

Queer Story

THE LAW AND THE SPIRIT.
"That's a big load of pine there, Mr. Munsey," commented Phineas Lock, an American lumber merchant, looking across his English customer's timber yard to where a group of men were loading trucks with long tree trunks, stripped but not sawn. "Going to the mills, eh?"

Munsey shook his head. "A customer in Scotland," he replied. The two men had finished their business and were waiting for a contract to be drawn up.

"Pit props?" asked the American. "It's likely. There are big collieries near his place."

Lock strolled across the yard and examined the wood curiously. "Not English pine?" he said.

"No, French. We get it up from near Bordeaux."

"That so? I didn't know you used French wood for props."

"This customer makes a point of our getting this Bordeaux pine for him," explained the Englishman. "He may not use it for props, though; but was only a guess of mine."

Lock stopped to view the stem nearest to him, one marked with a long, narrow blaze.

"Do you know your customer personally?" he inquired.

"No, but I've had him on my books for years, and a good customer he is," said Munsey, with pride.

"A Frenchman himself, perhaps," suggested Lock, watching with a puzzled frown as the log with the thin blaze was swung into the truck.

"Scotch by his name," said Munsey. "Not much in a name," remarked Lock, reflectively. "I suppose your miners this side are all British, eh?"

He touched another trunk reflectively, laying the palm of his hand in a broad axe-mark on its side. The blaze he noticed was wider than his hand.

"Most miners are," agreed Munsey. "but they run a lot of Polish labour up North."

"Poles, eh?" said Lock. "Well, well!" The puzzled look had lifted from his brow.

"They make good miners too, I fancy, when they're sober," said the Englishman. "Though the Tories used to make capital crying out against the Polish vote. Lies, of course."

"Politics are mostly lies," said Lock absently, his eyes still bent on the men at work. "All graft."

"We're not as bad as you," said the Englishman with a smile. "Our politicians don't make laws and then look on quietly while they're broken like your drink enactment."

"There's no temptation to break your laws, maybe," said Lock. "Wait till you've got Prohibition and a man can get 500 per cent. on every bottle he slips in. Your Pussyfoot gang will get their way one of these days and then you'll see."

"I am a teetotaler myself," said Munsey.

"Not a Prohibitionist, surely?" asked Lock, turning from his watch on the logs with an air of surprise.

"I might vote for it," admitted Munsey, "but if it was passed I should not be sorry. But apart from the drink question, it's the law-breaking that I cannot hold with out in your country."

"No?" said Lock coldly, looking at the other over his spectacles.

"Take that judge in New York who was caught a little while ago," argued Munsey, warming to his subject. "He was abusing the law he was supposed to administer. You can't defend that?"

"You mean that case reported in the English papers?" remarked Lock. "That was a regular frame-up."

"But the liquor was found in the Judge's house—he took it there in his car," protested Munsey.

"Maybe. But the Judge never had that booze assigned to him," said Lock. "Why, he's a well-known Pussyfoot."

"You don't mean to tell me a man can take his car home full of imitation petrol tins each containing whisky and not know what is inside," objected the Englishman.

"I sure do. You see the Judge had a notion he'd land some of the big fish in the rum-running game—men way up—but he talked too soon, and—whiff! They framed him up and got him as neat as you like. That's what happened to that Judge."

"But if it wasn't his whisky, why didn't he prove it?" Demanded Munsey, in bewilderment.

"How could he? They had the police waiting and witnesses on the spot."

"Then how can you be sure it was his whisky?"

"I tell you the Judge was a teetotaler like yourself. Why did the police search him that night? They knew the stuff was there, that's why. Someone had put them wise and if you cared to bet that same person loaded up the Judge's cans, you'd win your money, sure."

"You mean the whole thing was done out of revenge?" asked Munsey, thrilled in spite of himself by this strange version of the news.

"Revenge? No!" scoffed Lock. "The Judge was going to talk out loud and give the names of prominent men who were bootlegging, so they stopped his mouth. Who's going to listen to him now?"

"Well!" said Munsey. "A thing like that couldn't happen over here." "Think not?" asked Lock, lightly. "If you had Prohibition here, and I was

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By CY HUNGERFORD



pile of timber on his right; he examined it and strode towards the diminishing pile of three trunks.

"What are you doing?" cried Munsey.

Lock, stooping among the timber, had found what he wanted—a log with a narrow blaze.

"Stand clear!" he shouted, as he swung the axe.

The axe fell with heavy workmanlike strokes on the wood until the blade cut with a metallic clink into the centre of the tree. A thin trickle of liquid came oozing out, and Lock stood back.

Munsey saw a silver sparkle of tin in the wood. In astonishment, he leant forward and touched the mark.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Brand," said Lock. "It's a common trick in America. Hard on the Polish miner to call his hand, but my sympathy goes to honest men—like the Judge—every time!"—In Truth.

E. WINCH.