

STORIES BY A DETECTIVE

The Latimer Robbery

“ONE day, some years ago, Mr. Latimer called upon me. He was a wealthy man, a land owner, engaged in several kinds of business and among others in the sale of real-estate. He said that on the previous night the sum of \$7,255 had been stolen from a room adjoining his bedroom. He had left it there in the evening, because it had been too late to deposit it at the bank. I asked him where, from whom, and in what sums the money had been received, and I ascertained from him that he had been collecting house rents, a part he had taken for a load of pressed hay sold in Jersey City, and another sum had come to him from the country. At my request he gave me a specification of each of the separate payments, also the names of the parties who had paid them, and the considerations. I also asked him whether any other persons were present when he received the money. In reply to this question he told me when he took the money for the hay several persons were standing by, some were customers, others working people, a few well, but rather flashily dressed young men. Latimer had taken out his pocket-book in which there was already a considerable sum of money, and opened it to put in the amount just received. He had put this back into an inner pocket of his waistcoat, and as soon as he reached home, he put it away in the safe. After this interview Mr. Latimer left me and I promised to visit him another day at his house, and take a look at the surroundings.

On the same evening my duty took me into several gambling houses, and in one of them I fell in with a young man who had plenty of money, from whose appearance I could not divert my mind of the idea that this money was part of that which had been stolen from Latimer. But, unfortunately, I did not yet know the denominations of the notes belonging to the stolen money, otherwise I would have looked into the matter a little closer, and have arrested the man forthwith if my suspicion had been confirmed.

On the next morning I called on Mr. Latimer. I asked him about the members of his family and his servants. His children were not in New York, the boys being away at college and the girls at boarding-school. He, his wife, and their servants were the only persons residing in the house; and even his wife—as he remarked—had, as it happened, not been aware that he had the money, or that it was deposited in the safe. I examined the servants, in whose honesty, by the way, Mr. Latimer said he had the utmost confidence. None of these could give any information. Only one had heard on that night a slight noise; the others had slept well and heard nothing. Since the safe stood in a room adjoining their bed-room, Latimer and his wife must also have slept very sound that night, otherwise they must have heard something. I saw at once that a very skillful thief must have been at work here, and again I could not help thinking of the young man whom I had seen the evening before spending so much money, and who, it certainly seemed to me, must be the man who had committed the robbery. But there was one question I could not answer to myself

satisfactorily. How was the thief able to open the safe? He must have been acquainted with the interior of the house and the safe.

Perhaps he had a key for it, or that he had in his possession several safe-keys, of which one might have opened the lock. If otherwise he must have used Mr. Latimer's key (a very small one) Mr. Latimer had it in his vest pocket, and his clothes, during the night, lay upon a chair at the head of the bed. He had laid them there at night and he found them there in the morning. He was also quite certain that he had locked the safe after placing the pocket-book inside. I asked him to let me see inside the safe, and show me the place where he had laid the money. He opened the safe. The lock was a simple one and by no means a sufficient protection against thieves. For, although the keyhole was very small, so that the lock could not well have been burst by powder, yet the construction of the lock was such that it could not have presented any difficulty to a dexterous thief. But to open it by force, without making any noise, would not have been possible. Latimer had placed the money in one of the little drawers inside the safe and had turned the key of the drawer, but left it in its place. But the drawer fastened very closely and although we opened it at least a dozen times, we found it impossible to do it without making considerable noise. In fact upon that night Latimer and his wife must have slept unusually sound.

After I had examined everything thoroughly, and questioned and cross-questioned Mr. Latimer, we were about closing the safe again, when he took out some papers that lay disarranged on the bottom of the safe, for the purpose of setting them straight. While doing this a lottery ticket, which had been lying on the papers, fell to the floor. He picked it up, looked at it in astonishment, and handed it to me with the words:

"This is strange, you will think at last that I gamble in lotteries, but I don't know how the ticket got in here."

"Has anybody besides you got a key to the safe?" I asked him in reply.

Upon which he told me that "of course his wife had a key." "Oh! then," said I, "she may have placed the ticket there." But he emphatically denied this, saying that his wife was a bitter enemy to lotteries, and that if she had found the ticket there, she might well have thought that he gambled.

"No," he continued, "the ticket does not belong to her, but perhaps one of the servants may have given it to her to take care of, for it is possible that they may speculate in lotteries."

So Mrs. Latimer was called in and questioned. She knew nothing of the ticket, and answered very angrily that if any of her servants came to ask her to take care of such things, she would tear it up first, for no servant of hers should gamble in lotteries.

Now then, how did the ticket get into the safe? It was for a lottery which was to be drawn in Baltimore at the firm of Henry Colton & Co., who were at that time agents for lotteries in

Maryland, and it bore the number 1710. It appeared from the ticket, which was new, that the drawing was soon to take place. But still there was a mystery, and again I asked myself how did it come into the safe? Mr. and Mrs. Latimer clearly knew nothing about it, and I was quite certain that it had not been in the safe long. At last I came to the conclusion that, as the drawer moved stiffly, the thief, in opening it, had been obliged to use some force, and that, in leaning over, the ticket had fallen out of his waistcoat into the safe, where we had found it. But still the question remained unanswered. How had the safe been opened? And this I could not satisfactorily answer. Perhaps it had been done with a false key. But as the keys of all these safes are different, how could the thief have procured one that just opened this lock.

After we had finished this investigation, Mr. Latimer shut the door of the safe, turned the knob and took out the key. I do not know what exactly caused me to do so, but I asked him. "Have you locked it?" "Yes," he answered, "with this safe you have only to close the door firmly to fasten it," and with these words he took hold of the knob and pulled it to show me the arrangement, when—the door opened! Latimer stood stupefied; and I must confess that I was scarcely less astonished. It was now evident that on the night when the robbery took place, the thief had found the safe open, just as it was now. We now examined the lock more closely and found that the catch did not come out far enough to close the safe securely. There was in fact something out of order with the lock which Mr. Latimer had not before remarked.

But I now had the lottery ticket, and I told Mr. Latimer that this must now be made the means of possibly of detecting the thief. I requested him to go to all those people who had made him any payments on the day in question, and to ask them if they could remember the amounts of the various notes and the banks to which they belonged. The answer he brought me to these inquiries gave me some information, and I then explained to Mr. Latimer my plan of operations.

He authorized me, in case I should consider it expedient, to offer a reward of five hundred or a thousand dollars for the discovery of the thief, or double the amount for the detection of the thief and the recovery of the stolen property.

My first idea now was to go to Baltimore. But I felt convinced that even if the ticket were genuine it would not give me any information as to who had bought it. Possibly I could get that information from New York agents, but I dare not go there, because they may be an acquaintance of the man who had bought ticket No. 1710, and in that case the thief hearing of my inquiries would come to the conjecture that he had lost the ticket at Latimer's house. I gave up the thoughts of going to the office, and at first did not know very clearly what I should do. Presently, however, a plan suggested itself to me. If the ticket wins, I thought to myself—and the winning numbers must be published immediately after the drawing—then I will offer to the Baltimore agent the promised reward of \$500 or \$1,000 to find out the thief; but if it does not win, I must take into my confidence the New York agents who sold the ticket, that he may write to the purchaser of it, to say that it had won and that he could have the money. So being decided as to what under either circumstances I would do, I determined to remain in Baltimore during the two days preceding the drawing.

Luckily No. 1710 won; the prize, too, was not less than three thousand dollars. I now went to the agent, told him how the matter stood, offered him the promised \$500 and half the amount of the prize, and he expressed his willingness to help me discover the thief. Naturally, too, the New York agent, who had sold the ticket, interested himself about the payment of the prize; for that so large an amount had been won by a ticket procured from him, was a matter that had to be put before the public. But where was the ticket? The agent had thought the purchaser of it would present himself without delay, but he did not come. He wrote to him and told him of his good fortune; upon this the man called, but with the complaint that he had lost the ticket; whereupon the agent, who did not want to lose his commission, wrote to the office in Baltimore, requesting that the money be paid only through him. It was now arranged that the purchaser of the ticket should make an affidavit in due legal form that he had bought ticket No. 1710, that he had not surrendered it to anybody, but had really lost it. And—as a pretended precaution, lest possibly any one who may have found the ticket should present it for payment—I further determined that it would be better for the actual purchaser of the ticket to say in the affidavit, whether, as is often the custom, he had put any private mark on the ticket. I wanted this in order to bring the recollection of the thief to the point, and it facilitated me in getting from him the declaration that he had not marked the ticket, but that he well remembered to have so doubled the paper up together so that there were two breaks in the paper across the figures 7 and 1. That was just what I wanted, because it identified him as the true purchaser. He swore that he had not parted from the ticket to anybody, that he had upon such and such a day (and he named the day upon which the robbery at Mr. Latimer's had taken place) lost it, as he thought, while on his way from Broadway and Fulton Street, (where at the time was a gaming house,) to Union Square.

He had signed the affidavit, but how was I to know if that was his real name. At the same time the N. Y. agent also made an affidavit that he had sold the ticket to this man, whom he again recognized. We now agreed to arrange matters thus:—that if the ticket were not presented for payment by anybody else within a month, then the amount should be paid over to the signer of the affidavit; but that if anybody else should put in an appearance in the meantime, he should be duly informed and given an opportunity to defend his claim. These arrangements being safely made in Baltimore, and the New York agent made acquainted with them, I returned to New York to find out, if possible, who this Charles F. Worden was, who had signed the affidavit. The Baltimore agent also came to New York and worked ably in the business, since the agent had written him a description of Worden. He succeeded in having a long interview with Worden in the presence of his New York colleague, and when he wrote to me a description of the latter, I recognized at once, and without any doubt, the young man whom I had seen in the gaming house on the evening I first mentioned and whom I then suspected of being the thief. The general description of his person was amply sufficient, but he had besides a remarkable mark, a bare spot on the left side of his head, which he was in the habit of trying to conceal with his hair.

Now I was certain of success, but still I felt assured, that the real name of the man was not “Worden.” It is sufficient, however, to remark that in two days I found out all I wanted to know. Even his antecedents were fully known to me. He belonged to a good family and was not without

abilities, but his love of pleasure and dissipation had made him a grief to his relations and friends. His father, who, although not a rich man, was a well-to-do merchant, had cast him off more than a year before. As he could find no other occupation, he went as clerk to a grocer, who, besides his legitimate business, had a drinking-saloon in a back room. Here Worden made the acquaintance of a "Bauker" from down town, who lived near the grocery, and soon was very intimate with him. It occurred to him, however, to find out the kind of banker the man was, and he discovered that he was the banker of a gambling hell at the corner of Broadway and Fulton Streets, but was regarded in the neighborhood where he lived—for who in New York knows his neighbors?—as an active and wealthy merchant.

This acquaintance was the occasion of the young man beginning to neglect his duty, and to waste time in wandering about when he had to go out, till at length the grocer dismissed him. How after that he managed to live, and dress himself so well, was a puzzle to his earlier acquaintances. One day, after he had gambled away his last dollar, he stole some money from another man with whom he was living in a boarding-house. Suspicion did not rest upon him, and the consequence was that he was led further on along the road to crime.

Although confident now of securing my man, I had not got him; moreover, I must confer with the Baltimore agent. Upon him much depended. I had the ticket, and the young man had sworn that it belonged to him; but he would certainly declare that he had lost it, and that the thief must have found it, if I laid my hands upon him yet. So I took Mr. Latimer with me, disguised, to the gaming house which the young man frequented, and there he recognized him, without any doubt, as one of the people standing near when he received the money for the hay in Jersey City. But even this did not suffice to secure the conviction of the thief, since we were not in a position to say that the stolen property, or any part of it, was in his possession. Yet I hoped that this would be possible, for I saw that now he did not play recklessly, as formerly, but with caution, like a man who puts by what he wins. I thought that now that the robbery had given him a fine capital in hand, he felt that he had only to play and win more, and that then with the proceeds of his lottery ticket he could begin business. And, that I calculated rightly, the later acquaintance I made with the young man assured me.

As stated before, Mr. Latimer had, by the questions he had put to the people who had paid him money, provided an important fact towards the conviction of the thief. I went to Baltimore and told the chief agent, that I thought the time had come to bring the affair to a crisis. We then decided on our plans.

The New York agent was informed that the ticket had been presented at the chief office, and a request made for the payment of the prize, that in consequence he must now come to Baltimore with "Worden" to see the holder of the ticket, and that the latter would call again in three days. The chief agent was much delighted; for I had promised him, that if the affair turned out well, and we succeeded in recovering a good share of the money, he should have the whole of the lottery winnings, provided he would renounce his claim to the \$500 reward.

He was for charging the young man with the theft at Mr. Latimer's as soon as we got him into the private office, telling him that we knew all about his presence when the money was paid in Jersey City, and the circumstances of his identification of the ticket in the affidavit, thinking thereby to frighten him, and to drive him into an immediate confession.

I, however, felt that it might not be so easy to bring him to a confession, and that we had better let things take their course and see what the result would be.

I had not yet told the agent what information Mr. Latimer had given me as to the denominations of the notes, but I arranged with him that, when the time came for the payment of the money, he should give the young man a draft upon New York to the amount of \$3,500 in payment; so that Worden should give him \$500 in exchange.

The New York agent and Worden came on and we had a private conference, in which I assumed the position of legal assistant to the Baltimore agent. The New York agent was also present. I put several questions to the young man with reference to the ticket, heard the statement of the New York agent, and in the presence of both gave it as my opinion that the Baltimore agent should pay the young man, but that he had better first send for the holder of the ticket with instructions to bring it along with him. The New York agent was not requested, "as there was no one at hand who could be depended upon," to take a note over to a man who lived some distance from the lottery office, who would then send on to the person who held the ticket. The Baltimore agent had, as he previously told this man that he should, written to him that morning, instructing him what to do. The man kept a little shop; he received the New York agent very politely and requested him to take a seat in the office, remarking, that he would send his assistant to the gentleman and give him the letter. I had requested the New York agent to bring the gentleman with him and to wait a couple of hours if necessary.

"All right. All right. You be sure I shall make it all right," said the New Yorker, and with that he started on his journey.

We offered the young man the newspapers to read, and spoke of things generally by way of conversation. The Baltimore agent went back to his desk in the next office. At the end of about half an hour I said:—"It is a nuisance that that man delays so long." "I must go to my office. I will be back presently," I observed to the agent as I opened the door of his room. "When shall I come?" "Oh! pray stop," answered the agent, "or at any rate come back directly," and at the same time he gave me a wink, which of course was not seen by the young man. I went and came back in a quarter of an hour with the remark:—Look, the matter assumes a new shape." I found the gentleman who had the ticket in my office waiting to speak to me about something. He said he knew that I was your legal advisor and would also counsel him as to what was best to be done. And when I told him I was certain that the ticket was the property of this young man, he answered that he would not interfere in the affair any further, and then gave me the ticket.—"See, here it is. Do you remember it?" said I to Worden. He jumped up, looked at it, and cried out delighted "Yes, that's it, do you not remember that I described in my affidavit how I had

broken the ticket by doubling it together?" Now Mr. Worden, I answered, I have no doubt that the ticket belongs to you, and of course the agent will pay you the money. "Certainly," answered the agent, "as you are here, it can be done at once. I will make up the account and be back directly with the money." He closed the door after him, and as it was already getting late, he told his people in the office that they might go home. And they left.

After a short time he returned and remarked to Worden that he had not \$3,000 in cash, but that he could give him a draft, payable at sight, on a New York bank for \$3,500, if he could give him the \$500 change. Worden willingly agreed, and the agent went now to his desk, wrote out the draft and gave it to Worden, who laid it on the table, and opening his travelling bag (in which, as I saw, there was plenty of money), took out five one-hundred dollar notes, which he handed to the agent. The latter went back again into his private office and I followed him. He showed me the notes, and—now the thief was in our hands. Four of the notes had upon the backs the name of one of the people—a Mr. Bordell, from whom Latimer had received a part of the money. They were notes of the Bank of America, which the man, who paid them to Latimer, had taken from the bank only an hour before; and his custom always was, in that case, to put his name on the back of the notes. I then requested the agent to ask Worden whether he could not give him two fifty or five twenty dollar bills for one of a hundred; and I gave him one of the notes that was the notes that was not written on the back for that purpose. He did so, and I followed him; and the moment Worden took his travelling bag into his hand, and was going to open it, I snatched it out of his hand, saying:

"No nonsense, you rascal! You are under arrest. You are the scoundrel who robbed Mr. Latimer's safe. I have followed you up step by step, but you don't escape now. And I seized him by the throat.

He tried to get free from my grasp, but I held him tightly, waited a few moments till he recovered from the first shock, then sat him on a chair, and explained to him in a few words how he had been taken. In the mean time the agent looked through the travelling bag, counted the money that was in it and found another hundred dollar note with the name of Mr. Bordell upon it. Worden saw that he could not escape. We found that he had still three thousand dollars by him, and he begged to be allowed to go back to New York, where he had the remainder, within six or eight hundred dollars that he had paid away, but which he thought he could procure in the city. He said he was willing to give up all if we would not prosecute him. He wished to reform. The certain prospect of a journey to prison had mollified him. I was now about to handcuff him, but he besought me not to bring this disgrace upon his father, and promised that he would go with me willingly. And as the agent declared that he was not yet ready to accompany us, and to divide with me the care of watching him, I consented. The agent arranged his business for a short absence, wrote to the New York agent that he was suddenly called to New York but would see him there another day, and so we set out with our prisoner to the nearest station.

The young man kept his word. Not only did he give up all the money which he still had left from the robbery, but he borrowed from a friend, whom we called upon together, the sum of \$710

which was required to make up the amount. He also gave the Baltimore agent the ticket and then I let him go to his father's house. Nor am I sorry that I did so, for he truly reformed, and is now living—a merchant in a large city in the West. His real name I have never made known to anybody, not even to Mr. Latimer. He had crept quietly into the house at dusk with the intention of opening the safe with a key which he had provided, but which he found to be unnecessary when the safe opened upon turning the knob.

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