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THE BARRIER.

The gate stood wide, and wide the door,
As on a thousand nights before;
And ... the ... through ...
...
As on a thousand nights before;
...
As on a thousand nights before.
...
As on a thousand nights before;
Yet I there through may pass no more,
As on a thousand nights before.

—Edith M. Thomas in Independent.

A FALSE CONFESSION.

I haven't a bit of patience with that class of men who are always shaking their heads in a solemn way and declaring that many an honest man has been sent to state prison on circumstantial evidence. Such instances have been known, of course, but they are very rare, and it is then the fault of the accused. I am about to narrate the particulars of a case which excited widespread interest in 1863, and I ask the reader to follow the situations closely and to see what curious combinations can arise through circumstances.

James Stowe was a merchant in the village of G——, Ills. He had been there fifteen years. He was a church member, had no vices, and while accounted rather close fisted, he was said to be strictly honest. A year before the mystery occurred he had taken a boy named Robert Lisle into his home, the lad being an orphan and his nephew. Bob, as we all called him, was 13 years old when he came. He went into the store as a clerk, and a bedroom was made for him up stairs.

I was a boy of Bob's age, and we came to be chums. It thus came about that I learned the cause of certain welts and bruises on his legs and body. His uncle, while pretending to feel a great interest in his welfare, and while speaking to him in the kindest manner before others, was beating him on the slightest excuse and seeking to make the place so warm for him that he would run away. Some boys would have gone, but Bob hadn't the courage to get up and face the world without a shilling in his pocket.

On the afternoon of the 23d day of June, 1863, as was sworn to in court, I was in the alley back of the store, and I heard Stowe whipping Bob in the storeroom. I heard him charge Bob with stealing some money, but the boy vigorously denied it. After the whipping Stowe told three different customers that he had caught the boy stealing, but suppressed the fact that he had whipped him. I saw Bob about an hour after the affair, and he made his denial in such a manner that I felt sure of his innocence. I then advised him to run away, but as I had no money to give him, and as he had not a penny of his own, he did not think it best to go. He wanted me to come and share his bed with him that night, as I had often done before, but a circumstance prevented. Stowe saw us together and ordered me away from the store.

At 7 o'clock that evening a man named Chadwick arrived in the village from Chicago to visit a sister. He had $2,000 in money with him, and he asked Stowe to keep it in his safe over night. At 8 o'clock the store was closed, and Stowe went home. At 9 o'clock I left home to go to the store, calculating to call Bob up by throwing pebbles against his window, a signal often made before. As I passed the alley I saw a man skulk away. I afterward swore in court that I believed this man to be Stowe. The sight of him frightened me, and I returned home at once. Next morning "the mystery" opened with a grand blast of trumpets. Bob Lisle had disappeared during the night and the safe had been robbed of Chadwick's $2,000. Investigation heightened the mystery.

There was blood on Bob's pillow. A trail of blood led from his bedside to the back door of the store. The safe had been opened in the regular way, and Stowe claimed that $400 of his money had gone with Chadwick's. The town was at once alive, and the village constable proved his enthusiasm and worth by arresting two strangers. One soon identified himself as an honest man, while the other admitted that he was a deserter from the army and a tramp. On searching him $120 in greenbacks was found in one of his pockets. He declared that he found this money in the alley in the rear of Stowe's store that morning about daylight, he having passed the night in a straw shed further down the alley. If he expected any one to believe such a thin story as that he was sadly taken aback. It was believed by all that the right man had been arrested, and the constable at once became the hero of the hour. A Chicago detective, who happened in the town that same day, looked the ground over and declared the arrest to be a slick job.

There had not only been a robbery, but murder had been done, and there was no doubt that both deeds had been accomplished by the same hand. Everybody turned out to look for Bob Lisle's body, and every spot where it could have been concealed within a radius of three miles was carefully examined. It could not be found, but this fact only strengthened the general belief in the deserter's guilt. He had, by the by, given his name as William Davis, and had vigorously and continually asserted his innocence of any crime whatever. A warrant had been issued, charging him with robbery and murder, and inside of a week he had been examined and held to the higher court without bail.

On the very day that this occurred a Down East Yankee with a patent churn arrived in town, and of course he soon heard all about the mystery. To everybody's surprise he declared Davis innocent, and argued as follows:

"How was the store entered? As the doors and windows were all right, it must have been entered by one of the doors with a key. How was the safe robbed? By some one who knew the combination and opened it. The boy was upstairs, the safe downstairs. What need to meddle with the law at all?"

While the heroic constables and others were digesting the above the Yankee was turning things over in his mind and preparing to add:

"What object to kill the boy, or even to arouse him? And if killed where is the body? Why should the robber have carried it away at all? If David is the robber there must have been blood spots on his clothing. What did he do with the balance of the money? Where did he get his key to enter? How did he learn the combination of the safe?"

This line of reasoning upset everybody, and it no sooner reached the ears of Stowe than he suggested the arrest of the Yankee as an accessory. It was not done, but the latter heard of it, and replied:

"Investigate Stowe. He knows more about this than the deserter does!"

His suggestion turned public attention and suspicion in another direction, and it was not long before some curious results were forthcoming. I gave out the information that I saw him in the alley at about 9 o'clock of the night of the crime. The village blacksmith then came forward and said he saw him on the street half an hour later, and that Stowe dodged past him and did not return his salutation. The hired girl at Stowe's house declared that he went out just before 9 o'clock and did not return until 11. It was so unusual for him to go out of an evening alone that she particularly noticed his going.

Three or four of us boys told how Bob had been beaten and misused, and so it came about that while the deserter was not released, Stowe was arrested. His story was that he had caught Bob pilfering from the money drawer on several occasions, and that on the day of the murder and robbery he had laid a trap for him and caught him taking $5. He said he had a feeling when he got home that he had neglected to close the safe door, and that he had returned to make certain on this point. After finding that everything was all right he had stopped to put up some goods left on the counter, and had then returned home. He denied being in the alley at the time I thought I saw him, or of meeting the blacksmith.

A new and more vigorous search was made for the body, but no trace of it could be found. During this time a citizen picked up a ten dollar bill in the rear of the store, and everybody at once declared that the deserter must have told the truth. When the man who robbed the safe went out by the back door he must have lost his grip on the money, and the wind had scattered some of it. The case against Davis was dropped when called before the higher court, and Stowe was put on trial for robbery. Everybody now believed him guilty of the murder of the boy, but as the body could not be found this charge was not included. Search was made high and low for the money, but it could not be found. The general idea was that he buried the body somewhere in the village and concealed all traces.

Just previous to the trial Mrs. Stowe admitted that when her husband came home his coat was covered with dust, he was pale and nervous, one of his fingers was bleeding from a cut, and that he sat up for an hour after she had retired. It was further discovered that his business affairs had gone wrong, and that two creditors were pressing him for payment of debts. All in all a pretty good case was made out against him, but he had a surprise in store for the public. When called upon to plead he answered "Not guilty" to the charge of robbery, but desired to plead guilty to the accusation of having murdered the boy. This took everybody aback, of course, and as they had no more proofs in the one case than in the other, the charge of robbery was dropped and he was arraigned on the other. On the stand he told the story as follows:

"I had discovered that Bob was a thief, and had punished him several times for stealing. I had punished him on this day. When I returned to the store in the evening I went up to his room to have a talk with him. He was impudent, and I struck him a blow and broke his neck. I then carried the body to the river and flung it in, and the reason you didn't find it was because it floated away with the current. I am very sorry. I had no malice and no thought of hurting him. I struck the blow on the impulse of the moment."

When he came to trial a plea of "not guilty" was of course entered, but his lawyer made little or no effort and he was pronounced guilty and got a sentence of fifteen years. After it was over, public opinion whirled about, as it generally does, and every person felt sorry for the man. He went to prison, saying that it was a just punishment, and it was a year and a half before the real climax came. One morning Bob Lisle walked into town as cool as you please, and when he had satisfied us that he was no ghost he told his story as follows:

On the night of the murder he had hardly got to bed when he had nose bleed. He was down stairs to look for water when his uncle came in and opened the safe and removed the money. He did not see Bob at all, but after hanging around for a spell left by the back door, falling out of it as he went. In this way he got the dust on himself, and at the same time let go of some of the money. Bob realized that it was a robbery, and suspecting that it was a put up job to get him sent to prison he determined to run away. He took two or three dollars left in the money drawer, bundled up something to eat and when morning came was miles away. For upward of a year he had been running on a steamboat. One day he had heard two passengers talking of the case, and when he discovered that he was supposed to have been murdered he at once started for home to clear his uncle. Stowe was in state prison, as you know. When told that the boy had returned alive and well he was all broken up. When Bob was taken to the prison his uncle had nothing to say.

Well, as a matter of course, steps were taken to secure Stowe's pardon, and it was soon granted. Then came the question of trying him for the robbery, but various delays occurred, and his lawyers advanced various technical objections, and the case finally petered out. He disappeared, going to Australia, and it was two or three years later when the final particulars came to light. He had been hoarding his cash for three or four years, calculating to skip out. He had robbed the safe and buried the money in his cellar, and he fully intended to accuse Bob of the crime. He suspected that Bob had run away, and therefore accused himself of the alleged murder to cover up the other crime. After he had skipped, leaving his family without a dollar, a great many of his dishonest transactions came to light, and it became plain to everybody that he was a rascal in disguise.

While I do not deny, as I told you at the outset, that a man entirely innocent of a certain crime may be sent to prison as guilty of it, it can scarcely happen if he is an honest man and above suspicion. His conduct must be against him as an innocent man. Circumstances—such as being seen near the place of crime, betraying guilt when arrested, being unable to make satisfactory answers, etc.—go a long ways where direct proof is lacking, and I think I am safe in saying that the man who has been found innocent of the crime for which he was hanged or sent to prison was guilty of something else of a serious nature which he was seeking to hide at the time.—New York Sun.

Effect of Water on Bad Coins.

A street car conductor says: Passengers often think us discourteous because we examine coins tendered us a little critically, but as all bad money we turn in is returned to us, and as some people take advantage of darkness and rush to push any kind of coins on to us, our caution is not to be wondered at. In damp or wet weather our troubles are increased. I will defy any man to palm a bad dollar or half dollar off on me when it is dry, but if it is wet, or even damp, the best judge can be fooled. It is possible to counterfeit money so far as weight, color and appearance are concerned, but when it comes to feel, no spurious coin can be made to deceive a man with moderate experience. This test, to be any good, must be on a dry coin. When wet, good and bad feel just alike, and unless you can "ring" a suspicious coin you must take your chances on it. Men who sell drinks at festivals or in parks, and have their hands always wet, take in a quantity of bad money, and a conductor on a wet night runs a risk of losing, in one trip, half he has earned by his fourteen or fifteen hours' work.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

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