth died out with the discovery that the date of the coin was 1871. Whosoever the treasure was that Jim had found, our only concern must be to return it. But how? The question grew to be one of burning and transcendent interest as the passage of a week added two more long flights to Jim's record, and first a five-dollar gold piece, then an eagle to his credit — or rather discredit.

How to trace him we did not know. The shot in his wing had lamed him so that he had never been able to fly very fast, being obliged to stop every few hundred yards and rest, but he seemed gifted with the instincts of a born criminal, and when we tried to follow him he always eluded us by dint of distracting doubles, and detours, and cross-country flights. And yet to kill him, or even to condemn him to imprisonment for life, meant to cut off all clues whatever.

We tried indirectly to learn if any one in the neighborhood had lost money. We drew out our friends and acquaintances persistently on the subject of burglaries and mysterious disappearances, and father even went so far as to mention the treasure-trove of our bird at the store in a casual way; but we only made our neighbors think we were addicted to dime novels, and nothing but father's honorable reputation saved him from open ridicule. Evidently we, a respected and law-abiding family, were destined to become the "fences" of an immoral bird.

We used to joke about the possibilities of arrest and the officers of the law, but the thought actually weighed on us, until the sound of the doorbell or a strange step would send a panic through the 'house, and finally the necessity for some kind of action drove us to advertise.

We realized one day, to our astonishment, that in a single month that bird had earned more than the farm and all the rest

of us put together, and the next week this paragraph appeared in the *Dongo State News*: —

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN I

A tame crow, belonging to the undersigned, has brought home \$45 in gold during the past three weeks. The owner of the crow disclaims all responsibility for its acts, and the money will be given to the rightful owner upon proof of property and paying the expenses of this advertisement. — *Willard Culkins.*

The paragraph was copied, several reporters interviewed us, and our pet's fame spread even to the New York papers. But the only practical result of all this free advertising seemed to be that several persons offered to buy Jim, three dime museums made tempting bids for the right to exhibit him, and one man was anxious to give a hundred dollars for the bird "with all his rights."

The weeks wore on, and it was two months after Jim Crow had entered upon his professional career as a burglar, when father returned from the fields one day and found a detective in possession of the premises. What we had so often joked about had come to pass. Father was put under arrest. "It's just for form's sake," the detective explained. "I can't serve a process of law on a bird."

He told us that his clients were an aged brother and sister who had lost some gold and securities, but we could get nothing more out of him except that there was no conclusive evidence that the coins hoarded by our Jim were the ones he was after.

"There's more than one gold eagle of '71 in the world," said he grimly.

But I knew there could be only one key in the world like Jim's key. I brought it out. The detective's hand closed over it, and I thought I detected a glint of recognition in his eye. But he thanked me coolly enough and turned to father.

"We've got to track that bird," said he. "Where is he?"

Since he had realized he was in the clutches of the law, father had stood around looking at us in a dazed way, but at this he chuckled. He had tried tracking Jim himself.

"Stranger," he said, "if I've got to stay in jail till you've tracked that there bird, I'll stay till kingdom come. I calculate you ain't much acquainted with Jim Crow."

The detective smiled. "I reckon it ain't so bad as that," he remarked. "Now, I s'pose you ain't never thought of tyin' a leetle string of red flannel onto his leg?"

We had to admit we had never thought of that, and went to find our crow. He was not at home, but that evening he returned with an irregular bit of paper which proved to be a piece of a United States bond. When he set out on his mysterious quest next day, he wore a bright red anklet and was followed by some twenty trackers especially engaged for this secret service.

And then ensued such a chase as an experienced crook might have led a band of thief-catchers. Had it not been for his lame wing, which obliged him to rest at intervals, and impeded the swiftness of his flight, the task would have been hopeless from the first. Even as it was, backward and forward, east and west, now circling dizzily over one spot, now darting off as fast as he was able across the country, Jim led those men a breathless chase for twenty miles. Several times he disappeared altogether, but the red anklet betrayed him, and at last he was discovered going to roost in a tall pine tree. The detective now seemed sure of the direction of his flight, and he sent men forward to station themselves in relays all the way between there and Portland.

Early the next morning Jim was on the way again, this time making no flippant detours, but skimming along in a line as straight as the proverbial crow's flight, as befitted a bird bent on serious business. Throughout the morning he kept to his course, in view all the time, until just before noon he began circling over a stretch of forest about nine miles from the city, then dropped suddenly down out of sight into the dense mass of foliage. Within half an hour fifteen grown men might have been seen waving their hats like mad, shaking hands, and, in general, behaving like the successful backers of an election; for a red-flagged crow was to be seen busily at work in the crotch of a neighboring tree. A giant of a hundred feet was that tree, and the crotch where Mr. Jim perched rose a sheer, leafless distance of thirty feet from the ground, but the detective was not country reared for nothing.

Before the group had finished offering their services, he was shining up like a monkey, and ten minutes later he was perched on the limb that forked from the crotch, and was holding out a handful of something that glistened in the sun, while Jim fluttered around cawing shrilly. It was the lost gold.

When the detective touched *terra firma*, he had also a little package containing the missing notes. Both that and the gold had been deposited in a hollow above the crotch, the paper being protected from the damp by a piece of oilskin which had evidently been torn from some oilskin clothes. We now supposed that the search was over, and after we had congratulated ourselves all around and petted Jim, we began to get ready to go home. But not so the detective. He watched the bird, and, sure enough, after Jim had rested a few minutes on my shoulder, he was on the wing again making shoreward. The detective followed, and, curious to see what would happen next, I went along with him. This time the chase was short. A few rods from the shore Jim fluttered up to a small fisherman's cabin, where he was greeted by a young fellow who looked to me like rather a hard customer. I glanced at the detective. He was examining with much interest some articles of clothing which hung along the outside of the cabin near the eaves. Among them was an oilskin coat from which a piece had been torn. The officer took a hasty measurement with the piece of cloth which had been wrapped around the notes; then he walked up to Jim's friend noiselessly and touched him on the shoulder.

"I arrest you in the name of the State of Maine!" said he.

Since that day our tame crow has answered proudly to the name of Detective Jim.

