

Secrets of the Secret Service

-THE HOWARD BARR CASE

Razor Blades and Clever Penmanship
Convert Two-Dollar Bills Into
Twenties and Tens
Into Hundreds

By JOHN JAY DALY

FROM the very first, the United States Secret Service was baffled. Some one with the same artistic ability of Jim the Penman was engaged in the business of making one-dollar notes look like ten; two-dollar notes resemble twenties and five-dollar bills become hundreds.

When Secret Service experts in the Treasury Department see a phony bill they usually know the maker—for each counterfeiter or note-raiser has certain characteristics. Not in this case, however. This was a newcomer to the field, so far as the Secret Service knew. They had never seen the work before until it began to show up around Nashville and Memphis, Tenn.

Though members of the Secret Service had come in contact with many artists in the course of long careers, all those who saw the new series of raised bank notes paid tribute to the ability of the unknown counterfeiter.

"Here," Chief Moran said, "is one of the best in the business. Get him!"

There seemed to be no way to get the man; no clue to his whereabouts. He was in hiding. Then one day three men were picked up in one day, all passing the same brand of bills.

Taken to police stations in Memphis, the men were found to be ex-convicts recently paroled from the State prison at Nashville.

"Could it be," Secret Service men asked, "that these notes are made in prison?"

That's just where they started from—the State Penitentiary at Nashville. Though the ex-convicts arrested would not "squeal," Secret Service agents followed a hunch.

All men coming out of the penitentiary on discharge or parole were watched. Nearly each one of them had in his possession raised notes which he attempted to pass; and, in most cases, did pass. There was the tipoff. Those notes were being raised in a cell.

With the co-operation of State officials, the United States Secret Service went to work in the Tennessee Penitentiary. They tracked down a counterfeiter who, for two years, had baffled the best detectives in the country.

Finally, after a process of elimination, they settled their attention on one Howard Barr, a man in his early thirties doing twenty years for grand larceny.

Barr, before being convicted, was one of those sidewalk pen-and-ink artists—a fellow with a little table and cards and ink. He wrote your name with all kinds of flourishes on calling cards, with birds and flowers and finery—filigree work. On the side, Barr was also a show-card writer, clever at lettering. It looked like this might be the man.

He was the man. In his idle moments and without regular occupation, Barr found life behind the bars rather monotonous. So he conceived the idea of decorating Uncle Sam's currency. With special erasers he worked out a plan to remove most of the identifying characteristics from a dollar bill—and replace them with those of the ten-dollar note.

A two-dollar bill became a twenty under Barr's skillful operation. His



The Secret Service men rushed to the cell. But before they could retrieve the counterfeit bill, Barr swallowed it, thus destroying the evidence

touch raised the ordinary five to the aristocratic one hundred.

Without market inside prison walls for these wares, Barr contacted outgoing prisoners. On a business-like basis he sold them the raised notes for a certain quantity of good coin and currency.

Only those who could keep secrets were permitted to get in on the racket. Barr, through association with the prisoners, hand-picked his men. By obeying his instructions, they found little difficulty passing the raised bills to unsuspecting persons. In that way Barr kept at his new-found trade.

Not even the prison officials knew what their artistic guest was doing until Secret Service got on the job. Then prison officials refused to believe such a thing could happen in a well-regulated penitentiary.

Still, at intervals, the notes showed up—and the arrest of ex-convicts paved the pathway back to the pen. The accusing finger pointed always to Barr. He was placed under close surveillance. One day prison officials and Secret Service men discovered in his cell a complete assortment of materials—inks, erasers, pens and artist's tools that might be used in note-raising.

This confirmed the belief of Secret Service agents that Barr was their man. Still they could not get any direct evidence on him. Barr knew the boys were now on his trail. He temporarily discontinued work. For a month or two all was quiet on the prison tier where Barr lived.

Then a new series of notes made their appearance. All bore the earmarks of Barr's handiwork. Observation of Barr was further increased.

Aroused at being baffled, Secret Service men and prison officials crept up to Barr's cell while he had his back to the grated door. They caught him in the act of raising a one-dollar bill to a ten. Before the agents could actually capture his work, Barr swallowed the bill—fresh ink and all.

Now it became a battle of wits. Barr had actual proof he was being watched. His equipment had been taken away

from him. He lay quietly in his cell planning.

Then the notes began to come out again. This time there was another method. Barr, with the aid of a safety-razor blade, patiently developed the art of splitting a dollar bill in two parts—separating the face from the back. He did the same thing with a twenty-dollar bill. Then he pasted the front of a twenty on the back of a one. With his clever pen he made the back of the one-dollar bill look like the back of a twenty. He took the back of a twenty-dollar bill and pasted it to the front of a one. That frontispiece was raised to twenty. Thus Barr found a method of saving himself lots of trouble—and passing only half-counterfeit bills. He got away with that for some time until the Secret Service agents grew tired of this man in a cell who flooded the Southern States with queer money.

They wrung a confession out of a confederate. Then they confronted Barr. Unable to refute the charges against him, he was indicted in Nashville for note-raising. Brought before United States Judge Gore to answer the indictment against him, Barr pleaded guilty.

This was the first breathing spell the prison officials had since the Secret Service traced America's second Jim the Penman to a cell. Although Howard Barr had many years to serve under the grand larceny charge, officials of the State of Tennessee were so glad to get rid of him that they waived all claims on him—turned him over to the custody of the United States authorities.

Barr was convicted and sentenced to ten years in the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta—a term shorter than he had to fulfill on his lesser charge; but that made no difference. In Atlanta Barr will make no more trouble for the Secret Service.

"His money-raising days are over," an official of the Secret Service remarked the other day, discussing the Barr case. "Only money he can raise now will be legitimate—for work in the penitentiary, if he chooses to do so."

Nevertheless, Secret Service men and

experts at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing express admiration for Barr's ability with pen and ink. Some of the notes he raised are on exhibit in the Treasury Department, shown to young men training for detective work as the highest form of this nefarious art.

With all this artistry behind them, however, the Barr notes could be passed only on a gullible public. They are handsomely done, but they have their give-away—and the give-away on any raised note happens to be the picture of a President of the United States.

According to Secret Service men, lack of alertness on the part of the American public makes it possible for men like Barr to raise bank notes and have them passed.

There are other ways of detecting spurious money. For instance, there is the "feel" of the paper. Those who handle a great deal of paper money can tell almost intuitively when a bill is counterfeit. It is a good rule, when in doubt, to compare the feel of a questionable bill with one that you know is genuine.

Every one should guard against counterfeiting and report immediately when they have discovered a spurious bill. Don't wait when you have detected one.

"If people handling money gave more than passing attention to bills that come their way, we'd have little trouble in this direction," one of the authorities says. "Any one who handles paper money should be aware of the fact that a ten-dollar note does not carry the portrait of George Washington."

Yet that is the picture all of Howard Barr's ten-dollar bills carried—George Washington. A legitimate ten-dollar note out of the Bureau of Engraving has a picture of Alexander Hamilton. Twenties carry a portrait of Jackson; fifties, Grant; one hundreds, Franklin; five hundreds, McKinley, and a thousand-dollar bill a picture of Cleveland.

Barr, in his cell, had plenty of time to improve upon Uncle Sam's currency to the extent of raising one-dollar bills to ten; but even he—artist that he is—could not make over a portrait of George Washington into that of Alexander Hamilton.

Out of a cell in the State Penitentiary at Nashville came what the Secret Service men, in jocular mood, refer to as a sell-out—for one of the raised notes was passed on a warden.