

## THE BANKER'S MISTAKE.

My profession isn't a popular one; in fact, there is considerable prejudice against it. As for myself, I don't think it's much worse than a good many others. However, that has nothing to do with my story.

Some years ago me and the gentleman who was at that time connected with me in business—he's met with reverses since then, and at present isn't able to go out—was looking around for a job, being at that time rather hard up, as you might say.

We struck a small country town. I ain't a-goin' to give it away by telling where it was, or what the name of it was. There was one bank there. The president was rich and old; owned the mills, owned the bank, owned most of the town. There wasn't another officer but the cashier, and they had a boy who used to sweep out and run errands.

The bank was in the main street, pretty well up one end of it—a nice snug place at the corner, with nothing very near it. We took our observations, and found out there wasn't no trouble at all about it.

There was an old watchman that walked up and down the street at nights, when he didn't fall asleep and forget it. The vault had two doors; the outside one was chilled iron, and had a three-wheel combination lock; the inner door was no door at all—you could pick it open. It didn't pretend to be nothing but fire-proof, and it wasn't even that.

The first thing we did, of course, was to fit a key to the outside door.

This was our place: After the key was fitted, I was to go into the bank, and Jim—that wasn't his name, of course, but let it pass—was to keep watch on the outside. Whea anyone passed he was to tip me a whistle, and then I was to douse the glim and lay low. After they got by I goes on again. Simple and easy, you see.

Well, the night we selected the president happened to be out of town; gone down to the city, as he often did. I got inside all right with a slide lantern, a breast-drill, a steel jimmy, a bunch of skeleton keys, and a green baize bag to stow the swag. I fixed my light, and rigged my breast-drill, and got to work on the door right over the lock.

Probably a great many of your readers are not so well posted as me about bank locks, and I may say for them that a three-wheel combination lock has the three wheels in it and a slot in each wheel. In order to unlock the door, you have to get the three slots opposite to each other at the top of the lock.

Of course, if you know the number the lock is set on you can do this, but if you don't, you have to depend on your ingenuity. There is in each of these wheels a small hole, through which you put a wire through the back of the lock when you change the combination. Now, if you can bore a hole through the door, and pick up those wheels by running a wire through those holes, why, you can open the door. I hope I may make myself clear.

I was boring that hole. The door was chilled iron, about the neatest stuff I ever worked on. I went on steady enough, only stopped when Jim—which, as I said, wasn't his real name—whistled outside, and the watchman toddled by.

By-and-by, when I'd got pretty near through, I heard Jim, so to speak, whistle again.

I stopped, and pretty soon heard footsteps outside, and I'm blamed if they didn't come right up the bank steps, and I heard a key work in the lock.

I was so dumbfounded when I heard that, that you could have slipped the bracelets right on me. I picked up my lantern, and I'll be hanged if I didn't let the slide slip down and throw the light right on to the door, and there was the president!

Instead of calling for help, as I thought he would, he took a step inside the door, and shaded his eyes with his hand and looked at me.

I knowed I ought to knock him down and cut out, but I'm blest if I could, I was that surprised.

"Who are you?" says he.

"Who are you?" says I, thinking that was an innocent remark, as he commenced it, and a-trying all the time to collect myself.

"I'm the president of the bank," says he, kinder short; "something's the matter with the lock."

By George! the idea came to me then.

"Yes, sir," says I touching my cap. "Mr. Jennings, he telegraphed this