

# WHAT DID YOU STEAL?

Honest Answers to a Query About Dishonesty Will Reveal the Astonishing Fact That Each Of Your Most Trusted Friends Has at Some Time Appropriated Something That Did Not Belong To Him or Her—Are Women Worse Than Men???

By J. Mabel Dilhan

ADHERE to my notion that women are naturally more honest than men, and if I had a million dollars to leave to the safe keeping of a man or a woman it would be a woman for my money any day."

The high pitched voice and nasal drawl plainly stamping the New Englander, and so seldom heard in California, roused me from my reverie on the McAllister car, and the rather extraordinary topic of conversation for the early morning hour attracted my attention so that I turned squarely around to look at the speaker and his companion. The latter I knew at a glance to be a Britisher and the un-

ing put such beastly ideas into my head and caused me to make the silly experiment. I could not shap. I would go home. "Mother," I demanded, as I entered my mother's boudoir, "did you ever steal anything?" I sank down on the couch, my knees trembling under me at the temerity of my question. My mother turned a startled look toward me and then a reminiscent smile played about her lips and her kind gray eyes. "Yes," she replied. "I once stole a piece of yellow silk."

"You, mother! A piece of yellow silk?" I gasped. "Yes, a piece of yellow silk. It was about 6 or 8 inches square, and I was between 6 and 8 years old. I was visiting my aunt and she showed me, with

teller, who looked me up and down in the most supercilious manner imaginable, as he replied: 'You are wrong; we never make mistakes here,' turning his back upon me as he finished speaking.

"At first I wanted to laugh, then I was angry. 'Oh, very well,' I replied, 'sorry to have troubled you,' and I again left the bank, thinking that it would serve him jolly well right when he discovered his error later on. I again walked down Market street and



mistakable accent betrayed his London birth.

"That's because you are ruled by sentiment in regard to women and not by logic or facts," he said, with a short laugh. "You put your women up on pedestals and worship them. According to your American ideas your women are—what is it you say?—'the real thing,' 'the whole thing.' But since that's about all the sentiment you allow yourselves in your commercial, American way of living, it's a pity to try to take it away from you. Go on thinking that women are more honest than men, but if you ever take the trouble to make a test you will find that a great deal of what you call honesty is simply cowardice or fear which prevents a woman from committing a big theft, although the same woman will steal any little thing that may come her way, a purse that some other woman has dropped, for instance."

"Van Ness avenue," called the conductor, and, hurriedly picking up their bags, the two men, evidently tourists, left the car.

There was no more reverie for me. The Englishman had set me thinking, and I looked curiously at the women in the car. Was it possible that any one there would steal my purse if I dropped it, or my handkerchief, or my gloves? A woman was sitting in the same seat with me, a good looking young lady, neatly gowned, evidently a prosperous, salaried woman, going down town to her daily grind in some office. There were perhaps 20 others of her sort in the car.

An irresistible impulse saved me. I signaled the conductor, and, rising, managed to drop my purse, as though by accident. It fell at the feet of the young lady. Surely she would grab my sleeve or my skirt and hand me my purse! I was in a terrible hurry and rushed precipitately toward the front of the car, dropping my handkerchief, and, when near the door, my gloves. Of course, I did not expect to lose all those articles. Some one must have seen one or all of them fall and would call my attention to my loss. Not at all. I got to the door of the car and looked back. The young lady, my erstwhile seatmate, was looking straight ahead, apparently in deep thought. No one was looking at me. I felt ashamed, as though I myself had been guilty of a crime. I dismounted hurriedly and found that I had several blocks to walk to my father's office. My car fare was in the dropped purse. Fortunately the purse was an old one and contained little in the way of money. My name and address were written on the first page of my little memorandum book, so if the finder desired the purse could be returned to me. Perhaps it would come through the mail. But it never did!

I got some money from my father, bought a new purse and tried to do some other shopping, to no avail. My mind was completely upset by the nasty episode on the streetcar and I anatomized the horrid Englishman for hav-

all the condescension of the grownup to the little child, a bundle of silk pieces. In pioneer days in California silks were rarities and I had never seen such pieces before. The crisp shininess of those wonderful pieces fascinated me. I was hypnotized as though by the charm of a serpent. If only I might have one piece for my very own. Surely my aunt could spare just one when she had so many. But, no, it did not occur to her to offer me even the tiniest scrap. The little piece of yellow silk fell to the floor without her seeing it, and leaning down, I picked it up and tucked it under the folds of myingham apron.

A maid entered, announcing the arrival of a caller, and my mother rose to her feet. "Some other time," she said. "I will tell you more about that piece of yellow silk, and my punishment. I have never stolen anything since. That one experience taught me that 'honesty is the best policy,'" and with the reminiscent smile still playing about her lips and kind gray eyes, my mother left the room.

At the same moment my brother Bob came in, and throwing his riding gloves and whip on the table, pushed back my hair from my forehead and raised my chin for his morning kiss.

"Bob," I asked, "did you ever steal anything?"

Bob did not laugh as I expected. Nor did he speak for a moment; then he answered, quite seriously: "Yes, kiddo, I once stole \$20." "Bob! Twenty dollars! You!" My amazement was so great that I could hardly speak. "Yes, dear, and the fellow deserved it, all right. It was when I first came to San Francisco. I had a draft for \$600 on the — bank. The paying teller was a pompous, important looking individual. Thank heaven there were fewer of his sort to be found now in the banks than formerly. He counted out the money in gold. It was a dark, rainy afternoon. The bank was crowded. There was a long line behind me waiting to get to the window. It seemed to me when I took the money, counting it as quickly as I could that there was too much of it, but the cold austerity of the man behind the window chilled me, and I did not dare take up any more time, so I escaped from the line and left the bank. I walked down Market street toward the ferry, still with the uncomfortable feeling that the money was not right, and when I reached the Call building I stepped inside the entrance and again slowly counted the money. Sure enough, there was \$620. I immediately turned and went back to the bank. It was near closing time, and when I at last reached the window it was three minutes to 3. "You made a mistake in my draft a few minutes ago," I said to the paying

in a few minutes encountered a Salvation Army lass selling War Crys, to whom I gave the \$20 I had stolen against my will. I told her to send out a box of good cheer to some widows of the war. I was so proud of my deed that I could not sleep. I would repay it 10 times if I could find the woman. Don't ever steal anything."

The next day was Saturday, my morning at the markets, for my mother insists on my doing the marketing for the family. She believes that nine-tenths of the divorces are caused by the inadequate knowledge of domestic economy, most girls when they are married not knowing how to buy food or cook it. As I went to the various stalls in the big market I questioned the vendors. "Are women more honest than men?" I asked.

"There is no difference," said one dignified elderly man. "In marketing, the natural hogishness of people, men and women, comes out. There are plenty of people who're always trying to get the big end in quantity, in price, in change, every way, and we see them here. Only last Saturday I made a big mistake in change. I absent mindedly handed a fellow back a five dollar gold piece, then put my hand in the drawer and gave him the change for it. He went straight away with the five dollar piece and the change for it as well."

"But a woman would not have done that," I remarked incredulously. "Oh, yes, a man or a woman; it's all the same. If they get the best of you they congratulate themselves, shake hands with themselves, pat themselves on the back."

From one stall to another I made my way, buying many things that I did not need in order to feel at liberty to put the question which was making life miserable for me. The consensus of opinion seemed that the natural hogishness of human nature finds its way out around the markets, and that there is no difference between men and women.

The bank was my next stopping place. The first man whom I questioned smiled. He is a friend of mine. "I don't like to answer that question," he said. "It's not fair. Go to the president."

To the president I went. I felt that I should have had a graphophone. The question was becoming automatic. "In small matters," said the bank president, "women are apparently less honest than men. Not as employees, not as depositors, but in the little mistakes that arise in making change, etc. If a woman is given \$5 too much she will usually walk away with it and not come back; the man, on the other hand, almost invariably does. 'Here, old man,' he will say, 'I don't want this five, it belongs to the bank or to your depositors.' It doesn't seem to occur to him to keep the money." Other banking men whom I interviewed said practically the same thing. One bank official made the startling assertion that during 20 years of business they had never lost a dollar, either through an employee or a customer, which certainly speaks well for the business morals of San Francisco. From the banks I went to a detective agency with my wornout question. The detective, a man worldly wise in troubles and whose nostrils scent a ciew from afar, looked very grave. "In our business," he said, "we are

for \$200 and handed it to her with a smile. She was only too glad to get her rent back and it never occurred to her that I had rented the apartment for more than \$50 a month. No one ever knew of my theft, yet I have suffered tortures for it. I would repay it 10 times if I could find the woman. Don't ever steal anything."

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THE WOMAN THIEF IN THE DEPARTMENT STORE IS AN EVERYDAY VISITOR

usually called to ferret out big things. The petty larcenies don't come to us. With us the proportion is about one to fifteen; that is, we are asked to go after one woman to every fifteen men, and when a woman is stealing money we almost always find that a man is getting it. A woman will do things for a man that she would never do for herself."

This was another aspect of the situation. I liked it better, somehow. It was lunch time and I went to the M-restaurant in Market street. The place was crowded; I had to wait for a table and looked about me. A man and a woman were just finishing their coffee. The man left a dime on the left of his plate for the waitress. I made my way toward that table, but before I could get there another couple had availed themselves of it. The man spoiled the dime, and, presto, with a sweep of his left hand it was in his pocket. The woman saw him and her face turned scarlet. Just then the waitress hurried up; she began to clear the table, looking everywhere for the dime which she, too, had seen the former customer leave for her. "Where is that dime?" she demanded of the man seated at the table. "Give it to me. It is my money."

"I do not know what you mean," replied the man. "I have no dime." and he looked across at his wife, his face also red by this time, but he could not confess that he had the dime. His wife, poor thing, with a woman's wit, came to the rescue. She called the head waiter.

"Will you please send us another waitress?" she asked. "This girl has insulted my husband. Give us another waitress or we will leave the restaurant."

Another waitress came and the two ordered their luncheon. When she had gone to the kitchen with the order the man said to his wife: "What made you do that? I never did such a thing before." Tears were in the woman's eyes, but she bravely forced them back and smiled at him.

On my way home I met my best man friend. "Do women steal, do you think?" I asked plaintively, for I was nearly worn out with the subject. "Yes, little girl," was the reply; "some of them do, many of them do, most of them do; but so long as you do not don't worry about it. I'll tell you some funny things that I have observed and experienced, the last of which I have just heard. Some years ago I was boarding with a couple here in San Francisco. The man was an industrious, hard working, honest sort of fellow, but his wife was a terror. A splendid cook and the cleanest house keeper that ever lived—that's why I stayed there—she was an inveterate gambler and frequented the small poolrooms which are to be found in all sorts of odd places, grocery stores, laundries, flats, anywhere, in fact, where women go to put a dollar or two on the races. That woman actually starved herself and her husband to get money to play with. She had to give me decent food, of course, or I would not have stayed, but the poor husband had barely enough to keep alive. Out of \$10 which he would give her for the table five invariably went to the poolrooms. But I got mine at last. As she could not take it out of my food she took it out of my clothes, and stole two valuable suits of underwear and sold them. She laid the blame on the laundry; said the things never came back with the wash. I took the matter up with the laundry people and was convinced that they had never had them; then, later on, I traced the suits to the pawnbroker's and, like the idiot I was, informed the husband, thinking to warn him to look better after his gains. The result was the usual one. They both turned on me and I lost my happy home for the time being."



THE MAN SPIED THE DIME - WITH A SWEEP OF HIS HAND IT WAS IN HIS POCKET

"Another woman comes to my mind who was dishonest at cards. At another house where I boarded the landlady had a semi-weekly card party. Poker was the game at a 10 cent limit. The lady of the house provided the cards and the chips, red, white and blue. Occasionally coming home early I sometimes stopped in the parlor to watch the play. I suspected one of the ladies, and after the game one night I asked my landlady to see if she had all the chips that had been distributed. They were not all there; 12 were missing, and all had to be cashed carefully. Of course the landlady had not made an accurate count of the money distributed. At the next sitting I was on hand, and after settlement I gathered in, as quickly as possible, as if I were amusing myself with them, all the missing chips. When the guests had gone we counted them and there were 12 more than the number distributed. Certainly one of the visitors had come with the 12 chips in her pocket, for which she had not to pay. But that day I gathered in the chips too quickly for her and she was unable to make her usual provision for the next game. It was a question of only a few cents and the lady is well to do and in a good social position. I am certain that I incurred her everlasting enmity when I prevented her from playing her little skin game with her friends."

"The fact is, however, that it did not amuse me; they seemed low and common, and yet they were true. At home I found two of my father's friends, businessmen. One the head of a large local manufacturing establishment, the other a retired merchant of Paris and San Francisco. To each of them I put the same old question, 'Are women more honest than men?' "Please don't ask me that," said the manufacturer. "Ask me something about matters. For that reason we have the Chinese or the Japanese, and time almost discontinued, time and time again, business relations with the petty dealers—those who have little stocks of notions in outlying districts. You wouldn't believe it, but it is a positive fact that they come into our place with their baskets on their arms, and, going through the gangways, abstract an article here and something else there, until it is maddening. We know that they do it and have caught them at it many times. It seems impossible for women to resist when it comes to little

things to wear, something for personal adornment, and they seem to think that a little thing taken from a big establishment makes no difference. They get it free, gratis and for nothing and it's all to the good."

The retired merchant was of the same opinion. He said: "While a Mme. Humbert or a Cassie Chadwick is rarely to be met with, the woman thief in the department store is an everyday visitor. Sometimes she is a saleslady who wants a little pin to wear with her new stock, or a pair of gloves for an evening party. It is so easy. There are so many right at hand, and she sees no harm in the act. Sometimes it is the shopper. She is at the lace counter, perhaps, or at the necktie counter. She looks over several pieces of a different sort, fingering them as though to ascertain the quality, and then gazes vaguely around, apparently looking for something entirely different. 'Oh, no, this isn't the color I want at all,' she remarks, but in that interval of hesitation a necktie has disappeared under her fur piece or inside a half opened coat or into a convenient pocket."

"I recall one peculiar case in which a full skirt was the shoplifter's chief asset. Entire pieces of silk began to disappear mysteriously. You know silks are put up on pasteboard cartons—wound about them—and when a part of a piece is so marked off, the number of yards so we know just how much there is left. Almost every day for several weeks we discovered an empty carton, but how did the silk get away? A detective was detailed to wait counter, and at last the woman was caught. Her scheme was quite clever. She would ask to be shown silks and, while looking them over, would lift one of the pieces with apparent unconsciousness, holding it in front of her and moving it about, at the same time making the salesman take down other pieces, while the piece upon which she had designs was slipping slowly from its carton down into a capacious pocket in the front of her full skirt waiting to receive it. Then she would slide the empty carton in among the other pieces of silk, where it would be discovered later on. This woman was, of course, a real thief and was stealing the silk to sell. When she was arrested several hundred pieces of silk were found in her room."

"Generally, though, when a woman steals, it is for personal adornment, wearing apparel, or little things which she fondly believes will make her more attractive, while when a man steals, it is to get money either for a woman or for gambling. If he can pick up an article of jewelry which he can sell, he may do it if he wants money for the races or for a woman, but the same man would not think of stealing a necktie for himself. The fellow who 'borrows' \$20 from his employer's cash drawer, expecting to put it back from his winnings at the track, does not think that he is stealing; it is only 'borrowing.'"

"Sometimes stealing in the department stores is not confined to single individuals, but it is organized and operated on co-operative lines. Not so very long ago the largest stores in several cities were in the throes of great excitement. The investigation was instigated at a big public ball. The proprietor of one of the large stores was there with his wife, whose attention was attracted by the magnificent gown worn by one of their employees, a young lady who was the head of a department. The material of the gown was of great value and the suspicions of the proprietor were aroused. Within a few weeks it was discovered that many of the clerks, the heads of the departments and the cashiers were banded together and were working a gigantic swindle. Goods apparently purchased by a customer were accompanied by a paid slip, sent up to be wrapped and then sent out by the delivery wagon to some convenient address, to the house of a friend or relative who was in the game and helping it along. This particular store, one of the largest in the west, found that it had been robbed of thousands of dollars by its employees. The upheaval in that establishment led to similar investigations in many other stores, with the result that precisely the same conditions were discovered in other cities."

"The propensity for women in shopping to get something for nothing led to the adoption of the coin system for

charge accounts in the east. It used to be that a woman who had a charge account at a store could simply give her name and address and take away her purchase. Then the woman who had been standing at her elbow waiting the attention of the clerk, if she desired, could go to another department, give the same name and address and walk away with the goods. When an alarming number of customers with charge accounts found that they had been robbed in this way the stores adopted the coin system. Each customer with a charge account was given a coin, which she had to bring with her whenever she wanted to take any charged purchases from the store. All the big New York stores adopted this system several years ago.

"One thing strikes me as very odd, and it is the many of these women who are really as dishonest as they can possibly be in money matters are as scrupulous as possible in their morals and will draw their skirts away from the other woman who has stepped aside." "Now," said my father, "let me cap the climax with a little episode which I witnessed today at the N— soda water store. The store is a refreshment booth on the main floor of the store, is oblong in shape, with high stools along the two sides and across one end; at the other end is the cashier's window. It was around the noon hour when the store is always crowded, and nearly all the high stools were occupied by women shoppers. One lady whom I noticed lunched quite substantially on an oyster cocktail and when she had finished walked deliberately away, leaving her check lying on the refreshment counter, going about her shopping in the big store. A moment afterward another lady hopped up on the high stool, glanced at the check still lying on the counter, took it up, and, handing it to the white coated clerk, evidently a green hand, said: 'Give me an oyster cocktail, please.' "The green clerk took the check and gave the lady her oyster cocktail. What the poor fellow did with the check I do not know. Certainly neither of the cocktails was ever paid for." "Well," remarked the lady with the poker chips, "I don't believe I want to hear anything more on the dishonest woman question. I have been pursuing this investigation for two days and I'm tired. I intended going to the police station tomorrow for more information, but I've had enough."