The Highwayman

About the period when I received my first actual "detective" appointment, a most singular circumstance occurred in connection with a class of offences which was believed to be dying out—namely, highway robbery; but which had the effect of fully awakening public attention to the proceedings of the "knights of the road."

Although not a part of my own experience, yet I received it from the lips of one of the principal "parties" in the affair, whose words I use.

Great changes had been for some time taking place in the speed and the general appointments of stage-coaches. The days of the "York Fly," which went at about the rate of that well known insect, were numbered, and the conventional Salisbury wagon was very nearly obsolete. Men with means and enterprise were setting up fast coaches, well horsed, and well appointed, and well driven, so that traveling assumed a very different aspect to what it had for so many years presented. The post office contracts were more stringent and, under penalties, those proprietors of coaches who undertook to carry his majesty's mails were compelled to reach certain towns at certain periods.

Among the most noticeable of those new and well-appointed conveyances was the Warwick mail. This was a well-appointed four-horse coach, that went from St. Martin's le Grand to the town or city of Warwick. It was believed that the coach belonged to a firm of Quakers, from the frequency with which one or other of the broad-brimmed fraternity travelled by the Warwick mail.

But with all its comfort, with all its speed, with all its punctuality, there was something connected with the mail which gave it an unenviable reputation. No coach was more frequently, or indeed, anything like so frequently, stopped by highwaymen. At all points of its journey it seemed to be specially subjected to this peril. Indeed it would appear that some of the old adventurous highwaymen, who were believed as a race to be extinct, had risen from their graves to re-enact, in the case of the Warwick mail, those exploits which had almost become the exclusive property of the romancist.

On the high-roads and by-roads the Warwick mail was attacked and robbed. People began to be afraid of it. Its passenger traffic fell off, and there was a lull in the attacks of the highwaymen. People went by it again and then there were some tremendous robbery by which everyone was fleeced. And in the course of time there got about an impression that these robberies must be committed by someone who had more than mortal means of information, for the highwaymen would demand by the name of each passenger such and such sums and valuables as he might have in his or her possession. How the information could be obtained was a matter of profound mystery. People got frightened more and more, and the Warwick mail would sometimes start with hardly any passenger from London.

Then some months elapsed, and no robbery took place; indeed, it was reported that a man who had been found dead on the road, in a scarlet coat, and with a half mask on his face, was the

veritable robber of the Warwick mail; and that consequently, it would proceed for all time to come in safety. We shall see.

It was on the 14th of March, rather a tempestuous season, the mail started as usual at eight o'clock in the evening, from St. Martin's le Grand for Warwick. The result of that journey was the apprehension of a man named Marmaduke Dobbins, a commercial traveler, on the charge of "doubling," as theatrical people call it, that ostensible and peaceful calling with the much more exciting one of highwayman.

This case came under my notice professionally, and the short facts as I took the trouble to ascertain them, were just these. I weave them into a narrative for the better comprehension of the reader, and they are quite sufficiently curious to be worth understanding. The Warwick mail then, left St. Martin's le Grand "all right," as the guard said, at eight o'clock on that tempestuous evening of the 14th of March, in half a gale of wind. The four horses made a pleasant sound with their sixteen iron-shod feet, and the guard played a rollicking air on his horn, as the vehicle chattered on its way. There were four inside passengers. On the outside there were five, one of whom was a young servant just going to a place in Warwick. The four inside passengers consisted of a Mrs. Vallance, a maiden lady, who as going all the way to Warwick to visit her married sister there. Secondly, a Mr. Mason, a proctor, who was going on professional business to Oxford, through which the Warwick mail passed with the Oxford letter bag. Thirdly of Mr. Marmaduke Dobbins the very commercial traveler who was eventually accused of being the perpetrator of one of the most audacious robberies on record. Fourthly of a Quaker with the name of Aminadab Holdfast, who was going to visit some "friends" at Banbury, through which the Warwick mail also passed.

The outsiders were, two of them, clerks to Mr. Mason, the proctor—the young woman going to a place, and two men, both of whom had all the appearance of working mechanics, and who from their talk with each other, seemed to be painters and glaziers.

With the assemblage, then, off went the Warwick mail, without a thought of danger appearing to come into one's head. The mail-bags were always heavy until after passing Oxford, because the bags of that city were generally fully, and the guard, who was thoroughly trustworthy, kept a good lookout for the safety of the whole affair. The coachman was an old "whip," and had driven the Oxford mail before being employed by the proprietor of the Warwick mail. The horses were as good as money could purchase. Of course at that hour—eight—in the month of March, it was dark.

And soon the lights of London were left behind, and the mail was upon the country road, over the hedges of which on both sides gleamed the coach ramps, giving a momentary brilliancy and imparting that metallic tinge to the young spring vegetation which artificial light bestows upon leaves and flowers. None of the inside passengers were acquainted, and the only two persons that apparently knew each other on the outside were the two workmen, who kept up a talk about the likelihood of getting work in their line at Oxford. The guard soon joined this talk, and the two clerks of the proctor likewise, to while away the time, put in a word now and then. The outsides were getting sociable.

It was longer before the insides thawed sufficiently to say anything to each other; and it was the proctor, who, at length rubbing his hands together as Englishmen do, commenced upon that fertile subject, the weather; and addressing the commercial traveler, said:

“The weather keeps chilly.”

“Very,” said Dobbins, “very!”

And then he rubbed his hands together.

The Quaker then spoke.

“Yes, friend, thou mayest say that the season keeps chilly. Friends at Banbury write me that the buds, yea, and the grass are backward; and I would not have ventured this journey, in this conveyance, at such a time, with so much of this world’s bounties about me, but that the outside people are given to the pomps and frivolities of the world.”

The Quaker then gave a kind of groan, and turned up his eyes until the whites was painfully visible.

“Do you mean the outsiders of the coach, sir?” said the proctor.

“Nay, friend, nay. I mean those people who are outside the pale.”

“The pale?” exclaimed Mrs. Vallance the maiden lady, as she looked from the window of the coach and hastily cleared it of vapor with her handkerchief. “The pale? What pale?”

“Yes, verily!” answered the Quaker. “I am miscomprehended; I mean those who are not of us—who are not of our people.”

Here he made another half sigh, half groan, which seemed to come from the very lowest depth of his stomach.

“O, I comprehend!” said the proctor.

“You mean people who are not Quakers, sir?”

“Even so.”

Well, I am traveling,” said Dobbins, “With some value with me.”

“Friend,” said the Quaker, “thy valuables can be as nought, when compared with mine.”

“O, indeed!”

“Yes, indeed; for in my pockets, and in this small leathern valise, as the vain call it, I have jewels of price, and pearls, and precious glittering pebbles, such as the vain of heart and frivolous of mind, who are fond of tinkling cymbals, and profane laughter, and jigs, and merriment, and dancing, and—”

“My dear sir,” said the proctor, interrupting him, for the Quaker was raising his voice as he enunciated the vanities of the world, and was swinging his long bony arms about in an alarming manner— “my dear sir, pray be calm!”

“Calm, calm! O, world! —O, sin! —O—”

The maiden lady began to get alarmed, and with a slight scream, that promised, if it were encouraged, to become hysterical, she said:

“Indeed, sir, if you go on in this way, I shall not be able to remain in the coach.”

“Amen!” said the Quaker.

Whether he meant amen to the maiden lady’s opinion that she would not be able to remain in the coach, or that he had arrived at such a pause, in his denunciation of the wickedness and frivolities of the world, that such a word was required, the other passengers could not tell; but certainly he was comparatively silent, and only groaned now and then in a fearful way. The commercial traveler, Mr. Dobbins seemed very anxious to change the conversation, for he said:—

“Well, there is one good thing about the Warwick mail now; it don’t get attacked by highwaymen, as it used.”

The moment he uttered these words the Quaker slipped off the seat to the bottom of the coach, among the straw and cried out:

“Murder! murder! Take my life, but spare my property!”

“Why, what is the matter?” said the proctor. “There is no danger as I can see.”

“Yes, verily, methought that person said that the man of the highway was present.”

“Pho, pho! I didn’t say anything of the sort.”

“No,” added Mrs. Vallance. “What this gentleman said was, that the Warwick mail was not attacked by those dreadful wretches of highwaymen as it used to be.”

The Quaker gathered up his long legs, and sat down again quietly.

“Truly and very I was alarmed at—,”

“Nothing,” said the commercial traveler. “Now, I have in this small square box, which you see I have put under the seat, a matter of a thousand pounds worth of jewelry.”

“Thou hast so much, friend?”

“It is all vanity; but I too have even about that amount.”

“Well,” said the proctor, “all I have, gentlemen, about me is a matter of one hundred and sixty pounds, which I have to pay to the Oxford proctors on account of some business in London.”

“Dear me!” said Mrs. Vallance, “I have only my watch and ten guineas.”

“Then,” said the Quaker, as he suddenly let down the coach window on the side next to him, “I will warn the young man, whom the vain call the guard, to be watchful, and to blow out the ungodly brains of any highwayman who may stop this conveyance. Hi! hi! hi! Young man, I feel an inward feel—I feel a call—a presentiment—a movement of the vitals—to the effect that a highwayman is upon the road.”

“Hilloa! hoy!” cried the guard. “Pull up Dill, —there’s a gentleman ill inside.”

The coachman pulled up.

“Nay,” said the Quaker, “I am not ill, except in spirit. Young man, thou art the guard?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then be merciful, and should we be stopped by an ungodly person, who shall cry, ‘Stand and deliver!’ do not miss him with thy machine which the vain call a blunderbuss.”

The Quaker then pulled his head in at the coach window, and drew up the glass. The coachman swore at being made to pull up for such “rubbish,” as he called it, and the “outsides” all laughed, and the guard said that the Quaker was a “rum ‘un!” the coach rattled on.

There was a gloomy valley through which the road ran, and at that time of the year and of the night a thick white mist was enshrouding it, so that nothing could be seen but now and then a spectral looking tree, which the coach lamps shone upon. The coachman drove slowly.

“A bad bit this, Jem,” he said to the guard.

“Very. I will listen if there should be wheels on the road.”

“Ah, do! For I can’t see nothing no more nor as if my head was in a bag! Is that the Wheelright’s Arms Inn there away?”

“I think so.”

At this moment a voice from the inside of the coach cried out:

“Hillo! Stop, stop! Hoy!”

“What now?” said the coachman.

“The Quaker gentleman,” added the voice, “is not well.”

“Yes I feel an inward conviction that I am about to depart,” said the Quaker with a groan.

“He has frightened himself into an illness,” said the proctor.

“Yes, I am as one in the shadow of the valley of some indisposition. Where is the young man whom the vain call a guard?”

“Here you are!” said the guard, as he got down from the roof.

“Come, come, I can’t stop!” cried the coachman. “If the gent is very bad, he had better get out and go to the Wheelright’s Inn, which is thereaway. The mail can’t stop for anybody.”

“Yes, I will—yes, I will!” said the Quaker. “Young man, art though called the guard?”

“To be sure.”

“Then thou wilt see on my leathern packet, which is properly called a valise, the address to Simon Bull of Banbury, near unto the Cross. Wilt thou, when thy coach reacheth that town, deliver the same, and he will pay unto thee what charge thou mayest make? I am worse. O—ah!”

The Quaker sprawled out of the coach, as if his long legs and arms did not belong to him, and would have fallen down in the road if he had not caught hold of the commercial traveler, Mr. Dobbins, and fairly dragged him out with him.

“Come, come,” said Dobbins, “hold up—hold up!”

“Yes, the spirit would fain hold up, but the flesh and the bones say nay. Wilt thou, O friend, be so good as to help me reach the habitation which is called an inn?”

“Yes—O, yes! Hold hard, coachman?”

“I will wait five minutes, and I would not wait any longer for King George!” said the coachman.

“I shall not be two. Come, Mr. What’s-your-name-broadbrim, lean on me. There’s the inn, I fancy, out yonder; it is not fifty yards.”

“Yea, yea, thou shalt be rewarded friend, for they tenderness to a stranger. Verily, friend, I tell unto thee, that although the spirit is frail, yet the bones and the flesh are bitter—bitter.”

They then disappeared in the white mist. The coach door was winging open and the guard stood at it and waited. The coachman swore again.

“Hoy! hoy!” cried the guard. “Now, sir!”

“I won’t wait, Jem.”

“Half a minute, I’ll run to the inn.”

At that moment the light that appeared to have been at the inn door went out. The white mist seemed to gather thicker and thicker each moment around the coach. Not a shadow or vestige of the passenger who had left to help the Quaker could be seen.

“I won’t wait,” said the coachman angrily. “Shut the door, Jem.”

The guard shut the door.

“Go on then. I can’t help it.”

The guard scrambled up into his place on the roof and cried out:

“Hoy, hoy! We are going on. Hilloa-oa-oa!”

The echo of his own voice only came back to him. The coachman started the horses, and went on in a savage sort of haste to make up for lost time.

The two persons who were now left on the inside—that is to say, the proctor and Mrs. Vallance—looked at each other uneasily. There was something in the whole transaction which was suspicious and strange, and which they did not like, and yet they did not know what remark to make.

There too, in the coach, was the Quaker’s leathern valise, addressed to the “Friend” at Banbury, and which he had declared to contain such valuable jewels; and there, too, under the seat, was the square box of the commercial traveler, which he had said was well provided with jewels.

“My dear madam,” said the proctor, “don’t you get sick.”

“No, no! Oh dear.”

“Come, come, keep up, do. We shall soon get to where we shall change horses, and we can take some steps in the matter. It’s a very odd affair, and if I were to say —,”

“What’s that? I hear something!”

“Where?”

“On the road—yes—what?”

The proctor let down the window.—The coach was just clearing the valley, and commencing the ascent up the other side, which was so steep that the horses went at a walk. The hard gallop of a horse’s feet on the road came distinctly upon their ears.

“It is a horseman,” exclaimed the proctor.

Another moment and the figure of a man on horseback flashed past the window. As he went through the broad fan of light cast by the coach lamp on that side, the proctor and Mrs. Vallance saw him plainly.

Mrs. Vallance screamed. The proctor uttered a very unprofessional remark,—The horseman was attired in a scarlet coat with lace trimmings, buckskins, and high, polished boots. He wore a rakish looking hat, with a long scarlet feather, and there was a half mask upon his face. The horse looked a miracle of blood and strength and his glossy coat shone like a piece of satin.

“A fearful highwayman,” gasped the proctor.

Mrs. Vallance fainted.

“Hold,” said a loud, clear voice from the front. “Hold, or you are a dead man!”

“Stopped at last,” cried the coachman. “Over you go, my fine fellow.”

The coachman lashed his horses. There was a sharp crack of a pistol shot, then a scream, and then the coach swayed to and fro for a few moments and a scen of great confusion ensued, followed by the heavy gallop of horses. The coachman lay dead in the road.

The highwayman had, with a celerity that was quite astonishing, cut the traces of the leading horses and set them free. He then led the two wheelers to the side of the road.

“He who stirs or resists is a dead man!” was the next cry, in the same loud, clear tones.

“You are another!” yelled the guard, as he pulled the trigger of the blunderbuss, with which he had taken such a deliberate aim at the highwayman that nothing but a miracle could save him.

The miracle, it appeared, did happen; for soon as the smoke had cleared away the highwayman cried,

“My good fellow, another time you will know not to fire at me. There is your bullet.”

Something was thrown and went rattling away among the luggage on the roof of the coach.

The guard rolled down into the road, and ran into the hedge, where he could get no further, but remained there firmly wedged in between a thorn and a holly bush.

The highwayman was, at the coach door in another moment and lightly balancing the barrel of a pistol on its edge by the window, he said:

"Your money and jewels. Quick, if you please!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the proctor.

"Come, sir. Your hundred and sixty pounds I want."

The proctor turned pale and gave him his purse. The highwayman glanced at its contents and said:

"Yes, that will do. Now, give me that leather valise belonging to Mr. Holdfast, the Quaker, and the square box of Mr. Dobbins, the commercial traveler if you please."

The proctor complied without a single word.

"As for you, madam," said the highwayman, addressing Mrs. Vallance, who did not know him, "I'll not deprive you of ten guineas. Goodnight. Remember me."

The proctor was not likely to forget him, and he drew a long breath as he heard the gallop of the highwayman's horse.

It was a good half hour before the guard could find courage to come out of the hedge; and then by the assistance before the guard could find courage to come out of the hedge; and then by the assistance of the proctor and his two clerks who had been outside and too much terrified to do anything at the time of danger, the coachman was picked up and placed on the top of the roof.

The two working men from the outside had disappeared, and the servant-girl was in a state of as great fright as Mrs. Vallance in the inside of the coach. The guard mounted the box and, with the two horses that were left, drove the coach to a village that was about two miles ahead, where there was a post-house for a change of horses.

And now comes a most curious and mysterious part of this story. The coach went on to Oxford before any active pursuit could be undertaken for the highwayman; but from there some half-dozen mounted constables went off to scour the road.

At about as many miles from the scene of the robbery as they had got from Oxford, they met a post-chaise, which they stopped, and a man put his head out of the window.

"What's amiss? What is it!" said the man.

"A robbery of the Warwick mail," said a constable.

“The mail. Good heaven! I was one of the passengers!”

“You, sir,”

“Yes, to be sure. My name is Dobbins. I got out to assist a sick gentleman into an inn called the Wheelwright’s Inn, I think they said it was, and being too long gone, the coach went on without me. I don’t know what I should have done, but this post chaise, which is one returning to Oxford from a job, overtook me on the road.”

“Yes,” said the driver of the post chaise, “I overtook this man and his two boxes.”

“His what?” said Mr. Dobbins.

“Your leather valise, sir, and your box!”

“Why, the fellow is mad,” said Dobbins. “I had only one box, with my name on it, and that I left in the Warwick mail!”

“Come, that’s a good one,” said the driver of the chaise. “What are these, eh?”

The officers produced their lanterns, and there, sure enough, on the top of the chaise, was a valise, addressed to Simon Bull, at Banbury, and a box with the name of Dobbins on it.

“Why, here they are,” said the constables.

“Stuff!” said Dobbins.

“Look for yourself.”

He did look, and he began to think he was dreaming, and to the driver of the chaise, he said:

“How, in the name of all that’s wonderful, did those two pieces of luggage come here?”

“You threw them up before you got in.”

Dobbins looked aghast for [he] knew he had done no such thing, but one of the officers said:

“Have you any objection to our opening these boxes?”

“None in the least; one is mine.”

They opened them. The Quaker’s was empty, but in Dobbins’ box was a scarlet coat, a cap and feather, and a mask and a pair of horse-pistols, and a horse’s bit and bridle.

"Ah, ah," said an officer. "I think we need go no further. You are our prisoner. You are a clever fellow, but we know you now."

"Know me?"

"Yes, to be sure; you are a highwayman."

This was the case. Dobbins was put upon trial for being a highwayman and stopping the Warwick mail. The Quaker was found quietly resting at the Wheelwright's Inn; and Dobbins own account was this:

He said that he had taken the Quaker about half way towards the inn when he got so ill he could not walk at all, and he, Dobbins, was compelled to let him sit down on a bank by the roadside.

He admitted he did not reply to the calls of the guard, because he thought them impertinent, and did not like the tone in which the "Now, sir," was uttered, but he had no idea that the coach would go away without him; and when he heard it so he raised a shout, and left the sick Quaker, and ran after it for more than a mile; but missed his way, owing to going down a line instead of keeping the high road. He then wandered for hours about the country, until he met a countryman, who asked him if he had lost his way, and told him how to get into the road again, when the first thing he saw was the post chaise which he hailed, and the driver of which promised to take him to Oxford. He positively denied that he had either box or valise with him.

The whole affair was very mysterious indeed, and the trial of Dobbins created great interest, as there was nothing to warrant the supposition that he was a highwayman.

Still the evidence was against him. —Mrs. Vallance said she thought that the voice of the highwayman was like Dobbins, and the proctor was of the same opinion.

The most remarkable circumstance, however, was the total disappearance of the Quaker, and the two workmen who had been outside passengers.

It was found that the proprietors of the coach were Quakers; but they knew nothing whatever of Aminadab Holdfast, nor of Simon Bull, at Banbury; and a reward of fifty pounds failed to produce either of the workmen who had been on the roof of the coach.

The people at the Wheelwright's Inn, though, deposed that a Quaker gentleman did come there on the night in question, and took a bed and stayed until morning, when he went away saying he was much better, and was going on to the town of Banbury.

So the case came on, and I was engaged for the defense, but hardly knew what to say, although I had a theory of my own which I intended to set up as a defense, that the Quaker was the robber; but I could not, to tell the truth, make much of it.

The crown prosecuted; and on the table of the court was laid the scarlet coat, the cap and feather, the pistols and other matters that were found in Dobbins' box. Anxious, and much broken down

by his imprisonment, did the accused look when he was placed at the bar. It was a Friday—that ominous day on which capital offenders were tried. Death stared him in the face, for on the verdict of the jury hung his life or death.

The case for the crown was opened very calmly and very fairly, and Mr. Mason, the proctor, was the first witnesses examined. He deposed to all the facts as I have related them: and he was told to look at the prisoner to see if he could identify him. He shook his head.

“My lord,” said the counsel, “will your lordship order the half-mask to be put on the prisoner’s face?”

The judge smiled.

No, brother,” he said; “I do not think that the identification of the mask should identify the individual.”

The counsel bowed.

“No,” said Mr. Mason. “I cannot swear to him except as one of the passengers of the coach.”

“Did he and the Quaker seem intimate?”

“Not at all.”

“Because our theory is that they were accomplices, my lord and gentlemen of the jury.”

“What!” exclaimed I, “in robbing each other? The only other booty was your small amount of cash, Mr. Mason.”

“That was all, sir.”

I did not cross-examine Mr. Mason, and Mrs. Vallance next was called; but all she could say was, that she had fainted and knew nothing about it.

The guard of the Warwick mail was called, and he was so lost in wonder that he had failed to shoot the highwayman, that he could talk of nothing else. The judge, however, put questions to him.

“You say that you got down from the tops of the coach when the Quaker gentleman complained of illness?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Did you take your blunderbuss with you?”

“No, my lord.”

“Then I think we may cease to wonder at its doing no execution on the highwayman.”

The next witness was the landlady of the Wheelwright’s Inn, but before she was examined, I made the guard depose that it was half-past ten o’clock by his watch, just before the illness, real or assumed, of the Quaker took place. The evidence of the landlady merely went to show that a Quaker gentleman did come and sleep there that night.

I rose to cross-examine. I felt that there was but one chance for Dobbins, and that was to raise so much doubt of his complicity with the real highwayman that it would not be safe to convict. The only course open to me by which I could hope to succeed would be by thoroughly directing suspicion to the Quaker, Aminadab Holdfast.

The landlady of the Wheelwright’s Inn, was, for her amount of education, an intelligent woman, and I won her confidence at the cross-examination.

“Madam,” I said, “I am well aware, and so is the judge, and so is the jury, that no one in all this crowded court, is more anxious than yourself that the innocent should not suffer for the guilty, in this matter.”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Well, then, I want you to be as exact and as precise as you can in informing me at what hour it was that the Quaker gentleman reached your house.”

To use a popular phrase, you might have heard a pin drop in the court as I put this question.

“It was a little after eleven, sir.”

“How much?”

“About a quarter past, I think.”

“You are sure of that?”

“Yes, I had occasion to go into the bar-parlor, and noticed the clock.”

“Were you closed for the night?”

“O, no!”

“Is there a lamp at your door?”

“Yes.”

“When do you put it out at night, if you put it out at all?”

"We always put it out at eleven, but on that night we put it out earlier, as we did not expect company."

"Did you hear the Warwick mail on the road?"

"The lamp was out, then, when the Quaker gentleman came to your house?"

"O, yes, and had been for some time. I heard the coach pass the house?"

"Can you say how long it was after that, when the Quaker gentleman came to your house?'

"About an hour."

"That will do."

I sat down.

The officers who had stopped the post-chaise in which the prisoner at the bar had been met on the road to Oxford, were next examined, and they both told exactly the same story. I merely asked them one question.

"Would you have passed the chaise if the prisoner at the bar had not challenged your attention, by looking out of the window?"

"I should only have questioned the post-boy," was the reply.

"Do you know the post-boy?"

"No."

"The counsel for the prosecution rose and said:

"I have to announce to you, my lord, and to you, gentleman of the jury, that this important witness is not to be found."

"The post-boy?" asked the judge.

"Yes, my lord."

"Where was he seen last?"

"At Oxford, my lord."

"Has he been subpoenaed, or was he examined before the Oxford magistrates?"

“Neither, my lord. He and the chaise disappeared while the officers were conveying their prisoners to the lock-up at Oxford.”

“That is very strange,” remarked the judge, “this case complicates itself as we go on.”

“It does, indeed, my lord,” said I.

“I have no further evidence to offer,” said the counsel for the prosecution.

The judge, I thought, looked carelessly at his notes, as though the case was weak, and I rose to speak for the prisoner.

“My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—That there is a train of circumstantial evidence against the prisoner at the bar, which for his sake, as well as for the sake of justice, required this formal investigation, I am not prepared to dispute. But that he is in any degree guilty of the crime held to his charge, is a proposition which I feel assured you, as reasonable men, will dispute when you approach, even in the most simple manner, an analysis of the evidence. Every fact, gentlemen, that is in the favor of the prisoner’s innocence is vouched before you this day by witnesses whom you have seen in the witness box, whose demeanor you have watched, and whose credibility you have had an opportunity of ascertaining. Every presumed fact that can be considered as suggestive of the prisoner’s guilt has only been brought before you at second-hand, or by inference. What do even these assumed facts amount to? First, he left the Warwick mail before it was attacked by a highwayman; and secondly, he was encountered on the high road to Oxford in a post-chaise, on the roof of which is conspicuously placed a portion of the plunder from the mail coach. Who is he that caused it to be placed there? The post-boy? No, the post-boy only told them, and their evidence stops short at the fact, that on the outside of a post-chaise they see two boxes, and on the inside a man. They cannot of their own knowledge, connect the prisoner at the bar with the leather valise and the square box on the outside of the post-chaise. Where is the post-boy, who could do so if he dared attempt it?

Gentlemen of the jury, my client is as innocent of this highway robbery and murder as you, or as my learned friend for the prosecution, or as the honored and exemplary judge who presides over this court. But you will say there is guilt somewhere, and I agree with you. The Warwick mail was stopped—the coachman killed. I will tell you by whom. The pretended Quaker, who has disappeared—the post-boy, who has disappeared. Look to them as the perpetrators of the offence. Look to the pretended Quaker, with his sham sickness, as the highwayman—look to the others as his assistants.”

There was a demonstration of applause in the court at this point of my address, but of course it was suppressed instantly, and I proceeded with my speech.

“Yes, gentlemen of the jury, look to that confederation of a Quaker, two workmen and a post-boy, for the real heroes of the romantic and most criminal incident. But they had set themselves to do something more than merely rob the Warwick man. They wished to cast the guilt upon an innocent man. From merely a general wish to do this, or from some special wish to involve the prisoner at the bar at this charge, which affects his life, pains were taken to make him look so

like the guilty person, that he—I—you—all of us were astonished at the cleverness of the web of villany which has been cast about him. The web has close meshes, but we may see daylight through them. The illness of the pretended Quaker—the call upon the prisoner at the bar to help him along—the post chaise that met him on the road—the very countryman, who no doubt followed him when he went astray, and then put him in the right path when it was time to do so—were all parts of one plot. This you may say, is a theory. It is so; and I will abandon it on one condition. Let Aminadab Holdfast appear; let the post-boy appear; let the countryman who directed the prisoner, appear; let either of the workmen appear, who were outside passenger, and I will not say that he is guilty, but I say he may be guilty."

There was a pause in court, and everyone seemed to hold his breath, as if in expectation that one or other of the parties I had mentioned would step forth, crying:

"Here I am!"

But no; no one appeared. I felt safe; I sat down at once, and my junior proceeded to call some witnesses to the character of the prisoner, all of whom knew him well as a commercial traveler. Only to one of those witnesses, who was a livery stable keeper, did I put a question of importance.

"How long have you known the prisoner?"

"About twelve years."

"Is he a good horseman?"

"Lord, bless you, sir, he is no horseman at all!"

I looked at the jury.

"The dashing highwayman?" I said.

There was a general smile.

The case was not over. The judge's charge did not occupy five minutes, and was all in favor of the prisoner.

"Not guilty!" said the foreman of the jury, almost before the last words were out of the judge's mouth.

The prisoner was instantly discharged and I saw him leave the court with an excited look on his face.

What remains to be told of this strange story he told me himself in the presence of his solicitor, at my chambers the next day.

When he was discharged from the dock, he went at once to look for his sister, who was waiting in a hackney coach in Newgate street, as he had been told, the result of the trial. At the corner of the Old Bailey a man ran up to him and said:

"If you please, sir, Miss Dobbins is this way."

"O, thank you!" he said.

In another moment he was half pushed into a hackney-coach, and it drove on, but not before, to his horror and surprise, he found it to contain no one but Aminadab Holdfast, the Quaker. Dobbins was about to cry out to the passengers to save him, but Aminadab said:

"Friend, if thou makest any noise, I will put the barrel of this carnal weapon, called a pistol, in thy mouth, and pull the trigger, as it is vanity named, when the top of thy head will be blown off."

Terrified, Dobbins sat still. The coach went on quickly.

"Friend Dobbins," added the Quaker, "thy counsel was quite right. I am the man who robbed the Warwick mail, and I have thy jewels all safe. Dost thou remember one Janes Ingerston?"

"Ingerston?—yes. He was prosecuted for stealing an emerald, while I was in business with Mr. Bridge, in the city; as jewelers and silversmiths."

"Friend, what did he promise thee on his condemnation?"

"I recollect that he said it should cost me more than twice the value of the emerald, and a fright that would last me my life."

Well, my friend, after that what did Ingerston do?"

"He escaped from Newgate."

"Verily, he did! That was eight years ago. Janes Ingerston was a boy—he is now a man and has kept his word. The emerald was worth five hundred pounds—he has taken a thousand from thee, and then has lived for a month with the idea of a halter round thy neck. Get out, my friend; I have done with thee."

The Quaker then opened the door of [the] coach, and without stopping it, thrust Dobbins into the road; and before he could recover his feet the coach had got round the corner and had disappeared.

THE END

Waters, Thomas. [Pseud.] [Attrib. William Russell.] *Autobiography of a London Detective*. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1864.