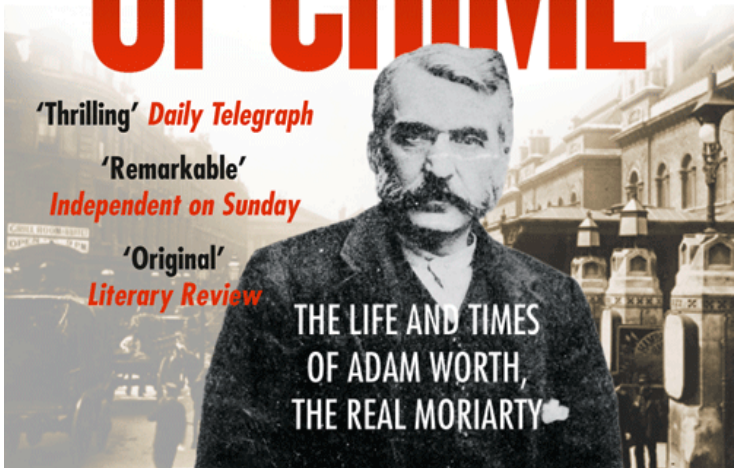
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
AGENT ZIGZAG & OPERATION MINCEMEAT

BEN MACINTYRE

THE NAPOLEON OF CRIME



'Thrilling' *Daily Telegraph*

'Remarkable' *Independent on Sunday*

'Original' *Literary Review*

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ADAM WORTH, THE REAL MORIARTY

Ben Macintyre

The Napoleon of Crime: The Life and Times of Adam Worth, the Real Moriarty

Аннотация

The rumbustious true story of the Victorian master thief who was the model for Conan Doyle's Moriarty, Sherlock Holmes' arch-rival. From the bestselling author of 'Operation Mincemeat' and 'Agent Zigzag'.Adam Worth was the greatest master criminal of Victorian times. Abjuring violence, setting himself up as a perfectly respectable gentleman, he became the ringleader for the largest criminal network in the world and the model for Conan Doyle's evil genius, Moriarty.At the height of his powers, he stole Gainsborough's famous portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, then the world's most valuable painting, from its London showroom. The duchess became his constant companion, the symbol and substance of his achievements. At the end of his career, he returned the painting, having gained nothing material from its theft.Worth's Sherlock Holmes was William Pinkerton, founder of America's first and greatest detective agency. Their parallel lives form the basis for this extraordinary book, which opens a window on the seedy Victorian underworld, wittily exposing society's hypocrisy and double standards in a storytelling tour de

force.Note that it has not been possible to include the same picture content that appeared in the original print version.

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The Napoleon of Crime
The Life and Times of Adam Worth, the Real Moriarty

Ben Macintyre

Copyright

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FOR KATE

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Preface

I had come to Los Angeles to cover the latest instalment in the Rodney King case, that grimly defining saga of modern times. But I left the city with a very different tale of cops and robbers.

The white Los Angeles policemen who had been filmed by an amateur cameraman beating up a black motorist were in the dock for a second time, stolidly proclaiming their innocence. It was confidently predicted that the city was on the verge of another riot. One afternoon, when the jury had retired to consider its verdict, I decided to drive out to the suburb of Van Nuys to explore the archives of the Pinkerton's Detective Agency, thinking I might write an article for *The Times* about American law enforcement in another, sepia-tinted age, a world away from the thugs on trial downtown, or those in the ghetto who might take to the streets if they escaped justice again.

The Pinkertons. The name itself summoned up hard lawmen with comic facial hair and six-shooters, riding out after the likes of Jesse James, the Reno gang, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Shown into the basement archive by a bored secretary popping bubble gum, I immediately realized there was far more here than could possibly be digested in a year, let alone an afternoon. The rows of cabinets literally overflowed with files, a testament to the painstaking methods of America's earliest detectives. After an hour or so of random delving, I picked up a

bound scrapbook, dated 1902. Leafing through it, I came across this fragment of newsprint:

SUNDAY OREGONIAN, PORTLAND, JULY 27, 1902.

ADAM WORTH, GREATEST THIEF OF MODERN TIMES; STOLE $3,000,000

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 $2,000,000, and most probably as much as $3,000,000.

He cruised through the Mediterranean on a steam yacht with a crew of 20 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 bade defiance to 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 flipped coins for £100 a toss, who at one time had an interest in 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 – aside from certain officials and detective inspectors of Scotland Yard, the Pinkertons, and a very few American police officials – even to the great majority of the police officials of the world as he had been throughout his life. If he had not become prominent recently as the man who stole and returned the Gainsborough portrait, the 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 almost half a century in trying to hunt him down.

Nothing in this history is left to conjecture.

The rest of the promised article, infuriatingly, had not been pasted into the book. Time and again I read this clipping, extravagant in its claims even by the journalistic standards of

the day, and a small LA riot of excitement began building somewhere in the back of my mind. Then my electronic pager sounded, bringing me hurtling back to the present with the news that a verdict in the Rodney King trial was imminent. By the next afternoon, two of the cops had been found guilty, the inhabitants of South Central Los Angeles had obligingly decided not to go on the rampage, and I was back in Van Nuys, combing the Pinkerton archive for every scrap of material I could find on Adam Worth. The detectives, I soon learned, had hunted Worth across the world for decades with dogged perseverance, and the result was a wealth of documentation: six complete chronological folders, tied together with string and bulging with photographs, letters, more newspaper articles and hundreds of memos by the Pinkerton detectives, each one written in meticulous copper-plate and relating a tale even more intriguing and peculiar than the nameless *Sunday Oregonian* writer had implied.

For Adam Worth, it transpired, was far more than simply a talented crook. A professional charlatan, he was that most feared of Victorian bogeymen: the double-man, the charming rascal, the respectable and civilized Dr Jekyll by day whose villainy emerged only under cover of night. Worth made a myth of his own life, building a thick smokescreen of wealth and possessions to cover a multitude of crimes that had started with picking pockets and desertion and later expanded to include safe-cracking on an industrial scale, international forgery, jewel theft and highway robbery. The Worth dossiers revealed a vivid

rogues' gallery of crooks, aristocrats, con men, molls, mobsters and policemen, all revolving around this singular man. In minute detail, the detectives described his criminal network, radiating out of Paris and London and stretching from Jamaica to South Africa, from America to Turkey.

I left the Pinkerton archive elated but tantalized. The material was vast but incomplete. Like any sensible crook anxious to avoid detection, Worth had not written his memoirs and had left behind only a handful of coded letters. My initial researches had raised more questions than they answered. How had Worth evolved his contradictory moral code? How had he escaped capture for so many years? How had he transformed himself from a penniless German-Jewish emigrant from Cambridge, Massachusetts, into an English milord in the aristocratic heart of London?

One mystery intrigued me more than all the others. In the early summer of 1876, at the height of his criminal powers, Worth stole from a London art gallery in the dead of night *The Duchess of Devonshire,* Thomas Gainsborough's famous portrait and then the most expensive painting ever sold. What had possessed him? And why, still more bizarrely, had he kept the great painting, in secret, for the next twenty-five years? The Gainsborough portrait, I was already certain, held the key to unlocking the secret of Adam Worth.

California proved to be only the first stop on a long trail. Slowly I assembled a fuller picture, from letters, diaries, published memoirs by other criminals, newspaper accounts

and the archives of Scotland Yard, the Paris Sûreté, Agnew's art gallery and Chatsworth House. Other, quite unexpected discoveries, soon followed.

Worth invented his own life as a dramatic romance. But when the *Sunday Oregonian* talked of his piquant history as the very stuff of fiction, the newspaper was telling the literal truth. The English detective Sherlock Holmes was already a household name when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle first learned of Worth's villainous deeds. The great English writer, it turns out, had used Worth as the model for none other than Professor Moriarty, Holmes's evil, art-collecting adversary and one of the most memorable criminals in literature. Conan Doyle was not alone in his debt to Worth, for writers as diverse as Henry James and Rosamund De Zeer Marshall, an author of wartime bodice-rippers, also found inspiration in Worth's activities.

My quarry led me on some unlikely pilgrimages: to the grand building in Piccadilly near Fortnum & Mason's that was Worth's criminal headquarters; to the Civil War battlefield where he first reinvented himself; to the London art gallery where he stole his most prized possession and to a room in Sotheby's auction house where, for the first time, I encountered that indelible image face to face. As I write, from the Paris office of *The Times,* I can look across the Place de l'Opéra to the Grand Hotel, where Worth ran an illegal casino and held court with his mistress in the 1870s. I am still not sure whether I have been following Worth for the last four years, or whether he has been shadowing me.

I had set off to hunt down 'The Greatest Thief of Modern Times'. What I found turned out to be an unlikely reflection of those times, and our own: a Victorian gentleman and master thief who merged the highest moral principles with the lowest criminal cunning. What follows is a story that has never been told before; it is a story of dual personalities, double standards and heroic hypocrisy.

This is the story of Adam Worth.

Paris

March, 1997

'Adam Worth was the Napoleon of the criminal world. None other could hold a candle to him.'

SIR ROBERT ANDERSON, Head of Criminal Investigation, Scotland Yard, 1907

'He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider at the centre of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organized … the central power which uses the agent is never caught—never so much as suspected.'

SHERLOCK HOLMES on Professor Moriarty in 'The Final Problem' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

'I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending

to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.'

OSCAR WILDE, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

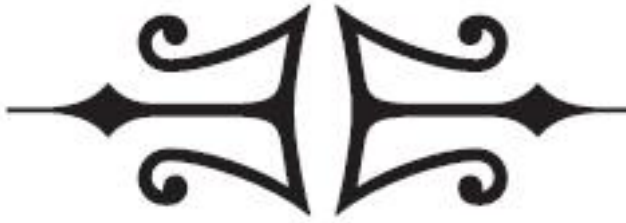
£1000
R E W A R D.
STOLEN

Between half-past nine p.m. 25th, and 7 a.m. 26th inst, from the Picture Gallery, No. 39b, Old Bond Street, the celebrated Oil Painting, by Gainsborough, of the Duchess of Devonshire, Size 60 inches by 45 inches, without frame or stretcher.

The above Reward will be paid by Messrs. Agnew and Sons, No. 39b, Old Bond Street, to any person giving such information as will lead to the apprehension and conviction of the thief or thieves, and recovery of the painting.

Information to Superintendent Williamson, Detective Department, Great Scotland Yard, London, S.W.

ONE
The Elopement



ON A MISTY MAY MIDNIGHT in the year 1876, three men emerged from a fashionable address in Piccadilly with top hats on their heads, money in their pockets and burglary, on a grand scale, on their minds. At a deliberate pace the trio headed along the empty thoroughfare and at the point where Piccadilly intersects with Old Bond Street, they came to a stop. Famed for its art galleries and antiques shops, Old Bond Street by day was choked with the carriages of the wealthy, the well-bred and the culturally well-informed. Now it was quite deserted.

The three men exchanged a few words at the corner of the street before one slipped into a doorway, invisible beyond the dancing gaslight shadows, while the other two turned right into Old Bond Street. They made an incongruous pair as they walked

on: one was slight and dapper, of some thirty-five years in age, with long, clipped moustaches and dressed in the height of modern elegance, complete with pearl buttons and gold watch-chain. The other, ambling a few paces behind, was a towering fellow with grizzled mutton-chop whiskers, whose ill-fitting frock coat barely contained a barrel chest. Had anyone been there to observe the couple, they might have assumed them to be a rich man taking the night air with his unprepossessing valet after a substantial dinner at his club.

Outside the art gallery of Thomas Agnew & Sons, at 39 Old Bond Street, the two men paused and while the aristocrat extinguished his cheroot and admired his own faint but stylish reflection in the glass, his brutish companion glanced furtively up and down the street. Then, at a word from his master, the giant flattened himself against the wall and joined his hands in a stirrup, into which the smaller man placed a well-shod foot, for all the world as if he were climbing onto a thoroughbred. With a grunt the big man heaved the little fellow up the wall and in a moment he had scrambled nimbly onto the window ledge some fifteen feet above the pavement. Balancing precariously, he whipped out a small crowbar, wrenched open the casement window and slipped inside, as his companion vanished from sight beneath the gallery portal.

The room was unfurnished and unlit, but by the faint glow from the pavement gaslight a large painting in a gilt frame could be discerned on the opposite wall. The little man removed his

hat as he drew closer.

The woman in the portrait, already famed throughout London as the most exquisite beauty ever to grace a canvas, gazed down with an imperious and inquisitive eye. Curls cascaded from beneath a broad-brimmed hat, set at a rakish angle to frame a painted glance at once beckoning and mocking, and a smile just one quiver short of a full pout.

The faint rumble of a night-watchman's snores wafted up from the room below, as the little gentleman unclipped a thick velvet rope that held the inquisitive public back from the painting during daylight hours. Extracting a sharp blade from his pocket, with infinite care he cut the portrait from its frame and laid it on the gallery floor. From his coat he took a small pot of paste and, using the tasselled end of the velvet rope, he daubed the back of the canvas to make it supple and then rolled it up with the paint facing outwards to avoid cracking the surface, before slipping it inside his frock coat.

A few seconds later he had scrambled back down his monstrous assistant to the street below. A low whistle summoned the lookout from his street corner, and with jaunty step the little dandy set off back down Piccadilly, the stolen portrait pressed to his breast and his two rascally companions trailing behind.

The painted lady was Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, once celebrated as the fairest and wickedest woman in Georgian England. The painter was the great Thomas Gainsborough, who had executed this, one of his greatest portraits, around 1787.

A few weeks before the events just recounted, the painting had been sold at auction for ten thousand guineas, at that time the highest price ever paid for a work of art, causing a sensation. Georgiana of Devonshire, nee Spencer, was once again the talk of London, much as her great-great-great grandniece Diana, Princess of Wales, nee Spencer, would become in our age.

During Georgiana's lifetime, which ended in 1806, her admirers vied to pay tribute to 'the amenity and graces of her deportment, her irresistible manners, and the seduction of her society'. Her detractors, however, considered her a shameless harpy, a gambler, a drunk and a threat to civilized morals who openly lived in a *ménage à trois* with her husband and his mistress. No woman of the time aroused more envy, or provoked more gossip.

The sale of Gainsborough's great painting to the art dealer William Agnew had been the occasion for a fresh burst of Georgiana-mania. Gainsborough's vision of enigmatic loveliness, and the extraordinary value now attached to it, became the talk of London. Victorian commentators, like their eighteenth-century predecessors, heaped praise once more on this icon of female beauty, while rehearsing some of the fruitier aspects of her sexual history.

When the painting was stolen, the public interest in Gainsborough's *Duchess* reached fever-pitch. The painting acquired huge cultural and sexual symbolism. It was praised, reproduced and parodied time and again, the Marilyn Monroe

poster of its day, while Georgiana herself was again held up as the ultimate symbol of feminine coquetry. The name of the man who kidnapped the *Duchess* that night in 1876 was Adam Worth, alias Henry J. Raymond, wealthy resident of Mayfair, sporting gentleman about town and criminal mastermind. At the time of the theft Worth was at the peak of his powers, controlling a small army of lesser felons in an astonishing criminal industry. Stealing the picture was an act of larceny, but also one of hubris and romance. Georgiana and her portrait represented the very pinnacle of English high society. Worth, by contrast, was a German-born Jew raised in abject poverty in America who, through an unbroken record of crime, had assembled the trappings of English privilege and status, and every appearance of virtue. The grand duchess had died seventy years before Worth decided, in his own words, to 'elope' with her portrait, beginning a strange, true Victorian love-affair between a crook and a canvas.

TWO
A Fine War

FOURTEEN YEARS EARLIER, at the end of August 1862, the armies of the Union and the Confederacy had come to grips in a muddy Virginia field and blasted away at each other for two days in an encounter known to history as the Second Battle of Bull Run, one of the very bloodiest engagements of the American Civil War.

According to official war records, more than three thousand soldiers died in that carnage including one Adam Worth, who was just eighteen at the time.

Bull Run was the scene of Worth's first death and first reincarnation. Reports of his death were, of course, greatly exaggerated and so far from perishing on the Virginia battlefields, the young Worth had survived the war in excellent

health with a changed name, a deep aversion to bloodshed and a wholly new career as an impostor stretching out before him. The Civil War almost destroyed America, but after the bloodletting the country fashioned itself anew, and so did Worth. Over the next forty years he would vanish and then reappear under a new name with a regularity and ease that baffled the police of three continents.

Worth was notoriously reticent when it came to discussing the years before his strange renaissance at Bull Run – the better, perhaps, to preserve the myriad myths that clustered around them. Some later accounts insisted that he was the product of a wealthy Yankee family and an expensive education, a gentleman criminal in the Raffles tradition. Another stated, categorically and without corroboration, that 'his father was a Russian Pole and his mother a German'. The great detective William Pinkerton, a man who came to know Worth better than any other, insisted that he was the child of a rich Massachusetts burgher who had sent his son to a private academy to learn an honest business, only to see him seduced into crime by bad company in the stews of New York. 'Had he continued an upright life, he undoubtedly would have become famous as a businessman,' the worthy Pinkerton lamented. Another important figure in Worth's life, a notorious thief and gangster's moll named Sophie Lyons, concurred in the belief that Worth had come from good stock, reporting that he was 'born of an excellent family and well educated, [but] formed bad habits and developed a passion for gambling'.

Worth himself was the last person to deny such glamorous beginnings which were, like so many aspects of his existence, a very considerable distance from the truth. Adam Worth (or Wirth, or even, occasionally, Werth) was born in 1844 somewhere in eastern Germany. His father and mother were German Jews who emigrated to the United States when Worth was just five years old. Speaking no English and almost destitute, Worth père set up shop as a tailor in the town of Cambridge, Massachusetts. No other details about Worth's mother and father have survived, but one may surmise that their parenting skills, particularly in the area of ethical guidance, were distinctly lacking: not only did Adam Worth take to crime at an early age, but his younger brother John quickly followed suit and his sister, Harriet, continued the family tradition by marrying a crooked lawyer.

Worth's first lesson in swindling was apparently learned in a Cambridge school playground. Pinkerton liked to tell the story of how Worth 'entered school when six years of age, and was very soon after, as he himself stated, drawn into a trade with a boy larger than himself, who offered to give him a brand new penny for two old ones'. The child Worth, finding the newly minted coin a more attractive object than his two old ones, agreed to the swap and returned home to show his father, who 'gave him a most unmerciful whipping', thus 'impressing on him the value of the new penny as against his two old ones'.

'From that day until his death, no one, be he friend or foe,

honest or dishonest, Negro or Indian, relative or stranger, ever got the better of Adam Worth in any business transactions, regular or irregular,' Pinkerton concluded.

The young Worth grew up, or rather did not grow up, to be small in stature, measuring between five feet four and five feet five, according to police records. Contemporaries made much of his lack of height, and his criminal colleagues, who were nothing if not literal when it came to the allocation of sobriquets, called him 'Little Adam'. In reality, for an age when human beings were appreciably smaller than they are now, he was not much below average height, but it suited the purposes of those who could not help admiring him to make our man out to be a midget, for thus his evil-doing was magnified and his ability to thwart authority appeared the more remarkable. When the Scotland Yard detective Robert Anderson called him 'the Napoleon of the criminal world', he was referring not only to the man's nefarious accomplishments and criminal stature, but also to his contrasting lack of inches. The undersized Worth quickly developed an outsized Napoleonic complex.

Worth's height was always the first physical feature noted by the various detectives, policemen, crooks and lovers who came into contact with him. The second was his eyes, which were dark, almost black, penetrating voids beneath shaggy eyebrows, suggestive of intelligence and determination. When he became enraged, which was seldom, they bulged unpleasantly. He had thick hair, which he wore short and combed to one side, a

prominent curved nose and, in later life, a long moustache which curled across his cheeks to meet a pair of mighty side whiskers.

If Worth's tough childhood left him with a cynical determination to outdo his peers by guile, it also seems to have imbued him with an intense romanticism. As his father scraped together a living to keep his brood alive in the malodorous hovel that was the Worth family home, his eldest son's imagination released him to a world of grand dinners, fine apparel and civilized conversation.

In the Harvard students who paraded through Cambridge, the immigrant Jewish urchin had ample opportunity to observe the outward show of wealth and privilege. The brighter the penny, he saw, the easier the counterfeit. Ashamed of his lowly origins, frustrated by impecunity, the young Worth clearly felt himself to be the equal of the finest of the young gentlemen strutting Boston Common. Their wealth and sophistication provoked ambivalent feelings, of envy, resentment and anger, but also of admiration and desire. Worth resolved to 'better' himself.

America, then as now, promised all things to all men, even if it did not always deliver. It was a time when 'ambition', as Cardinal Newman wrote, 'sets everyone on the lookout to succeed and to rise in life, to amass money, to gain power, to depress his rivals, to triumph over his hitherto superiors, to affect a consequence and a gentility which he had not before'. Worth shared those aspirations, and would eventually realize them. His methods alone would set him apart from other 'self-made men', for what

others had earned, inherited or bought, he would simply steal, winning respectability by robbery, effrontery and fraud. Where his father had toiled to make clothes for the vanity of rich men, Worth would spin himself the dazzling outfit of a pretender, from pilfered cloth.

But it would be wrong to see the young Worth as merely a creature of immorality, a natural-born wrecker of the social fabric. From an early age he espoused many of the worthiest principles: loyalty to family and friends, the virtues of hard work, perseverance, generosity, charity and courage. As he entered his teens Little Adam was already evolving into a character of many and conflicting parts: selfish, greedy and generous to a fault, at once ruthless and romantic. He regarded his fellow men, and particularly his social superiors, with undiluted cynicism, yet he would never swindle a friend, rob a poor man or harm the harmless. He was acutely aware of the difference between right and wrong and evolved a code of behaviour that he held with the same resolute conviction as would any pillar of society, while he turned society's codes upside down. Adam Worth had plenty of time for morals; it was laws he disdained. The hard, uncertain circumstances of Worth's early life left him with the deeply held conviction that it was possible to be a 'good' man, at least in his own estimation, while pursuing a life of calculated deceit.

As he emerged from a deprived childhood into an adolescence that offered little better, Worth took the fateful decision to rid himself of his first, unglamorous life. At the age of fourteen,

Worth ran away from home, leaving behind his humble parents and their status as social outcasts. The idea of a career in crime and imposture may not yet have formed in his young mind, but Worth already knew what he did not want. He never again set foot inside his childhood home, but a need for family love, and perhaps also for the strong father-figure that his own father never was, marked the rest of his restless existence.

After some months of leading 'a vagabond life in the city of Boston', he drifted to New York where he took, for the first and only time, an honest job as a clerk 'in one of the leading stores in New York City'. Worth never offered any details of this brief flirtation with paid work, master criminals being notoriously touchy about that sort of thing, and the experiment was, anyway, cut short by the start of the American Civil War. At the age of seventeen, the store clerk from Massachusetts promptly abandoned the tedious job of filling in ledgers, and joined a New York regiment in the Union Army preparing to march south for battle.

Worth's name first appears in the register of the 34th New York Light Artillery, better known as the Flushing or 'L' Battery, which assembled in Long Island. He was officially mustered into the regiment in New York City on 28 November 1861, and received a 'bounty of $1,000', according to Pinkerton. Many young recruits inflated their ages upon joining up, to appear more mature than they were and thus hasten possible promotion. The seventeen-year-old Worth gave his age as twenty, his first

recorded lie.

The commander of the Flushing Battery was a German-born shoemaker named Jacob Roemer, who had emigrated to New York in 1839. Captain Roemer was a fussy, irascible man with a thrusting beard, crossed eyes and the bristling face of a natural martinet. Vain, blustering and courageous to the point of insanity, many years later Roemer wrote a massively self-inflating memoir, apparently designed to prove that the author himself was primarily responsible for winning the war. Young Worth, Roemer's fellow countryman by birth, seems to have caught the eye of his commander, for he was soon promoted to corporal and then, on 30 June 1862, to the rank of sergeant in command of his own cannon and five men. Worth was well on his way to becoming a successful soldier, but he had by now fallen into bad, and thoroughly congenial, company. 'He became associated with some wild companions, whom he had met at dances and frolics' while in New York, Pinkerton later recorded.

The life of the Flushing Battery was anything but frolicsome. For several months, the soldiers drilled on Long Island, learning to wheel the field guns under the obsessively critical inspection of Captain Roemer. Then, in early summer, Captain Jacob Roemer, five commissioned officers, Sergeant Adam Worth, 150 men, no horses, 12 baggage mules and a laundry woman packed up and headed south to join the rest of the Union Army under the command of that dithering incompetent, General Pope, deservedly one of the least remembered generals of the entire

Civil War. In Washington they drilled some more, around the unfinished Capitol building. Worth clearly hated every moment, and even Roemer admitted that Camp Barry was a 'mud hole'.

'All we wanted was a chance to prove our devotion and our loyalty to our country,' the prickly and patriotic Roemer wrote. Worth already had other ideas. Indeed, his first taste of army life compounded a blossoming disrespect for authority.

During the early part of August the Union Army and the Confederates, under the command of Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson, warily circled each other in the fields and hills of Virginia. The Flushing Battery took part in several violent skirmishes, but it was not until late August that Roemer's men tasted the full horror of battle when the two sides met head on, for the second time in the war, near the stream known as Bull Run.

On the evening of 28 August, thanks largely to Captain Roemer's absurd determination to cover himself and his men in glory and blood, the Flushing Battery found itself engaged at close quarters with the enemy in the middle of Manassas valley. Roemer enjoyed every moment. 'Shot and shell flew thick and fast,' he recalled, as the gunners fired off 207 rounds and somehow beat the enemy back. 'I was triumphant,' wrote Roemer. One of his terrified lieutenants, however, was found hiding under a bush and had to be removed, gibbering, from the field. The battery commander was in his element, belting around the battlefield expecting, perhaps even hoping, to be shot by the enemy and leaving a trail of appropriately heroic last words as

he went. On the 30th he gave a pep-talk to his troops. 'Boys, it is no longer of any use to keep from you what may be in store for us,' he announced gleefully. 'Before the sun sets to-night, many of you may have given up your lives; perhaps I myself will have to, but all I have to say is – Die like men; do not run like cowards. Stick to your guns, and, with the help of God and our own exertions, we may get through. Forward march.' What Worth made of Roemer's epic oratory may be deduced from his subsequent actions.

A few hours later L Battery was caught up in the fiercest engagement so far. 'Bullets, shot and shell fell like hail in a heavy storm … bullets were dropping all around and shells were ploughing up the ground. Men were tumbling, horses were falling and it certainly looked as though "de kingdom was a-comin",' recalled Roemer, who had his horse shot from under him and received, to his transparent delight, a flesh wound in the right thigh. Finally the enemy retreated. The Union Army was soundly defeated at Bull Run, but the unstable Captain Roemer regarded the battle as an immense personal victory.

From Adam Worth's point of view, however, the most intriguing fact about the engagement at Bull Run is that he did not, officially speaking, survive it.

Roemer was unemotional in recording the passing of young Worth: 'During this battle, generally known as the Second Battle of Bull Run or Manassas, 29-30 August 1862, the casualties in Battery L were fourteen enlisted men wounded

(including Sergeant Adam Wirth [sic], mortally wounded) besides myself, three horses killed and 21 wounded.' According to his army records, Adam Worth died at the Seminary Hospital, Georgetown, on 25 September from wounds received at the battle three weeks earlier.

What really happened to Adam Worth at Bull Run must be a matter of speculation for, unlike Roemer and for obvious reasons, he did not write his war memoirs. Certainly he was wounded during the engagement. He later boasted of the fact, yet the injury does not appear to have been serious. At some point between 30 August, when he was carried from the battlefield, and 25 September, when he was officially listed as dead, Worth successfully made his escape. Perhaps he swapped his identification with another, mortally wounded soldier, or perhaps in the confused aftermath of battle when so many injured and dying were crammed into the nation's capital, he merely ended up as a fortuitous clerical error, marked down on the wrong list. Either way, Worth emerged from the battlefields of Virginia with only a superficial wound and an entirely new identity. Adam Worth was now officially no more, and thus could move on without fear of pursuit. For the first time, but not the last, he reinvented himself and became a professional 'bounty jumper'.

Over the coming months Worth established a system: he would enlist in one regiment under an assumed name, collect whatever bounty was being offered, and then promptly desert. Thus he drifted from one part of the sprawling army to another,

changing his alias at every stop and developing a talent for masquerade that would later become a full-time profession. William Pinkerton, who was himself a young soldier in the Union Army at the time, reported that Worth, after his first desertion and re-enlistment, was 'stationed for a time on Riker's island, N.Y. [and] from there he was conveyed by steamship to the James River in Virginia, where he was assigned to one of the New York regiments in the Army of the Potomac.' Although the war convinced Worth of the futility of violence, his desertions were prompted by avarice rather than cowardice, and he repeatedly found himself in the thick of battle including, according to Pinkerton, the famous Battle of the Wilderness in May 1864, an engagement scarcely less ferocious than the Battle of Bull Run.

Desertion was a lucrative but highly risky business. 'On his third enlistment,' according to one of his criminal associates, 'he was recognised as a bounty jumper, and was in consequence sent, in company with others of his class, chained together, to the front of the Army of the Potomac.' Once more, Worth somehow emerged unscathed; he promptly deserted and re-enlisted again. There was clearly a limit to how long Worth could get away with changing regiments so, in a remarkable act of brass cheek, he now decided to change sides. As a contemporary wrote: 'About this time General Lee of the Southern Army issued a proclamation to the effect that all Federal soldiers who would desert from the Federal armies to the Confederate lines, bringing their arms with them, would receive thirty dollars from the

Confederate Government, and also receive a free pass to cross the frontier back into the United States by way of the adjoining States of West Virginia and Kentucky.'

The aspiring crook, untroubled by niceties such as loyalty to the Union cause, immediately 'took advantage of these exceptionally liberal terms, and deserted one night in company with some others, while doing picket duty'. He did not linger in the South, and having collected his thirty dollars travelled back 'through the Confederate States on foot, in order to gain the frontier of the Northern States'. He would doubtless have repeated the process several more times, but before he could do so the war came to an end, and so did the first phase of Worth's criminal career.

Worth was just one of thousands of young soldiers to find themselves at loose ends with the declaration of peace. William Pinkerton, a man who came to play a defining role in Worth's life and was to become his most reliable chronicler, was another. Before long the two men would become adversaries on either side of the law, then grudging mutual admirers, then co-conspirators and finally, most bizarrely, friends. Their paths did not cross until the war's end, but already they were dark and light reflections of one another. Like the bright and tarnished pennies of Worth's childhood, they were similar in value but utterly different in lustre.

The elder son of Allan Pinkerton, a Scotsman who had founded the great detective agency in Chicago in 1850, William

Pinkerton was Worth's exact contemporary and had enrolled in the Union Army at much the same time. Where Worth's early life had been marked by material want and a complete absence of moral guidance, Pinkerton was brought up in well-to-do Chicago under a regime of the strictest ethical rules. Allan Pinkerton was a superb detective but a brutal father and a fantastic prig who hammered the virtues of honesty, integrity and raw courage into his children and employees with something close to fanaticism. William did his best to live up to these exacting standards, but could never be quite good enough. Working with his father, Abraham Lincoln's official spymaster, William Pinkerton not only ran agents across the border into Confederate territory but was also present on the first flight of an observation hot-air balloon during the Civil War. Brave, bluff and energetic, Pinkerton was wounded in the knee by an exploding shell at the Battle of Antietam, having already 'gained experience that was invaluable to him in the vocation which he was to follow'. He attended Notre Dame College in Indiana for a year and then joined his father's fast-growing detective agency where he soon established a reputation as a tireless lawman, one of the first and perhaps the greatest of the American detective breed. The Pinkertons chose as their symbol an unblinking human eye and the motto 'The Eye that Never Sleeps', from which the modern term 'private eye' has evolved.

The lives and subsequent careers of Worth and Pinkerton starkly demonstrate the moral duality that so obsessed

Victorians. They shadowed and echoed one another, the detective playing Holmes to Worth's Moriarty, yet they were birds of a feather in their tastes, attitudes and opinions. Both, to a remarkable degree, represented typical American stories of self-created men from immigrant stock, rugged in their opportunism, sturdy in their beliefs, but at opposite poles of conventional morality. Worth would have made an outstanding detective; Pinkerton, a talented criminal. The American Civil War was a grimly levelling experience, but its end allowed the country to begin to rebuild and reinvent itself once more. The two men emerged from the battlefields determined, like thousands of others, to make their mark. They took diametrically opposed routes to that goal, but a lifetime later the bounty jumper and the war hero would end up, in a way neither could have predicted, on the same side.

Pinkerton's had been a remarkable war, but then the official military record of Sergeant Adam Worth was also one of unblemished bravery and tragic heroism: a young and promising soldier mortally wounded while defending the Union on the battlefield at Bull Run. In truth, of course, he had spent the war dodging the authorities, swapping sides, abandoning the flags of two rival armies and collecting a tidy profit along the way.

THREE
The Manhattan Mob

AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, Worth drifted, like so many other veterans, to New York City which, by the mid-1860s, had already become one of the most concentratedly criminal places on earth. The politicians were up for sale, the magistrates and police were corrupt, the poor often had little choice but to steal while the rich sometimes had little inclination not to, since they tended to get away with it. Seldom has history conspired to assemble, on one small island, such a vivid variety of pickpockets, con men, whores, swindlers, pimps, burglars, bank robbers, beggars, mobsmen and thieves of every description. Some of the worst professional criminals occupied positions of the greatest authority, for this was the era of Boss Tweed, probably the most magnificently venal politician New York has

ever produced. Corruption and graft permeated the city like veins through marble, and those set in authority over the great, seething metropolis were often quite as dishonest as those they policed, and fleeced. As human detritus washed into lower Manhattan in the wake of the Civil War, the misery, and criminal opportunities, multiplied. In 1866 a Methodist bishop, Matthew Simpson, estimated that the city, with a total population of 800,000, included 30,000 thieves, 20,000 prostitutes, 3000 drinking houses and a further 2000 establishments dedicated to gambling. Huge wealth existed cheek by jowl with staggering poverty, and crime was endemic.

New York's most famously bent lawyers, William Howe and Abraham Hummel, wrote a popular account of the wicked city, entitled *In Danger, or Life in New York: A True History of the Great City's Wiles and Temptations,* which purported to be a warning against the perils of crime published in the interests of protecting the unwary. But it basically advertised the easy pickings on offer and provided a primer on the various methods of obtaining them, from blackmailing to card-sharping to safe-cracking. Howe and Hummel promised 'elegant storehouses, crowded with the choicest and most costly goods, great banks whose vaults and safes contain more bullion than could be transported by the largest ship, colossal establishments teeming with diamonds, jewelry, and precious stones gathered from all the known and uncivilized portions of the globe – all this countless wealth, in some cases so insecurely guarded'. (The

book was an instant best-seller and, according to one criminal expert, 'became required reading for every professional or would-be law-breaker'.)

It was only natural that an ambitious and aspiring felon should make his way to New York and, once there, learn quickly. Determined to avoid returning to work as a mere clerk and hardened by his wartime experiences, Adam Worth took his place in the thieving throng. 'On account of his acquaintance with bounty jumpers, he finally became associated with professional thieves and crooked people generally, and from that time on his career was one of wrong doing.' Pinkerton glumly recounted.

Worth soon found himself in the Bowery district of Manhattan, an area of legendary seediness and home to a large and thriving criminal community which was divided, for the most part, into gangs: the Plug Uglies, the Roach Guards, the Forty Thieves, the Dead Rabbits, the Bowery Boys, the Slaughter Housers, the Buckaroos, the Whyos and more. Many of these gangsters were merely exceptionally violent thugs, whose criminal specialities extended no further than straightforward mugging, murder and mayhem, often inflicted on each other and usually carried out under the influence of prodigious quantities of alcohol laced with turpentine, camphor and any other intoxicant, however lethal, that happened to be on hand.

'Most of the saloons never closed. Or if they did, for just long enough to be cleaned out and then to begin afresh drinking,

fighting, cursing, gambling, and the Lord only knows what,' recalled Eddie Guerin, a useless crook but successful memoirist who would eventually become Worth's friend and colleague. The three thousand saloons noted by Bishop Simpson included such euphonious establishments as the Ruins, Milligan's Hell, Chain and Locker, Hell Gate, the Morgue, McGurk's Suicide Hall, Inferno, Hell Hole, Tub of Blood, Cripples' Home and the Dump. But if the nomenclature of the dives was indicative of the immorality therein, the names of the clientele were still more telling: Boiled Oysters Malloy; Ludwig the Bloodsucker, a vampire who had hair 'growing from every orifice'; Wreck Donovan; Piggy Noles; the pirate Scotchy Lavelle, who later employed Irving Berlin as a singing waiter in his bar; Eat-em-up Jack McManus; Eddie the Plague; Hungry Joe Lewis, who once diddled Oscar Wilde out of five thousand dollars at banco; Gyp the Blood; the psychotic Hop-Along Peter, who tended, for no reason anyone could explain, to attack policemen on sight; Dago Frank; Hell-Cat Maggie, who filed her teeth to points and had sharp brass fingernails; Pugsy Hurley and Gallus Mag, a terrifying dame who ran the Hole-in-the-Wall saloon and periodically bit the ears off obstreperous customers and kept them in a pickling jar above the bar 'pour encourager les autres'; Big Jack Zelig, who would, according to his own bill of fare, cut up a face for one dollar and kill a man for ten; Hoggy Walsh, Slops Connally and Baboon Dooley of the Whyos gang; One-Lung Curran, who stole coats from policemen; Goo Goo Knox;

Happy Jack Mulraney, who killed a saloon keeper for laughing at the facial twitch which led to his sobriquet; brothel-keepers Hester Jane 'the Grabber' Haskins and Red Light Lizzie; and the unforgettable Sadie 'the Goat', a river pirate and leader of the Charlton Street Gang which occupied an empty gin mill on the East Side waterfront and terrorized farms along the Hudson River.

According to Herbert Asbury, whose 1928 *Gangs of New York* is probably the best book ever written on New York crime, 'Sadie [the Goat] acquired her sobriquet because it was her custom, upon encountering a stranger who appeared to possess money or valuables, to duck her head and butt him in the stomach, whereupon her male companion promptly slugged the surprised victim with a slung-shot and they then robbed him at their leisure.' (For reasons unknown but not hard to imagine, Sadie fell foul of the formidable Gallus Mag of the Hole-in-the-Wall, who bit off her ear, as was her wont. But the story has a happy ending: the two women eventually became reconciled, whereupon gallant Gallus fished into her pickle jar, retrieved the missing organ and returned it to Sadie the Goat, who wore it in a locket around her neck ever after.)

Sophie Lyons, the self-styled 'Queen of the Underworld' whose remarkable memoirs are a crucial source of information on Worth's life, was held by Asbury to be 'the most notorious confidence woman America has ever produced'. She eventually went straight, began writing her salacious, and partly fabricated

accounts of New York low-life for the city newspapers, and ended up as America's first society gossip columnist.

Into this colourful and horrific world, Adam Worth slipped quickly and easily. At the age of twenty, now complete with his own criminal moniker, Little Adam became a pickpocket.

'Picking pockets has been reduced to an art here, and is followed by many persons as a profession,' wrote the author of *Secrets of the Great City* in 1868. 'It requires long practice and great skill, but these, once acquired, make their possessor a dangerous member of the community.' Sophie Lyons, who became Worth's close friend and sometime accomplice, described how Little Adam took to the apprentice criminal's art: 'Like myself and many other criminals who later achieved notoriety in broader fields, he first tried picking pockets. He had good teachers and was an apt pupil. His long, slender fingers seemed just made for the delicate task of slipping watches out of men's pockets and purses out of women's handbags.'

As an apprentice pickpocket, Worth found himself in an intensely hierarchical world. The lowest level of pickpocket was a 'thief-cadger', inexperienced youngsters often virtually indistinguishable from beggars; of slightly more consequence were the 'snatchers' who, as the name implies, made no attempt to avoid detection but simply grabbed and ran, or 'tailers', who specialized in extracting silk handkerchiefs from tail-coat pockets. The most developed of the species was the 'hook', also known as a 'buzzer', for whom picking pockets

was an art requiring considerable daring and manual dexterity. Nimble and inconspicuous, Worth began as a 'smatter-hauler' or handkerchief thief, but soon the Civil War veteran graduated to become a fully-fledged 'tooler', a master of the art of 'dipping'. Churches were particularly profitable hunting grounds, as were ferry stations, theatres, racecourses, political assemblies, stages, rat fights and any other place containing large numbers of distracted people in close proximity.

While lone pocket-dipping could be profitable, the most successful pickpockets worked in gangs and Worth's talents ensured that 'it was not long before he had enough capital to finance other criminals.' Teaming up with some like-minded fellows, Worth now established a dipping syndicate, with himself as principal co-ordinator, banker and beneficiary. It was, proclaimed Lyons, 'the first manifestation of the executive ability which was one day to make him a power in the underworld', a Napoleon of ne'er-do-wells.

The technique for team-dipping or 'pulling', was well established. A prosperous-looking 'mark' is selected: he is then jostled or bumped by the 'stall'; while the mark is thus distracted, the hook (sometimes known as the 'mechanic'), quickly rifles or 'fans' his pockets, immediately passing the proceeds to a 'caretaker' or 'stickman', who then moves nonchalantly in another direction. Charles Dickens described the manoeuvre in *Oliver Twist:* 'The Dodger trod under his toes, or ran upon his boot accidentally, while Charley Bates stumbled up against him

behind: and in that one moment they took from him with extraordinary rapidity, snuff box, note-case, watchguard, chain, shirt-pin, pocket handkerchief, even the spectacle case.' The 'mark', in this case, was none other than Fagin himself, the paterfamilias of dippers.

With his efficient team of purse-snatchers, Worth was fast becoming a minor dignitary in the so-called swell mob, as the upper echelon of the underworld was known, and according to Lyons he soon acquired 'plenty of money and a wide reputation for his cleverness in escaping arrest'. But no sooner had Worth's criminal career begun to blossom, than it came to a sudden and embarrassing halt. Late in 1864 Worth was arrested for filching a package from an Adams Express truck and summarily sentenced to three years' imprisonment in Sing Sing, the notoriously nasty New York gaol just north of the city on the banks of the Hudson River.

Worth's brief incarceration for bounty jumping had not prepared him for the extravagant horror of the 'Bastille on the Hudson'. In 1825 the prison's first warden, a spectacular and inventive sadist by the name of Elam Lynds, remarked, 'I don't believe in reformation of the adult prisoner … He's a coward, a willful lawbreaker whose spirit must be broken by the lash.' In 1833 Alexis de Tocqueville had described Sing Sing as a 'tomb of the living dead', so silent and cowed were its inmates.

Clad in the distinctive striped prison garb instituted by Lynds, Worth was sent with the rest of the convicts to the prison quarries

where he was put in charge of preparing the nitroglycerine for blasting. Many years later, Worth recalled how he was instructed by the foreman to heat the explosive when it became cold and brittle in the freezing air. This he did, grateful for the chance to warm his hands, and was lucky not to be blown to pieces for, as he frankly admitted, he 'never had an idea at that time how dangerous it was'. Teaching hardened criminals how to handle nitroglycerine was not, perhaps, the brightest move on the part of the authorities, as Worth's safe-cracking skills in later years so clearly proved.

The man who had slipped his chains on the Potomac, who had made a craft out of desertion, was not going to suffer the horrors of Sing Sing a moment longer than necessary, even though the prison's guards, a breed of breathtaking brutality, had orders to shoot anyone attempting to escape. As he worked, Worth calculated the movements of the guards and after only a few weeks of prison life, he slipped out of sight while the guard-shift was changing and hid inside a drainage ditch, which 'discharged itself inside the railway tunnel'. Under cover of night, according to a contemporary, 'he managed to get a few miles down the river where there lay at a dock some canal boats', in one of which, freezing and covered in mud, Worth hid, and 'had the satisfaction a few hours after that, of having himself transported to New York City by a tug boat, which came up to fetch the canal boat in which he took refuge.' At dawn, as the tug approached its 'lonely dock far up on the West side of the city', Worth clambered into the

water and swam back to shore. 'He managed, although having his prison clothes on, to get to the house of an acquaintance, where he was provided with a suit of clothes.' He immediately plunged back into the ghastly but protective anonymity of the Bowery.

Worth's later insouciance when recalling this escape belied what must have been a dreadful, if formative experience. At barely twenty years of age he had seen the worst the American penal system had to offer, and his contempt for authority was formidable. That Worth did not hesitate to plunge into a churning river at dead of night, clad in prison clothes and aware that apprehension might well mean death, reflected both his physical toughness and a growing faith in his own invincibility. So far from being reformed by his brief and unpleasant experience of prison, Worth concluded that the life of a 'dip' did not offer sufficient rewards, given its perils, and the time had come to change direction, to up the stakes in his personal vendetta against society. Reuniting with some of his former gang, Worth began to expand his scope of operations to include minor burglaries and other property thefts as well as picking pockets. His word 'was law with the little group of young thieves he gathered around him,' remembered Sophie Lyons. 'He furnished the brains to keep them out of trouble and the cash to get them out if by chance they got in. Every morning they would meet in a little Canal Street restaurant to take their orders from him – at night they came back to hand him a liberal share of the day's earnings.' So far Worth's activities had gone no further than what might

be called disorganized crime. Henceforth he would tread more carefully, delegating often and putting himself at risk only when the rewards, or promise of adventure, were greatest. His strict dominance over the rest of the gang was the first illustration of a power-complex that would grow more pronounced with age. Criminals, it is fair to say, are not the most intellectual of people. Indeed, the class as a whole tends to be characterized by fairly intense stupidity. Worth's highly intelligent approach to the business, and his ability to get results in the form of hard cash, was enough to ensure the obedience, even the reverence, of his underlings.

Solvent for the first time in his life, Worth's determination to beat the odds at every level soon led him to New York's roulette wheels, gambling dens and the faro tables – that extraordinarily chancy game that was once the rage of gamblers and has since virtually disappeared. Betting heavily, in the burgeoning belief that the more he dared the more fortune would smile, he began to live the life of a 'sportsman', moving away from the grim Bowery dives to the brighter, more luxurious, but no less dissipated lights of uptown New York and the famously seedy glamour of the 'Tenderloin' district.

Worth's native intelligence was not the only character trait to distinguish him from his fellow crooks. He was also notable for avoiding strong drink, at a time when alcoholism was endemic and heavy drinking virtually obligatory among the criminal classes. Perhaps still more strangely, he refused to countenance

any form of violence, regarding it as uncouth, unnecessary and, given his limited physical stature, unwise. Of the 68,000 people arrested in New York in 1865, 53,000 were charged with crimes of violence. Yet Worth made it a rule that force should play no part in any criminal enterprise that involved him, a rule he broke only once in his life. His rejection of alcohol and violence was itself part of a need to control, not just himself, but those within his power. Crooks who drank or fought made mistakes, and for that reason he steered clear of the established gangs, which were often little more than roving bands of pickled hoodlums at war with each other. Worth was not content merely to organize his minions, he needed to rule, regulate and reward them as he clawed his way up through the underworld. A sober, resourceful, non-violent crook marshalling his forces amid a troop of ignorant, drunken brawlers, Worth was also exceptional for the scope of his criminal aspirations, or, to put it another way, his greed. Sophie Lyons took note of his 'restless ambition' as he began his ascent into the criminal upper classes.

One of America's senior crooks later recorded that 'the state of society created by the war between the North and the South produced a large number of intelligent crooks' of varied talents, but in post-bellum New York bank robbers were considered an aristocracy of their own. James L. Ford, an expert on, by participation in, New York's seamy side, wrote in his memoirs: 'Such operations as bank burglary were held in much higher esteem during the 'sixties and 'seventies than at present, and the

most distinguished members of the craft were known by sight and pointed out to strangers.' Allan Pinkerton, the father of Worth's future adversary, in his 1873 book *The Bankers, The Vault and The Burglars,* observed that 'instead of the clumsy, awkward, ill-looking rogue of former days, we now have the intelligent, scientific and calculating burglar, who is expert in the uses of tools, and a gentleman in appearance, who prides himself upon always leaving a "neat job" behind.'

Worth's friend Eddie Guerin argued that 'a successful bank sneak requires to be well-dressed and to possess a gentlemanly appearance.' Sophie Lyons concurred, noting also that a certain amount of professional snobbery pertained in the upper ranks of crime. 'It was hard for a young man to get a foothold with an organised party of bank robbers, for the more experienced men were reluctant to risk their chances of success by taking on a beginner.'

Without success Worth sought acceptance in such established bank-robbing cliques as that of George Leonidas Leslie, better known as 'Western George', which was responsible for a large percentage of the bank heists carried out in New York between the end of the war and 1884. Lyons first encountered Worth when he was 'itching to get into bank work', specifically through her husband, Ned Lyons, a noted burglar. But the veteran crooks turned down all advances from the aspiring newcomer.

Worth needed a patron, someone to provide him with an entree to the criminal elite. He found one in the mountainous

figure of ‘Marm’ Mandelbaum.

FOUR
The Professionals

CONTEMPORARY WRITERS reached for superlatives when describing Fredericka, better known as 'Mother' or 'Marm' Mandelbaum: 'The greatest crime promoter of modern times', the 'most successful fence in the history of New York' and the individual who 'first put crime in America on a syndicated basis' are just a few of the plaudits she garnered in a long career of unbroken dishonesty.

Marm's nickname was a consequence of her maternal attitude towards criminals of all types, for her heart was commensurate with her girth. She was an aristocrat of crime, but unlike the object of Worth's later affections – namely the portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire – Marm Mandelbaum was no oil painting. 'She was a huge woman, weighing more than two

hundred and fifty pounds, and had a sharply curved mouth and extraordinarily fat cheeks, above which were small black eyes, heavy black brows and a high sloping forehead, and a mass of tightly rolled black hair which was generally surmounted by a tiny black bonnet with drooping feathers.'

Like Worth, Fredericka had emigrated from Germany to the United States in her youth, arriving 'without a friend or relative', but far from defenceless. Sophie Lyons, who adored Marm, noted that 'her coarse, heavy features, powerful physique, and penetrating eye were sufficient protection and chaperone for anyone,' adding unkindly (but no doubt accurately) that 'it is not likely that anyone ever forced unwelcome attentions on this particular immigrant.'

Soon after she got off the boat, the formidable Fredericka had fixed her beady eye on one Wolfe Mandelbaum, a haberdasher who owned a three-storey building at 79 Clinton Street in the Kleine Deutschland section of Manhattan's East Side. A weak and lazy fellow, Wolfe was 'afflicted with chronic dyspepsia'. A few weeks of Fredericka's voluminous but easily digestible cooking persuaded him to marry her, and 'Mrs Mandelbaum forever afterward was the head of the house of Mandelbaum'. While still nominally a haberdasher's, the property on Clinton Street was turned by Marm into the headquarters of one of the largest fencing operations New York has ever seen. She started by selling the 'plunder from house to house', and in a few years had built up a vast business which 'handled the loot and financed

the operations of a majority of the great gangs of bank and store burglars'. Warehouses in Manhattan and Brooklyn were used to hide the stolen goods, while the unscrupulous lawyers Howe and Hummel were employed on an annual retainer of five thousand dollars to ensure her continued liberty, principally through bribery, whenever 'the law made an impudent gesture in her direction'. Most of Marm's business was fencing, but she was not above financing other crooks in their operations and was even said to have run a 'Fagin School' in Grand Street, not far from police headquarters, 'where small boys and girls were taught to be expert pickpockets and sneak thieves'. A few outstanding pupils even went on to 'post-graduate work in blackmailing and confidence schemes'.

Marm Mandelbaum is first listed in police records in 1862, and over the next two decades she is estimated to have handled between five and ten million dollars' worth of stolen property. Criminals adored her. As the celebrated thief 'Banjo' Pete Emerson once observed, 'she was scheming and dishonest as the day is long, but she could be like an angel to the worst devil so long as he played square with her'. As the fame, fortune and waistline of Mrs, soon to be the widow, Mandelbaum (Wolfe's dyspepsia having returned with a vengeance) grew, so too did the extravagance of her lifestyle and her social ambitions. The two floors above her centre of operations 'were furnished with an elegance unsurpassed anywhere in the city; indeed many of her most costly draperies had once adorned the homes of aristocrats,

from which they had been stolen for her by grateful and kind-hearted burglars'. There Marm Mandelbaum held court as an underworld *saloniste,* and 'entertained lavishly with dances and dinners which were attended by some of the most celebrated criminals in America, and frequently by police officials and politicians who had come under the Mandelbaum influence.'

'I shall never forget the atmosphere of "Mother" Mandelbaum's place,' Sophie Lyons recalled wistfully, for here congregated not merely burglars and swindlers, but bent judges, corrupt cops and politicians at a discount, all ready to do business. Such criminal notables as Shang Draper and 'Western George' came to sit at Marm's feet, and she repaid their homage by underwriting their crimes, selling their loot and helping those who fell foul of the law. In a profession not noted for its generosity, Marm was an exception, retaining 'an especial soft spot in her heart for female crooks' and others who might need a helping hand up the criminal ladder. Marm was an equal opportunities employer and a firm believer that gender was no barrier to criminal success, a most enlightened view for the time and a verity of which she was herself the most substantial proof. She did not, however, brook competition, and when one particularly successful thief called 'Black' Lena Kleinschmidt stole a fortune, moved to Hackensack (more fashionable then than now) and began putting on airs and dinner parties, Marm was livid. She was thoroughly delighted when Black Lena was exposed as a jewel thief and jailed after one of her dinner guests

noticed his hostess was wearing an emerald ring stolen from his wife's handbag a few weeks earlier. 'It just goes to prove,' Marm Mandelbaum sniffed, 'that it takes brains to be a real lady.'

At the time that Worth was desperately seeking a way into the criminal big league, Marm Mandelbaum was already a legend and arguably the most influential criminal in America. 'The army of enemies of society must have its general, and I believe that probably the greatest of them all was "Mother" Mandelbaum,' observed Sophie Lyons, who had taken a shine to young Worth and probably introduced him into Marm Mandelbaum's charmed criminal circle. Worth became a regular at the Mandelbaum soirees, and it was almost certainly under her tutelage that he made his first, disappointing foray into bank robbery. In 1866 Worth and his brother John broke into the Atlantic Transportation Company on Liberty Street in New York and spent several hours attempting to blow open the safe, before leaving in frustration as dawn broke. Lyons recounts his 'great disgust' at the failed heist. Nothing daunted, after a year of organizing some lesser thefts, Worth, now working alone, pulled off his first major robbery by stealing twenty thousand dollars' worth of bonds from an insurance company in his home town of Cambridge. Marm Mandelbaum, who could fence anything from stolen horses to carriages to diamonds, obligingly sold them on at a portion of their face value – giving Worth her customary 10 per cent and pocketing the rest. He was hardly made a rich man by the robbery, but it was a start and the minor coup effectively

'established him as a bank burglar' among his peers. Before long, Worth had gained a reputation as 'a master hand in the execution of robberies', and stories of his sang-froid began to circulate in the underworld.

Worth seems to have delighted in sailing as close to the wind as he could get, and with every near-escape his contempt for the forces of law and order was confirmed and amplified. As the detectives Eldridge and Watts later recounted: 'Once, after robbing a jewelry store in Boston, this daring burglar slipped out of the front door, only to meet a policeman face to face. Without an instant of tremor, this man of iron nerve politely saluted the officer and stepped back to re-open the door and coolly call to his confederate within: "William, be sure and fasten the door securely when you leave! I have got to catch the next car." So, indeed, he did, after bidding the officer a pleasant good night, but he hopped off the car a few blocks beyond the store, slipped back stealthily, signalled to his confederate and both escaped with their booty.'

An avid pupil, Worth appears to have found in Marm Mandelbaum both an ally and a role model. The easy way she farmed out criminal work to others, her lavish apartments and social graces, were precisely the sort of existence he had in mind for himself. Above all, it was perhaps Marm who taught the lesson that being a 'real gentleman' and a complete crook were not only perfectly compatible, but thoroughly rewarding. Marm's dinner table offered an atmosphere of illicit luxury,

where superior crooks could enjoy the company of men and women of like, lawless minds.

Two of Marm's guests in particular would play crucial although very different roles in Worth's future.

The first was Maximilian Schoenbein, 'alias M. H. Baker, alias M. H. Zimmerman, alias "The Dutchman", alias Mark Shinburn or Sheerly, alias Henry Edward Moebus,' but most usually alias Max Shinburn, 'a bank burglar of distinction who complained that he was at heart an aristocrat, and that he detested the crooks with whom he was compelled to associate'. For the next three decades the criminal paths taken by Adam Worth and Max Shinburn ran in tandem. The two law-breakers had much in common, and they came to loathe each other heartily.

Shinburn was born on 17 February 1842, in the town of Ittlingen, Württemberg, where he was apprenticed to a mechanic before emigrating to New York in 1861. Styling himself 'the Baron' from early in life, Shinburn later actually purchased the title of Baron Schindle or Shindell of Monaco with 'the judicious expenditure of a part of his fortune'. Aloof, intelligent and insufferably arrogant, the Baron cut a wide swathe through New York low society. Even the police were impressed.

Inspector Thomas Byrnes of the New York Police Department considered him 'probably the most expert bank burglar in the country', while Belgian police offered this description of the soigne, multilingual felon: 'Speaks English with a very slight German accent. Speaks German and French. Always

well dressed. He has a distinguished appearance with polished manners. Speaks very courteously. Always stays at the best hotels.' Shinburn's looks were striking; he had 'small blue penetrating eyes, long, straight nose, moustache and small imperial, both of brownish colour mixed with grey, moustache twisted at the ends, pointed chin … at times wears a full beard and sometimes a moustache and chin whisker, in order to hide from view the pronounced dimple in chin.' His numerous encounters with the law and a youthful taste for duelling had left him with numerous other identifying features. After one arrest, a police officer noted these with grisly exactitude: 'on back of left wrist … pistol shot wounds running parallel with each other and near the deformity in right leg … pistol or gunshot wound on left side … several small scars that look like the result of buck shot wounds; scar on left side of abdomen, appearing as though shot entered in the back and came through …' Shinburn's fraudulent aristocratic claims were full of holes, and so was the rest of him.

His criminal notoriety sprang principally from the invention of a machine which he maintained could reveal the combination of any safe: 'a ratchet which, when placed under the combination dial of a safe, would puncture a sheet of calibrated paper when the dial stopped and started to move in the opposite direction. He would repeat this process until he had the entire combination.' According to other police sources, 'his ear was so acute and sensitive that by turning of the dial he could determine at what numbers the tumblers dropped into place.'

With his mechanical training, Shinburn also perfected a set of light and powerful safe-cracking tools which he was prepared to sell on to others for a price. 'Shinburn revolutionized the burglar's tools and put them on a scientific basis,' recorded Sophie Lyons. The better to perfect his safe-busting technique, the Baron 'for some time took employment under an assumed name in the works of the Lilly Safe Co. [whose] safes and vaults were considered among the best and most secure.' But not for long. Leaving a trail of empty safes in his wake, Shinburn was eventually penalized by his own competence and the Lilly safe 'came into such disrepute, that the company was forced into liquidation'.

'The safe I can't open hasn't been built,' Shinburn once boasted to Sophie Lyons.

By the time Worth encountered Shinburn in the mid 1860s, the latter had developed a name for himself as a man of importance among the bank-robbing fraternity by cleaning out the Savings Bank in Walpole, New Hampshire. Worth was ambivalent about the Baron. He admired his dandified dress and envied his reputation, but found his endless braggadocio and air of superiority unbearable.

Far more to Worth's taste was another dark luminary of the underworld and Mandelbaum protege, Charles W. Bullard, a languid and alluring criminal playboy better known as 'Piano' Charley. The scion of a wealthy family from Milford which could trace its ancestry to a member of George Washington's

staff, Bullard 'had a good common school education', inherited a large fortune from his father while still in his teens and had gone to the bad, immediately and extravagantly. Having squandered his inheritance, Bullard briefly tried his hand in the butcher's trade but gave up the occupation and 'devoted his ability to the robbing of banks and safes', for which he inherited a taste from his grandfather, who was said to be a burglar 'in a small way'. Bullard's 'dissipation and a restless craving for morbid excitement made him a "fly" [skilled] crook' and later an uncommonly daring and wily burglar. In New York low society he was considered 'one of the boldest operators that has ever handled a jimmy or drilled a safe'.

'Bullard is a man of good education,' recorded one admiring police report, 'speaks English, French and German fluently, and plays on the piano with the skill of a professional.' Raffish, refined and handsome, with a wispy goatee and limpid eyes, Bullard had three passions in life, each of which he indulged to the limit: women, music and gambling. Through constant practice on his baby grand, Piano Charley had developed such 'delicacy of touch' that he could divine the combination of a safe simply by spinning the tumblers, while his piano sonatas could reduce the hardest criminal to tears and lure the most chaste woman into bed.

'An inveterate gamester', perennially short of funds, often outrageously drunk but always charming, Bullard was one of the most romantic figures in the New York underworld. Under the

benign eye of Marm Mandelbaum, he and Worth struck up an immediate rapport.

Piano Charley Bullard's crime-sheet included jewel theft, train robbery and jail-breaking. Early in 1869 he teamed up with Max Shinburn and another professional thief, Ike Marsh, to break into the safe of the Ocean National Bank in Greenwich Village after tunnelling through the basement. The venture was said to have realized more than a hundred thousand dollars, almost all of which ended up in Shinburn's pockets. 'The robbers were nearly a month at the work, and the bank was ruined by the loss,' the police reported. Later that year, on 4 May, Bullard had again conspired with Marsh to rob the Hudson River Railroad Express as it trundled from Buffalo in upstate New York along the New York Central Railroad to Grand Central Station. Knowing that the Merchant's Union Express Co. used the train to transport quantities of cash, with the connivance of a bribed train guard they 'concealed themselves in the baggage car … in which the safe was stored and rifled it of $100,000'. Bullard and Marsh then leaped off the train in the Bronx with the cash and negotiable securities stuffed into carpet bags. The guard was found bound and apparently unconscious, with froth dripping down his chin – this turned out to be soap, and the guard was immediately arrested.

The Pinkertons, whose reputation had expanded to the point where they were called in on almost every significant robbery, had traced the thieves to Toronto and found Ike and Charley

living in high style in one of the city's most expensive hotels. After a long court battle, Bullard was extradited to the United States and gaoled in White Plains, New York, to await trial. Using what little money remained to them, the Bullard family hired an expensive lawyer to defend their wayward son. Like Worth, Piano Charley never passed up a criminal opportunity and arranged for one of his many women friends to extract a thousand dollars (the entire fee) from his attorney's pocket 'as he was returning to New York on the train'.

It was almost certainly Marm Mandelbaum who decided that Piano Charley, whose music-making was such a popular feature of her dinner parties, should not be allowed to languish behind bars.

Worth, already a close friend of the gaoled man, was selected for the job of getting him out, along with Shinburn. It was the first and only time the two men would work together.

One week after he was imprisoned, Bullard's friends dug through the wall of the White Plains gaol and set both Ike and Charley at liberty, whereupon the crooks promptly returned to New York City for a long, and in Bullard's case staggeringly bibulous, celebration. The Baron was immensely pleased with himself. 'Shinburn used to take more pride in the way he broke into the jail at White Plains, New York, to free Charley Bullard and Ike Marsh, two friends of his, than he did in some of his boldest robberies,' Sophie Lyons recounted. But the immediate effect of the successful gaol break was to cement the burgeoning

friendship between Bullard and Worth. Piano Charley had the sort of effortless elan and cultural veneer that Worth so deeply admired and sought to emulate. On the other hand, Worth was clever and calculating, qualities which the suave but foolish Bullard singularly lacked.

They decided to go into partnership.

FIVE
The Robbers' Bride

THE BOYLSTON NATIONAL BANK in Boston was a familiar sight from Worth's youth. The rich burghers of Boston believed their money was as safe as man could make it behind the bank's grand façade, an imposing brick edifice at the corner of Boylston and Washington streets in the heart of the city. According to Sophie Lyons, Worth 'made a tour of inspection of all the Boston banks and decided that the famous Boylston Bank, the biggest in the city, would suit him'. Max Shinburn would later claim to have had a hand in planning the robbery, but there is no evidence his expertise was either required or requested. Indeed, Shinburn's exclusion from this 'job' may have been the original source of the enmity between him and Worth. Ike Marsh, Bullard's rather dim Irish sidekick in the train-robbery caper,

was brought in on the heist, which was, like all the best plans, perfectly straightforward. Posing as William A. Judson and Co., dealers in health tonics, the partners rented the building adjacent to the bank and erected a partition across the window on which were displayed 'some two hundred bottles, containing, according to the labels mucilage thereon, quantities of "Gray's Oriental Tonic".' 'The bottles served a double purpose,' the Pinkertons reported; 'that of showing his business and preventing the public looking into the place.' Quite what was in Gray's Oriental Tonic has never been revealed since not a single bottle was ever sold.

After carefully calculating the point where the shop wall adjoined the bank's steel safe, the robbers began digging. For a week, working only at night, Worth, Bullard and Marsh piled the debris into the back of the shop, until finally the 'lining of the vault lay exposed'.

'To cut through this was a work of more labor,' the *Boston Post* later reported. 'So very quiet was the operation that the only sound perceptible to the occupants of adjoining rooms was like that made by a person in the act of putting down a carpet with an ordinary tack hammer. The tools applied were [drill] bits or augers of about an inch in diameter, by means of which a succession of holes were drilled, opening into each other, until a piece of plate some eighteen inches by twelve had been removed. Jimmies, hammers and chisels were used as occasion required for the purpose of consummating the nefarious job.' In the early hours of Sunday, 21 November 1869, Worth

wriggled through the hole, lit a candle inside the bank safe and surveyed the loot. 'The treasure was contained in some twenty-five or thirty tin trunks', which Worth now handed back out to his accomplices one by one. 'The trunks were pried open, their contents examined, what was valuable pocketed and what was not rejected.' As dawn broke over Boston, the three thieves packed the swag into trunks labelled 'Gray's Oriental Tonic', hailed a carriage to the station and boarded the morning train to New York.

At nine o'clock on Monday morning, fully twenty-four hours later, bank officials opened the safe and were 'fairly thunderstruck at the scene which met their gaze'. The entire collection of safe-deposit boxes, and with them the solid reputation of the Boylston National Bank of Boston, was gone.

THE BOSTON POST

TUESDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 23, 1869

Yesterday morning Boston was startled. There is no discount on the word. A robbery of such magnitude as that of the Boylston National bank – amounting to from $150,000 to $200,000, in fact – which was perpetrated sometime between Saturday afternoon and Monday morning, is something quite out of the ordinary run in the municipal affairs of this city, and nearly if not quite too much for ready credence. But the robbery stands indisputably a robbery; and, taken as an exploit, considered in its aspect as a job, as one artist considers the work of another, it is one of the most adroit which it has ever been the fortune or misfortune of the press to record. The almost uniformly successful manner in which this class of burglary has been carried on throughout the country during the past few months may lead to the inference that the party or parties in the present case will escape the arm of the law, although it is true that the prime originator is as well known as any criminal need to be. The infinite cleverness with which his operations have been conducted from beginning to end, indicate him to be a man of no ordinary ability, and it seems very probable that, having so far succeeded in eluding police, he may escape altogether. Should he do so, he will find himself a richer man, even, than he had perhaps anticipated … The name by which the criminal is known

is William A. Judson.

The *Boston Post,* barely able to suppress its admiration, was conservative in its estimate. The Pinkertons believed that 'nearly one million dollars in money and securities' had been stolen by Worth and his accomplices, a sum confirmed by Sophie Lyons. In the premises of William A. Judson and Co. police found 'a dozen bushels or more of bricks and mortar', about thirty disembowelled tin trunks and two hundred bottles of Gray's Oriental Tonic. For a week the Boylston Bank robbery was Boston's sole topic of conversation. 'Everyone continues to talk about the robbery of Boylston Bank,' the *Boston Post* reported gloomily a few days later. 'But nobody – or nobody that has anything real to say – communicated anything new. On all sides it is admitted to be a very neat job, all the way from the Oriental Tonic clear through to the Bank safe.'

It was indeed Worth's neatest job to date, yet the very success of the venture, the huge amount of money involved and the stated determination of the authorities to track down the thieves (spurred on by a reward of 20 per cent of the haul) left Worth and Bullard with an obvious dilemma. To stay in New York and attempt to 'work back the securities' in the traditional way was to invite trouble since even Marm Mandelbaum would think twice about fencing such hot property. They could take the cash, abandon the securities and head west, where the frontier states offered obscurity and where the law was, at best, partially administered. But Worth and Bullard, with their taste

for expensive living and sophisticated company, were hardly the stuff of which cowboys are made, and the prospect of spending their ill-gotten gains in some dusty prairie town where they might be murdered for their money was less than appealing. A more attractive alternative was to make for Europe, where extradition was unlikely and wealthy Americans were welcomed with open arms, and few questions were asked. Big Ike Marsh had already decided to take early retirement with his share of the loot. He returned to Ireland via Baltimore and Queenstown, and was received in Tipperary with grand ceremony, a local boy made good or, rather, bad. In the end, the Pinkertons reported, 'he gambled, drank and did everything he should not have done, and eventually returned to America for more funds.' Poor Ike was arrested while trying to rob another bank in Wellesborough, sentenced to twenty years' solitary confinement in Eastern Pennsylvania and ended his life 'an old man, broken down in health, dependent on the charity of friends'.

Worth and Bullard rightly surmised that the Pinkertons would be called in after such a large robbery. Indeed, just a week after the bank heist, the detectives had traced the thieves and their spoil to New York and documents in the Pinkerton archives indicate that Bullard and Worth, thanks to some loose talk in criminal circles, were the prime suspects. The news that they were wanted men rapidly reached the fugitives themselves. 'Those damned detectives will get on to us in a week,' Bullard warned Worth. 'I don't want to be playing the Piano in Ludlow

Street [gaol].'

Acting quickly, the pair dispatched the stolen securities to a New York lawyer, possibly either Howe or Hummel, with instructions to wait a few months and then sell back the bonds for a percentage of their face value and forward the proceeds in due course. At the time this was an accepted method for recovering stolen property, winked at by the police, who often helped to negotiate the return of securities themselves, to the advantage of both the owners and the thieves. 'All [the robbers] need do is to make "terms" which means give up part of their booty, and then devote their leisure hours to plan new rascalities,' noted the *Boston Sunday Times,* one of the few organs to raise objections to this morally dubious collusion. 'There must be something radically wrong in the police system of the country when such transactions of [sic] these can repeatedly take place.'

Worth and Bullard then hurriedly packed the remaining cash into false-bottomed trunks, bid farewell to Marm Mandelbaum, Sophie Lyons and New York, and took the train to Philadelphia where the S.S. *Indiana,* bound for England, was waiting to take them, in style, to Europe and a new life. For this they would need new names, and in high spirits in their first-class cabin the pair discussed how they would reinvent themselves. Bullard elected to call himself Charles H. Wells and adopt a new persona as a wealthy Texan businessman. Worth's choice of alias was inspired.

That year had seen the untimely and much-lamented demise,

on 18 June, of Henry Jarvis Raymond, the founder-editor of the *New York Times.* Senator, congressman, political conscience and stalwart moral voice of the age, Raymond had succumbed to 'an attack of apoplexy' at the age of forty-nine and his passing was the occasion for some of the most solemn adulation ever printed. A single obituary of the great man described him as: patriotic, wise, moderate, honourable, candid, generous-hearted, hard-working, frugal, conscientious, masterly, modest, courageous, noble, consistent, principled, cultivated, distinguished, lucid, kind, just, forbearing, even-tempered, sincere, moral, lenient, vivacious, enterprising, temperate, self-possessed, clear-headed, sagacious, eloquent, staunch, sympathetic, kindly, generous, just, suave, amiable and upright. The *New York Times* ended this adjective-sodden paean to its founder by declaring that Raymond was 'always the true gentleman … in fact, we never knew a man more completely guileless or whose life and character better illustrated the virtues of a true and ingenuous manhood.' The newspaper's journalistic rivals agreed: the *Evening Mail* noted, 'He was always a gentleman … true to his own convictions.' The *Telegram* called him 'one of the brightest and most gentlemanly journalists the New World has ever produced', while the *Evening Post* also noted 'he was a gentleman in his manners and language.' The grave in the exclusive Green-Wood Cemetery of this man of integrity, this ethical colossus, was marked with a forty-foot obelisk in honour of his achievements and virtue. 'Contemporary opinion has rarely pronounced a more unanimous, more cordial

or more emphatic judgment than in the case of the departed chief of the *New York Times,'* that paper declared.

Worth, already hankering after the respectability to go with his new wealth, had read these breathless accolades (few could avoid them) and the repeated references to the late Mr Raymond's 'gentle-manliness' had lodged in his mind. Appropriating the name of such a man would be a rich and satisfying irony, not least because Worth, an avid collector of underworld gossip, may have known that the great moral arbiter of the age had himself led a double life of which his readers and admirers possessed not an inkling. Officially, on the night of his death, the worthy editor had 'sat with his family and some friends until 10 o'clock, when he left them to attend a political consultation; and his family saw no more of him until he was discovered, about 2.30 the next morning, lying in the hallway unconscious and apparently dying.' The truth was rather more dubious, for in reality Henry Jarvis Raymond, man of virtue, had died of a sudden coronary while 'paying a visit to a young actress'. Adam Worth now decided that, whether Henry J. Raymond resided in the heaven reserved for great men or in the purgatory of the adulterer, he did not need his name anymore. On the voyage to England he adopted this impressive alias (replacing Jarvis with Judson, in memory of the name he used for the Boston robbery) and kept it for the rest of his life. It was one of Worth's wittiest and least recognized thefts.

Early the next year, two wealthy Americans swaggered into

the Washington Hotel in Liverpool and announced they would be occupying the best rooms in the house indefinitely, since they planned an extended business trip. The pair were dressed in the height of fashion with frock coats, silk cravats and canes. Two Yankee swells fresh off the boat and keen for entertainment, Mr Henry J. Raymond, merchant banker, and Mr Charles H. Wells, Texan businessman, headed for the hotel bar to toast their arrival in the Old World. Mr Raymond drank to the future, Mr Wells, as usual, drank to excess.

Behind the bar of the Washington Hotel, as it happened, their future was already waiting in the highly desirable shape of Miss Katherine Louise Flynn, a seventeen-year-old Irish colleen with thick blonde hair, enticing dimples in all the right places and a gleam in her eye that might have been mistaken for availability but was probably rather closer to raw ambition. This remarkable woman had been born into Dublin poverty and had fled her humble origins at fifteen, determined even at that early age that hers would be a very different lot. Hot-tempered, vivacious and sharp as a tack, Kitty craved excitement and longed for travel, cultured company and beautiful things. Specifically, she understood the value of money, and wanted lots of it.

Mercenary is an unkind word. Kitty Flynn was simply practical. The squalor and deprivation of her early years had left her with a healthy respect for the advantages of wealth and a determination to do whatever was necessary, within reason, to obtain them. In her present situation this involved

enduring, and blowing back, the good-natured and flirtatious chaff of the hotel's regular drinkers. But when these same patrons overstepped the mark and were foolhardy enough to suggest that Kitty might like to consider some more intimate after-hours entertainment, they were left in no doubt, by way of a stream of vivid Irish invective, that the barmaid considered herself destined for rather greater delights than they could offer. The steamer from Dublin to Liverpool had been the first stage in Kitty's planned journey to fortune and respectability; her current job as a hotel barmaid was but a way-station along the route. The arrival of Messrs Raymond and Wells opened up new and enticing vistas. Knights in shining armour were few and far between in Liverpool, and two wealthy Americans with money to burn were clearly the next best thing.

'She was an unusually beautiful girl – a plump, dashing blonde of much the same type [as the actress] Lillian Russell was years ago,' recounted Sophie Lyons. She was, like all the best barmaids, buxom. Her blonde hair curled into ringlets reaching to the middle of her back, which were arranged in such a way that they appeared to have exploded from the back of her head. Her features were delicate, her nose snubbed, her lips full, but it was her eyes, startlingly blue and slightly distended, that tended to reduce her admirers to putty. In certain lights she looked like nothing so much as an exceptionally attractive frog: which was only appropriate since Kitty would shortly embark on a career in which, as in the fairy tale, she would be kissed by a variety of

princes, Charming and otherwise. In the best surviving portrait of her (a coloured version of a picture by the great French photographer Felix Nadar) Kitty Flynn is wearing an expression that hovers between flirtatious and simply wicked.

That expression had an electric effect on the newest arrivals to the Washington Hotel in January 1870. It was never clear which of the two felons first lost his heart to Kitty, but that both did so, and deeply, was accepted as fact by all their contemporaries. Sophie Lyons is characteristically blunt on the matter: 'Bullard and Raymond [she uses Worth's real name and his alias interchangeably] both fell madly in love with her.'

For the next month Kitty was besieged by these two very different suitors – the one small, dapper, almost teetotal and intense, the other tall, lugubrious and, as the Pinkertons put it, 'inclined to live fast and dissipate'. Suddenly Kitty found herself being wined and dined on a scale that was lavish even beyond her own extravagant dreams and that stretched Liverpool's resources to the limit. In spite of their amorous rivalry, the two crooks remained the closest of friends as they swept Kitty from one expensive candlelit dinner to another, as Bullard serenaded her and Worth did his best to persuade her that he, rather than his exotic partner, represented the more solid investment. 'The race for her favour was a close one,' records the inquisitive Lyons, 'despite the fact that Bullard was an accomplished musician [and] spoke several languages fluently.' Finally Kitty gave in to Piano Charley's entreaties, and agreed to marry him. Yet for Worth she

always reserved a place in her heart and, for that matter, her bed.

Kitty Flynn became Mrs Charles H. Wells one spring Sunday. The ceremony was performed at the Washington Hotel and a large and curious crowd of Liverpudlians turned out to watch the toast of the city being driven away in a coach and four by her handsome American husband. Adam Worth was the best man and, Lyons reports, 'to his credit it should be said that the bridal couple had no sincerer well-wisher than he.' Worth had good reason for his equanimity since, although Kitty had agreed to marry Bullard, she seems to have been only too happy to share her favours with both men. If Bullard objected to this arrangement he did not say so. Indeed, he was hardly in a strong moral position to do so, for, unbeknown to Kitty, he was married already. It was not until some time later that Kitty discovered Bullard had a wife and two children living in America. Conceivably Worth used this information to blackmail Bullard into sharing his wife. But that was hardly his style, and as the relationship between the two crooks remained entirely amicable, it seems more likely that the accommodating Kitty Flynn, the broad-minded Bullard, and Worth, who never let convention get in the way of his desires, simply found a *ménage à trois* to be the most convenient arrangement for all parties.

While Kitty and Charley enjoyed a short honeymoon, Worth passed his time profitably by robbing the largest pawnshop in Liverpool of some twenty-five thousand pounds' worth of jewellery. The Pinkertons later gave a full account of the theft:

He looked around for something in his line, and found a large pawnshop in that city which he considered worth robbing … he saw that if he could get plaster impressions of the key to the place he could make a big haul. After working cautiously for several days he managed to get the pawnbroker off his guard long enough to enable him to get possession of the key and make a wax impression: the result was that two or three weeks later the pawnbroker came to his place one morning and found all of his valuable pieces of jewelry abstracted from his safe, the store and vaults locked, but the valuables gone. M

The robbery caused a minor sensation in Liverpool, where crime was rife but large-scale burglary rare. The Pinkerton account was written many years later, but seems to be largely accurate. Most of the bonds stolen from the Boylston Bank had now been 'worked back' to their owners and the bank had therefore decided to call off the costly detective agency, rightly concluding that the thieves were now beyond reach. But the Pinkertons continued to keep tabs, via a network of informers, on American criminals living abroad. In the coming years their information on Adam Worth and his activities as Henry Raymond grew increasingly detailed.

Robbing pawnbrokers was easy game, and Worth was becoming restless for more challenging sport in new pastures. Kitty was also eager to find more glamorous surroundings and Bullard did not care much where he went so long as there was money and champagne in plentiful supply, and a piano near

at hand. Worth showered Kitty with expensive gifts (including his stolen gems), bought her expensive clothes and connived and encouraged her in her determination to leave her lowly origins behind. With his stolen money, Worth sought to shape and remake Kitty just as he was reinventing himself. But grimy Liverpool was no place for a would-be lady, and the great shared fraud required a brighter backdrop. At the end of 1870 the trio packed up their belongings, including the still considerable remnants of the Boylston Bank haul, checked out of the Washington Hotel and headed for Paris, where the war between France and Prussia, the siege of Paris and the impending lawlessness of the Commune had rendered the French capital a particularly enticing venue for a brace of socially ambitious crooks and their shared moll.

SIX
An American Bar in Paris

PARIS FURNISHED stark evidence of that peculiar brand of double standards Worth would absorb and adapt: under the Second Empire, a woman could be arrested for smoking in the Tuileries gardens but personal immorality was almost *de rigueur*. The surface was magnificent, but corruption and libertinism were rampant. Entrepreneurs speculated, hedonists indulged and English visitors railed about the 'badness of the morals'. The great gay façade of the Second Empire had come tumbling down with the crushing of the French armies by the Prussian military machine, and more than twenty thousand people had died in the horrific violence of the Commune that followed the crippling siege of the city. Worth, Bullard and Kitty travelled slowly south through England and then tarried in London to await

the outcome of the bloody events taking place in Paris, before making their way across the Channel at the end of June 1871. They found a city exhausted and partially in ruins, disordered and vulnerable, but still glamorous in her devastation: a perfect spot from which to co-ordinate fresh criminal activities, with plenty to satisfy the trio's extravagant tastes. As a later historian observed, 'France is an astonishingly resilient patient and now – shamefully defeated, riven by civil war, bankrupted by the German reparation demands and the costs of repairing Paris – she was to amaze the world and alarm her enemies by the speed of her recovery.' Here, Worth saw, were rich pickings. His namesake Charles Frederick Worth, the famed couturier, had 'bought up part of the wreckage of the Tuileries to make sham ruins in his garden'; now another Worth would also make his mark in the remnants of the devastated city, where, for the time being at least, the authorities were far too busy washing blood off the streets and piecing together the capital to pay much attention to the newly arrived triumvirate.

In later years Kitty would claim, unconvincingly, that she had no idea her husband and his partner were notorious international criminals. It must have been clear from the outset that her charming spouse and his friend were hardly respectable businessmen, since they paid for everything in wads of cash, did no work whatever and never discussed anything approaching legitimate business. Kitty's part in the next stage of the drama indicates that she was involved in their criminal activities up to

her shell-like ears.

With the remains of the money from the Boston robbery, Bullard and Worth purchased a spacious building at 2 rue Scribe, a part of the Grand Hotel complex next to the Opéra, under the name Charles Wells, and rented large and comfortable apartments nearby. The new premises, christened the American Bar, were refurbished in 'palatial splendour' at a cost of some seventy-five thousand dollars, with oil paintings, mirrors, and expensive glassware. American bartenders were imported to mix exotic cocktails of a type popular in New York but 'which were, at that time, almost unknown in Europe'.

The American Bar was a two-pronged operation. The second floor of the building was fashioned into a sort of clubhouse for visiting Americans, complete with the latest editions of newspapers from the USA and pigeon-holes where expatriates could pick up their mail. 'Americans were cordially invited to use it as a meeting house,' a spot where they could gather and enjoy American drinks, a quiet, sober and entirely respectable establishment. In the upper floors of the house, however, the scene was rather different. Here Worth and Bullard set up a full-scale, well-appointed and completely illegal gambling operation. By importing from America roulette croupiers and experts on baccarat, they gave the den a cosmopolitan sheen, but it was Kitty who turned out to be the principal lure for 'her beauty and engaging manners attracted many American visitors'.

Pinkertons' agents in Europe began keeping a watch on

the place almost from the day the American Bar opened, and declared that it was fast becoming 'the headquarters of American gamblers and criminals who here planned many of their European crimes,' yet even the forces of the law were dazzled by the ample charms of the hostess. 'Mrs Wells was a beautiful woman,' the detectives later reported, 'a brilliant conversationalist dressed in the height of fashion: her company was sought by almost all the patrons of the house.' While gorgeous Kitty presided, a vision in silk and ringlets, the affable Bullard played the piano and Worth carefully monitored the clientele. An alarm button was discreetly installed behind the bar 'which the bar-tender touched and which rung a buzzer in the gambling rooms above whenever the police or any suspicious party came in'. Within seconds of the alarm sounding, Worth could render the upper storeys of 2 rue Scribe as quiet and respectable as the lower ones. The Paris police 'made two or three raids on the house, but never succeeded in finding anything upstairs, except a lot of men sitting around reading papers, and no gambling in sight'. Worth also bribed the local police to tip him off when a raid might be expected.

The American Bar, the first American-style nightclub in Paris, was an instant success, a gaudy magnet in the ravaged and weary city, and the Parisians were 'astonished by its magnificence. The place soon became a famous resort and was extensively patronized, not only by Americans, but by Englishmen: in fact, by visitors from all over Europe.'

Businessmen, bankers, tourists, burglars, forgers, convicts, counts, con men and counterfeiters were all equally welcome to enjoy the products of Worth's superb chef, sip a cocktail, or, if they preferred, repair upstairs where the delightful Kitty would help them to lose their money at the gambling tables with such grace that they almost always came back for more. Word soon spread through the underworld that the American Bar was the best place in Europe to make contact with other criminals, arrange a job, or simply hide out from the authorities.

The elegant and pompous Max Shinburn became a regular patron. Like his former associates, the Baron had found it necessary to relocate to the Continent rather suddenly. Some years earlier, to his intense embarrassment, he had been publicly arrested at an expensive hotel in Saratoga where he was masquerading as a New York banker and charged with the New Hampshire robbery committed in 1865. Police found seven thousand dollars in stolen bonds in his pockets and, on searching his New York address, discovered 'a complete work shop for the manufacture of burglar's tools and wax impressions of keys'. Sentenced to ten years, the Baron had managed to escape from prison in Concord after nine months – a breakout considered 'one of the most dashing and skillful planned in criminal history' – and had fled to Europe, where his safe-cracking skills were still in great demand. 'With the money he made from his various burglaries, Shinburn is said to have left the country with nearly a million dollars,' the Pinkertons reported.

Shinburn had settled in Belgium, purchased an estate and an interest in a large silk mill, and formally declared himself to be the Baron Shindell, which 'nobody cared to dispute'. His cosmopolitan existence included frequent visits to Paris and the American Bar, where the bogus Baron liked to patronize his former criminal colleagues and spend his money 'with an open hand'. Worth resented the intrusion of the 'overbearing Dutch pig', as he called him, somewhat inaccurately, but tolerated his presence for the sake of Piano Charley, who still owed the Baron a debt for springing him from gaol.

Sophie Lyons, who often travelled to Europe on business (entirely criminal in nature), was another familiar face at the American Bar, and soon a motley cluster of crooks, many of them familiars from the criminals' New York days, began to orbit around the Paris club at a time when professional American bank robbers were migrating across the Atlantic in increasing numbers. 'I could name a hundred men who got a good living at it [bank robbery] and then came over to Europe to try their luck. France used to be a particularly happy hunting ground,' wrote Worth's friend Eddie Guerin.

Out of the criminal flotsam eddying around Paris, an unscrupulous and unsavoury bunch, Worth would eventually forge one of the most efficient and disciplined criminal gangs in history. Fresh from clearing out the First National Bank of Baltimore, for example, came Joseph Chapman and Charles 'the Scratch' Becker. Chapman was a habitual lawbreaker with a long

beard and soulful eyes who had, according to a contemporary account, 'but one vice – forgery; and one longing passion – Lydia Chapman,' his wife, and 'one of the most beautiful women the underworld of the 1870s had ever known'. Becker, alias John Blosh, was a neurotic Dutch-born forger of wide renown who was said to be able to reproduce the front page of a newspaper with such uncanny verisimilitude that when he was finished no one, including Becker, could tell the original from the fake. Pinkerton considered him 'the ablest professional forger in the world'.

Other patrons at the American Bar included 'Little' Joe Elliott (alias Reilly, alias Randall), a rat-like burglar of intensely romantic inclinations ('a great fellow for running after French girls,' Worth called him), Carlo Sesicovitch, a Russian-born thug with an ugly temper but an uncanny knack for disguise, his Gypsy mistress Alima, and several more criminals of note.

But by no means all the clientele at the American Bar were rogues and miscreants. Many were simply visiting businessmen, 'swell Americans who were not aware that the keepers of this saloon were American professional bank and safe burglars', and tourists keen for some nightlife and a flutter at the roulette or faro tables. Their number even included some who had fallen victim to the club's owners in earlier days. According to one police report, the American Bar was visited by Mr Sanford of the Merchant's Express Co. while he was in Paris, 'but Mr Sanford did not know until his return to New York that Wells was the man Bullard, who had robbed the company of

$100,000' back in 1868. It was also said that visiting officials from Boston's Boylston Bank spent an enjoyable evening at the club, little suspecting how the mahogany card tables and expensive furnishings had been financed.

For three years the American Bar prospered mightily, and the peculiar *ménage à trois* of the owners continued, amazingly enough, without a hitch. Kitty Flynn, her telltale Irish brogue now quite evaporated, was becoming the gracious grande dame she had always hoped to be, even if half her admirers were thieves and con men. Bullard was happily consuming American cocktails in vast quantities, beginning his day when he opened his eyes in the late afternoon and ending it when he closed them, around dawn, usually face down on the ivories of the club piano. 'In the gay French capital he soon became a man of mark as a gambler and roue,' which was all Piano Charley had ever really wanted to be. Worth was also contented enough, though strangely restless. Serving drinks was profitable, while the gambling den was a standing invitation to show his hold over fate, but the Paris operation was hardly the grand criminal adventure he saw as his destiny. The *demi-monde* thronging his card tables was glittering and amusing, to be sure, but he had more ambitious plans for himself, and Kitty, than merely the life of an upscale croupier and a club hostess.

In the winter of 1873, a most unpleasant blot suddenly appeared on the horizon of the merry trio when William Pinkerton, the scourge of American criminals, wandered

nonchalantly into the American Bar and ordered a drink. No man put the wind up the criminal fraternity more effectively than William Pinkerton. The detective had become a stout and florid man, whose ponderous frame belied his astonishing energy and an unparalleled talent for hunting down criminals. Pinkerton's face was known to just about every crook in America, and so was his record as a man who had 'waged a ceaseless war on train and bank holdup robbers and express thieves who infested the Middle West after the close of the Civil War'. The direct precursor of the modern FBI, the Pinkerton Agency was gaining international respect as a detective force, thanks in large part to William Pinkerton's phenomenal energy. The West's most notable outlaws – Jesse James and his brother Frank, the murderous Reno brothers and the legendary Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid – knew only too well the discomfort of having Pinkerton on their trail. 'It was not unusual in those bandit-chasing days for William Pinkerton to be days in the saddle, accompanied by courageous law officers searching the plains and hills of the Middle West tracking these outlaws to their hideouts.' A man of great bonhomie and charm, Pinkerton could also be utterly ruthless, as many criminals had discovered at the expense of their liberty and, in some instances, their lives. 'When Bill Pinkerton went after a man he didn't let up until he had got him, if it cost him a million dollars he didn't mind,' recalled Eddie Guerin.

Many years later, Worth, in an interview with William

Pinkerton, feigned nonchalance when recalling the detective's unexpected and unwelcome arrival at the American Bar. 'We were rather troubled at what had brought you to the club,' Worth said. Frantic would have been a more accurate description.

Worth recognized the burly detective at once and, opting as ever for the brazen approach, offered to buy him another drink. Pinkerton accepted. It was a strange encounter between the arch-criminal and the man who had already spent five years, and would spend the next twenty-five, trying to put him in prison. They chatted awhile on the subject of mutual acquaintances, of which they had many on both sides of the law, until Pinkerton announced that he ought to be getting along. The two men shook hands, without ever having needed to introduce themselves.

The moment Pinkerton had left the premises, Worth summoned Piano Charley and a visiting ruffian known as 'Old Vinegar' and set out into the rue Scribe to follow the American detective. 'There was no intention to assault you,' Worth later assured Pinkerton. 'We just wanted to get a good look at you.' Pinkerton was fully aware he was being tailed and after leading the trio through the streets of Paris for a little way, he suddenly rounded on them. Piano Charley, his nerves frayed with drink, 'nearly dropped dead' with fright and the three bolted in the opposite direction. 'Old Vinegar went into hiding for weeks,' Worth later remarked with a laugh.

He might not admit it, but Pinkerton's surprise visit had badly rattled him. Worth was only partially reassured to discover, from

a corrupt interpreter with the French police by the name of Dermunond, that the detective was not in pursuit of him and his partners, but was in the pay of the Baltimore National Bank and had his sights set on Joseph Chapman, Charles Becker and Little Joe Elliott. Indeed, the informant warned, Pinkerton was already preparing extradition papers with the French authorities. Worth sent the message to his colleagues that they were in mortal danger and should on no account come to the bar. A few days later Pinkerton, accompanied by two French detectives, walked into another of the gang's favoured dives, a dance hall called the Voluntino, where Worth was dining with Little Joe Elliott. Worth happened to catch sight of the brawny detective as he came through the door, and rightly assuming the 'entrances were guarded well', he bundled Elliott upstairs to a private room, opened the window and, holding Joe's hands, dropped him fifteen feet into a courtyard below. 'Joe made the drop alright and got up and hobbled away,' Worth recalled, but it had been another unpleasantly close escape.

The gang got a welcome, if only temporary, reprieve when Pinkerton was called away to help investigate a series of forgeries perpetrated on the Bank of England. Pinkerton accurately identified the forgeries as the work of brothers Austin and George Bidwell, 'two well-known American forgers and swindlers', who also happened to be two of Worth's regulars. While the Pinkertons were busy chasing the Bidwells (Austin was arrested in Cuba, George in London), Joe Chapman and the

others slipped out of Paris and went into hiding.

By now Worth had concluded that the days of the American Bar were numbered. During his brief visit to the club, Pinkerton had correctly guessed that some sort of early-warning system was in place to alert the gamblers upstairs of an impending raid. On his return to the United States he informed the Paris police of this hunch, and began pestering the Sûreté to do something about the nest of foreign criminals flourishing on the rue Scribe. Even the French police, sluggish through bribery, were pushed into action when Pinkerton provided detailed case histories of Worth, Bullard, Shinburn, Chapman, Becker, Elliott, Sophie Lyons and many of the bar's other regulars. The following May, Worth was again tipped off by Dermunond of an imminent raid and managed to remove all evidence of gambling just minutes before the police burst in. But the attentions of the Sûreté were proving bad for business, particularly among the jittery criminal clientele. 'The respectable people did not patronize it, and it soon went to the dog,' Pinkerton recorded triumphantly.

With profits declining, Worth decided to improve matters in his traditional way, by stealing a bag of diamonds from a travelling dealer who had carelessly left them on the floor while he stood at a roulette table. It was a spur of the moment larceny – Worth cashed a cheque for the diamond salesman and distracted him while Little Joe Elliott crept under the table and substituted a duplicate bag for the one containing the diamonds. The theft netted some thirty thousand pounds' worth of gems, and it was

Worth himself 'who insisted on the police being called in and the place searched from top to bottom. But he did not suggest that they look at a nearby barrel of beer, at the bottom of which reposed the precious jewels'. In spite of this elaborate bluff, the diamond-dealer demanded that the club manager be arraigned on a charge of robbery. At a preliminary hearing Henry Raymond, playing the part of an enraged foreign businessman whose good name was being dragged in the mud, demanded that he be allowed to cross-examine his accuser and so confused the merchant by bombarding him with angry questions that the poor man was unable to remember clearly whether he had had the bag with him in the first place. Worth was released, but the theft, while lucrative enough, sealed the fate of the American Bar.

'The robbery startled all Paris, and was the means of attracting suspicion to the house [which] lost prestige and soon went to pieces.' By now Pinkerton had begun recruiting international support in his bid to close the American Bar, most notably Inspector John Shore of Scotland Yard in London. Shore had been receiving reports for some time of a clutch of criminals operating out of Paris and he, too, began to demand that the Paris police shut down the establishment once and for all. Through his spies, Worth learned that the English policeman was putting pressure on the French authorities and his alarm redoubled. It was the first time Shore and Worth had crossed swords.

'The place was finally raided by the police,' Pinkerton reported, but this time the Sûreté were not going to be beaten

by Worth's alarm system. 'The bar-tender was seized as soon as they entered, and rushing upstairs, they found the gambling in full blast.' Worth and Kitty, by lucky chance, were not in the building at the time, but 'Wells [Bullard] and others [a pair of unfortunate croupiers] were arrested and charged with maintaining a gambling house, but were admitted to bail.' Bullard, the nominal owner of the bar, skipped bail and fled to London, leaving Worth and Kitty to sort out what remained of the business.

Worth later told Pinkerton that he had already decided the bar would 'never again be a success the way he wanted it', and the club was sold to an 'English betting man or bookmaker named Jack Ballentine' who kept it going for two more years before the American Bar was finally closed.

Pinkerton later wrote, on Worth's authority, that 'the ruction which I kicked up was the means of ruining Bullard in Paris, driving him out, breaking up the bar and sending, as he termed it, all of them on the bum.' But rather than resenting Pinkerton's rude intrusion into his affairs, Worth seems to have admired Pinkerton's detective efforts. 'Afterwards when we met in London [he said] that he had always fancied me and found that I was a man who kept his own counsel and that he had always felt a kindly feeling towards me,' Pinkerton wrote. They might be on opposite sides of the law, but the thief and the detective had already developed a healthy respect for one another's talents, which would eventually blossom into a most unlikely friendship.

So far from being 'on the bum', Worth was still a substantially wealthy man. The breaking up of the American Bar simply closed one chapter in his life and opened another. He increasingly craved, for himself and the aspiring Kitty, if not genuine respectability, then at least its outward trappings and, at the age of just thirty-one, he could afford them.

There was really only one destination for a man of social and criminal ambition, and that was London, centre of the civilized world, where the gentlemanly ideal had been elevated to the status of a religion, abounding with wealth and, therefore, felonious opportunity.

Victorian Britain was reaching the pinnacle of its Greatness, and smugness. 'The history of Britain is emphatically the history of progress,' declared the intensely popular writer T.B. Macaulay. 'The greatest and most highly civilised people that ever the world saw, have spread their dominion over every quarter of the globe.' A similar note of patriotic omnipotence was struck earlier by the historian Thomas Carlyle: 'We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway, nothing can resist us. We war with rude nature, and by our restless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils.' For a crook at war with the natural order, such heady recommendations were irresistible. Huge spoils, and the social elevation they brought with them, were precisely what Worth had in mind.

Piano Charley was already across the Channel, operating under the cover of a wine salesman and steadily drinking a large

proportion of his supposed wares. Worth, Kitty and the rest of the gang packed up what was left from the American Bar – the chandeliers, brass fittings and oil paintings – and merrily headed back across the Channel to the great English metropolis.

The upper floors of what was once Worth's gambling den are now the bedrooms of the Grand Hotel Intercontinental, one of the most expensive hotels in Paris. But still more appropriately, given the next phase of Worth's life, the door to number 2 rue Scribe now leads into 'Old England', the chain of stores where one can still buy all the appurtenances, from monogrammed riding boots to top hats, of a pukka English gent.

SEVEN
The Duchess

BY COINCIDENCE, or fate, in 1875 Gainsborough's portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, was also about to make a triumphant public reappearance in the English capital after long years in hiding. The subject of this painting had died some four decades before Worth was born, but she would play a defining role in his life.

Georgiana Spencer (pronounced George-ayna) was just seventeen in 1774 when she married William Cavendish, fifth Duke of Devonshire. The duke, one of the richest and oddest men in England, was also, by popular assent, one of the luckiest, for the eldest daughter of John, first Earl of Spencer, was already considered to be the most beautiful and accomplished woman in the nation. Poets praised her to the heavens, the Prince of Wales

fawned on her, and painters vied with one another to reproduce her charms. Her detractors were equally emphatic, portraying her as an aristocratic slattern whose hats were too tall and whose morals were too low. Everyone had an opinion on Georgiana.

Thomas Gainsborough began his most celebrated painting of the duchess around the year 1787, and it was no easy commission, even for the greatest portraitist Britain has ever produced. There was something about the pucker of her lips, the hint of a smirk, playful and suggestive, that defied reproduction. Or perhaps it was simply the captivating presence of the sitter herself, 'then in the bloom of youth', that baffled the master. Gainsborough's frustration mounted as he drew and redrew Georgiana's mouth, trying to catch that fleeting, flirting expression, 'but her dazzling beauty, and the sense which he entertained of the charm of her looks, and her conversation, took away that readiness of hand and happiness of touch which belonged to him in ordinary moments'. Finally he lost his temper. 'Drawing his wet pencil across a mouth which all who saw it considered exquisitely lovely, he said, "Her Grace is too hard for me!"'

Gainsborough painted Georgiana, as far as we know, three times: as a child in 1763, a delightful painting 'giving promise even then of her remarkable charms' which now hangs in the collection of Earl Spencer of Althorp, England; and a second time in 1783, for a full-length portrait now in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. In the latter painting the duchess

is draped around a column in classically demure posture, but appears a trifle seedy and 'greenish' in Walpole's words, possibly after a hard night on the town. By the time he came to paint her again both artist and sitter had become yet more celebrated and Gainsborough was plainly determined to capture Georgiana's allure. Hence his frustration with the duchess's elusive mouth.

He persevered, and the resulting portrait was a masterpiece, seeming to distil Georgiana's delectable expression. Her left eyebrow is arched and winning, a tantalizing half-smile plays across her lips and beneath the huge cocked hat her glance is slyly mischievous. In one hand she grasps a blooming rose and in the other, pinched suggestively between thumb and forefinger, a ripe pink rosebud. Georgiana had not proved too hard for him after all, and the finished product was devastating, frankly sexual yet strangely coy.

She had been painted many times before and would be painted again by the greatest artists in the land, including Reynolds, Romney and Rowlandson. As one critic wrote in 1901, 'More portraits exist of Georgiana than of any other English lady of the eighteenth century.' Yet for grandeur and cheek, personality and piquancy, none matched Gainsborough's painting of the duchess in full bloom.

There is no evidence that the portrait ever hung in the ducal home of the Devonshires at Chatsworth, but at around the time that Georgiana became pregnant by her lover, the future prime minister Charles Grey, the lovely Gainsborough painting

abruptly and inexplicably vanished. Perhaps the duke, although himself a serial adulterer, found the portrait of his wife with her coquettish smile and arched brow too powerful a reminder of her affair, and banished it from his presence.

In the autumn of 1841, three years before Adam Worth came into the world, the London art dealer John Bentley was making one of his annual forays through England's Home Counties in search of rare paintings. An astute art connoisseur, Bentley owned a thriving dealership in the metropolis and was much in demand as a valuer of old masters. Over the course of his career, for pleasure and profit, he had made it a rule to spend a few weeks every year wandering through the small villages and towns of England making enquiries as to whether any of the local residents had works of art or other antiques they wished to value or sell. Many a bargain was to be found in this way, and the practice enabled Bentley to shed, for a while, the cares and strains of metropolitan life in a bucolic and nomadic quest for art.

In this particular year, Bentley's enjoyment of his annual outing had been sharply diminished by a stinking cold which had settled both on his chest, making him cough and sneeze, and on his mind, making him grumpy.

On the morning of 17 September, Bentley's ill-humour and streaming nose were suddenly forgotten when his researches brought him to the small sitting room of one Anne Maginnis, an elderly English schoolmistress long retired. For there, above Mrs Maginnis's fireplace, grimy but unmistakable, was the

portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, by Thomas Gainsborough. Quite how the widow Maginnis, who had little money and even less interest in fine art, managed to get her hands on Gainsborough's famous missing portrait has never been adequately explained. According to one account, the old lady 'spoke of it as the portrait of a relative of hers, and that it was bought, not as the picture of the beautiful Duchess, but merely as "a Gainsborough".' Bentley never enquired too closely into how she had obtained the great picture, partly out of tact, but largely because he had immediately identified the missing duchess, knew a sucker when he saw one, and wanted to buy it, cheap.

No one can be sure quite what had happened to the painting in the intervening years. One biographer quotes the Reverend Henry Bate as referring to two Gainsborough portraits of the duchess, 'one of which Lady Spencer has, the other, we think, is in Mr Boothby's possession'. One possibility is Charles Boothby-Skrymshire, also known as 'Prince' Boothby, a man of fashion so nicknamed on account of his egregious social climbing and his tendency to 'abandon friends as soon as he met people of higher social position or rank'. He was believed to be a close friend of the Devonshires, and may have obtained the picture when the duke decided he no longer wanted it. Prince Boothby committed suicide on 27 July 1800, whereupon his effects were 'dispersed'. Another candidate for the elusive 'Mr Boothby' is Sir Brooke Boothby of Ashbourne Hall, just twenty miles from

Chatsworth, a scholar, poet, friend of Rousseau and Charles James Fox, satirist and art collector who owned at least one other portrait of the duchess as well as a crayon drawing and was acquainted with his ducal neighbours. Sir Brooke may have sold the Gainsborough in 1792, when he suddenly ran out of money. Whichever Boothby had briefly owned the *Duchess,* the portrait had completely vanished until it cropped up again in Mrs Maginnis's tiny cottage under Bentley's knowing and excited gaze. The elderly woman plainly had no idea what the painting was, or what it was worth, for in a singular act of vandalism some years earlier she had cut off the *Duchess's* legs just above the knee, shortening the painting to three-quarters of its original size and consigning Georgiana's feet to the fire. Henry James would criticize the 'very wooden legs' in Gainsborough's portraits, but that was hardly a reason for burning them, and Mrs Maginnis's brainless surgery left the portrait out of balance: Georgiana seems almost overpowered by her vast hat. But even in these sadly reduced circumstances, Bentley recognized Gainsborough's *Duchess,* admired her still-saucy smile, and scented a bargain.

Many years later Bentley's grandson, one Sigismund Goelze, explained what had happened, recalling his grandfather's discovery in a letter to *The Times:* 'It was then hanging in her sitting-room, over the chimney piece, and, knowing that originally the picture was painted full-length, he asked her how it was that it only showed to the knees. The old lady told him that

she had cut it down to fit the position it then occupied, and added that she had burnt the piece which she had cut off.'

Although Bentley could not be certain that this was indeed the *Duchess,* his expert's hunch told him to take a gamble. The widow Maginnis, while no expert in matters artistic, knew the value of money and was, moreover, an experienced haggler. After some lively negotiations lasting several hours, the old lady agreed to let the art dealer take the painting away on the promise that he knew a man who might pay as much as seventy pounds for it. Bentley was careful not to mention whom the picture portrayed, for even thirty-five years after her death Georgiana's remained the sort of household name that could only increase the expectations of an impoverished English schoolmistress.

On 6 October Mrs Maginnis wrote:

Sir, I am obliged by your prompt attention to the disposal of the picture, and will take £70 for it, ready money, if the gentleman will give it, as I feel assured you will make the most you can of it.

Hoping you are in better health than when I last saw you, I remain, Sir, your obedient servant, Anne Maginnis

In the end Bentley managed to persuade Mrs Maginnis to let him keep the portrait for the sum of fifty-six pounds, one of the most advantageous deals he ever made. According to his grandson, Bentley 'never had the slightest doubt as to the genuineness of the picture; and to an artist it is obviously impossible for any copyist to successfully reproduce the swift,

spontaneous touch of the greatest master of female portraiture'. The dealer carried the painting to London, where he cleaned it up and proudly displayed the *Duchess* to his admiring friends. 'The picture remained in my grandfather's possession for some time, and my mother still remembers it hanging in the dining room of her old home in Sloane Street,' Goelze wrote.

Bentley subsequently agreed to sell the *Duchess* to his friend and fellow connoisseur, a silk merchant named Wynn Ellis –'characteristically declining to take any profit, so I have been told', Goelze reported. 'Mr Bentley was the intimate friend and adviser of most of the great collectors during the early years of the late reign; but he made it a rule never to receive any remuneration for his services in assisting to form collections of pictures, a habit which I fear must in these days seem curiously Quixotic. The reason he gave was that in this way only could he prove his advice to be absolutely disinterested.'

Wynn Ellis (probably the painting's fifth owner) started out in business, in 1812, as a 'haberdasher, hosier and mercer' and ended up as owner of the largest silk business in London and a man of immense wealth, excellent taste and profound views. As a Member of Parliament for Leicester and a Justice of the Peace in Hertfordshire, where in 1830 he purchased a large estate called Ponsborne Park, Ellis advocated the repeal of the Corn Laws and considered himself an advanced liberal. But his most trenchant views happened to address a pastime dear to Adam Worth's heart, for Wynn Ellis 'had an intense dislike of betting,

horse-racing and gambling'. Ellis did not gamble on anything, and least of all on the great paintings which he purchased with his grand fortune. John Bentley, on the other hand, was a most canny art dealer who did not scruple to extract a tough bargain from an elderly schoolmistress. So whatever his grandson's claims and the demands of friendship, it would have been far more characteristic of the man had Bentley charged Ellis a small fortune for the painting. Sadly, we will never know how much profit Bentley made on his investment of fifty-six pounds for the silk manufacturer – like other, later owners of the portrait – flatly declined to say what he had paid for it and allowed the rumour that he spent just sixty guineas on the purchase to circulate uncontradicted. Ellis sent the painting to be engraved by Robert Graves of Henry Graves & Co., and the result, simply identified as Gainsborough's *Duchess of Devonshire,* was published on 24 February 1870.

Ellis owned one of the finest art collections in England, and the great Gainsborough now took a prominent place in it. Did Wynn Ellis know for sure that 'the painting which had been mutilated to hang above a foolish old woman's smoke-grimed mantel shelf was … a pearl of rarest price? Some, subsequently, had their doubts. 'There was … a very general belief among those interested in art matters, that not a few of the pictures [in the Wynn Ellis collection] bearing the names of distinguished English painters were copies or imitations.' Had Wynn Ellis been too hasty in declaring the painting to be Gainsborough's

Duchess of Devonshire? 'Though a great lover of art he was not an infallible judge,' one critic observed, 'and it is recorded that his discovery that three imitation Turners had been foisted upon him at great prices led directly to his death' – an event which took place on 8 January 1875, when Ellis was eighty-six years old and had amassed a fortune, it was estimated, little short of six hundred thousand pounds. His 402 paintings, along with 'watercolour drawings, porcelain, decorative furniture, marbles &c.' were left to the nation. The trustees of the National Gallery selected some forty-four old masters, as directed under the terms of Ellis's will, and the rest of the vast collection was put up for auction. Gainsborough was then considered to be a modern artist and so that painting, too, was offered for sale by the auction house of Messrs Christie, Manson & Woods. After years in mysterious obscurity, Gainsborough's *Duchess* was about to make her first public appearance for nearly a century, and tales of the charming Georgiana and her piquant history began to circulate once more in London's salons. The auction was set for 6 May 1876, and suddenly the *Duchess* was all the rage again: where the Georgians had fallen in love with the rumbustious woman herself, the Victorians were about to be smitten by Georgiana's portrait.

EIGHT
Dr Jekyll and Mr Worth

TO MARK THE FIRST STAGE of his transformation from the raffish boulevardier of the rue Scribe to the worthy gentleman of London, Adam Worth established himself, Kitty and Bullard in new and commodious headquarters south of the Thames, using the remaining profits from the sale of the American Bar and the stolen diamonds. Alerted by the Pinkertons and the Sûreté, Scotland Yard was already on guard and soon sent word to Robert Pinkerton, brother of William and head of the Pinkerton office in New York, that the resourceful Worth 'now delights in the more aristocratic name of Henry Raymond [and] occupies a commodious mansion standing well back on its own grounds out of the view of the too curious at the west corner of Clapham Common and known as the

West Lodge.' Bow-fronted and imposing, the West, or Western Lodge was built around 1800 and had previously been home to such notables as Richard Thornton, a millionaire who made his fortune by speculating in tallow on the Baltic Exchange, and more recently, in 1843, to Sir Charles Trevelyan: precisely the sort of social connections Worth was beginning to covet. The rest of the gang, including Becker, Elliott and Sesicovitch, lived in another large building leased by Joe and Lydia Chapman at 103 Neville Road, which Worth helped to furnish with thick red carpets and chandeliers.

Worth almost certainly knew that Scotland Yard was watching him but, since he entertained a low opinion of the British police in general and Inspector John Shore in particular, the knowledge seems to have worried him not one jot. With a high-mindedness that was becoming characteristic, Worth made no secret of his opinion that Shore was a drunken, womanizing idiot – 'a big lunk head and laughing stock for everybody in England … he knew nobody but a lot of three-card monte men and cheap pickpockets'. Worth had come a long way in his own estimation since he too had been a lowly pickpocket on the streets of New York.

But while Worth was beginning to take on airs, styling himself as an elegant man about town, and while he set about laying the foundations for a variety of criminal activities, the original threesome was beginning to fall apart. Back in October 1870, Kitty had given birth to a daughter, Lucy Adeline, who would be

followed, seven years later, by another, named Katherine Louise after her mother. The precise paternity of Kitty's daughters has remained rather cloudy, for obvious reasons. Kitty herself may not have known for sure whether Bullard or Worth was the real father of her girls – conceivably they may have shared them, one each, as they did with everything else – but most of their criminal associates simply assumed that the children were Worth's, as he seems to have done himself. William Pinkerton believed that Worth had simply taken over his partner's conjugal rights when Bullard became too alcoholic to oblige. 'Bullard, alias Wells, became very dissipated; his wife, in the meantime, had given birth to two children, daughters, who were in reality the children of Adam Worth,' the detective stated.

More irascible and introverted with every drink, Bullard was no longer the carefree, dashing figure Kitty had fallen for at the Washington Hotel in Liverpool. He would vanish for long periods in London's seamier quarters and then return, crippled with guilt and hangover, and play morosely on the piano for hours. To make matters worse, Kitty had learned of Bullard's pre-existing marriage and his children by another woman. Though she had few qualms about sharing her favours with two men, Kitty was furious when she discovered Bullard was not only a depressing drunk but also a bigamist.

Aware of Kitty's restlessness and hoping to keep her by dint of greater riches, Worth was now laying the groundwork for the most grandiose phase of his criminal career. In addition to

the Clapham mansion, with its tennis courts, shooting gallery and bowling green, he also took apartments in the still more fashionable district of Mayfair, renting a large, well-appointed flat at 198 Piccadilly 'for which he paid £600 a year'. The apartment was just a few hundred yards up the street from Devonshire House at number 74, where the duchess once entertained on such a lavish scale, and is now the Bradford & Bingley Building Society – precisely the sort of business Worth would once have had no hesitation in robbing. From here, with infinite care, Worth began masterminding a series of thefts, forgeries and other crimes.

Using his most trusted associates, he would farm out criminal work, usually on a contract basis and through other intermediaries, to selected men (and women) in the London underworld. The crooks who carried out these commissions knew only that the orders were passed down from above, that the pickings were good, the planning impeccable and the targets – banks, railway cashiers, private homes of rich individuals, post offices, warehouses – selected by the hand of a master-organizer. What they never knew was the name of the man at the top, or even of those in the middle of Worth's pyramid command structure. Thus, on the rare but unavoidable occasions when a robbery went awry, Worth was all but immune, particularly when the judicious filtering of hush money down through the ranks of the organization ensured additional discretion at every level. Ever the control fanatic, Worth established his own form of

omertà by the force of his personality, rigid attention to detail, strict but always anonymous oversight of every operation, and the expenditure of a portion of the profits to ensure, if not loyalty, then at least silence. He was happy to entertain senior underworld figures knowing, like a mafia godfather, that their survival depended on discretion as much as his, but the lesser felons who were his main source of income never knowingly saw his face. Before long the Piccadilly pad became an 'international clearing house of crime'.

Worth's phenomenal success in these years is perhaps best described by the frankly admiring assessment of the Pinkertons, who considered him 'the most remarkable, most successful and most dangerous professional criminal known to modern times'. In an official history published many years later, the detectives recalled that '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 – with complete immunity … His luxurious apartment at 198 Piccadilly, where he received in lavish style … became the meeting place of leading thieves of Europe and America. His home became the rendezvous for noted crooks all over the world, especially Americans, and he became a clearing house or "receiver" for most of the big robberies perpetrated in Europe. In the latter 70s and all through the 80's, one big robbery followed after another; the fine "Italian hand" of Adam Worth could be traced, but not proven, to almost every one of them.'

As another contemporary recorded: 'Crimes in every corner of the globe were planned in his luxurious home – and there, often, the final division of booty was made.' A particular speciality of Worth's gang was stealing registered mail from the strongboxes carried by train and in the cross-Channel steamers. 'One robbery followed another in quick succession … from two to five million francs were abstracted from the mails in this way.' To initiate these robberies Worth relied on his trusted compatriots, preferring reliable American crooks to the more fickle British variety. Finding recruits was not hard, for, as one recorded, 'the West End was full of Americans, bank robbers, safe smashers, forgers, con men and receivers'. Many years later Worth offered this opinion of the British criminal classes: 'There were some men among the Englishmen who were really staunch, loyal fellows and could do good work and take a chance, but the majority of them were a lot of sticks.'

The key figures of the Worth gang included the forgers Joe Chapman and Charles 'the Scratch' Becker, Carlo Sesicovitch, the bad-tempered Russian, and Little Joe Elliott, whenever he could be persuaded to stop chasing chorus girls. To their number was added the imposing figure of Jack 'Junka' Phillips, a vast and vastly stupid burglar, so named on account of his habit of carrying quantities of junk in his coat pockets. He was the only English crook to be admitted to the inner circle, a decision Worth would live to regret. Combining ignorance and treachery in almost equal degrees, Junka was a terrifying figure with a

prognathous chin, long mutton-chop whiskers and a face that might have been carved out of parmesan cheese. A former wrestler, Junka's main attributes were his height (well over six feet), his ferocious visage and colossal strength. He could carry even the largest safe on his back, which could then be broken open at leisure, while his daunting appearance made an excellent deterrent to the overinquisitive. There is a hilarious photograph in the Pinkerton archives of Junka, under arrest some years later, in full evening dress, tied to a post. Like a criminal Samson, Junka is straining at his bonds, his eyes screwed up in fury. The Pinkertons, with rare understatement, labelled the image 'An unwilling photograph'.

The scope of Worth's operations was increased considerably by the purchase of a 110-foot yacht requiring, it was later said, a crew of twenty-five, which he equipped lavishly and then used to ferry his criminal cohorts on a series of foreign expeditions. He named the vessel the *Shamrock,* in honour of his Irish love. In 1874 the gang set off for South America and the West Indies and in a single operation they looted ten thousand dollars from a safe in a warehouse in Kingston, Jamaica, before slipping back out to sea. 'This last exploit would have ended in his capture by a British gunboat which pursued him for twenty miles had his yacht not been a remarkably speedy craft,' said Lyons, who was apparently aboard at the time. The Colonial police in Kingston sent a report of the robbery to the Pinkertons and Scotland Yard. 'Inspector Shore agrees with me this must be Adam Worth,'

William Pinkerton wrote to his brother in New York. The hunch was accurate enough, but without proof they were powerless to pin him down.

The yearning for respectability, for gentlemanly rank, was arguably the single most strongly motivating urge in Victorian society; stronger, even, than the lust to acquire money which was, for many Victorians and certainly for Worth, simply a means to that end. As the philosopher Herbert Spencer noted, 'to be respectable means to be rich'. This was an age of immense snobbery at every level, of intense social consciousness, but also upward (and downward) mobility. A man *could* raise his position in the hierarchy, through work, wealth or good fortune, and, by the governing precepts of the day, he *should*. 'Now that a man may make money, and rise in the world, and associate himself, unreproached, with people once far above him,' wrote John Ruskin some years before, 'it becomes a veritable shame to him to remain in the state he was born in and everybody thinks it is his DUTY to try to be a "gentleman".'

Defining quite what it took to be a gentleman at the various levels of society was rather trickier, since, as Anthony Trollope observed in his autobiography, any attempt to do so was doomed to failure even though everyone would know what was meant by the term. One historian has written that a Victorian gentleman was 'expected to be honest, dignified, courteous, considerate and socially at ease; to be disdainful of trade and … to uphold the tenets of "noblesse oblige". A gentleman paid his gambling debts,

did not cheat at cards and was honourable towards ladies' – all of which qualities Worth displayed to the full, with the sole exception of the first: honesty. Added to this was the general perception that the less obvious industry a man expended and the greater his expenditure, the higher his rank on the social scale. As far as his neighbours and non-criminal associates could tell, Henry Raymond did not a hand's turn of work and spent money at a rate that might have been suspicious had it not been so thoroughly satisfying to the Victorian sense of priorities. As Oscar Wilde ironically observed, 'it is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances'. Worth built himself a shell of glittering wealth and possessions to hide his humble beginnings and crimes, and he remained a sober, even punctilious figure, laying on a lavish dance but watching his creation from one remove, forever an outsider, a prototype for Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby.

With extraordinary ease he slipped into the life of an English gentleman, hosting grand dinner parties in the Mandelbaum tradition in his Piccadilly apartment and his Clapham mansion, both of which were now equipped with 'costly furniture, bric-a-brac and paintings' as well as rare books and expensive china. He mixed as easily with men and women of wealth and fashion as he did with the denizens of London's underworld for, as the head of Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation Department, Sir Robert Anderson, later acknowledged, 'he was a man who could make his way in any company,' effortlessly switching roles from the

rich man of leisure to the criminal mastermind. While he lived like a prince, Worth also seems to have sought to improve his mind and knowledge of culture. 'He became a student of art and literature,' Lyons noted, the better to play his role of man about town, but also out of a genuine interest in the finer things that could be obtained with others' money.

Like any wealthy chap of a sporting disposition, Worth took an interest in the turf and purchased a string of 'ten racehorses, and drove a pair of horses which fetched under the hammer £750'. To his Piccadilly neighbours Worth was a polite and evidently prosperous American, who entertained often and well, and had his suits made in Savile Row. To the frustrated Inspector Shore he was a permanent gall, for Worth always managed to stay a jump ahead by covering his tracks with infinite care and bribing sources within Scotland Yard to keep him abreast of Shore's doings. One account even claims 'he employed a staff of detectives and a solicitor, and his private secretary was a barrister.' To his criminal colleagues Worth was a source of wonder, and regular income, whose largess was legendary: 'When he had money, he was generous to a fault, never let a friend come to him a second time, and held out a helping hand to everybody in distress, whether in his mode of life or no,' one associate later wrote, a view confirmed by the Pinkertons. 'Anybody with whom he had a speaking acquaintance could always come to him and receive assistance, when he had it in his power to give.' In an oblique recognition of his own humble, and

now wholly concealed, beginnings, he only ever stole from those who had money to spare and remained adamant that crime need not involve thuggery: the Pinkertons found it astonishing that 'throughout his career he never used a revolver or jeopardized the life of a victim'.

Perfectly confident in his own abilities to avoid detection, Worth began to take even greater risks and reap ever larger rewards. As he told his followers, 'It's just as easy to steal a hundred thousand dollars as a tenth of that sum … the risk is just as great. We'll, therefore, go out for the big money always.' Many years later the forger Charles Becker was interrogated by the Pinkertons and gave this account of the gang's philosophy. It is worth quoting in full, for it provides important clues to the strange double life of Adam Worth:

If you want to get on quickly you must be rich or you must make believe to be so. To grow rich you must play a strong game – not a trumpery, cautious one. No. No. If in the hundred professions a man can choose from he makes a rapid fortune, he is denounced as a thief. Draw your own conclusions. Such is life. Moralists will make no radical changes, depend on that, in the morality of the world. Human nature is imperfect. Man is the same at the top, the middle or bottom of society. You'll find ten bold fellows in every million of such cattle who dare to step out and do things, who dare to defy all things, even your laws. Do you want to know how to wind up in first place in every struggle? I will tell you. I have traveled both roads and know. Either by the

highest genius or the lowest corruption. You must either rush a way through the crowd like a cannon ball or creep through it like a pestilence. I use the cannon ball method.

In its way, this was a peculiarly Victorian philosophy. Worth was (or considered himself to be) a superior being, equipped with greater resources for the Darwinian struggle for survival, which is, after all, a struggle without morals. Like many Victorians he considered the acquisition of wealth, and the respectability that went with it, to be a worthy goal in itself, but how the money was accumulated was, to Worth, a matter of the most profound indifference. The mere fact that he could dance one step ahead of the Pinkertons and Scotland Yard was proof that he ought to. None knew better than Worth that man is the same at the top, the middle and the bottom of society, for he had visited all three. The morality of the time was a strange, malleable thing: 'They pretended to be better than they were,' as one historian has observed. 'They passed themselves off as incredibly pious and moral; they talked noble sentiments and lived – quite otherwise.' Victorians strove to live outwardly 'good' lives, and made much of the fact, yet they enjoyed behaving 'badly' as much as any other society in any other period of human history. Worth's own code of morality was a stern one, genuinely adhered to. He prided himself on a strict personal regime, abstained from strong drink, rose early, worked hard at his chosen profession, gave to charity and may even have attended church, while he broke every law he could find and enriched himself with the wealth of others. If

Worth held to a set of high-minded convictions that were utterly at variance with his actions, he was by no means alone. He would have enjoyed Wilde's quip in *The Importance of Being Earnest:* 'I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.'

Sober, industrious, loyal, Worth was a criminal of principle, which he imposed on his gang with rigid discipline. With the exception of Piano Charley, drunks were excluded and violence was specifically forbidden. 'A man with brains has no right to carry firearms,' he insisted, since 'there was always a way and a better way, by the quick exercise of the brain'; robberies were to be inflicted only on those who could afford them, and the division of spoils was to be fair. Myriad crooks and hangers-on owed him their livelihoods, yet Worth was no Robin Hood, robbing from the rich to give to the poor. Then again, neither was Robin Hood.

'It was his almost unbroken record of success in getting large amounts of plunder and escaping punishment for crimes that gave the underworld such confidence in him and made all the cleverest criminals his accomplices,' Sophie Lyons concluded.

Worth delighted in his new-found position, elevated in both respectable society and the underworld. Slowly his confidence expanded into hubris. In the mid 1870s he met William Pinkerton again, on this occasion in the Criterion Bar in Piccadilly, a noted meeting place for *flâneurs* and sporting men, but this time Worth felt so secure at the centre of his

criminal network that he could offer the American detective a compliment, while damning his English counterpart, Inspector Shore. The Scotland Yard detective, he said, ‘could thank God Almighty

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.