

SECRET SERVICE

True Stories of Experiences in the State, War, Treasury and Postoffice Departments by
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No. 9.—The Trader's Five.

THERE was a time during the 70s when counterfeiting was carried on to a greater extent than now. In fact, it became a very serious menace to the circulation of the country. Numerous bogus bills of all kinds and denominations were floating around the United States, and many a time it was a toss up as to whether or not a bill was good or bad, so perfect were the imitations.

The secret service at this time was not in the best of shape; it was openly bruted about that many of the operatives were in sympathy with the gang of counterfeiters. Evidently this gang had a central or national organization, because every counterfeit bill in the country was employed to defend him. Ball to the extent of \$20,000 or \$25,000 was readily furnished many times for men totally unknown in the city wherein they were caught. Then when the case was called the accused would not appear; ball would be declared forfeited, and immediately paid without waiting for its collection to be enforced by the slow process of law. The gang was strongly fortified with two kinds of money—"green goods" or counterfeit, which was circulated among the general public, and "shike" or real money, which was used in the defense of those unfortunate enough to be caught.

Finally, so bold and general did the gang become, that the entire subject was laid before a cabinet meeting in Washington and drastic measures determined upon. It was Secretary Boutwell who recommended that Col. H. C. Whitney be appointed chief of the secret service and given special instructions to stop the counterfeiting. Whitney was consulted and, after much deliberation, agreed to accept the position, provided he was given a free hand as to men and expense. Politics and pull were to be eschewed; he was to choose his own operatives and run the department as his judgment dictated.

Whitney obtained the desired results. The gang was broken up, and many of its members sent to jail or compelled to remain in hiding. There were, of course, a great many curious and exciting cases which were carried to a successful conclusion, but one of the most interesting was that of the "Trader's Five," so called because of a counterfeit \$5 bill of the Traders' National bank of Chicago. The spurious bill was well-nigh perfect, but, as is usually the case, there was a slight difference in the details of the bill. The cashier's signature had a curve to the letter J made slightly unlike the original; the letter S of "Traders" barely crossed a given line, taking almost a microscope to detect.

As soon as its existence became known the secret service men in Chicago were placed at work on the case. No headway was made. Outside help was called in; still no clew as to the identity of the gang uttering this bill. Chief Whitney, at Washington, was charged, and at long distance began to direct the case. The long-distance operatives had about given up in despair when, one day, Charles Mason, in charge of the local office, received an order from Whitney directing him (Mason) and another man to be at Shenandoah, Ia., two days hence. They were to arrive after dark, and at 8 o'clock the same evening they were to board a train leaving Shenandoah for St. Joseph, Mo.

At the station, a stationer, a stationer south of Shenandoah two strange men, one carrying a sole leather valise, were to board the train. These two men, Mason and his partner, were to watch—not for one instant were they to lose sight of them. At St. Joseph the two strangers would leave the train and be joined by a third party, who would be awaiting them at the station. As soon as this meeting took place all three of them were to be arrested, and a full report made by wire to Washington. Extraordinary care was to be taken to get the leather valise.

Mason studied these instructions very carefully. They were specific and to the point. He was somewhat puzzled as to who to take with him. Most of his men were busy on important cases and to take any one of them off at this time might work hard. Col. Jack Cheney was a warm personal friend of his; they had known each other many years together; perhaps he would do it. Cheney was the head of a big detective service company, and could command big prices for his service, but there ran in his veins that always unsatisfied longing for action and excitement. If he could take Cheney, Mason felt assured of success, and he wanted success for two reasons. One was that if he and then, too, he was ambitious and aspired to a higher position in the service.

When Mason's name was brought in to Cheney by the faithful left he was quite busy, but he put everything aside and bade his old friend welcome. Mason explained his mission and added: "That's the whole story, Cheney, and I'd like to have you go if you can. It will only take two or three days' time at best and I haven't anything very important on hand now."

Mason handed Cheney his chief's letter and together they studied its contents carefully. "No mistaking the chief's intent; is there, Chuck?" said Cheney. "That's true," replied Mason. "The old man appears to have it all worked out like a chess problem. It doesn't look like a very pleasant job, though. That train leaving Shenandoah at 8 p. m. reaches St. Joe at 11 in the morning. The two men are to be joined by a third party, and we are to pinch the whole crowd. Our work is cut out all right."

Well did Chief Whitney know the caliber of the man he had so wisely chosen. Mason did not know the meaning of the word fear; he had been in many a hard-fought scrap with cowards, smugglers and counterfeiters, and carried scars of more than one bullet wound. If his chief had ordered him to arrest a dozen men he would have made the attempt. Truly did he possess the Balaklava spirit:

"There's not to reason why; There's but to do and die."

"What case do you reckon this is, Mason?"

"Hanged if I know, Cheney. There's a whole slew of them on now. You can bet the old man knows what he's talking about. He's the best 'long-distance detective' I know."

Two days later they took a train and reached Shenandoah after dark. At 8 p. m. they boarded the St. Joe train, and at the first station south "two men, one carrying a sole leather valise," got aboard. Mason and Cheney saw them enter the car immediately in rear of the one in which they were sitting. The leather valise appeared to be rather heavy, and was carefully guarded.

The train conductor, Jack Bellamy, knew Mason quite well, in fact, had served with him during the war, and greeted him pleasantly.

"Hello, Mason, what's on tonight?" "Go through your train," replied Mason. "Then come back here, and I'll tell you. Watch out for two men in the next car." Briefly he described the men.

When Bellamy returned he sat down opposite Mason and Cheney, and quietly Mason told him the lay.

"Now, Jack," continued Mason, "I don't want those birds to get on to either me or Cheney. They may know us, and they may not; but we won't give them a chance. Keep your eye on them, and when we get to St. Joe we may need a little of your help." Bellamy had a hankering for a good scrimmage.

"All right, Mason," he replied. "I don't know what it's all about, but I'm with you whatever it is. I'll put my head man in that car with orders not to leave it. He's all right. You fellows can ride here, and we'll all be on hand when we reach St. Joe."

At five minutes to one Mason and Cheney took a position in the rear of the first car, so they could see every passenger of the first car alight. The brakeman had purposely locked the rear door, so they would, perforce, have to leave by the front. Bellamy, the conductor, was near the rear end of the second coach, intending to follow the suspected men as they left the car. This literally put them between two fires. Mason and Cheney intended to jump off right after the suspects and nab them as soon as they were met by the third party.

It was a damp, dismal night, and there was a steady rain falling. The train slowly pulled into the old Burlington depot. It was before the days of electricity, and the dim, yellow, flickering gaslight only accentuated the darkness. Truly, an ideal night down for devilment of any kind.

As soon as the train stopped the suspects alighted and started quickly down the platform. Unfortunately, Mason and Cheney were caught in a crowd. As soon as possible they extricated themselves, and scarcely 10 seconds elapsed before they jumped to the platform, followed by Bellamy.

But their birds had flown; disappeared as if swallowed up by the earth. It was a predicament and a nasty one. They had been ordered to do a certain thing, and right on the eve of its accomplishment they were balked. "Well, I'm damned!" ejaculated Cheney. "You will be all right, and so will I," said Mason, "when the chief hears of this. I've read of mysterious disappearances before this, but those fellows did the 'fade away' act in a high-class manner." Bellamy was too nonplussed to speak.

After a careful search of the depot and the adjoining grounds, Mason and Cheney checked their valises and went up town. Bellamy was at the end of his run and went along. Jack Bellamy was chief of police at the time, and they quickly routed him out. Mason told him the story.

"Those birds are in town all right enough, Walsh, and we want them. We've just got to have them or my job won't be worth a cent." All of which was absolutely true. Chief Whitney would brook no excuse whatever. The case was too important; there were the two men indicated in his orders, in plain view all the time, until they met the third man, and the party of three—vanished into thin air! No, Mason's salvation depended on finding the three men, and landing them high and dry behind bars. The "sole leather valise" must be secured at all hazards.

Walsh Agnew, of course, knew St. Joe like a book, and in those days it was a typical river town; neither better nor worse than others. There were plenty of saloons, dance halls and gambling places, and the four men started out to make a systematic tour, taking in every place. Not a sign of

their quarry, and finally Chief Agnew said: "Well, fellows, I'm near beat. There's one new place, old man; Leftrich's dance hall, and if they are not there it's ten to one St. Joe doesn't hold them; that is, not the 'under' part of the city."

Mason was mad—mad all the way through. "They're in this town all right, Walsh. They couldn't get out on a train until 8 o'clock, and the country roads are so bad a team couldn't pull a wagon very far. Some house holds them, and I'm going to find the gentlemen if I have to search every house in town. Chief Whitney expects a wire in the morning, and we've got to have it."

Leftrich's place was a typical dance hall, a long, low, rambling shack standing just across the Hannibal and St. Joe railroad tracks and right on the bank of the Missouri river. Ugly stories had been told about crimes committed within the shack, and all evidences thereof cast into the swirling torrent of the Big Muddy. Be that as it may, old Leftrich himself was not an entire stranger to the force. His revolver butt had two nicks, and he had "done time" down in Jeff City. In St. Joe, however, he had played as fair as one of his class could play. True, he ran a dance hall with gambling attachments, and once in a while, doubtless, some of the light-fingered gentility had taken refuge there, but "Leftrich," as he was called, steered clear from doing any action by which he might be judged an accessory before or after the fact. His virtues would not entitle him to a place in Sunday school, but he wouldn't sacrifice himself nor his liberty for any crook or gang of crooks. They might meet there, and so long as the last didn't intervene he wouldn't raise any rumpus. Virtuous Leftrich! He knew Agnew, of course, and he also knew Mason; therefore, when he saw these men enter his place he glanced anxiously around the room to see who they might be after.

There was a haze of blue, rank-smelling tobacco smoke, the clink of glasses, and ribald songs and jests of men and the pity of it—women, too, habitues of the place. At one end was the bar, backed by bright mirrors, in front of which were the ornate bottles filled with what has truly been called "hot fire and blue ruin." A fero game was in progress; poker and keno held forth. Such was the scene greeting the eyes of Mason and his party.

Many an anxious glance was cast at

the officers; perhaps more than one heart beat faster in anticipation of a "pinch," probably nine-tenths of the entire crowd should have been behind the bars. But it was not ordinary game Mason and his party wanted. They wanted "three men and a sole leather valise."

Leftrich came forward rubbing his hands like an oily gammon. "Good evening, gentlemen; what can I do for you this evening, or morning, rather? Have a drink on the house?"

"No," replied Agnew, "we're just looking 'round a bit." Smooth old "Leftrich" knew what "looking 'round a bit" meant. His eyes and ears were wide open. "They're not here, evidently," said Agnew to Mason sotto voce.

Now, Charley Mason was born on Friday, and the 13th of the month. He was a great believer in "hunches"—some of his greatest successes were founded on "hunches." He suddenly became possessed of one this night. It was working overtime. In this respect he was like Cheney's friend Guthrie, and Cheney had occasion to be thankful for Guthrie's hunch at one time—it saved his life; therefore his views coincided with Mason's. Quickly Mason glanced around the room, taking in everything. A door to one side and in rear of the bar attracted his attention.

"I'm not so sure of that, Walsh." Then to Leftrich, "Where does that door lead to?"

"That—falterer Leftrich—"oh—that—that—leads to a private room. Sometimes we rent it to select parties for a quiet little game."

Just then a shrill female voice came from the "private room." "Now, Ed, loosen up. Order another round of drinks; you've got plenty of the green." "Darned 'select' bunch in there now," continued Mason. "Who are they?"

"Strangers to me," said "Leftrich." "Three men and some lady friends. Only been there about an hour; had several drinks."

Every sense within Mason, Cheney, Agnew and Bellamy was alert; the trail was getting warm. "Did they have a 'sole leather valise'?" queried Mason. "Yes, I believe they did. There was the quarry run to earth at last. They could not get out of that back room save by coming through the bar unless they wanted to take the chance of a 50-foot drop in the Missouri."

"Leftrich," said Mason, "we want those men and we are going to get them. This looks like a pretty ugly crowd here. You know them. You hold them in check while we go in there, and if any monkey business goes on I'll fill you full of holes first clip."

Celerity of movement is always an essential to success, and Mason, Agnew, Cheney and Bellamy quickly crossed the floor. Trusty six-shooters were nervously fixed, and smash! in went the door.

"Hands up, everybody," commanded Mason, as he sprang in, closely followed by Agnew and Cheney, while Bellamy kept his eye on the crowd in the rear room. "Hands even up," but in one was a derringer. Bang! Out went one of the flaring kerosene lamps, and before the second could be extinguished "Bang!" spoke Mason's gun, and the wrist of the hand that was setting as a light extinguisher was shattered by a well directed bullet. The women screamed and backed against one side of the wall.

Smash! the butt of Mason's gun came down on the head of the nearest man, and he went down in a heap. One of the others grabbed "the sole leather valise" and made a break for the door. Mason tackled him, and after a struggle brought him down, while Agnew and Cheney slipped the bracelets on the other two. Their hunt was ended, and the party quickly made their way to the police station.

The prisoners were locked up and an inspection made of the valise. As soon as it was opened out rolled package after package of "green goods."

"The Traders' five, by all that's good," said Mason. "And yes," continued Cheney, delving deeper in the valise, "here's the plate. Say, Charley, maybe this isn't a rich haul."

"It's rich, all right enough; but where would I have been if we hadn't made the haul? I tell you a hunch is a great thing when it works right."

"Mason," said Cheney, when they had placed their prisoners in jail and had retired to a room for a few hours' sleep, "I'm glad you asked me to come with you. You needn't put in a bill for my services."

"Why not, Jack?"

"Well, you see," replied Cheney, with a broad smile, "I was directly interested in the case, and I did not know it. I got taken in by their clever counterfeiter work. Look here," and taking out his pocketbook he extracted

therefrom and laid on the table the Traders' five-dollar bill. "Beautiful, aren't they, Mason? But Mason had gone to sleep."

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