

MY LIFE IN THE UNDERWORLD

The Gambling Partner of Lieutenant Becker and the Chief Witness Against Him for the Murder of Herman Rosenthal.

\$16,000,000 a Year Police Graft.
The Third in a Remarkable Series of Revelations
of Crooked Work in New York.

THAT the police of New York collect graft nobody doubts. In the last few weeks Mr. Buckner and his investigating committee and District Attorney Whitman's Grand Jury, have collected thousands of pages of sworn evidence showing that the police license the criminals in New York.

There are three questions which the average citizen is curious to have answered.

First—How much money in a year do the police collect from the various kinds of licensed vice and crime?

Second—Are all policemen grafters, or is this graft grabbed up by a little clique of police officers?

Third—Do the grafting police officers have to divide up with somebody "higher up"; and how many and who are these hidden people "higher up"?

For the last 20 years, off and on, I myself have paid graft to the police in one way or another. For several months I have collected graft for the police. I am one of the few men in New York who have seen the graft business from both sides.

Nobody denies that there is regular systematic grafting by the police, but it is commonly supposed that police graft is confined mostly to the protection money paid by gamblers and the keepers of disreputable resorts. This sort of graft is a tax levied by the police on vice.

But there is a much more wicked and dangerous form of police graft, of which little has been told. This is the licensing by the police of burglars, pickpockets, shoplifters and thieves of all varieties. There is a definite partnership in crime between the police and the thieves.

Burglars are whipped up to "get busy" because the division of profits for their last month's robberies were not satisfactory. Pickpockets and detectives jump on the same car together and in case of trouble, the pickpocket's partner shows his badge and confuses things by arresting the wrong person until his pickpocket friend has made his escape.

Graft at the Fair.
 "Lefty" Boyle, the famous pickpocket, declared he had a police license to operate anywhere in three specified police precincts. I have heard of others who purchase licenses for certain territory and were never disturbed so long as they did not work outside of their district and were prompt in paying the regular monthly tax.

The most famous instance of selling districts to criminals was during the World's Fair in Chicago. The Chicago police realized that a specially fair harvest was offered for all kinds of thieves among the great crowds that came to visit the fair. Word was sent out to the best known crooks of England and America and they were invited to attend a private police auction. The City of Chicago was carefully laid out in districts and bids were requested for the "rights" in each district.

It was quite a complicated plan because there were fat and lean districts, and there were so many separate "rights" in each district. In the jewelry district there were burglar rights, highwaymen rights, pickpocket privileges, shoplifting concessions and bunco rights. In the residence districts these concessions were worth less money, but certain other rights were of value.

So it was all auctioned off to the highest bidder and the police were kept busy keeping the various crooks in their concessions and making them pay the price they had agreed to.

I have lived my life in the underworld. I know the thieves and the pickpockets. Astonishing as it may seem, there is between the police and the criminals, it is true. Later on in this article I will explain in detail how this partnership works.

Let's go back to the first question asked: How much money in a year do the police collect from the various kinds of licensed vice?
 I can answer without hesitation, at least \$16,000,000 a year. This \$16,000,000 of year of police graft flows from three main fountains and one small one.

There are about 200 well-organized gambling houses run under police protection and the regular price of protection is \$1200 a month for each gambling house. I have paid this amount to the police as a gambling house proprietor and I have collected this money from gambling houses when I was Lieutenant Becker's graft collector. These 200 gambling houses paying \$1200 a month each total up \$2,400,000 a year.

Great Army of Crooks.
 The greatest source of graft of all comes from the licensing of vice. Mrs. Gould on oath has testified that there are 35,000 outcasts under police protection in New York. This estimate is generally accepted as being correct and \$5 for each one of these outcasts is levied every week by the police—35,000 licensed outcasts at \$5 a week amounts to \$9,100,000 a year.

There are 35,000 of these outcasts and perhaps 15,000 professional gamblers, making a total of 50,000 criminals. But it is commonly agreed that the professional criminal population of New York is not less than 200,000. So we still have left 150,000 criminals of all kinds and descriptions, most of whom are licensed in one way or another by the police. This army of 150,000 burglars, "fences", pickpockets, bunco men, wire tappers, green goods operators, shoplifters and other varieties of criminals probably yields an annual revenue to the police of not less than \$4,000,000.

These are the three chief sources of graft. There still remains one small source of revenue—the releasing of small offenders by policemen who threaten arrest, but change their minds for a \$5 bill; the licensing of criminals who have skipped their bail and are not re-arrested so long as they pay protection money; the merchants who are allowed to obstruct the sidewalks for a small payment, chauffeurs who caught speeding and are allowed to go for a small consideration, etc., etc. These small grafts perhaps amount to \$200,000. Summing up all the main sources of police graft, we have:

200 gambling houses at \$1200 a month \$2,400,000
 35,000 outcasts at \$5 a week \$9,100,000
 Burglars, "fences", pickpockets, bunco men, wire tappers, shoplifters, etc. 4,000,000
 Other small graft 200,000
Total annual police graft.....\$16,100,000

Who the Grafters Are.
 These estimated figures are probably smaller than the real truth. Mayor Gaynor has said that the police used to collect \$4,000,000 a year from saloons that kept open after closing hours. If this comparatively small

privilege to a relatively small number of law violators yielded, as the Mayor has publicly stated, \$4,000,000 a year, it certainly is not unreasonable to suppose that 200,000 professional criminals in New York yield a protection revenue of at least \$16,000,000 a year. If two or three thousand saloon keepers can be milked of \$4,000,000 a year it is beyond belief that the profits offered by these other broader and richer fields for graft would be neglected.

To go back to the second question: Are all policemen grafters, or is this graft grabbed up by a little clique of police officers?
 The police department consists of one Police Commissioner, four deputies, 18 district inspectors, about 160 captains, several hundred detectives and about 10,000 patrolmen. Most of the 10,000 men in uniform who are out on posts get little or no graft. There are probably not over 1000 members of the police department who are in the graft system—in other words, nine policemen out of ten are honest.

As to the third question: Do the grafting police officers have to divide up with somebody "higher up"; and how many and who are these hidden people "higher up"? Of the men "higher up" which would be accepted in a court, but does it seem reasonable that the professional politicians who name the city officials would allow their creatures in office to pay \$16,000,000 a year in their pockets without sharing in this?

Crime flourishes in big cities because of the protection which can be bought from the police. The police grow rich because of the protection they sell to the criminals. If the criminals are in prison the police get no graft income—the police grafters do not want to see criminals in prison; it ruins business.

Police grafting is of two kinds—systematic and individual. The systematic kind is paid by gambling houses, poolrooms and disorderly houses. It is paid regularly, like rent, only it is collected twice a month, usually the 1st and the 15th.

It is paid to the captain of the precinct and to the inspector of the district in which the house is situated and it is paid to nearly every other official who has power to close up the house. The formation of the "strong arm squad" opened a new source of oppression for the graft payer.

Protection for Gamblers.
 The gambling house which pays graft is of the kind that operates the faro bank box, the roulette wheel and the poolroom. They exist in great numbers all over the city. They cannot run for two days without their existence being known to the police officials. Some of them have been running for years without a day's interruption. These, however, are of the most exclusive kind—the kind contented sometimes with a single millionaire player a night, where a new player must be vouched for almost as though he were trying to get a position as cashier of a bank. Although his honesty is not the principal qualification.

There are hundreds of smaller houses, such as all of the crap game and the stuns game. All of them pay protection. Last comes the poker club.

There are several hundred of these poker clubs in the city. For a long time they were immune from paying graft. Finally, they, too, were marshaled into the line of graft payers. Poker clubs were illegal just as it is illegal to play poker in your own home because gambling itself is illegal. Somehow, however, the poker-club was always looked upon by the police as harmless. Their certificates of incorporation, their wide open doors, and their air of general legitimacy protected them from arrest or extortion.

They began springing up like mushrooms all over the city. Far-seeing gambling-house keepers like "Rachel" Braunstein (a man) and Bridget Weber, saw in these poker rooms the solution of the ever-present problem of how to conduct a gambling house without paying graft money to the police.

They opened up what to all appearances was one of the many poker rooms around the city. When the graft collector heard of the new venture of these well-known roulette wheel and poolroom keepers, he paid a visit to the newly opened place to look it over and report back to his boss. They were easily convinced by "Rachel" and "Bridget" that the places were run as poker rooms only.

"There isn't nothing in any of the other grafts any more," declared the former graft payers, "we can't stand

the toll. We are going to try to make a living with a cheap poker game."

Trying to Beat the Police.
 Very soon afterward these new poker rooms added to its poker game a small poolroom, so that the poker players could get a little variety by playing the horses. The scheme was a great one. A full-fledged poolroom and no pay to the police.

"Rachel" and "Bridget" chuckled to themselves. Their joy was short lived. "Rachel" and "Bridget" neglected to have letters patent taken out to prevent infringement on their idea. Seeing the success of their scheme "Beansie" Rosenfeld opened a poker room on Forty-fourth street. He, too, was visited by the collector and handed out the same tale of woe. The poolroom-keeper-rouletier "Beansie" was soon flourishing. It became a strong opposition to the "Rachel"-Bridget combination.

An anonymous letter sent to the inspector of the district told him of the deceit that was being practiced on him by the wicked "Beansie." A raid took place on "Beansie's" so-called poker room.

From that time the poker rooms all had to fall in line with a fixed amount of graft or get raided. It doesn't pay to try to cheat the police out of what they expect. The annual revenue from this source to the grafters has helped greatly to swell the grand total.

A license to sell liquor costs \$1200 a year. It is granted by the excise department according to law. A license to run a gambling house costs \$1200 a month. It is secured from various police officials through their "men."

The man who wants to run a gambling house figures upon paying this \$1200 a month, just as the man who wants to open a saloon knows that he has got to pay \$1200 a year.

This is not theory or guessing. I have been associated in a number of gambling houses. We always had to pay it. I have been associated with a grafting police official and collected his part of the \$1200 for him. It went to pay for protection from the "strong arm squad" of which he was the head. The remaining part of the \$1200 was gathered in by other collectors representing other police officials.

For Becker I collected \$300 a month from 29 different houses. My share was 25 per cent. This is how I worked.

Collecting the Graft.
 My days of collecting were the 1st and 15th of each month. I called on the poolroom keepers first, as their business is conducted in the early afternoon.

I invariably greeted the proprietor with a cheery "good afternoon." That was the code.

His return greeting and looks told plainlier than so many words the esteem in which he held me. Next to the un-derworld, perhaps, I was the person he was most pleased to see!

The first shock of seeing me over, the keeper of the poolroom would begin by telling me that I was a "hook."

"Say, Jack," he would say, "how do you account for the fact that every time you come to collect the races run disastrously for me? Here you haven't been here five minutes and I've lost almost my entire bank roll. I really can't pay you today; come around tomorrow. Then it was up to me to tell him how sorry I felt for his predicament, usually following it up with the information that I wasn't there to collect anyway, just to deliver a message from the "boss."

"You've got to close up, Steve. Too many letters have been pouring in about this place. Not for a thousand a month can Becker stand for this place another day!"

The horrified look on the poolroom keeper's face didn't die out until I had assured him that perhaps if I returned to Becker at once with the monthly payment in my pocket I might be able to get things fixed up. That usually worked the trick and the money was passed over.

At the next place I might visit I would be given perhaps a story of the poverty-stricken state of the proprietor and how he would have to quit the business unless I agreed to cut down his payments. My reply was that yesterday I had delivered a similar message from a poolroom keeper to Becker and then the "boss" had told me that my answer to any and all of their complaints must be the same: If they can't stand the tariff tell them to quit the gambling business and start a frankfurter stand.

At the next place the proprietor is intimately acquainted with a politician

who knows everything that is going on at headquarters.

"Last night I was in this politician's saloon," he would say, "spending a little money. I asked him what was new at headquarters. Well, he told me in the strictest confidence that Commissioner Wicks had just asked him to take Becker's place as head of the 'strong arm squad.' Becker is through. Come around the rumor this morning. Jack—If you feel like it."

"That's all right," I would reply, "but you make good today or not at all. That's my orders."

I guess Becker'll be through. That's what I'm telling you. No, Jack, nothing doing today. Goodbye."

Thinking perhaps there was some truth in the rumor this man had got, I rushed back with the news to Becker. The next day the room was raided by Becker, and the poolroom proprietor was chasing all over town trying to find me to pay his graft with a bonus by way of peace offering.

"When a poolroom was raided by the 'strong arm squad' one thing was always most sought after by the raiders. It was what is known as the 'horse betting sheet.' On this sheet is written the name of the horse and the amount wagered on his chances by the bettors. Tickets with printed numbers on are given the players when they enter the poolroom each day and these numbers are used as means of identification when a player presents himself at the window to cash a winning bet."

If in raiding a poolroom this betting sheet is secured by the raiders great excitement prevails between the poolroom keepers and the players. The players get wind of the fact that the betting sheet has been seized by the police. The following day they appear in the raided place and make demands for money far in excess of what is coming to them. Losers make claims on horses that have won. To refuse to pay a bet is suicide for a gambler. He becomes a welcher. Rather than that the distracted poolroom proprietor will pay every demand however unjust he knows it to be.

For this reason, when a poolroom is raided every effort is made to save the betting sheet. At the first appearance of the raiders the sheet is torn into half a dozen pieces, perhaps, and distributed among the employees of the place. In one case I knew of one of the employees jumping out of a second-

story window with the sheet. He didn't get arrested, either.

He broke his ankle but he saved the sheet.

But if the police do get the sheet there is still a way out for the poolroom manager. A couple of hundred dollars, the raiding officer will give him an opportunity to make a copy of it. With this, the poolroom player can confront the players with the actual wagers made by them.

This is a fruitful source of graft. Becker made the most of it. On one occasion, though, he was buncoed by a man he had raided, and it was through Becker's help that I came to know Becker. The man raided, who was a close friend of mine at that time, got permission to copy the sheet, promising to pay Becker \$300. After he had obtained the copy and settled with his customers he made the alarming discovery that he didn't have enough for Becker. He made an appointment to meet Becker with it the next morning.

He gave Becker a stand-up. Becker vowed vengeance. When the opportunity came for Becker to pay off old scores, I was asked by my friend to intercede. In the negotiations which followed Becker decided that I was just the man he wanted for collector and I got the berth.

My knowledge of the underworld made me a valuable collector. It was a simple matter for me to inform every one whom the information would do the most good that I was the man to see for Becker. Among these people—gamblers, thieves, politicians, disorderly house keepers and the like—it was my function to sound the praises of the "boss" and to spread tales of his power. Becker helped it along with an occasional object lesson for the disbelievers in the shape of a raid pulled off at a given hour.

Protecting Real Crooks.
 But new for the class of grafters which I have referred to as "individual grafters." As I have said, money paid for protection in this way is twice as much as that collected systematically, although its exact amount cannot even be guessed at. It is paid in various amounts from the \$1 wrung from the pushcart peddler to the thousands of dollars extorted from the wiretapper, the "fence," the frenzied financier or the "big" crook.

A law recently passed makes the pickpocket an easy prey for the police grafter. The law says that if a pickpocket is caught in any public place, he can be dragged before a magistrate charged with "jostling" and sent to the workhouse for 30 or 60 days.

Not long ago there were three detectives attached to the Central Office who were assigned to work chiefly among the inhabitants of that part of the underworld of which some Second avenue is a part. They soon earned the nickname of the "three guardsmen" because they stuck together so well. They were perhaps the biggest grafters the department ever knew of this type. They were sometimes referred to as the "three devils." They were past masters in the art of grafting and framing the successful dip they easily established the reputation for being able to send any dip to the workhouse for some months on a frame-up charge of jostling. With that reputation graft-collecting was easy.

Grafting the "Dips."
 Their usual plan was as follows: Guardsman No. 1 would arrest a dip on suspicion of jostling. On the way to headquarters they would accidentally run into guardsman No. 2 or 3.

"What have you got?" guardsman No. 2 would ask of guardsman No. 1.

"Only a 'grub' caught him jostling."

"Why don't you let him go?"

"I know that kid, Bill. He's a decent kid. Stand for a stake from him, Bill, and turn him loose."

The interview was ended by the dip handing over whatever he had on him to the guardsman to save himself from a workhouse sentence. If the amount he had didn't come up to the amount demanded, he was given a certain time within which to make good.

"And say, kid," the detective would add, "mind you come across tonight. I'll keep my eye on you, too."

That night the dip would work overtime. Hopping on and off cars, it might take him a couple of hours before he would be able to pay the amount demanded. During that time he would run into the guardsman who had arrested him several times, perhaps, but he would not be molested. He had practically been granted immunity for the night. He might turn a trick right under the detective's nose without any fear. He was working to say what he had promised the detective.

In a similar way central office men get the dips to act as stool pigeons for them, that is, they turn them loose



Jack Rose

without the payment of graft upon their agreement to act as informers. As there was an organization on the lower East Side known as "The Boys of the Avenue," this organization was composed almost entirely of pickpockets. It was their social club. Two hundred and fifty of them belonged to it. It was their safest retreat. There at least they were safe from the framed-up charge of jostling. Among the 250 members there were a number of stool pigeons.

On the night of the \$7500 touch there wasn't a member of that club who didn't know of it. It was the only thing they talked of. The name of the dip who made the touch was freely mentioned. The stool pigeons heard it. Naturally they carried the news to police headquarters. And yet there was no arrest. He thought of it as the dip in question had to give up for his freedom is not known. In the club the amount was mentioned at \$1500.

It was an interesting fact that the balance of the money finally found its way back to the very bookmaker who lost it. The dip was playing the races, as all of them did. He thought of it as good luck to place his bets with the man he had touched.

"It's one of the few chances I've had to play with a bookie's own money," he said. Though the dip lost every cent of it, he always said it made him laugh to see how nice and polite the bookie treated him, while the dip was simply losing the bookmaker's own money back to him.

When times are hard and revenue scarce a good haul can usually be made from one of the many "fences" who have stolen.

How this is done may be illustrated by a case which came to my attention and which is only one of many of the same kind.

Through a stool pigeon two precinct detectives learned of a big burglary that was to be in the drygoods district by three crooks. They were on hand when the trick was to be turned, but made no effort to pinch the crooks. A lot was deliberately removed and loaded into a wagon.

Disposing of the Loot.
 The detectives trailed the stolen property to a "fence." Then the crooks were arrested. No graft was extorted from them, the "fence" being too important to spoil. Before the "fence" could distribute the stolen goods among his stock in the manner usually followed by them, the detective placed him under arrest. Satisfied with the glory they got out of the arrest of the burglars, they were quite ready to listen to reason when the "fence" asked for his release. It cost him \$2000.

There is no limit to the number of stories of this kind which might be told. This kind of detective collecting 250 days in the year. No criminal is free against it. Few commit their crimes with the direct aid of the criminal police officials, perhaps, the criminal police officials, perhaps, they have earned by a judicious payment out of their "fall money" bank roll.

"Fall money" bank roll is a fund kept in reserve by every crook of the higher grade. It is used for many purposes. It is used to try to bribe the complainant, to whom a "fall money" is paid. This procedure is known in the underworld as "squaring the raffer."

It is used also for the engaging of a "mouthpiece"—a lawyer. It is used in a last effort to square the detective who made the arrest, and who may be hired suddenly to develop a poor member of the profession. This procedure is known in the underworld as "squaring the raffer."

Another frequent source of graft is through the ever-ready information furnished by his stool pigeons. These characters frequent the opium layouts where crooks of all kind are to be found. There they learn of "bunco" and burglaries which for some reason or other have never been reported to the police.

The crafty stool pigeon gets all the particular details of the "bunco." Then the grafting detective looks up the crook and gets what he is after.

Buying Off the "Cop."
 "Come along, Butch," the detective would say, "the boss wants to see you at headquarters."

"What for?" asks the surprised crook.

"For that \$600 roll you pinched from the source last night."

The crook has no means of knowing that a complaint has not been filed by the victim, and does not scent the detective's scheme.

A walk around the corner, a well-worded hint, the passing of a couple

of hundred dollar bills, perhaps, and the crook is turned loose.

When Herman Rosenthal, the gambler, exposed the partnership existing between himself and Lieutenant Becker and was about to make further disclosures regarding graft in the police department, he was shot down in the public street. The evidence showed that the murderers were hired to do the deed by Lieutenant Becker.

The public was astounded. That the police would go to the length of murder to cover up their grafting operations was regarded as unbelievable. The case was looked upon as unprecedented.

And yet it is only half a dozen years ago that another informant, who had committed numerous crimes in partnership with policemen, and who, becoming disgruntled, exposed the whole business, was similarly shot down in the public street by a man whom he did not know and who every inference indicated must have been hired by the startled police.

In that case the investigation which the District Attorney commenced bore no fruit, the policemen accused by the informant were never brought to trial, the informant's murderer got off with a life sentence and nothing more was heard of the case.

Trimming a Farmer.
 The informant in that case was James Boyle, known as "Lefty" Boyle, a veteran pickpocket. Boyle declared that he had been free rain in three precincts, that is to say, he might pursue his calling without molestation from the police as long as he confined his operations to those three precincts—and divided the spoils.

One night, "Lefty," who was living with his wife and children at the Hotel Regent at Twenty-eighth street and Sixth avenue, was awakened by a loud banging on his door.

Getting out of bed he found that his visitor was one of the detectives of the precinct with whom he was regularly dividing the proceeds of his crimes.

"Get on your things, Lefty," ordered the policeman, and "meet me at Tom's."

Without another word Lefty did as he was bid. He knew that a summons of this kind meant a "trick" of importance.

Tom's, a Seventh avenue saloon, he met the detective. In a few whispered words the detective explained that at one of the tables in the back room was a man named Pritchett, a neighbor of Lefty's, who was from the woman, Lefty, and send him on his way," suggested the detective, "and you can do the rest."

"Lefty" went down the block. The detective sat down at the table with the farmer and the woman. What occurred then was subsequently told to District Attorney Jerome by the woman herself.

The detective asked the farmer whether he had his money safe. The farmer reached down and felt his two bank rolls in place.

"You'd better see if it's all there," counseled the policeman, "you know you're traveling in pretty fat company tonight."

The farmer, a man named Pritchett, at that friendly hint, decided that he had better go. The policeman told him not to be alarmed. More drinks were purchased and then, when the farmer insisted upon seeing the detective, he followed him and arrested him for intoxication.

The next morning when Pritchett was released only his \$1000 roll was handed to him by the police. He demanded the other. The desk sergeant declared that \$1000 was all he had on him when searched at the station and showed the entry in the blotter to prove his statement.

Fate of an Informer.
 Pritchett was content to let the matter rest at that. He complained to Commissioner McAdoo and then some days afterward a roll of \$2500 was suddenly located somewhere under the sergeant's desk and delivered to the farmer.

The matter might have rested, but "Lefty" Boyle unfamiliar with all these developments, stuck to the belief that the detective was not playing fair. To appease Boyle, this detective enabled him to rob "Jew Dora" of \$700 worth of jewelry. The jewelry was pawned. When "Jew Dora" threatened to squander the detective unless he produced the man he had introduced to her (Boyle) the detective promised to secure the pawn tickets for her for \$100. The woman paid him the money, the tickets were handed to her and she recovered her jewelry.

But Boyle never forgave the detective for the way he was treated in the matter, and some time after, while in prison awaiting trial on another charge, he got into communication with Jerome, and offered to tell all he knew about the protection which the police were affording to certain criminals, himself included.

The offer was accepted and an investigation started. As a result several policemen were arrested and some indicted.

Boyle was paroled in return for the information he had furnished and which Jerome easily corroborated. None of the witnesses examined, however, was as familiar with the situation as Boyle. Upon the strength of his testimony the District Attorney would have to rely to procure the conviction of the guilty policemen.

The day of the trial approached. One night, six days before the trial, Lefty Boyle was found dying in the tenderloin

(Concluded on Page 7.)



THE PICKPOCKET'S PARTNER SHOWS HIS BADGE AND CONFUSES THINGS.

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