

# Glimpses into the Organized Business of Shoplifting

## The Staggering Losses Inflicted on Great Stores Everywhere, With 1000 Arrests a Year in a Single Establishment

BY CAROL BIRD.

THIS is the season when "boosters" are especially active. They are busy workers all the year round, but now as the holiday season approaches they are beginning to marshal their forces for a rush business as it were. "Boosters," be it known, are shoplifters. Though business is always "picking up" with them, their trade prospers mightily at the Christmas season. For this is the time of the year when merchandise is exhibited in especially alluring and tempting displays. And, too, this is the time when shoppers are out with fat handbags and wallets. The joyous festive season fills them with good cheer. Dark suspicion does not lurk in their minds. They are inclined to think that their fellow men are pretty much worth-while, after all. And when a man or woman is in that nice, friendly frame of mind a "booster" or a pickpocket can sneak right up and "snitch" their eyeglasses off their noses without being noticed.

That is, they can if a department store detective isn't somewhere in the offing. It is in the department stores where boosters and pickpockets ply their trade on a large scale. And almost all department stores have whole regiments of detectives circulating about, spotting the nimble-fingered ones. Each store has its own system of guarding its goods and its customers from shoplifters and pickpockets. It is obvious that the details of the elaborate and effective system of operation for store detectives cannot be divulged. But suffice it to say that these days only a few shoplifters—and these few particularly clever—stay out of the net of those who are on the alert for them. They may get away once, but the second or third time they are bound to be caught. Or they may possibly escape one regiment of detectives in one big store only to tumble into the net laid for them in another.

If the stores were not thus policed, "boosters" would probably carry out everything worth taking and then come back for the electric light fixtures. The extent of the activities of shoplifters can best be judged when the following staggering figures are noted: In one department store of a great city more than 1000 thieves are arrested in a year. Scarcely a day goes by that doesn't find some of these light-fingered gentry in the store detectives' net. Their hauls average all the way from a cheap spool of thread to a fur coat costing thousands of dollars. This store could not estimate exactly its yearly loss of merchandise due to store thieves, but it is certain that the figure would be pretty high. Of course, a great deal of the stolen property is recovered, but shoplifters do manage to get away with rich hauls.

Shoplifters are old and young, rich and poor, black and white, men, women and children. Some of the adults are as old as 75, some of the children as young as seven or eight. There are first offenders—the amateurs who have not yet learned the technique of shoplifting—and the old-timers who have international records. They work singly and in pairs and sometimes in groups of four or more. There are the "placers," whose job it is to see to it that coveted articles are put within easy reach of their confederates. And there are the "lifters," who carry away the loot after it has been conveniently arranged for them.

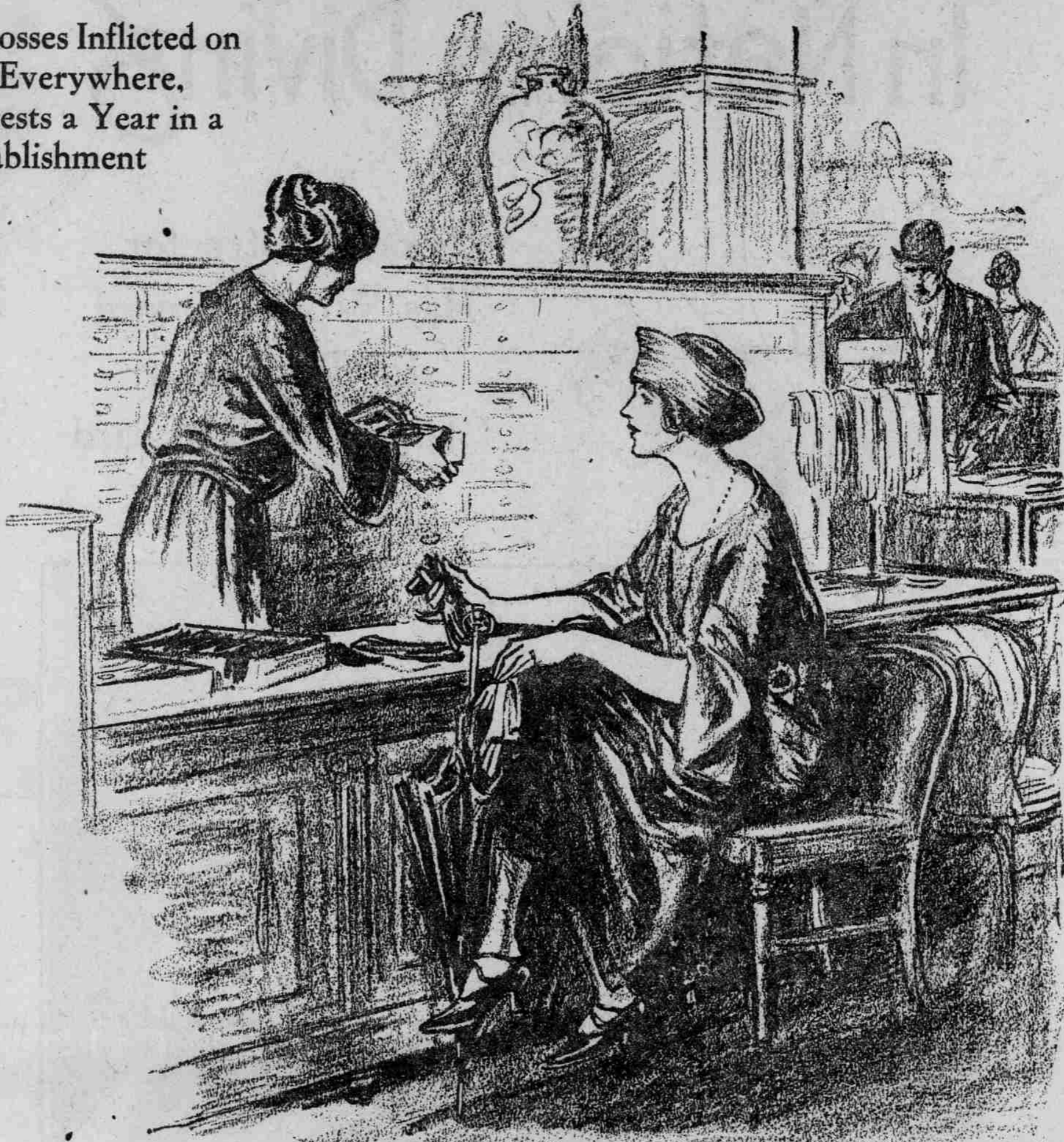
The shoplifting devices used by thieves caught in a big city would fill a museum. There is one collection that fills a room. All of them were taken from shoplifters caught in that store. The motley array of apparatus testifies to the inventive turn of mind of "boosters." All of them have worked out ingenious schemes to make it easier for them to get away with what they have lifted. The most popular receptacle used by shoplifters—the old-timers and the novices—is a bag. It may be a leather bag, or a canvas bag, or a net or cloth bag, or a paper bag. Bags! Bags! Bags! They are piled up in hill fashion. There are worn bags and new ones, bags with false bottoms and trick openings. And they are manipulated in all sorts of ways. Some of these contrivances and methods are going to be described, for, as the chief detective of this particular department store pointed out, shoplifters themselves cannot benefit by the information. It will only tend to let them know that all their cunning tricks and devices are old as the hills to experienced and watchful store sleuths.

Take, for instance, a harmless looking black leather bag, of the type usually carried by women shoppers. It is a bit larger than the average handbag, and has two leather straps. The chief of detectives gave a demonstration with this bag, showing how it is used by the "booster" from whom it was taken when she was caught.

"We will pretend my desk here is a counter. You are shopping. I am the 'booster.' I make a small purchase and then open my bag to take out my money. My bag rests on the counter thus. There. Now I have found my money, replaced it to my bag, shut my bag and am off. What did I lift?"

He opened the bag, and in it was a box of clips, an ink-well, a package of envelopes, MY handkerchief, a few pencils and a bunch of keys. The detective explained:

"You didn't see me work because there is a hole at the bottom of the bag, and I simply thrust my hand deep into the bag and pulled things into it through the opening in the bottom. Then I closed the opening with a leather flap worked from the inside. After the 'booster' who owned this bag had filled it with merchandise she retired to the ladies' rest room, and



Umbrellas are frequently used by shoplifters.

fastened the opening securely with this steel clasp."

Another bag taken from a shoplifter was large, shirred at the top with a drawstring. This the shoplifter opened and attached to a counter by merely weighting down the upper part of it with a bolt of cloth, a book, or something else a bit heavy. Thus it hung suspended over the counter, with its top open, but otherwise out of sight. Then she proceeded to slide things off the counter into it. When she decided it was full enough, she simply pulled the drawstring, removed the weight, and strode out, to all appearances a woman who had just completed her shopping.

A type of bag commonly used in the shoplifting business is one made of canvas, cloth or leather, which rolls up when empty. It resembles a harmless music roll. But a whole lot of merchandise can be tucked away in it.

Another receptacle in the collection was a paper suit-box, the type in which a store or a tailor or a dry cleaner wraps up a suit or a gown. This box was wrapped neatly, and tied with cord. The man "booster" who carried it might, to all appearances, have been a shopper who had just purchased a suit in the men's furnishing department of the store. However, holes were gouged out of the paper box, and the outside wrapping was so slit that the booster could, while standing close to a counter or display table, cram into the box silk hose, jewelry and other smaller articles.

Newspapers and magazines are used by "boosters," who, while examining certain goods, deftly slide valuable handkerchiefs, laces, embroideries, silks, gloves and other flat articles and thin fabrics between the leaves. Then they fold the papers carefully, tuck them under their arms and stroll out. A few "boosters" use suitcases or handbags, but these are not popular. They are too large, and too liable to attract attention. Umbrellas are used frequently, for much valuable merchandise of the lighter sort can be tucked into their depths.

Perhaps the most novel and most ingenious piece of shoplifters' apparatus in the entire collection is a walking stick. It looks harmless enough, but it was responsible for the theft of many thousands of dollars' worth of liberty bonds from that store during bond sales. It was used by an adept "booster" who was known as the "doctor." He was dressed and made up to look like a professional man. He strolled through the store, jauntily swinging his cane, and to the average onlooker appeared to be merely a prosperous professional man, probably commissioned to do an errand for his wife. But, for some reason or other, known only to store detectives, he aroused suspicion. He was

followed in his peregrinations around the store. He finally paused in front of the window of the cashier of the liberty bond department. The cashier was out of his cage. The "doctor" thrust his cane through the wires, a small wire hook, which opened and clamped shut, shot out from the bottom of the cane, neatly opened a drawer, hooked out a bunch of bonds, and then dropped them within

easy reach of any passerby: The "doctor" did not take them, but walked swiftly on. He was immediately followed by a confederate, who, now that the bonds were within easy reach, picked them up and followed the doctor out.

The store detective took up their trail, about a block away backed the "doctor" into a corner, and immediately seized his



Whenever the clerk turned to the shelves one of the men would hide a shirt under his coat.

trick cane. He was then arrested, and later sentenced, for he had a long shoplifting record. Store detectives never seize a shoplifter in the store, but wait until he or she has left the place and taken the stolen goods away from the premises. Otherwise too many excuses would be offered. A lady with a bolt of goods under her coat might say she was just "taking it to the door" to see its shade away from the electric lights. Or a man with a bundle of gloves might drop them on the floor when seized, and then say he couldn't help it if they "slid

off the counter." But no one, not even some one afflicted with extreme absent-mindedness, could walk out into the street with a silk dress tucked away in an overcoat pocket, and offer the excuse that he had "forgotten to pay."

A box with a false top was carried by a young man shoplifter caught stealing in this store. The box was of cardboard, and wrapped and tied, and he carried it under his arm. The box did not have a cover, however, but a wrapped picture, the size of the cover, was carried on top of it. This the shoplifter slid to one side whenever he wished to peek a silk shirt or some other coveted article into the box.

However, all "boosters" do not work with boxes, bags, newspapers, books, canes and such articles. They enter a store empty-handed, but come out with costly coats flung over their arms. One woman shoplifter took two valuable coats from the same store, using the first coat to help her "lift" the second one. On her first trip she carelessly picked up a wool velour coat, with an expensive gray squirrel collar, which was lying over a chair after a customer had tried it on, flung it over her arm and walked out. A few days later she entered the store again, asked to try on coats, and laid the coat which she had stolen several days before over the back of a chair. After preening herself a while before a full length mirror, she decided she did not care for any of the coats, picked up the one she had worn into the store, and managed at the same time to pick up and enfold with its roomy depths another coat which was on the chair beneath it. She had been foresighted enough on her first trip to take an extra large size. This time, however, she was watched by a store detective, and about a half square from the store found herself under arrest.

Silk, satin and other soft fabric dresses are favorites with the "boosters." It is so easy to take one, crumple it up into a soft, small ball and cram it into a capacious coat pocket. Some of the "boosters," after filling their bags and pockets, adjourn to the ladies' rest room, where they empty these receptacles and pin the stolen property underneath their outer skirts. Then they are ready for a second looting. If they are successful "boosters," they are pretty well weighted down with merchandise when they depart.

Two men shoplifters were nabbed with a choice supply of silk shirts on their persons. They entered the store together, went to the men's furnishing department and asked to look at a fine grade of silk shirt. The clerk placed shirt after shirt upon the counter for their approval, and whenever he turned to the shelves one of the men would slide a shirt under his coat. When he had a half dozen or more

tucked away, the other "booster" thanked the clerk and said he guess he'd wait till later to make a choice, and they both departed. Somewhere, somehow, a keen eye saw the sleight-of-hand performance, and the silk shirts now form part of the "booster" collection at this store. There is a whole room full of fur and wool coats, polo and sport coats, suits, capes, dresses and other merchandise which have been taken from shoplifters. The "loot" collection isn't limited to merchandise, however. There are also several bags of phoney nickels which store crooks dropped into the telephone boxes in the store booths. One of these phoney thieves was caught after he had successfully "tapped" the telephone money boxes for a long time.

There is also a strange collection of instruments which were taken from many "boosters" and pickpockets nabbed in this store. They are parts of dope outfits. A large proportion of "boosters" and pickpockets are drug addicts. When they are searched, hypodermic needles and drugs are found on them.

The "picture gallery" of this particular store contains another interesting collection. Photographs of the shoplifters and other crooks caught in the store are kept here, together with their entire histories. The women are a pretty hard-looking lot, and all seem to be a certain type. Many of them are stout and coarse. There is one slender negress who is so emaciated that she looks as though she might blow away at any moment. There is also a young, baby-faced girl, who got away with much loot before she was caught, because of her innocent expression. There is another peculiar looking middle-aged woman, wearing a high, peaked hat. She has a sly expression around her eyes, and is one of the most clever and elusive shoplifters in the country.

Many of them have nicknames by which they are known, such as "Johnny, the Dope," "Queen Annie," "Slick Susie" and the like.

One of the elderly men had an international record. He has been arrested many times in this country, and in England, France, Germany, Spain and elsewhere for shoplifting and pocket-picking.

Not all of these store thieves are professionals, nor are all of them from the lower ranks of society. There are the "kleptomaniacs," those men and women who have an insane and uncontrollable propensity to steal. Sometimes women kleptomaniacs caught with merchandise are wealthy, who are certainly not forced by circumstances to take things which do not belong to them. In their cases relatives are communicated with, who pay for what they have stolen, and who assure the store authorities that they will send their relative away for treatment, or see to it that they do not repeat the offense. Children are dealt with very leniently by this store and other department stores of Philadelphia. In most cases parents are communicated with, or the house of detention is asked to take care of the small thieves. It is only in cases of professional thieves where the police authorities are called in.

There is never any possible danger that an innocent shopper will be suspected or embarrassed in a store, for the detectives know "boosters" almost as soon as they glance at them. But the real "booster" must have a care these days. His job is getting more and more precarious as more elaborate systems are perfected by department stores for his apprehension. He has got to do one of two things—decide to reform and work for a living, or be resigned to his fate and expect to be nabbed and sentenced.

### KEMAL PASHA

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tempt to promote in these nations an immediate overthrow of the existing system in accordance with the Russian pattern.

Under these circumstances, while they still wish to retain their ties with the nationalist movements of the orient, the communist leaders are following there an entirely different policy—a policy that would be in consonance with their other activities.

Kemal is not a communist and never was one. He had accepted assistance from the soviets on the same principle on which they now counsel him to make peace with the allies—to the extent to which he found it of advantage for the furtherance of his plans. But he always quite frankly mistrusted the Russian leaders, who, in turn, just as frankly mistrusted him. The alliance between Moscow and Ankara has always been, at best, one of expediency, in which neither side concealed its understanding of the fact that it was taking chances.

The relations between soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey, defined by the treaties of Moscow and Kars—by virtue of which, incidentally, important portions of Russian Armenia were yielded to Turkey—have been outwardly entirely friendly. The Moscow leaders have repeatedly expressed feelings of utmost friendliness for the Turkish nationalist leader and his movement, while Kemal, in a message to the toiling masses of Russia, transmitted through the Russian Soviet Telegraphic agency last July, said:

"The relations between new Turkey and communist Russia are most sincere and friendly. The foundations of this friendship are deep-seated and lie in the community of interests of the two peoples and the fraternal feelings of the two peoples. Our order is very much like bolshevism. Just as Russia has for her aim the liberation of all lands from their oppressors and the good of the toiling masses, so our government is actuated by the same desires."

But all this has been merely on the surface. Underneath these diplomatic amenities the situation has been quite different.

According to an astronomer of the French Academy of Sciences, the new rays in "yellow stars" are said to be much more penetrating than the most penetrating X-rays.