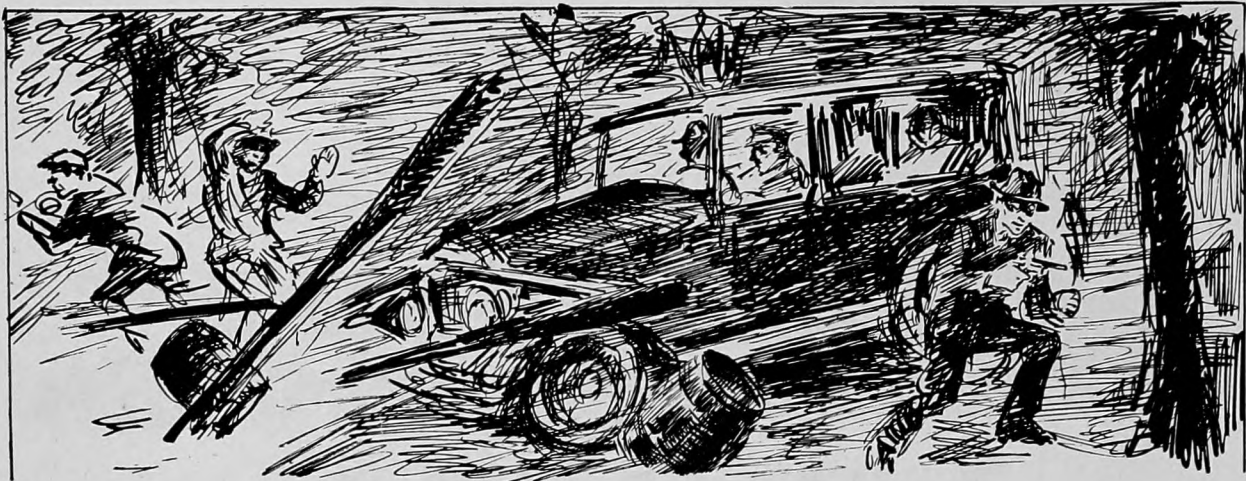




Another



The Hold-Up Era

Bill Ehmling was the first victim. Cruising homeward at midnight, he was waylaid near the entrance to Echo Lake Golf Club and relieved of \$28. A discriminating stick-up man declined his diamond pin. "Maybe you ain't such a damn fool for wearin' that sparkler, Buddy," said he, "because what the hell would I do wid it?" After that, it was just one hold-up after another, from December, 1920, to March, 1921.

One foggy winter's night, the highwaymen erected a barricade across Springfield Road, near the road leading to Baltusrol Golf Club, and placed a light in the center. Postmaster Bob DeCamp and Art Tuttle were singing, "Yes, We Have No Bananas" when their car reached the barrier. "Say, Buddies, dat's nice music," said the polite stick-up man, while removing \$367 in greenbacks from their wallets. Youse can keep the loose change." The occupants of three cars which followed were quickly divested of all their money; but a fourth car (driven by a chauffeur who had borrowed his employers Rolls Royce and was returning with four friends from a crapshooting party in Newark) knocked down the barrier and got away. A bullet whizzed after the speeding auto, went through the window and lodged in the arm of a Plainfield man in the back seat. A doctor extracted the bullet and a small portion of the \$5500, which the driver had saved by his daring escape. Lady Luck was with him, that night.

The highwaymen's preferred fields of operation were Clark Township and East Rahway, where street lights were few and far between, and where (as was later disclosed) the railroad tracks screened their movements. Within a week, they stopped twelve motor cars by blocking the roadways and robbed forty-two persons. Occasionally they tackled the trolley. Their method was to throw a rope across the overhead wire so that the pole would jump off and the car come to a sudden stop with all lights out. Then, while accomplices stood guard on the platforms, the head man passed through the car behind a dark lantern and rifled the pockets of the passengers. The swag from two such hold-ups amounted to over \$3000.

Meanwhile the public had become thor-

oughly alarmed. Actually, it was not safe to go for a spin after dark. These highwaymen plied their nefarious trade when and where least expected and mysteriously disappeared. Westfielders organized a special night patrol, consisting of Bill and Charley Ehmling, Sherm Reese, Charley Tice, Ralph Childs and Fireman Phil Brody. To lure the bandits into the open, they dressed Phil up as a young lady of fashion and set her adrift near the Lehigh Valley crossing on Central Avenue. The ruse might have succeeded if John Frazee's hound dog hadn't been doing some sleuthing on his own account. He blinked suspiciously at Phil's brans, sniffed, then let out a howl that aroused all Picton.

A brazen attempt to hold-up a trolley between Springfield and Elizabeth after a snow storm led to the capture of the highwaymen. The car was approaching the Lehigh Valley bridge when the pole left the wire. The conductor opened the door to fix the pole and saw the forms of three men silhouetted against the white background. He closed the door and warned the passengers. All but one of them dropped behind the seats. He was Deputy Sheriff Carl Smidlin of Elizabeth, son of the supervisor of physical education. Smidlin drew his Colt automatic and went to the conductor's aid. In an exchange of shots, one of the highwaymen was wounded and they all fled. Schmidlin telephoned for help and was soon joined by policemen from near-by towns. A blood-stained trail along the railroad tracks led to a house in Kenilworth. Here they found the wounded man in bed, his confederates hiding in the cellar. Cornered at last, they gave themselves up.

A brief but spectacular career of crime ended when Judge Carleton B. Pierce sentenced Martin Shannon and his cousins, John and Charles Krebs, to serve from fifty to seventy-five years in state's prison. Before the prison doors had closed behind them, a bill, sponsored by the state Chamber of Commerce and introduced by Senator Case of Somerset, was passed, authorizing the establishment of the state constabulary—that alert and efficient organization which has since been making it increasingly difficult for highwaymen to do business in New Jersey.