

NOTES THROUGH the MAIL



David F. Kemp

By Janet White

DAVID F. KEMP is a living prototype of the Horatio Alger "From Rags to Riches" hero. At sixteen, imbued with the spirit of restlessness which makes men leave the family hearthstone, their eyes glued on the distant horizon and the pot of gold, he shut the gates of his father's small stock farm behind him, felt in his pocket to make certain his week's board money and railway ticket were safe, slung his knapsack over his shoulder, and took the first step into the unknown.

That first step landed him in Indianapolis. With the last step, he mounted into the halls of the successful, the founder and owner of the United States School of Music—a cultured, poised gentleman, who today somewhere in his late fifties, is no longer active in the institution which he founded, but is wealthy enough to spend his time exactly as he pleases, whether it is traveling through Europe, which he does twice a year; resting at his Great Neck home, dabbling in real estate or playing golf.

It is hard to reconcile the fact that David Kemp's scholastic training extended no further than the rude country classroom where he was taught the three R's. His appearance, his knowledge, his intellect, his conversational ability all suggest the college-bred gentleman.

In the beginning, by the dim light of the midnight oil, a farmer's son pored over books learning things he wanted to know, studying at home, himself as teacher and student. For the farmer's son had no desire to follow in his father's footsteps. He wanted the city to be his home, not the rural village. He wanted an environment of sophistication and wealth and intellectual attainments, not surroundings of pig pens, chicken coops and stables. Later travel, contacts with fine intellects augmented that diligent and at times wearisome home study.

And so, feeling that people all over the world can learn the way he did, all the things they long to know, but have no facilities to acquire, David Kemp in 1898, organized the United States School of Music, giving home study courses in learning to play musical instruments, bringing a real knowledge of music, and therefore a better appreciation of it into the backwoods. It is David Kemp's contention that only the people who really have an understanding of the technique of music can appreciate the artistry of a Chopin sonata, a Bach fugue or a Beethoven symphony.

"You can never be a real music lover until you know the fundamentals of music," he told me. "When only three percent of the people are able to read music, you can hardly expect more than that to appreciate it. Musicians always learn to love real music, because they understand its difficulty, its artistry, its mechanism. People talk about the opera, but they don't really enjoy

David F. Kemp Won Fame and Fortune With His Idea to Teach the Fiddle and Piano by Correspondence

It. The opera lovers are those who are familiar with the score, who know the composer and his work. The more we know about a thing the more we love it and appreciate its value."

There is another fact to which the pioneer home study music school owes its success. Music has always been surrounded with a highbrow aura of mystery and artiness. Young people are afraid to study music. There is the habitual aphorism that musicians are born, not made, and they are tremulous lest an attempt to solve the intricacies of playing an instrument end in abject failure. They dare not risk employing a teacher, but a home study course seems easy—no one need ever know really, and if they find themselves unable to master it, why, they needn't continue.

David Kemp taught himself music. At that time there were no lessons sent to him in an envelope every week. He found an old piano primer, and taught himself. It wasn't until years later that the inspiration to teach others through home study came to him. He chose music because he felt it was a field that had a universal appeal, a language everyone understood. He began, he says, with an idea, and a few hundred dollars. The first year, he prepared the material for the lessons himself, with the knowledge he had gained through home study. There were courses in six instruments—the piano, violin, banjo, organ, mandolin and guitar. Four hundred pupils enrolled. Today there are twenty-two courses in the curriculum arranged by prominent artists in each field, including voice culture, sight singing and harmony and composition—sent to 100,000 eager students every year—to English speaking people anywhere on the face of the earth—a continuous chain through six continents—from a vast metropolis to a straggling town, to a settlement in darkest Africa.

Four hundred pupils the first year for an initial venture was quite large, immediately revealing the gap that correspondence course in music was filling. Of course, there were bores and hisses. A home study course in learning to play a musical instrument was unprecedented. Why it couldn't be done. Musicians shook their heads, shrugged their shoulders and smiled behind their hands. The more temperamental threw up their gifted hands in horror. This man Kemp was a fool. But they lived to change their opinions, to respect and honor this man Kemp, and accept him as one who had the vision and perspicacity to realize that the whole world loved music, and to bring music into their homes would not only render them an invaluable service but would make David F. Kemp a successful man in an original undertaking.

But let us go back to David Kemp when he lived in a suburb of Dayton, Ohio, and burned the midnight oil trying to learn stenography by an old Pitman book. Diligently did he outline pothooks and curves. Perhaps occasionally, he threw the book down in disgust, but he always picked it up again, for he had already felt the lure of the big city and had sufficient foresight to realize that he could not storm the citadels of a metropolis without some practical knowledge.

At the tender age of sixteen he felt he had seen enough of small town life, so with a week's board money, a railway ticket and a knowledge of stenography and typewriting as his stock in trade he left home. When the conductor called Indianapolis, David alighted, looked about him, and immediately set to work on the job hunt. For two years he was employed in an attorney's office, first as a stenographer and then, after reading law for a number of months by himself, as a law clerk. After two years, office routine grew monotonous, and he went back to Ohio. Always with the spirit of the wanderer,

David again had the fever to travel and this time joined an engineering corps with which, surprisingly, he stayed for five years, eventually becoming field engineer on a line from Michigan into Chicago in 1892. Studying engineering or anything else in a school for that purpose was foreign to David's nature and his engineering knowledge came wholly through apprenticeship.

In 1894 the smash came. Most of the railroads in the nation were in the hands of receivers. There was no railroad construction and David lost his job. He was asking himself, "What shall I do now?" when the Government answered the question. They threw open the Cherokee Indian land in Oklahoma for settlement. David was one of 100,000 who expected to sail in on 20,000 claims of 160 acres each. Presumably, some 80,000 hopefuls would find themselves without settlements. A gun was to be fired by the United States troops, signaling the opening of the land, and a mad rush by 100,000 men on horseback to stake their claims. By an accident, planned or otherwise, some one fired a pistol five minutes before the time set, and a mass of humanity let loose on the gallop. David, who was not the type to be left behind, rode in with the others, traveling nineteen and one-half miles in fifty-five minutes, and getting a claim. He settled on a piece of land midway between the railway town and the county seat, where he lived from September until the first of May. For the first three months David used the sky for a ceiling and the earth for a bed, not that he felt romantic, but he had no money with which to buy lumber. When he finally garnered enough to put up a shack, he did not have sufficient timber for the whole roof, so half of his home was left uncovered. When the blizzard arrived, said Mr. Kemp smilingly looking back, it was a cool proposition.

During his residence on the claim, David held two apparently important positions, city engineer and secretary of the Board of Trade in the railroad town where the sheriff was the police department, fire department, mayor and roundsman of the Lord. In the spring David, with no desire to cultivate the soil, and with an opportunity to join a railroad in Texas, sold his claim for a paltry \$300. If Mr. Kemp hadn't reaped financial rewards in other ways, he might well have rued that day.

While in the East good fortune brought him into contact with a representative of the International Correspondence School. He learned the president of the school had been a mining engineer, and then an idea flitted through David Kemp's brain.

Why not teach music in this way? The idea remained in a passive state for a year or two. David returned to Dayton as advertising manager of one of the local papers, and then the Spanish-American War called him. In 1898, with a new life in front of him, David Kemp started to build reality out of his dreams. He opened a small office in the Presbyterian Building in New York City, and started to advertise and enroll pupils. The first year, he managed to break even and the school grew steadily. The second year there were 1,000 pupils. Now, thirty-one years later there are 100,000 students a year. In its long life the school has brought a knowledge of music into a half million homes by the print and picture method.

A year after the establishment of the unique institution, David Kemp married a young woman who spent five years at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Leipzig, and is an accomplished pianist. There are six children, all boys, and the eldest, David W. Kemp, is now manager of the school.

Though the courses are available only to English speaking people, a letter came across the sea from Calcutta last year. A native asked for the rights for India, Siam and Burma. His daughter was the first violinist in the only symphony orchestra in India, and all her knowledge had been obtained through the United States School of Music. Letters come from prisons where convicts call it the official instructor of the penitentiary.

"My main object," says Mr. Kemp, "is to teach people to know music. We have created a desire in ten people, where before there was only one. In 1898 people raised objections. It couldn't be done, they said. But there are so many things that couldn't be done, and we're doing them. The French pianist, Cortot, one of the scoffers, actually saw the lessons one day and said, 'It is a wonderful idea,' and asked for the piano course."

At another time, Ovid Musin, the violinist, was sitting in a restaurant at a table next to Mr. Kemp. He recognized him, turned to his companion and said, "My friend, Kemp, there, teaches music like typewriting. A piano, yes, I can understand, but a violin?" Kemp took him down to his office and gave him a copy of the first lesson in the violin. Musin tapped his head. "Ah, had I only thought of it. It is better than I do. I take a violin and show them. You have the photograph, which is always in front of them."

HOUSE BURGLARY POOR TRADE

By Helen Herbert Foster

OF ALL the men embezzling from their employers with whom I have had contact, I can't remember a dozen who smoked, drank or had any of the vices in which bonding companies are so interested.

Nor have I ever known a man capable of turning out first-class work in a trade, a profession or an art who was a professional criminal.

House burglary is probably the poorest trade in the world—I have never known any one to make a living at it.

Pocket-picking is the easiest to master of all the criminal trades. Any one who is not crippled can become an adept at it in a day.

These are the opinions of Dashiell Hammett, formerly a Pinkerton man, and now a writer of detective stories, among which "Red Harvest" and "The Dain Curse" are well known. And though Mr. Hammett tells us about many people there are few more interesting than he is himself. Until he began to write fiction he had had no writing experience except that of writing letters and daily reports for headquarters.

It seems, according to Mr. Hammett, that to be a good detective one must have a gift for poking one's nose into other people's business. Doubtless many of us know people—ourselves, of course, never—who, we think, could qualify in this respect. But that's only the beginning.

"For being a professional busybody requires more energy, more dogged patience than you'd suppose. I got so tired of it that I just had to give it up, though I have a flair for that kind of thing. There never was anything lacking in the matter of my curiosity. It's not an easy business. A good detective is quite a person. He is a type that has always intrigued me. And for that reason I never subordinate his personality to the plot of my story."

Naturally enough, the detective as a study would interest Mr. Hammett. And well it might. Some of the greatest writers of the past have studied the detective's curious makeup. Victor Hugo in his immortal "Jean Valjean" tells us of a crack detective, Javert by name, who either had to be that or a first class crook. The physical machinery, so to speak, of a good sleuth is a complicated thing and worthy of the pen of a competent writer.

"What I try to do is to write a story about a detective rather than a detective story. Keeping the reader fooled until the last possible moment is a good trick and I usually try to play it, but I can't attach more than secondary importance to it. The puzzle isn't so interesting to me as the behavior of the detective attacking it."

And so Dashiell Hammett has given us a hard-boiled little "op," a closeup of him at work. And an "op," as every reader of detective stories should know—and who is not these days when Presidents and Prime Ministers admit a weakness for them?—is a man who does in real life what the "master detective" does in fiction. He is, in short, an operative.

"The 'op' I use," says Hammett, "is the typical sort of private detective that exists in our country today. I've worked with half a dozen men who might be he with few changes. Though he may be 'different' in fiction, he is almost pure 'type' in life. I've always tried to hold him as close to the 'type' as possible because what I see in him is a little man going forward day after day through mud and blood and death and deceit—as callous and brutal and cynical as is necessary—towards a dim goal, with nothing to push or pull him towards it except that he's been hired to reach it—a sort of Manuel whose saying is: 'The job's got to be done.' But please don't think I suppose that I've been altogether successful in translating him to the printed page—I admit: having moments when I think I'm having a little luck."

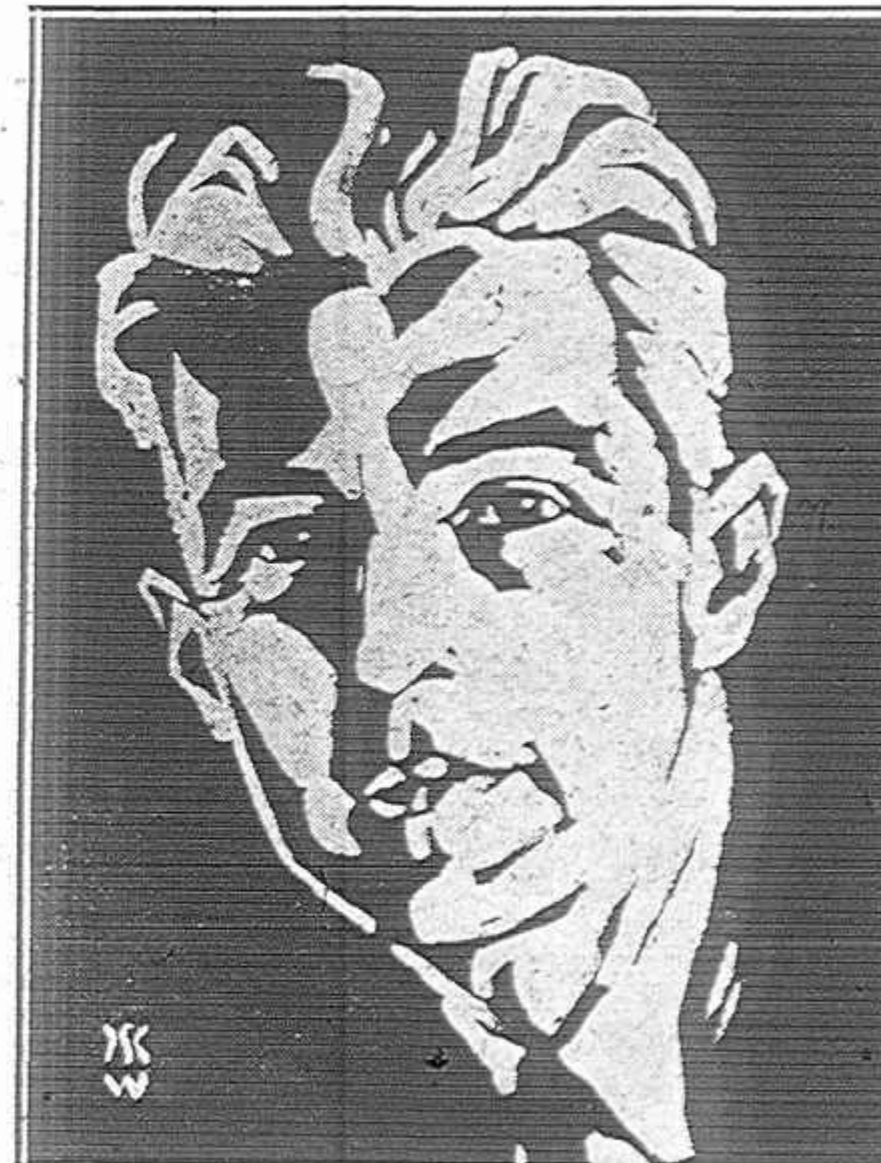
When Mr. Hammett speaks you just have to watch your step. You have the feeling he's setting traps for you to fall into. And maybe he is. He's cynically funny though one of the most genial people you'd want to meet.

"I knew a man who once stole a Ferris wheel," he said. "And then there was the man I shadowed out into the country for a walk one Sunday afternoon who lost his bearings completely and I had to direct him back to the city. And I once knew a detective who attempted to disguise himself so thoroughly that the first policeman he met took him under arrest. And then there was the man I knew, and still know, who will forge the impressions of any set of fingers in the world for only fifty dollars—and then there was—"

"This is what you wanted to hear, wasn't it?" he said, smilingly interrupting himself. "All reporters want to hear such experiences from detectives. And these are authentic enough, goodness knows."

"It couldn't be so long ago," we commented, trying to

And Embezzlers Usually Have Fine Personal Habits, Says Dashiell Hammett, One-Time Detective Now Gone Literary



Dashiell Hammett

get in the spirit of his genial mood. "You don't look very old."

"No, indeed, I'm not at all old. I'm quite young. I'm just thirty-five and am what might be called of the 'younger generation of writers.' Surprising, isn't it, how old the younger generation can be?"

"So then I can proceed to the fact that I was brought up in Philadelphia—though I wouldn't emphasize that too strongly—and in Baltimore. There isn't much to be said for my education, for I had little of it. I left school at fourteen, in the middle of my first high school year."

"My first dive into bread-winning was a messenger boy for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, though I had dipped my toes in before that by selling newspapers after school. Later I drew wages as a junior clerk, very junior, in an advertising office. Then I went into a stock broker's office—but let me pause here. Things come to mind."

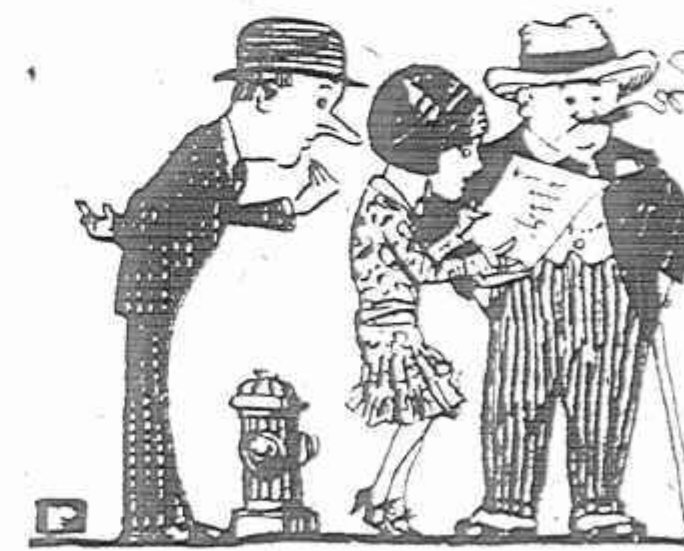
"I was often fired, I'll admit that. But always most amiably. So much so that I was always on good terms with my ex-employers after. But about the stock broker's. There was a place. It seemed that I could seldom get the same approximate total twice in succession out of any column of figures, but still more seldom managed to get down early enough in the day to make any of my mistakes before noon. And they had a weird notion that one should be there all day. Well, of course, when such a situation arises something is bound to happen. It did."

"Maybe I should have gone in for journalism. But let me get on with this story of my life and get the agony over with. After the stockbroker's I became a timekeeper in a cannery and in a machine shop and from that the way was easy to that of stevedore. I made the grade but then it became too strenuous."

"Now I approach, chronologically, when I became a detective. I was attached to a national agency as an operative, before and after the war, in the East, Northwest and on the Pacific Coast. I was a pretty good sleuth, but a bit overrated because of the plausibility with which I could explain away my failures, proving them inevitable and no fault of mine."

"You'll want to hear of my war record, no doubt. Frankly, it was dull. I contributed practically nothing to the Allied victory. I came out of my uniform with tuberculosis, which later sent me to a couple of hospitals for seven or eight months."

"When the Tijuana racing season closed in the spring of 1921 I left the last of these hospitals—just outside of San Diego—and brought my still frayed lungs to San Francisco, where I returned to sleuthing. But that didn't last long. My health continued to go blooey."



and I was getting tired of butting into other people's business. That's where you never can tell about the neighborhood busybody's ability to be a professional; it takes perseverance. I lacked the drive to keep it going at par.

"Well, by this time I had a wife and daughter, and they were to be somewhat housed, clothed and fed. I decided to become a writer."

"It was a good idea. Having had no experience whatever in writing, except writing letters and reports, I wasn't handicapped by exaggerated notions of the difficulties ahead. By the end of the year writing was supporting us in so far as we were being supported at all."

This, then, was Dashiell Hammett's story of how he began writing, and it is a story, you will admit, that one doesn't hear every day. After he began wielding his pen he stuck right to it except for a few excursions into advertising "to pick up a few dollars."

"There's another weakness I possess that I haven't confessed: I'm an artist, or nearly. That is, I have a tendency to fritter away time over a drawing board trying to make black marks come out beautiful on white paper, which they seldom, if ever, do."

In the fall of 1927 a lot of doctors—yes, a lot of 'em, he said, and one professor—told him his lungs were all right. To date he sees no reason for doubting they knew what they were talking about.

"Detecting has its high spots," said he in a somewhat more serious vein, "but the run of the work is the most monotonous that any one could imagine. The very things that can be made to sound the most exciting in the telling are, in the doing, usually the most dull tiresome."

"Up to the time I became a sleuth I liked gum-shoeing—did I forget to give you the details of that experience?—better than anything I had done before. But at that I wasn't such a rotten sleuth. Thanks to my ability to write pleasing and convincing reports, my reputation was always a little more than I deserved. A couple of times I was offered official jobs but dodged them, since I was by then about fed up."

"I wish we had lots of time, for I'm just remembering other things that might interest you. I'd like to tell you of the chief of police of a Southern city who once gave me a minute description of a man, down to the mole on his neck, but neglected to mention that he had only one arm. Then there was the forger who left his wife because she had learned to smoke cigarettes while he was serving a term in prison. Sleuthing has its funny side though it's trying work. A good detective has to be brave, vigorous, damnably clever, tireless—altogether a real person! His is an extraordinarily complicated mechanism."