

THE EARLIER BIRD.

(Concluded.)

VARIOUS circumstances which I need not detail lengthened my stay at Denver from a week to nearly a month, and in course of that time I forgot about the letters of introduction. When I was ready to depart, however, I thought of them with a sudden and intense pang of discomfort.

I telegraphed to Yelverton and proceeded to pack my trunk. Just as I was about to turn the key it suddenly occurred to me that I had not noticed the bundle of letters in its customary corner of the till. I opened the trunk and investigated. The letters were not to be found, either in the till or elsewhere. Then I remembered that shortly after my arrival at the hotel I had taken them out to show to Yelverton, and had put them on the table. However, they were not there now.

I made a thorough search of the room; the letters had plainly disappeared.

I went immediately to the clerk and told my story. He sent for the head chambermaid.

"Who takes care of Mr Bonworthy's room?" he asked.

"Maggie," answered the head chambermaid; "but Clara had that room when he first came."

"I have lost a package of letters," said I.

The two exchanged significant glances.

"Do you think they were stolen?" I asked; "no one could have any possible object—"

"Oh no," said the clerk. Then he asked me if the letters were valuable.

"N-no," I said; "not exactly."

"Well I'll tell you," said the clerk, evidently much relieved; "we let that girl Clara go, because she had a reckless way of burning up things that she found lying around in the rooms. If you have made a thorough search and you are sure the letters are not there, the chances are that they are destroyed."

I found it difficult to repress my joy at this intelligence. It is to be doubted if the clerk and head chambermaid ever succeeded in explaining my strange conduct, in actually refusing to make a row when one was quite justifiable. I hastened back to the room and executed a fresh search, so as to satisfy the last kick of my conscience. When I was absolutely convinced that the letters were gone, I danced about the room in a transport of glee. The awful incubus which had been weighing down my spirits was suddenly removed, and I breathed again.

"What a blockhead I am," I said to myself: "why did it never occur to me to destroy the letters, and claim, on my return, that they had been lost."

Chance had supplied the excuse which imagination had been unable to conjure up. I continued my journey, light-hearted as a prisoner who has just secured his freedom—and to all unsuspecting of the fate that was about to overtake me.

Yelverton had advised me to stop over at Sacramento—one of the historic cities of the State—and visit the capitol and other places of interest. I adopted the suggestion. The train got into Sacramento in the morning, and I was driven right to a hotel.

I wrote my name on the register, and asked for a room for one day. The clerk whirled the book around, glanced at the name and said:

"All right, Mr Bon——why, are you Mr Bonworthy? Elliot Bonworthy—of Cleveland?"

"Well," I said with some dignity, "what did you imagine I wrote that name for—amusement?"

His tone and manner surprised and annoyed me. It was evident, however, that my cool answer had disconcerted him, for his hand shook as he pencilled the number of a room after my name, and his voice trembled when he called up the bell-boy.

Ten minutes later, just as I was completing a hasty toilet, there was a knock at my door and, in answer to a "Come in," the clerk entered, followed by a tall, military looking man. When the door was closed, the clerk motioned his hand toward me, and nodded.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Do you understand," said the military man, "that you acknowledge your name to be Elliot Bonworthy?"

"Of course I do," I answered, somewhat angrily.

"Well, I like his nerve," said the military man to the clerk, and the clerk grinned at me.

"Say," continued the military man, "have you any friends in this town?"

"No," I said; "I had some letters of introduction to several——"

The clerk gave a loud, derisive laugh.

"That settles it, Bill," he said to his companion: "You had better run him in. You can take him down to the city on the afternoon train."

"What does all this mean?" I exclaimed.

Bill produced a paper from his pocket. "It means that you are under arrest," said he, "on charge of obtaining money under false

pretences. We know all about your letter of introduction scheme; it may have worked all right in San Francisco, but it doesn't go here. Now just come along quietly, and there won't be any trouble, otherwise——"

I glanced at the warrant. There was my name. "Elliot Bonworthy," as plain as print. I don't need to remark that I was astonished and frightened. I had heard of men being mistaken for criminals and put to the necessity of proving their own identity, but here was I, arrested under my own name, in a place where I had supposed myself utterly unknown. What could I do—or say? I asked a few questions, and learned that the crime that was charged had been committed in the city of San Francisco a week or two before. Of course I could prove an alibi at the trial—but, in the meantime, what was to be done to keep out of jail?

I accompanied Bill—"quietly," as he had suggested—to the sheriff's office, and we waited there until the next train left for San Francisco.

Bill proved to be rather an entertaining companion. The first half of the trip he did his best to convince me that I ought to make a full confession to him of all my crimes. He promised to "stand in" and get me off with a light sentence. When he found this undertaking hopeless, he began to talk about the country, answering the questions which I, a stranger to the scenes through which we were passing, very naturally asked. At length, however, as we were crossing the ferry from Oakland, when I expressed my satisfaction at beholding the Golden Gate for the first time he turned on me, with a sheepish grin, and said:

"You'd better let up. It won't do no good. Of course you know the place as well as I do, and it's no use your tryin' to fill me full of prunes."

When we arrived in that city, we went directly to the sheriff's office.

"We will take you to the gaol later on," said Bill, apologetically.

The sheriff dispatched a messenger after some of the complaining witnesses, and then proceeded to interview me. I told him my name and explained that I was a tourist from Cleveland. He nodded his head and announced that the jig was up, and that I might as well confess, for they had a very good case against me.

Presently, two well-dressed men were ushered into the room. Bill accompanied them.

"This is the man," said the sheriff, "he acknowledges it—at least the name."

"He is not the man," said one of the new-comers, emphatically.

"He isn't?" exclaimed the sheriff, and Bill made a hasty reference to the infernal regions.

"No!" cried the gentleman. "I told you the fellow had blond moustache, blue eyes, was thick set, and wore his hair parted nearly in the middle."

"Yelverton!" I exclaimed, springing up.

"That's one of his names," said the sheriff; "he went under the name of Elliot Bonworthy, and he had an armful of letters of introduction, with which he worked the town. What do you know about him?"

"He stole those letters from me at Denver," I said.

"Oh, then you are the Simon Pare Elliott Bonworthy?" said one of the gentlemen.

"I can prove it readily enough, if necessary," I said.

The sheriff and Bill began to make profuse apologies, to which I paid little attention, as I was anxious to learn of Yelverton and his performances.

"He arrived here nearly a month ago," said one of the gentlemen, "and began immediately to make acquaintance by means of these letters—your letters, it appears. They were to many of the finest people in the city. So we took the man right in, for he talked and acted like a perfect gentleman. Well, sir, I don't suppose any man that ever came to this city got more elegant treatment than that fellow. Do you?" he asked, turning to his companion, who signified his entire agreement.

"Go on," I said, with an inward groan.

"The best private houses and the clubs were all open to him, and he received every possible attention. Several men I know gave him wine suppers. There wasn't a social event of importance to which he failed to have an invitation. He gave out that he was sizing things up for a syndicate of Cleveland capitalists that thought of investing largely in mines. Well, sir, I calculate that in the three weeks that he put in in this city, he had probably one of the very largest times that any man ever enjoyed. And he wound the thing up by getting the names of three or four good business men on spurious drafts, and then suddenly disappeared from view."

"That was when I telegraphed him that I was coming," I said.

"Well," observed the speaker in conclusion, "if you have any more letters of introduction bearing that same name, I would not advise you to present them, for you are liable to get arrested every time you try one on."

I explained that Yelverton had captured the entire pack. The complaining witnesses then shook hands with me and departed. I