

A Famous Old-Time Detective

"You can put it down as an established fact in medicine," said a Buffalo doctor to a St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* reporter, "And I've had an experience of over forty years, that it's a beastly, up-hill job, if not well nigh impossible, to drug one with chloroform in midwinter in the open air. It evaporates very rapidly, indeed, and its power is about gone before it could have time to act. I've made a great many attempts in an experimental way, hence feel as if I knew what I was talking about. I've known quite a number of cases in army practice where it required many minutes of persistent effort to get a patient under the control of the drug. The common impression that chloroform is instantaneous in its effect is all nonsense. It is much more rapid than ether, and also more dangerous, and for that reason the fraternity are generally adopting ether as a safer resort.

"But," continued the Doctor, "Let me give you a story combining medicine and detective work, with a dash of chloroform in it. Just before the war there was a banking house in Buffalo by the name of Brown, Keep & Co. They were private bankers, of course. For about a dozen years they had in their employ a trusted and confidential clerk who knew all the secrets and carried all the keys. Among his other duties he was obliged to sleep all night in the bank. Well, one night the town was horrified to learn that the bank had been robbed of some thousands of dollars. The amount was not quite up to the standard required in fashionable circles to-day, but it was a fair haul for those primitive times.

"They called in Ham Best, one of the most remarkable detectives who ever lived, and turned him loose on the case. The story told by the young man was that he had allowed an old friend, whose landlady had demanded his key, to share his bed with him that night; that he was very tired, had gone to bed early, and must have been drugged in his sleep with chloroform. There was no doubt of the chloroform, because a small vial of it was found only a few feet from the bed. While the clerk was under the influence of the drug, the foul villain had cut the glass in the bank window and rifled the safe.

"Well, Best went quietly to work on the case and at the end of the first day he informed the directors that he had the man. He said it was Mr. Clerk. Then did they all with one accord begin to crowd him with exclamations of disbelief. But Best never jumped till he was good and ready. He first observed that the bank glass had been cut from the inside. Next he telegraphed to Dr. Frank Hamilton of New York (the same one who attended Garfield), and got a statement by dispatch that chloroform can't be administered to a sleeping patient without waking him up. The clerk 'fessed up, and nearly all the money was recovered. His friend had been simply an accomplice.

"By the way, while I'm at it I might as well tell you an old story that illustrates the detective powers of Ham Best. Years ago it created quite a stir in St. Louis. One of the banks in our city had occasion to send a lot of gold to a bank in Hartford. This was before the war. The route east was then by way of Chicago. Well, when the gold arrived at the place of destination the Hartford bank discovered that the box had been opened, and that some hundreds of gold had been scraped from the top. Complaint was made to the

express company, and Best was called in. His first move was to get the names of the men on the runs between St. Louis and Hartford, and to learn as much as possible about their past business, what they had been engaged at, etc., etc. In less than no time he exonerated every agent between Chicago and the East. The robbery was committed west of Chicago, and I think I have the man, said Ham. He got leave to travel on the express car with the suspected man, having the opened box in his possession. All got along amicably till the agent produced a small hammer, which, he remarked, was quite handy at times. Best at once brought forth the box and asked Mr. Agent if he would not be kind enough to fit that hammer to a dent in the side of the box. The fellow stammered and turned pale, but complied. It fitted like the paper on the wall. He had found his man. This small dent in the box was the only thing to indicate that the box had been opened. No one but an expert could have done it. In running over the former occupations of the various agents Best had found that the man in question was the only one of the number who had previously been a carpenter, and hence the only one likely to know that you can pry open a wooden box with a wooden wedge and leave no marks. The unfortunate slip of his hammer furnished the connecting link. Dead? Oh, yes. Best died fifteen years ago, I should think, while Chief of the Buffalo Police. He had a very wide range of information and was as modest as a school girl. He said the work of a detective was merely applied common sense. The trouble with our detectives of to-day is that they have no common sense and wouldn't know how to apply it if they had."

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