A SENSATIONAL LONG COMPLETE STORY OF THE C.I.D.

Chapter 1.

The Croucher Strikes.

Sir Richard Gilbert, the Chief Commissioner, sat at his desk in the austerely furnished room at Scotland Yard and gazed absently through the window at the efforts of a flashy tag to negotiate Westminster Bridge.

He was a slim, wiry man, with a grey-imperial beard and grizzled hair, an almost dandified figure with his braided morning coat and faultlessly creased trousers. He toyed with a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles that dangled from a silk cord about his cravat, and sighed a little.

It would be a wrench to leave this familiar room and to relinquish the duty of controlling the greatest police organisation in the world. But the time had been cast, and in a few hours he would have to welcome his successor to the post of commissioner.

A tap sounded at the door, and a uniformed policeman entered.

"The morning papers, sir," he said, depositing a bundle on the desk.

"Thank you, Bowers," said Sir Richard, in his dry, impersonal tones. He smiled wryly as the door closed.

No need to look at the newspapers to see what they contained. He had heard it in his resignation to the Home Secretary the previous night. The banner head of the "Daily Clarion" seemed to strike him like a blow between the eyes:

SCOTLAND YARD COMMISSIONER TO RESIGN!

It was the sensational climax to a sensational Press campaign which had had its repercussions in Parliament itself.

Sir Richard pursed his lips as he read the third-wool triumph in the "Daily Clarion's" leading article at the news, and the ably of his successor, General Sir Martin Dale. "Oh, well," the commissioner shrugged, if the public wanted a scapegoat, his shoulders were wide enough to bear the blame even of the Croucher's misdeeds, for, of course, it was the activities of that elusive criminal that originated the whole affair.

It was not until the tragic and untimely death of Lady Pamela Howard that the storm had burst, and the name of that enigmatic crook, the Croucher, achieved the fearsome notoriety of Jack the Ripper himself.

True, at Scotland Yard, they had long known of the Croucher's existence—and that was about all even the argus-eyed C.I.D. knew of the man responsible for the
Suddenly the door opened and Dorothy Somerville was led into the room by a masked man. The girl’s face was wan and pale. She had endured a terrible ordeal.

alarming increase of the cocaine traffic, not only in the West End but throughout the country.

Through the “Noes’ Gate,” a discreet, little portal which admitted shabbily, fur-
tive men into police H.Q. when daylight waned, meagre information trickled about
The Man Higher Up, as the Croucher was first known in the underworld. But the
information was very vague and unreliable, and when sifted and tabulated would scarcely have covered the surface of a
postage stamp.

Not even “Sheeny MacGuire,” most
knowledgeable of “noes,” had been able to
sniff out the slightest clue to the
Croucher’s identity.

It was Lady Pamela’s death from an
overdose of cocaine that brought matters
to a climax, for, in addition to being an
earl’s daughter, she had been a member of
the “Daily Clarion” staff. She had a
clever, moldant pen, and her bright para-
graphs of Society gossip were a popular
feature of that go-ahead newspaper.

Her sudden end came near to shocking
that most unshockable of thoroughfares—
Fleet Street. Young Maynard, “The
Clarion’s” star crime reporter, started
the wave of indignation which was to sweep
the country by a bitter attack on Scotland
Yard. He had been a friend of the dead
girl. He could write brilliantly, and had
his own peculiar methods of learning
what went on in the underworld in-
dependently of the police. He exposed the
alarming growth of the dope traffic, the
gradual but unmistakable increase in the
number of unsolved crimes, and mercilessly
criticised the C.I.D. It was he who nick-
named the hidden figure behind the cocaine
smugglers the Croucher, and pointed out
that the dope sniffer was as familiar a
figure in Mayfair Society as in the dingy
all-night cafes of the Tottenham Court
Road and Chinatown.

Backed by the vast resources of the
“Daily Clarion,” the campaign grew. The
public became uneasy as that newspaper,
with damning effect, printed daily a list
of unsolved crimes side by side with
trivial cases which failed because of the
policeman’s unscrupulous evidence.

The clamour grew for a general tighten-
ing up at Scotland Yard.

Questions were asked in Parliament, and
after an interview with the Home
Secretary, Sir Richard Gilbert handed in
his resignation.

He had spent his life in the service of
his country. For many years he had

served with distinction abroad in India
before being appointed head of the C.I.D.
He was by no means a popular man, but
he was respected. At Scotland Yard the
general attitude of his staff can be sum-
marised in the schoolboy’s definition of his
headmaster:

“He’s a beast—but he’s a just beast!”

“And now, I suppose,” he murmured
half-aloud as he folded the “Daily
Clarion,” “the Press is satisfied until they
get some other stunt.”

He pressed the ivory bell-push on his
desk, and a few moments later a tall, well-
built young man entered.

He had a frank almost ingenuous ex-
pression on his smooth, pink face that was
oddly boyish, his blue eyes had a twinkle
of humour, but his chin was resolute and
his lips betrayed firmness and decision be-
hind his mask of flippancy.

“Ah, New?” said Sir Richard. “Are
there any further developments in the
Whitechapel area?”

Detective Inspector Nicholas New shook
his head.

“Nothing further, sir. Berry pulled in
Larry Lomax. Found about half a kilo
of dope on him; but where he got it and
how, the Squidge only knows!”

“The what?” snapped Sir Richard
irritably.

“‘The Squidge, sir. An engaging
creature of my own invention. It is
closely related to other strange beasts who
made their appearance during the war.
Maybe you’ve heard of the Wosser, sir?"
The Thriller

The Squidgy is a sort of second cousin, twice removed."

"Are you mad, New?" gasped the scandalised commissioner. "What the deuce d'y mean by quoting nonsensical gibberish to me?"

"You asked me what a Squidgy was, sir," said Elliston, pleasantly, "I—I endeavoured to explain."

"Don't talk nonsense!" snapped the other irritably. "You are far too facetious. New. I wish you would hear me, New."

He broke into a hurried statement, and a tap sounded on the door, and then said crisply "Come in!"

A bronzed, soldierly-looking man with a close clipped grey moustache and chin in an image of strict, entered, and bowed rather formally.

"The retiring commissioner rose to his feet.

"Ah! Good-morning, general! Pray come in," he added cordially. "This will be your kingdom. He made a gesture that embraced the aesthetically-furnished room that overlooked the Thames. It was an airy, workmanlike place with a roll-top desk, half a dozen comfortable chairs, a telephone, and a three-valve wireless set near the bookcase.

"Inspector New. This is your new commissioner, General Sir Marton Dale."

Nicholas New's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Hallo, Uncle Kimbo?" he said. "Two coppers in the family—eh? Aunt Araminta'll have galleping hystericis!"

"New?" thundered the scandalised Sir Richard. "How dare you have the internal impudence to—"

"It's only Nick's nonsense," broke in General Dale, with a chuckle. "I—I—ahem—have the misfortune to be his uncle. Isn't he, Nick?"

"God bless my soul!" gasped Sir Richard. "How long have you been in the force, New?"

"Since the Armistice, sir," replied Nick. "I'm afraid the family have never quite forgiven me for becoming a policeman. They'll blame me now for having a bad influence on Uncle Bim, I suppose," he added.

"But this is astonishing," said Sir Richard. "I know your promotion has been rapid and well deserved, but—"

He flung up his hands in a helpless gesture.

Inspector New winked at his uncle, who turned to Sir Richard.

"I understand from the Home Secretary that your resignation does not take effect till the end of the month, and you have suggested you will be pleased to remain and show me the ropes."

"That is so," said Sir Richard rather stiffly. "In the circumstances, as I pointed out to the Home Secretary, it would hardly be fair to you, general, to expect you to turn your back on the Metropolitan until they are ready to replace you immediately."

"It is exceedingly kind of you," said General Dale. "I am a soldier, and there are bound to be very many points in connection with my new job on which only you could advise me sincerely."

Sir Richard bowed.

"I shall be most happy to co-operate," he remarked cordially, and Inspector New saw that the two men, being two united women, had tactfully avoided that rather awkward problem of their future relationship.

"Perhaps, as a preliminary," said Sir Richard briskly, "I had better show you round the station and introduce—"

There was a knock at the door, and a policeman entered with a letter.

"By express messenger, sir," he announced, handing it to the retiring commissioner.

With a murmured apology, Sir Edward tore open the envelope and scanned its contents through his pince-nez.

"Er—no reply, Bowers, he said to the hovering policeman. As soon as the door had closed, he turned to Nick with a perplexed expression. "What the deuce d'y make of that—oh?" he demanded.

Nick took the document. It was neatly typed on a sheet of yellow notepaper, and ran as follows:

"Commiserations, commissioner, but resignation, like patriotism, is not enough. Scotland Yard is getting uncomfortably warm. I must remove a few of the more meddlesome ones to discourage the others. I never warn twice."

"Sheeny Macguire died very suddenly at 3 a.m. this morning you will be sorry to learn. He knew too much. You and others are on my list."

The Crocuses.

At the corner of the sheet was a roughly-drawn picture of a choking woman in a dagger poised to strike.

Nicholas New wrinkled his brows with surprise. "It's certainly a remarkable document, sir," he announced. "May I examine it further?"

"You don't think it can be genuine, New?" asked Sir Richard. "It sounds absurdly melodramatic to me. What do you say, general?"

"Egad!" said the general. "I'm dashed hazy about the whole business. The Press have been screeching about the Croucher for weeks, but—"

Breezing the phone bell tinkled sharply, and Sir Richard raised the receiver. He listened for a few moments, then his face became very grave.

"Very good, Berry. I'll send New along at once," he said. He turned to Nick. "That was Berry, of E Division, speaking," he announced. "The man Macguire was found stabbed to the heart twenty minutes ago, in Stonewall Street, Pimlico."

THE SINISTER MR. SIN.

"I'm afraid Sheeny was an unpleasant fellow and got what was coming to him," remarked Nicholas New to his shining companion later in the day. "I dislike noises—except when they are set on a fair man, and when feminine counterfeiting, he added gallantly.

"Don't be personal, Mr. New," said Miss Dorothy Somerville, hurriedly opening her vanity case, and dabbing a powder puff on her delightfully audacious nose. She took a half-coquetish glance at her reflection in the little oval mirror, and

pushed back a rebellious curl beneath the brim of her tight-fitting cloche hat. Her tailored suit, though simple and un conspicuous, had a subtle effect on enhancing the graceful figure of her slim figure. She was, Nick considered judicially, far too pretty to have anything to do with a police force, and yet Nicholas had sophisticated young women had held a secretarial post at Scotland Yard for two years.

She came daily into contact with the seamy side of London life and still maintained a diffidence of outlook that was a source of continual surprise to the C.I.D. man.

They were dining now—an alfresco meal at a small Spanish cafe in Soho. There was no orchestra, the clientele, like the menu, was pleasantly varied, and the aloof in which their table was set distinct, but not too discreetly, separated from the rest of the diners.

"Scotland Yard seems to be getting it in the neck," announced Dorothy. "That horrid young man on the 'Daily Clarion' ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Who, Billy Maynard?" asked Nicholas. "Not he. He's hard-boiled, Miss Somerville. No young no-calendar men were born without a sense of shame."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Dorothy. "But I always do," pleaded Nicholas. "If you know the longer I live in this wicked world, the more I realise that nonsense is the greatest thing in life."

"Precisely what do you mean?" she asked, with an adorable pout. "I know you're always quoting absurd limericks and inventing all sorts of preposterous animals, like that silly Oogle you mentioned this morning."

"The Oogle!" said Nicholas solemnly. "A well-meant, but rather ineffectual beast, I am afraid."

He began to quote solemnly:

"The Oogle does abhor a Snark, and often when the nights are dark—"

"Oh, stop, do!" pleaded the girl. "I really think you're quite crazy at times, Mr. New."

"My dear girl, I'm perfectly serious. Nonsense is the one thing to keep me sane in this sordid profession of mine. I like to talk about the Incongruous, for instance, it's all nonsense that a delightful girl like you should be earning your living in the dull and sordid surroundings of Scotland Yard, when you could do better."

"Please don't!" she broke in hurriedly. "I love the work, the hours are short, the salary is adequate, and—er—have compensations."

She glanced through her very long eyelashes at Nick, and that peculiar young man felt oddly embarrassed.

Nicholas New's strange personality was an interestingly tantalising one. One could not know whether to take him seriously or not. When, after the Armistice, he had been demobbed, a mere stripping of twenty, after two years war service in the R.A.F., he announced to his scandalised family that he intended to join the police force.

"But that's all nonsense!" said his mother, Lady New, widow of that distinguished diplomat, Sir T. S. P."

"Precisely," Nicholas had agreed blandly. "That's why I'm doing it."

He served two years as a uniformed constable in the C.I.D. His smart cap and Wally the Dip and his gallantries attracted the attention of his superiors, who transferred him to the plain clothes branch of the C.I.D. His promotion was rapid. His methods were terribly unorthodox—but he got away with it.
It was at the 99 Club that Nicholas New first heard of the Croucher. That engaging con. man, "Gold Brick" Brady, let fall a few casual remarks that a big noise was "a-pistol-waiting-thick and heavy in the air. From him it was Nick gleaned that all the little "snowmen" of Limehouse and the Tottenham Court Road, mainly comprising the so-called "overcoated waiters," had all suddenly become affluentes—and not only affluentes, but wealthy.

Even when the Flying Squad pulled in a dozen or more of such old hands at the garage next door to Limehouse Ltd., "Shanty" Harris, and "Snitcher" Marks, they gleaned little of the source from which they obtained the deadly white drug. Nick also learned that the "Blackers" were growing active again—active and aggressive, and that was a bad sign, for the blackmailing gangs of the West End are the most difficult of all criminals to round up. Despite the repeated assurances of the Press and police that the victims’ names would not be disclosed in open court, scores of highly-placed people hesitated to come forward and give evidence, and preferred to pay hush money to the Blackers.

Some were driven to the coward’s way out of their troubles as the demands of their creditors became intolerable, and the increasing number of suicides supported the "Clarion’s" theory that a colossal crime had entered the lists in the never-ending battle between the police and the underworld.

Inspector New, in his own whimsical fashion, made discreet and strictly illegal inquiries among his crook friends, but not even the most highly-placed of them could be led upon "to come across" with any information against the Croucher.

And now Sheeny MacGuire, that most reliable of reliable lists of nosies was killed—murdered, undoubtedly, because he knew, or suspected, the Croucher’s identity. There was no clue. His body had been found by a policeman behind an advertisement board on a plot of waste ground in Pinlco. He had been stabbed to the heart. There was no trace of a weapon. Not a scrap of paper or a coin in the dead man’s pockets.

Sheeny MacGuire had not been a particularly pleasant person in life. In death, Nick recalled with a slight shiver, he was repellant. He had seen dead rats that re- minded him of Sheeny as he saw him last on the mortuary slab.

"Don’t look round!" whispered Dorothy Somerville. "Somebody seems to be watching you very closely. A Chinaman.

Nick New proffered his cigarette-case. The girl took one, and as he held a match to its tip, he slowly swivelled round. His action was perfectly natural, and for a fleeting moment his eyes rested on the occasioned spectacle.

It was a Chinese. The man’s smooth, hairless face was as yellow as a lemon, the slanting shoe eyes watched Nicholas and the girl impressively. He was dressed in a trim grey cashmere dress-suit. Nick noted that the cigarette he held between his slim, saffron fingers was black. It was an odd, incongruous detail that appealed to his observation.

"Queer!" he murmured, pouring out a glass of wine. "He may, or may not be, interested in us. One is always inclined to think that all Chinese are inscrutable and sinister. Ways that are dark and tricks that are vain, and all that! But that’s nonsense, and so I’m inclined to believe it," he added.

"You’re incorrigible, Mr. New," said Dorothy. "Tell me, do you really think that the Croucher exists, or is he simply a product of the fertile imagination of the ‘Clarion’ reporter?"

"Of course he exists," said Nick seriously. "If we only had Sheeny’s murder to go on, I might be inclined to doubt it. A mad desperate to make the best of the two possible worlds—the Under and the Over, and generally ends in the next," he added dryly. "A score of people might have stabbed Sheeny, but that letter this morning shows that the Croucher is getting nervous or vain. Both..."

"Look! Look! That ghastly face," he cried, pointing a shaky finger at the dirty window pane.

There was a curious reserve about her, however, at times that intrigued him.

He glimpsed a wiry, ferret-faced little man hovering uncertainly at the tail of the crowd boarding a West-bound bus, and his blue eyes hardened.

"Well! Well! Shifty!" he murmured pleasantly, as his muscular hand shot out and grasped the little man’s arm. "Fancy meeting you here! And only just out of the ‘Ville, too! Dear, dear, how indiscreet!"

"Shifty" Lee, one of the cleverest dips who ever worked the bus queues, turned with a snarl.

"Leggo my arm, you big stiff! I tell you..."

"Tut! Tut!" said Nicholas gently. He signalled to a burly red-faced man, who strolled out from the shadow of a theatre canopy.

A present for you, Willis," he said, handing over the squirming little pick-pocket. "Pull him in."

He began to hum softly a chorus tune from the latest revue, but broke off suddenly as his fingers encountered an envelope in his pocket. He drew it out, and saw that it was addressed to himself in typescript. With a puzzled frown he tore open the envelope, and read the brief, last-minute message. It contained three words:

"You are next!" and it was signed the Croucher.

Nick whistled. He was certain the message was not in his overcoat pocket when he entered the restaurant. That meant that he was being trailed, and the envelope must have been slipped there during the past eight minutes.

Suddenly he recalled the Chinaman who had passed him in the restaurant.

"My gosh!" said Nicholas New. "I wonder?"

He thrust the note into his breast pocket, and stood for a moment or two irresolutely on the kerb, watching the stream of traffic at the corner of Piccadilly Circus, the centre of the world. Ablaze with light, its sky signs shot heavenwards cascades
cades of coloured fire. Above the theatres, thousands of electric bulbs winked and glowed like monster fireflies, while from Shaftesbury Avenue poured the ever-moving body of peopled theatresland. Expensive limousines purred feline and catlike at the exits, a hawk in rags stood in the gutter holding out a tray of bootlaces.

A young man with a thin, emaciated face, held aloft a banner foretelling the wrath to come. Contrast — tragedy — comedy. The night life of the world's metropolis. All those familiar to Nicholas New.

Suddenly he started forward. In a momentary jam of the traffic he glimpsed a luxurious cab, rakishly built for speed, judging by the greyhound trace of her streamlined body. Lounging in the tonneau was an elegant figure in a silk-lined opera cloak with a jewelled order ornamenting his chiffon shirt-front on a stash of moiré silk.

It was the mysterious Chinaman, and as Nick gazed at him his yellow face relaxed into a mocking smile, and he waved a kid-gloved hand.

Headless of the traffic the detective dashed through the gulf, but at that moment the temporary jam cleared, and the grey car shot forward like an arrow from a bow. Nick memorised the number-plate, and looked vainly for a taxi to take in pursuit. By the time he had hailed one, the grey car and its mysterious occupant had vanished.

"Scotland Yard — quick!" said Nicholas New.

Down the Haymarket, into Trafalgar Square and through Whitehall the taxi threaded its way with what seemed madmening success.

Nick fumed impatiently. He wanted to verify that number-plate.

Outside the grim, barricade-like building at the end of Whitehall the taxi drew up, and Nick hurriedly alighted.

Even as he stepped under the archway of Scotland Yard a tall, elegant figure emerged.

"Ah, Inspector New," cooed a musical, rather sibilant voice. "This is indeed fortunate. I was about to leave a written message for you, as it is. I can deliver it in person."

With difficulty Nick repressed a start of astonishment, for confronting him was the Chinaman, dressed like a monk, but his smile was bland, revealing a perfect set of white, even teeth.

"Indeed?" snapped the detective. "Who the devil are you? I've seen you before twice to-night," he added.

"Allow me to present my card," returned the other in impeccable English. From a small case, he opened a damasked gold cover and抽出 a card bearing the name of Dr. Pangloss. Its fitted case was elaborately etched.

"Professor Li, Sin, D.Sc.,
University of Peking."

Nick looked up at him, but the Chinaman's voice, hairless face was a mask of impassivity.

"You'd better come along inside with me —er—professor," he said grimly.

"Thank you, I would prefer not to," replied the arbiter.

"I have rather an urgent appointment."

"I don't know what your game is," snapped Nick. "You come along in and answer a few questions."

"I think not," said the other. "My name is Sin— not Saviage. The message I wished to deliver to you is very brief. Beware of The Croucher."

Almost before Nick realised it, the man had climbed into his grey limousine and had gone.

THE HOUSE OF LARRY.

INSPECTOR NICHOLAS NEW was an equable man. He very seldom lost his temper, but the calm enfrantry of the band Chinaman, whom he had shot in the arm, made him feel nervously. He frowned irritably and barely acknowledged the salute of the policeman on gate duty as he entered Scotland Yard.

"Get me this number verified," he snapped.

"What did that Chinink want?"

"I couldn't say, sir. He simply asked if you were not the gentleman who was here earlier. When I told him you were out, he said something about leaving a message—and then you turned up."

"Huh?" said Nick. "Hurry the Traffic Dept. I want that number badly."

He mounted the steps towards his room, his footsteps echoing hollowly down the dim suit corridors. Most of the C.I.D. were off that night, and the only light that dulled was pulled out the deposits concerning the murder of Sheeny MacGuire.

There was very little indeed in the way of clues to go upon. Sheeny, being an in-

EDGAR WALLACE

AGAIN

NEXT WEEK!

former, was despised by the police, and hated by the criminality. In no dozen criminal men might he have murdered him, but that letter from the Croucher was significant. He pulled out the last note of warning he had received that night, and compared it with the note received by the commissioner.

Both had evidently been typed by the same machine—a portable Underwood. There was the same malformation of the letter "h", and the slight eccentricity of alignment. He placed them both in a buff envelope and sealed it.

"I'll let Brownlow have a go at 'em," he murmured. "But I'm not so damned ignorant."

Inspector Brownlow was in charge of the finger-print department, and had also an encyclopaedic knowledge of typewriters.

The phone bell rang suddenly, and Nick lifted it from the table.

He recognised the voice of Bill Maynard, of the "Daily Clarion."

"What is it?" he demanded. "No thing fresh about Sheeny. What's that?"

He listened intently to the disjointed information that came over the wires.

"You've had a letter from the Croucher, you say?" he demanded.

"Yes," said the journalist. "Came by district messenger an hour back. It doesn't frighten me. Matter of fact, I'm running a facsimile of it in to-morrow's rag and had better be prepared."

A letter reached me this morning from a joint in Shadwell. It's very vague, but the writer hints he knows something about the Croucher."

"Who wrote it?" demanded the Yard man.

"It's a signed simply— One who you know. I'll repeat devil, I should imagine, but I'm following it up. I thought maybe if you've any info we could trade."

"Almost before Nick realised it, the man had climbed into his grey limousine and had gone.

THE HOUSE OF LARRY.

INSPECTOR NICHOLAS NEW was an equable man. He very seldom lost his temper, but the calm enfrantry of the band Chinaman, whom he had shot in the arm, made him feel nervously. He frowned irritably and barely acknowledged the salute of the policeman on gate duty as he entered Scotland Yard.

"Get me this number verified," he snapped.

"What did that Chinink want?"

"I couldn't say, sir. He simply asked if you were not the gentleman who was here earlier. When I told him you were out, he said something about leaving a message—and then you turned up."

"Huh?" said Nick. "Hurry the Traffic Dept. I want that number badly."

He mounted the steps towards his room, his footsteps echoing hollowly down the dim suit corridors. Most of the C.I.D. were off that night, and the only light that dulled was pulled out the deposits concerning the murder of Sheeny MacGuire.

There was very little indeed in the way of clues to go upon. Sheeny, being an in-

EDGAR WALLACE

AGAIN

NEXT WEEK!

former, was despised by the police, and hated by the criminality. In no dozen criminal men might he have murdered him, but that letter from the Croucher was significant. He pulled out the last note of warning he had received that night, and compared it with the note received by the commissioner.

Both had evidently been typed by the same machine—a portable Underwood. There was the same malformation of the letter "h", and the slight eccentricity of alignment. He placed them both in a buff envelope and sealed it.

"I'll let Brownlow have a go at 'em," he murmured. "But I'm not so damned ignorant."

Inspector Brownlow was in charge of the finger-print department, and had also an encyclopaedic knowledge of typewriters.

The phone bell rang suddenly, and Nick lifted it from the table.

He recognised the voice of Bill Maynard, of the "Daily Clarion."

"What is it?" he demanded. "No thing fresh about Sheeny. What's that?"

He listened intently to the disjointed information that came over the wires.

"You've had a letter from the Croucher, you say?" he demanded.

"Yes," said the journalist. "Came by district messenger an hour back. It doesn't frighten me. Matter of fact, I'm running a facsimile of it in to-morrow's rag and had better be prepared."

A letter reached me this morning from a joint in Shadwell. It's very vague, but the writer hints he knows something about the Croucher."

"Who wrote it?" demanded the Yard man.

form-

"It's a signed simply— One who you know. I'll repeat devil, I should imagine, but I'm following it up. I thought maybe if you've any info we could trade."

"Almost before Nick realised it, the man had climbed into his grey limousine and had gone.

THE HOUSE OF LARRY.

INSPECTOR NICHOLAS NEW was an equable man. He very seldom lost his temper, but the calm enfrantry of the band Chinaman, whom he had shot in the arm, made him feel nervously. He frowned irritably and barely acknowledged the salute of the policeman on gate duty as he entered Scotland Yard.

"Get me this number verified," he snapped.

"What did that Chinink want?"

"I couldn't say, sir. He simply asked if you were not the gentleman who was here earlier. When I told him you were out, he said something about leaving a message—and then you turned up."

"Huh?" said Nick. "Hurry the Traffic Dept. I want that number badly."

He mounted the steps towards his room, his footsteps echoing hollowly down the dim suit corridors. Most of the C.I.D. were off that night, and the only light that dulled was pulled out the deposits concerning the murder of Sheeny MacGuire.

There was very little indeed in the way of clues to go upon. Sheeny, being an in-

EDGAR WALLACE

AGAIN

NEXT WEEK!

former, was despised by the police, and hated by the criminality. In no dozen criminal men might he have murdered him, but that letter from the Croucher was significant. He pulled out the last note of warning he had received that night, and compared it with the note received by the commissioner.

Both had evidently been typed by the same machine—a portable Underwood. There was the same malformation of the letter "h", and the slight eccentricity of alignment. He placed them both in a buff envelope and sealed it.

"I'll let Brownlow have a go at 'em," he murmured. "But I'm not so damned ignorant."

Inspector Brownlow was in charge of the finger-print department, and had also an encyclopaedic knowledge of typewriters.

The phone bell rang suddenly, and Nick lifted it from the table.

He recognised the voice of Bill Maynard, of the "Daily Clarion."

"What is it?" he demanded. "No thing fresh about Sheeny. What's that?"

He listened intently to the disjointed information that came over the wires.

"You've had a letter from the Croucher, you say?" he demanded.

"Yes," said the journalist. "Came by district messenger an hour back. It doesn't frighten me. Matter of fact, I'm running a facsimile of it in to-morrow's rag and had better be prepared."

A letter reached me this morning from a joint in Shadwell. It's very vague, but the writer hints he knows something about the Croucher."

"Who wrote it?" demanded the Yard man.
done. I don’t bear any personal animosity towards any of you at the Yard—it’s your methods I condemn.”

“Cut the cackle,” said Nick. “Let’s see the other note.”

He took the unsavoury looking sheet of paper. It was grimy and dog-eared, and the following message was scrawled in pencil:

Dere Sir,

I no somethink about the Crowther, but shan’t be none on him to your office or the Yard. If you call tomorrow nite at No. 4 Bakewell St Shadwell at midnight I can tell you somethink. Ask for Larry.

One Who Knows.

“If I’m!” said the detective, examining the envelope. “Posted last night in Commercial Road, written by a man. Not very illuminating, is it?”

From the tonneau of the car two vicious tongues of flame spat out. Bill Maynard clutched convulsively at his chest, then stumped down the wall.

The newspaper man shrugged.

“It’s worth trying, anyhow. Like to come? I’ve got the old bus outside.”

“Of course, I’m coming,” said Nicholas New. “It’s probably a trap of some sort—but we’ll risk that.”

Together they entered Maynard’s weather-beaten roadster and headed eastward. It was nearly midnight, and the traffic roar had died down a little as they bowed along through Aldgate and Commercial Road.

“Got your gut?” Nicholas jerked out as they neared the malodorous dockside of Shadwell.

Maynard grinned.

“Yes. Do you want to see the licence?” he said cynically. “Bakewell St. has somewhere round here, I believe. Old Beng Lee used to have a chop suey joint at the corner of it, I believe, before it was raided for puck-a-poo and chanty.”

They found it at last, a narrow, gloomy street of such depressing uniformity that it not out in ten minutes,” said Maynard, “I’ll do the needful.”

Nick’s face was very grim and purposeful as he strolled down Bakewell Street. One or two lights glimmered in the windows, but mostly the street was shrouded in darkness. A dark mist was rising from the river, and the head of a steamer’s syren floated mournfully through the fog. The detective halted before the paint-blistered door of No. 4, behind the fanlight of which flickered a gas-jet.

He knocked gently, for loud rat-tats are apt to scare the inhabitants of Shadwell’s salubrious neighbourhood.

Not a sound came from the dark, dilapidated house. Nick scratched his chin and knocked a second time—somewhat louder. The door swung soundlessly open and his hand sprang to his hip. Every nerve in his body was tense as he peered ahead into the gloom of the corridor. He flashed on his electric torch. Save for a rickety chair the hallway was deserted. Wallpaper pealed The man’s swarthy face was wet with sweat; he seemed to be a half-breed, and he gasped painfully, fighting for breath.

“Are you Larry?” demanded Nick.

“Brace up, man, tell me what’s happened.”

The man opened his lids and turned two glaring eyes towards the detective.

“I’m Larry. Larry the Wop,” he croaked hoarsely. “He got me, the cuss, got me—”

A terrible fit of coughing tore from his constricted chest, and the crimson stream widened.

“Quick!” snapped Nicholas New. “Who is the Croucher? Tell me. Don’t be afraid!”

“The Croucher,” gasped the dying man painfully. “The Croucher is—”

A bubbling scream of horror welled from his ashen lips as his gaze turned towards the window.

“Look! Look! That face, that ghastly—” he shrilled, pointing a shaky finger at the dirty window-pane.
Nick swung round. From the swelling mists of fog he glimpsed a smooth, hairless face, mocking, sardonic.

It was the face of the mysterious Mr. Sin.

He raced across the room, and, with an effort, flung open the sash.

Crack! Crack! His automatic spoke twice. A low, nocking laugh seemed to float from the depths of the dark river mist.

Larry the Wop, mumbling painfully, strove to speak. Nick bent low to hear his whispered words.

"The Croucher is—" he gasped, and suddenly a convulsive shudder ran through his limbs, and the death rattle sounded hideously in his scrawny throat. The One Who Knew had carried his secret to the grave.

For a moment or two, Nick gazed down at the body. He felt slightly sick with the suddenness of it all, but his first reaction was one of rage against that bland and smiling Celestial who called himself Li Sin.

He clambered over the window-sill and dropped, lithie as a cat, into the garbage-strewn, asphalted courtyard, and flashed his torch through the muck. There was no sign of the Chinaman, but a dotted creaking on its hinges, gave access to a narrow alley-way, down which the detective sped. It debouched on the dilapidated warehouse where Maynard had parked his car. There came a snapping painfully for breath. Nicholas New was just in time to see a high-powered limousine driven at frantic haste through the fog, its yellow headlights glaring like monstrous cat's eyes. Then from the tonneau of the car two vicious tongues of flame spat out, and the next instant, Bill Maynard, pacing the opposite pavement, clutched convulsively at his chest, then slumped head forward to the ground without a cry. Nick ground out an oath between tight-clenched teeth. Lungs almost bursting, he raced after the death car, but it was a hopeless task.

From his pocket he drew out a police whistle and blew three long, urgent blasts, then turned back to where, on the pavement, sprawled the limp, lifeless body of the newspaperman.

Reverting, Nick turned over Maynard's body. One quick, cursory glance showed that he had been shot through the heart. In the rays of the detective's torch, the dead man's face held a faint, surprised expression. His death must have been practically instantaneous. Thought Nick, as he lowered the body to the dank pavement. Then, suddenly, a gust of fury seized Nicholas New, stark, berserker rage that shook him as a mighty wind shakes a sapling. He forgot his seven of training to repress emotion in times of crisis. A fierce, inexpressible fury against the foul and cowardly murderer who had shot down his friend. Maynard in cold blood suffused his being.

"By—" he swore. "I'll get the Croucher if it's the last thing I do in this world. I'm the one the police are after, and my voice was husky, "I'll see you are avenged!"

From the gloom ahead came the sound of heavy, running footsteps, and a moment later two uniformed policemen emerged from the fog.

"What's all this?" demanded one, a grizzled sergeant, suspiciously.

"Murder!" rasped Nicholas New. "Quick, one of you, get the ambulance! There are two more victims to be added to the Croucher's list!"

"The Croucher!" the sergeant, then, suddenly recognizing Nick, saluted smartly.

"Where's the other chap, sir?"

"Round the corner," answered the detective curtly. "Chap named Larry the Wop. Knows something."

"Phew!" whistled the sergeant. "So Larry's got it. It was coming to him a long time. He's one of Brilliant Ling's men."

"He was," corrected Nick significantly. "His running days are over now, poor chap!"

THE CLIENTS OF MR. AMBROSE ERTZ.

Miss Dorothy Somerville was down the steps of her little house in the quiet, little street off the King's Road, Chelsea, at exactly 8.30 a.m. and, following her invariable custom, bought a copy of the "Daily Clarion" at the bus stop opposite the Town Hall.

Save for a subtle air of refinement about her carriage and the quiet distinction of her neat dove-grey costume, there was little to distinguish her from a score of other City-bound girl clerks and typists who boarded the No. 11 bus.

She opened her paper cursorily enough, and suddenly a blaze of headlines met her gaze:

With an oath, Mr. Ertz swung round and found himself gazing at the bland, unruffled figure of Professor Li Sin.

£5,000 REWARD FOR CAPTURE OF THE CROUCHER!

Dorothy gasped as she read the news of the dastardly crime in Shadwell. The present high at Hitherto she had been inclined to think that the Croucher was a partly mythical crook—existed mainly in the fertile imagination of the "Clarion's" reporter, but now as she read the stark account of the murder of Bill Maynard, a little tremor of fear seized her. It was only too horribly true. The report in the newspaper was meagre enough, but she thrilled a little as she read the significant sentence:

"Detective Inspector Nicholas New, who is in charge of the case, and was actually present when the dastardly crime was committed, is in possession of a valuable clue to the identity of this master criminal, who is evidently bent on incurring a reign of terror."

It was with rising impatience that she continued the journey from Victoria to Westminster, and at Parliament Square the climax came, through the drab courtyard of Scotland Yard with a good deal of suppressed excitement.

Dorothy arrived at her desk where she noticed that a locked envelope had been entered, and a queer little pang shot through her as she noticed how careworn and haggard his usually cheerful face appeared.

He flashed her a little smile of greeting.

"Well, Miss Somerville. The Croucher's sprung at last with a vengeance," he remarked. "Two in one night, and if I hadn't been lucky I'd have been a third!"

"Oh, don't! It's ghastly to think of it. Mr. New?" said Dorothy, taking her coat and hat, and seating herself at her desk. "And to think I spoke so horribly about poor Mr. Maynard last night. Is— is there any clue at all to the Croucher?"

"A dozen, but they have all to be sifted and sorted," he announced. "Bowers is working on the notes for the insomniac got the drag-net out for all cars, I'm covering the diwes. We'll get him, never fear. I wish you'd type these documents as soon as possible, Miss Somerville," he added. "I've got to report to the commissioner. Tough luck on my poor uncle taking over at this time; fortunately, Sir Richard's there to help him."

He rose to his feet and laid a mass of closely written reports on her desk. He noticed the tired strain in his eyes and the grimness about his lips. This was a different Nicholas from the gay, inconsequential joker of nonsense of last evening's little dinner-party.

Nick tapped at the door of the commissioner's room. His uncle was pacing restlessly up and down the rug, hands clasped behind his back, while Sir Richard was giving instructions to Inspector Myers of the Flying Squad.

"Pull them all in if they can give no satisfactory account of themselves," he was saying. "Some-one's bound to know the Croucher's haunts. He cannot possibly work without accomplices. This reward the 'Clarion's' offering will help, of course. Ah, New, he added, turning to Nick. "Find anything further about this man, Larry the Wep?"

"I did, sir. He's been in twice for dope peddling—years back. Used to work for that Chink, Brilliant Ling, we deported. I wouldn't be surprised not to slip into the country again, and is backed by a cleverer rogue than himself."

"It's feasible, of course," said Sir Richard, tapping at his imperial. Poor Maynard, murmured a cycle of criticism against us now, of course, so we'll have to strain every nerve to get the Croucher. This is particularly unfortunate for you, gentlemen; you have to deal with two spectacular murders on your very first day of office."

"Confound it, yes!" fumed the general. "Fortunately, I have your valuable advice, but I almost wish I hadn't allowed the Home Secretary to persuade me to take on the post. Damme, sir!" he added explosively. "Judging by what I've seen of
Scotland Yard’s inner organisation, this Croucher chappie hasn’t a snowball’s chance in Hades. The public simply don’t know—they’re misled by cheap newspaper criticism of the finest police force in the world. Just because we don’t catch a criminal red-handed, or in a few hours, they seem to think the whole organisation ought to be scrapped—and stashed, I suppose, by a lot of Fleet Street pen-pushers!” he added bitterly.

Nick smiled.

“I’m following up the Brilliant Ling lead, sir,” he announced. “There were very little indeed to go on in Larry’s bedroom. He had only inhabited the place a week. The divisional surgeon reports that he must have been stabbed half an hour before my arrival. May I have a free hand?”

“Heavens, said Sir Richard. “And by the way, Myers”—he turned to the Flying Squad chief—“it’s as well to raid the Tottenham Court Road clubs in addition to the East End joints.”

In the aperture appeared a black garbed figure, his face completely hidden by a mask. “The Croucher!” gasped Ertz.

“Very good, sir. I'll instruct Winslow in the matter,” replied Myers. “I was won over by your logic.”

The phone bell shrilled sharply, and Sir Richard lifted the receiver. As he listened his face contorted with rage.

‘Who is that?” he snapped. “A bomb! Good gad! The murderous scoundrel will stop at nothing! Of course I’ll be along at once.”

He turned to the others, and his voice shook a little.

“A bomb exploded in my flat ten minutes ago, gentlemen,” he said quietly. “If I hadn’t left half an hour earlier than usual this morning, the Croucher would have fulfilled his threat.”

He sank into a chair, and his face was pale and twitching.

“Great Scott!” ejaculated Nicholas New. “Are there any casualties, sir?”

“None, fortunately, according to the sergeant on duty,” replied the other. “My

men, Hynes, was out shopping, but my study and dining-room are completely wrecked.”

Nick felt sorry for his old chief; the stern martinet had known the windows had suddenly become strangely old and feeble.

“Egad, Gilbert!” snapped the general. “This—it’s damnable! The murderer’s villain must have an organised gang. I suppose I’m the next on his list!”

Sir Richard rose to his feet, slightly more composed now.

“Mr. Myers, I’ll come with you in a tender to see the extent of the damage,” he announced. “He’ll try again, of course,” he added. “Please, Heaven, that’ll be his undoing. Criminals nearly always overreach themselves in the end!”

Bedford Row, that eminently respectable thoroughfare off the Gray’s Inn Road, housed a no more respectable-looking tenant than Mr. Ambrose Ertz, whose neat brass plate outside the door of his mellow

roundings. His grey hair was brushed smoothly back from the forehead, and his plump, well-kept fingers drummed a tattoo on the desk before him. He affected a monocle with a tortoiseshell rim, and this he screwed into his eye as he scanned an afternoon edition of the “Evening News.”

He chuckled his tongue in disapproval as he read.

“Dear me! How shocking!” he murmured. “What will the Croucher do next? Bombing the Scotland Yard Commissioner’s House indeed! Dreadful! Dreadful!”

Something in the account of the Croucher’s latest outrage seemed to amuse Mr. Ertz, for his eyes twinkled as he pushed the ivory bell-push on his desk.

A thin, stoop-shouldered man well past middle age entered the room. He was dressed in rusty black, his cadaverous face ornamented with his beautiful copper plate. He looked exactly what he wasn’t, a studious, rather dull lawyer’s clerk.

“Ah, Stephens!” said Mr. Ertz, with a smile. “Have you finished that letter?”

“I have,” said Stephens. “What a darn good job I made of it, chief, if you ask me.”

The geniality vanished from the eyes of Mr. Ertz.

“I didn’t ask you,” he snapped. “And don’t use that tone during business hours. Let’s see the note.”

Stephens pulled a folded piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Ertz, who scanned it narrowly through his monocle.

“You won’t find any fault with that if you were to use a microscope,” said Stephens, baring his yellow teeth in a grin.

“That’ll get Mr. Nosey New and—”

“That’ll do, you fool!” snarled Ertz, and his face twisted into an ugly grin.

“Do you want to see the T piece at eight on a chilly morning?”
A flicker of fear stole for a moment in the unseen eyes of Mr. "Phoney" Stephens, ex-engraver, and now one of the cleverest forgers in Europe. He stood in awe of his employer, the mysterious Mr. Ertz, who knew so much of his dubious past.

"Sorry, chief," he mumbled. "By the way, Hanlon's waiting to see you."

"Send him in!" snapped Ertz. Stephens paled, turned and took the room, and Mr. Ertz's ill-omened vanished as suddenly as it appeared. He gazed round the austere lawyer-like office and surveyed the dusty japanned brief boxes on the shelves with appraising eye.

Scotland Yard would have given a good deal to know the contents of those boxes. Mr. Ertz had inhabited that quiet house in Bedford Row for many years. His neighbours, both dry-as-dust solicitors, whenever they bothered their heads about anything other than their deeds and conveyances, thought Mr. Ertz a very sound, dependable member of the legal profession. In a sense they were right.

The confraternity of confraternity found Mr. Ertz very sound and dependable—as a fence.

His clientele was not extensive, but it was peculiar, very peculiar, as the newcomer, who now entered, attested. He was a sharp-nosed, ferret-eyed man with reddish hair and a snub hooked nose.

"Come in, Hanlon," said Mr. Ertz. "Have you fixed it with Brillant?"

"Sure, chief," said Red Hanlon, with the peculiar lip movement of the old leg. "Everything's fixed but, um, ain't the Croucher put it over midnight? The girl's room must be shut into—"

"Shut up, hang you!" snarled Ertz. "What the devil's the Croucher to you? Remember what happened to the last man who talked too much."

Mr. Ertz closed his soft hand in a slow, mellowed and developed Hanlon's face paled suddenly. He changed the subject hurriedly.

"Brilliant has the room all set," he announced. "The darn buggers and flinty are as useful a bunch of bastards in Limehouse, boss—they've pulled in Mike the Whizz an'."

"Police activities do not worry me," Hanlon, said Mr. Ertz coldly. "Remember—at midnight, the girl's room must be ready at the house of Brilliant Long."

"Midnight it is, chief," said Red Hanlon, and his loose lips curled into a lascivious leer.

"Give this to Stephens as you go out," snapped Ertz. "Tell him to have it delivered on the stroke of six p.m."

He handed the folded note to the red-haired crook and dismissed him with an airy wave of his plump hand. For a few moments he gazed into vacancy. There was a peculiar expression in his cold, strangely light eyes, a reptilian glint that was not pleasant to contemplate. Then, as if impelled by a sudden decision, he lifted a small brass telephone that stood on his desk and murmured a few words into the receiver.

"Pardon me, my dear Ertz," cooed a soft voice at his elbow. "It is quite unnecessary to inform me. I rely as much on telepathy as telephony."

W.A., as Mr. Ertz swung round in his wicker chair, and found himself gazing at the bland, unruffled figure of Professor Li Sin.

The Chinaman was dressed in his usual impeccable fashion, between his lemon-hued fingers he held a black, rice-paper cigarette.

"Gosh! You—you startled me," gasped Ertz. "I—I was just going to let you know that all's set for the big kill."

"I know," said Mr. Sin blandly. "It is work of sheer superannuation on your part, my dear Ertz. I, however, appreciate your zeal, while decapitating your impetuosity. It was surely an error to tell the rather obvious Mr. Hanlon to call. He is dangerous—he drinks too much."

Mr. Ertz, who inspired so much terror in others, found great difficulty in controlling his trembling fingers, and winced beneath the cold reproof of the man from Pekin.

THE MAN IN BLACK

Nick New had a comfortable bachelor flat just off Trafalgar Square. He found it central and convenient for Scotland Yard, and shortly after two o'clock in the afternoon he restored a little of his customary serenity of outlook with a long, luxurious soak in his tub and a light but appetising lunch.

He had been on his feet for nearly thirty-six hours, and, after accompanying the commissioner to the scene of the damage at his place in Elmsmore Square, and helping Myers restore a little order out of the chaos of the wrecked rooms, Nick felt entitled to an hour or two's rest.

The Croucher's latest outrage might have had serious consequences had the bomb exploded earlier. Both Sir Richard's study and dining-room had been completely wrecked by the force of the explosion. Amidst the debris of splintered furniture, gaping walls and shattered windows, Myers had found a mass of twisted steel and an enamel dial, which indicated that a time-bomb of some kind had been hidden somewhere within the house.

Sir Richard's man had been rigorously cross-examined, but he could supply little or no information. Indeed his one reiterated statement was one of joy that he was out shopping when the sanguinary bomb went off. The commissioner himself, in a towering rage, had decamped for his club, a funeral building in Picaadilly, leaving, as Nick misquoted to Miss Somerville, "the world to darkness and to me."

The Flying Squad had excelled itself, however. Into its all-embracing net had been dragged all the queer fish that infest the polluted streams of the underworld. But one and all, from pickpocket to con man, stoutly denied all knowledge of the Croucher.

Meanwhile, Fleet Street was in a ferment. Every half-hour special editions of the great national dailies appeared, each with its own garbled and fantastic account of the developments, with each of genuine relief that Nick reached the sanctuary of his flat, there to ponder on the baffling problem.

He lit his after-luncheon pipe and considered every aspect of the case, since he had received that laconic warning, "You're Next," the previous night.

Maynard had been murdered obviously because the Croucher feared that the newspaper man knew too much. Sheeny Mac-

Greatly relieved, Wop shared his fate for the same reason. There remained only Sir Richard and himself to be accounted for. If the commissioner had followed his usual habit of leaving his house at 9.30 a.m. he would certainly have perished in the explosion.

Again and again in Nick's mind rose the memory of that saffron-tinted incorruptible, Mr. Li Sin, of Pekin. Who was he? Why had he warned him against the Croucher? Was it sheer bravado on the man's part that visit to Scotland Yard?

Nick was frankly out of his depth. The uncanny reticence of even the most loquacious mark was attributable to the fact that they did not know anything at all about the Croucher, or that they were scared to death of his vengeance.

In any case, it seemed hopeless to expect any results from that angle unless theClarion's offer of £500 would result in avaricious overcoming fear.

Nick recalled the Gutteridge case in that connection, and it gave him a few crumbs of comfort. If only one of the crooks caught in the Flying Squad drag-net could be induced to speak—

The 'phone bell tinkled sharply and interrupted his reverie. He lifted the receiver and greeted each of the commissioner with a hearty laugh.

"Is that you, Mr. New?" purred the Chinaman.

"It is," snapped Nick. "What the deuce do you want. I want you very badly, incidentally."

"Come and find me, my dear sir," was the mocking reply. "I'm—sorry I missed you suddenly as I recognised the snare, cool voice of Professor Li Sin."

"Is that you, Mr. New?" purred the Chinaman.

"It is," snapped Nick. "What the deuce do you want. I want you very badly, incidentally."

"Come and find me, my dear sir," was the mocking reply. "I'm—sorry I missed you suddenly as I recognised the snare, cool voice of Professor Li Sin."

Nick swore softly under his breath, but he managed to control his voice.

"The regret is mutual, I assure you," he replied.

"I want you to take great care of yourself, Mr. New, and incidentally of your commissioner. The Croucher does not fail twice, you know. Unless the Flying Squad ceases its ruthless action—and that shall be compelled to—er—take very drastic measures indeed. They are seriously embarrassing me. That is all."

There was a faint click. The Chinaman had rung off. Feverishly Nick called up the exchange and found, as he suspected, that
the call was from a public call-box in Piccadilly.
He swore roundly and seized his hat--then abruptly turned on his heel, strode into his dressing-room. Peeling off his dressing-gown he surveyed himself critically in the mirror, then opened a drawer of his dressing-table and produced various items necessary to his disguise.

"Linemouth-Louie's the only hope," said Detective-Inspector Nicholas New cryptically. "If I can't get wise to the Croucher that way--nobody on earth can."

"Where the deuce is New?" snapped Sir Richard Gilbert irritably, as Miss Dorothy Somerville entered the big, airy room in Scotland Yard shortly after five p.m.
"I told him to report to me by four o'clock. Myers has discovered a very promising lead from the Yellow Harlequin Café."

"I could not say, Sir Richard," replied the girl quietly. "I believe he went home to change at two; he hasn't communicated since." She placed a heap of neatly typed despatches on the desk, and stood rather hesitatingly beneath her chief's scrutiny.
Sir Richard's eye rested in frank approval on the girl's trim figure. She coloured faintly under his gaze, and, clearing his throat, Sir Richard pulled irritably at his greyish beard. He was nervous and restless. The Croucher affair was getting on her nerves. Usually coldly practical, Dorothy saw that that bomb outrage that morning had shaken him considerably.
She was not very keen on Sir Richard, but she thought that the Press attacks on his régime were uncalled for. After all, he had spent years at Scotland Yard, and received little credit for the many reforms he had instituted. She remembered little acts of kindness on his part to her, when raw and inexperienced, she had first joined the staff at Police H.Q., but she disliked his discoursing habit of gazing at her in that peculiar speculative fashion.

"Is—is there any further news of the Croucher, sir?" she ventured. "That horrible affair this morning seems to show he's terribly in earnest."

Sir Richard's voice lightened a little.

"Bless my soul!" he remarked. "Are you worrying about me? I have a personal bodyguard of plain-clothes men, my dear young lady—and as for this scoundrel, the Croucher, I have every hope of pulling him in within the next twenty-four hours. Myers has a splendid clue that he is following up. Er—send Inspector New to me immediately he arrives," he added.

Dorothy nodded and withdrew quietly.

"Egad, my nephew's chosen a damned pretty secretary," chuckled the general, who was deep in a bewildering maze of traffic returns.
Sir Richard nodded absentmindedly. He was distinctly jealous of Inspector New.

"Your nephew is a remarkable young man, general, but I do wish his methods were a trifle more orthodox. It's very bad for discipline the way he mixes so intimately with the criminal fraternity. A little fraternisation is, of course, essential, but I am afraid he overdoes it."

Meanwhile, Mr. Ambrose Ertz, that eminently respectable tenant of Bedford Row, was filled with a pleasant feeling of anticipation as he glanced at the ormolu clock on his desk. In a few minutes the note to which Mr. "Phony" Stephens had devoted so much time and skill would be delivered at Scotland Yard, and Mr. Ertz awaited developments with keen interest. There was absolutely no risk, of course. Nothing that the versatile Mr. Ertz tackled

ever had a risky element, at least, to himself. To others maybe—but no dossier of misdemeanors, no hint of suspicion concerning himself were extant at police headquarters.

Very few people indeed knew Mr. Ertz's real profession—those who did were silent, for the shadow of the gallows is a great deterrent to the squealer.

He pressed a bell on his desk and the cadaverous Stephens entered.

"You and Martin stay until the girl has arrived, then vanish," he said. "Understand?"

Stephens grinned evilly.

"Sure, chief. And does New get his?"

"Mind your own business!" snarled Ertz.

Stephens rubbed his brawny chin, and his shifty eyes shot a look of hatred at his employer.

"I see there's five thousand quid out for info' about the Croucher, chief," he said quietly. "It's a big sum for a tiny scrap of—"

He broke off, appalled at the sudden look of tigerish ferocity in the other's face and backed away hastily.

"What's that?" snarled Ertz.

Gone was his suavity, gone his respectability. He was brute beast. His eyes glowed with an unearthly light, and his lips were writhed back from his too-white teeth in a wolfish snarl. "You think you can squeal on the Croucher, eh? He demanded, and his voice was shrill with passion. "You—you—squeal rat! Let me tell you that no man alive has ever hinted that he'd squeal on the Croucher—and lived. You've signed your death warrant, Stephens!"

"No—no—chief!" gasped the terror-stricken crook. "For 'eaven's sake, I—I didn't mean it; I—I couldn't squeal if I wanted to. As Heaven's my witness, I don't even know who the Croucher is."

Ertz stared at the cowed wretch and laughed softly. His rage passed with almost startling suddenness.

"Your ignorance is indeed bliss, Stephens. Knowledge would mean a particularly unpleasant death, my friend. Go!"

He pointed towards the door, and the trembling crook slunk out like a whipped cur.

"A letter for you, Miss Somerville."

Dorothy looked up from her typewriter as a young constable entered the room, an envelope gripped in his ham-like hand. She smiled her thanks charmingly, causing a distinct flutter in the constable's breast, and glanced at the superscription. She recognised the handwriting, and flushed a little, then, woman-like, felt oddly restless that the sight of that familiar scroll should react so strangely upon her.

The note had evidently been delivered by District Messenger. It was addressed from Bedford Row. The message was brief, but explicit:

"Dear Miss Somerville," it ran, "Please bring copies of depositions A and B to the above address by 6.30 p.m. I believe I am at last on the Croucher's trail—curiously enough, through a woman not even remotely connected with the underworld.

"She will not speak, however, except in the presence of her solicitor, Mr. Ertz, and must be very tactfully handled. You being the embodiment of that virtue, your presence is both desirable and essential. Sincerely,

"NICHOLAS NEW."

Dorothy smiled at the odd mixture of formality and friendship in the note which was typical of the relationship between her
and Nicholas New. She glanced at her wrist watch. It was five minutes past six. She generally finished work at six p.m. except on special occasions. It was quite evident that Nicholas needed her presence urgently at the lawyer's office. It was not the first occasion she had been present when the police in the course of their duties had to question a female witness.

She felt a queer thrill of excitement at the thought that at long last Nick had found a clue to the Croucher's identity, and wondered who the woman was that was not even connected with crime. It was certainly an intriguing situation, she mused, as she snapped the lock of her little attache case and added a few deft tongs to her toilet.

Dorothy hesitated for a moment, wondering whether she should leave word indicating her movements. This precaution appeared to her rather unnecessary, as she was acting on the direct instructions of Inspector New, who she would meet in so short a time.

She hailed a taxi in Whitehall, down which leather-hung newsvendors ran bawling "Croucher Latest," and felt a pleasurable sense of superiority at being admitted behind the scenes of this sensational drama.

The taxi turned into Grays Inn Road and deposited her outside No. 7a, Bedford Row. She noted its atmosphere of aloof respectability and lawyer-like mustiness. She dismissed the cab and entered the outer office. An ancient clerk in shabby black, who looked as if he had stepped out of Dickens, shuffled towards her, quill pen behind his ear.

"Miss Somerville?" he ventured, with an old-world bow.

Dorothy nodded.

"Mr. New is waiting for me, I believe," she remarked.

"He is in with Mr. Ertz and his client," said Stephens. "Won't you step this way?"

He lifted the flap of the counter and led the way towards a green baize door and knocked.

"Come in!" called Mr. Ambrose Ertz.

"Miss Somerville," announced Stephens, as he held open the door.

Dorothy entered, and found herself in a cozy, workmanlike room and facing a rather portly, pink-faced gentleman clad in clothes of rather old-fashioned cut.

Mr. Ertz rose to his feet and smiled. Subconsciously, Dorothy noted his teeth were rather too large and too white.

"Ah! The—er—young lady from Scotland Yard," said Mr. Ertz. "Won't you sit down? Inspector New and my client are expected at any moment."

He waved his hand towards a leather-backed chair, and surveyed Dorothy appraisingly through his monocle.

"Pray pardon my presumption," he purred. "But you are a most attractive young lady to be connected with the police force."

Dorothy stiffened. Her first impression of Mr. Ertz had not been exactly favourable, but now she felt she thoroughly disliked the man. He was too suave, too smooth. She checked the retort that rose to her lips, and hurriedly changed the subject.

"I understood from Inspector New that he was waiting for me here," she said coldly.

Mr. Ertz nodded and gave an oily chuckle.

"Quite right. That's what I meant you to understand, my dear Miss Somerville."

Dorothy felt her heart thumping uncomfortably, but she kept her head and tried to still the feeling of alarm that startled her.

"I—I fail to understand what you mean, sir," she said. "I had a letter from Inspector New—"

"You did not, my dear little police lady," broke in Ertz, and his eyes narrowed. "You had a letter purporting to come from dear Nicholas—a different matter."

Dorothy leapt to her feet. Panic gripped her.

"You—you mean it was a forgery?"

"Precisely," was the reply. "But do not blame yourself unduly, that letter was forged by the greatest expert since the late lamented Jim the Pennant."

"Then—then this is a trap?" gasped Dorothy, glancing round wildly.

Ambrose Ertz rose to his feet, and the expression on his face was ugly.

"Now, my dear girl, be sensible!" he said. "I wanted you here for a particular reason."

With a panther-like step he strode towards her.

"Let me go at once!" hissed the girl.

"If you touch me, you beast, I'll—"

She screamed as she felt his soft, pudgy hands close on her arms.

"Scream away, young lady," cried Ertz. "This office is soundproof. Beyond that door are plates of steel. You have no possibility of escape. The very taxi that brought you here was fake."

Dorothy felt a sickly wave of nausea sweep over her as she struggled in his grip. His hot breath fanned her cheeks, his curiously light eyes were ablaze with passion.

She wrenched one arm desperately from his clamy clutch, and struck with all her might at his pink, fleshy face.

He staggered back and spat out an oath.

"By— You little spitfire! I'll make you pay for that! I'll —"

"Keep back, you beast!" she cried, and her fingers closed on a heavy leaden paperweight on the desk. A wild surge of exultation flooded her veins as she raised the
NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

will contain another gripping book-length story by

EDGAR WALLACE

especially written for

"THE THRILLER."

with acute disfavour. The other lifted up his head and stared with lack lustre eyes through the small aperture. The shivering lips and rapidly dilating nostrils were the tell-tale marks of the cocaine sniffer, and Shifty gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Criskey! If it ain't Limehouse Louie!" he remarked. "Er, Lou", doncher remember me? Martin's joint 'bout six munce back? You was all lit up and standin' drinks all round."

"Eh?" said the other, in a dazed fashion. "I seen to know your dial, mate. What's your moniker?"

"I'm Shifty Lee," said the pickpocket, with an odd assumption of pride. "Gosh! But you ain't 'arf got the willies, Louie! What they run yer for—snow? It's a blame silly frame now the Yard's all out for fer the Croucher."

It was significant that even in the privacy of the cell the little crook lowered his voice to a whisper as he mentioned the byword of master crook's name.

"Shh!" gasped the other. The blighted Flying Squad's cleared us all up, Ginger's raided; they pulled in Wong Foo. They got me and an hour back, the devils—got me afore I'd think 'em over. Me nerves are raw, they're burnin' me alive—"

Flecks of foam appeared round his writhing lips, and Shifty, who knew a little of the feud's anonymous ending, eyed the dope fiend suddenly deprived of the drug his
tortured system praves, leapt for the bell push. "Hi, Beeny!" he roared through the grille. "This chap's going bats! Quick, fetch the doc., you fat blighter!"

The burly warder quickened his pace and unlocked the cell door. He cast one glance at the writhing figure on the bench, then rapped out sternly: "Stow it! Stop that screaming, d'y'ear." "Fetch the doc. for the luva Heaven!" moaned the quivering, pitiful figure clinging convulsively to the turnkey's sleeve. Warder Higgins grasped the writhing Louie in his arms as though he had been a child. Another warder appeared on the scene, much to Shifty's disgust, for that witty crook had edged near the open door. "Come on now, Louie! Pull yourself together!" mumbled the warder. "You're better alone, I reckon. I'll send for the doc."

He half-dragged, half-carried him out of the cell, and the last glimpse Shifty had of Limehouse Louie was kicking and struggling in the warder's arms down the dreary cell corridor.

The warder flung open the inspector's room and saluted. "Louie seems to have a death of a bad way, sir," he announced. "Better let the doc. see him."

"Right, Higgins!" said the inspector sharply, with a glance of disgust at the shivering derelict. "Leave him here for a moment, and I'll get Sergeant Royd to examine him."

"Very good, sir!" Higgins saluted and withdrew, and when the door had closed Shifty's last companion shook himself like a dog, sat up straight, and grinned at Inspector Rawlins.

"Good morning, Rawlins," he remarked casually. "I'm sorry to have to play tricks on my comrades of the force. Could you spare me a cigarette?"

Rawlins frowned, stared hard at his captive, then grinned his appreciation of the splendid make-up. "By heck, New, you're playing a dangerous game! You'll get it in the neck one of these days. You know it's strictly illegal!"

"Rot!" said Detective Inspector Nicholas New, blandly waving aside the objection. "It isn't the first or the last time I've assumed the identity of Limehouse Louie. Besides, the commissioner's given me a free hand. All's fair when one is up against the Croucher. I had a hunch and a camera ready. By the way," he added, "when Shifty comes up again on Thursday, don't press the charge. Indirectly he's given me a lead to the Croucher, but he's had orders here until I've pulled in that murderous brute."

"Good grief! Does Shifty know who the Croucher is?" gestured the astounded Rawlins.

"He hasn't the vaguest idea," laughed Nick. "That's the nonsensical part of it! Knowing nothing himself he's put me wise to a good deal."

THE HOUSE OF BRILLIANT LING.

DOROTHY SOMERVILLE's first sensation was one of deadly nausea. Her temples throbbed dully, her mouth was parched and dry, and she felt she had not even the physical energy to open her eyelids.

She lay for a few moments quite still, striving to collect her scattered senses into some coherency. She had, she remembered, called at Bedford Row in re-
It was a significant fact that, despite every effort made by the Flying Squad, not one single member of the inner circle of the Croucher's organisation had been caught, a fact which the master crook took pains to impress upon his lieutenants at their bizarre headquarters the night following Bill Maynard's murder.

It was a queer assembly, in a queer rendezvous. In the maze of streets beyond Blackfriars Bridge, narrow, evil-smelling, hemmed in by gaunt and gigantic warehouses that make the Surrey side of the river hideous, the Croucher's headquarters lay unseen and unsuspected.

It had the double advantage of having at least ten different means of ingress, including one cunningly hidden between the piles of a crumbling jetty, long since abandoned by the owners of the derelict grain warehouse that frowned desolately down on the Thames.

Not even the River Rats, as the Thames Police are known at Scotland Yard and the
underworld alike, suspected that the bored and shuttered building standing so forlornly cheek by jowl with a busy contractor’s yard and an abandoned and crumbling church, was the H.Q. of the Croucher’s organisation. It was here that Brilliant Ling returned secretly after his deportation to China and plied again his evil trade of smuggling that soul-destroying drug—cannabis. Few people ever penetrated the house of Brilliant Ling save those who knew the password. Fewer people knew the river’s secret. Some who passed through came back strangely altered, some who went through never came back. The warehouse was honey-combed with passages, and it is typical of the Croucher’s thoroughness that the seemingly busy contractor’s yard abutting the dreary building was his property, and the workmen had nearly all cleaned their building experience on the grim breakwater at Portland and the grimier quarries of Dartmouth.

Six men in evening dress sat round a horseshoe-shaped table in a bare, vaulted room within the skeleton shell of the warehouse. Each one was masked, each one was a murderer, but only three knew the Croucher’s identity. The rest was content not to know, for knowledge might have meant death.

“You’re too jumpy to-night, Erz,” drawled a bullet-headed man with a strong American accent. “What’s bitten you?”

Mr. Ambrose Erz shrugged his shoulders.

“Nothing. Touch of nerves I reckon. From his waistcoat pocket he pulled out a small oval gold case rather like a woman’s vanity box. He carefully emptied a few crystals of white powder on the back of his hand, and inhaled it gracefully. The dry, glittering haze behind the slits of his mask.

“Stephens needs fixing,” he announced significantly. “That five thousand’s rank insufficient.”

“What of it?” laughed the American.

“Phony’s too darned scared of his hide to try anything for five grand. What do you say, Duval?”

The man addressed, a grey-haired Frenchman, and, incidentally, proprietor of one of the most popular restaurants in the West End, smiled beneath the rim of his hat.

“Leave him to the Croucher!” he said quietly.

“Yes, leave everything to me,” lauded the unsmiling grey-eyed Erz, and the velvet-garbed figure of the Croucher, his face completely covered by the folds of his sable mask, strode into the room.

“My friends,” he said, seating himself at the head of the table, “very soon we will have London at our mercy, and we can proceed with the plans I outlined to you. The police are already demoralised. The police are already demoralised. The arrival of that gendarme, Maynard, has given the Press something to think about. Tonight, Sir Richard Gilbert and Mr. Nicholas New will also be removed, and then—well...”

Very slowly he closed his claw-like hand.

“The Croucher squeezes, and all London is his orange.”

“Eh bien!” drawled Duval. “And meanwhile?”

“Meanwhile,” said the Croucher, and his baleful eyes turned full upon Ambrose Erz, “a little discipline action must be taken against friend Erz here. I am afraid he forgot the respect due to a lady in whom I am—very—interested.”

The last three words were slowly emphasized, and Erz shivered with fear as he read death in the eyes that glittered so evilly behind the Croucher’s mask.

THE RETURN OF EDGAR WALLACE

GOOD NEWS FROM YOUR EDITOR

A word in haste! I have just stopped the machines which were printing this issue of The Thriller in order to announce the return of Edgar Wallace to our pages. Another remarkable story from the Master of Mystery will appear next week. Spread the good news! Tell your friends! Warn your newsagent to increase his supply and reserve you a copy.

Mr. Wallace asks me to excuse him to my readers for a little delay in the delivery of this yarn. It was to have been in your hands ere now. However, he has annotated for his sin by giving us a story we might well describe as a super-thriller—one that will make the red blood tingle in our veins and hold us breathless with interest from start to finish.

The story we are about to tell is not needed to be able to make this announcement, because I am aware how eagerly many of you have looked forward to another adventure in company with J. G. Reeder, the world’s most remarkable detective. Mr. Wallace tells me that amongst the multitude of characters he has created none appeal to him as does J. G. Reeder. Presumably that is why Edgar Wallace always scintillates in a “Reeder” story. He always writes them as much as we revel in their perusal.

“The stories in the early issues of The Thriller were so excellent,” states a Birmingham reader, “that I doubt if you could maintain the standard.”

I am well aware that our friend in the Midlands has voiced the thought of thousands of thriller-story lovers in all parts of the land. It was not realised that authors could be found to make possible the offer of stories of such high quality at a cost to the reader of only twopence weekly. My readers have been both surprised and delighted.

“Naturally,” I am proud of our achievement. It has meant many months of hard work and diligent search. Authors of quality do not grow on gooseberry-bushes. Such persons have to be found, guided, encouraged and aided by every means known to a highly-trained editorial staff.

Actually, the stories you read week by week in The Thriller are those picked for you by experts from amongst hundreds that are rejected. That is where the reader of such a periodical as ours scores doubly over those who choose their own books from the array on a bookstall or in a library. In The Thriller the choice is made by those who have been born and bred in the world of fiction, and unworthy work is weeded out no matter how famous the name of its author.

We set off on this grand adventure into the world of thriller-fiction, realising that success or failure depended entirely upon our ability to maintain one hundred per cent good stories. There is so much on the market that is inferior. The greatest success of our new periodical is that we have achieved our object.

Undoubtedly next week’s issue will break all records. We shall greatly increase our printing order to meet the demand, but do not take a risk. Order your copy and make sure of Edgar Wallace’s latest and best novel.

Yours sincerely,

THE EDITOR.
Nick pounded the steel door with his pistol, but only the echo of his blows replied.

Nick picked them up from his blotting-pad, and his eyes narrowed. Fantastical and improbable though his theory was, there was in the streak of oddity in his character that impelled him to reject the obvious and concentrate on the subtle.

For a moment or two he examined the strips through a magnifying-glass, then his lips set in a firm, decisive line as he swept them into the drawer of his desk and locked it.

"And now, for Mr. Red Hanlon," he murmured, patting his hip pocket, where his automatic bulged comfortably.

The 'phone bell tinkled as he donned his grey felt hat, and with a frown of annoyance he lifted the receiver.

"Is that Inspector New?" demanded a suave voice—"is that Nick?" he had heard before. A vein throbbed daily in his forehead as he recognised it, but his tone was quite impersonal as he answered.

"Sure! What can I do for you?"
"Your activities, my dear New," drawled the voice, "are causing me serious embarrassment. I must ask you to refrain from these wholesale panic measures which the Flying Squad are conducting, otherwise the consequences will be very serious."

"Indeed?" langued Nick. "So you are feeling the slightest—Professor Li Sin?"

He sensed rather than heard the sudden grasp of astonishment at the other end of the wire.

"Your crude methods must cease, Mr. New, otherwise the very charming Miss Somerville will undergo a very unpleasant experience."

"What! You yellow hound!" snarled Nick. "If any harm comes to that young lady, by heaven, I'll kill you with my own hands!"

"How very interesting," mocked Li Sin. "At the moment Miss Somerville is quite safe in my care, but—"

He paused significantly, and a gust of rage swept over Nicholas New. Dorothy in the hands of that evil yellow shadow—sounded. It was unthinkable. The man was bluffing. With difficulty he controlled himself.

"Listen, Li Sin," he hissed into the receiver, "I'm going to get you, if I have to tear London to tatters to find you. As for Miss Somerville, I'll have a treble guard put over her night and day——"

A dry, mocking laugh twanged in the telephone.

"You have an English proverb, I believe, which runs: 'It is useless to lock the stable door after the horse has bolted.' Miss Somerville is very well guarded, indeed—by me. She has been a prisoner since six p.m. That, my dear sir, is for your information and necessary action, as the Civil Service so felicitously suggested."

For a moment or two Nicholas New was quite speechless. He was stunned by the appalling fact. Dorothy in the hands of the Croucher!

His face was white and strained as he mechanically picked the receiver to call exchange, and found himself told that the call had come through from a public call-box in the Blackfriars district.

He pressed a bell-push on his desk and gave curt orders to his sergeant.

"I've got a message from Mr. Red Hanlon,‖ he announced. "The Croucher's got Miss Somerville."

"What!‖ gasped the astounded sergeant, then fell back hastily at the blazing fury in his superior's eyes as he strode out of the room.

"Eaven 'elp Red—and the Croucher!‖ he muttered.

Nick hailed a taxi at the corner of Westminster Bridge. His brain was chaotic. The one fact that hammered incessantly was that Dorothy was in deadly danger. It came after him as a savagery that was startling, that he loathed her. It was the first time he had ever put the thought into words, and to Nicholas, who had always treated the opposite sex with a kind of gay camaraderie, this sudden revelation was disturbing. He resolved to hold the girl in his arms, to smash through all the barriers that kept her from him. A fierce primal passion possessed him; he wanted to reach and pound his way through to her side and claim her as his mate by right of conquest.

He laughed discordantly. "Love is the greatest nonsense in the world," he muttered, as he drove along the Embankment, the lights gleaming in the darkness like a necklace of amber beads.

It was significant that the phone call had come through from Red Hanlon, for in that district, just beyond the king, was the hang-out of Kenny Marks, who was ostensibly a marine store dealer, but in reality a fence and receiver of stolen property. According to Shifty, Red Hanlon had dispensed with Kenny's services in favour of the lawyer whose name was like a sneeze, but that, Nick argued, was no reason why Kenny couldn't put him wise to Red's new hang-out. The more he considered the matter the more promising it seemed. If Red had quarrelled with the old Jew, Kenny might conceivably open up.

He dismissed the taxi at the entrance of the Boxing Ring and plied into a rabbit Warren of alleyways. The houses, mean, brick-built slums, were in the last stages of décrépitude. Some of the passages were as dark as tunnels, and at the end of one court that rejoiced in the name of Angel's Rents, Nick New halted.

Ramshackle houses, unlit by any comforting gleam of yellow, were huddled together, like evil hags; from a nearby court came the shrill chatter of guttersnipes at play and the strident voice of some nagging madam.

His hand sneaked stealthily to his hip as he crossed over towards a frowsy-looking shop. The windows were so grimed with dust that it was impossible to see into the interior. Over the lintel, in faded yellow lettering, was the name "K. Marks," and in the transom a sickly gas jet flickered.

The yard man rapped sharply on the rusty knocker, and was rewarded by the sound of shuffling footsteps.

"Whothere?‖ quavered a voice through the slit in the letter-box. "Go away. I'm in the bath."

"Open up, Kenny!‖ rapped Nick sternly. "It's me. You'd better open quickly, or I'll smash the door in!"

The weary eyes surveyed him through the slit: then, as if reassured, Kenny heaved a wheezing sigh.

"Oh, Mither New! 'Ow you frightened me!‖ he mumbled. There was a rattle of chain, the catch clanked, the key was turned, and Kenny revealed himself in all his hideousness.

He was a bent, incredibly dirty old man, with wriggled, matted beard, a nose like a predatory snout, and red-rimmed, bleary eyes, which now blinked suspiciously at Nick.

"Come on inside!‖ snapped the detective brusquely, leading the way to the filthy little living-room behind the shop. "It depends on how you answer, Kenny, how I'm going to treat you.‖
The THRILLER

“V'y, vot do you mean, Mitther New?” demanded Kemmy Marks, with a feigned innocence that was ludicrous in the circumstances.

Nick New wasted no time on formalities.

“When did you quarrel with Red Hanlon?” he snapped.

“Hah!” Red laughed through the fence. “I'm afraid I don't know vot you're talking about, Mr. New.”

Nick's hand shot out, and his fingers gripped the other's scrawny throat in a throttling grip.

"Listen, Kemmy," he rasped. "I'll choke the life out of your filthy carcass if you don't come across. The verdict will be justifiable homicide." he added with grim humour.

"Oh, merth—merth!" gasped the wretched Kemmy. "I—I'll tell you anything you want to know within reason, Mitther New."

Nick released his grip, and Kemmy collapsed into a rickety chair. The detective dustered his fingers delicately with his handkerchief and rapped out sharply.

"Where does Red Hanlon hang out?"

Kemmy licked his lips furiously, his red-rimmed eyes dropped beneath Nick's steady stare.

"I ain't seen him for three months. Honeth, I ain't," he whined. "The dirty tyke let me down over a deal an—"

"Never mind that. Who's Red working with now?"

Kemmy glanced suspiciously over his shoulder, then lowered his voice to a whisper.

"I don't know. That's what he's running with the Croucher," he announced. "Don't ask me who he is, Mitther New, becaus I don't know—nobody knows."

"I'm!" said Nick thoughtfully "Has Red been doing any jobs lately? Don't be squeamish, Kemmy," he added. "You've squealed enough in your time!"

The fence leaned forward, his mean little eyes malevolent with hatred.

"Red's running around with a girl—she's a straighth—"a barmaid at the Goat's Head down Frame Road way Thath's all I know—and that's the whole truth, Mitther New."

"Ah!" said Nick, and a triumphant glint came into his eyes. "Red's got a girl, has he? I know the Goat's Head. Doesn't Brusier Patterson keep the place?"

Kemmy Marks nodded eagerly as the detective rose to his feet.

"For the love of Mike, don't tell Red you've seen me, Mitther New," he pleaded, laying a skinny claw on Nick's sleeve.

The detective shook him off with a gesture of disgust.

"Watch your step, Kemmy," he said significantly. I'll be rolling this way again very soon, no, I won't bother to see me to the door—I can find my way out!"

Kemmy Marks cursed in his matted beard as the door closed behind his unwelcome visitant.

"Nothly beath!" he snarled. "I hope the Croucher geth him!"

Meanwhile Nick had quickened his pace. The fact that Red was keen on a girl—and a strange one at that—had to be believed—was at least a tangible link to his whereabouts. His nose wrinkled in disgust as he plunged into the malodorous squalor of the streets that fronted the river-side.

The Goat's Head at Frame Street was a public-house of some reputation among the dockers and water-front men, in that its license was an ex-welter-weight champion—one Brusier Patterson. The police had little complaint to make about the place, for the burly landlord ruled his tough customers by the strength of his strong right arm, and woe betide anyone who started any funny business. His richly-embroidered black coat, starched as the dart of a snake, Nick's fist shot straight for the other's jaw. Creak! Like the sound of a mallet on wood, his fingers gripped the other's scrawny throat in a throttling grip.

He walked quickly into the four ale bar with his hands in his pockets. It was crowded, and a babbie of voices rose from a dozen market chattered over the counter was sloppy with unwiped beer-stains. A purring-lairnarkaig with bobbed, peroxide hair, and a shrill, cantankerous voice dispensed tankards to a crowd of seedy faces, some where he glanced covertly at the bar occupant.

The clientele of the Goat's Head was like Nick's whisky, badly mixed. Hulking dock labourers, woody wharf rats, one or two lascaros from docked vessels, and, in the corner, a slant-eyed celestial placidly eating potato crisps. From behind the bar the gigantic torso of Brruie shuddered threateningly as he roared to a hilarious group of sailors in the corner, "Nah, then! Less noise there, you lot!"

Suddenly Nick's keen eyes narrowed, and his nervous System became. At the other end of the long bar counter, screened by a pot of ferns, was a red-haired, ferretd, man face deep in conversation with a plump and rather good-looking barmaid.

It was Red Hanlon!

Nick glanced at the clock. It wanted a few minutes to closing time, and hastily he planned a form of action. On the table below was the last copy of the "Evening News." He opened it, and pretended to be immersed in its contents, though one eye watched Red's movements as a hawk followed its prey.

"Nah, then, Milly!" roared the landlord. "Stop that chin-waggin', there's customers waitin' to be served!"

Nick noticed Hanlon swear under his breath and hastily gulp down his drink. The barmaid flashed him an apologetic smile, showing the glint of a gold tooth. Hanlon muttered a curt "Good-night," and clapped the last ounce of change out of his pocket.

Unobtrusive as a shadow, Nick followed in his wake. He had two courses open to him. One was to tackle Red point-blank—in which case it would undoubtedly mean a fight—the other was to shadow the crook in the hope that he would glean some information about Dorothy. While there were many points in favour of the first course—and it would be easy, Nick thought, to pour an unholy joum on Red Hanlon's face into a pulp—it by no means followed that Red would give him any information.

Accordingly, Nick, with a skilful born to leading profession, unobserving crook through the maze of crisscross streets that led to the water-front. Red slouched along at a fairly rapid pace. He was not drunk, but his gait was unsteady, and his voice was uncertainly as he neared the house of Brilliant Linn.

Nick was frantically puzzled about the man's true identity. He knew, after inspecting the narrow walkways, so puzzled that he did not notice a dark figure detach itself from the shadows of a neighbouring timber yard and signal with a peculiar motion of his hands to him.

Nick, still intent on his quarry, failed to notice half a dozen dim, shadowy forms converging upon him, until an incantations movement behind him caused him to wheel round suddenly. He glimpsed a yellow, hairless face, a clenched hand that held the point of a small black wrought as the dart of a snake, Nick's fist shot straight for the other's jaw. Creak! Like the sound of a mallet on wood, his fingers gripped the other's scrawny throat in a throttling grip.

The sound of the mallet on wood, his fingers gripped the other's scrawny throat in a throttling grip.

"That's the secret of LI SIN."

Nick came to with a cracking headache an hour later. Though he had lost all sense of time when the first glimmer of consciousness came, he felt as though his head was tied tightly by strands of red-hot wire, and for some seconds he did not move. He found himself in complete and oppressive darkness, and put out a shaking hand that seemed contracted somehow, to touch a cold, slimy wall.

From afar off he could hear a faint drip, drip, and to his hypersensitive nerves it sounded like the drip of blood.

Gradually his brain started to function. He found himself lying on what seemed to be a filthy straw pallet. Something squeaked in the darkness, and two jewelled eyes watched him unwinkingly. He shuddered as the hand came in contact with something warm, leathensome—and waggling.

Rats. The ceiling was full of them. Desperately he struggled to his feet—only to realise that his leg was bent at the knee, and he laughed discordantly as something jingled at his wrists. He had been handcuffed with his own bracelets!

Suddenly he heard the sound of footsteps that seemed to be descending a stone stairway. Whoever it was, he was approaching cautiously, a step at a time. The footsteps grew louder, and a little later there was a wordless click in the lock and the door began to open slowly.

A second later Nick was almost blinded by a ray from an electric torch that cut through the darkness like a sword. Nick struggled up to a sitting position, and in the rays of the torch made out three figures—one each was garbed in evening dress, and a black domino masked their faces.

"What have you done to Miss Somerville, you—villains?" he demanded wrathfully.

"By heck! If you've harmed a hair of her head, I'll—"
"Miss Somerville is quite safe, my dear sir. She has a charming room, plenty to eat and drink—in fact, everything she wants except liberty, and that, unfortunately, she cannot obtain until—er—certain formalities are completed."

Nick groaned helplessly as he gazed at his manacled wrists. What his immediate fate was to be he did not much care, but he was writhed at the thought of Dorothy alone and helpless in the hands of the Croucher.

"I suppose you know that all three of you are being arrested," he said, with a ugly little smile. "You'll take a very short walk at eight o'clock one morning, my friends—and none of you'll ever come back from that walk. A good, clean wind will whistle between your teeth when you are dead."

"Drop that, dash you!" snarled Ambrose Ertz with a threatening gesture. His nerves were all on edge. It was only the news of Nick's dramatic capture that had saved him from the Croucher's wrath.

Three of the outside guard of Brilliant Ling's house had noticed Nick shadowing the unsuspecting Hannon, and acted. Although they knew it, the detective was now actually in a cell of the Croucher's headquarters, having been brought there while still unconscious by two of Ling's dope runners through the maze of passages that honeycombed the place.


"Ah!" said Nick. "So you are the missing link. Ertz. I've searched for you with the painstaking devotion of a Darwin, and rejoice to note you're almost human."

"Funny, aren't you?" snarled Ertz. "You'll laugh the other side of your face when the Croucher's finished with you."

"Ertz—Ertz. It really does sound like a sneeze," said Nick. "Good theme for a nonsense rhyme, too. There's a curious creature called Ertz, who bluffs and bamboozles and blurs—SMACK!"

Ertz's open hand caught Nick full on the mouth.

"Stop that!" he snarled, stung by the detective's maddening coolness.

Nick's eyes blazed, but he kept his temper.

"I'll remember that blow, Ertz," he said quietly, "when I am not hampered by these."

He jingled the steel handcuffs significantly.

"Are you going to come quietly? I believe that is the formula you use," asked Duval, with an exaggerated bow. "The Croucher is very anxious to see you."

"And I also reciprocate," said Nick, with a grim smile. "Please lead the way, gentlemen. My steps are somewhat restricted," he added, with a glance at the rope which barely enabled him to walk.

"It's not far, buddy," crawled the third man, who had hitherto remained silent. Nick noticed the American accent, and his head whirled as he rose to his feet.

What fantastic fate was in store for him? Above all, how and where was Dorothy?

The dank stone stairs were climbed in silence. To Nick's ears came the sound of muffled hammering, and it grew louder as they advanced along a vaulted corridor. Suddenly Ertz paused before a large wooden door and inserted a key in the lock. It swung soundlessly open on well-oiled hinges, and Nick and himself half pushed and half-dragged into a high, vaulted room lit by a spattering arc-lamp.

The whole room was bare of furniture save for a horseshoe-shaped table at which sat three masked men, immobile as statues. There was something sinister about the very bareness of that vaulted room, and the harsh light from the arc irradiated the scene with a chill, bluish glare.

Nick hardly knew what to expect the Croucher's headquarters to be like. He was half-prepared for luxury, even for squalor, but this bare, austere room, devoid of all comfort, was like some monstrously enlarged prison-cell.

Suddenly one of the masked figures rose to his feet. Nick noted that he alone was garbed in a black velvet cloak, and his heart quickened its beat.

"The Croucher at last!"

For fully half a minute no one spoke.

Ertz, Duval, and Roscoe the American sat down in silence. Nick stood, manacled hands in front of him, gazing steadily at the motionless figure of the Croucher.

Then suddenly the tension was broken.

"You have given me a great deal of trouble, Mr. New," said the Croucher quietly, in his curiously sibilant voice. "People who annoy me do not do so for long," he added. "Mr. Maynard of the 'Daily Clarion' annoyed me; he is dead. Sheeny MacGuire might have annoyed me; he also is dead. Larry the Wop, poor fool, thought he could identify me; he also died under that delusion."

"As for you, Mr. Nicholas New—tell me frankly what my fate would be, assuming our present roles were reversed, and I was your captive."
you live in the shadow of the gallowsy,” he remarked flippantly.
“Do you seriously imagine that you are going to get yourself hung and be hanged one day?” he turned to the Croucher.
“I do not imagine,” was the reply, “I know. I have been told from now, Nicholas New, the quicklime will be searing the flesh from your bones. Have you any message you would like to convey to Miss Somerville and my client?”
He within called and quite comfortably, so do not worry on her behalf.”
“You darned scoundrel!”
Mr. Croucher burst out. He hurled himself forward, bound as he was, but Ertl and Duval seized him ere he could reach the master-crook. Quivering with rage, Nicholas turned to the Croucher and said thickly:
“It’s—it’s—usually to grant one boon to the condemned. May I see her for two minutes?”
“I have something, I particularly want to tell her before—”
He broke off hastily as his eye fell on the sinister, dangling noose.
“It is a reasonable request,” said the Croucher slowly. “You may certainly speak to her—and see her, but in my presence.

So saying, he signalled to one of the masked men and whispered a few words, too low for Nick to catch.

“Oh, I am afraid it is now too late to proceed with the plan I first contemplated—namely, to join us.”

“I Join you!” said Nicholas, and his voice was icy with contempt. “I’d sooner hang themselves.”

He pointed to the dangling noose.

“Quite,” said the Croucher dryly. “You shall. Meanwhile, of course, I may say I have a very great regard for Miss Somerville.”

He broke off suddenly as the door opened and Dorothy, accompanied by the masked man, entered.
The girl’s face was wan and pale, dark circles showed beneath her eyes, and she gave an involuntary cry as she recognised Nick.

He made a half-step towards her, but was checked by the Croucher.

“Oh, Nick! They’ve got you, too!” she gasped huskily.

He was thrilled at her use of his Christian name. How desperately he longed for her, and how ironic the situation! Even in his present plight the sense of the bizarre influenced him.

“Keep a stiff upper lip, dear,” he said quietly.

“It—it’ll work out right in the end, you know,” he added lamely.

“Yes—yes—you wanted to tell me something particularly,” said Dorothy quietly.

She ignored the others completely. It was as if they did not exist.

Nick read the message in her eyes, which were wet with tears, and, reading it, felt that death somehow would be easier now he knew.

“And I, too, Dorothy,” he said very quietly.

The Croucher chuckled satirically.

“Very affecting indeed! It’s a pity you don’t have here to chronicle the latest romance of Scotland Yard—but one of very short duration.” He added with a sneer.

“You always were fond of melodrama, my dear Croucher,” broke in a cool voice.

“Perhaps this will appeal to you. ‘Put em up. They both spit death.’”

Nick’s jaw gap opened. As if by magic, two squats, vicious-looking automatons had appeared in the hands of the masked man who had brought down Dorothy from the Lacquer Room. And the hands were your own.

One gun pointed at the Croucher’s heart; the other covered his dumphoundified accomplice. For a second or two no one spoke, then a strangled snarl tore from the Croucher’s throat.

“Li Sin! You yellow scum! Have you gone mad?” he demanded harshly.

If you don’t elevate your hands before I count three, I shoot to kill,” said, with slow, shibolistic emphasis.

You incurred double-crossing Chink,” broke out Ertl, with a wild oath. “I’ll—CRACK!”

Calmly, imperturbably, Li Sin fired as the masked man rushed towards him. With a squeal of agony Ertl covered back, holding a shattering wrist.

“Back, you dog!” rasped the Chinaman. “Miss Somerville, if you will kindly slip your hand into my waistcoat pocket you will find the key to Inspector New’s handcart—and quite probably another small automatic.”

Like one in a daze, Dorothy stared at the speaker. Her brain was reeling at the suddenness of this unexpected denouement.

Nick’s urgent voice impelled her forward, however.

“Hurry, darling!” he pleaded.

Feverishly she groped in the Chinaman’s pocket. There was the key, there, calm, imperturbable as a statue, while the chill menace of his guns cowed the others into immobility. Her fingers fumbled nervously as she turned the key into the handcuffs.

Nick smiled reassuringly at her, there was a slight click, and his hands were free.

She thrust a small, nickel-plated gun into his hand, and Nick’s heart leapt exultantly.

“Now, you murderous fiend,” he ejaculated, turning to face the masked master-crook. “Let’s see your ugly mug!”

Hampered as he was by his still pinioned legs, Nick approached the Croucher, who backed away hastily, arms upraised from the menacing purpose in the detective’s face.

“Keep back, curse you!” snarled the Croucher. “Ertl, Duval, you spineless fools, why don’t you rush ‘em?”

“They have too wholesome a regard for their own skins,” chuckled the imperturbable Li Sin.

Nick’s left hand shot out like a darting snake, straight for the Croucher’s face. He tore off the sinister black domino. A scream rose involuntarily from Dorothy Somerville’s lips. She recognised in the spattering glare of the mercury lamp the hate-distorted features of Sir Richard Gilbert, the retiring Commissioner for Scotland Yard!

For one split second she saw it, and then suddenly there was a loud explosion, followed by the crash of breaking glass, then a holocaust of roaring darkness.

The latest—and best complete story by

EDGAR WALLACE

Appears next week in this paper!
Detective New's fist shot out viciously, and the Croucher crashed to the cabin floor.

"Quick—the launch!" he hissed. "Hurry, you fool! Tell Mathers to stand by for an extra passenger—a woman!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" croaked the other hoarsely. "There's bad trouble in Lych Street. The Flying Squad is —"

"Curs the Flying Squad!" snarled the Croucher. "Stand by for the girl."

Gently he lowered Dorothy's unconscious body through the dark aperture above the river. A ladder led from the jetty below to the foot of the improvised gallows. Pietro, accompanied by another man, lifted their still inanimate burden, and the Croucher heaved a sigh of relief as he heard the subdued clanging of the motor launch. He was just about to descend the ladder when there came a thunderous knocking at the steel shutter that separated the room of death from the vaulted chamber.

"Knock away, you fool!" grumbled the Croucher. "It'll take you half an hour to batter down that door."

He backed away, lowered himself down until he reached the improvised jetty built right beneath the gantry and apparently derelict warehouse. He stood in the shadows, an evil, satanic figure, with his long black cloak flapping about him like the wings of a monstrous bat, while Pietro and Mathers carried Dorothy into the waiting launch.

It was characteristic of the man that, even when the closely guarded secret of his amazing double life had been so dramatically revealed, and the bounds of the law were hot on his heels, his actions were cool and unfurled. He issued orders curtly to his henchmen, and it was proof of his utter callousness and ruthlessness that spared no thought to his five lieutenants, nor cared whether they were alive or dead.

Meanwhile, Nicholas New, with a gash in his temple and a cold, smouldering fury in his heart, pounded vainly with the butt of his empty automatic on the steel door of the execution-chamber. Events had happened with such bewildering rapidity in the past five minutes that he scarcely realised what he was doing. Since the stuttering arc-lamp had exploded into a myriad fragments he had been fighting literally and metaphorically in the dark.

It was not until later that he was to learn that the Croucher had been prepared for every emergency, and that when the master-crook cowered back in apparent fear when Nick tore off his mask, it was to reach for the switch in the wall which would automatically blow up the lamp. Hobblt as he was, Nick had been hampered in the general melee that followed that abrupt change from dazzling light into complete blackness. He had fallen sprawling over a chair, and hacked his temple against the concrete floor.

When he had regained his breath it was to find pandemonium raging around him. He lashed out indiscriminately with his fists, and felt a fierce joy as his knuckles slammed home into the writhing bodies of his opponents. Dorothy's scream for help turned him into a raging tornado of fury. He kicked and smashed his way in her direction, only to realise with a sob of despair that the Croucher had succeeded in slamming down the steel shutter, and that the girl was gone.

Li Sin, meanwhile, that cool and enigmatic individual, had not been idle. He seemed to have the peculiar feline quality that went with his cat-like grace of being able to see in the dark. As Dural blundered towards him in a mad rush of blind fury he calmly reversed his gun and smashed down the butt on his skull. Dural fell like a log, Ertz, with his crippled arm, moaned feebly in the corner. All the fight had gone out of him. Nick himself had accounted for Roscoe with his first savage onslaught, and the American, blissfully oblivious of everything, sprawled face downward on the floor. Of the fifth man, Brilliant Ling, there was no trace. That wily Oriental had no stomach for a fight at such close range, and had taken a hurried refuge in the passage that led to the Lacquer Room in which Dorothy had been kept prisoner.

"CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!"

Nick pounded a hail of blows on the steel doors of the execution-chamber, and bellowed to Li Sin to bring a light.

Calmly and imperturbably the Chinaman switched on his electric torch and approached Nick. Not a trace of emotion or excitement appeared on his lemon-hued features.

"I'm afraid it will take some time to batter that down, my dear inspector," he drawled. "In the meantime it would be as well to attend to our prisoners."

"But I tell you the Croucher's got Miss Meadows of the Flying Squad. His arrival is most propitious."

There was a clatter of footsteps in the corridor, and a man in a red jacket and hat, like an avalanche of blue-clad figures surged into the vaulted room, headed by the burly, bull-necked Meadows.

Nick smiled wryly. Meadows' blank astonishment when his gaze fell on the scene of the holocaust.

Dural lay sprawled at the foot of the table with his head on his blood-stained holowly, while Ertz whimpered in the corner, holding his splintered wrist.

"Pull 'em all in, Bill!" said Nick. "They're a mixed bag, but I'm sorry the Croucher isn't among 'em."

Meadows whispered.

"Great Mike! It seems to have been a fierce scrap while it lasted," he ejaculated. "Where's the loot?"

"I don't know," announced Nicholas New grimly. "But I'm not letting up till I've got him—dead or alive."

A hunched, squat figure in glistening oilskins grunted his approval in the Croucher's speedy motor launch, the Yellow Queen. Heading downstream, her slim nose sheared the waters of the turgid Thames like a knife. The night was pitch dark, black as the belly of a wolf, and like a wolf himself the Croucher sat in the cabin, his smouldering eyes watching the slim figure of the girl on the tiny bunk. A vein throbbed dully in his white, smooth forehead. It was the one sign of emotion he showed—but the strain of the past half-hour was beginning to tell. Ahead of them lay the great London Bridge, the Tower Bridge loomed massive in the dark river mist, and beyond, if hisluck hold, lay the open sea.

The Croucher's slim finger beat a tattoo on his knee, a deep rhythm of insurance—and suspense. None knew better than Sir Richard Gilbert, ex-commissioner of Scotland Yard, how well the London river was patrolled by that new police force known by crooks and colleagues alike as the River Rats. If he was to get through at all, he would have to rely upon bluff. His thin lip curled. Did anyone but Nicholas New and that yellow traitor, Li Sin, know that the commissioner and the Croucher were one and the same person?
He had guarded the secret well, he reflected. Placing that bomb in his own flat had been a masterpiece of ingenuity. The threatening letters, too, had all been part of his scheme to hamper and terrify the police. He had confided the issues, and keep their attention away from himself.

He smiled reminiscently. The 'Daily Clarion’s' demand for a clean up, Scotland Yard was certainly justified, but not even the acute Maynard had suggested the real truth, that the chief of the London police was also hand in glove with the chief crooks of the underworld. But now the mask was off! It was bound to happen eventually, of course, he mused. His resignation was a mere prelude to the future he had planned for himself thirty years ago. Conan Doyle had merely accelerated the issue, that was all.

His brooding eyes studied the girl who lay on the bunk, and he stroked his beard complacently.

Once at sea, his yacht, the Spindrift, would carry him to freedom and to luxury in that Roman State of Torridor—from which there was no extradition. He had planned well and cunningly. Not for him the beggarly pension of a retiring Civil Servant. Well over half a century, the processes of blackmail and dope running, lay to his credit under another name in an American bank.

Dorothy Somerville, as if conscious of his brooding gaze, stirred uneasily, and her eyelids fluttered open. For a moment or two she lay there quiescent, then, with a half-sag of her head, she sat up.

"Better, my dear?" said the Croucher, reaching for a silver-topped decanter on the table of his luxuriously-furnished cabin.

Dorothy passed a trembling hand over her throbbing head, and stared at him wide-eyed.

"Sir Richard?" she gasped. "Where am I? What am I doing here?"

The throbb of the engines, the snort of the Yellow Queen's bow as she cleared her way through the Pool bewildered her. Then in a memory that was fantastic, incredible, but true! Sir Richard, her chief, was the Croucher!

"We are going on a long voyage, little girl," he said, with a half-smile, "Far away from the sordid routine of Scotland Yard. I am taking you to a land of luxury and adventure, a land drenched with sunshine, for you were created for love and beauty and the care of your head, and the soulless routine of the Civil Service."

"Stop!"

Dorothy's eyes blazed. She sprang to her feet, and her little hands clenched until the knuckles shone white in the subdued light of the cabin.

"You are mad!" she breathed. "That is the only possible explanation. Keep your filthy hands away from me!" she added with a shiver, as he loomed over her. "If you don't give orders to stop this boat, I swear I shall pull out this lifeboat. I would sooner drown than—than breathe the same air as you, you cold-blooded fiend!"

Sir Richard Gilbert laughed softly.

"Try, my dear. The door of the cabin is locked and bolted, and your lifeboat is in my pocket. The skipper and mate are my creatures body and soul."

Dorothy dashed herself frenziedly against the door. Her eyes flashed, her face went pale with despair. It was only too terribly true! "Now, don't be a foolish little girl!" he said in a voice that was like a purr. "I shall not harm you, don't harm your head. I love you, Dorothy. Have loved you, ever since the day you first brightened the diminutiveness of Scotland Yard with your presence. Do you realise what it means to be loved by a man like me?"

A fanatical light blazed in his eyes, a proof of his monomania, and Dorothy felt as though she was being forced to choose between the love of the Croucher and the hate of her own life.

"A traitor, a murderer!" she gasped. "Keep away from me, you beast!"

With an abrupt change of manner, the Croucher had pressed the lean tips of his fingers together.

"A genius, my dear, a man with too vast a brain, too soaring an ambition to be content to be a mere glorified policeman. The fear of inexperience—little dreamed that I know more of crime and criminals than any man alive. I was monarch of all! I surr—Scotland Yard and in the underworld. I know the secret of a hundred unsolved mysteries. I have levied toll on the rich, and on the poor, on the righteous and on the unrighteous. But now I am tired. I want rest—and love. I want you, Dorothy, and by Heaven you shall learn what love can mean. I am a young, hot-headed stripling, but a man, mature, so can offer you all that a woman craves—"

He broke off suddenly as a thunderous rat-tat-tat sounded at the cabin door. With a gesture of annoyance he pulled aside a small, latched spy-hole, and saw the cold, piggy eyes of Pietro.

"What is it?" he snarled. "Can't you get more speed out of this dashed tub? It will be drawn soon, and we must make the Spindrift by—"

"Police boat overhauling us, chief. The engine's missing badly. Mathers is in a blue funk, grumbled the other."

The Croucher sat down with a suppressed breath. "I'll deal with the River Rats. Tell that fool to slow down."

He unlocked the cabin door. A scurry of feet and dark river mist swirled into the cabin.

"Stay there!" he jerked over his shoulder to Dorothy.

He slammed the door shut and locked it, and went on deck.

The spume from the bow waves dashed coldly into his face. The ugly hulk of a tram-shaped steamer, with the chim-chum of a Thames Police boat gave louder as a dark shape overhauled them.

The Croucher's lips set grimly as his keen ears heard the irregular beat of the Yellow Queen's engine.

Hang the luck! He could easily have outstripped the police boat if that fool Mathers had done his job properly.

"A hoy there!" he called a voice through a megaphone. "Launch hoy!"

"Reverse the engines!" snapped the Croucher. There was only one thing for it, to bluff.

Pietro brought the boat to a rolling halt, and the black, pantherine shape of the T.P. boat creamed alongside.

"What the devil d'you want?" snapped the Chief Constable of the Thames police, and have reason to believe that—"

"Crash!"

There was a splintering sound of glass, and something fell into the water with a loud splash. A second later Dorothy Somerville's voice screamed for help.

The Croucher ripped out an oath. Dash the girl! She must have smashed the porphite glass or something. His eyes blazed with fury.

"The game's up, Croucher!" bawled a voice through the megaphone. "Heave to, or by gosh I'll shoot you where you stand!"

Like lightning the crook's hand darted for his hip. He could make out a dark figure at the tiller, and, taking careful aim, he fired.

Crack!

The man at the stern collapsed without a cry. Instantly a fusillade of shots rang out. The Croucher darted for cover behind the engine-room just as Pietro fell with a bullet through his lungs.

A dark shape hovered for an instant on the gunwale of the police boat, which had nosed imperceptibly nearer the Yellow Queen, then, with an almost soundless splash, slipped into the river. The Croucher was on the other side of the launch, did not see the swimmer approaching. His one thought now was revenge—revenge against the girl who had spoiled his plans. The thin dividing line between reason and madness had snapped, and it was a madman lusting to kill that raced down into the cabin and leapt with scrambling fingers for the throat of the white-faced girl.

"Curse you!" he rasped, in a queer-hitched pitched voice. "I might have known! I'm going to kill you, you vixen. If I cannot have you no one else shall!"

Dorothy screamed as she felt those talon-like hands about her throat, but they dug relentlessly into the soft, white flesh. Flecks of foam appeared at the Croucher's whirring lips. He felt a fierce pleasure in watching the horror and death fear in the girl's beautiful eyes.

"For—all—men—kill—the thing they love!" he panted breathlessly.

"A hoy there!" he called a voice from the doorway, and Nicholas New, dripping, but exultant, hurled himself like a tiger on the murderer. So great was his impetus and so sudden his appearance that the Croucher was taken utterly unawares.

Nick's left fist shot out with the battering force of a battering-ram, and the Croucher was enveloped with a queer little jerk. His fingers relaxed, and suddenly he collapsed to the floor like a poleaxed ox.

His head moved in a strangely helpless fashion as he crashed like a flower on a broken stalk.

Nick grazed at him for a moment, and his hand went to the other one which he held in his uncle General Sir Martin Dale, the new Scotland Yard Commissioner, as he misquoted one of his favourite nonsensical rhymes.

General Dale's eyes twinkled.

"He's perfectly incorrigible, Miss Somerville! he remonstrated with his uncle, and the Croucher was pronounced dead. The Commissioner, as he is known, is no less likely to make a sensational death than the woman whom he loves.

"It nearly was—once," said Nick, growing suddenly grave. "If it hadn't been for Professor Li Sin her—"

Dorothy, a radiant figure in evening dress, smiled shyly at the bland, inscrutable Chinaman, who held one of his eccentric black rice paper cigarettes in his saffron fingers.

A week had elapsed since the Croucher's
end—a week of sensation unparalleled in the history of Fleet Street. A week of hurriedly summoned Cabinet Meetings, of almost hourly conferences at Scotland Yard; since it was announced to an astounded world that the master criminal who had terrorised London was the one-time head of the Metropolitan Police.

Much to Nick's relief little fuss had been made at the inquest on the body of the Croucher. The coroner, by arrangement with the Home Office, brought in a purely formal verdict of "Death by misadventure." Only Nick knew that the blow he had struck that wild night on the Yellow Queen was a blow aimed to kill and rid the world of a monster of iniquity.

The "Daily Clarion," of course, claimed its due share of the credit for exposing the scandal, and General Dale wisely allowed them to have the fullest information about the circumstances, and of his plans for the future.

The dinner to-night at the Hotel Splendide was by way of celebration of the new regime at police headquarters. Public confidence had been restored by the Home Secretary's frank statement in the House, and the four people who had been mainly responsible for the round-up of the Croucher's gang, and the smashing of one of the most dangerous organisations that ever menaced society, were now seated in a private room of the hotel overlooking the river on which the grim drama had been played to its close.

Nick, looking very handsome in his evening kit, gazed with frank admiration at Dorothy, while his uncle glanced meaningly at Li Sin.

"I find, inspector," drawled the Chinaman, "your methods, though unorthodox, have had a singular element of success. I found it absorbingly interesting to compare how you and myself both arrived at the same conclusion."

Nick recalled his eyes from Dorothy's superb profile with a start.

"You certainly fooled me, professor. How the dickens was I to know that Uncle Bim here had advised the Home Secretary to give you a free hand?"

The Chinaman shrugged.

"In the first place, my dear fellow, it had been obvious for months that the Croucher was no ordinary crook. It was also obvious that some leakage of information came from police headquarters. When young Maynard's Press campaign started, the Cabinet were naturally perturbed, and a successor to Sir Richard Gilbert was looked for. Not, of course, that anyone suspected him of being the Croucher, but simply because they thought a new man at the head might restore public confidence. They sent for your uncle, who, as you know, has had a distinguished career in the Far East as a political officer. He very kindly brought to their notice my unworthy name, as he was convinced that the recrudescence of the dope traffic was of Oriental origin."

(Continued on page 28.)

J. G. REEDER WARNS YOU

NOT TO MISS

EDGAR WALLACE'S

Latest and Greatest
New Novel in

NEXT WEEK'S
ISSUE OF

"The THRILLER"

Those of you who are acquainted with J. G. Reeder—world-famous detective, and Edgar Wallace's greatest creation—know what a treat is in store for you NEXT WEEK, when you will accompany him on another amazing adventure.

There will be a rush for this issue of "The THRILLER." Order your copy NOW!

ASK FOR No. 7 of "The THRILLER"

ON SALE SATURDAY NEXT.
The DEATH of BERNARD FROBISHER

At 9.25 on the evening of January 12th, the police received a telephone call from a man who spoke in an excited voice.

"This is the butler at Bernard Frobisher's. Mr. Frobisher has shot himself. He just killed himself. I'm all alone in the house. It's terrible. What? 220, Sandhurst Avenue. Yes, I'll stay here. Graves—John Graves, the butler."

The police found Graves and Annie O'Hagen, the cook, who had just come in, waiting anxiously by the front door. In the library the dead Bernard Frobisher slumped down in an armchair, dead from a bullet which had entered the middle of his forehead. A revolver was found on his lap, which he was holding. The shoe of the chair lay on the floor beside him, its polished surface perfectly matching the highly-polished surface of the newly-vaxed floor of the library, and found there what seemed to be correlating evidence of his suicide. Frobisher's heel marks matched the marks on the floor perfectly.

When the butler returned at 9.25, she discovered the body in the library and reported it to the police.

Was the butler telling the truth? The police examined the butler's stories and found that the butler had been fired from the estate three years ago.

THE RULES.

The rules are simplicity itself. On this page you are given details of Raffler Problem No. 6—and there will be another next week. Briefly, you are told the story of a crime and given ALL the clues necessary for its solution. Be your own detective. Read the problem through very carefully, giving consideration to every detail, and then try to answer the questions at the end.

Awards yourself marks as indicated after comparing your answers with those given on page 28. These answers are printed inside the book so that you may not catch your eye before you have had a chance to test your skill. Remember, it is the sense of your solution, not its exact wording, that counts.

Try a baffler on your friends. Read the problem to them and see if they can make out, awarding a small prize—if you like—to the first to give the correct solution.

extravagance with her husband, but denied vehemently that he would have taken his own life merely on that account because of losses from speculations. She said she could offer no adequate reason for suicide. On the other hand, she could not suggest why anyone should have desired his death. She testified most positively—and her opinion was shared by the cook—that Frobisher was the kind of man who would not commit suicide. On the other hand, both refused to believe that John Graves, the butler, could have shot Frobisher, for neither knew of any animosity between the two men or any possible motive. Graves had been with the family for only two months.

Investigations revealed that Mrs. Frobisher had been at the opera from 8.15 until summoned home by the tragedy, and that Annie O'Hagen had been at the fire during the time she had said she was there. John Graves, the butler, stoutly denied further knowledge.

When asked if he thought it possible that some intruder had entered the house and shot Frobisher while he, Graves, was in the kitchen, the butler denied the possibility. He pointed out that the hall door of the library and all the windows had been locked from the inside.

The police had found little evidence in the case.

You now have all the evidence which was available to the police on the night of the death of Bernard Frobisher. What do you deduce about the mystery? Three days later much light was shed by the discovery of certain papers in the private files of the dead man, and of these you will read in the answer section. Meanwhile, these are the questions to be answered:

1. At whose hands did Bernard Frobisher meet his death? (Marks 5).

2. How do you know it? (Marks 5).

(Next week's fascinating "Baffler" problem for you to solve will be entitled The Shooting of 'Whisper' Malloy, A real mystery to test your skill as a detective.)
INTRODUCTION.

The Trapper, a wealthy but dangerous fanatic, was under the impression that he was performing a very necessary and wanted service to the community at large by independently dealing with criminals where he considered the police powerless or incompetent to deal with.

Enough ruthless in his methods, he is trying to organise a gang, one of the first members of which is Dick Estrehan, an ex-clerk of the firm of Hont, Hart, Son & Barter, and a friend of Stella Cliffe and Velvet Grimshaw, two crooks who, ignorant of his real position, fleeced him of the money.

In the hands of the Trapper, Dick is promised that the $20,000 shall be paid back in payment for one year of his life. For that period he must give his life and reputation to the Trapper. The alternative being prison and disgrace. There being no option, he is dismissed as an Evasion named Thompson, and interned as clerk to the sham firm of Maule, James & Co., of Farrington Street.

Meanwhile, Velvet Grimshaw is murdered under strange circumstances at a West End night club. On his coat is found a wire noose such as is used for trapping rabbits.

This was the first appearance of the wire noose. Several previous crimes had borne this trade-mark, and Chief Constable Winter, of the CID, is determined to get the mysterious criminal known as the Trapper.

The job is given to Detective Martin Wilde.

Wilde is obliged to accept the assistance although in only an unofficial capacity, of Quentin Thordor and Patricia Langton. Thordor, an American millionaire, was already known to the Yard on account of valuable services he had previously rendered. On the night that Grimshaw was murdered at the Gnomes Club, it was Thordor who signaled to Detective Wilde a flash-lamp belonging to the murderer, and curiously enough Thordor was the only person present that night who possessed a revolver. The following day Wilde called at Thordor's flat, and while there discussing the situation with the American and Patricia Langton, an envelope is delivered to each of them—and each contained a wire noose.

Through following Stella Cliffe, Wilde traces the Trapper and Estrehan to a bogus firm in Farrington Street, but fails to make an arrest. Thordor, however, is not accurate and he means him, and going to the American's flat, accuses him of being the Trapper. Thordor, however, is not accurate, and he means him, and going to the American's flat, accuses him of being the Trapper. Wilde finds himself unable to prove his case.

Later, Wilde finds he is being followed by a habitual crook, known to him as Paddy the Ghost. Intercepting him, Wilde questions him, and becomes suspicious that he and the Trapper are not exactly unknown to each other. Wilde learns that Paddy the Ghost has been seen with the Trapper.

Accordingly, the detective sends some of his men to the circus in which he is performing, and to the shipping yards where he is supposed to have a connection.

Wilde and his men follow the Trapper to a place where he plans to murder his victim. Wilde then realizes that his victim is Paddy the Ghost.

The Trapper is arrested, and Paddy the Ghost is released.

THE ALIBI THAT FAILED.

"You can do just what you like about that," laughed Thordor. "It would amuse me more than anything, but you would most certainly be on the carpet for making a false move. But this shadowing business ...

Wilde adopted different tactics. He made no attempt at denial.

"I'm sorry if our fellows have been as clumsy as all that," he answered quietly. "It was a temporary expedient after the events of yesterday. I quite forgot that she was being watched. I'll see that there is no reason for any more complaint."

Thordor shrugged his shoulders, and spoke more calmly.

"I'm glad to see that you're not an absolute congenital fool. I don't want to make myself unpleasant. You can carry on the joke with me as long as you like. I'm pretty sure that you haven't called your people off me, though I haven't quite spotted them, yet. Reckon that won't worry me. All the same, I might be tempted to hurt one of them if they become too conspicuous. I'm here for a short while, anyway."

"Ah! Going back to the States?" queried Wilde.

"I am. If the Trapper works any more little stunts you might drop on me again. That would be embarrassing for both. So, in a week or two's time, I sail."

The detective rose and held out his hand.

"No ill feelings, I hope," he asked.

Thordor held back a moment, and then laughed as he grasped the extended hand.

"You're a harmless, incompetent, blundering old ass, Wilde," he said; "but hang it all, there's something about you I like. If you'd trusted me I might have stayed, and got you out of the mess that you're going to drop into."

The detective also laughed.

A DRAMA OF THE NIGHT-HAUNTS OF LONDON

By GEORGE DILNOT

Author of "Scotland Yard," etc.

In most criminal investigations there are times when the quest resolves itself into patient and sometimes waiting for some false step on the part of the suspects. Martin Wilde felt that he could afford to wait. He rather hoped that someone would be tempted to another exploit, which would, in all likelihood, open up a fresh line of inquiry, and tie in with those already in hand. But nothing of that sort happened.

Nor did anything meanwhile, both Stella Cliffe and Paddy the Ghost were assiduously watched. That they were aware of this Wilde was perfectly sure, for had they believed that he was not interested in the activities of the detectives they would have done all in their power to make the police's task as difficult as possible.

Following an old detective axiom, Wilde took measures that enabled him to know something of the correspondence received and dispatched by each of them, although this action presented difficulties, for the Post Office and the Yard knew all about them. Many of these were crooks, of course, but all the activities of the detectives could not be implicated in the activities of the Trapper.

From Crest, the divisional inspector who had been looking into the burglary at Duthy Ogle's, he got precise details of the affair. They consulted the files of what Scotland Yard calls the M. O. system, wherein the individual methods of export criminals are detailed, but this added little to their knowledge of the case.

"I am as sure as that the sun will rise to-morrow," asserted Crest, "that this job was pulled off by Paddy. No one else could have done it. Yet his alibi is complete—absolutely water-tight. We should be laughed out of court if we presented him."

Wilde's own opinion was exactly on those lines. His threat to Paddy to look into the matter himself had been no idle one, and although it meant going again over much of the ground already covered by Crest, he followed it up vigorously.

He went to Liverpool himself, and showed photographs at the hotel at which Paddy claimed to have stayed on the night of the burglary. They were identified by several of the hotel servants. There was even a detective-sergeant who remembered meeting Paddy, and his accent and facial expression, and warning him in a friendly way that anything untoward happened in the city he would be held responsible. The hotel register contained the date of Paddy's arrival. Wilde studied the book with some care, and then betook himself to the Bridewell, and borrowed a file of evidence. In which Scotland Yard presents portraits and details of notable ruffians who had disappeared from London, and
may be traveling in the provinces. In a little he had traveled what he wanted, and returned to the hotel.

Can you remember whether this gentleman sign a receipt for you?" he demanded of the reception clerk.

"No," he replied almost immediately.

The gentleman had sprained his hand, and had written a statement to that effect. He asked me to fill in the details."

Wilde wasted no time in pointing out a technical irregularity. He was anxious to get to a post-office, hence he sent a long telegram to Scotland Yard.

He caught the next train to London, and found a room for him when he arrived some five hours later.

"I don't know what you've found, sir," said the detective, "but I don't believe it." He added, "I've done my best, but I don't think it's going to be a success." Wilde had a half-thought that all the people to Paddy's flat had been tracked down, and that there was nothing left to be done."

"There's just a chance," explained Wilde. "It's thin, but we may make something of it. I've got enough to convince me that the man who killed Ogle was not only clever, but also someone made up to resemble him. The thing is a fake alibi. Paddy's double, whoever he was, had access to Paddy's hotel, at a time when Paddy was out of action, because he feared that his writing might give the game away.

"That's a bit of an overstatement," confessed Crest ruefully. "I tested the alibi, and, when it looked good, I gave up hope of roping Paddy. Naturally, I relied on the receipts from the post-office.

"No one's to blame," declared Wilson. "The man was a professional, and the alibi was drawn up by a man who wouldn't think of testing the signature, as there was apparently no doubt. Now, Crest, there's the chance to get the man. A false alibi is mighty thin to bank on by itself. Is there anything else we can do to help you?"

Both these men would have denied, with emphatic sincerity, any wish to "railroad" a crook who might be innocent. But in this case, neither of them had the shadow of doubt about Paddy, although both were aware how slight the evidence would appear to a jury.

"We can find the man who masqueraded as Paddy," ventured Crest dubiously.

Wilde cut him short.

"First of all, we have to get something more hopeful than that. Let's go and have another look at your file.

In every case handled by the Criminal Investigation Department, there was a mass of data—reports, plans, statements—of things which may be revealed. Frequently, in fact, the most important item was irrevelant, for no one can be certain that some seemingly inconsequential trifle may not be of importance. In this case, Wilde had already been over several times over the collection of matter held by Crest, but his mental attitude had been biased by the belief that Paddy held an impregnable alibi. Now it was different.

He interested himself particularly in a plan of the building in which the murder was committed, by Crest, of the condition of the place after the burglary. He laid his finger on a passage containing the names of the cigarette-ends lying about the room. Ogle does not smoke, so that these were evidently left by someone who smoked while he worked on the safe.

"You've got these cigarette-ends?" he questioned. "I'll take some with me. And this thread, you mention. Let's have a look at that."

"The thread was not doubt used for opening the safe," said Paddy. "I've had inquiries made. You can buy that sort of thread anywhere."

"Just to be on the safe side," he added.

"No," admitted the other. "They didn't seem important."

Among the equipment of many skilled burglars, fine soft thread frequently finds a place. There are locks which may be overcome by a patient expert who has mastered the art. Paddy had discovered that the tumbler by deft manipulation with a piece of wood. It was one of Paddy's favourite methods. He had been taught it outside his discovery of the thread was in itself of no help.

Part of the remainder of the day went in discussing the cigarette-ends, including tobacco, paper merchants, a analyst who held a retainer from the House of Lords, and a number of local people. The two detectives, excluding Paddy, appeared and filled for his latchkey. He had partly opened the door when Wilde's hand fell on his shoulder.

"I want you, Paddy."

"I've got a warrant," declared Wilde quietly. "Our best friend, with his arm linked in that of the other, marched into the little sitting-room of the flat. It was an elegant interior, with an easy chair and stood over him. "I am going to arrest you for burglary at Ogle's place. Anything you say can be used as evidence. Shall I read the warrant?"

"Oh, keep it to yourself!" laughed the man, "I've had nothing to do with that job. Just go ahead. Don't mind me." He crossed his legs and folded his arms.

"Run him over," ordered Wilde, and in less than five minutes Paddy and all his public possessions had been effectively searched, and a little heap of his personal belongings lay on a table. Wilde picked up a look at the evidence, and for the first packet of cigarette-papers. "Still make your own, I see," commented. "You mean to say, Paddy, you make your own cigarettes?"

"Think so," said the other indifferently. "Well, that's my business."

"Mine, too, I think," observed Wilde mildly. "The fellow who did that Dalston job smoked too much. Same kind of tobacco and same kind of mixture."

"Paddy's indifference vanished.

"So that's part of the frame-up, is it?" he said. "I can't help it if other people smoke the same kind of tobacco. I've got a habit."

"I see," replied Crest. "It was a chance discovery, for no one can be certain that some seemingly inconsequential trifle may not be of importance. In this case, Wilde had already been over several times over the collection of matter held by Crest, but his mental attitude had been biased by the belief that Paddy held an impregnable alibi. Now it was different."

He interested himself particularly in a plan of the building in which the murder was committed, by Crest, of the condition of the place after the burglary. He laid his finger on a passage containing the names of the cigarette-ends lying about the room. Ogle does not smoke, so that these were evidently left by someone who smoked while he worked on the safe.

"You've got these cigarette-ends?" he questioned. "I'll take some with me. And this thread, you mention. Let's have a look at that."

"The thread was not doubt used for opening the safe," said Paddy. "I've had inquiries made. You can buy that sort of thread anywhere."

"Just to be on the safe side," he added.

"No," admitted the other. "They didn't seem important."

Among the equipment of many skilled burglars, fine soft thread frequently finds a place. There are locks which may be over

Get on with your knitting! I stand pat. I agree."

"As you like," said the detective imperturbably.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE OLD BAILEY.

The proceedings against Paddy were pressed, perhaps, a fraction more keenly than they would be in the normal course, because of the undercurrent of feeling in the case.

At the Home Office, at the Department of Public Prosecutions, and at Scotland Yard, there were whispers of what eight or nine old-timers—who appreciated the importance of showing Paddy that there was no let-up in the police action. Each of them had his own legal mind. Neither promise, nor threat in words was made to the prisoner. He was subjected to no interroga tions, and received no more than mere courteous treatment; but he was allowed to know that every classification of his case was in the hands of the police, to "make a statement," in the trust of softening his fate.

Inevitably, the presence of Wilde in the case, together with the fact that one of the ablest defense counsel was in charge, the murder in the police court, gave rise to suspicion in the minds of the newspaper men. The trial of a well-known and popular man, who was accused of the murder at the Gnomes Club. But the detective carried all questions with a laugh, while the chief inspector frequently pointed out that the mystery of the murder still remained unsolved, while the chief inspector in the case was prominently concerned with a matter of burglary.

"I can do no harm," commented Winter. "They're only guessing, and one of the boys must have had a snook at it. They've been thinking over. Besides, it's all calculated to get on Paddy's mind."

In the course of the trial it was disclosed that there was no certainty among those concerned that Paddy would be convicted. A counsel for the prosecution remarked to Wilde, "This is a big case. It's a big case, and I think to those who had been in the habit of using, and that thread found at his flat was like that discovered at the scene of the murder."

There was scarcely more than the pretense of a fight at the police-court proceedings. The counsel for Paddy stated that for weeks the longer the trial was delayed the greater the chance of some piece of evidence turning up that might tell against his client. Such a piece of evidence, according to him, was a statement that the authorities were streaming every nerve. He was not inclined to underestimate the activity of Wilde.

So it came about that only a couple of weeks elapsed after the arrest before Paddy was committed to take his trial at the Old Bailey. The well-dressed wheels of criminal justice permit of little delay in England. A session of the House of Commons was in progress, so the Criminal Court was already in being, and, since there was a light calendar, it was merely a question of days ere Paddy took his place in the spacious dock of the main court room. The man who had been the sole witness for the prosecution sat to one side of the great sword of justice, rather than immediately beneath it. The spectators, who as short as the clerk of arraignments began to read the indictment, with the air of a bored business man in something that had been done, were sent for dinner. The jury had scarcely echoed through the court, before a jury was empanelled, and were repeating, "Children recent school lesson, the for mula of the juror's oath."

"I swear by Almighty God that I will tell and truly try the issue joined between our Sovereign Lord the King and the petitioner at the bar, whom I shall have in charge, and a true verdict give, according to the evidence. So help me God."
The clerk of arraigns in quaint, age-long language, gave the prisoner in charge to the jury, and a little, bewigged man rose, and in quiet, conversational tones began his opening: "May it please your lordship. Members of the jury—

The case was on. Paddy yawned ostentatiously. For all that, his mind was keenly alert to everything that was passing, and a little frown gathered on his brow as counsel skillfully elaborated his points and stressed the pains that had been taken to manufacture an alibi, which the witnesses for the prosecution would be able to demonstrate was false.

There followed in swift succession an array of persons who swore that they had seen Paddy in London about the date when he was supposed to have been in Liverpool, and others who declared that he had suffered no injury to his hand. A bitter cross-examination shook some of these, but the majority held to their time and dates. One or two expert witnesses were examined as to the cigarettes and the thread, and Wilde himself was the last to go into the box for the prosecution. His evidence-in-chief was utterly formal.

In even, matter-of-fact tones, he related that he had taken the prisoner into custody on a warrant and had directed a search at his flat. Under cross-examination, he asserted he had exerted any illegal pressure on Paddy to extort a confession. By itself Wilde's evidence did not go beyond testimony that was so commonplace as to be almost a formula in British criminal courts.

Paddy himself went into the witness-box, and detailed a story of a trip to Liverpool. On his journey to that city, he explained, he had seen his hand in slaming a railway-carriage door. A lady had screamed and he had injured it and put it in a sling, and he intended to have had it looked at by his own doctor on his return to London. The injury, however, had not proved so bad as he had anticipated, and he had abandoned the bandage and the sling on his return.

Cross-examination failed to shake him on the details of his movements. He had been well rehearsed. The witnesses who declared that they had seen him in London were mistaken. But he was not so steady when questioned about his injury. He did not know the person who had bandaged his hand. He could not call any person who had seen the accident. He had not mentioned it to anyone when he got back. The thing was too trivial to stick in his mind.

His alibi was confirmed by a few witnesses from Liverpool, and counsel gave their concluding addresses. The judge summed up, and the Treasury solicitor rubbed his chin doubtfully as the jury retired.

"Touch and go," he observed in an undertone to Wilde.

Within a quarter of an hour the jury were back. The confused buzz of talk ceased as three knocks heralded the return of the judge. As the foreman of the jury stood to announce the verdict, every gaze focused on him. No one paid attention to a man who pushed his way beneath the panelled front to the high dock, as though to obtain a better view point.

"Guilty!"

"Stop! Stand back, you people!"

Jammed in the crowd, from his place near the solicitor's benches, Wilde could just catch a glimpse of a tall man at the door. A black mask hid the upper portion of his face, and in his outstretched hands wore a couple of automatic pistols.

The City policeman, who acted as doorkeeper, flung himself forward. There was a venomous crack, and he rolled forward with a wince, just as the doughty Wilde gave a shrill squeal that might have been caused by either fright or pain. The other door leading to the court was hidden from Wilde's sight by the dock, but a loud exclamation and a second report from that direction told that that also was well guarded. In the public gallery above the court a third masked man was looking down, also armed with a pair of pistols. The man who had gained the front of the dock dropped to the floor and edged his way to the door. The man who had held up the warders, looked upwards. His confederate in the public gallery, ostentatiously brought a pistol to bear on the officers in the dock, and the other followed Paddy.

Better stay where you are, Paddy," urged Wilde, and his voice was cool and solemn.

"This will only get you in worse."

Ah, there you are, Wilde!" said the leader.

"I couldn't see you before. Keep your nose out of this."

He levelled a pistol, and on its report the greatest sword of steel in England split the bullet bored its way into the panel behind the Bench to which it had been secured.

"Defend the children of the poor!"

quoted a mocking voice. "Good-bye, Wilde. Look after yourself."

The door opened and closed again. They were gone.

(The Trooper's Hold-up at the Old Bailey leads to sensational developments in next week's instalment of this gripping serial.)
The Solution of this week's ‘BAFFLER' PROBLEM

on page 24.

DO NOT READ THIS ANSWER until you have made your effort to solve the crime. To this end the facts are printed upside down.