

## *Behind Crime's Curtain*

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### A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.

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#### Scientific Burglars—The Champion Rogues of the World—How the Burglar Divides His Plunder—Two Murders at Sea.

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A little blue cloud of smoke floated over the head of a well-known criminal lawyer of this city yesterday as he sat in a big, soft, shiny leather chair and dreamily puffed dainty wreaths and garlands from a long cigar. His fat, red hands, sparkling with diamonds, drooped lazily over the creased sides of the chair, and every time the wide bosom of his shirt rose and fell a bunch of jewels twinkled and blazed, a fairy island in a white sea, beneath which a thousand dark secrets rolled like the bones of dead sailors. Deep gray eyes, rosy cheeks and a thick, red neck, swollen with muscles, lay against the dark brown back cushions. From the snowy cuffs that enclosed the burly wrists a pair of large manacles of solid gold dangled.

From the walls of the room a faded picture of Lord Chief-Justice Cockburn stared at a faded picture of Reddy the Blacksmith, and My Lord was not flattered by the comparison either. At the door was an old-fashioned little boy with keen eyes and a sharp nose.

“Yes,” said the obstructor of the course of justice, to a reporter while fanning the blue cloud away, “I’ve known personally nearly all the criminals that have amounted to anything in the last twenty-five years. Men of brains? Well, I should say so. If the cause of education had such men of heroism and genius enlisted on its side how much better the world might be today, and how much poorer I might be! It’s dreadful to think of what wickedness there is in the world, and yet I long ago made up my mind that we had to bear with it in a spirit of Christian fortitude. This is really a very pleasant cigar.”

Here the lawyer crossed his legs and sighed with an air of delicious contentment. The golden shackles jingled and twinkled as he gently rubbed his chubby palms together and settled himself more cozily in the chair.

### Different Kinds of Burglars.

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“I long ago learned to distinguish between criminals in a way that the ordinary public seldom understands. Now, take the burglar, for instance. He is a fine, romantic figure, and yet burglars differ in their spheres as Prof. Virchow, the great anatomist, differs from an ordinary coroner’s assistant. In the lower walks of life we have the common burglar, the tramping vagabond who breaks into a house upon the mere chance that the people may be asleep, and that he may find something worth stealing. Such men seldom rise in life and are mere drags upon modern civilization. I always think of their poor lawyers with a feeling of profound pity. Hardened as my profession may make me, I always hope to have some tender feelings. The drunken burglar comes next in the scale. He loafs around bar-rooms all day, swigs beer and whisky until his brains are all fuddled, and at night he breaks into some unprotected grocery store. Now I come to a very interesting class of people, who are generally chaperoned by persons like a certain dear

old lady now in Canada who shall be nameless. These burglars send young women—in most cases their own sweethearts—to intelligence offices in order to get situations as servants to wealthy families. These servants learn where the family valuables are kept, study the habits of their employers, and then, at the right hour, leave the door open. The burglar who works on the plan finds his task easy. Colored criminals use this scheme very much. You remember that it was only a few months ago that Gertrude Ash, a colored servant, concealed her lover in the house where she was employed, and thus enabled him to steal what he wanted.

### The High-Toned Fellows.

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“Then there are the educated, systematic burglars—the men of science. Ah! what magnificent men I have known! These men never go into a house on a chance of finding booty. They first learn what kind of wealth is kept in the house. If it is jewelry, they arrange their plans to steal jewelry; if it is bonds, as in the case of the great Lord robbery, they get ready to steal bonds. When they enter the house they do not seize the first valuable thing they see, but work systematically toward the place where the jewelry or the bonds are kept. The first thing a man of science plans is how to get out of the house he is going to rob. One of the greatest burglars that ever lived said to me: ‘Any mechanic with cool nerves can break into a house, but it takes a man of brains to get out.’ The true burglar has arranged before he enters the house just what he will do if the occupants discover the burglary—turn the light out, lock the hall door, drop out of the pantry window, climb the fence and dash away in a carriage waiting for him around the corner. The man of science never works unless he has sentinels posted outside to warn him in case of emergency. The popular method of posting these sentinels is to hire a room opposite of the place where the robbery is to occur. The sentinels have a wire with a handkerchief tied to it or some other signal by which the burglars can be warned. The scientific man comes prepared to kill, and when he is cornered is the most merciless criminal you can encounter. But he will never kill while there is a hope of escape. A man of science shrinks from murder except as the very last means of avoiding capture. There is one little thing about systematic burglars which few people know of. They never address each other by their real names when engaged in a crime. The usual way is to give each one a number. Then the leader can talk without giving the police a clew to the identity of his confederates. He can say, ‘Here, No. 1, you gag this man. No. 2, you bring that jimmy and lantern into the next room.’ You see, in order to carry out a big plan several men must be in the conspiracy, and this is the way they communicate with each other.”

### The “Boss” Burglar.

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“Who do you think is the best burglar in the world?”

“Dan Noble. He is at present living against his will in England. Dan was caught in an attempt upon the Bank of England. You don’t know what a man he was.”

The lawyer shook his head sadly.

“How about Bill Vosburgh; wasn’t he a clever burglar?”

“Oh’ don’t, don’t mention such a man in the same breath with Dan Noble,” cried the lawyer, with an expression of pain upon his face. “It simply disgusts me. What! Bill Vosburgh compared to Dan Noble! A common sneak thief compared to the king of scientists! Why, Noble could do anything. Many a time he’s sat in the very chair you’re sitting in and talked to me. Some of the great bank burglars become electricians and chemists. A man who was once a celebrated burglar, but who is at present an honored physician, told me when I was defending him that he could go through a steel shutter with a phial of acid, a piece of silk and a spring saw just as if he was cutting through so much tissue paper. Burglars study electricity in order to cope with patent alarms.

### How “The Swag” is Disposed of.

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“But there are some things in which the poor burglar is misunderstood. He seldom gets the lion’s share of the profit. Take a sample case. I’ll give you one founded upon fact that will illustrate scores of others. A burglar breaks into a silk house and gets away with two or three cases that cost the owner, say, \$5,000. He has to pay at least two confederates. Before the burglary he had to hire a floor in some cheap tenement house and an express wagon. The silk is taken in the wagon to the tenement house, for no receiver of stolen goods or fence, as we call such a person, would allow so many goods to be carted to the receiving place. It would attract too much attention. If the wagon and horse belong to a trusted friend the burglar returns them; if not, he lets them go in the street and don’t bother his head about them. Now, the next thing to do is to call in three or four fences to bid for the silk. It is a curious fact, but a true one, nevertheless, that when a man is robbed he always says that his loss is greater than it really is. In this case the merchant claims that the silk stolen from him is worth over \$9,000, instead of \$5,000, its real value. The burglar reads the newspapers, for he must always keep up sharply with the news of the day, and gets from the merchant’s misrepresentations an exaggerated idea of what his booty is worth. The first fence to arrive surveys the silk and says, ‘Mine friendt, dose goots are vort \$5,000; I gif you \$1,000, vor I haf to sell vor \$2,500 to a friendt of mine who knows all apout dot robbery.’ The fence is perfectly honest in his statement, but the burglar doesn’t believe him and refuses to sell.

### Where the Detective Comes in.

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“Now, what does the fence do? I don’t want to be too explicit, but the chances are that within a few hours a detective taps the burglar on the shoulder. ‘Say, wasn’t that curious burglary in So-and-so’s silk warehouse?’ says the detective. ‘I don’t know anything about it,’ says the poor burglar, who is now inwardly quaking. ‘Yes, you do,’ says the detective, ‘and you’ve got the stuff. Now I give you till to-morrow to fork over the stuff to the owner, or I’ll collar it and you, too.’ You see, the detective doesn’t know where the silk is hid, but he pretends he does. What does the poor burglar do now? He either sends for the fence and sells the silk for whatever he can get, or he agrees with the detective to return the goods to the owner for say \$2,000 reward. If the latter course is decided upon, the public suddenly learns of a very brilliant piece of detective work through which two detectives have unearthed the headquarters of a gang of burglars. The thieves managed to escape, but all their swag was captured. Thus the silk is returned to the owner, who pays the reward, in which the burglar and the fence share. You see what a discouraging thing it is to be a burglar.

## A Burglar at Home.

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“A man like Dan Noble sometimes becomes prominent in his own community. Dan lived in Elmira and owned trotting horses there. I have often heard it said that he was so popular in Elmira that the authorities could not get a conviction against him there. Once when I was on my way to Binghamton to get a famous burglar out on bail I met Dan Noble on the train. He had a whole section in the car, had two splendid dogs, and was waited upon as if he was a Prince. I told him where I was going, and he laughed. ‘I’m on my way to my residence,’ he said. ‘It’s too bad that people will get themselves in trouble, isn’t it?’ Noble, you will remember, stole over \$7,000,000 in bonds from Mr. Lord.”

## A Prince of Sneak Thieves.

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“Who is another remarkable criminal of your acquaintance?”

“Chauncey Johnston. He’s dead now.”

The lawyer turned his head away. Then there was a moment of silence. Then he pressed a piece of blotting paper to his eyes.

“Chauncey was the most eminent sneak thief that ever lived,” he said. “He made over \$500,000 in his profession, and yet he died a beggar. Sad, isn’t it? Well, that is the way of the world. Chauncey once robbed the Fifth Avenue Hotel. The story never came out, but I’ll tell it now. Every year the New England Society had a dinner at the hotel. When the committee was arranging for the dinner one day in the little room at the back of the main office Chauncey walked in. He was elegantly dressed and picked his teeth with a gold toothpick. The hotel proprietors thought he was a member of the committee and the committee thought he was one of the proprietors. There is a safe close to the door of the little room, and Chauncey stole the first thing in it he could reach. When he got home he found that he had stolen very valuable papers belonging to an English clergyman. The clergyman went back to England and, of course, put in his claim against the hotel. Shortly afterward Chauncey visited the Fifth Avenue Hotel again and made another haul from the safe. Just as he got to the sidewalk he was grabbed by a big Irish porter who saw him commit the robbery. Well, Chauncey hired me and gave me the story. I suggested to the hotel proprietors that the English clergyman ought to have his papers, and they were returned, not, however, before Chauncey’s accusers recommended the Court to give him a light sentence.

## Quick Work in a Bank.

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“When you talk about the manner in which criminals get their liberty I can tell you some daisies. You’ve often noticed that the paying tellers’ windows in banks are guarded by little iron or brass bars? Well, before Dutch Heinrich’s time the windows were entirely open. By the way, what a genius he was.”

The lawyer closed his eyes in ecstasy and murmured the name.

“Heinrich used to wait till the teller of a bank had a good pile of money in front of his window, and then he would reach in, seize an armful if he could and get away so quickly that pursuit was hopeless. During the war Heinrich got away with two bags of gold from a Wall street bank in this fashion. He passed the bags to confederates, who managed to escape. Heinrich, however, was arrested. He offered to return some of the gold if he was set at liberty. The President of the bank accepted one bag of gold and then bailed Heinrich out. The case was before Justice Hogan, and I remember it very well.

### Two Murders at Sea.

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“I’ll tell you of a thing that saved a man’s life, and I didn’t even have to tell a lie to do it either. In 1864 a man named Griffin was mate of a big ship. He wanted to be Captain, and so he induced the steward, a man named Lees, to help him kill the Captain. They rubbed blue vitriol on the edge of a drinking-glass, and in this way poisoned the Captain, who died. The owners were notified, but instead of promoting Griffin they hired another Captain from the outside. Griffin was wild over his disappointment, and he killed the second Captain in the same way. Again the owners went outside for a man to fill the vacancy. The Mate made an attempt to poison the Captain, but the owners of the vessel suspected what was the matter and had the bodies of the two murdered Captains exhumed. Traces of poison were discovered and both Griffin and Lees were arrested. Lees confessed, and when Griffin was tried in New York I defended him. The court was in Burton’s Theater, in Chambers street, on the very spot where the American News Company’s buildings is to-day. My wife wanted to hear me defend Griffin, and she came to court with her little baby in her arms. Well, the trial went on. I made Lees, the steward, admit that he had terrible dreams, in which the scenes of murder haunted him. Upon this mainly I based a theory that Lees was the real and the only murderer, and that he was trying to implicate Griffin to save his own neck. When I got up to sum up the case I felt shaky. I wanted to awaken some emotion in the breasts of the jurors, and yet I couldn’t see my way clear. While I was talking my eye happened to alight upon my wife and baby sitting in a far corner of the room. It was an inspiration. Pointing at them I cried: ‘Oh, gentlemen! gentlemen! Will you make that mother a widow and that innocent babe an orphan? Can you look upon those guiltless ones and send this man to an undeserved death?’

“The jury was moved to tears, and I need not tell you that Griffin’s life was saved. My wife, who was too far away to hear my words, never could understand why she suddenly became the center of attraction for all the eyes in the room. I may as well tell you that Griffin was unmarried. The present Judge Andrews was Assistant United States District Attorney in the case. The baby is now the mother of five of my grandchildren.

### A Bank of England Burglar.

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“Of course you’ve heard of McDonald, the great Bank of England forger, who is now serving out a life sentence—well, I knew him well. He used to practice his profession in this city. He was a mean man and would screw his lawyer down to the last cent. Even his abilities can never make me admire such a man. McDonald’s greatest game was this: He would hire a cheap house on

South street, which in those days was a poor neighborhood, and would put up on the front of the house a sign, such as Buggins & Co., commission merchants, or Muggins & Co., shipping merchants. Then he would order whole shiploads of goods from Canada and other distant places. Sometimes his victims would make proper inquiries about Buggins & Co., and would refuse to till the orders. Other firms would jump at the princely style of the orders and would send on the goods. Of course Buggins & Co. would instantly sell the goods, pocket the cash and disappear. McDonald got \$1,700 worth of umbrellas from Spencer H. Smith, a wholesaler. The swindle was discovered and McDonald was arrested. Although the umbrellas were taken to Police Headquarters the prisoner made an assignment of them to me, together with some furniture he owned. McDonald was arraigned before Judge Dowling, in the Tombs, and discharged.”

“How?”

“Oh, in consequence of his innocence. Good heavens, what a question!”

“What did you do with the umbrellas?”

“When I went to get them I found that Spencer H. Smith’s lawyer had put an attachment upon them. I offered to compromise and take half of the umbrellas, but the other fellow wouldn’t give up one. The result was that they rotted in Police Headquarters, and, for all I know, the frames are there now.”

### The Story of an Alibi.

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“Some criminals are well versed in law. I remember a case in point. A man named Page and a pal broke into a house in Surrey, England, and got away with a mass of valuable plate. They were arrested, and I had them bailed out. Now alibis concocted by burglars are generally very weak, but Page was an extraordinary fellow, and he executed a very shrewd trick. He took two friends out in a buggy, drove them across London Bridge and stopped at a hotel called the Elephant and Castle. The three drank wine, and Page swept the empty glasses from the table. When the waiter returned he asked who broke the glasses. ‘I did with my cane,’ said Page. ‘Why?’ said the waiter. ‘Because I wanted to,’ roared Page. The result was that Page paid for the glasses. He next took his friends to Merton, where they had dinner. Page gave the waiter a bad guinea, and, after a dispute, substituted a good coin. Then they went to Epsom where they entered a gypsy’s tent and cut the tent strings. I would here observe that they got a beating which they didn’t bargain for. On the day of the trial Page swore that when the burglary was perpetrated he was at Epsom. He then called his two witnesses, who told the story of the trip I have described, simply substituting the date of the burglary for the real date. The subtlest cross examination failed to shake their testimony, for they only had to tell one little lie and all the rest was the truth.”

“Haven’t criminals often suggested false alibis?”

“Yes, but they are very unsafe. Besides that, they are immoral. John Flood, the celebrated murderer, once asked me to take poison into the Tombs so that he could commit suicide.”

“You refused, of course?”

“What! in the middle of my case? I should say so.”

“Homicide cases pay well, don’t they?”

“Not as a rule. I was assigned by the Court to defend a murderer free of charge, and it cost my firm \$1,800 in cash to foot the expenses. I never got a cent back.”

“Do criminals, as a rule, try to deceive lawyers as to their guilt?”

“An old one doesn’t, but a new one does. It’s always best to tell your lawyer the truth.”

“Do they try to cheat lawyers out of their pay?”

“Almost every man who is arrested for the first or second time tries to skin his lawyer. He thinks it’s a clever thing. Old criminals are sure pay. They know that if they cheat their lawyer he’ll make it hot the next time they are caught. I’ve dealt with all kinds of criminals. Why, in the very chair you sit on, I’ve seen Reddy the Blacksmith, Bill Tweed, Chauncey Johnston, Dutch He[i]nrich, Johnny the Mick, Billy Porter, Sheeney Mike, McDonald, Sharkey, the murderer; Dan Noble, Spence Pettus, the king of genteel malefactors; George Howard, the murdered burglar; George Ellis, Mother Mandelbaum—but hold on, where are you going, young man? Hold on, you are safe here—”

*The Telegraph-Courier* [Kenosha, WI], October 23, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*LeRoy* [KA] *Reporter*, October 24, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*St. Joseph* [MI] *Saturday Herald*, October 24, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*Bethany* [MO] *Democrat*, October 29, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*Little Hatchet* [Clay Center, KA], October 29, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*The Eskridge* [KA] *Home Weekly*, October 29, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*The Onaga* [KA] *Democrat*, October 29, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*The Weekly Chieftain* [Vinita, OK], October 29, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*Greenleaf* [KA] *Journal*, October 30, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*The Fairbury* [NE] *Gazette*. October 31, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*The Star* [Beattie, KA], October 31, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*St. Mary’s* [KA] *Express*, November 5, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”

*Xenia [OH] Daily Gazette*, November 24, 1885—with the subtitle “A Peep at the Way Justice Is Cheated.”