

# HOW THE BLACK HAND STRIKES

BY WILLIAM J. FLYNN, CHIEF OF UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE

"To rob the unwary, to grow wealthy by terrorizing Italians, to hurl bombs at those who refuse to submit to blackmail, to kidnap little children, to poison the horses of their enemies, to make counterfeit money and to commit murder when a necessity arises."

These were the words used by Uncle Vincent in describing the objects of the Black Hand Society to Comito the Sheep, the Calabrian who ran the press in the little stone house near Highland, N. Y., where the spurious Canadian and American notes were printed.

It is a concise description of how the Black Hand strikes.

Comito, as I told before, made several trips to New York while he was engaged in printing the counterfeit money for the Black Hand members. On one occasion Cecala, Lupo's chief lieutenant, met him and rode with him in an elevated train to Houston street, where they both left the train. Comito was going to see his aunt, in Bleecker street, and Cecala said he would accompany him.

I will quote Comito again.

"As we went down into the street Cecala said, 'Let us first go to a drug store near by.' I, the drug store Cecala said to the clerk, 'Where is the boss?'"

"He is out."

"Tell him," said Cecala, "that I have been here and to prepare that matter."

"As we went out he said to me in a low voice, 'See what a nice drug store?'"

"I praised the place."

"I have saved this druggist," said Cecala, a ring of pride in his voice.

"How?"

"I burned his store," said Cecala.

"I was astounded. Cecala saw my surprise and continued:—'First I suggested to him that he should insure the store. After he had paid for a little while I put fire to it, and the insurance company paid him \$3,000.'

"And why do you do these things?" I asked.

"Because," said Cecala, "when the insurance money has been paid I receive a percentage. Besides, you see, I have saved a poor man from ruin." This Cecala said with an evil wink.

"Is there not danger?" I asked.

"Not to me," said Cecala. "When you send for me I will set a fire in an instant and no trace of it will remain. In the store of the druggist I used glycerine mixed with other matters. It does not smell and leaves no traces of how the fire was started."

"And do you do all this alone?" I asked.

"No," said Cecala. "In that way I might some time be caught. I always need three or four men. I direct them and they handle the material. I pay them five dollars a night."

"They must earn much money," I said.

"Cecala laughed wickedly.

"They do," he said.

"I shuddered at the wickedness of these men who so endangered human life."

"So," I said, "then you are the man who was the cause of that fire in Mulberry street where so many poor people were burned?"

"No," said Cecala heatedly. "I do not set fires to make accidents happen. That fire was started by a bungling hand of Neapolitans. They did not use their heads, which at best were almost empty. If I had set the fire there would have been no lives lost."

"The fire was started by men in accord with the dry goods merchant whose store was underneath the tenements. These men did not know how to start a fire. Instead of using a clever device for the spreading of the flames they used rags soaked in kerosene, which is very clumsy. In order to stamp out all the signs of how the fire was set they jaced explosives on the stairs, which were outside the store and at one side of the building. Then they themselves ran to the roof."

"When the explosives went off the stairs were wrecked, also the fire escape, and the flames spread so quickly that some could escape. Had I set the fire no accidents would have happened. I have many times performed tasks more difficult with no loss of life."

"Listen how it would have been done. First I would procure a large pig's bladder. They may be purchased at any butcher shop. There is no suspicion aroused by the act. In fact I might send a young boy to buy the bladder. Boys are always in the possession of these things. They blow them up, tie a string around the neck and hit people over the heads with them to make sport."

"This bladder I would fill with gasoline and attach a fuse. Perhaps, if the store was very large, I would have used more than one. When the fuse was lighted my men would escape. There would be plenty of time. The fuse would burn slowly until it reached the gasoline



## "BUT FIRST TAKE THIS OTHER TO THE HORSES ACROSS THE STREET."

run the counterfeiters' press. After escaping from Italy he went to Tokio, Liverpool, London and other big cities, finally going to America.

To quote Comito's confession again:—

"Have you worked all the time that you were in America?" I asked Uncle Vincent.

"Never," he said. "Neither do I expect to work. If I met the man who invented work I would kill him."

"What do you do to live?" I asked.

"You are too young to know certain things," said Uncle Vincent in a voice which angered me. "When you have become well interested in the affairs of our society you will learn how to live without work."

"Then you belong to some society which gives you money?"

"Yes, but not like the societies to which you belong. When you leave your societies and join ours you will feel better about life."

"And what is the price of initiation?" I asked.

"Nothing," replied Uncle Vincent.

"How, then, will I be admitted?" I asked.

"We must try you with a courageous deed and secrecy."

"What? Masonry?" said Uncle Vincent. "It is a society that never ends and is bigger than the Masons."

"And when will you allow me to enter?"

"I must school you first. When you have known the heads and respected them, then you will be christened. Do not be alarmed because you have already been christened once in the Roman Catholic Church. This is not a matter of religion, but you must have a title that you will bear in secret, so that you will be respected in all parts of the world."

"Where are the headquarters?" I asked.

"In all parts of the world," said Uncle Vincent, "and the activities of the society are many and very great. We gather much money from kidnapping of children, making of counterfeit money, burning of buildings and the like."

Never does the Black Hand strike more vigorously and more swiftly than in the cause of revenge. I have already described in my first two articles the mysterious barrel murder, which was actuated by a desire for revenge on the part of the Black Handers.

There was a barber, Carlo Maresse, who went to New Brighton, Staten Island, from Sicily. In February, 1907, he received a letter from Giuseppe Vena, a friend, who said that he too would like to come to America. Maresse sent his friend money for the passage, with \$40 to spare.

Vena had been not long in America when Maresse's friend, Pasquale Pucillo, a cobbler, was threatened with death unless he paid a sum of money to the writer of a letter. Alarmed, Pucillo showed the letter to Carlo Maresse and asked his advice.

Thinking that he recognized the writing, Maresse took the letter home and compared it with others in his possession. Placing it beside the letter Vena had written from Sicily, he saw that the penmanship was the same. He sought out his friend Vena in a saloon in Mulberry street, where he knew he often went, and besought him to turn aside from the life of crime upon which he was entering.

Vena turned upon Maresse in a rage and, calling him a liar, swore that he had written no letter to Pucillo. Very soon afterward, Pucillo receiving another letter, the barber advised him to give it to the police.

Three days after this Maresse was attacked in the early morning by Vena and a man named Parente. A driver of a milk wagon intervened and saved Maresse's life, but as his assailants fled they swore vengeance upon his daughter, a girl eighteen years old, reputed to be very beautiful. The barber was not a coward and had been scoffed at the threats against his own person, but the thought of what might befall his daughter unnerved him. From that hour he kept a heavily loaded shotgun close at hand day and night. Vena and Parente were as good as their word. During a storm

at night they attempted to force an entrance into Maresse's house. The barber pulled both triggers of the shotgun, the contents of one barrel laying Vena low, the other missing Parente.

Giuseppe Vena was carried to the New Brighton Hospital, where he was confronted by Maresse.

"Is this the man who shot you?" asked the policeman who had the barber in custody.

"There was no reply from Vena."

"Do you know this man?" asked the policeman.

"I never saw him," said Vena, who was dying.

"The barber glared at him."

"You lie, Giuseppe Vena," he cried. "I shot you, and you know why I did it."

Vena died without making any statement as to who shot him, though Maresse steadfastly maintained that it was he. That is the way of the Black Hand. They do not wish the law to punish those who harm them. Vengeance is too sweet to them.

Carlo Maresse was never brought to trial, but the Black Hand watched and waited. The fact that his life has not as yet paid for Vena's is due partly to the vigilance of the law, partly to the troubles the Black Hand has had within its own ranks. But the incident illustrates the methods of the society. When it strikes it strikes without the law, and it never calls in the law to help or to bring retribution. Its members die with the names of the murderers sealed within their lips, but they manage to let the society know in the knowledge that the society will avenge them.

I have often mentioned the Secret Service operatives who had become trusted members in the Black Hand organization. It is to these men that I owe much of the success which attended the Secret Service in the fight to put the Black Hand counterfeiters behind prison bars. After the arrest of the leaders the society was in a turmoil. No man knew whom to trust or to distrust. Factional fights started and a wave of murder swept over those districts of New York where the Black Handers were accus-

ed to congregate. The merest suspicion of duplicity was enough to send a man to certain death. I am happy to say that none of the operatives of the service was reached in the wholesale murders.

Since the Black Hand has been operating in New York I can safely say from information brought to me through the inner circles that this criminal element has been responsible for at least sixty murders in and around New York city. Sometimes these murders averaged one each week. I have searched in vain for the secret burying ground used by the Black Hand, which is supposed to be in the vicinity of Highlands, N. Y. This spot is known only to a few men in the very highest councils of the Black Hand. I recall an incident in connection with these men to whom I have so often referred as having gained the confidence of the society. I was on one occasion walking through Prince street on the lookout for anything of interest to the service in the fight against the counterfeiters.

Outside a café I saw two men fighting. I started to run toward them to drag them apart, but when I got into the light so that I could see them I was astounded to find that they were both Secret Service operatives. Of course I knew they did not know each other. It would not have done for me to interfere, for each man, knowing who I was would have thought it strange that I did not arrest the other.

Fearing that they would see me I jumped behind a pile of packing cases and had a good long look. Later I learned that each operative had been watching the other as a thief and that each had attempted to arrest the other.

This will show how true is my contention that the men who work in the inner circles of the Black Hand do not even know one another.

While Comito was in the stone house with the counterfeiters Salvatore Sylvestre told of how he and "Nick" Terranova, a half brother of Lupo, stole horses in New York, drove them to nearby towns and sold them.

He told of being arrested once with Morello's son and brother for throwing a bomb in a store in Mott street.

"We threw the bomb," said Sylvestre, laughing, "but we were let go because there were no witnesses to the act."

To quote for the last time in this series from Comito's confession:—

"After Sylvestre told of throwing the bomb he related a story of stealing watches at a dance."

"One night," he said, "Morello's brother, other friends and I went into a hall where a Jewish wedding was being celebrated. There we recognized several policemen who from time to time helped us. We stole about fifteen watches, but while I was taking one the man who wore it caught me."

"He cried out and called for help. One of the policemen came running toward us, but he told the man to get out, saying that he had known me for ten years and that I was an honest, decent fellow. After that we ran out of the hall pretty quickly, giving two of the watches to the policeman."

If this is true it bears out what Cecala said to Comito on one occasion when Comito asked whether it was not dangerous to commit crimes so openly.

"In America everything is prohibited, but if you pay the police or detectives they will leave you in peace," said Cecala. "In this land money counts, so that if you kill any one and you have money you will get away."

"Morello knows how much money he has given to detectives to go free. Even now he is being watched by the police who really do not wish to watch him because they know that they will receive their bit. Often orders are given to arrest Morello, for the superiors of the detectives suspect him of being the head of the Black Hand Society, but in most cases some policeman warns him and he escapes and hides and waits, but there is no reason to believe there is not some truth in it. On the police force are some men who are open to bribery. One or two of them may have been reached by the Black Handers. Of course the department as a whole is not in league with the society, nor are any considerable number of men on the force. The few who are, are responsible for the fearlessness with which the Black Hand was wont to strike before it was attacked and Lupo the Wolf, Morello and six of their most trusted aids sent to the federal prison in Atlanta.

Some time after Morello was incarcerated in the federal prison at Atlanta he sent word to the headquarters of the Black Hand Society in New York that one of the most highly trusted members should be sent to visit him.

A man noted for his ferocity of character and his faithfulness to the leaders of the society was sent to him. Morello received this man in the presence of witnesses who did not, however, bear what words passed between them. Later I learned that Morello had ordered my death at whatever cost.

How do I know this? Again those intrepid operatives, known only to myself, who stand at the elbows of the leaders of the Black Hand and know their every move.

This order to assassinate me has not been fulfilled, and it is my intention to see that it shall not be. But there are links still to be forged in the chain which shackle the Black Hand. More than forty of its members are behind prison bars, but I know of sixty more who should be.

There is still work to do. I quote Morello's message to his henchmen:—

"Have no doubt, I am not sleeping, and have not slept since that time."

## ALL PARIS IS EXCITED OVER TRIAL

Wife of Former French Premier is Charged With Murder.

The Air is Filled With Political Intrigue—Remarkable Case.

(By Special Wire to the Courier)

PARIS, July 20.—The thoughts of all Parisians were occupied to-day solely by the opening of the trial of Mme. Caillaux for the murder of March 26 of Gaston Calmette, Judge Louis Albane acting as president of the court.

The dramatic setting of the affair involving political intrigues in the prisoner's husband, a former French premier and minister of finances, was a prominent figure, was the taste of the French public. Ad to this was the rumored threat of a list of heads to create a disturbance of the trial, and the extensive precautions taken by the government to prevent an outbreak.

Long before the opening of the palace of justice, crowds, defying the drizzling rain, had assembled in the vicinity and special forces of police were called out to keep them in order.

From an early hour, long lines formed on the Place Dauphine, the Boulevard Du Palais, hoping to be lucky enough to secure a place in the court room, which had been the most part allotted to press representatives and barristers. A homeless waif had even taken their positions outside the building last night with the object of selling their places to others willing to bid for the chance of admission to the court room.

The police, however, eventually succeeded in securing entrance to the court.

Madame Caillaux, herself, had been conducted from the prison of Conciergerie to the court by several ways, so that those outside had opportunity of cheering or hissing her, according to their sympathies. The other leading figures who occurred with the case, however, were the subjects of demonstrations. Among them were the procurator-general, J. Herbaux, in charge of the prosecution, and Fernand Labori, the famous advocate, whose face is known to everyone, owing to his connection with the Dreyfus trial.

The newspapers to-day were filled with references to the case, and a worded article on the opening of the trial from the pen of Alfred Capus, the recently chosen academically "immortal," who now occupies editorial chair of the Figaro, formerly held by Calmette. In it he declares:

"The party which assassinated Calmette is going to do its best to file his memory, for which purpose has stopped at nothing, and has Continued on Page 8"

## A SUNDAY BLAZE

Child Playing With Matches Caused Fire on Terrace Hill Yesterday.

The fire department had a long incidentally slow run at Sunday to the house occupied by Mr. Battye at the corner of Princess Bydenham streets. Fire had started in the clothes closet in the front stairs bedroom as a result of a one in the household playing matches. Bed clothing and fecticks stored away, made a lively fire for a few minutes and it was the prompt assistance by neighbors, friends, Dave McDonald, Alex. Adair and J. W. Watkins that fire did not gain any headway, burning material was thrown through the window although the upstairs filled with dense smoke. When the fire was extinguished, the room was a mass of ruins and the loss amounted to about \$100.

The fire horses made a quick run to the house on Terrace Hill, but plainly evident that in case of so fire, the time required to reach race Hill with the heavy apparatus would be too great. It is believed that a motor truck or a station on the hill with light equipment would be of great protection. The problem long been considered but its solution has not yet been arrived at.