

FRENCH DESPERADOES CAUGHT AFTER 980 CRIMES

"Band of the North," Contemporary With Garnier Gang, Murdered and Robbed for Years Undetected—Mother of Member Killed for Treachery Betrays Bandits While They Divide Loot in Crypt Headquarters

year-old Julienne, sister of his smuggling companion, Auguste Platteel; but "He will marry her when he has done his military service" every one said wisely. And he did it. At 20 Abel had begun serving his three years in the 110th of the Line; and in time his honorable release with a certificate of good conduct hung at the head of Julienne's white bed.

The night of his marriage he and the two Augustes robbed a house in Pradelles of 514 francs. And no one was suspected. It seemed a virtuous little company that met for social evenings in Widow

to suffer from more frequent and important burglaries. These are dark, deserted, Old World streets by night. Notte and Lowers were continually on the road with loads of merchandise for French and Belgian receivers; and the mysterious but not infamous smuggling industry was there to explain their discreet prosperity.

Laughingly Robbed a Farmer.

One bright Sunday morning in midsummer Victor Notte was torn from his ease by Julienne in a hurry. "Abel says come quick to the fete of Bully!" Once in the country roads, however, Abel led them strolling, until they saw Farmer Faesse carefully lock his door and go off ahead of them. They knew that they would be unperceived.

"Pocket money for the fair!" laughed Abel joyously; and before the women could dissuade them from such a hastily planned undertaking the men had capriciously jimmied open a window, smashed a desk, and disappeared with 95 francs.

Unfortunately they had been perceived by an astonished gamekeeper, who hastened to Vieux-Berquin for reinforcements and returned with the gendarmes in time to take the young folks in the act of dividing the spoils. The community could scarcely believe it possible. Before the tribunal of Hazenbrouck the young folks' counsel pleaded boyish aberration and first offense. Even here Abel covered himself with glory by taking all the blame and representing Notte as having tried to stop him by force. The judges smiled, but nevertheless gave Notte one year to

liberty and reputation every day for moderate rewards," said the Belgian. "There are across the border men of energy and attainments whose methods and tools make yours look cheap. It is a select band of experts, resolved to remain small, whence both advantages and disadvantages. It could profit by and at the same time enrich your larger and less technical association."

The mere fact that the mysterious stranger knew about him and his band—and how much did they know?—won the intense respect of Abel and his lieutenants. This respect was fed on sustained mystery. After they had met and planned and worked together Abel knew them only by letters of the alphabet, as Monsieur C. Little R or the Big Q, and even after the explosion of the conspiracy Abel and the local authorities alike remained ignorant of the true identity of the consummate technicians, who seemed to melt into thin air when wanted.

There is a glimpse of the "striving" of Abel by the judicious Belgians. The wall surrounded suburban villa of a Vieux-Berquin manufacturer was reputed rich



"Don't Be Foolish," I Said, Grabbing the Baby."

moved the ominous figure of Henri Fauvert, Guardian of the Secret of the Crypt, avenger of suspected treachery. At various times a comrade disappeared, and Henri grimly polished his stiletto!

Which leads to the incident of capital importance. Outside Calonne-sur-Lys on an isolated farm lived old Achille

plunder, new indicators for rich hauls, and crimes increased with impunity while wealth increased with crimes. But the seeds of an ill thing had been planted.

In the mysterious old house of Vieux-Berquin a dark old heart suffered and beat. And old eyes watched the countryside.



They Were Carefully Disguised as Low-Class Toughs.

The extraordinary criminal bands that have been terrorizing Paris are not, as might be imagined by a startled world, of sudden and endemic origin in the great capital. They are, on the contrary, but part of a phenomenon distinguishing all France and whose causes might be easy or difficult to trace, according to the bias of the philosopher. Simply, it required exploits in Paris to astonish the world. Bands as redoubtable as that of Bonnot and Garnier have been broken up without attracting other than local French attention. The Band of the North still has a partial existence in connection with the still more mysterious "Band of the Big Q."

PARIS, June 13.

It. France talked of a new and mysterious association of brigands by night and good citizens by day, known at once vaguely and precisely as the Band of the North. During two years, 1909 and 1910, its 980 violent crimes had terrorized the ancient provinces of Artois and Flanders.

When a mystery proves too complicated for the provinces they send to Paris. So when the Prefect of Bethune received from the Paris Surete two consummate detectives, Special Commissary Vignolle and Principal Inspector Forest, the local Parquet counted on a prompt solution. Instead, imagine, six months passed in burrowing, during which the subtle Parisians had time to be forgotten, rent farms and engage themselves to marry.

It was a land of sweet and prosperous old farming villages, sullied here and there by manufacturing towns and iron works. Every inhabitant seemed industrious and reputable. Yet the crimes continued six months.

Then suddenly Vignolle and Forest became prosperous young farmers, well liked, well known, utterly unsuspected:



The Inhabitants Began to Suffer from More Frequent and Important Burglaries.

to the despair of a wealthy merchant of Vieux-Berquin, whose studious son, Jacques, could not rise beyond second. Two days before their first Communion the rich man proposed a bargain to Abel. "I will give you a place in my stores, where you can rise," he said, "but Jacques must be first at catechism. My son must have the position of honor."

"I care no more for the honor than for the employment," replied Abel. "Give me 50 francs and a new suit of clothes."

He took the lower rank and secret profits, and the negotiations affording opportunity, he took 180 francs from the merchant's petty cash with which to celebrate the event in his family. And no one suspected.

Next he is seen as a capable young smuggler of 15 with his brother, Auguste making night trips across the Belgian frontier for tobacco, coffee, alcohol, tea and matches. Once the gendarmes



A Nocturnal Holdup and Double Killing in the Village.

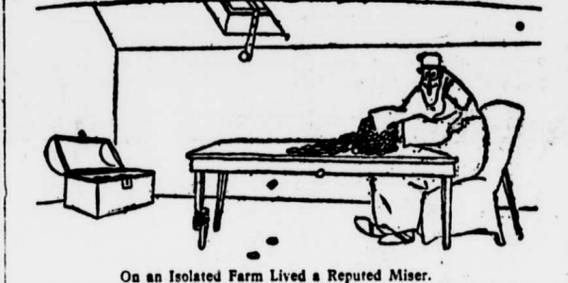
Fauvert's ancient wainscoted drawing room. The house was almost a historic monument, dating from the fourteenth century; and it seemed fit setting for the Fauverts, a Legitimist family, ever ready to "manifest" for throne and altar. There came Abel Pollet, his young wife and the two Augustes; Theophile and Marcel Deroo and Victor Notte, member of the Royalist Committee of Allouagne; the butcher Geisel, another ardent royalist later killed by the regular army while he defended the church of Boeschepe from Separation inventory; and the three Fauvert sons, a gloomy trio famed for morality.

Who could imagine that they were all robbers and encouraged by a venerable hypocrite, the pious Widow Fauvert? When engaged in their nefarious enterprises they were carefully disguised as low-class toughs.

Their wardrobes and disguising rooms were hidden in a safe place. Who could dream that an ancient stone chapel, long become a disused blacksmith shop and actually the storehouse of one Lowers, was connected with the Fauvert house by old secret passages? Between them, underground and half a block away, were vast underground halls of some forgotten Gothic building. And a similar subterranean passage gave secret access to the Deroo house, two blocks away and on the opposite side of the street.

All this was disclosed when the police opened them, seeking for Leon Fauvert's body.

How and when the Fauverts discovered crypt and passages remained a mystery; but their common possession with the



On an Isolated Farm Lived a Reputed Miser.

Abel's four. At the Loos Penitentiary Abel was such a model prisoner—a godly youth bewildered at having yielded to a single impulsive temptation—that the recommendation of the Prison Director and a petition signed by all the inhabitants of Vieux-Berquin procured his release after sixteen months. Abel seemed to have a gift of moral disguise. He could absorb for the time being the sentiments of those about him. Yet at the hour of his release as an indulged first offender he had 110 unsuspected crimes already to his credit.

It was a memorable evening in the Fauvert house when Abel came back. After dinner, in the crypt that blazed with festive lights, he made a speech. "Friends," he said, "we know our value; we esteem each other; but, in spite of our skill and courage, we have acted until now like children. Our error has been to count too much on our individual qualities. I have 'worked' a hundred times, yet in one of the few operations that were really fruitful I was stupidly taken for lack of devoted aid. Now we must plan like men of business. The land is rich."

A disciplined band was organized. Three lieutenants, Theophile Deroo, his brother Marcel and Auguste Pollet took the three departments of indications, executions and dispositions. Abel Pollet was grand and generous dictator, ever imagining perfections. One day he would audaciously enlist a reputable merchant of Hazenbrouck as fence; the next he would establish a married couple of the band as tavern keepers at Nully-Graney.

They had grown to sixty members with headquarters in a dozen towns, when Abel began to suspect secret crookedness. Every now and then some brilliant robbery would come off. Good. But he, the chief, had been informed nothing about it!

The rank and file of the band in turn began to wonder if their beloved leaders could be playing double; they too had admired exploits to whose execution every one of them had been a stranger.

Abel had a next door neighbor, a quiet Belgian, recently moved in. One twilight evening he saw a distinguished stranger in silk hat and fur lined overcoat enter. Out of professional curiosity Abel had drilled holes in the partition walls and could overhear conversations. Now, to his astonishment he heard his own name mentioned.

"Yes," the distinguished stranger was saying, "this young Pollet seems both adroit and circumspect, not to speak of his band, whose numbers and mutual fidelity would be of use to us. The time has come to speak to him. Put him in relation with Camille, but do not let him know too much in detail."

Abel saw light. There were others.

Band Remained Faithful.

Abel saw that his band was still faithful. It was an immense relief to him to learn it. But he burned with curiosity and ardor. That evening he went to the Belgian, whose good natured revelations at once mortified his pride and inflamed his ambition.

"While you and your companions risk

in plunder; why not attempt it? Let Abel take three men and show what he could do by night.

"I do not need night," boasted the mer-

Deroo, reputed a miser. One night in bed he opened his eyes to find himself in the grip of masked men.

"Old miser, where's your hoard?" they hissed, but he cried courageously:

Killed the Old Miser.

"Bandits, kill me; you'll not find a liard!" A Deroo boy brained him with a rusty sabre from the wall.

"He's done for," observed Abel, "now to work."

Running conscientiously, they found only 18 francs in silver. As they walked home, troubled and disconcerted, in the moonlight the unmistakable tinkle of a falling gold piece was heard.

"Eh!" exclaimed Abel, looking terribly at Leon Fauvert, Henri's younger brother, "perhaps there's more gold on you; traitor, you discovered the hoard and would keep it! Ho, boys!"

Leon begged for mercy. He had been trying to play a joke. He gave up the treasure, some 19,600 francs, mostly in

Widow Fauvert obstinately, ignorantly blamed the dashing Abel and his three lieutenants for the disappearance of her son Leon. She waited with a deadly purpose.

After nearly two years came her opportunity. No one could ever imagine how she recognized it. How could she know what no one dreamed of? How could she suspect the detective's identity? But she was very old and experienced of life, and mingled love and hate gave her a strange clairvoyance.

She whispered a word and it sufficed. A word in the ear of a stolid young man, who pretended not to understand, caused the local police to arrest Canut Vroomant and the Pollet brothers. Yes, a word in the ear of a prosperous young farmer, on the point of desperately groping for a daughter of the hand's Bethune banker, led to a raid of the underground crypt when only Widow Fauvert's enemies were in it.

And that young farmer, that stolid young man who pretended not to understand, was the subtle Paris detective, Principal Inspector Forest, unknown, unsuspected.

But how did Widow Fauvert know him?

DIRT THEIR DIET

The practice of eating earth is confined to no particular part of the globe. Earth eaters are found in various countries, and by some tribes earth is actually deemed a delicacy. In Java, for example, certain native tribes consume little red earth cakes resembling in appearance fancy biscuits. These are a readily marketable product in parts of Java.

In certain districts of Germany, Sweden and Italy earth is mixed with flour for bread making. Indians of South America frequently mix clay with their food, and in China there is eaten a white clay. In western Africa the natives chew a yellow oleaginous clay.

Among other countries where the earth eating habit obtains may be mentioned Assam, Bengal in India and Zanzibar. In the bazaars of Calcutta there is offered for sale a peculiarly thin wafer of edible clay.

Earth eating, as has been evidenced in the case of the Southern States, gives rise to various bodily ailments. It is said that once formed the habit is difficult to shake off.



"In Spite of Our Skill and Courage We Have Acted Like Children."

caused the local police to arrest two brothers, Abel and Auguste Pollet; their cousin, Canut Vroomant; and Julienne Platteel, Abel's young wife, for a nocturnal holdup and double killing in the village of Vioinaines.

It was a brilliant coup, worth the time it took preparing, because in Abel Pollet the patient Paris sleuths disclosed a generalissimo in crime, whose organized, disciplined and prosperous band, increased by a disquieting quantity of indicators and receivers, was extending

caught him on the line, but just as they slipped on the handcuffs Abel butted one, tripped the other and ran handcuffed back to Belgian territory, where the police had no right to follow.

Swapped Handcuffs for Loot.

"Give us back our handcuffs," they had requested, both to confess that they had been tripped and butted by a boy.

"Give me back my pack," answered Abel. They carried back and key to the frontier line; and Abel unlocked the hand-



"That's the Way I Operate. I took 2,700 Francs in Gold from the Strong Box."

a veritable business throughout the entire north of France.

And if Abel Pollet lived from day to day, too prodigal and generous, too brilliant, too humorous to amass wealth, it was he alone—true captain of adventures—whom all obeyed, the rich and the poor alike.

From childhood disdain for exterior distinctions characterized Abel. At 13 he was easily head of the catechism class,

cuffs, threw them down and made off with his merchandise.

The easy going frontier population smiled indulgently on smuggling as a safety valve for youthful high spirits. None connected young Pollet with robberies that were beginning to trouble the countryside; and his reputation was the better for his almost exclusive frequentation of the pious Fauvert family.

True, he showered gifts on sixteen-

Deroos and Lowers made a bond between them and suggested occult maneuvers and clandestine warehousing. Widow Fauvert's second son, Henri, became the guardian of their secret. Moore, silent and brooding, he let it be known that false comrades would make the acquaintance of his needle pointed stiletto.

It was not a disciplined band, but the spirit of solidarity was growing. One Sunday afternoon young Abel and his Julienne broke in triumphantly on them. Throwing down a heavy moneysack, he boasted:

"That is the way I operate. I took it during vesper from the strong box of the notary of Merville. Count it!" (There were 2,700 francs in gold.) "Here, Julienne!" (He handed her 1,000 francs.) "Now, you others, divide the rest among us. We can find more when it is spent."

While the company was dazzled by the high-souled generosity of the act, Victor Notte, a more thoughtful party, mediated on Abel's energy and audacity. He saw the advantages toward discipline and devotion that might be drawn from the blind admiration of the comrades for this young Overman. On Notte's proposal Abel was acclaimed dictatorial leader. Businesslike meetings began to be held in the old crypt, and the inhabitants of Bully-Graney, Laos Vermelles, Bally-Labourse, and Masingarbe began



Abel Had a Quiet Belgian for a Next Door Neighbor.

curial young Frenchman. "I will do the work by day—and now!"

Sceptical but admiring the more cautious and systematic Camille stationed two of his Belgian lieutenants as lookouts and reporting experts, and at 3 P. M., as the proprietor was seen departing, Abel climbed the wall.

An hour passed. The Belgians were persuaded that Abel had been surprised by a servant who would telephone the police. Then suddenly they saw the great porte-cochere open and the villa supply wagon drive out with Abel Pollet on the front seat! He tranquilly jumped down, shut the double doors behind him, remounted and drove toward them.

"Get in," laughed the young Frenchman. "I think that I have neglected nothing but the baby."

"What baby?"

"Bright kid! Took to me at once. Every one's asleep there. I had the swag packed in this box when a scrumptious little German nursemaid came pointing a gun and squealing 'Burglars!' 'Don't be foolish,' I said, grabbing the baby. 'I'm the plumber come to take the induction to the works.'"

"Have you got a rig?" she asks, tranquilized, because she saw the baby playing with my keys. 'Will you take me into town with you if I wake Cook to tend the kid?' 'Sure. Hurry and get dressed,' I said. And I guess that she's dressing yet. No harm. She's a foreigner and won't remember my face."

A golden period began for Abel's band. Content to obey blindly in the joint ventures, they found themselves sent here and there by rail and automobile, without knowing any too well under what sublime masters they were "working" but conscious of richly improved results. Abel was still the beloved master; but in the shadow, silent, morbid, concentrated,



"While Your Band Risk Liberty for a Small Reward, There Are Others."

bank notes, and as they cooled down Abel and the Deroos were perplexed. How punish a Fauvert boy? Why, they were going to his mother.

Later Abel contented himself by telling the tale alone to Henri Fauvert, the avenger. In bitter playfulness he added, "Give me your stiletto!"

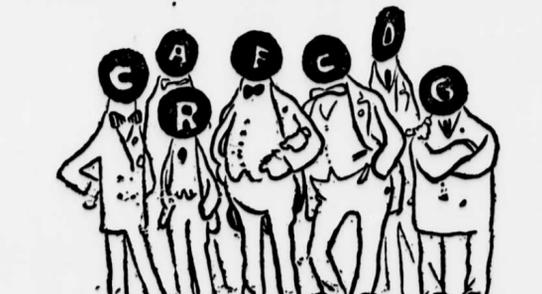
"Let he!" glowered the morbid fellow; and as Abel in his grand way said that it was a first offence, a boy's temptation, to be kept secret from the band, the incident seemed closed.

The truth dawned on them in its horror only the next day when Leon disappeared. Unquestionably Henri Fauvert was wrong in his head. He killed his brother alone, and mailed he dragged the body through an unused subterranean passage leading to an old well.

After this the band lived prosperously almost two years. They had Belgian experts to open burglarproof safes, a new connection for the businesslike sale of



He Was Torn from His Ease by Julienne in a Hurry.



Respect Was Fed on Sustained Mystery.