

MY APPRENTICESHIP TO CRIME

An
(To the memory of my
Autobiography

Grace Maria Treadwell.

-by-

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CHAPTER 12.

We young Russian Anarchists, 1910. Found in Brick Lane knew all these aliens and their girls friends better than the police.

The events I relate here are my personal recollections of the men and girls who played some part in the tragedy of the 16th December, 1910, in Houndsditch. A lot has been written of these events, the information supplied by the police in the person of D.D.I. Fred Wensley. Strictly speaking, this case had nothing to do with The Weasel. He was not in charge of the case, but he succeeded in hogging the limelight.

The shooting of five City of London policemen. The murder of Leon Beron on Clapham Common on the 31st December, 1910. The Sidney Street fiasco. The trial of Steinie Morrison. All these events were connected with the initial tragedy. In the public interest, it was considered advisable to conceal certain facts, such as the part played by police informers.

If the true facts had been known, then the mystery of the murder of Leon Beron would have been solved and the guilt or innocence of Steinie Morrison proven.

The C.I.D. or H Division, Metropolitan Police, were the

officers concerned in permitting these alien criminals to wander around the East End without a challenge. This gang of foreign desperadoes were the most dangerous gang that had ever come to this land. To the police they were ordinary Jewish emigrants fleeing from Russian pogroms. Ians mixed with the newcomers using We young men who were always to be found in Brick Lane knew all these aliens and their girls friends better than the police. For one thing, we knew they were not Jews. We were told they were on the run from the Russian secret police; that fact alone gained them our sympathy. They were supposed to be anarchists, and belonged to a club in Jubilee Street, which was also a spielers. They were doing a little burglary to get funds for their political aims. not mistake in an identity parade if They always marched along in the roadway with their women folk in the middle of them; they numbered sometimes as many as twelve or fifteen people, men and girls, who all seemed blond. In Sclater Street, Brick Lane, there was a Jewish restaurant which they frequently used. This restaurant was near Clarks coffee shop where I and my friends would meet, so we had many opportunities of becoming acquainted with them. Sometimes they dined at "The Warsaw" restaurant in Osborne Street, which was a continuation of Brick Lane. occasions we laid in We knew these aliens were crooked, but we never had any information that they carried guns. We were on nodding terms,

they knew we were the same kind as themselves; we tried to become friendly with the girls who were good-lookers, gypsy style. During these early years of the century, thousands of these refugees came to London from Russia and Poland, most of them Yiddish. These Bessarabians mixed with the newcomers using the same kosher restaurants and spielers in the Commercial Road and Stepney area. By these means they avoided suspicion being focused on them. Among the heterogeneous groups of emigrants to be found in the Brick Lane and Commercial Road area was a certain Russian Jew named Steinie Morrison. He was a man of striking physical appearance, standing over 6 ft. tall and very powerfully built. He was a man you could not mistake in an identity parade if he was the suspect. Morrison was not a violent man and this had never been convicted for violence, he was a burglar pure and simple; he had many convictions for burglary and house-breaking. Morrison was a frequenter of many of the spielers in this part of London, where he became very friendly with a French Jew named Leon Beron, who was reputed to be a rich man; a sign of his wealth was a £5 piece hanging from a large gold watch and chain. (I might add that on several occasions we laid in wait for Mr. Beron, but he always avoided the dark streets and alleys.) Now both Morrison and Leon Beron were patrons of

"The Warsaw" Restaurant where they were often seen in conversation. This restaurant stood in Osborne Street, Brick Lane. This kosher restaurant played a great part in the social life of these aliens, it could be compared to the coffee houses of Dr. Johnson and Bosworth. This restaurant remained open like the pubs until midnight.

Another patron of "The Warsaw" restaurant was a rather good-looking young Russian named George Gardstein, he was one of the group of men who could be seen sometimes in Sclater Street with the others of his gang.

All these characters were frequenters of many of the Spielers in the district. These Spielers were ideal places for the disposal of stolen jewellery. Now one of the most important of these Spielers was called "Cocky Flat Nose's". Here in this Spieler one could buy any jewellery that was for disposal. All these gambling houses were permitted to open by the police because they were the channel from which much information reached the C.I.D., also the Special Branch.

Two years after the first bandit attack on the bank cashier on that January morning at Tottenham, which led to the shooting of some twenty persons, Scotland Yard were still ignorant of the dangerous aliens who had been allowed to roam the East End streets without the local C.I.D. taking any interest in them.

Some time about 11 p.m. on the 10th December, 1910, police

were alerted to investigate suspicious noises coming from the back of a Houndsditch jeweller's shop. Bishopsgate police station was just a few minutes away from Houndsditch, so five City policemen were sent to Exchange Buildings which were behind the jeweller's shop and from where the noises seemed to emanate.

One of the police sergeants knocked at the door, which was opened by an alien who gave an alarm signal to the persons inside; the sergeant immediately entered the house, only to be met by a fusillade of shots from inside. The other police rushed to the help of the sergeant but were met by a hail of bullets from the house. All five policemen were shot down, three fatally and two so badly wounded they were never able to give a coherent account of their assailants.

The deadly Mauser pistols which were used by the gang of burglars were the same kind of automatic weapon as used by the Tottenham desperadoes some two years before.

The next day, 17th December, 1910, information reached the police that a dead man was to be found in Grove Street, Commercial Road. The police searched the house, and in a room upstairs found the body of a young man who had been shot in the back; they also found the loaded automatic pistol underneath the pillow.

The dead man was identified as George Gardstein, sometimes known as Karl among his friends. He goes down on the record as George Gardstein, aged 25 years, Russian refugee, and the

leader of the gang who we young men from Brick Lane had become friendly with, but none of us would give any information to the police. Some 1,200 officers and men, who wore a distinctive

The problem of how Gardstein was able to reach Grove Street was one that puzzled the police, but the first thing to remember is that 1910 was when the pubs closed at midnight, and the district was one where many drunken people would be on the streets making their way home. Another point to remember is, on that Friday night the Jewish Sabbath begins and most Jewish people keep inside their houses. I have often seen a number of people carrying one of their drunken friends home at that time of night. Detective Superintendents John Stark and Ottoway, and The police did not see anything unusual in a drunken man being carried home, especially if there were women in the company. In this locality everybody minds their own business and nobody cares.

The explanation of Gardstein's death must be that he was shot in the passage of Exchange Buildings by one of his friends firing from the back of the narrow dark passage. I might add that some twelve years after this incident, I was present when the same kind of accident happened in Hoxton, with the same fatal result. A man was shot through the back by one of his own friends and died in St. Leonard's Hospital, Hoxton. In this case D.D.I. Fred. Wensley failed to convict.

The City of London police are a private police force, maintained and governed by the City Corporation. The force comprises some 1,200 officers and men, who wear a distinctive uniform. H.Q.s Old Jewry. The force has a good name among the people of London for its humanitarian way of dealing with young delinquents who come before the two City Courts, i.e. the Mansion House and the historic Guildhall.

The hunt began with the mobilisation of the City of London police, because the five shot policemen were attacked in the Bishopsgate police station.

The police of both City and Metropolitan were put under the command of Detectives Superintendents John Stark and Ottoway, and also D.D.I. R. Wensley of H Division, because the alien gang were domiciled in the East End. The police always put in that extra bit of zeal when hunting down the killers of their comrades.

The gang concerned in the attempted burglary of Harris's jewellery shop in Houndsditch, and the murder of the three policemen, consisted of some five men and one or two women. Each one of the gang took an active part so there were no informers. Although there were several of us young men in Brick Lane who could have given valuable information, none of us would, because of the deep hatred we all had for the C.I.D. and their aides.

For my part the deliberate conspiracy to send me to prison had affected me mentally, making me indifferent to the sad fate of these brave men, although we admired the great bravery of P.C. Choate who, with some eight bullets in him, still had a go.

It must be remembered that the killers were also burglars and they had "fences" who bought their stolen property. These fences were their danger.

The gang concerned in the shooting were some of the men and women who had been about Brick Lane area for the last twelve months. These were the men and women who had used the Jewish restaurants in Sclater Street and Snelvars "The Warsaw" hotel in Osborne Street. The only persons who could positively identify them were the persons who had bought their stolen jewellery. At this point Steinie Morrison enters into the story. Morrison was known to Gardstein and Leon Beron. He was the contact man between the gang and the fences, so he was going to earn good commission. It is true he did not know much about them because Morrison had not been in the East End very long, having been in Parkhurst serving a sentence of seven years p.s. He was wanted by the police for failing to report to the police; he was a convict on licence.

The French Jew, Leon Beron, had lived in Whitechapel for

many years; he dabbled in a small way with stolen jewellery, the gold chains that we stole from the old gents in the streets, the gold watches that the pickpockets stole, the small pieces of jewellery that the housebreaker or burglar found in his search for valuables, rings, brooches and chains, these were the articles of jewellery he bought.

The myth of being a rich man was for the benefit of the criminals who traded with him, so that if they were lucky enough to get a rich haul of stolen stuff they would bring it to him.

All these small time fences took the really valuable hauls to the big time buyers of stolen property, or such rich buyers, there were three in the Aldgate district or the East End at the time in question.

The wealth of these rich buyers of stolen property could be counted in thousands of pounds, not so the little French Jew, who was supposed to own property; his wealth consisted of his personal jewellery and a few sovereigns.

This was the man who had been buying whatever stolen jewellery the gang had to dispose of. The evidence went to prove that Beron and Steinie Morrison were very friendly, the story the underworld believed was that Leon Beron had given information to the C.I.D. That this information led the police to several members of the anarchist clique that associated with George Gardstein, the dead man.

So it was decided to eliminate Beron and Morrison because they knew too much and were both a potential danger to the gang, so it was decided to eliminate the informer by using the man who was the informer's friend as the decoy, namely, Steinie Morrison. So, if the plan succeeded, the two men who could inform on them would be eliminated.

The informer would be dead and the decoy would be hanged for murder. This plan was put into execution. Morrison was told that the gang had a large haul of stolen jewellery to dispose of, but it was highly dangerous to do any business in the usual place, because of police activity, so the meeting place was made for Clapham Common, because Morrison was well acquainted with the locality, having lived there.

Morrison met Leon Beron in "The Warsaw" restaurant, told him of the deal: time 31st December, 1910, at about 6 p.m. From that minute, Morrison never left Leon Beron in case he should inform police or the meeting place; these precautions are always taken when the would-be rince is told or the meeting place.

The two men left "The Warsaw" together and some time after midnight they travelled to the meeting place at Clapham Common. When they arrived at the meeting place, Morrison left Beron with his executioners, not knowing the fate that awaited his former friend. After leaving Beron, Morrison then went to a

house he knew and burgled it for some jewellery, which he afterwards disposed of.

The next morning, he went to the spieler called "Cockie Flat Nose's" and heard the news. He excitedly shouted, "So that's what they got me to 'lumber' him for," and hurried from the spieler. Morrison was next seen looking in "The Warsaw" restaurant, then not seeing the person he was looking for, he left and went to Whitechapel railway station and left a gun in the left luggage office.

By this time, the news had already become known and the papers had a full account of the murder of Leon Beron at Clapham Common on the last night of the old year.

Morrison was arrested and charged with the murder of Leon Beron. My old enemies, Det. Sgts. Brogden and Dessent, supported by a number of C.I.D. officers including my old friend, Sgt. Jack Stevens, made the arrest on the orders of D.D.I. F. Wensley. Morrison was handicapped by lack of funds to brief a good criminal lawyer, he had to be satisfied with a good trier and that is all that could be said of the lawyer, Mr. Edward Abinger.

Morrison was found guilty, not on the evidence against him on the indictment for murder, but on the evidence against him of being a burglar who had been convicted for burglary.

Mr. Justice Darling gave permission for the Crown to prove