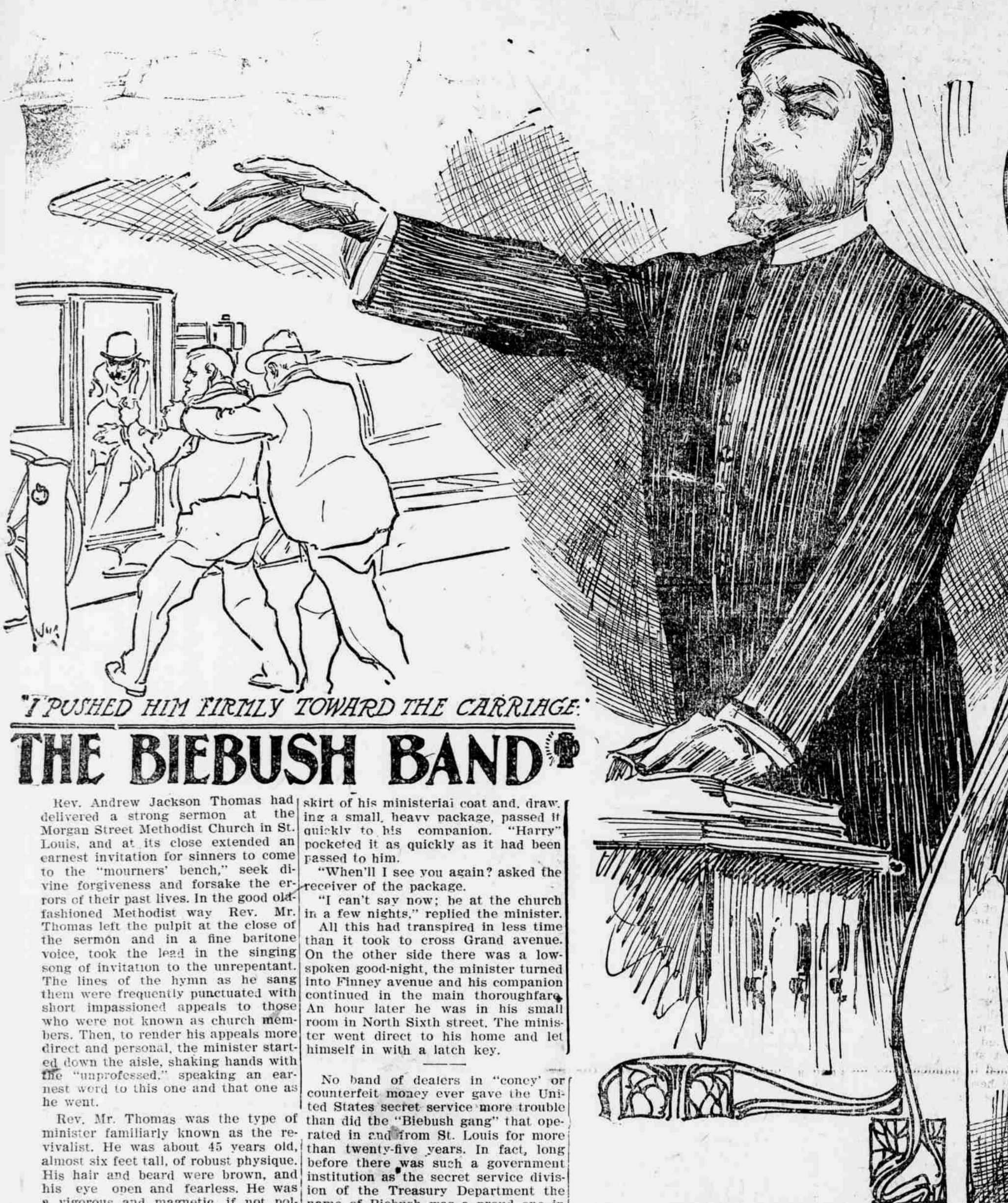


Stories of The Secret Service,

By : : : : :
Captain Patrick D. Tyrrell



"I PUSHED HIM FIRMLY TOWARD THE CARRIAGE." THE BIEBUSH BAND

Rev. Andrew Jackson Thomas had delivered a strong sermon at the Morgan Street Methodist Church in St. Louis, and at its close extended an earnest invitation for sinners to come to the "mourners' bench," seek divine forgiveness and forsake the errors of their past lives. In the good old-fashioned Methodist way, Rev. Mr. Thomas left the pulpit at the close of the sermon and in a fine baritone voice, took the lead in the singing of invitation to the unrepentant. The lines of the hymn as he sang them were frequently punctuated by short impassioned appeals to those who were not known as church members. Then, to render his appeals more direct and personal, the minister started down the aisle, shaking hands with the "unrepented," speaking an earnest word to this one and that one as he went.

Rev. Mr. Thomas was the type of minister familiarly known as the revivalist. He was about 45 years old, almost six feet tall, of robust physique. His hair and beard were brown, and his eye open and fearless. He was a vigorous and magnetic, if not polished speaker, a fine singer, a good "mixer" among all classes and apparently imbued with a sincere desire to bring sinners to repentance. He had not been in St. Louis long at the time of which I am writing, twenty-six years ago, during his residence there, by his devotion to his ministerial labors, had endeared himself to the little flock of Christian men and women worshipping in the church at Morgan and Twenty-fourth streets. While he was passing among the sinners in his congregation the night on which I introduce Rev. Mr. Thomas to my readers he stopped at a pew well toward the rear of the church. The visitor was a plainly dressed man of middle age, evidently a workman. The minister spoke a few words to him, still grasping his hand, and there was some response by the visitor. The conversation held in undertones so that the words passed between the two were not distinguishable by those near. The incident was not different, to all appearances, from a score of others in the church that night when the minister importuned the wayward to repent.

The church services ended, Rev. Mr. Thomas left the building with several members of the congregation, chatting of religious matters, until their homeward paths diverged. No attention had been paid the visitor at the church after the minister apparently had failed in including him to come to the "mourners' bench," but he had left before the services closed and had taken a rapid westerly course. As soon as the pastor separated from the members of his flock he walked well out of their sight and hearing in a leisurely way and then suddenly adopted a quick, business-like gait. Walking rapidly west to Grand avenue he turned north. His home was in Finney avenue, west of Grand avenue, and near the intersection of these thoroughfares the "Rock" church an imposing Catholic edifice, loomed blackly in the night, casting deep shadows over the sidewalk on the east side of Grand avenue. As he approached this point Rev. Mr. Thomas slackened his pace and became alert, peering ahead into the shadows as though looking for some one. He was not disappointed. From the opposite direction, thing his pace so that he would meet the minister in the deepest shadows of the church, emerged the man who had occupied the rear pew at the evening church service. There were no other pedestrians in sight.

"Hello, Harry," said the minister in a low tone, halting.
"Hello, Andy," responded the other, swinging about and falling into the preacher's stride.
Glancing furtively around him, Rev. Mr. Thomas thrust his hand under the

skirt of his ministerial coat and, drawing a small, heavy package, passed it quickly to his companion. "Harry" pocketed it as quickly as it had been passed to him.
"When'll I see you again?" asked the receiver of the package.
"I can't say now; he at the church in a few nights," replied the minister. All this had transpired in less time than it took to cross Grand avenue. On the other side there was a low-spoken good-night, the minister turned into Finney avenue and his companion continued in the main thoroughfare. An hour later he was in his small room in North Sixth street. The minister went direct to his home and let himself in with a latch key.

No band of dealers in "coney" or counterfeit money ever gave the United States secret service more trouble than did the "Biebush gang" that operated in and from St. Louis for more than twenty-five years. In fact, long before there was such a government institution as the secret service division of the Treasury Department the name of Biebush was a proud one in criminal circles. It had been carried to distinction in the annals of crime by Frederick Biebush, who was born in Prussia in 1823 and emigrated to this country when he was 21 years old. Prior to his arrival in America nothing is known of him, but his history since is a romance of crime. His whole life was devoted to crime as a chosen profession, and his principal pursuit had been the exacting one of a wholesale dealer in counterfeit money. In this business he had gained the sobriquet of the "great south-west koniacker."

The readers of this narrative who read my recent account of the events leading up to the attempt to steal the body of Abraham Lincoln will recall that I then made clear the different hands through which counterfeit money passes before it reaches the public. The engraver, printer, dealer, shover and bootle carrier each has his distinct function to perform in the process of robbing the people. The dealer is the circulator, and if he has suitable plates or dies, can flood the country with counterfeit money long after every engraver or diecutter in the business is behind prison bars.

To the business of dealing in "coney" Biebush had devoted his time and genius, yet he found leisure to act as a receiver of stolen goods, and was the patron and financial backer of thieves and burglars. He furnished the engravers of counterfeit plates with capital, helped produce the plates, bought plates, bought presses, ink and paper, and then found trustworthy men to act as his agents in the circulation of the spurious currency. For thirty years he had followed his chosen calling with unequalled success, his bold and profitable operations extending from Illinois to Texas.

Within a year of his arrival in the United States Fred Biebush began his criminal career. He was then a broad-shouldered man of fine physical appearance. The year 1850 found him keeping a saloon called the War Eagle, after a famous steamboat of antebellum days, in Third street, St. Louis. His place was frequented by river men of the better class, for he was a jovial chap and a good business man as well. I am not familiar with the way in which suspicion first attached to him, but one day the St. Louis police raided his saloon, and buried in the walls they found an immense lot of stolen silverware, plate and jewelry. There is said to have been found a good-sized sack of watches. He was arrested, but escaped punishment. At this time his permanent headquarters were established in St. Louis, but his agents worked throughout the entire Mississippi Valley. Personally he dealt at wholesale only, negotiating with extreme caution and keenness of discernment for the sale of very large quantities of his wares.

In Missouri at that time there was a state law which provided that the testimony of no man who had served a penitentiary term was admissible in the courts of the state. Fred Biebush was familiar with this provision and followed one rule—as immutable in his business as the laws of Medes and Persians—never to deal directly with any man who could not prove he had been a convict. And he went even further toward the extreme of caution, for the sale of counterfeit money with an ex-convict and would receive from such a one the honest money in payment for the bogus currency, he would invariably deliver the "coney" through the hands of a third party. So far as I know there is no man who can say he ever received "coney" from Fred Biebush except his time-tested personal agents. His rule against doing business with any ex-convict was the thing that rendered it practically impossible to convict him. Besides observing the precaution mentioned he usually succeeded in bringing his subordinates under his power so that his safety was theirs. For twenty-five years he pursued his criminal career unpunished.

At the end of the civil war Colonel H. C. Whitley was appointed in charge of the newly-organized secret service and determined to bring such criminals as Fred Biebush, "Pete" McCartney, John Hart, "Bill" Burney, Thomas Hale and other notorious counterfeiters to justice. Operative John Eagan was put in charge of the St. Louis district, and after much work, arrested Biebush for selling counterfeit money. Eagan pushed the case with a vigor unknown to Biebush, forced the prisoner to early trial, and succeeded in having him sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary. The wily old German stayed behind the bars exactly one-half that many months, when he returned to St. Louis and resumed operations.

Under the direction of Colonel Whitley a "stool pigeon" named McCabe was sent to Biebush and succeeded in paying him marked money for "coney." Biebush was arrested again in 1869. He had, as usual, "fixed" the government's witnesses and thought he was again to escape. In the meantime, however, William Shelley had been caught in the act of engraving a plate. The secret service learned that he had recently come from St. Louis, where he had made some plates for Biebush. Shelley was induced to return to St. Louis and tell his story in court. When Biebush appeared in court he was suddenly brought face to face with Shelley, and his bravado failed him for the first time. He escaped from the courtroom, forfeiting \$20,000 bail and disappeared.

Secret service operatives were put on his trail. A close watch was kept on the movements of Mrs. Biebush, who, in a day or so was traced to Cabaret Island, opposite the town of Venice in the Mississippi River. There she met her husband in a corn field Biebush retiring to a hut in which he had taken shelter. The hut was surrounded and several shots fired to frighten the fugitive out. The shots were returned by the counterfeiter. Then the hut was fired. Biebush rushed out and made a mad dash for liberty, but was caught at a high fence, and after being manacled,

by use of money or his secret power taken back to St. Louis. Once more he was tried, and in December, 1870, he was sentenced to fifteen years in the Missouri penitentiary.
He served five years and again was paroled, returning to St. Louis to resume not only his old calling, but to set up as a dealer in high-class burglars' tools. John Eagan had retired from the secret service to private life and I was transferred to the St. Louis district from Chicago to manage the pursuit of Biebush.

Here, then, was not a mysterious crime, the perpetrator of which was unknown, as I suppose should be the case in all well ordered detective stories, but the task of fastening guilt on a man who had had a criminal reputation for more than a third of a century, been arrested forty-nine times and, profiting by the lesson of the past, was following his vocation with greater caution than he had exercised before.

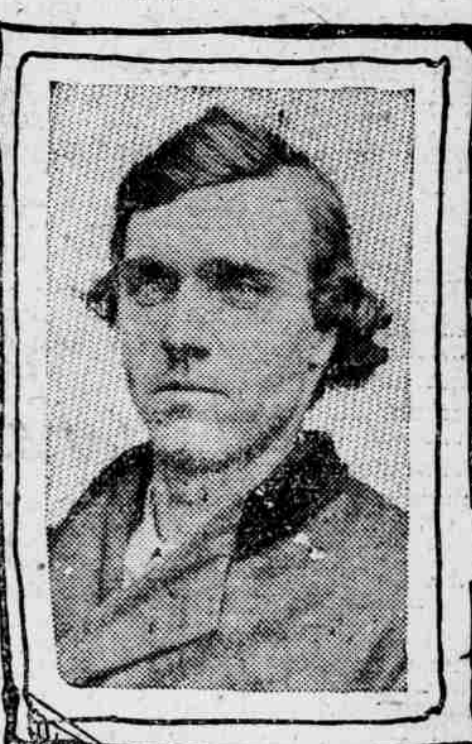
When I took up the effort to put "old Fred" Biebush where he could make the government no more trouble he was busy circulating brass, silver-plated coins in denominations of 25 and 50 cent pieces and dollars. These coins could not be classed as clever counterfeits, presenting an almost perfect appearance, but being noticeably light in weight. He was also circulating the spurious \$20 United States treasury note engraved by "Pete" McCartney and the bills known at the Richmond tens. The former was a perfect piece of work.

The Richmond bills were made from a "skeleton" plate in which the name of the bank was left blank. Other plates were then used in connection with it on which nothing was engraved but the names of the Richmond, Muncie and Lafayette, Ind., banks. An issue of bills was struck from the principal plate. Part of this issue would be run through the press on one of the other plates, thus filling in the name of the bank desired. And here I may say that the engraver of the Richmond plate was never found, so far as I know, nor his identity ascertained with certainty. I knew perfectly well that Biebush was getting the treasury notes from McCartney, but this precious pair were so cunning in the transaction of their affairs with one another that we were never able to connect them with legal evidence in this case.

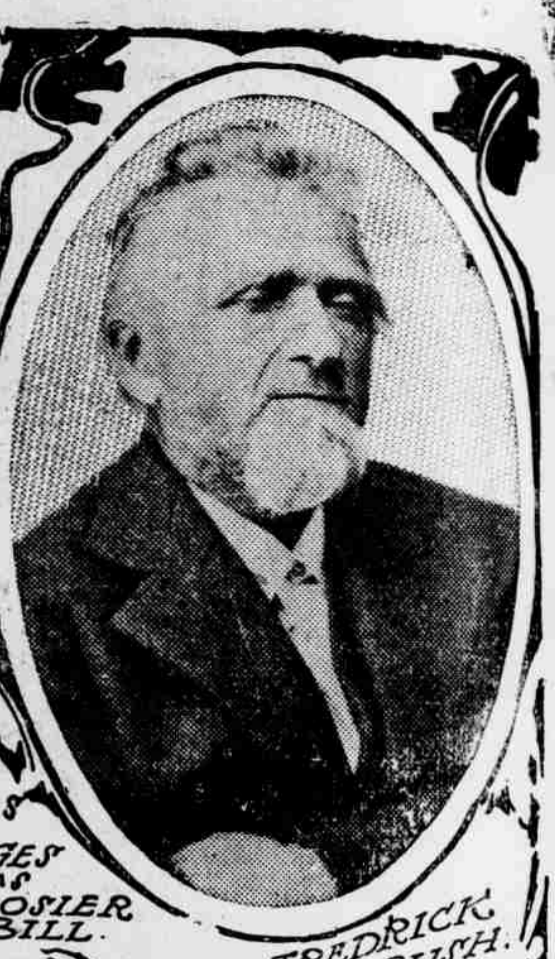
As soon as I had taken a general view of the task I had before me and had secured all the general information available concerning Biebush I sent for a man named Thomas Gallagher, with whom I had had some dealings in the pursuit of criminals, and instructed him to try to buy counterfeit money from Biebush. Gallagher was from Seymour, Ind., and had done some good work in the capacity of a stool pigeon or "roper," as we called them in the secret service. Reinhardt Bosse, a countryman of Biebush, ran a saloon known as the Sheridan Exchange, at 2724 Franklin avenue, and his place was the headquarters for the Biebush clique. Biebush lived with his wife and children at 2733 Stoddard street, a short distance away.



AUSTIN J. THOMAS



JOHN MEYERS ALIAS BRIDGES ALIAS HOOSIER BILL



FREDERICK BIEBUSH



enough to know genuine proofs from false ones. Here was failure number two.

I did not consider myself any shrewder at such work than Kenneth, but it is a universal trait for one to believe he can do a thing better himself than anyone else can do it for him. I determined to see what I could do toward leading the old fox into our trap. I was not known to Biebush. I allowed my beard to grow into a stubble and chose the make-up of a river man. If I may be pardoned the digression I will say that with a few days' growth of beard and rough clothes I could look "tough" enough to satisfy even the fastidious Biebush, to whom the appearance of "toughness" was a strong recommendation. Thus attired I made my debut at Bosse's. There was a card game in progress most of the time, and I sat in. Biebush and others whom I afterward learned were members of his band played in the game with me. I frequently sat opposite my quarry and studied him closely. Friendly relations were established between us, and I thought matters were progressing favorably until I hinted to "old Fred" that I would like to handle some of his goods. Then I found I had made just as much progress as Gallagher and Kenneth had made—and no more. Biebush said he did not object to doing business with me, but he "had no comey just then." From the way he spoke I knew I was wasting my time and that before we landed him behind prison bars we would have to practice deeper and more circuitous methods in "roping." Failure number three.

Before I took charge of the St. Louis district I had been informed by a deputy warden in the Joliet penitentiary that a certain prisoner in that institution had intimated to him that he had information which might be of value to the secret service. I thought myself of this and went to see him. He proved to be John Bridges, alias "Hoosier Bill," under sentence for horse stealing. This worthy was an Indiana product and a something over 40 years old. He was a congenial criminal, stopping only at murder. His favorite form of crime was "garroting" that is, grabbing a pedestrian by the throat from behind, thrusting his knee into the small of the victim's back and thus pinning him while his assistant relieved the prey of valuables. He had information which was particularly valuable, taking side excursions into the field of burglary, horse stealing and pretty acts of knavery. The Chicago police knew him as a West Side hold-up man of dangerous character.

I listened to his story with deep interest, as it bore directly on the case in hand—the landing of the big fish we were playing for—Fred Biebush. "Hoosier Bill" knew Biebush intimately. He had established this intimacy by presenting proper penitentiary credentials, of which he had plenty. Before he ran afoul of an Illinois sheriff and had been "settled" for driving off the wrong horse, Bridges had operated in St. Louis as a burglar and turned over to Biebush such of his "swags" as was suitable to the latter's purposes, especially the solid silverware. On one occasion he had arrived at the Biebush residence at 4 o'clock in the morning in a cab, bringing with him a package of silverware. The paper wrapper broke as he was about to ring the door bell, scattering the loot over the porch. The "cabby" helped him gather it up, after which Biebush appeared and took it into the house. I found this "cabby" later and used him as a witness against Biebush.

The "swag" brought in by Bridges was paid for in "coney," according to Bridges, the thieves favoring this way of dealing because they received large compensation in representative of counterfeit dollars than they would in genuine money. The silver was melted by Biebush into bars, to be used in the manufacture of silver money. But this was not the most valuable information learned from "Hoosier Bill." He let me into the secret of the identity of the more active and important "Hankey" Thielen and John Sullivan, he said, were two of "Old Fred's" most trusted lieutenants, serving as bootle carriers and go-betweens in the delivery of "coney" for their chief to do business. Thielen, in addition to his