

A Detective's Story

Tracing a Gang of Counterfeiters—A Close Call

[From the Omaha Bee]

“About the narrowest squeeze I ever had in the course of my profession happened to me while tracing down a gang of counterfeiters in Chicago two or three years ago,” commenced a noted eastern detective, who was in the city last week on a visit, in answer to a reporter’s request for a “yarn.”

“This is what saved my life and reputation as well as aiding in capturing my men,” he continued, handing the scribe a peculiar looking contrivance resembling a cigar case in many respects. “This is a pocket telegraph sounder, and is used quite extensively by members of the secret service in warning each other in case of danger or when necessary to impart information. See,” pressing the sides and producing a clicking sound, “it sounds like a telegraph instrument in a distant room. I took a thorough course in telegraphy when I was young, and have found it of great benefit to me in my profession. With this thing, two of us who understand the system can carry on a conversation and never appear to know one another. Getting impatient, are you? Well, my yard hangs of my ‘secret ticker.’ I thought it best to describe its use before telling the story.

It was during such weather as this,” continued the detective, “when I was summoned from an important case in some southern town to undertake the highly lucrative (if successful) case of ferreting out this band of criminals. They had given the local authorities no little trouble and the case was getting ‘cold’ when I took a hand. It is useless to worry you with a tale of vexatious disappointments in getting their trail sufficient to say that at least I struck one that led into interesting quarters, and among a set of criminals who were hard to handle. To get conclusive evidence it was necessary for me to visit a certain dive in an unsavory quarter, and resort to some detective tactics not necessary to mention now. I was disguised as a sport, and I tell you it made me feel chilly when I thought of the possibility of being discovered in my character, as I descended into the room where the leaders of the counterfeiters’ band were wont to congregate, for some of them knew me by name. I had carelessly made no provision for police within call, not thinking I would corner my men that night. I was soon mixed up in some game, playing with a crowd of men, none of whom would scruple at taking human life, and among whom a betrayal of my identity meant almost certain death. In entering the room I had noticed something familiar in appearance of one of the waiters, but did not give it much thought, so deeply engrossed was I with other things. Plenty of whiskey had been flowing, and the men were getting hilarious. Seeing their condition I thought it best to depart, and had made steps toward doing so, when a hand was laid on my shoulder and a voice, perfectly steady, said, “Hold on cully, don’t be so fast, I know you; please sit down.” Turning, I perceived a member of the company until now slightly noticed by me, but who, on closer inspection, proved to be a noted and desperate criminal. I sat down more from weakness than in compliance with his sarcastic request. He rose and told the others who I was, and what I wanted, and wound up by requesting a suggestion as to how

I should be disposed of. Threats of all kinds were made, most of them being in favor of killing me on the spot.

I sat thinking deeply when suddenly a clicking sound startled me. I almost jumped from my chair with joy. One of my men was in the room in some disguise and had recognized me and was now letting me know of his presence. We kept conversing until I learned that he was the waiter whom I first failed to recognize. A plan was formed on the spot that he should slip out and raid the concern with the police. Well, in an hour the entire gang was under lock and key, and we had earned the heavy reward offered by the authorities. You can depend upon it that ever since that episode I have congratulated myself that I understood telegraphy.”

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