

# THE WALL STREET EXPLOSION MYSTERY

BY EDMUND GILLIGAN

TOWARD high noon of September 16, 1920, an old, rusty-brown wagon, drawn by a bay horse, came slowly westward on Wall Street. On the seat of the wagon sat a man who, if he is alive today, keeps a secret in his heart that has no equal in our time.

The bells began to toll the hour of twelve when the driver pulled his horse to the curb in front of the Assay Building, directly across the street from the office of J. P. Morgan and Company. The driver jumped down from his seat, flung the reins across the horse's back, and vanished. Perhaps he stepped into a subway, or there may have been a motor car waiting for him farther down the street. In any event, he left that place swiftly, not tarrying to see the effect of his arrival. It would be a marvelous flight of the imagination to determine what thoughts were in his insane, cruel mind when he took that last, backward glance at his horse and wagon and went away.

The bells ceased. At once the noon-day throngs appeared: bro-

kers and bankers, clerks and girls, all sauntering along Wall Street toward the luncheon places. There was only a minute left. In that time, hundreds of men and women glanced at the horse and wagon, an unusual sight in the financial community; indeed, a forbidden sight, according to a city ordinance which forbade the approach of such a rig without due and difficult permission. Among those who looked at the horse and wagon were many who were never to see again, and some who would never even breathe again. And there were hundreds of others who looked at the wagon, and others who said they saw the driver. Later, when sharp observation might have provided the one great clue, these casual observers could not produce an accurate account. A natural thing, of course, because their thoughts were on luncheon and not on death.

At one minute past twelve an enormous bomb in the wagon exploded. A mass of saffron gas appeared where the horse and wagon

had been. The Street shuddered under the blow. A vast sound roared, and the saffron gas made a flashing, burning change into a pillar of brown smoke. A green flame whirled, spouted upward, then flattened into a disc-like shape that whirled faster and faster and expanded until it covered a space a hundred feet in diameter. Out of this inferno the explosion hurled a hail of metal fragments, hurled them with such strength and velocity that they maimed and killed men and women, crushed their skulls, broke their limbs. Awnings twelve stories above the Street burst into flames. Windows half a mile away shattered, and the gentle sound of the tinkling glass, falling and slipping from sill to ledge and thence to the pavement, came like music into that absolute silence. The gas cloud vanished; the shambles appeared.

Not a living soul was there, except the dying and the wounded. A hoof of the horse lay in a pool of blood, and the pool sparkled in the sunshine. The dead girls lay in grotesque positions. One stood against another, seeming arm in arm, and then they both fell dead. Many men, and parts of men, lay in a windrow around the smoking remains of horse and wagon. There were boys there, too; mes-

sengers carrying great fortunes in securities. One boy lay in an idle pose, as if his lazy feet had failed him in the sun and a few feet away his envelope was found, still clutched in his tight hand. In the Morgan office, Thomas Joyce, the chief clerk, had fallen dead upon his desk amid a litter of plaster and shattered glass.

The throngs had been thrown back. Hundreds of thousands stood transfixed in the by-ways, not daring to move, striving to pierce the mystery of that vast, shaking explosion. Those who had been near the horse and wagon, and had escaped, now huddled in the doorways or rushed speechless into offices near by. No man dared to approach the shambles. Thus the silence was created and held for a long time, a silence in which moaning was the only flaw.

A girl among the dying raised her blonde head and screamed. Those who heard it said that it was an awful, dying cry. It seemed to be a signal, for at once the backward-flowing throngs turned and flowed forward, ran toward the horse and wagon and the shambles. It was a sight full of wonder. Men and women, eyes bulging and mouths wide open, ran and even stumbled, in some cases, over the bent knees of the dead. One man

looked down into a distorted face and fainted. Instantly six or seven women near him, screaming in their hysterics, pitched forward or fell backward, fainting, too. Tinkling loudly in an unbroken, jangling song, the window-glass kept pouring down on them.

Soon that scene of loneliness was again crowded. The roar of the explosion was almost equaled by the sound of many voices shouting the same question, screaming it: "What was it? What happened?" Thousands rushed from offices. The throng became a mob, turning, pushing, fighting its way toward that one bloody point. Fear of another explosion never seemed to strike them. They were seized with a savage desire to look with their own eyes at the shambles and to learn what had happened.

Into this mob the police and the firemen entered, making way for many ambulances. Surgeons fought shoulder-to-shoulder with the cursing cops to make a pathway to the dead. The throng fell back. The ambulance men counted thirty dead, and threw sheets over them. Two hundred injured persons lay there. The stench of the gas was sickening. Platoon after platoon of police marched in; then came the Federal troops. The ambulances rolled away with their

burdens. All the offices were closed, and clerks and brokers hurried home. The Stock Exchange closed. The way was cleared for the work of the detectives, who stared at the horse's hoof in the pool and began a long, useless pondering, a bitter, fruitless task.

## II

When the history of crankage is written, the Wall Street explosion must take first place in it; for it seemed that all the cranks in the country had been at a fever point then and, it was proved, some of them had even predicted the explosion. One had named the day. But those unbalanced, merry minds, which seemed to find pleasure in an image of Wall Street destroyed, could not be forced to give up one intelligible word. From the beginning of the investigation to its end (which may not have been reached yet), all the insane men who confessed or who had warned their friends to keep out of the Street were put aside as worthless reservoirs of worthless fancies. Red-baiters accused every Radical in prison and out; Sacco and Vanzetti were not spared. Even the Irish patriots, who were working against the tyranny of England, came to grief at the

hands of certain remarkable theorists, especially certain *World* reporters, who apparently had been taking lessons at a correspondence school for detectives. Rewards of about \$100,000 were posted.

The hunt began before the blood was mopped up. What was the evidence? The fragments of the horse; a few spokes of a wheel, splinters, an axle, a strap of charred leather, and a handful of odds and ends. The statements of eye-witnesses, as usual, were not worth a tinker's dam. The only hope of revenge for society lay in the hooves and bits of flesh and in the metal objects that had blown like shrapnel through the noon-day throng. These metal objects, it was found, were window weights. Five hundred pounds of them were gathered there, there and blocks away. And in the nature of these weights the police saw proof that the explosion was not an accident; because the weights had been carefully cut up into small pieces so that they would accomplish the purpose the wagoner had in mind: kill and maim.

The detectives laid all their material before a number of skilled veterinaries, wagon builders, and blacksmiths. They labored intensely for many hours and at the end produced a description of the

horse, its shoes, the wagon and its harness. In the police circulars it read as follows: Horse — dark bay mare, fifteen and three-quarters hands, fifteen years, about 1000 pounds, long mane and stubby foretop, clipped a month before; scars on left shoulder and white hairs on forehead. Shoes — hind shoes marked JHU and NOA, about half an inch apart; front shoes had pads, circle in center reading "Niagara Hoof Pad Co., BISON, Buffalo, N. Y. Harness — single set of heavy wagon harness, old and worn and frequently repaired; turret rings originally of brass, one broken; the other silver-mounted and evidently belonging originally to coach harness. Wagon — single top, capacity one and one-half tons, red running-gear, striped black with fine white lines. Three-foot wheels on front; four-and-one-half on back, of Sarvant patent. Body — five-and-a-half feet high, fifty-three inches wide, about eight feet from ground to top of wagon.

The detectives visited nearly five thousand stables along the Atlantic seaboard, and it was not long before the police reported that they had found the actual maker of the shoes, an Italian, whose shop was on Elizabeth Street, New York. He remembered that the day be-

fore the explosion a man had driven such a horse and wagon into the shop and had asked him to tighten a shoe. The blacksmith had suggested that a new pair was needed and his visitor, seeming rather distressed, asked in a nervous manner how long this would take. He was told that twenty minutes would be long enough. The pair of shoes was made and nailed to the hooves. The smith even described a cleft in one of the hooves which was found in a hoof taken from the shambles. He then described the customer, said he was apparently a Sicilian, and he even noted that his hands were white and soft. All this seemed promising at the time, yet it led to nothing. The clue was just another blank.

The number of clues that came into the hands of the investigators was enormous. The tenacity with which the detectives stuck to their jobs was something remarkable. Of course, there were confessions. Every now and then a lunatic, in Denmark, China, or in some prison, declared that he had done the job and gave all the details. But not one could prove his story. And even today, when the crime has long since been considered unfinished business by the police, a mention of it in the newspapers,

when its anniversary comes, is enough to start a new rumor and bring new clues, worthless as ever.

It is too late now for a solution. Eighteen years have passed since the poor old plug took his last trot down Wall Street. Many times since then the police have checked over the whole story, on the chance that a fresh examination will turn up the one great detail overlooked before. Sometimes, when a new man has done a brilliant turn on an important case, they send him down to the Corner, as the scene of the explosion is now generally known. He hears again the story of the explosion, studies the types of wounds, examines the few relics of horse and wagon and window weights, and studies. But he always gives up in the end. Some of the new students of the crime insist that the man never left the wagon, that he was dissolved in that thrust of gas. Others believe, for no good reason at all, that he was merely a madman, working alone, and that he may be alive today. They are the optimists who are hoping that some day, in a time of remorse or in the time of death, he will confess.

Except for these vague hopes, the Wall Street explosion is as complete and baffling a mystery as it was five minutes after it took place.

# HOME FOR MOSES

## *A Story*

BY ROYDEN STEWART

THROUGH the co-operation of Mr. Rockefeller and God, there is a playground back of Mr. Rockefeller's Riverside Church and sometimes children play in it. I used to walk by there between classes at Columbia last summer and often stopped to watch the kids from the gate in the brick wall. I didn't know anyone in New York and there is nothing friendlier than the sight of kids playing, especially small kids. But what first made me notice the playground was the fact that it was paved. Pavement on a playground surprised me.

That shows I didn't know much about New York, because it turns out all the playgrounds here are paved. Since I met Moses Kleinman, the little half-Jewish boy with the braced leg, this playground paving has interested me, even worried me. No one seems able to give me a satisfactory reason for it, and I still don't know whether it's a good thing or a bad thing. For Moses Kleinman, I mean. Now

that Moses has gone to his new home and Mr. Rockefeller is no longer a factor in his life (though you can't ever be sure of that, in America) and I'm anxious, and a little afraid, to go back home to Indiana, where playgrounds and prejudices are of different proportions and different construction from those in New York.

I asked a sociology professor about the paving. He gave me that wary look that is any scholar's reaction to something not reported on in Juggergramm's thesis as printed in some Journal, Volume Roman Numeral. Then he said that possibly it was to condition children for life in the city. In the best crypto-epigrammatic tradition.

I asked Moses Kleinman, too, that first day, but in a different way because he was only eight and couldn't be expected to give an indirect answer. I asked him if he wouldn't rather play on the grass in Riverside Park. I told him that out in Indiana you couldn't get