

"You Can't Make it Pay"

Bearding the Laws and the Prophets

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WHEN Chub Walker heard the words of the dignified Judge directing that he be confined in the Federal prison for the term of three years he accepted the sentence, not as a visitation upon him for his wrong-doing, but merely as a run of the luck against him. And, penny-wise in the ways of the world, he knew that soon the luck must swing back his way. He had played ar-d lost, that was all. He had matched his talents, experience and luck against the vigilance of the United States government as expressed in its postal inspectors. If he had been able to keep his fifty per cent investment bureau hidden from the inspectors for another three months he would have annexed, safely and permanently, \$100,000 of the confiding public's money. That would have spelled success. Well, sooner or later, it would come. The luck was bound to change. Somewhere ahead of him was the big killing of easy money for which he had been striving ever since leaving college.

"And it is to be hoped," concluded the Judge, "that this punishment which the law metes out to you will be, not a hindrance, but a help to your future career. It is to be hoped that, no matter what the promptings of your instincts may be, your superior gifts of intelligence will appreciate that it is hopeless to seek to thrive by wrong-doing, that no matter how shrewd, how brilliant you may be—you can't make it pay."

THE solemnity of the words moved Chub only to a polite sneer. He had heard that kind of talk before. In fact, ever since he had made the discovery that the world was made up of two kinds of people, the fools who worked for a living and the wise ones who lived off the fools, and had decided to cast his lot with the latter, there had always been some sheep-like croaker standing by to warn him of the ultimate end of his ways. At college, for instance, when he had tricked the New York ticket speculators with a bunch of fraudulent tickets to the big foot-ball game, Leander, his room-mate, had pointed out the desperate chances he had taken. And Leander now was a timid book-maker at \$20 a week. Later, in his senior year, when he was pretending to play the market with a pool contributed by six young freshmen the sanctimonious class president, Borton, had pleaded with him for the honor of the class to quit skating on thin ice.

After graduation it had been his father who had trotted out the old banal admonitions to work hard, be honest, and succeed. Chub had indicated how much he despised such child's talk by borrowing \$100 from the parental purse and vanishing into the mazy, shifty half-world, where men—and women—live by their wits and despise the rest of the world which toils for their benefit. Tonopah, Reno, San Francisco, Hot Springs, New Orleans, Broadway—in all of these he had pursued fortune in his own illegal way. Sooner or later he knew that he would



Chub went straight to his father in New York when his term was over

make the big clean-up which would give the lie to those who advocated honesty and industry as the best means to success.

When he had entered New York with the idea for his investment bureau he had felt sure that he had it at last. Well, he had been mistaken. The luck had run against him. So now it was a prison sentence and three years to sit down and—evolve an easy-money scheme which could not fail. Plenty of time to work out a sure thing. And after that, Chub, the wise gambler, knew that the pendulum inevitably must swing his way.

"Thank you, your honor," sneered Chub softly. Then the deputy marshal led him away.

Late the next afternoon Chub stood respectfully before the warden of the Federal prison, crop-haired, bathed, and arrayed in prison garb, but nevertheless bearing himself with the air of the man who appraises all people and decides how best they may be deceived. The warden, famous for his humanitarian principles and skillful handling of prisoners, sat with the commitment papers in his folded hands and regarded Chub with sorrowful interest.

"Walker," boomed his deep voice, "I'm sorry to have you with us, honestly sorry. You've got too good a head; you should have known better. However, they've only given you a three-spot. I hope you won't be with us that long; I hope you earn and keep your copper. You've had experience in office work, have n't you?"

"Yessir," said Chub respectfully.

The warden indicated his approval by a brief nod. "Then you're in luck. My registry clerk finished his bit this morning. You'll take his place." He pressed the button on the side of his desk marked: Library—and soon the door opened timidly and a convict came in. The man appeared to be of middle age. His forehead was that of a student, bulging heavily above timid, washed-out eyes. The mouth was weak, and an apologetic, ingratiating smile hovered over the lips. Chub, appraising the man in one swift, expert glance, labelled him mentally: A first class sucker; the kind of man he could bend to his own desires.

"Clarkson," said the warden, "here's the new registry clerk. You'd better take and break him in right away. There's some work piled up ahead now."

Clarkson smiled, bowed humbly, and beckoned Chub to follow him into the office. Here he began apologetically to initiate Chub into the simple clerical duties of the job. For three days they worked together, Clarkson the humble instructor, Chub the quick-minded contemptuous pupil. Then the warden directed that the instruction cease, and then for the first time Clarkson dropped his apologetic smile and manner and looked the new man over from head to toe.

"**F**IRST time in stir, eh?" he said in the convict's normal tone of huskiness. "What'd you bring with you?"

"A three-spot," said Chub carelessly. Three days' constant association had wearied him of this doddering old fool.

"Bank work?"

"No. No rough stuff. I had a little investment bureau." Chub yawned. "They got sore and nicked me."

"Sure." Clarkson shook his head mournfully. "They always do."

"Do what?" demanded Chub.

"Nick you. You're nothing but a kid, but you've



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been educated. You ought to know better. They always nick you. You're a foolish kid."

Chub smiled his most contemptuous smile. "Well, you must be a little foolish yourself, old timer," he said. "I notice they nicked you, too. What've you got?"

"Fifteen!" A gleam of indignation shone in Clarkson's washed-out eyes. "They ought n't to have made it so strong—me with a wife and two kids outside."

"Bank work?" taunted Chub. The older man stiffened instantly, and for an instant his face was almost strong and hard with a flare of pride.

He looked Chub squarely in the eyes.

"**Y**'EVER hear of Dell Mungry, kid?" he hissed.

Chub nodded. He had lived just near enough to the world of avowed criminals to know that the name stood for the most skillful counterfeiter in the country, a man whom underworld tradition said had passed bills of his own manufacture on a United States sub-treasury.

"Well," said Clarkson relapsing weakly into his former humbleness, "well, I'm him."

Chub sat very quiet, very impassive on his high stool. Somewhere in the back of his sharp mind there had registered a certain thrill. And by this thrill Chub knew that here was where Luck began to come his way. Wherefore he put on a look of most respectful astonishment and stammered: "Well, I did n't mean to be fresh, Mr. Clarkson. I did n't have any way of knowing, you know. From what I'd heard I did n't think they'd ever nick you."

Clarkson smiled emptily to show that he was appeased.

"All right. But now mebbe you'll pay some attention to me. Couldn't nick me? Why, you nick yourself the minute you begin to play this crook game. The game does it. It nicks you. Why? Because it's wrong. It don't fit in with the world. Take my word for it, kid; anybody who plays the crook game is the prize sucker." He sighed hopelessly, shaking his head. "It—it can't be made to pay."

Chub, also shaking his head, agreed: "I guess you're right." But when Clarkson had gone he got off his high stool and did a jig-step, in spite of his heavy prison shoes. For Chub had seen the light; he knew now just how his luck was going to change.



"Looks kind of queer to me, Bill," he said. "Look it over, will you?"