

The Shadow Business

BY HOWARD McLELLAN

A one-time private detective reveals some of the methods of the craft

RECENTLY the quiet, domesticated night air of suburban New York City was bored into by two pistol shots, and a young man on secret business doubled up with one of the bullets in his left side. There wasn't any mystery about it. A rich New Yorker merely had pinned his resentment of private espionage on his all-seeing shadow, and that part of the universe which lies thickly between the Hudson and the East River, and detests espionage of any kind but uses a lot of it, was aware that a private detective had been painfully interrupted in his peculiar art.

Casualties like this which crop up from time to time indicate, but only to a slight extent, how intently many Americans are being watched by others. During each twenty-four hours of an American day at least twenty thousand pairs of trained eyes, whose scrutiny is privately paid for, are watching the possessors of twenty thousand other pairs of eyes which almost always are totally unsuspecting.

I fear that the new census will not accurately reveal the number of private detectives in our midst, for

an essential part of their business is to keep that business dark. My own experience in the craft, plus rather intensive research, leads me to conclude that Americans are more subject to the "eye," if I may use the trade term for private espionage, than the people of any other nation. This is due not to any greater criminality among us but rather to our broad-minded attitude toward divorce. I shudder to think of how many young and able-bodied men who have embraced private detection as a lifetime occupation would be reduced to pick and shovel were it not for the increasing demand for divorce evidence quickly and quietly produced.

THERE are two large and reputable detective agencies in the country whose ramifications are world-wide. Each has thirty branch offices in strategically located cities. Five thousand smaller agencies, ranging in personnel from ten men to one man, are scattered throughout the country. Altogether they employ about 30,000 operatives, and of these 2,000 are women. The game is not a steady one and probably only 20,000 enjoy full-time em-

ployment. For their services the public pays about \$150,000 a day. It was with one of the two large agencies that I was connected, first as an operative, then investigator, assistant manager and finally manager. In these various capacities I saw enough of the work to convince me that the velvet, or easy money, in the detective business, comes from matrimonial work.

Fortunately for private agencies this type of work can not be undertaken, legally, by the regular police. Even if this were possible I doubt whether a divorce-seeker would entrust his secret mission to the police.

IN TIMES past private agencies eschewed divorce cases, widely advertising the fact that "divorce matters will not be undertaken." Even now reputable agencies would like to have the world believe that they do not handle such matters. The reason is quite obvious. Divorce work is considered dirty, unscrupulous and corrupt; and it is. Where wealth is involved, along with a woman's honor, private operatives (who get as much for their daily labor as a green cabin boy earns on a sailing ship) may be too susceptible. While working for one side they may sell out to the other, or they may be just humanly sympathetic for the woman. They are all romantic devils and out for the coin. Fiascos, resulting from these sell-outs, are reflected in the law of the land which permits a judge to charge a jury that the evidence of private detectives must be taken with a handful of salt, or possibly the same proportion of chloride of lime.

There is a method, however, by

which the large agency maintains its attitude of apparent resentment against divorce work and yet loses none of it. Mr. A —, let us suppose, hastens to a reputable agency and, behind closed doors, unbosoms himself of certain suspicions concerning his wife. He asks the agency to find something concrete that will serve as evidence in a divorce court. The agency manager explains that he can not undertake divorce operations.

"Not even for a substantial fee?" the husband asks.

"Not divorce cases," the manager persists. "Our rules are strict. But if you are prepared to pay say \$25 a day for the service of a shadow man, we'll shadow anybody for anybody."

That is all the visitor seeks. He quickly digs up sufficient cash to carry on a shadow job for two days, "to see what turns up." But the manager has not yet emptied his bag of tricks.

"Of course," he says, "you will be permitted to see the shadow's reports only in this office in my presence."

SHADOWS' reports make good reading. The client may appear surprised or disappointed, but few of them insist further. If they do, and they are clients worth cultivating, the manager may explain that no private agency cares to have its reports bared in a court of law with exposure of its methods and operatives.

In this explanation there is a grain of truth. I rather think though, from what is regarded as "agency low-down," that other motives rule. In the first place, divorce operations are risky undertakings from the box-office standpoint. It has often hap-

pened that after an operative had worked for days on an investigation which revealed nothing of consequence, the client discontinued the work and forgot to settle his unpaid bill. But if a client is compelled to come each day to an agency to read the reports, the fee can be collected before he is shown them.

STILL another sound, if unusual, motive exists. It is buried in the annals of the business, and amounts to tradition. Some years ago Mr. J—, a rangy gentleman from Texas who was possessed of a cactus temperament, retained the services of an agency to shadow his wife. The "op" tailed her about and finally found her "connecting" with a man, much her husband's junior. The "op" named the young man in his reports and gave his address. The Texan went to this address, found a young man who answered the reported description. He had the "op's" reports in one hand and a six shooter in the other. He killed the young man, but unfortunately it proved to be the wrong man. It is highly probable that this tragedy had much to do with the unwillingness of agencies to let reports out of their hands. It also had something to do with the form and style of the modern divorce report which runs something like this:

Chicago Operating No. 17685

Chicago, Ill., December 12, 1929

Chicago Investigator H-12 reports:

Pursuant to instructions from Manager X-2 I proceeded at 11 a.m. today to 0000 Michigan Boulevard to take up surveillance of subject.

At 11.10 a.m. I observed subject come out of a store at the above address. She walked to Randolph Street, went west and at 11.20 a.m. entered a blue Packard automobile which

was run by a man about 30, brown suit, green tie, who drove away.

I hired a taxi. Subjects 1 and 2 went through Randolph to Clark, parked the car and entered a restaurant at No. 0115 Clark Street.

I waited until 5.35 p.m. and subjects did not come out. On telephone instructions from Manager X-2 I discontinued for the day.

Time

One day..... \$25.00

Expense

Taxi hire..... \$ 1.50
Tip to restaurant doorman.. .50
Telephones..... .15
Lunch..... 1.00

THIS report, typed on plain white paper, is the one seen in the office by the client. It is about as relevant as an infant's scribblings. However, the original handwritten report of the operative was quite revealing and conclusive and it told too much. In it the "op" gave the number of the Packard automobile, the name of subject No. 1, the suspected wife, while reference to motor vehicle registrations gave the name and address of the car owner. These essential facts were deleted by the manager for safety's sake and one other compelling reason. But like the beginning of a successful short story, the successful report must have strong elements of suspense. Subsequent reports, if the client cares to pay for them, will reveal more. A little later, when contact with the client has convinced the agency manager that he is an even-tempered person, capable of withstanding shocks and incapable of gun play, all the deleted facts are permitted to dribble through to him. Still the client must find witnesses, for the agency refuses to permit "ops" to

take the stand. The client passes the witness quest on to his lawyer.

One should observe that the taxi ride described in the body of the report is actually about four blocks in length, yet it cost \$1.50, according to the itemized expense summary. However, a client in the flush of excitement at discovering that his suspicions are well-founded, rarely questions an expense item. It is quite likely that the vehicle described as a taxi was the operative's own Ford, so that here his profit on expenses is nearly 100 per cent.

The expense item is of paramount importance to the operative. A shadow, whose rank is the lowest in private detection, usually receives \$3 a day and expenses from the agency, while the agency receives from \$12 to \$25 a day and all expenses from the client. An investigator, who is a step higher than the shadow, is paid from \$4 to \$6 a day, and the agency receives from \$15 to \$30 a day for his services in matrimonial cases. Thus the profits for a detective agency come mainly from the difference between what the client pays per man and what the worker receives, while the worker, where it is possible, makes his profits on expenses.

THE technique of shadowing has undergone vast changes in the last two decades. When only street cars or slow-moving hacks were available and a great many people walked, the shadow had a comparatively easy job of tailing his subject. But since modern courtship is carried on to a large extent in or with the aid of motor cars, the "tailing" job is not so simple.

Yet in spite of the motor car it is

possible to maintain what are known as "close" and "rough" shadows on a subject. The rough "tail" is one which is maintained on a subject who may have reason to suspect he will be shadowed and the tail follows him at a long, safe distance. A close tail is carried on when the subject is without reason to believe he will be followed.

A RICH and influential subject, who was being followed at the instigation of his wife, thought he was throwing off his shadow when he came out of the bank of which he was head and dived into a taxi waiting at the curb. The taxi shot away, the driver always managing just to get by the red traffic signal, thus leaving behind any car that might be following with an "eye" in it. The same taxi and the same driver were always awaiting the subject at the curb.

Yet the wife was in complete possession of her husband's daily movements by motor car, which invariably wound up at the door of the young woman in whom he showed an undue interest. He paid the taxi driver handsomely for always being in readiness for him and dodging past the red light. But the agency hired by the wife had "gotten to" the driver and paid him handsomely also for his daily reports on the banker's tours. In this case the driver was not a shadow man but a specialist in agency service known as a "plant." This trick, made necessary by the motor car, is employed again and again. Agencies maintain a list of live taxi plants.

The taxi trap does not always work. Men and women who are followed frequently use private machines and go to circuitous lengths to

lose shadows. It may then be necessary to employ another type of specialist, indexed as a "rope." A proficient female "rope" who has that certain way with men, will first size up her subject, and, if he shows the slightest interest in her, contact results. An acquaintance thus formed leads to more valuable information than the old process of shadowing produced, and this information is relayed to the client *via* the agency. If the subject-in-chief is not susceptible to feminine wiles, the female "rope" may succeed, through sisterly offices, in engaging the confidences of the correspondent. If this can not be done, an operative is detailed to "go up against" either the subject-in-chief or the correspondent by seeking employment as a maid, cook, laundrywoman, stenographer or what not.

AS STRAIGHT operatives, women are not outstanding successes. As "ropes" no man is their equal. I have had college graduates, girls of good social position and smart appearance, plead for an opportunity to try their hand at roping. Invariably they offer the explanation that they have been fascinated by detective tales which they have been reading and want to see what sleuthing is like in real life. This, I believe, is more pretext than reason, for after the thrill of their first job is over they beg for more assignments. I suspect that many of them are really trying out their ability to win men, and in this there seems always to be an unending fascination for their sex.

Sometimes disaster overtakes them. The daughter of a banker wanted to try detective work. She

was assigned to a matrimonial job and her "rope" subject was a suspect husband. Her reports which at first were interesting, gradually became meagre and at last were carefully worded defenses of the subject. Of course she lost her job and the divorce was obtained with other evidence; but afterward she married the husband. The former wife, slyly waiting, collected from the father of the girl \$60,000 for alienation of affections.

THERE are times when none of the methods I have just outlined will produce results. A well-to-do and cautious old husband established the object of his affections in a mansion by the road, and to this mansion he hurried every afternoon when he was supposed to be at his office or club. He travelled to and from the mansion in a fast motor car and successfully evaded all efforts to tail him.

The law required evidence that he not only visited the mansion when the correspondent was occupying it, but required as well some evidence that they were actually together within the house. The mansion was surrounded by a high brick wall and hidden by trees. The chauffeur who drove the gentleman always stood guard at the gate and permitted no one to pass within. Servants and chauffeur proved unpurchasable.

Nevertheless the subject was quite continuously watched while he was in the house. First the electric lights went out of commission and a line-man appeared at the gate to restore service. He was welcomed within and he did his little job of fixing the wires. He came out with abundant evidence that the old gentleman and his

youthful flame were not together in the mansion for the purposes of saying *paternosters*. The lineman was a duly authenticated agency operative who had cut the wires to gain admittance to the house. A few days later a taxi rattled past the gate and came to a dead stop at the side of the road. Its driver got out and meddled with the engine for an hour. Pretty soon the old gentleman's chauffeur left his sentry post at the gate and offered to help fix the engine. Well, there was no wrench in the taxi. The chauffeur started toward the house to get one. The taxi driver asked him if there was a telephone in the mansion and, if so, could he use it to call up the fare he was on his way to pick up when the engine went dead? The obliging and thoroughly trusting chauffeur invited the driver into the house and he was permitted to use the telephone in the hallway. As he phoned to a confederate he looked over the interior scene, and, like the light repair man, walked away with additional evidence.

THE aggrieved wife demanded still more evidence, and was in a position to pay for it. So an operative was assigned to build a little roadside refreshment shack facing the gate to the mansion grounds where he might carry on a daily watch. This was too much for the old gentleman. Presently a moving man arrived with his van and the lady in the mansion departed with her *lares* and *penates*. Later it was a matter of great distress for both correspondent and the husband to find his flaming letters to her introduced as evidence at the divorce trial, along with receipted bills which the husband had paid for

the upkeep of the correspondent. How these documents came into possession of the wife offers no mystery to the detective. The moving man was an agency "plant" who knew how to rifle the desks and dressing tables which he carried off in his van.

The detective service in this long-drawn-out operation cost about \$25,000. The wife paid the bill out of money which came to her from her husband under a liberal alimony decree.

IT is amazing what can be done with pretexts in private detective work. Many of them are as old as the institution of marriage, yet those who are trapped by them seem never to suspect their use. For instance, the Western Union Telegraph Company rigidly enforces the rule, which is protected by law, that messages which pass over its wires are not to be seen by unauthorized eyes. To most agencies such rules are made to be broken. The manner in which they are broken is simple though illegal. An operative engaged in watching a house observes a messenger boy deliver the telegram. He hurries away to the nearest telephone and calls the person who received the message, and representing himself to be an employee of the telegraph company explains that there was a mistake in time or wording of the message and would the recipient kindly read it over so that the correction might be made? Almost without exception the message is repeated over the 'phone.

One might suppose that the hegira of unhappily married couples to Paris, Mexico and other sources of the easy divorce decree, has con-

siderably reduced the business of the private detective agency, robbing it of its best paying clientèle. However, the contrary is true.

MENTION in the press, by barest cable intelligence, that Mrs. J. Whatterwaite Townsley has won a Paris decree from her husband, the eminent banker and polo enthusiast, does much to promote the impression that they settled their differences without the aid of detectives.

Yet Mrs. Townsley comes away from Paris with a decree and a handsome settlement. How was it possible for her to whip her hard-headed banker husband into accepting the decree and agreeing to the handsome settlement? It was a private detective agency on this side of the water that made it all possible. And the evidence was, no doubt, assembled bit by bit through the indefatigable efforts of a score of shadow men working on the job.



Prohibition's Absurdities

BY HARRY HIBSCHMAN

Some gems of inconsistency and paradox in the law and methods of enforcement

VOLTAIRE once wrote to a friend that there was one short prayer he often made. "My God," it was worded, "make our enemies very ridiculous!"

Were he alive today and opposed to Prohibition, he would be happy without finding it necessary to call on the Deity for help. For the Prohibitionists are doing that job themselves; and, if ever any other proponents of a cause have surpassed them in that respect, historians have not done their duty to the rest of us and humorists have overlooked a glorious opportunity to win immortal fame. Nor has there ever been a movement or an effort to regulate human conduct by force that was more prolific in absurdities than Prohibition in these United States of the Anti-Saloon League, or else the name thereof has been buried with its too solemn advocates and defenders.

As a former Prohibitionist who can obtain considerable information on the subject by looking into my own past and who now has the grace to blush at some of my former antics, I offer the readers of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW an inventory of

some of the major of these absurdities. Of course, the specific enumeration of certain particular items does not imply the non-existence of others not named.

WHEN the Anti-Saloon League was incorporated thirty-five years ago, its object was stated to be "the extermination of the liquor traffic." Nothing was said about the use of liquor. And its official spokesmen at all times both implicitly and explicitly created the impression that the League was not aiming to make drinking illegal.

This same impression was deliberately fostered when the Eighteenth Amendment was proposed. The things to be prohibited by it were "the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation from, the United States — for beverage purposes." It was absolutely silent regarding purchase, possession, or use. And that was no accident. The proponents of the Amendment were running true to form. They centred attention on the traffic and concealed their real purpose.