

A CASE FOR 3 DETECTIVES

By LEO BRUCE

COPYRIGHT BY LEO BRUCE, RELEASED BY CENTRAL PRESS ASSOCIATION



"You, all of you, know these literary murders."

CHAPTER 1

I CANNOT pretend that there was anything sinister in the atmosphere that evening. Nothing of the sort that is supposed to precede a crime. Nobody walked about looking furtive, no whispered quarrels were interrupted, no mysterious strangers lurked near the house. Although afterwards, as you may imagine, I went over the events of the day again and again in my mind, I could remember nothing which might have served as a warning, nothing at all extraordinary in anyone's behavior. That is why the thing came as such an abominable shock to me.

I remember, of course—I have good cause to remember—that we discussed crime over our cocktails. But we discussed it in general terms, and how could one have guessed that there was any relevance in the discussion? And I could not say for certain who had brought up the subject. Perhaps if I could have done so, if anyone could have done so, it would have helped us later to understand. For that discussion was relevant, appallingly relevant, in a very special sense. As you shall see.

But at the time—well, at the Thurstons' week-end parties, crime might be discussed, or religion, politics, the cinema, or ghosts. Any topic of general interest which arose was sure to be pretty well threshed out. That was the kind of party which the Thurstons gave, a party at which everyone talked a great deal, shouting opinions which he would afterward have denied, and trying to shout them as cleverly as possible. I do not mean that it was all rather self-conscious and arty, like those awful parties in London at which women with unpleasant breath advocate free love and nudism. But at the Thurstons' conversation was enjoyed, and not treated as a tiresome stop-gap between dinner and bridge.

Dr. Thurston himself was no conversationalist, though he enjoyed listening, and could put in an incentive phrase now and again. He was a big, bespectacled man, rather Teutonic in appearance, and in manner, too, for he showed a jolly German simplicity and sentimentality to everyone. He liked pressing his guests to food and drink and cigars, with booming emphasis. He had been the local doctor in that Sussex village, till

he married, and although he no longer practiced he had kept on the house, because he liked it, and allowed the new practitioner to build afresh. It was understood that Mrs. Thurston had money, at all events they had been very well off since their marriage, and entertained a great deal.

She, too, was amiable, most amiable, but not very intelligent. Although I stayed with the Thurstons many times, and must have spent hours in the same room with Mary Thurston, I cannot recall a single sentence that she uttered. She was stout, and spent a great deal of money on her clothes, a big, blonde, rather painted woman, easy-going and quite unpretentious. I can see her clearly enough, even if I cannot remember words of hers, beaming round on us all, filling quite a wide armchair, giggling like a girl at flattery, obviously overflowing with kindness. "The Goddess of Plenty" someone once called her, aptly enough, for as a hostess, from the practical point of view, she was supreme. The food was really exquisite, the house beautifully kept, and Mrs. Thurston had that important gift—a memory for drinks. She was a good woman.

Whoever may have started discussing crime, it was Alec Norris who did most of the talking, though he pretended to be contemptuous of the topic.

"Crime?" he said. "Can't we talk about anything else? Don't we get enough of it in books and films? I'm sick to death of this crime, crime, crime, wherever you turn."

Dr. Thurston chuckled. He knew Norris, and knew why he spoke so bitterly. Norris was an unsuccessful writer of novels very different from murder mysteries—rather intense psychological books, with a good deal of sex in them. Dr. Thurston saw his chance of making Norris excited.

"But is it crime in those books?" he asked. "Crime as it really happens?"

Norris might have been a diver on a springboard. He hesitated for one moment, blinking at Thurston, then he plunged. "No. I'm damned if it is," he said. "Literary crime is all baffling mystery in real life, murder, for instance, nearly always turns out to be some sordid business of a strangled servant girl. There are only two kinds of murder which could baff-

the police for one second. One is that committed by a man with a victim who cannot be missed—like the recent Brighton murder. The other is the act of a madman, who murders for the sake of murder, without another motive. No premeditated murder could puzzle the police for very long. Where there's a motive and the victim is identified, there's an arrest."

He paused to swallow the rest of his cocktail. I was watching him, thinking what an odd-looking fellow Alec Norris was—narrow in head and body, with a bony face in which jaw and teeth, cheekbones and forehead protruded, while the flesh seemed to have shrunk till it barely covered the skull.

Another guest spoke then. Young David Strickland, I think it was. "But an arrest doesn't always mean a verdict of guilty," he said. "There have been murderers so desperate that though they knew beforehand they would be suspected and probably charged, they took the chance. They were clever enough not to provide enough evidence."

I did not look with much interest towards Strickland, for I knew him quite well. He was younger than any of us, a thick-set fellow, fond of sport, particularly of racing. He was apt to try to borrow a fiver from you, but bore no malice if it was refused. He was some sort of protege of the Thurstons, and Dr. Thurston sometimes spoke to his wife of him good-humoredly as "your lover, my dear." There was nothing in that, however, though I could imagine Mary Thurston helping him out of difficulties. Nothing of the gigolo about young Strickland, a hard-drinking, gambling type, fond of smutty stories.

Alec Norris brushed aside his interruption. "The police will find the evidence, when they know their man," he said, and returned to his condemnation of detective fiction. "It's all so artificial," he said. "So unrelated to life. You, all of you, know these literary murders. Suddenly, in the middle of a party—like this one, perhaps—someone is found dead in the adjoining room. By the trickery of the novelist all the guests and half the staff are suspect. Then in comes the wonderful detective, who neatly proves that it was in fact the only person you never suspected at all. Curtain."

(To Be Continued)

Urges More Relief



Secretary of Agriculture Wallace is shown as he testified before the special Senate committee investigating farm unemployment. He declared that demands for rural relief were steadily increasing, and that neither local nor Federal agencies have the means to cope with the situation. (Central Press)

College Head Quits



Dr. Edmund D. Soper ... retires as college prexy Resignation of Dr. Edmund D. Soper, president of Ohio Wesleyan university at Delaware, O., since 1928, has been announced. Friends of the 61-year-old president said Dr. Soper planned to retire because of illness. In campus circles, however, it had been reported that there had been dissatisfaction among certain alumni over some of Dr. Soper's appointments and administrative steps.

Pin in Lung 9 Years



Mrs. Catherine George ... had pin in lung nine years Nine years ago Catherine George, 21, of Chicago, swallowed an open safety pin. She forgot about it until she developed symptoms of bronchitis a few days ago. Surgeons now have removed the pin, found near her left lung. (Central Press)

Musick's Wife



Above is a recent picture of Mrs. Edwin C. Musick, wife of the skipper of the Samson Clipper, giant Pan-American airliner, wreckage of which was found in the South Atlantic by searchers. (Central Press)

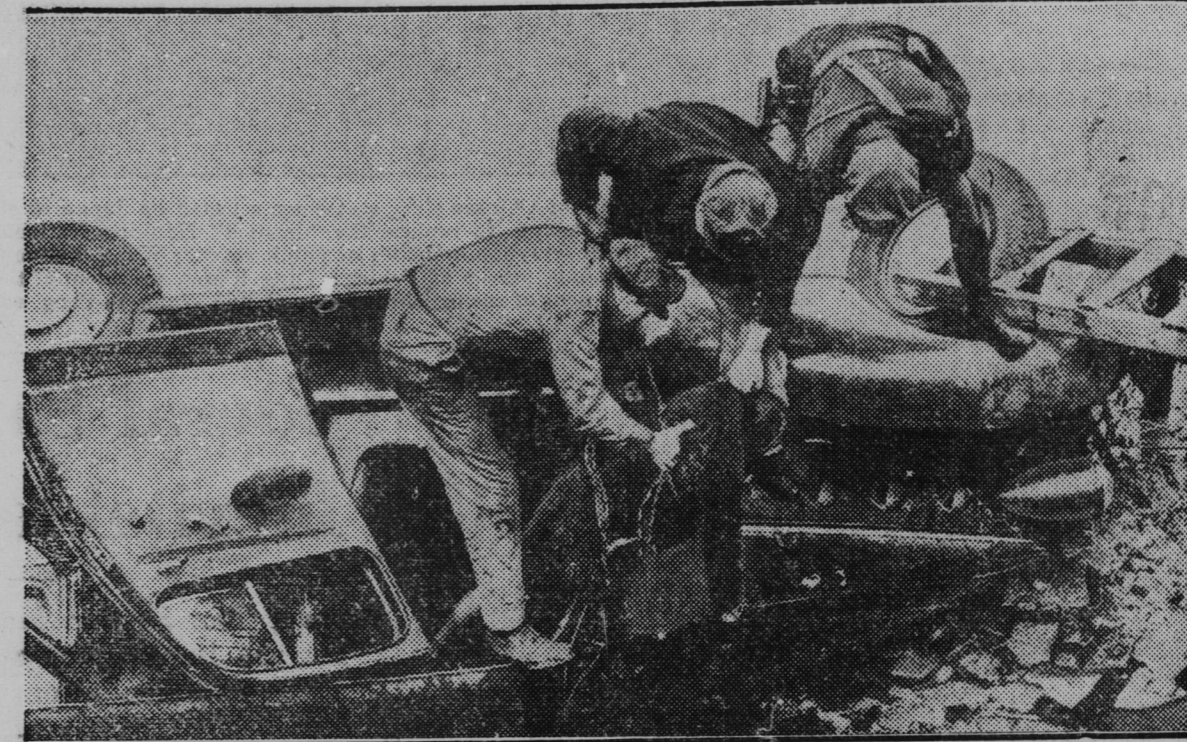
First to Get Unemployment Compensation Check



J. D. Shelton receives check from B. W. Cason, left, of Louisiana labor department

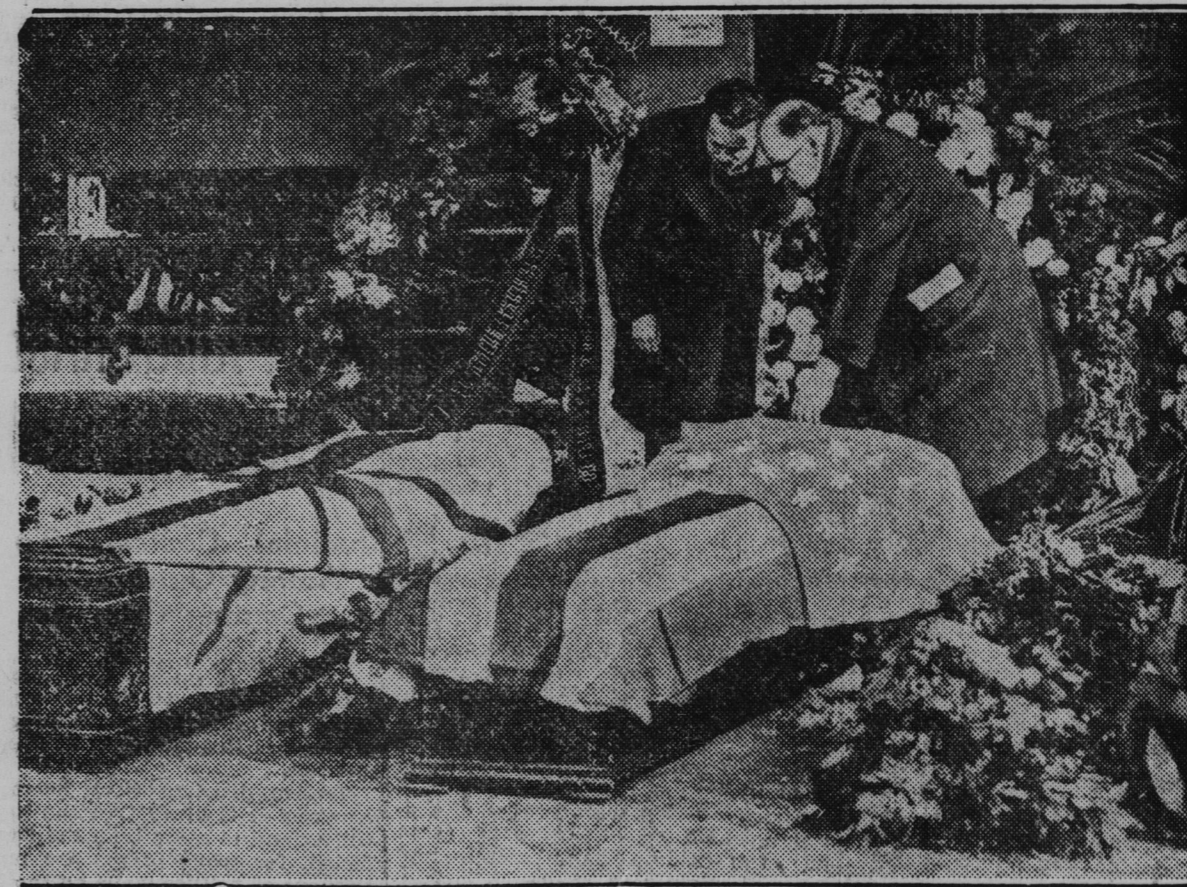
An unemployed painter of Baton Rouge, La., J. D. Shelton, 37, receives the first check paid in the United States under the unemployment compensation program established by the federal social security act. B. W. Cason, left, commissioner of the Louisiana department of labor, is personally presenting the check for \$14.20 to Mr. Shelton, whose family stands at his side.

Removing Victim of a Freak Accident



Dr. Louis Mackler and his wife, of Atlantic City, N. J., were driving near Bradshaw, Pa., when their car skidded off the road and landed in a five-foot stream. Rescuers who rushed to the scene saw the couple, uninjured, trying to escape. By the time they were able to pry off the jammed door the couple were drowned by the rising waters. State troopers and rescue worker are shown removing Mrs. Mackler's body. (Central Press)

Newshawks Journey on Their Last Assignment



The flag-draped coffins of E. R. Sheepshanks, British correspondent, and Edward J. Neil, American newspaperman, are shown in Paris, one awaiting transfer to England, the other to be returned to America. The men were killed when their automobile was hit by a shell near the Teruel front in war-torn Spain. (Central Press)

Leading Industrialists Confer With President



Colby Chester, Ernest Weir, Lewis Brown, Alfred Sloan and M. H. Clement

Five of the leading industrialists in the United States are pictured after conferring with President Roosevelt are, left to right, Colby Chester, president of the National Manufacturers association; Ernest T. Weir, president of the National Steel corporation; Lewis Brown, president of Johns-Manville corporation; Alfred P. Sloan, chairman of General Motors corporation; M. H. Clement, president of the Pennsylvania railroad. The five reported "a better understanding" between government and business and predicted "closer co-operation" in attempts to check the recession. Sloan said business was showing signs of improvement.

Dominican Choice



Jacinto B. Peynaldo, brother of the late Francisco Peynaldo, one-time Dominican Minister to the United States, is pictured above. He has been nominated by President Rafael Trujillo as successor when Trujillo retires from presidency in August. (Central Press)

NOAH NUMSKULL
YOU WIN DARLING BEFORE WE START

DEAR NOAH—IS IT TRUE THAT HUSBANDS OF NAGGING WIVES RANK HIGH IN ENDURANCE TESTS?
MRS. HAL MILLER, CRESSBARD, S. DAK.

DEAR NOAH—IS A HOUSE IN A RUN-DOWN CONDITION BECAUSE ITS WINDOWS HAVE A PANE NOW AND THEN?
LOUISE E. WEBER, TOLEDO, OHIO

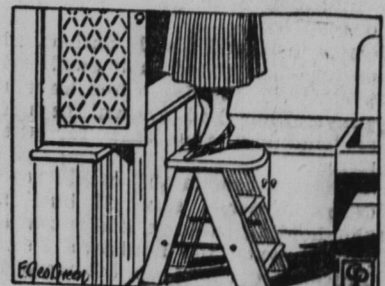
—COME ON FOLKS!—MAIL YOUR OPINIONS EARLY TONITE TO NOAH—CARE OF THIS PAPER.

New Red Chief



Andrey A. Andreev, veteran Communist official, pictured above, was selected as the first president of the first Parliament of the Soviet Union. Only 43, he was formerly commissar of transportation. (Central Press)

Wife Preservers



To prevent accident in the home, use a sturdy stool of approved type whenever you must climb to a high place. Be sure steps are securely locked in place before you mount it, says Good Housekeeping Institute.

Wife Preservers



For a change serve whole kernel corn, with dried, cooked, buttered celery, or add a can of corn to buttered onions.

SAVE AT **BILLER'S** CLEARANCE SALE