

JEWELRY STORES ARE MAGNETS FOR THIEVES.

Ruses Resorted to by Various Kinds of Crooks to Steal Precious Stones and Other Valuables and Escape Arrest.

THE very nature of a jeweler's store makes his store a most tempting possibility to the professional or amateur crook, be he the top-hatted, frock-coated individual or the handsomely gowned woman who may stop at a most exclusive hotel, and who endeavor to make their "strike" through deep scheming, or the plain, out-and-out cracksmen.

According to George S. Dougherty, Superintendent of Pinkerton's Agency in New York, crime, as applied to jewelry stores, resolves itself into three divisions, first, thefts committed by employees; second, those committed by customers, including the so-called "kleptos," and third, thefts by professionals. The latter is subdivided into that class called "sneaks" and "pennyweighters," who ply their game by daylight; the "window smashers" and "showcase breakers," who work both day and night, or when the store is closed; the "filmflammer" and "hold-up men," or women, who take advantage of existing conditions; the "yeggmen," who operate on safes and vaults; and, lastly, those who obtain goods under false pretenses by means of worthless checks, drafts, articles sent on "memorandum" or "approval."

Supt. Dougherty, who has had a wide experience with every class of criminal, says that so far as thefts on the "inside"—by employees—are concerned, the sole guard apparently against the evil is for the employer "to know his man or woman." Jewelers must make a careful study of those they employ, just as does a banking institution. They must know their habits and connections long before giving employment, and should continue studying them each and every day. If the habits of any of them become unusual and a sign of dissipation or unnecessary extravagance is noted, there is but one remedy—discharge. Never take a chance. As a matter of fact, however, there are no set rules to guard against dishonesty in the employe, except those established by common sense, coupled closely with the various well-known precautions any able merchant takes for the protection of his stock.

Thefts committed by customers or those belonging to the "klepto" class, said to steal without apparent reason for so doing, are a far more delicate matter for the jeweler to handle, and, sad to relate, the majority of these cases occur with the gentler sex, who, as a rule, give no intelligible reason for their wrongdoing.

In the strictest sense of the word those belonging to this class are not criminals, and cannot be handled as are ordinary thieves. For example, there is the wealthy "klepto," one who has been and is still a regular customer of a store. She is seen to take a diamond pin. The matter is reported to the office. What is the jeweler to do? The woman possibly has been dealing with the store for many years, pays her bills regularly, is of high

standing in the community, perhaps a church member, but the beauty of the pin benumbed her moral sense and she pilfered it.

It is said on good authority that in instances of this nature several of the largest stores in New York and other cities resort to a certain brand of diplomacy. A bill is sent to the individual for the amount of the "purchase," and in most cases the article is paid for without a murmur. In event of the person not being well known an arrest follows a theft, yet subsequent events often show that he or she belongs to the "klepto" class. In any procedure, whether ordering an arrest or sending a bill, the jeweler must be sure of his position, and must reason it out his own way and pursue a course according to the dictates of conscience and business judgment.

And now we come to the interesting proposition of thefts by professionals. Take the "sneak," who robs more jewelry stores every year than does his "yeggman" brother-in-crime. Bolts and bars are apparently useless, for he works by stealth, using his wits and alertness to meet the conditions that confront him. As a rule they all operate on the same general plan. One will have the store under observation until it is ascertained where the loose stones and valuable pieces are kept on display—it may take some days to find this out, but he does so eventually. He studies how the jeweler conducts business—the habits of the clerks and their failings, if they have any.

The "sneaks" generally travel in a party of three or more, enter a store as strangers to one another, and by a pre-arranged plan succeed in getting as many of the clerks as possible engaged in conversation at some point furthest away from where the diamonds and other valuable articles are located. Then the light-footed and deft-fingered member gets into action, makes connection with the wallet, tray of diamond rings, or the safe—frequently left unlocked during the day—secures the booty, and is off like a shot.

As a rule "sneaks" are well dressed—many of them are so well groomed that they might be in a respectable line of business, and some even appear to the manner born. Therefore it behooves every jeweler to be on the qui vive. The employer and salesman should be, according to Supt. Dougherty, students of human nature—able to distinguish between buyers, and under no conditions should more than one customer be waited on at a time, unless all are personally known—well known.

The jeweler must guard against all possible contingencies even to the trial for any unusual get-away on the part of the thief. A store, for example, with but one main exit, the door opening on the inside and with handles on the outside, helps the thief. He has probably studied all this out beforehand, and once in possession of the goods darts through the door, closes it, shoves a walking stick through the handles, and thus firmly secures it. He is on the outside, the clerks on the inside, and while figuring how to get out and give the alarm the crook is "on his way."

The fact is that every time valuable gems or jewelry are shown to strangers a certain risk is run. Many a rare stone has been stolen by the man who comes in a store and asks to be shown some diamonds, rubies, pearls, or whatever the case may be.

The tray or wallet containing them is produced, and the goods once within handling distance the crook's sleight of hand and an innocent wad of chewing gum resting near the under edge of the counter does the rest. The hand is far

quicker than the eye, and without the salesman being aware of it one of the stones finds its way to the gum and sticks there.

No; the prospective customer will not buy this day; he sees no stone to suit him except the one in the gum, so he departs. It is not long before his confederate enters, and on the pretext of buying something—possibly he may buy a trinket of some sort—takes a position near the gum. It requires but a second to get both gum and stone.

The play has been made. If man No. 1, suspected of having stolen something, is followed and even arrested, the stone is not found on him, and there exists only the "circumstances" against him.

Up-to-date jewelers and clerks must be perceptive. They must take particular notice of every stranger who enters the store. A story told by Supt. Dougherty shows how the perceptive quality in a clerk saved a jeweler in Piccadilly, London, the loss of a valuable diamond necklace at the hands of May Gleason, a notorious "pennyweighter."

During the several visits she made to the store she always looked longingly at the diamond necklaces and with the average woman's ever-present delight in the beautiful. All this time, however, she was taking in the minute details of one particular necklace, and from memory had an imitation made in paste dia-

monds, correct enough in every particular to deceive almost any one.

At her final visit, while handling the real ornament she made the change—the imitation for the good—and finally with a sigh, accompanied with the remark that it was "really too high in price," handed a necklace back to the clerk and started to leave the store. The clerk had seen no transposition made, but when the necklace was placed in his hands he noted that the attached tag was of a buff color.

All goods in the store bore white tags and he immediately surmised that something was wrong. It was. The woman was detained and search revealed that she had the original and the clerk's imitation. She had made one fatal mistake—a small one, it is true, but nevertheless costly to her, while the perception of the clerk saved the day and incidentally his job.

The "pennyweighters" are up to all sorts of dodges, ply their game during

rush hours, and only by the greatest care can loss at their hands be prevented. Diamond rings are a favorite plunder and the substitution of paste for real stones their pet scheme. The half-eaten apple scheme is an old one, but even now worked successfully in the smaller cities and towns.

The operator enters a store munching an apple, and while examining uncut stones presses one into the apple, casually saunters to the door, and throws it out. Then he returns and buys a little something. His confederate on the outside gets the apple and the stone. The real thief, if suspected, submits to an examination through a storm of indignant protests, threatens legal action and all that, and finally is allowed to go.

The umbrella-carrying thief is also another one to look out for. It is easy to sweep goods off a counter into its folds, and the alert salesman always keeps his eye open to the stranger who handles a handkerchief while looking over goods, but apparently does not put that article to its natural use.

The jeweler of course stands a fair show against the man he can see, but the "sneak," who secreted himself in the cellar, for example, in order to get at the window display by making an opening through the floor, is quite another proposition. One jewelry store in New York has been robbed in this manner on two occasions, and to frustrate a further attempt a sheet of iron was laid over the window floor.

And now we come to the "window smasher," who, next to the "sneak" is the greatest danger and whose chief operations are carried on during holiday display. Certain precautions can be and are taken to guard against this class.

Many jewelers have found it unwise to mass goods in trays, which enables the thief to seize a large number of pieces with one hand. Most of the valuable pieces in window displays are now kept back out of reach; consequently if the glass is broken, the "grabber" has less opportunity to get the best.

Another precaution used in a store at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-first Street, New York, is an extra plate of glass hung from the ceiling by chains, just inside the window pane, and half a foot from it. The force of a cobble stone thrown might break the outside glass, but its velocity would be spent, and scarcely affect the inner plate glass. Even if it did the thief would have two jagged holes to reach through—a delicate opera-

tion—and would give those in the store an opportunity to reach the scene before the crook got in his work.

Both the "sneak" and the "window smasher" resort to various dodges to take the attention of those in the store from their business. The small dealer especially is open to a number of these dodges. He may be called to the telephone and given a bogus message to step around the corner and "assist a friend who has been taken ill."

He may be called from the store to see some one in a carriage—a Cleveland jeweler, alone in his store, recently lost several thousand dollars' worth of diamonds by responding to a call like this. The thief secured the jewels in less than three minutes.

A fight is always enjoyable to some folks, but the man in the jewelry business—especially if he is alone—should hesitate at being a spectator of one taking place near by in the street. It may be a fake scrap and only started to get him out of his place of business.

And how about the "yeggman"—the safe cracker—that well-educated (in certain ways) and clever criminal, who, according to the police, is the most dangerous because he is the more daring, and does not hesitate to kill when cornered? While some safe manufacturers maintain the vaults they make are proof against the "yegg," the fact still remains that an operator given time enough, will in some way force an entrance to any strong box. There are many jewelers who cannot afford an up-to-date safe, but even if they have one and retire for the night feeling perfectly confident that the stock is secure because "it is in the safe," have no sound basis for their reasoning.

William A. Pinkerton on the "yeggman" question explains that the man sent ahead to obtain information as to the "jay" is called the "gray cat," and is usually a graduate tramp, selected because of his innocent appearance.

Possibly he may appear in the guise of a drummer. At any rate, it takes him but a short time to ascertain what he wants to know and reports to the "brains," who frames up the visit.

Most "yeggs" now operate on safes with the aid of nitroglycerine, and in some cases dynamite is used. There are usually three men on the job—two of them who do the actual work on the vault, and the third, the "straw man," as he is called, who watches on the outside to intimidate any interfering citizen, or to give the alarm at the approach of an officer.

The highest-class of "yegg" are those known as "combination manipulators," who carry no tools but depend upon their acute hearing and delicacy of touch to get the safe door open. There are only three or four such men in the country, and unless they are caught on the premises an operation made by them is generally put down as an "inside" job.

It is within the past decade that "yeggmen" have called electricity to their aid in making "breaks." This is done by using an electric light wire, the current burning a hole through the metal near the combination plate, which permits the lock to be picked quite readily. A recent report from United States Consul Norton, stationed at Chemnitz, Germany, tells how a safe was entered by an entirely new method.

Means of absolute protection against the "yeggmen" are indeed a difficult problem and yet unsolved. It may be all very well for the merchant or jeweler to say, "Well, they won't get me," or claim that burglar alarms give excellent protection. The former is a fallacy and the latter an uncertainty. Alarms are easily "fixed," and then, too, they must be inspected quite as regularly as you lock your safe door.

It is said that fear of the law makes many individuals good. This may be the reason that the visits of the crook in general have been growing less each year, so far as jewelry stores are concerned, but it is said in the trade that the moral effect, to a degree, is due to the organization of the Jewelers' Security Alliance of New York. Most jewelers are members of this association, and if a loss is experienced it makes every effort to locate and punish the guilty party. The man or woman under suspicion will be followed relentlessly for months or years, if necessary, and the average crook of to-day knows perfectly well there is no compromise.