

Aged Lady's Gold.

Rev. William N. Coffey, pastor of the Christian church at Ninth and Shaw streets, Des Moines, Iowa, languishes in a cell in the county jail. He is charged and has confessed that he robbed an old lady of her life's savings, amounting to \$600. Mrs. Magart, a lady seventy years of age and quite alone in the world, took Coffey to her home as a boarder some three years ago. He became a minister of the gospel, and the old lady grew to look upon him as a son. She showed him her savings and exhibited rare coins of gold. She had every confidence in Coffey. He stole the money, but the kind old motherly lady was ignorant of the fact. The minister did not steal all the money at once. He gradually took a coin, and then another, until the little pile had disappeared. With the money he had a good time. He was engaged to three different young ladies at one time, and each one of them received a present at his hands. All three of the young ladies had promised to be his wife. On one of them he spent the kind old lady's money for a diamond ring, and on the others he spent divers amounts. Suspicion pointed to the young man when the loss of the money was discovered. The old lady had every confidence in him and would not believe him guilty.

He was taken before a church committee. At the close of the trial, as the old lady was passing down the aisle, broken hearted and crying, the minister—the young man whom she had befriended all these years—threw his arms around her neck and, weeping bitterly, said:

"Auntie, I stole your money!"

She told the story about in this way to the committee of church officers who called on her:

Mr. Coffey was preparing his sermon one morning last summer in Mrs. Magart's little parlor, and Mrs. Magart was busy arranging the room, when she asked him if he had ever seen a three dollar gold piece. In reply to his negative answer, she said she would show him one, which she had in her collection of money. They were rather a rare thing, and she thought he would like to see one. She went to a well worn lounge in the corner of the room to get her money, but started back when she opened the lounge and found it gone. She burst into tears and exclaimed that she had lost everything, even the gold pieces her dead husband had given her.

Coffey at once professed the deepest sympathy for her, but when she was quieted, advised her to say nothing of the loss.

"I too have lost money since I have been here," he said to her. "I have lost different sums at different times. I think it would be better

for us to say nothing about it. If either of us spoke of it, it might cast suspicion on the other."

"So I decided to say nothing about it," said Mrs. Magart, in giving her testimony, "for I trusted him as I do my own son."

This evidence, together with other interesting testimony, was taken by the committee of church members, who assembled recently in University Place. He was questioned and cross-questioned and caught up on his statements on every hand, but for five consecutive hours he stubbornly refused to admit one of the charges against him.

It was discovered that while Mr. Coffey was preaching the gospel at Ninth and Shaw streets, he was also making good progress in a three sided love affair, and the evidence the committee had gathered in this matter was considered almost enough of itself to deprive the young man of his freedom, for a time at least. It was brought out by the committee that, one year ago last winter, Coffey went to the little town of Farlin, in Greene county, Iowa, to assist in a protracted meeting by leading the singing. While there he contracted a cold and became quite ill. He was taken to the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Reed, living a few miles from Farlin, was cared for and restored to health by these kind people. While enjoying their hospitality he became enamored of their daughter, Miss Grace, who promised to become the wife of Coffey. He was assiduous in his attentions to the young lady, and when he came back to Drake university kept up a lively correspondence with her, and often went to see her.

It was after his engagement to Miss Reed that he met Miss Letha Bly, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Bly, of University Place, and fell in love with her. Miss Bly also promised to be the wife of Coffey, believing that his protestations of affection for her were sincere. He spent much of his time at her home while engaged to Miss Bly, and confided to her parents that he owned a farm in Greene county, but that it was in the name of a certain Reed family of that vicinity. He took much of the income from his farm, so-called, and left it in the care of the Bly family. Every now and then he would state that he must go to his farm and look after business matters, and would get a little money from his so-called income and leave the city for a few days or longer, when he went to the home of his first betrothed to visit her.

Coffey's actions in this respect were not seriously questioned until during carnival week, last fall, he had invited Miss Reed, betrothed number one, to spend the week with him in Des Moines. She came, but when Mr. Coffey was taking her to University Place the evening she

arrived, he was startled by an encounter with Miss Bly on the West Walnut street car. Miss Bly was with her sister at the time, and, not liking the thing on the face of it, went to her betrothed and demanded that he accompany her and her sister home. So, under the pressing invitation of the two girls, he was compelled to allow Miss Reed to find her way to his boarding place as best she could, and he accompanied the sisters to their home. There he was questioned by the two girls and their parents until they were thoroughly satisfied that the young minister was unworthy of further courtesies on their part, and he was peremptorily dismissed from their home and released from his engagement to Miss Bly.

While Coffey was spending the holidays at his home in Manhattan, Kansas, he wrote a letter to Miss Bly, vowing renewed devotion to her. About a month later he wrote such a letter to Miss Reed, of Greene county. Both letters are in the hands of the committee of church members which has been investigating the case.

It is not known how many sweethearts Coffey has, three of them being accounted for today, but it is expected that some of them will rally to his rescue and visit him in his dark cell in the basement of the county building.

The matter came before the justice court, where the preacher waived examination and was held to the grand jury, and his bond fixed at \$1,000.

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