

*Max Shinburn*  
by Allan Pinkerton

MAXIMILIAN SHINBURN, *alias* Mark Shinburn, *alias* Mark Baker, *alias* Zimmerman, with half a hundred other *aliases*, is a very brilliant and exceptional instance of a professional criminal having won considerable fame from a series of masterly bank and bond robberies, marvelous prison escapes, and the like, in America, and then crowning all by a final escape, sound and safely, to Belgium, where he has since lived an active, and, as far as can be learned, an honorable business life, being favored with luxury and the pleasantest of life's surroundings.

He is now about forty years of age, and, whether born in America or elsewhere, is a German Jew, and has a fluent command of the English, German, French, Spanish, and Italian languages. One account has it that he was born in Europe, and received his superb education there, leaving his native country on account of some wild, boyish escapade, and coming to America when he was about eighteen years of age, proceeding to St. Louis, where he became very proficient in the locksmith's trade; but finding this a slow way to secure the elegancies of life, turning the knowledge thus gained to criminal pursuits, and after being arrested, and while awaiting trial, effecting the liberation of himself and seventeen other prisoners.

Again, some of his old associates in crime state that he was born of German parents, near Germantown, Pennsylvania, and was spoiled by a rich mother, who lavished her wealth upon his education and accomplishments; and that, after graduating from college as a highly finished scholar and gentleman, he was placed in a large mercantile establishment, and, after securing a thorough knowledge of business there, was given a position in a bank, where he familiarized himself with monetary affairs, but where he grew so extravagant in his habits and dissolute in his mode of life that at last he became hopelessly in debt, when he duplicated the keys of the bank vaults and for a long time pursued a system of "weeding" the packages of notes in the vaults, and making its loss correspond by false entries, in the ledgers. This was continued for nearly a year increasing in amount until the annual settlement, with the loss was discovered. So artfully had the thing been done, that both tellers were arrested on suspicion, as the alterations in the books were exact imitations of their handwriting; but as they lived honest and respectable lives, nothing could be ascertained derogatory to their characters, and the charges were subsequently withdrawn. At length suspicion was thrown upon young Shinburn by his reckless life generally, and, while no absolute proof of his guilt could be gathered, he was eventually discharged in disgrace.

These same old companions also relate that the stigma of his crime rested heavily upon Shinburn, and, after a night's carouse, he suddenly resolved to become a professional criminal. Hardly had the idea seized possession of his mind, than he proceeded to carry it into execution. Securing what money he could command, he attired himself magnificently, and departed on the Camden and Amboy road for Boston.

His adventures here were attended, as they always seemed to be, with fine success. Registering himself as Walker Watterson at the Revere House, he soon, by his engaging conversation, elegant manners, and liberal expenditure of money, rendered himself the favorite of all the

gentlemen of the house. After a good standing had been secured, he laid siege to the heart of a prepossessing daughter of a cultivated Boston banker, and in this way became intimate at the banker's house, the bank itself, and with many of the bank officers and clerks of course all this time keeping a keen eye out for the main chance, and gradually acquiring possession of all information in reference to the character of the locks and the location of the vaults; and early one morning, when returning from a fashionable party, amidst a terrific storm, he forced an entrance to the building. He then retired from the place, changed his clothing, and returning, passed inside of the bank, and immediately began operations upon the vaults. Here was occasioned his first great trial, as the locks at first baffled his attempts; but after a half-hour of patient work he had the satisfaction of seeing the entire contents of the vaults at his command. But instead of taking a large sum of money, which would immediately raise a hue and cry, he only took several thousands of the money, closed and locked the vault-door, and then, after taking a wax impression of the locks, decamped from the place, arriving at his hotel safe and sound before the milkmen had made their morning calls.

However much truth there may be in all this, the adventure is wholly characteristic of the man. He was a zealous student of everything that might fit him for a most complete, safe, and perfect success in his nefarious calling; and wherever and at whatever time he secured his mechanical knowledge, it is certain that he was most splendidly skilled in all that pertained to the locksmith's trade and intricate work in iron and steel. He was a constant reader of the *Scientific American*, and devoted much time and money in keeping posted on the intricacies of every new patent or novelty that in any way pertained to appliances for bank protection.

His keenness in this regard is illustrated by the fact that at one time there was not a Lillie lock in existence of which he could not secure the combination and which he could not pick. His genius was also as inventive as it was inquiring.

He purchased a Lillie safe simply for the purpose of "operating" on the lock. Every part and portion was studied with an assiduity and zeal truly remarkable. He shut himself up with it until he was the complete master of it. But though he had acquired as much knowledge of it as its inventor, there was one thing still to be overcome. He could never be certain of the combination. Here his inventive skill was exhibited in a brilliant manner indeed. He actually constructed a delicate piece of mechanism by which he could secure the combination of any Lillie safe, providing he could only get access to the outside of it.

This was when the dials of the Lillie lock were secured by screws on the outside, and could be taken off.

It was usually no trouble for him to secure entrance to a bank, for he could manufacture a key to its doors without the least trouble. When this much was gained he had a sure thing on a Lillie safe or any vault guarded by that kind of a lock. His apparatus was a delicate affair, a handsomely finished ratchet, which, when placed under the dial, would make no mark or indication if moved in one direction, but when the dial was stopped and an attempt made to move it in an opposite direction, it made a little puncture in a sheet of paper or other light substance which would retain it, and which was properly placed to receive such puncture.

Shinburn would enter a bank at night, insert this under the dial of the lock, and the next night on his return he would have discovered the first feature of the combination. Then he would set his register for the reverse motion, which he would secure the second night, and so on until he had just as perfect a knowledge of the combination of the safe or vault as any officer of the bank.

In this way he robbed the New Windsor Bank, of Maryland. Some of his confederates proved traitorous subsequently, and he was arrested by John Young, then chief of detectives of New York city, since deceased, who, on securing a portion of the stolen money, permitted Shinburn to go free; and following this Young resigned.

He also in this manner committed a robbery at Norwalk, Connecticut, where he obtained nearly two hundred thousand dollars, as also the robbery of a bank at Binghamton, Vermont; while a large number of the same class of depredations were done by him which never came to light.

After his Boston adventures, already related, Shinburn arranged a regular system of bank depredations throughout New England, which should apply in its operations to all banks of importance. In pursuance of this scheme he made regular tours of that section of the country, for the purpose of securing information in reference to the location of these banks and the means necessary to enter them successfully. Having secured this indispensable knowledge, he prepared the keys and implements requisite to carry his plans into execution. Then the raid began and continued for several years, in which he was from first to last undetected, and was at length arrested only through the treachery of some of his false friends, after he had stolen and recklessly spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in the most extravagant manner.

His adventures during this period were as remarkable as his criminal successes. During the summer of '64 he had secured a very handsome sum from several banks in the section of country referred to, and he determined to pass a gay season at some of the fashionable watering-places. Procuring a magnificent outfit, he proceeded from New York to Saratoga, and, registering a romantic *alias* on the books of the Union Hotel, soon became one of the leaders of the fashion in that summer hot-bed of dissipation and frivolity.

His appearance was particularly agreeable: well-proportioned and finely cut, expressive features, his form attired in the latest style of clothing, with a magnificent solitaire diamond glittering in his shirt-front, small hands and feet; with altogether a *distingué* air, he presented every external appearance of a gentleman. His intellectual ability, of a high order, was rendered more conspicuous by his fluent command of the foreign languages, already referred to. With these combined qualifications and a plentiful supply of greenbacks, which he expended most lavishly, he speedily made his way into the very best society, and was everywhere courted as a desirable acquaintance. Flirting with handsome young ladies and playing the heartless Lothario, betting at the race-course, mornings at the springs and night divided between faro and the hops, he led a life of reckless extravagance, vile deceit, and criminal pleasure.

During the time he favored the Grand Union with his presence, he courted and was under promise of marriage to the daughter of a prominent western politician, which of course was never consummated. After paying visits to Newport and Long Branch, he passed through the summer, and devoted the winter to his regular practice of bank "weeding" with varying success,

until, emboldened by his hitherto good luck, he determined, in concert with several noted bank-thieves, among whom was his criminal partner, George White, *alias* George Bliss, to rob the Concord (New Hampshire) Bank, which was most brilliantly executed, and from which they succeeded in securing over two hundred thousand dollars. With the plunder the thieves separated with their shares, when one of the gang was captured, and disclosed the names of the depredators, chief among whom was that of Max Shinburn. Upon this information the hunt commenced, and Shinburn was captured, tried, convicted, and sentenced to the Concord state prison for ten years.

His arrest was effected while he was holding one of his orgies of pleasure at Saratoga; and a most profound sensation was caused there at the sudden retirement of the gorgeous leader of fashion; but the social waters soon quieted, to be disturbed by the next ripple, while Shinburn went behind the great gray walls of the prison.

But he was too much of a genius in his line of life to sit down meekly and waste his time brooding over his misfortunes. While others of the common sort might give themselves up to the despair of a life in the living tomb of a prison, his being in such a place at all was only preliminary to getting out of it. His first move was to make friends with everybody; and as he always managed to keep a good supply of money on hand, this was not difficult to accomplish. Being a wonderful burglar, he was treated with distinction, and of course everybody knew him. His keepers came to think that Shinburn was one of the cleverest fellows in the place. He was an exemplary prisoner, and, as he always had a cheery smile for his fellows and an occasional substantial “tip” for the officer, he soon had everything his own way, and had acquired a degree of familiarity with his keepers that made the bold and daring act he had so long planned, possible.

One night he called the keeper to his cell, and entered into conversation with him over some trivial matters which were made very agreeable and entertaining on Shinburn’s part, for some little time, when suddenly he asked the keeper to step inside for some purpose which the shrewd fellow made seem an important one. The unsuspecting guardian did as he was requested, when quicker than lightning, Shinburn overpowered the keeper, took his revolver from him, threatening, if any alarm was given, he would blow his brains out, took his keys from him, locked the unfortunate keeper in his own cell, and coolly let himself out of the prison and regained his liberty.

Great astonishment and alarm was created at the time in New Hampshire at this daring and bold escape, and a large reward was offered for the recapture of the reckless criminal; but for twelve months he eluded the most vigilant search, until one evening a private citizen, traveling on the cars from Binghampton, recognized Shinburn amongst the passengers—the citizen having been in court at the time of his trial and conviction.

With commendable presence of mind, the gentleman, well knowing the desperate and dangerous character of the man, immediately went into another car and inquired if any sheriff’s men or other officers of justice were on the train.

It so fortunately happened that four deputy-sheriffs, who were returning from the State prison, to which place they had conveyed some convicts, were on the train, and they returned to the car in which Shinburn was quietly sitting, and with drawn revolvers pounced upon him and made him their prisoner.

He was conveyed to his old quarters, and an extra watch and guard set over him; but he soon disarmed suspicion, and a want of caution supervened, which, as the sequel shows, resulted in a second escape. Shinburn, with the potatoes that were served with his food, took an impression of the cell-lock, and from his iron spoons made a key to fit it. Think of the patience, perseverance, and real ability requisite to such a purpose. After a painfully long time he found himself provided with the means to reach the corridor; and after all was still for the night he would leave his cell and proceed to the outer barred gate, where, with a delicate steel saw that had been conveyed to him by an accomplice, by being imbedded in the fore-piece of a light silk cap, he would saw the massive iron bars until they would just hold, but would be broken off by any sudden contact of a heavy object. The slight trace of this work would be completely removed by filling the interstices made by the slender saw with portions of a potato mixed with soot.

It was the rule of the prison to march the prisoners around the yard every day; and Shinburn, having by perseverance so cut the bars that they would give way upon a quick pressure, on one of these occasions, when the prisoners were taking their daily circuit, the daring fellow made a sudden rush at the then apparently secure bars, which yielded as if by magic, and Shinburn went through them like a flash of light, and while the keepers were struck dumb by what appeared a miracle, the bold thief sprang into a wagon in waiting for him, and was again at liberty. He immediately changed his clothing, and with his companions set out for Plymouth. They were hotly pursued by the prison watch and a large posse of citizens, who came up with the fugitives in a dense piece of woods. Here they were ordered to halt; but their only answer was a well-directed volley from their revolvers; and finding that the desperate men were determined to surrender only after a conflict, in which many of the pursuing party would undoubtedly meet their death, the latter retired, and Shinburn was free to again pursue his brilliant career, to eventually be recaptured and again make his escape in a manner which for a time turned the laugh upon me, as he had so often upon others, and which I will not neglect to record, at the risk of a joke upon myself, with the reflection that he is about the only criminal that ever escaped me in my nearly a third of a century's active and exciting detective's career.

On the night of July 9, 1868, the office of the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company, at White Haven, Pennsylvania, was entered, the vault and safe opened by means of false keys, and fifty-six thousand dollars, in bank bills, currency, and bonds, stolen.

The entrance to the building had also been effected by means of false keys; and while no clue to the robbers remained, it was evident the job had been carefully planned, and that professionals were concerned in it.

The case was put in my hands; and from certain evidences of the style of work which are as marked in noted criminals as are the brands on goods of different manufacture, I at once concluded that whoever had suggested the robbery, it was Max Shinburn's mastermind that had planned it and brought it to a successful execution.

In pursuance of these convictions, I soon had run down the entire party, among which was the redoubtable Shinburn. It then came to light that the robbery had been suggested by one Starks, then proprietor of the White Haven Hotel, in White Haven, who had let two other parties, named Spencer, *alias* Griffin, and one Sinclair, into the scheme; but none of them being accomplished criminals, Shinburn's services had been secured.

The robbery had been planned as early as March previous, and the scheme was to enter the place while it contained a large amount of currency for the monthly payment of the company's hands. On arrival at White Haven, and receiving such information as the conspirators there were able to furnish, Shinburn daringly entered the agent's house at night, and then, in the bedchamber, took from the pockets of the sleeping man all the keys of the safe, vault, and compartments, of which he took impressions in wax, and, having returned the keys and removed all signs of his visit, departed. When Shinburn had manufactured such keys as he desired, he returned to the place, and at night entered the coal company's office, opening the various doors and the vault. One key was found imperfect; but this defect was subsequently remedied. The thieves now only awaited the arrival of the money to do their work; but although they were ready for operations in April, it was not until July that circumstances favored them.

On July 5th Griffin hired a team in Dunmore, representing that he would be absent for a number of days and leaving a deposit for the value of the turn-out. A short distance out of town he met Sinclair and Shinburn, to whom he surrendered possession of the team, returning to town himself and going into retracy. Sinclair then drove to a rendezvous in the woods, near Wilkesbarre, where they remained until the 9th, when, after dark, they drove to White Haven, arriving there at midnight. Shinburn entered the office, opened the safe, abstracted the money, and within twenty minutes they were dashing away toward Scranton, fifty-six thousand dollars richer for their nocturnal visit.

I had already captured all the lesser game, and had just succeeded in laying my hands upon Shinburn, after an exciting chase, when my clients urgently advised that Shinburn should be held in custody by my officers until he had been relieved of the lion's share of the plunder which it was known he had carried off. Though strongly objecting to this course—as it is a thorough principle with me to immediately turn prisoners over to the regularly constituted—authorities I at last reluctantly yielded. This deviation from my rule in such cases cost me my prisoner, for Shinburn's matchless cunning, which always seemed to be equal to any test, came to his rescue again, and he here made one of the most remarkable escapes for which he has become so notorious.

Knowing the slippery character of the man, I had every precaution taken to prevent the execution of any of his brilliant schemes. I shut him up in a room at a Wilkesbarre hotel, and put my most trustworthy men in charge of him, handcuffing them together, so that there could be, as was thought, no possibility of escape. In this way they passed the time, eating, drinking, and sleeping together, seemingly as inseparable, on account of the handcuffs, as the Siamese twins, while the men were relieved often enough to keep them wakeful and vigilant. At night extra precautions were taken, and the guard and prisoner were compelled to sleep together.

But all this did not avail; for Shinburn, one night, after countless trials which would have unnerved and dismayed any less wonderful a man, using his left hand, picked the lock of the handcuff with the shank of his breast-pin, stole softly, silently, and breathlessly from the side of the sleeping officer, and fled. All pursuit was useless. He in some manner shipped as a sailor, and finally reached Belgium, from which country he could not be taken by an American officer.

But Shinburn could not resist the temptation of returning to a field where his abilities made him so successful; and it is quite probable that he came back to America with the fixed determination of securing enough plunder to give him a competence for the remainder of his life. He worked for nearly six months with the greatest secrecy and good fortune, finally crowning all by his masterly planning and execution of the famous Ocean Bank robbery, at New York, in June, 1869, in which over a quarter of a million dollars in securities and currency was taken.

This robbery was done in the following manner: Parties in the scheme rented a portion of the basement under the bank, at the corner of Fulton and Greenwich Streets, for the ostensible purpose of opening a branch office of the Chicago Life Insurance Company, but announced to Mr. Okell, the lessee of the entire basement, that they would not be ready for business for some weeks, as they would have to comply with the insurance laws of New York, which required a deposit from foreign insurance agencies.

After this much was done, every little item of information concerning the bank was gradually secured, until a favorable time had arrived, when the burglars began work after the closing of business on Saturday evening, and probably within twenty-four hours had secured all that they wanted, departing with the utmost leisure, and leaving not the slightest clue behind them. They had made most accurate calculations, and had sawed a large hole through the ceiling of the basement and the bank floor, enabling them to come up through within the private office of the president of the bank. Having thus gained access to the bank floor, they hung black glaze and oiled silk over the windows and doors, and went to work. In some mysterious manner the combination to the locks of the main vault was known—which showed Shinburn's genius again; and when the vault was entered, the small safes and compartments were easily opened with a massive jack-screw and other well-known burglars' appliances. Thirty thousand dollars in gold was left—that evidently being too heavy for transportation—but altogether upward of a quarter of a million in money and securities was captured. The adventurous fellows left behind them probably the finest "kit" of tools ever got together. It must have cost at least three thousand dollars, and comprised a jack-screw capable of raising the side of the bank building, six large and powerful "jimmies," an assortment of finely-tempered steel wedges and copper-headed sledge-hammers, also patent drills, braces and bits, augers, compasses, saws, small hand-saws, brad-awls, two large pruning-knives, putty-knife, powder-flasks, patent fuse, a cleverly contrived and constructed funnel with an India-rubber tube attached for inserting powder into holes drilled in the doors of the safes, a pair of handcuffs, coils of rope, dark-lanterns, rubber shoes, overalls, and a large quantity of oiled silk used for deadening the sounds of the blows from the heavy sledge-hammers, and a large number of cold-chisels, screw-drivers, gimlets, and other small tools too numerous to mention in detail. The "kit" comprised over two hundred pieces, and was the largest and finest ever seen.

Immediately after this magnificent capture, Shinburn, who probably secured a large portion of it, at once escaped to Europe, and settled in Belgium. It is thought that he must have saved from two to three hundred thousand dollars. With a portion of this he purchased a title from some wretchedly impecunious Belgian, and is now living in luxury and ease from the proceeds of his villainies in America.

Altogether, Maximilian Shinburn may be considered one of the most remarkably successful criminals of the present century, and is almost the single instance on record where such a character has escaped a violent death, a convict's career, and cursed end, or a final dragging out of a miserable existence in wretched poverty and disgrace, which may yet be his end, as the old adage, that "a fool and his money are soon parted," is no less true than that "a thief and his plunder soon separate." when the old daring, the old temptations, and the great shadow of old crimes prove the irresistible power that propel to the certain fate of the professional criminal.

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