

THE FORTUNE OF SETH SAVAGE

P. H. Woodward

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At one time the bogus-lottery men drove a thrifty business, but the efforts, virtually co-operative, of the post-office department and of the legislatures of the older states, have latterly pretty effectually forced them into the wilderness. The managers forage on the same class of people as the sawdust swindlers, procuring lists of names in the same way. A common method of procedure is to inclose with advertisements announcing the prizes, together with the place and date of drawing, one or more tickets duly numbered. Great confidence is expressed in the personal fitness of the party addressed, who is requested to act as agent for the sale of the tickets. A few weeks later another letter is sent to the intended victim, informing him that the ticket of a given number forwarded to him at such a date had drawn a prize, the value of which is variously stated from a few hundred to many thousand dollars. He is then requested to send immediately ten dollars—more or less—for the ticket, perhaps ten or twenty more for additional charges, when the full face value of the prize will be forwarded promptly by express, check on New York, or in any other way the recipient may direct. He is also told to antedate the letter, the intermediary promising to blur the postmark to correspond, so that the remittance may appear to have been made prior to the drawing. In conclusion the writer adroitly suggests that he desires the fortunate man to exhibit the money to his neighbors, stating how he obtained it, and mentioning particularly the address of the agent from whom the ticket was purchased, the object being to create an excitement in the place with a view to large sales for the next drawing.

Even of a trick as transparent as this the victims are counted by thousands, exposures and warnings being alike disregarded. The infatuation of a certain class of ignorant and credulous people is well illustrated by the case of Seth Savage, a poor man possessed of a few acres in the vicinity of a small village in Vermont. One day, when a special agent of wide experience happened to be visiting the post-office, Seth received a letter, the perusal of which threw him into a frenzy of excitement.

"What is the matter?" inquired the postmaster. "You seem to have good news."

"Look a—here," replied Seth, holding forth the missive in his shriveled and bony fingers, "for nigh on to sixty—five year, Mr. Martin, I've fit and work'd and work'd and fit jest for my vittles and drink. Neow when I'm tew old tew 'joy it, a fortin comes to me."

"Is that so?" answered Mr. Martin. "I am very glad; but tell me, what is it? Your neighbors will all be glad to hear of your good luck."

"Read that," said Seth, handing him the letter triumphantly.

The postmaster read the manuscript. One Dewitt of New York City assured Mr. Savage that a certain ticket sent to him a month before had drawn a prize of three thousand dollars; that on receipt of thirty—five dollars in a letter antedated according to directions, the full amount would be forwarded to him.

"Surely, Seth," expostulated the postmaster, "you are not going to be fooled in this way. Dewitt is a humbug, a swindler."

"Neow, heow dew yeou know that?" inquired Seth. "Has he ever fool'd yeou?"

"I don't deal with that sort of people," replied Mr. Martin mildly. "I dislike to see anyone wronged, especially a neighbor. Here is a gentleman who knows all about such matters." And Seth was formally introduced to the special agent, who took pains to explain the character of the swindle fully.

The officer left the village with the pleasant assurance that his brief visit had contributed at least toward the rescue of one poor object from the jaws of the devourer.

After all, however, Seth was not convinced. By selling his only cow he managed to swell his scanty stock of cash to the requisite sum, which he sent to Dewitt, fully expecting to be able in a few days to confound the postmaster by the actual display of his newly gotten wealth. The dupe, who had invested a goodly portion of his scanty means in the venture, waited long if not patiently. At length, after the expiration of the last hope, Mr.

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Martin inquired, "How did it happen, Seth, that you threw away your money on that lottery scamp, when we showed you that the whole thing was a cheat?"

"Wall, neow, arter it's all lost," replied Seth, "I'll tell yeou jest heow 'twas. Human natur' is naturally suspectin'. I tho't yeou and that ar' t'other postoffis fellah want'd to git the prize for yeourselves; an' I didn't mean to be beat so."