

How Linton Bank was Robbed

The little city of Linton, a place remarkable for the sobriety, industry and morality of its people—is just emerging from a thrilling scene which shook the whole community with nervous excitement, and that came near to destroying the fire of faith in humanity which has so long burned brightly in the bosoms of those easy-going, honest country folk.

The journey I have just completed was one of haste, and my stay in Linton was much shorter than I had hoped it might be; but I was there sufficiently long to witness the closing scenes of a remarkable trial, and one that will be long remembered by the people of that quiet town, and be talked of as the city's tragedy.

The Linton Bank is one of the interesting institutions not only of Linton, but of the whole county in which it is situated. It has long been noted for its financial stability, and its officers and clerks have many years borne the name of “Linton's Conservatives,” which was given them for their perfect honesty and firm adherence to strict banking principles.

One of my first movements after I had arrived and partaken of a wholesome noonday meal, a la rural district, was to visit the bank for the purpose of having a check cashed.

As the teller handed me a small package of greenbacks, I observed that my old friend, President Goodnow, who was sitting near the huge doors of the iron vault, was looking me sharply in the face. He seemed to have observed that the new iron and wire railing, separating the teller's corner from the outer part of the room, had strongly attracted my attention, and from my looks judged that I was noting the changed appearance of things, and, therefore, naturally inferred that I was not a stranger at the counter. But the teller's face was a strange one to me, and that, with the new railing and wirework, had created within a feeling of inquisitiveness which I could not hide.

The bank President arose from his chair, raised his glasses from his eyes, and walked toward the railing which separated us. He soon recognized me, and I was greeted in his usually warm and friendly style.

“I saw you were interested to understand why all these radical changes in our little bank,” said Mr. Goodnow, “and, from the manner in which you looked at the strange face at the teller's desk, and the wire-work surrounding it, I concluded at once that you were not a stranger to us.”

“Yes,” said I, “it looked so strange to me that I almost doubted for a moment that I was in the place that I had supposed it to be. But I got a glimpse of your familiar face and my doubts were dispelled. Tell me, Mr. Goodnow,” I continued, “what is the cause of this change?”

“Yes. I will,” replied the old gentleman in which he assured me that his tender sympathies were aroused on the subject. “I will tell you the circumstances as far as they have gone,” he said, with deep feeling, “and I can assure you that it is a sad story you shall hear. But, as we talk, I will ask you to walk with me. I must be at the court room promptly at two. I shall be glad to have you with me if you have time,” and the aged man wiped the sweat from his brow, and pushed back

the white locks which partly concealed his pleasant face.

“Indeed, Mr. Goodnow,” I answered, “it will be a pleasure to accompany you; I will most happily accept your invitation.”

“Poor John Earnest is in jail for theft. I would almost as easily expected to be there myself as to see John Earnest in jail. I could scarcely have believed it had the facts not come before my own eyes, and even now it seems as though it must be a dream.” The tones in which these words were uttered were sufficient to tell me of deep sadness in the old man's heart as he was speaking.

“Yes,” Mr. Goodnow continued, “John is in jail, and his poor widowed mother is almost crushed with grief. John was her only support, her, idol and her pet. She is a noble woman, a true mother, I can tell you, and even to this day, in spite of all the evidence which has been produced, she believes that John is innocent.”

“But what are the charges against him, Mr. Goodnow? Do I understand that John Earnest, that faithful, intelligent man, who has served you so long and so well, is now in jail for theft?”

“He is,” was the trembling reply. “He is charged with having stolen a package of money containing \$5,000 from our bank.”

“Is it possible? And what are the circumstances? pray let me know,” I asked, with great impatience.

“The circumstances,” said my friend, if “are that a package containing \$5,000 was missed from our bank, and we have never been able to account for its disappearance upon any theory or supposition save that John must have known what became of it. He declares, of course, that he does not, but all the circumstances point so strongly to his guilt that I am in great doubt. If there were any reasonable theory upon which I could base a presumption, or any evidence at all pointing to his innocence, I should readily accept his word as the truth, although it was against all the evidence produced by an examination of the books.

“It was on a busy Saturday that the shortage occurred—or, at least, so far any of us know. In closing business the bank, Saturday afternoon, John asked our cashier, Mr. Westman, if he had put away a package of money from the teller's desk. Mr. Westman said he had not, and John carefully looked over his cash again, and finally packed it up and put it in the vault. He checked over his cash entries and balanced his books as if all were right. Sunday morning Mr. Westman called for me, and asked if I would go with him to the bank. I consented, and when inside the bank Mr. Westman said he wanted to examine John's cash. We made a careful count and compared the money with the book, and found the cash was an even \$5,000 short. We said nothing about it until Monday morning when we met John at the bank. Mr. Westman then asked him if he had balanced his cash on Saturday. His face was slightly flushed, and he said that he had balanced the cash-book, but that his cash was short, and he did not stop to see what the trouble was. He said it was short \$5,000 as he supposed, but he expected a careful examination on Monday would show where the mistake was. Then followed an examination and a re-examination, and still another trial at finding the lost money. All attempts were fruitless, and an

expert was employed. The expert corroborated the other trials, and reported to the board that there could be no doubt about it that John Earnest was positively short in his cash to the amount of \$5,000. The matter was placed in the hands of detectives, and John was arrested. It was discovered that soon after the money was missed John paid off a mortgage on his mother's house, and that fact gave the detectives—as they thought—a direct clue to his guilt. When John was arrested his bondsmen came forward and offered to make good the loss, but John positively declined and refused to allow that to be done. He declared his innocence, and said he could prove where the money came from to pay off the mortgage. He would rather suffer imprisonment and a trial than to have his bondsmen pay for what he had not stolen, and thereby be considered a thief. He demanded a trial. This is probably his last day in court, and I see no chance whatever for the poor boy to escape the full penalty of the law. I admit being greatly in doubt about his guilt, and it will be a terrible blow upon me to see John Earnest taken to prison. It would be almost as hard as to see my own child taken there.” And with these words the old gentleman tremblingly shook his white locks and wiped his moistened eyes.

We were now at the court-house steps, and we slowly ascended to the commodious court-room. An immense throng had gathered around the building, and when we entered the court-room we found it completely packed, and the doors guarded to prevent further ingress of the crowd. My companion passed me in, and led the way down the aisle to a seat in the space reserved for counsel and witnesses. A few minutes later the prisoner came in under escort of a deputy sheriff. The face was natural, and was the one I had expected to see at the counter where I went to get my check cashed. The prisoner looked pale, however, from the severe trouble he had evidently been passing through. But his clear skin, soft, glossy dark hair, bright eyes, and face beaming with intelligence and good nature, all helped to inspire his friends with confidence in his innocence. It was a picture for an artist as every eye was turned toward the smooth-faced young prisoner. The old gentleman leaned over to me, and in a whisper said, as the tears came to his eyes: “Isn't it a sorrowful picture? Isn't he the type of a noble man? And my poor daughter—she was deeply in love with him. I wouldn't have it happen for half I'm worth.”

Before I could ask any question, though I was now more thoroughly than before awakened in the case, the Judge took his seat, the jury were escorted to their box, and the court was called to order. Just then a small boy came tiptoeing through the crowd, and beckoned to the deputy sheriff. I heard him say: “Here's a message for Mr. Earnest.”

The telegram was placed in the prisoner's hands. He nervously opened the wrapper, read it, and passed it to his counsel. The attorney for the State had just arisen, and asked to recall the expert who had examined the books. The request was granted. A series of what seemed to me quite unimportant questions were asked and answered. The witness was excused, and, just as the State Attorney was about to arise, the counsel for the prisoner sprang to his feet and addressed the court:

“May it please your honor, I hold in my hand material testimony in this case. It is a telegram from an important witness, who will be here tomorrow to testify in the prisoner's behalf. I desire to ask your Honor for a stay of proceedings until the witness arrives. If there be no objection I shall be thankful for the privilege of reading the telegram.”

The Judge informed the attorney that he could first show the paper to the attorney for the State, and if he did not object it could then be read. This was done; consent was given and the telegram, dated at St. Louis was read, as follows:

John Earnest, Linton: Delayed by accident. Will be there tomorrow to prove your innocence, and corroborate your statement of my bequest. Take courage, all shall be well. PETER PORTER.

After the telegram had been read the State Attorney arose, and addressed the court:

“I see no reason, your Honor, why this trial should be delayed upon the strength of this telegram. There is no evidence to show that it is genuine, and that point be admitted there is no evidence to show that the testimony to be thus secured will establish the innocence of the prisoner. Even though it be proven that the author of the telegram is the uncle of the prisoner, as is alleged, and that he will be able to satisfactorily prove how the prisoner came with the money to pay off the mortgage, that will remove only one of the strong circumstances which go to prove his guilt. There are other circumstances, as your Honor is aware, upon which he may be convicted. I trust, your Honor, that this shall not be deemed of sufficient importance to grant postponement of this case.”

The able counsel for the prisoner then followed with an eloquent argument in favor of a postponement. While he was talking a beautiful young lady entered the court-room. She was at once the observed of all observers, and an almost deathlike silence stole over the immense audience as she carefully, though evidently under great excitement, followed an officer of the court until they reached the railing within which sat the counsel and witnesses.

As soon as the young lady's presence was observed by my elderly companion he arose quickly and hastened toward her, showing signs of surprise to see her there. The two held a short whispered conversation, the young lady pointing to a small package which she held in her hand. My elderly friend evinced by his movements, excitement. He opened the little gate leading through the railing, the young lady stepped inside and took a seat near the counsel for the prisoner.

When the lawyer had finished his remarks he turned round and bowed gracefully to the young lady, and they shook hands. A few whispers passed between them, and the attorney, amid a breathless suspense of the spectators, and while every eye in the room was upon the person who last entered, arose, and said: “If your Honor please, and with the consent of the learned counsel for the State, while I was speaking an important witness in this case entered this room. That witness is now here willing to testify, and I beg the privilege of introducing further testimony.”

At this the attorney for the State arose and said: “I have no objection, your Honor, to receiving any testimony which is important to a fair and impartial trial of the accused. I consent to the gentleman's request of course, upon his honor that the testimony is important and material.”

“I call Miss Nettie Goodnow,” the prisoner's attorney said.

The Judge bowed very politely as the young lady arose, and he said: "Miss Goodnow, you will please take this chair," pointing to the witness-stand. The directions were obeyed, and the oath administered. The usual questions as to the acquaintance with the case and the prisoner followed.

Then came the question; "Will you please inform the court and the jury as to the nature of the package you hold in your hand, Miss Goodnow?"

The witness carefully unfolded the package as she replied: "This is the package of money, sir, which was taken from the Linton Bank on Saturday, the tenth day of last month—five thousand dollars!" and she held it up that the Court might get a view of it.

"From whom, or where, did you get this money, Miss Goodnow?" continued the counsel.

"I found it today at the house of Mr. Henry Black, and among a bundle of papers belonging to George Westman, the brother of Cashier Westman, of Linton Bank!"

This reply came like a thunderbolt from heaven, and the excitement which followed was so great that the Court rapped vigorously upon his desk before order could be restored.

The counsel for the accused stepped forward, and taking the package of money placed it before the Court saying: "If your Honor please, we desire to offer this package of money as a part of our evidence in this case."

A paper held in the young lady's hand was a letter from George Westman addressed to her, and which gave a clue to the true history of the robbery.

Young Westman was the brother of the cashier. He was in love with Nettie Goodnow, the daughter of President Goodnow, and knowing that John Earnest was the young lady's favorite he planned and carried out a scheme to steal the money in such a way that suspicion would rest upon the young teller, and through the disgrace thus produced the attachment between the couple would be broken off. The letter in the young lady's hands was from George Westman, confessing to her his crime, telling her where the money was, and begging her to get it and not inform on him. It contained direful threats if she should dare to reveal the truth, or refuse to send him the money.

As soon as the letter had been examined by the counsel an agreement was made for a postponement. Young Earnest allowed his friends to give bonds for his appearance the next day, and there was not a dry eye in the court-room when the accused man started toward the door and was stopped by the sweet voice of the young lady who approached him with an extended hand, sympathetically saying: "We have never lost confidence in your honesty, John. You shall be free to-morrow."

The remainder of my story can be as easily imagined as told. John Earnest is again teller of Linton Bank. Cashier Westman is one of his best friends. The cash is no longer short, and though George Westman is not to be found, his honorable brother has paid all the costs in suit, and no

charges have been preferred against the guilty person. I shall not be surprised to receive, ere long, cards inviting me to witness an interesting ceremony, which, I understand, is to take place at the residence of President Goodnow. —*American Counting-Room*.

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