

THE CONVICTS STORY.

"I am an ex-convict in search of work. Will you please help me pay my rent." This was inscribed at the head of a sheet of paper put into my hands by its author. He was a man fifty-two years of age. His constitution was evidently broken. The hang-dog look of a long time convict was become habitual.

"How long have you been out," I asked. "Two years. I was sent up in 1870, for twenty years, of which I actually served eighteen. I lost four years of my shortening time by getting into trouble with the foreman. He called me a horrible name in anger one day, and I threw my tailor's goose at him—missed him—and went into the dark cell six months, besides losing the four years. See that?"

He pointed to a bunch on his skull, evidently the relic of a dreadful contusion. "That is where the foreman hit me with his club." "What was your crime, my friend?" "Twenty years means a serious offence." "Yes. If you'll let me sit down I'll tell you about it."

I seated the man in my office chair and gave him a glass of water at his request. His frankness and entire absence of affectations and protestations seemed to me to argue his essential sincerity. "Probably you never heard of me—or you have forgotten. Twenty years is too long to carry all the newspaper crimes around in one's head I suppose, though they had a great deal to say about me. I would have succeeded all right if it hadn't been for a young man named Gordon,— Dicky Gordon I think they called him. I've that against him—but I've no time left to settle scores. It's no use, either. But this isn't telling the story, is it?"

He paused a moment to consider—or perhaps still reluctant to go over the matter. "My name is Carson Bailey. Father and mother never paid much attention to making a good man of me. Still, I had New England air to breathe—and, up to the time of my one, only crime, I was not called a bad fellow. You see the first step in my down-fall was in getting acquainted with two medical students at the hospital. Rather, I may say, they got acquainted with me. They had a scheme to work that needed a third actor, and they pitched on me, very rightly guessing that I would be likely to offer few scruples. I was poor and discontented. I had served in the army three years, and the monotony of life after my return made me uneasy for adventures, and ambitious for gain. Without a very fine moral sense, I fear, I had enough education and experience to feel that I was cheated by fortune. There was a girl in the case—always is. I guess she did think something of me, and I—well it's no use now. Her name was Bertha—I've kept her picture."

Bailey took it from his pocket and showed it to me. "She's living yet, not any more a girl I suppose—but I don't want to see her now, I'd rather think of her looking like this." He kissed the picture—there was moisture in his eyes. "These medical students were careful scoundrels, and the game they were up to was a great one. It was carried out well, too. But there's always a weak place in every bad design, I think. One day after our plans were well arranged—that took a year and a half—I decided that in to be drowned in the pond just above the town. Sixteen insurance companies had policies underwritten on my life, amounting in all to over seventy thousand dollars. My body was recovered, after a three days search. The face was eaten some by fishes, so it appeared, though I suppose acids, and not fishes, had been at work. But the height, the size, the cut of the hair, the color of the eyes, the cast of the face; the clothing, finger-ring, watch, papers, everything, were Carson Bailey's. Not a breath of doubt was there. I had been seen to go out in the leaky dory, and it was found full of water, washed against a grassy island. No one could be found to say that I knew how to swim. There were a dozen villagers who were entirely certain that I could not swim a stroke. My body was inspected—no inquest was deemed necessary. The two village physicians certified to my death; the undertaker to my burial. There was never a clearer case, nor one which could be more absolutely free from suspicion. Englewood, the leading spirit in the scheme, had a "sister" to whom it was known I had been paying attentions. When it became public that I was engaged to marry her—this was before I was drowned—there was a little scene one night with the other one, well, she knew afterward why I did it. All the policies were issued by this female confederate. This was the only weak place in the plot. So much insurance in favor of a woman who at best was only a betrothed fiancée, was liable to be questioned. But, strange to say, the policies were nearly all paid.

As for me, I took my own death with as much philosophy as could be expected under the circumstances. It made me smile when I heard of the positiveness with which my body was identified. Englewood, who occasionally visited me in my secure concealment, kept me informed of the progress of the plot. He declared that if I had seen his skillfully prepared "stiff" in the coffin, I should have never pretended again to be alive. Englewood was a sly, gentlemanly fellow, with a grim humor about him as ghastly almost as his occupation—a man absolutely without nerves, or a scruple of any moral color in his entire mental constitution. We had prepared and stocked a brush-camp in the nearly impenetrable morass of a great swamp, penetrated and saturated by the waters of the lake in which I was drowned. I lived here alone for seven months. Englewood, about once a week, ostensibly to go fishing, rowed up the crooked creek that penetrated the morass as far as he could get his shallow punt, and thence, over logs and bogs, and dangerous masses of roots and grass, visited my camp. He usually brought me the papers and a supply of cigars or other necessities. Englewood also brought me at length, a pocket-book full of bank notes, and made an accounting of the insurance money. Three companies held out on some technical ground or other. The money was divided equally among four of us. I had only \$15,000 for my share. I had only to go away to a distant State or land and enjoy it. It had come out of insurance companies. I did not feel any

great amount of regret or remorse. I simply meant not to get caught. "Not long after the death and burial of Carson Bailey, the P—Life Company, that had underwritten five thousand dollars on my life, sent a young fellow named Dicky Gordon down to the place to see what he might see. The P—Life Company was not satisfied, but as it seems they had decided to risk the loss of five thousand dollars on a scheme of their own. They paid the policy in full without any protest, and left the rest to Dicky Gordon. Naturally enough this young spotter turned his attention to Englewood's "sister," who kept very quiet and gave no evidence of anything but the most discreet grief at the death of her betrothed. But Gordon was a patient scamp—blame him! He obtained a situation on the village newspaper, where his natural occupation was news gathering. Little by little he formed his theory. He watched Englewood and traced his course to the bog. Now during my confinement on the morass I used to walk about more or less, in the tall grass and brush for amusement, and to relieve the tedium. I had a skiff hidden in a little inlet under some grass and foliage, and at night when it was late enough to make it safe I used to row a little up and down the creek. One night I came back from one of my walks, and found pinned on my knapsack a note from Englewood. He wrote that arrangements had been made to get me out of the region on the following night. Somebody was trying to work up trouble. It was not safe to visit the bog, I was to row over to the west side of the lake at midnight. A man would be there to carry me across to B, where I could catch the Pullman night express to Boston. The note closed with minute directions and cautions, and the declaration that the man who was to meet me knew all, and was in his entire confidence.

I was angry when I read Englewood's letter. The scheme was known to another, —very likely it had been blown abroad. I knew how rapidly such things travel. Still his direction to leave this place at once, was the best and first thing to be done. I kept in my camp the next day, and laid my plans. At eleven o'clock that night I got out the skiff, and rowed away. The money I had received was in my clothing. I took nothing else along, but was at pains to sink in the creek every article of my camp, and to demolish it as completely as I could. I rowed across the lake to the point named in Englewood's letter. Here I landed and gave signal agreed upon. Before I knew there was anyone near, I found a man on either side of me. I stepped back into my skiff instantly, and before I could be prevented, had shoved it out again into the water.

"You might as well come back, Bailey, game's up," I knew the voice. It was Greely, the county sheriff. I immediately turned, and dove into the lake. I swam under water as far as I could, and straggled out into the deeper parts. It was very dark, and they had no boat with which to follow me. It was a long swim across, but I accomplished it. I heard their voices on the shore, and they lighted some torches and lanterns after awhile, but I was then too far out to be seen, swimming on my back, with only the level of my face above the calm surface.

But luck was not on my side. Dicky Gordon had posted men at various points all around the lake. There was one near enough to hear the slight splashing I made in coming out on the other side. Long before the signal had been sent around, of course. It takes an hour for an average man to swim a mile and a half. I was nearly dead from fatigue, and dropped down on the beach to rest and recover breath. But in three minutes they found me. I heard them moving up the shore, and hid as closely as I could behind a big mill-log under the bank. When I found there was no use hiding, I got hold of a piece of fence-rail and told them not to come. I had hardly got the words out when somebody threw a rope over my shoulder, and directly over my head in a regular lasso noose. And then it was no use.

Dicky Gordon wrote that decoy letter himself. He had never lost a moment watching Englewood and his "sister." But they proved too smart for him. Englewood tricked him into a betrayal of himself—just how, I never learned. But Englewood and the other two left in the night, without even time to warn me. Dicky Gordon sent his men around the pond all day and all night, made his way to my camp, watched me go out for my walk, left his decoy letter, and waited for his game.

Of course there was no defence. The P—Company go their five thousand dollars back—the rest went to the companies that were quickest to file claims. When the judge sentenced me he said, with tears in his eyes, that he had no doubt I was the least guilty, and the most unfortunate of the lot of conspirators. "And they were never caught?" "Englewood was killed in a railroad accident two years later—the others I never heard from.—Portland Transcript.

THE BIG LAGOON. Where the Squaws and Children Play Lacrosse. On the northern coast of California, some thirty miles below the mouth of the Klamath river, is one of the most interesting natural formations to be found in this country, known as the Big Lagoon. Here the coast, which runs north and south up to this point, takes a sharp turn inland, bordered by very high hills, running to a distance of about three miles, then turning out again makes a sharp bay almost V-shaped, and for ages past a sand-bar has been washing itself up across this bay until the bar has raised up out of the water some ten or twelve feet, having a width of about 100 feet and a length of four miles, reaching across the entire bay. This bar is in the shape of a roof. When there is a storm the breakers will roll up one side of it, break over and run down into the bay inside, and it is a novel sight to stand there and watch the waves mount high on one side and perfectly calm on the other, the line between the two at intervals hidden altogether. This bar is a sort of short cut and can be traversed on horseback. In a storm the horseman will one minute be high and dry on land, the next minute a large wave will roll up and running under the horse's feet to the depth of a foot or more, the rider will be, for an instant, four miles or so at sea on

horseback, with no land nearer than the high bluffs of the mainland in sight. The wild ducks that frequent this part of the coast literally fill this inland bay, and the passing hunter, should he take a shot at them, will raise such a cloud and such a quacking that he will think all the ducks of the earth have gathered there. Occasionally some wild boar, like a bear or a panther, will be found crossing this bar, and the Indians have much sport when such a thing happens, the animal rarely escaping capture or death.

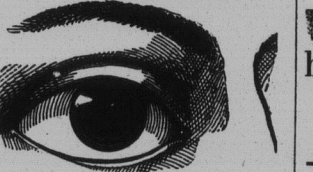
Here the Digger Indians abound, living on the shell fish which they catch along the beach, seldom going over the ridge of hills to capture a deer, which are plentiful. It would astonish a Yale or Harvard football man to come upon this scene some bright morning at low tide and see the squaws and children playing lacrosse on the beach. They get so excited with their sports that they keep it up until the tide drowns them from the beach, often staying there until they have to chase the ball down into the surf.

The Tantalizing Typewriter. But of all the girls the most amusing, at least to the casual observer, is a typewriter to whom a playwright is dictating a play. I had fun of that kind yesterday. "If you speak during that period," the author began, "I will—" "A period after 'that'?" the typewriter interrupted. "No, no; the word 'period.' I will kill you."

"I always get so interested. Is this a comedy?" "Maud, spare me—spare me—'You must not call me Maud.'" "No, no; the character speaks. Maud is the girl in the play, you know. Where was I?" "You were at 'spare me.'" "Go down on your knees in brackets." "On his knees?" "I am writing this comedy, Miss. Knees in brackets." "Yes. What's he got his knees in brackets for? Broken, I suppose?" "What are you doing? Let me see. No, no, no. Put down 'knees' in brackets. Enter servant. Servant—Never have I seen nothing like that—"

"Anything of course." "I am writing this piece." "That's bad grammar, you know." "Yes, I know—I know. Put down just what I say. Maud, look at—" "Sir! Oh, I forgot. Yes. Look at—" "In brackets; George looks at servant and shakes—" "Period. And shakes his head—" "Who shakes his head—George or the servant?" "George—I said George." "Oh? He shakes the servant's head, doesn't he?" Author dies.—Ex.

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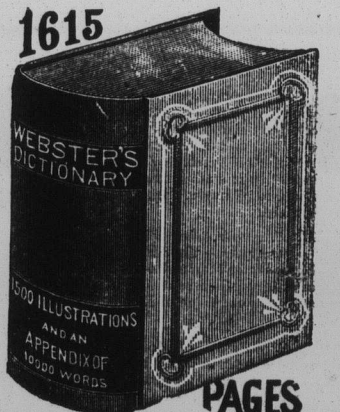
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