

The Price of Two Lives

A bag, containing ten thousand dollars in gold, was stolen from the counter of a bank in New Orleans in open daylight in the year 1868.

A gentleman brought it there for deposit and as he approached the counter a friend accosted him, and they entered into conversation, he, the meanwhile, placing the bag on the counter.

The conversation lasted half an hour, and his friend prepared to leave the bank. The gentleman turned to the place where he had deposited his money—it was no longer there.

His friend heard his exclamation of surprise, as he had reached the door, and at once rejoined the gentleman, and asked:

“What is the matter, Mr. Ferguson?”

“Some one had stolen my money,” was the reply.

Of course there was a great stir about the matter, and numerous questions were asked, and, finally, one of the clerks remembered seeing a seedy looking fellow with a black traveling bag in his hand, whom one of the men employed in the bank had ordered out of the place half an hour before, but the clerk could not say this fellow had stolen the money.

To [indecipherable text] this man, the suspected thief; a detective was employed to work up the case, and the officer sought for the man diligently for two days, without getting on his track.

On the third day, however, he learned from a man that a man answering the description was seen to enter a small cabin occupied by a lone man who followed hunting for a living; said cabin was located some four miles from the city. The hunter’s name was Manton Newman.—When Mr. Darrah, the detective, called on him and questioned him, he admitted that such a man had stopped and represented himself as a geologist; his bag contained specimens of rock which he had gathered in the vicinity. The man slept in his cabin, he said, but got up some time during the night or early in the morning while the hunter slept, and went away, for at daylight he was no longer there.

The detective covertly watched the speaker’s face while he spoke, and thought the man sincere in what he said.

Mr. Darrah did not remain long after this statement had been given; he resolved to look further for this “geologist,” whom he suspected to be the man he was after.

All that afternoon he traversed the vicinity on all the roads leading from the hunter’s cabin, but met with no one else who had seen the man with the traveling bag.

He could not have gone any distance without being seen by some one, yet no one appeared to have seen such a person. This fact led the detective to thinking. He mentally went over the whole ground, and when done he shook his head in very perplexity.

But next morning he had fixed upon a plan he meant to pursue; he retraced his steps to the vicinity of Newman's cabin in the guise of a middle aged gentleman, and cautiously inquired into the character of Manton Newman; he heard nothing to his discredit; the hunter was regarded as a quiet, inoffensive man, "one who minded his own business and let folks mind theirs if they were so inclined."

Notwithstanding all this, Darrah decided to watch the movements of Newman. To do so without exciting the hunter's suspicion he pretended to be a botanist, and lingered about the vicinity of Newman's cabin, looking for botanical specimens, ostensibly, but in reality he kept a strict watch on the hunter's movements.

Toward four o'clock Newman closed his cabin and started down the road leading to Gentilly, a small town some five miles from the city; he halted at the later place and took a seat in the station of the New Orleans and Mobile railroad, apparently awaiting the train, then nearly due.

The detective made a material change in his disguise, and also took a seat in the waiting room of the station.

When the train arrived, Darrah heard Newman ask for a ticket to Mississippi City, seventy one miles from New Orleans and about the same distance from Mobile, Ala. The detective also purchased a ticket for that city, and seated himself not far from Newman in the car.

At Mississippi City Newman took lodging at a hotel, and became the observed of all observers by his liberality. He would call up every one in the bar room to take a drink with him, and paid *in gold* for all he ordered.

The detective now became firmly impressed that Newman was in collusion with the bank robber, and after receiving his share of the booty provided the robber with a change of garments or a disguise and thus enabled him to leave unobserved.

This was the only theory Darrah could hit upon to account for the singular disappearance of the "man with the traveling bag."

Another circumstance added to Darrah's suspicions: Newman registered by the name of John Forrester on the hotel register.

The detective contrived to form Newman's acquaintance that night, and made a favorable impression on him before they retired.

“Are you going farther East?” he asked.

“To Mobile,” Newman replied.

“Why, so am I!” exclaimed Darrah, in feigned delight, “so we will have each other’s company not only on the journey but at Mobile, likewise, where I shall introduce you to some of my friends.”

“I’m your man, old boy,” rejoined the hunter, who felt the effects of the liquor he had imbibed, and let his tongue run pretty freely, quite in contrast with his quiet habits when at home.

He remained in Mississippi City until the following afternoon, then took the 8:20 P.M. train and reached mobile at 11 P.M., where he and Darrah roomed together at the Alabama House.

The detective’s object was to ascertain what amount of money Newman had with him. If he found but a hundred or two he believed he would return to his cabin after spending what he brought away. But should he find say three or four thousand on his person, he would take him into custody as the confederate of the robber.

The detective had provided himself with a phial of chloroform, and when Newman was in a sound slumber he applied the subtle drug to his nostrils rendering him completely powerless for the time. The detective then carefully “went through” the sleeper’s clothes (he had no baggage), and all his possessions amounted to a fraction over eighty dollars, principally in gold eagles and half eagles. Next morning after breakfast, the detective left the hotel, changed his disguise, and returned. Again he crept into Newman’s favor by representing himself as a citizen from New Orleans, and that he would shortly return home.

“So am I, after I have ‘fought the tiger’ a bit,” said Newman, with a laugh.

That night he did ‘fight the tiger,’ and got worsted! He came back to the hotel ‘completely cleaned out,’ as he expressed it, reserving only sufficient to take him back to New Orleans.

Next day they left Mobile on their return trip by the 3:30 P.M. train and arrived at New Orleans at 9:14.

The detective had telegraphed to a “follower” he sometimes employed to meet him at the station, and saw him the moment he and Newman alighted from the cars. He handed this man a note, in which he had written the instructions he was to follow, and told him to read it at once.

The man did so and immediately followed Newman to his cabin after he and the detective separated.

Darrah, after parting with the hunter, kept on his course until the latter had disappeared in the darkness; then he retraced his steps; and keeping out of sight, followed Newman to his cabin, and when he entered the door the detective was joined by his 'satellite,' who said:

"He kept straight on after he left you."

"So now you try and find a crevice through which you can watch his movements from the rear, while I do the same in the front. Lose not the slightest movement of his," he joined, "for it is essential to my success to note everything he does between now and morning."

The two watchers now separated, and the search for an opening in the structure began.

Molier was not long in discovering a knot hole some six feet from the ground through which he could see the entire interior of the cabin. Newman had lighted a lamp, and when the watcher first gained a sight of him in the cabin he saw the occupant lying on a rude couch and smiling complacently. He lay thus for half an hour, puffing vigorously at his pipe; then he arose and stretched himself, after which he opened a closet, kneeled down on the floor and removed the flooring of said closet, laying the boards on the floor outside. Just at this moment the detective also discovered a crevice in the weather-boarding and watched Newman's proceedings with lively interest.

The man reached his arm into a deep opening in the closet and drew out the leather bag of gold, and gave a low chuckle as he arose to his feet.

Judging by the exertion in lifting out the bag, Darrah believed that it contained all the coin stolen from Mr. Ferguson, in which case, the question presented itself: What became of the robber; he who purloined the gold at the bank?

Newman smiled cunningly as he gently deposited the bag on the table, then sat down and thoughtfully gazed on it for fully ten minutes. He did not mutter his thoughts, but Darrah judged they were not of a pleasant nature, for the smile vanished from the man's face and frowns succeeded it. He was evidently dwelling on recollections of the past, and they were not very agreeable by any means. Presently he dove his hand into the bag and drew out a handful of coins, which he thoughtfully dropped into his pocket, then tied up the bag again and returned it to its hiding place.

He now seated himself once more at the table, and drew the coins out of his pocket and softly laid them on the table, side by side, and gazed on the glittering pieces for a few minutes in silence, his face wearing a thoughtful expression the while, then, as if actuated by a sudden impulse, he gathered up the money and replaced it in his pocket, shook up his couch of skins, blew out the light and probably retired for the night.

Darrah quietly moved away from the post of observation, and was presently rejoined by Molier. They silently left the spot, and, when they reached the road leading to the city they compared notes—both had seen all that had transpired within.

“We have him now as a confederate in the robbery,” Molier remarked.

“As a *confederate*?” quietly queried the detective.

“Yes,” rejoined the other, confidently, “for that bag is evidently the one stolen from the bank.”

“Yes, and contains all, or nearly all the gold then stolen,” was the significant response.

“Well, doesn’t that prove him a confederate?”

“No!” replied Darrah, “it proves quite a different thing, according to my interpretation. The man with the traveling bag—the presumed thief—was a much shorter person than this Newman, and cannot now be found; though he was traced to the cabin, he was not seen to leave it again.”

“And the fact that *all* the plunder is in Newman’s possession—what does that imply?”

“That the robber *de facto* did not dare carry it about him, as he left it with Newman, who, by accepting the trust has made himself a confederate—a robber after the fact,” was Molier’s response.

“Molier, my dear fellow, you are not a bad follower, or I would not employ you,” Darrah replied with a laugh, “but you must display a little more ability, if you would ever aspire to be a ‘leader.’ There is no accomplice in this case. The man who took the money did so on the impulse of the moment; he saw the bag on the counter, apparently unguarded, and he yielded to the temptation to purloin it; then, after leaving the bank, he first saw the enormity of his crime, and strove to avert suspicion from himself by hiding.”

“Newman’s lone cabin, he thought, offered such a secure retreat that he entered, and, possibly, made a confidant of his host, who, actuated by mercenary motives, and the idea that a robber is as good *under* the ground as *above* it, took his life and appropriated his victim’s plunder.”

“That theory seems plausible, I admit,” said Molier, reflectively, “but if that be the case, how did he dispose of the body?”

“That we shall probably ascertain after Newman is in jail and a thorough search is made,” replied Darrah.

When they reached the city the detective called on the Mayor, stated what he had discovered and what he expected, and his Honor issued a warrant for the arrest of

Newman next morning, and gave the detective instructions to bring the prisoner before him.

Darrah and Molier proceeded to the cabin and stated their errand, after seeing that the accused could not possibly give them the slip. Newman laughed mockingly, and said he was willing to accompany them to the Mayor's office, since he knew nothing of the man with the traveling bag, save what he saw of him for a few brief hours on the night he asked for shelter.

But when brought before the Mayor and Darrah gave his evidence, he glared at the detective like a wild beast at bay. The latter had not yet mentioned the hidden bag of gold in Newman's presence, but the idea that he had been on intimate terms with a detective whose aim was to entrap him was a bitter pill for him to swallow, but one more bitter still was awaiting him.

At the request of his Honor, Darrah then stated that he would have arrested Newman at Mobile and brought him to New Orleans, subject to a requisition from the Governor of Alabama, but by so doing he would not have been able to discover where the bulk of the stolen treasure was secreted.

"Do you know?" asked the prisoner, in a mocking tone.

"I do," was Darrah's quiet rejoinder.

"You—lie!" exclaimed Newman fiercely.

"That will do, prisoner," remarked the Mayor, with a grim smile. "You have committed yourself. It is but natural that you should suppose plunder hidden beneath the floor of a closet was not likely to be found."

The prisoner was thunderstruck at these words, and uttered a savage cry as he sprang to his feet and attempted to fly; but a careful watch was kept to guard [indecipherable text] suppressed and the prisoner secured in such a manner as to prevent him from repeating the attempt. But the glances he gave Darrah were of a fiendish character, and, possibly, had Newman been unshackled, he would have added another victim to his list. The prisoner was committed, pending the search for the unknown's body, and Darrah, accompanied by his Honor and a policeman, went to the cabin and secured the bag of gold, after which a protracted search for the presumed murdered man's body followed.

The space around the cabin was examined most carefully, but no trace of freshly turned ground was discerned until Darrah suggested to examine underneath the floor of the cabin. The floor was accordingly torn up, and traces of recent digging in the earth were distinctly visible. After digging some five feet they came upon a body.

There were no marks of violence discernable—he might have died a natural death, and Newman, finding his dead guest, may have examined the contents of his bag, and his

avarice prompted him to conceal the body in order to appropriate the money to himself. This theory was advanced by the police officer, who, Darrah was aware, had for a long time aspired to a position on the detective staff.

“But, Mr. Parley,” remarked the detective, with a quiet smile, “there are other means of depriving a man of his life than by brutal violence, such as resorting to the pistol, knife or bludgeon. Murderers bring science and chemistry into play, and apply it to their nefarious vocation. It is more than probable that the prisoner caused the man’s death by means of chloroform, or, perhaps, arsenic. That will be ascertained by analysis.”

The detective’s surmise proved correct. The man had been chloroformed.

When the prisoner learned that his crime was fully exposed, he no longer denied the charge. He said the man—who was a perfect stranger to him—came to his cabin and made a confidante of him. The fellow, it seemed, was afraid the robbery would be traced to him, so he proposed to divide the plunder, and leave the vicinity in disguise, after the excitement had somewhat blown over. But the temptation to possess himself of the whole was not to be resisted, and that bag of gold was the price of two human lives, for Newman was executed four months after his conviction.

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Herald and Mirror [Carlisle, PA], May 23, 1881
The York Gazette [PA], July 5, 1881