

*A Curious Case*  
by Judge Clark

Silas Coppel's rotundity of figure and rubicundity of visage were so suggestive of jollity, that few would have thought the cheery little bachelor had ever experienced a care, or tasted a sorrow. And yet he had done both.

Silas had been a good deal younger once—a fact most people found it as difficult to realize, as they did the possibility of his ever growing older. Nevertheless, it *was* a fact, noy only attested by the family Bible, but laid up in the memory of divers old ladies with a tenacious recollection of dates.

That Silas had been very poor in his younger days, there were also those who remembered. Nor was it forgotten with what sturdy pluck he had fought his way from poverty to wealth; nor how, in reply to one who had offered him assistance in the darkest of his struggles, he had uttered the saying afterward a proverb in the neighborhood—*“Borrowing without the prospect of being able to repay, is only begging under false pretenses.”*

But there *was* a secret in the little bachelor's life, the existence of which had never even been suspected. Neither Charles Burton nor Mary Warren, in making their mutual friend Silas the earliest confidant of their engagement, had the remotest thought that the announcement could cause him aught but pleasure. How deep and rankling was the wound it gave him, they nor any other mortal ever knew. And when he assisted as groomsman at their marriage, and was the first to wish them joy afterward, none save himself could have told “how ill all was there about his heart.”

It was during one of those seasons of pestilence, the periods and causes of whose advent alike baffle calculation, that within two years after their marriage, and within a few days of each other, Charles and Mary were both snatched suddenly away, leaving their infant son and only child an unprotected orphan.

It needed not his mother's dying words to commend the friendless little one to Silas Coppel's warm and generous heart, which, compassion aside, longed for something, all its own, to love and cling to.

With even more than a father's kindness and a mother's tenderness did Silas watch over his charge, for it filled a void in his life which erst had made it desolate.

As the boy grew to manhood, he developed traits of mind and person that might well have filled a father's heart with pride. The feeling in Silas was so near akin to adoration, as to be voted positively sinful by a certain convocation of pious spinsters, each one of whom, we may add, would have been quite ready to forgive the wickedness, had its object been *herself*.

But the person whom it shocked the most was a second cousin of Silas—one Ezekiel Lowe; “Lowe by name, and low by nature,” as Tom Moore said of the first Napoleon’s jailer.

As Silas increased in years and riches, the more unnatural did it seem to Mr. Lowe, that he should prefer a stranger to his own flesh and blood. And when the little bachelor began to talk seriously of making his will, and of leaving all he had to his youthful *protégé*, Warren Burton, Ezekiel, as next of kin, feeling deeply the enormity of the outrage, took occasion to speak out his mind upon the subject. But Silas received his cousin’s suggestions with so little favor, that the latter went away in the sulks, and the two had no more to say to each other.

It was while affairs were in this posture that the village was startled one morning by the news that Mr. Coppel had been robbed, and it was feared, murdered, during the preceding night.

The alarm had been given by Warren Burton, who, besides the housekeeper and Mr. Coppel, was the only inmate of the house. Warren’s xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx which was open, he had discovered Mr. C, lying on the floor, covered with blood, and apparently lifeless. After raising the body, in which he perceived there were yet signs of animation, he had called the housekeeper and given the alarm.

The wounds seemed to have been inflicted by repeated blows to the head with some blunt instrument—probably a heavy iron poker, which was found lying on the floor, with marks of blood upon it.

Mr. Lowe was among the first to reach his kinsman’s dwelling, and seemed a good deal more anxious, it was observed, that immediate steps should be taken for the discovery of the assassin, than for the relief of the victim; for while the doctor was examining into the condition of the latter, Ezekiel, with the aid of one or two others, was making a strict examination of the premises. Nor was their search fruitless. In an out-building, concealed under some rubbish, to which Ezekiel directed attention, was found a bundle of bloody clothes, wrapped up in which was Mr. Coppel’s pocketbook, containing a large sum of money. But what amazed and shocked all who heard it, was Ezekiel’s positive *identification of the garments as Warren’s!*

When summoned to the spot, Warren acknowledged the clothing to be his; but how it came in such a condition, or to be found in such a place, in company with the pocketbook, he protested he knew no more than any other person present.

But protestations went for little in the face of proofs so damning. “It was plain,” Ezekiel said, “that the viper Silas had nurtured in his bosom had raised its *hand* to *sting* its benefactor.” In the excitement, Ezekiel was excusable for a little mixing of metaphors.

Warren was at once arrested and placed in confinement. Whether he would ultimately be hanged, or subjected to a long and degrading imprisonment, everybody said depended solely on the life or death of Mr. Coppel.

When, at the end of many days, it was announced to the prisoner that the physician entertained a glimmering of hope, "Thank God!" he exclaimed with fervor; "so *his* life be spared, I can endure anything."

On being told a little later that the patient's symptoms were still improving, "Has he spoken yet?" he inquired eagerly. Receiving a negative answer, "His first words," he rejoined, with an earnestness that almost carried conviction, "I am sure, will be to clear me of this horrible suspicion."

But singular to relate, though Mr. Coppel slowly, and at length almost entirely recovered, it soon became manifest that, of all men, he was least able to throw any light on the occurrence of which, it had been hoped, he would be able to give a full explanation. Beyond and including that terrible night, all, to him, was a *blank*. All antecedent memory of events, language, persons, things, had been completely blotted out. His return to consciousness had been a new beginning of life. Save for a greater vigor of intellect, it was as though he had been born then. He had to learn everything anew—even to *speak*.

Warren's trial had been long delayed, in the hope that Mr. Coppel might at length be in a condition to give his testimony; but it was now plain that nothing was to be gained by further postponement, and the case was set down for an early day.

It was at this point that Dr. Pritchard, a distinguished physician and surgeon of a neighboring city, was called in consultation with the practitioner previously in charge of Mr. Coppel's case. Notwithstanding the patient's recovery, he had ever since been liable to attacks apparently of an epileptic character. It was reference to these, that a consultation had been deemed advisable.

Dr. P. made a careful examination of the patient in the presence of his professional brother and Ezekiel Lowe, the later of whom had been all along very assiduous in his attentions to his invalid relative, manifesting the warmest interest in all that pertained to his case.

"There is an operation," the doctor at length remarked—"a very dangerous one, I deem it right to say; but if the patient survived it, the relief would be permanent."

"Would there be any danger—any hope, I mean—of his *memory* being restored?" inquired Ezekiel.

"I do not say that," the doctor answered; "I was speaking of the difficulty in reference to which I have been consulted."

"The operation is very dangerous, I think you said?"

“I have so intimated.”

“You think it worth risking, however?”

“Decidedly.”

“You see,” said Ezekiel, “as my cousin’s nearest relation, I naturally feel a deep interest in him, and would be willing to take almost any risk to see his health completely restored.”

The doctor smiled at Ezekiel’s idea of *taking a risk*.

“You consent to the experiment being tried, then?” he inquired.

Ezekiel didn’t object.

As for Silas, who, by this time, had reached a point of development about equal to that usually attained by boys of five years, he was given no say in the matter, but was at once placed on his back on a table, and put under the influence of chloroform.

An incision was made through the scalp, in the form of a cross, just over a depression of the skull which could be felt immediately beneath the cicatrix of one of the recent wounds. The flaps of skin were turned up. Then, with a curiously shaped cylindrical saw, a piece of the skull was but or bored out, a portion of the inner plate of which appeared entirely detached by the force of an external blow. This sliver had evidently been pressing on the brain ever since the infliction of the injury.

Almost simultaneously with the removal of the piece of skin, the influence of the chloroform passed off. In an instant the patient raised himself to a sitting posture.

“Help! Warren!” he shouted.

Before he could be restrained, he had sprung from the table.

“Villain!” he exclaimed, glaring wildly at Ezekiel Lowe, at the same time clasping his hands on his head and staggering as if from the force of some deadly stroke, “would you murder me to become heir to my money?”

That was a question Ezekiel did not stay to answer then, nor has he come back to answer it since.

Silas Coppel’s memory all came back, and with it came a full demonstration of Warren Burton’s innocence. It need hardly be added, that Ezekiel Lowe was the real culprit, and that the proofs tending to implicate another, were all of *his* manufacture.

The most curious fact connected with the case is, that Silas's suspended memory should only have *begun* just were it *left off*, but that the intervening period, during which its owner was passing through his second childhood, should now be, as it is, quite as much of a blank as, during its existence, was his whole preceding life.

Please explain this, some psychologist or other *ologist*.

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