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**Expert Crook And Robber
Extraordinary Career of David Lewis, the
Dashing Desperado.**

Tales of the Pennsylvania Terror

**Daring Operations in the Keystone and Adjoining States – His Wife's
Fondness for Lace Gets Him into Trouble**

The Astors in New York have long been the object of the attempts of sharpers and thieves to get at some of their property and belongings. Ever since the time when the original John Jacob began to be known as a millionaire fur merchant down to the period of the harpies who now flock around his young descendant of the same name, the family has been marked out scores of times for blackmailers or plunderers, or adventurers on the search for weaknesses. One of the great sensations in New York in the days of the original Astor, relates the Philadelphia Bulletin, was the robbery of his wife by a celebrated Pennsylvania rogue, whom the Philadelphia authorities regarded for years as the most desperado thief and highwayman in the state. Known as Lewis the Robber, David Lewis being his full name, this man, when he hardly more than passed beyond the years of his youth he was a terror throughout southern Pennsylvania as a purse-lifter, marauder and counterfeiter, and to this day in some of the old towns of the Cumberland and the Juniata valley are preserved tales and traditions of his terrible prowess. There may be found near Carlisle a subterranean retreat known still as Lewis' cave, into which he made his escape when he broke out from the barracks in which General James Wilkinson had imprisoned him after having commuted a death sentence condemning him to death for desertion from the army.

Expert In Criminal Practices.

Lewis was a dashing and handsome fellow of unqualling pluck, liked by women and having some of the external bearing of a gentleman. He was able to pass himself off, to use the phrase of his day, as a "true dandy." There was not a trick in the criminal profession of which he did not believe himself to be a master. His robbery of Mrs. Astor in a Broadway bazaar of a reticule containing thousands of dollars' worth of her finest French laces and elegant jewelry was accomplished largely by the ease and grace with which he was able to move among the fashionable women in the emporium without exciting suspicion. His career in New York was the result of his flight from Carlisle, and it is interesting now to glance back upon it for a moment as an illustration of the fact that the police of New York and Philadelphia in those good old days had to grapple with crime and criminals not less formidable than those which are sometimes supposed to be products in this country of these latter days only.

Lewis was one of the ruling spirits in a gang of thieves, counterfeiters and desperadoes of New York and Philadelphia who had their headquarters in Pearl street. They were regularly organized as an association, governed by rules, rigidly enforced, for the collection, reception and division of spoils. According to Lewis' confession a bank was not under a stricter code or system of

managements. The rules of the band were written on parchment in blood drawn from the veins of the members as they knelt in a circle around a basin into which the ruddy drops of the fluid of life fell, and before which they pledged their fidelity to one another in a solemn oath. They had a president, a board of directors, a cashier and a teller, who acted precisely as the managers of a financial institution would in the administration of the stock on hand. Its conversion into cash, and its allotment as dividends. These were declared once a week after a special committee had been appointed to examine the contents of the "vault" and make report to a general meeting of the company. It was the duty of each man to contribute everything he stole to the depository, and when Lewis brought in the Astor finery and jewelry there was much rejoicing.

How The Trouble Began.

But the attraction of a beautiful piece of lace was too much for Lewis' young wife to resist, and she appealed to him to present it to her. This came to the ears of the board of directors of the Pearl street bank. It was a gross violation of the rules of the concern. It was tantamount to treason. "Concealing goods" was one of the highest crimes against the establishment, and Lewis was put on trial, found guilty, punished with an unmerciful beating and probably expelled.

It was at this time when he came to Philadelphia and formed a daring plot against Stephen Girard. The merchant, banker and millionaire was then approaching the height of his fame in commerce and finance. He was the richest man in Philadelphia; he was at the head of the principal bank; the wharves were lined with his ships and the government leaned on him and Astor and Jacob Barker the grandfather of Wharton Barker for loans as it does in these times on Pierpont Morgan and the Belmonts. His wife had long been in an insane asylum. Lewis' scheme was, through the romance of his own spouse, to entice the magnate out of the city into some quiet house, and then compel him to sign a check for \$25,000 as the price of his freedom. It seems that the illness of Mrs. Lewis prevented the execution of this outrage, which, by the way, was only one of several audacious plots that scoundrels conceived against Girard in the last thirty years of his life. Lewis also meditated another great stroke against the United States bank, on Third direct, opposite Dock. It was to enter the sewer on Dock street, and tunnel to the vaults, but was probably never attempted.

A Bullet Ended His Career.

In subsequent years, Lewis the robber, returned to his native heath in southern Pennsylvania, breaking banks, holding up travelers and counterfeiting. At last the authorities of Somerset county succeeded in having him put in prison for ten years, but it was not long before Governor Findlay was induced to pardon him, whereupon he began a fresh career of criminal exploits, which finally were halted for good in Center county. A sheriff's poise pursued him into a swamp, a bullet was fired into his shoulder and he died in the jail at Bellefonte, when only 30 years of age, refusing to take the chance of saving his life by an amputation of his arm.

It was when in the Bellefonte Jail that his career was associated with one of these pieces of tricky politics which seventy years ago were oven more common than they are today. James Duncan, a managing politician and shrewd lawyer of the time, was interested in securing the defeat of Governor Findlay for re-election. He induced Lewis in his cell to dictate to him a confession of

his life. The episode of the pardon was so artfully and suggestively treated by Duncan as to convey to the reader the impression that the governor was responsible for Lewis' crimes after the pardon. The confession of the outlaw, with Duncan's handiwork in it, was circulated in thousands of pamphlets in the counties which the outlaw had terrorized. It produced a reaction against Findlay, and to it was ascribed the chief cause of his defeat at the election. At any rate, the real author of the pamphlet was appointed auditor general by Joseph Holster when he took the gubernatorial chair as beneficiary of the trick in Lewis' name. This pamphlet is one of the rarest curiosities in the political literature of the state. It is a striking illustration how politics and crime blended together in these much-vaunted good old days.

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