

## A Popular Story.\*

BY DON MARK LEMON.



DON'T know who wrote the story. It was a newspaper yarn, taken from an exchange that probably had got it of a syndicate — but it certainly was a clever little sketch.

I read it on the train one afternoon while going home from the bank, and, when I had finished it, I slapped my knee and exclaimed, "By George ! that's neat." Then I got to wondering if anybody had ever tried the scheme, or had the writer thought it up himself, just for a story plot.

When I got home I read it to my wife, and she laughed and said there was a rat in the cage down cellar, and if it were gone in the morning she would know that I had taken it with me to the bank. Of course she was only jesting, but it went to show how easily one could carry out the idea in the story, and I must have looked thoughtful, for my wife suddenly came over and threw her arms about me and exclaimed: "Why, Will, you wouldn't do such a dreadful thing !"

Just to tease her, I looked sly and asked her if it were a fair sized rat in the trap, or only a mouse. Well, she doesn't know yet how to take me when I'm joking, and pretty soon she went down cellar and when I strolled down a little later, the trap and rat were both gone.

You see, the newspaper story was something like this: One day at a bank a bundle of twenty one-thousand dollar bills was found missing from the cashier's booth, and things were getting to look bad for the cashier, when the teller saw the tail of a rat sticking out from under a desk that set against the grating inclosing the cashier's booth.

Well, they moved the desk, and by George ! if that rat hadn't

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got himself caught between the bars and desk and strangled to death, with a bunch of five-dollar bills in his mouth. I think it was about twenty bills.

They all congratulated the cashier. Of course the rat had stolen the missing twenty thousand, and afterwards came back for more bills, and had been caught and strangled in the grating. They hunted hours for his hole, but couldn't find it. However, the rear door of the bank opened on a short, blind alley, and it was plain as Texas on the map that the rat had stolen in that way, and gone out the same way with the twenty thousand, and the bills were somewhere outside in the alley. But they never found where.

It was just here that the writer of the story got down to the neatest little stroke. I don't remember just his words, but they were something in this order: Why couldn't the cashier have brought a strangled rat in his pocket to the bank, stolen the twenty thousand, placed a package of five-dollar bills in the rat's mouth, and slipped him under the desk? That would have turned all suspicion from the cashier, and when you consider how simple a thing it was to do, and how few men in the world are strictly honest, you finished reading the story with the conviction that the cashier had stolen the money and done the trick himself.

Well, that's the newspaper sketch. Now, here's my story, and mine is where the fun comes in. About eleven o'clock next day, down at the bank where I worked—I mean the day after the sketch appeared in the newspaper—we discovered that a bunch of bills had been mislaid, then another bunch, then another and another; and altogether two thousand dollars in bills was found missing from different drawers and baskets.

Suddenly I smelt a mouse, as the saying goes, and began hunting for a rat. I found him! Then the cashier found another rat, about the same time the teller found another. Then the president saw a tail sticking from under a desk, and poked out the fattest rat you ever saw.

I was laughing by this time till I could hardly stoop to hunt for rats. You should have been around the bank yourself that morning—it was better than having money there.

Well, altogether, we found seven rats, every one of them strangled and dead and each with a bunch of bills in his mouth. The

bills we recovered came to seven hundred dollars, but thirteen hundred was still missing. So you see that little newspaper story cost our bank just one thousand three hundred dollars, and we had to hush it up or lose our reputation, for seven dishonest men in one bank was a bit too much.

But those seven dead rodents, hidden all about the office! I think I would have laughed had I lost the thirteen hundred myself.

