

What is Wrong With the Police?

(Continued from Page 3)

Government Secret Service, however, does not reckon time, but results.

The cardinal rule of a secret service agent is *Get your man!* It may take a month, a year, five years, but a case is never closed until a definite goal is reached. This is why the United States Secret Service has for years maintained a record of eighty-five or more per cent of convictions in the cases entrusted to its operatives—a record which has not been surpassed by any other police organization in the world.

When, therefore, the two suspects walked from the custody of the New York police, they did not leave the espionage of the Secret Service. This espionage, it should be made clear at the outset, was inspired by other reasons than the murder of Benedetto Madonia. Had there not been a strong suggestion of counterfeiting operations in the records of the suspected worthies, the secret service department also would have been compelled to abandon the case. The constitution imposes positive boundaries to the duties of the national police.

SUSPICIONS of bad money activities on the part of the two Italians proved well-founded. Gradually we were able to establish the fact that the pair were directing the movements of a large and aggressive gang of counterfeiters, with four headquarters, one on the East Side of New York City, another in Brooklyn, a third in Poughkeepsie, and still another in the woods near Highland, a Hudson river village. The organization was manufacturing and distributing spurious two-dollar and five-dollar bills, marketing their product principally by sales to small Italian merchants over the country at a rate of thirty-five cents on the dollar. One day we found fifteen hundred dollars in bogus bills under a bed in a deserted East Side lodging room, from which the tenants had just fled. Of the devious twists in our zigzagging trail this article has no direct concern. The statement will be sufficient that at the end of seven years we located a printer, who had been escorted at the point of a gun to a hut in the woods near Highland and forced to finish certain engraving details of a large quantity of counterfeits. Under his guidance we followed the path he had taken, surrounded the headquarters of the gang, and caught both of our men literally red-handed. They were given respectively thirty and twenty-five year penal sentences. Incidentally, it was the general conviction of their guilt in the Madonia murder case which had much to do with the severity of the court finding.

This illustrates another business lack in our police administration. Of course, there should have been no reason for a break in the investigation of the Madonia murder even with the release of the suspects. Justice had not been satisfied. Certainly the full functions of the police had not been discharged. The answer is that our police do not possess a "follow-up" system, one of the first requisites of a business organization.

Reflection will emphasize the importance of this point even to the layman. The protection of society is a task of necessarily infinite detail, of bewildering windings. While anything like a complete card index of human wickedness is, of course, impossible, yet it is obvious that the tabulation of the known law-breaker destroys half of his menace—if this tabulation be one of action as well as of paper. The harnessing of the persistent criminal is not the espionage of a year, but of a lifetime. It is not the feverish activity of a moment that will lay him by the heels, but the machine-like watchfulness of a system that does not reckon time. And

this means the reorganization of our police departments on a business foundation, with a business equipment. The worth of our police is not only detection but protection.

To make over our police departments, we must eliminate politics. Otherwise it will be a good deal like trying to get rid of a defective sewage system by covering the bad drainage pipes with a new concrete arch—and pretending that because we can't see them they don't exist. A business police administration, with a political handicap, is impossible. The police chief must know that he is as free to do his work as though he were the manager of a private detective bureau. And the men under him must know the same—must know that it is ability and not "pull" that counts.

The American police department is divided into two broad divisions, the uniformed force, and the plain clothes squad. It is the present rule



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that a man can join the latter only after he has served time in the uniformed ranks, that he must first walk a beat. In other words, our detective department is merely an organization of policemen out of uniform.

We are forgetting that there is a wide difference between a cop and a detective. The former maintains public order, guards property and person from obvious marauders, clears congested crossings. The detective must be viewed from quite another angle. He must see that the man who has threatened the public safety is brought to justice, must reason from effect to cause, must find the trail of the criminal, and follow it to his lair. His work is largely mental—the other is largely mechanical. The cop is always in the public eye. The successful detective should be as far from it as possible. A detective force of a hundred graduate policemen, with square-toed shoes, fat pouches, bristling black moustaches, is of little more benefit than were those men pacing beats. The criminal spots them a block away. Even the most casual bystander can guess their calling. Some of the most efficient operatives of the Government Secret Service are known to no man in the department but the chief. Not so much as a hint of their identity has ever reached the public. Were they known, seventy-five per cent of their usefulness would vanish.

Any improvement of police conditions must mean a revolution in the personnel of the detective force. We must eliminate at the outset the absurd restriction of preliminary ap-

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