

GREAT CASES OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVES

BY GEORGE BARTON.

Chief Brooks and the Man With the Lazy Eyes.

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James J. Brooks has been called "one of the bravest men that ever lived," and any one who had the privilege of his acquaintance will make a description of him as an internal revenue agent he was instrumental in breaking up the infamous "Whiskey Ring," which swindled the Government out of millions of dollars. In recognition of his good work, Gen. Grant appointed Brooks chief of the "called States secret service," a post which he filled with distinction and which he retained during the administration of President Hayes. After leaving the Government service, Brooks organized a private detective agency. He died in Pittsburgh, Pa., in 1902.

One morning in the spring of 1878 General Grant sat at his desk in the White House, puffing away at the ever-present cigar more glibly than he had done since he was a messenger to the President. "Show him in at once," said the President.

After the first greetings had been exchanged, Senator Cameron exclaimed, with marked earnestness: "Well, General, I have the man you're looking for."

"Who is he?" "James J. Brooks." "Do you think he'll fill the bill?" "I'm sure of it. He fears neither man nor devil. He is as straight as a string, and will be absolutely loyal to you."

It was in this manner that James J. Brooks came to be selected to destroy the "whiskey ring," a combination whose operations were bringing scandal upon the administration of General Grant. Brooks immediately proceeded to New Orleans, where, with the aid of competent assistants, he searched out and destroyed the illicit distilleries, and banded their backers in the penitentiary.

After that the internal revenue agent transferred the scene of his operations to Philadelphia. Strolling through the thinly populated section of Port Richmond—the northern district of the Quaker city—he noticed a thin cloud of smoke arising from a building which apparently had been lighted by some mischievous boys of the neighborhood. He carelessly scattered the smouldering embers with his foot and proceeded on his way. A curious man, who had seen a sedan man, but he had his reasons. That night a corps of Government detectives appeared on the scene and three notorious "moonshiners" and their assistants were arrested and sent to jail. A fully equipped still was in operation in a cave in the vacant lot, and the pretended boyish fire had been lighted to distract attention from the smoke which occasionally arose from the illicit distillery.

Consternation prevailed among the violators of the Federal law. The thought of losing their profitable business drove them to desperation. A syndicate of water was held in a saloon on Water street and it was openly announced that \$500 had been subscribed for the purpose of "putting Brooks out of the way." The low-brow ruffians who were present knew the meaning of this phrase only too well. But they all held human life cheap, and three of the toughs volunteered for the hazardous enterprise. The first was a man named Ahern, who had appeared in the criminal dock as often as he had fingers and toes; Neil Barlow, a backman, without scruples, and Hughie Harrison, a desperado, who was known as "the man with the lazy eyes." Fifty dollars were paid down as an evidence of good faith, and the party was immediately sent by the conspirators to the unwholesome neighborhood of their unholy mission.

In the meantime Brooks continued making his daily rounds, unconscious of the fact that a man was plotting his death. He was no self-advertiser, and his arrest after arrest in the most matter of fact way and without any blame of his own. Sometimes prisoners were captured with great ease, and again only after a struggle, but always it counted a part of an ordinary day's work. Brooks at that time lived at the Old Merchants' hotel, a quiet structure on North Fourth street, a corner of Revolutionary times. The three conspirators—Ahern, Barlow and Harrison—shadowed him from morning until night, waiting for a convenient time and place to strike the bloody blow.

The utter nonchalance of Brooks disconcerted the footpads—such is the effect which a really brave man has upon craven spirits. One night they had him at a dead end, but the work was abandoned because Ahern complained of a sore heel, which he peevishly said might interfere with his flight. On another occasion, just as they were ready to strike the blow, Brooks turned into Applegate alley and was lost to sight in the turnings of that narrow thoroughfare.

On one foggy night, however, all the conditions were favorable. Brooks was determined to do "the job." All that afternoon and evening the three men waited around the corner where Brooks was expected to appear. Neil Barlow was on hand with his yellow-wheeled carriage to carry the assassins to a place of safety. Ahern and Harrison hid within the shadow of a big doorway, respectively Brooks appeared, striding along at his usual fearless gait. One of those subconscious flashes of the brain which come to all, impressed him with the belief that his life was in danger. He knew that he had been shadowed, but he had not altered his daily routine in the least.

As he reached the corner of the street he paused for a moment. At that instant Ahern rushed from his place of concealment with a cocked revolver in his hand. He aimed at the head of the unknowing detective. His hand trembled a bit as he pulled the trigger and the ball instead of going into the brain penetrated the back of Brooks.



AT THAT INSTANT AHERN RUSHED FROM HIS PLACE OF CONCEALMENT WITH A COCKED REVOLVER IN HIS HAND.

He fell to the sidewalk. As he did so Harrison joined his confederate, and, pulling out a blackjack, began to beat the wounded man about the head. A mist spread over his eyes, but by a powerful effort he opened them and glanced up at his assailant. A mask that Harrison wore slipped down to the lower part of his face, and Brooks beheld his eyes—a pair of lazy eyes— which even the excitement failed to rob of their habitual indolence. The next instant the man had rushed to the corner and leaped into the carriage. The driver whipped up his horse and the vehicle dashed away. As it passed the prostrate man he lifted his eyes and looked feebly for a second time, and noticed that the carriage wheels were painted a bright yellow. The next moment he fell back unconscious, but indelibly imprinted upon his memory was the vision of a pair of lazy eyes and two yellow carriage wheels.

Brooks hovered between life and death for many weeks, but a naturally rugged constitution saved him for his country. When he left his bed, his luxuriant black hair was perfectly white—the lasting memento of an awful experience. The authorities offered rewards and the unknown offender was bitterly denounced. Brooks said nothing, but at all times and in all places he was haunted by the memory of the lazy eyes and the yellow wagon wheels. He grimly resolved that before he died he would see those eyes staring at him from behind the grated cells of the penitentiary.

For weeks after his recovery Brooks haunted the business section of the city in search of the carriage with yellow wheels. In that time he discovered many vehicles that impressed him as being the particular wagon of which he was in quest. His superiors urged him to take a much-needed vacation. He agreed to stop his work—with a mental reservation. And that reservation was his dogged determination not to relax in his effort to discover his assailants. He made several trips to the seashore, but after short stays always returned to the city to pick up the scattered threads of his investigation.

One day, to his delight, he discovered a wagon that answered the description so vividly pictured on the retina of his memory. It was an ordinary tumble-down public hack, but the yellow spokes glistened in the sunlight and filled the detective's mind with visions of the man he had sought so long. At the moment he saw the hack the driver, a burly, red-faced fellow, whipped up his spavined nag, and with upbraiding words urged it to greater speed. A conveyance was standing by the curb. Brooks jumped in, shouting to the cabby:

"Keep that hack in sight if you want to earn a double fare." The instructions were carried out to the letter. The street was crowded with trucks, trolly cars and express wagons, but the hack with the yellow wheels threaded its way through them with unbelievable ease and swiftness. Brooks's cab kept the first team in sight always. Once or twice there was a blockade, and the fear of losing his game almost reduced the detective to the verge of nervous prostration. But cabbies invariably caught up the trail and followed the hack with the certainty and swiftness of the hound that is pursuing the fox. The race finally led them to the main street of the city, and they went in a straight line toward the river front. Within half a block of the wharf, the cab became extremely mixed up in a mass of wholesale grocery trucks. The driver leaped off his seat and, opening the door of the vehicle, said:

"I'm afraid we're stuck, sir; but if you make haste you can overtake him." Before the man had finished speaking Brooks was in the street. "Where is he?" The driver pointed to a hack just on the edge of the wharf. "There he is, sir." The detective thrust his face in the cabman's open palm. He said, more to himself than to the other:

"I believe he's going on the ferry-boat." "That he is, sir; he's bound for Camden."

Brooks made his way out of the crush, and gaining the sidewalk, ran rapidly toward the ferry-house. The gates leading to the boat were open and he could see the hack with the yellow wheels going on the boat. The first bell had sounded its warning. Brooks calculated that he would be in time with a few seconds to spare. He reached the ticket office, tossed in his pennies and received his bit of pasteboard. As he turned around a heavy hand fell on his shoulder and a heavy voice cried out:

"Well, of all things in the world! Jim Brooks, as I'm a living man! This is a cure for sore eyes!" He recognized the man at once. It was Hughie Harrison, an old colleague, with whom he had spent many a happy day on the Pacific slope. He had not seen him in years. He paused long enough to make some incoherent remarks expressive of the joy he felt in the meeting. He concluded with:

"See you later." The next instant he was bounding toward the boat. The last bell had rung while he was talking. The gang plank had been pulled in and as Brooks reached the foot of the slip the iron gate closed with a bang in his face.

He was furious. He stood there in his impotent rage watching the boat as it churned its way toward the Jersey side, carrying as the most valuable part of its cargo one cab with yellow

wheels. His first impulse was to murder Harkins—the innocent cause of his misgiving—but on second thought he compromised by making an engagement to take dinner with him. Brooks crossed the river on the next ferry boat, but all in vain. There was no sign of a cab on the other side of the river and he returned to Philadelphia knowing that he would have to begin his search all over again. He never murmured. Patience and persistence were his two strong traits. One afternoon he was rewarded by a second sight of the yellow-wheeled carriage. This time he did not lose sight of the vehicle. He followed it to its destination, and in forty-eight hours had secured a complete history of the team and its driver. The carriage was owned by a liverman, who hired it out to Neil Barlow by the day. On some days, by reason of dissipation, Barlow did not call for the vehicle, and on such occasions it remained in the stable. It was a significant fact that the team was out on the day that moment Barlow was spotted. The detective did not return to the stable until late that night. Moreover, Neil Barlow had enjoyed the team as usual on that day and had given the owner 50 cents toward the regular fee. The detective was delighted with these discoveries. He was morally satisfied that Barlow was one of the men who had tried to murder him. From that moment Barlow was spotted. At home and abroad, waking and sleeping, he was kept under constant surveillance.

The detective next turned to the task of finding the man with the lazy eyes. It seemed like a ridiculous quest, but he thought—now that he had one of the gang—that it was not hopeless. Indeed, he felt somewhat humiliated at having permitted the fugitive to escape at all. They had clearly outwitted him, even though it was done with the aid of a pistol and a blackjack. He admitted that he had been beaten. He smiled in a helpless way, but to stay beaten—that would be a disgrace. He learned among other things that Barlow was a precinct politician. He had served time for stuffing the ballot box, and was one of the parties who make a living by hanging on to the coattails of those who are more fortunate in life. Reasoning thus, it was not difficult to assume that his unknown associates were also engaged in the national game.

Consequently election night found Brooks in the vicinity of the morning newspaper offices mingling with the patriots who were scanning the election returns. After a while the detective went up to the editorial rooms of one of the newspapers where he was intimately acquainted. From that point of vantage he not only learned the latest news but also gazed out upon the crowd that thronged the street below. It was a wonderful sight. From curb to curb the space in front of the building was densely packed with thousands of excited, cheering men.

Their faces were a study—some handsome, some scowling, some smiling, but all filled with absorbed interest at the sight of the returns which were being flashed over the wires from every section of the country. The big electric lights made the scene as bright as midday. Brooks scanned that array of upturned faces with a professional air—with the intelligent interest of one who is a student of humanity.

Suddenly his gaze rested upon one particular countenance that was different from all the rest. What differentiated this man from all the others? He asked himself. The answer flashed through his brain instantly. It was in the eyes! Those mirrors of the soul that so often and so eloquently portray a man's character. Amid that sea of faces he rested for a moment, and his particular pair of optics remained motionless. They were more than that. They were absolutely languid. Suspicion turned to conviction. Brooks could have shouted for very joy. It was the man with the lazy eyes! He hastily summoned a special policeman who was in the neighborhood.

"O'Leary," he said, "you know most of the fellows in this town, don't you?" "I do," replied O'Leary, unobtrusively.

"Well, get your gaze on that man down in the crowd there. Don't you see? He's standing next to a letter carrier. Do you see whom I mean? The man in the brown suit."

"Who is he?" "Why, that's Hughie Harrison."

"What's his line?" "Everything—he's what we call a handy man."

"Well, I want him."

"What is it for—picking pockets?" Brooks smiled grimly.

"I don't care for that. It may be for something more serious than that."

"Well," said the special, "I'll try to get him for you."

The two men started downstairs and made for the street. The crowd was so dense that their progress was slow. Finally they reached the spot for which they were bound, but their man had quietly slipped away. They searched for an hour, but personally kept watch on no trace of the fellow. Did he know that he had been discovered? Had he guiltily fled or merely left in the natural order of things? There was no answer to these queries. In any event, Brooks had his name and his record and that meant much.

The following day the detective located the lodgings of Hughie Harrison. It was a respectable section of the city and the landlady with the craft of her kind denied all knowledge of the man. Brooks, well armed, hunted the neighborhood. He detected a man who personally kept watch on that particular house. He had an offer detailed to assist him in case of an emergency. Winter was approaching and the days were bitterly cold. One day afternoon the door of the lodging opened and a medium-built man, dressed in a storm coat, came out of the house. The fellow had the big collar of the garment pulled up about his face, effectively disguising his features. Giving the tip to his assistant, Brooks followed the man. He had not gone many blocks when the big-coated one realized that he was being shadowed. He quickened his pace and soon reached a narrow street, lined with second-hand clothing stores. The sidewalk was crowded and Brooks experienced some difficulty in keeping his man in view. At times he was almost within an arm's length of his prey; again he pursued would be half a block in advance of the pursuer. Presently the man disappeared in the most unexpected manner. They were in the middle of the block and there were no courts or alleys in sight. But he was lost to view as completely as if the sidewalk had opened and swallowed him. Near the spot where he had disappeared were three second-hand clothing stores, differing in appearance only by the names on the creaking wooden signs that were suspended from the second-story windows. Each one was a perfect wilderness of old clothes. Dummies arrayed in all the glory of extravaganza and striped suits confronted one at every turn. Coats and trousers hung suspended from hooks, making a dense forest which almost entirely concealed the doors and windows from sight. A barker stood on each sidewalk imploring the passersby to come in and purchase clothing at prices which were the ordinary bankrupt sales seen like the height of extravagance. Brooks paused irresolute for a moment. But it did not take him long to form his purpose. He looked at the three stores and then dashed into the doorway of the middle one.

The dusty-smelling shop was shrouded in semi-darkness, and it was some minutes before Brooks could get his bearings. He did so by the light of a long counter ran the length of the room. At the far end, standing in a doorway communicating with a back room, there was a man and a woman. Both were elderly and the man wore a long gray beard. Something in their attitude struck the detective as being significant. Both started and they shrank from Brooks as if he were infected with some contagious disease. He knew his people well enough to know that under normal conditions they would give a prospective customer the heartiest sort of welcome.

He was about to speak when a third person emerged from the gloom behind the counter. It was a young man apparently, though he was somewhat stooped and wore green spectacles. He approached Brooks with an affable smile, and rubbing his two hands together said in a subdued voice:

"What can we do for you today?" The detective hardly knew how to begin the conversation. He answered at random:

"I'd like to look at a coat."

The man behind the counter paused to think. At the same time Brooks's keen eye detected a big storm coat on the end of the counter. He put his hand on the garment, and said:

"This just suits me; what's the lowest price?"

The man started unconsciously.

"That's not for—" he began, then stopped abruptly. He smiled in an apologetic way and began again:

"I meant to say that it would not fit you."

The venerable couple stood in the doorway, the unsophisticated faces filled with wonder. The detective

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turned to the salesman and said sternly: "How do you know it won't fit me?" The man smiled again and began to rub his hands harder than ever. He spoke gently, "I merely judged by your build."

Brooks felt in his hip pocket. He was satisfied with what he found there. He leaned over the counter until his face almost touched that of the salesman. He spoke slowly and with deliberation:

"Come! It's time to end this farce."

"What do you mean?" cried the other, straightening up.

Brooks did not speak. He acted. He reached his arm across the counter and, grabbing the green goggles, pulled them from the astonished face of the salesman. A shout of dismay rang through the room.

There before the detective stood the man with the lazy eyes.

Those languid orbs never showed the slightest signs of uneasiness. The man's face twitched convulsively, but his eyes were almost motionless. Brooks dropped the green goggles and covered the fellow with his pistol.

"Come, Hughie Harrison!" he cried. "The game's up!"

"You see," said the other saliently, "I surrender."

He was promptly handcuffed, much to the relief of the aged couple in the doorway. That same afternoon Neil Barlow, the driver of the yellow-wheeled carriage, was taken into custody. Harrison and Barlow "squealed on" Bob' Ahern, who was with them in the conspiracy to kill Brooks, and after a hasty trial all three of the criminals were convicted and given ten years apiece in the State prison.

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