

# CLEVEREST CROOKS MAKE MISTAKES

Little details overlooked by criminals often lead to their undoing—Some instances given



THE most absorbing detective stories are based on the proposition that a series of truthful events dovetail together with exact nicety, while a fabricated story of similar events must always have a missing cog, which with diligent search will be discovered. It is beyond human ingenuity to construct a false story of a series of events and not make a mistake. Prosecuting attorneys are always on the watch for these little openings that explode the false testimony. Nor are there lacking numerous examples of this situation in the daily court grind and in general police work.

A few days ago a merchant reported to the police that a large shipping case had been opened nearly \$500 in merchandise abstracted and the case nailed shut again. A police detective was detailed to make an investigation of the theft. He went over the ground with a department head and at the conclusion of his investigation had learned absolutely nothing. At a loss as to the next move he engaged the head shipping clerk in conversation, the talk being relative to the man's trade.

The clerk, an affable mechanic, took pride in demonstrating the efficiency of his department. He explained everything about the business and at last demonstrated the method of making boxes. This was a new thing to the officer. The boards were placed in position about a form of the dimension the finished box would be and with one movement nearly 100 nails were automatically driven home. The box was thus made as quickly as a man could assemble the boards, there being no time lost in the nailing process. The detective looked over the machine that in one operation drove all the nails and got a hunch.

Strolling back to the packing case that had been filled of its contents he made a careful examination of the surface. Then for the first time in his experience as a detective he took stock of the fiction detective and brought into play a magnifying glass. The surface of the box indicated that instead of the mechanical nail-driving process the nails had been driven with a hammer. The magnifying glass disclosed that the hammer marks were made by a badly chipped hammer. Continuing his search the officer eventually found a hammer in the tool chest of a delivery boy's equipment that made exactly the kind of marks found on the packing case.

It only required a few hours' investigation to ascertain that the youth was the thief and that he had been disposing of the goods in a foreign settlement. The discovery of the hammer marks unfolded the crime in a few hours, while had the usual process been followed the detectives would have had to investigate the entire force of employees who had access to the basement. The theft and sale had been entirely covered up and it was only the one cog in the wheel that had been missing.

## Arson Plots Revealed.

It is in cases of arson that this theory is often demonstrated and the prosecuting attorney must ever be on the alert to detect the point where there is a divergence of the fabricated story. Within recent years there have occurred in a limited district more than 100 fires of more than a suspicious nature. Many of these have been exposed in court and others by some flaw in the construction of the crime.

An arsonist planned a fire and was highly successful. He had also concocted an alibi and proved by excellent witnesses that he had left home 24 hours prior to the fire. The district attorney's office, while feeling that the man was lying, could hardly refute the testimony of the witnesses produced. It was not until the last day of the trial that a member of the district attorney's office discovered that on the day the man declared he left home by train, owing to a wreck the train had not been sent out over the regular route and it was therefore impossible for the man to have taken that train. The prisoner was convicted on this one circumstance.

A woman conducted an unprofitable apartment house venture and planned for more than five months to destroy the property by fire. She placed more than 100 gallons of distillate and gasoline in various vacant rooms in the house. The place was a veritable bomb and had it been fired it would have been blown to pieces with great loss of life. On the night the fire was to have been started the woman opened a stopcock in the furnace room, permitting 40 gallons of distillate to escape into the room. Then she went to the top floor of the building for the purpose of overturning the many cans of inflammable liquids.

In the first room she entered, long vacant, the fumes of the gasoline overcame her and she swooned, falling against a table and overturning a telephone. The light on the switchboard alarmed the operator, who, knowing the room to be unoccupied, made an investigation and discovered the plot.

The ring and gang of arsonists fired the home of a wealthy fellow-countryman, but in arranging their plans spilled some of the liquid on their clothing. When they struck a match to light the slow fuse that was to have exploded the bomb after their departure they were both horribly burned. The men were given long prison terms, but were released on a technicality after serving two years of the sentence.

A jeweler desired to get a quick return on his insurance and planned a fire. He placed a gasoline bomb in a closet, floated a lighted candle in the mixture and fled to a neighboring city, thereby hoping to establish an alibi. When he opened the front door of his home to leave draught was created and the closet door blew shut. Lack of air extinguished the flame. A policeman witnessed the flight of the jeweler and made an investigation. The fire trap was discovered and an officer went in pursuit of the jeweler. When apprehended the police searched the man and found on him his fire insurance policy. On the envelopes were figures that later turned out to be an invoice of the property as it stood and a computation of the

insurance, indicating that the man anticipated a fat profit from the transaction.

A well-known detective once overthrew an insurance fraud that was all but perfect in detail. The fire was to all appearances an accident and there was nothing on the surface to indicate fraud. Notwithstanding, the officer went into court to contest the claim for insurance and to prosecute the insured. The case went slowly along until the defendants put in their claim, mostly for expensive furniture. Then the officer showed his hand. He produced the entire remains of the fire in the form of ash and charred wood and convinced the jury that the fire was not only of an incendiary origin, but that there was nothing of value in the building.

The owners of the furniture had described a number of brass beds, elaborate, brass-finished furniture, dressers, wardrobes, trunks, tables, lamps and other metal-bound articles. The detective showed that there was not a trace of metal in the ash—no hinges, knobs or brass bed frames—nothing in fact but several hundred nails, such as come from packing cases. While it was impossible to prove arson, the insurance was never paid, as the insured fled the same night.

## Rancher Robbery Victim.

Only a few weeks ago a Lankershim rancher saved \$2,700 and sent a dishonest broker to jail for a long term by breaking up the elaborate story of the accused. The rancher drew the money from a local bank for the purpose of purchasing an additional piece of ground. He went to his home to meet the agent, and while awaiting his arrival worked about a windmill in the yard. Becoming warm with the exertion of tightening up a number of rods and replacing a number of iron pipes the rancher removed his coat and hung it on a board at the well. After a time he went to a nearby building to secure an additional section of pipe.

On his return the coat was on the ground, the money missing. The rancher heard the muffled roar of an automobile driven at a high rate of speed and rushing into the road saw a small machine disappearing in a cloud of dust. The rancher believed he recognized the broker's automobile, and going to a telephone he notified the police and sheriff's office of the theft and of his suspicion of the broker.

But while waiting to hear from the officers the rancher was surprised to observe the broker coming down the road in an entirely different car than the one he usually rode. The rancher formally welcomed the broker, made a quiet statement of the robbery and then declared that he had recognized the thief. He did not mince words, but openly accused the broker of the theft. While the men were wrangling a deputy sheriff appeared.

The rancher was so positive in his identification of the broker as being the person that had fled that the deputy placed the man under arrest. A search of the broker's safe revealed several sums of currency that totaled a little more than \$2,700. The broker fell back on the plea that there could be no identification of money unless it was marked or unless the numbers on the bills were produced. Nevertheless, after a consultation between the rancher and a deputy district attorney a warrant was issued. The money in the broker's safe was seized, placed in an envelope and marked evidence.

At the trial the rancher was unable to prove much of a case on the broker. The machine was one of several million of the same model. He could not swear whether the broker was in the machine, and he acknowledged that he did not have the numbers of the lost currency. Then the broker was placed on the witness stand and endeavored to show that he was at a certain office at the very time of the robbery. Then by relatives he tried to show that the money in his safe had been delivered to him in several sums. At this point the district attorney called on several persons who alleged they had paid him money. In each instance they declared the money had been drawn either from a bank or had been secured on the day of delivery from another.

The district attorney's representative then arose and walking over to the accused broker, broke the seal on the package of money held as evidence and, holding it in front of the prisoner, demanded if there was any identifying mark on the currency. Nonplused for the moment, the man replied there was none. Turning to the rancher the deputy asked the same question. "Yes, there is a decided mark of identification on every bill," the man replied. Turning back to the broker the deputy gave him another opportunity to identify the money, and a third time appealed to him to know if there was any way in which he could establish ownership.

Remember the rancher had not viewed the currency since it went into the hands of the deputy district attorney. The deputy then called on the rancher to identify the money.

"If the bills in that package are mine the edges will be found smeared with red lead. I dropped the roll onto a splotch of the red lead while I was working on my windmill and, after cleaning off as much of the stuff as I could, I put the money in a coat pocket, letting the damp edges project out so they would dry. That is how this man (pointing to the prisoner) came to see the money."

The bills were examined and each one was found to have the telltale red mark along the edge. More than that, three witnesses came forward to testify that they had observed traces of red on the broker's hands on the day of his arrest and the broker declared that he "must have cut his hand."

## He Forgot the Rain.

In a prepared story meant to deceive, quite as likely as not the impostor will overdo his part and thus lead to exposure. A youth with a serious charge hanging over his head managed to quite for the issue of the case by a cleverly prepared alibi. Two reputable but mistaken witnesses assisted him. In an effort to find a point on which to seize the district attorney permitted, or rather,



insisted, on a complete detailed account of the man's movements on the day in question. The story was glibly told and it was impossible to confuse the witness.

Then came the stumble. Among other incidents the prisoner told of visiting a bootblack and explained that in addition to having his boots polished he had received a thorough brushing off, all because it was an exceedingly dusty day. The records were produced and these showed that one of the heavy rains of the season raged not only on the day of the crime, but on the days prior and following. The witnesses were recalled and they also remembered that it was a dusty blowy day. This so confused the prisoner he made several other misstatements which in the end led to his conviction.

A ranch hand accused of the wholesale theft of grain from the fields of California ranches declared that he was not in California until after the date of the alleged robbery. He then convicted himself by describing a clump of gum trees in one of the fields. The prosecution was able to show that these trees were cut down two weeks before the robbery and that the accused could not have described the trees except from personal knowledge. His alibi upset, the unfortunate ranch hand pleaded to turn state's evidence and implicate what he was pleased to term the ringleaders of an extensive gang of grain thieves.

## Identify Coin by Perfume.

Several weeks ago a woman dropped her purse, containing a large sum of money. A child of tender years picked up the valuable container and started to carry it home. Two men in an oil distributing station saw the incident and managed to get the purse from the child, giving him a few pennies. The men hid the money in an oil can, first extracting a few bills for immediate use.

The same day the owner of the money made a report to the police and also instituted a person's search. She inquired all along the street in which the loss had occurred, eventually embracing the very child that had found the money. The little tot immediately pointed out the two men who had taken the purse and the woman made a formal demand for the return of the money. The men denied the theft and by their fierce denial frightened the child.

Police officers were summoned, but by this time the child was thoroughly demoralized and refused to identify the men, declaring that he was not now certain to whom he had delivered the purse. The owner of the money, among other things, declared the bills of currency could be identified, if located, by their odor. She explained that following her securing the currency from a bank she had purchased a bottle of perfume and that this bottle had been accidentally opened in her purse and the bills saturated with the liquid. The police visited the stores in the neighborhood and learned that one of the suspected men had paid a grocery bill a few hours after the money was supposed to have come into his possession. On examining the bills that had been paid to the grocer they were found to be strongly impregnated with perfume. Then the officer searched the oil station, sniffing into every can and box in the place. Within a few moments after the search was instituted one of the officers found the bills secreted in a can of cotton oil waste, the perfume being distinctly discernable in spite of the oil.

## Minor Matters Trip Crooks.

Instances of a similar nature may be found in the police court without number. A thief was convicted recently on a charge of larceny because, although he had memorized the numbers on the case and works of a watch and produced what purported to be a bill of sale, still he did not know that in the scroll work on the back of the case were the initials of the owner.

Another criminal was justly convicted and later made a full confession after the police had dispaired of fastening the crime on him. He was accused of cutting open a number of packages in an express office and extracting articles of value, repairing the damage to the package so that there could be no exposure for several days after the theft. While the trial was in progress the prosecuting witness picked up a pocket knife, the acknowledged property of the accused, and on a close examination found a red coral bead in the slot where the knife blade reposed when clasped. One of the beads had stuck to the knife blade and had thus been imbedded in the knife slot. This simple find resulted in the man's conviction and the return of several thousand dollars of loot to the express company.

# IN THE LIMELIGHT

## EDITS FIRST JERUSALEM DAILY

Mar Itamar Ben Avi, editor of the first daily paper ever published in Jerusalem, and properly a Hebrew paper—the Jerusalem Haav—recently visited Boston. It might be well to explain that "Mar" means "Mr."

Think of it. If—Mar Itamar Ben Avi's enterprise had flourished 1917 years ago; and if it had kept pace with the current events of that period in Jerusalem, how much of mind speculation, personal and national animosity, fruitless controversy and trouble generally it would have saved the world—providing Herod did not out-Herod himself in the use of a ruthless and perverse censorship.

However, as Jerusalem is again passing through a crisis in its history and as it is likely to become of more political importance—of more international importance—than ever after the war, it is well that it should have so comprehensive and capable a journalist as Itamar Ben Avi to chronicle the events and the news. For he believes that Palestine has a new message to give the world, and that it is destined to play a large and important part, not only in the future history of the Jews, but in the future progress of humanity.

He is an ardent Zionist and he believes that out of the success of Zionism will come not only a regenerated Jewish nation, but a force that will react in a fine way on the intellectual world.

He may be a dreamer, as his father, Ben Zehuda, was, and as Herzl was; but as the dreams of both these men were being realized when the war broke out, Itamar Ben Avi believes that their dreams and his own will be fully realized when the war is over—that the war will prove to be the thing necessary to the full fruition of these dreams.



## MRS. LONGWORTH DOING HER "BIT"



Two daughters of ex-President Theodore Roosevelt are showing their colors; they are not allowing all the glory to fall to the share of the three brothers, Theodore, Quentin, and Archie, who are now in France. Mrs. Nicholas Longworth, who as Alice Roosevelt was the most popular girl in the White House since Dolly Madison, has turned her home in Cincinnati over to the Red Cross for war relief work. The war has had a sobering effect on the original and darling daughter of Theodore Roosevelt, who, in her reign in the White House, attracted general attention, no less for her independence of manner and scorn of conventional rules as for the charm of her unusual costumes.

In London, where the society of the English capital lionized her, she was hailed as the most daringly free young woman who had ever been admitted to the inner circles. She declined to wear a wedding ring, smoked cigarettes, and declared that a cocktail was not necessarily an instrument of evil. Today she is one of the most ardent workers in the Red Cross, giving of her time, her energy, and her money.

Her sister, Mrs. Richard Derby, the former Ethel Roosevelt, has served in France as a Red Cross nurse, going over with her husband, Doctor Derby, at the beginning of the war. Doctor Derby had charge of a Red Cross unit and together the young couple worked in their mission of mercy. Mrs. Derby has been back twice since her first trip over and the pitfalls of the ocean do not seem to daunt the valiant daughter of Colonel Roosevelt.

## WAR SECRETARY'S BOYHOOD

Newton D. Baker, secretary of war, got his first military experience when he accepted the office President Wilson offered him. He never even played with tin soldiers when he was a boy. He was always peaceable. His own mother, Mrs. Mary D. Baker, says so.

"I hate war," the mother of the war chief said, "but I wouldn't have a son who would hesitate to fight for his country."

Another son, Capt. Frank H. Baker, is on his way back to his post in Paris. Her husband was a noncommissioned officer in the Confederate cavalry, and 13 of her cousins served in the Civil War.

"Nonsense! No!" she said when asked if she thought her son, Newton D., would be the next president. "I don't think he wants it. The only person who is confident he'll be the next president is his old black mammy down in Virginia. Newton has aged in the last year. There are lines in his forehead which were not there before. He always had such a boyish appearance."

"I don't worry about my boys, though. They can all take care of themselves." Mrs. Baker, though seventy-five, hasn't a gray hair in her head. "That's because my boys are so good," she explained.



## COMMANDS REGIMENT IN FRANCE



Col. George D. Duncan, now on active detail, was born in Kentucky, October 10, 1861, and appointed to the Military Academy from that state in 1882. In 1886 he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Ninth Infantry, and has served continuously in that arm of the service.

Colonel Duncan was recently released from detail to the general staff corps to join one of the infantry regiments to be sent to the French front, and is now on the field at the head of a regiment of regulars.

Colonel Duncan is an exceedingly active officer and maintains a wonderful control of his men. He first distinguished himself in the Philippine islands, where, after serving for two years in the field, he was in 1900 appointed chief of scouts, in which capacity he did creditable work.

General Pershing and Colonel Duncan have long been close friends, the commanding general having recognized the worth of his subordinate when they were serving in the Philippines together.