

The Vanishing Men

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(Continued From Last Week)

That many things had been disturbed since the moment when Parmelee had walked out into oblivion was evident. The correspondence on the large desk in the center of the room had been gathered into a neat pile and tied with string; the papers once held by a waste basket, now empty, had been poured into the open fireplace and most of them burned. The chairs and some of the splendid bindings to mildew and dry rot. The study had the air of having been cleaned and straightened.

Peter tried the drawers of the desk. Some of them had swollen with the



Peter Tried the Drawers of the Desk.

camp, but none were locked; they were filled with catalogues, pamphlets and with clippings in envelopes arranged in alphabetical order. A deep drawer at the bottom contained several account books, many packages of canceled bank checks bound with elastic bands now dried and crumbling under the touch. On the whole Peter, who had Brena's permission to examine anything he found, saw at first no interest in these private papers, unless when time elapsed so that Parmelee after another three years could be declared legally dead, an executor might find value in them as a record of the financial affairs of the vanished man. No doubt his lawyer had seen many of them already.

For the correspondence, however,

Peter had a greater interest. He drew it toward him, untied the string, and having stopped to survey the room again from the chair that once had known for so many restless hours of penic and suffering, the warmth of Parmelee's living body, began to go hastily over the letters there.

They were not illuminating. There were a few letters from stock brokers as to investment changes, and a few bills. One of these bills was the only piece of matter that gave Peter the slightest interest. It was from the famous old John Henry Wycoff of Baltimore of whose death Peter had read by chance, a man remembered only among those who are book collectors.

A dealer whose black coat was always covered with dandruff and who left a third of a million dollars. This bill was for two thousand eight hundred of these dollars—an account that had probably been settled by Parmelee's attorney, Lanfrew. It was something of a bill for one book—a book described as Kohl's privately reprinted version of the Jesuit MSS, entitled "Explorations of Father Carlos in Mesalero Desert," shipped via registered post on 18th inst. Below this statement of account were the words, "Please see letter." There were two pin holes at the corner of the paper as if Wycoff had attached his letter to the bill.

Peter thought it would be interesting to see a book, so obscure, that was worth nearly three thousand dollars. He even wondered what plausible explanation the old dealer had given his letter, however, was now missing. Peter spoke aloud; he said: "Parmelee wanted that book badly." He looked at the date of the bill. "I wonder if this was the zeal of a collector who has a passion for perfect copies."

The words defined a thought for Peter. It would be interesting to see whether "The Explorations of Father Carlos in Mesalero Desert" had appeared with Parmelee when he had answered his strange impulse to go to some unnamed destination. Peter turned toward the library shelves and then with the thought that a search among these volumes would be saved if he found a catalogue he went again to the desk. The copy of the book was there—under two or three other books—a handsomely bound volume of large pages whose thick paper rather than the length of the text gave it bulk.

The book had been printed in English in 1830 from copies of manuscripts of Jesuits that with other records had been lost in the destruction of the mission church in Los Rances in 1812. The work was a beautiful piece of bookmaking in perfect preservation and Peter, though interested in quaint descriptions of this old missionary who had braved the terrors of thirst and heat to penetrate the country

along the eastern border of New Mexico, was admiring also the rare skill and beauty of the pages when he suddenly came upon a hiatus in its continuity. Page thirty-two began a description of the Lost Pueblo, where according to legend a city whose age was of centuries had been ended as a punishment for failing to worship the god of water. A scourge of thirst had been visited upon the degenerate Indian dwellers who had been so long protected by the terrors that the waterless desert must have had for more warlike tribes who would otherwise have attacked them. The well around which the pueblo had been built—the very life of the people—had been dried up in one night by a miracle.

"Many and curious are the carvings upon the walls of this Lost Pueblo. To copy them and their heathenish devices I was sorely tempted and would have done so had time been given me," said Father Carlos. "Especially I noted a figure of great size upon the wall that faces the setting sun, for this was a serpent with feathers like a bird, a figure such as is seen never but in the lands to the south and beyond the Great river. While waiting for day I drew the lines of the journey we had made which I here set down again for the guidance of others. On the coming of the moon we went toward the purple vapors of the—"

Peter turned to the next page. It began: "These accounts of treasure are but the poor speculations of the ignorant. Long after the sandstones have covered the pretensions dwelling places of man such perversity will endure that worldly avarice will conjure into belief the tradition of fools." This was not page thirty-three but page thirty-seven. The pages between were gone.

For a moment DeWolfe was puzzled. This was not a perfect copy. After a moment's reflection he felt the humiliation of stupidity. Of course the copy he was examining was the imperfect volume that Parmelee had owned originally; the one sent by Wycoff probably would be found in its place on the shelves where Brena's husband had put it—one of the last acts he ever did in that house. Peter, arising, walked along the rows of books looking at the titles; in less than three minutes he had found the other copy of the quaint old book and taken it down.

He blew the dust off the once glided top of its pages and as he did so he noticed that at one place the pages did not quite press close together. The volume felt open there—at page thirty-seven. The two preceding leaves of the book had been torn out!

He went back to the desk chair, sat down, thrust his feet out straight before him and whistled.

After a few moments he opened the first copy of "Father Carlos" again and read over the paragraphs on page thirty-two.

"Serpent with feathers like a bird," he said as one who desires to hear the words so that their meaning shall be more clear. He was thinking of the scrap of paper in his pocket—that scrap of paper that Jim Hennepin had left inadvertently with Brena when she saw him for the last time, that scrap of paper with the crudely drawn figure of the feathered serpent—the god, Kuk-ul-can, and the two scrawled words, "This Sign."

He took out this scrap and walking to a window, with its barred grating through which the gray east wind was hurrying more rain against the spattered panes, he examined the handwriting. With the manner of a guilty man engaged in some nefarious and shameful performance, he drew forth Brena's letter of introduction addressed to Lanfrew, the attorney, opened it, and holding the two pieces of writing side by side glanced from one to the other. The capital S in the word "Sign" was not like hers. And now—

He paced again, thinking; then uttering an exclamation, he pulled open the lower drawer of the desk and took out a handful of Parmelee's canceled checks. Shifting one behind the other, he went on hurriedly glancing at the dates until he had found one for eighty dollars made payable to "Brena Selcoss Parmelee."

Almost viciously he slapped this one over onto its face and stared down at the endorsement on the back. "Pay to Bearer, Brena Selcoss Parmelee." "That will do," he said and thrust it in his pocket.

He returned to the lower drawer again, threw out upon the desk top the many little books that his casual observation had determined were Compton Parmelee's private books of account.

(To be continued next week.)

Zero Hours of Automobile Accidents, 4, 5 and 8 P. M.



ONE thousand and thirty of Chicago's 11,755 auto accidents last year, according to the Stewart-Warner Safety Council for the prevention of automobile accidents, occurred between five and six o'clock, just when congestion is at its worst in the home-going rush. Only 47 of these 1,000 accidents were fatal.

Four o'clock is the children's zero hero. Thirty-three of the 182 children killed by autos in Chicago last year came to grief at four o'clock, playing in the streets after school.

Seven to nine is the dangerous time for adult auto fatalities, according to Chicago's 1924 record. Eighty-six of 353 such deaths occurred around the theater-going hours.



POTATOES were a very profitable crop in 1925, according to a survey made by the Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation. The acreage was the smallest since 1919 and the yield the lowest since 1917. Yielding four bushels of overproduction and very low prices, the 1925 season started off with a good price, which increased daily. The peak will be reached in spring shipments.

The annual consumption of 2 1/2 bushels per capita, including seed, is 379,000,000 bushels. The 1925 crop is estimated at 323,243,000 bushels or 46,757,000 bushels under normal consumption.

The 1925 crop is 24 per cent less than the crop produced in 1924, but the ratio of consumable potatoes for the two years may vary still more in favor of the 1925 crop.

With the acreage cut severely all over the country in 1925, the opening prices started out on a higher scale than the peak prices for 1924 and began to increase at digging time until they reached in some instances 35.50 and 34 per hundredweight at local shipping stations. Every grower should save seed for next spring, as all indications point to high-priced seed potatoes for 1926 with an exception that the acreage planted will be larger in 1926.

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