

Quack, Quack Here and Quack, Quack There



A national duck-calling contest was recently held over station WTAD at Quincy, Ill. F. W. Brockmeyer of Quincy, Ill., was the winner. He is shown holding the cup and the lady calling is Mrs. Margaret Gillet of Peoria, Ill.

Phone Swindle Soon Thwarted

Soft-Spoken Thief Dupes Commercial Operator to Get Aid in Fraud.

New York.—In these days of highly specialized endeavors rogues have kept pace with the trend of the times, as is proved by police records. Cracksmen meet protective skill with destructive cunning, highwaymen utilize latest methods of transportation to swoop upon victims and so on down the calendar of crime where brain is pitted against brain by forces for good or evil.

Among criminal free companions who patrol the highways and byways of cities there was one swarm which invariably shunned the clash of arms while obtaining their sustenance through illegal practices. Actuated by the age-old theory that the world owes them living, they collected by stealth and with little effort, from public booth boxes of the telephone companies. They were a mild herd of thimblegriggers, as a rule, with ingenious minds and faint hearts, willing to accept what could be pilfered with the least risk. In recent years they pulled several Lovel swindles from their bag of tricks, but each time the companies have been prompt to curb these frauds and to re-perpetrators over to justice.

Among the ranks of these shrinking knives were some of persuasive tongues and fascinating manners. To these came the greatest harvest. It was only when the hand of the law, as represented by the efficient police of the telephone company, closed upon them that they tolled or spun as walled-in wards of the state.

The plan of operation employed by the more ambitious of the telephone-box thieves, who were often graduates from the school of poorbox raiders, was based on romance. A nimble-footed, wavy-haired youth made the rounds of the community dances until he became acquainted with a girl who worked on the switchboard of some big commercial establishment. Then he grew attentive and the wooing sped.

Dupe Selected Carefully.
The selection of a dupe was made with care, for the plainer the maid

the greater the impression. He was an ardent suitor, and in a short time waxed pathetic over his inability to wed and have a little home enshrined in chintz curtains and scatter rugs. He had the promise of a good job, only a small sum was needed, and, furthermore, he had a plan by which love would find a way.

The girl listened to soft words, basked in tender glances and reached the point where she was willing to join in with any scheme as a short cut to their goal. Then he got her thousandth pledge of undying affection and first vow to perpetual silence on the particular project which he was about to broach and the stage was set.

"All you have to do," began the tempter, then went on to unfold the following procedure: Tomorrow morning at ten o'clock he would call up as he had done often during the last week or more. Yes, of course, he would tell her how much he loved her, but this time she must not cut off the wire until he gave the word. That might be for a half hour or so and she was to connect all calls that came over her wire to any destination through the switchboard. There might be a great many of them, but caution was the watchword, and therefore let none know what she was doing.

The following day this graceful youth walked into a telephone booth in one of the busiest terminals in the city where there was a line of folk waiting to make a call and a getaway. "Hello, dearie," he crooned when he had deposited his nickel and heard the girl's voice. The usual passionate patter took place, then he instructed her to answer the rest of the calls like a regular telephone operator with the rising inflection of tone. This bit of art completed, he slipped a tiny black wedge of wood underneath the hook of the receiver. In this way he had baited his trap and departed to await returns.

Calls Go Through Accomplish.
A steady stream of calls came from the booth, local and long distance, all of which were guided by the patient girl at the commercial switchboard, who considered the work a labor of love. Each of these had been paid for at the regular toll rate in coin, ranging from a nickel to a quarter.

Now the coin box in a telephone booth, which seems so human to the lay mind, both in efficiency and obstinacy, is a wonderful bit of mechanism but it functions according to its lights no matter who derives benefit. The coin is dropped into the slot designated; if it be a nickel it traverses an irregular chute, rings one bell, short and sharp, and drops on to a horizontal plate, where it is held in abeyance until the conversation is finished.

Should the call go through, per schedule, and the person who is telephoning hangs up, the operator at the switchboard, advised of this by a light at her desk, presses a black button and the toll passes to the company's bank, which is at one side of the telephone appliance. But if there is complaint of a wrong number or busy signal the money drops into the return slot at the other side by touching a red button. A dime or quarter passes through almost the same procedure, except that the dime rings two bells and the quarter one resonant chime. So much for technique.

When the pseudo-suitor had loitered about for a half hour or so he slipped into the booth and spoke to his gentle accomplice. As a rule by this time she was aware of what was going on, but to her, at least, love could do no wrong. After an interchange of cooling he bade her fond farewell and the

line was plugged out. Then he garnered the harvest.

Taking the tiny wedge from under the receiver hook, the thief joggled this hook impatiently. The operator in the telephone office, who had failed to notice the extent of the call, answered with a query regarding the trouble.

"I can't get my party," he complained; "trying here for almost half an hour. Gimme information, please." No sooner said than done, the button pressed to release his nickel and immediately a shower of coins, which had been awaiting disposition, jangled into the return slot and the seeker for easy money strolled on his way, with several dollars more than he had before. In his waistcoat pocket was the little wedge, which prevented the hook from clicking a connection with the central exchange, but whose use was not suspected by the booth patrons.

Although unlike the bee in industry, the indolent thief improved each shining hour according to his own standard and he usually had several temporary fiancées working under his guidance in the manner described above. Sometimes his earnings amounted to \$40 a day, until the inevitable crash came or his instinct warned him it was on the way, and he fled to another city to play the same role over again.

Captures could be traced to observant operators in the telephone companies' exchanges who noticed coin-box stations in use for long periods. Detectives were sent to watch booths recording prolonged calls and the miscreant was arrested as he collected gains.

Cases have been known where gangs have worked with girl confederates, who were of their number. These obtained positions in large business houses and were expert telephone operators. They quit their jobs before the monthly check-up of telephone bills was made, for, in the last analysis, the commercial concerns were the losers by all this roguery, as the calls had been charged to them as they passed through their switchboards.

Another Type of Swindler.

Another knave who was decidedly in the lower stratum of crookdom, but still refused to sully his hands by honest toil, was the man who gained a livelihood by plugging up the coin slots in telephone boxes. This undesirable citizen mapped out a route, much the same as the farmer has in a sugar maple orchard and trued about each hour or so to see what fate had cast in his way.

The initial procedure in this bit of petty larceny was to knead tissue paper into clinging pulp and press it into the opening where nickels, dimes or quarters roll when the patrons have received wrong or busy numbers. These obstructions were so placed that they were not noticed.

Entering a booth which had been marked for prey, a busy business man, or pretty debutante, as the case might be, made a call and perchance encountered a busy number. Quite naturally it was expected that the money would be returned. When this failed to materialize there was a raucous complaint sounded. A satisfied customer is ever the aim of the telephone company, so the impersonal voice of the operator urged the angry patron to give her the name and address and a check for the amount deposited would be forwarded.

At the same time the conscientious employee informed the "trouble department" that there was something wrong with that particular telephone. Sometimes the mechanics arrived before the plug had been withdrawn and the 15 or 20 cents collected. In that case the sleuths would hurry over to wait until the self-appointed collector arrived. Then it was up to him to tell it to the judge.

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W. N. U., PORTLAND, NO. 16-1927.

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Robin Goes Bobbin' With Key to Bank
Columbus, Ind.—The key to the Citizens National bank at Hope was stolen by a robin recently and the robin was chased by a posse of citizens of the town until the key was recovered. Joseph A. Spough, president, closed the bank and went to the home of Henry Simmons, caretaker of the bank building, to leave it with him, as is his daily practice. Mr. Simmons was in the dooryard at his home and placing the key on the top of a stone post. Mr. Spough called to Mr. Simmons that he had left the key on the post. Mr. Spough turned to depart when a robin swooped down upon the post, and taking hold of a string to which the key was attached flew away with it. Mr. Spough gave an alarm that aroused citizens living in the neighborhood who, with Mr. Spough and Mr. Simmons gave chase, finally harassing the robin to an extent that it dropped the key, which was recovered.