

FAMOUS DETECTIVE CASES

By Cleveland Moffett

Mysterious Murder and Robbery of an Express Messenger and the Final Solution of a Most Difficult Crime Problem

(Copyright by W. O. Chapman.)



HE through express on the Rock Island road left Chicago at 10:40 p. m. on March 12, 1888, with twenty-two thousand dollars in fifty and one-hundred-dollar bills in the keeping of Kellogg Nichols, an old-time messenger of the United States Express company. This sum had been sent by a Chicago bank to be delivered at the principal bank in Davenport, Iowa.

In addition to the usual passenger coaches, the train drew two express cars: the first, for express only, just behind the engine, and, following this, one for express and baggage. These cars had end doors, which offer the best opportunity to train robbers. Messenger Nichols was in the first car, and was duty at his work when the train stopped at Joliet, about forty miles southwest of Chicago. But at the next stop, which was made at Morris, Harry Schwartz, a brakeman, came running from Nichols' car, crying: "The messenger is dead."

The messenger's lifeless body was found lying on the floor of the car. The head had been crushed by some heavy weapon, and there was a pistol wound in the right shoulder. Apparently he had been overcome only after a hard fight. His face was set with fierce determination. His fists were clenched, and the hands and fingers cut and scratched in a curious way, while under the nails were found what proved to be bits of human flesh. The pistol wound was from a weapon of .32 caliber; but it was not the cause of the man's death. This, unmistakably, was the blow or blows, on the head, probably after the shot was fired. All who knew Messenger Nichols were surprised at the desperate resistance he seemed to have made, for he was a small, light man.

The express car was immediately detached from the train, and left at Morris, guarded by all the train crew except Schwartz, who was sent on with the train to Davenport. After the first cursory inspection no one was allowed to enter the car where Nichols lay; and nothing was known precisely as to the extent of the robbery. The safe door had been found open and the floor of the car littered with the contents of the safe.

An urgent telegram was at once sent to Chicago, and a force of detectives arrived at Morris on a special train a few hours later. Search parties were at once sent out in all directions along the country roads and up and down the tracks. Hundreds of people joined in the search, for the news of the murder spread rapidly through the whole region, and not a square yard of territory for miles between Morris and Minooka station was left unexplored. It happened that the ground was covered with snow, but the keenest scrutiny failed to reveal any significant footprints, and the search parties returned after many hours, having made only a single discovery. This was a mask found in a cattle guard near Minooka—a mask made of black cloth, with white strings fastened at either side, one of which had been torn out of the cloth as if in a struggle.

Meantime Mr. Pinkerton himself entered the car and made a careful investigation.

Coming to the safe, Mr. Pinkerton found that the twenty-two thousand dollars were missing, and that other papers had been hastily searched over, but left behind as valueless.

Among these was a bundle of canceled drafts that had been roughly torn open and then thrown aside.

All the train hands were immediately questioned, but none of their stories was in any way significant, except that of Newton Watt, the man in charge of the second car. He said that while busy counting over his way-bills and receipts he had been startled by the crash of broken glass in the ventilator overhead, and that at the same moment a heavily built man, wearing a black mask, had entered the car and said, "If you move, the man up there will bore you." Looking up, Watt said further, he saw a hand thrust through the broken glass and holding a revolver. Thus intimidated, he made no attempt to give an alarm, and the masked man presently left him under guard of the pistol overhead, which covered him until shortly before the train reached Morris, when it was withdrawn. He was able to locate the place where the crime must have been committed, as he remembered that the engine was whistling for Minooka when the stranger entered the car. This left about thirty minutes for the murder, robbery, and escape.

Returning to Chicago, Mr. Pinkerton investigated the character of the man Watt, and found that he had a clean record, was regarded as a trustworthy and efficient man, and had three brothers who had been railroad men for years and had always given perfect satisfaction. Watt's good reputation and straightforward manner were strong points in his favor, and yet there was something questionable in his story of the mysterious hand. For one thing, no footprints were found in the snow on the top of the car.

Brakeman Schwartz, the only man

on the train who had not yet been questioned, "deadheaded" his way, in railway parlance, back from Davenport the following night on Conductor Danforth's train, and reported to Mr. Pinkerton the next morning. He was a tall, fine-looking young fellow, about twenty-seven, with thin lips and a face that showed determination. He was rather dapper in dress, and kept on his gloves during the conversation. Mr. Pinkerton received him pleasantly, and, after they had been smoking and chatting for an hour or so, he suggested to Schwartz that he would be more comfortable with his gloves off. Schwartz accordingly removed them, and revealed red marks on the backs of his hands, such as might have been made by fingernails digging into them.

"How did you hurt your hands, Schwartz?" asked Mr. Pinkerton.

"Oh, I did that handling baggage night before last," explained Schwartz; and then he related incidentally that as he was on his way back to Chicago, the conductor of the train, Conductor Danforth, had discovered a valise left by somebody in one of the toilet rooms. Later in the day Mr. Pinkerton summoned the conductor, who said that the valise was an old one, of no value; and, having no contents, he had thrown it out on an ash pile. The only thing he had found in the valise was a piece of paper that attracted his attention because it was marked with red lines.

Examining this piece of paper carefully, Mr. Pinkerton saw that it had been torn from a money draft, and at once thought of the package in the express messenger's safe.

Mr. Pinkerton at once ordered a search made for the missing valise, and also an inquiry regarding the passengers who had ridden on Conductor Danforth's train between Davenport and Chicago on the night following the murder. The valise was found on the ash heap where the conductor had thrown it, and in the course of the next few days the detectives had located or accounted for all passengers on Conductor Danforth's train, with the exception of one man who had ridden on a free pass. The conductor could only recall this man's features vaguely; and, while some of the passengers remembered him well enough, there was no clue to his name or identity. As it appeared that no other of the passengers could have been connected with the crime, efforts were redoubled to discover the holder of this pass.

So great was the public interest in the crime and the mystery surrounding it that three separate, well-organized investigations of it were undertaken. The Rock Island railroad officials, with their detectives, conducted one; a Chicago newspaper, with its detectives, another; and the Pinkertons, in the interest of the United States Express company, a third.

Mr. Pinkerton, as we have seen, concluded that the crime had been committed by railway men. The railway officials were naturally disinclined to believe ill of their employees, and an incident occurred about this time which turned the investigation in an entirely new direction and made them more disposed to discredit Mr. Pinkerton's theory. This was the receipt of a letter from a convict in the Michigan City penitentiary, named Plunkett, who wrote the Rock Island railroad officials, saying that he could furnish them with important information.

Mr. St. John, the general manager of the road, went in person to the penitentiary to take Plunkett's statement, which was in effect that he knew the men who had committed the robbery and killed Nichols, and was willing to sell this information in exchange for a full pardon, which the railroad people could secure by using their influence. This they promised to do if his story proved true, and Plunkett then told them of a plot that had been worked out a year or so before, when he had been grafting with a mob of pickpockets at county fairs. There were with him at that time "Butch" McCoy, James Connors (known as "Yellowhammer"), and a man named "Jeff," whose surname he did not know. These three men, Plunkett said, had planned an express robbery on the Rock Island road, to be executed in precisely the same way, and at precisely the same point on the road, as in the case in question.

The story was plausible, and won Mr. St. John's belief. It won the belief, also, of the Chicago newspaper; and forthwith the railway detectives, working with the newspaper detectives, were instructed to go ahead on new lines, regardless of trouble or expense. Their first endeavor was to capture "Butch" McCoy, the leader of the gang. "Butch" was a pickpocket, burglar, and all-around thief, whose operations kept him traveling all over the United States.

The police in various cities having been communicated with no purpose, the editor finally decided to do a thing the like of which no newspaper proprietor, perhaps, ever undertook before—that is, start on a personal search for McCoy and his associates. With Frank Murray, one of the best detectives in Chicago, and other detectives, he went to Galesburg, where

the gang was said to have a sort of headquarters. The party found there none of the men they were after, but they learned that "Butch" Grady, a notorious criminal with whom "Butch" McCoy was known to be in relations, was in Omaha. So they hurried to Omaha, but only to find that Grady had gone to St. Louis. Then to St. Louis went the editor and his detectives, hot on the scent, and spent several days in that city searching high and low.

The method of locating a criminal in a great city is as interesting as it is little understood. The first step is to secure from the local police information as to the favorite haunts of criminals of the class under pursuit, paying special regard to the preliminary inquiries to the possibility of love affairs; for thieves, even more than honest men, are awayed in their lives by the tender passion, and are often brought to justice through the agency of women. With so much of such information in their possession as they could gather, the editor and his detectives spent their time in likely resorts, picking up acquaintances with frequenters, and, whenever possible, turning the talk adroitly upon the man they were looking for. It is a mistake to suppose that in work like this detectives disguise themselves. False beards and mustaches, goggles and lightning changes of clothing, are never heard of except in the pages of badly informed story writers. In his experience of over twenty-five years Mr. Murray never wore such a disguise, nor knew of any reputable detective who did. In this expedition the detectives simply assumed the characters and general style of the persons they were thrown with, passing for men of sporting tastes from the East; and, having satisfied the people they met that they meant no harm, they had no difficulty in obtaining such news of McCoy and the others as there was. Unfortunately this was not much.

After going from one city to another on various clues, hearing of one member of the gang here and another there, and in each instance losing their man, the detectives finally brought up in New Orleans. They had spent five or six weeks of time and a large amount of money, only to find themselves absolutely without a clue as to the whereabouts of the men they were pursuing. They were much discouraged when a telegram from Mr. Pinkerton told them that "Butch" McCoy was back in Galesburg, where they had first sought him. Proceeding thither with all dispatch, they traced McCoy into a saloon, and there three of them—John Smith, representing the Rock Island railroad; John McGinn, for the Pinkerton agency, and Frank Murray, working for the newspaper—with drawn revolvers captured him, in spite of a desperate dash he made to escape.

McCoy's capture was the occasion of much felicitation among the people interested in the matter. Mr. St. John and the editor were confident that now the whole mystery of the express robbery would be solved and the murderer convicted. But McCoy showed on trial that he had left New Orleans to come North only the night before the murder and had spent the whole of that night on the Illinois Central railroad. It also appeared that McCoy's associate, Connors, was in jail at the time of the robbery, and that the man "Jeff" was dead. Thus the whole Plunkett story was exploded.

Some time before this the man who had ridden on the free pass, and given the detectives so much trouble, had been accidentally found by Jack Mullins, a brakeman on Conductor Danforth's train. He proved to be an advertising solicitor, employed by no other than that self-same newspaper, which would have given a thousand dollars to know what its agent knew; for the advertising man had seen the conductor bring out the valise containing the all-important fragment of the draft. But he had not realized the value of the news in his possession, and Mr. Pinkerton took good care to keep him from that knowledge. Not until he had seen the man safely on a train out from Chicago did Mr. Pinkerton breathe easily; and it was not until months later that the editor learned how near he came to getting a splendid "scoop" on the whole city and country.

The identification of the pass-holder removed the last possibility that the valise had been taken into the train by any of Conductor Danforth's passengers. And yet the valise was there! How came it there? In the course of their examination two of the passengers had testified to having seen Schwartz enter the toilet room during the run. Brakeman Jack Mullins stated that he had been in the same room twice that night, that the second time he had noticed the valise, but that it was not there when he went in first. Other witnesses in the car were positive that the person who entered the room last before the time when Mullins saw the valise was Schwartz. Thus the chain of proof was tightening, and Mr. Pinkerton sent for Schwartz.

After talking with the brakeman in a semi-confidential way for some time, the detective began to question him about Watt, his fellow trainman. Schwartz said he was a good fellow, and, in general, spoke highly of him. Mr. Pinkerton seemed to hesitate a little, and then said:

"Can I trust you, Schwartz?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, the fact is, I am a little suspicious of Watt. You see, his story about that hand overhead does not exactly hang together. I don't want to do him any wrong, but he must be looked after. Now, my idea is to have you go about with him as much as you

can, see if he meets any strangers or spends much money, and let me know whatever happens. Will you do it?"

Schwartz readily consented, on the assurance that the railroad people would give him leave of absence. The next day he reported that Watt had met a man who wore a slouch hat, had unkempt red hair, and in general looked like a border ruffian. He had overheard the two talking together in a saloon on Cottage Grove avenue, where the stranger had discussed the murder of Nichols in great detail, showing a remarkable familiarity with the whole affair. Schwartz had a sort of Jesse James theory (which he seemed anxious to have accepted) that the crime had been committed by a gang of Western desperadoes and that this fellow was connected with them.

Mr. Pinkerton listened with interest to all this, but was less edified than Schwartz imagined, since two of his most trusted shadows, who had been following Schwartz, had given him reports of the latter's movements, making it plain that the red-haired desperado was a myth, and that no such meeting as Schwartz described had taken place. Nevertheless, professing to be well pleased with Schwartz's efforts, Mr. Pinkerton sent him out to track the fabulous desperado. Schwartz continued to render false reports. Finally, without a word to arouse his suspicion, he was allowed to resume his work on the railroad.

The shadows put upon Schwartz after this reported a suspicious intimacy between him and Watt, and a detective of great tact, Frank Jones, was detailed to get into their confidence, if possible. He was given a "run" as brakeman between Des Moines and Davenport, and it was arranged that he should come in from the west and lay over at Davenport on the same days when Schwartz and Watt laid over there, coming in from the east. Jones played his part cleverly, and was soon on intimate terms with Schwartz and Watt, taking his meals at their boarding house and sleeping in a room adjoining theirs. They finally came to like him so well that they suggested his trying to get a transfer to their run, between Davenport and Chicago. This was successfully arranged, and then the three men were together constantly. Jones even went to board at Schwartz's house in Chicago. About this time Schwartz began to talk of giving up railroad work and going to live in Kansas or the far West. It was arranged that Jones should join him and Mrs. Schwartz on a western trip. Meantime Schwartz applied to the company for leave of absence, on the plea that he wished to arrange some family matters in Philadelphia.

Mr. Pinkerton being informed by Jones of Schwartz's application, used his influence to have it granted. When the young man started East he did not travel alone. His every movement was watched and reported, nor was he left unguarded for a moment, day or night, during an absence of several weeks, in New York, Philadelphia, and other eastern cities.

To one unfamiliar with the resources and organization of a great detective system it is incomprehensible how continuous shadowing day after day and week after week, through thousands of miles of journeying, can be accomplished. The matter is made none the simpler when you know that there must be a change of shadows every day. However adroit the detective, his continued presence in a locality would soon arouse suspicion. The daily change of shadows is easy when the man under watch remains in one place; for then it is only necessary to send a new shadow from the central office early each morning to replace the one who "put the man to bed" the night before. But it is very different when the subject is constantly traveling about on boats or railroads, and perhaps sleeping in a different town each night. Without a network of agencies, including large and small bureaus established all over the United States, the shadowing of a man in rapid flight would be impossible. As it is, nothing is easier. Schwartz, for instance, spent several days in Buffalo, where his actions were reported hour by hour until he bought his ticket for Philadelphia. As he took the train a fresh shadow took it, too, securing a section in the same sleeping car with him, and taking his meals at the same time Schwartz took his, either in the dining car or at stations. No sooner had the train left the station than the Pinkerton representative in Buffalo reported by cipher dispatch to the bureau in Philadelphia, whither Schwartz was going. The exact form of the dispatch, which well illustrates a system in constant use in the Pinkerton bureaus, was as follows:

"R. J. LINDEN,

"441 Chestnut street,

"Philadelphia, Pa.

"Anxious shoes sucker Brown marbles man other dropping eight arrives put grand fifty marbles articles along or derby coat ship very tan seer wearing these have and is ribbon ink dust central Tuesday for dust to rice hat and paper vest yellow ink get must jewelry moping depot on.

"D. ROBERTSON."

In dispatches in this sort important information regarding criminals is constantly flashing over the wires, with no danger of any leak.

Thus, from one city to another, and through every part of the country, any criminal may be shadowed today as Schwartz was shadowed, one set of detectives relieving another every twenty-four hours, and the man's every word and action be carefully noted down and reported, without his having the faintest suspicion that he is under observation. The task of shadow-

ing a person who is traversing city streets is entrusted to men especially skilled in the art (for art it is) of seeing without being seen. This is, indeed, one of the most difficult tasks a detective is called upon to perform, and the few who excel in it are given little else to do. Where a criminal like Schwartz, upon whose final capture much depends, is being followed, two, three, or even four shadows are employed simultaneously, one keeping in advance, one in the rear, and two on either side. The advantage of this is that one relieves the other by change of position, thus lessening the chance of discovery, while, of course, it is scarcely possible for several shadows to be thrown off the trail at once. An adroit criminal might outwit one shadow, but he could scarcely outwit four. A shadow, on coming into a new town with a subject, reveals himself to the shadow who is to relieve him by some prearranged signal, such as a handkerchief held in the left hand.

The result of the shadowing in Schwartz's case was conclusive. No sooner was the brakeman out of Chicago than he began spending money far in excess of his income. He bought fine furniture, expensive clothing, articles of jewelry, presents for his wife, and laid in an elaborate supply of rifles, shotguns, revolvers, and all sorts of ammunition, including a quantity of cartridges. The shadows found that in almost every case he paid for his purchases with fifty or one-hundred-dollar bills. As far as possible these bills were secured by the detectives from the persons to whom they had been paid, immediately after Schwartz's departure. It will be remembered that the money taken in the robbery consisted of fifty and one-hundred-dollar bills.

In addition to this, it was found, by the investigations of detectives at Philadelphia, that Schwartz was the son of a wealthy retired butcher there, a most respectable man, and that he had a wife and child in Philadelphia, whom he had entirely deserted. This gave an opportunity to take him into custody and still conceal from him that he was suspected of committing a higher crime. The Philadelphia wife and child were taken on to Chicago, and Schwartz was placed under arrest, charged with bigamy.

Mr. Pinkerton went to the jail at once, and, wishing to keep Schwartz's confidence as far as possible, assured him that this arrest was not his work at all, but that of Detectives Smith and Murray, who were, as Schwartz knew, working in the interests of the railroad people and of the Chicago newspaper. Mr. Pinkerton told Schwartz that he still believed, as he had done all along, that Watt was the guilty man, and promised to do whatever he could to befriend Schwartz. The latter did not appear to be very much alarmed, and said that a Philadelphia lawyer was coming on to defend him. The lawyer did come a few days later, when a bond for two thousand dollars was furnished for Schwartz's reappearance, and he was set at liberty. Matters had gone so far, however, that it was not considered safe to leave Schwartz out of jail, and he was immediately arrested on the charge of murder.

Whether because of long preparation for this ordeal or because he was a man of strong character, Schwartz received this blow without the slightest show of emotion, and went back into the jail as coolly as he had come out. He merely requested that he might have an interview with his wife as soon as possible.

Mr. Pinkerton had evidence enough against Schwartz to furnish a strong presumption of guilt; but it was all circumstantial, and, besides, it did not involve Newton Watt, whose complicity was more than suspected. From the first Mr. Pinkerton had been carefully conciliatory of the later Mrs. Schwartz. At just the right moment, and by adroit management, he got her under his direction, and by taking a train with her to Morris, and then on the next morning taking another train back to Chicago, he succeeded in preventing her from getting the advice of her husband's lawyer, who was meantime making the same double journey on pursuing trains with the design of cautioning her against speaking to Mr. Pinkerton. She had come to regard Mr. Pinkerton more as a protector than as an enemy, and he, during the hours they were together, used every device to draw from her some damaging admission. He told her that the evidence against her husband, although serious in its character, was not, in his opinion, sufficient to establish his guilt. He told her of the bills found in Schwartz's possession, of the torn piece of the draft taken from the valise, of the marks on his hands and the lies he had told. All this, he said, proved that Schwartz had some connection with the robbery, but not that he had committed the murder, or done more than assist Watt, whom Mr. Pinkerton professed to regard as the chief criminal. The only hope of saving her husband now, he impressed upon her, was for her to make a plain statement of the truth, and trust that he would use this in her husband's interest.

After listening to all that he said, and trying in many ways to evade the main question, Mrs. Schwartz at last admitted to Mr. Pinkerton that her husband had found a package containing five thousand dollars of the stolen money under one of the seats on Conductor Danforth's train, on the night of his return to Chicago. He had kept this money and used it for his own purposes, but had been guilty of no other offense in the matter. Mrs. Schwartz stuck resolutely to this statement, and would admit nothing further.

Believing that he had drawn from

her as much as he could, Mr. Pinkerton now accompanied Mrs. Schwartz to the jail, where she was to see her husband. The first words she said, on entering the room where he was, were: "Harry, I have told Mr. Pinkerton the whole truth. I thought that was the best way, for he is your friend. I told him about your finding the five thousand dollars under the seat of the car, and that was all you had to do with the business."

For the first time Schwartz's emotions nearly betrayed him. However, he braced himself, and only admitted in a general way that there was some truth in what his wife had said. He refused positively to go into details, seemed very nervous, and almost immediately asked to be left alone with his wife. Mr. Pinkerton had been expecting this and was prepared for it. He realized the shock that would be caused in Schwartz's mind by his wife's unexpected confession, and counted on this to lead to further admissions. It was, therefore, of the highest importance that credible witnesses should overhear all that transpired in the interview between Schwartz and his wife. With this end in view, the room where the interview was to take place had been arranged so that a number of witnesses could see and hear without their presence being suspected; and the sheriff of the county, a leading merchant, and a leading banker of the town, were waiting there in readiness.

As soon as the door had closed and the husband and wife were left alone, Schwartz exclaimed:

"You fool, you have put a rope around Watt's and my neck!"

"Why, Harry, I had to tell him something, he knew so much. You can trust him."

"You ought to know better than to trust anybody."

The man walked back and forth, a prey to the most violent emotions, his wife trying vainly to quiet him. At each affectionate touch he would brush her off roughly, with a curse, and go on pacing back and forth, fiercely. Suddenly he burst out:

"What did you do with that coat—the one you cut the mask out of?"

"Oh, that's all right; it's in the woodshed, under the whole woodpile."

They continued to talk for over an hour, referring to the murder and robbery repeatedly, and furnishing evidence enough to establish beyond any question the guilt of both Schwartz and Watt.

Meantime Watt had been arrested in Chicago, also charged with murder, and in several examinations had shown signs of breaking down and confessing, but in each instance had recovered himself and said nothing. The evidence of Schwartz himself, however, in the interview at the jail, taken with the mass of other evidence that had accumulated, was sufficient to secure the conviction of both men, who were condemned at the trial to life imprisonment in the Joliet penitentiary. They would undoubtedly have been hanged but for the conscientious scruples of one jurymen, who did not believe in capital punishment.

About a year after the trial Schwartz's Chicago wife died of consumption. On her deathbed she made a full confession. She said that her husband's mind had been inflamed by the constant reading of sensational literature of the dime-novel order; and that under this evil influence he had planned the robbery, believing that it would be easy to intimidate a weak little man like Nichols, and escape with the money without harming him. Nichols, however, had fought like a tiger up and down the car, and had finally forced them to kill him. In the fight he had torn off the mask that Mrs. Schwartz had made out of one of her husband's old coats. It was Watt who fired the pistol, while Schwartz used the poker. Schwartz had given Watt five thousand dollars of the stolen money, and had kept the rest himself. He had carried the money away in an old satchel bought for the purpose. A most unusual place of concealment had been chosen, and one where the money had escaped discovery, although on several occasions, in searching the house, the detectives had literally held it in their hands. Schwartz had taken a quantity of the cartridges he bought for his shotgun, and emptying them, had put in each shell one of the fifty or one-hundred-dollar bills, upon which he had then loaded in the powder and the shot in the usual way, so that the shells presented the ordinary appearance as they lay in the drawer. The detectives had even picked out some of the shot and powder in two or three of the shells; but, finding them so like other cartridges, had never thought of probing clear to the bottom of the shell for a crumpled-up bill.

Thus about thirteen thousand dollars lay for weeks in these ordinary-looking cartridges, and were finally removed in the following way: While Schwartz was in jail, a well-known lawyer of Philadelphia came to Mrs. Schwartz one day, with an order from her husband to deliver the money over to him. She understood this was to defray the expenses of the trial and to pay the other lawyers. Superintendent Robertson remembers well the dying woman's emotion as she made this solemn declaration, one calculated to compromise seriously a man of some standing and belonging to an honored profession. Her body was wasted with disease, and she knew that her end was near. There was a flush on her face, and her eyes were bright with hatred as she declared that not one dollar of that money was ever returned to her, or ever used in paying the costs of her husband's trial. Nor was one dollar of it ever returned to the railroad company, or to the bank officials, who were the real owners.