

A Detective's Story

HIS EXPERIENCES IN WATCHING A GANG OF EXPERT CRACKSMEN

The Ocean Bank Robbery— An Englishman's Way of Cracking a Safe— Thwarting an Attempt to Rob the Illinois State Treasury— A Dangerous Resemblance

Some years ago, at the time that Capt. Jordan was chief of police of New York [City], there occurred one of the most daring and successful robberies ever known. It was accomplished under the leadership of a notorious burglar, who bore the cognomen "O.K." He had recently committed several robberies in various places, and had managed to get into his possession a considerable sum of money. Arriving in New York, he determined to establish a brokerage business, and for that purpose secured rooms in the same block with the Ocean bank, the officers of which allowed him to keep his money and bonds in the bank safe. In this way he obtained information which he determined to take advantage of for his own benefit. He decided to rob the bank.

He was acquainted with an expert burglar, then in England, and, in order, to divert suspicion from himself, he sent for him, and the expert came over, bringing with him two young men, his nephews. As soon as they arrived in New York, they set a stool pigeon at work to find out the best way for carrying out the scheme of robbing the bank. At the same time a party of Illinois burglars had a stool pigeon at work for the same purpose. The two met and discovered each other's plans. After some conversation it was deemed best to report to headquarters, and this was done, the parties met and decided to detail three men from each party to perform the work of robbing the bank. In order to get the janitor out of the way they paid him \$500, and then had no trouble in committing the robbery. The robbers secured over \$60,000 in money, besides a large amount in United States bonds.

When the two gangs got together in council, Andy McKay, of Springfield, one of the most notorious burglars, and a great talker, proceeded to explain to the old Englishman the manner in which he opened the Lillie safe. He said "The center pin is loose. I pull it out about a half inch; then strike it hard with a sledge hammer; it breaks like glass; then I take a prick-punch that will not get fast in the hole; one man holds the prick-punch, and another strikes it hard with the hammer and drives it through the lock; another hard blow causes it to spring the strap that holds the lock on; then I take the crooked tunnel, pour in the powder, insert the fuse, set it with a match and get out of the way." The old Englishman replied in a peculiar drawling way "That would make a noise, wouldn't it?" "Yes," said McKay, "but we throw a wet blanket over it, and that prevents the noise." The Englishman replied "I don't make any noise; I don't make any more noise than a mouse would eating a cracker."

The way the old Englishman robbed a safe was this. He used a diamond drill, with which he bored on one side of the center pin, and inserted a wire in the hole. Then all he had to do was to turn the knob once around. Every time it struck the wire it would raise the lug out of the slot, and then the door was opened.

The Illinois burglars persuaded the English burglars to come to Chicago. The old gentleman and one of his nephews put up at the Sherman House for six weeks; the others took rooms at the

Revere house. My stool pigeon gave me a “spot” on the old burglar at once, and went with me to the hotel as many as ten or fifteen times to get “spot” on the other young man, but I never could succeed in seeing him. They got up a “site” on the state treasury safe at Springfield, and also on the state treasury safe of Minnesota, and on a private bank of St. Paul.

I wrote a letter to the Hon. George H. Harlow, secretary of state, at Springfield, telling him the robbers of the Ocean bank in New York were in Chicago, and were preparing to rob the state treasurer’s safe at the state capital, but would probably wait until the county treasurers had made their annual returns. After that “look out for quail tracks.” About three weeks later I received a letter from Gen. Bates, treasurer of Illinois, asking me to come to Springfield by the first train. I started for the Sherman house, and, finding my men gone, took the late train, reaching Springfield at daylight the next morning. After breakfast I called upon Mr. Harlow, who went at once and gave me an introduction to Gen. Bates. The general told me his suspicions, and I went out to look for my man. Within half an hour I ran across the young man, and followed him all day.

He would occasionally step into a confectioner’s and buy candy and peanuts, and then he would visit a saloon and purchase a bottle of pop. Finally he went down by the capitol, where the streets were not built up much, and I was obliged to follow on a parallel street, and get a look at him occasionally through an opening among the scattered buildings and trees. At length I retraced my steps to the new capitol building, near which I hid myself in a thick cluster of bushes, staying there until after sundown, when he came back, and I followed him to the Leland house. I remained the rest of the week, but saw nothing further of him. Now, see how I got beat. He had his brother, whom I had never seen, following me all day. They had a team and a [wagon] with a double box. Their plan was to put the money they got in the lower box and fill the upper one with bags of oats. They then could travel through the country without exciting suspicion.

After they were frustrated at Springfield they went to St. Paul Minn. After I got back to Chicago I was one day walking on the sidewalk, when I saw a man coming toward me whom I took to be the one I had shadowed all day at Springfield. As he came up I saw it was not the one I thought, but a man by the name of Reed, whom I knew very well. I hired him at an early day to teach the school in Blackberry Center. He married Peter Johnson’s daughter, and removed to St. Paul Minn., where he engaged in the banking business. As he came up to me I said to him: “Friend Reed, you frightened me. When I saw you coming I thought you were one of the Ocean bank robbers.” I told him that party had a “site” on the state treasurer’s office of Minnesota, and also a private bank at St. Paul. “Now you have frightened me,” he replied. “Our folks told me the morning I came away that a man came into the office whom they at first thought was me. He was there twenty minutes before they saw their mistake.” Mr. Reed then went to the telegraph office, and wired the bank to look out for the man they mistook for him, for he was one of the Ocean bank robbers. I wrote the sheriff at St. Paul that the robbers of the Ocean bank had a “site” upon the safe of the state treasurer of Minnesota, and to look out for them. Shortly after that I had business at St. Paul, and while there called upon the sheriff. He told me that the robbers bothered them nearly two weeks during the old of the moon. I kept track of those men. They never robbed another safe while in the west. They finally returned to Boston, and took passage for England, taking along with them Mark Shinborn, one of the toughest burglars we had in this country. — B. C. Yates in Chicago News.

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