

The Robbery of the Paymaster.

By "A"

Submitted in The Tribune's Short Story Contest.

THE PRINCIPAL event in this narrative—the murder and robbery of the paymaster of one of the large coal mining companies of Northeastern Pennsylvania, which occurred a number of years ago—will, no doubt, be remembered by the older residents of this region, although this is the first time that the details of the manner in which the criminals were hunted down and the crime fastened upon them has been put into print.

There appeared to be absolutely no clue which would lead to the detection of the perpetrators of the double crime.

Mr. Williams, the paymaster, and the young man, whose name was Andrew McMullen, who accompanied him in the capacity of assistant and guard, had left the railroad at Johnson's siding to drive to the Hadley mines at 9 o'clock in the morning. The distance was about three miles and was through a country that was entirely uninhabited, part of it being through the woods. Both the paymaster and his assistant were well-armed, each carrying a revolver of large calibre and the best make. In addition to this, McMullen, it was remembered, as they drove up the hill from the station, had, lying across his knees as if ready for instant use, a repeating rifle with which he was known to be very expert, being able to hit a mark the size of a silver dollar at one hundred yards distance with absolute certainty.

However, it was not with any thought of danger or any apprehension of attack that he was apparently ready for it. The two had in the same young month after month in perfect security. But McMullen was a young man who performed every duty with the utmost care. He had been sent with the paymaster to guard him and the large sum of money he carried, and he was always as much on the alert as if he expected the attack which was finally made.

But when it came it was like a stroke of lightning out of a clear sky and all his vigilance was of no avail. The paymaster was expected at the mines between 9 and 10 o'clock. When he did not arrive, the men and boys who were assembled to receive their pay supposed that for some reason the time for paying had been postponed and many went back to work. Others determined to wait until afternoon for their pay. Several decided to take a day off, and started for the station to take the train for the neighboring town, and it was some of these, about noon, who made the discovery that a terrible crime had been committed.

As they neared the middle of a dense woods, through which the road to the station ran, they were surprised to find a horse hitched to a carriage standing by the road side.

As they came up to it, they saw that the animal was bleeding from several wounds, and that he had evidently been unable to proceed further on account of weakness caused by loss of blood.

"By—!" said one of the men in an awe-struck voice, "it's the paymaster's horse."

"Yes," said another, "and he's done for; and I am thinking that it's worse that has happened to the paymaster."

Even as they spoke, the poor animal swayed back and forth where it stood and then fell blindly to the earth. The blood gushed from the hole in its side, and after one or two convulsive movements it lay dead before them.

Without another word and with white faces the men hurried on through the woods over the road along which the horse had evidently dragged himself as a thick trail of blood marked the way.

About a hundred yards farther on they came upon a ghastly sight.

The bodies of two men were lying in the middle of the road quite near to each other in great pools of blood, and huddled together in a shapeless, lifeless position, just as they had fallen from the carriage when the fatal shots were fired. For it was evident at once that both had been shot by some unseen person or persons with never a chance to fight for their lives and the money entrusted to their care.

The men, hurrying along the road, uttered a hoarse cry of horror and ran to the spot—at least two of them did; the third, as they remembered afterwards, held back.

"The paymaster will never pay us again," said one of the men as he examined the dead body of Mr. Williams.

A charge of buckshot, evidently fired from some point close at hand, as the wounds from the shot were all close together, had struck him in the back, making a fearful looking wound, and had passed through his body and must have killed him instantly.

"Poor man," said the second of the two men, "he never knew what struck him. Not a horse did he take after the murderer's hand pulled the trigger. And young McMullen, too, as fine a young fellow as there was in the country. Shot through the head," he said, as the two bent over the body of the young man and examined the wound which had struck him in the back of the head and had apparently penetrated the brain.

"What is the matter, Lovisky?" said one of the two to the third man, who had kept in the background.

"It makes me sick," said the Pole—for such he was—with white face and shaking limbs.

"Well, it ain't a nice sight, that's a fact," said the first speaker, "but some one must go back to the mines and tell them what has happened."

"No no go," said the Pole, hastily.

"Well, you can stay here then, and Phillip an' I'll go," replied the man.

"No, no, no," said the Pole, in great agitation.

"Where's your nerve, man?" said the other in disgust. "You've worked about the mines long enough to have seen men hurt and killed before."

"Come here, Murphy," said the one called Phillip, who had been examining the body of young McMullen during this exchange of words between the other two.

"I do believe the young fellow is alive still," he continued, as Murphy hastened to him, startled out of his anger with the Pole by the sudden earnestness of his companion. "Just put your hand under his coat and tell me if you can't feel a little warmth."

Murphy did as directed.

"Hurray!" he exclaimed, "of course there is. He's only stunned. The bullet must have glanced off. He's dead a lot, but if we can get help right away may be we can save him yet, and I tell you he's well worth saving. That's what all the men will say, and the boss thinks so, too. Now let's lift him in the shade here out of the dust and sun, and then I'll get back to the mines as quick as any one could afford and we'll have the doctor and a carriage here in no time."

The two tenderly picked up the unconscious body of McMullen and carefully hid it in the shade.

"Lovisky has something the matter with him," said Murphy, as the Pole silently watched them, but making no attempt to help.

Murphy then proceeded with all speed to the mines, and in a short time returned with an ambulance and medical assistance.

The doctor, upon examining young McMullen, informed them their conjecture was correct.

The bullet which had struck him had glanced off. It had struck him and made an ugly scalp wound, from which he had lost a good deal of blood. But a strong constitution and an indomitable will enabled him to be around again in a couple of days, in fact before the physician who attended him approved.

But McMullen felt that he was partly, at least, responsible for the death of the paymaster and the loss of the large sum of money to the company, although all of the officials sought to remove any such feeling from his mind.

An advertisement was at once published offering a reward of \$5,000 for the apprehension of the parties who had committed the crime and for the recovery of the \$40,000 which they had secured.

Officers and detectives were at once on the scene, but all of their efforts proved of no avail. They agreed that the criminals had so carefully covered up their tracks that there was small chance of capturing them, and that

they had gotten away to some distant place with their booty.

McMullen, however, had a different theory, although as yet he had nothing upon which to base it.

He was of the opinion that some one would have noticed any strangers in the vicinity, and all the inquiries made by the detectives had failed to establish this fact.

Then he was himself acquainted with all of the men at the mines and none of those employed at the place had gone away.

Therefore, he concluded, the criminals were still at work in their old places and were simply waiting until attention had ceased to be directed to the event, when they would quietly slip away on some pretext and go where they could enjoy the proceeds of the robbery.

Andrew had formerly worked in the mines and won his way up to the position he held by his intelligence and industry.

He now went back to his old occupation, allowing it to be understood that the officials were dissatisfied with him because he had failed to guard the paymaster. He hoped in this way to secure a position on the mine, but for a long time his efforts were unavailing.

One day he happened to meet Murphy, who had been one of the three first on the scene of the murder, and the conversation turned upon that event. In the course of which he mentioned what he called the "back of nerve" upon the part of the Pole, Lovisky, who had been with him and Phillip at that time.

An intangible something suddenly flashed into McMullen's mind. A peculiar expression on his face now recalled to him the look of the Pole's face when he had met him, which, he now remembered, had occurred only once or twice since he had been back in the mines.

Andrew said nothing, but he managed to lead the man Lovisky more frequently and to observe him more closely.

He soon became convinced that the man was avoiding him; and this led him to an increased vigilance which very nearly cost him his life.

The Pole was actually one of the two men who had committed the crime.

He at once became suspicious of Andrew and told his partner in the crime and who worked with him in the mines of his suspicions. They observed Andrew closely for a few days without allowing him to know it. And then laid a trap for him.

Andrew observed Lovisky making his way just after dark one evening towards the edge of the village. He followed him and saw him meet another workman, also a Pole, and go into an old building.

Creeping up close to this, Andrew was enabled to overhear their conversation.

It was as he had suspected. They had committed the crime and had hidden the money down the mines. They would secure it the next day and then, in a few days, on the pretext of getting work somewhere else where they had relatives, would leave the country.

The next day Andrew followed them into the mines, and saw them proceed to a portion of it quite remote from the usual places of working. He kept the small lamp in sight until reaching a certain spot it suddenly disappeared. Pressing forward cautiously,

he was suddenly grappled from behind and at the same time received a stab from a dirk, which, luckily for him, struck his shoulder blade and made only a long slash in his back instead of penetrating his heart as was intended, but from which the blood poured in a stream.

Nothing but Andrew's skill as an athlete and his presence of mind saved him. Sinking back as if he had received a fatal wound, the men somewhat relaxed their grasp. As they did this Andrew, by a sudden effort, shook them loose. He could see them by the dim light which they had uncovered making a rush at him. With one terrific blow of his closed hand he caught the foremost on the point of the chin. It fairly lifted him off his feet. The blow itself was sufficient to render him unconscious, but in falling, as was discovered afterwards, the back of his neck came in contact with a piece of rock with such force that his neck was broken and death was instantaneous.

Grappling with the second one, Andrew at once discovered that he was the one who had stabbed him. The man endeavored to keep his right hand free, and Andrew at once divined his purpose and strove as desperately to grasp the hand that held the dagger. He received one or two slight wounds, but finally succeeded in catching the man's wrist. Then all that was at end as far as the Pole was concerned. With a sudden exertion of his own muscles Andrew bent the man's wrist until he heard the bones snap like a piece of dry wood. Wrestling the knife from his hand, in an instant he had buried it in his breast, and the fight was over.

Warned by the increasing weakness of his partner, Andrew hurried back as fast as he could to the part of the mines where he could secure assistance. That was the last he could remember until he found himself lying in the open air half an hour later with a crowd of wondering faces gathered around, among them the doctor, who had just discharged his cuts and stopped the bleeding.

In a few minutes Andrew had privately informed the superintendent of what had happened. The latter at once organized a party, and, guided by Andrew's directions, had no difficulty in proceeding to the spot in the mines where the dead bodies of the Poles lay. And close to them, in a small recess in the mines, was found the money.

Andrew was soon around again. His exploit received a great deal more attention and honor than he deserved. He felt depressed at first over the event, as the killing of two men was anything but a pleasing recollection to a young man of twenty.

"You must not feel that way about it, my boy," said the president of the board of directors. "You saved your own life and recovered the money for the company, and here is your reward, fairly earned and well deserved."


And the official proceeded to count out a pile of bills until \$5,000 lay before Andrew on the table. And what was, perhaps, of more importance, Andrew received his old position back with a very substantial increase in salary.

His subsequent career was a very successful one, and, although at times he could not help feeling sad over the terrible event, still he could not imagine how he could have done differently.

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HAWLEY.
Special to the Scranton Tribune.
Hawley, May 10.—Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Welsh and W. N. Pierson and wife attended the funeral of Mrs. George Hamlin, at Hollisterville, last Friday. Miss Dora Baker, of Honesdale, spent Saturday and Sunday at the home of Alex. Correll.
Mrs. H. C. Ames is visiting in Scranton this week.
Next Sunday evening, May 12, there will be a union meeting of all the
Hawley churches in Standard opera house, in the interest of the New York Tribune's fresh air children.
Bessie, the little daughter of E. J. Richardson, fell from a wagon last week and broke her arm.
Mrs. John Thompson is ill with the grip.
Misses Lucy Ames, Virginia Ammerman and Edna Manderville were Scranton visitors last week.
William Case and two children of Montague, N. Y., were guests of Alex. Wagner and family last week.

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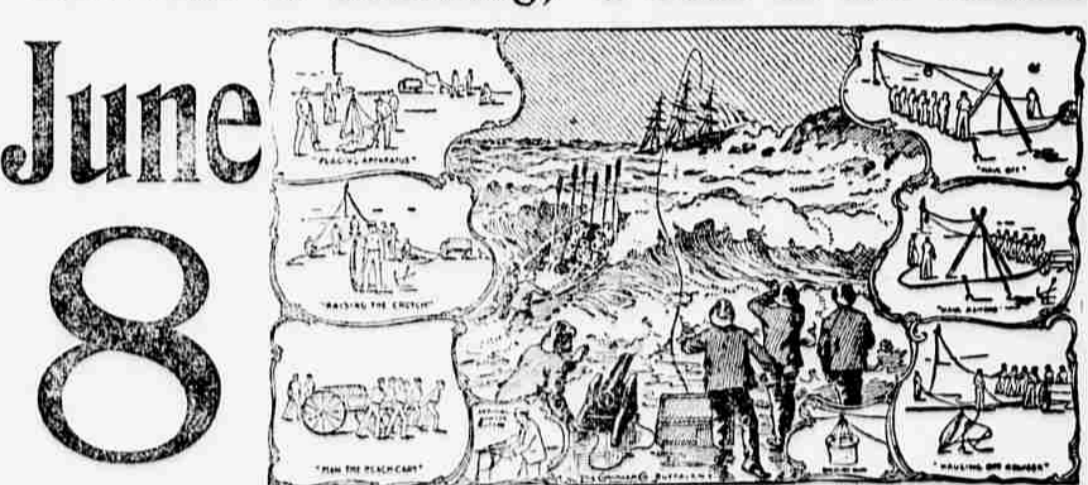
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