

A Detective's Story

Stealing and "Washing" Revenue Stamps
—Demoralization of Office Boy—
Fagin and His Pupils

Well, now, sit down and I'll tell you all about it; but Lord bless you, you musn't say I gave you the account of it, or—why, what's the little fellow there going to do with the note book? Oh, you musn't put it down as I say it—that would never do; I don't talk grammatical enough. Put up your book, now, and I'll tell you all about it, and then you can put it in your own language to suit yourselves. But mind, I tell you, some of these things you musn't print—I'll keep showing you all along which you can write out, and which you must keep in your own heads. You see, Mr.— came to me and said (but Lord, you musn't print his name—it'd never do in the world): "Sampson, I wish you'd look after that boy of mine that keeps the revenue stamps." So Ed. Malloy and I—Ed's a good fellow, put down his name; or no, no don't put in anybody's name—I'll just give you the facts; that's all people care about reading. You see, Ed and I looked around a little, and we found out there was a whole lot of boys stealing stamps, and selling 'em at a discount. I went to Mr. C., an iron merchant, and said: "Have you got a boy here of such an age? In charge of stamps? And could he steal?" Yes, he said, he could; but I hope he don't, for he's of such a nice family, and it would almost kill them if he were to go wrong. Well, I said, I never want to be hard on a young fellow—take him out and talk to him—get him to confess, reform, and show who it is *receives* the stamps. For I always say, it's better to convict one receiver than five thieves.

Lord bless you, my boy, you've no idea of the thousands of dollars I found involved in this thing. It turned out that a whole lot of the boys were stealing. If all of it were to come to be known, the bottom would fall out from under the brokers, and none of 'em could tell where they stand, or whom to trust. For, don't you see—now, little one, you can put this down—there, all ready—don't you see, there was one boy I hauled up; he was a stylish fellow, put on airs, and he said, "Do you know who I am, sir? I want you to know, sir, that I'm an honest boy; I'm so and so." I said, "Oh, my lad, I know you; you live on ---- Island, and your father is so and so; and you took, day before yesterday, \$13 worth of stamps; the day before that, \$10, and, yesterday, \$15." Then he burst out crying, and I was mighty sorry for him. But, says I, tell us all about it. He tried to bluff me, though; he says, "nobody saw me *take* the stamps." I told him I was too old an officer to try the bluff game with, and he better make a clean breast of it. So I found how it was. The boy says, Mr. Sampson; I have taken stamps—I didn't think it was very wrong. Why, one day, right after I went to work, I saw Mr.---, the head clerk, do what looked to me like stealing; and then, in the morning, the partners would come in, and talk about how much they'd made at cards at the club the night before—and everybody was so fast and careless—I thought the way was to make money almost anyhow one could." He spent what he got for billiards, and fruit and cigars—he got \$12 a week, and sometimes was short—so that he took stamps to pay for his lunches. The restaurant people would take 'em at one half discount, allowing 25 cents for a 50 cent

stamp. That's just how it was. We spotted a dozen boys—some of them had been taking \$25 worth a day.

Yet, it was queer how John Schwartz, or Black, that's the English of it, got his money. Leroy Nichols had discharged him a year ago, and yet he kept in the street, dressed showy, parted his hair in the middle, and stood back on his dignity, like thus. (Folding his arms and straightening up). You see, he'd worked around and got a lot of the boys on a string. He'd have one teach another how to steal the stamps, and bring them to him. A boy would bring him a bundle of them and Schwartz would hand him \$2 or \$3. The boy'd say, "Why, look-a-here, do you know there's \$25 or \$30 worth of stamps there?" Then Schwartz would say, "Shut up, d---n you, or I'll mash your snoot! You fetch me some more stamps to-morrow, or I'll tell your employer about you. Don't you see I'm an officer?" And then he'd pull out a shield he'd made to show the boy that he was a detective. The first arrests we made were Schwartz and George Max Keller, a broker's boy. Keller confessed he'd taken \$900 worth of stamps in two or three months. We got 'em last Wednesday. Several of the houses didn't want their boys arrested. The boys were relatives of high families, and they thought they could do better than to punish them. I thought so too, for, don't you see, a boy's mind isn't like a man's—it's more easily confused about right and wrong. And then—don't you put this down, it wouldn't do to say it, you know—the fact is, some of these houses don't set a very good example to their boys.

What d'ye think? There is a broker's office where the other brokers had often seen boys selling stamps, and they kind o' shunned it. They'd never seen their own boys there, but they recognized other brokers' boys, and they knew the stamps couldn't be honestly come by, so as to be sold at 15 or 20 per cent. discount and that's what the broker was paying for them. Well, we found that this broker's own boy was stealing from him the very stamps which he was buying in at a heavy discount from the boy's friends outside!

Got any of the receivers? Of course we have. Arrested three yesterday (Saturday)—the firm composed of Theodore Crommelus, Benjamin Hoagland, and Daniel A. Sweeney. This firm has been buying revenue stamps at 20 per cent. less than their face value, from John C. Einsiedt, a youth employed by Plume & Van Emburgh of No. 45 Exchange-place, and from whom he had stolen them.

Would you like to see some of the "washed" stamps? Here's a lot that I got Frank Goss, an office boy employed by Glendenning, Dunning & Co., to buy for me [off] Edward Ogden, who we arrested on Friday. You see they look sort o' crumpled, and there's some small ink marks left on 'em; but they're clean enough to pass generally. Goss said Ogden wanted to sell him some washed stamps. So I gave him \$10 to buy them with; and when they stood in a crowd and Ogden handed out the stamps, and Goss gave him the money and then scratched his ear (like this) to show me which was the man, I stepped up and made the arrest, and Ogden's in jail now awaiting trial. You see, the plan was to let the boys take the "washed" stamps, and put them into the boxes in place of the good stamps, and then in the hurry of business, and after they were canceled again, nobody'd notice the difference.

Oh, the boys had a regular “ring,” in true stock-broker fashion. The thing wasn’t confined to boys in any particular business; it had spread around in all sorts of down-town houses, but particularly around Wall street, where there’s so much slap-dash and flurry. Now, you just put this down, and put it down strong; don’t put it down in my words, but I’ll tell it to you, and then you tell him how to say it in his own notes, so it’ll look proper to print. The Board of Brokers (I’m employed by them, you know) are bound to break up this stealing business. They told me to leave off my regular duties, and stick to this until I’d worked out the facts. We’ve only just begun to make arrests. Now, I’ve told you as much as, I guess, it’s best to say anything about now.—*N.Y. Tribune*

Daily Evening Bulletin, February 9, 1872