



## "Wise-Cracking" Crook Novels

What are we going to do with the crook plays and the crook novels now so much with us? I refer of course to the trouble the authors of them deliberately cause us by their flourishing of the crook language. At least I assume out of politeness that it really *is* crook language that is flourished. I should hate to think we are all of us being baffled or intrigued (*intrigued*—that indeed is a word which Sophie Kerr might well have added to her "detestable" list in the February number) by a language specially cooked up in the humble hall-bedroom or the palatial studio (as the case may be) of some crook-story artist. Yet stranger things have happened—

How disturbing it is to the simple-minded reader with the usual 700- to 800-word vocabulary to discover, for instance, that neither "soup" nor "sausage" has anything to do with food, nor "bubble" with drink, that a "gay cat" is by no manner of means a hilarious feline, and that bells have no part in a "ring-up"!

Revolving these great matters in my mind, I have come to the conclusion that what the reading public needs is a little discreet guidance. To this end I have prepared a short examination paper in crook terms which I give below, and which I believe covers the ground with some completeness. Any student who devotes a mere four or five hours a day of his spare time for a few months to the careful study of the works of George Bronson Howard, Mrs. E. T. Rath, and the other well-known crook-story writers, with this paper as a guide, will be able—I feel convinced—to graduate *summa cum laude* in the noble art of "wise-cracking". In

fact he (or she) should not only be able to read a crook novel or see a crook play without discomfort, but will be able to "shoot the wise-cracking stuff" personally, to the envy of his (or her) friends, and even (theoretically) to hold up his (or her) end in the company of the very crooks themselves. (May I be there to see!)

To encourage the earnest-minded inquirer I shall be glad to donate a copy of "Belle Jones" or "Jessica's First Prayer" as a prize to the best set of answers sent in before July 4th, on the condition that each candidate for the prize encloses an affidavit, sworn on a stack of "Daisy" books not less than four feet high, that the answers are his (or her) unaided work, and that no assistance whatever has been sought from a professional crook.

### EXAMINATION PAPER

(Note—Write your answers clearly, on one side of the paper only. Additional marks will be given for verifiable references to authorities and quotations of original texts.)

- Construct sentences illustrating the correct use of the following terms: olivet, galway, ducket, to clean for the works.
- If a pete intends to snuff a drum,
  - would he prefer a harnessed box or a keister, and why?
  - in which case would he make use of soup or of dooley, and why?
  - for what reasons would a looker be desirable?
- Is a paper-hanger or a scratchman generally considered as the higher grade of worker? How does each compare socially and professionally with (a) a mush-talker, (b) a baster, (c) a moll-buzzer, (d) a knucker, (e) a creeper, (f) a yegg?
- Distinguish carefully between (a) the bubble, (b) the callie, (c) the hoose-gow; and evaluate (without the use of logarithms) the difference in the feelings of a gentleman (a) kangarooed to the dump by a stool-pigeon, (b) ditched through a pal crocking to a snitch.
- Discuss the effect of the Prohibition Amendment on a white liner. What would be his chances after its passage of procuring sufficient powders to enable him to get slopped up (a) in the State of Maine, (b) in New York City?