

Choice Literature.

HIS FIRST CRIME.

When Mr. John Atwood, the owner of the great Atwood elevator at Enfield, Minnesota, was about to go to dinner at noon on a certain bright October day, twelve years ago, he observed that he was leaving a canvas bag lying in plain sight upon the table. That canvas bag contained \$850 in gold and \$50 in silver. Mr. Atwood had left the key of his safe at his home—two miles away—and the bag had been an annoyance to him ever since it had been given to him that morning by one of his men who had been out collecting.

"It won't do to leave that there," he said to himself.

He took up the bag. It was too heavy and too bulky to carry with him. At last he tucked it into the drawer of the table by which he was standing, turned the key, put it in his pocket, and went to the neighbouring hotel, perhaps fifty rods away, to get his dinner. In about two hours he returned to find the office door, which was half of glass, shattered to fragments, the table drawer open, and the canvas bag, with the money, gone.

Mr. Atwood was not a poor man, and if the money never turned up again he was not going to be ruined; but it was an ugly thing to be at the mercy of an unknown thief. The great grain dealer stepped across the broken glass to his chair and sat down in it, sick at heart.

He rose, after a little, and critically examined the door and the table. From the marks upon them, he became convinced that a certain hatchet, which hung always in the engine-room, had been used in making the robbery. He walked out into the engine-room. The hatchet was in its place.

"Whoever did this," reflected Mr. Atwood, "knew where the hatchet was kept, and was careful to put it back after using it."

The young engineer, Eben Dorlon, who also acted as hostler and "general utility" man, was whistling and singing as he attended to his engine. He had been at work for Mr. Atwood for about a year. He was a bright faced, happy boy, and Mr. Atwood trusted him implicitly.

"Come here, Eben," he said.

The young fellow followed his employer obediently into the office.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, when he saw the shattered glass; "what's been going on here?"

"That's what I want to know," rejoined Mr. Atwood, sternly.

"I—I thought I heard a noise," stammered Eben: "but when I listened I didn't hear anything more. I thought it was the men over at the hotel stables. I hope nothing is missing, Mr. Atwood?"

"Only nine hundred dollars—that bag of money that I handed to you this morning, when I got off my horse."

"I—I haven't seen a soul around. You—you couldn't think for a moment that I could have done such a thing."

"Well—I shouldn't have thought of it"—his employer looked sharply into the boy's face—"only there isn't anybody else around to suspect."

Eben drew himself up with a good air of injured innocence.

"I beg, Mr. Atwood, that you will search me and search my room. You know, as well as I do, that I could not steal—and"

At this moment the hotel keeper came rushing in.

"I hear you lost a large sum of money while you were out at dinner, Mr. Atwood," he began.

"Then the thief must have told of it," said Mr. Atwood, with sudden conviction; "for I have only just found it out myself."

The man, however, did not see the significance of this fact.

"Four men have this moment taken the train for Minneapolis—strangers. They took dinner with me. Hadn't you better telegraph to have them arrested?"

This was done, but with no result, as Mr. Atwood expected, except to make the men very angry. Eben Dorlon's request to be searched was also complied with, and the little town was thoroughly ransacked; but no trace was obtained of the missing money or of the thief.

A month passed. It was now the middle of November. Mr. Atwood, though he was as determined as ever to probe the affair to the bottom, was beginning to grow discouraged about getting any proofs in the matter, though he felt sure from the first that he knew the culprit.

One day his mail contained a rather odd-looking letter, addressed to the Atwood Elevator Company, in a feminine hand. Upon opening it, Mr. Atwood found inclosed a telegram, three days old. This was addressed to "Miss Millie Sargent, Larkin's Valley, Minn.," and read as follows:—

"Millie, look out for a little package by express to-morrow."

There was no signature, but the girl had evidently found out that the package had come from the Atwood Elevator Company, for in the note inclosing the telegram she said, coquettishly; "Will the Atwood Elevator Company please tell me who sent the inclosed telegram? I want to be sure and thank the right person."

Larkin's Valley was about twenty miles from Enfield. Five miles beyond it lay the town of Branch, where Eben Dorlon's family lived. Mr. Atwood had hired Eben on the recommendation of an Enfield man. It occurred to him now that he ought to find out what sort of people the Dorlons were.

An hour later, Mr. Atwood's fine pair of bays were speeding him toward Larkin's Valley and the town of Branch. His good superintendent, who had been absent at the time of the robbery, was back in his place now, and Mr. Atwood felt easy about his elevator.

"I may be gone a week," he told everybody when he drove away.

Miss Millie Sargent proved to be a pretty blue-eyed damsel of about sixteen. She blushed when Mr. Atwood referred to the telegram, and fingered confusedly a handsome brooch which she was wearing.

"That brooch cost a pretty penny," reflected Mr. Atwood, as he talked with her; "it undoubtedly came in the package from my young engineer, who is getting forty dollars per month for his services."

He explained to Miss Millie that her letter had fallen into his hands, instead of into those of another person, who usually took the letters from the office, and for whom it was probably intended.

"He has therefore not received your thanks," he con-

tinued, good-naturedly; "and you had better write him in person. I think you must know his name."

Miss Millie simpered and bridled, and remarked finally that she didn't know anybody in Enfield very well, and she wasn't in the habit of accepting presents from anybody she didn't know very well. But it wasn't any matter. Maybe she could guess; and she was sorry to have troubled Mr. Atwood.

Poor little Miss Millie! She had made more trouble for somebody else than for Mr. Atwood.

He left her, after gallantly assuring her that that was all right. He was convinced that wherever guilt might lie, it was not in the foolish little bosom of Miss Millie Sargent. That evening he reached Branch, to find that the Dorlon family, though poor, was highly respected, and that the boy Eben had always borne a good character. This made him feel more uncomfortable than ever.

"I can't bear to hunt him down!" he thought, as he tossed restlessly on his bed that night. "The boy took the money; but it is evidently his first crime, and was done under the impulse of the moment. He does not intend to do anything worse with it than to buy breastpins for pretty girls, and trinkets for his mother and sisters."

In the morning he had come to a decision, for which he could not wholly account to himself, but to which he felt inwardly impelled. He proceeded to the little express office of the place, and called the agent aside. After telling him who he was, and enjoining upon him absolute secrecy, he said: "You will probably receive at this office soon a package from Enfield—not large, but very heavy. It will contain seven or eight hundred dollars in specie, belonging to me. I empower you to open that package, no matter to whom it may be addressed. Telegraph me immediately upon the receipt of such a parcel as I have described."

The agent promised, and Mr. Atwood drove toward home.

Just as he was entering his stable, which was close by his elevator, he saw a man coming out of the engine-room. It was Louis Preneau, a young Canadian, and an old school mate of Eben Dorlon, who was just now in charge of the railroad station, while Mr. Emery, the regular station master, was away on his vacation. It suddenly flashed over Mr. Atwood's mind that this young man had been a good deal with Eben lately. Then he remembered Miss Millie's telegram and express package. Perhaps they might not have been sent if the usual station master (who was also telegraph operator and express agent) had been in charge. Mr. Emery, though he had been out of town, happened just now to be in Enfield. On Monday he was to resume his duties. It was now Friday afternoon. Mr. Atwood strolled over to the station, found that Emery was in his private room, and had a talk with him. He had known him for years, and felt sure that he could rely on him.

"Don't tell Preneau," he said, significantly; "but if any despatch comes for me, see that I get it at once, and show me the list of express parcels that are sent from Enfield from to-day onward."

Mr. Emery promised readily.

"I hate to risk these next two days," mused Mr. Atwood, as he turned away; "but I must trust to Emery's oversight."

Just then the hotel keeper approached him.

"I hadn't thought to tell you before, Mr. Atwood," he said, with some little embarrassment, and in a low voice. "I couldn't remember at the time; but it occurred to me the other day that it was Preneau who told me that you had had some money stolen—the day it happened, you know."

Mr. Atwood thanked him, asked him to say nothing of the matter to anyone, and went on. There was another fact against Eben. He had told Preneau within half an hour, probably, after committing the theft.

It was nearly ten o'clock on Saturday morning before Mr. Atwood was able to leave home for the elevator. As he approached it, he saw Preneau and Eben just outside the engine-room door, engaged in close conversation. When they saw him, they parted, and Mr. Atwood saw Preneau tuck something into his vest pocket.

"My despatch has come," thought Mr. Atwood. He determined to go ahead boldly on this supposition.

Hastily beckoning Eben to take his horse, he overtook Preneau on the station platform. They walked into the waiting room together, and Mr. Atwood gave the young man ample opportunity to make any announcement that he might wish. Seeing at last that the boy was not going to say anything, Mr. Atwood said firmly: "Mr. Preneau, you may give me the despatch which you have in your vest pocket."

The young man stared at him aghast.

"What—what made you think I had a despatch for you?" he stammered. Then his manner suddenly changed. "Oh, Mr. Atwood," he began, imploringly; "if—if you'll see that I am suitably protected, I think I can put you on the track of at least part of that money that you lost."

His cringing air, and his willingness to betray his friend in order to shield himself, thoroughly incensed Mr. Atwood.

"When I want anything of you, I'll tell you," he said shortly. "Give me my telegram."

Sure enough, the boy produced a crumpled telegram from his pocket. It was dated "Branch," and said:—

"Package received answering your description, addressed to Mrs. Ellen Dorlon."

Threatening Preneau with dire punishment unless he kept absolutely still in regard to the whole matter, Mr. Atwood went back to the elevator.

Eben was in the engine-room, as usual; but his young face was shadowed with an awful fear. He knew of the telegram; and though Preneau had engaged not to deliver it, and had promised to return an answer which should "shut up" the agent in Branch, he had no confidence in the result. If Mr. Atwood had described the package which he had just sent to his mother, there was nothing more for him to know. The poor boy was not used to guilt.

His eyes grew wild with terror when Mr. Atwood summoned him into the office. He came obediently enough; but when he sank into the chair which his employer placed for him, and met Mr. Atwood's stern look, the boy broke down altogether. He bowed his head upon the table, the scene of his crime and burst into tears.

"I don't know what made me do it, Mr. Atwood," he sobbed; "I hid it for weeks in the ashes. I didn't have anything in my mind to do with it. I wanted to give it back but I didn't dare. I just bought a few presents with it for my friends, and then I sent it—the most of it—to my mother."

I told her that I had done so well that you had given me a share in a consignment of wheat, and it had panned out better than we expected.

The boy had raised his head now. His tear-stained, working features were pitiful to behold.

Mr. Atwood could say nothing for a moment, and the boy continued: "Are you going to send me to prison Mr. Atwood?"

"I'm afraid I ought to do just that, Eben."

He rose and began to pace the room. He was a Christian man. He wanted to do his duty. He wished that the Lord would somehow make it plain to him.

"Oh, that would kill my mother!" wept the boy, now almost beside himself with grief and fright. "She is the best woman in the world, Mr. Atwood. Here!"—he lifted his head and with trembling hands drew a letter from his inner pocket—"here is her last letter. I wish you would read it."

Mr. Atwood opened the letter. It said:—

MY DEAR SON: We are very happy in your good fortune. We expect you to be loved wherever you go; but Mr. Atwood's kindness is indeed remarkable. He could scarcely do more for you if you were his son. He is a noble man. Thank him for your father and me for his generosity to you. I wish he did not object, as you say he does, to having us write directly to him. Night and morning I pray for you, and my prayers are being answered. We will keep your money for you until you come home. I cannot consent to use it for myself. We think you had better consult Mr. Atwood about the investment of it. All send thanks to you for the beautiful presents which you have given them. With renewed messages of our love and pride in you, I am your devoted "Mother."

Mr. Atwood's eyes were moist as he concluded this epistle. It did not seem to him as though he ought, for a first offence, to crush the heart of a mother like that.

As he sat silent, the boy broke in with a ring of new courage to his voice: "Mr. Atwood, you know I have told you the truth. You know I have always tried to do just right, till—till this happened. If you could see your way to forgiving me this time, I would promise you, as solemnly—oh, so much more solemnly than I ever promised anything in my life!—to live the best I know how always after this. I think I couldn't suffer more in prison than I have suffered ever since that happened,—only that my mother would feel it so. I—I don't suppose you could let me off, could you?"

The agony of hesitation and uncertainty expressed in his voice only increased Mr. Atwood's agitation.

"Eben," he said, at last, "I am a man who believes in prayer. Your mother believes in prayer. We will pray over this matter."

They knelt beside the table, and in a strained voice the rich grain dealer prayed that he might be guided aright in regard to the treatment of his erring young engineer. The boy sobbed uncontrollably during the whole petition.

When they rose from their knees, Mr. Atwood walked to the window and back again several times. Then he said: "I suppose, Eben, that I might be accused of compounding a felony, if it were known that I let you off in this way; but as this is your first crime, and since I cannot doubt your penitence, I will give you another chance. I believe that you will do right henceforward; but if you ever do sin again, I shall feel constrained to tell the story of this sin also. In the meantime, you may leave this part of the country and begin new and fair, if you will restore my property. I will wait for what you cannot pay at once until you can earn it. Some hint of the trouble will leak out, I presume, but I will do all that I can to keep it quiet. I advise you not to have anything more to do with that precious crony of yours, Preneau. He was ready just now to give you up, if he could only be saved himself."

The boy could only weep softly for some time. Mr. Atwood went to writing. At last, Eben rose, flung his arms around his employer, and pressed a kiss upon the top of his bald head.

"You have saved me, Mr. Atwood!" he said, tremblingly. "I won't disappoint you; God helping me, I won't! Good-by."

The package, which was returned to Mr. Atwood in a few days, contained a large part of the lost money. Preneau undoubtedly had some of what was lacking. Eben himself went to the far West. What explanation he made to his poor mother, Mr. Atwood never knew but in less than a year he had repaid the missing sum, and he has now grown to be one of the leading citizens of his adopted home.

"I have often thought of that Eben Dorlon," Mr. Atwood was saying not long ago to his wife. "I did right to forgive him, I know. In fact, I believe I was more to blame than he was in the matter. I had no business to tempt him so. Nine hundred dollars isn't such a great sum to me, but to him it was a fortune. We men put temptation in the way of young fellows like him too often. When we must, we must. When we don't really need to, we shouldn't. I learned as much of a lesson from that case as the boy himself did."

Kate Upson Clark, in the Independent.

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THROUGH SUEZ.

Bonaparte broached the plan of re cutting through Suez. Half a century later Engineer De Lesseps did it. He actually changed geography. He broke a continent in two for the world's commerce. An old man now, Count de Lesseps writes for *The Youth's Companion*, in humorous, charming vein, how he came to build the canal.