

# THE FAKE AUCTION

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AMERICANS have the reputation of being quick witted and shrewd. As a matter of fact we are Barnumized bluffers, far more gullible and credulous than any class of any nation.

Right now, in nearly every moderate-sized city of the United States we are falling in line and dropping gold into the tills of organized fake auction stores and taking in exchange a misrepresented article. These bogus auction stores are more harmful to us as a nation than all the old-time lotteries, policy games, mail-order fakes and circus grafts, including gold bricks and shell games, combined.

They are not honest. They play "heads we win, tails you lose." Uncle Sam doesn't want to bring up his boys in the business; yet he countenances it, and over 530 of his cities issue licenses regularly to the auctioneers of these fake companies, giving them the privilege of swindling the public at a nominal fee.

Any town with over 10,000 blithed, Barnumized Yankees waiting to be buncoed is considered a fertile field.

From coast to coast,



THE PROPRIETOR

from line to line, we find in nearly every state from one to forty cities supporting temporary auction swindles. Few are permanent; it is a mushroom business which springs up over night in a cheap store, leased from month to month, and stays until trouble occurs or the field is worked dry.

New York city alone demands to be duped by no less than eight practically permanent companies of this sort, only shifting their positions to greener fields as the crowds change.

There are three ways to tell a legitimate auction. If the place is permanent and advertises sales on certain days, if the goods to be sold are catalogued piece for piece, and if there are no outside men hired to control the bidding, then it is certain that the sale is genuine.

The fake auction game is played under the pseudo patronage of reliability. The auctioneer's license, issued by the city, is hung conspicuously near the door and the goods are claimed to have been consigned from private sources or pawnbrokers in nearby cities. It is misrepresentation from the start. As a matter of fact the goods were picked up in job lots from novelty houses, jobbers, Japanese stores and regular auction supply firms who handle job lots of trashy stuff and are to be found in all the larger cities. The ivories they handle are made of cheap clay by shrewd Japs who have scraped through the shell of American bluff and found the flabbiness of the flesh beneath. These antiques crumble to pieces after six months in a heated apartment. Practically all the goods handled in these stores are made on the same principle and bought at from one-fifth to one-fiftieth of what they will bring at auction.

There is nothing criminal in selling at an exorbitant profit if the purchaser gets the square deal. But a fake auction company is primarily a ring of cheats never intentionally giving anyone a square deal.

The proprietor is the arch rogue. His profit depends on selling an article at anywhere from fifty to two, three and sometimes five hundred dollars. The auction does not pay it run for the average buyer; it is merely a trap, a "plant," for the occasional "good thing" who happens in and is quickly relieved of a large amount of money through an elaborate system he never suspects.

It is a joyless game, played on cut-and-dried rules which admit of no freshness or originality. The average cast—for they are all actors and play the same cheap show every day—is made up of one backer, or proprietor, two auctioneers, one pretty girl cashier, and from two to ten "shills" (the pale-faced people with mushy morals), their number depending on the size and situation of the store.

The backer usually is a shrewd and unscrupulous man who rents a vacant store, fills it with a scattering of cheap, showy articles to attract attention and a number of large so-called "works of art" and "antiques" which, on inspection, prove to be minors. The range runs from fountain pens at ten cents to deceptive "ivories," "bronzes" and "paintings by the old masters" that bring from fifty to two hundred and fifty dollars, and sometimes more, from the uninitiated.

The proprietor hires a pretty girl cashier and counts her as an additional attraction. He gets one or two auctioneers—they usually travel in pairs, to relieve one another and the public—and guarantees them ten per cent. of the sales; which commission runs from forty to two hundred dollars a week.

Then the dealer incorporates the backbone of the whole crooked business—the body of "shills."



I don't believe you gentlemen would give \$2.50 to see statue of liberty do a Salome dance. Two dollars bid, oh, shill! Two dollars!"

Jones, your out-of-town friend, is undecided whether to go in or not; but at that moment a fellow near the door shakes his head to a seeming stranger beside him and says in a low voice: "It's a shame. Things are going for nothing. Wish I had the price to buy some of that cut glass. It'll sell for a song."

Jones overhears and is interested. He thinks the mind of everybody in that store is centered on the opera glasses, going so cheap. He smiles at their rapt attention and the auctioneer's hard luck complaints. The smile would disappear instantly if he knew that he himself was the sole concern of the eight minds in that audience, and the auctioneer. He would be furious if he knew that the whole sale of the opera glasses was a sham; that when the auctioneer saw Jones looking in he immediately transmitted this fact to the shill nearest the door by saying, "Oh, shill," casually in his speech. Jones had never heard the word, so naturally he didn't select it with suspicion from the auctioneer's jargon, and suspected nothing when the man near the door remarked about cut glass bargains.

As a matter of fact Jones was interested in cut glass. His wife liked it and occasionally he invested in some, it being the nearest he could get to diamonds.

So he sauntered in casually and watched with an amused smile the frantic auctioneer trying to sell a watch. Jones wasn't interested in watches. He had one in his pocket; so his eyes continually roved toward the cut glass in a little Japanese cabinet.

He didn't know it, but before he was in the place two minutes, while the auctioneer was trying to "feel him out" with the watch, one of the shills had noticed Jones's interest in cut glass, and had called the auctioneer's attention to the fact by touching the cabinet significantly.

The auctioneer, on his perch above them all, had control of the situation. He noted the signal from the shill, jotted down mentally that Jones wanted cut glass, and knicked down the watch he had been expounding with to one of the shills for a ruinous price, which was all helpful in showing Jones that a shrewd man could pick up a bargain if he laid low, attracted no attention and bided his time.

"Sold for six ninety. Put it with the other goods for Mr. A. Deposit sufficient," the auctioneer cried to the pretty cashier.

Jones did not bid on the first piece of cut glass. The auctioneer did not look toward him once to give him a chance. The piece was knocked down for \$3.80. It was a frightful bargain. Jones would have given \$5 for it himself. But the auctioneer passed abruptly to the next article.

Jones pressed forward this time as a gorgeous punch bowl was put up. He heard various exclamations around him, all tending to give him confidence in the fact that things were going dirt cheap. Two ladies beside him commiserated because they wouldn't have enough. "Gentlemen and ladies," the auctioneer went on solemnly, "if I had this article in Chicago or New York it would bring one hundred dollars, one hundred dollars. You couldn't duplicate it at retail for less than two hundred. It is the finest piece of art glass ever shown in your city."

"Can I get one hundred dollars? Ninety? Eighty? Seventy-five dollars? Can I get sixty? Fifty? Give me forty; thirty-line; thirty!"

"Fifteen dollars!" came a halting voice from beside Jones.

Jones was interested. He sensed a bargain. Had he known that when the auctioneer said "thirty-line" it was a signal to the shill beside Jones to bid \$30 with a line through it, or fifteen actual dollars, he would not have been so enthusiastic.

"Sixteen!" "Seventeen!" "Half!" "Eighteen!" staccato offers punctuated the atmosphere after the auctioneer's encouragement.

The little man beside Jones shook his head sadly.

"Gee, it's gone beyond me," he sighed, turning to Jones; "it'll go dirt cheap, too. If you could buy that for \$50 it'd be a bargain, sure enough."

"Twenty-eight is the last bid," wailed the auctioneer. "Why, you could take it out and pawn it for more than that."

Jones thrilled as the auctioneer turned to look squarely at him.

"You'd give thirty, wouldn't you?" he cried. Jones gulped and nodded.

The auctioneer skillfully led up to the grand landing by taking offers of "thirty-six" and "thirty-seven" from members of his troupe. He had felt out his man carefully and knew that \$40 would be Jones's limit.

"Will you give me forty?" he said simply, in a level tone, leaning far over the showcase.

Jones hesitated, gulped, and then nodded his head abruptly.

Jones was pleased with his bargain until he got home and his wife told him he could get the same punch bowl for \$16 anywhere and that the other stuff was worthless.



THE CASHIER



THE AUCTIONEER



THE SHILL

The word "shill," or "shilliver" in full, is of indeterminate origin. It is synonymous with "capper," "booster," "ringer," "dummy," "stool," "stool pigeon" and "outside man;" all technical slang titles for the shabby creature, the human buzzard, who picks up his foul living by rascality and roguery in working between the public and some swindling game; in this case, working among those who stop in at the auction and pretending to have no connection with the sale, betraying a score of people a day after ingratiating himself in their good graces through cunning and craft.

Without these shills no sham auction can exist. Of course in smaller towns only two or three can be used, as strangers are more easily noticed in such places. They are the crooks on whom the proprietor relies to pick out unsuspecting visitors snared by the bargain lure and jockey them into buying misrepresented articles.

The shill mixes with the crowd. His business is to look just like an interested buyer and lie in wait for the fly for which the elaborate web was spun.

This individual, for whom the scenery is set and the actors dressed, is called in technical slang "a rummy." The old three-card monte men christened him "sucker."

Picture a room 40 feet long and 20 feet wide. Double doors to the sidewalk are invitingly open; above them hangs an enticing red flag bearing the name of what purports to be a legitimate auction firm; beneath that, in large letters, are the words:

### SALE TODAY.

Pick out any acquaintance who lives in a small town, is fairly prosperous, and has come to the nearby city of 10,000 to 20,000 population to look around for the day, purchase a present for his wife and some implements for the farm.

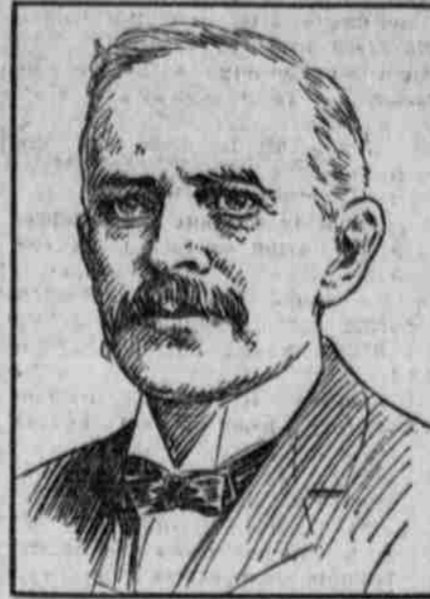
He has read in the papers and magazines accounts of book, art and antique auctions and noted the high prices brought by rarities. When he stumbles on to the flagrant flag of the fake auction house and looks in at the window, heaped with a miscellany of antiques, he is suddenly stirred by that perennial longing for a bargain.

He glances through the door. There is a worried auctioneer struggling with eight dull-faced people. He is trying frantically to sell a pair of opera glasses.

"Genuine Lemit, gentlemen; concave and convex lenses, put up in this heavy morocco case," the auctioneer cries, "and \$2 is bid for them. Think of that! Not a tenth of their value. Why,

# WHO'S WHO AND WHY

## AGED INVENTOR'S SUCCESS



The people who declare that a man has outlived his usefulness when he attains the age of sixty years and should be put out of his misery with a dose of chloroform, will have to extend the limit if they wish to make a hit with the residents of San Jose, Cal., since it has become known that George Gates, a struggling seventy-year-old inventor of that city, will become a multi-millionaire through the sale to a syndicate of eleven of the greatest railway systems of the United States, of his patent rights in a concrete railroad tie which he has invented. The price to be paid for the new tie is \$17,500,000.

Gates has been working on the concrete tie for about ten years. He cast thousands and thousands of concrete ties in those years and was not disheartened when they failed to stand tests and crumbled and cracked under the vibration of heavy traffic.

One day about two years ago Gates was leaning against a barbed-wire fence. His meager funds were about gone and he was almost ready to give up, but the barb wires suggested a means whereby he could reinforce the concrete. "I will just cast some of these barbed wires in the concrete." It was a happy idea, and one that afterward proved to be worth millions.

Ties were cast with barbed-wire strands running lengthwise. Tests showed that 36 strands twisted in a certain manner obtained the best results. A tie thus made will spring 1 1/2 inches and come back to line. And a single machine will turn out the ties at the rate of 3,500 per day.

Gates, who was born in Ottumwa, Iowa, lives in a modest cottage in San Jose, Cal. He is a small, spare and unassuming. He presents the appearance of a typical Yankee workman, and because he is out much in the air he is sunburned and does not look over sixty years of age.

## RISE OF PENNILESS RUSSIAN



The failure of the Northern bank of New York for \$8,000,000 and the story of Joseph G. Robin's career in New York is the story of the gold-filled streets of America that lures the ambitious of Europe here. Sixteen years ago he was a penniless immigrant, with perhaps a half-dozen words of English at his command. For the past year he has had a controlling voice in three banks, two bonding companies, two real estate development companies and two traction roads.

A Russian by birth, Robin came to the United States as Joseph Rabinowitz. He was about twenty-two years old then, and is now about thirty-eight. He came to this country alone, and he is still single and without relatives here.

A year after Rabinowitz reached America he fixed upon journalism as the profession he meant to follow. For rather less than a month he was a reporter on the Herald, with only broken

English and tremendous determination as his stock in trade.

Four years later Rabinowitz had become Robin and was attracting attention as deputy to Gen. James R. O'Beirne, Oom Paul Kruger's commissioner extraordinary for the Boers in the United States. Within five years more he was banker and financier both, his associates in ambitious enterprises including some of the best known men in the United States.

In 1906 Robin was president of the Bank of Discount, through which, as a base of operations, the merger which resulted in the Northern Bank of New York was carried out.

## COMMANDER TALKED TOO MUCH



Commander W. S. Sims of the United States navy has gotten himself into a lot of trouble after a long and very creditable career. He attended a banquet in London and made a speech, during the course of which he had the misfortune to "slop over." He was very anxious to impress on the minds of his British hosts the feeling of friendship which exists in the United States, but he went too far and assured them that:

"If ever the time comes that the British empire is menaced by an external foe she can count on every man, every dollar, every ship and every drop of blood of her kindred across the sea."

Now, Uncle Sam thinks a whole lot of John Bull, but he doesn't propose to have every Tom, Dick and Harry making wholesale promises for him. So Commander Sims has been jacked up. President Taft characterizes the offense as conspicuous and orders that

he be publicly reprimanded by the secretary of the navy.

This action on the part of the president was necessary, because had he taken no notice of the commander's exuberant speech other nations would have had a right to be offended. In international relationships it is necessary to steer a pretty straight course to avoid giving offense.

## THE NEW SENATOR FROM OHIO



The election of a United States senator from Ohio, to succeed Senator Dick, precipitated a lively contest, which ended only with the selection of Atlee Pomerene of Canton, McKinley's old town. It is said to have been one of the hottest senatorial campaigns in the history of the state.

Mr. Pomerene is a lawyer and is forty-seven years old. He is a native of the state, a graduate of Princeton and has been a practicing attorney since 1886. He has held the office of city solicitor and prosecuting attorney and was the most formidable rival of Harmon for the nomination for governor. He was forced to accept second place, however, and was elected lieutenant governor.

Mr. Pomerene is married and his wife is one of Ohio's popular and cultured women, who will no doubt be warmly welcomed to senatorial circles at Washington.

One of the prominent senatorial candidates before the legislature was Representative Carl C. Anderson of Postoria, who had the endorsement of the American Federation of Labor. Mr. Anderson began life as a bootblack and newsboy and has made a successful uphill struggle against early limitations.