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G-MEN OF THE G.P.O.

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THE STORY OF THE G.P.O.'S
FIGHT AGAINST CRIME

By

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G-MEN OF THE G.P.O.

CHAPTER I

A DETECTIVE AT FIFTEEN

I HAVE frequently been called "The Mystery Man of the Post Office," and I suppose the name has been more or less justified, for, without wishing to be mysterious as to my duties, it has been necessary for the success of my work to prevent myself becoming too well-known either to the world at large or to my colleagues in the Postal Service.

Although my profession has been in almost all respects similar to that of the men of the Criminal Investigation Department, it has been possible for me to avoid much of the publicity which falls to the lot of the Scotland Yard detective. As will be illustrated in the chapters which I propose to relate, I have taken a leading part in many strange criminal investigations without my activities being known to any save those in my own Department.

Occasionally my name has appeared in the newspapers, but only when it was unavoidable because of my having to give evidence in the courts. My first real taste of publicity came at the time of my recent retirement, when the Press descended upon me in numbers and evidently found me "a good story", particularly as the Postmaster-General, in presenting me with an honour of the O.B.E., referred to me

as "the veritable Sherlock Holmes of the Post Office".

This description, I may say, came as a surprise to many actually in St. Martin's-le-Grand itself, who, familiar enough with me by sight, had no inkling of the part I was playing in the safeguarding of the public's correspondence by letter, telegram and telephone.

At one time I had a house in London, next door to that of a postal official. I knew the nature of his calling, but he did not know mine, despite the fact that we had been good neighbours for some length of time. One morning, after I had appeared on the previous day in a case of Post Office crime, he called to me over the fence:

"I've just been reading of a Post Office case in which the G.P.O. detective was named Cartwright, like yourself."

"Really!" I exclaimed, affecting surprise.

"Yes," he replied. "Quite a coincidence that I should be a Post Office official and living next door to another Cartwright!"

"Extraordinary," I commented, for I had no wish to let him know that the "G.P.O. detective" and myself were one and the same man. I was very amused at the time, as no doubt he will be if he chances to read this book! I may say that I am a little below average height and am spare of figure. Had I been of the accepted "detective type" he might not have been so unsuspecting.

I am tempted here to say, as modestly as I can, that my length of service as a detective is no doubt a

record, for I was actively engaged in Post Office crime investigation for no less than forty-six years. Lest you think I must be a modern Methuselah, however, I hasten to add that I joined the Confidential Enquiry Branch, as my Department was then called, at the age of fifteen and a half years, and that I was put on to an investigation job at the very outset.

I had joined the Branch through the introduction of my father who had a friend who was an official in it, and I happened to come along at the moment when the Branch had several times failed to catch a postman who had been stealing letters. He seemed to be a wary individual, for never once, whilst he was under observation, did he do anything save his strict duty. I suppose it occurred to my superiors that, by putting "young Cartwright" on the job, the postman would not be led to suspect that he was being shadowed.

Be that as it may, I followed him one day into a Post Office in the Balham district, where he changed two postal orders which were made payable to a Charles Burns, a name which the postman wrote, in his own writing, at the foot of each order. The result was that he was duly arrested and sent to five years' penal servitude, whilst his young shadower received many pats on the back and the delight of being put on another investigation job immediately.

The severity of the sentence calls for comment. It was then, I think, the maximum sentence the judges meted out for that kind of crime, a maximum which was later reduced to three years.

As I managed to make a success of further jobs which were handed to me, I soon began to feel that I was a real part of the Confidential Enquiry Branch, and, as it contrived to find plenty of work for me during the next forty-five years, I suppose my assumption was not far wrong.

During those forty-five years I saw many changes in the Postal Service, particularly in the work which fell to my own Branch. At the beginning of that period Post Office crime was only just beginning to assert itself, and most of our work lay in tracing missing letters. In fact for a time we were known as the Missing Letter Branch. Before many years had passed we found ourselves doing more than tracking missing letters. We were tracking missing men, among whom were some of the cleverest criminals in the country.

A great development of crime seemed to occur contemporaneously with the telephone system passing from the National Telephone Company to the Government. The Service increased enormously and, with it, increased all manner of crime connected with the Post Office. It seemed as though the Telephone had made the whole of crookdom "Post Office conscious" for all manner of shady ones began to make a special study of the Post Office as it might be turned to their advantage.

Frauds on bookmakers began to be prevalent, the telegraph, telephone and letter services all being used against the bookies. Crooks acquired the art of robbing telephone cabinets on an enormous scale,

swell criminals turned their attention to valuable mail-bags and, altogether, the postal service seemed to be proving itself a new and lucrative field for the nefarious. Not all of the crooks were outside the Post Office, for, on numerous occasions, I had the unpleasant duty of bringing to book disloyal servants of the Service itself. Against this, however, I must say that there are about a quarter of a million postal workers, thousands of whom, in the course of their work, meet temptation every day; yet the amount of crime inside the Post Office itself might be called negligible. This wholesome state of affairs is a tribute to human nature in general and to G.P.O. workers in particular. Hundreds of thousands of pounds in cash are daily passing through the various departments and offices, yet rarely is there so much missing as a single pound.

There are, of course, always outside crooks on the watch for an opportunity of lifting some of this money, and on occasions they have been successful; but few of their successes belong to recent years. The Investigation Branch, with the assistance of Scotland Yard, has shown crookdom that Post Office crime is inevitably a losing game, even when that rarity, a dishonest postal servant is on their side. Mailbag thefts are generally the type of robbery which calls for the help of someone inside the Post Office, and in the following chapter I propose to relate several astonishing cases of this kind which came within my experience. They are not recent cases, for, I am glad to be able to say, the Investigation

Branch, after a long war with mail-bag thieves, showed them that the game was not worth the candle, with the result that this particular crook fraternity turned their attentions to less hazardous forms of crime.

CHAPTER II

MY GREATEST MAIL-BAG THEFTS

ONE of the biggest mail-bag robberies which the police and the Investigation Branch had to investigate occurred in the autumn of 1922, when a gang of crooks got away with £80,000 worth of Rumanian Government Bonds, dividend warrants and scrip payable to bearer. These securities were being sent to the Anglo-South American Bank in Old Broad Street by the Banque Belge in Antwerp.

They left Antwerp all right, and, so far as our inquiries showed, reached these shores, but they never reached Old Broad Street. They had completely disappeared in transit.

The effects of the discovery upon the authorities were staggering, and it was decided for the time being not to make the theft common knowledge. It was, in fact, a good six months before the story became known to the general public.

The manner in which the news came out was amusing. The police "got wind" that a bookmaker in Victoria had a number of the stolen bonds, and he was arrested and charged with being in unlawful possession.

The police found him to have no less than £10,000 worth of securities, but he was quite innocent in

that he had picked them up in a packet in a Piccadilly gutter!

But much had happened in the six months before the bookmaker's arrest. Conferences had been held daily between the police and ourselves. Every available man had been posted off to one or other of the European capitals, while, as soon as the theft had been discovered, the numbers of the bonds and warrants had been telegraphed to every quarter where the thieves were likely to try to dispose of their haul.

Several times the trail was picked up, whereupon the thieves almost uncannily dropped their efforts. This had occurred in most of the European capitals, and as far afield as Cairo and Petrograd, and none of the bonds had been negotiated.

Shortly after the bookmaker affair a firm of assessors received two mysterious packets by post.

One of them, an ordinary envelope, addressed in block letters, contained one of the missing £2,000 bonds, and a registered package disclosed no less than £70,000 worth, together with other contents of the missing bag.

Needless to say, everybody concerned was delighted though we of the Investigation Branch could not easily get over the fact that we had not caught our mysterious quarry. Not for six years did we get any satisfaction, when an East End solicitor was arrested on a certain charge and it was discovered that he had once been in possession of some of the stolen bonds.

He was sent to penal servitude for five years.

This was not the only mail-bag case in which the thieves were unable to dispose of their loot, for, earlier that very year, a registered bag of Treasury notes to the value of £17,000 was stolen from the London-Bradford mail train.

There were, so our inquiries showed, four men in the affair, so that a share-out might have meant £3,000 each. But, alas, they lacked confidence in each other to spend the money discreetly, for sudden wealth has often given away the game. Or else they could not agree upon the sharing of the money.

Be that as it may, they hid the whole of this great sum in an old disused brewery in Bradford, where it remained until they should be unanimous about it.

Then, out of the blue, came a letter to our head-quarters, revealing the hiding-place of the money, which was quickly retrieved. It seemed as though there had been a wrangle among the gang and that one, out of fear or spite, had sent the astonishing letter. Or it may have been the work of a woman.

Twice in my experience have I found this to be so. In one case the woman wrote to save her man from the possible consequences of the theft, imploring that he should not be told of her letter. In the other case the motive was different. One of the men had been unfaithful to the woman, who was one of a gang of thieves. Purely out of spite she gave information which led to the recovery of the haul. I may mention that this kind of case is often behind the "information received," which enables the police to make what seems an almost miraculous coup.

The Hatton Garden Robbery was easily the most audacious mail-bag robbery which ever came within my experience. It involved the loss of several hundreds of registered letters posted by diamond merchants in Hatton Garden, and was carried out in broad daylight in a London street.

The theft took place on a Saturday in September, 1926, a time which had been well chosen, for there is generally a heavy consignment of diamonds for abroad on that day, while the month marked the beginning of the winter season in the diamond trade.

The value of the gems was about £7,000, though this was not known immediately. The amount paid in registration is not necessarily a guide to the value of missing mail bags, as the Hatton Garden merchants generally insure privately against the loss before their packages are posted.

Sometimes the latter are registered for a few pounds only, on the principle that heavy registration might call attention to the value of the packages. In any case the G.P.O. is not responsible for more than £400 per package, which is not much in the diamond trade.

From this case emerged two of the most interesting men who ever came under my notice. One of them was "Diamond Dan."

The other was the driver of the van from which the mail bags were lifted before the eyes of various onlookers. It was he who drove away the van from his fellow postal workers and then disappeared as completely as a snowflake from a hot shovel.

"Diamond Dan" was at one time employed in the diamond trade and bore a good name in Hatton Garden. Then he started business on his own account and became mixed up with the crooks who for ever hover about this corner of the gem world.

Here is the story:

On the afternoon of the fateful Saturday the driver, accompanied as usual by a postman, drove his van to collect mail bags at certain offices in the East Central area, a job which he had been doing satisfactorily for five months.

Among the offices at which they called was that in Hatton Garden, where three registered bags were handed to them. Their next call was at the Smithfield Post Office in Charterhouse Street. Here the postman went inside to collect further mail bags. When he came out the van had vanished as if into thin air.

The alarm was immediately raised and the police notified. The result was that the van was soon found —abandoned in a street off Goswell Road. The three Hatton Garden mail bags were missing.

The name of the street was Upper Charles Street and here two people had witnessed the next exciting act in the drama which was being played.

A man named Smith and his son, a messenger-boy, saw the mail van speed into the street and pull up short by a grey touring car containing three men, which was standing there with its engine running. Immediately the driver dismounted, and, assisted by the men, began to take out three bags. For a

moment Smith took no particular notice until his boy suddenly cried:

"Look, dad, they're pinching the mails!"

Mr. Smith looked and was just in time to see the last of the three bags thrown into the car, the three men following. The fourth man, the driver, was last, as he had calmly removed his uniformed overcoat and cap and thrown them back into the van. A moment later the car made off at high speed. Smith, of course, raised a hue-and-cry, but it was too late. The car had gone.

This affair kept the police and the Investigation Branch pretty busy for a while. It was, however, mainly a matter for the former to shadow the man known as "Diamond Dan," and another man, both of whom were arrested within a month.

"Diamond Dan" had upon him at the time of his arrest some of the jewellery from the stolen bags, and the charge against him was of receiving these articles. He made the well-worn plea that he had bought the jewellery from a man he met in a public-house, but he was sentenced to three years' penal servitude.

The driver apparently had made a perfect get-away, for though the police combed London, with special attention to Soho, there was not a trace of him to be found.

From my own inquiries I learned that he had stayed at various addresses during a short period.

One landlady said she had always been mystified that so cultured a young man should have been content to be a vandriver. He was always smartly

dressed and frequently went out with friends who called for him in a luxurious car.

Every week-end he bought expensive flowers, which he said were for his mother in the Middlesex Hospital, but inquiries failed to find any such patient.

As time went on without him being arrested, he became a legendary figure. He was always being seen in places where he could not have been. Reports came from here, there and everywhere that the man was in the neighbourhood, but, although the police hurried to the spot, there was no sign of him. Then came reports that he was in America, which were true, as events subsequently proved.

Two years later he was back in England, and one of my men saw him in the Underground at King's Cross, but he disappeared too quickly to be followed. His next appearance was at Balham, where a policeman spotted him in a fast-moving car.

Shortly after this, to everyone's surprise, he was caught in the most unromantic manner. The police stopped a car which had been loitering late at night in the quiet roads of Wimbledon, and could hardly believe their eyes when they found the wanted man at the wheel.

At first he denied his identity, but eventually admitted it. He also confirmed that he had been in America, a fact later backed up by the receipt of his finger-prints from the police of that country.

He was duly tried and sentenced to a term of penal servitude.

And now for the story of a postman who stole £95,592.

His name was—well, let's call him Brown—and he was employed at the East Central chief office as a postman.

At the time of the robbery he was acting as "guard" on the van which delivered mail bags to the Lombard Street post office.

At about 7.30 on an autumn morning three postmen were engaged in taking mail bags from the van into the office. Brown suggested that one of them should help the other in with the mails while he, Brown, remained outside loading up a second trolley.

This meant that he would be left alone with the mails for a few minutes, a period which would be quite sufficient for his purpose. Immediately he was alone he calmly put two registered bags into a postman's sack which he had lying at hand. Then he walked briskly round a corner with them and went to a room he had rented above a barber's shop.

Then he went into the barber's and had his moustache shaved off before making himself scarce with his loot.

And what a loot! One of the bags was for the Clydesdale Bank and contained bank and currency notes to the value of £2,550, Bills to the extent of £3,676, cheques totalling £80,000 and a few other choice scraps of paper making another £1,000 or so. The other bag was for delivery to Messrs. Ruffer and Co., Lombard Street, and contained cheques to the value of over £7,000.

Much of the haul could be of no use to him, but there was quite a good margin of cash in addition to certain securities which he might be able to convert.

Leaving the empty bags and some of their contents in his room, Brown now disappeared into the maze of London, and, though the police and the I.B. hunted high and low for some days they were unable to pick up his trail until it was discovered that a mysterious "Jack Davies," with plenty of money to spend was frequenting a public house in the Edgware Road, where he had become friendly with the barmaid. But the bird had flown when we paid our visit.

He had, however, left a parcel in charge of the barmaid, saying that it was valuable. When it was opened it was found to contain £353 in notes.

It was imagined that Brown would reappear to call for it, but he had evidently decided to leave it until things were quieter, and when a couple of weeks had passed it looked as though Brown had disappeared without trace.

Up to this time I had not personally taken part in the search, as I had been occupied on another big job. I was now called in by my Chief and told that everything else I was doing must be abandoned, and that I must find Brown.

"You see, Cartwright," he said, "it's bad enough when professional thieves escape us, but it would never do for the public to think a Post Office employee can commit such a big robbery with impunity."

An amusing incident happened later that day. I was walking along one of the corridors of the G.P.O. when I met a very high official whose name I will not mention. To my surprise he stopped me.

"Ha! Cartwright," he said. "I understand you have joined the Brown hunt. Well, do your best. I've got a box of Coronas on you!"

Now Brown was a married man with children, and I learnt at the E.C. office that he frequently spoke of them fondly. This made me think that he would be communicating with them in some way. The wife had already been questioned several times, but had denied all knowledge of her missing husband. I now found that she had gone to a sea-side resort for a holiday with the children, and I decided that I would make this the starting-place of my investigations. Accordingly I went down by the next train and began to keep watch upon the apartment house where she was staying.

I saw nothing of her that day, but on the following morning she emerged and made her way to the beach. I decided, however, to keep watch on the house and observe the various callers. Luck was evidently on my side that day, for a somewhat strange-looking man went up to the door and rang the bell. In a moment I had crossed the street and was just in time, as I loitered by, to hear him ask for Mrs. Brown, though I had imagined she would have changed her name. The landlady evidently told him that the lady had gone to the beach, and he set off in that direction. So did I.

I knew a short cut by which I could get there before him, and this I took. On the way I changed my cap to an entirely different one which I had with me, and removed my collar and tie so that I appeared as though I might be someone on the dole! My reason for this was that the man might have noticed me by the door, and it was essential that he should not recognise me later on. I may say that this was by no means the first or last occasion on which I carried a spare cap!

I spotted Mrs. Brown and lay down on the sand within a few yards of where she and the children were sitting and awaited the arrival of the man who, I was now sure, had come from her husband.

Presently he came along and I heard him ask if she were Mrs. Brown. To his utter astonishment the woman flew into a rage and asked him what he meant by it.

"Can't you lot leave me alone?" she asked angrily. "I came down here to get away from you."

She had imagined him to be a plain clothes man who had followed her there. Then she learnt otherwise and she and the man chatted for some time in tones which I could not overhear. During the conversation I saw a packet containing bank notes change hands; then the man rose and walked away, with me following at a safe distance. He made a few calls for liquid refreshment, during one of which I managed to change back to my original appearance. Eventually by evening he led me back by train to London and thence to a quiet little hotel in the West End. I took off my cap and followed him into the lounge where

he spoke to a well-dressed man sitting there, who did not actually tally with Brown as I had had him described to me. This, however, was no doubt due to the disappearance of his moustache.

His identification was rather too flimsy for my liking, to make an arrest, so I phoned up the E.C. office for a Post Office official who knew him by sight. Even he was in some doubt, but was almost sure it was Brown. I therefore got into communication with headquarters and two detectives to come along.

Meanwhile Brown, who, I discovered, was living at the hotel, had gone into the dining-room to attend to a steak. I took a seat opposite him and read my paper for a little while. Then I spoke.

"Excuse me, sir," I said, "but may I ask if you were ever in the Post Office service?"

"No, I wasn't," came the reply, "and if I was, it's no business of yours."

"I'm sorry," I countered. "I did not mean to be inquisitive, but I happen to have been there myself."

His curiosity rose to my bait.

"Oh, what Branch were you in?" he asked.

Then I let him have it.

"In the same Branch that I'm in now, "I said, looking at him keenly and meaningly—"the Investigation Branch. I'm Frederick Cartwright and you are Bernard Brown. I am going to detain you in connection with a mail bag stolen from Lombard Street Post Office."

In an instant he sprang from his chair, but there was no escape. My two detectives saw to that.

He was duly sent to prison, but not so his emissary to Southend whom we did not even charge, for we learnt that he was a window cleaner who, whilst working at the hotel, was asked by Brown to take the letter to Southend for a fee of £1. Brown told him that he had to go to the races that day and could not visit his wife. In this there was truth, for he had been to the races frequently, and had parted with a substantial portion of his thousands to bookmakers, though how much we were never able to discover. Certainly evidence was given that many notes that had come back to the bank were from the racecourse, which seemed to show that there was something in Brown's story that he had lost his money to the "boys". The Judge, however, was not in a believing mind, and commented strongly on the small amount which had been recovered from so great a haul.

Incidentally, it may be of interest to say that, shortly after the case, I was the recipient of a box of choice cigars from an eminent gentleman in the G.P.O.

There were other robberies about that time, so cunningly conceived and daringly executed that to this day no one has been brought to book. In almost every case we were certain of the identity of the thieves, but it is one thing to spot your crook, and quite another to bring him to the Old Bailey.

Over £12,000 disappeared one night from the South Wales express. The missing bags contained

a consignment of notes from a Cardiff bank to its London head office. I had no doubt at all as to the identity of the men responsible, and though most of them have since gone to prison, it has not been for any connection with that particular crime.

The Cardiff mail-van robbery, however, marked the beginning of the end. My department determined to work the gangs to a standstill, and I was detailed to track down the ringleader, a man called Bruce, of Canadian extraction.

Bruce was one of the most remarkable individuals in the criminal world. Everything he did was on a big scale. He would never look at a job where less than £2,000 was involved. That was his "basic minimum". And he had never yet been caught out by the police of this, or, as far as I am aware, of any other country.

His methods usually revealed great imagination as well as uncanny skill. In addition to the Cardiff case, he was strongly suspected of complicity in the theft of several thousands of pounds from the mail van of a train travelling to Wolverhampton. On this journey he had with him two or three colleagues, we believed, including a lady expensively dressed in furs.

At a certain prearranged time, the lady, who was of course in a first-class carriage, was taken seriously ill, or so it appeared. The guard was summoned, and at the urgent request of the lady's companion (the rest of the gang were in another part of the train) the kindly fellow went off to fetch brandy from the restaurant car. During his absence from the van,

the "high-value" mail bag was extracted, and by the time it was missed, the thieves had vanished, having alighted at Blisworth, where they were picked up by a car and driven back to London.

I mention these facts in order to give some idea of the manner of man I had been detailed to run to earth. I realised that I was up against one of the toughest jobs of my career, but I was not dismayed. Before long I discovered that Bruce was an even more interesting personality than the details already in my possession had led me to believe.

Posing as a man of independent means, he lived in a fine house in the suburbs, with servants, a big car, and a charming wife, to whom he seemed devoted. He was cultured and handsome, and had a circle of interesting friends, none of whom had the faintest suspicion that he was other than a respectable citizen. As may be imagined, my task of shadowing such an individual was delicate.

None the less I was able to learn some secrets of his methods and plans through associates of less discretion than their leader, and by personal observation and enquiry to discover almost as much about Mr. Bruce as he knew about himself. From his movements it became evident that he had designs on the mail train running from Paddington to Reading, and which on certain nights contained high-value packets amounting to many thousands of pounds.

He made frequent journeys on the train, obviously to take note of the movements of the guard, the position of the mail bags in the van, and other details

vital to his plan. And while Mr. Bruce was noting these things, I was noting Mr. Bruce, for I always travelled somewhere in the same train.

After some weeks of close observation, during which I had changed my disguise about a dozen times, I discovered one more fact about my quarry which put him in a class by himself as a master crook. Apparently whenever he was preparing for a big job, he went into training as if for a boxing contest at the Albert Hall. Although past the thirties, he was still athletic, and had a gymnasium fitted up in his home.

He insisted that as many as possible of his associates who were to take an active part in the job, should also get themselves into physical trim. The idea was a sound one, for many a criminal has been caught after a cleverly-planned robbery through having too much flesh and too little wind when it came to a sprint with one of these hare-footed policemen whose size in boots is sometimes so deceptive. And a strong punch has its uses on these occasions. It is as effective as a life preserver, and has none of the dangers of the latter. When Bruce one morning made tracks for the local baths, where he was joined by two of his friends in crime, and afterwards went with them to Regent's Park, where they had an hour's sprinting and jumping, I knew that the day for the projected raid on the Reading mails was drawing near.

Every morning I watched them at their exercises, not always from the same spot nor wearing the same

clothes. I had to admire their energy, and Bruce proved himself to be "in the pink", as the athletes say. From his jumps, high and long, it was obvious that if pressed he would give a good account of himself when the big coup was attempted.

I saw him in my mind's eye, hurdling it over station barrows and clearing rails and fences like a kangaroo. Well, we were not taking any chances this time, for we were determined that the mail-bag robberies had to stop. At a conference at St. Martin's-le-Grand, it was decided that we should try to catch Bruce and his gang red-handed, and if we failed, at least to warn them off.

Arrangements were made for an adequate force of plain clothes policemen to be posted at Reading station on the night when the coup was expected. As anticipated Bruce appeared on the platform at Paddington, and took a seat in a third-class compartment where he settled down in a corner with his evening paper. Observers posted at the station noted with interest that he carried a suitcase, obviously to receive the stolen mail.

Three associates, the two whose athletic prowess I had been able to measure in Regent's Park, and another man with a criminal record, took seats in other parts of the train. So did certain other unobtrusive fellows, also interested in mail bags.

I was, of course, at Reading, my role, for the time, being that of a railway porter. Railway and other police in plain clothes were posted at various points. We were advised by telephone from Paddington that

the plotters were on the train. When the express drew up at Reading, I was busy sweeping the platform. I watched the compartments from under my peak cap, and spotted the chief conspirator.

I was at the door when he stepped from the platform. He had the suitcase in his hand, but an "accidental" knock with the handle of my brush revealed to me that it was empty. I knew from this that the robbery had either failed or had not been attempted. If Bruce did not have the "swag", no one else would, for one of his good points was that he always took the biggest risk personally when on a job.

He never played the coward's game, so common in crime, of arranging that the incriminating evidence should be in someone else's hands if something went wrong. I gave a certain signal, and the police officers allowed Bruce and his associates to leave the station and get into a waiting car whose presence we had already noted.

The explanation of Bruce's empty suitcase was this. It had been decided by the authorities that it would have been taking too big a risk to put the high-value mail bag which he was after, on that particular train, and a dummy was substituted. There was always the possibility that in spite of our plans he would have escaped. Apart from the loss of the bag, we would all have looked extremely foolish.

Actually Bruce was seen by a detective in the train to enter the mail van during a few minutes' absence by the guard. He took his suitcase with him. I have every reason to believe, from scraps of

information which subsequently reached me, that he lifted the dummy bag, but did not like the feel of it. Through long training he had developed a very sensitive touch, and his touch told him that the genuine packets were not in the bag.

In a flash he realised that a trap had been laid. He slipped out of the van as silently and as swiftly as he had entered, and sat down in his corner. Later he strolled along the corridor and conveyed the news to his friends by a signal.

It was in a sense a disappointment to me that we had not succeeded in catching red-handed one of the biggest men in the underworld, who had cost the community so many thousands of pounds in Post Office robberies alone. But we had really scored a triumph. I had put in a lot of work on the business, but so had Bruce, and he had in addition spent quite a large sum of money on the preparations.

Then at the end he realised that his cleverest schemes were liable to be known to the Post Office Investigation Branch. He got the shock of his life, and he never again tried to match his wits against ours, especially with the introduction about that time of the new protective methods. I may say that it was over ten years before he was caught by the police. Only last year he went down for a fairly light sentence, his first. Proof against him was obtained by pure accident, the bursting of a parcel containing jewellery which had been improperly obtained.

I said above that owing to our present system of mail-bag protection, the only hope of the crook, and

a slender one, is robbery with violence. Obviously if any of the officers in charge of the bags were to turn dishonest, they might decamp with substantial loot; but the risks of anything of the sort happening are so remote as to be negligible.

For the British Post Office servant is one of the most dependable men in the country. Naturally the bad egg crops up now and again in a service employing nearly a quarter of a million people, but the P.O. is astonishingly free from "inside" crime, considering the large bribes which are frequently offered to postal workers. It has been my pleasure time after time to compliment privately postmen and others in higher places, whom I knew to have remained loyal to their department and the public in the face of great temptation.

Which reminds me that I once had the more doubtful pleasure of complimenting a crook on his honesty. He was a postal porter named Dunn in the Lombard Street Office, whom I knew to be a crook and to have been mixed up in more than one mail bag robbery. On this occasion, however, his spite against his crook friends got the better of him, and he came to me, a picture of innocence to say that he had been offered a bribe by a man named Benson, who was also known as "Tubby" and "Connecticut Jim".

There was a remarkable sequel to Dunn's information, for, whilst shadowing "Tubby" and his gang, I stumbled upon the preliminaries of two jewel robberies which later were to make the country blink with surprise.

I knew something about the illustrious Tubby already, for I had once shadowed him in Wales where he was planning a big mail robbery. I had resorted to what I still think were some of my cleverest disguises, and was in almost complete possession of the gang's plans. Already I could see Tubby in the dock, and could hear my Chief congratulating me on my work. But it was not to be.

Tubby had been forced to get the help of others better acquainted with the Welsh transit system, and they, on the very eve of the *coup*, lifted the bag themselves, leaving Tubby with nothing save his lurid opinion of them. My own attitude to them was not much better! I felt a sort of sympathy with Tubby, for we both seemed to have been led "up the garden path".

I was therefore very interested when Dunn told me that the man who was trying to bribe him was my old friend Tubby.

The kind of information which Tubby banked upon getting from Dunn was of an intimate nature. There was a room at Mount Pleasant which interested him particularly, for in it were kept labels of various designs, and Tubby hoped his man could ascertain for him the designs used for certain Registered Bags, and inform him of the changes in colour, design, etc., which are frequently and wisely made in the case of this kind of label, so that he would know which bags to look out for at rail depots and docks.

Our first plan was for a colleague to dress as a postal worker and get Dunn to introduce him as a

man who could give him more information about valuable bags than could Dunn.

Soon we had Tubby very well pleased with himself and asking all kinds of questions of Denny, as my colleague called himself, which put beyond all doubt the fact that a very big robbery was contemplated. I have before me, as I write, the notes which I took of some of these questions:

". . . . There they were joined by the three men, and Benson (Tubby), who appeared to take a leading part in the meeting, said to my colleague: 'We are ready to get you some money, anything from eight hundred to fifteen hundred pounds for a little information which you can find out for us. We know all that happens *outside* "the Mount", but we want to know what happens to the green bags from Lombard Street after they reach the Mount.'"

(I should mention here that Lombard Street Post Office was one of the principal offices where registered packets of bank notes were handed in by Bank Head Offices for transit to the provinces.)

"'We want bulky bags' (my notes continue). 'What happens after they reach Mount Pleasant? A lot of these bags come in by the van 263 from Lombard Street, and the bulky packets in the green bags contain one pound treasury notes. Can you find out just what happens to them? The times they are dispatched, and in which bags the bulky packets go? Also the time of the trains they are conveyed

by if possible. You are on a good thing if you do this, and will have a fine winter and nobody will know a word. We work from fifty to a hundred miles from London, and there are three of us and four of you, and whatever we get, we hand over one-fourth share amongst yourselves. We keep the rest and will change your notes so that it will be quite safe for you.' After the foregoing conversation they left the public-house, and subsequently Benson was followed into the City and lost sight of."

The work of my colleague was necessarily delicate, for, if, by giving too much information, he enabled the thieves to "get away with it", our lives wouldn't have been worth living afterwards. Yet *some* bona fide information had to be given in order to lure the gang into our net.

Our plans came to an unexpected end, for Tubby, who knew a good deal on his own account, could see that he was getting no real help, and openly called my colleague, Mr. Lewis, and Dunn a couple of "b—— noodles" after which he left them in a temper.

But I knew Tubby would not let matters lie there, so I and my men kept observation on him for months. This shadowing is a nerve-straining and often discouraging affair. Day after day, night after night, wet or fine, we were on the tails of the gang. They would be around Lombard Street Office for nights on end, and there would I be also, never knowing when I might be detected. Next, they would be at King George Dock, watching P. & O. boats which carried

mails abroad. At other times they would be in other parts of London, always with me in the offing.

When a theft of perhaps £20,000 is at stake, crooks will take endless trouble before they strike. Often, weary in mind and body, I would see Tubby and Co. enter some building and remain in it for hours, whilst I stood outside in the cold.

My reward was the knowledge that owing to the information which we were able to supply to headquarters, plans for the delivery of mails were frequently altered at the last minute, so preventing any attempt, however well prepared, on the part of the crooks. The time table for the arrival of the bags, on which they were prepared to act, had an inconvenient habit of proving unreliable.

At about this time I noticed certain things, which would seem to show that the gang intended to change their field of operations. They spend a good deal of time watching the shop of Harman's, the West End jewellers, and also a jewel dealer's place—Whitehorn's —near Hatton Garden. I advised Scotland Yard, and with the police watched them on several occasions. It appeared certain that they were contemplating two big robberies, and then that they had changed their minds.

The police were called off, and for a time my men and I continued to watch in case the mail robbery might still be in the air. Several times we saw them near the two jewellers' places, but there was always the possibility that this was a coincidence. For a time we had to abandon the watch, for much more urgent

matters claimed the attention of our restricted personnel. Even the police cannot watch all the crooks all the time, however strong the suspicion.

A sequel to the story was subsequently told by the newspapers. One evening some months later I picked up my paper and read the following:—"Escape of West End Bandits: After Headlong Chase by Police in Taxi: £8,000 Diamond Coup: Yelling Crowd Joins in Pursuit."

From the report I learned that the crowd had been treated to a "tremendous thrill" when two men, after smashing the window of Harman's, New Bond Street, and grabbing some trays, leapt into a moving car which turned and twisted through the traffic, pursued by a taxi crammed with constables, by a mounted policeman and numerous private cars. The bandits jumped from their car when it was held up at a crossing, and escaped by tube.

Then later still, £20,000 of jewls and pearls were stolen from an office in Ely Place, at the point of our previous observations. While the watchman in that old-fashioned corner of London gave his hourly cry of "All's Well" throughout the night, all was not so well, for in the premises of Mr. Ernest Whitehorn, a dealer in precious stones, thieves were concealed and were busy with the safe.

From these events I had at least this satisfaction, that the crooks in question had apparently decided that they had no chance with the mail bags and concentrated on fields outside my province. At the same time I would have liked to read inside their minds when,

they found that on occasion after occasion the G.P.O. mail plans, which they had mastered for various routes, were so mysteriously altered at the last moment.

This experience undoubtedly convinced them that in the Investigation Branch were wits as sharp as, if not sharper than, their own. Needless to say, Tubby and Co., who had been elusive enough after their first robbery, were not seen in London again for a long time after the second. Indeed I never personally saw them again, from which I rightly concluded they had given up for good the hope of robbing His Majesty's Mails.

CHAPTER III

BLACK SHEEP

In writing about "black sheep" of the Post Office I must repeat my earlier remark that there is no more honest body of people, nor any, except bank employees, so subject to temptation on a wide scale.

We have, of course, had to deal with the dishonest postal servant, but he has generally been the weak, avaricious fellow who falls victim to the suggestions of smarter men than himself, who are criminals by nature and practice, and who only want him as a tool because of his position inside the Post Office.

In this chapter I propose to tell the story of one of the worst men of this kind I ever had the pleasure of rounding up, one who pitted his wits against ours and for a time did very well out of it, until he discovered to his cost that the second name of the "I.B." is "Nemesis."

In some ways I was sorry for him, for he was largely the victim of worse men than himself, who were quick to see that in the person of Thomas Gale they had what they had long been seeking—a potentially dishonest postal sorter. Gale had joined the service twenty-three years ago as a telegraph messenger and had gradually risen to the rank of

sorter in the branch which dealt with registered letters containing valuables.

Before I tell the amusing story of how I, in the guise of a grocer's assistant, effected his arrest and that of his friend Tippy Hyson, I will give an idea of the class of thieves with whom he had made acquaintance.

His downfall, we were all agreed upon, was chiefly due to his association with a man named Dennison, a well-known forger—a man with a University education, with influential friends in Society, but who could not go straight. This man, shortly before we brought Gale to book, had been sent at the Old Bailey to four years' penal servitude for frauds on the G.P.O. An all-round crook, he had eventually turned to the G.P.O. in order to widen his sphere of activities.

His methods were largely centred on the obtaining of forged withdrawals from depositors' P.O. Savings Books, large numbers of which, sent to the headquarters at Blythe Road, Kensington, failed to be returned to their owners. He was a perfect genius at obtaining money by means of telegraphic advances. It was clear that, to get so many Savings Books, Dennison must have a confederate inside the Post Office, but, despite our utmost efforts, we were unable to find the man who was the means of putting a good deal of money into the pockets of Dennison, despite the fact that we had very good reason to suspect Gale who had once before been prosecuted for a large Post Office theft, an occasion upon which

he managed to escape the net which we imagined we had cast about him.

It may seem strange to you that a man who had been sufficiently suspected as to appear in the Old Bailey dock should ever have been employed again in the Post Office. But, in the face of a verdict of "Not Guilty" the authorities were not in a position summarily to dismiss a Government servant. Suspicion was not enough. Facts, and proved facts, alone could have brought about Gale's dismissal.

The charge on that occasion was that of stealing a registered letter containing nearly £600 in notes. The letter had come from Crewe in a sealed registered letter-bag, but had mysteriously disappeared.

> Gale was actually identified as the man who had changed two of the notes, and a handwriting expert gave evidence that the writing on the backs of the notes was similar to that of Gale.

One would have thought that that would have been sufficient to put Gale under lock and key for a while, but it was not strong enough, for, against it, Gale was able to bring alibi witnesses who swore he was elsewhere at the time. The result was that the jury returned a verdict of "Not Guilty."

As an example of the man's impudence, I may mention that, after having been taken back in his old position, *he actually petitioned people in high places to assist him in a claim for compensation for wrongful*

arrest! But he soon discovered that the police knew a little too much about him, and he dropped the claim. As a matter of fact, we suspected him very strongly of being concerned in a theft of a number of registered letters some time previously.

Shortly after this episode he again came under suspicion of having had a hand in a daring theft of registered mail-bags from a large London office, but again we could not actually pin the crime to his jacket. Moreover, we learnt that Dennison had been behind the scenes on various occasions, and, as Gale had come under this man's influence, it was scarcely wide guess work to suspect a conspiracy between the two men.

Another man working with Dennison, and who was sent to penal servitude shortly after the latter was one named Jackson, better known by the soubriquet of "Fingers," a nickname which he earned in terrible circumstances, so terrible that they should have for ever kept him away from anything to do with letters or letter-boxes. This man, also, must have had an influence over Gale, who, we discovered later, was frequently in his company through the medium of Dennison.

Jackson's job was to obtain cheques for Dennison to forge, and his method was to slide his hands, which were small, into the letter boxes of City offices, a form of theft which was on the increase.

It was therefore arranged by several firms for large steel traps to be placed in certain City

letter-boxes, though you may be sure this method was tried only after many others had failed.

This was done, and it was an unlucky day when Jackson thrust his hand into one of these letter-boxes and gained the name of "Fingers", for *the strong steel jaws of the trap closed with a relentless snap upon his fingers.*

His agony must have been terrible, but he was a man of positively unbelievable fortitude. As soon as he knew what had happened, he turned his back to the letter box, and, to the early morning passers by, appeared to be a man lolling in the doorway, perhaps waiting for the office to open. And all the time he was gradually pulling his fingers through the cruel jaws of the trap, eventually getting them free.

When the office came to be opened, the morning's correspondence was drenched with blood, and the steel trap held pieces of flesh and scrapings of bone.

This terrible experience cost Jackson two fingers and left the rest of his hand badly scarred. In return, all he got was the nickname of "Fingers."

What story he concocted for the hospital authorities I cannot say, but the details of his terrible ordeal eventually reached the police some time afterwards through one of his associates.

In the hands of such men as Dennison and Fingers, specialists in Post Office crime, Gale proved a most useful tool, whilst every day he was learning for himself new methods from the gang of criminals

among whom he now found himself. The removal of Dennison and Jackson, via the Old Bailey, however, left him in a state of independence which possibly he did not want. After all, it was they who had done most of the work, his own part, from within, being comparatively easy. Still, having tasted the sweets of ill-gotten gain, he was loath to revert to his ordinary pay as a postal servant, especially as he was by this time living on a scale far beyond his legitimate means.

For some time after the conviction of Dennison the Savings Books frauds fell nearly to nil, and then gradually they began to recur. This time we were more certain than ever that Gale was at work again, for we had now learnt definitely that he had often been seen in the company of Dennison and his friends.

"We are giving this man no more rope," I said one day to a colleague.

"He's certainly had enough," was the laconic reply.

We therefore worked out a plan by which we hoped to catch Gale red-handed. I might say that this was not the first time we had tried, but he was as "fly as they make 'em," and had always scented danger. It is no easy matter to catch a man who is working with a large number of other sorters in a huge room, especially as it is impossible to know when he is likely to commit a theft. He might go for weeks, or even months, without making any attempt, and it is well-nigh impracticable to keep

intensive watch on a man for that length of time without his suspicions being aroused. Also it is one of the dullest jobs it has ever fallen to my lot to do.

In the case of stolen Savings Books there was an added difficulty. Once the thief had secreted a book out of the many hundreds passing through the office, he would hand it to his outside confederate, and a withdrawal would be made long before the rightful owner complained that his book had not been returned.

On this occasion luck was against Gale, who was dabbling in another form of post office crime—the theft of money orders payable at post offices. A series of these thefts had come to our knowledge and we fixed our suspicions on Gale. We therefore prepared a money order for £20 payable at a post office at Croydon, *addressed to a fictitious Mr. Kay.*

With a little ingenuity arrangements were made that a letter containing a M.O. should find its way to the table at which Gale was engaged as sorter.

The sorting office is a large one, and it was not difficult for me, by arrangements with the officials there, to keep observation on Gale.

My reward came when I saw Gale give a hasty glance about him and then slip a letter into his pocket.

So far, so good. I could, of course, have tackled him at once, but I wanted more than that. Very much more, for Gale had already shown that nothing but cast-iron evidence would put him under lock and key.

I observed him make an excuse to leave the table and go into an ante-room, where, pretending to look through some papers which he drew from his pocket, he quickly examined the envelope. He wished, of course, to make sure that it contained a money order—not a difficult matter for one so nimble-fingered as he. I have no doubt that, had he found the package of no value, he would have returned it to his table.

Instead, he slipped it back in his pocket, and, so far as I could see—I watched him till he left—kept it there.

Before I tell the story of how I arrested Gale on the following morning, I must allude to another bright gentleman who appeared with him in the dock within forty-eight hours. This man had become an outside accomplice of Gale and was generally known as Tippy Hyson, though his real name was Briscoe.

Tippy was far from being unknown to me, for he had had many convictions, some of them being for private letter-box thefts. Not on this account only did I know him. He had more than once been of service to me, for he was well-informed as to the activities of mail-bag thieves and others who preyed upon the G.P.O. He was a ratty little man who was unable to go straight in any capacity and would give away his friends at the mere thought of danger.

He once helped me to recover a stolen mail-bag almost as soon as it disappeared, an incident which I relate elsewhere. Yet I knew that he was just as likely, at any time, to act against me as for me. I

was sorry, however, to find him mixed up in the Gale affair; but I had no alternative but to make him take the consequence of his double-crossing.

I Become Grocer's Assistant

My next step was to keep observation at the post office in Croydon at which the money order was made payable, so, accompanied by a sergeant of police I went there early on the following morning. It was a small post-office, consisting of a counter in a grocer's shop.

Acquainting the post-master of my identity, I donned an apron and pottered about the shop, filling in the time as best I could, whilst the sergeant remained in a room at the back. With my knowledge of Gale's astuteness, I could see the unwisdom of loitering too near the Post Office part of the shop, so I arranged that as soon as the "trap" money order was presented the clerk should call across to the grocer and ask if he had any change.

I had not long to wait, for I had only just begun to sweep up the shop as a diversion, when the clerk gave the arranged signal. I was sweeping with my head down, and had only seen the feet of the customer as he entered. Imagine my surprise, when, looking up, I beheld the notorious little Tippy! In a second I dropped my broom and had him by the arms.

My surprise and disgust at his double-crossing us prompted my very first words.

"Tippy!" I exclaimed, "I always *told* you you were a blankety fool!"

Tippy turned several shades of pale when he saw who had got him pinioned.

"Cartwright, my God!" he cried. Then, lowering his voice, he said: "Let me have a run, Mr. Cartwright, for God's sake."

"Too late now, Tippy," I replied. "Where's Tommy Gale?"

"I—I don't know, Mr. Cartwright," he gasped, adding again: "Let me have a run, and I'll never trouble you again."

I expect my eyes were steely as I replied:

"Where—is—Tommy—Gale?"

"He—he's waiting up the road, Mr. Cartwright," came from Tippy. "*Now* will you let me have a run?"

But by this time the sergeant of police, in response to my signal, had appeared upon the scene and taken charge of Tippy who was now nearly in tears.

My next step now was to get Gale. I did not dare to peep out of the shop door, for I knew that he would be waiting almost on tiptoe, ready to disappear as soon as he thought a rat had been smelt. Hastily I tore off the apron and grabbed a cap hanging behind a door. Pulling this over my forehead, I took my own walking-stick and hobbled out of the shop like a man twice my age.

In the distance I saw Gale, alternatively looking into a shop window and casting glances towards the post-office door. I shall never forget that walk of a hundred yards or so. At every step I expected to see Gale turn and run like the devil.

Gradually the "old man" drew nearer to him until I could see the expression on his face, which was distinctly one of apprehension. Obviously he was growing alarmed at the delay which was attending Tippy's transaction, for more time had elapsed now than could have been necessary for Tippy to present the money order, show the covering letter and get the "worth-while."

I am convinced that a few more seconds would have ruined everything. As it was, I put on as much hurry as might reasonably be expected of an old man; then, as I came near him, I took two quick paces and grabbed Gale by the collar.

"What the hell——?" he gasped, swinging round in an effort to throw me off.

"Tommy Gale, I think," I said, hanging on grimly. "In fact I know you are, and you're coming with me. You are wanted by the Post Office."

"Post Office after *me!*" he exclaimed. "I don't know what it's all about, but I'm innocent; I can tell you that."

Somehow—I'm only a small man, myself—I managed to turn the struggle so that I looked him straight in the eyes. My language must be put down to the excitement of the moment, but the exact words I said to him were:

"*Gale, there's going to be no b—— alibi this time!*"

I saw him wince at my words, though his struggles became more violent. There were few people in the road at that time of the morning, so I called to a butcher, near whose shop the struggle was taking place.

"I'm an officer," I cried. "Help me to arrest this man."

In a moment or two the butcher was with us. He did not even trouble to drop the knife which he was using at the time—it was nearly a yard long—and I think that bloodstained instrument had something to do with Gale's submissal.

"Very well, then, I'll come with you," he said meekly, "but don't forget I'm innocent."

"I won't forget," I answered. "Not on your life!"

I escorted my man to the Post Office, and in due course the pair were safely lodged in a police station.

The result was their ultimate appearance at the old Bailey, where Gale was sentenced by Sir Ernest Wild to eighteen months' in the second division, and Tippy to nine months' hard labour. I could not help feeling somewhat sorry for Tippy, but for Gale I had no sympathy. How could one have for a man who pushed one of lesser intelligence forward to take the risk whilst he himself waited in the distance, ready to bolt?

It does not concern the story, but I may add that the authorities were good enough to convey to me their special congratulations on the outcome of the affair. It had removed from the postal service a most dangerous man, and had constituted a warning to any who might try to emulate him.

I referred to Tippy having once assisted me in the recovery of a stolen mail-bag. It came about in this way. There had been several cases of missing mail-bags, and I was anxious to put a stop to this form

of crime before it increased. All the cases had occurred at one office in particular, and to this, for a time, I gave my almost undivided attention. Gale worked there, but, although he was kept under close observation, nothing was found to suggest that he had turned his particular activities to this side of Post Office crime.

I therefore embarked upon a process of elimination of a staff of 1,500 postal workers, and had narrowed the number of "possibles" to half-a-dozen when, as I was leaving the office one evening, I encountered Tippy Hyson in one of his demurest moods.

"Fancy meeting you, Mr. Cartwright," he said, for he had known me, to his cost, on previous occasions.

"And fancy meeting *you*, near a Post Office," I replied with a smile which drew from Tippy a knowing wink. It was this wink which prompted me to put my cards on the table, and I told him I was worried about certain robberies.

"You don't happen to know anything about them, I suppose?" I asked.

"I'm on the straight now," replied Tippy, "but I happen to know a few things, all the same."

The end of the conversation was that Tippy promised to show me, later in the evening, an inside worker at the office who might be worth watching. By arrangement we met subsequently at a neighbouring public-house, and Tippy indicated a man whom I had included in my "probables", which showed that my elimination had not gone far wrong. I thanked Tippy in more ways than one, and went home feeling more elated than I had felt for many a long day.

The name of the man was Dean. He was a uniformed man whose work kept him in contact with mail-bags moving in and out of the office, and he had learnt precisely which kind of bag was likely to contain valuables in the form of jewellery, and by which vans they might arrive.

I kept personal observation on him for some time, and discovered him to be frequently in the company of a postman named Logan, whose chief job was the collecting of letters from pillar boxes in the Western District of London. On these two observation was now kept. For weeks nothing untoward happened; then, one Saturday morning, one of my men, stationed at that office rang me up at the G.P.O. to say that Dean had been in communication with the office to say that he was ill and would not be able to come to work that day.

Something—it was almost telepathic—seemed to tell me that things might happen that morning, and so strong was this feeling that I went up to the office together with others of the Investigation Branch determined to keep a close watch both inside the office and in its neighbourhood. You will see from this what slender clues must be worked upon in the great game of catching criminals.

The morning had worn on until one o'clock when one of my men reported excitedly that he had seen Dean in Drury Lane, which was quite near, and that he had entered a public-house there. Meanwhile I had looked up Logan's duties for the day and had found that he was due to collect from pillar-boxes

at 2 p.m. Also *I had discovered that a mail-van from Kingsway was due to arrive at the office a little before that hour, and that it would contain highly valuable registered bags.*

These pieces of information began to present a pretty picture to my imagination—too pretty to materialise, I thought. On the face of things it seemed that Logan could not be implicated, but I had long since lost my trust in the obvious. There were quite a few minutes at the disposal of Logan if he cared to use them, and it was soon clear that he meant to use them, for at a few minutes before two o'clock, I personally discovered him lurking outside the sorting office.

I had not long to wait before the mail-van drove up and the driver dismounted and hurried into the office to announce its arrival.

He was away scarcely a minute, but in that minute the uniformed Logan had quickly opened the door of the van and decamped with a bag. I was keeping observation not far distant and could have collared him on the spot, but I kept well on his heels as he hurried to the utmost down Drury Lane. I should add that he had slipped the green registered letter bag into his own sack, and that he presented no unusual sight to passers-by.

As I expected, he entered the public-house at the corner of Great Queen Street, which was where Tippy had pointed out Dean. In fact we knew that Dean was already in there with a bookie named Slade, who was in the game with them. Logan had

joined them in the private bar, from which he emerged a few moments later with his own empty postman's sack.

I let him pass, for I knew that I could get him later. The two men inside the pub were more important at the moment. Together two colleagues and I waited outside, imagining the scene within. Postman Logan had been in and deposited his sack under the seat, and then, when he left, had drawn his own sack off the mail bag (registered) which was much smaller. Immediately he had gone, one of the others had, under cover of the seat, slipped another bag over the stolen bag. That this was so was proved a few minutes later, when the two men emerged, Slade carrying a black sack such as East End tailors use to carry clothing.

That was good enough for me. Instantly I tackled Slade.

"What have you got in that bag?" I demanded.

"What the hell's it got to do with you?" was his indignant reply.

"It's got a lot to do with me," I said quietly. "I am an officer of the Investigation Branch, and I want you to come to the G.P.O. with me right now."

Meanwhile my colleagues were extending the same invitation to Dean, with the result that we bundled the men into a taxi and drove to Headquarters, where we dumped the tailor's sack on a table and pulled from it the registered bag labelled KINGSWAY TO W.O. P.O. I shook out the bag before them, and out

came packages containing hundreds of pounds worth of stuff in the form of cash and jewellery.

Leaving Logan and Slade in the hands of my men to await the police, I sped back to the District Office and asked that Logan should be brought before me. He came in jauntily, confident in what he thought was a perfect alibi.

"Good afternoon, Logan," I said. "I am Cartwright, of the Investigation Branch. A bag is missing from the Kingsway mail-van, and I think you may be able to give me some information about it."

"Well, that's where you're wrong," he said impudently. "I've heard of *you* before, but you're on the wrong scent this time. I know what time that van gets here, and I was clearing my boxes at the time. You can send for my boss, who'll tell you that I brought my letters in at the usual time."

"Possibly," said I, "but at a much greater speed." Then I told him how his every movement had been watched and that his confederates were now in custody. He refused to make a clean breast of it, but he knew he was a finished man, as indeed he was, for in due time he found himself serving a stiff sentence of imprisonment with his partners in crime.

I should add that the Investigation Branch has never considered itself too old to learn. From almost every crime we learnt a lesson which enabled us to make a recurrence almost impossible, with the result that the service is now almost thief-proof.

CHAPTER IV

THE POISON-PEN PEST

THE Poison Pen pests who use the letter-box are rightly looked upon as a great social evil.

The tracking of anonymous letter-writers is an important duty of the G.P.O. Investigation Branch, and many have been the cases with which I have been called upon to deal.

One of the earliest anonymous letter cases I was called upon to investigate during my many years at the Investigation Branch was also one of the most curious.

There had been an extraordinary number of anonymous missives received by people living in West London. Many of the recipients were well known in their particular district, and the letters were of a highly mischievous nature. Parcels were also sent, containing all kinds of objectionable matter. I was given the job of tracing the sender, and set about it with a will.

As is usual in such cases, a number of people were officially suspect, but finally, by a process of elimination, we fixed upon a woman of good position as the likely culprit, and for some weeks I shadowed her.

One afternoon she left her home and walked briskly for two miles to a post-office, and slipped a small package into the letter-box. A moment later

I was in the post-office and, making known my identity to the postmaster, secured the package, which I saw to my joy was addressed in the handwriting which had now become familiar to us at St. Martin's-le-Grand. It was addressed to a woman in West London.

Opening the package I discovered a small cardboard box and was astonished to find it contained some particularly repulsive beetles. Repacking the box I hurried away with it to headquarters.

My chief congratulated me on my work. At the same time he rebuked me for breaking one of the Post Office's laws. I had opened a package, though this is only permissible when one is armed with a warrant from the Secretary of State.

In fact, we had to obtain formal permission from the addressee before we dare keep the beetles at the trial which we knew was soon to follow.

Later on I arrested the woman red-handed as she was posting some objectionable postcards in a letter-box. She was unmarried and aged about forty. Next morning she appeared in court and was remanded on bail, but that night she turned from the poison pen to the poison bottle, and I had an inquest to attend instead of a prosecution.

The shame of her arrest was more than she could bear, for, apart from this one vicious propensity, she was a normal and charming woman.

Anonymous letter-writers are often clever in diverting suspicion from themselves, and I have in mind a striking case in North London.

There were a good many letters, distinguished by their vindictiveness and the ingenuity of the writer. I had an idea that the culprit was a North London woman of good family, but I was unable to catch her in the act.

Then one day at my office at the G.P.O. I received from a West End branch Post Office a postal order which had been forged. It had been issued at a shilling, and then altered to twelve shillings.

The order had been posted to a West End store in payment for a coat which had to be sent to a certain address. I recognised in the accompanying letter the writing of the woman in North London, and that the address on the notepaper was also hers.

The coat was specially delivered, and I kept watch upon her house. A few hours later she came out, carrying a parcel. I followed her. She walked across a common until she came to a pond, into which she flung the parcel, evidently weighted. I interrogated her at her home. She was almost hysterical and denied everything. She was arrested and ultimately sent to prison for nine months. The point of the postal order was this. Most anonymous letter-writers address a few of their more vitriolic missives to themselves as evidence that they, too, are victims. The North London girl went one better. She forged a postal order to demonstrate, as she thought, that some unknown person was trying to get her convicted of forgery.

She probably never expected the coat to be delivered in return for an obviously forged postal

order, and when it came she lost her head. Had she kept it we should have been defeated.

Some years ago the serenity of a seaside resort was disturbed by an outburst of anonymous letters and packages, the contents of which were about as foul as any which had ever come under my notice.

The letters were addressed to various people both in public and private life in the town, and eventually the police took the matter in hand.

Suspicion was centred on a woman who was charged and sent for trial at the Assizes. The case broke down and she walked out a free woman, but I was convinced, however, she was the author of the letters.

This woman was in the habit of using the beach sub-Post Office, and we arranged that when she next bought stamps she would be supplied from a special little batch on which the initials of my colleague had been written in invisible ink.

It was necessary for us to get proof of posting of the offensive packets.

You may ask why proof of posting was not sufficient without the marked stamps. The answer lies in the fact that I once caught a woman posting an anonymous letter, but she said that she had found it on the ground on her way to the Post Office and had posted it thinking she was doing someone a good turn. She even made me ask two people who witnessed her picking it up. They did not know, of course, that it was she herself who had dropped it deliberately.

Besides preparing our initialed stamps, we rigged

up a periscope in the Post Office window, so that the postmaster could see from within who was posting letters without. In addition we had the back of the letter-box cut away.

There followed a considerable period of waiting, but the day came when the postmaster, seeing the suspect outside, waited for her to post two letters which practically fell into his hands as he stood at the cut-out letter-box.

My colleague and I were close at hand and she was arrested and eventually sent to fifteen months' imprisonment.

The abusive letters she had posted bore stamps bearing the initials, and there could be no other outcome.

For sheer evil and cruelty I have nothing to compare with a case which I investigated a few years ago, and which ended in the culprit getting a severe sentence at the Old Bailey. The chief victims were a young girl and her brother, and her family were also sufferers.

The girl, a slim little creature, was in employment, as was also her brother. They supported an invalid mother who at one time had been in service at the house of a wealthy man.

The family's troubles began with the receipt of objectionable postcards by the girl, and later on several of her relatives also received the same kind of missive. And then began a flood of offensive cards to the girl at her place of employment. She was dismissed. The same thing happened to her brother,

who was also dismissed. They got other jobs, but before long the poison pest found them out and the same thing happened again.

In fact, for many months the pair were hounded from job to job, with periods of unemployment between which reduced the family to the severest straits.

I interviewed scores of people without result and for a time was completely baffled.

Meanwhile the brother and sister had obtained work many miles from home, thinking they might be safe, but again the poison pen reached them and again they lost their posts. The family found a Good Samaritan in the person of a man who helped them with small sums of money and gave the girl a day's work in his kitchen on Sundays.

As a matter of routine I thought it advisable to put this man through a few tests without his suspecting it, despite the fact that when I called upon him he shared my concern and said how anxious he was to help the unfortunate family. I found him a most charming person.

But suspicions were beginning to shape in my mind, and I managed "accidentally" to meet him one evening at a bus stop and to tell him that I had just left the girl, who had gone out with one of her boys.

As I spoke I watched him carefully and saw a gleam of anger in his eyes. He said she had promised not to go out with boys. I do not think he quite realised what he was saying. Certainly he did not

know that the girl had told me that he was urging her to enter his service as a maid.

While we were having a drink together I observed him closely and gleaned from him several facts which convinced me that he was the sender of the cruel postcards.

I had a word with the police, with the result that when he left home on the following day he was followed by two C.I.D. men. I joined one of these in the evening and we followed our friend from the West End to Victoria, where he was seen to drop something into a letter-box.

Immediately we had the box specially cleared and discovered several postcards addressed to the girl and her brother of a worse type, if possible, than the previous ones.

Evidently something had spurred him on to make greater efforts.

We arrested him that night, and from evidence collected when his house was searched the police were able to charge him with a more serious crime than that of writing anonymous letters to the girl.

The end was that the man received a sentence of two years' imprisonment for his use of the poison pen and five years for the other offence with which he was jointly charged.

It was a writer of poison pen letters who provided me with what was perhaps the most baffling case of my whole career.

It has always been one of our private boasts in the Investigation Branch that once we launch out on an

inquiry we never give up until we have "got our man".

In this particular instance I think we proved that boast up to the hilt.

For between the time that the first letter was brought to our notice and the day when the writer of it finally stood in the dock a period of thirty years had elapsed.

During that period thousands of detail inquiries were made, watch was kept on a score of people, a dozen traps were devised and laid to snare the perpetrator. He eluded all of them.

These letters first made their appearance in one of the big industrial towns of the north-east of England in the early part of this century.

Some were threatening, almost all of them contained gross libels of some sort or another. They were sent to judges and magistrates, prominent local men and women, and scores of private residents—always in the same district.

Our inquiries were hampered by the fact that the writer seemed to be some person who could move about the country at will. The postmarks on the letters bore the names of a dozen towns many miles apart. By the time our investigators had started their inquiries in one district more letters would have been received from some place forty or fifty miles away.

Then the stream of letters would cease suddenly, leaving our inquiries "in the air". Sometimes there would be a gap of a year or two before another

envelope with the tell-tale writing would be brought to the "I.B." by some fresh victim.

At last, after a long series of inquiries which led us only to further victims, a sorter noticed yet another envelope addressed in the "poison" handwriting.

My elation knew no bounds. At last, after years and years of empty inquiries and false clues, we had in our hands something tangible, a direct means of contact with the man we were seeking.

I sent one of my men up to the town where the addressee lived. I instructed him not to approach this relative directly, but to discover by discreet private inquiries the full details of the person who had written the letter to him.

Then I waited at headquarters in a state of excitement that no other case had roused in me.

In a few days my man sent back his report. As I read it all my elation ebbed away.

The man who we confidently believed had written the letters *couldn't* write. He had been an illiterate for years! Every week he signed for his pay with an X.

I sat down and set my bewildered brain to work again. When I'd thought my fill I had decided that the man *could* write, and I was going to prove it.

I allowed him three or four more letters to incriminate himself beyond any shadow of doubt. To make the evidence conclusive I determined that the man should be caught red-handed.

So when he left home in the grey of very early morning he was carefully shadowed by detectives. As he approached a letter-box at the corner of one

street my man and a police officer closed in on him unseen.

A letter which was afterwards found to contain more threats had scarcely dropped from his fingers into the box than the hands of the detectives fell on his shoulder.

A case which had baffled us, on and off, for thirty years had come to a close.

The tracing of anonymous letter writers is often not quite so difficult as it might seem, for the work may be greatly simplified by a process of elimination which I will set forth here, emphasising, however, the fact that I am merely giving the broad outlines of the method.

We will take the case of a small town where an epidemic of poison pen letters has broken out. Sometimes one person only is the victim; sometimes various people have received the objectionable missives. I will take a case where one person only has been the object of the writer's malice. The first thing is to ask the victim how many people he, or, it is generally *she*, knows in the neighbourhood, and who they are.

This first step in the process of elimination is in many ways interesting. A woman will declare that she knows hundreds of people, yet, when faced with the task of enumerating them by name begins to falter long before she reaches the first fifty. On the other hand, there are some who have a remarkably catalogued mind and are able to reel off names by the score.

We will assume in this case that the woman has been able to provide a list of two hundred people whom she knows. This is not an outside figure for a town of, say, 15,000 people, which is not large enough for the person to live "almost without knowing my next-door neighbour", as many women in large towns can say with a certain amount of truth. A woman in a small town knows far more people than does her sister living in a London suburb.

Let us, then, consider the two hundred acquaintances of the victim under review. Of course a percentage of the people she has named may be ruled out at once, possibly because they move on a different social plane; but in cases I have handled I have been reluctant to give anyone a clean bill until my own investigations have justified it to a great extent. I once knew a woman high in the social world who sent anonymous letters to a young charwoman. The reason was that the girl was one of the cleaners in her husband's office, and the wife, having noticed a pretty cleaner about the place, suspected that her husband might be casting glances in her direction. She therefore sent letters to the girl saying that she was suspected of pilfering in the office and advising her to get another job before the writer felt it her duty to write to her employers and tell them all she knew about her.

Of course the woman knew nothing about the girl, but the innocent young thing began to scan her past and to magnify trivial peccadilloes into crimes, until

a friend, in whom she confided, took steps which led to my taking the matter in hand.

So much, then, for social distinctions!

We will therefore return to our original two hundred. The names, of course, include both men and women, and by instinct one can almost eliminate the men; or at least put them on one side until the women have been dealt with. I might say that quite ninety per cent of poison-pen pests are women, so it is generally as well to begin on members of that sex, however ungallant it may seem. The next step is to form some idea of the age of the writer.

Now a woman may disguise her handwriting to the best of her ability—and I must say that some are uncommonly clever at it—but I have rarely met the elderly woman who can imitate the writing of a young girl or *vice versa*. It may be that they are so intent on effecting a disguise that they overlook the importance of giving a false idea of the age of the writer.

By applying this test to our two hundred we are able, tentatively at least, to eliminate perhaps fifty. Allowance must be made, of course, for the "borderline cases," women who are anything from thirty-five to fifty or thereabouts. By eliminating men and women of an age unlikely we have now reduced our two hundred to less than a hundred.

The next test may be that of the education of the suspect we are seeking. The handwriting expert can often say definitely if writing is that of board school origin or of the high school type. If it is of

the latter kind, you can for the time being rule out domestic servants and others who are unlikely to have had any but a board school education. This is a test, however, which must be applied very warily. Quite often an anonymous letter has betrayed its writer by containing a phrase which unmistakably points out the part of England in which she was born. I once had a case made easy by the following passage in a letter:

> "Your association with Mr. Blank (a curate) is being talked about. What right have you to come to Blanktown and start an affair with him? It was all right till you came. Unless you stop I'll make you pay for it, and all."

Now that phrase "and all" is almost exclusively a Lancashire or Yorkshire one, and within a few days of seeing the letter I had a Huddersfield woman under arrest.

The mention of the curate did not surprise me, for the clergy are often the unwitting cause of much friction in the feminine circles of their parishes. A good-looking curate can set even the most high-minded spinsters at variance.

Of course, the discovery of a poison letter-writer's place of origin often brings inquiries to a sudden close, but it is a discovery which comes to the investigators only once in a while. Still, the tests I have mentioned, with others, will have brought down the number of possible suspects to perhaps forty, when our tests have to be more searching and individual.

It may be that a victim's children have met with scholastic success, whereupon we examine our forty suspects to see which have children of the same age, and particularly at the same school. More than once have I found a jealous mother to have relieved her feelings by writing scurrilous letters to the more fortunate woman. In the same way a woman may be jealous of the success of another woman's husband. Soon we are able to shelve half of the remaining people, having thought of every possible reason which they could have for resorting to the poison pen.

At this point we may begin to keep direct observation by some of the means to which I have alluded earlier in this chapter. After that it is generally only a matter of time before the suspect is caught in the act.

Often a number of people in a small town are recipients of anonymous letters, and in that case it is often a good plan to take a list of acquaintances from them all. By comparing these lists we come upon a number of names which are common to them all. One may be pretty sure that the culprit's name is among them.

On the whole, anonymous letter cases cannot by any means be classed among the Investigation Branch's most difficult ones. The odds are well against the culprits and it is very rare that they escape the net which the G.P.O.'s "Scotland Yard" casts about them.

I have read many attempts to analyse the psychology

of the poison-pen pest, but the best was in the *Daily Express*, and I take the liberty of quoting from it:

A learned judge once said: "The fat do not write anonymous letters. It is the bony-fingered who dip their nibs into acetic, slime, and vitriol; it is the skinny ones who build bombshells for harmless postmen unwittingly to explode."

Psychiatrists' experience of poison-pen writers favours the plump. The skinny ones seem to take more readily to that form of slander known as gossip.

But there are all sorts, and nearly every sort is a woman.

She is plumpish, then; smooth-featured, round about her early thirties.

As she sits writing, the corners of her firm-lipped mouth curl downwards in a sneer; a vertical frown bisects her placid, slightly sullen forehead. She is not ill-looking, just ill-groomed.

The postcard finished (postcards do double the harm), as carefully written as if it were a miniature, she hides it in one crevice; writing material in another; her pens in another. She is proud as a craftsman, furtive as a crook.

To-morrow she will post it.

Meantime she puts the light out, creeps into bed, slips into dreamless slumber.

Dreamless for her, yes.

What possibly can be her motive? Sheer malice? What would make any one want to write a letter

that would kill happiness for others? Can you imagine?

Actually she is lonely.

She has few acquaintances, no beau, no husband, or one who is unresponsive or much older; perhaps she keeps house for a father who has lost touch with his youngers; no activities outside her home.

No one to gossip to.

She is naturally timid, afraid of people. The few people she knows mean more to her than she to them. She magnifies their intentions, their signs of friendship or hostility.

Perhaps she is about to lose one of these rare but slight acquaintances. This girl is about to marry, that man has ceased to visit. The vicar has ceased to look her way.

Thwarted, repressed, timid, she finds a way out, a solitary cowardly way: a letter written in the night, brimful of mischief, calculated to create misery.

The letter gives her a thrill. It gives her several sorts of thrill. If it is sex she has repressed, then her letters become unbelievably, vilely obscene. There is a thrill, too, in giving free expression to the hate that has been bottled up. Hate is another aspect of love. One hates the people one is not allowed to love. She glories in the intensest venom.

And a sense of power is always there also: the power to make people squirm, suffer, stay awake, contemplate suicide.

Loneliness has driven her timid, repressed little soul to this cowardly crime, but the thrill that it gives her grows with repetition and success.

She writes first to Mrs. A: then to the friends of Mrs. A. Soon she tries new fields, spreads misery over a wider area. writes about people she barely knows. By now she is a thrill addict, obsessed by it.

Almost any anyonymous letter contains one or more of these ingredients: revenge, thwarted sex, the desire for power.

Revenge ranges from petty malice to sheerest cruelty. Think of these types:

1. The people who torture the relatives after a murder trial or a coroner's inquest.

2. The man-hating animal-lovers who pore over the police records (one sent potassium cyanide to a man of seventy-four, fined for ill-treating a dog he was asked to poison; 200 others drove the man to melancholia and death from despair).

3. The occasional persecutors who are usually men (one crazy doctor sent 2,000 letters to a seventeen-year-old girl who had refused to marry him, made her lose her job and fiancé, then shot himself).

4. Cranks who write letters to celebrities, rectors, journalists (complex-provoking Hickey gets scores of these weekly), partly to relieve annoyance, partly as a form of showing-off.

5. Doctor-rejected spinster patients who write to make accusations, etc.

Detecting the poison-pen writer is no easy task.

Eighty per cent of the first guesses made prove to be wrong.

Suspect first the person who: (1) Is the most gravely scandalised in the letters; (2) is the first to report the matter indignantly to the authorities; (3) has the most to gain from the situation.

Suspect last, naturally, the person whose initials or name is appended to any of the letters.

What should you do with an anonymous letter that is not obviously an honest warning?

If about some other person, give it to that person, take no notice of its contents, ask him whether he wishes to have subsequent letters burned or handed to him. If about yourself, report to the police, however harmless and stupid it may seem.

A famous judge says all poison pensters should be flogged; a famous doctor says they should be psycho-analysed. Both agree that it is the meanest of crimes. But one cannot help pitying these unhappy people.

CHAPTER V

A VILLAGE "IDYLL"

I COULD not very well relate my experiences of frauds on bookies without telling the story of Daniel Bard, the bogus poet. I was not concerned in the affair myself, but heard of it from the schoolmaster of a village which I visited in connection with an anonymous letter case in the nearest town. The village was quite remote, being many miles from a station and well away even from the nearest main road. In fact, these conditions seemed necessary to the story as it was told to me, no doubt with more than a little embellishment. I will tell it, however, as it was told to me by the schoolmaster.

There lived in the village a poacher, a waggish sort of fellow who lived on his wits, not unlike, I should imagine, W. W. Jacobs' "Bob Pretty". Hardly a week passed without someone in the village missed something, and, though Joe Martin was fairly reasonably suspected, he was always clever enough not to be definitely found out. I gathered that the humour of his exploits kept him on good terms with the village, for all the world loves a cheerful rogue.

Now Joe had a nephew in Birmingham who was just such another as himself. His name was Daniel

Bard. Periodically Joe Martin would leave the village and spend a day with nephew, Daniel, though the latter had never so far returned the visits. The village, in fact, was unaware of his existence.

There came a time one summer when Daniel, having completed a short spell as a guest of His Majesty, was anxious to leave Birmingham for a while until he had replanned his future. He confided this to Uncle Joe on one of the latter's visits to the city, and Joe suggested that he should come down to the village for a time and share his widower's existence at his cottage.

"I've no doubt," he said admiringly to his nephew, "that you will be able to pick up a bit of beer money in one way or another from the natives."

Accordingly it was arranged, though the village was not to know that the visitor was Joe Martin's nephew. This prudent reservation was based on the fact that the natives no doubt considered that one of the Martin family in the village was enough.

Joe went about it very carefully, producing in the inn a letter from Mr. Daniel Bard saying that he had been told that a Mr. Joseph Martin could assist him in getting some cheap and homely accommodation in the village. Mr. Bard, it appeared, was a Bard by name and a bard by nature, for, stated the letter, he was a poet who, through overwork was in urgent need of a complete rest.

Several suggestions were made in the inn, as to where the poet should lodge, but Joe dispensed with them all and declared that he, himself, would offer

to accommodate him. It was known that Joe was a good cook in his own way, particularly of pheasants, and, as his cottage was always scrupulously clean, there seemed no reason why he should not act host to the man of letters. Three days later Joe was able to produce a letter from Mr. Bard, saying that he would be more than delighted to avail himself of Mr. Martin's hospitality.

The letter was followed very soon by Mr. Bard himself. But even the simplest villager could not fail to notice the difference in appearance between Daniel Bard and the conventional poet. Dan was a short, round little man with humid eyes and an expensive-looking nose. He wore a loud check suit and a green hat, but this resemblance to the best poets was purely accidental.

Needless to say, the village was vastly interested in him, and when it became known, through Joe, that he would be at the inn that evening, there was quite a good assembly to welcome him. Dan, who knew how to play his cards, stood them all some beer, and after that he was, as he declared, one of themselves. In a little speech he thanked them for the welcome they had given him, which he considered was but a sign of the respect in which they held Mr. Martin. There were no cheers at this, but a real outburst followed when the poet in Dan urged him to conclude with:

"Now that you're all pals o' mine,
Let the spark of friendship shine."

According to the schoolmaster, who, as I have said, told me the story, any doubts some of them might have had as to Mr. Bard's being a poet were immediately dispelled.

During the next few days Dan made various friends in the village, among them, William Price, an elderly man who had once kept the inn and who was reputed to have made a fair little fortune out of horse-dealing as well. As William had retired he had plenty of time on his hands, and he welcomed the company of the poet as the latter appreciated his. Daniel was glad to find that Mr. Price knew quite a lot about horse-racing, and that he frequently took small bets from such lads of the village who liked an occasional gamble. Horse-racing had long been a matter of interest to the poet, so that the pair had at once a mutual interest.

Mr. Price was also an ardent fisherman and spent most of his afternoons sitting by the river with his rod and line. To this pleasant pastime he introduced Mr. Bard, who declared it was just the right thing for his jaded nerves. So together the pair would go and while away the warm hours. Daniel, however, began to find it a little dull, but, as he took the day's newspaper with him, he amused himself by picking out selections for each race at about the time when it was being run.

"Warwick Races to-day," he would say. "What a lovely meeting. I'm not a betting man, Mr. Price, but I love to see the 'orses and have a few shillings on for fun. My knowledge of racing comes of reading

about it. Ah, I should like to be at Warwick to-day. They'll just be starting the three o'clock race."

Then Dan would study his paper and tell Mr. Price what he thought would win it.

"I wish I was there to put a trifle on it," he said temptingly to Mr. Price one day.

Mr. Price made the obvious reply, that he would be only too willing to accept a bet from him. And so it happened that bookmaker and client would conduct their little transactions by the side of the silvery stream. Sometimes the poet won; sometimes he didn't.

And then the question of beer money began to loom on Daniel's horizon, and he discussed it with his Uncle Joe. Surely there was some way of utilising his friendship with Mr. Price as a means of making a little money. Joe Martin heartily agreed, and the two gave the matter much earnest thought, with the result that they eventually evolved a scheme which met with their joint approval.

On the following evening Joe and his nephew were busily engaged in preparing a number of coloured pieces of paper, each one to represent a horse in a certain race on the following day. The pieces of paper were treated with oil to make them waterproof, for, as you will see, they were to float down the gentle stream on the next afternoon.

The plan was this. Daniel, as usual, was to go out fishing with Mr. Price, whilst Joe was to be up-stream at a telephone box in the next village. Here he was

to telephone a publican friend of his in a neighbouring town and learn the results of the races as soon as possible after they were run. In his pocket he would have his coloured papers, a colour for each of the likely winners. As an old poacher, Joe would know the trend of the currents in the river, and, by placing, say, a blue paper in the water at a certain point, he could be fairly sure of its floating past the two fishermen in due course. To make it more certain he put in several pieces, in case one might be caught up in transit.

What happened then was something like this:

Daniel, keeping a keen eye up-stream, saw a piece of paper coming down, whereupon he diverted the attention of Mr. Price to something away from the river.

"What sort of a bird d'you call that, up in that tree, Mr. Price?" he asked.

"That's a chaffinch," answered Mr. Price.

"How lovely to know nature as you do," said Daniel. "More interesting than 'orse-racing, for instance—which reminds me, they'll have run the two-thirty by this time."

Whereupon Daniel looked up the race in his newspaper and thought Simple Simon had probably won it. Mr. Price was quite willing to take the money for a bet about it, which pleased Daniel, who had seen the blue paper floating down the stream. This was the first day of the plan in action, and Daniel did not overdo it, but bet in small amounts only. His arrangement with Mr. Price was that they were

to meet at the inn next morning and check up the results in the newspaper. On this occasion Daniel was found to be the winner of a small amount.

This was a matter of mutual congratulation between Daniel and Uncle Joe, and, as soon as the inn closed that night they went back to the cottage to prepare more coloured papers for the next day. It was Daniel's intention to lift a good sum from Mr. Price on the following afternoon.

And so yesterday's scene was re-enacted.

After explaining that he had that morning been paid a considerable sum for a poem about a bunch of violets, Daniel let it leak out that he would like to back on a larger scale. He found Mr. Price almost pathetically agreeable. Even Daniel's conscience felt a pang which, however, soon disappeared when a yellow piece of paper came down the river telling him that Cute Lad had won the latest race. He judged the price of this horse to be about 5 to 1 and he had a pound on it with Mr. Price.

"It's almost the biggest bet I've ever taken," said the latter as he put Daniel's pound in his pocket. "Still, I can pay if it's won. Personally I should have backed Red Rabbit."

Daniel forbore to back the winner of the next race, although he knew it. On the next three races he had a pound each, and on the last one, following the tip of a piece of green paper, he went to the extent of two pounds, which was all the money he had left in the world. But what a prospect! He could repeat the process next day as well!

Uncle Joe accompanied him to the inn next day, for the sight of Daniel drawing his winnings was too good to be missed. Mr. Price was waiting for them when they entered, and Daniel admired the way in which he smiled in the teeth of adversity, for if losing about thirty pounds wasn't adversity, then Daniel didn't know what was.

"Well, Mr. Price," he said "I seem to have done a bit better than I expected. How much d'you reckon I've got to come?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Price.

Daniel showed sudden temper. "What!" he exclaimed. "D'you mean to say you're not going to pay?"

Daniel had not yet seen his newspaper which the old woman at the shop left for him at the inn, and did not know that all his horses had lost.

"Look at your paper," said Mr. Price, and Daniel did, with Uncle Joe peering over his shoulder.

The rest of the scene can better be imagined than told. Even the schoolmaster was unable to describe it to me. The end of it, however, he told me.

"You see," said Mr. Price when he had bought them a drink, "you forgot to pull your blind down when you were painting those papers the other night, and I happened to be passing. So I thought I'd paint a few myself next day. Then my sister's lad, who's fond of swimming, swam out and changed them for yours as they came down the river. And now you can write a poem about *that*. I'll bet it'll be as good as the one about the bunch of violets."

According to the schoolmaster, Joe Martin went to the inn alone that night, explaining that the poet had had to return to Birmingham, to which city he apparently had a return ticket. I asked the schoolmaster how he had managed to get all the details of this remarkable story. All he would say was that it was surprising how Herefordshire cider, with a little gin in it, would make Joe Martin talk.

CHAPTER VI

A TRIO OF TRICKSTERS

I HAVE in these pages brought in various crooks because they have been essential to my story. In this chapter I propose to devote myself to three crooks entirely as such. Each of them came into my net, though they had been in many nets before, and were in not a few afterwards. It is essential that I deal with the subject delicately, giving none the opportunity of bobbing up out of the Underworld and saying "Here! You've libelled me. What about it?"

Claims for libel, particularly against newspapers, have often meant considerable sums to crooks who had nothing whatever to lose by the libel. In this they have often been helped by a certain class of solicitor, who makes it his business to scan the newspapers in the hope of seeing some reference to a crook which might be construed into libel. The crook's attention being drawn to it a writ for libel results, and, if a payment is made, you may be sure the solicitor is not ill-paid. I therefore approach my subject by calling the trio of crooks A, B, and C. In and out of gaol perpetually, ever at war with the police, these three men caused our Branch a great deal of trouble from time to time. Indeed, apart

from cases in which we knew they were implicated, there were numerous others in which was very evident the cunning touch of one or more of these rascals.

A was a man who had had the benefit of a public school education. He had not been to the Varsity, though he had little difficulty in convincing people that he had. From what I learnt he had once spent a month in a University city almost entirely for the purpose of gaining a thorough knowledge of one of the colleges, both as to its interior and the names of men who might have been there with him. This knowledge was of supreme value to him, for it enabled him to strike up friendships among moneyed and influential people entirely for purposes of his own. He was not, of course, entirely dependent upon this imposture, for his people were quite well connected, though they had long since washed their hands of him.

His appearance was elegant. Tall, with the spare kind of figure on which clothes hang so well, he strode about the West End with his well-bred head in the air, his aquiline features sometimes adorned by a monocle. At times, however, I observed him in quite a different rig-out, for he was naturally not fool enough to make himself conspicuous among his fellow crooks when these, as often happened, were of a much lower order of society.

Forgery of Post Office Savings Bank withdrawal forms was one of his special accomplishments, though there were very few forms of the art of forgery

at which he was not an adept. He gave us an enormous amount of trouble over a long period, for he was most clever in keeping behind the scenes and letting other men take the active risks. With his persuasive and cultured manner he turned more than one postal worker into dishonest ways, which accounted for him getting hold of many Savings Bank Books in order to forge the withdrawals.

Aiding him was a remarkable woman whom he had described as a Russian countess, but whom we discovered to be the daughter of a Birmingham manufacturer who had run away from home because her father would not agree to her taking up art as a profession. This girl was most striking in appearance, having a shock of red hair which never seemed under the slightest control. Almost immediately on coming to London she had met A and had fallen a victim to his blandishments. They lived together somewhere in North London in considerable style, for A was a man who spent money lavishly when he had got it—and they were rare days when he was without it.

He told the girl that there was no need for her to look to Art as a means of earning her living, but encouraged her to sketch just to amuse herself. Then, always ready to extend his field of operations, he would take her to some of the Chelsea taverns where they met artists of varying grades of distinction. The man talked a great deal of his companion's art, but was careful that the girl did not accept the many invitations she received to bring specimens along for expert criticism. Apparently none doubted

her abilities—which, as a matter of fact, were very thin—a fact no doubt due to the Bohemian touzle of red hair.

Then one night they encountered at the Café Royal a portraitist of wide renown who, fascinated by her appearance, said she seemed more suited to be a model than an artist. The idea appealed to the "countess", and next night, after she had talked it over with A, she agreed to sit for him, but only on condition that her "husband" should come with her. This, it seemed later, was a move on the man's part to gain the entrée of what he knew to be a house of considerable wealth.

Fortune favoured him, for it was not long before he discovered the whereabouts of the artist's cheque-book, and from it, whilst the artist was occupied with the Titian-haired lady, extracted a cheque. He removed the counterfoil as well, and neatly gummed in another counterfoil and cheque in case the other was missed, there being only half-a-dozen cheques left. This was a simple thing for a man like A to do, for, as the police discovered later, he had a number of cheques of different banks at his house, stolen on various occasions. The number of the substituted cheque would be wrong, of course, but who takes note of the numbers on one's cheques?

This little operation was done on the last day of the sitting, and it was quite in the order of things that the girl should not return to the studio. The sequel was painful for the artist, for in due course he paid an account with the cheque which had been left

him by the red-haired lady's friend. The bank, of course, noticed it and soon the substitution was discovered. But it was too late to prevent the original cheque being cashed, and the artist was the loser of a sum running into three figures.

Unfortunately there was no proof that A had taken the cheque and no charge was preferred. The red-haired girl was not seen again, and I heard that she had returned to her parents, after seeing the kind of man into whose clutches she had fallen.

As it happened, A was arrested for Post Office frauds at about that time and sentenced to a heavy term of penal servitude.

Like Crook A, Crook B was also a forger and applied his abilities to Post Office documents, and he had, working under his directions, a number of men engaged in stealing postal packages from private letter-boxes. With him at one time worked the man to whom I have referred elsewhere as having had his hand caught in a steel trap whilst rifling a letter box in the door of a City firm's office. These men regularly brought him cheques which they had taken from stolen packets, and B quickly altered the amounts, "opening" them if they were crossed. In fact there was little he could *not* do with a cheque. But this was by no means the limit of his forgery ability. He was a master in the art of making counterfeit bank notes. So clever were his imitations that he had more than once received veiled compliments from the very Bench itself. But his life of crime was not one long series of successes. Despite his cleverness

he was never able to keep long outside prison walls.

To me this was always strange, though my close knowledge of him extended over thirty years. He would bring off some amazing strokes which at the time completely baffled the police; yet in some foolish way he would drop a clue almost at the very door of Scotland Yard. On two occasions he owed his detection to women. He was what is called "one for the ladies", with whom his relations lacked as much discrimination as they did limitation. It was therefore only to be expected that there was a good deal of jealousy rife among his various women friends.

At that time there were several women in the Underworld who were veritable queens. As an example I quote Lou, who had been associated with one crook after another. Her favours were eagerly sought by the crook fraternity, but they were just as definitely refused unless the suitor happened at the time to be well in funds. And by that I mean in a position to give her presents costing a hundred pounds or so. If Lou was consorting with a certain criminal for long you could be fairly certain that he had recently "done a job" of some kind, just as you could be certain that, as soon as the proceeds of the "job" were running short, Queen Lou would dismiss her courtier and find a new one.

Unlike many women associates of crooks, however, Lou was never disloyal. She was never known to "shop" a man, which is the term for laying

information against him. This, as every philandering crook generally learns to his cost, is a rare trait. Even when a man turned from Lou to a new charmer she kept her lips sealed about all she knew of his activities. Needless to say she was often "pumped" by detectives in disguise, but she was always too clever for them.

"Look here, you little devil," she once said to me in a public-house when I was trying to "get a line" on a mail-bag thief, "who *are* you? You seem a bit of a 'nosey Parker'; yet you're not big enough to be a 'split' (detective). P'raps you're a 'nark' (informer). But you get nothing out of me, and that's straight."

I managed to convince her that I had no reasons for asking the questions, but I asked no more. I had no wish to have a Guinness, glass and all, flung in my face, which is what happened to a young and over-zealous detective not long before.

But Lou was never a friend of the man I have called Crook B. Loyalty when spurned was no part of the make-up of the women which this foolish fellow had in tow. Otherwise he might have had more money and certainly more freedom.

Of this latter he enjoyed only about one half of the thirty years during which I knew of him. One of his sentences carried also a period of preventive detention and it was said that during this time he studied process-engraving to "improve the shining hour!"

Crook C was also an adept at forging Bank of England notes. He was a man of great personality and often posed as a musician, and the violin case

under the arm of the hurrying violinist in a South London suburb would have surprised many, had it been opened. For it was in a violin case that Crook C carried the implements of his art.

He, also, worked hand-in-glove with letter-box draggers (thieves) and from them obtained small cheques which he altered to larger amounts. One pound notes, however, were his speciality, and a large number of these he did by means of pen and ink. The notes then, however, were much easier to counterfeit than are the modern ones, with their highly complicated tints and design.

On one occasion this forger was described by a prosecuting barrister as a man who would do anything except work for a living, whereupon the prisoner grew indignant.

"You try making pound notes like mine," he blurted out from the dock, "and you'll find it's work, all right."

CHAPTER VII

THE "I.B." *v.* BETTING CROOKS

THE Investigation Branch of the G.P.O. has always as its adversaries the cleverest crooks in the crime world.

The very nature of the frauds which are perpetrated through the medium of the Post Office is such that only the most nimble-witted trickster can devise them and carry them through.

During the whole of my forty-six years at headquarters the battle of wits went ceaselessly on.

Guile was matched with guile. No sooner had we of the Investigation Branch discovered the way to counter one kind of crime than the criminals set us some fresh puzzle to solve.

Frauds on bookmakers provide one of the clearest illustrations of the sort of battle we had to fight. Here the methods of the tricksters reached the peak of ingenuity.

In many instances we knew for months that frauds were being daily perpetrated. Still the problem of how, and by whom, persistently baffled us.

Bookmakers have always "stood to be shot at" by means of letters, telegrams and telephones, and I suppose it always will be so. But there are many

tricks which will not be played upon them again. For this the bookies have got the Investigation Branch of the G.P.O. to thank.

I propose here to relate one or two frauds which came within my own actual experience.

There was one which had its sequel in what was known as the North London case and ended in the conviction of the crooks.

Information reached my department that certain bookmakers had received suspiciously successful bets from North London, by letters post-marked quite legitimately before the start of the race.

It came to my knowledge that in more than one case a bookmaker had opened an account for a man whom I will call "Mullins"—this, of course, is not his real name—who had won successfully on a horse and had ceased betting with that bookmaker—only to repeat the process at a later date with another.

Assuming that the letters had been subject to some trick, it seemed to have been one which did not bear playing twice on the same bookmaker. I confess that I was puzzled, for, in most of the betting frauds which I had previously investigated, the same bookmaker had been victimised more than once.

My first step was to make myself acquainted with the address from which Mullins carried on his correspondence. This I found to be a shop. But the name of the shopkeeper was not Mullins, and I learnt that for a trifling payment he would receive letters for anyone.

This, of course, was most significant, for I had long since learnt that a large percentage of people using accommodation addresses are up to no good.

Next, by arrangement with the local Post Office, I was able to keep an eye on all letters which came to that office for Mullins.

Mr. Mullins seemed to have a fair amount of correspondence, some of it addressed to him in ink and some in pencil. It was these latter which mostly interested me, especially as they had been posted at the North London P.O. in the morning, just in time for them to be delivered to Mullins' address by the early afternoon delivery. I also learnt that Mullins always called for his letters each day shortly after they had been delivered.

At first I was inclined to suspect an old trick, which, I think, is known to everyone. I refer to the trick in which a man addresses a letter to himself in pencil and posts it; then, when it reaches him, he opens it and inserts a bet on a horse which has just won, next erasing his own name and address and substituting, in ink, that of a bookmaker into whose letter-box he or an accomplice inserts the letter.

The envelope bears, of course, a pre-race postmark.

But I hardly thought Mullins was fool enough to try this trick, for it had long since been "rumbled" by the bookmakers, many of whom discontinued the use of letter-boxes at their premises, and requested the postmen to bring the letters into their offices.

How, then, was Mullins to get his bet delivered to the bookie? He could, of course, have bribed the

postmen, but, I am happy to record, there is no more honest class of men than these servants of the public. There are exceptions, of course, but they are rare.

My curiosity was, therefore, intense when, one day, I kept close observation on the accommodation address, knowing that there was a pencilled envelope in the North London office ready to be delivered early in the afternoon.

And there, in the open street, I watched while the whole trick was worked out, stage by stage, under my very nose.

First I saw the postman walk down the street and duly hand the letter to the shopkeeper. He had barely disappeared round the corner of the street than two men, one of whom I knew to be Mullins, walked rapidly up to the shop and came out a few moments later with a letter in his hand.

The confederates then crossed the road to a tea shop, into which I followed them, ordering tea at an adjoining table.

Under cover of reading a newspaper I watched them make out a bet, which proved later to be on a horse which had already won about half an hour before. Mullins' confederate had learned its name over the 'phone.

They left the shop a few minutes later, with myself following unobtrusively some distance behind.

Their next move was to take a bus to a street in an adjacent part of London, in which I knew was situated a bookmaker's office. I had by this time

memorised the locality of a large number of such establishments . . . a dull task, but not one without its reward.

As I followed I grew more curious, for I really could not imagine how they were to get their letter to the bookmaker. Presently the men separated, one of them proceeding along the street until he was about ten yards short of the bookmaker's office, *but on the opposite side.*

Here he stood, leaning against a lamp standard, affecting to read a newspaper. The other man, Mullins, stayed about fifty yards short of the bookmaker's and appeared interested in a book-shop window.

I was pondering on the meaning of this little manœuvre when I saw in the distance a postman delivering his afternoon round. Then I began to see the light. Mullins waited until the postman had passed him and was some few doors away from the bookmaker's office with a bunch of letters in his hand, as is the practice. Then he overtook him, dropping a letter behind him as he did so—*the* letter, of course.

Suddenly Mullins's friend across the road lowered his newspaper and called out:

"Oi!" at the same time pointing to the letter which lay behind the unsuspecting postman.

The latter glanced in the direction of the cry, turned round and picked up the letter, which he placed among those in his hand. Certainly ingratitude was no part of his make-up, for he called "Thanks,

mate!" to his "benefactor" before he proceeded to deliver the letter to the bookmaker.

All this time I, myself, was being followed by another officer of the I.B., who, when I accosted Mullins, treated his confederate to a similarly unpleasant surprise.

The sequel was two sharp sentences of imprisonment for Mullins and his friend, and special Post Office precautions against anything of the kind happening again.

. . . . .

At one time the original pencilled envelope trick was disturbingly prevalent, but not all bookies dispensed with the use of their letter-boxes to counter it. Many favoured the issue of their own printed, addressed envelopes, and notified clients that they could only accept bets in such envelopes, a practice now in wide use.

Even these, however, at first presented no great problem to the false-bet crooks, who had quite a good run until their method was discovered. It was a daring method, for the risk of detection was great.

They would place one of the bookmaker's envelopes in another slightly larger but of the same shade, having affixed a stamp to the former. They would also cut a square out of the outer envelope, smear a little gum under the cut edges and lightly press them down, giving the envelope the appearance of being stamped, though the stamp was actually on the bookmaker's envelope within they would then address the letter to themselves and post it.

All that was necessary on its receipt was to remove the outside envelope, whereupon they became possessed of the bookie's envelope, duly stamped and postmarked with a certain time. Needless to say, this time was well before that of the race on which they meant to operate. Then, having learnt the winner of the race, they inserted the bet in the envelope, which was eventually placed in the bookmaker's letter-box.

This scheme acted for quite a long time, for the deception was not noticed in a busy sorting office. But most good things come to an end. One day a particularly astute sorter spotted the cut-out envelope, and the matter was at once put in the hands of the Investigation Branch. A conviction resulted, which was a sharp warning to others.

It is fortunate that science, which has made available for the crook the telephone and the telegram, has also provided the crime-fighters with weapons to foil the men who misuse these inventions.

The microscope and micro-photography have made it far easier for the Investigation Branch to detect cases of forgery and tampering with letters.

Under the microscope the letter which has been tampered with tells the whole story of the fraud.

I had to be thankful for this in one of the many "invisible ink" frauds with which I had to deal. The swindler concerned, whom we will call "Smith", carrying on a regular business defrauding bookmakers in one of the big Northern manufacturing towns.

The scheme involved the use of an accommodation address for Smith, the use of the pencilled envelope trick, and the rounding off of the fraud by the use of invisible ink.

Smith took a room in a Northern town for the receipt of letters under an assumed name.

Acting upon information received from a bookmaker, we kept careful observation on Smith.

One day a colleague of mine watching the posting box outside a certain post office saw Smith approach and post a letter. He at once communicated by a pre-arranged sign with the people inside, then hurried off to trail the man.

In the meantime Smith's letter was undergoing a very close scrutiny at the hands of our men in the Post Office.

The letter, which was addressed in pencil, was in the presence of witnesses, marked with invisible ink and allowed to go on its normal course, which meant that it would shortly be delivered at the address on the envelope.

To this house also went Smith to await delivery. After receiving the letter, off he went to his own premises.

Here, of course, he took out the pencilled letter from his pocket, steamed it open, and inserted a bet on a horse which had already won.

His next problem, of course, was to get the letter delivered to the bookmaker, which he managed by an ingenious trick.

Nothing was done for the present to disturb

operations, but careful watch was kept for nearly a week, with the result that several more similar letters came through, including two to bookmakers in London and one in Ripon. In each case we arranged that these letters should be delivered specially to the addresses by their own local Post Offices, with the result that the bookmakers were acquainted of the fraud which was being worked upon them.

Soon afterwards the principals in the fraud were arrested. The evidence so painstakingly gathered was sufficiently incriminating to persuade both of them to enter a plea of "guilty".

Each was sentenced to a stiff term of imprisonment.

One remarkable series of frauds provided comedy in the audacious manner of their perpetration, though they ultimately savoured more of tragedy to those concerned—tragedy played out at the Assizes.

Some of the frauds had been perpetrated at Post Offices in Birmingham and Plymouth, whilst the scenes of others were as far afield as Woolwich and Brighton. I was personally engaged at all these places, a fact borne out by the words of the prosecuting counsel who, in dealing with one of the cases, remarked: "*Again Detective Cartwright was on the war-path, and the whole of the proceedings were carried out under his personal observation.*"

The perpetrators were a number of men belonging to the "sporting" fraternity themselves, and our haul, when the time came, included a bookmaker, a bookie's clerk and several so-called commission

agents, a fact which, since the victims were bookmakers also, scarce supported the theory that "dog doesn't eat dog".

These men betted on no modest scale; £10 each way on a long-priced winner (which they knew had won!) was nothing out of the ordinary, and, as such bets were often placed simultaneously with several London bookmakers, the extent of the winnings can be imagined. It entailed many weeks of intense observation and activity before my colleagues and I eventually brought these gentlemen to book. The extent of shadowing involved was greater than in any case in which I acted, inasmuch as we had to keep under close observation a number of men acting unexpectedly in widely separated towns. In telling the story I am altering both the names of the men and the towns; otherwise everything is told exactly as it happened.

In this particular case I am calling the men Danby, Rice and Weston. The last remains in London whilst the other two go to a provincial town from which they mean to operate on that day's racing.

Shortly before the 2 p.m. race Mr. Danby makes his way to a Post Office. Meanwhile Rice has gone to a local hotel, close at hand; or else to a telephone office. His telephone message is the vital link in the game, and he cannot use the same Post Office as Danby is visiting, on the grounds of caution. He puts through a call to Weston in London so that it gets through as soon as the race is run at Folkestone, Brighton, or wherever the day's racing may be.

Weston is on another line and has the result almost immediately after the race, perhaps by tape machine. This result he tells Rice when he comes through. The race, we will say, is won by Jim Crow.

We will now return to Mr. Danby in the sub-Post Office where he is pleasantly purchasing *nineteen* sixpenny stamps and a five shilling postal order. Having made his purchase he produces a bundle of telegraph forms upon which he proceeds to affix the stamps. Then he re-calls the sub-postmistress and hands to her *seventeen* telegrams with a request that they be despatched at once. Instinctively the post-mistress glances up at the clock. It is now 1.50 p.m., and with that time the telegrams are coded and are in the hands of the assistant who acts as operator.

Each telegram contains a bet addressed to a different bookmaker in London. They are bets which have involved no study of form of the horses named; no perusal of the sporting papers' selections. Any horses will meet the case so long as they are in the Harbour Selling Plate, for those telegrams are simply to hold up the wire until Mr. Rice has had a brief word with Mr. Weston. There is nothing new in this method of holding up the telegraph line. In fact counsel for defence declared that neither was there any harm in it.

"Who has not heard," he asked, "of the American reporter who sent the Book of Genesis through to monopolise the wires, and when he asked instructions of his millionaire proprietor got the reply: 'Go on with the Psalms'?"

Danby now leaves the Post Office, raising his hat politely to the postmistress, by whom he has a special wish to be remembered. There is now a hurried meeting with Rice as soon as he emerges from the hotel with the name of the winner, and the two remaining sixpenny stamps of the nineteen quickly find their way on to two telegrams backing Jim Crow for £10 and £5 each way respectively. The five shilling postal order also changes hands, and a few moments later Rice takes his turn to visit the Post Office.

He walks in casually and asks the sub-postmistress for a letter-card. Whilst she is producing it, he looks downwards and exclaims:

"Hello! Somebody's dropped a postal order. Yes, and a couple of telegrams as well."

Bending down he affects to pick up the order and the wires which, of course, were in his hand already.

"Dear me!" says the postmistress. "They must belong to a gentleman who has just gone out."

"A pity," says Mr. Rice. "Anyhow, I'll leave them with you. Possibly he'll come back when he discovers his loss, poor chap."

Mr. Rice is right. The "poor chap" is back in a few minutes in no end of consternation for Danby is nothing if not a good actor.

"Did I leave a postal order here?" he asks.

"Yes, sir, and a gentleman picked it up," replies the postmistress, "and there were two telegram forms with it."

Danby glances at the wires as she produces them and shows all the signs of passing into an apoplectic fit.

"Yes, they're mine," he gasps, "and they should have gone at the same time as the others." Then: "I'm going to ask you a favour. I want you to time them with the others. It means nothing to you, but it means much to me."

The result is that the postmistress takes the wires over to the operator and they are coded 1.50 p.m. Probably the last of the previous bunch of wires have not yet been dispatched.

The postal order, of course, is used merely as a blind. In one case a pair of chamois leather gloves took its place, the man taking care that the postmistress saw them clearly before he went out.

Such was the trick by which the gang obtained large sums of money. Sometimes, to give the bets to bookmakers with whom they had no account, the men would use the nom-de-plume of a perfectly innocent friend. Thus, Danby might say that he had no account, and would the friend mind him occasionally sending a bet to the friend's bookmaker under his nom-de-plume, guaranteeing to pay if it lost (which, in the circumstances, was hardly likely!).

Not always did the trick in the Post Offices succeed. Occasionally the officials declined to back-code the "dropped" telegrams, in which case there was nothing to do but for the trickster to take them back. But on one occasion he was unable even to do that. Danby bought sixteen sixpenny stamps and sent

off fourteen wires. He had also bought a ten shilling postal order according to plan. The wife of the postmaster took the wires, and, before sending them herself, gave certain instructions to the assistant (on whose suggestion you may guess!).

It was not long before Rice came in for his customary letter-card and to "find" the postal order and telegrams. The assistant was behind the counter at the time and was surprised when Rice told her what he had found. She at once spoke to the postmaster's wife, Mrs. Binyon.

"This man says he has found these behind the desk," she said, "but I'm certain they weren't there when I gave the public part a thorough dusting, as you told me."

Mrs. Binyon took charge of the telegrams and postal order, the former containing two bets of £5 each way on a horse called Day and Night, which won, of course. Presently in came Danby in the fluster of which he was now a master, but he received a shock when Mrs. Binyon said she could give him no information about anything being found. He was clever enough not to argue. All he said was:

"Probably somebody has picked it up," whereupon he calmly bought another P.O.!

But Mr. Danby wanted those telegraph forms back again, and a little later he reappeared in an angry mood.

"I have just met a gentleman in a shop across the road," he said loudly, "and he says he picked up

the postal order and two telegrams, evidently mine. I want my property back."

But again Mrs. Binyon said she could not help him, whereupon he said that he should write to the Postmaster-General about it and get the gentleman who found them to do the same.

"Very well," said Mrs. Binyon, "then you'd better await his reply. Nothing can be done here."

I imagine that Danby and Rice, and no doubt Weston also, did not feel very comfortable about the incident. But they had not long to wait before something *was* done, and they stood in the dock listening to Mrs. Binyon and the assistant telling the whole story of the transaction.

With regard to Weston, I should say that he also was under observation so far as his telephone conversations with his colleagues were concerned. In all cases we called telephone clerks to give evidence of trunk calls from the vicinity of Rice's and Danby's operations—time of call being made, period taken before connection and length of conversation.

The result of it all was that a conviction was obtained against most of our prisoners. In passing sentence the Judge said it was a very nasty business, and that those to whom it had been brought home must expect to suffer. It was a conspiracy of the most extensive kind, had been very successful in many instances and had probably gone beyond matters which were in the present indictment. It was about as bad a case as he could well conceive, and he could make no distinction between the

miserable instruments who had carried out the active part of the conspiracy and the men who were behind them. They would all be sent to imprisonment for two years with hard labour, and *not* in the second division!

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE THE BENCH

In the previous chapter I have given a pen-picture of how the trick of the "found telegrams" was worked. Here, for the interest of those who understand racing I set out, with certain prudent alterations, the Court proceedings which followed this and allied cases which give a good idea of the scale on which the bookmakers were victimised.

Often this class of trickster used the racing nom-de-plume of some friend of theirs, a proceeding which served to allay any suspicions which the bookie might have had. The crook would explain to his friend that he was going away for a day or two and might meet a man in the know as regards a race meeting being held that week. "But I haven't an account with a bookmaker," he would say, "and it will be difficult for me to get the money on. Do you mind if I use your account and code name?" Sometimes the crook would deposit a sum with the owner of the account to show that he would not be left to pay out on any losings which the crook might make.

On other occasions one of the gang might have an account himself, and this would be used; but it is obvious that they could not continually win money

off the same bookmaker by bets timed so near the race. Even the most benign bookie looks up and takes notice when winning telegrams reach him long after he has known the result of the race himself.

In the present case which came up before a judge and jury, the prisoners were named Danby and Rice, as you have seen. The charge was that one of conspiring by false pretences and subtle devices to defraud a number of bookmakers of large sums of money. There were also other charges of forging telegrams.

In a trial of this kind all evidence had to be supported by evidence, and even the fact that the race was run and won by a certain horse had to be proved. Consequently the first witness in this particular charge, was a sporting journalist, a reporter named Brown, who stated that the Chesterfield Cup at Goodwood was run on a certain day, at 2.30 p.m. and that it was won by a horse named Solar.

George Barnett, a commission agent, stated that on that day he received a telegram signed Nignep—the telegraphic name of a client of his—having £5 each way on Solar. The telegram purported to have been handed in at Blank Road, Brighton, at 2.20 p.m. If it had been genuine the sender would have been entitled to £60. The amount was duly paid to the client.

Arthur Lembrook, commission agent, proved receiving on the same day a telegram from the same office, in the name of a nom-de-plume of a client, making a bet of £10 each way on Solar. That meant a loss

to witness of about £120. He had heard the result of the race before receiving the telegram, which, however, was timed as having been handed in at 2.20 p.m. He drew a cheque in favour of the client but next day gave instructions for it to be stopped, his suspicions being aroused when he came to remember that he had had two telegrams before signed the same way and backing a horse which had already won.

A Clerk from the London, etc., Bank gave evidence of the above cheque.

Harry Atkinson, a commission agent, identified a telegram making a bet of £5 each way on Solar for the Chesterfield Cup. It was handed in at Blank Road, Brighton, at 2.20 p.m. and was received in London at 3.36. It was signed Nignep and a cheque for the amount won was duly sent to the backer.

Evidence relating to another race, a fortnight later, was next given.

A sporting reporter gave evidence that the race was run at 2 p.m. and was won by Caradoc.

Mrs. Graham, wife of a restaurant keeper in Plymouth, proved that Danby and Rice lodged at her house during the week of Folkestone Races. They left their lodgings early in the morning and remained away all day.

Thirza Griffiths, sub-post-mistress at Nonsuch Road, stated that on the day of the Selling Plate, Danby entered the office at 1.45 and purchased nineteen sixpenny stamps and a ten shilling postal

order. He had a number of telegrams written out and he affixed seventeen sixpenny stamps to the forms and handed them in. After he had gone about twenty minutes Rice visited the office and bought a letter card. He stooped as if to pick something up from the floor and handed her a ten shilling postal order and two telegram forms. The latter (interposed Counsel) were addressed to London commission agents and were making bets of £5 and £10 each way on Caradoc.

Witness, continuing, said that almost immediately after Rice had gone, Danby came in again and said he had lost a postal order. She told him it had been found with two telegram forms. He said he was very pleased they had been found and asked her to send them with the others, and time them the same. She handed them to the operator who had by that time sent off six of the original batch.

Elizabeth Jones, Assistant at Nonsuch Road office, proved the dispatch of the telegrams all timed at 1.50 p.m. She identified Danby as having visited the office earlier in the day.

Mary Lennon, clerk in a telephone office, spoke to a man, whom she believed to be Rice, visiting the office on that day and having a call to London. A second man came in just afterwards and also had a call to London. They were together.

George Currey, telephone clerk, gave evidence as to the use of the trunk lines on that day. Communication with London was set up at 1.48 and at 2 p.m.

Jack Mellor, commission agent, gave evidence that

he received a telegram that day and that the original was in the handwriting of Danby, whom he knew.

A G.P.O. Investigator said that he kept observation on Danby at the restaurant where he was staying and that he had observed him to make various visits to the Post Office on the 21st. He saw Danby join Rice and the pair left Plymouth. (This was at the end of the Folkestone Meeting.) The Investigator next kept observation on the men in London. On the 28th he returned to Plymouth to which Danby and Rice had returned.

James Wilkes, sporting reporter at Gatwick, spoke of the Norbury Plate being won by Carefree on the 28th, the time of the race being 2.30.

Elsie Martin, assistant at a Devonport Post Office, said that on the 28th Danby entered the office and handed in sixteen telegrams, after buying a ten shilling postal order and eighteen sixpenny stamps. The telegrams were handed in at 2.28 and the first message was finished at 2.36. Danby having left the office, Rice came in and bought a letter-card, and, turning to the writing desk, said he had found a postal order and two telegrams. She said they might belong to the gentleman who had just gone out. Rice kept them in his hand and left the office with them, returning with Danby, who said they were his and asked her to time them the same as the others. She said she could only code them the time it was then, but he said that unless he could have them timed before 2.30 they would be no good. He left without handing them in.

Kathleen Williams, telephone clerk, spoke to a call being made to London at 2.36 lasting three minutes. It was asked for at 2.20.

William Downes, clerk at the railway station, spoke to one of the men handing in four telegrams at about four o'clock that afternoon. One of them, directed to a London address, said: " Failed to-day. Trying to-morrow, from Plymouth."

A clerk in a Plymouth hotel spoke to the men having booked rooms there on that day.

A G.P.O. Investigator (the same man!) said he watched the hotel and saw the men conferring together with a third man, on the 29th. Later he and a colleague kept watch on the men and observed them to use the telephone office, after which they visited various public houses, after which they parted. Danby and Rice took a cab and were lost sight of. The other man had returned to the telephone office.

It was stated that on that day the Rostrum Selling Plate was being run at Gatwick at 2.0 p.m. It was won by Lighthouse.

John Price, landlord of the Red Lion, said that the Post Office in the case was seven or eight minutes' walk from his house. On August 29th, a man whom he identified as Rice, visited his house at about two o'clock with another man and used the telephone.

A taxi-driver spoke to driving Danby and Rice to the Red Lion from a certain street (which was where the Investigation Branch man lost them). He

waited for the men and then drove them to the Post Office.

Jessie Waites, assistant at that office spoke of a visit by Danby at about 1.50 on the 29th. He bought a ten shillings postal order and seventeen sixpenny stamps. He handed in fifteen telegrams, which were coded at 1.55. Directly he left, Rice entered, and after a small purchase, pretended to pick up two telegraph forms which he placed on the counter. Danby then reappeared and asked her to code the two telegrams with the others, but she refused and he took the two telegrams away.

Evidence was given by a telephone clerk to the effect that the third man had had two calls to London at about that time. Also that the same man had rung up someone at the Red Lion.

The next and last case in this extensive prosecution was that which I described in my previous chapter. There is this much to add, however. Mrs Binyon did send the wires, with the result that another bookmaker entered the witness-box and stated that he had on that afternoon received a bet of £5 each way on a horse, but the wire was timed after the race and he refused to pay. (Mrs. Binyon, of course, had coded it after the postal order and dropped telegram episode.) Otherwise the bookmaker would have stood to lose £65.

But that was not all. Another of our witnesses was a London shopkeeper who had authorised one of the men to use his code name on occasion with a bookie named Charles. On this day Charles

received a telegram timed after the race. The bookie got into touch with the shopkeeper and inquiries were made. We found that this telegram was the other which Mrs. Binyon had timed when she got it from Danby.

I have quoted these cases to give an idea of the scale on which this fraud was being worked. It had already been done from different parts of the country and large sums had been gathered in by the gang which we broke up.

CHAPTER IX

AN INVISIBLE INK CASE

My reminiscences of frauds on bookmakers would be incomplete without mention of a case which we had to investigate in the Midlands some years ago. Two men eventually stood in the dock—an insurance agent and a postman. For the latter I had a good deal of sympathy; for the former none, for he was a man of considerable earnings and had in some way got the postman, whose wages were only three pounds a week, into his clutches.

I cannot do better than to give a version of the trial. I will call the towns concerned Birmingham and Wolverhampton, though these, of course were not the identical places. They were, however, quite close to each other.

The charges was that of endeavouring to obtain money by means of forged betting letters. Under this heading four different cases were involved. The prosecution was in the hands of a solicitor who acted as agent for the solicitor to the Postmaster-General.

In opening the case the solicitor said that the two men were charged with four offences of endeavouring to obtain money by virtue of falsely-post-marked betting letters. It was, he said, enacted by the

Forgery Act that every person should be guilty of felony who, with intent to defraud, endeavoured to obtain money by means of a forged instrument, knowing the same to be forged. It had been decided by the Court of Criminal Appeal that a falsely postmarked betting letter was a forged instrument within the meaning of the Forgery Act.

The prosecution must establish two main points, that the two accused made use of falsely postmarked letters, knowing them to be such, and secondly that by using them in the way they did, they endeavoured to obtain money from other persons with intent to defraud.

"It would be the easiest thing in the world," he said, "for people to win money by backing horses if one could wait until the result of the race was known, and then back the winner!"

Nobody, he added, had so far been fortunate enough to discover a bookmaker willing to accept a bet on the winning horse after the result of the race. If, on the other hand, any person instructed a bookmaker to take a bet about a certain horse and sent the letter before the race he would accept the transaction, even if the letter did not reach him until after the result of the race was known.

Therein lay the key to the plan which Thompson, with his very necessary accomplice Grant (as I will call them) adopted. Thompson obtained the use of a house as an accommodation address, and to this address posted a letter addressed to himself in pencil. (The old trick, as you will observe.) The

envelope was duly delivered and bore the postmark in the ordinary way. Thompson got it and shortly afterwards obtained the winner of a race which had just been run. He opened the envelope and inserted instructions to his bookmaker to take a bet about this horse which had already won. Then, rubbing out the pencilled address on the envelope, addressed it in ink to the bookmaker.

The envelope, of course, bore a postmark showing the time of postmark to be before the race. He handed it to the postman Grant who tried to introduce it into the outward mail without another postmark on it. It reached the bookmaker and he assumed that it had been posted before the race. That had been the plan of campaign.

Dealing with one of the cases in which the complainant's name was Robbins, the solicitor pointed out that the accused were alleged to have obtained money from Robbins, who was a bookmaker. Robbins received a letter from "S. Brown, 72, Marlborough Road, Birmingham," investing five shillings each way on a horse called Pendennis and the same amount each way on a horse called Jester. The former horse won at 100 to 8. The other was among the "also ran". This latter bet, the lawyer probably rightly suspected as being a piece of camouflage intended to disarm suspicion. The letter was postmarked "Birmingham 10.45 a.m." It would be proved that "S. Brown" was none other than Thompson, and that the Marlborough Road address was an accommodation one.

The occupier of that address, who took in boarders, would identify Thompson as S. Brown who had stayed with her for a time. He asked her for a bedroom without food, saying that he was out of Birmingham most of the day and every week-end. He received a number of letters by post, a good many of which were registered. These the woman signed for and handed to "Brown".

By this time, however, we of the Investigation Branch were on his track, working on information received, which I will describe later. One of my colleagues, who was keeping observation on the outside posting-box at the Birmingham Head Post Office, gave evidence of how he saw Thompson come along, take a letter from his pocket and post it in the box. He at once communicated with the people inside and had the letter marked with invisible ink. He then went to Marlborough Road where Thompson called. Next the Investigator watched the office of Thompson, in Birmingham, which the insurance agent had quickly reached. (It was his own office.) After he had kept observation some time he saw the postman Grant enter the office. Following this, observation was kept on Grant in the Post Office at which he worked in Wolverhampton, particularly as to his actions in the sorting office.

He was seen to walk to a sorting table. A little later a clerk handed to the Investigator the letter which, when addressed in pencil, had been marked with invisible ink at Birmingham. It of course bore the Birmingham postmark and would have

duly reached the bookmaker to whom it was addressed.

The next step was for an official of the Investigation Branch to interview the postman, and the solicitor read out a statement signed by Grant. In this statement the unfortunate fellow threw considerable light on Mr. Thompson. "I have got myself into trouble through being hard-up and owing money. Thompson offered me thirty shillings for every letter I put back in the post. I didn't want to do it, but in the end I gave in. But he never gave me the thirty shillings for every letter. He said some of the bookies wouldn't pay him. I can't say if this is true, for *he* wouldn't show me the papers to prove it. I've had about twenty pounds from him so far, and I've put about sixty letters back."

The second charge related to an endeavour to obtain money from a bookmaker named Bryant. The letter backed a six-to-one winner, but the bookmaker had suspicions and refused to pay out. The third charge was of a similar nature.

The fourth charge concerned a London bookmaker named Steele to whom a £1 each way bet had been sent. Thomson at the time was paying 10*s*. weekly for a small room. He used the name of Wesley, and again received numerous letters, many of them registered. Steele paid out on a seven-to-one winner.

Various evidence was given, including that of a Cardiff bookmaker who received a bet from the Marlborough Road address. But the G.P.O. was watching things then, and the letter was specially

delivered to the bookmaker. The bet won, but was not paid. Other bookmakers gave evidence of not paying out, so that the story told by Thompson to Grant, if he told it, had some truth in it. The bookies did *not* pay, and for that they had the Investigation Branch to thank. Many of the wins were for sums of twenty pounds or thereabouts.

The solicitor was at pains, however, to make it clear that the enormous amount of time which the Investigation Branch had spent was not in the interests of any one branch of the community, such as bookmakers, but was on behalf of all those people who had a right to use the Post Office, and had the right to think that the authorities would deal with the correspondence entrusted to them in a straightforward way.

The evidence of the Investigator who watched Grant was interesting. On one occasion he saw Thompson enter his office; then he watched Grant make his collection from a letter-box in the neighbourhood, after which he went to Thomson's office. Following a short stay there he proceeded to the Post Office and into the sorting office, where he was watched. He disposed of his collection and proceeded to what was known as his walk-seat. On leaving he had several letters in his left hand, and walked to the town sorting section of the office and picked up other letters with his right hand. He then placed the letters in his left hand together with the others, went to a sorting frame and sorted the letters up.

A few minutes later Grant was called into a private

room and spoken to by the Investigator. Here he was confronted with a letter bearing the Birmingham postmark. That evening Grant found himself in custody.

Thompson was also arrested on the same day. He admitted that he had done that of which he had been accused, but loudly protested that the case had been magnified. He had only done it a few times to get even with the bookies who were never paying him. Many of his wins were genuine "tips" which he had received, but the bookies often had not paid him. This plea, however, did not avail him any. He was sentenced to a sharp dose of imprisonment.

The "information received" to which I referred, came from a turf commission agent in Bristol. He spoke to having received a betting letter from Wolverhampton sent by a man named Jelks. The bet won £10 but was not paid because he was not satisfied with the letter. He had previously had dealings with Thompson, and suspected that it was the same man again. When he had last doubted the bona fides of a letter from Thompson he had told him he would not accept any more bets from him through the post, and that he would only deal with him by telegram. After this Thompson's bets ceased. Suspecting, therefore, that Jelks was a name being used by Thompson, the bookie put the matter in the hands of the G.P.O. which, of course meant that it came to my department.

I have mentioned letters being specially delivered to bookmakers when we had suspected that they were

being swindled through the Post Office. It was occasionally my experience to take such letters to the bookmakers concerned, and I often smile when I think of the expressions of gratitude on their faces when they learnt how careful the Post Office was. Some of them might even have imagined that the Department made a special point of looking after bookmakers! One of them, who had been thoroughly bilked by a crook whom we were exposing, actually showed tears of gratitude.

Yes, tears of gratitude in a bookmaker's eyes!

CHAPTER X

AGAINST MYSELF

It all began with the overseers' breakfast which was continually spoiled by falls of dust from a hole in the ceiling at the side of the wall above their fixed table. Almost every day, just as they had begun to enjoy themselves, there would be a puff of plaster-dust which got either into their eyes or their bacon, or both. The scene was a big District Sorting Office in London where it was the practice of the overseers on early morning duty to make their own breakfasts during a break allowed for the purpose.

Naturally they made complaints, and a man was sent up to mend the hole which opened into the space between the ceiling and the floor of the room above, which was a large room containing wash-basins for use of the staff. When the man made his examination he received a surprise, for, in the space, he came across a large number of opened letters and postal packages. He immediately reported the matter to the postmaster who at once telephoned to us at the Investigation Branch. I at once asked him to suspend the man's operations and to take precautions that no one in the office was told of the discovery. Then I went round to investigate the matter myself.

An examination revealed that there was a space behind one of the wash-basins. It was through this that the packages had obviously been dropped. No doubt the person who dropped them had thought it an easy way of getting rid of opened letters containing postal orders and letters which proved to contain nothing of value.

It is not a difficult matter for a thief to choose letters likely to contain cash. Thus, letters addressed to the smaller hire purchase furnishing companies generally contain instalments sent in the form of postal orders by their customers. The same applies to mail order firms advertising cheap articles for sale. That great rarity, a dishonest sorter, need not be particularly clever in order to select likely packages from the sorting table.

Having made our discovery the problem arose of how to keep observation in that room and catch the thief dropping letters behind the wash-basin. There was, of course, the other method of trapping him at the sorting table, but this is extremely difficult in a large and busy office. Moreover, in this case we knew the thief's movements though we did not know the thief.

I decided to take the foreman porter of the office into my confidence, and get him to procure for me a large cupboard from one or other of the many departments in the building. This he was able to do, and on my instructions, he had it placed in the wash-room. It was not quite so big as I had hoped, for it was my intention to keep observation from

within that cupboard! Fortunately my small build made it just possible to get inside, and as we had made a chink commanding the wash-basin it seemed as though the thief's days were short.

It was, of course, necessary for the cupboard to be locked; otherwise some prying worker would be sure to open it to see what it contained. Consequently I had the key so that I might lock myself inside. The experience made me feel a good deal of sympathy with the late Guy Fawkes, part of whose torture at the Tower was to be placed in a stone chamber called The Little Ease, just large enough to contain him in a crouching position. Still, I had a rather snappy capture in view, so I did not mind the inconvenience.

Needless to say, the appearance of the cupboard in the room caused much comment among the users of the basins, and I listened to many an interesting discussion about it. What the foreman porter had not told me, however, was that a number of postmen were in the habit of playing football there in their spare time, the ball being made of paper and string. To them the advent of the cupboard was no small matter, for it was placed in their "field" of play.

As the overseers had said that the showers of dust fell on their table only at breakfast-time, it seemed that that was the hour when the thief was most active. I therefore only spent about an hour and a half in my cupboard; but, believe me, that was quite long enough; especially as the cupboard was an old one with a somewhat unpleasant smell about it.

For several mornings I kept observation thus, but nothing more exciting than the postmen's curses was my reward. Indeed one of the overseers said they had not enjoyed their breakfasts so free from dust for a long time.

On the fourth morning the postmen were more than usually put out about the old cupboard, for one of their company who had been on leave had returned with a "sorbo" ball, ignorant that their sport had been held up. The sight of that sorbo ball was more than the postmen could stand, and one of them, pointing to my hiding place said "Let's move the —— thing." And move it they did.

Their method might almost have been chosen to give me torment. Firstly they turned it on end, with me upside down; then they banged it over on its side. Finally they trundled it into a corner and left it with me the wrong way up. Then they began their game of football which lasted at least half-an-hour, one of the longest half-hours I have ever spent.

At last they had to resume duty and I was left with the problem of how to get out. At first I could not find the key, which had been on the floor when "moving" began; then, when I found it, I could not make it open the doors, which was probably due to my having to make the attempt whilst upside down. After a time I became almost frenzied, for I have a horror of closed spaces. The Greeks had a name for it—*claustrophobia.* I also had my own name for it at the time! In desperation I set my feet against the

doors, and, with my back against the opposite side, pushed with all my might. Instead of the doors opening as I hoped, however, the whole back gave way and fell with a clatter to the floor with me on top of it.

I realised that the clatter would soon bring someone to the room and I hastily darted through a side door which led to a little-used corridor and eventually found my way to the postmaster's room. To him I explained that further observation in the wash-room was impossible, and together we evolved a system of watching the sorting tables. Within three days we had collared the culprit, who was none other than the foreman porter himself who, taking advantage of the overseers' breakfast hour, had managed to secure letters whilst apparently attending to the lights.

He went to prison, of course, but he must often have laughed to himself about the affair, for, as I learnt later, he was in the room watching the postmen bundling me about, knowing all the time that I was in the cupboard.

Another story which I tell against myself had its origin in a dock town on the Thames where numerous postal thefts had been occurring. A colleague and I had the matter in hand, but found ourselves unable to catch the culprit, though we felt certain he was one of the inside staff of the Post Office there. Acting on the principle, however, of the guilty person often being the least suspected, we decided to test the

honesty of the postmen delivering letters in the district to which the missing letters were directed.

Quite a number of the stolen letters had been addressed to a hire-purchase firm, and my colleague went up and interviewed them, arranging for certain test letters to be sent to them, containing postal orders. We made sure that the letters were in the postman's bag, so that, were they not delivered, there was only one quarter in which to look for the culprit.

The letters were placed in the evening round, and later my colleague and I called at the business premises to see if the postman had delivered them. He had done so all right, and my colleague took possession of them with the intention of taking them back to headquarters. We were not returning that night to the Gravesend P.O. but were going back to London, where my colleague had an appointment for an evening out.

At the station he wished to make a telephone call, asking me to wait.

"And by the way, old man," he said, "I'd forgotten about staying late in Town and am rather short of money. Got any?"

"Sorry," I said, "but I happen to have very little myself."

"Oh, very well," he replied, "I can cash these test orders and pay for them to-morrow at the office."

That seemed to me an easy way of getting over the difficulty, especially as I was a witness to the bona fides of the occasion. Then he said:

"You might do me a favour whilst I'm telephoning, Cartwright. Slip round to the nearest Post Office and cash these orders. They're thirty bob altogether. It'll save time."

Accordingly I took the orders and hurried to a Post Office which was close at hand. Calmly I handed them over the counter to the postmaster.

"Half a minute," he muttered as he looked at them. Then he disappeared into his room at the back of the office.

My mind must have been more upon the train to London than anything else, for I suspected nothing until the postmaster reappeared—this time through the street door of the office. With him were two burly butchers, one armed with a chopper, the other with a knife, and, as though to add to the drama of the occasion, the chopper was red with blood. The postmaster was pale as a ghost and for a few long seconds was unable to speak. Then he gasped out the word:

"Stolen!"

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

The butchers closed in on me, and the one held his knife a few inches from my heart.

"You know what he means right enough," he said. "Them postal orders have been stolen and you know it. One movement of yours and this goes through your liver. *Right* through."

Vainly I protested.

"Give me a chance to explain," I pleaded. "I'll tell you just how I got them." Meanwhile I was feverishly thinking out some story to tell them if

they did give me the chance, for, of course, I did not wish to tell them the truth.

Eventually I had partly to do so, for presently two constables arrived in a rush. Meanwhile a large crowd had gathered at the Post Office door, which the police promptly closed.

"Now then," said one of them to the postmaster, "is this the man you allege has brought in some stolen postal orders?"

"I don't allege it, I *say* it," said the postmaster emphatically and producing the orders. These are the orders, and they have been circulated to me by the authorities as stolen. There've been a number of stolen orders cashed here lately and the Post Office detective has given me special warning."

"But these may not have been stolen," said the more decent of the police officers.

"Oh, yes, they have," replied the postmaster. "I'd already got the numbers on a pad. Here it is."

So saying he reached behind the counter and produced the pad.

The policeman glanced at it and then turned to me.

"I think you'd better come along with us," he said. "It looks a pretty clear case to me."

Inwardly I was cursing my colleague who had evidently overlooked the fact that he had caused the numbers of the postal orders to be sent to this Post Office which was where the thief had cashed most of his previous orders. It was just bad luck that this

happened to be the office which I had chosen for cashing the test orders. There was nothing left for me to do but to tell them sufficient to make them release me from the unpleasant position in which I was in.

"As a matter of fact I'm a P.O. detective myself," I said, "and I'd have told the postmaster before if he and his —— butchers had given me a chance."

With this I produced my official card and other documents in support of my statement. Whilst the police were examining them the postmaster examined me off his own bat.

"If those are test postal orders," he said, "how do you come to be cashing them?"

"There's a reason," I said, glancing suspiciously at the two butchers, "but I'm very sorry I cannot give it you in the presence of these men."

"Well, we're not going till we see all's square and above board," said one of the butchers. "There's some clever blokes about in these days, and you may be one of them."

The policeman looked at me curiously.

"P'raps there's something in what he says," said one of them. "How can we be sure that you're the rightful owner of those papers?"

By this time I began to lose patience. "For heaven's sake, then, ring up the postmaster at the General Post Office here and give them a description of me. Then let me speak."

This the postmaster did forthwith, and a few minutes later I was a free man, much to the undis-

guised disappointment of the police officers, the butchers and the huge crowd outside.

I found my colleague anxiously awaiting me at the station. What I said to him, however, would not very well fit into this book!

Perhaps the most amusing of my stories against myself is that of a forged money order case in London which I was called upon to investigate. It was a serious case, for there was a man at work somewhere who had managed to find a method of printing money orders to scale so perfectly that it was only with difficulty that they could be distinguished from the real thing. The false orders were printed from type, and the man had evidently even made a series of date stamps with which to stamp the orders.

Now, as everyone knows, in the case of money orders an advice is sent to the office of payment from the office at which the order is bought. It is therefore impossible for a forger to stroll into a post office and cash a forged order. What, then, did our man do? The answer is quite simple. He worked with crossed money orders which, of course, must be passed through a bank. And this is how he did it:

He would go, we will say, to Gloucester, where he would make an examination of the various jewellers' windows in that city. In one of these he would see, perhaps, a necklace priced at £35. He would study this very carefully so that he could describe it in a letter to the jeweller later on. Then he would return to London.

Back in Town he would take one of his forged

money order forms and fill it in for £35 and cross it "& Co." Next he would write a letter to the jeweller on similar lines to the following:

"Dear Sir.—Passing through Gloucester yesterday I saw in your window a necklace which I greatly admired. As I have to give my niece a wedding present this week I have told her of the necklace and she is eager to have it. Will you therefore please send it to me by return of post. As it is the only necklace in your window at that price you will know which one to send.

"In payment I send you herewith a Money Order, crossed, for that amount.

"Yours faithfully,

"F. St. J. Fortescue."

This letter would be sent from an accommodation address, perhaps a tobacconist's shop, though in a fashionable postal district such as W.1.

The money order, being, as I said, almost indistinguishable from a genuine one, would be accepted by the jeweller without suspicion. The fact that his unknown customer had not sent a cheque he would attribute to the customer wanting the article at once. Had he sent a cheque the jeweller would very naturally have waited for it to be cleared. In the case of the money order, he would simply pass it into his bank in the fond belief that it was as good as the same amount in cash.

The order would eventually reach headquarters

in London and the fraud detected by the absence of the necessary documents which should have been there to check with it. By that time, however, the necklace would have been received by " Fortescue ", and converted into what the Americans call " Worthwhile ".

When I say that four such orders were passed through the banks in a single week, it will be seen that the matter was assuming alarming proportions. There was no apparent remedy save catching the actual perpetrator of the frauds, for it would have been impossible to notify every jeweller and every bank. In short, Mr. Fortescue appeared for the moment to be in clover.

Such, then, was the problem with which I was confronted. My first step was to visit the jewellers in their several towns and examine the letters, and find out anything else which might assist me in getting my man. These visits, however, were of no immediate help; meanwhile other orders were coming into London from places as far apart as Norfolk and Warwickshire.

My next step was to discuss the matter with an expert on printing machines who, after examining the orders, gave me an idea of the kind of machine which the crook was using. I then began systematically to visit every maker of that kind of machine in London, determined, if that failed, to work the Provinces just as intensively. Even if my man had bought a second-hand machine I felt sure that I would eventually track him down.

I was unexpectedly lucky, for within a week I came upon a manufacturer who had recently sold such a machine to a man with an address in North London. To this address I went with all speed. Yes, there had been a Mr. Carson—the name the manufacturer gave me—but he had gone. The woman at the house, however, was not averse to giving me all the help she could. She described the man to me; then she remembered that he had told her that some of his relatives kept a small general store in a street in Clapham. He had evidently told her this when in a conversational mood, little expecting that it might eventually prove to be his undoing, as it did.

That same day I went to the street in Clapham, and after a little investigation, discovered the shop. There were several houses opposite and to the occupier of one of these I went and, showing my credentials, asked leave to use their upstairs front room from which to keep observation upon the street below. I did not, of course, mention the shop. The occupier was a decent fellow and readily assented, promising that he would not say a word about it to his neighbours. I arranged to begin my observation on the next day.

As it happened, the occupier and his wife were going to the seaside for the day, so, when they went next morning, they left me a key and I found myself in entire occupation of the premises. I waited all morning, but saw no one save apparent customers enter the shop. Then, in the afternoon there entered

a man who seemed to tally with the description which "Carson's" late landlady had given me. That he was the man I soon became convinced, for an hour passed without him leaving the shop. He was evidently in the private apartments of the shopkeeper.

Two hours passed; then three; then four. It had grown dark, and the street was lighted, when at last I saw him emerge. In a moment I was down the stairs and had let myself out of the front door. My man was well in sight and I started to follow him in order to find out where he lived and where, probably, he had his small printing machine which was causing so much alarm.

Now it was almost an obsession of mine, when keeping observation, that I, myself, might be under observation, too. It had happened more than once in my career that crooks, suspecting that I might be following them, put one of their gang on to follow *me*. Instinctively, therefore, I looked behind me as soon as I was a score of yards from the house which I had been using. To my discomfiture I saw a man emerge from the next house and walk briskly after me as I followed my own suspect.

Along several criss-cross streets walked the latter, and each time I glanced behind there was the next-door fellow, still "on my tail". Presently, with me but a few yards behind him, my man turned into the main street and crossed it to where a rush-hour crowd was waiting for their home-bound trams. Here he joined the crowd to wait for his own particular

tram, and I took my place close beside him, hoping that the other fellow had given up following me. I looked around, but could not see him in the vicinity.

A few minutes later a tram came along and there was the usual scramble for it. It was evidently the tram for which my man was waiting, for he fought his way to it and boarded it. Feeling most elated I did the same, only to find myself pulled suddenly backwards from it. Angrily I looked round—*into the face of a policeman*, behind whom was the fellow from next door! Meanwhile, of course, the tram had gone.

The policeman had a tight grip on my arm and, looking down fiercely upon me said:

"I must ask you to accompany me to the police station. This man alleges that you have broken into the house next door to his while the people are away. Come along."

I fiercely denied the accusation, though, of course, I was anxious not to divulge the truth. My follower repeated that he had heard noises in the house and that he had seen me leave it. And so to the police station the three of us went, where I was taken into a room by the constable whilst my accuser remained outside. Here I was able quickly to tell the officer my position and to ask for the Divisional Inspector whom I knew. The latter was soon with us and everything cleared up so far as I was concerned. The difficulty was how to get rid of the other man. This the Inspector did with considerable tact, saying that

he could safely leave me in their hands and that they would act quickly.

When the occupier of my house returned from his day at the seaside he heard a pretty story from my shadower, who had "heard me ransacking drawers and smashing things about." The occupier was one of the greatest "sports" I ever met. He asked the fellow inside to see for himself that nothing at all had happened. "You must have dreamt it," he said, to the other's disgust.

The police made inquiries as a matter of form, and, so far as that incident was concerned, it was allowed to fizzle out. But I was now sure of my man, and next day saw me in that street again disguised as a working man with a muffler. In a couple of days I had traced him to his address, and an arrest soon followed. At first he disclaimed all knowledge of the affair, but we soon found the whereabouts of his printing plant, with the result that for a couple of years liberty was merely a memory to him.

CHAPTER XI

"HITTING THE HIGH SPOTS"

As I have mentioned elsewhere in this book, keeping observation on suspected crooks can be the dullest job in the world. Occasionally, however, one gets a stroke of compensation in the form of watching a really interesting and amusing bunch of crooks. Possibly in the story I am about to relate I am not entitled to use the word "crooks", for we never actually secured sufficient evidence to secure an arrest. Nothing but cast-iron evidence can ever be used by the Investigation Branch. In this case we just lacked the vital links in our chain, though the circumstantial evidence was almost overwhelming.

I suppose I should really have been disappointed with the result of this observation by myself and an occasional colleague; yet, so amusing was the whole affair, that I felt I had been to a great extent repaid for the great disappointment which it entailed. The wonder at the time was that I did not have an attack of *delirium tremens* before we ceased operations, for it was essential that much of our observation had to be done in public-houses. Nearly all of it, in fact. Never, in the whole of my career, did I see such a welter of carousing as was indulged in by the gang which we were watching, and, as it was necessary

for me to play the part of a fellow reveller, I had to use all my wits to dodge the drinks which I was expected to take.

The time goes back to shortly after the war when a valuable registered mail bag had disappeared in transit. The contents included jewellery and a large amount of cash—a very considerable haul indeed, and it had vanished into thin air one foggy winter's night. By a process of deduction which I am not at liberty to describe, our suspicions fell on a man who had once held a temporary job in one of the London Post Offices. Not him alone did we suspect, but several friends also. For the purpose of this story I will call him Penton. His friends I will call Mr. and Mrs. Wilkin.

At the time when we decided to keep observation the latter were living at a south-coast resort, and to this town I went, taking a room at a family and commercial hotel which I gathered they had made their social headquarters. On the first evening of my stay there both Sam Wilkin and his wife came into the smoking-room, or bar-parlour, giving themselves a very hearty welcome! It was drinks round for everybody as soon as they bustled in, and I found myself included in their hospitality. Sam was a short, fat man with apple cheeks and about as deep a laugh as I have ever heard. To balance this, as it were, his wife had a most high-pitched voice, and the pair of them might well have been a couple of comedians of the old style. Despite Sam's air of geniality I was soon able to detect a sharp look in his eye which was

directed here, there and everywhere whilst he was making his wise-cracks. Frequently it turned upon me, and I gathered that I was the only stranger in a bar full of habitués.

Presently he turned to the landlord.

"Can't you introduce me to your friend?" he blustered. "Don't like drinking with chaps I don't know."

At once the landlord, who seemed on good terms with everyone, introduced me as Mr. Ellis, which was the name I gave him, and said I had come to the coast to recover from influenza—another of my necessary mis-statements! Sam Wilkin shook me warmly by the hand, said he was glad to meet me, and ordered drinks all round the room again.

Later on, having returned his hospitality, I stated that I was going to bed, pleading that I was not quite in form after my recent illness. At this Mr. Wilkin laughed heartily.

"Gentleman says he ain't in his usual form," he said loudly to the company. "Well, we'll soon get him back to it if he stays here long enough, won't we, boys?" Then he turned to the landlord and said: "Send him up a double brandy to his bedroom at my expense. He'll soon forget about his influenza."

I was glad to reach my room, and I well remember sitting on my bed and wondering what kind of a social tornado had struck me. The brandy arrived in due course at the hands of the potman who, I was glad to find, was not averse to drinking it on my

behalf under pains of various penalties if he should say I had not drunk it.

On the following evening Mr. Wilkin turned up again, and it was clear that he had not spent the day by his fireside, drinking tea. He met me in the entrance to the hotel and promptly shook my hand with much vigour.

"How's the influenza?" he asked with one of his deep laughs. "Brandy done it good?" So saying he took me by the arm and led me into the bar and ordered drinks.

There was none of his other acquaintances there, so that I had him more or less to myself. In some way I seemed to have put myself in his good books, which, I was given to understand, was not a light accomplishment.

"It isn't everybody that Sam Wilkin takes a fancy to," he said, "but I like *you*, and I'm glad you've come down here. Hope we see a lot of each other."

I reciprocated the hope. Then he added: "I've got one or two pals coming in to-night, so you can join them and the missus. They're all good sorts."

This looked as though it was blowing up for another rough night, but I determined to see it through as well as I could, for, so far, I had obtained no information except that Wilkin was uncommonly easy with his money, and that he was supposed to have bought a lot of expensive furniture for a partly-furnished house which he had rented on the best part of the promenade. It was fortunate for me that

his friends and his wife were late in turning up, for he spoke freely to me whilst we sat waiting.

"I've had a few ups and downs in my time," he said, "but I'm on the 'up' now, and I reckon I'll stay there. Had a bit of money left me a few months ago; then I bought some shares and they went from good to better until I cleaned up a comfortable packet, and so did some of my pals. By the way, what line of business are *you* in when you haven't got influenza?"

"Insurance agent," I lied.

"Well, I suppose there's money in *that*," he commented, "but you need a magnifying glass to see it. Still, it takes all sorts to make a world. I suppose I'm what you'd call one of the lucky ones."

"Don't be too sure of that," I felt like adding, for I was feeling pretty certain that the display of money which I had seen was not unconnected with the missing mail-bag. Instead, I asked him how long he intended to stay in the town. The question was a feeler. Sam Wilkin gave one of his laughs before he replied.

"For the rest of my life, I hope," he said, whereupon I affected surprise.

"You don't mean to say you've made enough to retire on?" I asked.

"You've got it right," was his reply. "The few thou I've made lately, and what I'd already got, have about put me right for life." Then his eyes twinkled shrewdly as he added: "And I daresay I'll make a bit more in the same way before long."

This last utterance caused me to think deeply. Was there another mail-bag theft being contemplated? The suspected ex-postal worker, Penton, might possibly be up to some tricks based on his knowledge of the inside of certain Post Offices. Sooner or later, I hoped, the name of Penton might be mentioned by him and I might be able to glean a little information about that gentleman himself.

Presently Wilkin insisted that I should go outside and have a look at his car. There I saw a spanking Austin, evidently not long out of the show-room.

"What do you think of that!" he roared, slapping me on the back. "Beauty, isn't she? Had an American one before that, but didn't seem to like it, somehow, so I got this one."

I expressed my admiration, and asked him if he got a good allowance for his previous car.

"Allowance!" he echoed. "There wasn't any allowance. I've got the other one still. The missus is learning to drive it."

His remark took my breath away, for there seemed to be no limit to the money which had come Sam Wilkin's way. Even if he and Penton *were* responsible for the lost mail bag, it could hardly account for all this wealth, especially as one could assume that Penton would have had his share out of it. There had been several other robberies of late, quite considerable, but not of the value of the mail bag which had given cause for our present investigations. Wilkin made no secret of the fact that his money was recently acquired, whilst his wife seemed unable to refrain

from mentioning incessantly their hard-up days. They could scarcely have attracted suspicion more effectively had they tried. Possibly their very prodigality blurred the perception of the local users of the hotel which, when the Wilkins were about, was practically a free house.

On this particular night as I sat talking with Sam Wilkin there was a sudden commotion in the entrance hall, from which came the high-pitched voice of Mrs. Wilkin, backed by the voices of several men. In short, the party had arrived—the good sorts to whom Sam had previously referred. It was not long before they all flowed into the bar-parlour, accompanied by two large pedigree Borzois hounds, worth, I was told later, at least fifty pounds. My eyes turned from the creatures to the party, and, to my great satisfaction I saw Penton among them.

Immediately Penton ordered drinks for them all and for Sam Wilkin, who promptly introduced me, so that I could be included in the hospitality. Penton, a slight, shrewd-looking man, eyed me up and down for a few seconds. I had, of course, known him by sight, and at first I feared that he might have noticed me on some occasion, but my fears were soon dispelled when he shook me by the hand and said that any friend of Sam Wilkin's was also a friend of his.

By this time quite a number of "regulars" had arrived in the bar with that mysterious alacrity which one finds when there are free drinks in the air. To all and sundry Mr. Penton offered drinks, and by the end of the evening must have made a large hole

in five pounds, and so also had Wilkin done. This expenditure, on the top of the heavy day which they had all obviously had, indicated that they could not have spent much less than ten pounds apiece on drinks. Nor was the day an exception, for I learnt by discreet conversation with the landlord that this kind of thing was a regular occurrence. He also confided in me that it was not so good for trade as it might appear, for it had driven away a number of his better-class customers.

Whence came all this cash so lightly scattered? There was only one answer to the question, so far as I could see, and I eagerly hoped that I would soon be able to prove it. Occasionally I would observe Wilkin and Penton in conversation together, but, although I managed to hear them at times, I learnt nothing of advantage. I soon decided that these two were the men with the money, and that the others were hangers-on whom they had picked up through their racing activities. Penton had apparently driven them down from London in his own car, which I discovered to be of an expensive make. Not bad for an ex-postal employee! But, alas, you cannot arrest a man simply because he has a lot of money!

With the aid of a large fern-tub, into which I was able to pour some of my drinks surreptitiously, I was able to survive the evening, having promised to go for a motor-run with Penton and Wilkin next day, for the latter had by this time decided to stay the night, largely, I gathered, as a traffic expedient!

Now, although I had seen much evidence of

wealth, I was to see still more on the morrow at the Wilkins' house. It was here that I had to call preparatory to the motor-trip which I was already beginning to dread. Accordingly I made my way to the house, accompanied by the landlord, who had also been invited. I found the landlord to be a very decent fellow, and I gathered the impression that he was greatly puzzled by our friends.

"They stayed with me for a week before they took the furnished house," he said, "and I was glad when they got out, for they'd almost taken possession of the house. Still, you've become a friend of theirs, so I'd better not talk like that."

"They're certainly curious people," I agreed, "and most generous."

"Ah, that's the point," added the landlord in a tone which indicated that he had some suspicions as to his lavish customers. I decided, however, not to interrogate him further. I had long since learnt to be very careful on these occasions, and, for all I knew, he might be pumping me at the behest of Penton and Wilkin.

It does not pay a detective to imagine that he has a monopoly of suspicion, as I learnt to my cost when I once shadowed two crooks for ten days, even to the extent of asking them into some rooms which I then occupied, for a drink. The end of this was that one morning I received a letter from them which made me feel a fool for many a long day afterwards. They said that they had had a good laugh out of me, for they had suspected that I was a "split" (detective)

of some kind or other from the beginning. They also mentioned that I would not see them again for dust. Nor did I, for they vanished into thin air from that very day.

I found the Wilkin house to be a strange combination of a place which had been rented furnished, but had received numerous additions in the way of furniture which in no way matched that already there. The actual owners had obviously been people of tolerably good taste and had furnished in the antique style. To this the Wilkins had added a number of pieces which clashed furiously with it. But they had spent money all right. In fact it seemed as though they had bought simply for the pleasure of riotous spending.

I found Penton, who had stayed the night there, engaged with a stiff brandy-and-soda, as were also Mr. and Mrs. Wilkin.

"Pour out one for these two lads," roared Wilkin. "If they've got a hang-over like mine they'll need it."

I tried to avoid this early start by protesting that I had no suspicion of a hang-over, but this only made my case worse.

"Well, you must have a damned good head," was Wilkin's comment, "and you certainly can stand a stiffener without taking harm." Whereupon Penton poured me out a large drink which I had to face without the kindly assistance of a tub of ferns.

After we had chatted for a time, and listened to several new stories told by Mrs. Wilkin without any

noticeable expurgation, Wilkin suggested that he might show me over the house.

"You'd be surprised," he said. And I was.

He had another brandy at a gulp; then he beckoned me to follow him, which I did. As we went round the house he pointed out every article by its price. "This cost me so-and-so." "I could have got this for less if I'd played my cards right." "I've been offered a profit on that one already." And so he went on. He was obviously in a condition for which the night before and that morning itself were responsible, to say nothing of weeks of bibulism before. I put out as many feelers as I thought prudent, hoping to draw a chance remark which might result in a piece of cast-iron evidence; yet not a word did I get which might be of use to me.

In saying this I am but giving a description of the usual lot of the Investigation Branch man who is detailed to keep observation upon suspects. Unlike the police, we cannot arrest on suspicion, or rush a man to the Station, interrogate him and let him go. Nothing in our case served, except definite and conclusive evidence, which accounts for the fact that our periods of observation were much longer than might have obtained had the police been on the job. Yet we had one satisfaction—we rarely brought a man into custody unless we were positive of his guilt.

Presently Wilkin took me into a lumber room.

"Nice little lot there," he said.

I looked around and saw nothing save a deal of junk which included several old suit-cases.

"Getting rid of it, I suppose?" I said, sincerely.

"Oh, yes," came the reply. "I'm getting rid of it just as you would, if it was yours."

I hardly knew what I was supposed to say next. Obviously, I thought, the man was rambling. Meanwhile he had bent down over one of the suit-cases and undone the catches.

"There you are," he exclaimed as he threw back the lid, "Would *you* get rid of *that?*"

To my astonishment I saw that the case was tightly packed with one-pound notes. There must have been at least a thousand of them.

I strove to keep calm.

"Got any more of 'em?" I asked casually.

"Well, you're a cool 'un," he said. "Most blokes have tried to borrow a few." Then he added: "Yes, I've got a few more, but they aren't here."

At that moment I wished I had tried to borrow a dozen, for then I might have found a note which I knew had come from the stolen mail bag. Instead I professed mild astonishment, mainly at the fact that the money was not actually under lock and key.

"Aren't you afraid of burglars?" I asked, whereupon Wilkin burst into one of his fits of laughter and slapped me on the back.

"A mere flea-bite, boy," he exclaimed. "Why, that's nothing to chaps like me and Penton. And I'm ready for any burglars. I got two revolvers upstairs, and the missus has one under her pillow and I have one under mine. So if burglars *did* come,

they'd have a sticky time. Still, as I said, this 'ere's only a flea-bite."

I said little more after this, but I determined to get hold of some of Mr. Wilkin's pound-notes, nevertheless. It was just possible that some of them might be identifiable.

Accordingly I telephoned later in the day to head-quarters asking for a ten-pound note to be sent to me with the intention of getting Wilkin to cash it for me out of his hoard.

"So your friend Penton is a rich chap, also?" I ventured as Wilkin closed the suit-case.

For a second only did he hesitate, but that second was enough to show me that he was on his guard.

"Yes, he's nicely off," was his reply. "He was always comfortable, but I've been able to put him on to some good things which have done him a lot of good. He's lucky with the horses, too. Never seems to touch a wrong 'un."

With this answer I had to be content, for we had now rejoined the fortunate Penton himself. After this there was a visit paid to my hotel "just to have one for the road" before setting off in the cars. The visit lasted about an hour and then, to my relief, we made for the country, where we lunched at a palatial hotel, so palatial that I really think it awed the party a little, for there was no more excessive drinking. The afternoon was spent in a secluded smoking-room into which a diplomatic manager adroitly shepherded us from the main lounge. As my hosts evidently intended to sleep I strolled out

into the grounds, followed, slightly to my surprise, by the landlord of my hotel.

As we strolled around he suddenly said to me:

"Mr. Ellis, what do you make of the Wilkins, if I might ask you such a question."

He asked the question with such suddenness that I was somewhat taken aback.

"Well, they certainly seem very hospitable," I replied. "In fact a little too hospitable for my liking. Who are the other two men who came with Penton; are they business friends?" (I have often found it convenient to avoid answering one question by asking another.)

"None of 'em seem to *have* any business," said the landlord. "That's the point. I just wondered if the same thing had struck you."

"Now that you mention it, perhaps it does seem rather odd," I said, non-committally. "Do the others come here often?"

"Yes, they come to my place regularly and stay the night, sometimes doing nothing but drink for days at a time. Still, I suppose they've a right to spend their money how they like, though I wish they wouldn't make such a hell of a racket with it in my house. Have you noticed the old woman's rings?"

"Can't say that I have," I replied.

"Perhaps she's not wearing them to-day," said the landlord, "but she was wearing a couple of beauties in my place one night when a chap in the jewellery trade from Birmingham was staying there. He said they were worth a few hundreds."

"I'll keep a look-out for them," said I, and there the conversation ended. Needless to say I would have liked to chat more freely with the landlord, for he was genuinely disturbed, as I could see. Moreover, he was a good fellow. But I thought it policy for the present not to appear too interested.

When we returned that evening we dropped Mrs. Wilkin at their house whilst the rest came along to the hotel. Mrs. Wilkin was to come along later. At the hotel the old game of drinking began, but I had managed to get my seat by the fern-tub again!

About an hour later Mrs. Wilkin arrived in a hired limousine. For reasons best known to herself she was in all the glory of evening regalia, and Sam beamed upon her with almost boyish pride of ownership. I duly admired her as I was commanded to do. Also, to myself, I admired her diamond rings. I had, of course, a pretty accurate description of the several rings which had been in the stolen mail-bag, but Mrs. Wilkin's ornaments did not tally, which, indeed, I did not expect them to do. Even though they were the stolen diamonds they would probably have been re-mounted and possibly re-cut.

The evening passed in the usual Wilkin-Penton manner and I was more than glad when the opportunity came to go to bed. I was pretty sure now that in this bunch I had the perpetrators of the mail-bag robbery and of other thefts besides, but so far there was no evidence of the kind on which the Investigation Branch could act.

On the following day my ten-pound note arrived,

and at noon, having had the customary "fresheners" with Wilkin and the others, I drew him aside and asked him if he could cash me a tenner.

"Course I will, boy," he said, "but I haven't got that much on me at the moment—not in pound notes, anyhow. Now, if you'd asked me to split a hundred into fivers I'd have done it on the spot. Still, come up with us to the house when we go, and I'll get it for you."

This was just what I wanted, for it was evident that he was to dip into his hoard and not give me notes which he had acquired by changing notes locally. An hour later, therefore, I was in possession of ten one-pound notes, the numbers of which I duly sent to headquarters.

You can imagine my disappointment, however, when later I heard that there was no record of the numbers of the notes to be found. Needless to say, it is impossible for the banks or anyone else to keep a check on the vast number of notes which daily pass through their hands, though a note is kept of every twentieth, say. It had been my hope that one of my ten would have been traceable and identified with the robbery; but inquiries at the banks through which the stolen notes had passed proved fruitless. Luck was on the side of Wilkin and Penton.

A few days later the former, who, I believe, on the advice of a doctor, had put the brake on his drinking, confided to me that he had placed all his money in the bank, saying that my remarks about burglars had somewhat scared him. Personally I thought

that his return to normal mentality had shown him the folly of having shown his money to so many people, for I knew that I was far from being the only one. That he had placed it in the bank I could scarcely believe, for the obvious reason of his keeping it in the suitcase was that he feared the bank might have suspicions. No, he had simply changed its hiding-place.

There now came a period when Wilkin was frequently absent from the locality for a day or two at a time. Sometimes, according to the landlord, neighbours had heard him returning, accompanied by other men, in the early hours of the morning. Keeping observation on him thus became difficult. Needless to say, his absence from my hotel was a source of curiosity to some, and a source of serious concern to many more who had had so many cheap evenings at his expense and had hoped for others.

If anyone were at all pleased it was the landlord, for Wilkin and his friends had driven away most of his good customers, whose place had been taken by a worthless crew of hangers-on.

"Of course, you've been friendly with them," he said, "and you may not agree with me, but I've got a notion that the whole of the Wilkin bunch are up to no good, and I've as good as told 'em so. All this money that's floating about them like water isn't honestly got. That's my opinion."

"Why are they so open about it, then?" I asked.

"Because they're a lot of drunken fools and can't keep their mouths shut," he replied. "You can see

the money has been got easily by the way they fling it about. Lightly come; lightly go."

"When did you tell him you were curious about his money?" was my next question.

"Last night," replied the landlord. "You had gone to bed and they wanted to stop here drinking half the night, but I couldn't let them, for I've got my licence to think about. Then Wilkin got abusive and I told him a bit of my mind."

This, of course, was no good news for me, for it seemed that the landlord's words would surely put my quarry on their guard. That I was right was proved a few days later as I was sitting in the smoke-room at lunch-time. Wilkin and his wife came in, and, to my astonishment, said they had come to wish me good-bye.

"Why!" I exclaimed, "are you taking a holiday?"

"Going for good," boomed Wilkin. "Place doesn't suit the missus, and, besides, I'm getting a bit fed up with it myself. Going back to London where people don't pry into your affairs as much as they do here. I must say, though, that I've enjoyed your own company, Mr. Ellis."

"I'm very pleased to know that," I replied. "When are you thinking of going?"

His reply was startling:

"When Sam Wilkin makes up his mind to do a thing, he does it without messing about. "We're going *now*. The car's outside waiting for us."

"But what about your house?" I asked when I had recovered from my astonishment.

"Only the furniture was mine and I've sold it to the people who own the house," he said.

Half-an-hour later, after a few farewell drinks, Mr. and Mrs. Sam Wilkin had gone.

As for me, I discussed the matter with my colleagues, and we decided to do no more than keep an eye on Penton, whose address I had discovered. We soon concluded that he had given up Post Office crime, and as it was not our business to watch the general criminal, the matter ended.

I stayed on at the hotel for a couple of days for appearances' sake; then I bade the landlord adieu.

"You'll hear of that lot again," he said, "as sure as my name's what it is. But, so far as I was concerned, he was very far from the mark, for I never saw them again. Nor did I want to do so, for, even to-day it gives me a headache just to think of them.

CHAPTER XII

THE STRIPED TIE

To catch one crook, whilst waiting for another, is an experience which, I imagine, scarcely falls to the lot of the average detective; yet, whilst lying in wait for the "man in the striped tie", I effected the arrest of a man for a crime quite different from that of the man I sought, which was the theft of postal orders from a sorting office in London.

One day, during the war years, I was sitting in my room in the Investigation Branch when there entered a young assistant whom I will call Simpson. He wore a depressed look on his usually cheerful face, and it was obvious that something had gone wrong.

"What is it, Simpson?" I asked, looking up.

"Well, it's like this, Mr. Cartwright," he said. "I've got a really sticky job. Postal Orders are coming in by the dozen, and I've gone through all the handwriting in the office, but I'm blowed if I can pick out a single suspect."

He referred, of course, to stolen postal orders which had been cashed by the thief or thieves, and which had been duly sent to us to deal with.

"I'm beginning to think," he continued, "that if something doesn't happen soon we shall have the

very office pinched from under our noses." Then he mentioned the West-End office from which the postal orders had been stolen. Then he continued:

"We've tried to analyse the sorters there, but it isn't much good these days (it was during the War), for we have to take on so many shady characters in the Service."

He spoke quite truly, for in those years it was with the greatest difficulty that the Post Office carried on at all. Fortunately women proved themselves of great value, though, of course, the whole Service could not be run by them, and therefore, we had to recruit such men as we could, without making the inquiries into their characters which are normally made.

I felt sorry for young Simpson. He was unfit for war service and had been working tremendously hard, as though to make up for the service which he might have rendered to his country in a different way.

"Perhaps I can help you a little?" I suggested and his face brightened considerably.

Presently he and I were going through the paid postal orders and their attendant forms. It appeared that the casher paid more frequent visits to the Shaftesbury Avenue Branch Office than he did to others which he used. Also, by careful inquiry I found that most of the payments had been made between the hours of twelve and three. The case began to interest me and, to my young friend's delight, I said that I would personally spend a few

hours daily at the paying office and see if I could not put an end to the thief's activities. I may say that I was always a great believer in a thief coming to us rather than chasing one suspect here and another there. In this case I undertook a little more than I had bargained for, because, for about a fortnight, my daily observation at that office brought me nothing more exciting than a cup of tea each afternoon. It was just the old humdrum game of waiting—waiting—waiting.

Then, one afternoon, as I was still patiently waiting, there entered at about two o'clock a man. There was nothing particularly distinguishable about him; yet I had a strangely instinctive feeling that something was going to happen. I have often tried to explain that feeling to myself, but have failed. Why, out of all the hundreds of men who had entered that office should I have paid particular attention to this one? I pass it on to those who profess to understand telepathy!

My man walked across to the writing desk, took a pen and began to write. Meanwhile he did what experience had shown me so many crooks do instinctively. He periodically looked furtively round the office, and I knew I was on the right track.

But he took a confoundedly long time in filling in his postal orders, which I assumed he was doing, whilst his frequent glances in my direction made me wonder if he had spotted me and was holding his hand. Accordingly I stepped into a telephone

cabinet and began a spurious conversation through the transmitter.

This move somewhat allayed his suspicions, but still he stayed at that writing desk until at last I left the cabinet and crossed over to the counter at a point near enough for him to hear what I said to the clerk who, of course, knew who I was beforehand.

"What the devil's the matter with your phone?" I demanded with a wink to put the clerk on the *qui vive*. For a moment she was genuinely surprised at my outburst. Then she suddenly understood and made some clever sort of apology, whereupon I recrossed the office and luckily for me found the telephone cabinet, which I had just vacated, occupied by another caller. This gave me every excuse for waiting outside the box, ready to follow my man when the occasion arose. Apparently my conversation with the clerk had convinced him that I was just an ordinary caller, for a few seconds later he left the writing desk and crossed over to the counter—but *not*, to my surprise, to the postal order section. No, he ambled along the counter to the rear of the office, but still making his furtive glances which, however, were not directed towards myself.

Presently he came to the parcel counter, where he leaned over and spoke to the young lady in charge, who immediately went along the counter in search of something. My man's glances round the office now began to be almost feverish; I don't think I ever saw the guilty conscience at work so clearly.

Very soon the girl returned with that ponderous volume of information, the Post Office Directory which she handed to him. Another long delay occurred here whilst he examined page after page; meanwhile his curiosity towards other customers at the counter never flagged.

Presently his eye caught mine, and he gave me a look as much as to say "What the devil are *you* hanging about for?" I immediately entered the telephone box again to deal further with my troublesome call. Then the fun began. He handed back the Directory with profuse thanks and, immediately the girl had gone to replace the book on its shelf, he snatched up a most inviting parcel from the counter. This he tucked under his arm and at once made his way towards the entrance of the office.

In a flash I was out of the box.

"Where are you going with that parcel?" I demanded.

"What?" he asked, as though he had not heard me, and I repeated the question.

"Oh, I'm just taking it back to my office as there's something I've forgotten to include in it. In any case, what the devil's it got to do with you?"

His look had suddenly turned threatening. He was an ugly-looking customer, and a good deal bigger than myself. Still, I had handled bigger men in my time and I was prepared.

"It's got a lot to do with me," I replied, "because you've just stolen it from the parcel counter."

"You little liar!" he exclaimed, and made a dash

for the door. But I was too quick for him and, with a trick I knew well, I had him struggling on the floor. A number of customers made for the door, for in those war days it did not take much to scare people. Meanwhile the clerks behind the counter were astonished to see what was happening. They quite naturally thought I had got hold of the wrong man, for they knew I was on the look-out for the postal order thief, whilst this man had not been to the postal order counter.

The struggle was sharp but short. I succeeded in getting a grip on his collar from which he could not shake me, and, after a good deal of pushing and pulling, got him to the flap of the counter which one of the girls opened for me. There were, of course, no men clerks to give me a hand. When I had got him so far my man gasped that there was some mistake which he could explain, and came almost willingly into the Supervisor's office at the rear. Here I asked the Supervisor to telephone young Simpson, which she did.

It was an awkward wait. My man was protesting violently and threatening me with an action for wrongful arrest and heaven knows what besides. Still, I kept myself between him and the door and in good time Simpson arrived, thinking, of course, that I had captured the postal order thief. His astonishment when he learnt the truth was good to see!

After a little consultation we decided it was a case for locking up, whereupon I asked a clerk to get a

taxi, after which we drove our man to Vine Street Police Station.

The immediate sequel to our arrival at Vine Street was most interesting and is well worth recording. When I had told my story to the station sergeant he stroked his moustache and looked very profound.

"Yes, it seems a clear case," he said, "and I'll get a man to take him in charge."

There was a reserve constable at hand, but it happened that he was due to go on leave the following day. For him to have taken charge of my man might have meant him appearing at the Court next day, and, if there were a remand, on the second hearing also. This, of course, was unthinkable! Policemen's leave was evidently not a thing to be treated lightly!

The reserve man therefore went into the depths of the station to find a man who would take on the job, returning a little later to inform his superior officer, the sergeant, that he could not find a constable anywhere. At this the sergeant stroked his moustache again and looked even more profound.

"Better go upstairs to the C.I.D.," he said, "and fetch one of their blokes down."

This entailed another wait, rather to the amusement of all except the sergeant. Presently the constable came back again to say that there wasn't a single C.I.D. man on the premises. Our prisoner laughed heartily at this, and asked the sergeant if the station was run by Harry Tate, a famous comedian of the day.

"I don't want any lip," growled the sergeant. "There's nothing about this station to laugh at, as you'll find out presently." Then he fell to stroking his long moustache again.

As he did not speak for a minute or so I suggested to him that it really did seem rather silly that a police station hadn't got a "cop" to take charge of a prisoner. Also I asked him what he thought I was going to do with my captive. Prisoners are awkward things to have left on one's hands, I remarked. This seemed to spur the officer into action again.

"I know what we'll do," he said, ignoring my remark and addressing himself to the constable. "Just slip along into Piccadilly Circus and rope in a man on traffic duty."

And that is precisely what was done! In a very short time the constable returned with another officer who duly took our prisoner in charge.

At the Court next day I had no difficulty in proving my case, and, as the prisoner's record was not too good, he received a sharp sentence of three months' imprisonment with hard labour. And now, when all this little affair was over, I found myself still faced with the problem of catching the postal order thief in my desire to help young Simpson.

As soon as the case was over I hurried back to St. Martin's le Grand, where I found Simpson in a state of mind which seemed to be a combination of anger and amusement.

"And *now* what d'you think has happened?" he exploded.

"Anything might happen in this place," I remarked.

"Well," said young Simpson, "while you've been at the Court our postal order bloke has been to Shaftesbury Avenue, P.O. again and cashed a number of orders! Of course I was back in that office without delay, interviewing the paying clerk and her colleagues. I found, as I had so often found before, that a number of people having seen the same man, can give entirely different versions of his appearance. One described him as this; another as that, whilst all varied as to his age. With regard to his headgear, he apparently wore a cap, a soft hat and a bowler!

But there was one feature which was common to all descriptions; each agreed that he wore a peculiarly striped tie. Now here was a valuable clue worth following up, and I at once went to the District Office—where the postal orders had been stolen—and told the overseers the story of the striped tie, asking them to visit the sorting office and see if there were a man there wearing such a tie. I did not go myself for fear the presence of a stranger might put the culprit on his guard.

The overseers' search, however, was fruitless. No such tie was to be seen. Still, it was the habit of some of the sorters to remove collar and tie whilst at work, so it was quite possible that our man was there, perhaps with his tie in his pocket. I also had formed the theory that he was a man who went on duty at three o'clock in the afternoon, which was the beginning of one of the "shifts". I deduced this from the

fact that most of the postal orders had been cashed between noon and three, which perhaps meant this—that the man stole the postal orders whilst at work at night, took them home with him to wherever he lived and cashed them next day at Shaftesbury Avenue which was near his place of work. Mere supposition on my part, but not far wrong, as you will see.

At six o'clock that evening I left the office, having given instructions to the overseers to look out for the tie during the rest of the working night. I had not, of course, overlooked the possibility of my man not continually wearing the striped tie; but in that event I was prepared to instruct observation to be kept until such time as he did wear it again.

I told all this to young Simpson, who tried to be very encouraging to me, though he was not quite successful in hiding his scepticism. He had a surprise next day, however, when he answered a telephone call from the District Office which told him that the tie had been noticed towards the end of the previous evening. As soon as he told me I got into touch with the office myself and ascertained the name and address of the wearer of the striped tie. It appeared that he lived in a road off Upper Street, Islington, and was one of our war-time acquisitions.

The day on which this news came to me was a Saturday, and I learnt that on this day our man would start work at two o'clock instead of three. I therefore guessed that if he had stolen any letters containing postal orders on the previous evening he

would probably cash the latter at Shaftesbury Avenue on his way to work.

Now I had a particular wish that young Simpson should see how things were done, and thus cure his scepticism, but the young men of the Investigation Branch left the office at one o'clock on Saturdays, and Simpson would be among them. I called him into my office.

"Simpson," I said, "I want you to stay late this afternoon."

In a moment I saw his face drop.

"Yes, Mr. Cartwright," he stammered "I—well—yes, I'll stay if you specially want me to."

"I shouldn't ask you otherwise," I replied. "Anyhow, why do you seem doubtful about it?"

"It's all right, Mr. Cartwright. I had an appointment, but I'll put it off." He was a willing chap, Simpson.

"What time is your appointment?" I asked. "Could you keep it if you got away by two-fifteen?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, brightening considerably.

"Very well, then," I said, "I'll bring in your postal order thief in time for you to get away by then."

For a moment he was staggered.

"You're surely joking," he laughed. "How can you promise to catch a thief on time like that?"

"Wait and see," I replied as I dismissed him. It was clear that he refused to take me seriously. Frankly, I was a little scared myself, for I had made a pretty high boast. Yet something seemed to tell me that I was going to succeed.

As soon as Simpson had gone I put on an old cap, turned up my collar and hurried away to Islington. I soon found the house of the suspect, but, when I inspected the position I found that direct observation on the premises could not be maintained for any lengthy period for fear of arousing the suspicions of the inmates. I therefore decided to wait at the top of the road where it ran into Upper Street. My man would be sure to come in that direction if he had not already left home. I had, of course, no definite description of him—nothing, in fact, to work upon except the tie.

For more than an hour I stood at the corner scanning the ties of every man who came up the road. It seemed as though all the striped ties in the neighbourhood were out that morning! Several times I thought I saw my man approaching with a striped tie, and I had to make quick decisions as to whether or not the stripes were "peculiar" as they had been described to me. At last there came a man of about fifty years of age, neatly dressed, and, oh, what joy! wearing a kind of zig-zagged tie which was quite peculiar enough to impel me to follow him.

And so to the Tube Station went we, down the lift and into the train. And so until we were in Charing Cross Road, down which my man walked at a leisurely pace. As he led me into Cambridge Circus, however, into Shaftesbury Avenue his manner changed and life to me became worth living. The nearer he approached the Shaftesbury Avenue Post Office, the greater the interest he took in the people behind

him. As I have mentioned elsewhere, none but the cleverest crooks can resist that longing to look around when they are bent on evil work. As my man approached to within a few doors of Shaftesbury Avenue Post Office he became even more nervous; then, plucking up his courage, he went into the building with a swinging gait.

I followed him into the office, doing a little quick thinking at the same time. Firstly I had to remember the fact that I was by this time well known to the clerks in that Post Office. They had not easily forgotten my rough-and-tumble with the parcel thief a few days before. It was almost a certainty that when they saw me watching a man approaching the postal-order counter their glances would warn the man I wanted to catch. I therefore managed to get into the office and take up a position in alignment with the postal-order counter unnoticed by the staff. Meanwhile my man had gone to the very same writing desk which my parcel thief had used so recently.

Presently he crossed over to the postal-order counter and handed in some orders. The paying clerk looked at the man doubtingly for a moment. Clearly she had recognised the writing with which she had now been familiarised. By this time, however, I had sidled up and taken my place behind him, and, carefully avoiding giving me a glance of recognition, she complied with the wishes of the customer before me. In other words, she paid him the money for the postal orders which he presented.

Here, again the fun began.

"Excuse me," I said, "but I should like a few words with you about those postal orders."

My friend was nothing if not cool. He just gave me a gentle shove with his elbow, yet sufficient to send me back a few paces, for he was a powerful man.

"None of your business," he growled.

"But I'm afraid it is," I answered. "You signed them with a name other than your own, Mr. Blank."

My use of his own name had the effect which it usually has in such cases; it completely disarmed him for a moment. His face went a shade pale, and his next words were uttered in a stammer.

"You—you're talking nonsense," he said, "and my name isn't Blank. It's the same as the one I've put on the orders. Who are you, anyhow?"

I told him that I was an official of the Investigation Branch of the G.P.O. If he felt any alarm he managed to conceal it.

"Well, you're making a very serious mistake," he said, "and it's a mistake you'll have to pay for."

Of course, I had heard all that bunkum many times before and was impervious to it. In any case, I had caught a glimpse of his handwriting as I stood behind him and knew that it was the same as that on the many orders which Simpson had shown me.

"Look here," I said sharply, "we may as well get this straight. I know your name, I know your address and I know that you are a sorter in the Post Office. The best thing you can do is to come with me to

headquarters, and, if you have any explanation to make, you can make it there."

This quietened him considerably, and he muttered his acquiesence. It was now necessary for me to get a taxi, which was not the easiest thing in those days; they all seemed to be commandeered by army officers.

"Why go to the expense of a taxi?" volunteered my man. "Underground would be cheaper—and probably quicker."

"Don't be anxious," I reassured him. "I've got plenty of time, and the G.P.O. has plenty of money."

I knew, of course, that had we gone by Underground he would have had a good chance of "losing" me in the crowd. Presently he said:

"As a matter of fact, that isn't really my reason. The fact is that riding in taxis always makes me vomit!"

At that moment, however, a crawling taxi overtook us and in a jiffy I had him inside it. We reached headquarters without causing him any gastric inconvenience and I landed him in the police room, where, after a few words to the sergeant on duty, I left him whilst I went across to Simpson's room. Simpson looked up wearily as I entered and glanced at the clock as an intimation of how long he had been kept waiting.

"Yes, I know it's ten minutes past two," I said, laughing, "but do you remember what I said would happen before a quarter-past two?"

"You mean about the postal order bloke?" he said. "Yes, I remember."

"Then perhaps you'd like to take a look at him," I suggested. "I've got him here."

Never did I see a man more astonished.

"You—you don't really mean it?" he exclaimed, adding: "Ah, you're pulling my leg, Mr. Cartwright!"

It was some little time before I could induce him to collect the papers relative to the case and come with me to interview the suspect. It was, of course, short work for us to secure an admission of guilt from our man, and soon he was safely lodged in Bow Street Police Station.

Before Simpson left to keep his appointment he shook me by the hand.

"They always say here that you're a bit of a mystery man," he said, "and I'm damned if you aren't, too!"

CHAPTER XIII

ROUNDING UP THE PHONE CROOKS

To you, who only make odd telephone calls from kiosks, it may seem strange that at one time robberies from coin-boxes assumed such proportions that the Investigation Branch of the G.P.O. became seriously alarmed, and that it took the Branch and Scotland Yard many a weary month to stop the mysterious robberies which had so suddenly made their appearance. I speak now of the years 1931–2.

There had, of course, always been cases of thefts from coin-boxes, but they had been isolated ones and, as such, scarcely worth powder and shot on the part of a great Department such as ours. That was the state of affairs at the beginning of October, 1931.

The case in the following October was, as you will see, very different.

Roughly speaking, the thefts from boxes from January to October of 1931 amounted to a little over £100, representing about £10 a month. Soon they were to reach nearly a hundred times that amount. At that time I personally kept a chart of the weekly deficiencies in boxes, the line of which sometimes went up a little, sometimes down. It was when this line began to go up sharply each week

that I began to see that something must be done, and done quickly. I discussed the matter with my colleagues, who shared my alarm. At first we hoped that the increase was merely coincidence, and that various persons had happened to think of robbing a coin-box at the same time. As the line on the chart began to look like the outline of a mountain side, however, we were forced to conclude that a gang was at work.

Our conclusions proved to be right, for before the next October the robberies were approaching £200 weekly, a sum which made a hole in £10,000 a year, and a sum which showed signs of perhaps doubling itself before long, unless the gang were laid by the heels.

We of the Investigation Branch were well used to dealing with crimes, large and small, which were to some extent centralised; but here was crime distributed over the thousands of kiosks in different parts of London. It was, of course, impossible to watch each one. Even to watch a selected few would have been difficult, for we had no idea as to what moment of the day or night the thieves might strike.

After looking at the case from many angles I discovered that the majority of the losses occurred at boxes which were fitted with a lock which we had designated " C." This lock offered a hundred combinations, twenty only of which were in use in the London telephone service. One key will open all locks of the same combination. That meant that if a thief stole a lock from a certain area and

had a key made to fit it, he would be able to open all the locks in that particular postal district.

There were other types of locks, but none of them offered more difficulty than the "C" type with the exception of the "K" type, which at that time had not come into full use. This lock admitted of a thousand combinations, and was most difficult to pick. A large number of these were ordered later on.

The capture of the kiosk robbers, however, was going to be a difficult job. They worked with the greatest care, and left no clues behind. The various captures which we had made previously had generally been more the result of luck than skill. Occasionally a man was observed by another caller in an adjoining box, and information given to the police, or, if the box were in a post office, to the staff. On one occasion a man dropped the tray of coins in the box. Nothing daunted, he began to pick them up—not an easy matter in the space of a telephone box! But a railway porter had seen him and opened the door to ask him what was his game. The man explained that he had bumped the telephone with his bag and that to his surprise, the money had fallen out. The porter, who, of course, was not aware of the impossibility of this, looked around to call a station official. A moment later his man had gone, never to be seen again.

The time had now come for ourselves, however, when we could no longer trust to luck. Some certain method must be evolved. In my mind I could see that this method must lie in some kind of apparatus

which would give a warning when thieves were at work, and I had many consultations with the Post Office engineers, the outcome of which was the invention of a buzzer of a special type. The invention was not actually my own, though it has often been called " Cartwright's Buzzer."

I should mention that we had already called in the help of Scotland Yard, who had been keeping a sharp eye on old offenders, but it appeared that these gentry had given up the game for good. We then made arrangements with the Metropolitan police for increased observation on " nests " of telephone boxes by the police patrols. But still the thefts continued. At our request the Criminal Investigation Department made a point of giving outgoing patrolmen a brief lecture on the thefts and the areas in which they might possibly occur. Certain arrests were made, but we were unable to get any valuable information sufficient to check the increasing robberies.

For their work in assisting us, various police were paid rewards by the Investigation Branch, with, of course, the concurrence of the Commissioner of Police.

With regard to " my " buzzer, most of the difficulties of ordinary observation applied also to the use of the apparatus. Officially these were divided into three classes:

(*a*) Lack of facilities for keeping direct observation.

(*b*) The fact that observation, to be effective, would have to be continuous over the whole twenty-four hours of each day.

(*c*) The difficulty of fitting the alarms and finding a suitable position in which to fit the alarm buzzer.

Whilst we were thinking over this depressing trio of facts something happened which got us to work right away. Some time previously the coin box of Macaulay 4066, the number of a box in Stonhouse Street, Clapham, had been robbed. We had not taken a great deal of notice of it at the time, but when the theft was repeated "our blood was up", we decided to give our whole-hearted attention to Macaulay 4066! No doubt our friend would come back again to Stonhouse Street.

Repetition of his crime in similar circumstances has been the undoing of many a criminal. For instance, I knew a man who is now serving a long sentence for stealing expensive cigars by means of a trick. He went into a cigar merchant's place, said he was the secretary of a well-known man whom he knew to be a customer of the shop. Ordering five hundred cigars to be sent to the usual country address, he suddenly said: "Oh, I forgot. His Lordship asked me to take a hundred with me now, as he has to send off a wedding present to-night." Result: nearly £20 worth of cigars handed over. But our friend had done this trick twice before, and the first thing the police did, when complaint was made, was to watch out for him. No

doubt, when he comes out of prison, he will try it again.

We hoped our man would do the same. The fact that he had done it twice showed that he was unaware that his previous haul had been noticed. He little knew that every telephone instrument is an "individual" known to the exchange, and all calls coming from it are recorded by a meter. When our collectors go out in a morning to draw the cash from certain boxes they can, if they wish, find out beforehand exactly how much money should be awaiting them. It is a simple matter, therefore, to discover cases of tampering.

Following our thief's second call at Macaulay 4066 I asked and received permission to fix up a buzzer in the kiosk. Therefore, on several foggy nights in November, an observer might have seen in the stilly hours two men working furtively and quickly in the Stonhouse Street, and at times in the kiosk itself. The hour was chosen as an unlikely one for the thief to discover what was being done.

In due time the work was completed, and a line laid from the alarm "gadget" in the kiosk to the local Sub-District Office about 200 yards away, where the actual buzzer, which did the buzzing, was placed. Then we settled down to keep observation.

Few people, I imagine, have much idea of what "keeping observation" may sometimes mean. In this case we waited, day and night, for three whole weeks, working in watches, as sailors do. I myself

took my share, partly because I wanted to be there when the buzzer sounded.

But the buzzer did not sound, and finally, all of us being thoroughly "fed up" with the buzzer, and the Sub-District Office we left the matter in the hands of the Postal Staff there. Then came irony. We had not long been gone when the staff were galvanized one afternoon by hearing the buzzer for which we, ourselves, had waited so long. The thief had come back.

I am afraid, however, that the Postal Staff did not reach the kiosk so soon as we, in our readiness, might have done, for when they reached it both man and cash had gone.

Still, the incident had proved that it was not the buzzer, but the human factor which had failed, and from this we derived some satisfaction.

It now came to our notice that the gang were paying special attention to telephone kiosks in railway stations, possibly because the yield from them was generally greater, or because they thought the hurly-burly of a station afforded them an amount of cover.

Now this promised to suit us very well, for the kiosks are usually near a booking-office from where we could keep observation, and from where we could pounce before the thief could make his escape. After money had been taken from a box at St. Paul's Station, therefore, we obtained permission to fix alarms in the "nest" of boxes in the entrance hall, a few yards from the booking-office in which the little buzzer was placed to play its part a second time.

Here, again, we waited patiently for three weeks, a period which seemed to dog a great many of my cases, not always luckily. In this instance, however, 3 seemed to be my lucky number, for, three weeks from the day of our taking up observation, the buzzer jerked out its good news.

There was no escape for the thief on this occasion, for we were at the box before he had finished emptying the coins into his bag. To his astonishment he found himself immediately under arrest.

"Where the hell did you lot come from?" he asked before he had recovered from his surprise.

All he got in reply was an indication of where *he* was *going*. He proved to be a man named Ralph Higgins, and he was duly brought up at the Mansion House Police Court. We ourselves were so sure that he would be put "inside" for a spell, that on the previous evening we toasted the buzzer to that effect.

But it was not to be. The Bench, with some unexplainable leniency, merely bound him over. I think the prisoner was as surprised as we were. He glanced at me in an amazed sort of way; then he threw me a mocking smile. That smile worried me for a long time, and it was with some pleasure that I was able to return it to him when we again arrested him some time later.

Needless to say, the case was no deterrent to the gang, and the thefts went on as merrily as before. But we were feeling heartened by his arrest, and I felt sure the ultimate victory would be on our side,

as it was. To make sure that this kind of thing would not happen again, however, we made representations asking that in future our prisoners—if any—should be committed for trial at the Old Bailey, where justice is made of sterner stuff.

Following what we called our success at St. Paul's Station, we next installed alarms at Leicester Square Tube Station where there had been a robbery, and here we kept watch—again for about three weeks—without results, when news came to us suddenly that, through the vigilance of a railway porter, two men had been arrested at Vauxhall Station. This porter, aware of the anxiety of ourselves and the police, had kept an eye on the kiosks and had informed the police of two men's suspicious behaviour by the telephones.

The two men arrested were named Carter and Vine, and their arrests led to some useful information being obtained regarding three other men who were opening coin-boxes. The police were informed of our suspicions and the three men were later arrested. We were commended by the Commissioner of Police for our share in this.

In the case of Carter and Vine we were again unfortunate in their keeping out of prison. They were remanded on bail, and Vine absconded from bail. As the charge included conspiracy, Carter could not be tried alone and was discharged.

Though discharged, however, Carter was not long out of our sight, and we were rejoiced to find that he was consorting with no other person than Higgins,

the man who had been bound over at the Mansion House. Moreover, we watched them carefully and found that they were constantly in the company of well-known thieves. It needed no buzzer to arrest them, in due course, in the very act of abstracting money from Reliance 3050; in other words, a kiosk in the Brixton Road.

The arrest of Higgins was particularly fortunate, for, whilst under arrest, he dropped a paper containing telephone numbers which put us on the tracks of others of the gang, including the leader. Higgins and Carter, of course, went to prison this time, and several other arrests followed their going.

Yet the thefts continued, and it was clear that a very large gang was operating. It was also clear that we had not sufficient men in the I.B. to "man" the buzzers which would be necessary to round up the thieves. We accordingly sought the permission of the railway companies to instal buzzers in a large number of stations where the railway staffs could act immediately the buzzer gave the warning. This permission was granted and the I.B. arranged to give rewards to those of the railway staff who effected captures.

Soon we had our "gadgets" fixed in more than twenty stations. It was rather like setting rat-traps!

Quite a few "rats" were caught in this way, and, with this encouragement, we began to think out further methods, for, as fast as we effected captures, so, apparently, did the un-caught thieves extend their operations.

More alarming still was the painfully obvious fact that the thieves had grown wise to our detective methods, which, I am inclined to think, was the result of demonstrations of the buzzer in Court on the recent occasions when we had brought a criminal into the dock.

Be that as it may, the gang certainly learnt how the alarm worked, and took steps to circumvent it. After unlocking a coin-box they would at once hurry from the kiosk, without drawing the slide which would have given them the "swag". They knew that, once the slide was drawn, an alarm might be sounded.

For a minute or so they would wait, to see if the unlocking of the box brought anyone on the scene. Finding that it did not, they would again enter the kiosk and pull out the slide to an extent which would have caused the buzzer to sound, had there been a buzzer attached to that box.

Again they would disappear to a point of vantage and await anything which might occur. If everything was serene, it was clear that no alarm had been sounded. After that it was an easy matter to re-enter the kiosk and empty the coin-box.

For a short and unforgettable time it seemed that all our methods had suddenly crumpled up. We were up against it at the very moment when victory seemed sure.

But there was more in store for us. Unless the railway staff acted immediately, there was a risk that some innocent person might enter a box immediately

after the thief had left, and be the subject of accusation. Not a pleasant prospect, nor an impossible one, as the following incident shows.

One afternoon at a station in the Paddington area the buzzer gave the alarm; but, in the short time which elapsed before the staff reached the box, the thief had gone, and a middle-aged lady had entered the kiosk. One could not, of course, expect railway people to use the same caution as would practised detectives, and we could not blame them for handing the lady over to the police. This, however, they did, with most unpleasant results. I am not at liberty to say how the matter was settled. All I can remark is that the lady treated the matter in a generous way, and that we were left with yet another difficulty facing our efforts.

And this difficulty could be met in one way only. It would be necessary to restrict the use of our buzzers to stations where our own Investigation Branch men could be in continuous observation.

We made arrangements for this in a limited way, only to find that by accident or design, the gang ceased to use kiosks in railway stations, but resorted to telephone boxes at all kinds of odd places.

But our luck was due to turn again, and turn it did. My colleagues and I had a number of consultations, and then, one day we hit upon a scheme which we hoped would make the thieves *come to us, instead of our seeking them.* We would *force* them back to the railway stations, and to those stations which we could properly observe.

And this is how we did it. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that the lock called "K" admitted of a thousand combinations and was most difficult, if not impossible to pick. Well, by this time some thousands of these had been made, and we decided to fix these in pretty nearly all the kiosks save those at stations, which were fitted with the easier types of lock mentioned earlier.

The result was as we had hoped. Taking the line of least resistance the thieves renewed their attentions to the railway kiosks, with the result that a number of them were caught and sent to prison. Meanwhile we had been busy tracking a man named Barker, whose existence was given to us, as I have mentioned, by a paper dropped by Higgins—the man who had smiled at me so mockingly.

But Barker, whom we knew to be the leader of the gang, was not an easy man to catch. He used a high-powered car to make his tour, with confederates, around the kiosks. One of the confederates would leave the car, make a sudden raid on a kiosk and be back again with Barker in next to no time.

We found Barker to be most difficult to follow until we, also, obtained a car from the Motor Transport Section of the G.P.O. By means of this we were able to follow him one day to a certain house occupied by a key-cutter. This man had been occasionally engaged by Barker to cut telephone keys, and was willing to give evidence against Barker when we arrested him later. Barker got three years' penal servitude.

During the latter months of which I write, we made numerous arrests at stations, and, with the ringleader gone the coin gang gave up the fight.

To-day the losses are practically back to their old normal.

On another occasion we had fixed up an alarm in a cabinet at a railway station and had run the line into a small room close at hand.

My men had been waiting in this position for weeks when, one afternoon, the buzzer sounded, and a peep through the door showed a man busily engaged thumping at the instrument.

Here, thought my men, was success at last, and when the man ceased thumping they flung open the door and challenged him.

The well-dressed suspect protested his innocence, and there was certainly a ring of truth in his statements; yet he fenced when asked to give an account of himself.

He was therefore given the option of being taken to the police station or to the G.P.O. so that inquiries could be made. He chose the latter.

Before the trio marched off, however, a further examination of the coin-box was made, but there was no outside evidence of tampering, neither did the coin-box seem to possess less money than might be expected.

An examination of the electric switch in the small room was also made, and it was found that the alarm continued to ring when it should not have done,

disclosing the fact that our connections were not all they might have been.

You may wonder why my men did not release their captive in view of this, but you have to remember that in such a case the only tool needed by a criminal is a tiny key which, at the sign of danger, could be thrown away or hidden on the person. And you have to add the fact that the man absolutely refused to give a reasonable account of himself.

They took him to the G.P.O., where I interviewed him. At first he refused point blank to give me any information, and the more I pressed him as to where he lived the more agitated he became.

"Look here," I said finally. "There is only one course open for the Post Office in a case like this, and I don't think I need tell you what it is."

"You—you mean the police?" he gasped.

"I'm afraid so," I said gravely.

He thought for a few minutes; then he said: "May I ask the favour of speaking to you alone?"

I agreed, and it was then that he told me an amusing story.

"It is like this," he said, with a trace of a smile. "I happen to be attached to the Diplomatic Staff of a certain country and am stationed abroad. I am not supposed to be in England, and I expect if you people know you'll pass it on to my chief."

"We may not," I said, pressing him to tell me more and expecting an intriguing story of some Secret Service mission.

"Very well, then," he said, "I'll tell you more. I happen to be engaged to the Hon. ——, and she has come to meet me in London, while I have skipped over from abroad, unknown to my chief, and against all the rules.

"I'm only here for a few hours. I was phoning her to announce my arrival, but couldn't get through, and I was so annoyed that I banged the box. Then your men came."

While he spoke he produced some documents which showed me that his story was true. Laughingly I told him that he need not stay any longer and that I would keep his secret to myself. He was most grateful as he prepared to leave. Then he said suddenly:

"I say, you seem a jolly good sport. I wonder if you'd do me another favour and let me use your phone. I really must get through to her *now!*"

CHAPTER XIV

A TOUGH FIGHT

THE art of shadowing is a difficult, but highly necessary, part of a detective's duties. During my career I have had to adopt many strange disguises to avoid arousing a suspect's suspicions while trailing him.

I have been tramp, milkman, commissionaire, clerk, market porter, messenger, and once a tough fishing trawler hand.

This last disguise I had to use in one of my more unusual types of investigation.

It used to be the custom at one of the London markets for seamen who were unable to write themselves to ask the man at the Post Office counter to address the envelopes in which they were sending postal orders.

As it is strictly against Post Office rules for any official to do this the employee would appeal to some customer at the counter to address the seaman's letter for him.

Making a great show of assisting the sailor one particular official—fortunately his type is extremely rare in the Post Office—would take good care to listen to the address he dictated to the helpful customer.

Within a few minutes of the seaman posting the letter outside, the official had extracted the particular envelope with the postal order inside.

Disguised as a trawler hand, complete with pea-jacket, peaked cap and work-grimed hands, I mingled with the seamen and went through the performance of having several letters at different times addressed by the helpful strangers.

As an added check every letter from that particular office had to be accounted for to establish beyond all doubt that the one with the key address was missing.

After long and tedious investigation it was revealed that a certain man was pocketing the postal orders, afterwards replacing them among his stock and selling them a second time. This was previous to the issue of counterfoils to postal orders.

So one afternoon when he had slipped down to the box to retrieve yet another letter, he was arrested by two weather-beaten trawler hands—myself and colleague—whom he had served unsuspectingly but a few minutes before.

To those unfamiliar with the problems which are daily faced by the G.P.O. Investigation Branch the word "drama" may sound out of place when linked with our work.

Yet time after time I have found myself involved in situations demanding as much courage and ingenuity as any which have to be faced by Scotland Yard.

It is my experience that it is the comparative new-

comer to crime who is most likely to show fight when faced with arrest.

Certainly the toughest fight I ever had to "get my man" was in dealing with a first offender—a six-foot giant.

This man had for some time been under observation, suspected of stealing postal orders from a Post Office in South London.

I went up to him and asked him politely if he would return with me to the office.

Without a second's hesitation the giant aimed a swinging blow at my jaw. I ducked and he missed.

The very weight of the blow swung him off his balance and when I pushed him sharply in the nape of the neck with my palm he went sprawling on his face.

He was on his feet again in a flash—and off down the street like a streak of lightning.

I caught my man up a second time just after he had twisted into a side street. Another blow on the back of the neck and he was spreadeagled on his face—winded this time.

So he thought he would rely on his fists. He backed up against some low railings and challenged me to come near him.

As he thrust forward his fists in an attitude of defence I leapt at him, snatched his hands and forced him backwards over the low railings. As the iron top bit into his back he yelled with pain.

"You're breaking my back!" he shouted—and I knew that I had won. He walked to the police station with me completely cowed.

The very nature of the crimes with which the Post Office investigator has to deal makes his every case a series of lengthy, delicate and intricate inquiries.

We cannot come out into the open with an arrest until we are one hundred per cent. certain that we have all the evidence necessary to prove our man's guilt in a court of law.

In many instances securing that evidence calls for weeks—frequently months—of painstaking spade-work.

I often found that in the long run the best way to procure this evidence was to let the convicted man supply it himself. To do that I had to become that man's shadow, follow him wherever he went, watch his every movement until he betrayed himself.

Yet I must never be seen.

It is, I think, a great tribute to the honesty of our Post Office workers that it has only been on the most rare occasions that one of their number has come under the secret scrutiny of the "I.B."

In one instance I trailed a postman suspected of dishonesty for two months. For days on end I was never more than a few yards from him. Yet when he appeared in court he swore he had never seen me in his life—and he meant it!

His case was an interesting study in psychology. Morning after morning when he left home he would be followed by a city clerk, a local roundsman, or a commercial traveller—in other words, myself.

Had I walked behind him all the time it would have been only a matter of minutes before he spotted

me. So I set myself out to study the geography of the neighbourhood.

I stalked him down parallel streets. Often I would anticipate his movements and be striding along a street well ahead of him.

This went on for seven or eight weeks without supplying a single clue. Then one morning the man, dressed in ordinary clothes, left his house. I sensed a difference in him.

To my experienced observation he showed unmistakable traces of nervousness. Every few yards of his walk he threw a rapid glance over his shoulder, his pace was more hurried.

Eventually my man slipped into a Post Office, with me close behind him, and cashed three postal orders.

The moment he left I obtained possession of them.

About a week later a complaint was made to the Post Office that a letter containing three postal orders was missing. The numbers given were those of the three the postman had cashed.

When we charged the man and eventually brought him into court the case for the prosecution rested almost entirely on my evidence. And the first move the accused man made was to deny flatly that he was the man who had cashed the orders.

His bluff sounded most convincing. To make his denials even more so—and notwithstanding the fact that he had engaged a solicitor to defend him—he persisted in cross-examining me while in the witness box.

That is the worst of most bluffers, they go one step too far and incriminate themselves by their own methods. So persistent was he in saying that I did not follow him that the magistrate suddenly remarked to the prisoner, "How do you know the witness did not follow you?" and as quick as lightning came the reply, "Because I looked to see!"

That reply was his undoing. I then explained to the magistrate that literally I did not follow him but always walked ahead of him owing to his continual looking round to see if he was being followed.

CHAPTER XV

A SOHO "MYSTERY"

ENTERING my office one morning I noticed smiles on the faces of my staff. Not that this was unusual, but on that particular day there was obviously some reason for the mirth. I found it when I went through the papers which were awaiting me on my desk.

"There'll be dirty work at the cross-roads," said my next-of-staff when I took up one of the papers which told me that there had been three simultaneous complaints from different people in Soho, alleging the non-delivery of letters which they knew to have been posted to them. The actual letters were attached and I noticed at once that they were all written in a foreign hand. I also observed that each of the complainants was the proprietor of one of the various cafés which abound in that foreign quarter of London.

There had certainly been much "dirty work" at those particular cross-roads of late. Hardly a week had passed but some affray had broken out in one or other of the little streets which criss-cross Soho. Consequently the prospect of making investigations in that quarter was, to say the least of it, enlivening.

For the benefit of those who do not know their

Soho, I will give a brief description of it. It is the recognised foreign quarter of London, and lies to the left of Shaftesbury Avenue as you leave Piccadilly Circus. You may turn up almost any one of the little streets and immediately find yourself in quite a different atmosphere from that which you have left in the Avenue.

Thus, a few yards up Greek Street you will come upon foreign tobacconists, displaying in their windows all manner of strange smokes, from the dubious French cigarette to the thin, gnarled, but almightily strong Italian cigars. A few paces and you will come upon a local wine shop, gaudy with the labels of Chianti flasks in their wicker casings, where you can buy a reasonable bottle of *vin ordinaire* for a couple of shillings or less.

Proceed, and you will come to Old Compton Street, where, even to-day, one never knows when a savage affray may not break out. Within a few days of the time when I write this a gang emerged from a basement club near at hand, chased a man along the street and threw him headlong through the plate-glass window of a shop, landing him among bottles of wine and strange cheeses. The district is, of course, policed as is the rest of London, but generally, by the time a constable appears, the affray is over and the participants have vanished—with the exception, perhaps, of one or two victims who are too afraid of reprisals to give the names of the gang who have slashed their faces with razors, or scarred them with broken bottles.

But let not the ordinary visitor be afraid to walk Old Compton Street. The odds are against you being there when trouble breaks out in this and neighbouring foreign streets.

For those fond of Continental food, Old Compton Street is a fine place for shopping. Almost every conceivable kind of sausage and salami is there, together with such un-English edibles as aubergines, or egg-fruit, and the like.

Altogether, a highly-fascinating district. . . .

You can imagine, therefore, that I was not a little interested in the three letters which lay before me that morning. My first step was to send an assistant up to Soho to talk with the complainants and discover what he could. Had I gone up myself in the first place it would have made it almost impossible for me to do any personal investigations *incognito*, as I might well have to do before the case was solved.

Frankly, at first, I suspected the old trouble of letter-box thieves, who, by this trick and that, as I have shown elsewhere, relieve private letter-boxes of their contents. But my assistant came back to say that this theory was false, and that the café people had actually awaited the postman on their doorsteps, hoping for letters which did not arrive.

The letters, my assistant learnt, were from Paris, which was perhaps not surprising, seeing that two of the complainants were French and the other Italian. Nevertheless, there was a certain amount of coincidence in the matter which I by no means overlooked.

I next considered the likelihood of the postman on that round being honest. But, even if this were so, why should he steal only those letters from Paris and addressed only to those particular people? My experience was that the dishonest postman generally has an idea that the letters he proposes to steal contain money, which these did *not*. My assistant endeavoured to ascertain exactly what the letters expected were *about*, but was met with evasions which were perhaps natural in the circumstances.

Although I disliked my theory of the dishonest postman I agreed to a test being made. This was quite easy with the use of used French stamps and imitation postmarks. Letters bearing these, addressed to our Soho friends, were put in the postman's bag and were duly delivered.

It was obvious that this case was not so simple as it seemed. So far, of course, we only had the Soho people's word for it that any letters were missing at all, so, as a test, my assistant obtained from one of the café proprietors the name of the person in Paris who was supposed to have sent him the missives. By means which it may not be prudent to mention here we found that this person was prepared to swear that he had posted the letters, but he would not divulge their contents; nor had we any power to make him do so.

At this point a curious fact emerged. The man in Paris, whom we will call Pierre Mertens, stated that he was the writer of the letters which had failed to reach the other cafés also!

You may ask why we should take so much trouble over the correspondence of a group of aliens. The reason was twofold. Firstly, those people in Soho were naturalised, and, as British citizens, were as entitled to the protection of the Investigation Branch as anyone else, and, secondly, the case was worth pursuing in the hope that valuable knowledge of letter thieving might come our way. Not once, but many times have we picked up the trail of one crime whilst working on another. It is quite a usual thing for a thief, to all appearances individual in his actions, to belong to a gang, and for him unwittingly to give us "a line" on his confederates.

After various consultations in the office I decided to go up to Soho and make observations for myself.

The first café I visited was kept by an elderly Frenchman named Caullier. It was of no pretensions—just a coffee counter on which stood a pale, perspiring ham, piles of saveloys and numerous glossy buns. There were about half-a-dozen tiled tables at which sat a number of nondescript foreigners and a couple of very black niggers. I ordered coffee and seated myself at a table, feeling slightly out of place. Occasionally M. Caullier glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, and I knew that he was regarding me as an outsider and that he was slightly curious about me. However, I took a paper from my pocket and began to read. Altogether I stayed in the café nearly an hour, but neither heard nor saw anything of real interest, except once, when a tall, seedy man entered, held a brief whispered conversation with the

proprietor, and left the premises without making a purchase. I rather blamed myself for having sat in that café. I felt too well-dressed for the surroundings; and it would be difficult for me to go there again without attracting more attention.

I decided to leave Soho for the day with the intention of returning on the morrow to visit the more elegant restaurant run by an Italian named Luigi under his own name. I had glanced at this, but had not dared to enter it so soon after my visit to M. Caullier. Moreover, I had not liked the look of the tall, seedy man, who, for all I knew, might also be a friend of Luigi; and it certainly would not do for me to be found by him in the latter's restaurant.

Next evening, wearing a light tweed suit, as against my blue serge of the day before, and brushing my hair back instead of parting it, I entered Luigi's and ordered dinner. And there I sat for a couple of hours, made reasonable by the periodical ordering of a glass of port.

I was just preparing to leave the restaurant when, in a mirror opposite, which I had been watching all the evening, I saw the tall, seedy man enter and engage Luigi in conversation. They spoke rapidly, and, as I learnt from the snatches I heard, in French, from which I gathered that the Italian had spent some time in that country. I knew no French myself, with the exception of a few words, and one of those words was "facteur", which means "postman". This word occurred several times.

Evidently they were discussing the missing letters, and I puzzled my mind as to why this tall fellow should be mixed up in it at all. He was clearly a link between Caullier and Luigi, from which I naturally concluded that these two foreigners were mixed up in some business together, and that this business was not unconnected with the letters which had failed to arrive.

Presently I left the restaurant feeling not unnaturally pleased with myself. Something seemed to be evolving from the mystery. Very soon, I decided, I would put one of my men on to shadow our tall friend and see what he did for a living.

Before leaving Soho, I took a stroll up Dean Street and turned into one of the little streets which lead from it. Here was situated the third of the three cafés. In appearance it was not unlike the establishment of M. Caullier, except that just inside the door was a flight of stairs leading to some apartment below. As I watched I saw several men arrive and go downstairs. I decided that on another night I would discover what was happening below this innocent-looking café.

I returned to Dean Street and walked towards Shaftesbury Avenue. Now a solitary stranger in Soho does not always go unnoticed if he makes more than one appearance in its smaller haunts. With the large restaurants, such as Kettner's and the Rendezvous, it is different. But the man who thinks he can move about the little cafés unnoticed is making

a mistake. The chances are that more than one pair of sharp eyes have spotted him, for the regular frequenters of these places are known almost as well as villagers know each other. Indeed Soho is practically a village in itself.

The knowledge that I might have been observed prompted me to do what I had often done before in similar circumstances—to pause and look into a shop window so that I could glance over my shoulder to see if I was being followed. This I did, and saw two men stop in their tracks and begin conversing with each other. My instinct told me pretty clearly that these two men were watching me.

And my instinct was not wrong. They evidently "rumbled" my shop-window ruse and decided to play their cards openly, for I had not gone many yards before they overtook me.

"Just a minute, guv'nor," said one of them. He spoke in a Cockney voice, though I attached little significance to this. So many in Soho are perfectly bi-lingual.

I stopped and looked at the two men inquiringly.

"We just wondered if you were looking for anybody particular up Dean Street way," said one of them. "You were there last night as well, dressed different."

"Well, I don't wear the same clothes every night," I said with an innocent smile.

He mentioned the names of the café and restaurant. "You were in both of 'em," he said, "and you've been hanging round the Café Bleu to-night."

"I suppose all of them are open to the public," I replied.

Then the other man, bigger and slightly more disreputable than the other, joined in.

"Don't try to be funny," he snarled. "What's your game? Are you a 'split' (detective) or what?"

I glanced down at my somewhat small figure.

"*Me*, a detective!" I laughed. "I think it's you who are trying to be funny."

I must have seemed very innocent, for my man said, "All right, then; clear off and don't forget it's unhealthy to nose about too much."

I needed no second bidding, and was soon on a bus bound towards Victoria. I was not flattered by the incident. I had been found out, and it was going to be very difficult for me to visit that third café, as I had intended to do on the following night. It was, in fact, going to be devilish risky.

Still, I determined to go—but well-disguised. It was never my habit to go to great lengths in the matter of disguise, but if ever a case called for caution it was this one. Therefore on the following day I visited a man who specialises in make-up, and by the time I went up to Soho late next evening my own wife would not have recognised me. The colour of my face was changed, I wore a moustache and steel-rimmed spectacles, whilst my clothes would not have passed muster in a Rowton House.

I went boldly into the café and ordered some food and coffee, over which I determined to linger as long

as I could. Meanwhile I was keenly watching the men who went down to the basement which I learnt to be a sort of club frequented mainly by foreigners. I could hear loud sounds of voices, but they were too mingled for me to hear any one of them distinctly.

By the time midnight drew near it seemed as though I had had a wasted night, when something happened suddenly to the entire contrary. The voices down below began to increase into violence and I noticed an alarmed look on the face of the proprietor, who, I had no doubt, knew his Soho "boys" pretty intimately. Suddenly he came from behind his counter towards the stairs, evidently with the intention of going below to restore order.

But he was too late. There came the unmistakable sound of a general fight. Furniture crashed as chairs were flung about. Glasses were being smashed, and among it all one could hear the "smack" of fists against flesh. It seemed as though hell was let loose in that basement.

The proprietor had descended a few stairs, but he came back in two strides as I heard the sound of running steps from below. A moment later a man dashed up, his face bleeding from a terrible gash down one cheek. Then came another, similarly wounded. These were then followed by a veritable pack, several with bruised faces and bleeding noses.

Out into the street they all went, followed by myself. Then began a running fight to the accompaniment of a shrill police whistle blown by a

constable who happened to be near at hand. A few moments later, as if by magic, the whole affray subsided and the participants disappeared into thin air. The only one left lay huddled in a shop doorway, bleeding from a wound in the side of his neck.

By this time numerous police were on the spot. An ambulance arrived and the wounded man was hurried away to the nearest hospital. A new-comer ten minutes later would have seen nothing out of the ordinary except a few groups of people talking excitedly at the street corners. And even these were presently "moved on".

Among the police I noticed a plain clothes man whom I knew, so I went up to him.

"What's it all about?" I asked.

"You clear off," he growled, "unless you want a spot of bother yourself. Beat it!"

Then it dawned upon me that I was still in disguise.

"It's me, Freddy Cartwright of the I.B.," I said. "I'm on a job as well!"

We had a good laugh about it; then he told me that the club where the trouble had started was the headquarters in this country of a gang which generally operated from Paris. They were an international bunch of the worst order and had been giving the French police no end of trouble.

When he told me this, things began to occur to my mind. The different café people were evidently in with the gang and various members of it had their letters from Paris sent under cover to the

cafés. From this I inferred that the missing letters had been intercepted by the Paris Sûreté, and this I ultimately learnt to be correct.

So, you see, there was not really so much mystery about it after all. But there was certainly a good dose of excitement!

CHAPTER XVI

A TELL-TALE HOLIDAY

MARY AMELIA had a sweet and innocent disposition. It was difficult to believe that a poison-pen pest could have the heart to include her among the victims whom, for three whole years, he had plagued in the town in which she and her family lived.

Nevertheless, of all the filthy missives posted by the miscreant, those received by this young woman in her late 'twenties were the worst. It seemed no deterrence that she was an ardent church-worker, a Sunday School teacher and generally interested in all matters concerning the Church to which she belonged.

The first blow fell one morning whilst she and her family were at breakfast, when the postman dropped a letter into the box. Mary Amelia's younger sister collected the letter and brought it back to the table.

"What awful writing," she laughed, as she handed it to her sister, to whom it was addressed.

Mary Amelia took the letter and looked at it in a puzzled manner.

"Who on earth can it be from?" she muttered as she slit open the envelope.

Now Mary was a highly educated girl, and held down a good secretarial position in the City. It was

not for her to be upset by trifles, and you may guess the surprise of her family when, after reading a few lines, she gave a shriek and dropped the open letter on the floor. The whole family rose in alarm and her father hastily secured the letter and read the contents. Meanwhile Mary Amelia had fled from the room.

"Whatever is it?" asked the mother, making an attempt to glimpse at the contents of the letter.

"Sit down, my dear," said her husband. "It's nothing much. Silly of Mary to make such a fuss."

But he knew more than that, for a glance had been sufficient to tell him that the poison pen fiend, of whom he had already heard, had turned his tainted pen to Mary Amelia. In the circle in which the family moved there had been whispers of almost indescribable missives being received by members of that circle, missives which very few had dared to show even to their friends. And now here was one of the same abominations delivered to one of the most harmless and sweet-natured girls of the locality.

There was no hope of it being an isolated instance. The fiend had been at work for three months, during which every week had produced its additional victim. As you will see presently, these three months were but the prelude to three whole years of what I can describe as little less than social terrorism.

The trend of the letters generally was to allege infamous conduct on the part of the recipient's wife or husband, or, in the case of an unmarried person of immorality on his or her own part.

In this case the allegations were not so impersonal as those which I had generally encountered, but invariably brought in the name of one person as a chief actor in the suggested orgy of immorality which was supposed to abound in this peaceful church-life backwater. And that name was the name of the bachelor curate of the parish!

I managed to make his acquaintance without disclosing my identity, and discovered him to be a young man of undoubted charm, but who was engaged to a girl in London, and who had not the least interest in the desperate, last-chance spinsters who were for ever on his trail. Apparently he had not let it be known that he was already engaged, with the result that almost all the women of marrying age were at silent war with one another.

I am sorry to say that there was nothing new in this state of things in church circles, and it became almost impossible for a well-meaning spinster to do any church work without being suspected by the rest of currying favour with the curate.

Needless to say, the curate himself soon began to receive anonymous letters himself, and then I concluded that for a certainty the sender of them was a woman, and that her motive was the same as that of many women who had come under my notice in similar circumstances. The motive, I judged, was this: a jealous spinster, having seen the curate talking to another woman several times, would seek a means of making him cease to speak to her in public. And what could be more effective than writing to him,

accusing him of wrong relations with her? Even though the curate might be a man of strong character, who did not care a hang what people said about him, he would, for the woman's sake, avoid her company, so that no undue suspicions should fall upon her.

The embittered anonymous letter writer would, of course, know this. Hence the letters. In the same way, by accusing other women of relations with the curate, the writer would hope to make it undesirable for any of them to seek his company.

Other members of the congregation, too, would receive letters, for my experience is that once a person has embarked on a poison pen campaign, he or she finds it difficult to draw the line. It needs only the slightest dislike for a person to make them the objects of scurrility. The poison pest is rather like a boy with his first catapult. He shoots at everything within sight.

As time went on Mary Amelia received more and more epistles accusing her of relations with the curate. Her home life was changed by this dark shadow which had fallen across it, and the sound of the postman's footsteps in the mornings was sufficient almost to send Mary into hysterics and her father into a violent temper.

At length the latter decided that something must be done, and he insisted that he and his daughter should lodge a complaint at the police station, which they did. The police were most sympathetic, for the father was highly respected in the district, whilst

his late brother had been an alderman of the borough. An inquiry was at once set on foot.

Meanwhile the curate confided in his vicar, with the result that he, also, went to the police. Needless to say, complaints from two such quarters showed the police that the matter was serious, and they spared no effort to track down the miscreant. But they met with no success, whilst the pestilence they sought to quell was increasing week by week.

It was the vicar who took the step of consulting the Post Office itself and this led to the matter being placed in the hands of my department. In consequence, with the concordance and collaboration of the police we took up the case, which had now been running for nearly three years without the emergence of a single clue.

It is supposed that a murderer usually makes one mistake which leads him to the scaffold, and I hoped that our quarry in this case might do the same. It was not, as you will see, an ill-founded hope.

Now, one of the fundamental points upon which the Investigation Branch bases its numerous successes is the extreme painstaking with which we handle matters coming under our notice. The process of eliminating one or another person from the picture is, as I have said elsewhere, a long and tedious job. Yet, because we know this and are prepared to abide by it, we achieve success where others have failed. Patience is the great factor which the Investigation Branch has always on its side.

Immediately we took over this case a fresh dossier

was created upon which we began work. Comparison of handwriting of various members of the church, and of many outside it who had come under our notice, was made—only to prove negative.

However, out of a welter of theories and many weeks of quiet investigation, we at last got on to a definite line. The writer had forgotten a minor matter in the sending of this continuous flow of filth, in which way he resembled the murderer of tradition. This minor matter was that in each of the three years of slanderous activity there had been a fortnight's break when no letters had been posted.

Here, then, was something upon which to work, and, after many discreet inquiries, further eliminations were made from the list of suspects until at last there was only one whom we could with reason suspect, and that was Mary Amelia herself, the first to complain.

Our inquiries showed that during each of these fortnights the innocent Mary had been enjoying her holiday by the sea!

In view of this fact I decided to keep her under close observation, the result of which was a police court case, a newspaper report of which I give here:

PILLAR-BOX POISON

CLIMAX TO THREE YEARS' MYSTERY

YOUNG WOMAN CONVICTED

For three years, it was mentioned in a sensational prosecution, a mysterious plague of anonymous letters has afflicted the town of——.

During that period communications of a poisonous character have been disseminated amongst prominent people in the district.

Time after time attempts have been made to track the writer of the missives, but without success.

Recently an important discovery was made by a member of the General Post Office Investigation Department.

After shadowing a young woman—who herself had received epistles of the kind complained of—on forty different days, he watched her drop something into a pillar-box.

When opened the receptacle was found to contain a number of postcards of the character which had caused trouble.

These were produced as evidence against the woman when she was convicted on a serious charge and fined.

SHADOWED BY SLEUTH

Postcards in Disguised Handwriting

It was a smart piece of work on the part of a Post Office sleuth that led to the arrest of ——, aged 29, described as of highly respectable parents.

Full details of the affair were told when she pleaded not guilty before the Bench to a summons for sending by post eight grossly improper postcards.—According to Mr. B. Evans, for the Public Prosecutor, numerous letters and postcards had been circulated in the district in the past three years. Most of them were addressed to the Rev. ——, and to members of his congregation. Miss —— was seen to post something

in a pillar-box added Mr. Evans. It was opened immediately afterwards, and the eight postcards were found therein. When cautioned by police officers, defendant stated, "If the officers say I did it I cannot say I did not. I have no explanation to offer."—Frederick C. Cartwright, of the G.P.O. Investigation Branch, gave evidence that he had known accused by sight since September. On July 27th he saw her leave a teashop in Cannon Street and go to London Bridge Railway Station. He followed her on a train and saw her alight at ——. Her conduct was most unusual, as she kept looking back. When she reached the pillar-box at the corner of the grove she again glanced round, and then put something into the aperture of the box. After that, proceeded witness, she crossed over and turned into Roman Road. Witness immediately went to the box and put a newspaper through the aperture in such a way that as it fell it unfolded and covered any other communications that might be lying at the bottom of the box. Then he brought a postman and the box was opened. On the newspaper was one letter, and underneath it he found the eight postcards and nothing else.—Cross-examined by Mr. Frampton, defending, witness agreed that the young woman's father was the original complainant about the receipt of cards. She was of high respectability.—Counsel suggested that from September, 1921, down to last June defendant and her father had been most persistent in their complaints about offensive communications. Witness replied that that was so. "And some

of these offending postcards," continued counsel, "were actually addressed to her employer?"—Cartwright agreed, and added that one of the eight cards was addressed to defendant, c/o her employer. The handwriting on the eight was obviously disguised, but before June the writing on the cards was quite different. Witness mentioned that he had watched defendant on about forty different days. Other officers had also kept her under observation on several days.

After further evidence had been given the defendant entered the witness box and gave evidence that the annoyance of the past two years over these communications had made her ill, and she had been obliged to consult two doctors. She emphatically denied writing or posting any offensive missives at any time, and declared that she did not put anything in the letter-box on the evening in question.

The father of the defendant informed the court that from the very beginning of the trouble he and his daughter had been in constant communication with the police and with the Post Office authorities in the hope of tracing the author of the communications. On July 27th his daughter reached home between 7.20 and 7.25. The moment he heard there was any allegation against her in the matter he instructed his solicitor.

The Bench, consisting of four magistrates, held a private consultation, after which the chairman observed that they very much regretted having to convict. They fined her £5, and ordered her to pay two

guineas costs.—Mr. Frampton intimated that it was quite likely there would be an appeal.

But there was no appeal, and the case just passed into our records as others had done.

And what shall we say of Mary Amelia? Just a disappointed woman using the poison pen as her only weapon against unrequited love, destroying the peace of mind of many because it was not given to herself.

CHAPTER XVII

A QUESTION OF LOYALTY

I HAVE often wondered which of the two—loyalty to the public or loyalty to one's own work—should take precedence. There has been more than one occasion when, in following Post Office crooks, I have found them to be engaged upon some theft which had nothing to do with the Post Office at all. On some of these occasions I have acquainted the police and thus instigated an arrest, only to realise afterwards that, in my momentary zeal for public good, I have done my own work a disservice. My "men" have been lodged in gaol and, when they come to be released, I may have all my work to do over again.

I had suffered in this way once when, almost immediately afterwards, I was faced with the same temptation of whether to ignore every activity of the crooks save that relating to the Post Office. In this case, as in several subsequent ones, I put my Department first.

It all arose in this way. We—a Detective-Inspector and Detective-Sergeant from the Yard, two Detective-Inspectors, one Sergeant and a plain-clothes man from the City police and myself—had been detailed to run down a gang of outside (private) letter-box

thieves who were not only playing havoc in the City of London, but also in the West End, and south-west. They had been carrying on their business successfully for months until at last by a stroke of luck we traced two of the gang to an address in North London. Then it became a case of careful observation and for weeks we shadowed the two, and gradually made contact with a whole host of letter-box draggers.

Each morning, rain or fine, we were at our posts shortly after six, for the dragger is no breakfast-in-bed man, and piece by piece we accumulated sufficient evidence against the gang to justify action being taken. But there was one fly in the ointment; we had not gathered enough evidence to tackle the forger of the cheques to whom the draggers used to take them for alterations to higher amount if of small value, so I laid myself open to bring about the desired result.

Day by day after our early morning jaunts after the draggers, I hung around the forger's abode hoping to get something tangible against him, and many times I followed him to public-houses where he would hand over cheques upon which he had been operating. We could, of course, have caught him on the spot, had we so desired, but I pressed the Yard and City men to hold their hand until such time as we could have a real big scoop up. I argued that little purpose would be served by arresting two men out of a total which had now swollen to nine. The remainder would still go merrily on their morning

rounds. No, I wanted to get the whole bunch at one fell swoop.

One afternoon, however, my forger friend left his home in company with a man, a stranger to me.

Apparently something important was moving judging by their actions to ascertain whether they were being followed. I tracked the pair from North London to a back street off Wardour Street in the West End. We arrived there at two o'clock. Then commenced a long vigil. In this little street were situated a number of offices and warehouses and it was clear that my two birds of prey were engaged on some nefarious game.

I noted during their loitering in and about the street that immediately the policeman on the beat made his appearance they disappeared until he was out of sight. Indeed an old friend of mine at the Yard happened to come along Wardour Street and they scuttled away like rabbits,—so did I, for it wouldn't have done the job much good had they seen me speaking to him.

Well, punctually on the stroke of four a man came to the door of a warehouse and at a signal from him my two friends quickly entered the warehouse and more quickly left with two large parcels of merchandise. I followed all three men to Wardour Street where they dumped the parcels and left the premises almost before you could say "Jack Robinson".

The whole procedure did not take more than three minutes. Now I could have had those three beauties

in the local police station within a few minutes. But would I have been doing justice to the Post Office? It would perhaps have meant three months' imprisonment each, and the finish of my own job for an indefinite period.

Well, I remained "mum" on the subject for three days, then quietly informed my Yard friends of what had occurred.

"Oh," said one of the Yard men, "it was our forger friend who did the job off Wardour Street on Wednesday afternoon. I saw in the Informations the value of the goods was over twenty-five pounds. I wish you had told us, we would have knocked 'em off."

"Yes," said I, "but what about our own job from a Post Office point of view?" And the City Police were with me to a man.

However, by judicious watching and pieces of luck that fell our way after about ten weeks of strenuous work we had the pleasure of rounding up at one swoop nine of them, including the forger, whilst they were holding what appeared to be a fraternal gathering in a public-house one mid-day.

The results at the Old Bailey were very gratifying, the sentences ranging from eight years' graduating according to circumstances to three months' imprisonment.

The City of London Bankers were heavy sufferers by the depredations of the gang. They took up the prosecution, and were very appreciative at the results of our efforts.

CHAPTER XVIII

HUMOURS OF "OBSERVATION"

KEEPING observation on a suspected person for a lengthy period often means nerve-racking consequences to the watcher.

There is always present the feeling that at any moment the suspect may "spot" you, and if that should happen the game isn't worth the candle—at least not until the suspect has recovered from what I might term his fright.

The detective in watching a suspect takes up the best position he can select from where he can observe the criminal's home or business premises. Now as an experiment you just go to the corner of a street in the suburbs with a view to taking up observation upon an imaginary suspect. Stand at the same spot say for three hours and see what will happen. You will, if you keep a smart look-out observe the rustling of window curtains at houses as far up the street as a view of you from the windows will permit. Presently to take better stock of you the lady of the house opposite will appear at an upstairs window and rub and rub at one window pane for half-an-hour, entirely oblivious of the fact that to carry out her window cleaning scheme properly other panes should have attention. This is a sure sign that the woman in

the house is becoming extremely nervous of you loitering in the vicinity, and eventually she becomes so alarmed that she will leave the house hurriedly.

Follow her discreetly and it is ten to one you will find her making a bee-line for the nearest telephone kiosk or police station to complain that a suspicious-looking character is loitering about outside her house. Later she will enter her house and slam the door.

I have often felt sorry for householders in the circumstances. How are they to discriminate whether you are a cut-throat or not! In these days of serious crime with motor car and cycle to assist house-breakers one cannot discourage the public from complaining of what to them is a matter the police should deal with immediately.

Now, a few minutes after the nerve-wracked woman has entered her home and again fixed herself behind the curtains, a policeman will turn the corner cruising slowly along on a pedal cycle. He has come at the bidding of the complainant. After taking stock of you in passing he'll dismount further up the road and wait in the offing long enough to satisfy himself you are loitering and justify a charge if necessary, then he'll retrace and speak to you. Now, my experience has shown me that there is a good deal of the psychologist in the average police-man, but of some I will say "now't".

Should you happen to be poorly dressed some policemen will start straightaway with, "Now then, what are you hanging about here for? We've received

complaints and there's been several cases of house-breaking round here lately, etc."

But should you happen to be well-dressed then it works out something like this: "Excuse me, sir, a complaint has been lodged at the station about you, etc., etc." Well, I suppose there is something to be said for being well-dressed. Even the policeman on the beat doesn't worry about you after seeing you at the same spot two or three days in succession.

Harking back to our policeman friend who is anxious to know your business, the production of an official authority card usually satisfies the most-thick-skinned policeman, and in order to relieve the feelings of the lady still watching behind the curtains I—it is I, now, not you—ask the officer to shake hands before leaving and the curiosity of those peeping through adjacent windows is allayed and the amenities of the district soon return to normal.

I have on frequent occasions during my career been on speaking terms with many of the residents of the immediate neighbourhood in which I have been engaged hour after hour and day after day. But there, that friendly nod and handshake with the policeman has always made life much easier not only for them but for me also.

Here is a little story and its sequel which may assist the reader of the foregoing to realise the amount of interest people take in an individual hanging around the same spot continually. Humour often creeps in even though the work is one calling for the most serious and concentrated effort possible.

Here, for instance, is a story to make my point.

It happened this way. A bad series of thefts of letters was occurring in a certain town in Yorkshire and in a number of cases the stolen letters were those posted by a Sick Benefit Society, containing Postal Orders, Cheques, etc., as sick benefits to members. From an analysis of the whole of the cases it appeared that the letters were being stolen before they reached the General Post Office or the Head Office in the district, as the case might be. Efforts to trace the identity of the thief had so far been unavailing, so it was decided that some observation should be kept in a certain district at such times as the losses were occurring.

A noticeable feature about the whole business, was that Saturday nights after, say 10 p.m., were favoured by the thief, and it was believed that he had some means of opening the pillar boxes after the 8.30 p.m. collection had been made.

After many tedious days of observation a clue was afforded as to the identity of the thief, and he was followed to an address in the suburbs. Now that meant that the movements of this man would have to be covered for long periods each day, perhaps twelve, thirteen, or fifteen hours. Just imagine standing in a suburban street for that length of time. You can well appreciate that it would not be long before the residents became either alarmed or inquisitive, or perhaps both.

It so happened in this case. After about three days on the job a very dear middle-aged lady approached me and said, "Good morning. I suppose you are looking for some wrong 'uns".

"Yes, that is so," I said, "but it depends how people view the rights and wrongs of things."

Now I at once sensed that I would very soon become the centre of attraction which would probably spoil the job, so I hit upon the idea of taking this dear old soul into my confidence. On the following morning, I well remember it—a bitterly bleak day in February—and anybody knowing a Yorkshire town on the outskirts of the famous moors, can quite realise how cold it can really be—the dear old soul came across to me and seeing me as I undoubtedly was, chilled to the bone, invited me to slip inside her house and to take a cup of hot cocoa. Needless to say it was very acceptable and, as I could keep observation upon my objective very nicely from her window, I did not hurry over the cocoa.

I knew, however, that the hospitality was really a medium through which she hoped to satisfy her curiosity. So I set about doing it.

"Well, Ma," I said, "this is indeed a nice cup of cocoa and I greatly appreciate your very kindly thoughts. Now if I tell you why I am here I want you to give me your word of honour that you will not tell anybody else in the neighbourhood."

She readily consented to keep the secret strictly to herself, and settled down in her armchair, agog with expectations. Then I said to her:

"Well, Ma, I am an officer from a big firm of enquiry agents in London, and I want to trace the whereabouts of a woman, thought to be living in this street, to secure such evidence as will enable her husband to divorce her. It is known she is living with a man in this district and of course I must see her and get a line on her mode of living, etc. So you see how delicate and important the job is, and how natural it is that I don't want it known who I am, or why I am here, because if the woman I am seeking gets to know it will spoil my plans."

The old lady fell for it, and suggested that she would like me to use her sitting-room, and then the prying eyes of other neighbours would not be able to see me. Now this suited me down to the ground, and, after a few days, I was able to secure enough information to cause a successful ending to the real job upon which I was engaged.

I thanked the old lady for her kindness, and promised to let her know the result of my work. Now about a fortnight later I purchased a copy of a local weekly newspaper, and there blazoned on the front page was "Bradford man cited as co-respondent, London woman traced to Bradford." I proceeded to the old lady's address and handed her the copy of the newspaper, and said, "Well, Ma, you can now see for yourself."

The thing that pleased her most was that she was able to tell the neighbours that she knew all about this weeks ago, as the gentleman who had done the job stayed with her and had tea. She does not know

to this day that the story I told her about the divorce agency, was something I invented to satisfy her curiosity and at the same time afford a cover for myself. It was, however, mainly responsible for bringing the real job to a successful conclusion.

CHAPTER XIX

"THE HUMAN TOUCH"

I HAVE no wish to emphasise the human side of my work, but occasionally I have run unexpectedly into some remarkable "stories", as our newspaper friends would say.

The story I now set out has little to do actually with the Post Office, except that I came across the beginning of it during my investigation of a fraud, and met the sequel—years later—also in the course of my duties.

The fraud was the familiar one of back-coding telegrams, and, as was prevalent in those days, was worked from a village Post Office. It consisted in disconcerting an old rural postmaster or postmistress by presenting several betting telegrams a few minutes before the time of a race, and persuading him to code them all at the same time, another one being added with a bet on the winner, whose name had been ascertained by telephone whilst the postmaster was fumbling about in the unaccustomed "rush" of business.

In this particular village, which I will call Morley, the postmaster, who also carried on the business of a general store, was a nervous old fellow approaching sixty. It had been easy for a clever pair of rogues

to work the fraud, but, as it happened, I had been on their tracks for some time, and this occasion proved to be their downfall. At their trial at the neighbouring Quarter Sessions, old George, the postmaster, had to give evidence, and received a "dressing-down" from the hottest-tempered Chairman I have ever met.

I was really sorry for the old fellow, for he was almost in tears at the end of the case. He came to me and said tremblingly:

"Mr. Cartwright, I can't go on being postmaster any longer."

"Nonsense," said I. "You needn't worry about what that old bully said. Take my advice and please yourself when you retire. It won't be long."

But he would have none of it.

"You're very kind, I'm sure," he said, "but I simply can't go on, and I beg of you to arrange for me to go."

It became clear to me that the best service I could do for the old chap was to direct his application through the right channel, which I eventually did. But before that there occurred a curious incident at the village inn which I liked so much that I stayed the night there instead of returning to London.

The "locals", of course, knew who I was, for you can't hide much in a village. They were all eager to talk to me about the case, but I kept myself clear of the conversation. I could not, however, help listening.

"Poor old George," said one of them. "He tells me he's a-giving up his job. Nerves is gone, he ses."

"They been gone a long time," said another. "He's never been the same since his other trouble." Then, addressing himself to me, he added: "You never heard of George's other trouble, did you, sir?"

Personally I was not sufficiently concerned about George's present trouble to hear about his past, and I hinted as much, whereupon the matter dropped. I little thought, however, that I was destined to hear it, nevertheless, and that it would be through the medium of another crime in that little village.

I prefer to call these things coincidences. Some might care to attach psychic significance to them. In which case, I will break my story for a moment to mention the most extraordinary "coincidence" which ever came my way.

There was a day when one of my officers failed for duty, and, in the course of the morning, 'phoned me to say that he was too unwell to attend. After condoling with him I asked the number from which he was 'phoning, and made a note of it on my pad.

Next day he again failed to attend, and, during the afternoon, I rang up the number which he had given me. The call was immediately answered by the absentee who told me he was just on his way to see his doctor.

"But," he added, "how did you know that I was here?"

"Well, I took the number down, of course," I replied.

I shall never forget the surprise in his tone as he said: "But I was speaking to you from a public kiosk in York Road and I'm speaking from there now."

My astonishment was no less than his: nor was it lessened when he said that, quite by accident, he was passing the kiosk when I 'phoned. He heard the bell and out of curiosity entered the kiosk to find me at the other end.

Still, as I said, I prefer to put these things down to coincidence.

We will now return to the village of Morley.

It was many years after this that I had placed on my desk the details of an outburst of anonymous letters in a village. To my astonishment, the village was Morley, and soon I found myself taking the little single-track railway to the village which, until recently, had been but a dim memory.

I arrived and stayed in the same inn as before, and, sure enough, there was the same man who had tried to tell me the story of postmaster George's past.

We exchanged greetings. Then he said:

"It was a pity about poor old George, sir. Didn't enjoy his retirement very long."

This was the first I had heard about the end of George. Then the old fellow continued:

"Of course, it was his first trouble that really finished him off."

I then remembered the unfinished story of George's past, and decided that this time I would really hear it. I ordered two pints of cider, for we were in the cider country, and gave what little encouragement was needed to get the complete story of the late postmaster.

As my work in connection with the anonymous letters had no bearing on our present story, and as it was just a conventional case of its kind, I shall not refer to it again. Here, then, is the story of George, told as nearly as possible as it was told to me. Apparently part of the story had been got from George himself.

It was like this (my rural friend said). A couple of years after you were here last time old George came very near to being a murderer. Anyhow, he set off from his shop with an old pistol in his pocket with the intention of killing Robert Iles one summer afternoon. Iles was even older than George, and you'd have thought old George would have had more sense than to go about murdering folk at his age. But there you are. There's no telling what some men will do where a woman's concerned.

Yes, there was a woman in it, but she'd been dead herself for nigh on forty years, so she was, as you might say, well out of it. Anyhow, we'll go back the forty years, when the story really started.

The girl's name was Prudence Rose, and a very nice girl she was. Quite the prettiest in these parts, with as nice a nature as you'd find in any girl in the

world. I knew her well, but having a girl of my own, I wasn't, as you might say, particularly interested. But George was interested. And so was Robert Iles. And, so it seemed, Prudence was interested in them both in a shy sort of way.

Well, country courtship is generally a bit drawn out, but in the end the girl linked up with Robert Iles and George had nothing left but to admit himself beaten. He wasn't postmaster then, of course, but worked for his father, who had the shop before him. As for Robert Iles, he had a good job on Whiteman's farm, so the girl didn't seem to be losing much by taking him instead of George.

Soon they got married, and it was one of the greatest days this village ever had. Farmer Whiteman insisted on putting up a tent in one of his fields and standing a cold meat tea with beer and cider as well to all the village. Absolutely everybody was there—except George, who said he had to be out of the village on some business. He shouldn't have done that, really, but I suppose he couldn't just bear it. It seemed as though his heart was broken by losing Prudence.

If it wasn't, it was soon going to be, as you'll see.

For a time Robert Iles and his wife seemed to be getting on all right, but Robert was a strange chap. He had always been a bit light-hearted in the village, and was what you might call "one for the girls." Perhaps it was this bit of dash about him that made Prudence choose him instead of George, who was rather an earnest sort of chap.

Anyhow, she soon had reason to regret it. They had been married only about a year, and Prudence was expecting a child, when a sort of change came over Robert. He would go home from work, and then, just as soon, almost, go out again. And he was seen in lonely places with a girl that the rest of the village hadn't much use for.

Well, that went on for a time, and several of the older men in the village had a word with Robert, but he was an independent sort of chap and told them to mind their own business.

Then there came a day when George thought he'd get up early and go down to the river to pick up a trout for breakfast. His way went past the mill, and there, where the river was dark and deep, he saw the body of Prudence floating in the backwater.

It won't take me long to tell you what happened after that. There was, of course, a coroner's inquest, but nothing was said about Robert's goings-on, probably because the coroner didn't know about them. So there was a verdict to say that she had committed suicide, and that perhaps her condition at the time had had something to do with it.

Now this wasn't at all what George had expected. He had been sure that the coroner would have said a lot of things to punish Iles, but Iles got off scot free. On the night of the inquest George went out to look for Robert to make good—in more ways than one—what the coroner hadn't done. But he couldn't find him. Robert Iles had left the village for good.

At least we all thought he'd left the village for good, and we believed it for something like forty years, and then Robert Iles came back. He didn't tell anybody he was coming, and at first nobody recognised him. He took a cottage on the edge of the village and lived there alone, with a woman next door looking after him.

Of course it leaked out somehow who he was, and we all wondered why he'd come back to end his days in a place where he could be sure of being hated.

This, of course, was since you were here over the betting frauds, and old George had given up his Post Office and his shop. He had managed to save a bit of money, and was living in a cottage on the other side of the village from Robert Iles' house. Several people mentioned to him that Robert had come back, but he said nothing. In fact he very rarely spoke to anybody at all, except me.

Then one day he decided to kill Robert Iles.

Of course he didn't tell me what he was going to do, or I would have stopped him. Later on he let me know all about it. It seemed that he'd got an old muzzle-loading pistol in a box—not a flint-lock, but one of those fired by little brass caps placed on the nipple and exploded by the trigger. For years he'd never known that there were any caps about, then one day, in some dust in the corner of the box, he found one cap—only one.

He fingered it, and somehow his mind went back to that morning when he had found Prudence's body in the stream, and he got the idea that Providence

had put the cap there so that he could kill Robert Iles.

He didn't waste much time about it. He loaded the pistol with some gunpowder which he'd used for smoking out wasps' nests, and set off along the road to do the job he had in mind. He didn't knock at Robert's door, but just opened it and walked in, his hand on the pistol in his coat pocket.

He found Robert Iles sitting at a bare table, eating bread-and-cheese. Robert looked up as he entered and smiled a sort of half-smile as George sat down on the chair opposite him, not saying a word, mind you. He didn't shoot him straight away because he wanted to tell him a few things first. Robert Iles was the first one to speak.

"I've been partly expecting you," he said.

"Oh, you have, have you?" said George. "Then you know just what I've come for?"

"I don't quite know that," answered Robert.

"Well, I've come to shoot you," said old George.

"I'm not surprised," said Robert quietly. "I ought to have been shot long ago."

"Very true," replied George, "for you're about the dirtiest dog that's ever been allowed to live so long."

"Well, shoot away, then," said Robert, and George pulled the pistol out of his pocket.

"I'm not going to shoot you for a minute or two," he said, "not until I've had a few more words from your ugly lips. Where've you been all this time?"

"In Australia, mostly," answered Robert. "When I left the village I got some work a hundred miles away, on a farm, and I saved up enough money to get me to Australia. I've just come back from there."

"Well, you don't seem to have done much good out there if this mouldy cottage is all you can afford to live in," said George, who was beginning to be interested. "I thought chaps who went out farming in Australia made their fortunes?"

"So they do, and so did I," says Robert.

George looked at him a bit doubtful like, then he said:

"What have you done with it?"

"Given it away," said Robert, "given it away, all of it, and it was close on twenty thousand pounds."

This made old George gasp a bit.

"Twenty thousand pound you made?" he repeated. "Look here! It seems as if you're telling lies on your death-bed."

"That I'm not," said Robert. "I gave it all away except just enough to keep me as you see me now."

"Well, who did you give it to?" asked George.

"Listen," said Robert. "I'm glad you asked me that. It'll give me a chance of telling you a few things before you shoot me. And I don't mind telling you that I'll be glad if you do shoot me. I'd have committed suicide, like Prudence did, if I'd had the courage. So if you think you're getting any sort of revenge on me, you're *not*."

This took the wind out of old George's sails a bit, and he waited for Robert's next words.

"I told you I gave all my money away," Robert went on. "And I gave it all to a society that looks after girls who have been treated as I treated Prudence. Just a minute. . . ."

Here Robert fumbled in his pocket and brought out a piece of paper.

"Read this," he said. "It's a receipt from the society for all the money that I've paid them."

It meant old George putting on his spectacles to read it, and he didn't mean to let go of his pistol. So he took Robert's word for it.

After that they sat in silence for a few minutes, while it sank into George's brain that Robert had made amends such as you'd hardly think a man could do.

"Go on, and get it over," said Robert.

Old George looked at him for a minute, then he suddenly put the pistol in his pocket and stood up from his chair.

"Robert," he said, "I won't say I'm right, but I'm going to let you live. You haven't told me as much, but I can see that, as well as what you've told me, you've come back here to face the music from folk you know hate you."

According to George, he just gave Robert one look and walked out of the cottage. He reckoned that a man couldn't do much more for the memory of the girl he'd wronged.

Now, you'd have thought that was the end of it, but it wasn't. Old George went home without saying a word to anybody—not even me, at the time.

However, the memory of Prudence had been revived, so to speak, in his mind, and on the next morning, very early, he went for a walk down by the river until he came to the place where he had found her body. He stood looking at the black water for a time; then he suddenly hurried back to his cottage and pulled out his pistol again. He felt that he'd been weak the day before, and that he should have shot Robert Iles without waiting.

So he set off again to Robert's cottage to do the job he'd meant to do.

But when he got to the cottage he found quite a few people at the garden gate. He tried to force his way through them, but they pushed him back.

"But I want to see Robert Iles," he said.

"Well, you can't see him," said the constable, who had just come out of the door. He died in his sleep last night and nobody's allowed in yet."

So George went back home with his pistol still in his pocket. As he said to me afterwards, it did seem as though Robert had done his best by Providence, and that Providence had done itself by him.

And this was the story I was told about the late postmaster, George. From what my friend told me, George was a happier man after the incident, and,

before he died, was at pains to say that he bore Robert Iles no ill.

Perhaps, now that you have heard this story as I heard it, you will excuse me for including it in this book of reminiscences.

CHAPTER XX

SOME "ODD SPOTS"

IN this chapter I give a few experiences, very vivid in my mind, which are difficult to classify under definite headings.

The first is an incident of which the newspapers made much at the time of my retirement recently. Not, I think, until they had carried headlines about my having been within an inch of being murdered, did I fully appreciate that they were correct—even to the distance! One inch! And yet at the time I had taken it so lightly.

There had been, in a seaport town, an alarming number of cases of seamen's letters being stolen or at least tampered with. Men, on returning to port, had posted money to their relatives, only to learn later that the money had never been received. I will not relate the story of my investigation as it is similar to one which I relate elsewhere.

Suffice it to say that one evening I returned to my hotel tired out after an arduous day of hanging around a dockside Post Office in the garb of a stevedore. The hotel—a small one near the docks—was one well favoured by sailors, and the dining-room was pretty full of seafarers—captains, mates and the like—who seemed to have been making "whoopee" in honour of a crew just returned from the Pacific.

I had changed into ordinary clothes, by the courtesy of a neighbouring police station, before I entered the hotel, so that I attracted no particular attention that I knew about. Placidly, therefore, I sat down and ordered a steak, which was my usual meal after a day's "hunting."

Convivality seemed to be the order of the day, but I was in no mood for it, and, as I sat eating, my mind was far away at work on the investigation problems which were baffling me.

Suddenly I felt someone near me and, turning my head slightly I bumped it into something steely and cold. In a flash I felt that the steel was the muzzle-end of a revolver. The steel moved away and I continued to turn my head slowly as though I had not noticed it, until, an inch from my eye, I saw the barrel of the weapon.

I had to think quickly. I had not seen the owner of the gun, for he was standing behind me. Was it a joke, or was I being threatened by one of the men whose tracks I had been watching during the day? It must have been an inspiration which came to me, for I just said, in an irritated voice:

"Take that —— thing away!" Then I continued to eat my steak.

Happily, among all the roystering, a seafaring man had seen what was happening, and crept up behind the man, who still held the gun, and dealt him a terrific blow on the side of the jaw. The man went down like the proverbial log.

Another man picked up the revolver, which he

found to be loaded. There was, of course, pandemonium in the room when the others saw the man fall, and during it I walked quietly out of the room and sat in the bar. It was not long before the proprietor of the hotel came to me with a white face.

"Well?" I asked, "and what was all *that* about?"

"The man should never have been in the hotel at all," he replied. "He's been warned off many a time. He's mad, sir, mad as a hatter, but they won't put him away. I hope you're not going to make trouble about it, sir, for my sake. I've given a pound to the man who socked him."

"M'm," I grunted. "I'm not so sure about not making any trouble about it."

As a matter of fact, trouble was the last thing I wished to make, for then my identity would have to be disclosed at a police court, and any further investigations of mine would have been impossible. Further, the proprietor satisfied me that my attacker had no reason in singling me out, and there the matter ended.

Some days later I caught the letter-thief culprits I had been seeking, and I left the sea-port with the revolver episode remaining in my mind merely as an unpleasant incident.

An unpleasant incident of a very different kind happened to me some years later in the Fulham area. I had been keeping observation around a number of mean streets, quite sure that no one had noticed my

frequent appearance. Then, one afternoon, as I was standing at the entry of a court, I felt a slight tap on my shoulder from behind.

"Excuse me," said a creaky old voice. "You've been standing about enough, haven't you? Come inside."

I turned to see an old woman of seventy or so.

She indicated a door a few yards up the court. Evidently she read my mind, for she followed up with:

"It's all right, I don't want to know your business, though I've seen you about for a good time. What I want to know is—can you write?"

"Er—yes, I can write," I answered. Then I noticed that there were tears in the old woman's eyes.

"Please come in, then," she implored. "I want you to write a letter. They don't like us about here, and I don't want to ask a neighbour. It *must* catch the five o'clock post."

She continued that it was urgent because her old brother, Bill, who stayed with them, had died. I therefore followed her through the door which led into a passage as dark as Egypt.

"Yes, I've got to let my brother in Scotland know that Bill's dead," she went on as we groped our way down the passage. "The funeral's on Wednesday."

Eventually we reached a small kitchen and from it came a peculiarly unpleasant smell. I looked round for some time before I could discern the contents of the room. I suggested a light and the old lady produced a candle.

"We've only got the two rooms," she said, but I was not interested. I wanted to write the letter and get away from that room as soon as possible.

When the candle was lighted I found that we were not the only occupants of the room, for, sitting with his head bowed on a small table was an old man who kept on moaning "Poor old Bill", with a dirge-like intonation.

Presently the old woman produced some grimy notepaper and very soon I had written a sympathetic letter informing the brother that "Poor old Bill" had passed over and that the funeral was to be on Wednesday.

I offered to post the letter, but apparently the poor old thing was in some difficulty, and I soon learnt that she had not the money to pay for a stamp. However, I soon eased her mind about that and dropped a half-crown on the table for her immediate needs.

I had been sitting facing the candle-light with my back to the wall, and pushed my chair back a little to allow me to rise from the table. I took a step backwards and was about to move to the door when the old lady, in an appealing manner, said:

"Perhaps you would like to see poor old Bill, sir?"

Now, if there is anything I dislike, it is viewing dead bodies, so I thanked her as graciously as I could and turned round to go. I made a quick step towards the passage door, bending my body to avoid the moaning man as I did so, when I tripped over

and fell sprawling across an open coffin which contained the remains of old Bill. It had been placed on the floor for lack of space. My hand touched something cold and clammy. . . .

Yes, there are times when one is glad to reach even the worst end of the Fulham Road. I know it did not take *me* long.

CHAPTER XXI

CRIME AND PENALTY

IN this concluding chapter I cannot refrain from mentioning a century-old case which has come to my mind every time I have spoken of one of "my" criminals being sent to prison, and I have thought how lucky he has been in not committing his crime a hundred years ago. The case is one reported in the *Bath Herald*, dated September 14th, 1811, and tells of a man who, for a Post Office crime, was sent to his death.

To-day many first offenders in Post Office crime are "bound over" under the system of a more lenient age, as you will frequently read in your newspapers. I am not against leniency, and on more than one occasion have been responsible for the exercise of it from the Bench, for my experience has taught me that long sentences of imprisonment have never yet stopped thefts in the Post.

I am glad, however, to record that the outside criminal who thinks the P.O. is just a corporation to be "stuck up" and shot at, is still receiving comparatively heavy sentences. Quite recently, as I write, a private letter-box thief received a term of seven years' penal servitude, though not, of course, for a first offence.

This is more the kind of thing one reads to-day about first offenders. I quote from a current paper before me:

"Charles Henry —— appeared at West London Police Court on a charge of stealing a letter containing value to the extent of 20*s*. After evidence of arrest had been given the prisoner, who had pleaded guilty, was bound over in his own recognizances, to be of good behaviour for twelve months."

And now read what happened to one, Arthur Baily, of Bath, who stole a letter from the Post Office of that town.

"Execution of Arthur Baily"

"On Wednesday morning, Arthur Baily was executed near Ilchester, pursuant to his sentence, for stealing a letter from the Bath Post Office, containing the property of Messrs. Slack, Linen-drapers, and for forging an Endorsement to one of the said Bills.

"He was taken out of prison a little after eight o'clock in the morning and placed in a cart; attended by Mr. Melliar, the under Sheriff; and the Chaplain of the prison in a chaise. He showed the greatest firmness on the way to the Fatal Tree; and when under the gallows, he joined fervently in prayer, and addressed the spectators audibly:—'I hope you will take warning,' and holding a prayer book in his hand, 'I hope and

beg you to look into this book, and you will not come to shame. Be sure to be honest, and, not covet money,—cursed money!—and particularly money that is not your own.' He was then deprived of his mortal state of existence, dying without a struggle.

"Shortly after his conviction Mr. Bridle, the keeper of the gaol, gave him a list of several letters reported to have been lost from the Bath Post Office, and which it is supposed he must have had some knowledge of. On this paper he wrote: 'I have clearly examined this list, and there is only one I really know of; must beg to be excused from saying which.—A.B.' On another part of it he adds: 'It has been said I have had concerns with others in the Post Office, now I do positively declare to God, I have had concerns with no one.—A.B.'

"Baily had some hopes of a Reprieve till Monday when his Solicitor informed him that all Applications to the Secretary of State, the Postmaster General, and to the Judge who tried him, were in vain. As the Prisoner before could only be brought to acknowledge the Crime for which he had been convicted, the under Sheriff in consequence of several Letters he had received to that Effect, thought he might be brought to make a further confession. Consequently, on Tuesday morning, after he had taken an affectionate and distressing Leave of his Wife and six Children, had received the Sacrament, and been left to himself and own

Reflections for some hours, Mr. Melliar, with much humanity, again urged him on the Matter, mentioning particular Letters which had been lost, and to which Baily firmly replied,—'I must request, Sir, you will not press me further on this subject; I have made a solemn engagement with Almighty God, that I will not disclose more than I have done, which I think would be heinous and additional Sin to break; If I had not made this Engagement, I would readily, Sir, answer all your Questions, and remove all Difficulties.' Afterwards he observed,—'I am about to suffer for what has been truly proved against me; all the rest must die with me.'

"Baily was a native of Ashburton, in Devonshire, was 37 years old, and came early in life to Bath, where he lived in some respectable Places, from whom he was strongly recommended to Mr. Price, Postmaster of this City. In this employ he conducted himself for seven Years, with great assiduity and to the perfect satisfaction of his Employer.

"About nine years since he married, and took a Public House near the bottom of St. James' Street, and afterwards removed to the Fox Inn, at Midford, on the Frome and Warminster Road, which Premises he purchased. Mr. Price always esteemed him as a faithful old Servant, and as such he had the Liberty to come to his House, and take his Meals with the other Clerks and Servants, under the Idea of rendering Assistance during the Hours of considerable Bustle: in the height of the

Bath Season, he was sometimes admitted into the Office; here the temptation of purloining Valuable Letters presented itself, and he was led to commit the Crime for which he has justly suffered. That he had been frequently guilty of similar Thefts, there is every reason to suppose, his motive for not disclosing in his last moments can scarcely be conjectured.

"The remains of this unfortunate Culprit were brought to this City last night and interred, about 12 o'clock in a Walled Grave, which he had made some time since in St. James' Vault. Notwithstanding the lateness of the Hour, a concourse of Persons, amounting it is supposed to nearly 2,000 attended to witness the Interment of this Victim of the Offended Laws of his Country."

Whenever I think of the case of Arthur Baily I am glad that there was no Investigation Branch in those days to swell the hangman's bag!