

## *Talk with a Letter Detective*

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“GATH” the Washington correspondent of the *Chicago Tribune*, recently had a talk with a Postoffice detective, in which the following incidents were related.

### A THIEF BY BAPTISM

I was ordered up to Newcastle, Penn., a year or two ago, to examine into the case of a man whose letters had been taken out of the Postoffice by [someone] else, checks and money subtracted from them, and who was still subject to depredations by this invisible unknown. The man’s name was Levi Miller. A person had called at the Postoffice for letters for Levi Miller, and had received one in which was a check for payment on some land which the writer had sold for this Miller. Not only had the strange man accepted the money, but he had replied to the letter, continued the correspondence, and intercepted more payments. It was a case which puzzled the Postmaster and Miller also, to know how the interloper had got the checks cashed. I found that the latest letter received from the rascal had been dated Williamsport, Penn., and he had ordered remittances sent there. So I hurried to Williamsport, two hundred miles eastward, and called at the banking house which had cashed one of the checks.

“How did you happen to give a stranger the money on this?”

“We did not. He left it for collection, and we forwarded it to the drawer, who duly cashed it. The man then came in and obtained the money.”

“Would you recognize him again?”

“I don’t think we would. We took no notice of him particularly, and it has been some time ago.”

I then went to the Postoffice and asked the Postmaster’s clerk if he remembered anybody stopping for letters for Levi Miller.

“Why, yes! he was here a few days ago.”

I took up a printed notice and filled it in with the announcement that there was a registered letter in the Postmaster’s hands for Levi Miller, and this I dropped in the mail. Scarcely had I done so when the clerk said:

“Hist! Mr. Depro, here is the man [outside] now, inquiring for a letter.”

I slipped out the side way and came to the man from behind.

“Is your name Levi Miller?”

“Yes.”

“Come in here. There is a registered letter for you.” He stepped inside and I gave him the registered blank book, telling him that he must sign his name. As he did so I looked over his shoulder and saw that the handwriting was the same as that upon the intercepted checks.

“You are just my man, sir; I want you to come with me over to the bank.”

“What do you mean?”

“That you have been robbing the Postoffice!” As he went along with me, I felt his arm tremble.

“See here,” he said: “I have property enough to pay for that check I took. I don’t want to go to jail.”

“How did you happen to get Levi Miller’s letters?”

*“Because my name is Levi Miller. I was traveling through Western Pennsylvania, and expected a letter. I opened, unsuspecting, the letter addressed to me, and I found a check in it. It came over me in a moment to appropriate that money, although I knew it was meant for another person bearing the same name.”*

He was recognized at the bank, paid up the sums he had abstracted, and was not prosecuted.

#### ROBBED BY HIS SON

A very large percentage of depredations on letters is made by the families of men who suffer, continued Mr. Depro—as an example of which I recall, just now, the name of a celebrated claim agent of Washington City. He was in the habit of receiving every day large fees from his clients in all parts of the country, and he came to the Postoffice to complain that quantities of his letters were daily robbed of their remittances and returned to the writers with taunting remarks appended, as: “Didn’t you think this money was going straight? You’re a fool to think that your cash can reach the agent! Robbed by the Postoffice man; try again!” The agent came to the Postoffice with loud complaints of dishonesty there, and the Postmaster asked me to investigate the case. I saw speedily that the emptied and returned letters were superscribed with the left hand. It bothered me to know what object there could be in thus returning the covers of robbery, and I was sure that no Postoffice clerk would be so absurd.

I dropped a couple of letters to the claim agent, and in a day or two called on him.

“Who gets the mail from the Postoffice?”

“My son brings it every morning.”

“Well, it’s your son that is robbing you!”

The old man flushed up indignantly:

“My son, sir! That is a slander! it is impossible! he is the son of honor and my chief assistant.”

“Well, do you want me to examine him?”

“Yes, sir; but you will find it vain. He is my only son.”

Directly the boy came in, and I addressed him:

“Did you receive, yesterday, two letters from B—— and J——?”

“No, sir.”

As he said this, a red line started from his jaw and ran up to his temples.

“Look there,” said I to the father, “I don’t always believe in marks of guilt, but how is it that your boy’s face flushes like that when I merely mention two names? Thomas, it is necessary that I search you.”

I searched him and found nothing!

“There!” said the father, “you never were more off the track in your life.”

“Thomas,” said I, “where do you sleep? I should like to go to your room.”

Arrived at his room I opened his chamber secretary, and there I saw one of the envelopes I had myself directed.

“Thomas, what are you doing with that envelope?”

He threw up his hands. “I own up,” he cried; “I am the depredator.”

“What did you return those letters with remarks for, in your left handwriting?”

“Because I did not want my father to lose that money. I wanted the people to know that it had not come to hand, so that they might re-enclose it.”

I took the boy again to his father, who said in a tone of triumph:

“Well, sir! I suppose you are satisfied.”

“Yes,” said I, “I am satisfied— that your son is a thief.”

“Father,” said the boy, “he’s right. I am guilty.”

The old man burst into tears.

“I leave your boy with you,” I concluded, “there is no charge against him unless you make it.”

The son was soon after sent to visit the West.

#### LETTER CARRIER GUTTING THE MAIL

Another case that I figured in, continued Depro, after I had questioned him some time, was that of a great quantity of rifled letters and envelopes which had been found in the harbor of Baltimore floating against the base of Federal Hill. There were several hundred of them, coming from all parts of the world, and though no complaint had been made, it was probable that there had been an extensive robbery of the mail. I took all the envelopes and patched them together, and I found that they were directed to certain quarters of Baltimore exclusively. Some parts of the town were not represented at all amongst those addresses, and observing this, I inquired of the Postmaster how the carriers received their mail. He told me that they sorted it over upon a great table separately. Number One, who served Number One route, selecting his letters; then Number Two picking out his, and so forth. By consulting my envelopes, I found that Numbers One, Two, Three and Four must have received their mail before the robber carrier came to his turn, because not one of the rifled letters were directed to their districts. My espionage was therefore reduced to the remaining carriers, and I pitched upon one as the culprit because he had lately been buying some property. So I went to his snug little home while he was off on his route, and his wife confirmed my notion that he was making investments beyond his honest means. While I waited, he came in, and I told him that I was a detective agent, and wished to satisfy myself of his honesty by going through the house, to which proposition he readily assented, alleging that everybody in the Postoffice was anxious to see the depredator secured, and he concluded by saying that as I should possibly want to search up stairs, he would go up and unlock the trunks, closets, etc.

As he went up stairs, I slipped after him, in a minute or two, and peeping through the crack of his bed-room door, I saw a hand glide from underneath the bed, and it was as quickly withdrawn.

“Mr. Adams,” said I, “what are you doing by that bed? Come out this way.”

“Why, I was unlocking the secretary here, to give you a chance.”

I felt under the bed-bottom, and brought out a large bag of gold.

“Adams, this is a good deal of gold for a poor letter carrier to have on hand. What were you doing with your arm under that bed?”

“I surrender,” he said; “it’s no use. I robbed the mails for a good while, and threw the envelopes into the Patapsco, supposing the tide would take them out, but it carried them only as far as the opposite side of the harbor.”

He plead guilty to robbing one letter, and by the aid of a smart lawyer, got only two years in prison, was pardoned out, and actually recovered at law the gold he had stolen.

## ONLY ONCE A THIEF, BUT FOR \$40,000

You would be surprised to see, sometimes, continued Depro, how people become thieves by the mere habit of handling valuables, which are exposed by somebody's carelessness. A short time ago, a package of bonds to the amount of \$40,000 was stolen in the New York City Postoffice. They had been sent from Newport, Rhode Island, and were for soldiers' widows' warrants, etc., so that the outcry was natural, and it came from all sides. The bonds were too bulky to go inside an envelope, so they were tied *to* the envelope, but this fact we did not ascertain till we found the thief. The package was put in a red-backed envelope, signifying a "registered" letter. Now at the Postoffice a mail is tumbled upon a large table, and consecutive clerks go through it energetically, each picking out his portion. First of all comes the clerk of registered letters—which are always important letters—and him we surrounded with spies for two years, in vain, for nothing was seen in any place or at any time to give us a wink of evidence that he was the culprit.

The real thief—let me anticipate—was the newspaper clerk, who handled that mail some time afterward. The red-backed envelope turned undermost in the ransacking, and left the wrapper on top, so that the registry clerk mistook it for a covered newspaper. He therefore left it, and so did successive clerks, till the newspaper sorter came along. Discovering this prize among his books and newspapers, the latter was seized with a sudden impulse to steal it, and it was at once transferred to the pocket of his overcoat, which was hanging close by.

The thief's name we may call Tippy Ramsdell, and, when he got home and opened it, the poor pauper was so overcome to find himself possessed of \$40,000 instead of a ten-dollar bill, that he was frightened out of his little wits. He hid the bonds for nearly two years, and we, meantime, having exhausted all means of detection, had given up the task.

Suddenly we received a dispatch: "Bond number 18,664 has turned up." We traced it to the New York house of Jay Cooke & Co. It was a small bond for \$100, and the clerk at Cooke's remembered well that it had been presented by a boy named Ramsdell, clerk for a bounty agent in Park Row, who said that he found it in the park.

My mind went back at a wink to the hitherto unsuspected name of Tip Ramsdell, the boorish newspaper clerk. I knew that he had a brother at Elizabeth, and that this brother had a spry son. So I arrested the boy, and myself and another special agent went separately to work with him. The boy had been well drilled, and nothing could shake his story that he had found the bond in the Park, while my colleague tried every means to bring out the truth. Then I went into him.

"Boy where did you get that bond?"

"I found it, sir, in the park!"

"You lie, you rascal! Tell me who gave it you, and if the rest are given up no body shall go to jail."

He still protested that he had found it in the park. I talked to him awhile and found that he was not a bad boy; that he had been to Sunday school, and had some moral ideas, and I pictured to him hell in all its material horrors of sulphur, and thirst and fire.

“Now,” said I, “I mean to make you take an oath that will send you there if you swear false.”

The boy’s lips turned white, “I can’t take that oath,” said he. “I can’t go there. My father gave me that bond and told me to sell it.”

We took the boy’s affidavit and arrested his father, who had become the custodian of Tip Ramsdell’s secret, for Tip being a poor shyster, without mind, had nearly died of this awful responsibility of wealth. The brother, Crosby, being a little sharper, but not more honest, had bought some ink to cancel the name on the bonds and then had made a venture with No. 18,664. We found the bonds on Crosby and half on Tip, and as we had promised the boy, we let the poor pair of thieves up as unworthy of further notice.

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