

Toronto Star Weekly
December 11, 1920

Plain and Fancy Killings, \$400 Up

Chicago.—Gunmen from the United States are being imported to do killings in Ireland. That is an established fact from Associated Press dispatches.

According to underworld gossip in New York and Chicago, every ship that leaves for England carries its one or two of these weasels of death bound for where the hunting is good. The underworld says that the gunmen are first shipped to England where they lose themselves in the waterfronts of cities like Liverpool and then slip over to Ireland.

In the Red Island they do their job of killing, collect their contract price and slip back to England. It is said that the price for a simple killing, such as a marked policeman or member of the "Black and Tans," is four hundred dollars. It may seem exorbitant when you remember that the old pre-war price in New York was one hundred dollars, but the gunman is a specialist and his prices, like those demanded by prizefighters, have advanced.

For killing a well-guarded magistrate or other official, as much as one thousand dollars is demanded. Such a price for even a fancy killing is ridiculous, according to an ex-gunman I talked with in Chicago.

"Some of those birds are sure grabbing off the soft dough in Ireland. It's mush to pull a job in that country but trust the boys to get theirs. One job means a trip to Paris."

It is a fact that there have been more American underworld characters in Paris this summer and fall than ever before. They say that if you throw a stone into a crowd in front of one of the mutuel booths at the famous Longchamps racecourse outside of Paris, you would hit an American gunman, pickpocket or strong-arm artist.

Most of the blood money from Ireland went to back some pony or other. For the gunman believes in taking a chance. He believes that if he can make enough of a stake he can settle down and quit the business. But it is hard for him to quit, for there are very few professions outside of prizefighting that pay so well.

The retired shuffler off of mortal coils who honors me with his acquaintance is about thirty-eight. Perhaps it were better not to describe him too closely, because he might run on to a Toronto paper. But he is about as handsome as a ferret, has fine hands, looks like a jockey a bit overweight.

He quit gunning when the quitting was good—when the country went dry and liquor running became the best-paying outdoor occupation.

After his principal customers discovered that it was altogether better and cheaper to ship whiskey up from the big warehouses in Kentucky than to take the chance of running it across the imaginary line that separates the U.S. and Canada, he retired.

Now he is a man-about-town and bond salesman call on him. When I talked with him he kept steering the subject away from gunning and the Irish situation to ask my honest opinion on some Japanese government bonds that will pay eleven percent interest.

In the course of an afternoon I learned a number of things about the trade. Yes, there were American "bump-off" artists in Ireland. Yes, he knew some that were there personally. Well, he didn't know who was in the right in Ireland. No, it didn't matter to him. He understood it was all managed out of New York. Then you worked out of Liverpool. No, he wouldn't care particularly about killing Englishmen. But, then, they gotta die sometime.

He's heard that most of the guns were Wops—Dagoes, that is. Most gunman were Wops, anyway. A Wop made a good gun. They usually worked in pairs. In the U.S.A. they nearly always worked out of a motorcar, because that made the getaway much easier. That was the big thing about doing a job. The getaways. Anybody can do a job. It's the getaway that counts. A car made it much easier. But there was always the chauffeur.

Had I noticed, he went on, that most of the jobs that fell through were the fault of the chauffeur? The police traced the car and then got the chauffeur and he squealed. That was what was bad about a car, he said. "You can't trust any of them."

That's the type of mercenary that is doing the Irishmen's killings for them. He isn't a heroic or even a dramatic figure. He just sits hunched over his whiskey glass, worries about how to invest his money, lets his weasel mind run on and wishes the boys luck. The boys seem to be having it.