

A Quaker Detective: A Story of the Road
by Judge Clark

We were five passengers in all; two ladies on the back seat, a middle-aged gentleman and a Quaker in the middle, and myself on one in front.

The two ladies might have been mother and daughter, aunt and niece, governess and charge, or might have sustained any other relationship which made it proper for two ladies to travel together unattended.

The middle-aged gentleman was sprightly and talkative. He soon struck up an acquaintance with the ladies, toward whom, in his zeal to do, he rather over did the agreeable – bowing and smiling and chattering over his shoulder in a way painfully suggestive, at his time of life, of a ‘crick’ in the neck. He was evidently a gay Luthario.

The Quaker wore the uniform of his sect, and confined his speeches, as a parliamentarian would save his credit by doing, to simple “yeas” and “nays.” As for myself I make it an invariable rule of the road to be merely a looker on and a listener.

Toward evening, I was aroused from one of those reveries from which a young man without either being a poet or a lover, will sometimes fall, by the abrupt query from the talkative gentleman:

“Are you armed, sir?”

“I am not,” I answered, astonished, no doubt visible, at the question.

“I am sorry to hear it,” he replied, “for before reaching our next stopping place it will be several hours in the night, and we must pass over a portion of the road on which more than one robbery is reported to have been committed.”

The ladies turned pale, but the stranger done his best to reassure them.

“Not that I think there is the slightest danger at present,” he resumed; “only when one is responsible for the safety of ladies, you know, such a thing as a pistol in reach would materially add to one’s confidence.”

“Your principles, my friend,” addressing the Quaker, “I presume are as much opposed to carrying as to using carnal weapons.”

“Yea,” was the response.

“Have the villains murdered any of their victims?” the elderly lady nervously inquired.

“Or have they contented themselves with – plundering them!” added the younger, in a timorous voice.

“Decidedly the latter, the amiable gentleman hastened to give assurance; “and as we are none of us prepared to offer resistance in case of attack, nothing worse than robbery can possibly befall us.”

Then after blaming his thoughtlessness in having unnecessarily introduced a disagreeable subject, that gentleman quite excited himself in efforts to raise the spirits of the company, and so well succeeded by the time night set in, that all had quite forgotten, or only remembered their fears to laugh at them.

Our genial companion fairly talked himself hoarse. Perceiving which he took from his pocket a package of newly invented “cough candy,” and having passed it first to the ladies he helped himself to the balance and tossed the paper out of the window.

He was in the midst of high encomiums on the new nostrum, more than half of the efficacy of which he insisted, depended on its being taken by suction, when a thrill whistle was heard, and almost immediately the coach stopped, while two faces hideously blackened, presented themselves at each window.

“Sorry to trouble you,” said the man on the right, acknowledging with a bow the lady-like screams from the back seat, “but ‘business is business,’ and ours will soon be over, if things go smoothly.

“Of course, gentlemen, you will spare as far as may be consistent with your disagreeable duty, the feelings of these ladies,” appealed the polite passenger in the blandest manner.

“Oh, certainly; they shall be first attended to, and shall not be required to leave their places, or submit to a search, unless their conduct renders it necessary.”

“And now, ladies,” continued the robber, the barrel of his pistol gleaming in the light of the coach lamp, “be so good as to pass out your purses, watches, and other such trinkets as may be accessible without much trouble.”

The ladies came down handsomely and were not further molested.

One by one the rest of us were compelled to get out, the middle-aged gentleman coming first. He submitted with winning grace, and was robbed like a very Chesterfield.

My own affair; like the sum I lost, is hardly worth mentioning. The Quaker’s turn came next. He quietly handed his pocketbook and watch, and when asked if he had any other valuables, said, “Nay.”

A Quaker's word is good, even among thieves; so after a hasty "good-night," the robber thrust his pistol into his pocket, and, with his two companions, one of whom had held the reins of the leader, was about making his departure.

"Stop!" exclaimed the Quaker, in a tone more of command than request.

"Stop, what for?" returned the other in evident surprise.

"For at least two good reasons," was the reply, emphasized with a couple of Derringers cocked and presented.

"Stop!" the Quaker exclaimed. "And if any of thy sinful companions advances a step to thy relief, the spirit will surely move me to blow thy brains out."

The robber at the opposite window and the one at the leader's heads, thought it a good time to leave.

"Now get in my friend," said the Quaker, still covering the man, and take the middle seat, "but first deliver up thy pistol."

The other hesitated.

"Thee had better not delay; I feel the spirit beginning to move my right fore finger."

The robber did as he was directed, and the Quaker took his place by his side, giving the new comer the middle of the seat.

The driver, almost frightened out of his wits, now set forward at a rapid rate. The lively gentleman soon recovered his vivacity. He was especially facetious on the Quaker's prowess.

"You're a rum Quaker, you are. Why you don't quake worth a cent."

"I'm not a shaking Quaker, if that's what thee means."

"Of the 'Hickory,' or rather of the 'Old Hickory' stripe, I should say," retorted the lively man; but the Quaker relapsing into his usual monosyllable, the conversation flagged.

Time sped, and sooner than we expected, the coach stopped where we were to have supper, and a change of horses. We had deferred a redistribution of our effects till we should leave this place, as the dim light of the coach lamp rendered the process somewhat difficult before. It was now necessary, however, that it should be attended to at once, as our jovial companion had previously announced his intention of leaving us at this point. He proposed a postponement till after supper, which he offered to go and order.

"Nay," urged the Quaker, with an approach to abruptness, and laying his hand on the others' arm, "business before pleasure, and for business there is no time like the present."

“Will thee be good enough to search the prisoner?” he said to me, still keeping his hand on the passenger’s arm.

I did so, *but not one of the stolen articles could be found.*

“He must have got rid of them in the coach,” the gay gentleman suggested, and immediately offered to go and search. “Stop!” thundered the Quaker, tightening his grasp.

The man turned pale and struggled to release his arm.

“Stir hand or foot and you are a dead man.”

The Quaker must have been awfully excited to completely forget both the language and the principles of his persuasion.

Placing the other pistol in my hand with directions to fire on the first of the two men that made a suspicious movement, he went to work on Lothario, from whose pockets, in less time than it takes to tell it, he produced every item of the missing property, to the utter amazement of the ladies who had begun, in no measured terms, to remonstrate against the shameful treatment the gentleman was receiving.

The Quaker, I need scarcely add, was no Quaker, but a shrewd detective, who had been set on a band of desperadoes, of whom our middle-aged friend who didn’t look near so middle-aged when his wig was off – was the chief. The robbery had been adroitly planned. The leader of the gang had taken passage in the coach, and after learning, as he had supposed, out defenseless condition, had given the signal to his companions by throwing out a scrap of paper already mentioned. After the unexpected capture of the first robber, it was attempted to save the booty by secretly passing it to the accomplice, still believing to be unsuspected, who counted on being able to make off with it at the next stopping place.

The result was that both for a season “did the State some service.”

The New York Ledger, June 19, 1869

Racine [WI] County Argus, July 22, 1869

The [Canal Dover] Ohio Democrat, August 13, 1869

Fort Wayne [IN] Daily Gazette, October 9, 1869

Hornellsville [NY] Tribune, November 4, 1869

Bangor [ME] Daily Whig and Courier, December 10, 1869

The Coshocton [OH] Age, December 17, 1869

The Orangeburg [SC] News, December 23, 1871