

THE THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

2^d



The Crook CRUSADERS

BY
GWYN EVANS

*Gripping
long Novel
of Sinister
Mystery*

THE CROOK



Leveling his automatic and grunting the receiver to his ear, Inspector New Hattened acidity to the croaker's orders which were intended for the baffled crooks gathered round the table.

Chapter I. GHOSTS OF THE GREY DAWN.

Not this blossom' stretch is over,
No more slabs o' stuff for me,
No more cans o' watered stuff,
No more margarine for tea.

Clasher Coker, that melodious man, raised his voice in a rhapsodical song as he polished for the last time the studs of his cell and looked approvingly at his battered face reflected in the shining surface of a tin mug.

It was the dull grey hour before the dawn, and the Clasher was up betimes. It was very quiet and still in his bare cell at Pottersworth Street, save for the little convict's timeless tenor raised in a rithful jodely.

The Clasher had got up early for the best of all possible reasons. It was the morning of his release from his fifth logging, and music seemed indicated.

He glanced round the bare square room in which he had spent the greater part of the last year. He would have no regrets at leaving, and, to show his contempt for authority, he spat very solemnly as a ritual in the four corners of his cell.

Again he raised his voice in song. Sweet memory of his war service had come back to him.

"When I get my civvie clothes on,
Oh, how 'appy I shall be—"

"Now then, stop that noise!" called a peremptory voice from the corridor outside, and the flap which covered the Judge hole in the steel door of his cell was suddenly raised.

A grey eye, unostentatiously magnified, glowered at Clasher Coker.

"Now, then, sit, not so much o' it!" cautioned the warden.

The Clasher's battered face twisted into an ugly grimace. In an hour's time he would be free. Only an hour to go. It would be a pity to spoil it by back chat, and he gulped down the angry retort that rose to his lips.

Came a jingle of keys, and the door of his cell opened. The "serge" entered and scanned the cell perfectly.

"All right, 407," he said. "step lively. We'll find your suit at the tailor's. Get into line, and mind, no talkin'."

The Clasher nodded. He had long been trained to oblige, and he obeyed the warden automatically. He passed along the dark grey corridor of the yard, and a dozen pairs of jaquise eyes watched his passage.

"Good old Clasher! Give my love to the old Bull and Bush," called a hoarse voice from behind a steel grille.

"Fetch us in some stout!" next time you come in!" said another.

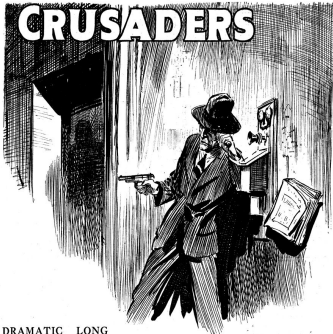
"Stop that talking, there!" snapped the warden mechanically.

The Clasher grinned. He had been very careful on this logging, and not blushed his copy-book. He had earned three months' remission, and his conduct sheet was marked "V.G."

The formalities were soon over, only remaining the final interview with the prison governor.

There were very few convicts having that meeting, he found. He would not leave the prison entirely penniless, and his mouth watered with delight. The first thing he would do, once outside those grey gates,

CRUSADERS



DRAMATIC LONG
NOVEL OF ACTION
AND GRIPPING
MYSTERY

By *Gwyn Evans*

would be to catch a train for Mr. Shapiro's, that benevolent lady, whose "good pull-up for carmen" was the means of all released lags.

It was a chill and misty morning. A few curious idlers loitered against the dark prison walls waiting for the gates to open. They spoke in whispers, a grey and melancholy little group dressed in dingy and nondescript clothes. They had a furtive, shifty air about them. One or two pale-faced women shivered and drew their tattered shawl about their thin shoulders.

Suddenly a glittering limousine appeared round the bend of the road, and a stir of interest swept over the little crowd.

In the morning mist their figures were amorphous, like grey ghosts of the dawn

against the dreary background of the goal.

"Lansky, 'ole pair' 'ome wiv the tiffs!" muttered a round-faced little man with an admiring glance at the magnificent saloon car which had drawn up near the prison gates.

The chauffeur, an immobile figure in bottle-green livery, stood woodenly ahead of him.

Meanwhile the Clinker grinned cheerfully at himself in a fly-blown mirror, as he dozed the waistcoat and jacket of his "giveie" suit, sodily frayed and crumpled after its long incarceration in storage. He was the last of the batch of released prisoners. The governor had spoken a few kindly adjutatory words, and in a few moments he would step out to freedom.

The assistant chief warden, a grizzled-haired man, patted the Clinker on his broad shoulders.

"Well, good-bye, Coke, mind you don't come back again," he admonished.

"I'll see that I don't," said the Clinker stoutly. "It was sheer bad luck and carelessness that got me here, Mr. Williams. I swear to you that I was—"

"Yes, yes," broke in the assistant warden gruffly. "You all say that."

He had grown used to the protestations of injured innocence throughout the years.

The Clinker grinned. "I don't mean as 'ow I were innocent," he said with a touch of bravado. "I were just blamed foolish. Quit the crook game!" he chuckled as if at a huge joke. "Set us yer

his, I don't. Next time I'll be on Easy Street."

"You're a fool, Clinker," said the waiter.

Clinker Coke ran a finger abstractedly over his chin.

"The folks 'ave been at this suit," he said in an aggrieved tone. "An', d'ney, yer might 'ave seen as 've this blissy was 'round. I'm hankin' at the Carlton today."

"Run along—and remember what I've told you," rejoined the waiter.

"So long," returned the Clinker. "See yer on the Christmas tree—but not this week."

With an airy wave of his hand, he quitted the walls of Pentonville Prison for ever.

"Coke!" said a voice, as the gates clanged behind him.

The Clinker halted suddenly. Before him at the kerb a Belle-Bayon parred. In the cushioned box was set a grey-haired man clad in a dove grey suit. His countenance was curiously pallid. Beneath his high intellectual forehead and bushy brows, his strongly coloured eyes were piercing and compelling—the eyes of a man born to command. They were agate green in hue, with something of that stone's cold hardness.

"Well, well," said the Clinker absently with an approving glance at the colour. "If this isn't a bit of all right!"

"Come here, Coke!"

The man in the boxman lifted a gloved hand and crooked his finger. Clinker Coke hesitated. With a touch of bravado, for the edification of the interested onlookers, he said:

"I suppose you're from the Prisoners' Aid Society, or the Salvation Army? Much obliged, but I've no intention of runnin' straight. Chappin' up 'sweated an' scortin' out newspapers don't appeal for me. Besides, my own liberality'll be around in a minute or two."

He made a pretence of glancing at his wrist-watch, and, with an exaggerated accent, said:

"Oukind! Alphas! I told him to be here at seven-thirty prompt!"

The white-faced man frowned.

"Get—im—side," he hinted stiffly, and swung open the boxman door.

For the first time the Clinker saw him clearly.

He gave a violent start.

"Oo-humny, it's yes, is it? Blissy, I didn't recognize yer, Farrow!"

"Get in, worse you!" said the other, in strongly unceremonious language.

The Clinker's mouth felt suddenly puckered, and a gleam of fear appeared in his stifty eyes.

Without another word, he entered the boxman. The other man lifted the opening-curtain.

"Bastimee Glad," he said surprisingly.

The chauffeur nodded, and the great grey car glided through the morning mist.

THE CURIOSITY OF KID DROPPER.

It was the insatiable curiosity of Kid Dropper that first revealed to an innumerable world the existence of that enigmatical individual known as "The Blinder."

If the Kid had not stayed for a "blinder" at a respectable hostelry, the Goat and Buckin, Dr. Charles Kronin would still be an ornament of the Buckinghamshire Bench, and the bones of his sanctity wife would have remained undisturbed in Aylesden churchyard.

That final drink of the Kid's was fatal. It was, incidentally, his favorite tipple—a mixture of gin and beer, known to the initiated as "dog's nose." It was destined

long afterwards to affect the lives of many men, and at least three women. It was responsible for the premature progress of Mr. Hector MacPherson, and cost Bismarck Bruce, the crime reporter of the "Daily Flash," many sleepless nights.

Detective-inspector Nicholas Kew, who was fond of speculating on obscure crimes, and whose hobby was fantastic statistics, compiled that the Kid's stuporous drink cost in the long run as many Treasury notes as, placed and to end, would stretch from London to Brighton.

Of that the reader may judge by its appointed place. The first act in the drama that was to take such sinister and far-reaching results, that was to establish a reign of terror in England and plunge Scotland Yard itself into chaos, opened shortly before eleven o'clock at that abandoned disreputable hostelry, the Goat and Buckin.

To its regulars it was known simply as Fick's place. The estimable Mr. Fick had a varied and interesting clientele, which consisted mainly of crooks and detectives. It was here, and at Mr. Shapperton's, in Covent Garden, that the convicts made for immediately after their release, in the assurance that they would meet old friends, rather of the same profession as belonging to the police.

Scotland Yard tolerated Fick's place. It was easier to have one or two joints where the crook fraternity could fraternize, than to have them, if they irretrievably did, then to close up such delicious rendezvous and scatter the queer folk who infest the muddy waters of the underworld.

Kid Dropper, a petter opener of reports, was normally an abstemious man, but tonight he was celebrating the successful landing of a suburban post office in North London. He was flush—and flushed.

When the above Mr. Fick roused out "Time!"—the Kid insisted on a final blinder. The landlady insisted on a final blinder. He landed himself up, and stretched a point. Unfortunately, the Kid drank his liquor down too swiftly, with the result that his home-made-beer journey was erratic, and to use the expressive nautical metaphor, he sailed home in the night breeze, "three sheets in the wind."

He found himself, for no apparent reason, some time later seated on the steps of a modest fronted brown stone house in Duke Street.

He blinked stupidly, and found that he was clutching something cold and hard. It felt like a bottle, and he contemplated as he raised it dully to his lips.

He swore softly as he realized that it was an empty milk bottle he had been nursing. He lurched to his feet.

Somewhere a distant clock chimed two.

Kid Dropper shivered. He was cold, porridge, and still a little dazed. The night was very quiet. The usual traffic had died down, only the hum of a belated taxi disturbed the quietude of Duke Street.

Kid stretched the rattings and blinked feebly towards the parties. It would be an easy matter, he reflected, to slip up with the aid of a convenient stack-pipe and have a "look see," but he shook his head mournfully. He wasn't feeling quite steady enough.

It was at that moment that he heard the purr of an advancing motor-car. Instinctively he crouched back in the shadows. The limousine drew up within a few yards of him, and the Kid watched from his vantage point.

He drew in his breath sharply. In the yellow rays of the street lamp he recognized the short, stocky figure of the liveried chauffeur as he hurried down to open the boxman door.

He whistled softly.

"Stretch, it's the Clinker!"

He recognized an old prison chum of his whom he had not seen for over two years.

"New wet the door in the Clinker's game?" he muttered, as he saw the other open the door with a flourish and stand respectfully in attention.

The next moment all curiosity regarding the Clinker had given way to astonishment as he saw the tall figure that descended from the car.

It was that of a man in full evening dress with a stiff-lined opera cloak hanging in graceful folds from his shoulders. But it was not the sartorial magnificence that brought the gasp to the Kid's lips. It was the fact that the stranger's face was masked by a deep white domino.

There was something bizarre about that white mask beneath the black opera hat.

The Clinker closed the door of the car while White Mask rapidly mounted the steps of the house and inserted a key in the lock.

"That'll be all, Coke," Kid heard him say. "I shan't need you any more tonight, but stand by the 'phone in case I have a call in the morning."

The Clinker touched his cap, took his seat at the steering-wheel, and drove off.

The Kid's curiosity was aroused. Had the Clinker unlocked the anchor, he wondered, using the crook's expressive idiom for going straight? It was hardly like the Clinker. Who was the guy in the white mask? He looked one of the up and ups.

There was still enough alcohol left in the Kid's system to make him wobbly. He glanced up at the parlor again, and a sudden decision came to him. The "look see" promised to be interesting.

He peered cautiously to right and left of Duke Street. There was not a soul to sight. In the distance the ruby glow of the limousine's tail lamp grew faint, and vanished.

"Here goes!" said the Kid.

He carefully replaced the mask with milk bottle on the step, and, with the agility of a monkey, hoisted himself up by the aid of the stack-pipe to the top of the pillared parlor. A little breathless, he passed. An oblong of yellow light appeared suddenly in a window to the left.

He had no very clear idea what he was going to do. Curiosity had always been the Kid's besetting sin. Was White Mask a crook, or was he a great buck from one of those fancy dress masked dances, or something?

The house looked as if it contained valuables. The Kid crouched down on the parlor and waited, debating with himself as to his next move.

After five minutes, very restlessly he lifted his hand and tried the catch of an oval window above the porch. He noticed there was no burglar alarm. He glanced over his shoulder to the left, and saw a shadow on the blind. It was that of a man taking off his collar and tie.

The Kid grimaced to himself.

"E'll be in by-here soon, an' then—"

He composed himself to wait. Ten minutes passed, then suddenly the light was extinguished. The Kid waited another seven minutes before making a move, then very cautiously he withdrew a peculiar thin-bladed knife from his pocket. With the ease born of long practice, he unlocked back the hump of the oval window, and, flushing on a minute electric lock, saw that it gave on to a landing.

He dropped, somehow as a cat, on his rubber-soled shoes, and listened intently.

Kid Dropper was a practiced hand. His first object was to secure a means of escape.

Softly he tiptoed downstairs, and found himself in a narrow passageway, in which two doors, leading to a kitchen and small sitting-room, were situated.

He came further down beyond which gave on to an unshaded yard, and, with a suppressed shriek, he drove back the lamp. All was set for his prey if it came to a show-down.

Very slowly he proceeded the stairs again. The house was intensely still. Evidently White Mask had retired for the night.

With great precaution Kid Dropper turned the knob of a door and pushed it his level. He saw a comfortably furnished study. A dying fire flickered in the grate illuminating the gold bindings on the book-shelves, and a massive steel safe set in an alcove in one corner of the room.

The croak's eyes sparkled. He noticed that there was a second door between the book-shelves, and he tiptoed towards it and very gingerly turned the handle.

Suddenly he started back with an oath, and his face went ashen as a dazzling flash of light temporarily blinded him.

Facing him, half-dressed in shirt and trousers, was the figure of a man in a white mask. In his hand there glinted a square, ugly automatic. His voice came crisply:

"Up with them—quick!"

The menacing round butt of the gun ordered Kid Dropper instantly. He licked his dry lips and glanced round like a cornered rat. The room was evidently a dressing-room, he noted unconsciously, judging by the six-sided beveled mirror above a wash-basin and dressing-table and the wardrobe crammed with miscellaneous clothes.

Sheepishly he raised his hands to the ceiling, and his mind worked quickly. He had earned his sobriquet because of his speed and strength in dropping not only on his feet but anyone who came up against him. It was a bit difficult, however, to adopt his usual tactics, rendered by that unswerving automatic.

He transported.

"All right, guv'ner, it's a cop. Send me, I wouldn't 'ave done it if it 'adn't—"

"Ah, spare me the usual whining story of a large wife and larger family," snarled the other.

Behind the slit of his white mask his eyes glittered hard and malignant.

"Your name is Dropper, is it not?" continued White Mask. "You served three years' penal servitude for robbery with violence."

"I—!" stammered the unhappy croak.

"Don't lie!" snarled the other. "Then, suddenly changing his tone: "Who put you up to this?" he demanded harshly.

"No tricks now, and remember I can drop you where you stand and the law won't touch me."

The Kid's jaw sagged.

His cunning brain strove to cope with the situation. If he got lagged this time it would mean five years' P.D. as a habitual criminal on top of the sentence for burglary. It was a desperate risk, but Kid Dropper took it.

"That's right, guv'ner," he said, shrugging his shoulders with assumed carelessness. "I shan't 'oo you are, but—"

Like a coiled spring released, he leapt suddenly and swiftly forward. One hand clutched the other's right wrist. So sudden was his movement that White Mask was taken for an instant off his guard.

The Kid thrust out a knee behind the other's legs, and his left hand clutched for the other's throat. He miscalculated, however. His fingers caught the mask, and it was ripped from the other's features.

With an oath, the man grappled desperately with Kid Dropper. Suddenly the Kid plumped the face that had been hidden beneath the mask, and his blood turned to ice.

"My heaven!" he gasped. "It's—it's—"



His curiosity aroused, The Kid hoisted himself to the top of the pillared portico of the master croak's house.

He could not faith the sentence. Panic gripped him as he saw the horror which the mask had hidden.

"Yes, my friend," laughed the other. "You are the first and last person who has pierced the Blacker's secret. You can carry your knowledge with you."

"Plop!"

Came a dull muffled report of an automatic equipped with a silencer, an acid smell of burning cordite, and Kid Dropper dropped for the last time and lay very still on the Persian rug.

The Blacker gazed down at the corpse, then coolly stepped over to the dressing-table. From it he took up half a dozen sheets of white blotting-paper. He was very fond of that Persian rug.

MR. SINNEY IS DELIGHTED.

P. C. WILKIN buttoned the flap of his citizen cap and continued his leisurely patrol of Mutton Common. It was a cold and drizzly morning, and the constable, who was young and disinclined, collected bitterly that Gilbert's famous dictum about a policeman's lot was grossly understated.

The rain trickled in annoying rivulets

from his helmet as he strode manfully out the damp grass of the common. He halted suddenly by a gorse bush whose yellow flowers were a gay and gaudy challenge to the grey drizzle. It was not, however, the aesthetic value of the gorse bloom that arrested P.-. Willis, but the glimpse of a very strong iron-bound book with a copper rather oak and a tawny red cap protruding from the base of the leaves.

The constable strode towards it. It was not likely that some tramp was enjoying the amenities of the common in that drizzly drizzle, and the book looked too new and expensive, in any case, to belong to a vagrant.

P.-. Willis stooped down—then gasped.

He saw what the gaudy-crowned game hid—It was the body of a man clad in an inconspicuous suit of navy blue. Judging by the condition of the sudden suit—and other things—the body had been lying there for some time.

P.-. Willis pushed back the prickly branches of the gorse and approached slightly. The dead man's face was almost unrecognizable. He rubbed his chin reflectively, and a moment later he momentarily "photograph" of a police whistle whirled through the rain.

He pulled out his notebook and scrawled it as best he could beneath his citizen cap. Slowly his fat fingers traversed the pages, and, half an hour later, a silent man in that gynn, barrack-like building on the Thames Embankment, Scotland Yard, pulled out Kid Dropper's dossier and wrote upon it the laconic word:

Deceased.

Inconceivable as fate, and as paradoxical, was the work of the silent man in charge of C.R.O. Howe was recorded patiently, week after week, year after year, the misdoings of those who fell foul of the law. Even death did not cancel his labours. The word "deceased" on the last file did not always mean the end of the story, and in the case of Kid Dropper it was not an end, but a beginning.

Maybe, the satirical man in charge of the Criminal Record Office, replaced Kid Dropper's dossier in the file and drew another bulky pile of half-bound documents towards him.

They chattered, in dry, unimpaired English, the life and adventures of one, Dorothy Delane, whose real name, Amelia Midge, the casual records had hastily printed in block letters.

Unemotionally Maybe wrote: "Sentenced to twelve months, Holloway." And added the date.

He looked up as a tall, broad-shouldered young man with a bronzed, clean-shaven face and merry blue eyes entered the silence of that room of dusty and hastily compiled biographies.

"Hello, New!" said Maybe.

L. C. DOUTHWAITE

has written one of his most enthralling yarns for you next week. Many weird mysteries surround

"THE HOUSE OF DEATH."

Read of them in this gripping tale next week
in

The THRILLER

and opened a new life. It was destined shortly to become very exciting.

Mr. Daniel Dibeay sat back in his velvet chair at his mahogany desk in his austere furnished office in Southampton Row. He was a tall, dark man, with graying hair, a handsome, if sorrow face. He was dressed in sombre black, and he wore a high stock collar and neatly-pressed black trousers, which gave him a vaguely clerical appearance.

He glanced for a moment at the portrait over the finely-carved mantelpiece. It was an oil painting of the Bishop of Lychester, a relative of Mr. Dibeay.

The room was furnished with excellent taste, although there was something faintly ecclesiastical about the carved paneling and the really excellent davenport above Mr. Dibeay's desk.

He was a well-preserved man on the right side of forty, and few people would have guessed from his appearance that he was the head of "Dibeay's Ltd., Detectives with Discretion," as his black-headed newspaper expressed it.

The elegant Mr. Dibeay was wont to comb to his privileged clients that he had been originally intended for the church, but circumstances over which he had no control had interfered with his ecclesiastical career.

It was a bright spring morning, and the sunlight streamed through the window of his office, lending an added lustre to the host of yellow daffodils on his desk.

From an adjoining room came the tapping of a typewriter, and Mr. Dibeay glanced lazily as he opened his correspondence. He polished his old-fashioned gold-rimmed pince-nez, and adjusted them on his cold aquiline nose.

A tap sounded on the frosted panel which separated his office from the clerk's, and his secretary, a trimly-garbed young woman in black, entered with a visiting-card.

Mr. Dibeay smiled.

"Good-morning, Miss Norris, I hope you are better?" he said in his somber voice.

He glanced at the card, which bore the name "Sir Frederick Jessell, Bart."

"Ah, please show him in," said Mr. Dibeay.

A moment or two later the girl ushered in a tall spare man with a lined, delicate face and a moustache that was fast turning gray.

He had a gentle voice, which he seldom raised above a whisper.

"I see the Dropper's got his."

Inspector Nicholas New, of the C.I.D., balanced himself precariously on the edge of Maylew's desk.

He was the youngest inspector at Scotland Yard, and it was said of him that he was a greater mystery than anything police headquarters had been called upon to solve. No one quite knew whether to take Nick seriously or not. His methodic methods scandalized his superiors, but as he achieved results he was seldom censured.

When, after the Armistice, Flight-lieutenant Nicholas New, B.F.C., had been demobbed, a mere strapping of twenty, he assumed to his scandalized family that he intended to join the police force. He did so, and served two years as a uniformed constable, until the smart capture of one Wally the Dip attracted the attention of his superiors, who transferred him to the plain clothes branch. His next promotion was rapid, and his brilliant work in running to earth that ruthless criminal, the Crusader, had vindicated him in the eyes of his most jealous superiors.

Maylew folded up the dossier of Miss DeLisle and replaced it in the cabinet.

"Anything I can do for you?" he inquired.

Nick nodded.

"Yes. Know anything about the Blacker?"

Maylew scratched his thin, beaky nose with the end of his penholder.

"The Blacker?" he repeated, and pressed an ivory ball-point. "Not under that name, of course, but let's have a look."

A uniformed constable entered.

"Fetch me File 1234," he ordered.

Nick grunted.

"Are you falling back on the old media spread or identification, is he made?"

Maylew nodded as in a few moments the young constable returned with a pile of envelopes.

"Where does the Blacker come in?" he queried over his shoulder.

Nicholas New drew out his cigarette-case and proffered it to the presiding deity of receipts. Maylew declined it with a shake of his head, and, lighting up, Nick gave him a terse account of the finding of Kid Dropper.

"The divisional sergeant says he's been dead at least a week," he announced. "He was shot by a 28 Derringer at close range. There's no bullet."

"Mhm?" said Maylew. "Bullet talk. What about the Blacker?"

"This," said Nick. He placed before Maylew a limp, sodden piece of pasteboard about the size of a visiting-card. On it was printed in waterproof Indian ink:

"Fisher—"

"It was signed simply—"

"The Blacker?"

"Mhm!" said Maylew. "New one on me. Let's have a look." He flicked through the file with his spatulate finger. "Let's see—the last blackmailer to be any killing was 'Angie Silverman.' He was the last man Bolia hanged before he retired in '38. Blackmailers seldom kill!"

Nick nodded.

"Gone and golden eggs," he said laconically. "A historic precedent. Better open a new dossier, Maylew."

The officer looked grave.

"No star, I suppose?"

"Not so set. The Press, of course, is swooning around. You've seen Angie was the last!"

"Quite sure," said infatigably G.E.O. Miles heated himself from the desk, and his good-looking, widely boyish face was very thoughtful. Maylew glanced at the damp

"Good-morning, Sir Frederick," greeted Mr. Dibeay. "Won't you sit down?"

The visitor looked startled and sat at once.

"Er—er—good morning," he began. "I was recommended to call on you by Mr. Frank Maurice."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Dibeay courteously. "I know Mr. Maurice very well. Won't you have a cigar?" he asked, hospitably pushing over a silver-topped ashtray.

The visitor shook his head, and it was obvious to the head of the Dibeay Detective Agency that he was labouring under some suppressed fear. He evidently found some difficulty in beginning his story.

"Er—I hardly know exactly where to—er—start," began Sir Frederick. "It is rather a long story, and I'm afraid—"

"Pray take your own time, Sir Frederick," said the detective. "I assure you that these walls have heard some strange stories in their time. You are evidently in trouble, and I shall be only too pleased to help you with advice."

"My detectives," he added, "are in a sense rather like doctors. People put off seeing us until the last minute, and then come in a hurry."

The visitor smiled faintly, and Daniel Dibeay saw that he was saving himself for the plunge.

"The fact is I'm being blackmailed," broke out Sir Frederick suddenly.

Instantly Mr. Dibeay's face became grave. "Dear, dear, that is rather a bad business, Sir Frederick," he said, and placed the tips of his slender fingers together as he gazed through his pince-nez at his client. "You may rely entirely on my discretion in this matter, Sir Frederick. I think Mr. Maurice will thank for my dependability."

The visitor drew out a silk handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

"Quite, quite," he remarked laconically. "As you doubtless know, Mr. Dibeay, I am engaged to be married to Lady Frederica Thyne, the daughter of the Earl of Mandeville? I have served in the Diplomatic Service for the past twenty years, and I think I can say that no breath of scandal has touched me until I received this abominable document yesterday morning."

So saying he pulled out a sheet of newspaper and handed it over to Dibeay. The detective adjusted his pince-nez and noted that the letter was typewritten. There was no address, and the message was brief, but pointed.

"Your indiscretion at Cairo in March, 1913, may possibly have escaped your memory, but it has an unpleasant aftermath. In view of your approaching wedding you would doubtless like to be reinstated of a certain ceremony that took place in the Consulate at Zagazig. A search of the records of Tanta Hospital will reveal that a mistake was made in recording the death of Mademoiselle Annes Esham in that disastrous fire. The sum of ten thousand pounds will buy the unfortunate episode in the obituary to which it belongs. Failure to comply will result in unpleasant consequences. A notice in the personal column of 'The Times,' addressed to T. R., signifying acquiescence, will show the episode. Any attempt to invoke the aid of the police will result in exposure."

The letter was signed in printed black capitals—"THE BLACKER."

Mr. Dibeay took of his pince-nez and glanced inquiringly at the visitor. In halting sentences Sir Frederick told his story.

It was the usual tale of youthful infatuation and bitter regret. He had become entangled with a beautiful Circassian girl, the daughter of an Egyptian notable, while

he was attached to the Presidency at Cairo. He had married her according to the Modern code, having undergone Islam. Two days after the wedding she had been taken ill with enteric fever and moved to a hospital at Taata. The hospital had been destroyed by a diarrhoea few weeks after her arrival, and at least thirty patients had perished. Among them it was alleged was Sir Frederick's wife, but the letter stated that a mistake had been made, and the husband confessed that he was tormented with anxiety regarding the possibility.

Mr. Diney smoothed out his document with his delicate fingers, and his calmly penetrating eyes rested speculatively on the baronet's lined, worn face.

"I see," he commented quietly. "It is a very awkward situation. I presume you have no idea who this man, the Blacker, is?"

Sir Frederick shook his head.

"No, I have not the slightest. I thought that episode was closed finally. The wedding was secret," he added. "The Honourable's wife, Mr. Diney, advise me what to do? It—if—data is alive, then—"

His voice broke.

The detective smiled reassuringly.

"Leave the matter to me, Sir Frederick," he advised. "We must not allow ourselves to be stampeded. Very probably the whole thing is a colossal bluff. First we must institute inquiries and find out if there is any truth in the blackmailer's assertion. I have a reliable agent at Alexandria, and I will cable to him right away. I advise you to answer this letter stating that you are willing to come to some agreement. Meanwhile, if you will leave it to me I will find out exactly how much truth there is in the story."

Sir Frederick coughed nervously and held out a fragile hand.

"My Honour, Mr. Diney," he said huskily. "If the story is true I shall never be able to hold up my head again."

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied the detective with a smile. "The battle is not yet lost. All dependence," he added, "as my uncle, the bishop, often told me when I was struggling through my theological course."

Sir Frederick shook hands wofully and took his leave. He seemed suddenly to have grown very tired and old.

After his departure, Mr. Diney gazed for a few moments at the portrait of his uncle, then smiled.

"The bishop's motto, I think," he murmured, and pressed the bell for his secretary.

THE CRIMSON CRUSADERS.

It was one of his several homes, that mysterious and obscure personality, the Blacker, sat, chin propped in his hand. His acute green eyes stared unseeingly before him.

It was 2 p.m. On his desk before him was a book of newspaper cuttings, and he turned over the leaves leisurely. It was a thick volume, and the Blacker stared for some time at the first entry in the book.

It was only a stick or two of type, but it seemed to afford the Blacker a good deal of quiet satisfaction.

F. X. QUARLES RELEASED.

Francis Xavier Quarles, who was sentenced in 1911 to five years' penal servitude for the notorious Anglo-Alexandria frauds, was released this morning from Prisoners-Walk. There was no demonstration. He left speedily in his private limousine for an unknown destination.

The Blacker chuckled. An unknown

destination was right. Three years had passed since that dull, grey morning when he and Clancher Coke had been released from goal, and in that three years the Blacker had profited the scheme which he had hatched during those long, weary years of penal servitude.

Prison, far from reforming him, had merely intensified his hatred against society. A brilliant financier with a queer, warped kick in his brain, F. X.—as he had since been familiarly known in the City—had been arrested through the medium of an anonymous letter to the Public Prosecutor. It was in the silence and solitude of his cell that he had planned the colossal blackmail conspiracy which was now bearing fruition.

It required tremendous patience and unlimited capital, but fortunately he had suited every a good man before his arrest.

On the day the prison gates opened F. X. Quarles, alias Convict 269, disappeared

The stage lost a great actor when F. X. Quarles, one-time president of the O.U.D.S., went in for finance and eventually embarked on crime. Used as he was to his master's amazing disguises, the Clancher was staggered at the change in Quarles' appearance when he emerged twenty minutes later from the dressing-room.

He glanced at his watch. It was 2 p.m. He issued a few curt instructions to his bookman and descended into the waiting taxi. Giving the driver an address in Camden Town, he beat back luxuriously.

Brotherhood Hall, in Sage Street, Camden Town, was a depressing-looking building of mustard-coloured brick. Sage Street itself was a narrow, dreary thoroughfare whose houses were as depressing uniforms with their dirty windows and paint-battered doors, that it might well have been the corridor of some derelict goal.



His hand on the door-handle, Kid Dropper started back with an oath. Facing him was the half-clad figure of a man in a white mask. In his hand glinted a squat, ugly automatic. "Up with them—quick!"

from the leg of man, and none knew of his passing save Clancher Coke, who had good and sufficient reasons to lag that knowledge to himself.

The Blacker pressed the bell as his desk. A moment or two later the Clancher entered. The ex-convict was a little taller and a little grayer since that foggy morning when he had said good-bye to Prisoners-Walk.

"Get me a taxi," ordered the Blacker.

The Clancher nodded, and spoke out of the side of his mouth.

"I see, boss, as 'ow Noney Now is occupy' road," he remarked. "He's one o' them 'ow clever ones, Noney."

"Curse Noney!" said the Blacker.

He crossed over to the dressing-room which grew off from the study. Here was a heterogeneous assortment of clothes, ranging from the galvans and laced hat of a bishop to the coverings and grey flannel shirt of a navvy.

Brotherhood Hall had had many vicissitudes since it had been erected way back in 1899 as a Nonconformist chapel. It was a two-storied structure with a flight of stone steps leading to its entrance. The hall had been in turn, after its debut as a chapel, a furniture repository, a social club, a rope factory, and a moving picture theatre in the early days of the film.

It had also been an auctioneer's warehouse, and again a furniture repository. Traces of its chequered past still lingered on the notice boards, which were covered by a thick glutinous mass of ancient posters, torn and bedded.

Brotherhood Hall, though dingy, still survived, however. Next door to it was a low, uncoloured shop, in which a light glimmered day and night. It was a depressing repository, the window dressings of which consisted of a very rusty marble cross that had once been white and half a dozen hideous artificial wreaths in glass cases. In

folded letters across the Hotel ran the legend:

EMMA TAPP,
UNDERTAKER AND FUNERAL
OUTFITTER.

And beneath it the amiable Mr. Tapp's slogan:

EMBALMING A SPECIALTY.
We Lead Death Dignity.

The apathetic inhabitants of that gloomy thoroughfare had recently learnt with little interest that the Brotherhood Hall was now the headquarters of a friendly society, "The Royal and Ancient Order of Crimson Crusaders."

A new notice board had been erected, but Sage Street shrugged its shoulders, and, learning that the place possessed no amenities in the shape of billiard tables or a bar, promptly forgot its latest metropolitan.

It excitedly saluted the man who called himself "Brian," and styled himself grandiloquently as the Exalted Grand Crusader.

The night was dreary and wet when the Blacker pulled up at a dreary gin palace at the corner of Sage Street. He buckled up his coat collar and drew a shabby broad-brimmed hat over his brow as he strode towards the black bulk which was Brotherhood Hall.

The gates were open, and a rectangle of yellow light shone from the interior of the bare-like structure. He ascended the steps and found himself inside a fairly large room, at one end of which there was a bar and restroom. Behind it was a door leading to what had once been a vestry. The walls were dark and wet with slime, and an evil-smelling substance, round which were grouped half a dozen men, stood in the centre of the room.

The Blacker nodded at them perfunctorily.

"We are all set, brothers, for the initiation ceremony, I take it?" he said.

"That's right, boss," answered the others.

The Blacker smiled frostily.

"Will all those who have their regalia kindly sit down?"

He turned to the leather-bound man who was guarding the door.

"Don't forget the signal," he warned. He cracked his finger towards a slim, elegantly dressed man in a pin-stripe blue suit. "I want you, Crews," he reminded.

Charley Crews, confident man and ex-sensist, shrugged his shoulders and followed the leader into the vestry. The Blacker shut the door.

"Anything to report?" he inquired.

The man shook his head.

"Intensive activity at police headquarters," he announced with a chuckle.

"But as they're all running round in circles we should worry!"

The Blacker smiled.

"And did you have a pleasant time at Apleton?" he asked.

His henchman lit a cigarette and perched himself on the deal table.

"The doctor's going to prove very useful to us, my friend," he remarked.

The Blacker nodded, and his greenish eyes held an unshy light.

"In conjunction with our friend, Earn Tapp, I am certain he will be able to assist us—dismissing of recalcitrant clients."

A grim smile played round the Blacker's lips as he opened his attaché case and took therefrom a round, glittering object of steel. It was a helmet, and he donned the stupor and drew down the heavy V-shaped visor so that the whole of his face was obscured. He next donned a long white robe on which was emblazoned a scarlet cross. Round his waist he wound a girdle and thrust a long straight sword into a leather sheath.

He looked through the slit of his visor at his companion. Crews laughed merrily.

"Don't you think this ceremony is rather foolish, chief," he said, drawing a similar regalia which he took out of a satchel.

"Don't be silly," snapped the Blacker.

"Are you aware that in this England of ours the police look with a tolerant eye on the activities of friendly societies?"

A member can wear any damn thing he likes in the sacred name of charity. The Ancient Order of Crimson Crusaders is duly registered as a friendly society" within the meaning of the Act. What better method can you devise for holding meetings than this? None of us need be embarrassed by knowing too much about each other."

"You're a clever devil, chief," said Crews.

"You don't know the half of it," laughed

the Blacker. Which was true. Not even that crafty confidence trickster was aware of the vast ramifications of the Blacker's web of intrigues.

The Ancient Order of Crimson Crusaders did not number more than twenty, but they were loyal to the Blacker, there is no gainsaying. Each single man was a specialist in some form of crime, and they were held together in loyalty, not by friendship, but by fear.

The Blacker knew enough about each one of them to send them to penal servitude for seven years. He knew enough about one or two to send them to the gallows. He ruled them with the menace of "either—or."

Who he was, and how he was possessed of his well nigh amazing knowledge, none of his gang knew. Crews had often noted his hints to discover the Blacker's secret.

"I've told Hanson to be here to-night," announced the master crook. "He'll have to work fast. The Flying Squad is raiding his lair at 9.30 to-morrow. You'd better order Spike Mullins, Lefty Stokes, and Billy the Dip to stand by for the sneak machines."

Crews looked alarmed.

"Are the cursed bastards wise to him at last?" he asked.

The Blacker smiled.

"What hurts me," said Crews, "is how in Heaven you give your advance information, chief."

The Blacker's lips curled in a secret grin.

"I know everything," he said with a grim chuckle. "For nearly ten years I have planned and worked for this infallibility of knowledge. I know the secrets of every crook, and am familiar with every skeleton in Society's cupboard. Omnipotence is invulnerable, Crews."

The man's shifty eyes lowered. There were certain necessary details in his past that he did not like recalling.

A tap sounded on the door, and a third visored figure entered.

"The brethren and initiate are all assembled, Exalted!" he announced.

"Good, then we shall begin," said the Blacker, and his voice boomed sepulchraly behind his steel visage.

The police-constable on duty on that night, yet evening faded his lamp in curiosity on the dilapidated steps of Brotherhood Hall. He mounted them steadily and peeped through the letter-box. He found a group of unshabby gentlemen dressed in heavy costumes, and, being himself a member of just such another secret society, the constable nodded and approved.

He clamped on steadily, with drawing of the gigantic criminal conspiracy that was even then being hatched in the darkness of Brotherhood Hall.

WICK TAKES THE TRAIL.

DORISSE SOMERVILLE emerged from Westminster Bridge station just as

Big Ben boomed back the hour of eight. It was a crisp, snappy morning, and Doris, a trim figure in her neat, dove-grey costume, bought a copy of the "Daily Flash" at the corner and hurried towards the prep. astute precincts of the Home Office.

She flashed a dazzling smile at the commonplace, a gallant old soldier who reflected for the umpteenth time that this slim, graceful girl was far too pretty to have anything to do with crime and the world routine of a police court.

Doris, Somerville was not yet twenty-one, and, though she came daily into contact with the seamy side of life, she still maintained not only a sense of humor, but a deeper insouciance of outlook that surprised that impressive young man Inspector Nicholas New.



It was P.-c. Willis who discovered the body of Kid Drooper under a bush during his lonely patrol at Miamon Common.

She was, however, thoroughly sophisticated, and had recently been transferred from Scotland Yard to be the private secretary of Sir Alastair Rankin, the Director of Public Prosecutions.

She was early this morning, fully an hour before time, but she had a lot of errands of work to finish, and was determined to avail herself of the opportunity before the rest of the staff arrived. She preferred coming early in the morning to staying late at night.

Dorothy had her own key to the office, but there was no necessity to use it. The door was wide open, and she found a pleasant-faced, grey-haired woman hard at work polishing the linoleum. She looked up from her task at Dorothy's entrance, and smiled.

"Good-morning, miss; early again, I see."

"Good-morning, Mrs. Raddell," said Dorothy, removing her little check hat and dabbing her powder-puff over her nose. "How's the rheumatism these days?"

The charwoman sighed.

"Not so good, miss," she answered. "But no manage to bear up. The least said, the soonest mended, is what I always say."

"Can I offer you a cup of tea?" asked Dorothy, crossing over to the little enfilade in the corner, where she kept a small spirit-stove and teapot.

The cleaner's lined face softened into a smile. She rose to her feet.

"Thank 'ee kindly, miss," she said, wiping her hands on her coarse apron. "I didn't 'ave much time this mornin' to make myself a cup. I been spring cleanin' 'ee home."

With soft fingers Dorothy Somerville laid out the tea things. Mrs. Raddell loomed on her breakfast and homed.

"An' 'ee's yer young man?" she inquired. "I see 'is name in the paper last night, all over 'is ar' large. Lawdy 's money, 'e got a dangerous job, miss."

Dorothy flushed a little as she sipped her tea. She had known Mrs. Raddell, the parlous old cleaner, for two years now. She evidently had a soft spot in her heart for Dorothy, and knew what very few in the department were aware of, that Dorothy and Nick were engaged.

Dorothy poured out a cup of tea for Mrs. Raddell, who accepted it gratefully.

"True," commented the cleaner, "I know 'ee 'is, pore dear Raddell 'e's a public man, in a manner of speakin', afore 'e was dead. 'E was one o' the most 'ighly respected valentines collectors in Bournemouth, an' 'is wife 'e was a sort o' saint, too. 'E actual thinks them people gets up to 'is wife's backcher water yer wouldn't believe."

She chuckled as while Dorothy sipped her tea and arranged a bunch of dowers in a silver bowl on her desk.

"And how 'er son these days, Mrs. Raddell?" she inquired.

A shudder darkened the charwoman's face.

"Jim's lost 'is job again, miss," she answered. "Pore fellow, 'e do 'ave had luck. One o' the honest boys yer could wish for most, but easily led, miss, yer know—easily led. I wish yer could git yer young man to talk ter 'im, miss. I don't like the bunch o' young fellows 'e's runnin' round with."

She sighed and replaced her empty cup on the desk.

"But there, miss, I'm not goin' ter keep yer away from yer work with my troubles," she said, picking up her broom and glancing round at the now spotless room. The starched white lining cabinets, behind the brass beds of which were hidden a thousand secrets, shone resplendently in the sunlight, and for a Government department the office was a pattern of neatness.

Mrs. Raddell glanced at the door.

"Don't forget as 'ee yer's promised ter come an' 'ave a cup o' tea with me some time, my dear. I'm a lonely body, an' Jim ain't come much these days."

"I'll come, never fear," returned Dorothy gaily. "I've heard such a lot about your home."

She smiled as the old dame took her leave, and applied herself suddenly to her work prior to Sir Alastair's arrival.

The Director came in shortly after ten. He looked, Dorothy thought, pale and somewhat worried as she took in the morning mail.

He was a thin, stoop-shouldered man with a lean, haggard face and a prematurely bald head which the public had seldom seen without its devious covering of light hair-shirt.

"Good-morning," said Sir Alastair.

"Riadly got me the case, and ring up the Inspector New to look in during the next half-hour."

He did not notice Dorothy's faint blush as she withdrew. Sir Alastair drummed with his fingers on his desk. He was worried, and with reason. Always an cautious post, the Director of Public Prosecutions had of late encountered insuperable and unexpected difficulties in his job as never easy task.

He picked up a wire basket which contained that morning's mail, which Dorothy had sorted out and classified for his perusal. Probably no person, save the editor of a great newspaper, receives such a varied and interesting post—on the Public Prosecutor. All sorts of facets of human nature are reflected in that queer mail. Most of the letters are anonymous, many worthless and nearly all lifeless.

Careful note, however, is taken of each, and if the evidence sounds promising it is sorted upon and sifted and sorted until false and true are placed in their right perspective.

It was an anonymous post-card to an illiterate land that first placed the police on the track of George Joseph Smith, the Blackboard of the bath. It was a letter from a neighbour that finally brought Armstrong, scotcher and pot-smoker, to the gallows.

Letters on all sorts of fantastic subjects crop up almost daily. There were communications from disgruntled shareholders regarding the private lives of company promoters; letters from jealous wives hinting at their husbands' infidelities were many. There were illegit accounts from embezzled ecclesiastics giving details of projected burglaries—all more queer fish in the Public Prosecutor's net.

Sir Alastair ran through them all. There was a worried expression on his face as he scanned the end of the basket. There was a letter signed "A FRIEND," bearing a Remover postmark, which described in scurrilous language the alleged misdoings of a local magistrate.



Disgusted at a newspaper seller, Detective-Inspector New watched in astonishment as he saw the baronet hand the mysterious parcel to Dorothy Somerville, his fiancée.

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Sir Alastair dropped it back into the basket with a gesture of disgust. He picked up another typewritten communication bearing a city post-mark. It contained a algorithmic hint regarding the income-tax returns of a well-known shipbuilder. The Director marked it with a cross for investigation. He picked up another letter and smiled. It was written on scented newspaper of a floridly low and in a big sprawling feminine handwriting.

"Has the attention of the Public Prosecutor been drawn to the illegal activities of a certain band of undergraduates of which I am your son in a number? Inquiries would yield some surprising information."

Sir Alastair's body quivered convulsed, and he looked up with a scowl as Dorothy Somerville entered with the Mason dossier. She looked at him curiously. Of late she had noticed a change in his manner. He had been irritable and indeed almost tartive in his attitude towards her.

"Inspector New will be along right away," she announced.

"Good," returned Sir Alastair. "Show him in as soon as he comes."

He picked up the scented missive again, and his nose wrinkled with displeasure. His face looked suddenly haggard. Was there any truth in the accusations? His only son, Malcolm, had always been a little wild and difficult to manage—heredity, of course. Sir Alastair reflected—he took after his body and impetuous mother, who had died when he was a boy.

Sir Alastair placed the letter in his pocket and sighed. A knock sounded on the door and Inspector Nicholas New entered briskly.

He was clad in his usual fashionable habits in a hooded morning coat, striped trousers and inevitable buffaloes. From the tips of his remoued shoes to the crown of his silk hat, he was sartorial perfection. Anyone less like a Scotland Yard detective would be difficult to imagine, yet an occasion Nick actually disguised himself in a

hard boiler hat and regulation boots, so that, as he explained, he looked as like a detective that no one would believe he was one.

He smiled at the Director.

"Good-morning, Sir Alastair. Murderer seems to have made a bad break in the Hanson business, poor devil."

Sir Alastair cleared his throat.

"Sit down, will you? I'm very perturbed, very perturbed indeed. You here, of course, seen the newspapers recently?"

Nick grinned rather nastily.

"I have, sir. I notice the Evans generally have a dig at Scotland Yard at this time of the year. It's a sort of little silly custom. About year hence, sir, the poor old-doggers must have something to write about. They'll soon be back to sea serpents and giant geometerias," he added with a chuckle.

The Director frowned.

"I'm afraid you're talking far too flippant a view of it. Look at this!" He pointed to a cutting of the leading article of that morning's "Daily Flash."

OUR PRECIPITATE POLICE

"The public is becoming alarmed, and not without justification, about the collapse of police evidence in a number of recent cases. Charges seem to have been brought by members of the force on the slightest of pretence and the most tenuous of evidence against citizens, only to be quashed when heard before the magistrate.

"It is necessary to dwell upon the mental torture endured by a sensitive man when charged with a crime in open court. Theoretically, English law assumes that a man is innocent until he is proved guilty, but a stigma attaches to one who has been forced to stand in the dock after being rewarded several times, even though the police finally withdraw their charge, as in the famous Filson case. Grave consequences

prevail. Rightly or wrongly, a growing public opinion inclines to the belief that the police do not take sufficient care to verify their charges. It is even rumored that a new spirit prevails at Scotland Yard, which can be summarized in a sentence—a case at all costs.

"No fewer than ten charges collapsed from lack of evidence in the Metropolitan courts last month. The situation calls for a drastic overhaul of police methods, and we draw the attention of the Public Prosecutor to the growing indignation of the public, whose interest he is."

Nick laid down the cutting and smiled.

"Old Man Caruthers, I bet, I can recognize his style. He's a sound and unflinching man since he was fined for exceeding the speed limit at Guildford a month back. As for Filson, he was damned lucky—that's all I can say. If the dear British public knew that the so-called 'innocent' Mr. Filson has already served seven years for robbery with violence I reckon they'd change their tune."

Sir Alastair stroked his chin.

"I don't like it, New. There's a balance somewhere. You know perfectly well that we never proceed against a person unless we have some pretty tangible evidence, yet in these last few cases we have found at the last moment the accused has managed either to get rid of the incriminating evidence or to be sufficiently forewarned to arrange an alibi.

"Take this man, Hanson, for instance, whom the Flying Squad raided yesterday. No one but Hanson and myself know the time of the raid, yet when we get there there was no sign of any counterfeit money or plates, which we knew were hidden in the room behind his studio."

Nick's face grew suddenly serious.

"Yes, sir, I admit it's queer. What about this Eyleson business, sir; this Dr.

Erwin chap? Hadn't I better sift the evidence?"

Sir Alastair nodded.

"Of course it may be village pump," he remarked. "But it wouldn't do you any harm to run over to Hards and have a look round. Have you heard any more of the Blacker?" he demanded suddenly.

Nick's blue eyes hardened.

"No, sir, very little indeed that's new. There are all sorts of queer rumors about him in the underworld, but I can't fix anything on him yet."

Over a month had elapsed since the finding of Ed Dropper's body on Hitcham Common, and the most intensive police inquiries had resulted in a dead end.

"I see," said Sir Alastair. He turned as a tap sounded on the door and Dorothy entered. She saw Nick and smiled prettily.

"Mr. Bruce, of the 'Daily Flash,' would like to see you, Sir Alastair," she said.

The Public Prosecutor blew his nose loudly.

"Tell him I cannot grant him an interview," he said.

"Very good, sir."

Dorothy was about to withdraw when Nick halted her.

"Half a sec., my dear. I want to see Bruce myself."

He bade the Chief good-morning and when the door closed gave Dorothy a bear-hug hug.

"You're looking radiant this morning, dearie," he told her.

Dorothy pushed him away.

"I do wish you'd behave on duty, Mr. Policeman," she protested. "I'm not a cook."

Nick grinned and turned to the tall, thick-set young man with a keen face and extraordinarily alert blue eyes, who sat at the edge of the desk in the outer room. It was Hanserton Bruce, the star crime reporter of the "Daily Flash."

"Well—nonchalant!" he remarked.

"What's the latest?"

"This," said Bruce laconically. "I found it waiting on my desk when I got into the office this morning."

He handed a letter over to Nick, who saw from the postmark that it had been posted the previous night in the West End at eleven-thirty.

He opened it, pulled out the contents, and read the following:

"To the Editor of the 'Daily Flash,'

"The recent high-handed police methods culminated today in the arrest of Mr. Max Hanson, the well-known artist, on a preposterous charge of forgery. Your paper has called attention to the questionable methods of the Public Prosecutor in recent cases. I have reason to believe that there are serious discrepancies and mishaps connected with the Prosecutor's office. The private lives of the officials might well enjoy investigation. The police, for some reason or other, are following a deliberate policy of victimization or a frame-up, as it is known in America.

"Has the 'Daily Flash' the courage to expose these methods?"

"THE BARON."

Nick New whistled, and his good-looking face became very grave.

"What do you make of it, Bruce?" he demanded.

The newspaper man shrugged.

"What can I make of it? Scotland Yard's been making a terrible lot of blunders lately, and I tell you quite frankly, now, the public are getting damned weary.

L. C. DOUTHWAITE AGAIN.



Scotland Yard and the business world found themselves taxed with. The mystery started when P.-C. Hedges found a parcel addressed to the president of the London Banking Company on the steps of that firm's building in the early morning. In that parcel was a solid bar of gold, manufactured by the Adjuster, that mysterious criminal who sought to paralyze the very backbone of the country's constitution. When Mr. Arrowsmith saved the beautiful American girl from death in a lovely corner of France, he inadvertently put the first fatal spark in one of the most colossal criminal plots which had ever hatched the grey heads of Scotland Yard.

And then there are more thrills to be "Look at Chicago." Remember, it has only just started, and Bruce's man, and more important in them for you from Edward D. Sullivan's ready pen. Get your friends to start reading it before it is too late.

Yours sincerely,

The Editor

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to: "The Thriller" Office, The Pictorial Magazine, Farringham Street, London, E.C.A.

FOR next week I have selected L. C. Douthwaite's latest novel. This brilliant author is well in the lead among our most popular contributors, and has given us of his very best since the earliest days of the THRILLER, keeping his ability to thrill up to its highest pitch in each one of his stories. He has a huge following of "fans," and thus I like to give you as much of his work as I can manage to get from him. His latest effort is entitled "The House of Death," and I can promise you that, like the rest of his works, it is exciting and gripping to the extreme.

Imagine what would happen if someone really discovered how gold could be manufactured from base metals and transmute articles already made from silver or even lead into the purest gold. This was what

Mason's bound to be released today through lack of evidence. What is the use of (olive H.Q.)?"

Nick shook his head.

"I'd give a year's screw to know who the Blacker is," he remarked. "Leave this with me for an hour or two?"

The newspaper man nodded reluctantly.

"I'm following up this story, Nick, and I expect you as a favor to keep me posted." Dorothea noticed Nick's lack of preoccupation.

"Tell me, Nick, if you think the Blacker's got anything to do with this department?" she inquired.

"Goshown knows," said Nick grimly. "I suspect everybody."

"Including me?" she laughed.

"Including you," he said gravely.

TELEPHONE BOX NO. 2

Nick was a very thoughtful man after his interview with Mason. On his return to his sparsely furnished room at Woodland Yard he found a visitor waiting for him, and his eyes were elevated in surprise as he recognized the slumped figure in the black suit with the vaguely clerical air.

"Whey, hello, Dinsley!" said Nick.

"There was not much cordiality in his voice, for he disliked both Mr. Dinsley and his methods."

"What brings you here?"

The doorman Mr. Dinsley drew out a silk handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

"I've on the track of the Blacker," he remarked.

Nick stared at him incredulously.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Just what I say. Read that!"

Mr. Dinsley sat back in his chair and reported Nick pointblank as he glanced at the envelope and saw that it was addressed to the Frederick Jessell, Esq., at a Pearly-dilly club.

"Class of mine," he explained, waving his hand airily.

"I see," said Nick, in a puzzled tone. "But what precisely has the case got to do with me? My don't deal in divorce business," he added, with a shy dig at the most questionable part of a famous detective agency's business.

Mr. Dinsley laughed somewhat scornfully.

"This is not divorce—it's blackmail," he announced. "Sir Frederick consulted me a little while ago on a very delicate matter in which I need not enter at the moment."

"Still living up to your slogan?" asked Nick.

"Fidelity," was the stiff reply, as his fingers fumbled with the gold ring on his watch-chain.

Nick opened the envelope, and his eyes were fixed in surprise as he recognized the Blacker's characteristic typing.

The message was brief, but pointed:

"You will obtain £10,000 in Treasury notes from your bank. Have them wrapped in a brown paper parcel and bring it at 9 p.m. tonight to-night to Telephone Box No. 2 situated in the arcade of South Ken, Tulse Station."

"Within the box you will find a young lady wearing a grey coat and a green cloche hat. You will at once hand her the package and immediately take your departure."

"Carry out these instructions, and you will not be further molested. Should you, however, call in the police or advise them of your intention, expense is inevitable."

"Do not speak to the young lady or make any attempt to follow her."

"This is final."

"Either—"

"THE BLACKER."

Nick drew in his breath sharply and physed a terrible glance on the edge of the table.

"What's the Blackening Jessell for?" he inquired at length.

Dinsley shrugged apologetically.



Came a sudden flash from a passing car, and Sir Edward gasped and staggered backward. Inspector New was barely in time to catch him as he fell brassy.

"I would refer you to our slogan, inspector," he said drily.

"I see," said Nick. "And what do you propose to do about it?"

"Well, er—" began Daniel Dinsley. "There are only two things to do. Either to nip up and look pleasant or to sit up a scheme to outwit the Blacker. My plan, which I've conveyed to Sir Frederick, is that he should call at his bank this afternoon as unobtrusively as possible. The Blacker is bound to be having his watchful. I have arranged with the manager to prepare a dummy parcel of notes to hand to Sir Frederick."

"Yes, that's all right as far as it goes," said Nick. "But what then? The Blacker's a wily bird."

"That," said Mr. Dinsley, with a nervous smile, "is why I came here to ask for your co-operation, sir, dear inspector. If we could station a Flying Squad van at the entrance to the Tulse station there would be some chance of getting a lead to the Blacker."

Nick shook his head.

"I doubt it, my friend. I'll bet the girl has orders to hand on the parcel to somebody else, and it will pass through at least a dozen hands before it finally reaches the Blacker."

"Think of the opportunities she has! There are no less than four entrances to South Ken station. She could have an accomplice on the head of the stairway leading to the District Railway. Another on the Pearly-dilly luncheon room someone waiting in a taxi just outside the woods."

Dinsley looked a little cross-grained.

"If I could I did not look on it in that light, inspector," he remarked.

"Coming to think of it, it's a distinctly clever scheme of the Blacker's."

He smiled indignantly.

"What do you propose, inspector?" he asked.

Nick scratched his head with the stub of his pencil.

"As that it wouldn't be a bad plan to have a F.S. van outside," he mused. "If we act quickly we may have a chance."

"That I can count on you, inspector?"

said Dinsley, and a look of relief came into his dimmed eyes.

"Yes," said Nick. "You can count on me all right."

Mr. Dinsley took his departure with effusive thanks, Nick in his pipe and smoked moodily at it. Events were moving fast. He drew from his desk the message dossier containing the scanty information which he had managed to glean about the Blacker. It was most illuminating, and he read through the letter which Inspector Bruce had received that morning.

Was there a leakage in the Public Prosecutor's department? It would explain many things. The unusually accurate advance information, for instance, which had enabled many crooks to show a clean pair of heels after the lightning raid of the Flying Squad.

"I must have more data," murmured Nicholas New, chewing the end of his penholder vainly.

He pressed the buzzer on his desk, and a few minutes later Sergeant Mendenham, that notorious man of the Furred Fury, entered into the room.

Mendenham always snarled. There was, as Nicholas expressed it, something fishy about the big, river-foggy giant who was notorious being heavyweight of the London Division.

"HEL," said Nick. "I shall want you to-night. There's a chance of a spot of hot down in South Kensington."

Sergeant Mendenham growled.

"Another smash and grab?" he inquired.

Nick shook his head.

"No, we're going for higher game this time. It's the Blacker!"

In a few brief sentences he outlined the plan of campaign, and Mendenham nodded his head in complete understanding.

"Good!" he remarked. "I reckon we'll take little 'Sunshine' out for an airing."

With which cryptic announcement he took his leave.

Sir Frederick Jessell was a well-known man, but whether it was the pointed approval of Mr. Dinsley that gave him confidence, or whether the fact that Woodland Yard was already talking the problem of the Blacker, it was with almost a jumpy air that he descended from his brougham outside the old-established banking firm of Hilton & Co., at the end of the Haymarket.

He was an elegant figure as he swept in through the swing doors of the bank, and, being a frequent customer, was allowed into the manager's private without delay.

In the gutter outside, a ragged individual in a check cap and cloak of vibrant hue stood with a tay strap from his shoulders. There was a glass of water on the top, in which floated those multi-colored and rather pretty plants of decoration known as Japanese water-flowers.

He was a red-faced, husky-colored man, and called out his name in a monotonous voice: "Japanese flowers, penny a packet. A garden in a glass. The very thing for the dinner table."

One of the harrying porters passed to hand the bundles.

Inspector Nicholas New gave him but a cursory glance as he passed into the bank shortly after Sir Frederick's arrival.

A small lad proffered a penny to the bowler and received in exchange a gaily colored envelope. The message went by, and the bank door opened with a rousal to admit Sir Frederick.

Under his arm he carried a neatly tied brown paper parcel heavily sealed. He strode hurriedly towards his waiting limousine, and even as the car moved off, the lawyer passed among the contents of his number into the gutter and scribbled his trap. The Markler's secret had been all he wanted to see.

Five minutes later he entered a public telephone box in Piccadilly Green and called up a certain number. It was signalled that the man he asked for was named Ernie, and had anyone listened to his conversation he would have learned that the prospects for the Crimser Commission in Camden Town was distinctly racy.

Sir Frederick Jewell dined at his club, the Maresfield, the seamy-like atmosphere of which was not conducive to a steady nerve.

Meanwhile Nick New had had a long and illuminating talk with the bank manager. Nick had a just job out of Travelers' Express, and secured his clothes before embarking for South Kensington.

Shortly before 1 p.m. a small, one-ton motor-car bearing the legend "Shanklin Laundry," drew up before the Ebury Road entrance of South Kensington Tube Station. The driver was a large, somewhat looking individual, who seemed to have some difficulty in lighting his pipe.

At five minutes to the hour a small grey closed-tourer drew up at the Sydney Street side of the station. A nervous new-comer, wearing smart, hunched out:

"Star-News-Standard," and efficiently probed one to the grey-haired, uniform-faced man who alighted from the car's interior.

"Keep quiet," Sir Frederick whispered Nick. He had disguised himself simply but effectively with a red wig and moustache, and had taken up his pitch a quarter of an hour before.

Sir Frederick Jewell stretched hold of the brown paper parcel like grim death. The shops in the arcade, in which the telephone booths were situated, were closing. There were four different converging streams of people, and even again Nick appreciated the closeness of the Markler in choosing a spot with so many entrances and exits as a residence.

A crowd of people accented the steps of the District Railway, and Nick kept a sharp look out for any familiar figures among the hurrying pedestrians. He knew that the house-to-house laundry man retained the stalwart Hudsons and four of the Peard Party, and that one end was covered.

Sir Frederick hesitated for a moment at the top of the steps. Nick kept lustily in his side to catch a glimpse of the occupant of telephone box number 2.

He could distinguish the slim figure of a girl in a grey costume with a green hat.

She turned suddenly as Sir Frederick approached and raised his hat. Nicholas New drew in his breath sharply and a queer frowning creased his brow as he recognized the pleasant features beamed beneath that seal hat.

It was Dorothy Somerville!

"My Heaven!" gasped Nick, utterly ignoring a fiery little man's demand for an "Excuse News."

Sir Frederick was talking to the girl. Nick saw his hand her the brown paper parcel with its red seal.

What did it all mean? Was Dorothy in league with the Markler? It seemed almost incredible—and yet—and yet—

He glimpsed Dorothy's smiling face as she took the bundle, and with a murmured word or two hurried towards the lift. For a moment Nick stood there spellbound, then was suddenly attracted into action.

"One minute, Sir Frederick," he muttered as the limousine stood in some bewilderment close to the lift.

Nick made a wild dive towards the lift just as the gates closed with a clang and Dorothy was swept forward out of sight.

He went forward, and muttering slightly, ran back towards Sir Frederick. It was just at that moment that the portly figure of Mr. Dibson emerged from the entrance of one of the second's shops. He rubbed his pudgy hands and mumbled at Sir Frederick.

"Ha, ha, the plot thickens," he began. "I think I know that young lady."

He looked awfully at Nicholas New, who was frowning inwardly.

Sir Frederick clutched his stick and peered around him nervously.

"Well, really, goodness, I'm at a loss to know whether you have failed or succeeded," he began.

"That remains to be seen," remarked Nick. "I've got two men covering the District station platform and two the Piccadilly line. If one of us doesn't link up with the Markler then I'm a Dutchman," he added.

Sir Frederick gasped for his drooping mustache.

"No—I am afraid I do not quite see what is going to happen."

"What did the young lady say to you?" demanded Nick.

Sir Frederick looked at him oddly for a moment or two, then suddenly he gave a queer choking gasp and clutched convulsively at his breast.

"Good heaven," gasped Nick as he saw a crimson stream issue sluggishly down the baronet's shirt front and between his clashing fingers.

"Quick, Nick," he snapped and signalled to a hovering plain-clothes man, jumping forward just in time to catch the baronet as he fell.

He glanced at the Sydney Street entrance, and was just in time to see a powerful black limousine gather speed and cut in between a taxi and a motor bus.

Nick sped forward, a police whistle at his lip.

The window of the limousine was down, and two sports of fumes flushed from the dark interior.

He glimpsed the shadowy outline of a man whose face was hidden by a white mask. Above the noise of the traffic sounded a sudden, abrupt "stop."

Nick snatched out his automobile and snared it at the speeding car. A bullet whizzed above his head and splintered the glass of the telephone booth into a myriad fragments. A woman screamed hysterically, and panic-stricken seized the crowd, which scattered to right and left.

"Quick, Members," roared Nick, and instantly the look of the house-to-house laundry man sprang and three burly figures stood into the arcade.

"After the car, you idiot," yelled Nick. "Spin her round. And take care—the bundle here got shrewder on their guns."

Members' driver slammed his foot on the accelerator and followed Nick's pointing, bar-finger with his eyes. A high-powered, black limousine went roaring away into the night, its red tail lamp winking devilishly through the tunnel.

Nick turned and saw the plain-clothes man quietly leave the limp figure of Sir Frederick Jewell to the ground. The frightened crowd pressed forward, and Nick ordered them back brusquely. He kept beside the baronet, and drew in his breath sharply as he saw the great face and the blood that stained the white shirt front.

Sir Frederick's eyes were glazed, then suddenly he gave a convulsive shudder and went limp.

The detective's face hardened. The Markler had killed again, swiftly and remorselessly as a striking cobra.

Nick issued a few curt instructions to the

plain-clothes man. His mind was in a turmoil at the bombarding succession of events.

What was Dorothy Somerville doing in phone box number 2? How was she connected with the haul and warden rascal? There was a bulging nose-bleed. Again the Markler had been concerned.

Who was the driver?

THE HOODED MAN.

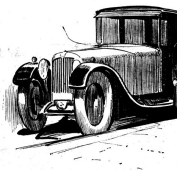
Dorothy Somerville escaped from Westminster Station with no idea of the disastrous results of her meeting with Sir Frederick Jewell. It was a quarter past nine. A shower of rain had fallen, and pools of gold were reflected on the pavement from the lights of Parliament Square.

A mist was gathering down the river and a fog bank loomed ominously as it passed under Westminster Bridge.

Dorothy observed, for the night was cold, as she turned into the grey, forbidding facade of the House Office. She was also slightly bewildered at the events of the past half hour. It was not even that she was engaged on departmental work so late at night, yet the instructions she had received had been explicit.

A uniformed night porter was on duty, drawing in his curly hair at the foot of the stairs. He glanced up curiously at the passenger and murmured a vague good-night.

Still clutching the little sealed parcel, Dorothy entered the lift and shut awkwardly in her office on the third floor. She wondered vaguely what all the mystery was about. A uniformed constable had presented her with a letter of instruction shortly before six o'clock, telling her to enter phone box number 2 at South Kensington Tube Station.



Crouched in the shadows, the watcher drew in a deep breath as the limousine halted at the kerb. The next moment the door was flung open by the stout chauffeur, and a tall, slender figure, his face half-covered by a white mask, stepped from the interior and made his way up the steps of the house.

It wasn't the first time she had received secret orders on the last page of Scotland Yard for extra duty. It came under the category of "over-time." Very often she had been summoned to attend police interrogations of female witnesses, so she saw nothing very unusual in the order.

The instructions were curt and explicit, and were signed with the sprawling signature of Inspector Nicholas New.

Widely, Dorothy's orders were to await the

arrival of Sir Frederick Jansell, to take over the sealed package, and proceed at once to the Public Prosecutor's office, where she was to surrender the parcel to Nick.

Her heart beat a trifle faster as she tipped along the corridor and switched on the light. Evidently Mrs. Randall, the cleaner, had gone home, and with a little gesture of reassurance, Dorothy sat down to wait for Nicholas.

Suddenly she became aware of a dim light beyond the frosted panel of the door that led to the Public Prosecutor's office.

Evidently Sir Alastair was waiting late. Evidently Dorothy was working late. Evidently she was liberally sealed by the rest of us at Hilbert's bank. She was about to place it

Looking above her was a tall figure thrusting in a black cloak. She caught no glimpse of his face, for his head was enveloped completely in a black hood, but between the slits of that ominous-looking hood two blazing eyes stared down implacably at her.

"Keep still, you cove!" barked the voice. It was strange, low, guttural and hollow. It sounded from the hole of the material.

Dorothy recoiled for one brief, but the pressure over her mouth increased, and her nose was held tightly between a spatulate thumb and forefinger. Her senses reeled and her lungs felt as if they were burning. Her head was jerked backwards, and a curtain of red flames shot with fire danced before her eyes, to give place a moment later to the complete blackness of oblivion.

explorer set in an above in a corner of the room.

"You'll wait there a bit, my beauty," he said.

Then, with a swift, gliding motion, he crossed over to the steel filing cabinets which occupied most of the furniture of the room. From his pocket he pulled out a bunch of skeleton keys, and his eyes glinted with chilly glee behind his mask as he turned up a dialer marked "K. M."

He took no notice whatever of the sealed packet which Dorothy had obtained from Sir Frederick Jansell. The Blacker was never fooled. His plans were too well laid.

Nick New drove like a demon from South Kensington to Scotland Yard. He did not bother to accompany the local police who had taken charge of the dead woman's body. He merely gave a rough description of the speaking black limousine to the local inspector. He could safely leave Meadows and his very inexperienced police van to chase the bandit car.

Nick alighted beneath the sickly blue lamp over Scotland Yard and walked within twenty minutes of the murder. His hair was very red and prepared as he strode moodily upstairs to his room. He was worried to think about Dorothy. What, in the name of mercy, was the girl doing mixed up in the blackmail of Sir Frederick Jansell?

Dorothy had been more than usually poring over Nick's copy of the London Evening News, and his eyes narrowed as he opened a dialer and registered a brief account of the murder at South Kensington.

The thing that puzzled Nick was why the Blacker should have shot Sir Frederick. As he had said, businessmen very seldom kill the man that lets the police see the money when his pen was lifted the receiver of his telephone. He got through in Parker of the wireless-room.

"Anything from Meadows?" he snapped. Parker's reply was brief. "Meadows followed him to Battersea and docked in at Wandsworth," he answered. "The limousine is a devil for speed, and Meadows got a punture on the way to Hammersmith."

"Meadows again?" asked Nick. "The Blacker seemed to have a leaden for the district. Usually he reached the secretary. In police stations all over England an A.B. message was being taken out giving a description of the murder car, with notes in bold it of all costs.

Nick did not linger at Scotland Yard. He was too worried about Dorothy, and decided to call on her, though the hour was late. Dorothy lived in a little flat in Chelsea, and as Nick struck into Whitehall and crossed his walking stick about, his eyes suddenly glimpsed a long, rattish thing car draw up close to the Home Office.

Instantly the detective's trained senses were on the alert. He buttoned up his coat collar, and, drawing his hat low over his eyes, followed a slim, elegant figure in evening dress as he slipped from the motor car and entered the Home Office.

Subconsciously Nick noticed the number. He gave the man two minutes' start, then followed him inside. The sleepy-eyed porter glanced at him suspiciously.

"What's up to-night?" he growled. "The whole Home's staff seems engaged on night work."

"Who was that that went in?" snapped Nick. "The Public Prosecutor's son," returned the other.

The detective stilled. What was young Malcolm Hamilton doing at the Home Office at this hour? The web was getting more tangled than ever.

"Your young lady's been," volunteered the porter.

"What's that?" snarled Nick, and his face darkened.

"Come in about quarter-past nine, she did," continued the porter.

Nick looked at his wrist-watch. It was a little after ten. What was Dorothy doing in the office at this time of night? The queer howling that had troubled him earlier on in the evening had given him all sorts of notions. He rearranged his lips firmly and moved toward the lift.

On the third-floor he halted outside Dorothy's



in a drawer in her desk when suddenly a hand closed over her arm.

Her flesh tingled at the contact, and she gave a startled scream.

"Keep quiet!" hissed a queer, sepulchral voice, and Dorothy felt a grasped and cold hand clapped roughly over her mouth.

She gave a strangled scream and turned to grapple with her assailant. She was pushed and jerked, and with a wrench she turned and faced the unknown, and her eyes widened in horror.

The Blacker stared down at the limp body he held in his arms and grinned crookedly behind his hood.

"You'll be safe for a bit, my beauty," he muttered.

From a pocket beneath his cloak he pulled out a small, glimmering hypodermic needle, and, baring Dorothy's smooth, round arm, pressed home the plunger. The girl's limbs gave a convulsive shudder and were still.

He lifted the unconscious form in his arms and carried her across to a large stationery

room. The light was still on. He glanced around ineptly, and noted the main evidence of lunacy in the level of freshly-out-turned eyes on the desk, noted also something else, and his eyes hardened.

Lying on the center of the blotting-pad was the sealed dummy package which had been the cause of one man's death that night.

From within the inner room he heard the sound of voices, and he frowned. He recognized the crisp, incisive tones of Sir Alastair Hensley, followed by the loud, drivel voice of a young man, obviously in a towering passion.

"But I tell you, father, I must have it. If this looks out, then it means the thing's over. Nick's eyes glared. He stepped towards the steel filing cabinet and crunched behind it. The windows of colors died down, and he heard the rattle of a door-knob. A minute later the door of the Prosecutor's anteroom opened, and a white-faced, agitated young man stepped out, muttering:

"My Heaven, it's the last straw!" Nick crumpled closer where he was. It would not have been polite to be discovered at the moment. He waited until the other had crossed the room, with quick, nervous strides, and heard him thump the gates of the lift in the corridor outside.

He overweighed then. This new development had further complicated the issue. What did young Hensley mean by his threat? What was Sir Alastair doing seeking so late at the office? Above all, where was Dorothy?

Nick's nerves were not quite steady as he lit a cigarette. Bracing his shoulder he opened the locked door behind which was another portal that separated the Public Prosecutor's anteroom from the outer office.

Sir Alastair was seated at his desk, a grey-haired, haggard-faced figure. He looked up hastily at Nick entered. The Yard man coughed.

"Good-evening, Sir Alastair," he said steadily. "I'm afraid I'm rather late, but I have reason to believe that Miss Somerville is on the premises. I want to speak to her very urgently."

Great New Series You Must Not Miss

Men Who Are Changing the World

In this week's PICTORIAL WEEKLY begins a fascinating new series of articles about the Master Minds who are Solving the Secrets of Science— secrets which hold the key to comfort, health and progress. In the first of these articles is told the story of the wizards of the National Physical Laboratory, who deal with everything from aviation, shipbuilding and electrical problems to wonder experiments accurate to one millionth of an inch. Don't miss these remarkable stories of amazing but true wonders of Science To-day in this week's!

PICTORIAL WEEKLY

Out on Tuesday.

The Prosecutor stared at Nick blankly. "Miss Somerville?" he asked. "Why, she went home hours ago. The only woman I've seen on the premises is the cleaner, Mrs. Richards, or Madge— something."

Nick surveyed him unflinchingly and produced the sealed package. He placed it before the Public Prosecutor.

"Then can you explain that?" he said, and his voice was grim.

The other adjusted his glasses and stared at the small parcel.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean," he said in his dry impersonal tone.

"That package," said Nicholas New quietly, "was handed by Sir Frederick Jones to Miss Somerville a little over an hour ago. Less than three minutes after Sir Frederick was shot dead."

"What?" gasped the Director, and his face was white. "Was it— was it—?"

"Yes," said Nick. "It was the Harker. And I'm telling you frankly, Sir Alastair, that I suspect this department of harboring the Harker himself. By some means or other he must have got wind of our trap to catch him with these dummy notes. For weeks past now the police have been hounded and hindered in their investigation through the man's uncanny fore-knowledge."

"What are you suggesting?" demanded the Director angrily.

"I suggest nothing," said Nicholas New, "until I can substantiate it by concrete facts. Incidentally, he added in a voice that he strove hard to make nasal, "was that your son that I saw going out a few minutes ago?"

Sir Alastair stared a second or two before replying, and his voice became husky and strained.

"Yes, that was my boy. I'm afraid that I had to be very stern with him, New. He's got into a very bad set at his university, and he had the opportunity to come here tonight in an endeavor to persuade me to use my official status in order to get one of his disreputable friends out of trouble."

"Oh," said Nick. "I see." He looked apologetic, but his voice did not sound convinced.

"Well, never mind my son," said Sir Alastair. "What about the shocking business at South Kensington?"

"Members of the Flying Squad is looking after that," replied Nick.

"Then while you're here," said Sir Alastair, "you might look into the case of this man Krums. The local police have assumed a good deal of evidence. I think you'd better get along to see how and see whether an arrest is justifiable."

Nick glanced sharply at the Director. Why this sudden change of subject? Did Sir Alastair want to have him cleared off on to another case?

The Director seemed to read some of Nick's unspoken suspicions.

"We'll see whether the Harker has any advance information about Dr. Krums," he said with a wistful smile.

He rose to his feet and yawned unexpressedly. Taking up a pile of documents on his desk he crossed over to a massive steel safe in the corner and looked them in.

"I've had a thing to say, New," he remarked. Nick said nothing. He was wondering whether Sir Alastair was lying or not. Had Dorothy left the building and if so, what possessed her to leave the dummy package on her desk?

He made goodnight to the Director and went to what he had discovered in the lift. There suddenly he possessed on a small platter the object beneath Dorothy's unbrid-tipped chair. It was a tiny Hunsdon brooch which he recognized as one that she used to pin her hair.

Nick recalled that she had been wearing the brooch that very evening when she had emerged from the telephobon.

Stopping, he picked it up and examined it. Suddenly he felt something hard and round jammed into the small of his back and a harsh voice hissed in his ear:

"Stick 'em up, mister, or I'll drop 'em!" Nick New was too old a tactician to try any

fancy business with the stout of a .42 revolver jammed against his fifth vertebrae.

He lifted up his hands and murmured:

"March!" commanded the voice. "And don't try any monkey business, inspector, or I shall hit you without compunction."

Nick withdrew at the indignity of it, but the situation was impossible. However brave a man you may feel, it would be nothing less than sheer lunacy to attempt to grapple with an assailant who can shatter one's spine to fragments with a touch of a trigger-guard.

He ground his teeth so he felt himself impelled forward in the direction of a small cupboard that gave off from the outer room. A rich throaty chuckle that sounded hollow and corroborating came from the man.

"They say that all movements carry within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. Mr. New," mocked the Harker. "You were evidently sanguine of meeting me this evening, judging by that."

Nick felt a hand inserted into his hip-pocket and cursed as he felt his teeth as he heard the jingle of handcuffs.

"Turn round, my friend," chuckled the Harker.

Nick spun round, and for a fraction of a second it seemed as if he were going to launch himself full at his captor, but he restrained the impulse in time.

"There is nothing that concerns me quite so much as the facility of apparatus as one of these little weapons, Mr. New," mocked the crack.

Nick found himself staring into the square, ugly muzzle of a revolver. It was gripped in the hand of a man in a black cloak whose face was covered by a white mask.

The detective's drive his breath sharply as with a deft movement the Harker snapped the handcuffs on Nick's wrists.

"And now, after, Mr. New," said the crack. "This needn't irritate your mouth will make an effective gag. The chances will probably release you in the morning."

He bowed mockingly and slammed and locked the door.

AT THE BLACKER'S MERRY.

Dorothy Somerville came to herself with a raging headache. Her eyelids fluttered open and she tried to speak, but her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth, which was dry and parched. Her limbs seemed to have grown suddenly numb and everything was spinning round her. She discovered she was lying on a small, ill-fitted bed in a lavatory-facinated corridor. The sole illumination came from an electric light bulb that dangled above the bed.

The wallpaper was hideous and an infamously low beam steadily in the grate. Dorothy moaned slightly and found that her wrists and ankles were lashed together by thin but strong strands of cord.

Desperately she tried to struggle up to a sitting posture. Her temples throbbled alarmingly, and she wondered, panic-stricken, what was going to happen to her.

There was a rickety gate-legged table in the center of the room. On it rested a quart bottle of beer and a bank of bread and cheese.

Dorothy looked her dry lips and tried to moan, but no sound came. Suddenly she heard the soft sizzle of footsteps outside the door of the room and a key turned in the lock. The door opened and a stout, hard-featured woman dressed in rusty black entered. She had a hard, redoubtable face and eyes so hard, shrew and malignant as two black haw-hawk's beak.

"Well," she croaked harshly. "You're come to yourself, 'ave ye?"

Dorothy moaned feebly.

"Where are I?" she asked, and her voice strengthened a little as she sat up, and some slight memory returned. "What's the meaning of this outrage?"

The words returned feebly.

"Ask no questions as yet! Not on this day, the Blacker's got 'er, that's not."

"The Harker?" cried Dorothy weakly, and a shiver of fear ran through her as realization came to her.

Her head was in a whirl. What did it all mean? Who was the man in the hood who

had attacked her in the office? Above all, why had Nicholas New not turned up as he had promised? She felt hot and bewildered, and her red lips curled maliciously as her waitress sat down at the table and poured out a glass of beer, which she drank with noisy gusto.

"Could I have a drink?" she suggested faintly.

The woman's laugh was harsh as she poured out more beer into a cracked cup.

"Yes, put this down!" she said harshly.

Dorothy chuckled.

The cup was dirty and greasy, but she managed to swallow half of the unappetizing beer. The woman attacked the bread and cheese voraciously, and her yellow teeth bared in a snarl of animal greed.

Dorothy chuckled. She wondered what further horrors were in store for her, and whether it would be worth while trying to please the grating features of the woman.

"Who is the Blackie?" she asked, and the woman tapped her lanky nose knowingly.

"That's a thing a good many would like to know, my lady," she said. "But I ain't telling—no!"

She demolished the final piece of bread and cheese and rose to her lumpy height.

"Well, I'd better be triflin' the chief as you're speakin'," she remarked.

Dorothy had no sense of knowing what time it was nor for how long she had remained unconscious. The glare of the electric lamp above her head made her eyes water, and she closed them wearily. The woman gave an odd laugh and unlocked the door.

"You rest a bit, dearie," she said. "And, mind, no talk, or it will be the worse for you!"

She shuffled out of the room, and Dorothy was left alone. A shudder of evil seemed to creep about that ghastly silent woman. The very rags upon her face was terrifying.

Who was the Blackie? Why had she been kidnapped? These and a hundred other questions surged through Dorothy's muddled and bewildered brain. The thought of Nick and his calm, deliberate attitude and his steady blue eyes brought her courage.

He wouldn't let her down. There must have been some ghastly mistake, she reflected, and shivered again as she recalled that terrible, maddening figure who had loomed over her as she became unconscious.

Suddenly she sat up. Again she heard the shuffle of footsteps. The door opened slowly and soundlessly. Dorothy gave a gasp of astonishment as she recognized the familiar figure that stood on the threshold. Her senses revived. There was something bizarre and fantastic about it all.

"Who—you?" she gasped. "What—what are you doing here?"

It was the last woman in the world she had expected to see. The figure in the doorway smiled wickedly.

"Good-evening, Miss Somerville. I'm sorry to put you in this temporary inconvenience, but, believe me, it cannot be helped. You are perhaps suffering from a little malaise, eh? I shall send in a medical adviser to see you."

"My husband?" gasped Dorothy. "Then it's possible you are the—"

"The Blackie," was the quiet reply.

"Rather amusing, isn't it?"

Nick with leisure, Dorothy stared at the smiling woman. At last she was beginning to realize how the secret information had leaked out from the Public Prosecutor's office. It was incredible, fantastic, but true.

The Blackie removed the grey wig, and the change in his appearance was startlingly inconspicuous.

"You must admit that it has been an amusing disguise."

He rubbed his hair, also fingers together in the attitude of Irish Heep.

"I am as pleased to welcome you to my humble abode, Miss—or—Copperfield?" he said mockingly.

THE SHIFTERS' JOINT.

Inspector Nicholas New was not the type of man to relax lazily to imprisonment.

The door had hardly closed behind the wretched convict when he seized his manuscript and rushed to the parson's of the door. The husband, veer of regulation pattern,

heavy and solid. Nick had noted that the key had been turned on the outside, and there was only one way out of the place, and that was by looking in the parson's.

He grined his teeth and brought the heel of the hand-coat down with a smashing blow against the heavy wood-work. He took half a dozen hours before a panel finally splintered with a crash.

Nick never flinched as a jagged sliver of wood pierced his wrist, inflicting a long, jagged gash. It was the work of a moment to thrust out both his hands and grope for the key on the outside. He turned the lock with difficulty, and, tossing the gag away from his jaw, he staggered into the outer office.

He took one glance at the open doorway, and his eyes narrowed as they fell on a square of sunlight on the floor that rested on the handkerchief. It was handcoated and slants, with a faint aroma of lavender which Dorothy adored.

Nick clenched his teeth. He took a flying leap towards the lift. It was not an easy task with his mangled wrist to manipulate the elevator, but he managed it finally, and went screeching downwards.

The waiting hallway was in darkness save for a faint light from the night porter's cubicle-hole. Nick staggered towards it, his eyes blazing feverishly.

"Hey, Robson, wake up!" he shouted—"I needled in here."

A creaking figure rose stiffly and awkwardly in his chair, his head and shoulders appeared on the table before him. There was an egg, jagged wound above the right temple from which the blood still flowed sluggishly.

Nick drew in his breath sharply and dashed down the steps into Whitehall. He was a dishevelled, wide-eyed figure with his handcoated wrist and torn coat. It was a foggy night, and the lamps glimmered palely yellow through the work.

Dazed and breathless, Nick splashed along towards Parliament Square, Near Scotland Yard he almost collided into a lady, ill-maintained constable, who flushed his lamp indignantly on to him.

"Now, now's all this!" he demanded, glancing at the glazing handcoats and handcoated wrist.

"Never mind questions," snapped Nick.

"I want to get home off!"

The constable stared, and a grin of recognition flashed over his red face.

"Hey, parson, eh, I didn't recognize you," he apologized.

"Sorry," cried Nicholas impatiently. "Come up with me. We don't want to attract a crowd."

They turned into Scotland Yard, and Nick saw that the handcoats remained.

"Now, an audience crowd to the Home Office," he ordered. "The Blackie's abroad."

He wiped the sweat from his forehead and purred his lips thoughtfully as he glimpsed a shuffling motor-car down up a little to the right of the roadway. It bore the inconspicuous legend—"Sunlight Laundry."

Nick stood up the stairs and belittled for Meadows. That big and burly man was seated in an armchair in his shirt-sleeves. Nick frowned.

"Well?" he demanded. "What happened?"

Meadows shrugged.

"The bloke 'ving got clean away," he announced. "I chased it as far as Wounds-worth, when I got a puncture in the front



Lifting the unconscious girl in his arms, the Blackie carried her across to a large cupboard.

"You'll be safe for a bit, my beauty," he muttered.

where, by god, that car can travel!" he added helplessly.

"What's the matter with you, Nick?" he inquired. "You look all in."

"Matter?" returned the detective grimly.

"The Blackie has kidnapped Miss Somerville. He held me up in the Home Office and killed the poor devil of a night porter."

"What's that?" ejaculated Meadows, and his round placid eyes widened in astonishment.

"What's the big idea, Nick?"

Nick shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"This can't go on!" he gasped. "I'm going over to the Bishop's. If anybody knows anything about the Blackie's movements he does."

Meadows nodded.

"My daughter's nick, Nick," he commented. "The Blackie's a killer. I'm willing to bet you you'll find the old abandoned scoundrel was 'Michans Cannon before the morning's out."

"What I want to know," prodded Nick, "is how the devil the Blackie knew we'd get the stag out of South Ken. There's more than one leak, Meadows," he said.

"What about Dilney?" asked Meadows. "I never liked that man, Nick. He knew all about the latest noise business. If you ask me, I wouldn't be surprised if Dilney was the Blackie."

"I'm not asking you," said Nick brusquely. "He is a squabbler and glared at the circumlocution on the wall. It was not yet 11 p.m. Much had happened in the crowded two hours since the murder of Sir Frederick Jewell."

He nodded a curt good-night to Meadows, and after having lit up his old pipe with a handkerchief he entered his little ramshack-



Covering the handcuffed detective with his automatic, the masked man quickly wound the scarf about his mouth.

and made direct for his flat in Trafalgar Square.

The Shifter's joint was situated in a side street off the Tottenham Court Road. Unusually, it was an Italian restaurant. The Shifter's real name was Bert Babbie, a former-matched Italian with wild brown eyes. The Shifter's place was well known to the police. He was one of the most knowledgeable of "ruses," one of those contemptible creatures who hover sternly on the edge of the underworld and are defiled by police and trucke alike.

Still, there was no doubt about it that the Shifter was useful. In his slight odd the barman and jockey of London's underworld drilled in and out continually. It was not in Scotland Yard's interest to close the place.

Shortly after midnight a big hulking fellow with a swarthy face, a broad cheek and heavy gold earrings swaggered into Babbie's joint. The Shifter's clientele was as diverse and varied as his room. In the main it consisted of Italians and play boys who were members of notorious race gangs.

The big way strode into the restaurant. The atmosphere was thick and blue with smoke. A starbucked Chinaman sitting next to a negro at a fifty-cigar-topped table stared at the newcomer, whose horn eyes took in every detail of that small and spindly man. An electric piano churned out an ancient melody and an obese Hebrew-looking individual clasped a honey-looking woman in a tight dance.

A big black negro in a respectful set of check was yelling the names with a half-cant at one of the side tables, while a pale-faced, pretty girl with chemically yellow hair giggled hysterically as she watched the players.

The newcomer passed through the pungent clouds of tobacco smoke and discarded the sign, vaguely aware of the Shifter. He was seated at the cash desk, and he twisted his black mustache fiercely at the big man leered over to him.

"Why, hello, Lou?" he said, fishing his teeth in a golden and glistening smile. "I haven't seen you this long time!"

The man addressed as "Lou" half-closed his eyes and without moving his lips tapped out: "De've you got staple?" he, Shifter?

A look of low leapt into the man's startled eyes. He moved his gray palm in a deprecatory gesture.

"Why, nobody as you know, Lou," he returned.

From the corner of his eye he watched one of the Chinamen who did fervently towards the crimson curtain that screened a door at the back of the café.

"Shifter," said Inspector Nicholas New, and his voice was unconsciously quiet, "where's the Blackie?"

The Italian staggered as though he had been shot. His shabby cheeks went pale with fear. "This—the Blackie?" he stammered. "I don't know was you drivin' at. Swear me bob, I don't!"

"Ah, you got da?" replied the Yard man. "Come on, screw with it, Shifter; I want a little chat."

He jerked his head meaningly towards the crimson curtain, and with a sigh the mark clambered down from his high stool and accompanied Nick behind the curtain.

The Yard man had assumed a role that he often used when fighting out information from London's night hawk. No one but the Shifter knew that "Lou Shifter" was connected with the police. Nick's disguise was simple but effective and enabled him to mix on terms of more or less equality with the weather by of criminal.

The Shifter slipped his gloves as they stepped into the back and entrance passage beyond the curtain. It was illuminated by a sickly gas jet that threw dense sooty shadows on the dingy ceiling.

"Now come across," commanded Nick. "Don't pretend you haven't heard about the Blackie."

The Shifter bit his lip. He was obviously agitated.

"It's one of 'em up and up, mister," he said. "Gotta me, I shuren't give you any dope on the Blackie."

Nick's eyes grew steady hard. He turned to the door on the right from behind which came a murmur of voices.

"Who's in there?" he demanded. "It's a few friends of mine, mister," said the Shifter usually.

Nick wrestled open the door. Three men,

fully dressed, were seated playing cards at a table on which rested a half-empty bottle of whisky and three glasses. One of them swore at the detective's sudden entrance.

"Sit down, gentlemen, sit down," said Inspector Nicholas New.

He smiled somewhat grimly as he recognized two notorious gangsters and a neat, bony man with a hanging, yellow face.

"Why, hello, if it isn't my old friend the Clincher?" said Nick. New.

The crooked started to his feet with an oath. As if by magic an automatic appeared between Nick's fingers.

"Sit down, Clincher, my lad," said the detective. "I want to have a talk with you. I hope you've been going straight for a while!"

Clincher Gabe curled his lip scornfully.

"I don't care a row you got 'em, Mr. Newey New," he rejoined. "You ain't got anything on me. Look at 'em, fellow, Scotland Yard's dandy detective. How you the 'ave and 'ave you the 'ands, ain't 'em for dispair?"

Nick New studied beneath his smugly make-up while the other two gangsters glared with amazement. The Shifter hovered about discreetly.

"Please, please don't make any trouble, gentlemen," he pleaded. "Inspector New thinks you know something about the Blackie, so 'I'm telling 'em you don't know a damned thing."

"The Blackie?" retorted Clincher Gabe, and his smile was ugly. "You watch out, or you'll be getting your Newey New."

In that instant the phone bell rang with startling suddenness. Nick saw the glance which passed between the three men. A glance of apprehension and fear. He waggled his automatic suggestively towards the trio. The telephone was on the wall, and the Clincher half-staggered to his feet to answer it.

"Sit down!" snapped Nick. "That's for me, I guess."

He grabbed hold of the receiver and muttered the words with his gun.

"Hello, that you, Clincher?" came a voice, low-toned and urgent, over the wire.

"Yes, Lou," said Nick in a gruff tone that was a fairly good imitation of the crooked's. "Listen, I shall be back at three. Keep an eye on the girl."

Nick's pulses raced. It was evident enough who the speaker was.

"Yes, Lou," he began. "I've forgotten the number of the place."

"What's the matter with you, you fool?" snapped the voice of the Blackie. "Are you drunk? She's over at Five Street, Park Lane, Number Seven. There'll be a meeting at Southampton Hall tomorrow. See that Green keeps off the loose."

Nick felt his heart pounding violently as he listened. It was obvious that the Blackie was referring to Dorothy. He did not dare say too much, however, in case the half-crook should suspect something was wrong.

"Right-o, Lou," he said loudly. "I'll do that."

Crack!

Nick eyes moved just in time to see the Clincher hurl over the table with his knife and glasses. A swirl of fury rippled from the crooked's throat, and without an instant's warning the Clincher hurled his heavy ball at Nick. He sprang with swift agility and gripped Nick's wrist in a vice-like grasp.

Crack!

Nick's crooked grip once—barbarously. The Clincher's sudden onset had spent his aim, and the crooked's merely granted as a smothering tongue of flame struck his temple.

The weapon went flying out of Nick's hand and the telephone receiver clattered helplessly from the instrument. The Clincher leaped straight for him, advanced on him. Nick swung back his deadly fist and drove it with every ounce of his strength straight for the Clincher's jaw.

The crooked's head arched back with the pain and suddenness of the blow. One of the gangsters jabbed a gun towards Nick as the Clincher crashed forward. A stream of swarthy curls flared from the Shifter's flared lips.

"Stick 'em up, yer darred boss!" roared the gangster bravely.

Nick's hands shot upward. His eyes were already noticed by a bracket on the wall a patient per-ocular glass eye-contraption. As his hand shot upward he seized hold of it and heaved the heavy object with a crash straight at the gangster's evil face.

It broke in a thousand fragments against the gangster's thick skull and with a howl of agony he dropped, his face streaming with blood. The room was full of pungent chemical fumes. Nick did not pause. He switched open the door and took a flying leap into the passage outside.

A revolver shot roared past him and he heard the whine of a bullet pass his ear. In two hours he was outside in the street. On the other side of the road was a crawling taxi. Nick hailed it, and wrenching open the door sank back inside.

"Fife Street, Fifeham!" he said. "And drive like the devil!"

THE BLACKER BLAZES OUT.

A lot less crowded in the grey oak-panelled library of Dr. Charles Krozin's comfortable home in Aylinton, a pleasant market town in Bucks, some forty miles from town. The doctor himself was a ruddy-cheeked, dapper little man with twinkling blue eyes and a beaming manner that was famous throughout the county.

He was a man of some substance. In addition to being Medical Officer of Health he was Justice of the Peace and chairman of the local British Legion.

It was close on midnight, and the doctor, who had had a strenuous day, now relaxed in slumped ease before the fire, little dreaming of the signs of terror which the Blacker had started in London, nor how soon he himself was to be succumbed in it.

Doctor Krozin's household was small but efficient. Recently a widower, his wife had been the "lady beautiful" of the district, and his sudden bereavement had evoked genuine sympathy from the countryside.

The doctor had a restless nature, however, and his many friends had vied with one another in showing him kindness and sympathy. It was rare indeed for the doctor to sleep alone, but this evening was the exception.

He had had a somewhat melancholy errand to perform that afternoon. He had called at a monumental mason's to order a tombstone for his late wife. The good doctor had spent a lot of thought over the inscription to her memory, and even the mason, whose plummy trade had cushioned him to retirement, was touched by the doctor's choice of an epitaph.

"Nothing is here for tears, nothing but toil and fear and what may quiet us in a death as noble."

Doctor Krozin laid down his copy of Milton's Paradise Lost from which he had taken the quotation. He smiled.

"I think I'll try Paradise Regained," he murmured.

His eyes narrowed reflectively. Nearly eight months had elapsed since the death of his wife whom he had named as decessedly during her illness.

The twilight rose and fell, casting strange fantastic shadows on the ramshackle walls of his study. Doctor Krozin's thoughts were very pleasant. The time for mourning was almost past.

In the corner of the grate he glimpsed shadow pictures of enchanted cities and tropic seas. The late Mrs. Krozin had had a considerable private income of her own, and now that probate had been proved the worthy doctor felt that at last he was entitled to a rest.

He stretched his arms luxuriantly. The household had long since retired. Outside a chill wind howled softly in the garden. The doctor stretched his legs and took down a volume of ten volumes from his well-filled bookshelves. He became so engrossed in his reading that he did not notice the faint click of a lock and the bulge in the heavy pink patterned curtain that screened the French window.

He scribbled a few illegible notes on the margin of his book.

"Indulgent, highly indulgent," said a calm, suave voice.

Doctor Krozin swung round in his chair and his eyes opened like won't the colour of death. Standing by the window was a tall figure in a stinked-upe cloak and his face covered by a white silk mask. In one hand he held a gun that pointed steadily at the doctor's heart.

The physician's jaw dropped.

"What—what do you want?" he stammered.

"You're the Income reply."

With an effort Krozin pulled himself together and in a voice that he strove to keep steady he demanded:

"Who are you?"

"You may call me the Blacker," said the stranger.

"The Blacker?" echoed the doctor, and his face was bloodless.

The other's tall red lip smiled crookedly beneath the rim of his mask.

"I have two words to say to you, my friend," he remarked. "Two very effective words. Either—or I need not particularise, but I think you will understand."

Dr. Krozin wotted his lips. He understood only too well. The midnight intruder crossed over to the fireplace and sat down in a chair opposite his victim's.

"My friend," he said, and his tone was almost casual, "your conduct during the past few months has been very indulgent. Village gossip is growing, and what is more, there are letters—anonymous letters—in circulation."

"What! what do you mean?" gasped Krozin.

"As for the Blacker—shocked softly. "Your charitable visits to the beautiful Miss—X, shall we call her?—and what about the sum of five thousand pounds you need Mr. Overman?"

"Incidentally," he added, almost as an afterthought, "you don't seem to have been successful in killing the woods in your garden as you were in—"

"Stop, cease now, stop!"

Krozin's face blanched. Gilt was masked by his eyes, and his heart was gripped by Kurt's icy fingers.

"A very capital point to see, aren't you?" commented White Mark. "It is better for you that I have come before the entire folk action, my friend. The Public Prosecutor is very interested in the matter."

"My Heaven!" gasped Krozin, and his voice shook. "You—you mean they are?"

The Blacker shrugged.

"Unless you are guided by me, doctor," he said quietly, "you will be welcomed up early one morning by a man you've never seen before, and one you will never see again. He will take you for a little walk, and—"

He hesitated a second, then said, very distinctly and definitely:

"You—must—come—back—now—this—night."

Dr. Krozin leapt to his feet and snatched hastily while the Blacker again uttered his terse ultimatum:

"Either—or. I need the services of a medical man in this—circumstances which I control. You preferably who is not too conspicuous. You have, of course, an alternative, my dear doctor. You can refuse—but I do not advise it. In the first place, I may mention that a Scotland Yard detective will start investigations in the district tomorrow. In the second place, a gentleman ignored my instructions this evening, and I was forced to kill him. His finger touched significantly on the trigger, and Dr. Krozin's blood turned to ice.

"On the other hand," continued the Blacker, and from his pocket he produced a half-coloured envelope which he had extracted too late before from the file in the Public Prosecutor's office. "If you follow my instructions you will be able to circumvent all police inquiries into the—lamentable death of your wife."

Dr. Krozin stared at the documents which comprised anonymous letters containing subtle hints and insinuations, and he smiled bitterly as he recognized the handwriting of a man who was calamity by his last breath.

"Well, what have I to do?" he said, and his voice was a mere croak.

"I think you'd better come up to town with me and discuss matters," said the Blacker.

"Even in this freezing village the fact that a doctor goes out in a midnight call will not occasion too much comment."

Dr. Krozin moved towards the fireplace. He looked suddenly very old and haggard. Behind the slit of his mask the Blacker's eyes glinted satirically.



Dr. Krozin swung round in his chair, and his face turned the colour of death as he saw the masked figure standing in the doorway, gun levelled at his heart.

BANG!

A crashing report rang in Blake's ears. He wrenched his hand away and allowed the pistol to drop from his bruised fingers.

"Without a sound the man with whom he had been struggling pitched headlong to the floor.

"You murderer! You've killed him!"

Seaton Blake turned unsteadily and stared at a second man who had rushed into his sitting-room from the room adjoining.

"Whoman?" he gasped in amazement, recognizing the chief inspector from Scotland Yard.

Wheman's face was hard as flint. Blake was too falteringly to make any resistance as the man pointed. There was a gleam of steel, and a sharp metallic click. A violent push sent the private detective staggering back, his eyes wide with amazement as he stared unbelievably at the hand-cuffs on his wrists.

"Are you sorry, Wheman?" he demanded angrily. "What is the meaning of this? Do you realize what you are doing?"

The C.I.D. man made no answer as he dropped to his knees before the silent figure motionless on the floor. He straightened up and fixed accusing eyes on Seaton Blake.

"He's dead!" he said grimly. "Shot clean through the heart! You've placed a rope round your own neck this time, Mr. Blake!"

From

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UNMARRIED!
Dorothy had lost all sense of time, and had fallen into an uneasy slumber after she had made her staggering discovery of the Blaker's identity.

She awoke with a start, conscious of the subdued murmur of voices in that dingy room. Seated at the table she saw two men whose faces were masked by white dominoes. In one case the disguise was unnecessary, for she recognized the suave, hateful voice of the Blaker.

He crossed over to the bed, and his smile was crooked beneath the rim of his white mask.

"Ah, you're looking better already," he said. "I have brought a doctor friend of mine to take a look at you. If you will promise to be a good girl, and not make any fuss, I shall be delighted to remove your band. I may as well inform you that previous help will be worse than useless, and the surgical result is very unpleasant consequences to yourself!"

Dorothy shrank back among her pillows, looking in her eyes. The other man, who was short and round, with grey hair, bent over her and held her fastened and swollen wrist.

"What—what if you want to me? Why do you kidnap me?" she inquired.

The Blaker laughed softly.
"It is a somewhat unusual proposal I have to make to you, Miss Somerville," he said. "As a matter of fact, it is a mere formality."

He passed, and Dorothy stared at him in wondering awe.

"Will you marry me?" said that strange man who called himself the Blaker, and who was now known as F. X. Quarbe.
"Blacker you?" asked Dorothy.

His question sounded so propulsive and fantastic that she began to laugh weakly, hysterically.

"Blacker you—a murderer and a black-maler! How—how dare you?"

Quite unperturbed, the Blaker shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not I believe, in these cases to ask the usual questions, matrimony, but, unfortunately, to make a choice, if it is not necessary."

His voice altered suddenly.
"You will marry me by special license within three days, time in the register office at Camden Town," he said.

Dorothy stared at him, her eyes wide with horror.

"You must be mad—stark, raving mad," she declared.

"On the contrary," laughed the Blaker. "I am exceedingly sane. The doctor here will corroborate that, I think!"

Dr. Kronin nodded. By his shaking head and a feverish glitter in his eyes Dorothy saw that the man had been drinking.

"Yes, yes, my dear young lady, I assure you it would be much better for all concerned if you—my—my friend's proposal."

Dorothy's lips curled scornfully.

"I would sooner die," she said. "You must be utterly insane, both of you. This isn't the nineteenth century. I cannot be forced into marriage against my will."

The Blaker gave a soft and sibilant chuckle.

"Correct—no. Permitted—yes! My friend, Dr. K., here, will doubtless substantiate my statement."

Dorothy's heart was numb, with fear. There was no doubt about it, the man was mad. The very clarity of his explanation held the ghastly, inevitable basis of the house.

"To be quite candid with you," continued the Blaker, "you will be dragged into submission in exactly the same way as violent females and criminals are pacified. You will be quite aware of what is happening to you, but you will not care very much. They tell me the effects of the drug are very pleasant. It is known as bromonal, I believe, and its chief effect is that it puts the will to rest."

The Blaker smiled again.
"I merely place before you the alternative I have placed before so many people. Either—no! Marry me or your own life will, and there will be no necessity in me for the drug. To face you!"

His pause was eloquent. Dorothy turned her face to the wall. She was sick with nausea and dread. The Blaker seemed so sure—so certain. She recalled now his diabolical plan. There was not much she planning her path to the rescue, she reflected. Nick did not know where she was. She did not know herself, and it was obvious that, having proved the Blaker's words, she would be guarded day and night until he achieved his insidious object.

"I will leave you to think the matter over," said the Blaker. "Come, datum, do you think we can trust her to remain quiescent if we were to untether her bonds?"

Kronin glanced at Dorothy and saw the defiance in her eyes.

"I doubt it," he remarked, shaking his head.

"So be it," said the Blaker.

He unlocked the door, and the two left Dorothy shuddering and bewildered as the thought of the Blaker's astounding proposal.

Nathanael New's nerves were apter with excitement as he sank into the taxi. It had been a piece of stupendous luck that the Blaker had rung up his taxi for just then.

It was not the first time that a visit to the Blaker's in the guise of Leo Somere had produced results.

The taxi howled along towards the Tottenham Road, and at the corner Nick rapped sharply at the window and looked out to a miserable old point guard.

"Look in at the Blaker's private," he commanded. "Paul in the Chamber; I'm off to Fulham."

The rouseable stared in bewilderment for a moment at the big, swarthy-looking Italian. Nick produced his identity card, however, and instantly the policeman's manner changed. He blew his whistle, and as the shell passed rolled through the deserted streets Nick ordered the driver to move on.

They rushed down towards the Rotten Row, and Nick grinned contentedly. He knew by the Blaker's phone message that Dorothy was alive. She was a prisoner in Pitt Street. The address was vaguely familiar to Nick, and he worked his brain to try and recall in what connection he had heard it before. He patted his hip pocket with satisfaction and jived in the thought of meeting the Blaker face to face. A cold rage filled his heart. If that arch sneak had harmed one hair of Dorothy's shingled head, then Nick swore to kill him with his own hands.

He glanced at the wall back of the driver and lifted the speaking-tube to order that policeman to hurry. He had just placed the rouseable mouthpiece to his lips when he suddenly inhaled a sobky, over-coming vapor. He gasped and coughed and dropped the handle while with a gasp. He felt a choking sensation in his throat, and with an effort he tried to open the window of the taxi.

The strap seemed to have jammed, and his fingers seemed suddenly paralyzed. With a choking gasp he slumped forward to the floor, out to the world.

From his seat in the front of the cab Steve, the driver, crackman and a prominent member of the Camden Town Consensus, turned round and gazed happily. He seemed to hold a ruse well, since had a minute before retained strict silence, and which he had only been making the opportunity to use.

"That's for you, Mr. Nancy New," he said with a grin and stepped on the gas. The car sped through the deserted streets towards Camden Town.

"Very satisfactory, very satisfactory indeed."

The same rule of the Blaker commented approvingly as he listened to the report of his lieutenant, Cronin.

The arch sneak had had a busy night, but so carefully had he arranged his plans and delegated instructions to his henchmen that it was not later than three a.m. when he entered the funeral parlors of Mr. Ben Tapp's undertaking company.

It was typical of the Blaker to have chosen Rotten Row, not only because of its

occupied position but because the sleep of the assistant Mr. Tapp was next door.

The most suspicious policemen would hardly connect the nocturnal activities of that well-known and repeated murderer of Gordon Toms with the work Blackmer did. The shop, like many undertakers in the poorer districts of London, was open all night, but some for a really light in the dressing-room window the place was in darkness.

The Blacker arrived shortly after three accompanied by Dr. Kroon, who was a very frightened man. They had returned from the place in Fatham after a forced trip from Blackinghamshire.

There were six members of the Crimean Crusaders present in the back room. They had diffied their robes, for they were all members of the inner circle of the Blacker's gang and in bold to the chief by his terrible reputation.

"Yes, very satisfactory, indeed," repeated the Blacker, with a dry chuckle and a side-long glance at Dr. Kroon. "All was beyond our anticipation needed was the services, freely given, of a medical man."

"Gentlemen, let me introduce you to our new colleague, whom you may call Dr. K."

Kara Tapp, the undertaker, was a lean, redoubtable individual with lantern jaws and eyes as deep set that they looked like the sockets of a skull. He was dressed in rusty black, and day and night affected a crumpled handkerchief nose pipe hat that added to his grotesque appearance.

The room in which they were now assembled was situated behind the shop, and the chief furniture of the place consisted of coffins in various stages of construction.

"Meet Mr. Tapp, a very ingenious man," said the Blacker. "You and he should get on famously together." Kara Tapp, the undertaker, bowed and rubbed his long hands. Elizabeth, Mr. Tapp's own difficulty in his ancient but necessary profession was to obtain the legal certificate necessary for burial.

"That will be remedied in future," said the Blacker quickly.

"What about the girl?" demanded Croon.

"Speak a little more respectfully of my future wife," he remarked. "What are organization needs in the services of an attractive young lady with no scruples and one, moreover, who will be unable to go into the witness box to testify against her dear husband?"

He chuckled malignantly.

"Well, well, Tapp, I think we'll go and take a look at our middleman friend, Mr. Nicholas New. That was a very smart capture of yours," he added, turning to Steve, the driver.

"Has he come to join us?"

Mr. Tapp touched his bowing nose with a skeletal finger.

"Just about. He's still a bit groggy. Ethyl chloride has rather a nasty after effect. We're got to hand it to Noisy New," he added. "It was a damned good make-up."

"If I hadn't had the nick tipped me by one of the Chinks in Shaffer's place, by word of the Chinks in Shaffer's place, I would never have known him," broke in Steve, the driver.

The Blacker laughed.

"Good!" he said approvingly. "Kick him in the ribs and bring him to love."

Mr. Tapp stretched out a hand and touched with an ornamental knob in the waistcoating of his funeral parson. With a faint, whirring noise part of the floor was held back revealing a dark, cavernous hole with stone steps leading to its depths.

Croon drew in his breath sharply at the charged floor when he saw the nostrils.

"My private anatomy," gasped Tapp. "Very useful in hot weather," he added with a chuckle.

Despite his professional training, Dr. Kroon shivered. There was something as utterly odious about the redoubtable undertaker.

"Come on, Steve," laughed Tapp, over his shoulder, shaking a torch.

The taxi-driver lumbered over while Tapp descended. There was a silence for a moment as the group waited. Suddenly from the dark hole below came the sound of Tapp's grating voice.

"Come on, Mr. Noisy New, as funny business."

A few moments later they heard stumbling footsteps, then the head and shoulders of Nicholas New appeared. He blinked dazedly, and his wrists were tightly bound by a knotted cord.

The Blacker toyed with his revolver as Nick advanced, closely followed by Tapp, who crossed him with an exclamation.

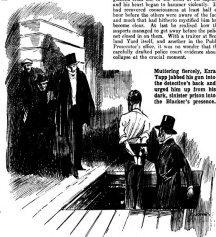
"Dear, dear," said the Blacker in a mocking voice, "so we meet again!"

Behind his mask his eyes were like those of a tiger about to spring. Nicholas New, pale, dazed, but indomitable, stared back at him with unswerving, gray eyes.

"So it seems," he drawled. "I thought I was a goner when I woke and found myself in a coffin. I fully expected to wake up in Heaven. But, seeing the present company, I am convinced that I'm—in—in the other place."

"Funny, aren't you?" sneered the Blacker. "You'll laugh the other side of your face when I'm done with you."

It was at that moment that a bell buzzed above the locked door of the parlour. Instantly Steve left, and the Blacker's eyes dropped as he heard the sound of an engine being set off.



"Who's that, Tapp?" he demanded harshly. The undertaker placed a bony finger to his lips.

"It's Ned—"

"Quiet!" hissed the Blacker warningly.

Tapp murmured an apology, and crossing over to the door drew back the bolt. Nick New stiffened. All his senses were on the alert. His flight was desperate, but he had one lone trump card to play.

He pressed his lips, and his pulses raced as he recognized a voice in the passage outside.

A moment later Tapp returned. With him was a big, burly man with the lower half of his face covered by a silk handkerchief.

Nick needed but one glance at the man's square shoulders and tiny gold compass on his watch-chain to realize that he now possessed one addition to the baggage of police investigation.

"Well, Meadows?" he said, and his lips curved in a cruel smile. "I've had my doubts about you for some time. So it goes you, was

it, that tipped the news of tonight's little raid at South Kent? Very clever of you?"

Meadows advanced towards Nick tremulously. "That's enough of your big, Mr. Noisy New!" he said indignantly. "You an' yer damned highbrowed methods 'ave 'em stuck in my gut for months past, you Communist's pet!"

The change in the big, grizzled man was startling. Few would have thought that the popular although member of the Flying Squad was a crook. For months he had been in the pay of the Blacker, and had indulged in several blackmarket coups of his own, lording toll on various night club proprietors on the plea of immunity from raids.

Nick's lips tightened.

"You dirty double-crosser, Meadows!" he said in an accent of withering contempt.

"Stop that, damn you!" sneared Meadows, and made as if to fling himself on the helpless detective.

"Steady as there!" snapped the Blacker. "Don't lose your temper. Remember we want to find out about—"

With a swift Meadows advanced. Nicholas glanced from one to the other of his captives, and his heart began to hammer violently. He had recovered consciousness at least half an hour before the others were aware of the fact, and much that had hitherto mystified him had become clear. At last he realized how the agents managed to get away before the police net closed in on them. With a trailer at Scotland Yard itself, and another in the Public Prosecutor's office, it was no wonder that the carefully drafted police court evidence should collapse at the crucial moment.

Muttering fiercely, Kara Tapp jabbed his gun into the detective's back and urged him up from his dark, sinister prison into the Blacker's presence.

"Now, Mr. New," said the Blacker conversationally. "We all readily admit you're intelligent and you've charm of manner. Unfortunately, however, you are a serious anomaly to my plans. You know too much."

"Indeed?" said Nick, and his smile was polite. With his eyes he gauged the distance between himself and the door. If he could only distract their attention for one moment there would be a slim chance of playing his trump card.

He held his bound wrists awkwardly in front of him, and relaxed his muscles. Very cautiously he edged near a pile of empty coffins reared one on top of the other.

Suddenly he straightened and slammed out violently with his right foot. There was a crash and the pile of coffins tumbled unobtrusively forward.

"Lock out!" snapped the Blacker, meeting steadily aside.

That woman's diversion was all that Nick

THE LAST THROW.

needed. With lightning rapidity he jerked apart his hands and reached for his gun-pit. During his incarceration in the collar he had managed to work his wrists loose. When assuming his role of Leo Kintner, Nick invariably carried a shoulder holster in the American fashion. A small automatic in addition to his ordinary weapon.

He grabbed the butt of the gun like a Band of lightning and whirled about.

"If any man moves I'll drop him!" he snapped as the pile of coffee crashed to the floor.

No one unexpectedly was his manœuvre that the crooks were taken aback for a split second. It was enough for Nick. With a parthenic lunge he reached the door, opened it, and in the passageway outside paused momentarily to send a huge stony statue of an angel crashing against the doorway as some sort of barrier against his pursuers.

Crack! Crack!

Two revolver shots whistled unpleasantly close, but Nick reached the outer door within two seconds. He shot it with a corroborating slam, and grinned exultantly as he saw Meadows' speedy little motor dune up beside the kerb. The engine was still warm, and, pressing the accelerator, Nick was away down the dreary, deserted street before the crooks could reach the outer door.

He smiled happily as he stopped on the gas. The Blazer, his face convulsed with rage, fired frantically after the car, whose red tail light winked at him derisively. He turned in a lurch on Meadows.

"You blamed fool, you've done for yourself this time!" he snarled. "Swatter, you fellows—and swatter damned quick before the Flying Squad is here in force!"

Dick drove like a head east he reached the outer circle of Regent's Park. A blue light above a police' phone box appeared, and hurriedly he dismounted and sang to Scotland Yard.

His information was terse but sensational, judging from the gasp at the other end of the wire.

"And now for Fife Street!" said Nick New, a fierce exclamation in his throat.

Minkova, who was an ocean driver, had never extracted so much speed out of his motor. The needle of the speedometer hovered between forty-five and fifty, and Nick took the corners very often on two wheels. No fewer than eleven policemen solemnly noted the car's number as it whizzed past them in the still dawn.

Dorothy Somerville had fallen into a troubled sleep. She was physically and mentally exhausted by her ordeal. She awoke shivering as the pale grey dawn light peered through the window. Her ears suddenly caught the roar of a motor, followed by the shrill scream of brakes.

She sat up, chill with fear. A moment later there was a thunderous knocking that reverberated through the house. Her heart almost stopped beating with terror.

There was a splintering knock, and she gave a strangled scream as the door of the dining room was torn from its hinges and a tall figure was precipitated into the room. She stared at the apparition with horror. Wild-eyed and dishevelled though he was, a glint of recognition suddenly displaced the look of terror in her eyes.

"Nick, Nick!" she cried. "I know you'd come!"

Her voice broke as Inspector Nicholas New leapt forward and took her into his arms. She allowed herself to relax, and Nick held her tightly in his.

"My dear," he said, "I came as soon as I could. These devils—"

"They—they haven't hurt you?" he added, in concern, as he noticed her white, drawn face.

She smiled, and her lips curved fondly. From the passage outside came the hoarse voice of the guard-house warden.

"Nicky, not a' all this!"

"No, not a' all this," said Nicholas New happily. "You go on back to bed."

With a light of triumph shining in his eyes, Nick strode out into the dawn. Away in the east the sun was rising in a glow of amber and gold.

When Nicholas New started to more things happened. After wrapping Dorothy warmly in a rug he sped Dorothea, and took her straight back to her little bachelor flat at the King's Road.

"You're all on the crash, my dear," he said, "and don't attempt to talk until I've made you a cup of hot tea, and if there's any laundry or 'winks in the place so much the better."

Dorothy smiled happily, and content.

"Oh the old-fashioned, my dear," she said.

"Help yourself to a whisky and splash, you look dreadfully tired."

"Non-sense," retorted Nick cheerfully.

He stepped over to the window and pointed to the clear, starling sky.

"No love hath been drawing another blue day."

"Think, old man, let it slip unless away!"

MYSTERY and TERROR

THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS



surrounded "The Fossoway," that terrible house in a lonely corner of Sussex where death lurked and from which emanated an evil that threatened to engulf the whole country in chaos. When that mysterious crook, "The Adjuster," sent a solid gold brick to the president of the London Banking Co., claiming that it had been manufactured by himself, and that he could make as much more as required, the financial world began to get nervous, and Scotland Yard was called in. That was just the beginning. And then Kit Arrowsmith learnt of "The Fossoway," and the mystery of Barbara Felton's father. From then, drama, followed upon drama, thrill upon thrill, and over all hung the sinister shadow of

"THE HOUSE OF DEATH!"

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be greeted, with a twinkle.

For a few minutes he looked himself in the little limousine and returned into the sitting-room with a jet of tea and some sandwiches. To her astonishment Dorothy found that she was hungry, and it was not until after she had broken her fast that Nick questioned her about her ordeal.

He listened grimly as she described how she had received a letter of instructions purporting to have come from him.

"Meadows' work of course," he said, "The letter was a forgery. The deliberate causing of it," he said, with smouldering eyes as he realized that but for an accident he would now be reposing on Mr. Tapp's memory slab. But it was when Dorothy described the Blazer's return and his intemperate proposal that Nick realized to the full the frightful machinations of that master black-magic.

He glanced at his watch. It was a little after midnight.

"By Jove, Dorothy," he said, "there may yet be a chance. If I know anything of the Blazer, I'll make it out for him and for the best place where you would suspect him to be, I'm very likely the place he'll make for. I'm beginning to understand the workings of that man's Machiavellian mind. To think of it, all these years he has been working right under our noses and none of us ever suspected. He is the really original master crook, content to hide his personality in that of an utterly colourless individual."

He started to his feet, and Dorothy laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Where are you going, Nick?" she inquired.

"To the Home Office," said Nick grimly.

"Then I'm coming with you," said the girl. Despite Nick's incoherence she arranged his scripples.

"What a blind fool I've been," said Nick, as he realized the number of people he had suspected in turn of being the Blazer.

Shortly before half-past seven Nick took up with Dorothy at the dock, grey bowing in Whitehall. A policeman was on duty outside, and there was an atmosphere of subdued gloom about the place.

The day porter had just arrived, and some half a dozen nondescript women in grey

(Continued on page 42)

The THRILLER

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Edward D. Sullivan

FOREWORD.

This story has so far been told of the author's dramatic introduction to the Chicago underworld, and of his first meeting with Dick O'Banion when that notorious gang leader was employed as "circulation slagger" as a newspaper. Starting as an expert safe-blower, O'Banion became one of Chicago's earliest high-jackers and rose to fame under the wing of Johnny Torrio, Al Capone's former boss. But even as a gang-child, O'Banion's high-jacking tendencies got the better of him, and eventually were to lead to his sudden and dramatic demise. O'Banion, having "got it in" for Dury and Harold Miller, imported a certain John Duffy from Philadelphia to do his killing, and left him to it. Duffy, however, not only failed to carry out his job, but got entangled in a love affair with a girl named Mabel Kiley, which ended tragically in murder. Duffy had fallen to O'Banion for help, which, after what he had done, was foolish of him. O'Banion now chastised him, and realized he was dangerous, with the result that his body was found on a snow bank in a prairie to the north-west of Chicago, riddled with bullets.

O'BANION AND THE FLOWER SHOP.

There is no purpose in going through the arrests on suspicion, the quick releases through influence and ready money, and the vast return in money and

prestige which came to O'Banion during his period in the sun.

In 1925 he married a quiet and attractive blonde girl. Her name was Anna Kasir. It was clear to those who knew O'Banion that they lived very happily, that she knew little of the operations in which he was involved, and that at no time up to his slaying in 1924 had she realized that death lurked constantly at his elbow.

It is strange the peculiar traits that can find lodgment in a character. O'Banion, sensible, sobering, and desperate in the dangerous field in which he moved, was a genuine home-lover when not active in his outland affairs. An incident will illustrate. Early in his career, when he was about to go on trial for the reckless safe-blowing, I met him coming out of the Sherman Hotel with a large envelope of photograph records under his arm. I said something about music loving themes, to which he answered:

"These are for my mother. Tomorrow I go on trial, and she's nervous as a cat. On the level I ought to be, but I think I'm all out. It's going to cost some money. These records are swell, but I bring them to her every week, anyway. What else would be good to cheer up an old lady who's worried to death? Believe me, she don't deserve a worry in the world."

Even in those early days, before his greater prosperity, O'Banion maintained a most comfortable and beautifully furnished

home for his mother. An sporting editor of the "Herald-Examiner," I was in a position to give O'Banion tickets for fights, a favor he appreciated mightily, even in the later days of his million-dollar operations. With other newspaper men, I visited his home on a couple of occasions. The parties were quiet and pleasant, elderly friends of his good-looking mother being among the guests. There was not the slightest trace of O'Banion's best-known traits, either in the home he made for his mother, or his later home with Anna Kasir.

With what force and hysteria his wife explained this to Chicago's first \$20,000-dollar funeral, following O'Banion's death.

Two months before that slaying the quarrel for trade arose in the new super-organized Chicago bootleg industry had reached a crisis. Scarface Al Capone was developing unprecedented power, so great that O'Banion sought to maintain an armed neutrality with his former bed keeper, now risen to a real state in the Chicago political situation.

This political power was attained by Capone in a way readily understood. He, with the second Green Brothers working under his aid and direction, first employed a vast group of distillers and alcohol cookers in the tenement houses of the Italian area.

This was infinitely better than a centralized distilling operation, for when one unit was raided or disturbed for any reason, the

not remained operating on all cylinders to meet the tremendous wholesale demand of Chicago. Italian families in great numbers were equipped with the necessary apparatus, and the cooking out of pizzas went on in their homes.

Picture the situation. A father employed as a laborer, trying to earn a living for the notably numerous individuals of an Italian family. Some agent of Capone gets in touch with him. He sets up his copper equipment and starts to make real money—perhaps a minimum of \$1000 a day. He has friends; he no longer gets up at five o'clock in the morning. His new income is beyond his previous dreams, and all the hopes and aspirations of his family, whether they have to do with education, good appearance, diversion, or better social status in the neighborhood, are magnificently gratified.

Who provides the almost unbelievable change in the family atmosphere and circumstances?

"Mr. Capone."

But it is too good to believe! What if they are arrested, and all this happiness leads to disgrace? Can anything save them? "Mr. Capone."

How would you feel about it if your life, heavenly blessed, had been an endless struggle with heart disease? If you were uneducated and ignorant—or even intelligent? Do you think your family would appreciate this change of fortune and desire wherever provided it. Yes, it would—from papa right down to the baby!

And there you have the heart of what politicians mean when they utter the word "constituency."

So when Al Capone went to the City Hall on any matter that might be vital to his tangled, but highly remunerative enterprises, do you think the political leaders called him "Scarface," or were installing? I'll tell you what they called him.

"Mr. Capone."

No one recognized this situation more readily and with more indignation than did O'Brian. His method of manipulation in legal matters, while profitable, made few friends and built little power. He either despised the other fellow's liquor, struck a warehouse or highway, or took huge chances on transportation with his own crack crew of loose hounds.

When O'Brian, associated in a friendly way with Terris and Capone in Chicago's early home supply, entered the war of the beer bars in supplying the retail trade in Chicago, his customers were forced into their patronage, and were, therefore, as particular friends of his. His drinks were cut to the last drop the moment he "mashed into" the beer field, and any Capone tolerance of his activities dwindled to nothingness.

The situation was a bad one. No one need tell O'Brian that he was intruding, and so one need inform him that it was a dangerous situation in which to intrude. The Germans, in addition, had begun selling converted wood alcohol at three dollars a gallon, two dollars under the O'Brian price. O'Brian had told Angelo, brother of that family doomed to annihilation, that they would either quit it, or else. He was not fooling.

A complete break with Capone was now certain. And so, as customary, O'Brian decided to have it with a bang. One on the west side, in Chicago, O'Brian and Terris, friend of Capone, had a brewery—the Sieben Brewing Company. Terris took his cut of the profits and knew little about the management or status of things at that particular property.

Joseph Stronzo backed this brewery and other brewing enterprises with gangsters who held the officers and had a share of the property in exchange for their ability to



"Scarface" Al Capone.

conjured up cash to buy their beer. Stronzo, a man of wealth, had connections which made it a simple matter to progress with the actual brewing details without interference.

He lived in the best residential section of Chicago—which he could afford to do at expense of 12,000,000 dollars a year—and was for many years in no way identified in the public mind with the gangster. He knew where to go, whom to see, and what to pay, none from having a bank roll ample to launch new enterprises. In return for good money Chicago, as early as 1911, was getting good beer and good delivery through this association.

At that stage more attention was paid to business than to murder, and the results showed in the brew.

With the Sieben Brewery working at capacity, things were developing that only O'Brian recognized. He decided to cut loose for himself.

Terris and Capone, having given him what they believed to be a great break for a young fellow in their organization, were out of temper with him for his unipity conduct and for his strong "in" with police, built largely at the outset with their organization's money.

Circumstances made this the time for a rupture. The situation at the Sieben Brewery was not so good.

The Federal authorities were beginning to fret about that property, and Chicago cops, who had been protecting shipments from the place, got to know that Chief Margus A. Collins, who knew Dion O'Brian well, had his eye on things thereabouts. Things looked nasty, and O'Brian, alone of all the "big shots," knew about it. He brushed his eyebrows.

Then, without a word to disclose the situation, O'Brian talked with Terris and West Side Brewmasters of Capone, and announced his intention of giving up the beer racket. It was great news.

HE SOLD THEM HIS SHARE OF THE BREWERY.

Within a week it was raised. The authorities had the brewery; O'Brian had his money, and the West Side mob had no good reason for murder as they will ever require.

For days O'Brian did not leave his flower shop. Across the street, in upper rooms, south of Holy Name Cathedral, a machine-gun covered his door. His rivals knew that two men lounged about his place. The West Side mob knew them, knew what they carried.

Nearly two months went by. Then Mike Merlo, head of the Sicilian Union and the only influence which ever kept the Gennaro and O'Brian from gun-fire, died. That night a man telephoned Dion O'Brian, talked in a sorrowful voice about Mike's death, and ordered a tremendous funeral? He would call for it the following day at two o'clock—it was to head a delegation at the funeral.

At the precise hour mentioned the following day three quietly dressed men drove up in what was obviously an undertaker's automobile. O'Brian, tremendously busy with orders and deliveries for the Merlo funeral, was unattended. Except for a young colored porter, he was alone in the shop. The three men approached him, and the man in the middle of the trio reached out and shook hands with O'Brian. He held the hand firmly while his two companions riddled O'Brian.

It was immediately apparent to the police that O'Brian either knew and had no fear of one of that trio, or else had been "out-ridden" by the well-to-do story of flowers for Mike Merlo's funeral. The porter in the flower shop said that O'Brian, with a shiver in his left hand, had extended his right to "a tall dark man who walked between the other two."

O'Brian, with two automobiles in specially tailored jackets, would have kept his hand disengaged if he had felt the slightest doubt of the visitors. He never had a chance. Five shots were fired first—all high on the victim—which is typical of gangster hang-offs. Two in the right chest, two in the throat. One in the chest. One a delay, and the final one—a carefully considered finisher—through the head. That's gang stuff.

In the more recent killing of Arnold Eaststein in New York, the type of the shooting indicated that it resulted from "missing a second," or a sudden outbreak of anger, as was true at the slaying of his bodyguard, Walsh, a few weeks later in Florida. These men were shot in the stomach. Gangsters do not, in premeditated killings, either fire one shot or aim at the lower body. Death is too uncertain that way. There is a delay before death—time for talk.

There was no delay for O'Brian.

How gauged settled after that killing! And there came the famous funeral, one of the most unusual and bizarre demonstrations this country has ever known.

Somewhere or other the details of that funeral were a blow to Chicago. Disconnected events had indicated that the city was gangsterized, and to an extent gangster-contrived. But there was sorrow, earnestness, and despair about the shootings. There was an element of bewilderment about the funeral—gangdom was announcing that it realized its power—Chicago was shocked.

The funeral of Dion O'Brian was without any question the most elaborate ever held in that city. Imposing beyond all good taste, it was simply astounding in its cost and pretensions. The body "lay in state" for three days, and thousands viewed it. There were twenty-six truckloads of flowers! Some of the individual pieces cost as much as 1,000 dollars. More than twenty thousand people were in the street before the Shurebourn Funeral Parlour, where gangster funerals are conducted with iced. Presidents are buried with less show.

A vast detachment of police mingled in the gangster mobs and suggested peace—if only for one day. At a pointed suggestion from the authorities, guns were given over by killers to their confederates who met them again at the Mount Carmel Cemetery—outside of Chicago jurisdiction—and turned them back to the skilled owners.

It was a great show! It astounded the mayor of the city. He could scarcely believe

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