

WHO PAYS?

For the Commonwealth

(Copyright, 1915, by Pathe Exchange, Inc. All Moving Picture Rights and all Foreign Copyrights Strictly Reserved.)

NINTH STORY

Sid Dodge's place was running full blast. Courteous, obsequious waiters slid soft-footed from table to kitchen and back again, bearing in their miraculous arms dishes adroitly chafed for the dissipated palates of epicureans—drinks cunningly mixed by the highest priced experts in the city. No expense was spared at Sid Dodge's place—the stakes were too big to skimp on the details that made for tone.

The room was filled with the strange murmur of many voices, high, low, soft, musical, harsh, droning—all contributing to an incessant mingling drum so meaningless in the abstract—so pregnant with meaning in each individual group. Bright lights made soft by artful globes hung suspended from the frescoed ceilings by massive linked chains; and mingled their mellowed radiance with the rose-colored glow of the numerous silk-shaded lamps that dotted the tables, and made pale faces seem glowing and warm. Luxurious carpets catered to daintily shod feet; bright silver gleamed in well-groomed hands and clicked an accompaniment to the incessant click of long-stemmed, bubbling glasses.

In one end of the room, from behind a line of spreading palms, rose the rhythmic pulsing, passion-laden strains of Pagliacci, and died out in a plaintive wail of cello and viol, as though surfeited with the luxury of its own sweet sadness—died out amid the appreciative applause of subdued clapping and the slightly swelled murmur of approving voices.

No one seemed surprised when a low, artificially constructed door in the wall near the palms swung back on noiseless hinges, and a young man entered in evening dress. Why should they? They had all come in that way—all this well-groomed company of dissipated midnight diners, past the watchful, scrutinizing gaze of the lookout on the silent street, down a flight of dark steps, up another flight that twisted and wound its way to that noiseless door—A foul stem blossoming exotically in that dining room of mingled rose colored lights, soft voices and sweet music.

To the young man who took unnoticed his place at a snug table in a far corner, the artificiality of all this superluxury was immediately evident. The richness of the room so out of keeping with its dark approach—the flushed, eager faces of the diners, the too courteous solicitude of the oily waiters, pointed unmistakably to some secret vice as yet unseen. He gave his order to a deferential waiter, and again turned his attention to the room and its guests, his deep-set, shadowed eyes and pale, thoughtful, abstracted expression concealing effectively the



The Dancing Girl at Sid Dodge's Place.

fact that he was keenly alive to every move in the room.

The music again started, this time in a brisk, accentuated tarantelle; there was a flash of red from behind the palms, a clinking of castanets, and out on the raised dais flashed a slim wisp of a girl, and flung herself with abandon into the spirited dance of Spain. Her face wore a rapt, set smile as of perpetual pleasure, her every motion betraying how well she loved this rhythmic expression—her expression of the beautiful. The music ceased suddenly, bravely, in a spirited crash mixed with the smart double-stamp of the dancer's heels on the floor, and the thrilling cluck of the castanets—there was again that subdued applause—again the resumption of conversation, and the dancer, panting and flushed beneath her rouge, came down from the dais, and curtsying familiarly, threaded her way between the tables. She stopped at one with a word of familiar greeting on her lips and sat down.

The young man in the corner watched her and her companion as the gliding waiter carefully wiped the bottoms of their liquor glasses and set them down. The girl seemed laughingly to propose a toast that met with the approval of her friend, who laughed heartily. The man she was seated with was a flabby, pink-faced, tiny-eyed individual, his light brown hair combed smoothly back over his head and accentuating a lack of forehead that he had done better to have left covered. The second drink was brought, disposed of in as short order as the first, and the girl again seemed trying to persuade the tiny-eyed man across the table. His wavering was

gradually lessened as she coaxed, and he at length got up and followed her to the wall, alongside that noiseless door. Her fingers seemed fusing with something on the wainscoting, when suddenly the wall slid back as though on a track.

The young man in the far corner of the room had to steady himself exceedingly not to betray his surprise. The room on the other side of the wall was as softly lighted as was the room in which he sat—but it was busy in there, without the subdued restraint of the dining room. The smoke of innumerable cigars and cigarettes made a foggy haze through which was distinguished a high chair on which a man sat spinning a softly running wheel. Around him, with tense, eager faces stood a group of men and women in evening dress watching with fascinated eyes the swiftly rolling ball. At a low table in the foreground stood a group of men excitedly watching a man in an enormous cravat and gartered shirt sleeves shaking a leather cup out of which rolled clicking transparent dice. All this young man at the table saw at a glance, indistinctly yet comprehensively—saw the young man of the tiny eyes, and the dancing girl, met by a tall stoop-shouldered man of about thirty, who after a few words from the girl and a mute, expressive glance, grasped the young man cordially by the hand and led him toward that high-stooled chair on which the man sat monotonously spinning the wheel. The girl stepped back into the dining room, the panel slid noiselessly into its place and all was as before.

But now some of the diners had arisen and the panel began an endless sliding to and fro as they went to join those in the smoke-hazy room beyond.

The girl walked slowly, smiling to the far end of the room in which the young man sat, hesitated a moment at his table, her head poised questioningly. He arose courteously, and pulling out a chair from the table, said, "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you."
"Will you have something?"
She smiled her assent and gave her order to the waiter.

"You dance very beautifully, miss."
"Ah, yes, I love to dance." And then, inappropos, "You care to play?"

"No, not tonight."
"The playing is high tonight. The bankers are hard pushed. It seems as though luck is with the players tonight. Would you like to try?"

"I don't feel I should win tonight," he answered, laughing. "And," his lips tightened over his slightly parted teeth, "I like to win. I like to clean up. I'll enter the game some other night," he said, a smile turning the corners of his mouth. "I shall come again, probably very soon, and when I do, I guarantee you I'll make a clean sweep of it."

"Yes, of course," she said wearily. She had heard that tone of surety many times before.

He rose and she followed.
"Good night," she said smiling.
"Good night."

He took his things from the waiter, and as he started to go turned and said, "I shall see you again."
She bowed and moved off, as he turned and made his way toward the low door of noiseless hinges.

II.
"It seems almost incredible, I know—especially at a time when the lid is generally supposed to be screwed on tight, Mr. Bell, but there is a gambling joint in this city, right in the heart of the white light district, that is running wide open to those who are in the 'know.' Roulette wheel, dice, cards, everything! I was there myself, last night—saw it all with my own eyes. The police must be fixed or they'd be onto that lookout on the street—they probably get a rake-off. But, I'll start from the beginning so you'll get it straight."

"I was down to a social welfare meeting last night and walked east through Delvin street for a car. I was about midway between Bradley and Histon streets when my attention was attracted by a limousine that drew up to the curb about 30 feet ahead of me. It stopped before a low brick structure that looked as if it might have been used as a private warehouse. There were no steps—no areaway—just an unremarkable old door as an entrance with No. 59 painted on it in letters half washed out by the rain. Two richly dressed people—a man and a woman, alighted from the car. The man gave his chauffeur a quick order. The car sped away, and the two started for that door. There was a big squinty-eyed rough lounging outside it who seemed to know the people, for he smiled and saluted as they passed in. I decided to take a peek for myself, and walked toward the door as though I had it for my destination. The big rough became suddenly very alert, and, walking toward me, shoved his face close up to mine in an effort at recognition. He looked doubtful and I decided to bluff it out. I waved my hand toward the door and raised my eyebrows as though surprised at being stopped.

"That seemed to fetch him, for he stepped back, said 'right,' and walked off a bit as I entered.

"When I got inside, I had to go down a flight of dark steps, through a narrow, twisting passageway, and up another flight of steps—darker, if anything, than the first—until I came smack up against a door. Inside I could hear the murmur of many voices, and a click, that sounded like the click of silver knives on plates, and I smelled food.

"I didn't know what was on the other side—but decided to risk it anyway, so I pushed open the door and walked right into the most magnificent dining room I was ever in in my life." From here on young Mason's narration to the district attorney is familiar to those who read the opening of this story.

When Mason was through, his chief turned slowly around in his chair, his face drawn and tense—his finger tapping positively the coat-lapel of the young man before him.

"Mr. Mason, I want you to understand me thoroughly—there are no gambling dives in this city, understand?—no gambling dives running here. Forget it."

"But I—"
"You saw nothing, I tell you. Forget it."

Mason rose, his face burning, his whole figure showing resentment at the all too obvious meaning of his chief's words. He bowed coldly—and opened the door leading to his own office, just as a messenger boy entered with a telegram for Bell.

III.

Ellis Mason sat at his desk, his fine, earnest face puckered in a look of amazed discomfort. So this was politics! This was the field he had entered two years before as an outlet for the splendid political passion—the passion for constructive legislation that had so obsessed him ever since his entrance to college. On his graduation from college he had entered the government service as a clerk in the customs. He had written two books on political economy, had given numerous lectures on "City Government," and had made himself so talked about in the newspapers that he had, a few weeks ago, by popular demand, received the appointment of assistant district attorney under Curtis Bell. Now, two weeks after his appointment he found himself crowded close to the rail by a chief who was shielding the very sort of thing he was elected and sworn to wipe out! He was cut short in his reflections by an office boy with a message from his chief.

"The district attorney wishes to see you immediately in his office, Mr. Mason."

He arose and went to Bell's office. Bell was standing by his desk, an open telegram in his hand, his face thoughtful but good-humored, as though pleased with something that had recently transpired. He showed no trace of the resentment of a half hour ago, when he had so arbitrarily impressed his assistant with the assurance that "there are no gambling dives running in this city."

"Mr. Mason, I have been called to the capitol by the governor"—indicating the telegram in his hand—"to discuss a political question of urgent importance. I shall return tomorrow. You will act on nothing unless absolutely necessary, and then only if you are forced to act. You understand, fully?"

"Yes, sir," coldly.

"Very well."

The district attorney turned to his papers, indicating with expressive silence that the interview was ended.

Mason hesitated a moment as though unable to restrain the scathing sarcasm striving for utterance on his lips, then with an effort that would have done credit to a much older and more experienced man than he was, controlled the rebellious spirit of him utterly, turned and went back to his office.

When Ellis Mason started for his office next morning, it was without the wonted eagerness of spirit that usually manifested itself in his quick buoyant step.

The keen pleasure he would have felt a few days before at the prospect of playing district attorney, only for a few short hours, was now that the opportunity had come, entirely lacking. Yesterday's warning that he was not to recognize the existence of a gambling hall in that city—and that, after he had made a special detailed report of one—so depressed his fine conscientious spirit that he could not bring himself to view part of his work with the enthusiasm so characteristic of him.

If, he thought, this foul corruption existed in the office of an executive so trusted as the district attorney, what of the courts, judges, lawyers, police department? He felt for the first time since he entered the government service, how small, how ineffectual was his personal power for the good he so wanted to do. How could he fight the gigantic, irresistible machine, fed by the votes of the public, and oiled by the gold of unmentionable vice-exploiters who bought and sold chief executives as one might a dancing toy—a toy whose steps were regulated by the mechanism of the controlling party?

When he reached his office the next morning, Mason was surprised to find a young man already there awaiting him. It was the very man, he realized in a flash, who, the night before last he had seen sitting and drinking with that dancing girl in the gambling dive he had stumbled on accidentally—the same dissipated, pink-faced, tiny-eyed, low foreheaded individual who had allowed himself to be persuaded by the dancing girl to back the bank. Mason wondered, fearfully, apprehensively, what this young man of all young

men should want in his office—wondered whether he had been recognized there in spite of the secluded table he had picked to escape observation. Was it possible that this young bouncer had seen him talking with the dancing girl, and recognizing him from his numerous pictures in the paper, had come up here to be ugly?—possibly with an attempt at intimidation—at blackmail? He was alarmed for the moment, but was quickly reassured as the tiny-eyed one told his story.

"Are you Mr. Bell, the district attorney?"

"No. Mr. Bell has been called suddenly away, and won't be back until the morning. I'm the assistant district attorney—acting district attorney at the present time"—here, Bell's words "acting district attorney in name only" flashed across his mind and made his cheeks flush—"My name's Mason—Ellis Mason. Can I help you?"

"Well, you'll do," said the pink-faced one, in a hard patronizing voice. "It's this way. I'm a clerk in Marger & Barnes—mercantile insurance. Green's my name—Ralph Green. I don't claim to be an angel. I have my fun like the rest of them—no better, no worse. I don't kick when I lose fair; but I do kick and kick hard when I get uncooed—and I've been uncooed—buncoed for fair."

Here he told Ellis the story; told him the story he already knew, told it from beginning to end, and we shall take it up with Mason where, for us,



The Hypocrite Gilson Congratulating Mason.

it left off on the night that Mason stumbled upon the notorious Sid Dodge's place, running wide open.

"You see," he finished, "if I wasn't sure that whole outfit is as crooked as hell, I wouldn't come up here squealing like a kid. But I'm dead sure those dice were loaded, the wheel was lopsided and the cards were marked; and I think that this rotten lot of underhand pirates"—Mason wondered at his qualifying adjective—"should be sent up."

Mason felt it was a strange trick of fate that sent that young loose-mouthed rounder to the district attorney's office at just the time it was possible for him to act. He had been admonished by his chief to "forget it" when he reported that flagrant violation of the law, and it seemed to his highly imaginative mind that this moment had been opportunely selected by an unseen judge to weigh the sincerity of his principles against the material "success" of his career. He knew that his ideals were noble, aspiring, splendid, true—knew that they would be true no matter how their inflections were slighted, glossed over, spurned—knew that truth was unalterable, everlasting, infinite. Truth wouldn't be any the less truth or his ideals any the less fine because he failed to stand by them. What good would it be—where was the advantage of his broad conception of what was right and just if he failed to acknowledge it in his actions?

IV.

That night the busy traffic of Sid Dodge's gilded cafe was interrupted in the midst of its feverish play by a squad of police, headed by Ellis Mason, and the entire outfit loaded into a waiting patrol wagon. Clarice Adair, the dancing girl and "guiding spirit" of the place, recognized Mason as the man who, two nights before, had refused her urgent persuasion to play.

While the police were busy taking charge of the place, he went up to her.

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to be detained. You remember, I said I'd be back soon, when I felt luck to be with me," he laughed; "You see, I've made a clean sweep, as promised."

She looked up at him, all the fierce vindictiveness of her passionate soul finding expression in the concentrated stare of her hate-glowing eyes.

"Yes, you have made a clean sweep of it this time," she said slowly, intensely. "Make the most of it. The banker always wins—in the end."

He turned from her, smilingly, but annoyed at her covert threat, and proceeded in the direction of the men under him.

V.

Charles Gilson was a "pillar of society." Ponderous and portly, he was endowed by nature with a dignified, heavy face, and pompous air that his snow-white hair and ivory-headed cane did a great deal toward making impressive. He was fifty-five years old and seemed sixty-five. His deeply-seamed face and massive jaw were his greatest assets, and would have vouched for him had the rest of his appearance needed endorsement.

His voice, never harsh or strident, had a peculiar booming quality that made his slightest utterance seem fraught with significance, its very tone commanding the respectful audience that many another voice of greater volume and more sincerity tried for in vain.

His Bible class revered that voice and unconsciously acknowledged its influence by an unusual proficiency

in that part of its study relating to the Prophets; his tenants in many a squalid, disease-breeding tenement of the East side feared it, and shrank at its threatening boom. His real estate holdings were enormous and his social influence correspondingly tremendous, his wealth and swing creating a deference to his wishes in the political world that amounted practically to unquestioning obedience.

He sat at breakfast, the morning after Mason's sensational raid, and at his butler's announcement of Sid Dodge and Clarice Adair, allowed his usually impassive face the luxury of an amazed expression at the personae of his early callers. Dodge and Clarice, after a night in a cell, had been released on heavy bail, and had come immediately to Gilson to apprise him of the raid and their arrest.

"Leave this to me. You go about your business; you'll hear from me later." He told them.

Gilson had engineered Bell's election and held the man's political destiny in his check book. He knew that any move from the district attorney's office had first to be sanctioned by Bell, and was at a complete loss to realize the motive that had prompted this astounding break. He wasn't aware that Bell was out of town and found it impossible to reconcile Bell's usual obedient docility with this drastic action. He had descended the front stoop of his magnificent home, and was proceeding in the direction of the district attorney's office when he was hailed by two men approaching from the opposite direction. He recognized them as John Drake and Albert Lesser, active members of the Commonwealth club, of which he was an honorary member. He greeted them in his usual effusive, solicitous booming way, and stood for a moment exchanging with them the commonplace courtesies of the un intimate acquaintance.

"We were just on our way to visit you," Drake said. "You've heard of course, of young Mason's highly commendable raid on the gambling den?"

"Yes, indeed. Splendid. That young man has a great future"—and then, to himself—"behind him."

"Yes, he certainly justifies our confidence in his ability as a fearless executive. But read this," and he handed Gilson an unsealed letter. "We were just on our way to deliver this to you at your home."

Gilson took the letter, opened and read it quickly.

"My dear Mr. Gilson:" it read. "You have been selected chairman of a committee to notify Assistant District Attorney Mason that the club urges his candidacy for the district attorneyship. We believe that Mr. Mason should accept in the interest of public welfare. Signed, A. C. Beane, secretary of the Commonwealth club."

Gilson finished reading and his face betrayed for a moment the trepidation of his mind. He recovered quickly and spoke with well-feigned enthusiasm. "Certainly, I shall be most happy to inform Mr. Mason. We can go to his office directly, if it is convenient to you."

"We shall be pleased," said Lesser, and together they started for the district attorney's office. Gilson was highly disconcerted, but allowed no evidence of it to escape him. He was the first to greet Mason.

"We feel honored, Mr. Mason, that we have the distinction of being the first to congratulate you." He spoke in his best public meeting voice. "I won't go into a lengthy explanation of the object of our visit. You may read this. It will explain itself." He handed Mason the letter.

Mason read it, his face registering the keen pleasure it gave him. "I thank you, gentlemen; thank you most sincerely. I feel more honored than I find it possible at this moment to express."

"You accept then?" said Lesser, needlessly.

"Accept! I shall be delighted."
"Very well. If you will call at the club tonight, we can discuss the many details attendant on your nomination. Good morning."

They started to go, all but Gilson, who had heard Bell's voice in the outer office. Bell had been apprised by one of the clerks of Mason's raid as soon as he entered, and the voice Gilson heard reflected adequately his reception of the news. The succeeding information that Mason had been offered the candidacy by the Commonwealth club served to restrain his expressed, if not his felt anger, and he bowed coldly to Mason in the outer office as the latter started eagerly for the home of his sweetheart, Marion Decker, to tell her and her mother of his good fortune.

Gilson approached Bell, and spoke without the formality of a greeting. "You have heard?"

"Yes."
"Well?"
"Come into my office. We have no time to lose."

Together the honorary member of the Commonwealth club, president of the Society for the Abolishment of Child Labor, preceptor of a Bible class and his marionette politician entered the district attorney's private office to discuss the most effective way of assassinating a reputation inconvenient to their "highest" interests. And while Mason was at the home of his sweetheart, telling her the good news, and asking her to be his wife, the other two—Gilson and Bell, were planning a different meeting for that night; a meeting at which the Spanish dancer, the gambling house manager, the smug hypocritical owner, and the recreant district attorney were to plan the details of a vile plot to discredit the young assistant in the eyes of the

world. And now we shall see how the plot worked out.

VI.

The next night Ellis and Marion took a long ride in his motor car. They returned late, and he lingered a few fond minutes before leaving her at her stoop. He came back toward his car, whistling softly, happily to himself, his hands stuck deep in his trousers pockets, his mind lost in the reverie his whistling belied.

A short sharp cry, as if of someone in urgent distress, brought him back to a consciousness of outward things, and he looked up in startled surprise to see a young woman staggering on the sidewalk, as if about to fall.

He rushed up and caught her quickly, half carrying her back to the stoop from which he had come. The woman had a deep black veil on, a veil that entirely concealed her face; but she was otherwise dressed in unrelieved black, so the veil was not provocative of any thought on his part.

"If you will come into this house, miss, we can send for a doctor."

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you," she said weakly. "Just a weak spell. I get them often. I won't trouble you further. You're very kind. I will go home." She started to walk away from him, but again staggered weakly as though about to fall and was again caught and steadied by Mason.

He helped her into his automobile and started for her apartment on the upper West side. She seemed to grow worse as they went along, and when they arrived her seeming plight made it necessary that he carry her up the stairs.

When they arrived at her room after a painful climbing of steps she suddenly recovered sufficiently to rise and take off her hat and veil, and he was shocked and incredulous at recognizing Clarice Adair, dancing girl of the cafe he had raided two nights before. Her recovery was now extraordinarily rapid, and he was suddenly panic-stricken as a realization of what this all meant came upon him. She smiled at him mockingly as she began to take off her outer garments. He had not long to realize, however, for in another moment the door was thrown rudely open, and two men entered.

"You will come with us," one of them said, shortly.

"But, I—"

"We cannot listen to explanations. Besides," looking meaningfully at the half-dressed woman in the corner, "I'm afraid you'd have rather a job of it."

The plot of Gilson and his tools had worked.

VII.

Came the day of trial; the trial of the young assistant district attorney, accused of contributing to the delinquency of a dancing girl. Clarice was the complainant; District Attorney Bell the prosecutor, Sid Dodge, the jury fixer, and Mason, the defendant. What if he did have a good attorney? What if he did get a jury disinterested? His reputation was blackened forever.

Into the surge of his despair came the thought of Marion—his Marion. He turned his footsteps in the direction of her home. When he arrived there the butler barred his entrance.



Clarice Overcome by Remorse, Attacks Dodge.

and the iron entered deeper into his soul.

"Marion," he cried out wildly. "Marion, oh Marion, you don't believe them?"

But the echoes of his mad, despairing cry were the only answer he received.

VIII.

Sid Dodge wrestled madly, fearfully with the woman before him, in the rear room of his cafe. She broke loose once, and with a fierce, wild gesture, took up a great vase and brought it down with terrific force on his shoulder, just missing his head. He closed with her and took her both soft yielding arms in his gripping fingers and slowly forced her back into a chair.

Slowly the struggling figure in his grasp relaxed, and became limp in the chair. Slowly there pervaded that face a horrible agony of powerless despair. Once her hands raised and tried to cover her face, and her shoulders hunched as she shrank deep into the chair as though trying to separate herself from the dread of her thoughts. Thoughts of the man she had ruined, the girl whose dream of love she had blighted, thoughts of the putrid vileness of her own lying soul! And now the light, and the realization that she would have evermore to pay!

That evening Charles Gilson spoke long and earnestly at a meeting of the Commonwealth club, on the necessity for sincerity in all of life's undertakings.

WHO PAYS?
(End of Ninth Story.)
The next story is "The Pomp of Earth."