

ASK NO QUESTIONS!

By BELDON DUFF

SYNOPSIS.

"Ask no questions" is in the lease which gives Annissa West temporary possession of Bride's House, a Conestoga estate. Mysterious deaths and disappearances have occurred there. Miss West's stable boy, Otto, is murdered. Then a deputy who is put on the trail of local suspicion follows. The only one who is not a suspect is the newspaper, who tried to prevent Ann from leaving Bride's House. Ann is strangely attracted to a mysterious individual who rescues her from a noose when she sought help at the house of Derick Cranston, a local veterinarian. This mysterious stranger, who gives his name as David, is suspected by the sheriff of knowing something of the murders. Ann accepts a dinner invitation from John Diamond, where she meets her former fiancé, Gaius Terhune. The dinner is interrupted by the news that a mob is forming to lynch David as the murderer. Ann tells Diamond that David is his son.

CHAPTER XIX (Cont'd.)

"Has she gone?" David asked, still without looking up.
"If you're referring to Miss West," said the Scotchwoman severely, "there's no doubt but the imousing is halfway to Berkshire Toor by now."
The giant smiled lazily into the fire.
"Pretty snappy, that blue-and-gold outfit. The kid looked like a million dollars in it."

Impertinent as she thought, him, Miss Barth could not very well take exception to his appraisal of her young mistress. She even unbent so far as to supplement it by saying, "You should see Miss Ann when she's really going somewhere."

"Oh, she wasn't dressed up to-night?" With another one of those slow, irritating smiles. "I would have said she expected to make a killing. He was smoking a pipe; and he stooped now to knock the ashes out against the stones of the fireplace. As he did so his eyes were inevitably drawn to the forbidding message scrawled across his face. Instantly the smiles faded. His manner changed. "What does it mean?" he muttered, following the letters to the last one in every stroke and curve.

"Ask No Questions! I'm thinking it's like Belshazzar's writing on the wall—a warning from God to the people of this community. Mr. Toby tells me that tongues in the Crossing have always wagged most shamefully about the Runnels family. The Good Man doesn't favor gossip."

The giant sank back in the wing chair, scowling at the blackened lettering through half-closed eyes. Ignoring the loquacious Scotchwoman, he continued to commune with himself. "And why on the fireplace?"

"Because it's the first thing you see when you enter the room," was Miss Barth's guess.

David rose and tapped the masonry with one of the fire irons. "Solid enough," he said, still to himself. Dropping the iron back into place, "Wonder when it was built?"

"The house is one hundred and fifty years old," volunteered Abby. "I heard a man who was here this morning tell Miss Ann so."

"But not the fireplace," came the quick retort. "There's nothing Colonial about oak slabs and tinted mortar. No," in a puzzled voice, "I can't reconcile myself to believing that any of the Pilgrim Fathers built this wood waster. It looks more like the sort of thing one finds in the South."

"You're from the South then?" asked Abby, noting the gradual softening in the deep voice.
"Maryland," he admitted. "The eastern coast of the Chesapeake."
"Let's have a bite to eat," suggested Abby. "There's half a cold chicken and a chocolate layer cake from last night. Cooking for Miss Ann is a waste of time these days. She's scarcely eaten a mouthful since Otto was killed."

With a bountifully laden table be-

tween them, Miss Barth found opportunity to study her companion; and though she hated to acknowledge it, she was forced to admit to herself before the meal was over that the big stranger had quite a way with him.

As for David, hunger dominated him. True, the Scotchwoman's stories about her young mistress brought an occasional comment to his lips, but for the most part, after the one outburst, he remained silent, an attentive enough audience except for his eyes, which continually strayed to the clock over the sink.

"I wonder why those men of Seth Toby's don't come?" he said at last. "They were to be here at eight o'clock. It's twenty minutes to nine now."

Abby remembered that there were to have been two men on duty for the night. She saw that her companion was growing restless, consumed by an urge to get away, and her distrust of him returned.

"You don't have to stay with me!" ruffling like an indignant hen. "I'm not afraid."
"Miss West made me promise not to leave till they came, and I'm not going to."

The giant's determination to keep his word to her young mistress was even more disturbing than his restlessness had been. He tipped the chair back until it groaned under his weight, folded his hands behind his head, and stared doggedly at the ceiling.

Under the pit of his left arm Miss Barth saw the holster of a revolver.
"What business have you with a gun?" she started to say, but changed it to: "You're armed, I see. Expectin' trouble?"

With an embarrassed laugh, he took out the gun, a Colt .45, and handed it for a moment between his palms. "No, but it's just as well to go prepared."

The doughy Scotchwoman was not unfamiliar with firearms. Her nursing tastes had been more of a lad's than the lassie's: riding to hounds—clay-pigeon shooting—an occasional trek after big game. "Been in the army, haven't you?"

David did something with his head which might have passed for a nod. "The war?"

"I'm only twenty-nine now."
"Lots of boys in their tens went." The big fellow hesitated. "Got over for the last six months. At seventeen I was as husky as I am now."
"What branch of the service were you in?"

"Aviation, of course. I wasn't going to let them coop me up for weeks in a stinking dugout. Not with the risk of being buried under a ton of debris if anything hit us. Flying, you've all God's air and sunshine around you. And if you fall it's a man's death."

Abby said, "You'd better go out and tend to the horses. I can manage better alone."
He saw she was afraid of him and decided to disregard Miss West's order. "Just as you say." From the peg where it was always kept, he took the lantern. "If anything bothers you, just holler. I'll leave the back door open."

The Scotchwoman heard him go stamping down the path. "A wild man, that one," she muttered to herself as she set to work scraping the supper dishes. "It'll only be by the grace of Providence if I get my bairn back to civilization unharmed, after all this."

On the floor above, Abby prepared her young mistress's room for the night. She turned down the sheets and drew the chintz curtains about the four-poster bed.
On a chest of drawers beside the



DUDLEY DAWSON

Who, at the annual meeting of the directors of the Dominion Bank, was appointed general manager. Mr. Dawson was formerly assistant general manager.

bed stood three heavy brass candlesticks, their candles spluttering sharply in the draft from the open window. In front of them lay the metal jewel box, its cover thrown back. The sapphires that had belonged to Rebecca West hung half in, half out, their golden fires burning dully against the white velvet lining and the bronze side of the box. Abby saw them and knew she had been careless. The Scotchwoman sidled into the deep, narrow closet to hang up a sweater. She had completed her task and was about to sidle out again when a sound, faint enough to be almost inaudible, caught her ear.

For a tingling moment the sound defied classification. But suddenly she knew it to be a woman's sigh—the deep-drawn, ecstatic breath which is taken when a woman's eyes light upon something which her heart desires. To Abby, in the closet, that sigh was more appalling than the "hands up" of a burglar would have been. It spelled the beginning of a disintegration that was physical and mental, as well as moral. It had been amusing to work on the fears of the tradespeople, even poor Otto's. And now, she herself, was afraid. Afraid!

The sound came again, accompanied by the soft pad of feet. Those feet trod as a cat treads, slowly, crouching, with a predatory urge that was blood-chilling.

Abby's Scotch Presbyterian courage had by this time commenced to revive a little. Her heart beat thickly against her ribs; but she managed to turn and cast a pallid glance over one shoulder.

From inside the closet there was nothing to see!
She brought herself to leave the closet. The room was empty!
On the chest of drawers three candles flickered, making hobgoblin shadows dance on the walls and low ceiling. Were those shadows all that moved? No. Inch by inch, the curtains around the four-poster parted. A hand stole out toward the neck-lace.

To do Abby justice, her first thought was to save the sapphires; but that bodiless hand had paralyzed her power of locomotion. She could only stand and gibber and gape. The fingers of the hand were long. The flesh that covered them, brown and withered.

"There was nothing human about it. It was a Dead Hand! With every ounce of strength that was left in her, the Scotchwoman added that final cry of horror: "The ghost! The ghost!"

Vengefully, the hand shot to the nearest candle. Thumb and forefinger caught the wick and snuffed the life flame from it. The second flame expired as the first had done. The third...

...of the blackness into which the room had been plunged came the scuffling of footsteps, undirected, stumbling. There was the sound of a heavy body slumping to the floor. A moment later, something lighter than air rushed through the door and down the hall.

(To be continued.)

A Strange Legacy

A Manchester professor whose hobby is cycling, and a woman undergraduate at Oxford, were every second person riders on a bicycle. They have been left \$1000 and \$500 "in the hope that they will utilize the money or part of it, in paying for taxicabs."

The bequests were made by the late Miss Catherine Isabel Dodd, the authoress and educationist, of Mortimer Crescent, Kilburn, N.W., to Mr. Samuel Alexander, honorary professor of philosophy at Manchester University, and to Miss Edith Wilson, of Oxford. Miss Dodd's total estate was valued at about \$82,000.

The professor, who has won fame with his theories, has neither theory nor solution of Miss Dodd's bequest. "Why did Miss Dodd do it?" asked a reporter.

The professor raised his eyebrows. "I don't know any better than you," he said.

"Have you any aversion to taxicabs, professor?"

"Oh, no, none at all—except paying for them."

Popular Books of Thirty Years Ago

Literary Reputations in the Making: Young Mr. Chesterton "Rapidly Coming to the Front"

A favorite idle-hour diversion of mine is the study of the sudden swerves of literary taste and critical fashion, writes Thomas Burke in John O'London's Weekly. It is an unprofitable but engaging diversion and, given the necessary apparatus, it can be played at any time in your own room. All you require is a long "run" of some literary periodical. You can then amuse yourself by discovering how a now-established man's first work was received and by trying to locate some of the "immortal" men of the recent past whose names mean nothing to you. I am happy in possessing a "run" of such a paper beginning at 1899, and it affords me as much interest as anything on my shelves.

Yesterday I was going through the issues of thirty years ago—the Coronation Year, 1902—and I give here a few notes on what that lapse of time has done for some great reputations and for some beginners.

PROMISING MR. CHESTERTON.

The first fact that emerged was that for books it was a dull year. The general tone of the books that attracted most attention was a nineteenth-century tone. Nothing remarkably "new-century" appeared; indeed, at that time publishers were by no means so encouraging to the "new" man as they are today. I found only one name connoting anything new. A paragraph in the Notes speaks of a young man of twenty-seven named Gilbert Chesterton. For the rest, the established had it all their own way, and the established were Marie Corelli, Hall Caine, Rudyard Kipling (then at his zenith with both critics and public), Conan Doyle, E. F. Benson, S. R. Crockett, J. M. Barrie, Mary Johnston, Henry Harland, Seton Merriman, Jerome K. Jerome, "John Oliver Hobbes," Gilbert Parker, Anthony Hope, Benjamin Swift, Stanley Weyman, Agnes and Egerton Castle, Baring Gould, Ralph Connor, Ellen Thornycroft Fowler, W. W. Jacobs. In piety Stephen Phillips was supreme.

RECORD SALES.

Thirty years have done something to most of these names, but Mr. Kipling still keeps his hold on, at least, the public, and W. W. Jacobs, outside all standards. In those days people bought books, and most of the authors named above made much more money than the "best-sellers" of today. For one thing, there were fewer circulating libraries; for another, novels were published at six shillings with discount, which meant that the purchaser paid only four-and-six. Ten thousand was a quite common sale, and numbers of books now forgotten reached fifty and seventy-five thousand. The first edition of Marie Corelli's "Temporal Power," published in that year, was 120,000, and before publication a second edition of 30,000 was put to press. Today a first edition of 50,000 is considered the high-water-mark of the supreme "seller," but 50,000, as I say, was the mark of many who were far below Marie Corelli and Hall Caine in popular appeal.

Henry James and Bernard Shaw were the darlings of the intellectuals. One of them has suffered by the passage of thirty years, but George Gissing, who then had a quiet reputation among the in-between intelligent, has profited. In 1902 he was sealing that reputation with "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft," which were appearing serially in the "Fornightly Review" as "An Author at Grass." James Douglas was the literary critic of the Star and a prominent critic of the Athenaeum. In those days he was the defender of the daring young! The advanced were talking about Maxim Gorki, whom the late Fisher Unwin was introducing to English readers, and the intellectual coteries, even as they do today, solemnly proclaimed the arrival of three geniuses. As the names of the geniuses are unknown today, it appears that the geniuses, like all coleric geniuses of that day and this, having come on and made their bow, slipped back into the wings and went home.

FIRST ISSUE OF CLASSICS.

The books of 1902 which have survived were those that attracted the attention, not of the wide public nor of the coteries, but of the discerning ordinary reader. There was a little book to which my paper gave a five-line notice—"Songs of Childhood," by Walter Ramal. Today that little book of 1902 realizes a high price among collectors of Mr. Walter de la Mare. Other books which won the quiet attention of what one may call the Left Centre, and which command a public today, were the young Mr. Belloc's "Path to Rome," W. H. Hudson's "El Ombu," Douglas Brown's "House with the Green Shutters" (which remained in best-selling lists for over a year), Arthur Machen's "Hieroglyphics," and Conrad's "Youth and Other Stories." These were good books, but none of them, as I say, was markedly "modern" or outraged current standards of technique. Both by calendar and spirit 1902 was very close to the nineteenth century; so

A Quality Which Is Incomparable

"SALADA" GREEN TEA

"Fresh from the Gardens"

close that the now-defunct firm of Smith Elder was announcing "the last work of Mr. Matthew Arnold." The young men of that period whose work is with us today were all bred in a nineteenth-century atmosphere. Twentieth-century literature did not begin until after the Great War.

FASHIONS IN TASTE.

Some of the more popular books of this year might raise a smile among the young generation nurtured on the brilliance of the nineties. But there is no occasion for that smile. Critical standards are as fickle as women's dress fashions, and as immaterial. The popular literature of 1902, and its criticism, are no better than the popular literature and criticism of 1902. They are different, that is all. The popular literature of 1902 was no better than that of 1870, nor that of 1870 any better than that of 1840. The only distinction is a difference. Great literature is dateless; but the general literature of any period serves the taste of that period, and if anybody thinks that the educated state of any century or any decade of a century is always an improvement on the taste that preceded it, he should study the history of culture. The progress of time implies only change, not necessarily improvement. Since 1632 poets have had three hundred years in which to practice and improve their craft, and still the lyrics of 1932 are no better than the lyrics of the seventeenth century; they are only different.

Judging by the names of 1902 which are names today, it appears that at least a quarter-century is necessary to the founding of a real reputation. In that period the reputation will have to weather three or four changes of critical fashion and the judgment of a new generation. If it can do that, you may be sure that the work on which it is based has the pulse of life in it.

Traffic Policemen in Graz Get Lighted Trees and Gifts

Vienna.—Curious scenes which may have been inspired by a supreme acceptance of the Golden Rule, a desire to propitiate the hereditary enemy or even by simple good-nature were witnessed at Graz at the end of the year. Officials of the Styrian Automobile Club visited the twenty-one traffic policemen on duty in Graz and set up beside each of them a Christmas tree with lighted candles. Thereafter amid the applause of the crowd club members drove up and placed New Year gifts for the policemen at the foot of the trees.

Society, sooner or later, must return to its lost leader, the cultured and fashionable liar. For the aim of the liar is simply to charm, to delight, to give pleasure."—Oscar Wilde.

When Motoring Was Doubtful

Some credit is due to the motorists of those days. It was rarely that one reached one's destination. As a matter of fact, only the incurable optimist ever tried. The common formula was: "Oh, it'll start off, and see what happens." Generally, one returned in a hired fly. Everywhere along the country roads one came across them; some drawn up against the grass, others idly blocking the way. Beside them, dejected females sitting on a rug. Underneath a grimy man, another running round and treading on him. Experienced wives took their knitting and a camp stool. Very young men with a mechanical turn got enjoyment out of them apparently. At the slightest sign of trouble they would take the whole thing to pieces, and spread it out upon the roadside. Some cheerful old lady, an aunt presumably, would be groveling on her hands and knees with her mouth full of screws, looking for more. Passing later in the evening, one would notice the remains piled up against the hedge with a lantern hung on it. At first, we wore masks and colored goggles. Horses were terrified when they met us. We had to stop the engine and wait. I remember one old farmer with a very restive filly. Of course we were all watching him. "If you ladies and gentlemen," he said, "wouldn't mind turning your faces the other way maybe I'd get her past."

'They were of strange and awful shapes at the beginning. There was one design supposed to resemble a swan; but, owing to the neck being short, it looked more like a duck, that is, if it looked like anything. To fill the radiator, you unscrewed the head and poured the water down the neck; and as you drove the screw would work loose, and the thing would turn round and look at you out of one eye. Others were shaped like canoes and gondolas. One firm brought out a dragon. It had a red tongue, and you hung the spare wheel on its tail.—Jerome K. Jerome, in "My Life and Times."

"When you were at your fair fourteen, And February was at his (Ah, nothing sweeter could have been, As nothing sweeter is). There came among your valentines One all made up of loving lines With Cupid's darts Through bleeding hearts (Were his initials accidental?) You kissed the rymes A hundred times And never thought them sentimental.

At forty—life's most lonely age— When valentines come not, Go seek again that treasured page Unseen but untorn. One poignant moment let a tear Flow for a boy's love so sincere: That triquet give Whereby shall live The lost, so tender and so gentle, Thank heaven that still 'Mid prose and lil, You can, in dream, be sentimental. —Robert Underwood Johnson, in the N.Y. Times.

Fair Weather Friends When fortune, in her shift and change of mood, Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependents, Which labor'd after him to the mountain top, Even on their knees and hands let him slip down, Not one accompanying his declining foot. —Shakespeare.

"To My Valentine"

The cult of St. Valentine and the observance of St. Valentine's Day was the last survival of an older England, older than the England of Punch and Judy and the Muffinman; older than the England of the Stage coach.

The England of Shakespeare, of ferry Mab and the drudging goblin, who earned his cream for threshing the corn, when the whole year from the hour when the Christmas-Brand was kindled and quenched on Candlemas Eve, until the day when the Christmas Log was brought with a noise to the firing, was punctuated by festivals.

St. Valentine's Day was one of the times that told the march of the seasons. It is perhaps a survey of something older still, for in Pagan days boys drew the names of girls in honor of the goddess of February. The feast of St. Valentine is said to mark the day when the birds begin to mate. Charles Lamb sang its praises, for in his day, and later, until the end of the 'eighties, you bought on St. Valentine's Eve your stock of Valentines. They lay in white cardboard-boves, aromatic with a particular scent; they were soft to the touch and pleasant to the eye; their appeal was sentimental; they were fringed with paper lace, and they mostly bore the picture of a Cupid aiming an arrow at a heart, and a little piece of verse.

Now all this is over. . . . There are no Valentines in the shop windows in February. But last St. Valentine's Day I picked up these verses in a London street:

The fog has hid the February skies, The streets are dark, and all the world is grey; But in the mocking sunshine of your eyes, Saint Valentine is keeping holiday.

Which proved that someone had sent to someone a Valentine.—Maurice Baring, in "The New Forget-Me-Not A Calendar."

Coyote

By Jason Bolles in "The Frontier." When February drifts were deep Coyote came and killed a sheep. I think it was in April when We found and dug Coyote's den. Coyote came among the flowers In June and took six hens of ours. One August night when stars were dim

We set a poisoned bait for him. Next month we heard Coyote laugh While dining on an orphan calf. November-time, among the haws Our trap caught three coyote claws.

The year came on to Christmas day Beyond the barn a little way We saw Coyote in the snow. I raised my gun—and Dad said, "No!" Then, "Merry Christmas, you old cuss, Tomorrow peel your eye for us!"

That night we heard the boggy wail Of Coyote, brisk and hale, Arrow up to the bitter air Before we said our Christmas prayer

"The surest way to bring about revolution is to go to the extreme reaction."—Colonel E. M. House.

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FOR LITTLE BABIES

Roll two Christie's Arrowroots very fine, pour enough boiling water over them to make a Paste; thin down with milk. Sugar may be added if desired.

