

so, after about the meanest breakfast upon record, I proceeded desperately to the gaol, and presented my formal credentials there.

"Gilbert is very low, and won't see you nor anybody," was the grateful reply to my application. "He won't even see a clergyman, or say what church he ever belonged to, and the Sheriff has given strict orders that no one is to disturb him."

To make sure of a faithful, though ineffectual discharge of my duty, I resolved to gain permission from the last-named official for one attempt more. He accompanied me back to the gaoler, and my professional card was taken in, as a matter of routine, and with no expectation by anyone of shaking the prisoner's resolve.

The gaoler came back irresolutely. "He wants to know, sir, if you are the Mr. Haywood who was in the party stuck up last October with the Eastern mail."

Till then it had not been known, to me that it was Gilbert himself who had questioned me that day. There were so many of these bandit leaders, and my mind had not been fixed upon him particularly. But, when the interrogation was thus strangely and expectedly put, it was easy to wonder at the want of previous identification.

"Yes, I was there, and he spoke to me—respectfully, almost kindly. But I never saw him before, to my knowledge."

"Then, sir, he bade me say that if you was to call to-morrow forenoon he'll receive you; but not till then."

Which of the three standing there in the gaoler's little parlor was the most amazed, it would be difficult to say; but there is no doubt as to which was the most annoyed and disgusted, or as to which accepted reprieve, even till the morning, just as the convict himself might have accepted a delay in his execution.

Implacable rose the sun behind the mountains. Implacable tolled the church-bells for the morning service. Implacable moved the hands upon the dial towards high twelve. And most reluctantly presented himself, the writer, in the little parlor once again, upon the most distasteful errand peculiar to his exacting profession.

As the key turned heavily in the lock, I wondered if it grated more upon the ears inside than upon those without. Apparently not so, for he was quietly asleep on his stretcher, his head resting peacefully on his arm, and his face turned to the wall—as men turn their faces to the wall who expect but one Visitor!

"I don't like to wake him now," I stammered. "Better go without what I want than rob him of a sleep that takes him out of suffering. It would be too cruel," and I was moving back into the corridor.