

ADAM WORTH, GREATEST THIEF OF MODERN TIMES

STOLE \$3,000,000 AND WAS CAUGHT BUT ONCE; ROBBED EUROPE IN SPLENDID STEAM YACHT; HIS CAREER AS RELATED BY THE PINKERTONS

THIS is the story of Adam Worth. If a fiction writer could conceive such a story, he might well hesitate to write it for fear of being accused of using the wildly improbable.

The sober, cold, technical judgment passed upon Adam Worth by the greatest thief-hunters of America and Great Britain is that he was the most remarkable, most successful and most dangerous professional criminal ever known to modern times.

Adam Worth, in a life of crime covering almost half a century, looted at least \$3,000,000, and most probably as much as \$5,000,000.

He cruised through the Mediterranean on a steam yacht with a crew of 10 men, and left a trail of looted cities behind him.

He was caught only once, and then through a blunder by a stupid confederate.

He ruled the shrewdest criminals, and planned deeds for them with craft that baffled the best detective talent in the world.

The police of America and Europe were eager to take him for years, and for years he perpetrated every form of theft—check-forging, swindling, larceny, safe-cracking, diamond robbery, mail robbery, burglary of every degree, "hold-ups" on the road and bank robbery—under their very noses with complete immunity.

There were three redeeming features in the life of this lost human creature.

He worshiped his family and regarded and treated his loved ones as something sacred. His wife never knew that he was a criminal. His children are living in the United States today in complete ignorance of the fact that their father was the master-thief of the civilized world.

He never was guilty of violence, and would have nothing to do under any circumstances with any one who did.

He never forsook a friend or accomplice.

Because of that loyalty he once rescued his band of forgers from a Turkish prison and then from Greek brigands, reducing himself to beggary to do it.

Because of that loyalty he became "The Man Who Stole the Gainsborough."

The reason for that theft will be told here for the first time. Until now, all who knew it were under binding obligations of silence. The motive that caused the deed was unique in the history of modern crime.

And Adam Worth, who had millions, who once slipped out of the clasp of a racing stable, had a steam yacht and a fast sailing yacht, died a few weeks ago as he had begun—a poor, penniless thief. He towered above all other criminals of his time; he was so far in advance of them that the man who hunted him weakened before his masterful intellect; but the inexorable fate that pursues the breaker of moral law caught him and finished him at last where the man-made law was powerless.

When Adam Worth died he was as much a mystery as the men who spent half a century in trying to hunt him down. Nothing in this history is left to conjecture. Before he died, William and Robert Pinkerton sought him out and induced him to go over the story of his career as they had gathered it from time to time, and he told them freely of all that he had done.

Worth's Wonderful Career

(Copyright, 1902, by William A. and Robert Pinkerton)

In many respects Adam Worth's successful theft of the great Gainsborough and the motive that was behind it epitomize the man's character so well that the rest of his story will be the clearer to the reader by the light that is shed on it by the true story of this famous crime.

The Famous Crime.

In 1876 Adam Worth, then posing in London as a rich American under the name of Henry Raymond, was the head of a great forgery syndicate. Charles Becker, "The Dutchman," the greatest forger alive today, was the chief worker, and associated with the two were men only less dangerous than they Joseph B. Chapman, Joe Reilly and Charles Sescovich, stars in crime. Their plans were well laid, but after they had succeeded in getting about \$300,000, one of the lesser numbers of the band was caught in Paris, extradited and imprisoned in London.

Now Adam Worth was confronted with a difficulty. The only hope for the prisoner was to get out on bail and "jump" it. He could not stand trial, for it would have been equivalent to conviction, since his guilt was clear. But in England a bondman must be a freeholder, furnish absolute real security, and his reputation must not only be excellent—he must be well known.

One day soon after the arrest Worth was walking through Bond street with Jack Phillips, alias "Junkie," a notorious burglar. They saw many carriages stopping before a picture gallery and crowds entering the door. It was Agnew's, and the attraction was the Gainsborough portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire. It had been purchased a few days before by the Agnews at Christie's for \$35,000, and Worth, who had a fad for art, remained in the gallery a long time, admiring the painting.

There had, however, been something besides admiration in his mind. When he emerged from the gallery, he told Phillips that he had a plan to steal the picture. Phillips objected vigorously. He said that it would be absurd—that the thing would be a "white elephant" on their hands. Worth insisted. Phillips yielded. Joe Reilly was taken into their confidence.

The next night was foggy. On the corner, near Agnew's, stood Joe Reilly, watching to see that no danger threatened. "Junkie" Phillips, a great hulk of a man, stood under the sign that was dangling over the street just below a window in the room that held the portrait. Worth suddenly emerged from the fog, leaped on Phillips' shoulder, who quickly seized the agile little man and raised him high over his head in order to enable him to reach the swinging sign. In another instant, almost before one could have noted his movements, he had pulled himself over the sign and was raising the window. In almost the space of time that it takes to tell, Worth dropped to the sidewalk with the portrait rolled under his arm. So completely had he thought out his plans during the first visit to the gallery, that he had even



public probably never would have heard of him at all. Only a very few of the most able detectives of the world knew him even by sight. Still less knew anything about him. The story that follows is an absolute and minutely exact history, verified in every particular and vouched for by the men who spent half a century in trying to hunt him down.

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Worth was a thief from the time when we first knew him. He was the son of respectable parents living on the East Side, and his qualities of mind were such that he could have succeeded well in business. But while still a boy he became a companion of sports and thieves.

His real history as a crook begins with the Civil War, when Worth became a terror to the Government as one of the most successful bounty-jumpers in the country. He was then a small, wiry, dapper fellow, full of nerve to the top of his head, and equally full of resource, so that all the crooks whom he met instinctively looked up to him.

He appears to have jumped bounties and it struck him that it would be a pleasing change to go to the front, which he did, participating in the battle of the Wilderness and other smaller ones. When he returned from the war he began picking pockets in New York until he "got his hand in," when he became a member of a gang of bank sneaks, a lucrative business in those days.

From this very beginning he dressed like an aristocrat, and bore himself like one. Except for professional purposes, he declined to mix with criminals. He soon created a barrier between them and himself, which not only made him the more respected and feared by them, but also put an effective obstacle in the way of police inquiries, and thus prevented the authorities from ever knowing much about him.

He had plenty of money from the very beginning of his career. This soon made him the natural financier of many crooks in operations, and before long he was at the head of a bank burglar's combination. Soon he furnished not only the money, but also the brains, and after a few years he was recognized throughout the criminal world as the greatest "financier" of work in the profession, and criminals sought him out as ordinary persons seek out a great lawyer when they want advice.

It was now that Worth began to display the wonderful knowledge of human nature which made his career so dangerous to the world. Criminals came to him by the dozens to enlist his aid in their plans. Most of them were men whom he had never seen before. Naturally, there were among them all varieties of men—stupid, treacherous, cowardly and selfish. Worth never made a mistake in his judgment. Those whom he trusted always justified his faith. Those whom he did not trust never got an opportunity to injure him.

The influence that he attained over his associates is shown by the fact that none of them ever broke the one great rule that he had laid down for their guidance when they "worked" with him. It was that never, under any conditions, except absolutely to save their own lives, should they use firearms. The result was that Worth was eagerly sought as a companion by the most noted criminals, who realized that he worked with his nerve instead of with clumsy weapons.

Great Boylston Bank Robbery.

One day a small, dark, elegant gentleman dropped into the office of a Boston citizen who had a store property near the corner of Boylston and Washington streets to rent. The papers were soon signed, and within a few days the windows of the store were filled with bottles of a new and potent bitters announced in eloquent

placards as being a most sovereign remedy. The dark, dapper gentleman appeared to build great hopes of a successful business on his venture, for in a few days after the opening he had three assistants. Possibly if the officials of the Boylston Bank had known that the four most bitter merchants next door were Adam Worth, alias "Little Adam," Ike Marsh, alias "Big Ike," Bob Cochran, alias "Big Bob," and Charles Bullard, alias "Piano Charlie," they would not have been entirely happy. For Mr. Worth's three partners in the bitters line were known to fame, and the owners of bank safes from the Pacific to the Atlantic oceans had had ample reason for several years to remember them.

The bitters business, as carried on by the firm, demanded the secret use of crowbars and similar tools and had anyone managed to peer behind the partition that divided the store in half, he would have been surprised to see a neat, dapper young man of brick and stone and plaster. But nobody did peer behind the partition. Indeed, it was difficult to see into the store at all, for the imposing array of bottles in the window hid everything from the passerby.

The firm did a rushing business day and night. In the day time they sold bottles over the counter. In the night time they dug a hole through the wall of the store into the contiguous vaults of the Boylston Bank. Adam Worth had "found" the vault again. On the tenth night Bullard (Piano Charlie) crouched on the other side of the wall. Before the dawn, the bitters business had been closed with the greatest profit on record. For three safes in the Boylston vaults stood wide open and empty, and in a hiding place four joyous men were dividing cash and negotiable paper amounting to nearly one million dollars. Boston detectives got on the trail and followed them to New York. But Worth had friends in the police department. The burglars fled to Philadelphia, and thence Worth, Bullard and Marsh sailed to England. Cochran escaped to Canada, and the loot was not an extraditable offense.

Cochran bought a fine stock farm near Coburg, Ontario, and lived like a country gentleman. He died a year afterward, universally lamented. Marsh went straight to his native town of Tipperary, Ireland, with his wife and child. He was a successful farmer, and his money was burning his pockets dreadfully, and to get rid of the ever-present pain he devised the simple but brilliant method of taking the entire town of Tipperary out on spree. This was a great success, and soon he found it necessary to return to America to get more money in the same old way. But he got 15 years in prison. He is living still, an old man, in broken health, and the Pinkertons say that he has reformed.

"Beautiful Kitty Wells."

Worth, on arriving in England, assumed the name of Henry J. Raymond, the noted editor of the New York Times. Bullard took the name of Wells. Bullard became infatuated with a harlot then known as Kitty, in Liverpool, and he married her. She became famous in England, France and America as the "beautiful Kitty Wells" after Bullard and she began to live high on the Continent. Nothing was too good for Kitty.

Worth, although he had plenty of money, did not waste time in loafing in England. He "found" a large pawnshop in Liverpool almost as soon as he landed, and one day he managed to get the pawnbroker off his guard long enough to make a hasty impression in wax of the safe keys. Soon thereafter Liverpool and Liverpool pawnbrokers particularly were shocked to awaken and find that \$100,000 in diamonds had vanished over night.

Worth then went on calmly to London, laughing at the police, and later on proceeded to Paris, where he became Bullard's partner in the first American bar

in Paris. It was in the Rue Scribe, and its furnishing cost \$5000. It became famous. Before long many Americans made it a practice to have their mail sent there. Bullard (Wells) and Worth (Raymond) became the boon companions of the blonde of Europe. Kitty, beautiful, with a grand air quite untraceable to a Liverpool bar, robed in magnificence, and crowned with blonde hair that set the Frenchmen to worshipping, attracted the most desirable element. To extract from that element its desirable constituent parts of cash, Bullard, haughty in mien, far different from the Piano Charlie of the Boston bitters establishment, opened a gambling house in the American style on an upper floor of the place. Soon he added faro and baccarat. Then the Paris police became solicitous and called often, but whenever they appeared they found only a lot of calm, contemplative persons reading newspapers. It saddened the police greatly until William A. Pinkerton arrived on the scene. He was chasing Joseph B. Chapman, who had robbed the Third National Bank, of Baltimore. Mr. Pinkerton, watching Wells' bar in Paris for Chapman, soon was able to explain to the Paris police that their raids were never successful because the barkeeper would push a button that set a "buzz" to going in the gambling-rooms whenever danger threatened. "Wells" and "Raymond" were captured in the very next raid. Although the identity of neither was suspected, "Wells," knowing that burglary was extraditable in France, and fearing recognition, jumped his bail and fled to London. "Raymond" quietly remained behind and not only continued to run the place, gambling heels and all, but he did more.

A Daring Coup.

Under the very eye of a watchful and angry police, faced with the constant danger that he might be identified at any moment as the Boylston Bank robber, he planned and carried out the famous \$125,000 diamond robbery.

A customer of the bar was a representative of a large diamond importing house. He had a habit, while taking his American drink, of placing at his feet his valise containing a large number of set and unset diamonds, which he displayed to prospective purchasers. Worth had studied this, and on an occasion when the customer had asked to have a check cashed, Raymond successfully held his entire attention for a moment, during which Joseph Reilly, alias Joe Elliott, successfully removed the bag and substituted an exact imitation.

All Paris was excited over this big robbery. Yet although Worth knew that the police were trying their best to connect him with the deed, he not only faced them daily without flinching, but actually held on to the place long enough to sell to an English bookmaker at a good profit.

Bullard returned to the United States and was arrested and served several years for the Boylston Bank robbery. He escaped, and was arrested in Canada for robbing a jeweler's window. After his release he lived for a while in poverty and died miserably.

Final Romance of Kitty Wells.

But there is a wonderful romance in the life of this family that is known to a few in this country.

The beautiful Kitty Wells, after Bullard's conviction for the Boston affair, got a divorce and married one of the wealthiest men in the country—one whose name was mentioned almost daily in the papers. She had a daughter by Bullard and two daughters by her second husband. He died a few years ago, and in his will he left his money to his two daughters, and in the case of their death to his wife. One daughter died almost immediately after her father's death. Her share in the estate then passed on to the mother. Then Kitty died and all the money reverted to the remaining daughter by the second marriage. Last year this daughter was killed, and now the child of Piano Charlie, the bank burglar, is the heiress

to one of the richest estates on this continent. After his successful coups in Paris, Worth removed to London, where he began his splendid career as a sporting gentleman. He rented beautifully furnished apartments in No. 18 Piccadilly. The society in his rooms was of the most varied character. Sportmen who knew him only as a sportsman thronged his rooms one night. The biggest thieves and black-legs of America and Europe would be his guests in another.

Worth's marvelous immunity from arrest had by this time made him the ruler of the criminal world. They brought him for advice and instruction. He got the lion's share of the spoils. They made him their agent. He became the biggest receiver of stolen goods ever known. He operated an actual clearing-house of crime.

During the 10 years while Worth was living high in London, the European police, from Turkey to Scotland, were almost demoralized by a steady succession of robberies, each one great, and each one so well done that not a clew was ever to be found. More trains all over the Continent and throughout the tight little island were looted. Banks were robbed. Steamships plying between Calais and Dover and Folkestone and Boulogne arriving at their destination with strong boxes broken open, and, of course, empty. False locks were discovered on some of the locked cars. Others were blown open by explosives. Others had been picked. So many were the devices, yet so unerring was the success, that it became a form in the years between 1870 and 1880 that a band of many members was at work, and that that band had one head, who was the arch-criminal of the country.

Master Criminal and Spendthrift.

But that was as far as deduction went. Worth was riding to hounds, and was a part owner in a stable of race horses. Sporting men everywhere were proud to know him. He owned a sailing yacht and a steam yacht, the Shamrock, with a crew of 20 men, on which he entertained like a prince.

At this time, gambling was the man's passion. He would bet on anything, stake money on anything, slip pennies for anything. More than that, he would bet a penny for one hundred pounds a toss in those days. Money was coming to him steadily from all corners of Europe, and every blacking in Europe was trying to get it away from him.

Once two American card sharps, Dr. Shaw and McCreery, picked him out as their prey. They found that he affected the company of two music hall singers, the "Buffalo Boys." Just then, and they picked an acquaintance with them. But their greed undid them, for before they had reached their object of an introduction to Worth, they fell to gambling with the singers and got \$1500 away from them.

The "Buffalo Boys" met William A. Pinkerton on the street next day and told him about it. He answered: "Why, boys, they don't want small game like you! They are after a pie. They want to get at Worth through you, sure."

The "Buffalo Boys" brought a meeting about and soon the gamblers were at it. First they allowed Worth to win, their scheme being to turn him out. Worth did win. He got about \$2000. Just as the sharps prepared to turn the tables, Worth arose with a laugh and told them that he knew all about them.

That was one time when he won money instead of throwing it away. But generally he threw it away.

In 1884 Worth decided to add a forgery branch to his "business." He imported into England the most expert American forgers that ever operated in Europe, among them being Becker, Chapman, Reilly and Sescovich, who have been mentioned in connection with the Gainsborough story. They forged letters of credit and went through Europe like invaders. Suddenly, when everything seemed particularly serene, Worth learned that the entire gang had been taken with evidence on them and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in Constantinople.

Worth went to Constantinople, and with unlimited money and equally unlimited audacity and pluck, he succeeded in effecting a general jail delivery, which resulted in the escape of all except Chapman.

While passing through wild country on their round-about-way to England, the escaped convicts were seized by Greek brigands and held for ransom. They agreed to open the safe and deliver the money, which was a large sum, to the captives. Then all made head-quarters in a large house in Brompton Road, London, where the wife of Chapman was living.

The jail delivery and the ransom money had taken all the ready money that Worth had just then, and for a time the

band lay quiet until Becker managed to raise \$12,500 on a forged check. With that sum to finance the operations, it was not long before the gang was rolling in money again, and Europe was aghast at the swiftness of the come-back and furious. It was then that the arrest of an accomplice in Paris caused the robbery of the Gainsborough.

About this time the London police began to despair of ever finding any evidence against Worth that would hold water, and they fell back on the expedient of stationing a policeman in uniform in front of his house and watching and reporting every one who entered. Sometimes the Shamrock was in port when the thefts were perpetrated. Sometimes she happened to have left just before. Sometimes her owner was the guest of the robber's victim, at other occasions the victim was a guest aboard the yacht while the robbers were visiting his home.

But the Shamrock and her owner never were actively engaged in any of the operations. The Shamrock was no vulgar pirate ship. Her owner was only pursuing his favorite vocation as a "finder" of work. Having "found" an opportunity, he would lay his plans, draw up the schedule of operations and then assign some of his international staff of crooks to do the work.

During all this time his family lived in America, totally ignorant of the real facts in Worth's career, and believed him to be only a sporting man. Devoted as he was to them, he took the risk again and again of crossing to this side of the water to visit them. As an illustration not only of his nerve, but his keen business sense, we will mention one of those trips when he came to the States to see his wife and children. There happened to be only a few cabin passengers, and one of them was a seaman who was on his way to Philadelphia to take the contract of one of the steamers of the same line. A heavy storm came up, and the captain and all the officers of the ship were disabled by terrific seas, whereupon the sailor passenger took command of the ship and brought her safely into port.

Worth promptly advanced money to this man with which to file a claim for salvage against the company. The company contested the claim on the ground that the claimant was about to enter their employ, but the matter was finally settled by the payment of more than \$5000 to the sailor.

On another occasion he was in land at Quebec. He had with him many diamonds and other jewelry which he had purchased from crooks in England. On the steamer it happened that a number of rooms had been entered and robbed. Worth had no hand in these robberies, but as he was a stranger and liable to suspicion and search, he left the steamer before it reached Quebec and took the railroad for Montreal. This directed suspicion to him, and he telegraphed ahead and a detective met the train and took Worth into custody. He was charged with smuggling jewelry, but Worth had noticed the detective's actions on the train, and, suspecting his mission, had placed the greater part of the diamonds behind the curtain in the stateroom. During the night he entered it in the yard where it was stored, regained his diamonds and safely smuggled them into the United States.

His \$1,000,000 Diamond Trick.

During the '80s, to divert the suspicion against him in England, he made a trip to South Africa. In Cape Town Worth was lured by the bringing of diamonds in suitcases from the De Beers and other mines and commenced to plan a robbery. He learned that they were always brought by a special coach, with an armed Boer guard, to Cape Town in time to get on the train for Grahamstown. He and Charles King, an English crook, decided that the most feasible method would be an American "hold-up" robbery. But they were both small men and needed a larger man. They found him in an American sea-captain, hiding there for sinking his ship at sea for insurance.

The coach was due at a certain point after dark. The three men stretched a rope across the road, which successfully threw the horses and upset the coach. But before they could overpower the big Boer guard, the coachmen, with a repeating Winchester, firing in every direction, driving the thieves to cover, and the coachman was delivered safely in Cape Town.

King and the old ship-sinker left the country quickly, but Worth coolly remained to make another trial.

The assistant postmaster in Cape Town was a most respectable old gentleman. Worth became so friendly with him that after several months that he formulated a plan to get possession of the postoffice safe keys long enough to make wax impressions of them.

He took three parcels out on the road and sent them by registered mail addressed to himself. Just as the assistant postmaster was closing the office one evening, Worth went to him, and pleaded that it was of great importance that he receive the packages which had been locked up in the safe, prevailed upon the assistant postmaster to open the safe and deliver the parcels to him. The assistant had to go to another part of his office for the receipt, and while his back was turned Worth managed to get impressions of the safe keys, which had been left in the open safe.

Several visits to the postoffice were necessary before the duplicate keys were fitted so that they could not be opened, and on these nocturnal visits Worth found large amounts of valuable there. But he would not commit a robbery until, as he explained to us before he died, he could get the "De Beers" out of the safe. It was a large sum, meaning a large shipment from the De Beers diamond mines.

He now found it necessary to arrange a plan to delay the arrival of the diamonds so that they could not be shipped on the steamer, but would be locked in the safe. Near Cape Town was a deep, swift stream, where the coach had to cross by ferry, the boat being pulled back and forth by a rope. Worth had the rope in the night, causing the ferry-boat to drift down the stream. The coach was unable to cross in time, and the steamer sailed without the consignment. It was placed

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