

pend. In the barber shop the mayor and the justice of the peace held a spirited dialogue. The mayor was a portly, pompous man, with a smooth red face with large folds of fat that seemed to press about his eyes. The justice was a scrawny, shiny-elbowed man, with unlimited confidence in his own wisdom.

"Seems to me too clear a case against Bobs," began the justice. "With my experience in cases, never seen one plainer."

The mayor ahemmed judicially. "I suppose so," and the justice leaned forward clasping his knees.

"You see it's this way. The postmaster at Greenwood'll swear the bag came on the train and the three mail clerks'll swear it was thrown off. And at the station the agent and Gambler Pete saw five bags put on the dray. They'll swear to it that there was five just before he left for the postoffice. Now, Bobs drew into the alley and says he was gone into the house a minute to see the woman, and when he got to the postoffice the bag was gone. Says he dunno how many he started with, dunno how many he left at the postoffice. Nobody seen him drive into the alley. Nobody ever heard of him doin' it before. The clerk at the postoffice says he acted queer and drev away without callin' fer his mail as he allus does, (which ain't funny, fer his mail allus comes in the bag that was lost). 'Pears like a mighty clear case."

"Well," drawled the mayor, shifting himself to one side as the lather was applied. "Bobs has been a good man. He's had a hard struggle here to make a livin' for them eight youngsters of his'n. The temptation was maybe greater'n we imagine. At \$3.00 a day it's almost a hopeless case to ever get up in the world, fixed as he is. But then, we can't afford to have robbin' right here in our midst if he is a respected citizen. It hurts our fair name, our civic pride. The hand of justice can't be stayed. The law'll have to take its course," and the mayor ahemmed several times.

By this time the justice was standing in front of the mayor's chair with one foot on the rest.

"But what beats me, though, for all the cases I've seen, is where he's got the bag hid. O' course they didn't make the search until this morning when they arrested him, but it's amazin' how he could o' hid it, he was so infernal clumsy in stealin' it. Anybody knowed he'd be found out. Old Dad's been stormin' around. Heard me say Bobs was in a bad fix, and the old tiger id like to eat me up; called me more infernal names in Chinese and Hebrew than I ever heard of before. The old varmint lays a heap by Bobs. The angels he wouldn't believe if they said Bobs was guilty. Contraryist old bat 'bove ground."

"But Bobs is in fer it, though he made a mighty good job o' hidin'. Might a got scared and burned it, of course."

The trial progressed rapidly. The evidence seemed to be all on one side. The postmaster at Greenwood, the three mail clerks, the agent and Gambler Pete all agreed on one point at least, that the pouch had been put on the dray. Further than this, no trace of it could be found. Bobs himself sat during the trial stolid, sullen and dejected. The justice sat in the front row of seats, alert, pricking up his ears and noting things on an old envelope as if following very closely important threads of evidence. Bobs' lawyer conducted the cross-examination rather half-heartedly, seeming to feel the odds against him. The only shadow of escape seemed to be in the

fact that Bobs had left the dray for a moment to speak to his wife. Someone could have taken the bag then. But this was supported only by Bobs' own testimony, which that of his wife seemed to contradict.

At first she had heard Bobs in the kitchen and went to speak to him—but here in her testimony she faltered, and said, "I don't remember; my head feels funny," and she was led from the stand with tears on her face. Then Bobs' shoulders were seen to raise once and he coughed deeply.

When Dad was called to the stand, a titter went round. The old man stood a sorry spectacle, gingerly fingering his flat-crowned little hat. His face was pale, almost haggard, and his uncombed hair stood out from his head. Bobs stared at him open-mouthed.

"Where were you on the night of this alleged robbery?"

"In the cooler, sir."

There was an audible smile in the audience, and the judge frowned over his spectacles.

"Were you there all night?"

"Until eight o'clock, sir."

"Were you at the postoffice that night?"

"Yes-sir." Here he fingered the hat very nervously, with a swift sidelong glance at Bobs.

"At what time?"

"About nine o'clock."

"Where were you between eight and nine?"

The old man staggered back and faced the court almost fiercely, with his scrawny right hand raised high in the air. In a shrill voice he almost screamed between his teeth:

"Yer, honor, I was cuttin' open the mail bag."

The judge looked helplessly at him. A few men in the court room stood up. The justice forgot to take notes. Bobs half raised in his chair, his mouth opened as if to say something, but Dad went on in a harsh, hoarse voice:

"Yer-sir, that man is innocent. I'm the man, sir. The mail bag is in the ash pile under the shop. There's a cut in it right near the lock."

The news spread like wildfire. Dad and Bobs were both in jail. The sheriff and his deputy were sent at once to the old paint shop and, sure enough, there was the mail bag, with the cut just where old Dad had said it was. Only one or two letters and half a hundred papers remained.

When the sheriff visited Dad in his cell the old man lay with one hand shading his face, the other on his breast. He did not even look up when the sheriff entered.

"What'd you wait so long for before owning up, Dad?"

Without moving, Dad said, "Didn't think they'd prove it on him. That he'd get through and I'd be safe. Couldn't see a good man as he is, with eight children, go to jail for an old worthless like me. He'll try to say he did it to shield me, but it's a lie. I did it."

A new trial was set for a week. Less interest, however, was shown in this than in Bobs' trial. There could be little interest in trying a self-confessed criminal. Before Dad's confession everyone had expressed themselves as believing Bobs guilty. "It was too plain a case," but now even those most outspoken before Bobs' trial declared that although things looked dark, they couldn't quite see how honest Bobs would do it. Circumstantial evidence was a humbug they had always believed.

"Jest as I reckoned all the time," said the justice to a knot of eager loafers that sat on the cracker boxes in front of the restaurant. "With my ex-

(Continued on page 5.)

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