

THE NEXT STAGE

by

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C.E. Bowles lives what looks like a prosperous life in 1870s San Francisco. His landlady knows him to be a gold prospector, who makes a lot of business trips out of town.

Bowles goes on one such trip, to Stockton, and stays in a hotel. He gets up early and rides East to Copperopolis. Bowles sets up a robbery there on the Wells Fargo stage going from Copperopolis to Sacramento.

The stage is robbed by a man wearing a flower sack on his head and carrying a shotgun. He says, "please hand down the strongbox" and is very polite. He declines to take the passengers' money or jewelry and tells them it will be over in a minute. Bowles leaves behind a poem and makes off with the gold and mail.

A montage of 20 stagecoach robberies.

In the final robbery, Bowles is shot. He runs off and spills the goods along the way.

Wells Fargo detectives find a laundry tag marked "SF" and canvass about 80 laundries in San Francisco looking for the mark. They find it.

The detectives lure Bowles to a meeting and arrest him.

There is a trial where the poetry is an exhibit.

Bowles is convicted and spends time in prison. He's always very courteous.

He gets out early for good behavior. At an interview with the press, he says he is through with crime.

Bowles is followed constantly by Wells Fargo detectives. One day he disappears and is never heard from again. Rumor has it that Bowles moved to Reno and lived under an assumed name, waiting out the rest of his years in a peaceful life.