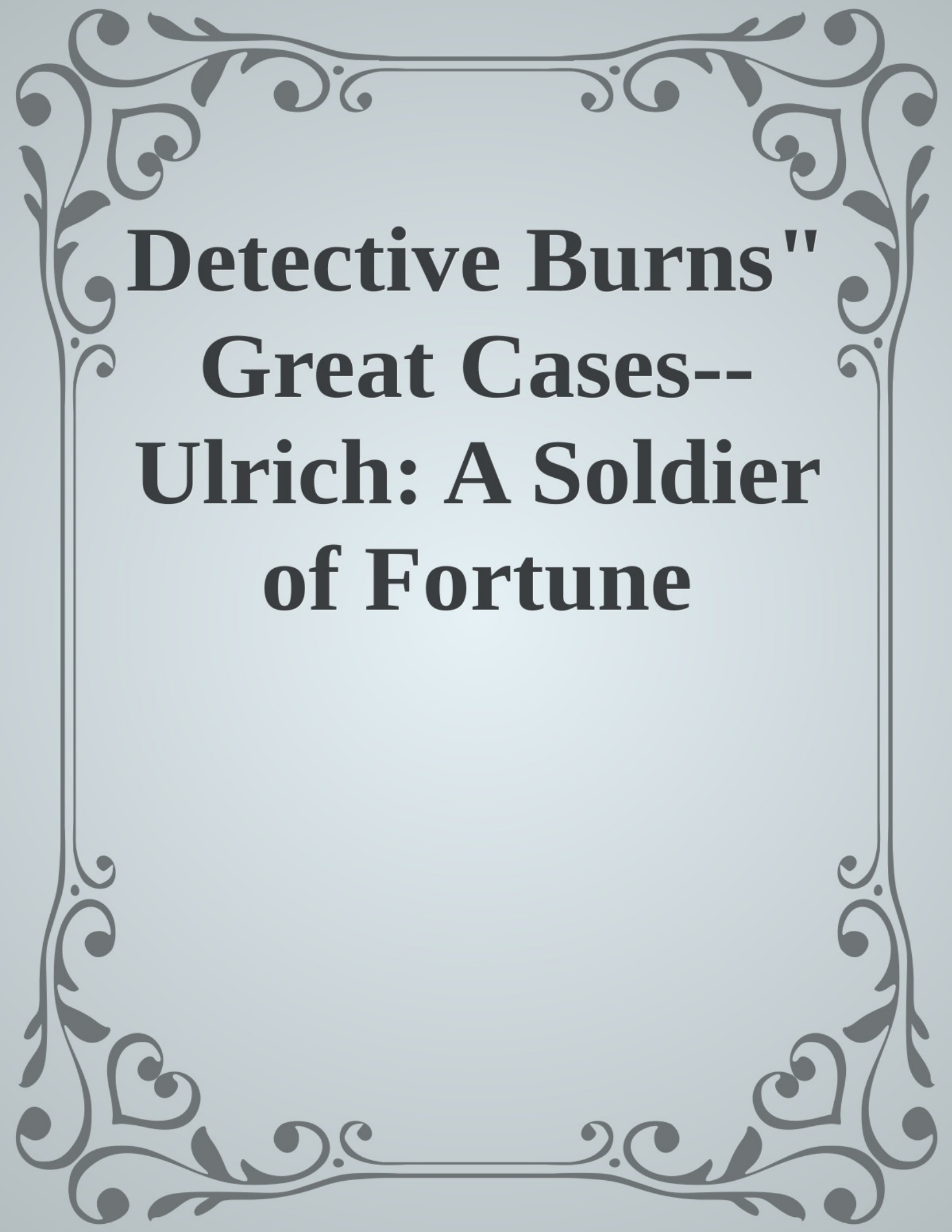


A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the central text.

Detective Burns"

Great Cases--

**Ulrich: A Soldier
of Fortune**

Detective Burns' Great Cases—Ulrich: A Soldier of Fortune

By Dana Gatlin

Taken from "McClure's Magazine," Volume 37, May - October, 1911

"Did I ever tell you about Charley Ulrich?" Burns asked. "Charles F. Ulrich was the greatest counterfeiter the world ever knew until the advent of Taylor and Bredell at Philadelphia. But Ulrich was, perhaps, the most versatile counterfeiter that ever operated. The government itself adopted his method of engraving a national bank note, and has used it ever since. Up to this time, the government had been engraving a complete plate for each bank. Ulrich engraved only one plate, leaving out the title line; he then engraved separately the title lines of the different banks, and combined anyone that he wished with the plate of the note. The government at once utilized Ulrich's ingenious device.

"Ulrich came to this country from Germany in 1853. He was a raw young German then, but a real artist. When I knew him he was one of the finest-looking men I ever met—six feet tall, straight as an arrow, with long, curly hair. He was one of the pleasantest and most genial companions in the world, one of the most interesting fellows to talk with on any subject—one of the best posted men I ever knew. He was a gentlemanly fellow, and his principal fault was that he was the best counterfeiter that ever lived.

Ulrich in the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava

"There has always been a good deal of mystery about Ulrich's early life, but the criminal records of the year bear out his account to me of his movements after he came to this country. Though he was still only a boy, his fame had preceded him here. After he landed in New York he soon became known as a very talented artist. It was not long before his work caused considerable comment among steel-engravers. They called him the 'young Dutchman.'

"A counterfeiter named Jim Colbert put a shadow on Charley and, finding where he lunched, sat at the same table. He finally got well enough acquainted with him to take him to the theater and show him about the town. At last he induced him to engrave a State bank note, having convinced him that there was a fortune in it. Charley did fine work on the note, but they were both caught and sent to prison for a short term. When Ulrich got out, the Crimean War was just on, and, falling in with some English recruiting officers, he enlisted in the English army. Charley went to England and joined what was known as the British Foreign

Legion, from which he and a few others were selected, on account of their superior bodily and mental equipment, as cavalrymen in the famous body known as the Light Brigade, and he was in the celebrated charge at Balaklava, immortalized by Tennyson.

“He was struck over the head with a musket by a Russian soldier, his skull was crushed, and he was bayoneted in the side. He was left for dead on the field; but thirty-six hours after, when the English came on the ground, they found him still alive.

How the Counterfeiters Got Charley Again

“After his recovery he returned to this country; but the counterfeiters soon got hold of him again. He finally went in with a fellow by the name of Jimmy Courtney, one of the smartest fellows in the business.

“Charley became acquainted with Jim Courtney through a couple of German girls, Kate Gross and Mary Braun, both criminals and associates of counterfeiters. Courtney persuaded Charley to leave New York and go with him to Cincinnati. Courtney had a partner named Stewart, a noted counterfeiter from Pittsburg, who put up part of the money to buy Ulrich into this deal. But Courtney threw Stewart down at the last moment and took Charley off by himself. He installed him in a little cottage on the Colrain Pike, and there Charley engraved a plate for fifty-cent ‘shin-plasters.’

“Stewart found out where Charley was, and put up a job on his old partner. He sent four men out to Cincinnati, who waylaid Charley and Jim Courtney as they were coming into town one day, held them up, told them they were Secret Service officers, and showed them their stars. The bogus sleuths then took the counterfeiters back to their plant, grabbed their plates, took twenty-five hundred dollars away from them, and then let them go. It was a smart job.

“Charley had his share of grit, though. He set right to work and engraved a hundred-dollar-note plate, printed eighteen thousand dollars, gave the counterfeit bills to Kate Gross and Mary Braun, and told them to go out and pass them. The girls acted like a couple of fools. Instead of traveling about, getting the bad money changed for good money in various places, they stopped off in Philadelphia, and bought fourteen thousand dollars’ worth of bonds from a woman named Emma Cole, who was the wife of the famous ‘Dutch’ Cole, a

notorious counterfeit promoter. Mrs. Cole deposited the entire fourteen thousand dollars in counterfeit notes in a certain bank in Philadelphia.

“Of course, when the notes were discovered to be counterfeits, they were traced as coming from this bank, and from there to Emma Cole, who admitted that she had bought them from Kate Gross and Mary Braun. After the girls had been caught and locked up, they promptly confessed. They said the notes had been made by Charley, who was then in Cincinnati under the name of Henderson, and that they were just about to ship twenty-eight hundred dollars to him by express. So the Secret Service officers went to Cincinnati, and one of them was installed as clerk in the express office.

Caught in the Express Office

“When Charley came into the express office for his money, he saw a strange clerk there. He said to himself, ‘Not for me,’ and turned and walked out. He stayed away for ten days; but when he came back the new clerk was still there. Ulrich looked in at the office occasionally for six weeks, and, as the new clerk was always there, he finally lost patience, and went up to the desk and asked for his money.

“‘Just wait a moment,’ said the clerk; ‘we would like to talk with you about this shipment of money.’

“Charley saw that the game was up, and replied: ‘I understand the situation thoroughly.’

“He was immediately taken to New York, and placed temporarily in Crow Hill Penitentiary, Brooklyn, where he was put in a cell with a Frenchman who was also under arrest for counterfeiting.

“Even in jail Charley didn’t go to sleep. Every day he watched the turnkey lock and unlock his door, until he got every notch in the key fixed in his mind. Then, with a common shoemaker’s awl, he cut out a piece of iron from around the wash-place, made a key, opened the door, let himself and the Frenchman out, and they both skipped to Canada.

“In the meantime, his first pal, Jim Colbert, was a fugitive from justice and had already escaped to Canada. Charley found him there, and the three sat around together in the saloons every night. They were not anxious, for there was no

extradition in those days. His old pal knew that the officers were wild over Charley's escape, and he decided to turn his partner to good use and ease himself up a bit. He wrote to the Chief of the Secret Service, and asked what could be done for him provided he'd tell where to catch Charley. The Chief wrote back that he'd be allowed to come back to this country. Colbert wrote the Chief to come on over, which he immediately did, taking six or seven men. They rounded Charley up while he was watching a game of billiards. Colbert pointed him out. Charley gave them a good fight, and the result was that the police came running in and arrested them all.

"So there were Charley and the Frenchman in prison again, waiting for their case to be heard, and Charley figuring how he could beat the cell. He did it. They got up on the top corridor, and climbed from there to a little window, pushed the bars aside, and dropped into the yard. Then they found they had a wall to scale. There were a lot of buckets in the yard, and Charley piled them up and held them until the Frenchman got up; then the Frenchman held them down while Charley got up.

"The soldiers outside were marching back and forth, and when they saw Charley and the Frenchman, they fired at them. But the escaped prisoners got to the railroad track, and there they did a very smart thing. They went along the track a good piece, and Charley threw his cap on the ground to put the guards on the wrong scent. Then they sneaked around back the other way, and crossed the river in a rowboat that they stole just above Niagara Falls—they didn't dream how near they were to the Falls.

"They went to Buffalo, and there Charley bade the Frenchman good-by, and wrote to Jim Courtney at Cincinnati. Courtney had been under arrest for making the hundred-dollar note, but was out on bond, and had all the papers made for getting back into business. He wrote to Charley to come on and meet him in Cleveland. They met there, and Courtney arranged for Ulrich to come on to Cincinnati and get into the business with him.

Betrayed by Another Old Pal

"At Cincinnati Courtney took Charley to the house of a Mrs. Roberts, where Courtney boarded. Courtney then went straight to the Chief of the Secret Service, and asked him what he would do to learn the whereabouts of Ulrich. (Poor Charley was the most unfortunate man, in his friends, that I've ever

known.) “‘I’ll let you off,’ said the Chief.

“‘All right!’ said Jim. ‘You can get him at noon to-day. Come to my house and pretend you are searching for him. I will hide him in a chest, so that he won’t suspect anything. Then I’ll take him down to the C. H. & D. Railroad, and you can nail him just as he’s going to get on the train.’

“So, at noon, when Charley and Jim were sitting in a room at Mrs. Roberts’, in walked the Secret Service officers. Before they got to this room, Jim hid Charley in a chest, and when the Chief came in he was told that his bird had not been there. The officers left.

“‘We’ll have to clear out in a hurry,’ said Jim. ‘We’d better try to catch the C. H. & D.’

“They hustled for it, and, just as Charley reached the depot he was grabbed. He seemed to know instinctively that he’d been betrayed again, and he was heartbroken. Charley was, as I’ve said, one of the most generous fellows I’ve ever known.

“‘If you’ll let everybody else go, and wipe the slate clean,’ he told the officers, ‘I’ll plead guilty and turn over my plates.’ The officers agreed to this.

Engraved a Portrait on an Old Saw-Blade

“Ulrich was tried, and sent to the penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio, for fifteen years. He was a model prisoner, and he was allowed to have a little shop in the prison yard. One day he picked up an old circular saw-blade in the yard, and engraved on it a portrait of William Allen, who was at that time the Democratic candidate for Governor. It was one of the most perfect portraits ever engraved.

“When Ulrich had been in prison for seven years, President Hayes pardoned him through the intercession of the warden, Colonel Innis, who thought it a shame that such a clever artist should be shut up. Innis then set him up in an engraving shop in Columbus.

“I was a boy living in Columbus then, and used to watch him go up and down the street, for I’d heard his history and it fascinated me. At times I used to go over to see him, and I little dreamed then how much I was to see of him later.

Charley's Friends Got After Him Again

“When Charley was pardoned, I’m convinced he intended to do what was right. He married, and worked hard. But all through his life his friends were his undoing. After a while old ‘Dutch’ Cole of Philadelphia came to Columbus to coax him to go to Philadelphia and to engrave a hundred-dollar note. Finally Ulrich was persuaded to go. He took his wife with him. They went to a place outside Philadelphia called Oak Lane, and here Ulrich began to engrave his note, while Cole sat by and jollied him on.

“One day Charley came into town to buy some supplies. A Secret Service man recognized him, followed him home, and made a report. The Chief sent a man out to nail Charley; but, as he was more anxious to get Cole than Charley this time, they agreed to give Charley a suspended sentence, provided he’d help them catch Cole. Charley thought he might as well try the personal-profit game himself, and he arranged to hide two officers in his house, so that, the next time Cole came out to visit him and jolly him up, they might hear the whole conversation. But, one day, when they were to be there, Cole came out unexpectedly. Mrs. Ulrich was preparing dinner, and had set the table for four people. The minute she saw Cole, she had enough presence of mind to grab the table and upset the whole thing—dishes and all—on the floor. Of course she did not want Cole to get on to Charley’s relations with the officers.

“‘What on earth’s the matter?’ said Cole, entering.

“‘I was trying to fix a caster, and upset the whole thing,’ she explained. A little later the officers stepped out and arrested Cole. He was sent to the penitentiary, and died there.

“Charley was given a suspended sentence, and for a time tried to lead an honest life. He went to Trenton, New Jersey, where he was the first man to introduce into this country the painting of pottery. Up to this time it had been done only in Germany. This industry at Trenton has grown to wonderful proportions, and some of the finest pottery is now made there.

Got Away with Nearly \$200,000, but His Wife Took in Washing

“Charley, however, finally drifted back to the old gang. Old Bill Brockway and his crowd got after him, and wanted him to engrave some railroad bonds and drafts. Charley refused; but they were so persistent that, rather than mix up in

their scheme, he left the country and went back to Germany. This was in the early '80's. While there, he opened a bogus commission house, and a large amount of goods was consigned to him to be sold. He sold the goods and kept the money. He told me he got together nearly two hundred thousand dollars, and was just about ready to leave Germany when they got on to him and sent him to prison. His wife returned to this country, settled in Cincinnati, and took in washing to support her family.

“Our government had determined to keep an eye on Charley, and the German government had promised to let us know when he was released. But they failed to do so, and Charley came to this country unannounced. Then, when we got word—I was in the service by this time—that he was among us, there was a scurry to locate him.

“Schuyler Donnella was the man who did it. He was watching Mrs. Ulrich's movements. One day she did not go to work as usual. She excused herself later by saying that her husband had just got home. Donnella found this out and reported it to Washington, and I was picked out to go to Cincinnati to work on Ulrich.

How Burns Shadowed Ulrich

“I went to Cincinnati and found out where he was living. There happened to be a little flat for rent directly across the street, but I knew well that Charley had that flat spotted. If a man were mysteriously to move in and lie low, wise Charley would move out the next morning; or, if he did not go, he would behave himself. I was not in Cincinnati to watch Charley behave himself. The very fact that Charley did not report his presence to the government indicated that he didn't intend to keep straight.

“About the first of November, Mrs. Burns and I moved our unpretentious belongings into the flat. The next morning, at six-thirty, I was out with my working-clothes and dinner-bucket, all ready for the eyes of Charley and his wife. I went down the street about two blocks and around the corner, and was thus disposed of for the day for the Ulrich neighbors. But I came in the back way, changed my clothes, and watched for Charley. When he came out I went out with him—by the back way.

“Charley and his wife watched me each morning as I went to work, and Mrs.

Burns watched them. About the fifth morning they did not watch any more. Every morning I'd pick Charley up. He'd walk around the street for blocks, testing to determine whether he was being followed. An old friend, a woman living in Vine Street, received his mail for him, and he'd walk around there and get it. The shadowing had to be done with the greatest care because Charley was unusually crafty. Moreover, he was experienced in the game. He knew most of the tricks of shadow work. However, by patient watching, I was able to find out most of his plans.

"So things went on for a long time," Burns continued. "I began in November, and all through November, December, January, February, and March I took Charley up in the morning and put him to bed at night. Nothing doing. One day I was sitting by the window, armed with my cap, and a sandwich in my pocket, when Mrs. Burns called to me.

Detective Burns "on the Move"

"'I wish you'd bring in some coal,' she said. We had an extra room in the rear that we used only to keep coal in. So I told her to watch that gate across the street, between the two buildings and giving entrance to both, and I took the bucket and went back. I had dropped just one lump in when I heard Mrs. Burns call:

"'There he goes! Just going away!'

"I dropped the scuttle, and ran down through the back way to the alley, and then to the next corner; from there I could go down the street and catch him. I didn't see Mrs. Burns again for four months.

"Charley walked around a dozen squares and down an alley, testing things thoroughly. Finally, he went to the Chesapeake & Ohio ticket office, and I saw him buy a ticket. Just as he stepped out, I ran up to the window.

"'I promised to meet my uncle here right now,' I said. 'He's a big tall man'—here I gave an accurate description of Ulrich. 'Did he get his ticket?'"

"'Yes,' said the agent. '

"Give me one just like it.'

“He gave me a ticket to New York. I took a car, and got to the station before Charley, who walked down. I boarded the train that left at twelve-one, and took a seat. Charley never saw me at all, but I could see him standing out there, watching everybody who got on the train. Finally, when it was coming time to close the gate, he went over to the guard.

“‘I’m expecting a friend who was to go out with me; he was going to meet me here.’

“‘Well, he’ll have to hurry. We’re going out right away. You’d better get on.’

“Charley walked in, and the guard slammed the gate. Charley got on the train, absolutely certain that he did it without anybody knowing it.

Ulrich Had His Tools and Was on His Way to Join the Brockway Gang

“For the first couple of hours he sat very close; then he walked out into the smoking-car to smoke his pipe. I managed to look over his baggage,—a paper suit-box,—and found a complete outfit for engraving plates. I left them as they were, and wired to Chief William P. Hazen, who arranged to have Operative W. J. McManus meet the train at Philadelphia and go on to New York with me. On the way we determined on our course of action. We concluded to nail Charley, and give him a choice of going to Jersey and taking his fifteen years of suspended sentence, or helping us catch Brockway and his gang.

“I’ve mentioned Bill Brockway to you before,” digressed the detective. “He cut quite a wide swath in government criminal circles. For thirty years he had been a counterfeiter; he took some special courses in Harvard to fit himself. A doctor named Bradford was doing ten years in Sing Sing for malpractice while Jim Courtney and Brockway were doing ten years there for forgery, and they all got acquainted. This gang later got together in New York, and had Sidney Smith engrave a five-hundred-dollar gold certificate. Then they thought it better to have Charley engrave it, and he was on his way to meet them.

“When we arrived, Charley went into a telegraph office and sat down to write a telegram, commencing with the body of the message, without writing the name of the person to whom it was to be sent.

“‘Have just arrived,’ he wrote, and then realized that somebody was looking over his shoulder. He looked up at me; I looked down at him.

“‘Are you interested in this?’ he asked.

“‘Yes,’ I answered.

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘maybe you had better write it.’

“‘All right; I will.’ I took the pen and wrote in the name and address of the fellow the message was to, and signed it with Ulrich’s name.

“Charley sat back, looking at me. ‘You *are* interested, aren’t you?’ That was all he said.

“‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘And I want you to come with me.’

“‘May I ask your name?’

“‘Burns is my name.’

“‘Burns?’

“‘Yes—Burns.’

“‘William J. Burns?’

“‘Yes, William J. Burns.’

“‘Well, Mr. Burns, I’m very glad to meet you—but not under these circumstances. I know of you, but have never seen you before.’

“‘Are you quite sure that you never saw me before this?’

“‘Never in my life.’

“‘Do you remember engraving a picture of Governor William Allen on a circular saw-blade in Columbus?’

“‘Yes, I remember that very well—very well.’

“‘I used to live in Columbus, and I used to go out to see you there.’ And we shook hands.

Burns Told Ulrich His Friends Had Ruined Him

“‘Now, Charley,’ said I, getting down to business, ‘the situation is this. Away back in ‘56 they landed you and “Key Jim”; and in an effort to get himself out of it, Jim told who the engraver was. You got two years.’

“‘Yes, that’s so.’

“‘You got out, went away to war, came back, and Jim Courtney took you to Cincinnati and gave you up.’

“‘Yes, that’s so.’

“‘You beat it and went to Canada, and were given up there.’

“‘By Gott! That’s right! That’s history.’

“‘You beat it again, went to Canada, were given up again, and beat it again. You got back to Cincinnati with Jim, and he gave you up. It was a succession of betrayals, one after another, Charley. There never has been a man who has profited by your work who has ever helped you out. The man who let you do the work has always got big money, while you went to prison to live. Your wife had to come from Europe alone, and wash clothes early and late. When you came home, you found that she had worked hard, had made good friends, and brought up your children well. You, like a big loafer, were willing to sit around and allow your evil friends, who are not friends at all, to get you into trouble again and put you in prison. You never take a thought of those young girls, just becoming women, that your wife has worked so hard for. You don’t mind their being pointed out as the daughters of Charley Ulrich, the notorious counterfeiter.’ I handed talk like that out to Charley until the tears began to roll down his cheeks.

“‘What’s the use of reminding me of all that?’ he cried.

“‘Because you need it. I want to ask you a question. Do you want to go to New Jersey and take the fifteen years that’s coming to you, or do you want to come in with us,—help us round up these crooks that have never done anything but play you false,—and live right with God and man and your family?’

“‘By Gott! I want to go with you, Mr. Burns, I’ll be absolutely loyal to you.’

Charley Helped Burns Run Down the Brockway Gang

“We put him in a carriage and took him up to the St. James Hotel. When the Chief heard of my proposal to Charley, he didn’t like it. He didn’t mean to let Charley out of his sight. But I pointed out my view of the matter to him. The Chief was the responsible man, and he agreed to take the chance.

“I let Charley roam around and meet the fellows we were after. He and Dr. Bradford had quite a time together. At last I got a letter from Charley telling me that he was with the gang at a place on Ann Street, West Hoboken, and that that was the place to find what I was after. So I went right ahead.

“When we raided the Ann Street place, Charley was there, and they were eating lunch—Charley, Abbie Smith, and a fellow named Wagner. Wagner and Mrs. Smith made the paper for the counterfeit notes by taking two pieces of paper the width and size of the note and putting silk threads between them. Poor Wagner was eating heartily when he caught sight of me.

“‘Don’t let me disturb you,’ I said politely. But his appetite was gone.

“‘What do you want?’ demanded Mrs. Smith.

“‘We’re government officers.’ I replied. ‘I want to notify you that your house is under arrest.’

“Charley kept right on eating. I looked at the woman.

“‘What is your name?’

“‘Mrs. Abbie Smith.’

“‘What is your name?’—I turned to Wagner.

“‘Johnson.’

“I looked at Charley. ‘What is your name?’

“‘Schmidt.’

“‘You are a German, aren’t you?’

“‘Yes, I’m a German.’

“‘What are you doing here?’ I then asked him.

Before he could answer, Abbie spoke up:

“‘He is my uncle and is visiting here.’

“‘That’s peculiar.’ said I. ‘One Smith and the other Schmidt.’

“‘No,’ said Abbie; ‘Schmidt is the German for Smith.’

“‘Haven’t I seen you before?’ I asked Charley.

“‘Perhaps you have. I live in Boston.’

“Then we began a search. Upstairs we found a complete printing outfit, over two million dollars in counterfeit gold certificates and hundred-dollar notes, and one oil-cloth printing apron. Perhaps that seems a trifling thing to you, but it resulted in the conviction of Brockway.

“Well, before we got through we had Jimmy Courtney, Dr. Bradford, and, as you know, Bill Brockway. For a whole year, during the time of arrests and trials, I kept Ulrich right with me, day and night. The whole story of the chase after these clever men is too long to tell now. It was the first time the government had ever got Brockway. Before that he had always escaped punishment by turning up the engraver and surrendering the plates.

“This time Brockway was sentenced to ten years in a New Jersey prison. He served his time and is still living. Dr. Bradford got five years in a New York State prison, but he died before his time was up. After his death \$80,000’s worth of securities were found in his cell. Jimmy Courtney escaped a sentence on the Brockway case, but we found an indictment against him in Detroit, Michigan, thirty years previous, and he had to stand trial on this. He was convicted, and, after serving a part of his time, he was pardoned. Then he disappeared, and no one has heard of him since.

“To go back to Charley, I must say that he played square with me. As a matter of fact, I became very much attached to him. He stuck close to me, because he knew that was his best protection against his former friends. I took him with me

down to Florida, where I had to investigate some Cuban filibuster cases. He lived an honest life from this time on until his death about three years ago.

“So there you have Charley Ulrich’s story. He was a fellow of wonderful talent, and one of the best counterfeiters in history. If he had turned his skill and ability to any honest business he might have gone far in the world. With all his cleverness, he’d taken the worst possible way of ‘making money.’”