

THE MAIL ROBBER. Story of a Government Detective.

BY A DETROIT REPORTER.

Complaints had been made that valuable letters passing between Smithville and Holden, two New England towns about seventy miles apart, had been robbed on the route, or at one of the two post offices. This was before the days of money orders, and also previous to the days when Smithville and Holden were connected by railroads. But little attention was paid to the complaints at first, as the public are always too ready to find fault, and too slow in appreciating the mail man who strives successfully against temptation; but when the firm of Cash & Co. lost from a letter addressed to them from Smithville, cash to the amount of \$300, then I got orders to take the mail and hang to it until the routes or routes were brought to justice.

Naturally, enough, I first turned my attention to the two postmasters. I found that both belonged to the church; both stood above suspicion in the minds of their friends, and that there was reason to believe that both were honest. But it was my duty to prove them so. This was not a difficult matter. I had first to get the confidence of the stage driver, who was also the mail carrier (the law was lax then) between the two towns. I knew that the driver had nothing to do with the robberies, as he had no keys to the bags, and his bungling fingers could never have unscrewed the letters, or revealed them after abstracting their money, and prepared the package again. This was what made the case a mystery. The letters were not stolen, but were manipulated.

With my mind made up that some post-office clerk, or some clerk's friend would prove the guilty party, I went to work. Standing at the window of the Holden post-office, I sealed up a bank bill in a letter, the clerk watching me, though I pretended I did not see him. This was late in the afternoon, and next morning I was out on the road, on a horseback, waiting for the Smithville stage. Pixy, driver and mail carrier, always carried the bags under his feet. I hid my horse behind, mounted up on his seat, and as we rolled along I opened the bag. My letter was there all right, as also two letters containing money, which I had dropped into the revolving box unmolested by any one. Getting down and mounting my horse, I reached Smithville next day two hours ahead of the stage. Standing by the window, I saw the postmaster and his clerk distribute the mail, and my three letters, as soon as picked up, were placed in the box of a friend to whom I had directed them. He came in presently, called for them, and we went to his office and opened them. The money was gone!

I had seen the letters through both post-offices all right, but yet they had been robbed. I was puzzled over the mystery, and in spite of myself I began to mistrust Pixy. I would lay another trap. I sealed up four one dollar bills in different letters, directed them to four mythical citizens of Smithville, but all to the care of one box, and dropped them into the Holden post-office. I repeated my manoeuvre of overhauling the bags, found the letters all right, and then hurried on to Smithville. The mail was poured out on a table, the letters sorted and sent out on any delay, but when I opened my four letters I found that they had been robbed again. I had carefully examined the letters, and I found that each one had been revealed with new mutilage. The thief had in three cases spread the mutilage considerably beyond the point where the original had ended, but altogether had made a neat job. None of the letters were in the least torn or defaced.

The two postmasters were cleared, and now who was the robber? Pixy's face came dancing before me, and I said to myself, "Thou art the man!" Now, to hunt him down and secure the proofs, without informing him of the results of my experiments; I told him that I was going away and would trouble him no more. He talked so frankly, and carried such an honest face under my scrutiny, that I doubted again if he was the guilty man.

I went to the hotel, overhauled my trunk, and the next morning a fat man, having red hair, wearing spectacles, and being of a very chatty turn, got upon the seat with Pixy as a passenger to Holden. My disguise was so complete that he could not suspect it. I intended to stick by the mail bags until I saw them delivered at the Holden post office, and if Pixy was the guilty party I should nail him. I had mailed three letters this time, only one of which contained money, though all weighed the same, and no one but an expert could have told which one contained the money.

I had reason to believe that the letters were in the bag at my feet as I mounted up with Pixy, but in my disguise I of course could make no examination. Riding along, I managed the conversation so as to finally bring him to talk about the mystery. It troubled him greatly.

"It makes me feel mighty uncomfortable," he remarked, his brow clouding. "I have lived in Smithville nigh on to forty years, and carried the mail for upwards of fifteen, and this is the first time that I ever had the slightest trouble. Something's mighty wrong somewhere, and I'll gin fifty dollars out of my own pocket to have the trouble cleared up."

If Pixy was guilty, he knew how to act the hypocrite better than any criminal I had ever encountered. A day or two would, I hoped, solve the puzzle, and allow me to lay my hand on the right party.

The coach rumbled along until noon, and then drew up to a tavern for dinner and a change of horses. I had my eyes open, to see what became of the mail bags. There were three of them, two for intermediate post offices, and one for Holden, instead of having all the mail in one bag, and the letters and papers hunched up so that the two other post masters would have the handling of the bag.

As this was a post office, one bag was left here. Pixy took the other two on his arm, carried them into the hotel, and I saw them locked up in an old chest in one corner of the bar-room. While waiting for dinner I examined the chest pretty closely, and saw that it was stout and firm, and could not be entered, except one had a key. The landlord had an open, honest face, and when we rose up from the dinner table I mentioned that I must look rather for the robber.

The afternoon passed away without incident, and just before dark we arrived at Liverpool, a small village, which was the half-way station. We were to remain here over night, and would reach Holden next day at dusk. Again I watched Pixy and the bags. The post master called for the one as the stage drove up, and the driver took the Holden bag, passed in behind the bar of the hotel, and locked it up in a little dark room. As near as I could judge, the room had but one door, and was used for no other purpose than to contain the bag. I, however, determined to find out, and after supper, as Pixy and I sat smoking, I mentioned that he took extra care of the mail at this point.

"To all you the truth," he replied, looking upward and lowering his voice, "I am half a mind to believe that all the trouble about the

letters has its start here. The room is the luggage room, but it's not once a year that it is used for anything but the bag; in fact, the landlord lost his key about a month ago, and I now hold the only one which unlocks it. I pay him a small rent for use of the room, as I am sworn to take good care of the mull, and must use all precautions."

"How about the landlord?" I inquired. "Oh! 'tain't him," replied Pixy; "I have known Tom Bell twenty years, and he isn't the kind of man to turn mail robber. No; it's some one else, but I can't guess who. The bag hangs just where I put it the night before, locked up just the same, and I can't say that any one has touched it."

I made no reply, and after a stroll through the quiet village, retired for the night, and slept "like a log" until aroused by the breakfast bell. We were off in good season, and entered Holden on time, when Pixy delivered the bag into the hands of the post master, resigned the lines to the hostler, and went off home. Knowing now that I had matters at a focus, I walked over to the post office just in time to see my three letters taken from the table and boxed. Securing them, I hastened to the hotel, and in five minutes had made the discovery that none of the letters had been opened and that none had been robbed. This was another puzzle. I was quite certain that none of the post masters knew that I was hunting them, and so it came around to Pixy again. He was the robber, He had become afraid, and had let the bag go

She passed out into the hall, and I heard the stairs creak as she went up. I rose up, lifted the chair away, and crept up stairs after her. A hall ran clear from end to end of the building, and I just got sight of a white figure entering a door at the further end. I passed quickly down and looking up at the transoms, could see a dim light, and could also hear a slight rattling from the mail bag. Picking up a chair I placed it beside the door, mounted up, and then I discovered the mail robber. A woman about thirty years old, in her night clothes, was just unlocking the bag. She opened the padlock without difficulty, put it on one side, and then drew the strap and opened the bag.

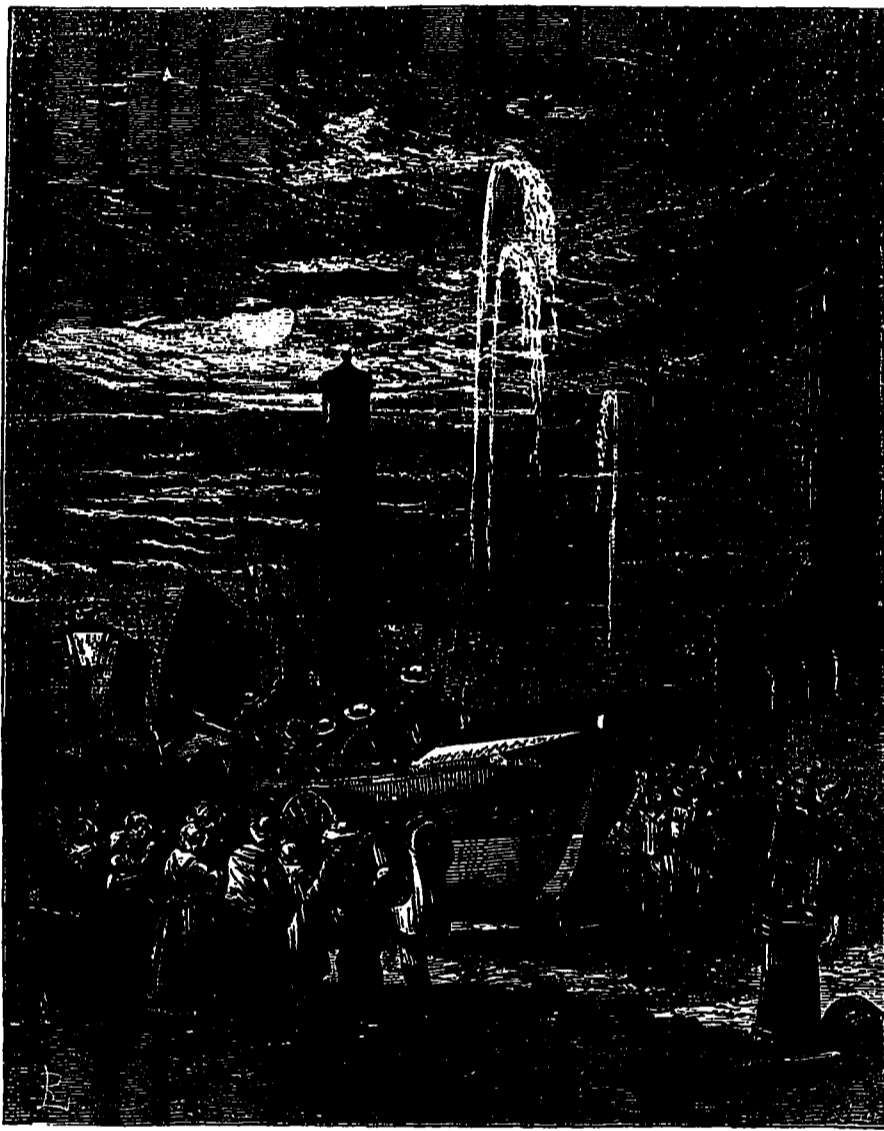
I had a good view of her. She seemed a little excited, but did not hurry. Emptying the letters out on the table—there were about a hundred—she sat down, and picked up one and held it between her and the candle. With a shake of her head, she laid it on one side, and took another; this she laid in another place. I think she was a full hour sorting over the letters, as she took up each one, and then she had eight laid on one side. Taking a common round pen-holder from a drawer, she then proceeded to open those letters. Her dexterity was wonderful. Inserting the small end of the holder under the flap of the envelope, she rolled the holder over and over, and the entire flap peeled up without a stop or a break.

My letter was among them. I plainly saw her remove the money, and she also took the money from the other seven. Then she went to

key to the door of the little room, which she had stolen from the landlord. She had robbed the mail of a large sum of money, and been the occasion of much anxiety and annoyance, but no earthly court could call her to justice.

SOCIATES.

To Socrates the world is indebted for checking the spread of the many absurd theories of creation, and discourses on nature which were fashionable in his day. He showed forcibly how little men who set up for professors really know about these matters, and he laboured with success to turn the attention of his hearers from physics to morals. He brought the powerful test of his cross-questioning Socratic method to bear on the misty, wordy speculations of would-be-scientific doctors, and he allegorized the concepts of knowledge without the reality as far more disgraceful than ignorance. He scattered the seeds of all that Plato taught of general terms, or, in other words, of those metaphysical abstractions called ideas, according to which visible things were made and concrete actions wrought, having the mutual relation of archetype and antitype. But his main effort was to lead thinking men to give precision to their own thoughts, and to define their conceptions. He insisted on definitions as the preliminaries of science, and the necessary condition of all useful discourse. In the early part of his career he had occupied his mind with physics, and when Aristophanes produced "The Clouds," and made Socrates the hero, he brought him on the stage as treading the air and speculating about the sun, while his disciples ransacked the bowels of the earth. But Socrates, in fact, became disgusted with physics, or rather with the ignorance of its professors, and giving his thoughts mainly to the study of himself, he summed up his philosophy in the well-known words of the inscription at Delphi. His object was not so much to communicate the germs of knowledge already discoverable in them, as to develop in others the germs of knowledge already discoverable in them. He professed to practice a kind of mental midwifery, and to imitate his mother, Phædroté, who was really a midwife, in an intellectual way. He believed that almost all persons know more than they suppose, but that they have never been led to express accurately their own ideas. His political life, his accusation, trial, sentence, and death are matters belonging to Grecian history, and familiar to all our readers. His admirable discourses on the immortality of the soul are equally well known, and if we are sometimes inclined to regret that he did not use the pen and record with his own hand his own acute and magnificent ideas, we are consoled by the reflection that his influence as a philosopher was wider than that ever attained by any writer, and that when dead he lived and spoke in Plato and Xenophon, in Eschylus and the Megarics, in Aristippus, the Cyrenaic Antisthenes, and Diogenes, all in a greater or less degree his disciples and that to this day he supports them without much of the peculiar teaching of Christianity, and helps to render it respectable in the eyes of intellectual men. But for a line of philosophers such as Socrates and Plato, alive to the supernatural, education would in the course of ages have become wholly materialist, and Christian schools, left alone in their better of spiritual and moral, would have no traditions of natural religion wherewith to build, and to which to appeal. The faith of the church depends in some degrees on the faith of those who are not of the church, for in conducting missions there can be no results in default of all common ground between the preacher and hearers.—The ILLUSTRATOR.



THE SIGNAL OF DISTRESS.—LAUNCHING THE LIFE-BOAT.

through without molestation. I was so certain of his guilt that I almost determined to arrest him, hoping to find some of the marked bills on his person or in his house.

But after a little reflection I gave up the idea, and determined to try him again. I had told him on the evening before that I was to stop in Holden a whole week, and now I meant to give him one more trial. I had brought along another disguise in a bundle, and next morning when the stage drove up to the door, a man with heavy black whiskers, stove-pipe hat, and wearing green goggles, got into the stage. I had dropped into the post office a letter containing a \$2 bill, and if that bill failed to reach Smithville, some one would be arrested for robbing the mails.

I was the only passenger except an old woman and we had a dull day of it. Pixy carried the same face as on the day before, and exercised the same caution in locking up the bag when we reached Liverpool. It was midsummer, and when ten o'clock came, he went to the barn to sleep on the hay with the hostler, while I was shown to a room up stairs. I threw off everything but pants and shirt, and made up my mind not to go to sleep that night. Something told me that I should be able to unravel the mystery before many hours, and I sat down before the window to wait until the house was quiet.

Out in the country people do not hold late hours, and wear the tired look of dwellers in cities. By eleven o'clock, even the dogs of Liverpool were asleep. There was no stir about the house, and I tossed my cigar out of the window and determined to go down and keep watch over the mail bag. If discovered prowling around below, I could make plenty of excuses to account for my presence. Barefooted, I slipped out of my room, crept softly down stairs, through the hall and presently entered the bar-room. The night was not dark, but in the room one crowded into a corner could not be easily seen. I sat down on the floor in the corner farthest from the room which contained the bag, drew a chair in front of me, and my watch commenced. To get the bag one must enter the room, and no one could enter it without my seeing them. I fully expected that before daylight I should have Pixy, and perhaps the hostler, under my care.

Half an hour went by, and then I began to get sleepy. The room was very warm, and in spite of my determination to exercise great vigilance, I actually went off to sleep before the clock struck midnight. But, I did not sleep long. About half past twelve o'clock I was awakened by a slight click, as if a key had turned back the bolt of a lock, and I was all attention in a moment. Through the room I caught sight of white garments at the little door behind the bar, and next moment I heard the mail bag rattle as it was taken down. I was considerably excited, but I did not move. Some one came towards me, carrying the bag, and I made out that it was a woman!

a trunk, deposited the money in a Bible, brought back a bottle of maudlin, and in five minutes had revealed the letters, taking great pains not to stain the envelopes. When she commenced putting the letters back into the bag, I got down and stole away to my room. I had seen all that I cared to, and nothing remained but to make the arrest. In a little time I heard her go down with the bag, and then come back after replacing it.

I would have given a hundred dollars had the robber been a man. I had seen the woman about the house, and knew her to be a sister of the landlord's wife. I knew just what a time of hysterics, weeping and wailing there would be, and dreaded the coming of the morning. But I must do my duty, and when morning came I had planned to do it in a way to prevent much of a scene. I intended to wait until just before the stage left, expose her, secure the proofs, and take her on to Smithville, and from thence to Brownfield, where she could be arraigned before a United States Court. By the time the woman had got to understand what was occurring, I would be away with my prisoner.

The programme was duly carried out. I called the landlord aside, told him what I had seen, and we went up to her room and found the money and other proofs. He was dumfounded and almost crazy, but did not propose to interfere in any way. Going down stairs, we passed into the dining room where Anna was washing dishes. She must have suspected that her guilt was known, for she fainted away before we reached her. On recovering, she asked for twenty minutes' time to dress for the journey, and I, of course, granted it. I did not like the way she received the denouement. Instead of going off into hysterics, as I had looked for, she was very calm, and her eyes had a look which I could not account for.

"I will not detain you long," she said, as I stood at the head of the stairs to wait for her to dress.

The news had traveled over the village, and the hotel was soon crowded with anxious citizens. The landlord was sobbing, his wife wailing, and I felt like a criminal. She asked for twenty minutes' time to dress for the journey, and I, of course, granted it. I did not like the way she received the denouement. Instead of going off into hysterics, as I had looked for, she was very calm, and her eyes had a look which I could not account for.

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I learned that the woman had once been employed in the family of a postmaster in another part of the State. She must have picked up the mail key around the house, and after coming to her sister's, and seeing how easily she could use it, being so strongly tempted that she could not resist. In her dress pocket was also found the

MARKET REPORT.

HEARTHSTONE, OFFICE.

Oct. 4th, 1872.

The following were the latest telegrams received on Change:

Table with columns for 'FROM LIVERPOOL', 'Oct. 3', and 'Oct. 2'. It lists various commodities like Flour, Red Wheat, and Corn with their respective prices.

Flour—Business was not active on Change this morning, and with the exception of some foreign orders transactions were confined to the wants of local dealers. Quotations of superior are a shade lower; 15000 barrels of Welland Canal Superchanged hands yesterday at \$6.65; a round lot of a City Brand deliverable next week, brought \$6.75; a cable sale of 2000 barrels transpiring at equal to \$6.85 for an ordinary grade, and \$7.15 for a choice sample. Sale to dealers included 50 barrels extra at \$7.00; 1000 lbs. of 25 lbs. Strong Bakers' Super at \$6.90; 100 barrels Welland Canal at \$6.70; 100 lbs. Ordinary Canada at \$6.65; 160 lbs. No. 2 at \$6.20; 300 City Bags at \$3.40; and 200 do at \$3.45.

Table listing various types of flour and their prices, such as Superior Extra, Extra, and Fresh Supers.

WHEAT.—Market quiet. A cargo of No. 1 Milwaukee Spring, to arrive, was taken at \$1.40 yesterday.

GRAIN.—Market quiet. Firm at \$4.70 to \$5.00 Upper Canada. PRAS, a bush of 66 lbs.—Quiet at 85c to 90c. A car of new changed hands at 82c. OATS, a bush of 32 lbs.—Quiet at 30c to 32c. CORN.—Market nominal at 97 to 100c. BARLEY, a bush of 48 lbs.—Nominal at 60c to 65c, for new. BUTTER, per lb.—Market quiet. Recent transactions were at 14c to 15c, for fair dairy Western; and 15 to 17c for good to choice do. CHEESE, 1 lb.—Market a shade firmer. Factory fine 10c to 11c. LARD.—Market quiet. Firm at \$1.10 per lb. ANDES, 100 lbs.—Potatoes, at \$5.00 to \$6.00. PEAS, firmer. First, \$5.20 to \$5.25.

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