THE SUNDAY OREGONIAN, PORTLAND, JULY 9, 1922

The Great Taxicab Robbery

Tale of Thrilling Bank Messenger Hold-up and How It Was Solved. A True Detective Story.

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I T WAS on a Thursday in February that the "great taxicab robbery" took place in New York city. At 10:30 o'clock that morning two trusted messengers left the East River National bank, at Broadway and Third street, in a taxicab to draw \$25,000 from the Produce Exchange bank, downtown, at Broadway and Beaver street.

Thee taxicab driver was an Italian, Geno Montani. He was customarily used by the messengers.

Five men suddenly swooped down upon the cab as it was on its way to the bank with the money. The unarmed messengers were beaten until they were unconscious. One man compelled the driver to speed out of the neighborhood, when all the bandits left the cab.

After the three robbers had left his cab Montani sought a policeman. In a few minutes we had the meager descriptions he gave us, and as soon as possible after that I sent out a general alarm:

"Stole \$25,000 in five and ten dollar bills, contained in a leather telescope bag 24 inches long, 16 inches square, from two bank messengers in a taxicab about 14 A. M., at Park Place and Church street and escaped in a five or seven seated touring car, top up."

While the detectives were working outside hunting for eyewitnesses and seeking to uncover a pretty well hidden trail we were having a conference back at police headquarters, mapping out a plan of action. First we recalled all bank robbers and holdup men we thought capable of having done this piece of work.

It was a complicated, well planned robbery. Brains had been in back of it; such brains as bank robbers in general do not possess. Moreover, the taxicab robbers had had knowledge. They knew the methods of the bank in transferring cash. They knew when the taxicab bearing the messengers would make its trip, and they knew the route. What is more, they knew that an old man and a boy, both unarmed, were the messengers. Their plans had been detailed.

After that conference we examined Montani in detail. He was willing to tell all he knew to help the police. He was frank and straightforward and confident of himself. Montani was an Italian, about 30, heavy set, medium height. His face was intelligent, particularly his big black eyes.

The newspaper men were won over by Montani's personality as well as his story. They set out at once to defend him and to set up criticism of the police for having held him—for we did hold him. After he was discharged in court after a preliminary hearing a few days afterward the police were condemned rather severely.

But, as a fact, the newspaper men did



One of the band opened the bag in the rooms of "Swede Annie"

Mrs. Sullivan replied, "but little that's Two days later King Dedo reported to me dressed and brushed up to an aston-

Then she told how, two weeks before, he had approached her and offered to pay her if she would appear as a character witness in a Brooklyn court for a criminal named Molloy being held there charged with robbery. Mrs. Sullivan had refused to perjure herself, having never heard of the man.

Then, after a few days, one morning while she was tidying up his room she saw two blackjacks in Collins' bureau drawer. She asked him why he needed the weapons. Two days later King Dedo reported to me dressed and brushed up to an astonishing transformation, his whiskers neatly combed.

Kinsman had not gone to Boston. Inspector Hughes found out where his family lived—a very respectable family, by the way—and learned many things about Kinsman's life in Boston. But we had to take up a new trail. Monday morning I arranged to question conductors of all trains that left New York on the afternoon of the day of the robbery. For two days nothing was learned of consequence, but on Wednesday Detective Watson, forHe was found in Detective Antony Grieco. Grieco and another officer were put upon Jess's trail. They learned that Jess was accustomed to stop in a Thompson street saloon kept by another Italian, James Pasquale, better known as "Jimmie the Push." They kept Jess under close surveillance and waited.

By roundabout methods and unwitting informants we learned that the "Gene" who was one of Kinsman's associates was Gene Splaine of Boston, an ex-convict. From his description we figured him as the man who had left with Kinsman and "Swede Annie."

Wednesday Detective Watson found the conductor who remembered Annie desperate "yeggmen," for whom they had warrants—two of the worst characters in the country. The officers had trailed them to this building. They described Clare and Daly. The woman vowed s' had never seen them, and the officers left. After a while Clare and Daly returned, and the woman told them "the bulls" were on their trail. Daly replied that they'd as soon kill a cop as anybody else, and said they were going to stay by her side till Splaine returned. Then she told them that Splaine had left town that day; she did not know where he had gone. The "Orange Growers" believed her.

They hurried to police headquarters and sent the alarm to other cities. The next morning Splaine was arrested in Memphis as he alighted from a train in the Grand Union depot.

Sunday night, the second Sunday after the robbery, an informant telephoned me that Kinsman had been seen in New York in the company of "Swede Annie" and an unknown man wearing a bright colored necktie. Immediately afterward Mrs. Goodwin telephoned that she believed Kinsman was back in New York. But Annie had been followed by the shadow men. I soon learned that five of them were outside a hotel on Third avenue near Forty-second street, to which they had followed Kinsman and Annie. I called for 25 detectives, and in 30 minutes the hotel was completely surrounded. But I thought it better to not arrest Kinsman at once in the hope that he would lead me to others. So I sent squads of men to the railroad station and simply kept watch on the hotel.

I was in the Eighteenth-street station house Monday night when a man was brought in for drunkenness. He gave his name as Molloy. He turned out to be the Molloy who has turned up twice before in this story.

Kinsman and Annie and the man in the red tie were followed the next day. He was arrested in the Grand Central terminal. Annie and the other men were with him. The unknown man turned out to be Kinsman's brother, who was not "in on" the robbery at all.

Kinsman was brought to me at police headquarters. His bearing as he was ushered into the room was of supreme confidence, almost arrogance. I asked him first if he would stand up and let me see how tall he was. He laughed and stood. Then I opened his coat and looked at the label. "I see you've been in Chicago," I said. I looked into his hat. "This was bought in Chicago, too." At his tie. "And this." Then I looked at the label on his underclothes. "These were bought in a State-street store in Chicago," I said, "and a very good store it is."

"Look here!" he turned on me as if ready to fight, "do you take me for a boob?"

"Yes, I do," I replied. "Why didn't you make your getaway with a brass band instead of taking 'Swede Annie' with you to Albany to attract attention all the way? Why didn't you advertise in the papers instead of sending her back here to tell where you had gone?"

We confronted our prisoner with much that Annie had told and much more that she had not until at last we had dragged a complete confession bit by bit from him. After he had told us all he went through the whole detailed admission again. His

take it. They went to the elevated station, boarded a train and rode to the next stop. Then they took a street car. The conductor of the surface car noticed the blood and remarked on it. "Dutch" said they had been in a fight.

They headed for the saloon of "Jimmie the Push." Arrived there they found Jess and "The Three Brigands" awaiting them. "Dutch" placed the leather bag on a table. Matteo Albrano, leader of "The Three Brigands," immediately drew a revolver and held up the taxicab bandits. Another of his band opened the bag and took a parcel containing \$10,000. Matteo gave the remaining \$15,000 to Jess, Kinsman and the robbery gang. Jess then took \$3000 for himself and the same amount for Montani. Splaine took his \$3000, and Kinsman had to be content with \$2750. Neither "Joe the Kid" nor "Scotty the Lamb" was present, so the former was counted out with \$250 and "Scotty" with nothing at all. What was left was to go to "expenses." Then they separated and made their escape.

In the examination of Jess Albrazzo I had to resort to trickery to get a confession. Jess was rather an ignorant fellow, superstitious in the extreme, but obstinate. He was not on the point of confession for a good while, and finally I walked over to where he sat and pinched his left ear. Then I left the room. As soon as I had gone out he turned to my assistant and asked why I had done that.

"To see if you were lying," was the reply. Then I came back and looked scrutinizingly at his ear. "Yes," I said, "he's lying all right." I called in several to examine it, and all agreed that he was lying. Jess himself was so curious that he tried to turn his head to see his own ear. Then he weakened and confessed. That night Jess and I went together to see "Jimmie the Push," whom he had implicated. In a day or so we placed "Jimmie the Push" under arrest.

When we arrested "Jimmie the Push" we also arrested his partner, Robert Deilio, upon whom we had proof of complicity.

Meanwhile Splaine had arrived on extradition papers from Memphis-and confessed.

We set out to find "Dutch" Keller. "Joe the Kid" and "The Three Brigands." We had some luck, but not a great deal. We found no trace of "Dutch" or Joe. But we did find Matteo Albrano, who had robbed the holdup men, and we learned something of his two mates, who, with him, made up "The Three Brigands." Both of them were in Mexico.

Matteo confessed to his part, as did all of our prisoners except Montani. The chauffeur, incidentally, got the longest prison sentence of them all.

How a Girl and a Plane Now Foil the Rattler

(Continued From First Page.) ing how the poison is extracted from a snake Roosevelt wrote:

"From the boxes an impassive assistant took the snakes and handled them fearlessly and with caution. The poisonous ones were taken out with a long-handled steel hook, inserting the hook under the snake and lifting him. . . . Dr. Brazil stepped forward. The attendant dropped his hook on the neck of each in succession, seizing by the neck behind the head and holding the reptile up for the doctor. . . Dr. Brazil inserted a shallow saucer into each mouth behind the fangs into which the poison oozed. From the big lachesis came a large quantity of yellow venom, which speedily crystalized into minute crystals. The rattler yielded a much less quantity of white venom, but which is far more active of the two."

not understand all they knew. And they didn't know everything. For on that first day Montani, through his answers, got himself so deeply into the case that we could have held him in spite of his discharge at the hands of the magistrate who, incidentally, reprimanded the police—but we let him go for the time being.

Montani had said he slowed down his cab to keep from running over an old man who got into the way. But detectives at the scene of the robbery found eyewitnesses who swore that such was not the case, that the cab had slowed without apparent reason. He had said, too, that his own cab with himself driving had answered the summons from the bank that morning, although the other one was first in line, because the other cab had been sent up town to have a tire vulcanized. Investigation by detectives proved that that had not been sothat no tire had needed vulcanizing and none had been vulcanized.

He testified he had raised a cry for help as soon as the robbers left his cab. Witnesses said that was not true. He admitted that he had gone south away from the robbers' automobile after he had taken a policeman aboard instead of going north following it, explaining that that was according to the policeman's orders. The policeman denied this.

A ticket seller came forward meanwhile to tell that three men had taken an elevated train at his station near the robbery scene that morning. They had carried a leather bag, he said, and had not waited for change from a quarter. He could not describe them except to say that two of them had blood spots on their clothing.

Montani was in my custody that night, but before morning we had more or less forgotten him and were working on a clew that was as new and unexpected as the robbery itself had been.

At about 1 o'clock Friday morning I received a message on the telephone. I rushed uptown to a hotel and met the man who had telephoned, arriving there at 2 o'clock. This informant had real information. Sometimes informants do; frequently they don't.

The man lived at a lower west side lodging house. On the afternoon of the robbery, at about 3, a fellow lodger by the name of Eddie Collins had hurried home and told a woman known as "Swede Annie," with whom he lived, to hurry and pack their belongings. Then they had left together. The informant said also that he had seen a hand bag filled with bills in Collins' possession.

Early the next morning we took careful steps to approach the landlady of the rooming house to discover whether she was in or out of sympathy with Collins. It was learned without difficulty that she was honest and reliable. One of the detectives asked her outright what she knew of Collins.

"Sure, and I know a lot about him,"

"We need 'em in our business," he replied.

"What is your business?" Mrs. Sullivan questioned. Then, assuming that arrogant, confident bearing which has proved the undoing of more criminals than all detectives have ever caught, he told her of a plan of his gang to rob a taxicab that carried money from one bank to another every week.

'It'll be easy," he said, "We've got it all fixed with the chauffeur."

Mrs. Sullivan did not notify the police because she decided Collins was boasting.

Immediately the 60 detectives were put on the career of Collins and "Swede Annie." Operatives went into the underworld and talked casually with divekeepers, criminals, shady women and other characters of that realm. By the end of the week we had learned that Annie and Collins had taken a taxicab Thursday afternoon, accompanied by a second man, and had left the lodging house to go uptown. A good description of her companions was obtained. It was also learned that the real name of Collins was Eddie Kinsman, that he had been a prizefighter, and that he had come to New York from Boston. Annie had worn cheap little hat with a row of red roses adorning it. Also the police got a good picture of Annie and a fair photo of Kinsman. These pictures were reproduced in a hundred copies and sent all over the country.

I believed that Eddie and Annie and their unknown friend had gone to Boston. Here I introduced a departure from custom. Instead of telegraphing the Boston police to intercept them, I sent two detectives from our own forces there. Saturday night Inspector Edward P. Hughes, in charge of the detective bureau, and Detective Sergeant John J. O'Connell left New York for Boston. Nobody in the department except myself knew they had gone.

Saturday I resumed my examination of Montani. An insurance company had come forward with the information that Montani had several months before presented a fraudulent bill for repairs on a burned car, which had never been repaired. The company had not pressed the matter, but had got a written confession from the chauffeur that the bill was fraudulent. We told Montani nothing of what we had learned.

Saturday night while Montani and I were walking together on the Bowery on our way to supper he stopped suddenly and pointed at an old Bowery beggar.

"There is the old man who got in front of my car," he said.

The old man was a typical character of the slums—rags and whiskers. He was picking up digarette butts with astonishing agility. I immediately dubbed him "King Dodo," and maybe he is still known by that name in the Bowery. We took him to headquarters with us. He immediately established a perfect alibi. In a spirit of playfulness I paroled him on his honor and he took it seriously.

merly a railroad engineer, learned that a train of the New York Central had carried three passengers to Albany on the day of the robbery who answered the description of the three sought. These three had taken the train at Peekskill. Evidently they had driven in the taxicab to that station. The conductor who gave the information remembered Annie, because he caught her smoking a cigarette in the lavatory of the day coach. Another of the trainmen remembered assisting her to alight at the Albany station. Detective Watson was sent immediately to Albany with instructions. To-tell what his instructions were it will be necessary to go back from Wednesday to Monday.

We learned Monday morning that a woman known as Myrtle Horn, a friend of Annie's, had moved from Mrs. Sullivan's rooming house to another place, taking a double room there; that she had carried Annie's trunk with her. Our deduction from that was that "Swede Annie" was due to come back to New York. I went to this house in person. as a contractor, and soon found that the landlady was trustworthy. I told her what I wanted and we worked out a plan. That evening Police Matron Isabelle Goodwin moved into the lodging house. carried her bundle, and when she and the landlady caught sight of each other they rushed together and kissed noisily, making much talk of the long time since they had seen each other. Mrs. Goodwin was posing as the landlady's sister from Montreal.

Tuesday "Swede Annie" came back wearing a new hat.

But I'm not through with Monday yet. On that day Montani was arraigned and dismissed for want of evidence.

We had started by tracing the fugitive Kinsman's career, learning that he had come to New York the previous summer, engaged in one prize fight and then had got a job as a waiter in the Nutshell Cafe on Sixth avenue. We learned of two of his associates there who needed investigation. One of his friends was a fellow known as "Gene," a man with a hooked nose. The other was a little Italian known as "Jess," who had once been proprietor of a dive and criminals' hang out named the Arch Cafe.

'It was an easy matter to learn who "Jess" was. We made a cautious approach to the Arch Cafe, planting a man there to pick up all possible information. The first day he was there he learned that a man named Clarke, alias Molloy, 'who was under arrest in Brooklyn had been the inspiration for a defense fund collected among his friends. The Italian, "Jess," last name "Albrazzo," had been placed in charge of the fund, and had squandered it on a spree. He had made it up later and sent it over to Molloy by a man known as "Dutch" and an Italian named "Matteo."

Molloy, incidentally, was the same man whose good character Mrs. Sullivan was asked to vouch for.

An officer who knew Jess was sought.

and her friends. That day he set out for Albany with instructions.

"In Albany," I said, "go to the big hat store on Broadway near the station. Maybe that's where Annie got her new hat." Detective Watson found the saleswoman in that hat shop who had sold Annie her hat. Also he found the old hat there, the cheap affair with the row of red roses. He sent it to me by express and I was glad to get it. It was a cheap thing, but it looked mighty dear to me just then.

Unquestionably the two men had left Albany, but we had no way of knowing when or where they had gone. Detective Watson made inquiries at Albany and sought information by telephone from the ticket salesmen in Albany, and we learned after a while that two men answering the description had bought tickets for Chicago Friday morning. We concluded that they had left on the next fast train, at 12, Friday noon. That conclusion was strengthened when Policewoman Goodwin reported that she had learned Annie had come back to New York Friday night and had hidden out until Tuesday. Kinsman had given her \$125.

So that night Detectives Clare and Daly took a fast train from New York to Chicago. I gave them unlimited expense privileges, false names and a telegraph code title of "Orange Growers." I told them they were to stick to the trail if it iasted all over the world.

Disguise is seldom necessary, but the "Orange Growers" thought it advisable, so, taking advantage of their train's being snowed under in Michigan and of numerous delays of the journey, they let their beards grow. When they arrived in Chicago they were not recognized by criminals they had known for years. First, of course, they had gone to police headquarters and enlisted the aid of local detectives. Then, wearing old clothes, they haunted Chicago criminal resorts, posing as "thugs." They made inquiries about Kinsman and Splaine, and successfully trailed them to a fashionable apartment house. They had spent several days in the underworld section of Chicago, but Kinsman, they learned, had returned to New York. Splaine was still thought to be in Chicago, but they could not find him. They tried several ruses, but none worked. The "Orange Growers" found a woman with whom * Splaine had spent some time. Clare went into the place where she lived and represented himself as a "strong-arm," a holdup man; described Splaine to her, telling her that he and his partner were looking "for the rich guy" to "stick him up." They described Splaine and promised the woman that they would give her a part of the loot if she would tell where her friend was.

She said she didn't know whom they were talking about. Clare and Daly posed to her as desperate characters and told her that they were going to find the man, anyhow. They went out, and two Chicago detectives came in directly afterward, telling the woman they were looking for two story brought new characters into our mystery.

While serving as a waiter at the Nutshell cafe Kinsman had met several men who were afterward to exert considerable influence upon his life. Among them were "Dutch" Keller, "Joe the Kid," "Scotty the Lamb" and Gene Splaine. Through these he was introduced to Jess Albrazzo. Another whom he met was Molloy, and "Dutch" and "Joe the Kid" had been Albrazzo's messengers to Molloy when he was in prison in Brooklyn.

Jess had been the first to tell Kinsman of the plan to hold up the taxicab. Meetings followed in which plans were laid, hinging principally upon Jess' friend, Gano Montani, who drove the taxicab in which the money was carried and who would be willing to collaborate on the job. The conferences were held in the saloon of "Jimmie the Push," and it was agreed that the loot was to be divided there.

At 8 o'clock on Thursday morning, February 15, the six bandits were out of their beds. Gene Splaine and "Dutch" Keller took the two blackjacks Mrs. Sullivan had seen in Kinsman's drawer. Kinsman, being a boxer, asserted he needed no weapons.

The six ate breakfast together in a cafeteria and then went to the saloon of "Jimmie the Push," where they had a round of drinks. There the final plans were gone through, Jess Albrazzo withdrawing from actual participation with the explanation that he was the chief of the robbers and would employ his privilege. Then three other characters, heretofore not implicated in the robbery, took a hand, and the affair took a new twist, A little band of Italian desperadoes known in the underworld as "The Three Brigentered the scene and put a claim, asserting that they proposed to take no part in the holdup but to be at the spot with fitting weapons to see that it should go through without a hitch. Then, they said, they would put up a claim for their share of the spoils. "The Three Brigands" were men to be feared. and so the six robbers went on their mission somewhat more diffidently than before, but still determined to carry the robbery through. They knew it was up to them.

"Dutch" Keller saw Montani's cab ambling up Church street and gave the signal. Montani stopped at once; "Dutch' rushed for the taxicab door nearest him and struck the old messenger, Smith, on the head with his blackjack. On the other side of the car Gene Splaine opened the door and was pushed in by "Joe the Kid." The younger messenger, Wardle, put up a little struggle, but was knocked senseless in quick time. Kinsman, who had "Dutch", into the cab, jumped on boosted the seat beside Montani and pointed his finger at the driver's side to simulate a revolver. The car sped toward Park Place. There the robbers alighted, "Dutch" carrying the bag with the money in it. He and Splaine were spotted with blood. The green car standing near by was a ruse. The three bandits did not

Roosevelt also observes that King Cobra, most poisonous of reptiles, will not feed on another poisonous snake, even though it may come from another part of the world.

According to Dr. Ditmars the cootalus serum manufactured at the Instituto-Therapico, which is used for snake bites, comes from the throats of horses that have been immunized under the direction of Dr. Brazil, discoverer of the method.

A small drop of rattler poison is first injected into the horse. The dose is gradually increased until the horse acquires absolute immunity. After this the horse's blood serum will neutralize snake poison when mixed with it. The resulting anti-toxin is what comes back to the United States and is one of the serums that will be rushed to a snake-bite victim by the airplane service of the San Diego Zoological society. The society also has on hand a supply of anti-venomous serum known as "antivenene."

According to the published plans of the society, in case of snake bite the alarm should be immediately sent in. The airplane will be started out. A special parachute will be provided and the anti-toxin, together with the necessary instruments for injecting it, will be dropped into the town or the locality from which the call for help came.

This service is one of the many humanitarian activities of the San Diego Zoological society and will be free to those who avail themselves of it. The society urges, however, that notification be made as soon after the wound as possible.

In case it is necessary to transport the serum by airplane, a charge for transportation will be placed against the town or place where it is dropped—or in case it is out in the wilds—against the person.

Instructions will be sent with the emergency kit containing the serum.

Copeia quotes Barbour and Garman advancing a new theory on the way a ratiler got its ratiles. They declare that the rattles developed through a constriction in primitive times that kept part of the skin on when the snake cast its skin. A nervous snake vibrates its tail. The rattler discovered that by vibrating its tail it could warn bigger mammals not to step on it. Thus it needed the rattles and, with the aid of the constriction, repeated at each casting, and the natural result of selection, the rattle was evolved, not to warn, but to protect, these writers conclude