

MONEY OR A CHILD'S LIFE.

A CRUEL ATTEMPT TO EXTORT MONEY FROM DAVID A. DE LIMA.

Mr. David A. De Lima, of the firm of D. A. De Lima & Co., commission merchants in South American products, was sitting in his office at No. 68 William-street, about 3 o'clock on the afternoon of Sept. 17, when a messenger-boy handed him a letter. The letter said that Mr. De Lima's daughter Lylia, 8 years old, was in the possession of the writer, and unless \$26,000 was sent in bills in an envelope, to be delivered by David De Leon, a lawyer, of No. 206 Broadway, to Mr. Spofford, on the Mall in Central Park, at 8 o'clock, the little girl's throat would be cut from ear to ear and her body sent to her father's house. Mr. De Lima at once sent a clerk to his residence, No. 36 East Fifty-seventh-street. Mrs. De Lima and her daughter Lydia were out at the time, but both returned safely 10 minutes later, and the clerk took word back that the little girl was in her mother's care uninjured.

Mr. De Leon called at Mr. De Lima's office after the messenger delivered the letter. He told Mr. de Lima that a well-dressed man, evidently an American, about 30 years old, with blue eyes, blonde mustache, and light complexion, came to his office, and, saying he desired to retain him as counsel in a case against a man named Hungersford, placed in his hands a fee of \$50.

"By the way," said the man to Mr. De Leon, "do you know Mr. David A. de Lima?"

"Very well, indeed," replied Mr. De Leon. "I know him intimately."

"I have a letter which I wish to send him. I will use your call-box to summon a messenger."

Mr. De Leon said that when the messenger came the man sent him with the letter and went away himself, saying that he would call later to unfold his business.

Mr. De Lima was at his home in Fifth-seventh-street last evening. The little girl, Lylia, who was threatened with death, was at his side. She is a very pretty little girl, with dark, lustrous eyes, flowing brown hair, and plump face. Mr. De Lima said that he was naturally alarmed when the letter came, but fear was dispelled when he saw his daughter was safe. The letter threatening death to the little girl contained a great deal of abuse of him beside the demand for money. Two other letters were sent to him and one to Mrs. De Lima. The last was to Mrs. De Lima and was handed, Oct. 8, to the family by Mr. De Leon, who said he received it by mail. None of the letters were dated, but all bear the New-York City post-mark and came through the general Post Office. Mr. De Lima said he had five children, and all were with him last evening except one. The last three letters contained threats to kill one of the children and do bodily harm to Mr. De Lima if he did not send the money to Mr. De Leon, to be given to Mr. Spofford, the man with the blonde mustache. There were a number of "personals" inserted in a newspaper addressed to "Spofford." Mr. De Lima said they were put in by the detectives to draw "Spofford" out. He put the case first in the hands of Inspector Byrnes and afterward empowered Messrs. Frederick R. and Charles Coudert to act as his attorneys. The letters he gave into the care of the Messrs. Coudert. Mr. De Lima declined to say whether he knew who the person was who wrote the letters, but remarked that Inspector Byrnes did know.

"Do you think the object of the man was money?" Mr. De Lima was asked.

"Undoubtedly."

"Do you think the person was sane?"

"He certainly appeared to be sane in his letters. He was sane enough to ask for money."

The other children tried to frighten the little girl Lylia by telling her Mr. Spofford was coming, but she laughed and showed no fear. A detective remained at Mr. De Lima's residence for many days. Mr. De Lima said he saw no one in the neighborhood of his house whom he supposed to be Spofford.

Mr. Frederick R. Coudert said the letters were evidently written with the left hand. There was a peculiarity that all writing with the left hand was alike. The letters were evidently written by a malicious person, perhaps some one who had been refused a loan by Mr. De Lima, who had at some time been intimate with Mr. De Lima and knew his tender spot. Mr. De Lima was passionately fond of his children. That circumscribed the circle in which to look for the man who gave the name of Spofford. Mr. De Lima did not recognize him by the description. Money alone was the object. It was such an absurd, foolish scheme that it was either the work of some bungling novice who was trying to make fame or else was a malicious joke. "I am inclined to believe it was a joke," said Mr. Coudert, "on the part of some one who meant to annoy Mr. De Lima just as men throw banana peels on the sidewalk to see people fall and break their limbs, or squirt vitriol on the garments of ladies. I don't suppose the man will be discovered. You can see how foolish it was. The man kept writing, 'We have got you in our power.' While I said money alone was the object. I don't suppose the man really had the slightest idea he would get any money. He didn't, if he knew Mr. De Lima."

Mr. De Leon said, at his residence, No. 212 West Fourteenth-street, that Mr. De Lima abandoned the case, and he placed the matter in the hands of Assistant District Attorney Allen, to whom he gave the correspondence. He tried to ferret out the case himself, and the "personals" were printed against his wish. He never saw the man Spofford before or after his visit, when the letter was sent to Mr. De Lima. Mr. De Leon did not propose to let the matter drop. The fact had been laid before the Grand Jury, and Mr. De Leon hoped the man would be brought to justice. To say more might defeat the ends of justice. Mr. De Leon would not say whether or not he had found out who Spofford was. The man attempted to black-mail me as well as Mr. De Lima," said Mr. De Leon. "He threatened me with harm if I did not help him get the money."

Inspector Byrnes said he was placed in a position where he could say nothing. Another police officer intimated that the case reached a point where it appeared to be the outcome of some bad feeling against Mr. De Lima and amounted to nothing more. The officer understood that Assistant District Attorney Allen had been informed that if he took the case to the Grand Jury it would be only to interfere in a personal quarrel. It was not believed that there was any serious intention of killing any of Mr. De Lima's children.