

BLACK HAND SECRETS REVEALED BY CHIEF OF SECRET SERVICE

The Long Arm of the Black Hand

By WILLIAM J. FLYNN, Chief of the United States Secret Service

CROSS deserts, rivers, seas the long arm of the Black Hand reaches. In every State of the Union its crushing grip may be felt, and even in Europe it may strike and do its enemies to death.

In the fight against the Lupo-Morello gang the Secret Service was concerned for the most part with counterfeiting operations in and around New York, but much was learned about the activities of the band in other fields, and many crimes were at least in part explained which might otherwise have gone down as baffling mysteries. There are criminal organizations in Italy, perhaps to a certain extent allied with the Black Hand of America, but the society which has its headquarters in New York fights its own battles.

Comito, the man who ran the counterfeiting presses for the Black Handers in the stone house at Highland, in his confession, which I have quoted freely, throws light on the killing of Joseph Petrosino in Palermo while on business there for Theodore Bingham, then Police Commissioner of New York city. It is an example of how the Black Hand hunts its enemies to death. Petrosino left New York in great secrecy and no mention was made of it in the newspapers. His purpose was to get evidence against members of the Black Hand so that they could be deported, and he was chosen for the work because he was himself an Italian, serving as the head of the Italian Detective Bureau of the New York police. He it was who helped me in establishing the identity of Mariano Benedetto, the victim of the barrel murder, and there was among the police no man more hated and more feared by the Lupo-Morello band than this Petrosino.

While Petrosino was in Palermo carrying out his mission he was shot to death walking in the street, and his murderers escaped and were never apprehended. The crime remained a great mystery, and although the police of New York called upon the Italian government to assist in clearing it up nothing was accomplished. While I may not say with certainty who killed Petrosino, I believe that certain things which Comito, the man who operated the counterfeit press in the stone house at Highland, told me throw light on the subject.

As I told in a previous article, Comito was called to New York by Cecala, Morello's lieutenant, to consult on the printing of the two-dollar American bills, which were conditionally a little off color. After complying with certain formal conditions Comito was taken to a room over a bank up town, where he was questioned by Morello about the ink used in printing the bills. In the room with Morello, Cecala and Comito was a Calabrian, a tall man, very dignified in appearance and giving the impression of great dignity and strength. Throughout the interview this man, whom Comito knew only as Michele, the Calabrian said not a word. He seemed to be in a reverie. As Cecala and Comito were leaving the room, according to Comito's confession—

"Cecala turned to Morello and said in a low voice:—'Tell me something, Piddu, have you arranged for the fare for the Calabrian?'

"Piddu is a nickname for Giuseppe Morello.

"Cecala asked, 'Why not?'

"Because we are not certain that he is going," said Morello.

"How not certain?" Cecala asked.

"It is not sure that this low detective will go. But as soon as Ceo returns from Brooklyn I will have him get information from that friend."

"Ceo was a stepbrother of Morello."

"The newspapers are not talking about it," said Cecala.

"Certainly not," said Morello, "for it is a secret thing and not even known to many of the police as yet."

"Pezzo di Sbirro?" said Cecala, which is to say, 'damn detective.' He guards his own hide without calculating how many he has ruined."

"Don't talk too much. Go away," said Morello, and we left the house. I did not know at that time of whom they were talking."

Now this was just before Petrosino left for Sicily, and although in itself it might not seem to have any great bearing on his death, Comito was to hear more of it later.

In one of the previous articles Comito told how Ignazio Lupo came to the little stone house at night and frightened the counterfeiters before they learned who the visitor was. After Lupo had unpacked the magazine rifles and cartridges which he had brought to the house the Black Handers sat down to a big meal which Caterina and Comito were forced to serve. To quote from Comito again—

"They were all eating and drinking merrily when Uncle Vincent (one of the counterfeiters) turned to Lupo and asked, 'What news are you bringing, Ignazio?'

"You know all the news that I bear," said Lupo, except that it is said Petrosino has gone to Italy."

"If he went to Italy he will be killed," said Uncle Vincent.

"If it could only be done successfully," said Cina.

"Lupo smiled, a crooked, twisted, wicked smile, except that it was raised many," he said. "It is enough to say that he had himself locked up in the Tombs Prison to interrogate the detained and uncover crimes."

"Many mothers' children he has ruined," said Uncle Salvatore Palermo, and how many are crying?"

"Well, but I can tell you that I HAVE GIVEN MICHELE THE CALABRIAN HIS FARE—!" Lupo broke off and looked around the table, then finished with a sly look, 'to go and see his family, which was stricken by the earthquake.'

"You have done well," said Cecala, and, winking one eye, he lifted his glass. "Let us drink to our health and to h— with that carogna."



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Italian government would institute proceedings. The fact that they do not is probably due partly to a feeling that Italy is well rid of them and partly to political influence. The political parties of the United States are by no means free from the influence of the Black Hand. Neither party as a whole is culpable in this respect nor any party in particular, but minor organizations of all parties existing in New York realize the power of the Black Hand and are not always above using it.

In fighting the Black Hand the police in the past were to a certain extent hampered by this political influence.

"I never knew him," I said.

"You never will," Cecala said grimly.

"Then, after all it was successful?" repeated Uncle Vincent.

"Certainly," said Lupo. "It could not be successful in New York because he guarded his hide so carefully. When he walked he brought a revolver in his coat pocket and was accompanied by two policemen a short distance behind him."

"It is a good example for the policemen," said Uncle Vincent. "No one will dare to go to Palermo, for going there they will find death."

"Una, another of the counterfeiters, came down from the pressroom in time to hear the last part of the conversation.

"As soon as we can," he said, "we must have a really big celebration. Now we will have to be content with a glass of wine."

"After this I went again to work at the press and because of the noise I could hear no more of Petrosino."

No one has ever been arrested and convicted for the murder of Joseph Petrosino, but what Comito heard during his connection with the Black Hand speaks for itself. It shows the scope of the society, how its mailed fist may strike even across the seas, through the headquarters of the hand is in Palermo, matter of fact New York.

There are other evidences of the world-wide power of the Black Hand. Many of its members have committed crimes in Italy and would be extradited if the

conversation at Morello's house and the time that Lupo was at the stone house before I asked—

"Who is this Petrosino?"

"He was the head of the Italian police in New York," replied Cecala. "A 'honey' man. Worse than the bubonic plague."

"I never knew him," I said.

"You never will," Cecala said grimly.

"Then, after all it was successful?" repeated Uncle Vincent.

"You have done well," said Cecala. "Let us drink to our health and to h— with that carogna."

them and they are in need of money." The man in question knew that the law did not persecute any person unjustly. He realized that the men in the past were to a certain extent hampered by this political influence.

After the arrest of the counterfeiters which I described in a previous article a fund of \$50,000 was quickly raised to be used in their defence. Much of the money was forced from Italian and Sicilian residents of all the cities of the world by the compari or godfathers of the accused. These compari are bound to do all in their power to protect their godchildren, even though they know them to be criminals and are honest themselves. The money raised by the compari to defend the Lupo-Morello counterfeiters came from Tunis, Algiers, New Orleans, St. Louis, Liverpool, New York and every other big city of the world where there are any considerable numbers of Italian residents.

It is small matter for wonder that the friends and agents of the Black Hand in foreign cities are able to raise money for the companions of the society who fall under arrest. Most of the Black Handers have left villainous reputations behind them and their compatriots are afraid to refuse to contribute to the fund. This reputation gained in Italy often stands the Black Handier in good stead.

One of the men raising the defence fund for the trial of Lupo, Morello and the other men arrested in New York visited an Italian in New Orleans.

"Some of my compatriots are in trouble," he said. "The law persecutes

neighbor of Giovanni Vella, walked through a dark alley to make a short cut to her home. In a shadow she noticed two men, lurking. She was a little frightened at first, but noting that one of the men was Morello, who she knew very well, she continued on her way and would have thought nothing more of the incident.

"Who are the men?" he asked.

"The Black Hand agent enumerated them. At the mention of Giuseppe Morello his listener started. It would perhaps be safer to contribute to the fund. He knew the record of Giuseppe Morello in Italy."

Giuseppe Morello! That was the man who had slain Giovanni Vella, chief of the Sylvan Guards, not half a block from his residence in Corleone. The entire story came to the mind of the man who had been asked to contribute to the defence fund for Lupo and Morello.

Again he heard the crash of exploding powder in the night. As though he were reacting the scene he remembered how he had run from his house into the street, frightened more by the horrid scream of anguish he had heard than by the report of the revolver. He saw the sickly, pallid face of Giovanni Vella as the light from the street lamps shone upon the little group of men who were trying to succor him. He heard the choking voice of Vella, trying to tell them who had fired the shot which sent a bullet tearing through his back into his lung. And he remembered how Vella had died almost as soon as they had carried him into his house, before even the priest had come to insure his soul everlasting life.

The man in New Orleans remembered all this, and he trembled for his wife and for his children, should he refuse to contribute to the fund.

He gave freely.

But what had Morello to do with all this? I will tell you the story, and it is stranger than fiction.

One night in 1890 Anna Di Puma, a

neighbor of Giovanni Vella, walked through a dark alley to make a short cut to her home. In a shadow she noticed two men, lurking. She was a little frightened at first, but noting that one of the men was Morello, who she knew very well, she continued on her way and would have thought nothing more of the incident.

She had not reached her house, however, when she heard a shot behind her. Running back into the alley she was the first to come upon the body of Giovanni Vella lying in the very shadow where the two men had been standing. Next day Mrs. Di Puma told her neighbors of the two men she had seen in the alley, and declared that she would go to a magistrate and relate all she knew.

Two days later Mrs. Di Puma sat in the doorway of a neighbor's store. A carbine crashed twice. Mrs. Di Puma toppled forward on the ground. Two bullets had entered her body and she was dead.

Morello was arrested and charged with the murder of Anna Di Puma, for it was known that the woman intended to become a witness against him when the Vella case went into the courts. Now Morello was at that time a member of the Mafia, an organization which Vella had sworn to break up. In the Mafia were two lawyers, who swore that Morello was in Palermo at the very hour when Anna Di Puma was shot in Corleone. Morello was discharged for lack of evidence.

Francesco Ortonello had been arrested meanwhile for the murder of Vella. This is the way it came about. Shortly before his death Vella had accumulated so much evidence against the Mafia that he would soon be in a position to arrest and convict a number of the members. At the time of his death the election for the chief of the Sylvan Guards was at hand, and the Mafia, knowing that to defeat Vella they must put up a man of unquestioned integrity, brought about the nomination of Francesco Ortonello, who was not aware that the Mafia agents were behind the campaign for his nomination.

Shortly before the election was to take place Vella went to the home of Ortonello and denounced him.

"So, Francesco Ortonello," flared Vella in a rage, "you have taken off your mask. Never before did I think that you were one of the Mafia's puppets. I thought that you were an honest man; but alas, I fooled myself."

Angered by this denunciation in his own home, Ortonello took up a carbine and drew Vella from the house. Nevertheless, he considered well what Vella had said and investigated the situation. When he was satisfied that the Mafia had forced his nomination in order to defeat their other foe, Vella he resigned.

The next night Vella was shot to death.

When Ortonello was brought before the court for the killing of Vella many honest men attempted to aid him. Prosecutor Jones, a police officer, tried to find court evidence clearing Ortonello. One night as he was walking home he was murdered and the assassins were apprehended.

Biaggia Milone lived directly across the street from the spot where Vella was killed. Later she admitted that she saw Morello shoot the captain of the Sylvan Guards. She was intimidated and later came to New York, where her cousin Domenico Milone conducted a grocery store, which served as the headquarters for the distribution of the counterfeit money.

Ortonello's son was tireless in his efforts to have his father freed, and several times warned by the Mafia to cease his efforts. He was not to be intimidated, and one night three rifle shots were fired at him, all of which, however, went wide of the mark.

Guarino Zangara lived in a room next to the one occupied by Morello and his mother at the time of the murder of Vella.

He heard Morello enter the room shortly after the shooting and heard his mother say to him, sobbing—

"Oh, Poppo, what have you done? Now they will come and arrest you!"

"Have no fear, mother," replied Morello. "They have gone on the wrong scent."

Zangara, fearing a fate such as Anna Di Puma met, did not tell the authorities until after Ortonello was convicted of the crime.

Information he was told that it was too late; that he should have come forward during the trial.

It was many days before Zangara's dead body was found under a bridge which crossed a small stream near Corleone.

Two lawyers who conducted Ortonello's defence were in reality members of the Mafia. They continually pointed out to the accused that his case was so clear that he could not be convicted. There was no necessity, they said, to prepare an elaborate defence. No tribunal could find him guilty. All the time they were playing into the hands of the Mafia, and Ortonello was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Thus with the dying motion of his head did Giovanni Vella seal the fate of a victim of the very men fighting against whom he gave up his life. Ortonello served more than twenty years in prison before he was released on evidence presented to the Italian government. He and his family are still prosperously in New York at the present time.

All this was known by the master New Orleans when the Black Hand agent asked him for a contribution to the defence fund for the counterfeiters. He knew what he might expect from these men if he refused, and he gave generously.

Uncle Vincent, one of the counterfeiters who were with Comito in the stone house at Highland, enjoyed a reputation for crime in Italy. Comito tells of his confession.

"One day while we were working at the presses," he told me, "Uncle Vincent explained that he had been a victim of cattle in his own town. His father had sold him two oxen which he was to purchase."

"The price the owner asked was satisfactory to him and a discussion followed, in the course of which the price of the oxen said something at which Uncle Vincent took offence."

"Without saying a word Uncle Vincent raised the life which he was carrying and shot the owner of the animal. Another man who had been working the field ran for his life, but Uncle Vincent dropped him with a bullet and he had gone fifty paces."

Having committed a double crime, Uncle Vincent knew that he must leave the country. He had no money, so he searched the pockets of the slain man and found 250 lire. The money he waited only long enough to be sure of it before he fled. He was in Tokio, where he lived by peddling. He had accumulated enough money to go to Liverpool and live on until he left there for New Orleans.

It is no wonder that Italian newspapers out the world fear these men as much as human life so cheaply when it is their own. That is why we should spare fear to the hearts of the members of the Black Hand and sending the news to the winds. The decent living people should be shown that there is a greater fear than that of the Black Hand, and that can and will protect their persecutors before their eyes.

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ON THE SPOT WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL FUNSTON.

BRIGADIER GENERAL FUNSTON, who was discovered in Cuba, his regiment (retired) because they were not sent to Santiago. A greater destiny awaited him in a bigger and more bitter campaign.

Again, when San Francisco was crushed by an earthquake, was Funston's good fortune to assist in the ruins and help straighten things up.

There are the bright lights in his career. He has always been where things are straining in the outskirts of civilization. He has pursued adventures up and down the world from the tropics to the Arctic and back again.

He does not call it "The Quest of the Great Adventure." That is story book talk. Funston calls it "looking for trouble" at the list of his activities.

He has a school teacher, a reporter on the staff of the San Francisco Chronicle, a man who has been in the snows of Alaska, a man who has been in the snows of Alaska, a man who has been in the snows of Alaska.

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