

T H E T R A P

BY JAMES HAY, JR.

THE young man had timed his entrance well. He opened the door quietly, and, as it swung shut, stood with his back to it while he watched the scene in front of him. The blood pounded in his temples, and there was a little catch in his throat; for this was the thing he had hunted and followed for more than three weeks.

The woman, who was old, was seated so that the light from the window fell on the countless wrinkles of her face, and her tremulous fingers were placing in the lawyer's hand a number of banknotes.

As his grasp closed on the money, the young man stepped quickly forward and caught his wrist, claspng it in such a manner that the lawyer could not drop the bills.

The woman fell back in her chair, too startled to make a sound, and the lawyer, realizing the futility of a struggle, began to protest angrily.

"It won't do!" said the young man curtly. "I've got you at last!" His tone was business-like, incisive. Turning to the woman, he said with authority, "Please take that pen and put on this top banknote any mark you can recognize later."

She obeyed him.

"It's all up with this game," he said to the man, taking possession of the money and loosening the grasp he had had on the wrist.

He stepped to the door and admitted an officer, who arrested the lawyer.

"This man," he explained to the woman, "is not on the level. I've saved you your money. He has been advertising through the mails that he is a lawyer who practises here and in Italy. He has brought you here by his claim that he can arrange your property interests in Italy. He can do nothing of the sort. We want him for fraudulent use of the United States mails. He doesn't practise law anywhere."

"But my sixty dollars?" she asked fearfully.

"You can use that by employing a reputable lawyer," he assured her in kindly tone. "We will return it to you. I am an inspector of the Postoffice Department."

Then the lawyer, who was not a lawyer at all, since he had been disbarred for unprofessional conduct, was taken to a police station.

World's Greatest Secret Service

ALL this was only a small incident in what is being done every day by the Government to punish those who get the money of the average citizen through false pretenses. In order to accomplish this object, the Government at Washington has built up what it considers the most magnificent secret service in the world. It has constructed a great trap which is set all over the country and in Canada, South America, and Europe.

It is supervised by two Cabinet officials who are themselves veritable sleuths. The talk about Nick Carter and Sherlock Holmes is entertaining to lovers of the mysterious and the elusive; but in pursuit and punishment of real criminals Frank H. Hitchcock, Postmaster General, and George W. Wickersham, Attorney General, are past masters.

They have under them more detectives and special agents than the celebrated Secret Service in the Treasury Department, of which John E. Wilkie is chief. They find their prey in luxurious offices of illegal business firms in New York, in steamboats that enter every harbor of the country, among promoters of stock in holes in the ground called "mines," and through all channels of the gold brick trade.

They go against the brainiest scoundrels who operate in such undertakings, and they have on their lists men who, if they engaged in legitimate business, would be powers for good in their communities.

In the Postoffice Department, although it is not written down in black and white, the work of catching criminals is conducted on this well understood motto, "Jail the million-dollar rogue as quickly as you would the chicken thief!"

When the Department of Justice was engaged in its campaign to destroy the bucketshop business, the Attorney General was the most enthusiastic sleuth imaginable. He kept all his men keyed up to the fact that the bucketshops must go—and they did.

Only a few weeks ago Mr. Hitchcock called Chief Inspector Sharp into his office and told him to stop issuing fraud orders against the men who were using the mails to defraud the public.

"Just put them in jail," was his final order.

A fraud order is the official step that prevents an offender of this kind from send-



He Claspng the Lawyer's Wrist So He Could Not Drop the Bills.

ing or receiving any mail at all. It was discovered, however, that a big concern, finding the fraud order standing against it, evaded the prohibition by reorganizing under a new name and continuing the objectionable business. A jail is a place in which crooked business operations are impossible. Since Mr. Hitchcock's order was issued, there have been few fraud orders; but there have been many arrests of wealthy men.

All Are Able Sleuths

THE maintaining of this big Government trap is a complicated affair. Every morning the Attorney General receives from Stanley W. Finch, chief of the bureau of investigation in the Department of Justice, a detailed report of the offenders under surveillance and of the progress made toward their arrests.

In similar manner, Mr. Hitchcock, assuming for a time the rôle of sleuth, gets from Robert S. Sharp, chief inspector of the Postoffice Department, a description of what is being done to run down lawbreakers.

Chief Wilkie of the Secret Service has the task of detecting and punishing counterfeiters of money. Hitchcock and Wickersham are after counterfeiters of business. The three of them are always in pursuit of that tribe which uses its brains and cunning to accumulate money without giving anything in return for it.

Under the bureau of investigation in the Department of Justice there are two hundred special agents and detectives, and, in addition to these, the bureau calls into service from time to time the thousand deputy marshals in the United States, making a total force of twelve hundred men.

In the chief inspector's office in the Postoffice Department are three hundred and fifty-five inspectors always in the field. The chief duty of these is to keep the Postmaster General constantly advised as to conditions in the postal service. They inspect and supervise in a general way all postoffices and rural free delivery routes in the country, more than sixty thousand offices, and more than forty thousand rural routes. But, when occasion arises, they go after criminals.

Not long ago two postoffice inspectors chased a man from New York to Germany and thence to Paris, where they made the arrest.

These inspectors and special agents are not ordinary men. Fifty per cent. of them are lawyers and physicians. Many of them have had wide business experience. The majority hold degrees from such institutions as Yale, Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Virginia.

They work under this set rule, "Never let a man get away!"

When it is necessary, they use disguises of various kinds. They hold themselves ready to jump from New York to Canada, or to sail from San Francisco to the Orient. Within the last year, two of them were chasing a fugitive through Australia. Always there are several of them in Europe.

They have as their business the work of running down those who break such laws as the immigration laws, the Sherman antitrust act, the national banking law, the laws against conspiring against the Government, and all acts for the protection of interstate trade and commerce. The counterfeiters of business, the sellers of gold bricks, almost invariably come into contact with the laws protecting mails and legitimate business.

Running Down the Thieves

THE indomitable spirit of the agents and detectives can best be shown by stories of what they have done in gathering evidence and solving mysteries in wrongdoing.

One morning Chief Inspector Sharp received a report of the robbery of a country postoffice in a Middle Western State. The office had been burglarized and a great number of stamps had been stolen. For the following week reports of additional robberies of postoffices in that same vicinity came in. They were all within a radius of a few miles of a large town, and the loot was always great quantities of stamps.

Hitchcock and Sharp put their best men on the job,—young men, experienced, clean cut, and fully imbued with the bulldog spirit. For a time they worked absolutely in the dark. They knew the burglars were selling the stamps; but they could not find the "fence" (a term used to describe the place where stolen goods are passed to a man to sell). Accidentally one night an inspector heard a conversation in which it was said that the president of a bank in the town was buying large quantities of two-cent stamps.

That was the clue which led to one of the greatest sensations in postoffice an-