

# The Greatest Rogue Living

Among the travellers who alighted at the railroad station in this city the other day was Paul D. Hart. He stopped only long enough to cross the platform and take a train on the other side of the depot and did not therefore renew acquaintances in Plattsburg.

Several causes united to produce this result, among them the fact that Mr. Hart was shackled with iron, hand and foot, to another man like himself clad in convict stripes. They were part of a company of fifty also ironed in pairs who were travelling from Sing Sing prison to Clinton prison for the purpose of balancing the populations of the State penal institutions.

Some years ago Paul D. Hart dropped off the train here and said he would like to buy a house for summer use. He brought a letter of introduction to Thurlow Weed and was introduced by that gentleman to several citizens as a business man of importance from Chicopee, Mass., seeking a healthful summer home for his family.

Mr. Hart stayed for some time, made some friends, cashed drafts for some \$800 or more and then, drifted out of town as unostentatiously as he had come in.

His letter of introduction was forged, like his drafts, and the laugh was on Mr. Weed. This affair was of course only a commonplace confidence crime, and it does not even suggest the remarkable qualities which render Mr. Hart eminent, even great, in his line.

His name, by the way, is not Hart at all, but Edward O. Stoddart, and he lived in his youth at Chicopee, Mass., where he was employed by the Ames Manufacturing Company. He was a bright lad at school and a smart youth in the counting room, gifted with a flow of speech which approached garrulity, except that what he said about things usually amounted to something.

But he was dishonest from the core out, and he embarked in wrong-doing pretty early in life. He seemed to take that delight in crime which an ardent sportsman has in the chase. "The pleasure of beating people is," he says, "the highest employment I know: even to this day I don't care for their money so much. I like to get it by ways so artistic that they may be called classic. I am an emotional actor when I swindle a man or a woman, and I especially enjoy the effective roles I fill."

Stoddart, as it is best to call him for the purposes of this article, visited nearly all the States in the Union and the Dominion of Canada. In Canada he was arrested and served a term in the Kingston prison. Since then he has lived as much in prison as out.

Just at present he is serving a term of four years for a crime committed while in the Tombs last March which is fairly representative of his varied methods in knavery. He was locked up in New York for some offense, waiting trial, when he telegraphed to a woman in Toronto that he was in the Tombs under arrest as Paul D. Hart and that he was her husband (which of course he was not), and asking that she send by wire \$400 to his attorney. She promptly responded with the money. The woman's husband was in New York, as Stoddart well knew, and having sent the money she hastened thither and drove to the Tombs to see her husband.

Stoddart says the meeting was delightfully dramatic. Explanations were necessarily made. Hart was searched by Warden Hagan, a considerable part of the \$400 was found upon him and he was, at once placed on trial for the new offense. He defended himself with some ability, denying the general facts, but of course conviction followed and the penalty on his heels. Had there been only this case to deal with Hart might even have escaped scot free, but another woman suddenly appeared from Indiana. She had not stopped to send the money that Stoddart had telegraphed for, claiming that he had been innocently locked up as a witness of a street murder, but had brought it with her. And from other sources money in various sums came for "Hart" in amounts from \$50 to \$200.

Stoddart complained bitterly of being sent from the Tombs; it was the ideal place, he said, to fool the wives of men who came to the metropolis.

"But how did you know the husbands in New York had wives at home?" was asked. "That is an unworthy question for an intelligent man," he replied. "The newspapers told me the men were here at the hotels. I assumed that they had wives at home. If a despatch was sent to a wife who did not exist

the message wasn't delivered and I lost nothing."

Stoddart's most eminent knavery took place in Tennessee, where he forged his way out of prison. Various inaccurate reports have been made of it, but it will be seen by this truthful narration of the facts furnished by Gov. Cameron, of that state, and by Stoddart himself, that it was as daring and clever a piece of rascality as any out of the domain of fiction.

Stoddart had been down South on a foraging expedition, moving from place to place, because, as he says, he "had to always go somewhere else," when he was arrested for a forged check and sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary. This offense, committed at Murfreesboro, was marked by his peculiar methods. He advertised for mules—"the subscriber would buy for spot cash good mules seventeen hands high, from three to seven years old, brought to the Cheatham livery stables on the 24th inst. between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Mules must pass accredited State veterinary surgeon."

On the 24th Murfreesboro was filled with mules. They came from all the central part of the State, from Southern Kentucky, and from the blue-grass regions in droves, actually thousands of them. But there was no purchaser. He had disappeared on the Nashville train the evening before after buying oats and straw, hay and halters and engaging men to care for the mules and cashing various checks and drafts for a sum aggregating a thousand dollars or more.

The indignant Southerners cried aloud for his punishment, and Stoddart, having been caught, was lucky to escape into a convict camp, where he dug coal by day and slept on a chain by night.

"The life was," he says, "something awful," and Stoddart set about freeing himself as soon as possible. With some money he had smuggled into the camp he bribed a warden to furnish him writing materials, and he wrote a letter which he signed with the name of the Governor's closest political friend dated on the train on the way to Washington. The letter was in effect as follows:

"I wish you would release Edward O. Stoddart at once, now a convict working in Merrill's camp. Have him up to Nashville and give him a good lecture. His people are fine folks up in Massachusetts and my best friends."

"You had better let him have a credit of \$200 and see that he goes right home. I have fully investigated the case and it is a proper subject for the action I ask, as I will explain," etc.

How Stoddart was able to imitate the handwriting successfully has not been discovered. Probably he had had correspondence with the Governor's friend and treasured a memory of his chirography for possible future use.

The chances were desperate, but Stoddart was in desperate straits, and agreeably to his hopes rather than his expectations the order for his release and the payment of his fare to Nashville came down in a few days. To this day Stoddart deprecates especially his failure to get to Nashville. He says it cost him one of the most interesting situations he had ever devised, namely, the chance to appear before the Governor with feigned humility and gratefully accept the \$200 that "the Governor's friend" had asked for.

But the allurements of a barroom at a railroad junction on the way betrayed him and after he had spent the few dollars he had in his pocket he was arrested for vagrancy. He spent three days in jail and when released he was overdue at Nashville, and his trick had been discovered. He however, took to the woods and mountains, and after incredible hardships and perils got across the Ohio river and breathed freely once more.

When he has subsequently been arrested the police, anxious to get the reward offered for an escaped convict, have sought to return him to Tennessee, but Gov. Cameron always replied "not wanted," until wearied with having the man offered to him he at last informed the Pinkertons that "Edward O. Stoddart was too brilliant a man to be returned to his State. If he will keep out of it his pardon stands."

Stoddart has served time in Joliet, in Jackson, Mich.; Wethersfield, Conn.; Wilkesbarre, Pa., and probably elsewhere, and his prison career has been almost as notable as his criminal one.

As soon as he was immured he began with indelible industry to correspond with "all and sundry." If a will were missing he had it, or the rough draft made by the testator. If there were a mystery in a

great crime he had the solution. If a child had been lost for years he could bring it home. Wherever anything was moving Stoddart took part with secrets of vast importance—to sell. When the post-office scandals were developing in Havana Stoddart was a "friend" of Neeley's—"knew him intimately at Muncie, Ind., and was in the plot. Trouble had come to himself and he was in jail. He had letters from Geely that would convict the defaulter, and if Postmaster-General Emory Smith would get him released he would clear the department of this Havana scandal," etc.

So specious were his professions that the Postmaster-General took the matter seriously and sent two special agents to Wilkesbarre jail to investigate. They took stock in Stoddart's story, and had it not been for a misdated forged letter from "Neeley" which was shown them Stoddart would have won his point.

Then Stoddart took a hand in the Gilman will case in Bridgeport, "having been present at the drawing of the will which let in the half-bloods."

So well did he play this part that he was brought to Bridgeport on his release from Wilkesbarre prison and managed to get several hundred dollars before the falsity of his alleged information was discovered.

He operated in this way all over the country, securing good returns, although failing of success often enough to discourage a less sanguine man. The chief trouble with his plans was that he never left himself a way of escape. His operations in prison show that. When discovered he was caught beyond hope. Nevertheless it was in prison that he delighted to work, and some of his begging letters were marvels of clever composition.

These he addressed chiefly to women of prominence in philanthropy and charity. His methods of approach were for most of these women simply irresistible. Watching the newspapers carefully he would clip out, for instance, something which such a woman was reported to have said and write to her that "her words had touched him with great force and truth and that no woman in the world had ever said these things with the force that she had."

Then would follow his own story, the narration being founded on fact or fiction to suit the case. More flattery was then administered in terms that showed him a man of education whose judgment was worth something. The correspondence being opened thus diplomatically, the outcome was an appeal for material aid to support the wealth of sympathy already bestowed, and the reply was rarely adverse.

At one time when a prisoner he was coquetting more than thirty of these correspondences, most of them with successful results. The ladies of Philadelphia's best society took special interest in him, and when he left Wilkesbarre jail he had from them a trunk of superior clothing, besides \$200 which they had sent him, while from other sources as far away as California he had money in varying sums.

When, however, he struck the name of Miss Jeanette L. Gilder, the editor of the Critic, and opened up a correspondence on the customary lines, basing his address upon the sentiments she had declared in a signed article, he met with a serious obstacle. Miss Gilder is an old reporter and she investigated her correspondent and made "copy" of him in a way which almost ruined his trade. Stoddart has a contempt for mere literary people since then, which was increased by his more recent experience with Lillie Devereux Blake, who, having invited him to call and having considered his mission, smilingly handed him half a dollar. "She read me like a book," said the victim of the lady's pleasantry afterward.

In later years he has chiefly sought to swindle women, and he counts among his victims the highest ladies in the land. His facility in penmanship is something extraordinary and was the means of setting out of court the Harrison will case in Philadelphia. The cause turned upon the authority of a witness' signature, and Persier Frazer, the American expert, widely known for his appearance in the Dreyfus trial, had examined the writing and declared it to be that of the man whose name it was. A. S. Shields, the leader of the criminal bar in Philadelphia, had come into the case—and had recently been counsel for Stoddart, whose acquittal he had secured upon a forged check. He had in this way learned of Stoddart's proficiency with the pen and, calling a meeting of the principals and counsel on his side, he introduced Stoddart to them and a test was made by sending him to a side table and passing rapidly before him to copy seventy signatures at random. Mr. Frazer was forced to admit that fifty-seven of the forgeries were so exact that experts might well be deceived. It was as a result of this that the case involving millions was amicably settled.

Stoddart has figured as a campaigning exhorter and circuit-riding preacher in Arkansas and Missouri. It was in this capacity that he fell from grace and into the hands of the law at the same time in Osage county in the latter State. He was assisting, with signal success, the presiding elder of his circuit in conducting revival meetings when he became the guest of a prominent Methodist farmer, whom he asked to indorse a check on the Boatman's Bank, in St. Louis, for \$125. This the farmer readily did, but when the check was turned into the local bank it called

for \$1,250, which was several hundred more than the farmer's balance. Payment was delayed, and the result of inquiries was the arrest of Stoddart. Being arraigned before the Justice of the Peace, Stoddart demanded that the proceedings be opened with prayer. He prayed for the court, the bank, the prosecutor, and especially for the persecuted, with such rigor and eloquence that he was paroled till next day in custody of his host. That night he started for the nearest State line and never stopped till he was in Hudson County, N.J., whence for his besetting sin he was sent a few weeks later to Trenton for ten years.—New York World.

# How He Kissed the Bride

"The official value of an illegal kiss has been estimated variously by different courts and as it is just cause for a damage suit, I want to tell you how I rendered myself liable for such an action without giving you the right names," said a rug expert. "The joke was rather more on me than on the girl, because she was awfully homely and she does not know that I had no right to kiss her."

"I have always lived in New York, and I know absolutely nothing about Brooklyn. When I received an invitation to the wedding of my old friend Williams to Miss Bridge, of Brooklyn, I telephoned Williams my congratulations and told him I never could find my way to the church and then to the bride's home."

"You must come, old man," said he, "because I want you to meet my bride. She's a peach. You'll find the church about two inches off the map. Don't mistake another church around the corner for it. You don't care for the church service, so just arrange to get there at 8:30 when that part of the show will be over and follow the crowd that comes out. It will lead you to the bride's home, which is only three blocks away. I'll never forgive you if you don't come and drink my wife's health."

"Such an invitation as that was not to be dodged. The wedding was last Thursday night. I persuaded my sister to go with me and at one minute past six we left our home in evening dress. "If Williams had been married up a tree it would have been easier for his friends. We exhausted several trolley lines, and after leaving the last car and walking six blocks we came to the church at just 8:30 o'clock. We were exactly on time."

"The bride and bridegroom had just driven away and a large array of men and women in their best togs were filing out. A few got into carriages. Most of them walked and we fell into line. "I didn't happen to see any of Williams' friends. My sister very unkindly said that this event must have been the first of the social season for the bride's friends, because there was a very noticeable odor of moth balls in the air."

"After walking about eight blocks we reached the house. A group of Roger's statuary beamed out of the front window and from the open door came the subdued sound of voices. "As we entered a maid at the door directed us to the dressing rooms. When I came down to the ladies' dressing room on the second floor my sister said to me:

"Joe, I don't see a single soul here whom I know. I am not going down until some of Williams' friends arrive. These women all say 'bean' with a conscious gasp and shake hands on a level with your chins. I'm not up to mingling with that kind of a crowd unsupported. You go down and prospect around for the Shaws or the Butlers or the Andersons or some one whom we know and we'll make up a little party by ourselves."

"When I reached the parlor it was filled entirely with the bride's friends. There was a generous looking buffet in the rear room, and with several others I drifted toward it. I had been traveling for nearly three hours and I needed something to sustain me. "A puffy, fat man, who evidently was a member of the household, caught my eye, and between us we made a small bottle look empty in a jiffy. "Only on such occasions as this, my boy, do I approve of wine," he said, eyeing me with moist eyes. "This is indeed a happy occasion," said I, "and let's have one more, for I am tired."

"We drank to the bride and bridegroom and the puffy man squeezed my hand affectionately and told me to come to him whenever I needed a friend, which I thought was mighty kind of him. "I wandered around for half an hour without seeing a familiar face.

Then I went up to report to my sister. She decided to wait until some of our friends arrived, and I went to the men's dressing room to smoke a cigarette. There was my fat friend smoking and he greeted me with all the warmth of old friendship. "What do you say to a little brandy?" he asked. "Suit me, thanks," said I, and from a closet he brought out a bottle and some glasses. Brooklyn isn't as bad as she is photographed, I thought. "Not as a regular thing do I approve of brandy," said the fat man, "but this is a most extraordinary occasion, my dear—say, I've forgotten your name."

"I told him. "Friend of the groom?" "Yes." "Known him long?" "All my life." "Say, now, honestly, what do you think of him?" "He is one of the finest boys that ever lived," said I, "honorable, ambitious and clean."

"Do you mean it?" "If I didn't I wouldn't have come all the way from Upper New York for his wedding," said I, and this then convinced the fat man. "He told me that he was the bride's father. He would always look upon me as his own son. He was proud to know his son-in-law's friends. They must make his house their own and would I, as a favor have just one more drink with him?"

"It was approaching the supper hour, and I finally persuaded my sister to come downstairs with me. The crowd around the bride and bridegroom was so dense that we could not penetrate it. "We fell in with the people who were going down to supper. That supper was all right, though we didn't know a blessed soul in the room. We had dined at 5 o'clock in order to get there, and we were hungry. "The conversation around us was about church socials, challenge ciphers and a Mrs. Somebody who won the Whist Club's prize by methods little better than downright cheating. When we went upstairs again the bride and bridegroom had disappeared to get into their travelling clothes. "I was feeling very comfortable and I again went over to the fat man and shook hands with him. "I am an old friend of the groom," said I, "and I haven't yet seen the bride. I intended to kiss her when I did."

"Kizzer, my boy, kizzer her. She's my daughter. She won't mind, no zezzer bit. You jus' stand on this stairway an' when she comes down you kizzer for yourself an' you kizzer for me."

"Williams had told me that she was a peach, and with this parental permission and the courage of wine I was determined to kiss her. The guests crowded the door with rice and old shoes, but I stood on the stairs. "Suddenly a commotion in the upper hall broke out and there were cries of 'Here they come! Look out for them!'"

"The bride came first with one of those loose raglan affairs with the hood drawn over her head. She bolted down the stairs, and when she was about to pass me I said: "One minute, please; I want a kiss."

"I grabbed her round the waist, pulled back the hood and—well after going that far I had to kiss her. In fact she seemed to expect it. I thought that Williams' peach looked decidedly frost-bitten. "The crowd at the foot of the stairs yelled approval, and I let her go, pretending not to hear the fat man's plaintive call: "Kizzer her again for me, my boy."

"He might do his own kissing. As I stood there, sobered by the view of the bride's face, a little man with side whiskers darted past me, and everyone pelted him with rice. I leaped over a rail and asked a man who was that. He eyed me suspiciously as he replied:

"Why, the groom, Billy Johnson. "It took me less than a minute to bolt into the men's dressing room and get my coat. I didn't give my sister time to put her rubbers on. Chucking them in my pocket, I hustled her out of the house in a rush, feeling like a thief. It wasn't until we had walked two blocks that she said: "I don't know what to make of it. I didn't see any of Williams' friends."

"Of course not," said I. "I haven't been to Williams' reception. I led you to the wrong church, and I followed the wrong crowd, and I don't want you to mention the thing again."

"My sister's idea of the humor is sometimes strong, and she just escaped hysterics. "I'm glad it wasn't Williams' wedding," I said. "Why?" she asked. "Well, you know Williams said that the bride was a peach, and the fat man, her father, you know, said that it would be all right, so I stepped this bride on the way down and kissed her. She wasn't a peach, that's all. If Williams had married her I'd never gone there to call."

"My sister seemed to think it was all very funny and perhaps I would have agreed with her if I hadn't kissed the bride. She wrote a explanation of the affair to Williams, and he and his wife sent a joint letter from Atlantic City yesterday. They knew about the wedding and they assured me that the bride was only 43. I'll never see such chances at another Brooklyn wedding, you may be sure."

"New York Sun.

**Return-d Today.** Weldy Young, mining recorder located at Clear Creek, who has been in the city for the past week or so returned to his distant post today. He will not be in town again after the opening of navigation.

**THEY ARE FINE.** You will say so after trying the Shredded Whole Wheat Biscuit. F. S. Dunham, The Family Grocer, corner 2nd avenue and Albert street.

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