

A Double Crime

The wholesale produce and commission store of Mr. Purvis, on Delaware avenue, Philadelphia, was robbed on the night of Oct. 17, 1865.

The safe had been opened apparently by false keys, and upward of \$900 in greenbacks were abstracted. A package of bonds to the amount of \$3,000 more remained untouched.

Two clerks, both young men, usually slept in the store. August Yerkes had been in the employ of Mr. Harrison Purvis about four years and enjoyed the confidence of his employer. Pembroke Sharon, the other clerk, had only recently been taken, but the manner in which he took hold of the business impressed Mr. Purvis so much in his favor that he predicted a successful future for the young man as a very able salesman and ultimate prominent merchant. Under this impression he placed implicit trust in Sharon, and selected him as a companion of Yerkes in the store at night.

Both of these young men were in the store on the night the robbery occurred, but when the place was opened in the morning Sharon was missing and Yerkes lay on the floor near the safe with a severe gash on the side of his head, which had been bleeding profusely, judging by the amount of blood on the floor.

The unfortunate young man had evidently endeavored to staunch the blood, for both his hands were stained, as also were his clothes. By the disorder in the office, and the numerous blood stains both on the floor and walls it was evident that a desperate struggle must have taken place.

It was conjectured from this that Sharon, having provided himself with false keys, had opened the safe and been surprised by his fellow clerk in the midst of his work, who, in turn, dealt him the blow near the temple, and then, after a severe struggle between them, Yerkes fainted from loss of blood, and the robber fled with his booty.

Varnoe, the detective, and a physician were at once sent for, and while Dr. Edson attended to his patient the detective examined the premises with his usual carefulness, particularly the second [floor,] and, returning to the lower floor, found that Yerkes had recovered and sat in an armchair with a bandage around his head.

“Well, Mr. Varnoe, what have you discovered?” asked Mr. Purvis.

“I find that the robber has been to the second floor,” replied the detective; “possibly he has taken some valuables from there as well.”

The merchant hastened upstairs, but presently returned, saying nothing had been disturbed or removed as far as he could see.

“Whatever his object may have been, I am positive that he visited the second floor after the bloody struggle had taken place.”

Then Yerkes gave the following account:

He awoke suddenly and found that Sharon had left the bed, and fearing that some mishap had overtaken him he lit a paraffine candle by the small gas-jet in the room and began to search for him.

Not finding him on the second floor he descended to the first floor, and found him before the open safe. They saw each other at the same moment, and Sharon was spell-bound at being discovered in his criminal act. Then began the struggle, the evidence of which was so plainly evident. Sharon being the stronger of the two soon overpowered his opponent, and threw him so violently on the floor that he became insensible.

Varnoe listened with wrapt attention to the end, then made a few notes in his book, after which he walked out of the store with his eyes bent on the floor before him until he reached the street; then, after casting his eyes searchingly around on the ground, he walked over to the dock and gazed for a few moments into the water in a thoughtful manner. When he returned to the store and rejoined the others in the office it was with a grave countenance.

“Mr. Purvis, the robber has evidently escaped by way of the river, as the blood tracks reach to the dock.”

All eyes were now directed toward the wounded man, who had suddenly grown very pale. He opened his mouth as if to say something, but fell back in his seat with a groan and fainted away.

While the doctor was applying restoratives to this charge the detective drew Mr. Purvis away to the rear of the store and remained there for half an hour in conversation with him, and judging by his frequent exclamations, he must have been greatly astonished at what the detective told him.

Re-entering the office, they found Yerkes still unconscious, and, at the suggestion of Varnoe, he was conveyed in that condition to the hospital.

“Now, Mr. Purvis,” said Varnoe, “you will please point out to me which are the clothes usually worn by Mr. Sharon while on duty at the store.”

“Certainly, sir,” replied the gentleman; “that is readily done,” and he went to a closet where the clerks kept their outer garments and opened it. He took piece after piece from the hooks, an exclamation as if of surprise escaping him as he did so.

“What is it?” asked Varnoe, when Mr. Purvis laid the garments on the bed.

“Why, as I live, Sharon has not only left his coat and vest behind, but also his pants!” said Mr. Purvis, with a look of bewilderment.

“That is singular,” remarked the detective, exchanging significant glances with the doctor; “the more so when you bear in mind that Mr. Yerkes, when found, had on his coat, vest, pants and boots, while the robber even left his boots behind him,” pointing to a pair beneath the bed.

“You will now please see whether Mr. Sharon has left anything of value in his pockets.”

Every pocket was instantly divested of its contents. There was found a valuable gold watch and chain, a wallet containing a trifle over \$5, a penknife, pencil and memorandum book, etc.

“Retain the articles, Mr. Purvis, and restore the clothes to the closet,” said Varnoe. “I have another surprise in store for you, I think.”

When this was done, Varnoe took off all the bedclothes and threw them on the floor, leaving the mattress bare. An exclamation of surprise burst from Mr. Purvis as he pointed to the mattress where a number of bloody finger-marks stained it along a seam about ten inches in length.

“Now I see what you are driving at,” cried Mr. Purvis, scanning the [seam.] “You mean to say the robber has hidden his booty in the mattress?”

“I think so, at all events,” was his reply, as he took out his knife and opened the seam.

Then inserting his hand into the opening, he presently drew forth the package of greenbacks. They were intact, so Mr. Purvis announced after examining the fastenings and seals.

“What am I to think of this?” asked the gentleman, in a helpless tone. “I declare that my head aches trying to divine the motive of this most extraordinary robbery.”

“Think as I do.”

“What is that?”

“Why, that Pembroke Sharon, instead of being the robber, is the victim of the robber, which accounts for his leaving all his outer garments behind. He evidently surprised the robber at his work, and in the encounter that took place he murdered the poor Sharon, dragged him across the street, as the trail showed to me, and tossed him in the river.”

“Then you really suspect August Yerkes as the robber?” asked the merchant, greatly agitated.

“I am sure he is not only the robber, but possibly also a murderer,” was the reply.

“Oh, the wretch!” cried the merchant, passionately; “and in my heart I admired his bravery, while I pitied him for what he had endured for endeavoring to protect my property.”

“I am convinced you have hit on the right man,” said Mr. Purvis. “If he knew of this he might give us the slip. The next thing to be done is to use every means in our power to recover the body of poor Sharon.”

“Poor, indeed, since all his clothes he has on his back are not his own,” spoke a voice behind them.

All looked at the speaker, who wore an old seaman's suit, and looked as if he had just recovered from a severe spell of sickness.

Something in the tone of voice struck a chord in the breast of the merchant. He approached the man and asked, eagerly:

“Who are you?”

“My name is Pembroke Sharon.”

In a moment he was surrounded by the trio, who congratulated him on his escape from death. He requested permission to resume his proper dress, after which he would tell exactly what had occurred during the past night.

His story was similar to the one told by Yerkes, with this difference: the positions were changed. It was Sharon who surprised the other before the opened safe just in the act of stowing in his pocket the package of greenbacks alluded to. It was Sharon who denounced the act, and Yerkes, both angry and frightened to be thus detected, picked up a paper-weight and hurled it at his fellow clerk, striking Sharon on the head, inflicting a ghastly wound, from which he fainted, and knew no more until he awoke on board a vessel near the Navy Yard. He was told that they picked him up in the river.

The Captain and two of his men had been to the theater, and were returning in a boat to the vessel, when a white object floating on the water attracted their attention, and they made for it, and drew the apparently dead man in the boat, and took him on board the vessel, where his wants were at once attended to.

When Yerkes' version of the affair was related to him he laughed derisively, and was on the point of making a remark when familiar footsteps were heard ascending the stairs.

“By heaven! I believe it is August Yerkes!” whispered Sharon, as he hastily entered the closet and drew the door to. He was none too soon, for the next moment Yerkes walked briskly up to where the three gentlemen were standing. Something in their faces told him that something was amiss—something to his disadvantage, too.

“You are probably surprised to see me here again?” remarked he, for want of anything else to say.

“We are, indeed,” said Mr. Purvis, regarding him with an ominous frown.

“You all appear to be anything but pleased to see me?” next remarked the robber and would-be assassin.

“On the contrary, we are very glad to see you,” here spoke Varnoe, with an ambiguous smile.

Glancing at the detective with a skeptical air, Yerkes walked to the closet and opened the door, and the next moment he uttered a fearful shriek and started back with his hair standing on end and his face the color of ashes.

He had seen (as his guilty conscience told him) the ghost of his victim, for Sharon remained standing in the closet perfectly immobile, his eyes fixed reproachfully on the guilty wretch.

The horrid vision was too much for his brain to endure. Yerkes became a raving maniac and behaved so violently that Varnoe was obliged to manacle him hand and foot and again return him to the hospital, from whence he was shortly afterward conveyed to the insane department of the alms house.

Pembroke Sharon was generously recompensed by his employer for his heroic attempt to prevent the robbery, and promoted to a responsible position in the store, which he filled with credit both to himself and his grateful employer.

Yerkes lived a year or so after his confinement, and died a raving maniac, a terrible retribution for his attempt to fasten a crime on an innocent person and thus rob him both of his reputation and life at one fell blow.

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This story was reprinted as
“An Extraordinary Robber” in
The New Bloomfield [PA] Times, April 19, 1881;

as “The Double Crime” in
Saline County Journal [Salina, KS], May 19, 1881;

as “A Detective’s Story” in
The Corvallis [OR] Gazette, May, 27, 1881