

HOIST BY HIS OWN PETARD

A True Story of the Secret Service
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URING the sixties and the early seventies of the last century, counterfeiting blossomed into one of the fine arts, and to such perfection was it brought that, in many instances, it was exceedingly difficult to detect the bogus stuff from the genuine.

As insidious enemies of the people in every walk of life, counterfeiters may well be classed among the most subtle and dangerous persons with whom officers of the law have to cope. Ever wide awake and on the alert for treachery in their own ranks, these crafty rogues can only be captured and convicted by means of carefully baited traps, or by what is generally known as the stool-pigeon system.

Counterfeiters are divided into six distinct classes: First, the capitalist or procurer; second, the engraver; third, the printer; fourth, the wholesale dealer; fifth, the retailer, and sixth, the shaver or circulator. The capitalist is the most difficult man to reach as he seldom handles any of the plates or spurious money. Hence the chief offender in this line may walk calmly about, defying the detective, each tacitly understanding the other in his relative position; one suspecting and watching, the other patiently and tirelessly picking up crumb by crumb, convicting evidence.

The methods pursued by detectives to entrap counterfeiters are rarely better illustrated than in the following account of the capture of William M. Gurney, alias "Big Bill" the Knacker, one of the foremost wholesale dealers in "queer" of his day. He was born of respectable parentage, reared in the quietude incident to country life, educated and supplied with a sufficient amount of money wherewith to live like a gentleman and, strangely enough, he chose a path that led to his ultimate ruin.

In the excitement of those tumultuous days the city of New York was well stocked with men possessed of a genius for conceiving and concealing crime. Perhaps no other city in the civilized world has ever afforded a better opportunity for fleeing the public. Gurney had been handling counterfeit money for several years but had managed to escape punishment. He was one of the chief distributors for Joshua D. Miner, who was the head and front of a powerful octopus whose tentacles were stretched out in almost every section of the country.

Gurney was by no means unattractive in appearance, and there were few men walking Broadway in his day whose physique could compare favorably with his. He stood six feet two inches in height and was correspondingly well proportioned, while his expansive chest and well-developed limbs gave him the appearance of a man possessing the muscular strength of a giant. His black eyes were sharp and severe, or mild and pleasant, to suit occasions. In conversation he was easy and interesting and, among strangers, would readily have passed for a gentleman of marked ability. To be a leader among the counterfeiting fraternity seemed to have been the crowning glory of his highest ambition.

In the spring of 1869 I was appointed chief of the government secret service and, though I had had experience with General Butler in New Orleans, and later in the internal revenue service, I was unknown among the counterfeiters.

Shortly after my appointment I received information, at my headquarters in Washington, regarding a rather unique affair that had taken place at one of the drinking resorts on Houston street, in New York city. William Gurney, with his characteristic push and daring, had invited a party of "queersmen" to partake of a banquet at this place. There were 24 persons present at this function, three ex-detectives being among the number.

On the following day I was furnished with the particulars of this remarkable assembly, and the ex-detective who reported it also, provided a list of the banqueters. Among other things I learned that my appointment as chief of the secret service was discussed at the affair, and pronounced a good joke upon the government. Gurney addressed his guests, boastfully declaring that "the new chief might do for a preacher or an internal revenue clerk, but that he could never cope with shrewd men like the queersmen."

"Now is our opportunity," he said, "to reap a rich harvest." At the same time he advised his friends that he was going to take the new chief into his confidence and keep him well stuffed with fictitious information. "In the meantime," he continued, "I will draw out from him his plans and keep myself posted as to his proposed movements."

This plan pleased the fancy of the scoundrels, and they agreed that Gurney was a great man. They were seated at the tables imbibing wine, and they drank to Gurney's health while the ex-detectives and counterfeiters jostled elbows and banded jokes good-naturedly as they contemplated the easy times in store for them. When sufficiently filled with wine and enthusiasm, they capped the climax by hurrahing for his satanic majesty. The feast of Belshazzar was

a tame affair in comparison with the indulgence of these men. If there were any letters of warning upon the walls, all were too drunk to read them, or they lacked a sober Daniel to interpret them.

Under the circumstances it seemed advisable to allow these merry plotters to pursue their way unmolested until sufficiently off their guard to permit the successful carrying out of a plan to entrap and apprehend the entire party.

Much of my time was now spent at my New York office in Bleeker street where, in due time, Gurney called upon me for the purpose of paying his respects and tendering some information in regard to counterfeiters. The artless appearing fellow said that when quite young he had been foolish enough to engage in counterfeiting, but had long since abandoned it and was now ready to render the government such assistance as he could. I affected to receive him with open arms, and apparently gulped down as truth everything he had to offer. Gurney

plified Bower cautiously, "but I do not like to take the chances any more."

"Oh, h—!" replied Gurney. "We've got everything our own way now. The government detectives are all green men and there's no danger of getting caught unless a fellow goes and gives himself up." Taking from his wallet a \$20 counterfeit note on the National Shoe and Leather bank of New York city, he added: "Here's something good enough to deceive the disciples."

After some parleying Bower accepted \$300 of the "queer" for the diamond, and I now instructed Bower to stay away from Gurney for a couple of weeks.

While Bower had been working Gurney, that worthy had been coming to my office every few days to work me. He imagined that I fully believed what he said, and that he was regarded as a valuable ally. I always received him kindly, and assured him that I had no desire to make arrests unless forced to do so, and that I did



YOU ARE A GOOD ONE



THE MINISTERIAL-LOOKING MAN WITH A QUICK MOVEMENT, SNAPPED HANDCUFFS ON GURNEY'S WRISTS

THE DETECTIVE STRETCHED OUT SEVERAL OF THE FELLOWS

ney was well fitted to deceive with a plausible story, for he seemed candid in manner and well equipped in every way to impose upon the most incredulous.

The officers of the secret service all considered him a dangerous person and none was anxious to encounter a man of such gigantic proportions and apparently desperate character.

My first move against Gurney was to send Mike Bower, a newly-fledged government detective, to form his acquaintance. Bower was selected because his appearance was anything but that of a detective. Bower drifted into Gurney's "boozing-den" on East Bleeker street where, after loitering around drinking and smoking for a week or two, he one day called Gurney aside and told him he was broke and must have a little money. He drew from his inside pocket a gold watch with a short piece of chain hanging from it, giving it the appearance of having been nipped from the pocket of some unfortunate citizen.

Gurney snapped at the bait at once and intimated, with a sly wink, that the watch had been stolen. When Bower finally admitted as much Gurney seemed pleased and bought the watch at about one-third its value, remarking: "You're all right, my boy. When you want anything, come to me."

After a few days Bower again approached Gurney, this time with a diamond stud that had been slipped from its fastenings. "I need some more money," said Bower.

Gurney inspected the gem with an appreciative eye, and finally said: "You are a good one. Did you ever handle a little of the 'queer'?" "I took a little hand in it once," re-

not believe in using harsh measures unnecessarily. Gurney fairly chuckled at this simplicity and was thrown completely off his guard.

He assumed an air of great mystery and spoke of the possible existence of counterfeit plates that might be reached for a reward. He would not, he declared, accept a dollar for his personal services but, because of his great fancy for me, was ready to assist in every way possible. He was permitted to blarney along and play the game to his own liking, secure in the belief that he was completely deceiving the government officials.

In the meantime the services of an old counterfeiter, fresh from the penitentiary, had been secured. Many of his old confederates were now operating with the Gurney gang and, through him, Bill Butts, a fresh-looking detective from one of the western states, was introduced to several of the men who made their headquarters at a saloon on the Bowery. Butts informed the barkeeper of the saloon that he had just served a term for "shoving the queer."

At first the counterfeiters and thieves hanging around the place appeared to be suspicious of Butts. One day, however, when these villains were drinking beer in the back room of the place, a fight arose. The detective went in with the rest and stretched out several of the fellows, though he was badly beaten up in the end, and in addition was robbed of his pocketbook and watch.

The ethics of the criminal profession are peculiar. When a crowd of crooks fight they frequently rob one another, and if the victim calls in the police to recover his property he loses the confidence of the rogues

who took part in the fray. But if he keeps silent it is conclusive evidence in their minds that he cannot stand investigation, and this establishes his character beyond doubt. It is accepted by them as sufficient voucher that he is a member in good standing in the brotherhood of crooks, and he is then admitted into full fellowship.

Shortly after the melee one of the crowd suggested to Butts that he call in the police. He promptly replied: "No police for me," and the detective was thereupon received without hesitation or mental reservation. During the next seven or eight months Butts worked with this gang of counterfeiters as a shover of queer.

"Counterfeit shovers," as they are called, usually travel in pairs. One fellow carries the bogus money and remains outside, while the other takes one bill, enters a place of business, purchases some trifle, tenders the counterfeit note in payment, and receives change in good money. If this precaution were not observed, the possession of other counterfeit money, in case of detection and arrest, would indicate guilt and lead almost inevitably to conviction.

Detective Butts, however, did not pass any counterfeit money but used instead a good bill in the place of the one he received from the carrier. That was kept for evidence, and in this way he deceived the queersmen

discussed my qualification over their wine at the banquet on Houston street. Bower had completely won Gurney's confidence. Telling him that he was about to take a trip to Texas, he inquired if he could buy \$3,000 in counterfeit money at a wholesale figure.

"Of course; any amount of it," answered Gurney.

A deal was arranged for its delivery on the New York side of Fulton Ferry. Bower was to be at a designated spot at a certain time, and Gurney was to pass along, hand over the spurious and receive good money in payment.

At the appointed time there was a large crowd standing around the ferry landing waiting for the boat. Bower was there, and a few paces from him stood a seemingly honest tinsmith with a joint of stove-pipe under his arm and a pair of snippers in his hand. His clothes and the soot upon his hands and face bore unmistakable witness to his calling. Near by, looking in another direction, stood a stoutly-built business man of ample girth. In one hand he carried a hat box, in the other a valise. In the immediate vicinity was a tall, reverential appearing gentleman, with neat side whiskers, whose white tie and the ministerial cut of his coat were in keeping with the sanctimonious expression of his face.

When the ferry boat struck the dock Gurney stepped off, peered cautiously and carefully around, scanning the faces of those who were standing near. Being satisfied that there were no suspicious persons about, he drew a package from under his coat and stepped toward Bower to deliver it.

At this instant the ministerial-looking man raised his hand. The fat man dropped his luggage and the tinsmith his tools. Both seized Gurney by the arms and held him while the tall brother, with a quick movement, snapped handcuffs on his wrists. Everything was done so quickly that Gurney did not have time to catch his breath before he was securely ironed.

The prisoner was taken to the secret service office. I removed my side whiskers and made some change in my clothing, then entered the office and shook hands with the crestfallen criminal.

During that day and evening the government officers were engaged in arresting the shovers of the gang, against whom Butts had secured evidence. Two of the ex-detectives, guests at Gurney's banquet, had already been arrested for passing counterfeit money—one at Pittsburgh and the other at Cincinnati. By 11 o'clock that night the officers had arrested 20 of the gang. They were arranged in a circle at the office, and the right hand of one was handcuffed to the left hand of the next. Gurney, appropriately, happened to be the center-piece.

I could not help a feeling of pity for the unfortunates, but they had voluntarily preyed upon society and transgressed the laws of their land, and the common weal required that they be punished. They were all tried and convicted, most of them entering a plea of guilty.

The boastful Gurney now fully realized the trap into which he had fallen. He had been hoisted by his own petard, a circumstance that seemed to humiliate him almost beyond measure. With little or no pressure he weakened and confessed that he had received his counterfeit money from Joshua D. Miner, who was the capitalist that owned the plates upon which the National Shoe and Leather twenties were printed.

Among the secret service officers Miner was known to be a counterfeiter, but on account of his great wealth and political standing, he was considered a difficult man to grapple with. He was a large city contractor at this time, and employed about one hundred men opening up a new road at the end of Ninth avenue.

Gurney was altogether too timid to make a deal with Miner in order to give the officers an opportunity to capture him red-handed, but he finally agreed to go with me to see Miner who, he believed, would surrender the \$20 counterfeit plates for the purpose of shortening his sentence.

Leaving a carriage on the boulevard, I walked with Gurney a short distance on Sixty-ninth street toward Miner's house. We met Miner on the sidewalk and I was introduced by Gurney, who then explained the trouble he had gotten himself into. Miner said he could do nothing for him and, as a last resort, I requested Miner to step aside with me, where I told him that I was convinced that he was the owner of the counterfeit plates of the National Shoe and Leather bank. This he firmly denied, but I insisted and threatened to arrest him. He finally said that he would make an effort to secure the plates. I knew what this meant and, upon his promise to meet me the following day, I left him.

Miner appeared on time, but was still doubtful in regard to his ability to make the surrender demanded. He was a hard nut to crack but, before we parted, I succeeded in convincing him, by the use of language not less threatening than it was forcible, that it was for his interest to surrender the plates. This he now promised to do and, shortly after another interview at his home, I received a check for a piece of baggage at the Grand Central depot. A detective went to the baggage room at this depot and obtained an old hair trunk in which were found the plates.

According to promise, Gurney, through my intercession and explanation, was given a sentence of seven years instead of the maximum sentence of fifteen.

The time now seemed ripe for the arrest of the entire party who had

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WHAT?



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The Test of Time.

Benjamin Hapgood Burt and U. S. Epperson of Kansas City were motoring in Long Island the other day and stopped at Evan's hotel in Douglaston. They ordered large quantities of raw oysters, some of which were thrown aside by the oyster opener.

"How do you determine when an oyster is bad?" asked Mr. Epperson.

"You wait a short time and if you have ptomaine poisoning the oysters were bad," said Mr. Burt. "If you are not ill they were good. That's the only safe way to tell good oysters from bad ones."

Reporter in Luck.

City Editor (hurriedly)—Anything new about that suicide in the St. Fashion hotel?

Reporter—Not much. The man was a stranger, about my size. Shot himself with a .32 caliber revolver. Had on a dress suit at the time. The body had been taken to the morgue.

City Editor—Bout your size. That's lucky. I want you to report a big society wedding in an hour. Rush around to the morgue and ask the keeper to lend you that dress suit.

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