

A Mail Robber Trapped

Danger of Using Plug Tobacco

[From the *Chicago Post*]

The mysteries connected with the Post Office Department of the Government are numerous, and some of them border on the marvelous. The diaries of retired physicians and venerable lawyers may contain strange adventures and romantic incidents, but they can scarcely equal, in fruitful subjects and interesting details, the experience of some of the detectives of the postal service. And if they did, the revelations could never be made public, for the seal of eternal secrecy is placed upon the mouths of honorable professional gentlemen; while the detective, when his ends have been accomplished, is free to relate not only the crimes, but the names of the criminals, and the minutest particulars regarding their developments.

A special detective connected with the Chicago Post Office some time ago “worked up” a case, and brought it to a successful termination, which has in it many elements which are calculated to impress themselves in a marked manner upon the minds of those who peruse this article. A registered letter was forwarded to this city, which ought to have contained five one hundred dollar bills. But when the envelope was opened the money was missing. As is usual in such cases, the matter was placed in the hands of an experienced and skillful gentleman assigned to the duty of bringing criminals to justice, with instructions to make a thorough and rigid investigation. The task was one well calculated to baffle the skill of even these experts in the art of detecting crime. The envelope arrived here intact, and to all appearances had not been tampered with in the least. What, then, could be done? There was not the slightest clue, and the detective finally abandoned the matter in despair of success. But one day, from what motive he did not himself realize at the time, the officer took the envelope, soaked it in water, and carefully removed the portion where the sealing process had been effected. By the assistance of a microscope, he found that small particles of plug tobacco still adhered to the paper, and from this fact became convinced that whoever wet the mucilage of the envelope must have used that description of the weed. Here, then, was found a faint clue upon which the investigation might be continued. He determined, in the first place, to ascertain if any one connected with any of the offices through which the letter had passed used tobacco of that description. Office after office was visited, from Chicago to the locality where the letter was first mailed, but in not one of these was there a single person who masticated any thing but ‘fine cut!’ He arrived at the last office with a faint heart, fully convinced that the last clue by which to entrap the guilty party had utterly failed in its accomplishment. The Postmaster was an old acquaintance and friend of the detective. He was an upright, respectable citizen; was loud in his denunciation of the crime: and regretted, with manifest sincerity, that the culprit could not be brought to justice. The Chicago official had not the slightest suspicion in the direction of the honest country Postmaster; but he had asked so many people for “a chew,” that the habit had grown upon him, and, addressing the worthy P. M. by name, he said:

“Will you give me a chew of tobacco?”

“Really,” was the reply, “I don’t think I have any tobacco that you would use. I never chew anything but plug!”

The detective was dumbfounded. That respectable man whom he had known for years, and who maintained a character among his neighbors above reproach, was the only man in all the offices through which the letter had passed who chewed plug tobacco; the person who sealed the envelope used that article; consequently the conviction unwillingly forced itself upon the officer’s mind that his friend was the thief.

Detectives never hesitate in cases of emergency, and with them friendship is a matter of no consideration when it is calculated to interfere with business. The party in quest of the thief who stole the \$500 in question, did not for a moment pause. He believed the Postmaster to be guilty, and acting upon this belief, at once informed that functionary that he was a prisoner. Detaining the suspected party in custody, a search warrant was produced, and the residence of the village Postmaster was visited. The house was subjected to a thorough overhauling from cellar to garret. Every crevice, every drawer, every hole in the wall, every trunk, all places where money could be concealed, were searched, but the examination was fruitless—nothing could be found which would implicate that honest man. Just as he was about to leave, the detective noticed upon a table in the parlor a daguerreotype case, such as were used years ago, before the art of photography was discovered, and before ambrotypes were known. Carefully folded up, behind the picture, he found five one hundred dollar bills!

The mystery was solved. The Postmaster was tried in the United States Court in this city, convicted, and may now be found at Joliet where he is working out the penalty assessed for his crime.

There is a moral to this statement of facts, which country Postmasters in particular will do well to profit by. It may thus be stated: 1st—It is better not to steal. 2d—It is better not to use plug tobacco. 3d—But if a person does steal, and does use plug tobacco, it is eminently essential that some safer sticking process be adopted than that which brought the hero of the above adventure to the State prison.

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