

THE UN-SOLVABLE



ONE day while the rush to the Yukon was at its full height the papers of San Francisco blazed with stories like this:

"On the heels of the announcement of the great rise in the shares of the Bed Rock mine in the Moose creek country of Alaska comes the startling discovery that the shipment of gold which started the rise in the shares has been stolen somewhere between Nome and San Francisco. The gold was in the form of bars packed in small wooden boxes and valued at over \$10,000. It was shipped from Nome on the steamer Star of the North on Aug. 24, consigned to the San Francisco offices of the Bed Rock Mining and Developing company.

"Frederick L. Harmon and his brother, Augustus N. Harmon, president and vice president, respectively, of the company, accompanied the shipment from the date it was taken away from the mine to the time when the boxes were opened in the offices in this city. The last time the gold was seen was at Nome. There the boxes were opened, their contents inspected, and the boxes sealed again. The seals were not broken until the boxes were opened before the assembled directors, and there they were found to contain bars of lead instead of the supposed gold.

"Apparently there is no explanation to the mystery. The seals on the boxes were intact, and Mr. Harmon and his brother are sure that they contained gold at Nome. No suspicion is directed at the two brothers, but the loss of the gold has sent the shares of the mine down several points."

"This is the story that I, in company with the rest of the reading public, read in the papers of San Francisco one night while going to my rooms in the Palace hotel. My business, that of an unattached detective, had taken me out of the city for a month, and here on my return was a mystery right at my hand and to my best liking. But, of course, a mystery so publicly exploited would be turned over to the police, or at least to one of the large detective agencies, so there was little chance that I would be given an opportunity to work on the case, much as I would like to do so.

"Imagine then my surprise when next morning the bellboy brought me a card bearing the name, 'Frederick L. Harmon, president Bed Rock Mining and Developing company.'

"Show him up," I said, instantly.

Mr. Harmon was an elderly man with gray hair, the conventional business man, with much of his usual self-possession and assurance disturbed by the catastrophe that had overtaken his wealth.

"Mr. Cleaver," he said, sharply, the moment we were face to face. "I acknowledge the name. I have heard of you, heard of your office through associates of mine who are in the banking business and for whom you have worked. They testify to your shrewdness and reliability, as well as to your ability to fathom mysteries which baffle all others. Consequently I know you are just the man I wish to see. You have read the story of the gold theft, of course I had. Then you know," said he, "about all that I am able to tell you of the theft. But I can give you a history of the gold and the mine, and this may help you some in coming to conclusions."

"We lighted cigars and he continued: 'My brother and myself located the Bed Rock mine five years ago in the Moose creek district. We were prospectors then with nothing but two blankets and a grub stake between us and nothing. We had no money or backing of any kind, but we had plenty of friends back here in San Francisco.

"When we located the claim upon which the mine is situated we saw at once that it was rich in possibilities but the possibilities were not of the kind that two men miners with no machinery could develop. There was plenty of gold there, but it was deep in the rock and to get it out would take much machinery and money. We came back to Frisco with samples of ore and diagrams of the claim. Using our friendship as a lever we formed a stock company here and secured the money for the mine's development. That was five years ago. The developments were slower than we had expected. The rock was hard to handle and little gold was obtained for a long time. The people who had invested began to clamor for evidence of the gold we had told them to expect. Envious miners began to circulate stories to the effect that the mine was a fake. To effect these stories their own men, my brother and I went to Alaska this spring. We drove machinery and men at top speed for two months and in the end there was \$10,000 worth of gold in the smelter in the shape of bars, like this one."



THE GOLD ROBBERY

By Matthew Coyne

Here he paused and unwrapped a small package which he carried and flung a bar of rough lead upon the floor. I picked it up. It was six inches long and two-wide and deep. I lifted it and scratched its surface with my finger. It was rough lead of exceptional hardness. I dropped it to the floor again, while Mr. Harmon continued with his story.

"The gold was packed in boxes and sealed in the smelter before our eyes and then taken to Nome, where it was transferred to the steamer. But before transferring it my brother and I opened the boxes and carefully inspected their contents. They contained the same gold that had left the mine. After that they were taken to the steamer, placed in the gold room, and the room securely sealed, while we remained to watch. The seals of the room never were disturbed on the passage home. We arrived at San Francisco in the evening. I had the gold transferred at once to a tug and taken to a slip on the water front. Here we had a wagon waiting and the shipment was at once taken to our office. Here it was placed in the safe, and along with my brother and the secretary of the company, Mr. Johnson, I sat guard over it all night. In the morning the directors assembled, the safe was opened, and the contents of the boxes exposed to view. They contained bars of lead, such as you see on the floor. That is all, except that my brother and I offer \$10,000 to you, Mr. Cleaver, if you can unravel the mystery of the theft."

"Ten thousand dollars was a large sum to me. I wanted it, and I wanted the case for the work it offered. But if the Mr. Harmon said was true, the case was incomprehensible, for I knew the care that steamship companies take in handling consignments of gold, and knew that the theft could not have taken place there. But where could it have taken place, then? Apparently no place, for the gold had not been out of Mr. Harmon's sight except on the boat, and it was impossible to believe that he had anything to do with the theft after having talked with him for awhile. While I cogitated thus he suddenly broke out:

"It must have taken place on the steamer." "It couldn't take place there," I said shortly. "It either happened before it was put on board or after it arrived here." "It did not occur in Alaska," he said positively. "Then it must have occurred here," I rejoined instantly. "Let us go to your office."

his brother. Naturally he resented such questioning but I told him it was useless to try to work on the case without having all the facts at my fingers' tips. I also asked about Johnson, the secretary. Apparently Mr. Harmon trusted him implicitly. Besides, there was the apparent utter impossibility of his having committed the theft.

At the office there was nothing for me to learn. Augustus Harmon was almost a duplicate of his brother, although apparently a few years younger. Their stories were identical. Both were positive that it was gold the boxes contained when they were sealed at Nome; both that it was lead that filled them when they opened them at San Francisco. Johnson knew

THE WINNING SYSTEM

By Grant Forster.



ORDINARY gamblers—men who regard the winning or losing of \$25,000 as something sensational—go to Monte Carlo.

But the real princes of roulette, the men who have seen six figure stakes ventured on one turn of the wheel, are not to be found there. Few know them, for their playrooms are placed on a windswept slope of the Bavarian hills. You will find no crystal chandeliers there, no carefully sponged palms or flaming carpet bedding. The players do not even appear in evening dress, for the place masquerades as a simple sanitarium, and though it may be reached in a few hours from half a dozen famous "Bada" casual visitors rarely find it.

It discovered by accident—an accident that cost me more than I could afford at the time—and only once did I mention its name to another person. It is a name to conjure with if used with discretion.

I was seated in the Marseilles night express. The green shades had been drawn over the lights, but I almost watched the moonlit country sliding by, but the flat scenery of France soon grows monotonous even in the daytime. At night it is as featureless as those endless plains of Hungary. My fellow travelers snored gently, and at last, giving up all hope of rest, I walked out into the smoking corridor to smoke. There I found a traveler as restless as myself. I helped him to sprinkle a few leisurely curses on night expresses, and then we talked. Night journeys are helpful to conversation if you find the right person. In reply to my first remarks, he said: "The fact is, I never sleep at night—at least, not till after 4 or 5 o'clock, and that is hardly an exception to the rule, is it? I am afraid it is an old habit."

"I had noticed that his eyes were sunk deeply in his head, and that he had the nervous, tense look that most night workers wear.

He volunteered no further information as to his profession, and we spoke of other subjects. A few weeks before newspaper readers had been told of one more night express mystery to be added to an already long series. A traveler had been found dead in one of the compartments. There were no marks of violence on the body, but the examination had shown that the man had died of poison. The lock of the small handbag at his side had been forced, but the mystery was made deeper by the fact that, though the bag contained notes to the value of nearly \$50,000, these had not been tampered with. They remained neatly tied up in little bundles. Yet, obviously, the other papers had been turned over hurriedly. The suggestion of suicide would have been accepted—the man might have forced the lock himself, if he had lost the key—but this simple theory would hardly account for the fact that four other men had been found dead under almost exactly the same circumstances during the last three years.

It was but natural that the case should be fresh in my mind, as it had been discussed over and over again by travelers. But when I spoke of it my fellow passenger seemed disinclined to venture any opinion.

"He was a gambler, more successful than most, and he paid the price. Others have gone the same road," he said with an air of dismissing the subject. But this was news to me, and to the world generally.

"I did not hear that he had been to Monte Carlo," I said.

He smiled. "No, it was not Monte Carlo. But

there are other places where they play higher. I wonder if the buffet is still open. Will you join me?" He seated at a jolting table, he talked of other things. To me it seemed so obvious that he wished to avoid this mystery that I could not help wishing to reopen the conversation. Could he know something about it that he wished to keep secret?

I thought over his words: "There are other places where they play higher," and an idea occurred to me. I casually mentioned the name of the sanitarium on the Bavarian hills.

Instantly his expression changed. "You have been there?" he asked.

I told him of my experience at the place, and he smiled grimly. "You were more lucky than that poor devil they found in the train," was the only remark he made.

As it seemed impossible to get further information from him, I took up a paper. There, among columns of gossip about gymkhanas, battles of flowers, and the latest arrivals at the various continental resorts, I read the following paragraph: "Baden-Baden, Tuesday.—Some sensation has been caused here by reports of gigantic sums won by an American gambler. Gossip places the amount at something over \$2,000,000, but the only foundation for the story seems to be the fact that a certain American who is well known here recently sent home through one of the banks a sum of \$50,000. All insist that this was won by gambling, though nobody can say where such sensational winnings could have been made. Inquiry adds nothing to the known facts, but meanwhile the story is the one topic of conversation."

I handed the paper over to my companion and pointed to the paragraph. He read it carefully and nodded.

"One more," he said. "When will it end?" "You think he will meet with the same fate as the others?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Watch the papers," he said. "You know the place. I can tell you nothing more."

The sun was just rising from the ocean drawn horizon, and I opened the window to let in the cold morning air. My fellow traveler rose from the little table.

"There are still two hours before we reach Marseilles," he said. "I think I might get a nap now. Good night—er, I should say, good morning!"

We shook hands. When I saw him again as we stepped from the train, he nodded.

"I shall watch the papers," I said. "So shall I," he replied quietly.

During the following three months I wandered far afield in southern Italy. In those sun scorched villages where pigs sleep peacefully at midday in the main street, and where all the world stesses through the hot hours, the memory of that mystery of the night express faded away. Papers would have been an impertinence in that land of drowsy sunshine.

But in autumn, when the primitive wine presses were a-brew, and the girls who tramped over the grapes looked as if they were paddling in blood, I turned northward once more. A few days in Milan, a lingering good-bye to Verona—the home of Juliet—and I was at Bale, en route home.

Some say there are two great gateways in the world, where you may meet most of the men and women you know if you will only wait and watch. One is Charing Cross station, the other the Suez canal. But there is a third—a hot buffet with the tessellated floor and the red check tablecloths at Bale

station. For Bale is the focus where most of the great railway lines that are ruled through Europe meet. Into that station come the squat funneled engines panting after their journeys from Paris, from Berlin and Vienna. There English climbers, with the snowburn of the Alps fresh on their faces, sit by sallow Russians, Germans in shiny peaked caps, wasp-waisted Hungarian officers glittering with gold lace, Americans who curse the foreign cookery, and bronzed men from the Tyrol, with peacocks' feathers in their soft felt hats.

The waiters could have straightened the tangle of Babel, for they speak all tongues. I had ordered supper here as a preparation for the night journey to Paris, and was aimlessly watching the many tongued crowd, when, in a corner of the big room, I caught sight of the man who had aroused my curiosity that night in the Marseilles express. Our eyes met, and he nodded. A few moments later he came to my table, and we were soon exchanging our experiences of the last few months. He also was going to Paris, so we agreed to travel together.

"You have not yet learned to sleep at night?" I asked.

"Not yet," he laughed. "I shall expect you to help me pass the time."

We had left the air lights of Bale far behind us before I mentioned the subject of our last conversation.

"You have not heard?" he asked in surprise.

"You know southern Italy," I said. "Since I saw you last I have read three week old papers, the greater part of a Bradshaw, and a revolutionary pamphlet. My literary researches ended at the pamphlet."

He opened a pocketbook, withdrew a cutting from a newspaper, and handed it to me. It was the report for which he had told me to watch—an account of one more mystery of a dead man and a rifled handbag. In almost every detail it was the same as the cases which at varying intervals had started Europe. The report ended with the sentence: "This is the fifth man who has been found dead, and the cases show a remarkable similarity, yet the police are unable to throw any light on the mystery."

"Yes," said my companion when I had finished reading. "It is the fifth—and the last."

"But the police have no clue," I said.

He smiled slightly.

"Sometimes justice is done without the aid of the courts. There are occasions when it is better so."

"You know more than you care to tell," I said bluntly.

"More than the world knows certainly," he replied, without offense. "Yet there is no longer any reason for secrecy; if I did not publish the facts it is only because I knew that no good purpose could be served by doing so, and I had no wish to have my name connected with the affair. As you do not know my name, I can be quite sure that I shall not be dragged into it, but I have no objection to giving you the story. It is long, but it will serve to pass the time till the sun rises."

I lit a fresh cigar and waited patiently. He leaned back in his seat and was silent for a few moments.

"You know that every old gambler has a system, which he considers infallible until he has lost the last coin he is able to borrow?"

I nodded. "Monte Carlo lives on systems," I said. "But do you know that every man who is seen playing there with a card full of calculations is closely spied upon by the authorities? No, you have never heard that! They keep their secrets well. Now, it might occur to any one knowing this that such spying

would be unnecessary if they could really afford to laugh at systems, as they affect to do. Do you see, then, why they watch those players so carefully?"

He paused. "It is because there is a system—an infallible system—and the bank knows it!"

I smiled incredulously.

"Yes, most people laugh at the idea," he said. "But the man who discovered it won \$2,000,000 at the tables and then sold his secret to the authorities for \$1,000,000, on an agreement that he should never play at Monte Carlo again. That is why they spy."

"But—" I began.

"There are no 'buts' in the case," he interrupted. "I know! I have had the papers explaining that system in my hands. O, I am not going to describe it to you," he laughed. "It has done enough harm already."

It was discovered by a German mathematician, and I do not mind giving you a bare outline of it. You know, of course, that most systems are founded on the principle that if you increase your stake after each loss in some definite proportion you are certain, sooner or later, to make a coup that will more than repay you for all the stakes you have lost. That principle is sound, if you have unlimited capital, and if the bank plays without a limit. But at Monte Carlo they guard themselves against this by placing a limit, otherwise a syndicate of players might ruin the society, for it is obvious that if the syndicate were to back one number continuously, each time increasing the stake, that number must turn up at some time. Possibly it might not appear for days, and the stakes might run up to a million, but it must come in the end. This is, of course, recognized wherever gambling takes place, and the limit is the bank's protection.

"But this German discovered a method of making the limit rule valueless. It was done with the aid of five confederates, who appeared to play independently, and backed different numbers, but who were all working on a definite plan, the complete details of which were only known to the inventor of the system. Each man—but that is enough!"

He smiled at my obvious anxiety to know more. "The German was content with his quickly won fortune, and faithfully held to the terms of his agreement; he was never again seen at Monte Carlo, and no one has since tried the system. The authorities were satisfied that they held the secret and that it never could leak out."

"But five years ago the papers were stolen from the safe in which they had been kept. More spies were employed, but it seemed evident that the thief knew the danger of making use of his secret at Monte Carlo; at any rate, he never tried it there."

"About that time I was a croupier at that sanitarium on the Bavarian hills. O, it was before your visit, so I did not have the pleasure of raking over your stakes!"

He laughed. "Well, one night we saw a man playing with a paper full of figures I front of him. He lost heavily, but another player won something like \$500,000, and our spies reported that those two men, in the company of four others, were afterwards found talking together. For a week the six played, and then left suddenly, leaving the bank poorer by about \$1,250,000. O, yes, we played high there!"

"Nothing more was heard of them until the report of the strange death of a man in the night express. From the detailed description given, and the notes found in his bag, we recognized him as the player who had tried his system at our tables. That was the first 'mystery'."

"Six months later one of the men who had been

nothing save that when he opened the boxes under Mr. Harmon's direction he found them full of gambling bars. The boxes were still in the safe and upon examination I found them filled with bars similar to the one Mr. Harmon carried with him. Here was a mystery worthy of the name. No clue and no trace of the gold. I begged to be excused and went back to my rooms to ponder, admitting to myself that here was a case which I was at a loss to know how to begin work upon.

On the day following I shadowed Augustus Harmon carefully. Nothing developed. The next day I went after Johnson with the same results. Apparently these two were not connected with the robbery in any way. But who was connected with it? I decided that it must be one of these two who would explain the mystery. But as the case went by and my work yielded nothing but disappointments I began to doubt the reliability of my conviction. It seemed that I was doomed to fail hopelessly in this case. I again consulted Mr. Harmon and went over the ground with him, but nothing new developed except the fact that his brother at times had a man for gambling for high stakes. This might account for a temptation to steal the gold, but it did not account for any opportunity for him to do so. I was baffled, lost completely. I again took up the task of shadowing the two men whom I suspected. Now I discovered that Johnson was also addicted to gambling and speculation, but nothing more.

A week went by and the mystery was no nearer solution than it had been when I went to work upon it. I was working now without any definite aim, knowing that if I did stumble upon its solution it would be the merest piece of good fortune.

I went to my favorite restaurant one night resolved to forget my worry over the case in a sound meal served with good music. A friend, seeing me seated, came over and shook hands. "Did you ever see anything like this?" he asked, and he held forth a coin. It was an old fashioned 20 cent silver piece gilded over and passed for a five dollar gold piece. After passing it back to my friend he excused himself, and left. Then suddenly I was struck with an idea. It was more than an idea, it was an inspiration. It was improbable, but I resolved to test it.

Next morning I called at the office. "Mr. Harmon," I said when we were alone. "I wish you would unlock your safe and leave me alone with the lead in it for five minutes."

Without a word he opened the massive steel doors and stepped out. The moment the outer door had closed upon him I drew a rough file from my pocket and attacked the nearest bar. At first nothing showed under the rasps of the steel save the dull lead. Then suddenly the filings were tinged with yellow and the next moment I saw what I had hoped to see—the bars were gold. Quickly I placed the filed bars back and called Mr. Harmon. "I have made a discovery of importance," I said, "but I am unable to reveal it now. However, I know now that I will solve the robbery. If you will wait with me here tonight I think we will find the criminals."

That night we secreted ourselves in a closet and waited. At twelve a key turned in the door and two men stepped into the dark. Without striking a match they groped their way across to the safe and opened it. At that moment I touched a button and turned on the lights. The two men in the room were Johnson and Augustus Harmon.

Afterwards it was all explained easily. Johnson and Mr. Harmon's brother, driven into a hole by their speculations, had determined to steal the gold with the aid of the superintendent of the mine. That worthy was a skilled chemist, and it was he who had invented and applied the coating to the bars which turned to lead and covered the gold from sight while the shipment was on its way home. Besides a preparation which required weeks to take effect, there was no change in the appearance of the bars at Nome. But when San Francisco was reached and the boxes opened the bars apparently were nothing but rough lead. And here the gold had been intact in Harmon's safe while he was growing white haired over his supposed robbery.

For some reason he never exposed his brother or his two accomplices. He discharged Johnson and the engineer and allowed his brother to "retire." He restored confidence in the stock of his mine and now is extremely wealthy. And he did not forget to add a substantial sum to the \$10,000 originally offered me when I showed him that the "lead" in his safe was pure gold.

He was in the company of the murdered gambler reappeared. He had five new confederates, and again the bank was the poorer when they left. Then the new possessor of the papers was found dead, just as the first had been. His bag containing the notes had been opened, but the notes were left. Evidently the papers had been stolen, but only we knew the truth.

The same events followed six months later. It was obvious to us that, as only the confederates of the man who held the papers could know its real value, the criminal must in each case be sought for among them. Yet the bank had no intention of taking action, as they feared the disclosures that must of necessity bring them into undesirable publicity.

I gave up my position as a croupier after the second affair, and have never entered any gambling rooms since, but I carry a souvenir of those nights in the form of sleeplessness.

"When you showed me that paragraph on the night we were traveling to Marseilles it occurred to me that I might take action on my own responsibility. I went to Baden-Baden and found the man who had won the money. I watched him and discovered, as I had expected, that he had five confederates."

"Three days after my arrival I saw the man who had won the money leave his hotel, carrying only a small handbag. He went to the station and booked for Paris. I traveled in the same train. For hours I paced the corridor, passing his compartment again and again. Just as the dawn was breaking I grew tired of watching, and feeling convinced that at any rate he was now safe, I returned to my own place and fell asleep."

"I was aroused as we neared Paris by loud shouts in the corridor. I knew at once what had happened—long before I was told by a dozen excited people. The man was dead, and his handbag had been ransacked! He had had the wisdom to transmit most of his winnings, but there were a number of notes in the bag, and these, as in the former cases, had not been touched."

"At Paris all who had traveled in the train were detained for inquiries. But I wanted to see all the others. I found the man I expected—one of the confederates I had seen at Baden-Baden!"

"I followed that man to a hotel, where he booked rooms. I also took a room, and unpacked a revolver—I thought it might be handy."

"While he was dressing for dinner, I went into his room. I took a chair to the door, and I locked the door, covering him meanwhile with the revolver."

"I think he misunderstood my object, for after we had been looking at one another he said: 'You can put that thing away. I will give you the papers.'"

"I took them from him, and recognized at once the closely figured sheets I had seen before at our tables. I read them through, and saw the idea that had puzzled many for years, and then—"

He paused for a moment.

"Well, then I burned them. We watched the paper flare and turn black in the fender, and—well, that was the end of the system that Monte Carlo had paid a million to keep secret!"

"But surely you ought to have handed the man over to justice," I said.

"There was another way," he replied: "You allowed him to escape?"

"Exactly! I allowed him an easy escape. I left him my revolver! He understood."

"And then?" I queried.

"Well," he said slowly, "you know suicides never create much talk in Paris; they are used to them!"