

A Detective's Story

During a short visit of the writer to London, I was invited by a friend to visit the Central Criminal Court. We readily acquiesced, and the next morning found us within the courthouse, eagerly listening to the various suits pending.

A gray-haired man, with tottering steps, attracted my attention; and being told that he had long been connected with the police, I sought an introduction, the better to satiate my thirst for a knowledge of passing events. I found him an agreeable and extraordinary man, and one possessing a large amount of common sense. He was free and easy in conversation, and seemed quite willing to impart any information I desired. After a short but interesting interview, principally relating to passing events, he related the following extraordinary tale, it being his maiden adventure as Bowstreet runner:

“Shortly after my appointment as a member of the police staff, I was aroused quite early one morning by the chief, who desired an immediate interview. It was a singular case, and as he related the incidents, the blood fairly leaped through my veins. I now had an opportunity to show my pluck, for which I had long been desirous. It was a mysterious affair, and the wooden-headed officials of that day—before steam and the electric telegraph aroused the nobler powers of men—declared it a useless and extravagant waste of money to attempt the ferreting out of the villains.

“A young man was sent to one of the banks with a large sum of money for deposit. In a few moments he returned, much excited, and declared that the money had been stolen; but when, and by whom, he knew not. Here was a mystery to be unraveled; for the youth was considered perfectly honest, and his employers believed him guiltless of the crime.

“But something must be done. If a band of outlaws were about they should be brought to justice; and, after a long interview with the chief, I was detailed to perform this arduous duty, little dreaming that I should be successful. I speedily made arrangements to unveil the painful secret.

“Month after month passed; I worked unceasingly, but nothing satisfactory came to light. I feared that success would not attend me, and became almost disheartened, believing that no living man could ferret out the diabolical deed.

“About this time the youth, Willie Johnson, left his employer, and began studying for the ministry. There was nothing wonderful in this event; but something seemed to whisper, ‘Now is your time; be active, and success will attend you.’ The next morning, as I was walking down Bond-street, dreaming of past events, a stranger accosted me.

“You are the very man I have been searching for this morning; for, I am told, that you are trying to obtain information concerning some money which was stolen months ago.”

I nodded assent, and he continued:

“If you will come to the ——, at precisely six o'clock this evening, you may receive some light upon the subject.’

“The stranger immediately withdrew, and passed out of sight. For a moment I was bewildered, but quickly recovered my senses, and then attempted to follow the youth and obtain more minute particulars. But he was gone; no one could tell me where for none had seen him pass. Mystery of mysteries, all seemed a strange, incomprehensible mystery.

“During the long hours of the day I was uncommonly nervous, longing for the appointed hour to come for I had concluded to be present, and gain all the information possible. Long before the above mentioned hour had come I was in the ————, eagerly scrutinizing every person present, but failed to behold my stranger friend. A few moments elapsed, and Willie Johnson hurriedly passed the window; I hastened to the door wishing for a moments conversation, but he was out of sight. Everything seemed turned upside down, and I was in an extraordinary mood.

““Strange,” I muttered, “the people all appear to be phantoms.”

“The clock struck six, and I was most uncommonly anxious for the stranger to come, fearing as the moments passed, that I had been made the scapegoat of some unprincipled wit. But in a few minutes the door opened, and my morning companion entered. He nodded, passed along, and motioned me to follow. We entered a small room, carefully closed a door, and took seats beside a cheerful fire. For an hour we communed together, and then I left the room with a clearer mind, a quicker step. The mystery, at length, was solved; all seemed clear as the morning sunshine. The stranger had revealed startling facts, of a most painful character.

“He and Willie Johnson had committed the theft, with an understanding that the money should be equally divided but, since the excitement had abated, Willie claimed the whole, leaving him minus a penny. He wished to be revenged, and had taken that opportunity to confess his guilt and implicate Willie.

“I hurried to headquarters, and very soon procured assistance and then began to search for the knave. During that night and the succeeding day we were active, and at nightfall caged the unprincipled scoundrel as he was leaving his lodgings. He was greatly surprised, and prattled much of his innocence, swearing that he would have revenge for such, as he termed it, outrageous proceedings. He was safely locked up; and, then I sought the chief and told him of my success relating the many events which had transpired.

“My star was in the ascendant—glorious thought. Johnson’s trial came on; and it caused a very exciting time I assure you.

“Learned and eloquent counsel were in attendance, and the people came in dense crowds to witness the proceedings. The scene opened. The clerk read the charges, and the judge put on his spectacles. The trial lasted four days, and Johnson was committed. Then, when his hope expired, he confessed his guilt, relying upon the mercy of the court. A strange tale he related – a life-scene painful in the extreme.

“Before coming to London he often preached for the Methodists in a country town, and there his first vile act transpired. Among his congregation was the daughter of a poor labourer, a sweet

fascinating girl. An unholy desire seized his bosom on beholding her beauty, and he soon formed her acquaintance. Unacquainted with the world, and possessing an unsuspecting nature, she was easily influenced—more easily, perhaps, by one who professed to be a follower of Christ. She was led astray, and yielded up her virtue to the luring wiles of the treacherous seducer. A child was born; but the vile wretch had fled, leaving the blighted maiden to die of grief.

“He journeyed to a distant village, and again began preaching. For months he was respected for his known talent and supposed virtue; but he could not long abstain from sin. At length the congregation beholding an improper intimacy existing between him and a member of the little flock, drove him from their midst a thrice-crowned villain.

“He came to London; and, possessing a manly appearance, won the confidence of all he chanced to meet. But during those years of arduous toil, he was perfecting a villainous plot – a scheme to rob his unsuspecting employers. How he succeeded you already know, and I have tried to give you a short account of his final capture.

“He stated that he wished to become an active preacher, and had stolen the money for the purpose of procuring a more liberal education. But he has learned one lesson, that trying to steal a profession often brings a man into disgrace.”

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