

Selected Matter.

USELESS LOOKS.

HOW AN EXPERT CAN OPEN THE MOST INTRICATE COMBINATIONS IN EXISTENCE.

"Locks? Locks won't keep burglars out. Why, I can open any lock that has ever been invented, without key or combination." The speaker was a close-shaved, clear-cut, penetrating-looking man. He stood in a locksmith's shop on four-and-one-half street, dangling the dial of a combination lock on the end of a bent wire.

"They open if he looks at 'em," said a youth, who stood by interestedly examining the bits of broken locks, old keys, drills, and odds and ends of wire, brass and steel which were scattered about the shop. The sign in front of the door read "Practical Locksmith and Safe-opener."

"Do you make a practice of breaking open safes?" asked the Star man.

"I open safes when nobody else can," replied the smith, giving the scribe a keen, inquiring look, which might have opened him had he been a lock. "That is, I open safes when the locks are out of order or the combinations lost. Sometimes a man will oil the lock of his safe and it gets gummed up so that the tumblers won't work, and he can't get it open. Some men are forgetful and lose their combination. Safes are sold at Sherriff's sale sometimes, and, the owner being mad, won't give up the combination. When anything of that kind happens they send for me.

"Do you blow them open?"

"No. If the lock is broken so that it won't work I drill a little hole alongside the dial and pick the lock with a small bit of wire. If the lock is all right, only the combination is lost, I go to work work to find it and don't deface the safe at all. It takes me from three seconds to six hours to open a safe, according to the kind and the method I employ."

"But how can you find the combination? Does it not take a long time?"

"By testing. As to time, it depends upon circumstances. If I know the man who set the combination I can find it in a very few minutes. If I don't it takes me longer. You see I study the character of the man. If I know him pretty well I can strike his combination through his character. When a stranger comes to me to say he has lost his combination I make a study of him, and in nine cases

out of ten I can hit it the second or third trial. But if he did not set the combination himself it is more difficult. Then I study the lock instead of the man, and I am sure to get it open in a few hours. Oh, no! It wouldn't do to tell you how. Safe openers are dangers in a community. They are always watched by the police. They keep an eye on me all the time. I have them trying my door all hours of the night, and there's generally one somewhere around. No, I couldn't teach you to open safes. But you might not find it easy to learn. There is a kind of association between me and locks—an understanding, as it were. We have the same way of thinking."

"Could you open the burglar proof time-lock?" I asked.

"I can open the best lock that was ever made in five or six hours. These little office safes I wouldn't put that much time on. They don't pay enough. I just take a hammer and break the knob off, and can get into the safe in about three seconds."

"What do you get for opening a safe?"

"For a little three-second safe I get \$10. For larger safes, like they have in banks and brokers' offices, and where they don't want the lock injured, I get \$250."

"Could you open the great safe in the United States treasury?"

"Easily. I could get rid of the time lock and everything in six or seven hours, and wouldn't make any particular fuss about it either. No safe was ever made but it had some weak point known to the maker, so he could get into it in case the lock should fail to respond. If there wasn't they would have to break the concern, all to pieces if the lock broke. Now, I know where to find these weak places. I can strike within a quarter of an inch of it every time. It is generally covered over by a thin sheet of steel or boiler iron, and by cutting away a block three or four inches, which is easily done, I could drill into the best safe that has ever been made. It would not be any trouble for burglars to get into the treasury safe if they understood locks as I do."

"Has your knowledge of locks ever got you into any trouble with the police?"

"No, not seriously, though, as I say, they always watch me. Down in Oil City, though, I created quite an alarm one night, and came near being captured as a

burglar. Some fellows got to tampering with the safe in a large hardware store here, and somehow got the combination changed so that no one knew how to open it. The proprietor sent for me, and I told him I could open it, but as I was quite busy I should have to wait until evening. I closed my shop a little after dark, and went over to the store and got to work on the job. I had been working a couple of hours, when somebody banged at the door and called for me to surrender without resistance if I did not want to be shot. The proprietor was fortunately in the store at the time, and opened the door. There was a squad of policemen armed, and the house was completely surrounded, so I could not escape. The patrolman had seen me at work on the safe and gone off and roused the town, and the whole police force had been called out to surround the building. The proprietor explained, and I went on with my job."

"But locks don't do much good against experts," he continued. "A gang of burglars would find no trouble in robbing the treasury. It is strange they have never attempted it. As to ordinary locks, I could take an ordinary case-knife or a piece of stiff wire and open every door on the avenue from the capitol to the treasury. And it would not take me much longer than a couple of seconds. I can open any trunk by simply a little tap with a hammer, and won't injure the lock in the least. If you forget your combination come in."—*Exchange*.

SEA SHELLS AND THEIR INHABITANTS.

Wonderful and beautiful as the shells look, they are after all only the used up homes of the still more astonishing things that lived within them and grew out of them. What marvel of nature is there that excels, for instance, the nautilus shell, and yet how much more interesting is the cuttle fish creature that made it, adding room after room, and walling up the old one it had left. It lived three hundred fathoms under the sea upon little crabs and lobsters, and was itself one day murdered by an old one, its beautiful house burglariously entered, and its body dragged out. Lying on the ocean bed, comfortably attached to a piece of coral, it probably spread out its arms, as the anomones about it were doing, and waited there in the green twi-