

WILLIAM J. BURNS, NEW WARDER OF THE BANKS

The Man Who Replaces the Pinkertons Is Known as "Never Fail," and His Career Proves That He Has Bravely Earned the Name

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EVERY morning in New York some man carefully scans the daily newspapers column by column and paragraph by paragraph in spite of his careful search he is interested only when he finds the announcement of the arrest of some unfortunate. Finally he settles back in his chair and to himself asks the question:—"Will I be the next?"

This man, whose identity changes from time to time, is employed in some one of the large banks. He is robbing his employers and he knows it is only a question of time when his trespassing will be discovered and he will be exposed in his crime.

This assertion was made to a reporter for this newspaper a few days ago by the president of one of the greatest of New York's financial institutions. He would be no more specific in his information.

"Thefts," he said, "are had advertisements for banks. Yet we all know that men are constantly planning to rob us. Sometimes it is deemed wise to cause arrests and bring about scandals that startle the city. Most generally, however, the wrongdoing is corrected in a very quiet manner. So long as banks exist men will be found who will succeed in robbing them—generally from the inside."

It is to prevent such robberies and to apprehend the robbers that the American Bankers' Association recently employed Mr. William J. Burns—who when he left the federal Secret Service was described as the most competent detective the United States has produced—to protect 11,000 banking institutions against frauds, defalcations and robberies. The William J. Burns National Detective Agency is his organization, with headquarters in New York, branches in all parts of the country and representatives in all parts of the world. After sixteen years in the Secret Service Bureau of the Treasury Department, during which he never disappointed his chiefs on a single case to which he was assigned, he has inaugurated his career as a private detective by obtaining the one largest commission procurable.

His Two Big Cases.

Every one in the West, and also every one anywhere who has followed the San Francisco municipal graft and the timber land fraud prosecutions, knows William J. Burns, who is called "Never Fail." Those two vital cases were his post graduate course in his profession and gave him a record that makes him without question one of the greatest detectives of the time. But few persons beyond those who have been directly associated with him are familiar with his personality or with the steps that have brought him into national prominence.

When a reporter for this newspaper entered the offices of the new detective agency a few days ago he was ushered into a room where a quietly dressed business man sat at a small desk. At least the reporter saw no particular difference between William J. Burns and any prosperous business man until he slid into a seat a few feet away. It is not a correct estimate of his appearance to say that William J. Burns might be a lawyer or a manufacturer or a promoter or a physician. He might, but the observer would know at second glance that he is none of these things. There is something about him that puts him outside the ordinary professional or commercial class—a suggestion of keen, fearless, "detecting" intelligence in his wide, clear eye; an impression of bodily and mental alertness in the set of his head and shoulders; an indefinable hint of an ulterior outlook and judgment behind his frank, ready, unhesitating manner. Perhaps one would not go up to him in a crowd and point him out as a detective, but having once known him as such one would certainly say that he is well equipped for his particular line of effort.

And still there is little of the ordinary policeman as popularly conceived about Mr. Burns. He is of medium height, with just a tendency to weight, soft reddish hair and mustache, light brown eyes and small hands and feet. He does not look a day over thirty-seven, though he is considerably more than that, and his cheeks are almost chubby. For the rest, he has the quiet command and repose of the man of action who is sure of himself and his abilities, talks well and is without pose or affectation.

"I was brought up among detectives and to the business of catching criminals," he said easily in answer to a question. "My father was a police commissioner in Columbus, Ohio, and while I was still a boy I was able to study police methods and to aid in solving crimes. It attracted me, and when I became older I drifted into it naturally."

"The first case of any importance on which I was engaged was in Ohio. There was a big uproar over election frauds perpetrated by means of forged tally sheets. I picked up some information, and, being near the authorities through my father, was asked to work on the case in earnest. I accepted and obtained a part of the evidence that uncovered the crimes and convicted those responsible for them. After that I was employed by a private agency in St. Louis for a time, and in 1890 I went into the Secret Service, where I remained until 1906, when I took up the San Francisco graft case."

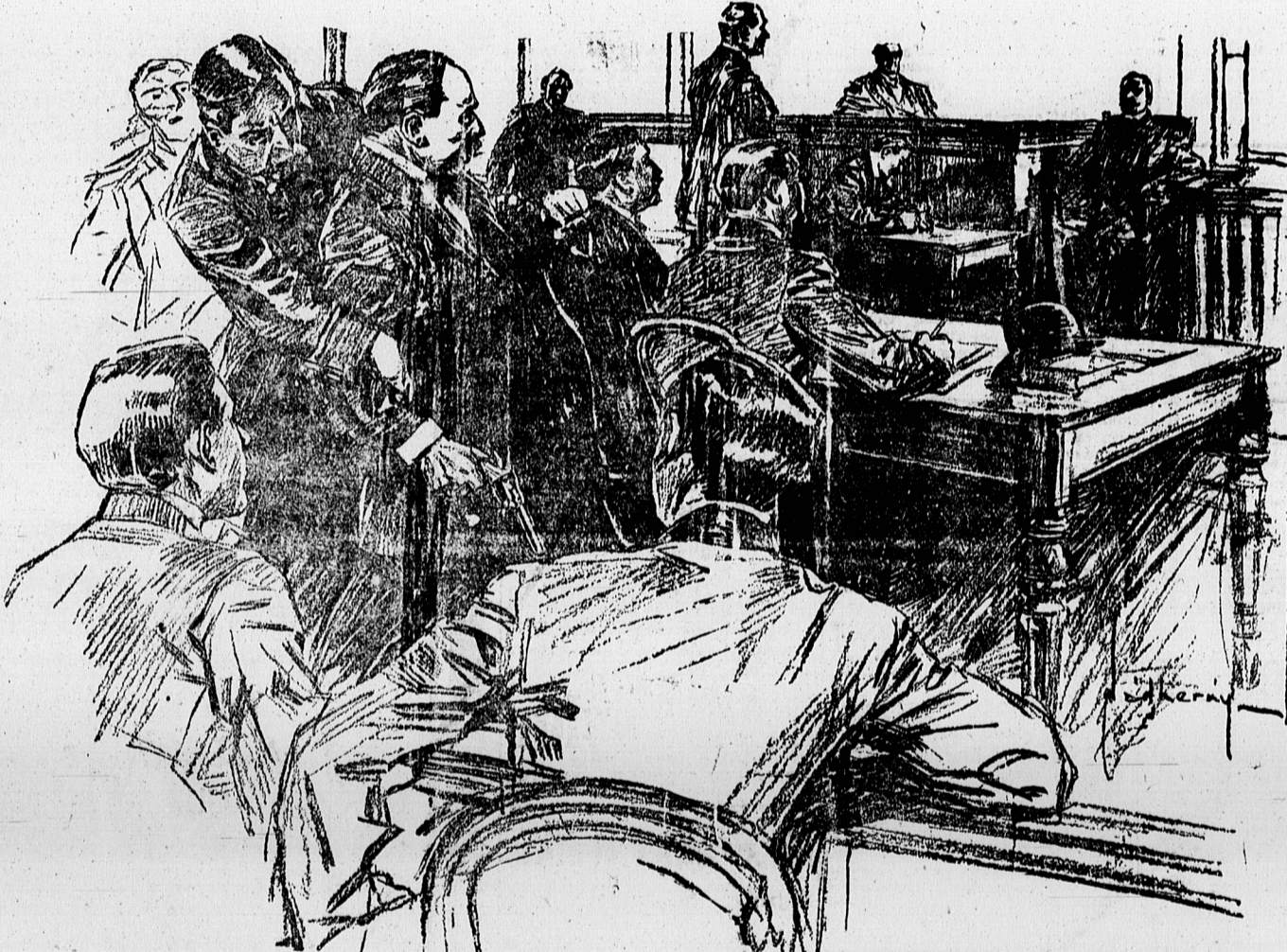
"How about your methods, Mr. Burns; deduction?" began the reporter.

"Nothing to it," said the detective vigorously. "I see what you're coming to. You mean these mysteries built up with a pen and solved by the color of cigar ashes. Whenever you hear a man talk about clearing up a crime the way Conan Doyle or Gaboriau work it out in print you can know he's a bunk talker."

"The only thing that goes for a detective is just plain common sense. It's not nearly so brilliant or so attractive or so good material for fiction as the genius of Sherlock Holmes. But it's the way that criminals are captured and convicted. I apply to my



WILLIAM J. BURNS Photo by Rothengatter



A Policeman Grabbed Him Before He Could Make a Move and Put Him Out

business simply the ordinary principles of system and foresight and practical handling of facts and patient investigation that a man does who runs a store or a factory. And I do it without going into a trance.

"Do I start out with a theory? Well, yes. When you have enough threads in your hands you fall in with a theory of course. But I never let the theory run away with me. A theory is a pretty flimsy thing that isn't safe to hang too much faith on. I always make my theory fit my facts, and not the other way about. If a man lets himself get too fond of his theories he can't give very much unbiased attention to the truth."

"You seem to have worked out most of yours fairly well," observed the visitor.

"Thanks," said Mr. Burns, with little smiling wrinkles around his eyes. "I've had reasonable success. I've never yet had to throw up a case or own myself beaten. I don't take any undue pride in it," he added, quickly. "That doesn't mean to say that I'm never going to fail. But I expect to succeed in this private work as I have in the government service."

"What kind of work did you handle after you joined the secret service?"

"I had a hand in every big case that came up and I made a kind of specialty of counterfeiting. For some years I was in charge of the St. Louis division, covering the South Middle West, but I was sent to all parts of the country on important affairs. Later I was promoted to Washington, with a roving commission."

"The prettiest counterfeiting case I was ever on and the most serious problem in that line that ever confronted the government was the Monroe head \$100 silver certificate matter. I was away from Washington at the time that George C. Emmer, assistant teller of the Philadelphia Sub-Treasury, discovered a counterfeit \$100 bill that all but defied detection. The bills had been accepted as genuine by every bank in Philadelphia, and some of them had even found their way into the United States Treasury. Secretary of the Treasury Gage was greatly alarmed, and the Secret Service Bureau, of which

John E. Wilkie had recently been appointed chief, turned loose every resource at its command.

"While reading over the newspaper accounts on the train coming East I was struck by the descriptions of the accuracy of the counterfeit. To my mind this immediately indicated that the process used was photo-engraving and that the operators were highly skilled and intelligent men. When I reached Washington and had a look at one of the bills I knew that none of the old school counterfeiters could have turned it out. I had my ideas before Chief Wilkie and had orders to go ahead."

"The bills had made their appearance first about June of 1897 in Philadelphia. I began by making a list of every photo-engraving firm in and around Philadelphia that had a man or a plant capable of such a job. For weeks after that I and the men under me proceeded by elimination. Our inquiries were directed particularly toward discovering a firm that had been closed or slack during the spring, the time when, as I figured, the counterfeiters must have been made."

"I hit at last upon a concern run by two young men, Arthur Taylor and Baldwin S. Bredell. Taylor was a master of photo-etching on steel and had invented a process of his own. Bredell was an expert transferer and a highly skilled mechanic. I found that they had turned away a lot of regular business and closed their shop during the early months of the year, and that was enough to make them objects of suspicion."

"I wanted to get into the place and look around without the chance of alarming the two men. There was a sharp little office boy employed by the firm to run errands, and by watching I found that he had a key with which he opened up when he came in the mornings. I stopped him on the street one day when he was running an errand and gave him

fraud, but of the \$100 certificate counterfeiting. The move that precipitated the arrest came when they discovered that I had them right and made me an offer of \$25,000 to keep off.

"I was feeling pretty comfortable over the result when Chief Wilkie sent for me in a hurry one day and showed me a wonderful \$20 counterfeit that had just appeared in Philadelphia."

"Now where does that come from?" he asked. "The only men in the country capable of turning out such work are Taylor and Bredell," I answered. "But, man, they are in jail," he objected.

"And still I say they've done this; there's no other possible conclusion," I insisted. And I proved to be right. The two prisoners had succeeded in turning off what was undoubtedly the cleverest bit of counterfeiting ever attempted. No one knows to this day just how they managed to do it, but by placing a secret watch over them we caught them in the act. Taylor's mother smuggled in tools to them and they made a plate. Then she brought in a lot of one dollar bills. They washed and bleached the bills by a method they alone had mastered and used the paper for printing the \$20 counterfeits, which the woman distributed. For brain and skill and daring the annals of counterfeiting have never shown the equals of Taylor and Bredell."

"The older counterfeitters were men of different calibre, then?" asked the reporter.

"Different type and different methods," continued Mr. Burns. "Individually they were more dangerous to handle, but they never threatened the financial integrity of the government as did the Philadelphia group."

"One of the most remarkable men among those who followed that branch of crime regularly was Charles Ulrich. He was a German by birth, a big, fine strap-

rived. Over this I wrote the name and address of the man for whom the message was intended—one of Ulrich's pals. I knew that Ulrich would get into communication with this man as soon as he reached New York. He stared a little, but kept his nerve and was about to try a bluff when I laid him by the arm.

"It's a case of pluck, Ulrich," I said. "Oh! Bineh, eh?" he stammered. "Well, all right. We took him off to a quiet corner and I put the situation straight to him. 'Ulrich,' I said, 'you can take your choice of helping us and going over to Jersey tomorrow to face that indictment that's been hanging over you for some years. If you play square with us we'll do what we can to make it easy for you. If you don't you know we can get you and put you away a long term. Now, which is it?'"

"He said he'd help us. Hazen didn't like it, but as I sized Ulrich up he was willing to throw his associates for the sake of leniency. At my insistence Ulrich was permitted at large and given free hand to take part in the big counterfeiting conspiracy which was then afoot."

"It was a gathering of the lights of the profession, and I knew that we would need some one like Ulrich to pin convictions on the shrewd criminals who were at work. He sent his telegram, took up his assigned part in the scheme and was soon on the inside. When everything was ready we descended on the prim little house in Ann street, Hoboken, which was being used as the headquarters of the counterfeitters."

Booty Unearthed.

"We found \$400,000 worth of United States gold certificates of \$500, and \$200,000 in Canadian bank notes of \$100, \$50 and \$20, all counterfeits. They were well made and the paper was especially good. Among those we arrested were 'Big Bill' Brockway, Mrs. Libbie Smith, William E. Wagner, and later, the notorious Dr. O. E. Bradford. Brockway, who was a very slippery and intelligent old man, had given the government officials trouble and served various prison terms since the '70's. When it came to trial we had nothing on him at first except the testimony of Ulrich, who gave State's evidence. I had the only bit of corroborative evidence."

"When we searched the Ann street house I came upon a bit of oilcloth that had been used as a printer's apron. The others had thrown it aside, but I saved it. When I ransacked Brockway's room in avenue A I found the roll of oilcloth that the apron had been cut from. The piece fitted into the space perfectly, and that was the thing that convicted old Brockway."

"Another of the band who got away before the thing broke was Jim Courtney. His specialty was filling in the perforations of drafts, reperfoming and raising them. I couldn't land him on anything else, so I dug up a warrant for him in Detroit thirty years before, brought on two witnesses who identified him and sent him West. He was tried and convicted on the old count."

"During Cleveland's second term, when John G. Carlisle was Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Burns handled a remarkable little case. It came to the ears of the Treasury Department that the State of Mississippi was issuing debt warrants, or notes that had been made to resemble legal currency and were passing as such. The detectives were sent to investigate and began by rounding up a number of persons ready to swear that they really had been imposed upon by the resemblance. This, technically, was counterfeiting, and Mr. Burns went to the United States District Attorney. "I want warrants for the arrest of the Governor, the State Treasurer and the Auditor," he said. The District Attorney offered to call an ambulance and have Burns examine the man's sanity. Burns thanked him and withdrew. A few hours later the District Attorney received a telegram from Washington ordering him to obey the Secret Service agent. Mr. Burns got his warrants and the Grand Jury was on the verge of finding indictments when the firm that had made the plates pleaded guilty, returned the plates and the case was dropped."

"When Secretary Hitchcock, of the Department of the Interior, first received information of the maze of land frauds in 1903 he sent for Chief Wilkie and asked for aid. Wilkie replied that he would detail him the best man he had. That meant nothing to the Secretary.

"Can he get proof, that's what I want to know?"

"If he can't no one can, Mr. Secretary," answered Wilkie, and Mr. Burns was given the mission.

After he had been at work on the difficult problem for a few weeks Mr. Burns was called into Secretary Hitchcock's office.

"Have you made any progress?" asked Mr. Hitchcock.

"Yes," said the other. "I've gone far enough to know that ——— is taking graft and has been chiefly instrumental in protecting the frauds." He named a man high in the department in whom the Secretary had believed implicitly. Explanation was demanded. "Well," began Mr. Burns, "according to my theory—"

"Stop right there," interrupted Mr. Hitchcock. "You can't accuse a man like that of such a crime on theory."

Mr. Burns bowed himself out and returned in a short time with the man to whom he had referred. They sat down with the Secretary. "Now, Mr. Secretary," said the Secret Service agent, "just tell me the same story you told me." A full confession was the result and the first real step in the investigation had been taken. It was solely through the work done by Mr. Burns that Senator Mitchell, of Oregon; F. A. Hyde and others were finally convicted in the land fraud cases that attracted so much attention.

In 1906 Mr. Burns gave up his position with the government and went to San Francisco to help Prosecutors Heney in his fight against the corrupt municipal government. He obtained the confessions from members of the Board of Supervisors and all the important evidence that brought about the conviction of Mayor Schmitz, "Boss Abe" Ruef and others. He it was, also, who discovered that the defence had managed to get a former convict, Morris Haas, on the jury at the Ruef trial.

"Haas stole into the court room one day," said Mr. Burns in relating his more recent adventures, "and got behind Heney and myself. A policeman grabbed him before he could make a move and put him out. He got back a few days later and shot Heney through the head. Before Haas committed suicide in jail he confessed that he had meant to kill both of us. But that was a detail. It was touch and go all the way through, and when they offered me \$100,000 as a bribe to get out I wasn't even surprised."

So this, in brief, is William J. Burns, who has tackled the biggest single private detective job in the world and stands ready to undertake any other that offers. Whether or not he will still be "Never Fail" Burns after he has measured against his latest venture remains to be seen. Whether he can replace the effective structure built up by the Pinkertons through generations is a question for results to decide. He has the qualities, the courage and the experience to fit him for the largest responsibilities.

a bundle to carry to a certain hotel, slipping him a quarter. He was ready enough to take the commission. I told him the package contained a boy's theatrical costume.

"Say, sonny, why don't you go on the stage?" I asked. "You'd get along fine and make big money." His eyes bulged at that and I went on to paint the actor's life in glowing colors. Before long I had captured his interest and he began to ask questions.

Impression of the Key.

"Why, you could wear the costume in that bundle," I said. "Would you like to come along to my hotel and try it on?"

"He was eager and accompanied me. While he was trying on the costume I got hold of his trousers. The key was in the pocket and I made a wax impression of it without attracting his notice. That night I was able to inspect Taylor and Bredell's premises, and no one connected with the firm had the slightest suspicion that such was the case.

"While I was getting my facts together the government found the situation in regard to the counterfeiters more and more serious. Secretary Gage finally adopted the heroic measure of withdrawing the entire 'Monroe head' issue. That meant taking \$26,000,000 from circulation. It was the first time in history that a counterfeit issue of the genuine original from the field, but no other course was open.

"I shadowed Taylor and Bredell to Lancaster, Pa., and discovered that they had close relations with two wealthy cigar manufacturers. All four were about to start a paper mill—one more suggestive link. Now came a queer turn to the affair. I began to investigate the cigar men and stumbled upon the fact that although they sold millions of cigars a year, their purchase of internal revenue stamps was very small. I determined easily enough that they were using thousands of dollars' worth of counterfeit stamps. By opening packages sent back and forth between Philadelphia and Lancaster I found that Taylor and Bredell were doing the printing for them. When that much was established we arrested the whole outfit and seized evidence not only of the stamp

plag fellow, well educated and polished. In 1895 he completed a term in a German prison, but we were not notified of his release until three months later by some mischance. When we did get the word the order was 'Find Ulrich.'

On the Trail.

"After long inquiry I discovered what steamer he had come over on and traced him foot by foot to Cincinnati. He was living in a quiet street and had a front room. There was an empty flat across the way and I rented it. Of course, he knew that if anyone was after him that flat would be taken as the post of observation. And I knew he knew it. I saw him watching the place from behind his curtains, waiting to see who should go in or out.

"I gave him his chance next morning by sauntering out the front door in rough workman's garb, swinging a dinner bucket. Late in the afternoon I came back the same way in the same disguise. I kept that up for five months, playing the part of the factory hand twice a day and watching his mail and his movements the rest of the time. He kept close for a week, being pretty suspicious of me, but finally he became convinced that I was no more than a seaman and he went ahead with his plans. When he was ready to act I knew as much about his intentions as he did himself.

"He hopped out of Cincinnati finally and came on to New York to get in the game that was hatching. Chief Hazen met me and we followed him to a little telegraph office in the lower part of the city. We entered close after him. He took a blank and a pencil and began to write.

"I meant to arrest him anyway, so I made no attempt at concealment when I moved up behind him and looked over his shoulder. He turned in surprise, but did not know me.

"Are you interested in this?" he asked, with lifted brows, waving toward the telegram.

"Why—yes, I am," I answered.

"Well," he said, "then maybe you had better finish it, if you would be so kind."

"Certainly to oblige you," I said, and took the pencil from him. All he had written was, 'Have just ar-