

## The Case Book of a Private Detective

True Narratives of Interesting Cases by a Former  
Operative of the William J. Burns Detective Agency

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### THE BRIBE TAKERS

How a Clique of Corrupt City Fathers  
Was Brought to Book

The connection of the Burns detective agency with the exposures of bribes and bribe-takers in various towns throughout the country has been so well exploited that it is unnecessary for me to say anything about it here. I am going to tell the actual story of how the ring of choice crooks, in the council and out, who had for years looted the city of Springfield finally were run to earth, sent to prison, or otherwise rendered innocuous, and the political life of the city purged for a time, at least.

Springfield is not the real name of the town. The case is too recent, and there are too many raw threads of it still hanging about, to permit of the use of the actual name. But shrewd readers, who have kept track of bribery stories in the newspapers in the last year, may be able to guess which of our cities it is that I am telling about. It is a typical case of the exposure of municipal corruption by outside detectives, and has been duplicated in a half dozen instances in other cities to my own knowledge.

Springfield had for years been what a magazine writer once called "corrupted and content." It was a busy manufacturing town. It was prosperous. That is, there usually was plenty of work to be had for the working people, plenty of business for the merchants, and plenty of money to be handled by the local banks. Most of this prosperity was due to the presence of the factories in the town. These factories were in the hands of a clique of men who placed money above all things. They would go to any length to make more money—and one of the easiest ways for them to make it was to violate the law, usually in the form of ignoring city ordinances.

Thus, there were violations of the child labor law, violations of street ordinances, water ordinances, building ordinances—in fact, violations of most of the articles in the municipal code applying to the regulation of factories were to be found in these establishments.

Naturally these violations could not be committed and continued, year after year, without being disturbed, without the connivance of the local authorities. The mayor, the councilman, the chief of police, the building commissioners, in fact, all the active heads of the city government, must have winked at the lawlessness of the factory owners, or the lawlessness would have been stopped.

Naturally, these heads of the local government, being human, and most of them politicians, did not agree to wink so accommodatingly solely for the good of their health. They did it for what there was in it. Thus, the factories became a fertile source of corruption of the city government of Springfield. When a factory needed the stub end of a street in its business, an ordinance would go through the council without any trouble—because the ways had been well greased by the factory's owner. If a factory wanted to tap a city water main and use city water without having it metered, it did it, because the water department was fixed. If a street car line felt that it needed a residence street in its business, that street it got in spite of the protests of property owners. The city hall machinery ran smoothly for the benefit of these factory barons because they controlled the oil that made the machinery go.

The whole town, naturally, in time came to take its moral tone from this influence. The banks were in on the deal. The bank that contributed most to the prosperity of the politicians was the one that got the deposits of city money. Several big merchants fell in line. Special privilege had the town by the throat; and while the town was prosperous in money matters it was poverty-stricken in good citizenship.

A few sterling citizens began to get tired of this state of affairs. They were men who believed that a city should be something besides a mere machine for the manufacturing of money. They believed that a city government should think first of the welfare of its citizens, and of the future of children growing up within its walls. They placed civic spirit above dollars, and to them was due the cleaning up of Springfield.

One of them was a judge on the local bench who had waged uncompromising war against the special interests and corruption. He was the only judge in town who was not the big interests' bond servant. Then there were two lawyers who had resisted the temptations of big fees offered them to turn crooked, one banker, one minister, two or three merchants, two or three others of various occupations, and one old retired capitalist. This man was the backbone and the foundation of the crusade. When this group of public-spirited men had determined on their course he quietly deposited \$100,000 cash of his own money to be used in furthering the campaign.

It was the action of the city council

in passing an ordinance that deprived the city of a square that had been set aside for improvement into a little park that brought on the war. The council calmly gave this tract to a railroad company for use as a switching yard. The steel was so raw that the mayor, who hitherto had been on the fence, vetoed the ordinance. The council laughed and passed the ordinance over his veto. Obviously there was only one answer to this: The railroad company had come across with enough money to make the council defy all public opinion. They had been bribed.

It was then that the decent and prominent citizens of the town got together and resolved to clean up the town.

"What is the best way to go about it?" asked one of them.

"Get after the council," said the old judge, grimly. "Prove them guilty of bribery. Send them to prison. Break them up. Throw the fear of God so hard into the city government of this town that it will be years before a city official dares to think of taking a bribe."

"That is right," agreed the retired capitalist. "We must scare this town so it will not forget."

The first process of concocting this scare was the sending of Cluffer and Dawson of the Burns Detective Agency to take up a temporary residence at the Imperial hotel—the leading hotel—in Springfield. Cluffer was a merry-looking little Englishman who could make friends with anybody in the world at ten minutes' notice. Dawson was a young, fine-appearing fellow who looked the part of a high class salesman, or a high class gambler, depending on your point of view. They merely registered at the Imperial, and commenced to spend money judiciously in the bars around the city hall. It was not long before they began to attract attention.

As in every city, the liquor emporiums near the city hall were the meeting places for a certain brand of politicians—the brand that Cluffer and Dawson were anxious to meet. Naturally they did not display any of this anxiety. After two or three days of being good fellows around town they began to make the acquaintance of the politicians who were steady customers of the places where the detectives were spending their time and money. At first the politicians were shy about making acquaintances. Later they began to warm up, and after a week of careful work the detectives found themselves part of the little ring that made these bar rooms their headquarters and whose occupations lay in the city hall. There were two councilmen with whom they became especially friendly, Corcoran and Stein, who were the leaders of the city hall clique. When they had established themselves on firm ground with these two, Cluffer and Dawson broached their alleged reason for being in Springfield.

"We represent the American Wood Block company," they said, "and we want to try to sell some blocks in Springfield. We sell the best blocks in the world."

Here they brought out some excellent samples of wooden paving blocks and began to expatiate on their merits. "Not only that, but we can sell these at prices far below those charged for the ordinary blocks," continued Cluffer. "We are so anxious to put our blocks into Springfield streets that we will make the city a price at which it can save all kinds of money on its paving bills. I'll bet you we can save the city \$50,000 a year and give it better paving material than it ever had before."

"Well, what of it?" said Stein.

"Well," continued Dawson, "we thought if we could interest you gentlemen and could show you where we could save the city all this money, we might convince you that it would be in the interests of the city to introduce wood paving here."

"Yes," said Stein, who was the spokesman for the councilmen. "What of it?"

"Why," said Dawson, "you gentlemen, in order to help the city save money, ought to introduce an ordinance calling for wood paving on some streets. Then, after we had shown how much we could save the city, we might hope to get some bigger contracts."

Corcoran and Stein laughed as one man.

"Geo, but you're green!" laughed Stein. "Is that really what you got us up here to tell us?"

"Why, certainly," said Cluffer, all innocence. "We're salesmen for the wooden block company."

"And you've got a couple of wooden blocks yourself," roared Stein. "If that's all you know about selling stuff to cities I don't see you holding your jobs much longer."

"Why?"

"Because that ain't the way it's done," said Stein. "Anyhow, not in Springfield. You got to have a different system than that, Johnnie, to do business here. Save the city money! What the devil do you suppose we care about the city? To hell with the city! If that's all you know about setting city contracts, take your little

blocks and go. You can bet you'll never get a contract here, if that's all you know about the game."

Cluffer and Dawson, having found out what they were sent for—that the councilmen of Springfield were reaching openly for graft with greedy hands—and having implanted the germ of wood block paving in the minds of the two leaders, quietly packed their grips, paid their bills at the Imperial, and flitted out of the case.

Then I came into the game. Now, there really was an American Wood Block company, and the president of it was an old man named Steger. He was interested in running down grafters, and for the purposes of this job he loaned me his name and identity. A few days after Cluffer and Dawson had retired from Springfield Alderman Stein got a letter from the president of the block company. It read:

"My Dear Alderman:

"I am afraid that my two salesmen who saw you in regard to furnishing wooden blocks for paving in your city knew little about how such things are managed. Now you and I, my dear Alderman, are men of experience and we know how such things are done. I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you at noon at the Imperial hotel in your city. It is long since I have taken part in any selling campaign, but in a matter like this, Alderman, I feel it is better and safer that I, and I alone, cover the ground."

"I suggest that you destroy this letter. I have always found it advisable to save as few papers as possible. I am, very truly yours,

"HERMAN V. STEGER,  
"President American Wood Block Co."

When Stein got that letter he saw at once that it was from a man of his own heart. The tone of it showed

blocks and go. You can bet you'll never get a contract here, if that's all you know about the game."

"Well, gentlemen," I said, "I am here to sell Springfield some cedar blocks. And I won't be so foolish as to talk about how much money I can save the city."

We had another laugh over this. We understood one another right away.

"The whole town ought to have wooden block paving," said Corcoran. "I know it. It's got to have it."

Again we laughed. We were getting along famously.

"Show me a good hand in this matter, gentlemen," said I, "and I'll show you a better one."

"We'll show you something tonight," said Stein. "It's a council meeting night. Just watch tomorrow morning's papers for the proceedings and you'll see how we do things in Springfield."

Next morning I saw that Stein had introduced and the council had passed an ordinance calling for the paving of two blocks of an important street with wood blocks.

"Well," said he, when he called upon me soon after breakfast, "how do you like that for action? That's just a sample we showed you. Now all you got to do is to pay the price and we come across with the whole delivery of goods."

"How large is that delivery?" I asked.

"Why, we'll pave the whole damn city with blocks and specify your brand," said he, "if you'll do the right thing."

"What do you call the right thing?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "some of these aldermen are cheap skates and some are what you call wise guys. Some can be reached for a ten-cent note and some want as high as five hundred. There's 18 of 'em to be deliv-

have the \$5,000. I don't care how much you make out of it; I don't care if it only costs you a thousand to get your men. I want to hear you tell me that you've got 'em before the money becomes yours."

"All right," said he. "I can get my men in one day."

He did, too. That night he was back with a list of his men. So much for this man, so much for that—he had them all there and the amounts required to buy their votes for the shameful measure he was putting through. This measure called for nothing more or less than paving about half of the streets of Springfield, except the boulevards, with wooden blocks. And my company was to have the contract of furnishing them. It was raw, rotten robbery; but Springfield was used to just that sort of thing.

I paid over the \$5,000 in cash and Stein made good on his promise. Next council meeting the ordinance went through with a rush. Stein called on me the morning after.

"Well, are you satisfied with the way things are done here?" he said.

"Perfectly, Stein, perfectly," I replied heartily. "Things could not have been done any better to suit me. But, Stein, I wonder if they have been done to suit you?"

"Why?" he said. Then, as if instantly scenting a rat, "Why? What in hell do you mean?"

"Suppose," said I, "that I should tell you that every word that you and I have spoken in this room has been overheard by a committee of prominent citizens in this town and several stenographers. What would you say?"

He looked me up and down and his usually red face began to go white.



—"and raising my fist I shot it through the wallpaper."

the writer to be "right" according to Stein's peculiar point of view. The cautious advice to destroy the letter was a winner. It showed that "Steger" had been through the mill and was too wise a bird to overlook any bets. Stein sat down and wrote a brief note to Steger, advising him that he looked forward to the latter's appearance at the Imperial hotel with much pleasure.

I came into Springfield at night and registered at the Imperial as Herman V. Steger. I stayed close to my room the next morning. It seemed, indeed, that Stein was awaiting my arrival with much pleasure, for at noon a telephone message from him informed me that, having seen my name on the register, he waited impatiently to welcome me to Springfield.

"Come up, Mr. Stein," I said, "I have been expecting you."

Stein and Corcoran came up together. I had taken the best suite of rooms in the hotel. I had attained myself in a manner as expensive as was consistent with fairly good taste. I wanted to give the impression of plenty of ready money.

Stein and Corcoran greeted me cordially, though quietly.

"Don't be afraid to speak up, gentlemen," I said, laughing. "I have reserved both rooms adjoining my suite as a precaution."

We all laughed together at this jolly. I ordered up champagne and cigars.

ered, and I guess \$5,000 would just about be right for what you want."

"Five thousand is what I had thought would be right," I agreed.

"But how is the money to be got to the right men?"

"I'm the money wagon," said Stein. "I handle all such deals for the boys."

Then without any solicitation on my part he began to assure me of his reliability by relating in detail how he had carried money from briber to bribe-takers in half a dozen cases. He gave dates, places, figures and names with an exactness that was marvelous. He told how So-and-so had given him such and such a sum in such and such a place, how he had split it up in certain amounts and given so much to that alderman and so much to that one, and how such and such an ordinance had been shoved through the council as a consideration. He had been so accustomed to dealing in graft that he looked upon it as a pure business transaction. He even referred to entries in a note book to substantiate some of his statements.

When he was through I said, "You say you want to see the money in your hands before the ordinance goes through. Now, I don't mind having my money up, but I want to see the goods delivered before I let go of it. Now, you go out and get your men one by one. Come back and give me your word that you've got them, and how much they cost you, and you can

"Ain't you in it as deep as I am?" he demanded. "What license you got to talk that way?"

"Oh, I'm just a detective sent down here to get the goods on you, Stein," I said. "Look here."

I went to one of the walls of the room, and raising my fist shot it through the wall-paper where the wall had been cut out to make listening from the next room easy. I went to another room and did the same.

"I reserved those adjoining rooms, Stein," said I, "to give these men a chance to listen to you and me."

With that I threw open a door and in came the group of public-spirited men who had set out to clean up Springfield.

"I have often longed for the opportunity to sentence you and your clique to the penitentiary, Stein," said the judge. "Now it seems that I am going to have that opportunity."

And he did. Before we had got through with that crowd fifteen of them were in state's prison, two of them were in jail, one committed suicide, two fled the country, and one died of heart failure when he heard his sentence. It was a terrible toll of punishment, but it was justified.

Stein turned state's evidence and helped us bare bribe cases for five years back. He had been in all of them himself, but he was punished for only one. He got two years. He and I got to be fairly good friends before

his trial fell due, and it was partly my intervention, and explaining the great service he had done in unravelling the whole mess, that kept him from finding a harder fate.

Springfield is fairly clean now, politically. The politicians are too scared to be crooked—for the time being.

## Rivers In the Air

Did you know there are air-falls in the atmosphere just as real and apparent as are the waterfalls you have so often viewed with admiration and delight because of their natural beauty? In the famed Yosemite valley the most interesting feature is, to the scientist perhaps, its winds.

The winds there are seldom more than light zephyrs, moody and capricious to the ordinary tourist, but when rightly understood, one of the wonders of the valley. These interesting facts are told by Prof. F. E. Matthes of the United States geological survey in the Sierra Club Bulletin.

In no other place in the entire world, perhaps, are the air currents more systematic and regular than in the Yosemite valley, he says. In the first place, the sun naturally heats the ground more rapidly than it does the air. Thus every hillside basking in the sun becomes a heat radiator and gradually warms the air above it, so that the air, becoming lighter, begins to rise.

But under these conditions the air does not rise vertically because the air directly over it is still cool and is pressing downward. Therefore, up the sides of the warm slope the heated air makes its way. That is why the tourist making his way up the mountain slope with the sun on his back finds his own dust traveling upward with him in a choking cloud.

But on coming down the same trail when the face of the slope is in the shadow the dust ever descends with the traveler in the same irritating cloud. When the face of the mountain is in the shade the air is cooling from the face of the slope and is pressing its way down into the valley.

Just as soon as the sun leaves the slope of the mountain, the earth begins to lose its heat by radiation, and in a very short time is really cooler than the air. The layer of air next the face of the hillside chills by contact with the earth, and becoming heavier as it condenses, begins to press down along the slope. Thus there is, normally, the warm updraft on the sunny slope and the cold downdraft on the side in the shadow. In a windless region like the Yosemite, with its bold cliff topography, these upward and downward air currents are somewhat interrupted. On every sunny slope bold cliffs create shadows and consequently there are downward air currents of local breezes daily at regular hours, as the shadows come and go.

Glacier Point is one place in particular in which Professor Matthes says this shadow effect on the air currents may readily be tested by casting small bits of paper into the air. As the afternoon wears on and the shadows in the valley gather, the cold draft in the hills pours downward, forming the valley like a great river, and flowing on to the plains below. Every side canyon and valley sends its reinforcement, like the tributaries of a great river, to this general air current flowing onward to the plain.

With the return of the morning sun the earth at the tops of the hills is warmed and the downward current in the air is suspended. The updraft soon begins as the sun shines into the valleys. The air currents are so regular that they may almost be timed.

Few realize, says the author of the paper, that it is on these reversing air currents that one of the chief attractions of the Yosemite depends. Mirror lake, to be viewed at its best, must be seen in the early dawn, when the reflections are most perfect.

The lake is stillest and its surface most mirror-like when the cold night currents have ceased and the uprising day currents of air have not yet begun. Yet unless one is punctual he will miss the chief beauty of the place for this perfect stillness is as brief as the turn of the tide.

In the evening and during the night when the downdraft of air from the mountain sides is strong, the stream of cool air pressing down the slope plun ges over cliffs just as water is seen to fall from similar heights. On either the Yosemite falls or the Nevada falls trails, this air-fall curiosity is readily encountered in the evening.

During the daytime, on the other hand, the air rises vertically along the cliffs and up into the hanging valleys taking part of the spray from the falls along with it. A pretty example of the air carrying the spray from the falls upward may be seen at Bridal Veil falls, where two little combs of spray one on each side of the stream, steadily curve upward over the brink.

As soon as the sun is off the cliff the spray combs cease to exist.

She Got the Money.  
"What did the lady sue for?"  
"She sued for \$10,000."  
"Did she win?"  
"She sure did."  
"Huh! I suppose her lawyer got most of it?"

"Her lawyer didn't get a cent, as far as I'm able to find out."  
"Go on! If he was able to recover that big verdict, he was smart enough to get his."

"Was he? Well, he wasn't. She married him!"

Why It Was Hard.  
"I want you to understand that I got my money by hard work."  
"Why, I thought it was left you by your uncle."

"So it was; but I had hard work getting it away from the lawyers."

## CLEANEST CITY IN WORLD

Traveler Says That Aix-les-Bains in Southern France, Well Deserves This Distinction.

I have found the cleanest city in the world. Very properly, it is the world's oldest watering place, for water means cleanliness. It dates back over twenty centuries. It is a little city of not more than 8,000 inhabitants, though this number is quadrupled during the height of the summer season, when all the world pays tribute to the remarkable efficacy of its salubrious warm baths. For the worn out, overworked American these baths have a peculiar fascination. Year after year the visitors from the United States include men of affairs, many notable in financial, business and professional circles. It is surprising that the rush of overworked Americans to this famous health resort, which has been so long a favorite resting place for titled Europeans, is not much greater. I am writing of Aix-les-Bains, or, as it is commonly called, Aix, says John A. Slescher in Leslie's.

Aix is in southern France, near the Swiss border. The snow capped peaks of the Swiss Alps, rising above and all around it, give to the clean little city a picturesqueness and a seclusion all its own. Two warm springs, gushing from the mountain at the rate of a million gallons daily, form the reason for the existence of Aix. These waters possess radio-activity, and their chemical elements, including chiefly sulphuretted hydrogen, render them most efficacious for gout, rheumatism and similar physical ills, the result of overwork, a sedentary life, lack of exercise and a too liberal diet.

The famous springs of Aix belong to the state. Its center of attraction is the bathing pavilion—a massive granite structure, with an imposing front and lofty wrought iron doors. It stands at the head of one of the principal streets and contains abundant accommodations for all the visitors, and the baths are of the greatest variety. The thermal waters are used only externally. The peculiarity of the bath at Aix is that it combines the douche with massage. I know of no other resort that gives anything exclusively of this kind, and no other springs, I am told, have the same chemical and radio activities that have made the water of Aix so efficacious for over twenty centuries, or since 125 years before the Christian era.

The Ragpicker Bird.  
The trumpeter bird is the ragpicker of the woods and swamps of Guiana, where he is always at work at his trade, with his stomach for a pack and his bill for a hook. He performs a useful but most extraordinary service, devouring a perfect multitude of snakes, frogs, scorpions, spiders, lizards, and the like creatures. But this terrible bird can be made perfectly tame. On the Guiana plantations he may be seen fraternizing with the ducks and turkeys, accompanying them in their walks, defending them from their enemies, separating quarrelers with the strokes of his bill, sustaining the young and the feeble and waking the echoes with his trumpet while he brings home his flocks at night. The trumpeter is as handsome as he is useful. Noble and haughty in aspect, he raises himself up on his long, yellow galled legs and seems to say, "I am the trumpeter, the scourge of the reptile, and the protector of the flocks."

Paul Jones a Strategist.  
Probably most of those persons who read the account of the dedication of the Paul Jones statue at Washington think of that daring seafarer as a man of strenuous action, a sort of sea knight. Paul Jones was, indeed, all of that, and he was a great deal more, concedes the Boston Transcript. He was a thinker, who thought deeply on naval strategy and naval organization, and, so far as our service is concerned, his designation as the "father of the American navy" is correct. Save toward the close of his life, and then under most unfavorable conditions, he never had a chance to put his ideas of strategy into action. The Russian navy, with which he served in the war against the Turks, was a poor school and one unwilling to learn from a great instructor.

The Wisdom of Johnny.  
"Mamma," said Johnny, "if you will let me go just this one time, I won't ask for anything to eat."

"All right," said his mother. "Get your hat."

Johnny, perched on the edge of a big chair, became restless as savory odors came from the region of the kitchen. At last he blurted out:

"There's lots of pie and cake in this house."

The admonishing face of his mother recalled his promise, and he added:

"But what's that to me?"

Couldn't Be Possible.  
"Seems to me your town is over-run with flies," asserted the visitor in Plunkville.

"Can't be," declared the loyal citizen. "No flies would dare hang around Plunkville with the daily paper full of distiches against them."

Why It Was Hard.  
"I want you to understand that I got my money by hard work."

"Why, I thought it was left you by your uncle."

"So it was; but I had hard work getting it away from the lawyers."

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