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Uncle Sam's Secret Service

Work of Government Detective Bureau, Which Is Bone of Contention Between Congress and the President. Sketch of John E. Wilkie, Chief of Sleuths.

By JAMES A. EDGERTON.

HERE is no government department concerning which less is known than the secret service. At the same time there is none about which there is greater public curiosity, which is just now heightened by the row between the president and the congress.

The secret service is Uncle Sam's Sherlock Holmes. It catches counterfeiters and now then tags a congressman or senator who has not been content with making laws, but has started to breaking them, thus working both ends of the line. It was this feat of getting a few legislators into jail that caused all the trouble between Mr. Roosevelt and the present session. Congressmen do not like to be imprisoned, for which we can scarcely blame them, considering the other inflictions they have to bear, such as associating with each other and listening to each other's oratory.

President Roosevelt charges in effect that it was because the secret service had exposed Senator Mitchell and an Oregon representative in the land fraud cases that congress cut down the appropriation for the secret service and prohibited its use outside of the treasury department, whereas certain members of the house, dignified senators and others not so dignified regard themselves as grossly insulted. Come to think of it, there is something in the nature of a personal insult in sending a man to jail or even in intimating that he ought to be there, though most men do not base their objection to imprisonment on this ground. Now, the president did not say that all members of congress should go to jail, but only that the law they had passed helped nobody but criminals, and the chief argument in its favor was that it keeps members of the two houses from being investigated and prosecuted.

He went further and intimated that

All of these things and some other made congress forbid the further leading out of Hawkins. There are stories and cartoons to the effect that a governmental spy system has grown up in Washington. This is the admission of a spy system, but at any rate there will be an investigation.

Wilkie Started as Reporter.

The head of the secret service started life as a reporter. He is John E. Wilkie of Chicago, son of a famous newspaper man in his day who was Wilbur F. Storey's chief editorial writer on the Chicago Times. Young Wilkie started as a fire and police reporter and was so intensely interested in the role that he bought a fireman's helmet and outfit and went to all the fires to help out, receiving much chaffing therefor both from the real firemen and the other reporters. He showed the same spirit in his police reporting and in at least one instance succeeded in unearthing a sensational crime. A store burned in a manner to show that it was fired by incendiaries. The proprietor was out of town at the time, but came in on a train soon after. In rummaging about through the ashes Wilkie came upon a charred photograph, evidently taken of the owner of the store when a much younger man, but on the back of which was a Philadelphia address and a name different from that by which the merchant was then known. On being confronted with this witness from the past the man supposed the jig was up, broke down and confessed that he had set fire to his own store, using a time fuse that would allow him to get out of town. This was not the only piece of Sherlockholmesing done by the young police reporter. Every available moment he was lounging around detective headquarters picking up ideas.

Some time later the elder Wilkie was placed in charge of the London bu-



JOHN E. WILKIE, HEAD OF NATIONAL SHERLOCK HOLMES BUREAU, AND WILLIAM J. BURNS (IN CORNER), FAMOUS LAWBREAKER.

If they did not want to be investigated—if they had records that would not bear investigation, I presume he meant—they might exempt themselves by a special provision, but should not cripple the whole detective agency of the government. That is talking some, even for Roosevelt. Congress waited a few days, and then the senate passed some mild mannered resolutions, adopted andatory not so mild and accompanied by thoughts positively unbecomingly, directing the committee on appropriations to investigate the secret service, the message and everything else with a handle on that looked as if it could be used to cause trouble. The house merely asked him for the facts on which the president based his statements, evidently wanting him to show his hand before it did any bluffing. The head-on collisions the house has had with Roosevelt on former occasions have apparently taught it caution.

Hunted Down Land Frauds.

The secret service proper belongs to the treasury department, and its chief duty is to catch counterfeiters. For twenty years, however, it has been the habit of the chief of the service to lend his men to other departments wherever needed. Among those so borrowing Uncle Sam's sleuths was the secretary of the interior, who used them in hunting down land frauds, in which they gathered in the United States senator and congressman before mentioned. It is also whispered that the secretary of the navy used one of the detectives in hunting down an absent naval official, and the place where he was found laid the basis for a divorce suit. That caused another row.

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Oregon Patents.

Granted this week. Reported by C. A. Snow & Co., patent attorneys, Washington, D. C.—E. P. Batchelder, Astoria, railcar; O. B. Cuiver and J. A. Heckard, Seaside, turbine; J. C. Keller, Newberg, shore-protector; H. E. Sweet, Portland, cutlery grinders; T. J. Thorp, Corvallis, seeding and drilling machine; W. A. Tompkins, Portland, apparatus for collecting, folding, and wrapping papers. For copy of any of above patents send ten cents in postage stamps with date of this paper to C. A. Snow & Co., Washington, D. C.

day. Yet the visitor will make a mistake if he jumps at conclusions. Let him try to find out who are the detectives employed by the bureau and he will begin to understand that the word "secret" is not a false label. Nobody outside of Wilkie, Moran and possibly one or two others knows the names of these men, what they do or even how many of them there are. They go about as ordinary citizens, never disclosing their connection with the department, except to police officials, district attorneys or others who may help them. As they are shifted around the country and passed from department to department, the criminal element is thus left in the dark as to the identity of the men with whom they have to cope. There are thirty-seven branch secret service offices throughout the nation and probably a couple of hundred men employed. Not only counterfeiting cases, but violations of the internal revenue laws, of the anti-trust laws, of the land laws, of the post-office regulations and of the thousand and one details of governmental rules, may come in for investigation at their hands. Rather they might have done so before congress interfered. Now the service is handicapped, and there is joy among the crooks in consequence.

The secret service man of fact and the secret service man of fiction are about as much alike as a real estate agent's description is like the dirt he sells you. The detective of romance is wonderfully made, with a brain like a machine and a personality that to the average American boy looms bigger than that of the president. The real detective—But why shatter an ideal? I never knew anybody else worse for believing in Santa Claus, and the popular conception of the average sleuth not only delights the juvenile heart—and some hearts that are not juvenile—but scares some would be criminals into being decent.

Sleuths' Strenuous Lives.

Fairy tales aside, there are spots in the lives of most secret service men that are sufficiently exciting for "melodrammer." It is a wise one among them who knows what his next assignment will be, whether to run down a gang of counterfeiters, look for moonshiners in the Carolina mountains, trace land steals among the cattlemen or lumbermen of the west or break into world politics by spying on a foreign government or shadowing the spies of a foreign government here. One of Chief Wilkie's notable achievements was in breaking up the spy system maintained by the Spanish government in America during the late war. No; the life of Uncle Sam's detectives is not without adventure and movement. For example, one of their many duties is to guard the president of the United States and accompany him every time he sets foot outside the White House. With the cross country gallops and tramps through blizzards and rainstorms indulged in by the present chief executive, this is not the mildest of occupations. The strain on those detailed for the leg racking duty will probably ease down after March 4. Now their lives seem like one long dream of looping the loops and bumping the bumps.

In their ordinary work of detecting crime the secret service men are divided into two classes, "shadows" and "ropeas." A shadow follows a suspect in all his comings and goings. It is not an easy task for the reason that the shadowed one must never have the faintest hint that any one is on his trail. Roping is still more difficult. Here the detective becomes a boon companion of the criminals, learns their secrets and collects sufficient evidence to convict them. In doing this he must have no scrap about his person that would reveal his identity. The old idea of disguises has largely passed out. Indeed, it never had existence among real detectives outside the lids of novels. Change of garb and the perfection with which a detective lives up to the character assumed furnish all the disguise necessary. That is the beauty of a service made up of members unknown to the criminal element. Few of Chief Wilkie's men were originally detectives.

Vast, Complicated System.

Mr. Wilkie assigns these men much as he assigned reporters when on the city desk of a newspaper. The principle is the same, although the system is infinitely more vast and complicated. The men work under the direct supervision of the various departments to which they are assigned or under the subordinate secret service bureau in whose territory they happen to be placed, although the Washington bureau keeps track of them all. In this way the head of the system has a more thorough inside view of the workings of the entire nation than any other one man outside of the president and his cabinet advisers.

Success in Raising a Zebra.

Dr. Almon Melvin, chief of the bureau of animal industry at Washington, has succeeded in breeding and raising a zebra. As the department of agriculture has been unsuccessful for years in attempting to raise the zebra, Dr. Melvin is proud of his accomplishment. Dr. Melvin explains that his young zebra is a cross between a Texas burro and a male zebra. The legs are well marked, but the stripes on the body are faint. He hopes, however, that as the zebra sheds off his coat the stripes will become more distinct.

Better Than a Marathon Race.

The promoter—Yes, the Marathon race is being overdone. The friend—What are you going to work up now? The promoter—I am going down to Washington to see if I can't get a bunch of those admirals to do their fifty mile walking test on a tank track for half the gate receipts.

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On Feb. 7 President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard university, who is seventy-four, leaves Cambridge, Mass., for two months on a trip through the southwest and south. Mrs. Eliot will accompany him.

On Feb. 8 he attends a dinner of the Harvard club of Buffalo at Buffalo. He proceeds the next day to Chicago, where he speaks on the evening of the 10th before the Religious Educational association on "The Ethics of Industrialism." The next evening he attends the dinner of the Harvard club of Chicago. On the 12th of February he journeys by day to Minneapolis and spends the 13th and the 14th in the Twin Cities. Upon the evening of the 13th he will be present at the annual dinner of the Harvard club of Minnesota. He intends also to visit the University of Minnesota and Hamline university. He reaches Chicago again on the morning of the 15th and leaves that evening for Nashville, where he will be the guest of Chancellor Kirkland of Vanderbilt university until the evening of the 17th. He then takes a night journey to Memphis, where he breaks the long trip from Nashville to Dallas by spending the night of the 18th at Memphis, and reaches Dallas on the evening of the 20th.

At Dallas he spends two days and on the 23d proceeds to College Station to spend twenty-four hours at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. On the 24th he journeys via Hearne from College Station to Austin, where he spends the whole of the 25th. While there he will spend some time at the University of Texas as a guest of President Mezes, '90, Ph. D., '93. He runs down from Austin to San Antonio early in the morning of the 26th to be present at the dinner of the Association of Northern and Eastern College Men in the Southwest on that evening. He leaves San Antonio about noon on the next day and reaches Houston late in the afternoon. That city will be his headquarters for the next three days, one of which he will undoubtedly spend in Galveston. On the 3d of March he journeys by day to New Orleans.

In New Orleans he attends the dinner of the Harvard Club of Louisiana on the 4th of March, visits the State university at Baton Rouge on the 5th, delivers the founders' day address at the Tulane University of Louisiana at 2 p. m. on the 6th and attends the annual Tulane dinner on the same evening. The next day he spends in traveling to Montgomery, where he remains for the next twenty-four hours. The week of the 9th to the 16th, both inclusive, he will pass at Birmingham, Tusculooza (where the University of Alabama is situated), Atlanta, Athens (at the University of Georgia) and on the road to Charleston. The 17th and 18th he remains in Charleston and proceeds on the 19th to Columbia (University of South Carolina) for the night. Leaving Columbia early on the morning of the 20th, he stops a few hours at Spartanburg (Wofford college) and finally arrives at Asheville, N. C., late that evening.

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