

enlarged the field of his usefulness from year to year. His operations extended over Oregon, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. It was in California, however, that he exerted his baneful activities to their utmost. It was there, too, that his voice was loudest. If he wanted twenty or more men made deputy surveyors, all he had to do was to name them, and they got the positions. In the names of ten persons, contracts amounting to \$500,000 were taken out without the request of the supposed contractors and without their consent or knowledge. Though the papers were supposed to be entered in the records, none of them discovered that these contracts were in their names until two years afterward, and in some cases not until the frauds had been exposed. So strong had Benson's influence become with the Californian land officials that whenever there was any hint of his work being investigated by a special agent from Washington, he would have that agent removed and another put in his place.

In less than five years Benson made over \$2,000,000 out of his contracts; but as he was always a free spender, he was often hard pressed for funds. In 1882 he was forced to assign, but the banks advanced money on new surveys and he went blithely on.

From reports turned in to the Commissioner of the General Land Office it became apparent that Benson and his colleagues had not done the work which they had so beautifully set forth on their maps. Special agents were set to work in a manner so secret that Benson, with all his boasted knowledge of Government land affairs, did not know what they were doing. These agents worked for two years and discovered many other things beside fraudulent surveys. They found that where the Benson gang had done real work or made a show of doing it by throwing stakes out of a moving wagon, by collusion with the surveyors-general, they were often paid from six to ten times as much as they were really entitled to for doing good work. For example, T. P. O'Reilly, a Benson dummy, contracted to survey eighteen townships in Del Norte and Siskiyou Counties, California, for \$1,800, that amount being distinctly understood and agreed upon as the limit of the Government's liability—that and no more; but what his silent principal really received for the beautiful map and the fine set of field-notes was \$12,168.39. The work had previously been estimated at the highest rate allowed by law, but Benson received nearly

seven times as much. Another contract entered into March 1, 1881, at \$3,000—this and no more—proved still more costly to the Government, the contractor receiving for his artistic map and field-notes \$30,139.40!

At last a particularly shrewd special agent, named Conrad, was sent to California. Conrad studied the stupendous scheme of fraud to such purpose that within six months he had put upon paper a full statement of the operations of the Benson gang. Before he had an opportunity to submit his report he was quietly forced to resign at the instance of Benson, the Washington end of whose machine was still in full working order. But other agents and other reports followed, and in 1886 the heavy hand of the Government reached out for John A. Benson. Both civil and criminal suits were begun—the initial steps in a prosecution in which no fewer than eighty-six indictments have been filed against Benson and his colleagues—a prosecution that has cost the Government thousands of dollars and up to the present has not deprived the shrewd surveyor of his liberty for more than brief periods of time, and, as he boasts, has not cost him so much as an hour's sleep.

Yet he must have been a badly frightened Benson when those first complaints were lodged; for when the time came for him to appear in court he was sailing over the blue Atlantic. His bondsmen put detectives on his trail and traced him to Chicago, New York, Liverpool, and London, and finally arrested him in Copenhagen. Then began a series of dilatory tactics by which he succeeded ultimately in wriggling for a time out of the clutches of the law. In 1888 he was indicted, but the first case was not tried against him until November, 1892, and on the thirteenth day of that month the jury returned a verdict of not guilty. In 1895 the last of the cases fizzled out, and from that time until his indictment in September, 1903, he has had comparative peace.

At what particular stage of his brilliant career as an opportunist Benson came to join his fortunes with Frederick A. Hyde is known only to those two eminent land grafters. The connection has always been kept secret, the two men even professing a strong hatred for each other, though their offices were connected by a private telephone-wire, safe from all curious ears; they were said to have transacted much business at night.

In personal appearance Frederick A. Hyde is the very opposite of Benson. He had been