

# The Iron Pot—Still a Mystery

By a Former Secret Service Man

## Ex-Operative Tells of Cleverest of Counterfeiting Plots



"IT WAS THE VESSEL WHICH HUNG OVER THE FIRE WHEN I VISITED THE COUNTERFEITERS."

HERE are few mysteries which are never cleared up," commenced Capt. Dickson, as he sat before the cheerful wood fire of his cozy study one night last winter, "although some of them slumber for years among the things forgotten, until the denouement is accidentally developed by some person who, perhaps, never heard of the original matter. Such was the case which I have come to remember as that of 'The Iron Pot.' It was a vessel of this humble character that finally cleared up a great mystery and brought the guilty to justice.

"A St. Louis gang had their plant in a cleverly constructed cave in a suburban district. It was an artificial cave, dug back in the face of a clay and gravel bluff. The entrance was through the shanty of a poor Irish family, a circumstance that disconcerted suspicion from it and one to which is partly due the long immunity the gang enjoyed.

"There was no scrap of metal, no coins, chemicals, or other thing used in the art. Only the machine and a few wrenches and similar tools. The gang had skipped out. The Irishman was half-witted, and his wife was too clever to be caught in the traps we laid for her. We had made a water-haul, except for the machine, which was destroyed. The cave was filled up. Acting under orders from Washington we maintained secrecy about the entire matter and nothing of it got into the newspapers.

"I found one thing in the shanty which might or might not offer a clue to the counterfeiters. It was an empty envelope bearing the postmark of an obscure railroad station in the sun-land district of northeastern Arkansas. I had long ago learned that it is the seemingly insignificant things that lead to the discovery of criminals, and while this envelope might mean nothing, on the other hand, it might be of the gravest importance. It had been found beneath the sheet of metal on which the cook stove stood, the tip of one corner, discolored and grimy, attracting my attention. I had secured it and pocketed it without attracting attention.

"If the gang had never existed it could not have disappeared more effectually. We were face to face with a blank wall. This made us the more anxious to capture the counterfeiters. As nothing better offered, the chief

suggested that I follow up the clew of the empty envelope.

"With as cumbersome and complete an outfit as every city sportsman carries into the woods with him, I left the train one day at the wayside station which bore the name of the postmark. Securing a guide and cook, in the person of a lanky native, I had my truck hauled out to the St. Francis river, only two miles distant, where I pitched camp and made preparations for an indefinite stay.

"By making inquiry of my visitors, I learned that about five miles down the river were camped, in a snug cabin built by themselves, three gentlemen from parts unknown. They maintained the place as a sort of club and had spent the spring season there. They left about March and were gone until October, when they returned one night and again took possession of their cabin. Our raid on the cave had been made on the 15th of October, and this caused me to think that perhaps the empty envelope was making good.

"As the three gentlemen did not deign to visit my camp, I decided to make a call upon them.

"I started out in a folding canvas canoe, late in the afternoon, and arrived in the vicinity of their camp just at nightfall. With a sharp cypress tree, aided by a jagged cut from my hunting knife, I succeeded in punching a bad hole in the bottom of the canoe, and with the boat rapidly filling with water, I landed just after sunset at the very door of their cabin. The three men were at home and they welcomed me with the open hospitality of campers, insisting that I spend the night with them. This was just what I had been playing for.

"It was easy to see that the men were crooks. There is always something to disclose the counterfeiter, if the observer is only sufficiently versed in their ways and mannerisms to recognize the telltale signs. I was pretty sure, before the evening was over, that these were the men who had done the job in St. Louis.

"Nothing about the cabin was the least bit suspicious. A large iron pot bubbled invitingly over the open fire, the fragrant odor of boiling meat issuing from under its lid when the steam pushed it up on one side. A steaming haunch of venison, cooking with some vegetables and dumplings, was produced from the pot for our supper, which was served soon after my arrival. In the center of the room was a big table, crudely constructed of heavy oak timbers. The cabin was well

lighted, the lamps being of expensive character and great brilliancy. Guns and fishing tackle and hunting tongs of every kind gave the cabin the atmosphere of a sportsman's club.

"The men talked freely of everything but themselves. They spoke of many cities, but never of their homes. They told me they were college chums who had always made it a custom to spend a few months together each fall in the woods. They were clever men and readily passed for the lawyer, the doctor and the merchant, the characters they respectively pretended to be. The one to whom the other two deferred in everything was a large, powerful man with clean-shaven face and a jaw like a bulldog. His face was too shrewd to be pleasant. He watched me furtively, a sinister, amused smile playing about the corners of his mobile mouth. That smile spoke volumes. It made me lie awake all night. It seemed to say that he knew my real character, and therefore I thought it best to keep on the watch. The man seemed capable of offering me personal violence. But the night passed away without incident. After breakfast, I repaired the leak in my canoe and paddled slowly up-stream, trying to figure out where I had seen the big man with the square jaw before.

"While I was smoking a last cigar before retiring that evening, it came to me where I had seen him. It was on a street car in St. Louis, on one occasion when I was shadowing the shanty at the cave. He had been on the same car and had kept his seat when I alighted near the hut. He had looked at me then as if he wanted to know me the next time he saw me. I was assured that he was one of the counterfeiters, and made up my mind to arrest the three of them the first thing next morning.

"Here I learned a lesson in procrastination. While I hastily gobbled down my breakfast the next day, a trapper, who camped near by and who had gone to the village the night before for supplies, happened along and told me a most disconcerting bit of news. The three men had taken French leave. They had caught a through freight about midnight, taking little or no baggage with them. I hastened to the village, and although I worked the single telegraph wire to its utmost capacity, the three men succeeded in making their escape.

"Sending a full cipher report to Washington, I repaired to the cabin in the swamps and made a careful search of it. Everything within was in the

**Captain Dickson Relates Tale—He Tells of Encountering Desperado Gang and the Ultimate Consequences—Man with Bulldog Jaw and His Daring Escape from the Grip of the Law.**

greatest confusion. Clothing and shells, guns and fishing-tackle were strewn about the floor, evidencing a precipitate departure. It was tantalizing to again allow the criminals to escape. I felt deeply chagrined, and resolved never again to put off a matter of this kind. The men had forestalled me by only a few hours, for I had intended arresting them that morning, and there had been nothing in their conduct during my visit to their cabin to indicate that they thought of flight.

"In one corner of the cabin, beneath the very bunk on which I had slept, there was an excavation three feet square and as many deep. The cover was down and dirt was strewn over it which gave it the same appearance as the dirt floor of the house. I discovered it by a hollow sound when I tapped over the spot. It was empty.

"I noticed the absence of the pot which had supplied my supper, but it was rather a subconscious notice of it. The fact really made no appreciable impression on me at the time, nor did it, in fact, until more than a year had passed. It was then recalled by a newspaper dispatch under date of the small village.

"Some of the boys in the village had appropriated the cabin as a sort of clubhouse, after the three men had fled. They would spend Saturdays there, fishing and swimming and hunting. Immediately in front of the cabin was a steep bank, and the river widened out into a broad, deep pool which afforded good fishing and swimming. The boys would throw white pebbles into this hole and dive for them from the bank. One of them had struck his head against something hard at the bottom of the river and had been pulled up a corpse, his skull having been fractured by the impact of the blow.

"The others investigated and found a large iron pot half buried in the soft mud. Its cover was sealed down and its weight had been so great the boys couldn't lift it from its oozy bed. The dispatch stated that the pot was to be raised and its contents examined.

"I was in Little Rock when I read this dispatch, and without waiting for instructions from headquarters, I boarded the first train and set out for the village. I was in a state of feverish excitement, fearing I would arrive there after the pot had been secured. I wanted to be the first to view its contents. I felt sure I knew what was in it.

"After a journey that seemed interminable I arrived at the village and inquired about the pot. My fears had been groundless. With the indifference so characteristic in country people the villagers had forgotten, after the funeral of the unfortunate young man, the incident of the pot. While there had been some talk of raising it, no one had taken the lead, and there the matter had rested.

"Securing a team of mules and some strong ropes and chains, I drove out to the cabin. By dint of much diving I succeeded in fastening the chains about the pot and had my assistant drag it out upon the bank. It was the vessel which had hung over the fire when I had visited the counterfeiters in their lair. Then I remembered its absence, when I had searched the hut after their departure. It was sealed with paraffin and sealing wax, and a drop of water had passed the lid.

"I contained a complete set of engravers' tools, several bottles of powerful acids, glass stopped and sealed, a number of bars of silver, some three hundred odd counterfeit silver dollars, and the dies with which they had been stamped out. The dies were thickly coated with wax and were as bright and fresh as when they beat out the false coins in the secret cave.

"After swearing my assistant to secrecy, I returned to headquarters with my booty.

"Not many weeks later two of the men were captured. I had given the department a minute description of them, after their unceremonious departure, and their vast machinery had been set in motion for their apprehension. It is a maxim of the service that a man once a counterfeiter is always a counterfeiter. This rule held good with reference to two of the men, at least, for they were captured and convicted of another job. The incidents I have just related were not introduced in evidence against them and consequently escaped the press. The man with the bulldog jaw escaped completely at that time, but I met with him, years after, under circumstances neither of us will forget so long as we live."

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EVENLY MATCHED.



Magistrate (to witness)—And where were you when this assault occurred?  
Witness—Just across the street, your honor.  
Magistrate—Then why didn't you go to the plaintiff's assistance when you saw him attacked?  
Witness—Faix, I wasn't sure then that he wouldn't be the defendant, your honor.

### Beware of Ointments for Catarrh that Contain Mercury,

as mercury will surely destroy the sense of smell and completely derange the whole system when entering it through the mucous surfaces. Such articles should never be used except on prescription from a reputable physician, as the damage they will do is ten fold to the good you can possibly derive from them. Hall's Catarrh Cure, manufactured by F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, O., contains no mercury, and is taken internally, acting directly upon the blood and mucous surfaces of the system. In buying Hall's Catarrh Cure be sure you get the genuine. It is taken internally and made in Toledo, Ohio, by F. J. Cheney & Co., Postoffice box 243, Sold by Druggists. Price, 75c per bottle. Trade Hall's Family Pharmacy for counterfeits.

### The Land of England.

Twelve thousand seven hundred and ninety-one persons own four-fifths of the soil of England, their aggregate property, exclusive of that within the metropolitan boundaries, being 40,150, 775 acres. In point of fact, the number of owners of four-fifths of the English land is nearer 5,000 than 12,000. Of these 500 are noblemen, and four or five of these swallow up the rest. —New York American.

The extraordinary popularity of fine white goods this summer makes the choice of Starch a matter of great importance. Defiance Starch, being free from all injurious chemicals, is the only one which is safe to use on fine fabrics. Its great strength as a stiffener makes half the usual quantity of Starch necessary, with the result of perfect finish, equal to that when the goods were new.

### Disillusion.

Little Joannie had just learned the heartbreaking fact that there wasn't a "really" Santa Claus, and he felt that the world had collapsed about his ears. "I d-d-don't believe n-nothin' at all," he sobbed. "I d-d-don't believe there's any George Washington neither!"

### Rain or Shine.

Small Wallace accepted an invitation to a party, as follows: "Dear Louise—I will come to your party if it don't rain" (then thinking that he might have to stay home in that case)—"and if it does."—The De-lineator.

"That an article may be good as well as cheap, and give entire satisfaction, is proven by the extraordinary sale of Defiance Starch, each package containing one-third more Starch than can be had of any other brand for the same money.

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