

## *Trailing a Thief*

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### A Detective's Long Chase After a Fugitive Cashier

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From Minnesota Through Canada, England,  
France. Spain and Italy to Switzerland—  
A Clever Ruse to Avoid  
Extradition Proceedings

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While a murder is now and then committed without the murderer being brought to justice, and while a proportion of burglars, robbers and embezzlers are bound to escape arrest, from the nature of things, an experience of twenty years in criminal work has satisfied me that no criminal can escape justice if a clue be left to work on, if that clue is persistently followed.

In March, 1865, a man named Vinewood, of Vermont, with another named Adams, of Cincinnati, established a bank in a new town in Minnesota. The former was a bachelor fifty years old, and the latter a young man of twenty-three. Just how they became acquainted I have forgotten, but I believe they first met in a bank in Cincinnati in which Adams was employed as book-keeper. He had \$10,000 in cash which a relative had left him, and Vinewood put in \$40,000, and a bank with a capital of \$50,000 was established. After about a month, when every thing was running smoothly, Vinewood returned to Vermont on business, having the most perfect faith that all would go well in his absence. On the very day he left Adams received deposits from citizens and from the county treasurer aggregating \$18,000. The trustees of an institution likewise placed in his vault for safe keeping \$20,000 worth of United States bonds.

Up to this date the bank had loaned out about \$3,000, and it had \$10,000 on deposit in Milwaukee and Chicago. Vinewood left in the morning. That same evening at eight o'clock Adams followed, having taken every dollar in the bank and the securities above mentioned. He left on Sunday night, and of course no one in town could suspect any thing until time for the bank to open on Monday. Then no one knew what had happened or what to do, and no one had Vinewood's address. It was three days before it was known for a fact that Adams had robbed the bank and fled. It was ten days before Vinewood put me on the case and said:

“I want this man run down if it takes ten years and costs me my last cent. Follow him day and night. Do not leave his trail for an hour. I will put \$10,000 to your credit in a New York bank, and when that is exhausted I will replace it.”

Vinewood was a man of deep feeling, and the robbery had aroused a sense of indignation which could not rest until the robber had been fitly punished. I got several cabinet photographs of Adams as a starter. They all showed him with a mustache. It was likely he would shave that off, and I got a Chicago artist to sketch his face as it would appear without. As he did not wear glasses he would likely put them on as a disguise. I had a sketch made with glasses on his nose and with his straight, long hair cut pretty close. As it was raven black he could not color it. He

had gone to Milwaukee and Chicago and checked out every dollar of deposits, and in the latter city he had disposed of the securities for cash. He thus had nearly eighty thousand dollars with him, much of it in small bills. I visited every bank in Chicago, but could not find that he had purchased drafts or exchange. At the express offices there was no record that he had shipped any cash. When he left the bank he only had the [satchel] in which he was carrying the money. He therefore had no change of clothing. After visiting seven or eight different hotels in Chicago I found where he had registered as "Burt J. Smith, St. Paul." He had made but a slight attempt to disguise his handwriting. He had remained at the hotel a part of the afternoon and over night. Instead of purchasing a trunk he had bought a new suit of clothes and taken his old ones out and sold them second hand. The new suit was entirely of gray, while his old one was black. This made such a change in his looks that remarks were made, when he came to pay his bills.

Two square from the hotel, on the way to the Lake Shore Depot, was a barber shop. I reasoned that Adams would seek to get rid of that mustache before he left Chicago, and after he had left the hotel I could only guess which way he went, but I meant to cover all routes. The barber in the first chair in the shop had all the information wanted. Adams had come on there with his [satchel], complained of a sore lip, and had his mustache shaved off. He had in his hand a folder of the Lake Shore road. After the mustache was off he had his hair shingled and the change in his looks was considerable. The barber had looked him over pretty closely, and had noticed a scar on his neck back of the right ear, as well as a mole on the left cheek, which had been touched out of the negative. I found no trace of him at the depot, but I bought my ticket to Cleveland on theory. Nine times out of ten the criminal who skips from a small town goes to a city to hide. He imagines that in the rush and confusion he will be passed by. Adams might stop in Toledo or Sandusky, but I took my chances on that.

On reaching Cleveland I made inquiries of all the depot officials, but no one had seen him. I went to all the hotels, but he was not registered. I visited all the trunk and clothing stores, but no one remembered a person of his description. I was in despair, when it occurred to me to visit the steamboat offices. At the second place where I called I discovered that he had bought a ticket by the Lake Superior Line for Port Huron. He had waited around for several hours, and had mentioned to at least one person that he had relatives in Port Huron. He had no trunk, but while waiting had bought a new collar and necktie, and had also been shaved again. I went to Port Huron by rail, and there on a hotel register in Adams' handwriting I found the name of "Charles M. Shaw, Cleve., Ohio." Inside of three hours I discovered that he had taken a Grand Trunk train to Hamilton, Ont. At Hamilton I did not have to go out of the depot for information. He had waited two or three hours and taken a train for Buffalo. Here he had got in the way of a baggage truck and had his foot hurt, and the row he made about it caused several officials to remember him.

At Buffalo I expected to lose the trail and have a hard task to pick it up again, and I was not disappointed. I was there two days before I found that Adams had been driven to a boardinghouse on Upper Main street, and had lain by for three days with his lame foot. After inquiring of half a hundred hackmen I finally found the right one. Adams had gone to this house on the recommendation of a boarder whom he met on the train. He pretended there to live in New Hampshire, and to be returning home from his cattle ranch in New Mexico. He further pretended to have lost his trunk in a smash-up, and before leaving he bought one, and a lot of

clothing. He now changed to a black felt hat and a tweed suit, and gave his name as "L. M. Davis." No one in the house knew what train he took, but I found the expressman who handled his trunk and had it checked for Harrisburg.

At Harrisburg Adams waited in the depot for three hours, and then bought a ticket for Philadelphia. He remained there at the Bingham House two days, and then departed for Baltimore. At Baltimore he went to a boarding house for three days, and it took me a week to discover this, and to learn that he had taken a steamer for New York City, booking his name as Henry Corning. I went to New York by train, and there found he had sailed for Liverpool. I was now two full weeks behind him, but more determined than when the chase began. I picked up four days on him at Liverpool, because he had remained there that long before going to London. He stayed two days only in London before going to Paris. I looked for him in the latter city for five days before I got any trace, and then it was to learn that he had departed for Bordeaux. He was now traveling as an American tourist, had invested in a fine wardrobe, and carried the [satchel] in his trunk. Its contents were seen by the customs officers in Liverpool and Paris, but he then pretended to be an agent of the Federal Government buying supplies.

At Bordeaux Adams took a sailing ship for Oporto, Spain. He was only eight days ahead of me when he sailed, but when I reached Oporto by the shortest route it was to find that he had departed by steamer for Naples. He remained there five days, and when I appeared and picked up his trail he was only four days ahead, but had gone to Milan. I was only two days behind him there, but he crossed into France, stopped two days in Lyons, went on to Paris, and I was again a full week behind him. I felt that he would now settle down, having dodged about until he was satisfied that no one could track him. I had by this time become pretty well acquainted with his tastes and characteristics. He had of late been spending the stolen funds quite freely, and at Lyons he picked up a woman who went to Paris with him. I returned to Lyons and found who the girl was. She was described as a handsome and captivating Parisian who had come down in search of adventure, and it was known to several that she had made a conquest of the American. After a patient search I found a girl who knew her well, and she explained:

"She fell in love with the American for his money. She will hang to him as long as it lasts. She told me her plans. They are to go to Switzerland for a month, and will then return to Paris for the fall and winter. She would want a week in Paris to get ready for the trip. By this time they are in Switzerland."

I returned to Paris and at once set out for Switzerland, and in two days I was full on their trail. They passed as a bridal couple, and the good looks of the bride caused every body to remember thorn. I knew that the long chase was nearing its end, and at the same time my anxiety became greater. If Adams had the sand to "kick," he had the money to fight off extradition. One afternoon I reached a hamlet under the shadow of Mont Blanc to find that I had run the fox to earth. He was there registered as "Harry Grafton and wife, New York. U. S. A." As I was the only arrival by the stage, but few noticed me. Two hours later I found Adams alone with his cigar on the veranda, and, drawing up a chair, I bluntly asked:

"Well, how much have you got left?"

“What do you mean, sir?” he demanded, but in a voice betraying trepidation.

“Adams, I have followed you over every mile of your wanderings,” I continued. “I am here to take you back to Minnesota for trial.”

“But I won’t go. You can’t extradite me for robbery.”

“But I can for murder. You killed Mr. Vinewood in cold-blood, and his body was discovered in the bank.”

“So help me Heaven, I did not.”

“Then who did?”

“Why, he had gone East before I left.”

“That is too thin. All the evidence points your way. Will you return without a fight, or will you furnish additional proofs of your guilt by putting me to trouble?”

In an hour he agreed to go. To find himself charged with a murder of which he was innocent overshadowed the robbery of which he was guilty, and he was really anxious to return and prove his innocence of the grave charge. He had spent about \$3,000 of the money; the rest was safe and came back with us. He never made me the least trouble on the way, and it was only when he found Vinewood alive and understood the trick that he grew wrathful. He had \$7,000 of his own money, and he employed such legal talent that the law was twisted and turned and the jury wrestled with until he finally got clear.—*N. Y. Sun*

*Pullman Herald* [Pullman, Washington Territory], October 19, 1889