

## *A Mysterious Deposit*

### The Owner of Seven Hundred and Fifty Pounds— A True Story

Outside the portal of the bank a commissionaire named Copp has for many years taken up his position. He is not in the service of the bank, but being a man of tried probity and trustworthiness, his right to the station is tacitly admitted. He is an old soldier, and has served with distinction in many glorious battles, as the numerous medals which he proudly displays bear witness. He has been a sergeant major, and comports himself with suitable dignity. Upon many occasions, on busy days, he has been entrusted with missions of delicacy and responsibility, and always fulfilled them with tact and exactitude.

One morning I was waiting at my desk for the arrival of our early customers, when I saw Copp advancing to me with his military step, and with even more than his customary dignity. He held in his hand a dirty canvas bag, which he placed on my desk.

“Well, Copp,” said I, “whose account is this for?”

He stood at attention, and said, after saluting me:

“This bag, sir, was placed in my hands an hour ago by a man who asked me to take care of it till he came back. Thinking, perhaps he was a customer of the bank, I took charge of it, and as he hasn’t come back I thought I had better bring as it seems to contain money.”

I opened the bag and found that it contained seven hundred and fifty pounds in bank notes and gold, but there was no indication of the person to whom it belonged, either written upon a paper, as is usual, or upon the backs of the notes. Copp, seeing my surprise, added:

“I beg pardon, sir, but I may as well tell you that the party who handed me the bag was decidedly inebriated—in fact, sir, I may say drunk. He could scarcely stand, and didn’t seem hardly able to speak.”

“Very well,” I replied, “you may leave it with me, and when the man comes, bring him in here.”

“Yes, sir,” said Copp, who saluted and retired.

I put the bag on one side, fully expecting that the owner would soon call and claim it. At the end of the day, however, nobody had called, although Copp had kept a sharp lookout at the door. I was much surprised at this, and put by the money. The next day and the next passed by, and still no claimant appeared. I interrogated Copp as to the description of the man. He said he was a short thick-set man, with dark hair and whiskers, but no mustache. He wore a black coat, very seedy looking, and his face and hands and shirt were very dirty; “looked as if he’d been on the loose, sir,” he added.

At the expiration of another week I inserted advertisements in the principal daily papers, stating that a bag containing a sum of money had been found, and inviting the owner to claim it and specify the contents. No satisfactory answers were received to the advertisement, and the question remained. What was to be done with the money? We could not place it to any account in the bank, and we could not, of course, open an account in an unknown name. The manager was of opinion that, as the money had been left in the hands of Sergeant Copp, who was not an official of the bank, and, besides, there was no evidence of it having been intended to be lodged in the bank, and that, therefore, it should be handed over to the commissionaire.

Upon my telling Copp this, however, he stoutly refused to have anything to do with it. "It was not his," he said, and he had only taken charge of it upon the supposition that it belonged to one of the customers of the bank." The matter was finally settled by opening a deposit account in the joint names of Copp and myself.

Two years rolled by, and nothing further was heard of the mysterious depositor, and we began to think that the amount would ultimately fall into the hands of the worthy Sergeant Copy or his family, to whom it would be a small fortune. At length, however, one morning Sergeant Copp walked up to my desk with an expression of great pleasure upon his honest face.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he commenced, "can I speak to you for a few minutes?"

"Certainly," said I; "What is it?"

"Well, sir, do you remember that bag of money—two years ago?"

"Of course I do," I replied with interest; "who could forget it?"

"Well, sir, I think I've got a clue to the man who left it with me."

It appeared that the sergeant's son was apprenticed to an upholsterer in the city. Among the workmen in the establishment who had recently joined was a French polisher. One day, in the course of conversation, he told his fellow workmen the following facts concerning a foreman of the firm of Smith & Jones, where he had formerly worked. The foreman, whose name was Thompson, had been with the firm a great many years; he was entrusted by his employers from time to time with the collection of large amounts of money, and had always been found honest and upright. Upon one occasion, about two years before, a shipping order had come to the firm for a quantity of furniture from a new foreign house, of which they had some suspicions. The goods were ordered to be shipped on a certain day, and it was agreed that they were to be paid for in money before being placed on board. As the order came to seven hundred and fifty pounds, the foreman went down himself in charge of the goods, with strict injunctions from his employers either to bring the goods back or the money. The goods were placed on board the ship from the lighter in the docks—so much was ascertained; but the foreman who had received the money, and had given a receipt for it, was never seen again, either by the firm or by his wife or family. The lighterman, who had been present at the payment of the money, and had conveyed Thompson ashore, deposed that he had not been able to get the goods on board on the day when they were sent down, and Thompson passed the night at a sailors' coffee house in the

neighborhood of the docks, in order to be in time to assist at their trans-shipment in the morning. When he arrived on board he looked very strange, and the lighterman noticed that his watch and chain were missing. Altogether, Thompson's appearance was that of a man who was still suffering from the effects of a night's debauch. On taking him ashore, the lighterman had conducted Thompson, at his urgent request, to a public house, and had there left him. From this point impenetrable mystery hung over the matter. Had Thompson decamped with the money, or had he been the victim of some foul play? The first hypothesis was scouted by Thompson's friends and fellow workmen. He had shown himself for more than twenty years a man of probity; he was a sober and prudent man, whose only delight was in his home and children. He was always preaching habits of saving and of economy to the men under him, and when he disappeared it was found that he had a considerable sum in the savings bank, which he had never touched. It was incredible, therefore, that he could have embezzled his employers' money. The second hypothesis seemed the more reasonable one. But if he had been murdered, how had his body been disposed of? The river had been closely watched from the tower to the sea, but no corpse answering his description had been found.

Young Copp had carried this story to his father, and the sergeant had, with much difficulty, succeeded in discovering Thompson's unfortunate wife and family, who were now reduced to poverty. From them he learned the confirmation of the sad story, and felt sure that now at last he had found the missing clue.

The good sergeant then waited on Messrs Smith & Jones, in whose employment Thompson had been, and ascertained two facts which had confirmed him in his supposition. The £750 had been paid by the foreign firm which had bought the goods in exactly the same proportion of notes and gold as the sum left with the commissionaire, and the date upon which they were paid corresponded with that of the mysterious deposit. The unfortunate hiatus in the chain of evidence was that nobody knew the numbers of the bank notes which had formed part of it.

"What do you think, sir?" concluded Copp.

I replied that I thought the solution quite probable, but that we should proceed very cautiously in the testing of every proof.

After turning over the matter carefully in my mind, I came to the conclusion that the only means of identifying the sum paid to Thompson with that left with Sergeant Copp would be a comparison of the notes in each instance. But then came a formidable difficulty. The foreign firm had been dissolved, and its members had left England. They had also already informed Messrs Smith & Jones that they had omitted to take the numbers of the bank notes which had just been remitted to them from the continent.

The plan I at last hit upon was as follows: When the £750 were paid into the deposit account, the notes which formed a portion of the sum were sent by us to the Bank of England in the regular course of business, and were canceled. I ascertained at the Bank of England the name and address of the party to whom the notes had first been issued, and then traced them through the several hands through which they had passed. Following up the clue, I discovered that some of them had been sent to a bank in Paris. I wrote to this bank, inquiring to whom they had been

paid, and, to my great gratification, was informed that they had been sent to the very firm in London a few days before they had handed them over to Thompson.

Here, then, was the missing link, and I had no longer any doubt in my mind that the money paid to us was the same as that which had been lost by Messrs Smith & Jones.

Honest Sergeant Copp was overjoyed, and wished to go at once to Mrs. Thompson and give her the good news. This, however, I would not permit, as I thought it would be better to endeavor, in the first instance, to ascertain the fate of the poor foreman.

I called upon Messrs Smith & Jones, and informed them that I had obtained certain information which led me to believe that a sum of £750 paid into the bank was identical with that lost by them, but that the only person who could satisfactorily prove the fact was Thompson, and that he must therefore be found. They promised to do their best to aid my inquiries, and employed a detective for the purpose. In the course of a few weeks they were able to inform me that Thompson had been discovered in Paris, working under an assumed name, and that, on being informed of the discovery, he at once came over to his family, who were overjoyed at his return.

On the following day Thompson called the bank, and was recognized by Sergeant Copp as the individual who had left the money with him.

The explanation given by Thompson of the transaction was that his coffee had been drugged at the house where he slept, and his watch stolen from him. He had, however, nerved himself by a violent effort the following morning to be at his post on the lighter, and, although half stupefied, had with some difficulty received and counted over the money; that on going ashore he had repaired to a public house near the docks, in order to get soda water; that after taking it he had rambled through the streets on his way to the work shop. His mind, however, was a complete blank to every thing which occurred afterward, until he found himself lying in a narrow alley, surrounded by ill-looking people. When he came to himself he was paralyzed with fear on finding, as he thought, that he had been robbed of his bag. His brain was dazed with the thought of the fearful accusations which would most certainly be brought against him.

Who would believe that he was guiltless of any crime when appearances were so much against him? How could he explain away his seeming state of intoxication when he went on board the ship in the morning? And, above all, how could he explain the loss of the bag? He could remember that up to a certain time after leaving the public house he still had the bag safe in the breast pocket of his coat, for he had a distinct recollection of keeping his arm tightly pressed against it. He had a dim recollection of finding himself amid streets of tall stone houses, and reeling against several people on the pavement, but after that his memory was altogether blotted out. All was darkness and vacancy until he awoke.

Then a feeling of blank despair took possession of his mind. How could he ever again show himself among his friends—he who had held his head so high, and had been so forward in denouncing vice and drink? He would be a laughing stock to all the world; and then the stain upon his honesty! Messrs. Smith & Jones he knew to be very hard people; they never had spared anybody in their business dealings, and they would certainly bring a criminal charge against him.

The idea was horrible. He would rather die than submit to such indignity. Pondering these things over in his mind, he had wandered heedlessly through the streets without remarking whither he was going. Fate or instinct seemed to lead him to the riverside again, and he found himself at last at St. Katharine's dock. Exactly facing where he stood was a flaming placard, announcing the departure that day of a boat for Calais at a very low rate of passage. The thought darted into his mind: Why not cut his difficulties at once and put the sea between himself and the scene of his disgrace?

It was a cowardly temptation which, if his intellect had been in a clearer state, would have been instantly rejected with scorn; but the poisonous drug which he had imbibed seemed to have paralyzed his energy, and to have utterly unmanned him and deprived him of the courage necessary to face his trouble. He yielded to the temptation, and made his way through to Paris, where, under an assumed name, he succeeded in getting work, for he was very expert at his business.

Nothing could exceed the delight of the worthy commissioner at having been the means of clearing up the mystery, except, indeed, his pride in re-telling the oft-told tale. Nor was his honesty unrewarded in a more substantial manner, for Messrs Smith & Jones presented him with £100 as a recognition of his integrity and intelligence.

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