

WIZARD of WOOD

He Took a Fortune From Lonely, Trusting Widows, but
His Brazen Glibness Could Not Keep Him Out of Jail

1951

By Elgar Brown

WARDEN JOSEPH E. RAGEN pushed a button on his desk in Stateville Penitentiary, Joliet, Ill., a short time ago and when an attendant appeared told him to have Convict No. 29,157 brought in.

In a little while, before the warden, stood No. 29,157, a small, erect, elderly man with sharp blue eyes and a manner of complete composure. It was the same manner which has characterized him through years of the most extraordinary duplicity, for he was Sigmund S. Engel, whose determined boast is that in his romantic career he has taken at least \$1,000,000 from more trusting women than he can remember.

When he began to serve a two-to-ten-year term last year for swindling one of his victims, a red-haired Chicago widow, it was generally believed that prison bars would end his outside interests. But Warden Ragen on this day recently had a reason to suspect that this wasn't altogether true.

"Look at these," he said to the 74-year-old convict, "What do you make of them?"

He pushed across the desk a pile of business stationery, with letterheads printed on a fine grade of paper. They had been mailed in New York City and addressed to No. 29,157.

At the top of each sheet were the words:

"Sigmund S. Engel, Lover of 1,001 Women, 610 West End Avenue., New York."

In the lower left hand corner was a large red heart and beneath it: "Mrs. Pauline Engel, President; S. S. Engel, Vice President; John Langton, Jr., publicity director."

The great lover stood silent for a moment and the warden went on:

"So you've been planning to operate a new enterprise here inside the prison," he said. "What will you think of next?"

No. 29,157 found his voice then.

1301

"Oh, I'll think of something, warden," he answered. "I always do. But I didn't think up this. The letterheads themselves prove that."

"How?" the warden asked.

"If this were my doing, I wouldn't be Vice President. I'd be President."

"Take him away," the warden told the guard and threw the letterheads in a wastebasket.

In the brazen, though thwarted, attempt to operate an enterprise behind prison bars Engel had the outside help of one of the women who has stood by him although she at first charged he had taken \$50,000 from her the day after their marriage.

She is Mrs. Pauline Langton Engel, 40, of New York City—a blonde who sometimes carries a poodle. It was she who was listed as "President" on the stationery and later she explained its significance.

"The letterheads are for what's going to be a publishing business," she said. "We plan to publish Sam's letters and memoirs. He's working on a script for a movie, too. We'll make money to get him out of prison and back in his rightful place in society."

The great lover for some time has been trying to return to what he says is his rightful place. He's typed a 14-page petition to the Cook County Criminal Court demanding that his conviction be vacated. Typical of its language is this excerpt:

"Ah, the feebleness of this indictment! Ah, the monstrosity of its iniquity!"

This appears hardly likely to worry officials. The self-termed "gentleman of the world," they believe, will stay snug and safe in Joliet, where he was sentenced last year after a jury in Chicago convicted him. He had been charged with swindling Mrs. Reseda Corrigan, 40, of Chicago, out of her \$8,700 life savings.

At Engel's trial, the prosecution declared that he had charmed many other women, mar-



ried some and swindled both those he wed and those he didn't.

"He's a greater swindler than Yellow Kid Weil," James Brown, assistant state's attorney, said. "He spent 23 years and 10 months in prisons and all of the time was for swindling women. Now, perhaps, his time has run out."

This gabby Romeo, however, has never seemed to be afraid his time would run out. Although after his last arrest police said their information was that he had taken \$305,000 from lonely widows he had wooed, he stoutly claimed the sum should be reported as \$1,000,000 or more, as if that added to his prestige.

He has even appeared to preen himself, telling of the way he had with well-to-do and unattached women.

"Give a woman a love potion of flattery and make yourself out a great fellow," he said when asked after his arrest what his romantic secret was.

He was always making himself out a great fellow. Among his aliases he included "Lord Beaverbrook," and he called himself "The Wizard of Woo." When he had money he liked to show it off. He liked to babble about his fondness for poetry and philosophy. He has mentioned that his favorite authors were such an unlikely group as Plato, Freud, Lord Byron and Schopenhauer.

"Women are my career," he once said. "It's similar to kleptomania. I call it woman-mania."

While officials look on this posturing as nonsense, they think very seriously of the ends to which it has led the little man with the big ears and long nose. At large, he has been an imposter leaving a trail of sadness and closed-out bank accounts.

Big talk and fine phrases have served him well in cottages and apartments from coast to coast. They have opened doors for him.

It isn't likely, however, that they will melt iron bars.

THE AMERICAN WEEKLY

