O'Keefe, Ahkoond of Swat: A Tale of Modern

Methods and Luck of a Lucky Man---By Wm. H. Osborne

(Copyright, 1904, by William Hamilton Osborne.)

Note—The scene of this narrative is laid in the mythical town of Monroe, on the Pacific coast. One or two chapters are laid in the Island of Swat in the Pacific ocean. The island, but not the name, is fictitious. There is a principality of Swat in the northeast corner of India, the ruler of which is known as the Akhoond. The Century dictionary describes this as being a province of which little is known. I have made it an island instead of a part of the mainland, explaining, of course, the discrepancy. The suggested derivation of the name of "Swat" as found in one of the latter chapters of the book, is, of course, purely fanciful. W. H. O.

CHAPTER I.

Constitutional Smith.

CONSTITUTIONAL SMITH was a strong-arm man. That, and a bit of a swindler, too. In fact, his success as a strong-arm man was due to the finesse which made him, upon occasion, a successful swindler. But it was as a strong-arm man that he excelled. He possessed the first essential—individual strength to a very great degree. It is the lack of fine physical ability, the lack of strength, that has too often been the ruin of strong-arm men and has brought the profession into disrepute. A strong-arm man who can neither successfully evade nor battle with the police department, individually or collectively, is something less than a cipher. He is more than a knave—he is a fool. His place is behind the ribbon counter in a dry goods store. He is, literally, no good.

Constitutional Smith was none of these. He had been too well brought up. He was a thoroughbred. His father was the man who cracked the County National bank in New York in '73 and made the most successful and sensational loot of the decade. His mother came of a family of well known and well recognized house breakers, and his grandfather was one of the most accomplished horse thieves west of the Mississippi. The branches and tendrils of his family root had for generation after generation received life and nourishment from many varied strata of the under-world.

Constitutional Smith had several virtues. He had no sweethearts, and no regular associates or pals. He had no entangling alliances. He worked alone. Beyond that, apparently, he laid no schemes and made no plans; he left no track or trail behind him; there were no earmarks to his jobs. Members of the force arriving at the scene of operations in any particular case could never say, from evidence he left, "This is one of Constitutional's jobs." Not by a long shot. And herein he was wise. For it is the man who carefully lays plans who makes trouble for himself, the man who hangs around a job before it is executed that is identified upon his trial. It is the man who walks in and does his job and then walks out that goes scot free. There are many instances of this. Up in Massachusetts a few years ago some one—who, no one knows to this day—walked into a house, butchered its occupants, executed a robbery, and then walked out. A hundred people might have seen this thing. As a matter of fact, no one saw it. A year later the same thing happened in Brooklyn. The whole countryside discussed each of these cases for a year. Each is still a mystery.

Now, Constitutional Smith was not a butcher. He had never killed even in self-defense. But his methods were just that. Suddenly he swooped down upon his victim, be it house or bank or individual, did his work and left—that was all. He was too economical to leave his visiting card. He walked away—and there was another little mystery to his credit; and a new failure chalked up against the sleuths.

And Constitutional Smith had another virtue—he was close mouthed; he never talked. He never blabbed. He took good care that word of his achievements never reached the dives. No ope ever whispered in the holes in the ground that "Constitutional's made another haul." To make confidants of his fellow criminals was, as Constitutional regarded it, placing just so much material evidence in the hands of the police. The constitution guaranteed to Constitutional the right of free speech, but Constitutional Smith knew that in his case freedom of speech meant the curtailment of his liberty. Silence is golden, and time usually is money; and in this case speech meant just the sort of time that Constitutional preferred not to do; and silence was money in his pocket. So he kept mum, did Constitutional Smith.

Constitutional had another virtue—he was gentle. He had a giant's strength, but he rarely used it like a giant. Like a successful and popular dentist, he could not always help hurting his victim, but he hurt no more than was necessary. But whereas the dentist hammers in the vicinity of the skull to put gold in, Constitutional hammered for the purpose of taking gold out. But his little taps were fatal. He had another dentist's habit—he used an anaesthetic. Abstracting money from the person of an individual is always painful. He mercifully deadened the pain as much as possible. But he never carried tools or arms or chloroform save for about an hour before and an hour after each job. He knew better. He was well up in the law of evidence.

As an earnest of the skill and ingenuity of Mr. Smith, it is only fair to mention here one or two of his achievements. The world knows about some of them and has marveled at them, although in each case Constitutional Smith left the prisoners' dock a free man, with an unproved charge behind him. That was because Constitutional Smith had prepared his defense before he had committed his crime—a wise thing to do. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. These cases merely have to be mentioned in order to be recalled.

One of these was the famous bank messenger case. It was a robbery perpetrated upon three bank messengers, each fully armed, and perpetrated in broad daylight in Wall street in the sight of half a thousand men. To a moral certainty Constitutional Smith did it, but to a legal certainty he did not. He was acquitted at any rate. The man that did it got off with some $30,000 in United States currency. Constitutional Smith has never yet denied the perpetration of this crime.

His second great alleged offense consisted in cracking the Atlantic and Pacific Trust company safe in 1899. This was done by means of setting up a false front to the safe, painted on canvas—a complete facsimile of the safe itself. A member of the force and a detailed watchman looked with complaisance upon this false front all through the night. Behind it was Constitutional Smith and a dismantled safe. This coup d'etat resulted in another famous case of the People, etc., against Smith. It resulted also in another acquittal of the one-and-only Smith.

To the trial of his third case he owes his peculiar name. In that case his guilt—of some crime at least—was proven beyond a reasonable doubt. He was charged with larceny from the person of one Willoughby G. Schneck. The larceny was accompanied with violence. The crime occurred on the outskirts of a country town. Willoughby G. Schneck was driving home, and foolishly carried with him nearly $50,000 in cash, the proceeds of a real estate deal closed late in the afternoon. He was held up on the highway by one or two persons, either Smith or another. This other, probably, was an accomplice, though Smith, as has been indicated, rarely worked with an accomplice. This man upon the trial was claimed to be a stranger and was the principal witness against Smith. Smith, however, showed conclusively that the stranger was covered with blood, presumably the victim's, while Smith was innocent of any evidence of the crime. The stranger's evidence was all the prosecution had. Smith was acquitted and the stranger was arrested. On his trial Smith swore that the blood upon the stranger's clothes was obtained in a fight by which the stranger attempted to arrest Smith at the time of the robbery. The circumstances were peculiar, but upon each trial the facts seemed to corroborate Smith. The alleged stranger was acquitted. Smith was rearrested for the crime immediately, but immediately he claimed his constitutional privilege, that no man can be twice tried for the same offense, and the court ordered his immediate release. On that occasion Smith argued his own case. It never occurred to the authorities at that time to take him into custody on the charge of perjury, and in the confusion, Smith, having all the nomadic tendencies of the Arab in the poem, walked down the center aisle in the court room and silently stole away. When they looked for him he had wisely

A MAN STANDING IN THE CENTER OF THE FLOOR SHOWED A LIGHT FOR A BRIEF SPACE OF TIME.