

THE MYSTERY OF AMBROSE SMALL

(From a Toronto Correspondent.)

The disappearance of **Ambrose J. Small**, the millionaire theatre proprietor, is the most sensational and baffling case in the records of Canadian criminology. In a few days or weeks John Doughty, his secretary for twenty years, is to be placed on trial on a charge of "conspiring to kidnap" his former employer. The public does not know what evidence will be produced at the trial and has as yet learned nothing about the case which in any important degree dissipates the mystery in which it has been shrouded for the last fourteen months.

It was on December 2, 1919, that the last was seen of **Ambrose Small**. His wife and friends were immediately anxious, but, scouting the idea of foul play, thought he must for some reason have gone quietly away, perhaps for a rest after the completion of negotiations for the sale of almost his entire theatre holdings which he had been working on for some time. Accordingly it was three weeks or more before any official report was made to the police department or any steps taken to find him. That delay has had an important bearing in hampering investigation. It surrounded with difficulty efforts to trace **Small's** movements on the day he disappeared and, if crime was committed, gave the criminals time to hide their tracks.

As far as can be pieced together now, **Small's** movements on the day of his disappearance were as follows:—He lunched at a restaurant with his wife and his solicitor. After lunch he accompanied his wife to an infants' home, telling her in parting he would be home to dinner at the usual time. He then went to his office. There his solicitor had a conference with him in the late afternoon, and fixes the hour of his departure by the fact that he left about 5.30 to catch a six o'clock train. **Small** was alone when the solicitor left. After that all is blank.

For a time the stories of two newsvendors who asserted that they sold **Small** papers on the street on the evening in question were accepted, and there have been built up on that assumption many imaginative stories telling how **Small** must have been kidnapped on the dark street on the way from his office to the point where he would take a tram. But when the newsvendors a year later came to tell their stories in the witness-box it was found they couldn't fix the date. There is accordingly no evidence available from anyone who saw **Small** after he left his office on the evening of his disappearance.

The Private Secretary.

Now what about Doughty, the private secretary? Under the sale which **Small** had completed Doughty was being transferred from **Small's** employ to that of the purchasing company at almost double the salary he had been getting. He was to move to Montreal, and on December 2 he took the night train for his new work. Three weeks later he returned to Toronto to spend Christmas with his family, but on December 28, instead of returning to his post in Montreal as arranged, he also disappeared.

This second disappearance had the effect of producing a sense of reassurance about **Small** on the theory that **Small** in retreat somewhere had sent for his secretary to join him, though among those who knew both men this theory was never given much weight.

It was not until some weeks after Doughty's disappearance that search for the missing man was energetically pressed. When it was found that \$100,000 worth of bonds were missing from **Small's** deposit box a warrant for Doughty's arrest was issued and rewards for information, of \$50,000 for **Small** and \$15,000 for Doughty, were offered.

By this time the case had achieved wide notoriety, and the police department, following the announcement of the rewards, was deluged with supposed clues. More than \$100,000 was spent in investigating them, only to prove that they originated either with cranks or with very superficial observers. However, in November, 1920, a clue, apparently no different from hundreds of others, led to the apprehension of Doughty, in Oregon City, Oregon, 3,000 miles from Toronto. He was working as a labourer in a paper mill, with no other attempt at disguise, and on arrest returned to Toronto without appeal to the extradition laws. After five adjournments, Doughty appeared before a magistrate for preliminary hearing, and was committed for trial on two charges—(1) of the theft of \$100,000 bonds, and (2) of conspiring to kidnap **Small**. He remains in gaol awaiting trial.

An immediate result of Doughty's return was the recovery of the \$100,000 missing bonds, and also of \$5,000 bonds of which the police had no record. They were found in an attic room of his sister's home, which had been his home, concealed in the wall behind fresh plaster and wall-paper. At the preliminary hearing a statement by Doughty to the police was read, and evidence was given by Doughty's sister and brother. From this testimony the following explanation of the missing bonds and of Doughty's flight was presented:—Doughty, in possession of the bonds on December 2, 1919, planned to hand them personally to **Small** in the hope that **Small** would give him a substantial honorarium at the termination of his twenty years' service. Not finding an opportunity to stage this little scene before his departure for Montreal on the night of December 2, he had handed the bonds in a parcel to his sister, telling her it was Mr. **Small's** property, and to place it in safe keeping. A few weeks later he became alarmed at **Small's** continued absence, which not only prevented him from returning the

bonds to **Small**, but would be sure to direct suspicion toward him, the bonds being in his possession. His alarm increasing, he took flight. On May 24, 1920, Doughty's sister handed the bonds to another brother, William, who secreted them in the attic wall, and it was William who, on John's return, led the police to the secret spot.

In committing Doughty for trial on the bond theft charge, the magistrate commented on the fact that no effort had been made by any of the Doughty family to dispose of the bonds or even to cash the interest coupons. But Doughty's flight and the whole circumstances made a committal necessary.

The Kidnapping Charge.

But main interest, of course, centres on the kidnapping charge. On this charge Doughty was committed for trial on evidence from two or three witnesses to the effect that Doughty had discussed with one or other of them such points as **Small's** indebtedness to him, **Small's** great wealth, the possibility of kidnapping him for the purpose of extorting money. Apparently in no case had these conversations been regarded as of much import until after **Small's** disappearance. Doughty, in his statement to the police, denies any knowledge of **Small's** whereabouts or fate.

But if **Small** was kidnapped, where is he now? If he is dead, where are the remains? As far as the public knows, there is not the slightest physical clue as to the disposition or fate of **Small's** body, dead or alive. It is as if the earth had opened and swallowed him. **Small's** office was in the Grand Opera House, his principal theatre, which is upon a block of the business centre of Toronto. There, according to the evidence available, he was last seen. Through his theatrical connections and his wide travels he had acquaintances all over the world, and it is regarded as impossible that he would pass for long anywhere without recognition.

Among the thousands of letters that have been received from all parts of the globe there is on the detectives' files one series that has a special interest. These letters came to Mrs. **Small** and her lawyers during the first half of 1920 through a practising lawyer of New York City, who on one occasion came to Toronto and had interviews with all the principals. The origin of them is a correspondent who signed his name "B. B. Friend." To the New York lawyer he professed to have information concerning **Small's** whereabouts, and on one occasion hinted at a reward of \$500,000. The New York lawyer said he had never seen "B. B. Friend," but had communicated with him on **Friend's** instructions, through the personal columns of newspapers. Nor was he sure he knew "B. B. Friend." But he intimated that under correct conditions he thought he could reach him. The correspondence continued until midsummer and then died. Who was "B. B. Friend"?

The general belief now is that **Small** is dead. **Small** was by far the most prominent figure in Canadian theatrical life. When he was 17, he began theatre work as an usher. He worked up through every phase of the business and knew everything about it from box-office to greenroom. As a boy he had ambitions to study law, but one day Henry Irving spoke to him and advised him that "The show business needs smart boys like you. Stay with the show business," and he did. He was always a great believer in ready cash. Curiously, he acquired his first sizable capital on a horse-race, laying \$200 on a 20 to 1 winner. He was always a keen follower of all racing fixtures, though never a horseman and rarely seen at a track. Perhaps once in two weeks he would make a bet and his intimates said he won oftener than most people. Eventually he had \$50,000 cash to make as a first payment on the Toronto Grand Opera House, which thereafter was his business home.

Mr. Small's Theatre Deals.

Before his disappearance he owned or controlled the bookings for 62 Canadian theatres. Many of these theatres fell into his possession easily when he made a deal with Klaw and Erlanger, the New York Theatrical Trust, giving him control of their bookings in Canada outside Toronto. Later on, when he secured a virtual monopoly of the theatres in a large territory, he was able to dictate booking terms to the Theatrical Trust itself. For his success he probably felt under obligation to no one. He played a lone hand, depending on his own resources and farsightedness.

On the day of his disappearance he had sold his entire theatrical interests to a Montreal corporation, the Trans-Canada Syndicate. He had received from it, and deposited in the bank, a marked cheque for one million dollars. Upwards of another million was to be paid later. Other investments bring his known fortune up to a total of between three and three and a half millions. While he had sold out his business he had given no indication that he contemplated permanent retirement. He was only 54 years old and was still ambitious.

Mrs. **Small** is one of the best-known women in Toronto. Before her marriage she was Miss Theresa Kormann, an accomplished musician who had been able owing to her considerable wealth to take courses in Paris, Berlin, and Milan. As she has no children, her chief interest in life has been her charitable work, and during and since the war she has raised and spent out of her own money large sums for the needy. Perhaps her special hobby is the Catholic Infants' Home, and her favourite organisation the Daughters of the Empire, in which she holds high office.