

Agatha Christie

the **thirteen**
problems



marple

Agatha Christie

**The Thirteen
Problems**

To Leonard and Katherine Woolley

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Chapter 3

Ingots of Gold

‘I do not know that the story that I am going to tell you is a fair one,’ said Raymond West, ‘because I can’t give you the solution of it. Yet the facts were so interesting and so curious that I should like to propound it to you as a problem. And perhaps between us we may arrive at some logical conclusion.

‘The date of these happenings was two years ago, when I went down to spend Whitsuntide with a man called John Newman, in Cornwall.’

‘Cornwall?’ said Joyce Lemprière sharply.

‘Yes. Why?’

‘Nothing. Only it’s odd. My story is about a place in Cornwall, too – a little fishing village called Rathole. Don’t tell me yours is the same?’

‘No. My village is called Polperran. It is situated on the west coast of Cornwall; a very wild and rocky spot. I had been introduced a few weeks previously and had

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found him a most interesting companion. A man of intelligence and independent means, he was possessed of a romantic imagination. As a result of his latest hobby he had taken the lease of Pol House. He was an authority on Elizabethan times, and he described to me in vivid and graphic language the rout of the Spanish Armada. So enthusiastic was he that one could almost imagine that he had been an eyewitness at the scene. Is there anything in reincarnation? I wonder – I very much wonder.’

‘You are so romantic, Raymond dear,’ said Miss Marple, looking benignantly at him.

‘Romantic is the last thing that I am,’ said Raymond West, slightly annoyed. ‘But this fellow Newman was chock-full of it, and he interested me for that reason as a curious survival of the past. It appears that a certain ship belonging to the Armada, and known to contain a vast amount of treasure in the form of gold from the Spanish Main, was wrecked off the coast of Cornwall on the famous and treacherous Serpent Rocks. For some years, so Newman told me, attempts had been made to salve the ship and recover the treasure. I believe such stories are not uncommon, though the number of mythical treasure ships is largely in excess of the genuine ones. A company had been formed, but had gone bankrupt, and Newman had been able to buy the rights of the thing – or whatever you call it

– for a mere song. He waxed very enthusiastic about it all. According to him it was merely a question of the latest scientific, up-to-date machinery. The gold was there, and he had no doubt whatever that it could be recovered.

‘It occurred to me as I listened to him how often things happen that way. A rich man such as Newman succeeds almost without effort, and yet in all probability the actual value in money of his find would mean little to him. I must say that his ardour infected me. I saw galleons drifting up the coast, flying before the storm, beaten and broken on the black rocks. The mere word galleon has a romantic sound. The phrase “Spanish Gold” thrills the schoolboy – and the grown-up man also. Moreover, I was working at the time upon a novel, some scenes of which were laid in the sixteenth century, and I saw the prospect of getting valuable local colour from my host.

‘I set off that Friday morning from Paddington in high spirits, and looking forward to my trip. The carriage was empty except for one man, who sat facing me in the opposite corner. He was a tall, soldierly-looking man, and I could not rid myself of the impression that somewhere or other I had seen him before. I cudgelled my brains for some time in vain; but at last I had it. My travelling companion was Inspector Badgworth, and I had run across him when I was

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doing a series of articles on the Everson disappearance case.

‘I recalled myself to his notice, and we were soon chatting pleasantly enough. When I told him I was going to Polperran he remarked that that was a rum coincidence, because he himself was also bound for that place. I did not like to seem inquisitive, so was careful not to ask him what took him there. Instead, I spoke of my own interest in the place, and mentioned the wrecked Spanish galleon. To my surprise the Inspector seemed to know all about it. “That will be the *Juan Fernandez*,” he said. “Your friend won’t be the first who has sunk money trying to get money out of her. It is a romantic notion.”

“And probably the whole story is a myth,” I said. “No ship was ever wrecked there at all.”

“Oh, the ship was sunk there right enough,” said the Inspector – “along with a good company of others. You would be surprised if you knew how many wrecks there are on that part of the coast. As a matter of fact, that is what takes me down there now. That is where the *Otranto* was wrecked six months ago.”

“I remember reading about it,” I said. “No lives were lost, I think?”

“No lives were lost,” said the Inspector; “but something else was lost. It is not generally known, but the *Otranto* was carrying bullion.”

“Yes?” I said, much interested.

“Naturally we have had divers at work on salvage operations, but – *the gold has gone, Mr West.*”

“Gone!” I said, staring at him. “How can it have gone?”

“That is the question,” said the Inspector. “The rocks tore a gaping hole in her strongroom. It was easy enough for the divers to get in that way, but they found the strongroom empty. The question is, was the gold stolen before the wreck or afterwards? Was it ever in the strongroom at all?”

“It seems a curious case,” I said.

“It is a very curious case, when you consider what bullion is. Not a diamond necklace that you could put into your pocket. When you think how cumbersome it is and how bulky – well, the whole thing seems absolutely impossible. There may have been some hocus-pocus before the ship sailed; but if not, it must have been removed within the last six months – and I am going down to look into the matter.”

I found Newman waiting to meet me at the station. He apologized for the absence of his car, which had gone to Truro for some necessary repairs. Instead, he met me with a farm lorry belonging to the property.

I swung myself up beside him, and we wound carefully in and out of the narrow streets of the fishing village. We went up a steep ascent, with a gradient, I

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should say, of one in five, ran a little distance along a winding lane, and turned in at the granite-pillared gates of Pol House.

‘The place was a charming one; it was situated high up the cliffs, with a good view out to sea. Part of it was some three or four hundred years old, and a modern wing had been added. Behind it farming land of about seven or eight acres ran inland.

“‘Welcome to Pol House,” said Newman. “And to the Sign of the Golden Galleon.” And he pointed to where, over the front door, hung a perfect reproduction of a Spanish galleon with all sails set.

‘My first evening was a most charming and instructive one. My host showed me the old manuscripts relating to the *Juan Fernandez*. He unrolled charts for me and indicated positions on them with dotted lines, and he produced plans of diving apparatus, which, I may say, mystified me utterly and completely.

‘I told him of my meeting with Inspector Badgworth, in which he was much interested.

“‘They are a queer people round this coast,” he said reflectively. “Smuggling and wrecking is in their blood. When a ship goes down on their coast they cannot help regarding it as lawful plunder meant for their pockets. There is a fellow here I should like you to see. He is an interesting survival.”

‘Next day dawned bright and clear. I was taken down

into Polperran and there introduced to Newman's diver, a man called Higgins. He was a wooden-faced individual, extremely taciturn, and his contributions to the conversation were mostly monosyllables. After a discussion between them on highly technical matters, we adjourned to the Three Anchors. A tankard of beer somewhat loosened the worthy fellow's tongue.

"Detective gentleman from London has come down," he grunted. "They do say that that ship that went down there last November was carrying a mortal lot of gold. Well, she wasn't the first to go down, and she won't be the last."

"Hear, hear," chimed in the landlord of the Three Anchors. "That is a true word you say there, Bill Higgins."

"I reckon it is, Mr Kelvin," said Higgins.

I looked with some curiosity at the landlord. He was a remarkable-looking man, dark and swarthy, with curiously broad shoulders. His eyes were bloodshot, and he had a curiously furtive way of avoiding one's glance. I suspected that this was the man of whom Newman had spoken, saying he was an interesting survival.

"We don't want interfering foreigners on this coast," he said, somewhat truculently.

"Meaning the police?" asked Newman, smiling.

"Meaning the police – *and others*," said Kelvin significantly. "And don't you forget it, mister."

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“Do you know, Newman, that sounded to me very like a threat,” I said as we climbed the hill homewards.

‘My friend laughed.

“Nonsense; I don’t do the folk down here any harm.”

I shook my head doubtfully. There was something sinister and uncivilized about Kelvin. I felt that his mind might run in strange, unrecognized channels.

I think I date the beginning of my uneasiness from that moment. I had slept well enough that first night, but the next night my sleep was troubled and broken. Sunday dawned, dark and sullen, with an overcast sky and the threatenings of thunder in the air. I am always a bad hand at hiding my feelings, and Newman noticed the change in me.

“What is the matter with you, West? You are a bundle of nerves this morning.”

“I don’t know,” I confessed, “but I have got a horrible feeling of foreboding.”

“It’s the weather.”

“Yes, perhaps.”

I said no more. In the afternoon we went out in Newman’s motor boat, but the rain came on with such vigour that we were glad to return to shore and change into dry clothing.

‘And that evening my uneasiness increased. Outside the storm howled and roared. Towards ten o’clock the tempest calmed down. Newman looked out of the window.

“‘It is clearing,” he said. “I shouldn’t wonder if it was a perfectly fine night in another half-hour. If so, I shall go out for a stroll.”

‘I yawned. “I am frightfully sleepy,” I said. “I didn’t get much sleep last night. I think that tonight I shall turn in early.”

‘This I did. On the previous night I had slept little. Tonight I slept heavily. Yet my slumbers were not restful. I was still oppressed with an awful foreboding of evil. I had terrible dreams. I dreamt of dreadful abysses and vast chasms, amongst which I was wandering, knowing that a slip of the foot meant death. I waked to find the hands of my clock pointing to eight o’clock. My head was aching badly, and the terror of my night’s dreams was still upon me.

‘So strongly was this so that when I went to the window and drew it up I started back with a fresh feeling of terror, for the first thing I saw, or thought I saw – was a man digging an open grave.

‘It took me a minute or two to pull myself together; then I realized that the grave-digger was Newman’s gardener, and the “grave” was destined to accommodate three new rose trees which were lying on the turf

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waiting for the moment they should be securely planted in the earth.

“The gardener looked up and saw me and touched his hat.

“Good morning, sir. Nice morning, sir.”

“I suppose it is,” I said doubtfully, still unable to shake off completely the depression of my spirits.

‘However, as the gardener had said, it was certainly a nice morning. The sun was shining and the sky a clear pale blue that promised fine weather for the day. I went down to breakfast whistling a tune. Newman had no maids living in the house. Two middle-aged sisters, who lived in a farm-house near by, came daily to attend to his simple wants. One of them was placing the coffee-pot on the table as I entered the room.

“Good morning, Elizabeth,” I said. “Mr Newman not down yet?”

“He must have been out very early, sir,” she replied. “He wasn’t in the house when we arrived.”

‘Instantly my uneasiness returned. On the two previous mornings Newman had come down to breakfast somewhat late; and I didn’t fancy that at any time he was an early riser. Moved by those forebodings, I ran up to his bedroom. It was empty, and, moreover, his bed had not been slept in. A brief examination of his room showed me two other things. If Newman had gone out for a stroll he must

have gone out in his evening clothes, for they were missing.

‘I was sure now that my premonition of evil was justified. Newman had gone, as he had said he would do, for an evening stroll. For some reason or other he had not returned. Why? Had he met with an accident? Fallen over the cliffs? A search must be made at once.

‘In a few hours I had collected a large band of helpers, and together we hunted in every direction along the cliffs and on the rocks below. But there was no sign of Newman.

‘In the end, in despair, I sought out Inspector Badgworth. His face grew very grave.

“‘It looks to me as if there has been foul play,” he said. “There are some not over-scrupulous customers in these parts. Have you seen Kelvin, the landlord of the Three Anchors?”

‘I said that I had seen him.

“‘Did you know he did a turn in gaol four years ago? Assault and battery.”

“‘It doesn’t surprise me,” I said.

“‘The general opinion in this place seems to be that your friend is a bit too fond of nosing his way into things that do not concern him. I hope he has come to no serious harm.”

‘The search was continued with redoubled vigour. It was not until late that afternoon that our efforts were

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rewarded. We discovered Newman in a deep ditch in a corner of his own property. His hands and feet were securely fastened with rope, and a handkerchief had been thrust into his mouth and secured there so as to prevent him crying out.

‘He was terribly exhausted and in great pain; but after some frictioning of his wrists and ankles, and a long draught from a whisky flask, he was able to give his account of what had occurred.

‘The weather having cleared, he had gone out for a stroll about eleven o’clock. His way had taken him some distance along the cliffs to a spot commonly known as Smugglers’ Cove, owing to the large number of caves to be found there. Here he had noticed some men landing something from a small boat, and had strolled down to see what was going on. Whatever the stuff was it seemed to be a great weight, and it was being carried into one of the farthest caves.

‘With no real suspicion of anything being amiss, nevertheless Newman had wondered. He had drawn quite near them without being observed. Suddenly there was a cry of alarm, and immediately two powerful seafaring men had set upon him and rendered him unconscious. When next he came to himself he found himself lying on a motor vehicle of some kind, which was proceeding, with many bumps and bangs, as far as he could guess, up the lane which led from the coast

to the village. To his great surprise, the lorry turned in at the gate of his own house. There, after a whispered conversation between the men, they at length drew him forth and flung him into a ditch at a spot where the depth of it rendered discovery unlikely for some time. Then the lorry drove on, and, he thought, passed out through another gate some quarter of a mile nearer the village. He could give no description of his assailants except that they were certainly seafaring men and, by their speech, Cornishmen.

‘Inspector Badgworth was very interested.

“‘Depend upon it that is where the stuff has been hidden,” he cried. “Somehow or other it has been salvaged from the wreck and has been stored in some lonely cave somewhere. It is known that we have searched all the caves in Smugglers’ Cove, and that we are now going farther afield, and they have evidently been moving the stuff at night to a cave that has been already searched and is not likely to be searched again. Unfortunately they have had at least eighteen hours to dispose of the stuff. If they got Mr Newman last night I doubt if we will find any of it there by now.”

‘The Inspector hurried off to make a search. He found definite evidence that the bullion had been stored as supposed, but the gold had been once more removed, and there was no clue as to its fresh hiding-place.

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‘One clue there was, however, and the Inspector himself pointed it out to me the following morning.

“That lane is very little used by motor vehicles,” he said, “and in one or two places we get the traces of the tyres very clearly. There is a three-cornered piece out of one tyre, leaving a mark which is quite unmistakable. It shows going into the gate; here and there is a faint mark of it going out of the other gate, so there is not much doubt that it is the right vehicle we are after. Now, why did they take it out through the farther gate? It seems quite clear to me that the lorry came from the village. Now, there aren’t many people who own a lorry in the village – not more than two or three at most. Kelvin, the landlord of the Three Anchors, has one.”

“What was Kelvin’s original profession?” asked Newman.

“It is curious that you should ask me that, Mr Newman. In his young days Kelvin was a professional diver.”

Newman and I looked at each other. The puzzle seemed to be fitting itself together piece by piece.

“You didn’t recognize Kelvin as one of the men on the beach?” asked the Inspector.

Newman shook his head.

“I am afraid I can’t say anything as to that,” he said regretfully. “I really hadn’t time to see anything.”

‘The Inspector very kindly allowed me to accompany

him to the Three Anchors. The garage was up a side street. The big doors were closed, but by going up a little alley at the side we found a small door that led into it, and the door was open. A very brief examination of the tyres sufficed for the Inspector. "We have got him, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "Here is the mark as large as life on the rear left wheel. Now, Mr Kelvin, I don't think you will be clever enough to wriggle out of this."

Raymond West came to a halt.

'Well?' said Joyce. 'So far I don't see anything to make a problem about – unless they never found the gold.'

'They never found the gold certainly,' said Raymond. 'And they never got Kelvin either. I expect he was too clever for them, but I don't quite see how he worked it. He was duly arrested – on the evidence of the tyre mark. But an extraordinary hitch arose. Just opposite the big doors of the garage was a cottage rented for the summer by a lady artist.'

'Oh, these lady artists!' said Joyce, laughing.

'As you say, "Oh, these lady artists!" This particular one had been ill for some weeks, and, in consequence, had two hospital nurses attending her. The nurse who was on night duty had pulled her armchair up to the window, where the blind was up. She declared that the motor lorry could not have left the garage opposite

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without her seeing it, and she swore that in actual fact it never left the garage that night.'

'I don't think that is much of a problem,' said Joyce. 'The nurse went to sleep, of course. They always do.'

'That has – er – been known to happen,' said Mr Petherick, judiciously; 'but it seems to me that we are accepting facts without sufficient examination. Before accepting the testimony of the hospital nurse, we should inquire very closely into her bona fides. The alibi coming with such suspicious promptness is inclined to raise doubts in one's mind.'

'There is also the lady artist's testimony,' said Raymond. 'She declared that she was in pain, and awake most of the night, and that she would certainly have heard the lorry, it being an unusual noise, and the night being very quiet after the storm.'

'H'm,' said the clergyman, 'that is certainly an additional fact. Had Kelvin himself any alibi?'

'He declared that he was at home and in bed from ten o'clock onwards, but he could produce no witnesses in support of that statement.'

'The nurse went to sleep,' said Joyce, 'and so did the patient. Ill people always think they have never slept a wink all night.'

Raymond West looked inquiringly at Dr Pender.

'Do you know, I feel very sorry for that man Kelvin. It seems to me very much a case of "Give a dog a bad

name.” Kelvin had been in prison. Apart from the tyre mark, which certainly seems too remarkable to be coincidence, there doesn’t seem to be much against him except his unfortunate record.’

‘You, Sir Henry?’

Sir Henry shook his head.

‘As it happens,’ he said, smiling, ‘I know something about this case. So clearly I mustn’t speak.’

‘Well, go on, Aunt Jane; haven’t you got anything to say?’

‘In a minute, dear,’ said Miss Marple. ‘I am afraid I have counted wrong. Two purl, three plain, slip one, two purl – yes, that’s right. What did you say, dear?’

‘What is your opinion?’

‘You wouldn’t like my opinion, dear. Young people never do, I notice. It is better to say nothing.’

‘Nonsense, Aunt Jane; out with it.’

‘Well, dear Raymond,’ said Miss Marple, laying down her knitting and looking across at her nephew. ‘I do think you should be more careful how you choose your friends. You are so credulous, dear, so easily gulled. I suppose it is being a writer and having so much imagination. All that story about a Spanish galleon! If you were older and had more experience of life you would have been on your guard at once. A man you had known only a few weeks, too!’

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Sir Henry suddenly gave vent to a great roar of laughter and slapped his knee.

‘Got you this time, Raymond,’ he said. ‘Miss Marple, you are wonderful. Your friend Newman, my boy, has another name – several other names in fact. At the present moment he is not in Cornwall but in Devonshire – Dartmoor, to be exact – a convict in Princetown prison. We didn’t catch him over the stolen bullion business, but over the rifling of the strongroom of one of the London banks. Then we looked up his past record and we found a good portion of the gold stolen buried in the garden at Pol House. It was rather a neat idea. All along that Cornish coast there are stories of wrecked galleons full of gold. It accounted for the diver and it would account later for the gold. But a scapegoat was needed, and Kelvin was ideal for the purpose. Newman played his little comedy very well, and our friend Raymond, with his celebrity as a writer, made an unimpeachable witness.’

‘But the tyre mark?’ objected Joyce.

‘Oh, I saw that at once, dear, although I know nothing about motors,’ said Miss Marple. ‘People change a wheel, you know – I have often seen them doing it – and, of course, they could take a wheel off Kelvin’s lorry and take it out through the small door into the alley and put it on to Mr Newman’s lorry and take the lorry out of one gate down to the beach, fill

it up with the gold and bring it up through the other gate, and then they must have taken the wheel back and put it back on Mr Kelvin's lorry while, I suppose, someone else was tying up Mr Newman in a ditch. Very uncomfortable for him and probably longer before he was found than he expected. I suppose the man who called himself the gardener attended to that side of the business.'

'Why do you say, "called himself the gardener," Aunt Jane?' asked Raymond curiously.

'Well, he can't have been a real gardener, can he?' said Miss Marple. 'Gardeners don't work on Whit Monday. Everybody knows that.'

She smiled and folded up her knitting.

'It was really that little fact that put me on the right scent,' she said. She looked across at Raymond.

'When you are a householder, dear, and have a garden of your own, you will know these little things.'

Charles Osborne on

The Thirteen Problems

Alternative title: *The Tuesday Club Murders*

MISS MARPLE (1932)

Having successfully introduced her amateur detective, Miss Jane Marple, in *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), Agatha Christie wrote for a magazine a series of six short stories featuring Miss Marple. In the first story, 'The Tuesday Night Club', the old lady is entertaining a group of friends at her house in the village of St Mary Mead. Her guests are her nephew Raymond West, the novelist, and his fiancé, an artist named Joyce Lemprière; Dr Pender, the elderly clergyman of the parish (what, one wonders, has happened to the Rev. Leonard Clement, the vicar in *The Murder at the Vicarage*?); Mr Petherick, a local solicitor; and a visitor to St Mary Mead, Sir Henry Clithering, who is a retired Commissioner of Scotland Yard.

The talk turns to crime, and Joyce Lemprière suggests that they form a club, to meet every Tuesday evening. Each week, a different member of the group will propound a problem, some mystery or other of which they have personal knowledge, which the others will be invited to solve. In the first story, Sir Henry is invited to start the ball rolling. Of course, Miss Marple is the one to arrive at the correct solution every time, not because she possesses any brilliant deductive powers but because, as she puts it, 'human nature is much the same everywhere, and, of course, one has opportunities of observing it at closer quarters in a village'.

In a second series of six stories, Mrs Christie repeated the formula, the setting this time being the country house of Colonel and Mrs Bantry, near St Mary Mead, and the assembled company including Sir Henry again, the local doctor, a famous actress and, of course, Miss Marple. A separate, single story, in

which Sir Henry visits St Mary Mead yet again, to stay with his friends the Bantrys, and finds himself drawn by Miss Marple into the investigation of a local crime, was added to the earlier twelve, and the collection, dedicated to Leonard and Katherine Woolley, with whom Agatha Christie had stayed in the Middle East, was published in Great Britain as *The Thirteen Problems* and in the United States as *The Tuesday Club Murders*, though only the first six cases appear to have been discussed at meetings of the Tuesday Club.

Some of the stories are especially ingenious, and all are entertaining, though if more than one or two are read at one sitting they can become monotonous, for they are all very sedentary stories whose action is recounted in retrospect. Miss Marple solves most of the mysteries without rising from her chair, and almost without dropping a stitch in her knitting. The exception is the final story, 'Death by Drowning', which is also one of the few occasions when Agatha Christie strayed into workingclass territory. Usually, it is only the crimes of the middle and upper-classes which commend themselves to her investigators.

For all her old-world charm, and the twinkle which is never far from her china-blue eyes, Miss Marple can be stern in her opinions. Talking of a murderer whom she had brought to justice and who had been hanged, she remarks that it was a good job and that she had no patience with modern humanitarian scruples about capital punishment. Miss Marple is speaking not only for herself but also for her creator, for many years later Mrs Christie was to write:

I can suspend judgment on those who kill – but I think they are evil for the community; they bring in nothing except hate, and take from it all they can. I am

willing to believe that they are made that way, that they are born with a disability, for which, perhaps, one should pity them; but even then, I think, not spare them – because you cannot spare them any more than you could spare the man who staggers out from a plague-stricken village in the Middle Ages to mix with innocent and healthy children in a nearby village. The *innocent* must be protected; they must be able to live at peace and charity with their neighbours.

It frightens me that nobody seems to care about the innocent. When you read about a murder case, nobody seems to be horrified by the picture, say, of a fragile old woman in a small cigarette shop, turning away to get a packet of cigarettes for a young thug, and being attacked and battered to death. No one seems to care about her terror and her pain, and the final merciful unconsciousness. Nobody seems to go through the agony of the *victim* – they are only full of pity for the young killer, because of his youth.

Why should they not execute him? We have taken the lives of wolves, in this country; we didn't try to teach the wolf to lie down with the lamb – I doubt really if we could have. We hunted down the wild boar in the mountains before he came down and killed the children by the brook. Those were our enemies – and we destroyed them.¹³

Imprisonment for life, Mrs Christie goes on to say, is more cruel than the cup of hemlock in ancient Greece. The best answer ever found, she suspects, was transportation: 'A vast land of emptiness, peopled only with primitive human beings, where man could live in simpler surroundings.' Well, yes, but of course the price one pays for that is the Australia of today!

Five minor points about *The Thirteen Problems*, two concerned with Christie carelessness and three with Christie parsimony: (i) in one of the stories, 'phenomena' is used as though it were a singular, and not the plural of 'phenomenon'; (ii) in *The Thirteen Problems*, Raymond West's fiancée is called Joyce

but, in later Christie stories, after they are married, she is always referred to as Joan; (iii) variations on the plot of one of the stories, 'The Blood-Stained Pavement', will be presented in the story 'Triangle at Rhodes' in *Murder in the Mews* (1937) and in the novel, *Evil Under the Sun* (1941); (iv) the plot of another story, 'The Companion', will be made use of again in the novel, *A Murder is Announced* (1950); (v) an element in the plot of 'The Herb of Death' will re-occur in *Postern of Fate* (1973).

Agatha Christie always considered that Miss Marple was at her best in the solving of short problems, which did not involve her in doing anything other than sitting and thinking, and that the real essence of her character was to be found in the stories collected together in *The Thirteen Problems*.

About Charles Osborne

This essay was adapted from Charles Osborne's *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie: A Biographical Companion to the Works of Agatha Christie* (1982, rev. 1999). Mr. Osborne was born in Brisbane in 1927. He is known internationally as an authority on opera, and has written a number of books on musical and literary subjects, among them *The Complete Operas of Verdi* (1969); *Wagner and His World* (1977); and *W.H. Auden: The Life of a Poet* (1980). An addict of crime fiction and the world's leading authority on Agatha Christie, Charles Osborne adapted the Christie plays *Black Coffee* (Poirot); *Spider's Web*; and *The Unexpected Guest* into novels. He lives in London.

¹³Agatha Christie: *op. cit.*

About Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie is known throughout the world as the Queen of Crime. Her books have sold over a billion copies in English and another billion in 100 foreign languages. She is the most widely published author of all time and in any language, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. Mrs Christie is the author of eighty crime novels and short story collections, nineteen plays, and six novels written under the name of Mary Westmacott.

Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was written towards the end of World War I (during which she served in the Voluntary Aid Detachments). In it she created Hercule Poirot, the little Belgian investigator who was destined to become the most popular detective in crime fiction since Sherlock Holmes. After having been rejected by a number of houses, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was eventually published by The Bodley Head in 1920.

In 1926, now averaging a book a year, Agatha Christie wrote her masterpiece. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was the first of her books to be published by William Collins and marked the beginning of an author-publisher relationship that lasted for fifty years and produced over seventy books. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was also the first of Agatha Christie's works to be dramatised — as *Alibi* — and to have a successful run in London's West End. *The Mousetrap*, her most famous play, opened in 1952 and runs to this day at St Martin's Theatre in the West End; it is the longest-running play in history.

Agatha Christie was made a Dame in 1971. She died in 1976, since when a number of her books have been published: the bestselling novel *Sleeping Murder* appeared in 1976, followed by *An Autobiography* and the short story collections *Miss Marple's Final Cases*; *Problem at Pollensa Bay*; and *While the Light Lasts*. In 1998, *Black Coffee* was the first of her plays to be novelised by Charles Osborne, Mrs Christie's biographer.

The Agatha Christie Collection

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Dumb Witness
Death on the Nile
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* novelised by Charles Osborne

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Third Girl
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A Caribbean Mystery
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By the Pricking of My Thumbs
Postern of Fate

Published as Mary Westmacott

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An Autobiography
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Play Collections

The Mousetrap and Selected Plays
Witness for the Prosecution and
Selected Plays

THE THIRTEEN PROBLEMS by Agatha Christie

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