

STORIES BY A DETECTIVE

A Whited Sepulchre

“ONE day the confidential clerk belonging to a large firm called upon me, and said that he was deputed, by one of the principals of his house, to consult with me concerning a systematic robbery which had been going on for some time in the concern, and to engage my assistance. I will call this clerk Phillips, the name of the principal shall be Redding. The two other principals were absent, one in the South, the other in Europe. Mr. Phillips told me fully how for a long time different goods had been constantly disappearing, that lately the robberies had been largely increasing, and that now great quantities of the most valuable goods were missing. He calculated the loss that had been experienced, within the space of the last few months only, at eighteen hundred dollars, and it consisted in silks, satins, laces, and goods of that kind. The loss might possibly have been greater since it was quite likely that many things taken had not yet been missed. He told me what Mr. Redding and himself had done to find out the thief, or thieves; and what measures had also been taken to keep a watch upon the premises. He informed me also that the opinion of Mr. Redding about the robberies differed from his own, and that Mr. Redding thought that some of the clerks must be the guilty parties. It seemed as if that was certainly very often the case, since the store was placed at night under the guardianship of a thoroughly trustworthy watch man, whom he himself controlled and was convinced in consequence that he had no dishonest accomplices. He could not, however, share in this opinion of Mr. Redding because the clerks had been there a long time, most of them five years, and the remainder, with the exception of three who had been there but a few months, had been two, three, and four years with the firm. He knew all their circumstances and from this knowledge he was loath to believe they were the thieves. Mr. Redding, however, adhered to his view that some of the clerks must be the thieves, and he wanted the question settled and cleared up.

I ask Mr. Phillips how many clerks there were in the establishment, and he said that, not including himself, there were thirty-seven.

“Thirty-seven?” I asked ;—“And do you mean to say that there is not one of these thirty-seven whom you consider to be more or less innocent or guilty than any of the rest.”

“I do.”

“Now we have considerable task before us which will not only take time and prove our patience, but also cost your house a considerable sum of money. We might perhaps, stumble upon the thief at once, but if we can prove nothing against him, we must convince ourselves that all the rest are innocent, and that may cost you more than the robberies even, till accident perchance in time leads to the discovery of the thief.

“I have discussed this point with Mr. Redding too,” replied Mr. Phillips, “but he insists that we must find out the thief, cost what it may, and once for all put an end to the plunder; for the house

cannot long stand against such constant and continuous losses. He has made up his mind to probe the thing to the bottom, and when he once takes a resolve into his head, he does not readily give it up again.”

In reply to inquiries I drew from Mr. Phillips that, although many of the goods were of a particular kind, it would not be easy to identify them if the private mark of the house were removed: “And any thief,” he continued, “who steals goods in bulk will be prudent enough to leave nothing on them by which they can be identified, and himself convicted. He would be sure to destroy our marks.”

We now agreed that on the next day I was to make a visit to the store, as a merchant from Buffalo, desirous of making some purchases, so that I might take a look at the place and the several clerks. After Mr. Phillips had left I thought the matter over well, but could not see the solution to the puzzle. My colleague, however, to whom I spoke about the business—for in an affair of this kind it is necessary to have more than one concerned—thought that some of the clerks must be the thieves and that it would be necessary to set a watch for a couple of nights in order to find out the right people. But it seemed to me that the discovery of the thief in this case would be by no means such an easy matter.

On another day I visited Mr. Redding. I had arranged with Mr. Phillips that in the presence of the other clerks he should not know me, at any rate not until Mr. Redding should have introduced me to him. As I was not personally known to Mr. Redding, I introduced myself to him by means of a letter written for the occasion. He received me with all the attention which business people usually show towards good customers, and took me through the entire establishment. In this way I was able to see the face of every one of the clerks, and as I very much wished not to create any suspicion in any of the people, we took our time. At last I thought to myself; “Either my judgment and knowledge of physiognomy have gone, or else the clerks in this place are the most honest set of men in the world.”

Presently Mr. Redding called his confidential clerk, Mr. Phillips, into his office and we talked the matter over together. At Mr. Redding’s request, Mr. Phillips laid before me a list of the goods that had been missed so far as could be made out, and it was indeed a formidable catalogue; but there was nothing in it which would be easily recognized, nothing to which there were not goods exactly similar in other shops. Lastly I expressed a wish to see some silks belonging to the same parcel as those which had been stolen, and having a tolerable good eye for form and color, my attention was at once attracted by a piece of goods such as I had never seen before, and which had such a remarkable pattern that it was immediately impressed upon my mind. But other stores also kept this same kind of goods and so, even if I should find anything like them in either of the retail shops, or at pawnbrokers, still I should not be in a position to identify them as having been stolen from Mr. Redding’s. At the same time I thought that possibly this piece of silk might be the key with which to lay open the secret of the robberies.

I now entertained no longer any doubt that the thefts must be perpetrated by one or other of the

clerks, and I determined to watch them all. For this purpose I deputed some of my people, while I undertook the supervision of a few, to look after them when they left business and so to find out whether any of them frequented gaming houses, brothels, or other houses of ill-repute. Many evenings passed away but without any result. One of the clerks, who lived in Brooklyn, came over to the city one Sunday evening and went to a house of assignation. That certainly threw a faint shadow upon his character, but it gave us no hold upon which we could rest for considering him as the thief before all the other clerks. Two other clerks, older than he, had also taken some acquaintances who had come from the country "to see the lions," to places which more solid people do not usually care to visit. But this should even less be laid to the charge of the clerks as an evil, for in many houses it is customary even in accordance with the wish of the principals that the assistants should pay such little attentions to acquaintances from the country.

Thus then I had so far taken a great deal of trouble without arriving at any result. Almost every day I held consultation with Mr. Redding and Mr. Phillips; and each day I liked the latter better for he showed the greatest zeal in the interest of his principal, and was untiring in his endeavors to assist me in my inquiries. Many times Mr. Redding was on the point of giving up, but it was always Mr. Phillips who encouraged him to persevere, because he was sure that sooner or later the thief must be discovered, and in his position as chief clerk in the establishment, and as an honest man he felt it his moral duty to press forward towards the discovery of the thief. But the robberies still went on; and whoever believes in ghosts might well think that some invisible hand was engaged in the business. And at last Mr. Redding determined himself to pass the nights for some time in the warehouse, with a watchman and a trustworthy dog, whilst another watchman did duty on the outside. But this, too, led to no discovery, and the most surprising part of the business was that even during that time goods disappeared. At length the continued misfortune, and the danger consequent upon these repeated losses in the business, made Mr. Redding nervous and ill, so that he had to give up these nightly visits to the warehouse.

One day after this Mr. Redding called me to him and told me that as all other measures had failed, he thought that his only safety depended upon his dismissing the whole of his thirty-seven clerks, innocent or guilty, and engaging others in their places; he showed me an advertisement in the "Herald" which he had caused to be inserted for the purpose, and in consequence of which he had a great number of applicants already before him. We discussed the proposition, and whilst I was giving many reasons against such a sudden and sweeping change, Mr. Phillips coincided with me, chiefly on the ground that they could not be more certain of the fidelity of the new, than they were of the old clerks; and that it would be unjust to punish the innocent with the guilty. That was decisive to Mr. Redding, who was a good man, who looked upon, and who treated his assistants as though they were his own children. But Mr. Phillips, who had always been much beloved by the other clerks, would now be much higher esteemed in consequence of the action which he was thus the means of determining. He was in fact a somewhat remarkable man, and so much the soul of the business that it was difficult to see how, if his place were made vacant, it could be refilled. Besides which he was a man irreproachable in his habits, and so impressed with his social and moral duties that he held a prominent position as teacher in a Sunday School. But as the difficulties seemed to be ever increasing, and the whole situation was one of extreme

discomfort to him, he one day expressed his wish to Mr. Redding to leave, although his agreement did not really terminate for two years longer. Mr. Redding would not hear of this; but of course he could not force Mr. Phillips to stay if he would not. However to avoid losing him and being deprived of his services he offered him from the next month an increase of fifty per cent on his salary, if Phillips would give up his old contract, and bind himself to remain five years longer. That gave the matter a new turn, and Phillips full of thanks went on and now worked with redoubted ardor for the discovery of the thief. He even gave up the association of his family circle and did as Mr. Reddings had done for a long time previously, slept in the warehouse. But when a week had passed, and during that time the robberies had still been going on, despair came over him as it did before over Mr. Redding. He gave up all hope of being able to discover the thief and openly spoke of the regret he felt at having signed the new agreement.

So Mr. Redding came back to his former plan of dismissing all his clerks and engaging new ones in their places, and he was on the point of carrying this out when his fellow-partner, who had been in the South, returned. Being informed how matters stood, and not agreeing as to the step proposed by Mr. Redding, he took the business into his own hands, holding each individual clerk responsible for the goods which were specially under his control. This worked well for a few days, but soon the goods began to disappear again, first from this then from that one, and he had to report losses. At this now the clerks protested and the partner felt himself as helpless as Mr. Redding and Mr. Phillips had been before him. It was now quite apparent that if there was any suspicion allowed to rest upon one of the clerks as being guilty of the robberies, it must also be extended to all who were deficient with their goods in the department. So now they returned once more to the idea of making a general change. The partner gave his consent and ten clerks were forthwith dismissed and ten others appointed.

In the mean time I was requested not to relax my exertions. The firm paid me most generously for my past services, chiefly at the instigation of Mr. Phillips, who laid much stress upon the fact that although all efforts to get hold of the thief had thus far been of no avail, they had to thank me in that Mr. Redding and himself had not long since given the matter up in despair.

After so many fruitless efforts, I now became most anxious to effect something decisive, for I did not feel despondent about the affair. For although I had been in error all through, it did not indicate that I should not succeed, although it piqued me to think that I, who had generally been successfully in my exertions, had not been able to find a solution to the present case. Nevertheless I had already experienced many cases where the discovery was delayed even longer than in the present and was made at last—shall I say? by accident.

However, three weeks after the events thus far recorded, the light began to dawn. Concluded next week.

CONCLUDED.

ENGAGED upon a business of rather pressing nature, I one day rode in a Fourth Avenue car to the New Haven Depot at Twenty-seventh Street. Two women got into the car at Eighth Street. They might have been taken for fashionably-dressed *ladies*, if they had not been dirty—an unfailing mark either of low birth or sudden and rapid wealth. The car was full of people with their travelling-bags, going on by the Boston train, and, as no one else stood up, I did so, and gave one of the ladies my place. The feeling of sympathy, or otherwise which sometimes arises, is a curious phenomenon, and I cannot to this day explain to myself how it was; but, before I had even glanced at the dress which this woman wore, it occurred to me that in her I might find the clue to unravel the mystery of the thefts at Mr. Redding's. But so it was. The silk which I had seen at Mr. Redding's, and which struck me at the time as so peculiar in pattern and style, did not recur to me at first. But after a while, when I had noticed somewhat closely the appearance of the lady, I began to puzzle myself with thinking where I had seen a dress like hers before, till at last it occurred to me that it must have been in Mr. Redding's store. Now there was work before me. But the business which I had in hand was of much importance, for I had to go to the New Haven Depot before the departure of the train, to look for a man who was wanted for a burglary committed in New Jersey. It was possible that the ladies also were going by the train; but it was possible, too, that they might alight before we reached Twenty-seventh street, and I must perforce go on. What was to be done? I looked down the rows of passengers in the car, went also on the front platform, but found nobody who seemed likely to answer my purpose. While, however, I was turning it over in my mind, and had in the meanwhile inspected the rear platform, a good-looking black-eyed Italian boy got up on the car with a basket of toys which he wanted to sell. The boy pleased me, and to my question how old he was, he answered "thirteen." And when I asked him whether he would like to earn five dollars that afternoon, his eyes glistened with delight as he replied that he would. I now asked him his name, place of residence, the names of his parents and so on, and noted all down in my pocket-book.

"Now," said I to him, "here is my card. I am a detective, and would like to know where in the city I could find you in the middle of the night. But for a little while you must be a detective too. I will take care of your basket, and you can get it in the morning at my office. Here are two dollars to begin with, and I will give you the other three tomorrow morning. You may bring your father with you if you like. I would like to speak to him; and if you do the errand that I am giving you now very well, it is possible that I may engage you in a place where you will earn a good deal of money."

I had struck the right note and the boy was at my disposal. I now told him in a whisper that he must go on with the car, and watch where the two ladies went whom I pointed out to him, but in such a manner that they could not notice him, and then he was to come back to me. Then I told him he must follow them any distance, and that, in case they separated, he was to go after the taller of the two—the one in the silk dress. If they went into a store or house, he was to wait until they came out, and not to give up following them until he was sure that they would not come out again and that they were at home. He was then to notice the street and the number of the house, so that he would be able to take me there. "Can you manage this properly, so as to not give rise to any suspicion?" I asked him.

The boy's ambition was aroused. "Of course I can," he replied, his eyes beaming with pleasure; "I'll follow her till night, if necessary."

I then wrote my private address on the back of the card which I had given to him, and told him that if he liked he might come and stay through the night at my house. Tears ran down the child's cheeks, for he evidently had never met with any one who had spoken to him as kindly before.

Scarcely had I completed my instructions, when the sound of the bell told us that somebody was going to leave the car at Twenty-second Street. It was the two ladies. That they might not see the boy's splendid eyes—which, if they had seen, they must have noticed—I drew the boy's cap over his face, and then took him on with me to the next street, where I put him off and enjoined him to bring me a good report. I told him he was to spend as much of the money as was necessary in riding, and that what he so spent I would repay him—a promise which seemed very much to increase his self-confidence.

In the evening the boy was duly at my house, and he brought me a complete report. The ladies had gone a long distance; fortunately, however, they had not used any carriages except the street stages and horse cars, so that he had been able to keep them in view the whole day, and finally he had followed the lady in the silk dress to her home.

Considering how the ladies were overdressed, I had been fearful lest the pursuit should lead to a house of prostitution, for as the inmates of such houses are practiced in deception, it was very likely that, if the clothes they wore really were a part of any stolen goods, it would be very difficult to prove it and to follow out the traces thus far obtained. But the ladies lived in a respectable place in Nineteenth Street.

The boy went to his father to tell him what he was doing and to take him the five dollars, and then he returned and passed the night at my house. At a very early hour next morning we were both in Nineteenth Street, where I surveyed the house and took a note of the number, and two hours later, when the shops were open, it was easy enough to go to the grocer's and a druggist's in the neighborhood, and to learn the names and the position of the residents.

At the end of two days I had seen the gentleman who lived in the house, one William Bruce, in whom I recognized an old acquaintance and who was a speculator in Wall Street, leave the place twice in the morning and return twice in the evening. But I had not sufficient facts in hand to take any decided step in the matter, so I went to Mr. Redding to freshen my memory concerning the pattern of the stolen goods; but I did not let him know that I had even the smallest clue. His partner and Mr. Phillips had gone to Cincinnati to make arrangements with a house which owed them a considerable amount of money, and had recently failed. Unfortunately I now wanted the assistance of Mr. Phillips in directing me to the necessary proofs, but learned to my satisfaction that both would be back in a couple of days. In the mean while I received some useful information from Mr. Redding, and the next forenoon saw me busy with the tools as a workman

under the Croton Water Board, which was just then engaged in laying the water pipes and looking after the connections with the houses.

A sprightly Irish girl opened the door when I went to the house and let me in, as soon as I told her what my pretended business was. I said that she must tell the lady that after I had finished in the basement I would go upstairs, as we wanted to examine all the places; upon which she replied that the lady had been on a visit to a friend for a few days, and that Mr. Bruce was out. So I found that I could take my own, and after doing a little joking and flirtation with Sarah—for that was the girl's name—all of which she took very kindly, she let me go over the house from top to bottom and examine it thoroughly. I induced Sarah to show me her mistresses' wardrobe, which, indeed, was splendid, and made me a little envious, when I bethought myself, with what a comparatively poor wardrobe my wife had to be contented. And I found, in the course of this inspection, among a number of silks not yet made up, some from which the private mark of Mr. Redding's house had not yet been removed. These I contrived to get hold of without Sarah knowing it. And with a pair of scissors, which I found in Mrs. Bruce's room, I cut a little piece from the silks, also without Sarah noticing me. But in a closet there were a dozen more dresses, each apparently handsomer than the last, and among them I found the dress with the peculiar pattern which Mrs. Bruce had worn on the day when I saw her in the street car. I now continued my flirtation and bantering with Sarah for a long time, till at last an opportunity offered to enable me to slip into the closet, and to shut myself in long enough to enable me to cut a piece of silk from the broad seam on the inside of the sleeve. Having finished my inspection—still of course retaining the character of a Croton Water man—and having found out all I wanted, I saw that Sarah had been taking all my jesting in earnest, and verily believed that she had discovered a very desirable sweetheart. For, returning to the basement, I found a splendid lunch set out for me, all of which assured me when I left the house that the damsel would not be very likely to say anything to her master about the visit of the "Crofton Water man."

After I had changed my dress, I went to Mr. Redding, took him into his private office and told him my story; cautioning him not to let the faintest whisper leak out, not to mention the least word to anybody, not even to his partner nor his confidential clerk, Mr. Phillips who on the same day was expected back from Cincinnati. I begged him to speak absolutely to nobody until I saw him again, "for," said I, "the thief is one of your old clerks, and Mr. Phillips has so good a heart and will feel so much for the man, that he will be above all astonished, and perhaps unable to control his better judgment, might give the thief an opportunity to abscond."

"Mr. Redding could not very well understand that, but he promised me to do as I wished, for I convinced him that for a secret to be well kept it must be known as little as possible, however trustworthy people may chance to be.

I knew now that I would have to take the fortress by storm, so on the next day I went with my badge of authority, and accompanied by a police officer, to the house in Nineteenth Street and asked for Mrs. Bruce. When she came into the parlor I said to her that I had some business with her husband and I asked her where I could find him? She gave me a card with his address:—

“William Bruce, Dealer in Stocks, &c., 64 Wall Street,” which I took, rose from my seat and walked towards the door, near to my companion, as though I were going away;—when I locked the door. I had remarked that when Mrs. Bruce came in she changed color at the sight of the police uniform, and she now was perfectly pale when I locked the door and said to her:—

“Mrs. Bruce I have come with my friend here as servants of the law to search your house. Your husband is, as you very well know, not that which his card represents. He is a clerk in the house of Mr. Redding, and a thief. The greater part of your splendid wardrobe, which I inspected yesterday, is stolen property, and I am here to seize it, but do not desire to make any demonstration with it before the neighborhood. I do not think that you participate in his guilt. Very probably he has never informed you of his secret, and I do not wish to inflict upon you an annoyance. But the firm must have their goods back again, and as I see that you have much jewelry and many articles of value, I must ask you to hand all over to me, until your husband shall have settled with the firm.

She was speechless with amazement. When she had recovered herself a little, she said that she could not believe that Mr. Bruce was any other than he had always represented himself to be; that she had received letters from his sister, who lived in Pennsylvania; that she had always taken him for an honorable man; and that he was always ready to give where it was required, if, by so doing, he could render any assistance.

The end of it was that during the day many large trunks full of beautiful and valuable goods left the house in Nineteenth Street. Sarah helped to do the packing without any misgiving as to my being the Croton Water man, and her fond sweetheart. When I was about to go away, happening to be alone with her for a moment, I whispered a word into her ear. Astonished and flurried she seized my hand, drew it towards her convulsively, and to my request that she would tell nothing, said: “I’ll hold my tongue.” The truth was she had had many season lovers before.

The trunks were first deposited in a safe place, and then sent on to Mr. Redding. Most of the goods were at once identified as having been stolen from his house, especially a number of silks that were still unmade; also a very valuable shawl of which description only three had been imported; and Mr. Redding knew where the other two had been bought.

Mr. Redding now pressed me to tell him without any further delay the name of the clerk who had committed the robberies, but I did not do that, [preferring] rather to wait till the two gentlemen from Cincinnati had returned; and accordingly I requested him, to send for me as soon as that occurred. At the end of two days he sent for me. Luckily I was at home, and went to him immediately. I found his partner and Mr. Phillips there too, they having returned, within an hour only, from Cincinnati; having settled their business there satisfactorily, they were being very cordially received by Mr. Redding.

“Now, Mr. Redding,” I began, “I think we have advanced so far that I can tell you all my story.”

“One moment,” he said to me, and turning to his partner and to Mr. Phillips, he continued: “I have also some good news to tell you. Our friend here has at last been successful. He has discovered the thief, and we have got some of the goods back again.” Then turning to me again, he said: “Now tell us all about it, for I have not yet had the least idea who the thief is.”

The partner and Mr. Phillips looked at each other in astonishment and called out together: “Yes, yes, let us hear it all.”

“But first,” said Mr. Phillips, “let us know the name of the rascal, if you have it, and then you can go on with the rest of the story.”

“Very well, Mr. [Phillips],” I replied, “His name is William Bruce, Dealer in Stocks &c., 64 Wall Street, so his card says.”

Mr. Redding and his partner looked at each other in bewilderment (because I had told Mr. Redding that it was one of their old clerks). Mr. Phillips also looked very much surprised, but from altogether a different reason. But their bewilderment increased yet more when I turned specially to him, and continued: “But Mr. Bruce has an *alias*, another name, and that is—Charles Phillips; and you, sir, are the rascal to discover, whom you worked so strenuously with me.”

Phillips was deadly pale. He wanted to speak, but his voice forsook him.

“Mr. Phillips,” I now continued, “the house in Nineteenth Street has given up its treasures. They are in my keeping, together with the diamonds, pearls, watches, and all the other valuables which were in the possession of your mistress; who, as your “wife,” consented to hand them over to me. You, too, are now my prisoner, without the remotest probability of being able to escape the fullest penalty of the law. And now I wish Mrs. Bruce to be sent for. She, I think, is not a party to this crime, and will be surprised to see again her returned husband in the person of Mr. Charles Phillips, the, for many years past, confidential clerk of this house.”

Phillips instantly stretched out his hands to me in a most pathetic manner, and besought me not to send for Mrs. Bruce, adding “It serves me right, I am ready to confess all.”—And then he began to cry bitterly.

It is hardly possible to describe the astonishment of Mr. Redding and his partner. Never in my life have I seen such a sudden change in any man as there was in Mr. Redding.

He, who for several weeks past had been quite broken down, stood in full vigor and strength, firm and decided. He spoke very few words, but these were to the point. There was something sublime in his scorn for Phillips.

“You hypocritical scoundrel!” he said, “you detestable whited sepulchre! You most miserable wretch, of all who ever betrayed the confidence reposed in them! I am more annoyed to think

that I have allowed myself to be deceived by your canting hypocrisy, than I am at all the loss and anxiety you have inflicted upon me. But, as it is in the Bible you are so fond of quoting “With the measure that you measure withal shall it be meted to you.” So it shall be. You thief! You libertine! You hypocritical Sunday School teacher!”

Phillips was silent for a moment; and, as I considered the woman to be innocent of his crimes, I was anxious to know what he would say in reply to my previous remark; but hardened sinner as he was, he still had enough manliness left in him to take all the guilt upon himself. He replied:

“Oh! no, she knows nothing of my offence. She has not misled me, and I have been brought to the position of a criminal only by my wicked affection for her. I am indeed what Mr. Redding called me, a whited sepulchre, and unworthy to have entered even any church. But, if you insist upon it, I have now to suffer the penalty which the law imposes; although I wish that for the sake of my wife and children they would release me, and so enable me to go and begin a new life far away from New York.”

After the lapse of a couple of days Mr. Redding’s disposition had softened, and he decided to let Phillips go, on condition, never again to return to New York. And thus the thief, the confidential clerk of the establishment, who so long had betrayed the confidence of his principal in the most infamous manner, escaped the punishment he so justly merited.

Now how had Phillips managed to carry on these depredations so long without detection! He was a cunning, crafty fellow. He packed up such goods as he wanted with his own hands, and then sent them out with other things by the carrier. One of the porters remembered that he had often had packages for Mr. or Mrs. Bruce put into his charge. Then Phillips addressed the packages himself to different hotels, to be left “till called for,” as though intended for some stranger staying there, and so he sent them away. Then he used to go round and take them himself from the various offices, a matter in which of course he had no difficulty, since knowing the contents of the parcels, he could always identify them.”

“A wolf in sheep’s clothing” is the title appended to this case by Mr. McWalters’ in the collection of experiences which under the general head of “Knots united” is to be found in his notes; and truly an admirably suitable title it is. But how many more such wolves in sheep’s clothing are there not even now sneaking about New York!

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