



Liverpool Docks c1880s

Chasing a Runaway Tradesman

The Wiltshire Times tells the following story:-

Much surprise was occasioned a short time ago when it was stated that Mr H. A. Stevens, of the Church Street music warehouse, Trowbridge, had disposed of his business. The announcement that his stock-in-trade, furniture, &c., was all to be sold by auction, gave rise to some suspicion, and it was speedily rumoured that the licensed victualling scheme, which it was stated he had entered upon in Bristol, was a blind, intended to put his creditors off the scent, and that the real object of Mr S. was to seek "fresh fields and pastures new" in America. Some of his more importunate creditors questioned him to this end, but to all their queries he returned indignant denials, asserting with much heat that he was not a cheat. "I don't say you are," was the reply vouchsafed by the presentee of an account for £15 – much of it incurred within a few days – "but I should like my money." "Then put me in the County Court," was the taunting rejoinder, accompanied by a most impolite and abusive expression. Other applications met with like rebuffs. In the meantime, the auction sale proceeded, and there seemed to be every probability that with the proceeds – about £300 – and other funds, Mr Stevens would in a few hours be far beyond the reach of County Court summonses and judgments. What was to be done? There appeared every chance of the debtor defying his creditors, and escaping with well-lined pockets to some foreign shore. Application was made on Tuesday – the day after the sale – to Mr W. S. Rodway, and that gentleman took prompt steps to checkmate what was evidently a carefully planned scheme. The creditors – so many of them as knew of the contemplated proceedings – were hastily summoned to swear to their debts, which amounted to over £50, and Mr Rodway immediately went to Bath, where he consulted the Registrar of the County Court, and afterward left for Liverpool by the mail train, accompanied by Mr J. H. Foley, in whose charge a balance of the proceeds of the sale had been left with instructions to forward to an address given. In the meantime, Mr Rodway's clerk, Mr Linzey, prepared the necessary documents containing the facts of the case, and drove to Bath on the same evening, obtained a debtor's summons, and telegraphed the result to his employer in Liverpool. On the following morning a reply was received from Mr Rodway, stating that the defaulting debtor had been overtaken and the amount of money and all expenses recovered, so that the issuing of a warrant was unnecessary. We learn that on their arrival at Liverpool, early on the morning of the 6th, Messrs. Rodway and Foley at once proceeded to the docks, and, after

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looking over the emigrant ships, enquired at the booking office if a family of name of Stevens had been entered. The clerk replied that there had not; but, in answer to further questions, he stated that an agent at Trowbridge (Mr Moore) had booked a family, consisting of a man, wife, and six children. Although the name given at the office was Alfred Taylor, the pursuers were too much on the alert to be duped by that fact; and acting on the information obtained, the two gentlemen immediately drove to the place where the family were said to be staying, and there, evidently prepared for a speedy departure, were the missing family, with the exception of the head, who was out doing the sights. Conjecturing that he would return, the two gentlemen remained, and in a short while their expectation was realised. At first he positively declined to part; but when it was explained to him that in that case he would be taken into custody and brought back to face his creditors, he gave way – with a very bad grace – and authorised Mr Foley to discharge the debts with the balance previously left in hand. Mr Rodway returned to Trowbridge on Monday night, and the money was paid over to the creditors on Tuesday. It is reported that several London creditors, representing very large amounts, have been anxiously enquiring as to the whereabouts of the defaulting tradesman.

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