

"The Ghost of the Past," New York's King of Pickpockets, Tells of His Long Criminal Career

OLD JOHN HANLEY, a pickpocket since he was twenty years old, and now credited in New York a few days ago as he was snatching a purse from a young woman's muff. Detective Casazza caught him red-handed. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to ten months in the penitentiary. After his conviction Hanley consented to write his life story for this paper.

He has been dubbed "The Ghost of the Past" by the New York detectives, who upon seeing him at Headquarters on the day of his arrest, exclaimed, "Here's a ghost of the past. We thought old John had been dead for twenty years."

By John Hanley.

WHEN I turned crooked fifty-two years ago pickpockets were gentlemen. Today they are moll buzzers.

A moll buzzer is the lowest type of thief. He steals from women, opens handbags and takes their purses or anything else that looks like a square meal. I fell for this game a few weeks ago and Frank Cassassa, the slickest detective in New York city, picked me up. Result is I am settled for ten months. Thank Heaven, I don't have to go back to Dannemora. I owe them fifteen months yet and it's always humiliating to a crook to return to a prison within a few weeks of his liberation. But I intend to turn straight when I come out and Frank Cassassa has promised to get me a job. It's me for the straight and narrow from now on.

I have been crooked now for fifty-two years. That's a long time, and when I realize that most of that time has been spent behind the bars it seems longer than it really is.

How did I turn crooked? Just like many another young fellow in New York city—by coming in contact with crooks, of course. My parents came from Ireland. I was born and raised in New York in the old Eighth ward. When I started out to earn a living I got a job in Reilly's saloon. That was over in Nineteenth street, near Third avenue. I was making \$18 a week, and that with my rake off—for in those days all bar-keepers felt entitled to their pickings—I was doing pretty well for a young fellow.

Thrown with Thieves.

This saloon, you see, was the hang-out for a lot of fly fellows. At first I didn't bother my head about where they were getting their money. All I knew was that they were spending lots of it, and of course, it meant more for me and more for the boss. There wasn't a day's receipts the more room there was for me to grab off my change without arousing suspicion that I was getting it at all.

These fellows would blow in of a morning and after treating everybody in sight they would remark they were nearly all in and then swing me for a round or two. Maybe they would borrow a little change. Then they would leave, but in an hour or two they would return and always with wads that would make a workman turn green with envy as he gazed at them.

After they had come to know me well enough to confide in me they told me what their game was. They were pickpockets, and, as they expressed it, I was like picking money from trees. All they had to do, it seemed to me, was to leave the saloon, take their stand on the corner and all that passed would take out their pocketbooks, wallets, watches, sparklers or wads and chuck them at their heads. Sometimes when this mob returned to the saloon after an absence of an hour or two they would split up a thousand dollars.

It didn't take me long to figure that it was easier to shake a guy down for his wad than it was to shake drinks. I could tap the cash drawer for ten a day and get away with it, but these fellows could pick up a thousand in an hour, and sometimes a single round of drinks would come to twenty dollars.

Learned to Pick Pockets.

When business was slack these pickpockets showed me how the trick was turned. I was a likely young chap and it didn't take me long to learn. My eye was quick and my hand quicker. In two weeks I could lift a watch or a wallet or a wad for that matter as handily as any one of them.

I was coming out of a theatre one night when a man in evening clothes and a young woman hanging to his arm brushed past me. I don't know what prompted me, but in a flash it came over me that here was the chance to try out my skill. I hovered close to this big, fine looking chap and when I moved away I had his watch as well as his wallet. I think he had to borrow supper money from the girl that night, for when I counted what was in the wallet I found my night's test of skill had netted me a watch and fob worth \$300 and a wallet with \$210 in crisp, new bank notes.

As easy as this came you might suppose that the boss had to open up the saloon himself the next morning. I never showed. But I did make it my hang-out for a long time after that because I wanted to train with the mob that had showed me how to make the easy coin.

I was twenty years old when that first bank roll dropped into my hands. From then on for six months, at least, it was something like that every night. I worked the theatre crowds and they

never failed to pay me for my trouble. Sometimes it was a hundred, sometimes more. I lived on the fat of the land, played the horses, played faro and any other game of chance that happened to be running. I was a desperate gambler from the start, and, strange to say, never drank a drop of intoxicating liquor in my life, never smoked and never chewed tobacco.

Sooner or later every pickpocket comes to grief. Less than a year after I quit my job in Reilly's saloon I was picked up for stealing a watch. They had the goods on me, too, because they caught me before I had time to pass the time-piece to a friend.

Luck was with me. The "bull" that got me was open to a proposition, and when I had passed him a pretty good bunch of coin he didn't make out a very strong case against me when I came up for trial, and I was discharged. I was muzzed and that photograph is at Police Headquarters now.

The First Prison Sentence.

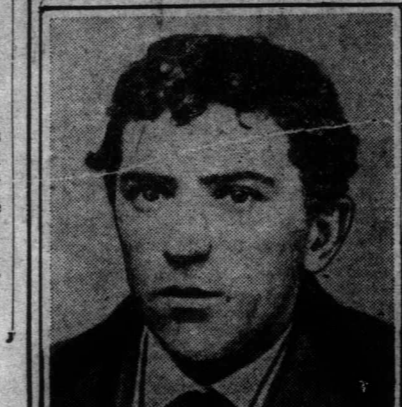
I got what was coming to me a little later, though, and luck wasn't with me. Again I was caught red handed and I went away for a six months' stretch. That set me thinking. Maybe it was better to tend bar with an eighteen-a-week salary and a ten-day rake off than to walk around with several hundred in my kick and every detective in the city liable to pick me up and frame me at a second's notice.

I knew they were watching me, so I

looked upon an artist. They are as clumsy as street pavers now. I don't mean to say that I managed to escape arrest and conviction, too. Lord knows I have had my fill of prisons. In all, I guess I have been fifteen years behind the bars. But considering the money I got and the chances I ran I was extremely lucky. Here I am, seventy-two years old and just sentenced to ten months in the penitentiary today. I should have gotten a life term. Any crook clumsy enough to be caught opening a woman's handbag deserves to be hanged.

I was carrying for a Brooklyn friend. I got eleven months and a fine of \$200. I paid the fine, served a month, and was turned out.

I pulled a little trick in New Haven once and was sent away for a short time. When I got back to New York it was the year of the big blizzard. I noticed a fine looking man who looked like ready money. I was broke and I figured he had more than he knew what to do with even though he wore the garb of a clerkman. I followed him for an hour before I could get him right, but when I left him I had his wallet and its \$70. I



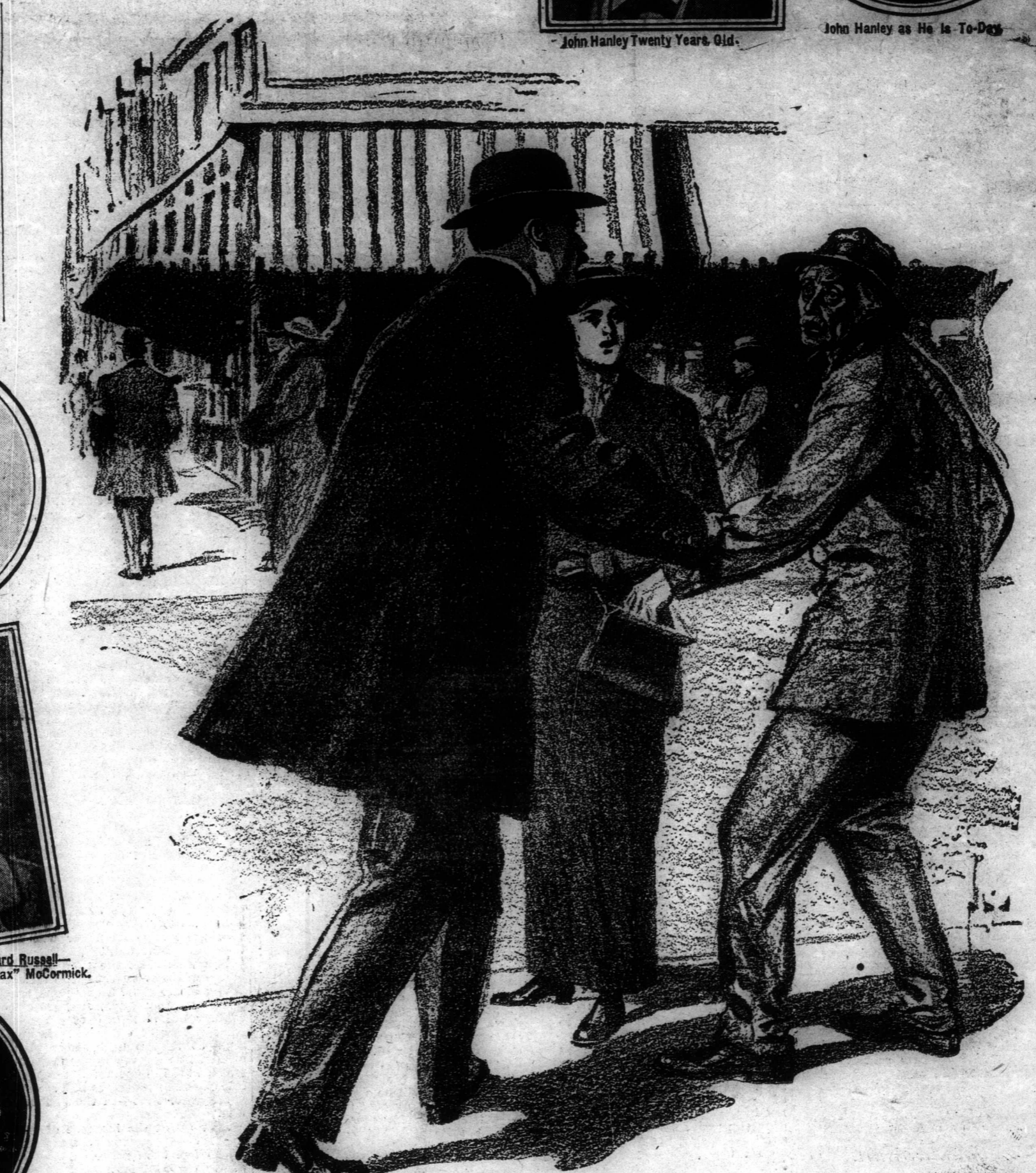
John Hanley Twenty Years Old.



John Hanley as He Is To-Day.



John Hanley When Forty-Five Years Old.



Poor chap, I'm sorry for him, and when I do my bit I must look him up.

Billings was caught down in Washington about a year ago. They got him for lifting a wallet from a Patent Office clerk. It had \$5,000 in it, too. He never was a piker. Billings was browsing around one of the departments, and when a young clerk entered an elevator Bill suspected that he was ready money. He edged close to him and jostled him. At the next floor Bill alighted from the elevator and with him went young Clamson's pocketbook and its wad.

The clerk missed his wallet before the elevator reached the bottom floor. He had the car shot up to the next floor and then he set out in full cry after Bill, who was descending the stairway. It was a chase all right, and poor Bill finished second. They settled him all right, and the worst part of it is he didn't have time to plant the money. They recovered every penny of it. Now, ain't that the limit? Think of getting away with \$5,000 and then being caught before it could be salted down for a rainy day. But such are the fortunes of the poor pickpocket.

They say a man is judged by the company he keeps. I guess that's right. I have hooked many thousands of dollars at Newport and Narragansett Pier one way and another, and I never got in trouble there but once in my life. I didn't get settled even then, and it was a little matter of \$20,000 at that. The wealthiest as well as the easiest people in the world flock to Newport. They have more money than they know what to do with, and in the old days they used to gamble there a good deal, and no man likes to be caught short. If a game was on he liked to declare himself in, and he took care to have enough cash in his pocket to pay his losses. Those boys didn't fool with I. O. U.'s.

Well, a pal and I got mixed up in a jewel robbery in a hotel at Narragansett Pier. The stones belonged to the wife of a New York banker, and much to my surprise I was picked up in Providence on this charge many months afterward. They thought they had me hooked up for a confession, and an alleged confession was sent out broadcast. That was a little bit. When other arrests were made I had made so many conflicting statements that no one knew where they stood, and finally I was turned out. I confess? I sneezed on a pal! Why, I'd just as lief walk out of here and jump into the North River, and I don't like deep water a little bit.

Well, I'm off to the Island now for a ten month stretch. Maybe I can dodge that fifteen-month bit hanging over me, and if I do I will turn straight. When I come out maybe I'll have a better story to tell.

Chinese Women's Changing Dress.

GEOORGE E. ANDERSON, United States Consul General at Hong Kong, China, has made an interesting report to the State Department upon the revolution going on among Chinese women in their mode of dressing. Here is what he says:

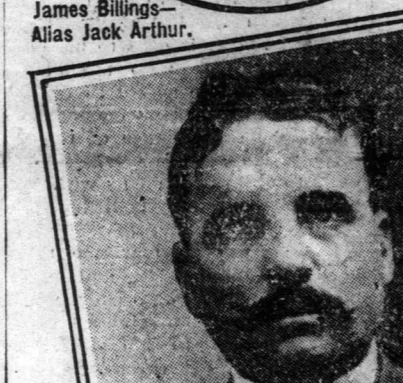
Of the characteristic features of modern life in the open ports of China, and in Hong Kong is the tendency among Chinese women of the fashionable class, especially in the diplomatic circles, to adopt foreign styles of dress, modified to suit Chinese taste. This change, though limited to a comparatively small number, is having a marked effect upon trade in Hong Kong shop windows—the more fashionable things that cater to Chinese tastes are full of modifications of foreign dress for the use of Chinese women, and many displaying styles are of a distinctly foreign cast.

"Formerly warmth in winter in China was obtained by a series of garments of various qualities and weights, the number of undergarments, all similar to the outer garment, being proportioned to the temperature. The introduction of knit underwear, however, has made these several layers of clothing unnecessary, and the change has resulted in a difference in the cut of outer garments. The coat, formerly reaching just below the hips, has been lengthened into what is practically a skirt, almost covering the trousers. In the cut of these skirts, or long coats, fashionable Chinese women now generally affect foreign styles.

"The use of foreign underclothing and of fewer layers of Chinese garments has also modified the wraps of Chinese women. Many Chinese women for some time have affected foreign style tulle, the Chinese being very fond of the latter. Formerly in native dress, the Chinese woman completed her costume with a fur lined garment, sometimes more than one, or by garments quilted with cotton or waste, having been replaced by the long coats previously mentioned, which are now made of heavy materials than the short coats of the old style. Some Chinese women use wraps wholly foreign in style."



James Billings—Alias Jack Arthur.



Edward Russell—Alias "Wax" McCormick.



Henry Wilson—Alias "Horse Face Harry."

Somehow the pickpockets that are working New York now don't realize that their faces will become so familiar to every detective in the city that sooner or later they will be arrested as suspicious persons every time they show their faces on the street. In my young days I would drop into New York, make my killing and then go myself. I would go to some other town and work it and then move on to the next. In that way the "bulls" never got next to me. Sometimes I wouldn't go any further away than Newark or Jersey City, but in some event I wasn't seen hanging around Broadway.

I remember once that a young man entering a bank attracted my attention. He was a fine looking young chap and I thought I would stick around and look him over when he came out. He reminded me of a pal I had when I was a boy. When he sauntered out to the street I noticed his inside coat pocket had a suspicious bulge to it, so I decided I would give him the "once over." Unfortunately for me two of my old comrades came along and, seeing my game, they declared themselves in on the game. To make a long story short, I sneaked the wallet and when we counted the roll there was \$1,500 in banknotes in it. I took a thousand and let them fight over the division of the balance. One of them had a bad record anyhow. He flashed his roll in a saloon that night and a "bull" collared him. He had an awful streak of yellow, that fellow, for he squealed, and an hour later I was pinched in a poolroom. Fortunately, I had a thousand in my pocket. I cleaned up several thousand dollars that day. Toward the afternoon I figured that every second I stayed in town the greater the chances for me being picked up. I knew I could not stand by and watch those crowds without fighting my way into them and coming through with the "leathers" that were just begging to

be snaked. So late in the afternoon I went over to Newark.

A man passed me on the street and a big wallet was sticking out of his inside coat pocket. I couldn't resist the temptation, so I trailed him. I got the wallet all right, but a detective saw me, and before I knew it I was collared. I was released on cash bail and skipped. I was steered clear of Newark for some time to come. Since then, however, I have had some good cases over there.

The New York police call me "The Ghost of the Past." That's because they haven't seen me for so long. I was arrested in that city the other day for taking a purse from a woman. I thought I was safe, for I worked through my overcoat pocket. It's done this way. I cut the lining out of my pocket. It's a fake pocket, you see, and should a bull be near he runs less chance of getting on to me. When I have got the man or woman I wish to touch in the right position, I just lift the hand that's in the pocket, seize the purse and draw it carefully up under the coat. If she should turn suddenly I am looking the other way and my hands are in my pocket. This Cassassa, however, is on to all these tricks and he saw me, although I thought he was a block away. He grabbed my hand before I could drop the purse and, of course, he had me right. I am glad I don't have to go back to Dannemora, though, for even a crook has some pride, and it's pretty tough to get the laugh from the bunch you left in the pen.

Prior to this last pinch the police here hadn't seen me for ten years. When they saw me brought in and I was recognized, one of them exclaimed, "The Ghost of the Past! We thought this old crook was dead ten years ago."

I don't mind being sent away so much this time. After being back here a few months I learned that nearly all my old friends are either dead, in the penitentiary or turned straight. One fellow, "Jim" Duffey, was an especially good friend of mine, and a rattling good thief he was, too. I can only think of him now with extreme contempt. He reformed and turned detective. Worked in a department store, I am told, and stayed there until he died. Think of a dip turning detective! Isn't it enough to make you lose faith in all fellow men? I've had my chances, like all other crooks. Justice Goff once let me off after I had been convicted of stealing a pocketbook from a Miss Gunther. I made a getaway on a subway train, but a policeman made a desperate leap to the train after it had started and caught me. Justice Goff was moved to compassion when I told him I had spent so much time in jail, and when I told him I wanted to reform he said he would help me. He told me to go to the Salvation Army Barracks and register there. I was to report to him at regular intervals. If I went wrong and came before him again he said he would settle me for the limit. I couldn't keep straight, and as luck would have it, I came up before Goff. He was as good as his word and fixed me right.

Caught in the Act.

"I miss my old friends. There was Jack Arthur, whose real name was James C. Billings. He was a big fine looking chap and looked all the world like a regular Western politician, a Congressman, or something like that. He was as smooth as grease and always could be depended upon to get the money no matter how tight the pinch."

Henry Wilson, "Horse Face Harry," was another good thief. We called him that because he looked so much like a horse. When he laughed one could swear that it was a horse neighing. He not only looked the part, but his whinny was a wonder. Wax McCormick, or Edward Russell, was another good one. Some one told me he went away for a five year stretch just the other day.

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GREAT WAR IS BRITISH WHAT

Remarkable Sec All its Move Moved Out in The Situation.

By Special Wire to the Cour... LONDON, Aug. 24.—The mystery of the war to Engli... minds is the British expeditio... army. That a large force of Bri... troops is on the Continent... public has every reason to belie... But the numbers of the field ar... its present position, which ar... ments compose it, from wh... ports they have sailed are poin... known only to the governme... Several days ago the French ge... ernment gave the papers a sta... ment of 20,000 British troo... had landed at Dunkirk and Cal... and that the landing was manag... by English-speaking French of... cers.

No English newspaper... printed a word about the mo... ments of the troops. The news... pers are not submitted to any c... sorship before their publicati... but the war office issues an... casual suggestion regarding... class of news that should not... published and the press has... lowed these instructions faith... ly. To-night the watchful c... ship over incoming telegrams... from a Brussels message, p... ages which, judging from the... tents, probably referred to... British forces. One important... tence apparently escaped the... sor's eye, a reference to the... allied armies, in Belgium.

A news agency which referre... message, having Lord Kitac... er's veto before it, did not... the message to the newspaper... Twenty thousand men of... regular army stationed in Ire... embarked on transports at... port of Dublin last week. Ste... ers coming into Liverpool... other ports in the past few d... have encountered other ship... ing out with soldiers in kin... It is the belief of the British... tionary force has already... abroad, and that it is in Bel... ready for co-operation with

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By Special Wire to the Cour... LONDON, Aug. 24.—The... mend correspondent of the... Mail says that the German... umms are marching south... toward Valenciennes on the... eld, 31 miles southeast of... one proceeding by way of Ni... Grammont, and Lessines, Bel... and the other going by wa... Hal, Braine-Le-Comte and J... Belgium. They are moving... great speed. Further north... advanced parties have app... and done damage successiv... Thiel and Lichtervelde. It... suggested that this means a... upon Roubaix, one of the w... west of French towns, or... Lille. In that case the mo... toward Valenciennes pro... would be an encircling one... CANT BEAT THEM... LONDON, Aug. 24.—A... despatch from St. Petersburg