

*THE PARTNERSHIP OF THE THIEF  
AND THE LIAR.*

THERE was once upon a time a thief, who, being out of a job, was wandering by himself up and down the sea-shore. As he walked he passed a man who was standing still, looking at the waves.

‘I wonder,’ said the thief, addressing the stranger, ‘if you have ever seen a stone swimming?’

‘Most certainly I have,’ replied the other man, ‘and, what is more, I saw the same stone jump out of the water and fly through the air.’

‘This is capital,’ replied the thief. ‘You and I must go into partnership. We shall certainly make our fortunes. Let us start together for the palace of the king of the neighbouring country. When we get there, I will go into his presence alone, and will tell him the most startling thing I can invent. Then you must follow and back up my lie.’

Having agreed to do this, they set out on their travels. After several days’ journeying, they reached the town where the king’s palace was, and here they parted for a few hours, while the thief sought an interview with the king, and begged his majesty to give him a glass of beer.

‘That is impossible,’ said the king, ‘as this year there has been a failure of all the crops, and of the hops and the vines; so we have neither wine nor beer in the whole kingdom.’

‘How extraordinary!’ answered the thief. ‘I have just come from a country where the crops were so fine

that I saw twelve barrels of beer made out of one branch of hops.'

'I bet you three hundred florins that is not true,' answered the king.

'And I bet you three hundred florins it is true,' replied the thief.

Then each staked his three hundred florins, and the king said he would decide the question by sending a servant into that country to see if it was true.

So the servant set out on horseback, and on the way he met a man, and he asked him whence he came. And the man told him that he came from the self-same country to which the servant was at that moment bound.

'If that is the case,' said the servant, 'you can tell me how high the hops grow in your country, and how many barrels of beer can be brewed from one branch?'

'I can't tell you that,' answered the man, 'but I happened to be present when the hops were being gathered in, and I saw that it took three men with axes three days to cut down one branch.'

Then the servant thought that he might save himself a long journey; so he gave the man ten florins, and told him he must repeat to the king what he had just told him. And when they got back to the palace, they came together into the king's presence.

And the king asked him: 'Well, is it true about the hops?'

'Yes, sire, it is,' answered the servant; 'and here is a man I have brought with me from the country to confirm the tale.'

So the king paid the thief the three hundred florins; and the partners once more set out together in search of adventures. As they journeyed, the thief said to his comrade: 'I will now go to another king, and will tell him something still more startling; and you must follow and back up my lie, and we shall get some money out of him; just see if we don't.'

When they reached the next kingdom, the thief presented himself to the king, and requested him to give him a cauliflower. And the king answered: 'Owing to a blight among the vegetables we have no cauliflower.'

'That is strange,' answered the thief. 'I have just come from a country where it grows so well that one head of cauliflower filled twelve water-tubs.'

'I don't believe it,' answered the king.

'I bet you six hundred florins it is true,' replied the thief.

'And I bet you six hundred florins it is not true,' answered the king. And he sent for a servant, and ordered him to start at once for the country whence the thief had come, to find out if his story of the cauliflower was true. On his journey the servant met with a man. Stopping his horse he asked him where he came from, and the man replied that he came from the country to which the other was travelling.

'If that is the case,' said the servant, 'you can tell me to what size cauliflower grows in your country? Is it so large that one head fills twelve water-tubs?'

'I have not seen that,' answered the man. 'But I saw twelve waggons, drawn by twelve horses, carrying one head of cauliflower to the market.'

And the servant answered: 'Here are ten florins for you, my man, for you have saved me a long journey. Come with me now, and tell the king what you have just told me.'

'All right,' said the man, and they went together to the palace; and when the king asked the servant if he had found out the truth about the cauliflower, the servant replied: 'Sire, all that you heard was perfectly true; here is a man from the country who will tell you so.'

So the king had to pay the thief the six hundred florins. And the two partners set out once more on their travels, with their nine hundred florins. When they reached the country of the neighbouring king, the thief

entered the royal presence, and began conversation by asking if his majesty knew that in an adjacent kingdom there was a town with a church steeple on which a bird had alighted, and that the steeple was so high, and the bird's beak so long, that it had pecked the stars till some of them fell out of the sky.

'I don't believe it,' said the king.

'Nevertheless I am prepared to bet twelve hundred florins that it is true,' answered the thief.

'And I bet twelve hundred florins that it is a lie,' replied the king. And he straightway sent a servant into the neighbouring country to find out the truth.

As he rode, the servant met a man coming in the opposite direction. So he hailed him and asked him where he came from. And the man replied that he came out of the very town to which the man was bound. Then the servant asked him if the story they had heard about the bird with the long beak was true.

'I don't know about that,' answered the man, 'as I have never seen the bird; but I once saw twelve men shoving all their might and main with brooms to push a monster egg into a cellar.'

'That is capital,' answered the servant, presenting the man with ten florins. 'Come and tell your tale to the king, and you will save me a long journey.'

So, when the story was repeated to the king, there was nothing for him to do but to pay the thief the twelve hundred florins.

Then the two partners set out again with their ill-gotten gains, which they proceeded to divide into two equal shares; but the thief kept back three of the florins that belonged to the liar's half of the booty. Shortly afterwards they each married, and settled down in homes of their own with their wives. One day the liar discovered that he had been done out of three florins by his partner, so he went to his house and demanded them from him.

'Come next Saturday, and I will give them to you,' answered the thief. But as he had no intention of giving the liar the money, when Saturday morning came he stretched himself out stiff and stark upon the bed, and told his wife she was to say he was dead. So the wife rubbed her eyes with an onion, and when the liar appeared at the door, she met him in tears, and told him that as her husband was dead he could not be paid the three florins.



But the liar, who knew his partner's tricks, instantly suspected the truth, and said: 'As he has not paid me, I will pay him out with three good lashes of my riding whip.'

At these words the thief sprang to his feet, and, appearing at the door, promised his partner that if he would return the following Saturday he would pay him. So the liar went away satisfied with this promise.

But when Saturday morning came the thief got up

early and hid himself under a truss of hay in the hay-loft.

When the liar appeared to demand his three florins, the wife met him with tears in her eyes, and told him that her husband was dead.

‘Where have you buried him?’ asked the liar.

‘In the hay-loft,’ answered the wife.

‘Then I will go there, and take away some hay in payment of his debt,’ said the liar. And proceeding to the hay-loft, he began to toss about the hay with a pitchfork, prodding it into the trusses of hay, till, in terror of his life, the thief crept out and promised his partner to pay him the three florins on the following Saturday.

When the day came he got up at sunrise, and going down into the crypt of a neighbouring chapel, stretched himself out quite still and stiff in an old stone coffin. But the liar, who was quite as clever as his partner, very soon bethought him of the crypt, and set out for the chapel, confident that he would shortly discover the hiding-place of his friend. He had just entered the crypt, and his eyes were not yet accustomed to the darkness, when he heard the sound of whispering at the grated windows. Listening intently, he overheard the plotting of a band of robbers, who had brought their treasure to the crypt, meaning to hide it there, while they set out on fresh adventures. All the time they were speaking they were removing the bars from the window, and in another minute they would all have entered the crypt, and discovered the liar. Quick as thought he wound his mantle round him and placed himself, standing stiff and erect, in a niche in the wall, so that in the dim light he looked just like an old stone statue. As soon as the robbers entered the crypt, they set about the work of dividing their treasure. Now, there were twelve robbers, but by mistake the chief of the band divided the gold into thirteen heaps. When he saw his mistake he said they had not time to count it all over again, but that the thirteenth heap should

belong to whoever among them could strike off the head of the old stone statue in the niche with one stroke. With these words he took up an axe, and approached the niche where the liar was standing. But, just as he had waved the axe over his head ready to strike, a voice was heard from the stone coffin saying, in sepulchral tones : ' Clear out of this, or the dead will arise from their coffins, and the statues will descend from the walls, and you will be driven out more dead than alive.' And with a bound the thief jumped out of his coffin and the liar from his niche, and the robbers were so terrified that they ran helter-skelter out of the crypt, leaving all their gold behind them, and vowing that they would never put foot inside the haunted place again. So the partners divided the gold between them, and carried it to their homes ; and history tells us no more about them.