

Our Secular Story.

THE MYSTERIOUS DRAWER.

"Is Mr. Carbon in?"

"That is my name," I replied.

"Are you the detective?"

"That is my profession."

"I am being robbed, and want your assistance."

"All right. Now give me all the particulars—your name, residence, place of business, of what you are being robbed, whom you suspect; in short, state clearly everything connected with the matter."

"My name is Thomas Hughes. I keep a country store in the village of—, and reside in the dwelling part of the house. I am being systematically robbed of money. The amounts taken at one time are not very large—ranging from one to five dollars—but they are very frequent—some three or four times a week."

"Where is the money taken from, Mr. Hughes?"

"From the cash drawer in the store; and what I cannot account for is that on one or two occasions I secretly watched the drawer, and am certain that no one had access to it—in fact, no one was near it at all; and yet, upon my examining the contents, which I had carefully counted before, I was astounded to discover that the amount was two dollars less."

"Are you sure you counted it correctly?"

"Yes; for I went over it three times, and then made a memorandum on a piece of paper to be doubly sure."

"This seems a rather interesting case, Mr. Hughes. Whom have you employed in your store?"

"A young man and a boy. They both have been with me for two years."

"And you don't suspect either of them?"

"No, I feel sure they are innocent, and yet I don't know what to think."

"Is there any one else you suspect?"

"No, no one."

"Have you spoken to any one about your losses?"

"No one except my wife."

"Has she mentioned it?"

"No; for she enjoined me to keep silent about it, and come to the city and consult a detective. I called on the firm I buy some of my goods from, and they recommended me to you."

"When do you go home?"

"To-night."

"Could you employ more help without exciting suspicion?"

"Yes, for I have been thinking about putting on some one else, as my business is increasing so that I actually require it."

"I have a very smart lad in my employ, and the best thing to be done is for him to go back with you, and for you to ostensibly set him to work in your store. Call here about four o'clock this afternoon, and he will be ready to accompany you."

Mr. Hughes then left, and I sent for my lad.

When he arrived, I informed him of the case, and gave him what instructions I thought necessary.

At four o'clock Mr. Hughes came back, I introduced the boy to him, and they then left together.

A few days after my young deputy returned, and handed me the following written report:

"I arrived at Mr. Hughes' house about eight o'clock of the day we left, and after supper I was introduced to the young man and boy employed there, and was told that the boy and myself were to sleep together."

"The next day I went to work in the store, and managed to examine the money-drawer pretty thoroughly without being observed by any one except Mr. Hughes."

"I could discover nothing wrong about the drawer—it being an ordinary one, with a springlock attached, and also a burglar-alarm, so arranged that unless you touched a spring, when opening it, it would strike a gong."

"For three days nothing was missed; but on the fourth, while Mr. Hughes and myself were the only persons in the store, a five-dollar note disappeared."

"The boy had been sent out to deliver some purchases, and the young man, whose name was Samuel Silvertton, was upstairs in his own room, preparing to go out."

"Both Mr. Hughes and myself had examined the drawer and counted the money; and, an hour afterward, upon making another examination, we discovered the money to be missing."

"As soon as we had ascertained this fact, I quietly went upstairs to see if Silvertton was there. As I passed his door I found it open, and saw him in the room."

"Surely he could not be the thief—for I had heard him ascend the stairs to go to his room before we counted the money, and I now found him there. But could he have left the room and robbed the drawer? No, he could not; for Mr. Hughes and myself were the only persons remaining, and no one but ourselves had been in the store during the absence of the others."

"I came down and reported that Silvertton was in his room."

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Mr. Hughes.

"It is a great mystery, I must admit," I replied; "but when we discover the process by which the money is abstracted, we may find it is not such a deep mystery after all. I always look at these matters as I do upon the tricks of a magician, which seem impossible to the uninitiated, but are easy enough when found out. I am not in the least superstitious, and there is always a rational way of accounting for what happens. No, we know that money is abstracted from the drawer; we know that somebody must take it, for it cannot leave without help; and that in order to take the money there must be a way. We also know that no one has been near the drawer in the store. Now, what are the means used? That is the first point we must find out; and after we discover that, it will be an easy matter to discover the thief."

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"When Silvertton goes out you must send the boy away on an errand, and then I will have an opportunity to take the boxes and barrels from under the counter, and also take the drawer out and make a thorough examination."

"All right, it shall be done, and I hope you will succeed."

"In a short time Silvertton passed out through the store as the boy entered."

"Mr. Hughes then sent the youth out, and I went to work."

"The first thing I discovered was that, among the boxes stowed under the counter, was a barrel, with both the head and bottom out, standing near the drawer."

"The drawer was made so that it would not come all the way out; but when it was pulled out to the end it would stop—being arranged that way on purpose—so that I was compelled to draw some nails in order to examine every part of it."

"The next thing I discovered was, that the back part of the drawer was on hinges, and could be let down from behind, even when the drawer was closed."

"I then examined the floor, and discovered what appeared to be a trap-door, but could find no way to open it. I descended into the cellar, and there found that I was right, and that it was a trap-door, just large enough to allow a person to squeeze through, and was opened and fastened from the under or cellar side."

"I informed Mr. Hughes, and showed him the means used to abstract the money."

"Well, you have found the mode," he said, "but who is the thief?"

"That remains to be seen," I replied; "but we will soon find him, and I think it will be best to catch him in the act."

"You are right—but how will you do it?"

"To-morrow I will appear not to be well, and you must order me to

my room. I will then descend to the cellar, secrete myself and watch; and if I find anyone at the trap-door I will knock on the floor, and you must come down immediately. We may not be able to catch the thief for several days, but I am sure we shall in the end."

"The next morning we were all very busy until dinner time, so I was not ordered to my room until afternoon."

"Robert," said Mr. Hughes, in the hearing of Silvertton and the boy, "you are not looking well; and, as the rush is over for the day, you had better go to your room and rest yourself."

"Thank you, sir. I shall be happy to follow your advice."

"Instead of going to my room, I hid myself in the cellar, in such a position that I could see any one who might approach the trap-door without being seen myself."

"After I had been there about two hours I perceived Silvertton come down the cellar stairs very quietly."

"He looked all around him, and then walked over to the trap-door."

"After again glancing, first one way and then another, and attentively listening, he concluded that all was safe."

"He then placed a barrel under the trap, a box on top of the barrel, and climbed up and went to work at his nefarious business."

"I waited until he was fairly through and in the store, and then I gave a rap on the floor."

"This seemed to alarm Silvertton, for he immediately commenced to descend."

"Not so fast, my young fellow!" I said, as I kicked away the barrel and box."

"Mr. Hughes came running down, and was just in time to see Silvertton let himself drop to the ground."

"Before he could rise Mr. Hughes grasped him by the arm and said:

"You rascal! I've caught you at last, have I?"

"Like all sneak thieves, he was a coward, and so showed himself."

"Oh, Mr. Hughes," he said, "I've done nothing wrong—indeed, indeed, I haven't!"

"Have done nothing wrong, eh? What were you doing up there?"

"Why, I just saw the trap-door, and thought I would investigate it."

"I'll investigate you, you hypocrite, thief and robber!" cried the angry owner. "I will put you in jail."

"Oh, don't! please don't—I—I never will do it again. Oh, good, kind sir, please let me off this time, and the rascal fell upon his knees, crying and sobbing like a child."

"How long has this been going on?" demanded his master.

"Not long, sir."

"Don't lie to me! How long, I ask?"

"About six months."

"How much have you stolen in