

The Magistrate Outwitted

It is necessary for the purposes of this narrative, that I should take the reader into custody, and carry him before Mr. Oldbeke, the stipendiary magistrate of a nameless city.

A police court is not a savory place at the best of times; but on a warm, wet, foggy November morning, when the great unwashed is present in unusual numbers, on account of the Irish row that has taken place the night before, and the atmosphere teems with odors, among which the concentrated essence of American overshoes and wet cotton umbrellas is the least offensive,—it is about as repulsive a spot as a good walker could find in a day's march. Still, comfortless as is the accommodation, close and foul as is the air, there is that to be seen and learned by anyone who will keep his mind's eye open, in a police court, which will more than requite him for what he may undergo in acquiring the information. The incident I have to recount is a very simple one, but still it conveys a lesson that may be useful.

Ha! silence in court! Here comes the magistrates. That kind-looking middle aged gentleman, who takes his place in the centre of the bench, is Mr. Oldbeke. Supporting him, on his right and left, sit two city justices. Below them, at the head of the table, where the attorneys who defend prisoners are assembling, sits their clerk, hotly besieged by a crowd of men, women, and children, more or less bruised and battered, who are applying for warrants and summonses. One by one the applicants come forward, and state their grievances. The first wants a warrant against her husband, for breaking her arm with a poker. The next demands a summons against John Smith, for kicking his (the speaker's) little boy down stairs. The next seeks to take criminal proceedings against Anne Jones, for "using her shamefully" and is followed by Anne herself in the flesh (and very fleshy she is,) who makes a counter-charge. Then it is recounted how Mary McDowd "up and shied" a quart pewter-pot at Julia O'Shothnesy's head, and cut her cheek open to the bone, merely because the "young man" of the said Mary offered to treat her (the said Julia) to a glass of whisky. These atrocities are listened to quietly, as though they were ordinary matters of course. Miss McDowd and her "young man" are taken into custody there and then; warrants are granted for the apprehension of such others of his assailants as the policeman can catch; and the court, after having disposed of the "night charges"—that is to say, sending a miserable homeless urchin to prison for eight days for sleeping in a shed, and fining two rapid young gentlemen five shillings each, for being drunk and disorderly—proceeds to hear the cases of felony committed since yesterday morning.

"Put up John Jones" says the clerk.

A good looking boy of fourteen appears in the dock, and a fidgety little man dressed in black bustles into the witness box. He tells his story as though he were Mr. Charles Matthews singing a "patter-song" of which he has not yet learned the words. He has finished it, and stands gasping for breath, before Mr. Oldbeke has opened his note book, to take down his own name and evidence. He is told to begin again, and he obeys, starting off at the same railway speed as before, puffing, spluttering, and gesticulating wildly. After some difficulty he is made to moderate his pace, and subdue his excitement, and then it appears that as he was walking into town to his business, he stopped at a stationer's shop window to see the new number of the

London *Journal*, that whilst he was admiring Mr. Gilbert's illustration, he felt a tug at his coat pocket, that upon looking round, he saw a boy (the prisoner at the bar) running away, and that upon feeling in his pocket he missed his purse.

"Anything known about this boy?" asks Mr. Oldbeke.

"No, sir," replies the superintendent, "nothing."

"Has the purse been found?"

"No, sir," replies a policeman, entering the witness box. "I took the prisoner into custody—he had been caught by the prosecutor. I took him to the station, where he was searched. I found on him the piece of string, the knife, the half apple, and the two pence halfpenny in copper, which I now produce," and the man in blue laid these articles upon the ledge before him, with the air of one who has just solved a great problem.

"Hum-m" replied Mr. Oldbeke, putting down his pen, and settling his spectacles, "now, Mister-r"—referring to his note-book—"Mister-r Brown, attend to me."

"Yessir—Iamsir—attendingtoyou sir."

"Very well—but don't interrupt me."

"Nosir—Iwon'tsir."

"Now, how long before you felt this tug at your pocket did you know that you had your purse safe?"

"Oh, sir Ihaditquitesafesir," spluttered Mr. Smith, relapsing into his former state of rapid utterance and excitement.

"Perhaps," continued the magistrate, "but that is no answer to my question. How long before you felt the tug, did you know that you had it safe?"

"Howlongsir?"

"Yes, yes—man, you understand me well enough—how long?"

"Wellsir—Ireallydon'tknowsir—that is Iamperfectlycertain suresir—whysir MaryJanesir that'smywifesir—knowsittobetruesir—that—I—alwaydoputinmypocketsir—wheneverIgo outyourworshipsir."

"Can—you—swear—Brown," said Mr. Oldbeke, shaking his head at the witness, "that you put your purse into your pocket when you left your house this morning? Now, sir, yes or no."

"Yes, sir—I mean no sir."

“Now, really, Mr. Brown,” replied the careful magistrate, leaning back in his chair, “how can you expect that I am to believe you if you say one thing and then another? Just try and collect yourself, and think.”

“Will sir—I could almost swear sir—I put it in my pockets sir—I always do.”

“*You always do!* That is not enough for me. Your purse may be at your house in another coat, or on the table for anything that I know at this moment. I *always* put my watch in my fob, and just now when I felt for it, and missed it, I thought as you think now, that I had been robbed. But after a moment’s calm reflection I remembered *that I had left it in one of the ornaments on the mantel piece in my dressing room.*”

At this moment there was a slight stir in the gallery.

“One more question, Mr. Brown,” continued the magistrate, “where did you catch this boy?”

“At the corner of King Street, sir.”

“How far is that from where you felt the tug at your pocket?”

“About a quarter of a mile, sir.”

“You ran after the prisoner all that way?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How many times did you lose sight of him?”

“Four or five times, sir.”

“And how many corners did he turn?”

“Let me see, sir—one—two—three—four—five—a—six—sev—en—seven, sir.”

“Now, how do you know that the boy you caught was the same boy you had started after?”

“Because he was running away, sir.”

“Is that your only reason?”

“Yes sir.”

“So you ran after the boy a quarter of a mile—lost sight of him four times—turned seven corners (thus missing him eleven times in all), seized upon the first lad you find running; and bring him here?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the unabashed Mr. Brown.

“Then you may take him away again the prisoner is discharged.”

Mr. Oldbeke proceeds with his day’s work in the Police Court, and Mrs. Oldbeke attends to her household duties in the pretty suburban villa in which the worthy magistrate resides. Just as she has finished ordering his dinner, a nice-looking youth bearing a brace of pheasants and a hare, rings at the front door, and desires to see her.

“Oh, if you please ma’am,” says the nice-looking youth, “Captain Sampson sent me to the court with this game for Mr. Oldbeke, as he did not know his private address, and Mr. Oldbeke desired me to take it home for him; and Mr. Oldbeke says, would you be good enough to send his watch, which he left in one of the ornaments on the mantel-piece in his dressing-room.

“Here, Jane,” says Mrs. Oldbeke, “take this game down into the larder, and then run up to your master’s dressing room and get his watch, he forgot to put it on this morning, and give it to this young man, Jane, and mind,” turning to the nice-looking youth, “that you take great care of it, for it is a very valuable and favorite one.”

So the game is put away, the watch brought down, and the nice-looking youth minds and takes great care of it.

Scene — The villa of Mr. Oldbeke. Time—five o’clock in the afternoon. Enter Mr. Oldbeke from the Police Court. To him—as we read in the old comedies—his wife. Mrs. Oldbeke.

“How inconvenienced you must have been without your watch, my dear Mr. Oldbeke.”

“Ah, that I was, indeed; but it was all my own fault.”

Mrs. Oldbeke. “I have been to see that dear little Mrs. Wrosebud, and her sweet baby. She is to come down tomorrow, so I think I shall send her one of those pheasants!”

Mr. Oldbeke. “Pheasants!— What pheasants?”

Mrs. Oldbeke. “Why those Captain Sampson sent.”

Mr. Oldbeke. “Upon my word, it is very civil of him; how many did he send?”

Mrs. Oldbeke. “One brace and a hare. Did you not see them when you spoke to the messenger?”

Mr. Oldbeke. “What messenger?”

Mrs. Oldbeke. "Dear me! How dense you are today. The young man you sent for your watch."

Mr. Oldbeke (astonished.) "*Sent for my watch!*"

Mrs. Oldbeke. "Now, Oldbeke, don't tease. It is well that you remembered to tell him where you had left it, otherwise we never should have found it."

Mr. Oldbeke (eagerly). "What, W— what d— did he say?"

Mr. Oldbeke. "That we should find it in one of the ornaments on the mantle-piece in your dressing room."

Mr. Oldbeke (sinking into a chair). "My very words!"

Mrs. Oldbeke. "What is the matter—what do you mean?"

Mr. Oldbeke. "Simply this; my love—that I was foolish enough to use those words in open court, and that some scoundrel has made use of them to obtain my watch. [*Tableau.*]

Mrs. Oldbeke (after a variety of exclamations, and a long pause). "But the game! —do you think that Captain Sampson really sent it?"

Mr. Oldbeke. "We shall see. If he did not, it may afford a clue to the thief. Don't say anything more about it, my dear. Let Jane go down to the detective office after dinner and describe the person of the young man, and now I think I'll go and wash my hands."

Next day Mr. Oldbeke proceeds with his work at the Police Court, Mrs. Oldbeke attends to her household duties. Just as she has finished ordering dinner, a "Hansom" cab drives up at a furious pace, stops at the door, a short burly man springs out, rings the bell, and demands to see "the lady."

"I'm a detective officer, ma'am," said the burly man, "my name's Lager—here's my card. From information I received, I apprehended the young man who stole Mr. Oldbeke's watch, and from inquiries that I have made I find that he left here two pheasants and a hare. Am I right, mum?"

"Yes—yes; go on," replied Mrs. Oldbeke.

"There is a card with writing on it attached to the left-hand leg of the hare. Am I right again, mum?"

"I think you are; but go on."

“The writing on that *hare* card corresponds with that in this *here* book;” and Mr. Lager produced a greasy account book. “Do I continue to speak what’s correct, mum?”

“Supposing that you are—what then?” Mrs. Oldbeke was growing cautious.

“Why, mum, I must trouble you for the loan of them pheasants and the hare, to try and trace them where they was bought, and to produce them at the station agin the prisoner.”

“But, my good man said Mrs. Oldbeke, “I don’t doubt you, of course; but you know we have been taken in once already. How am I be sure that you are really a policeman? Pray don’t be offended, but—.”

“Quite right, mum—quite right,” replied Mr. Lager, in a tone of high approbation. “I likes to see a lady sharp, and with her eye teeth about her like. You shall be sure that I am a policeman, though in plain clothes on account of this ‘ere duty I’m on, I told you that I had got the thief, mum—but that ain’t all— I’ve got back Mr. Oldbeke’s watch.”

“Oh, have you really! I am so glad.”

“Should you know it again if you was to see it, mum?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Is this here it?” and Mr. Lager dived into his capacious pocket, and dragged up the stolen watch by the chain. “Now, mum,” he continued, repouching the time-piece, after it had been identified by Mrs. Oldbeke, with many explanations of delight at its recovery. “I think it’s pretty clear who *I* am.”

“Oh, yes, I’m quite convinced now; here, Jane, give the policeman the game, and policeman, would you like to take any thing to eat or drink?”

“Mrs. Oldbeke,” replied Mr. Lager severely, “I never touches bite or sup when I’m on duty. Good morning, mum.”

“He is evidently a very intelligent and active officer,” Mrs. Oldbeke remarked, as the door closed upon Mr. Lager, and he drove off in his Hansom’ cab.

Scene—The villa of Mr. Oldbeke. Time—five o’clock in the afternoon. Enter Mr. Oldbeke, from the police court. To him his wife.

Mrs. Oldbeke. “Well, dear, I’m so rejoiced that you have recovered it.”

Mr. Oldbeke. "It? What *it*?"

Mrs. Oldbeke. "Why, your watch, to be sure."

Mr. Olbeke. "But I have not recovered it."

Mrs. Oldkeke. "Then you have not seen Mr. Lagger, the detective?"

Mr. Oldbeke. "No—not today. I left court early, and have been at the club."

Mrs. Oldbeke. "Oh, that accounts for it. He has caught the thief, and got back your watch. I saw it in his hand. He came for the game this afternoon, and took it away in order to trace it as you suggested."

Mr. Oldbeke. "Ha! that's all right, then."

ENTER JANE

Jane. "If you please, sir, Mr. Lagger, sir, wants to speak to you."

Mr. Oldbeke. "Show him in."

Enter Lagger. "Well, Lagger, what about my watch?"

(On the appearance of Mr. L., who is a remarkably tall, quiet man, Mrs. Oldbeke becomes greatly agitated.)

Lagger. "No trace of it, sir, I'm sorry to say."

Mrs. Oldbeke. "I—is t—this Mr. L— lagger?"

Lagger (bowing politely.) "At your service, madam?"

Mrs. Oldbeke, "Then who was it that came to-day and took—."

Mr. Oldbeke (interrupting her, and perceiving what is coming). "I'll speak to you tomorrow, Lagger; never mind waiting now."

EXIT LAGGER.

Mrs. Oldbeke (greatly agitated). "But, Oldbeke, I conjure you—."

Mr. Oldbeke. "Don't my love. I can see through this business at a glance. We have been taken in *twice*. The man who came today pretending to be a detective, was an accomplice of the thief. They baited their trip with game to catch my watch having caught it they have taken the bait away again that's all."

[Tableau.]

Mrs. Oldbeke (recovering.) “And the wretch held it in his hand before my eyes! Oh, it is unbearable!”

Mr. Oldbeke. “Don’t talk about it, my love. It’s gone, and there’s an end of it. So now I think I’ll go and wash my hands.”

The Illinois State Journal, November 2, 1859