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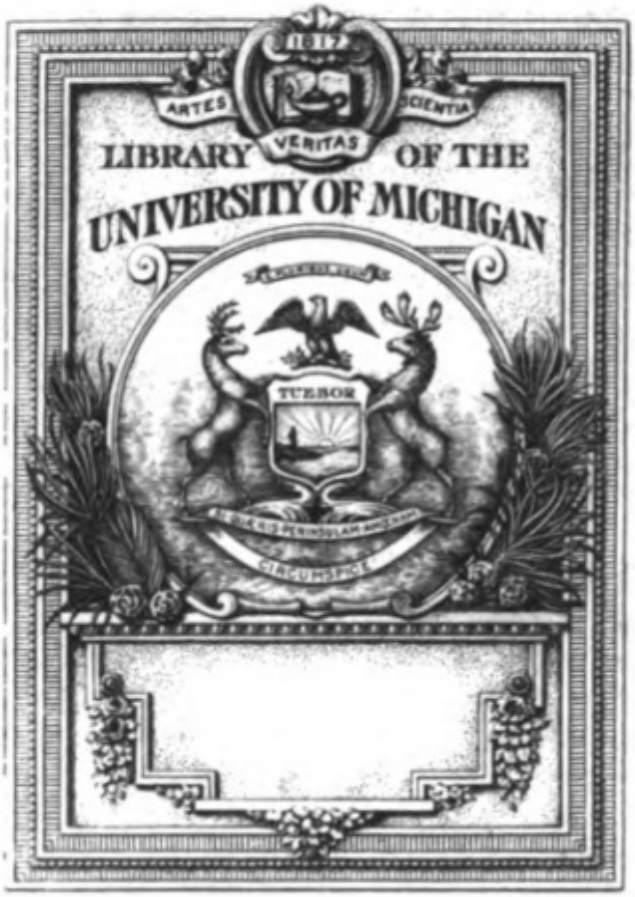

BEQUEST OF
ORMA FITCH BUTLER, PH.D., '07
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TWENTY MINUTES TO KILL

By Arthur M. Chase

High above the city in a penthouse as luxurious as modern invention and modern capital could make it, a party dined and chatted at the sumptuous table of Edward S. Tilden. The guests were a curious collection —suave, smart, gay and even brilliant apparently, but in reality (as was to become only too evident later on) there were cross currents of envy, jealousy, greed, and a strange tangle of interwoven emotions.

"Stick 'em up!"

The command was barked by a masked figure at the pantry door and confusion reigned.

And thus commences the series of events which developed into the most sensational case of the season. For murder—coldly calculated and subtly planned murder—followed swiftly.

In Twenty Minutes to Kill, Arthur M. Chase has constructed one of the most intricate and brilliant of his many mystery stories. The reader will find herein enough subtle detection, perplexing puzzles and spine-chilling thrills to "kill" many more than twenty minutes.

By the Same Author

THE PARTY AT THE PENTHOUSE

DANGER IN THE DARK

MURDER OF A MISSING MAN

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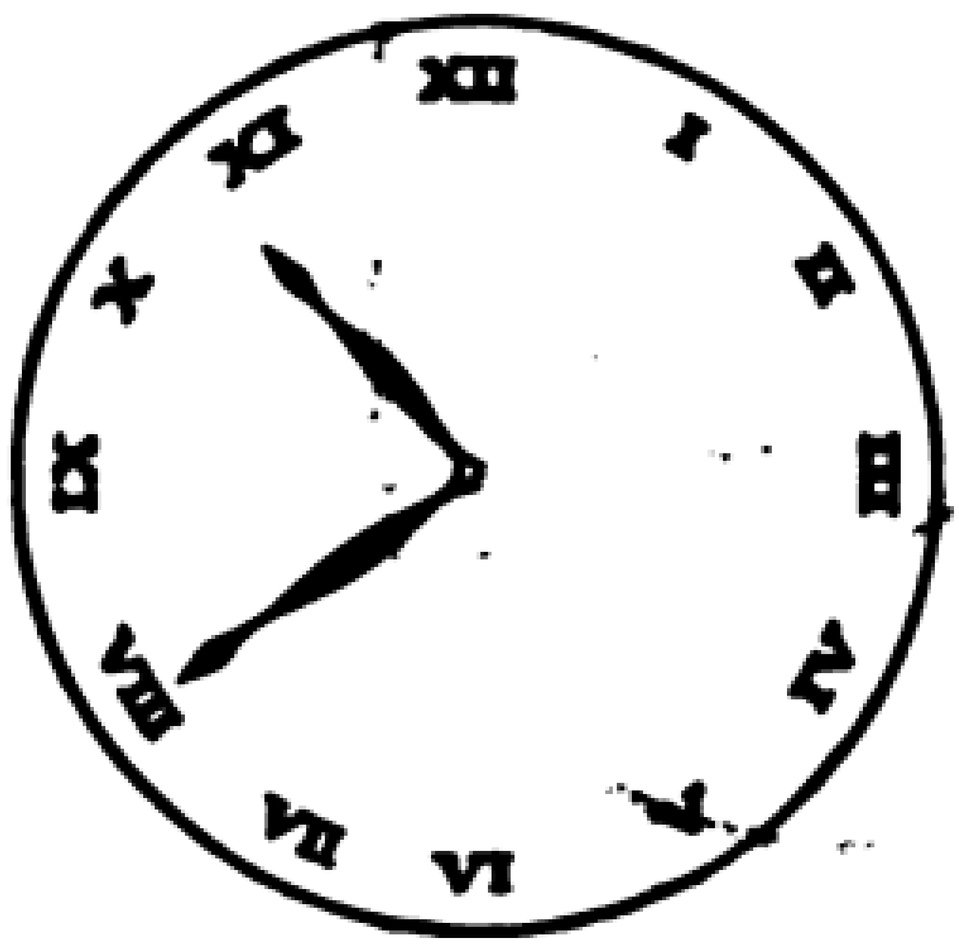

By

ARTHUR M. CHASE

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
New York 1936

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To

EDWARD H. DODD

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TWENTY MINUTES TO KILL

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CHAPTER I

THE BUTLER SERVES

THE BUTLER was serving wine. Moving noiselessly and deferentially from place to place, he made the act of filling each glass in some slight measure a ceremony, as if to emphasize that he was pouring Chablis of the vintage of 1900; a real Grand Chablis, rare and costly.

From the dozen people sitting around the table rose a hum of modulated voices, little bursts of laughter, occasional words or sentences emerging now and then above the murmur of conversation. Candles threw a mellow light on silver and glassware and flowers, on linen and mahogany, on the bright gowns of women and on the white shirt fronts of men.

"White shirt fronts are more or less as they used to be," Miss Townsend soliloquized, "but where are the gleaming white shoulders of yesteryear? Women, nowadays, are pretty well covered up in front; but be-

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hind—well! As for me, having no back, only a backbone, I don't show it."

Miss Townsend's gown might have been labeled 1910 conservative style. But it went with her hair which she wore in a pompadour, after the fashion of 1910 or earlier. However Miss Townsend dressed in the manner which she thought best fitted her, and somehow the old-fashioned clothes suited the spare, tiny lady with her face innocent of cosmetics, with her alert expression and shrewd, bright eyes.

With quick, birdlike pecks she ate her boiled filet of pompano and glanced about her. At the head of the table sat her host, Edward Spencer Tilden, large, suave, pompous, whose well-fed face and figure gave evidence of years of good living. He was the sort of man who can be seen in the lounges of the most expensive hotels both here and abroad, and in the smoking rooms of the biggest and fastest steamships, quietly dressed but with a hang and fit to his clothes that only an expensive tailor can achieve. Miss Townsend's glance noted his silky, black mustache above full, red lips, his flushed face, the jowls that were beginning to develop under his jaw.

"Never done a stroke of work in his life," was her inward comment; "he's only played at living. I'm afraid he's as soft as he looks right through to the marrow."

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