

The Defrauded Heir

by a New York Detective

I WAS brought up to the medical profession, although I never graduated as a physician. It was an incident that occurred during my pupilage which made me adopt the profession of a detective officer, and I cannot do better than illustrate my experiences by relating it to the reader.

My father was a respectable merchant, living in the city of New York. He bestowed as good an education on me as he could afford, and then placed me in the office of Doctor Lignon, who resided in a huge country village, for the purpose of studying medicine. I was then eighteen years of age, and was to remain with him until I was twenty-one, and then enter a medical college.

I was very fond of reading, and soon exhausted the doctor's library. From my very boyhood I possessed an analytical mind. I never allowed anything to escape my observation. The most trivial circumstances, which to others would appear unworthy of notice, were recorded by me, treasured up in my memory, and ultimately supplied a missing link in some chain.

Doctor Lignon did a large practice, and afforded a very good school for a student. I had not been with him two years before I was of considerable use to my tutor, being able to visit the poorer classes of patients, and attend to office practice.

Among the doctor's patients was a Mr. Stephen Barton, a wealthy gentleman who lived about three miles from the village. He was a widower with an only son, a boy about four years of age. His brother, Mr. Amos Barton, also resided with him. The latter was reported to be a very pious man, at all events, he visited church regularly.

One day Doctor Lignon was sent for in a great hurry to attend Mr. Stephen Barton, who had been taken with a fit. The poor gentleman, however, died before he reached the house. A few days afterwards I learned from the doctor that young Henry Barton had been left heir to all his immense wealth, and his uncle was the sole executor to the will; there was a provision in the will that if the young lad died before he reached the age of twenty-one years, the whole of the property was to revert to the uncle, Amos Burton.

It was about this time that I noticed my tutor paid very frequent visits to Burton Manor House, although there was no one ill there I noticed this more particularly, as I knew Dr. Lignon was no great friend to Amos Barton. I had frequently heard him observe that he looked upon Mr. Stephen Barton's brother as a hypocrite. I also noticed that a great change came over the doctor in a few days; his manners were generally open and frank, and he possessed a naturally great flow of spirits; but suddenly all this changed, he became moody and reserved. His health also seemed to give way, he grew pale and

sallow. This set me to thinking, and I wondered in my own mind what could be the cause of it.

One morning about a week after Mr. Barton's funeral, I entered the surgery before the doctor was up. The first thing which struck my attention was a glass mortar on the table. I concluded that my tutor had left it there, and must have prepared some medicine during the night. I examined the mortar, and found some small crystals at the bottom of it, which emitted a strong odor of prussic acid. I also noticed that the bottle containing antimonial wine, and one containing chloroform were displaced.

"So, so," thought I to myself, "the doctor must have been preparing medicine late last night. But what kind of case in the world can it be that requires cyanoret of potash, chloroform and antimonial wine, for those are the medicines he used? Why there's enough of the first drug to poison half the village. Well, here's a problem for me to solve, that's all."

I made a note of the circumstance in a copious note book which I carried about with me. I then commenced my daily reading, and continued to be thus unremittingly engaged until evening, when the doctor entered the office.

"Well, James," he said, divesting himself of his overcoat, "busily engaged I see. What is the subject of your studies today?"

"I am very much interested in a curious French book which I found in the library," I returned.

"Indeed, I was not aware you could read French."

"Oh, yes. I can read it as well as English. I taught myself."

"There are many good French books in the library. What subject does the one you are reading treat on?"

"It appears to be a philosophical treatise on different subjects. I am now reading an essay on the 'Art of producing the exact appearance of death.'"

The doctor started and turned pale, he snatched the book from my hand, and hurriedly exclaimed:

"James, you had better be studying the bones. This book is not for you to read just yet. I may let you have it by-and-by."

So saying he hurried from the apartment. I was confounded for a moment or two, and then a subdued light entered my mind, and I took my notebook from my pocket and made another entry.

A few days after this occurrence a mysterious kind of disease made its appearance in the neighborhood called the black tongue; a great many persons were taken sick with it, and several died. Within ten days of Stephen Barton's death, his little son, Henry Barton, was committed to the grave. Everyone that attended the funeral thought that it was shocking that father and son should both die within such a short time of each other, and no one appeared more concerned than Amos Barton. His grief was so natural that even his enemies were constrained to acknowledge that in the present instance he had shown himself most disinterested. He could not have mourned more if his own son had died.

After young Henry Barton's funeral, Doctor Lignon returned home for the first time within two days. I had, however, visited the most urgent calls, and had managed very well.

"What a terrible, sudden death that of young Barton was," said I, "what was his disease?"

"Black tongue," replied the doctor, curtly, as if he wished to put an end to the conversation.

"I have heard something about this disease, but know nothing about it," was my reply.

"It is a mysterious disease that has lately made its appearance in this country, supposed to be taken from animals; it affects human beings from the use of the milk taken from cows that have the disease; but look into Copeland's Medical Encyclopedia, and you will find a very able article on it."

I was no sooner alone than I examined the work referred to. I read the article over two or three times, and was entranced by it. I learned how rare the disease was, the strange pathological developments in persons dying from it, and the fine opportunities which were offered for scientific examination.

A sudden idea entered my mind – it haunted me all day – and in the middle of the night I put it into execution. Forgive me, reader, I was an ardent student in my profession, and perhaps might never have an opportunity of investigating this strange malady again. I determined to exhume young Harry's body.

The cemetery where he was buried was removed about a mile from the village. The road to it was a very dreary one at the best; but especially was this the case when darkness was over the face of the earth.

It was a cold November night when I started on my fearful errand. The wind whistled through the leafless trees, and by its moaning and sobbing I almost fancied it seemed conscious that a grave was about to be desecrated. Until the limits of the village were passed, I got on very well; but when I reached the dark road leading to the cemetery, I must confess my heart began to fail me. I whistled to distract my attention, I sang, I even called out in a loud voice. It was no use, I felt my courage fast oozing away; but shame

for my own fears, and an ardent desire to investigate this mysterious disease, made me proceed.

At last I reached the cemetery gate, and with a trembling hand opened the massive portal. The grave where the body was laid was at the further end of the cemetery, and I had, as it were, to walk through a whole city of graves before I reached it. How I reached it I know not, for by this time my fears had almost unmanned me. My legs trembled under me, and various horrible incidents I had read in the course of my life all rushed into my mind in a most vivid manner. I could just trace the form of the white tombstones which lay in my path. Twenty times I had transformed them into spectres, and fancied they were advancing towards me. More than once I turned my back to fly from the spot, but a more powerful feeling than fear prevented me, namely, the love of science.

At last I reached the spot where the boy lay buried. I could distinctly trace the form of the newly-made grave. I put my lantern on the ground, and untied the sack I had brought with me for the removal of the body, and which now contained the spade and other instruments necessary for exhuming the body. As I proceeded in my work, my ardor increased, and all my superstitious fears left me. The earth was easily loosened, and in a short time two large heaps were raised on both sides of me. I soon reached the coffin, and a little more exertion served to bring it entirely in sight. I was very strong, and had no difficulty whatever in raising it up, and placing it on the edge of the grave. This done I unscrewed the lid, but before taking out the body I thought I would take a peep at it. I brought the lantern to bear on the face. It stared back in consternation; the lantern fell to the ground, but fortunately was not extinguished. I knew young Harry Barton's features perfectly well, and those of the corpse were none of his!

I picked up the lantern, and again examined the features of the deceased. They were entirely unknown to me. I seated myself on one of the mounds of earth, and remained for at least a quarter of an hour absorbed by my reflections. I then rose up, readjusted the coffin lid, and again consigned the body to the grave. The hole was soon filled in. The work finished, I hastened home, and in a quarter of an hour I was seated in the doctor's office without any one having been aware of my absence. That night I made another entry in my notebook. This time it was a longer one than usual.

I felt deeply interested in this mystery, and determined to investigate it to the end. For that purpose I asked leave of Doctor Lignon to visit New York on business. I set off the next morning, and made some important discoveries which I shall relate by-and-by to the reader; but on one point I was entirely unsuccessful, but I learned sufficient to compromise Doctor Lignon in my eyes, and I determined not to return to him. I wrote to him, stating that I had made up my mind I would adopt another profession. I need not now enter into the reasons which made me turn detective officer, as they have nothing to do with the matter in question; suffice it to say that in a few years I became quite famous, and had as much business as I could attend to. I married and settled myself in the upper part of New York city.

One January evening, eighteen years after I had left Doctor Lignon's, I returned home as usual after the labors of the day. I found my wife seated by a cheering fire, with the teakettle hissing on the table, on which too was placed the tea-service, and the toast racks fastened to the fender, betokened that the evening meal was waiting for me.

"Home at last, dear James," said my wife. "I have been waiting tea for you some time."

"Yes, I was engaged longer at the office of the chief of police than I expected today. By-the-by, who do you think I met on Broadway today?"

"I don't know. Who?"

"None other than Amos Barton."

I should have said that my wife came from the village where Doctor Lignon lived, and was well acquainted with all the parties mentioned in this history.

"Indeed," she replied, "did he speak to you?"

"O, yes; it appears he intends running for Congress. He solicited my influence; but of course I did not promise it to him."

"It is very strange, but father never liked that man. There was something in his countenance or his manner which was very repulsive to him."

"A great many people share his prejudices, my dear," I returned. "Amos Barton is by no means a general favorite. I remember when I was a pupil at Doctor Lignon's I used to hate him."

"And yet no one can tell why they dislike him. They can bring no immoral act against him. Did you ever hear anything tangible proved against him?"

"Never."

"Do you remember how strangely he came in for his property? I was but a little girl then, still I recollect distinctly the sensation it made. His brother and nephew died within ten days of each other. It was very curious."

"Very."

I suppose I uttered this word in a peculiar manner, for my wife put down her cup which she was in the act of raising to her mouth, and glanced curiously at me.

"What do you mean by that 'very?'" said my wife. "Now, James, I know by your manner that you have a secret to tell me."

“My dear, what secret should I know?”

“I don’t know; but you are so different from other men—you have such an extraordinary faculty for tracing matters out – I am certain you know more about that affair than you pretend.”

At that moment there was a ring at the bell, and the servant girl entered almost directly afterwards and handed me a sealed envelope. I glanced at the outside, and saw that it had “House’s Printing Telegraph Company” printed on the outside of it. I hurriedly broke the seal, and drew from the red envelope a slip of paper, on which was printed the following message:

“Come to me immediately. I am dying, and have something of importance to communicate to you. Doctor Lignon.

“A—, *New York.*”

I handed the dispatch to my wife.

“Must you go?” said she, with a shade of disappointment in her voice.

“I must indeed,” I rejoined. “I have some idea as to the nature of the communication he has to make, and leaving out of consideration my duty as his former pupil, I must go for other reasons.”

“Well dear, of course I can make no opposition; you won’t stay longer than is necessary, I am sure.”

“Let me see, it is now seven o’clock. The train leaves at eight. I can be at my destination by tomorrow morning.”

Kissing my wife good-by, I hurried off. It was bitter cold in the streets, and the snow was falling in large flakes. In spite of the obstruction caused by the snow, I reached the depot in good time, and taking a seat in a car near the stove, in a few minutes I was proceeding on my way to my destination.

The stove heated the cars thoroughly, and I lay back in my seat, and yielding to the relaxation caused by the warmth, I closed eyes, and in a very short time I was asleep. While in this condition I had a curious dream. I thought I was in a court of justice, and that a prisoner was placed at the bar charged with conspiracy and abduction. The prisoner’s face appeared to be perfectly familiar to me, although I could not recollect who it was. I also recognized the tone of his voice. I asked myself over and over again who it could be. While endeavoring to recollect, I thought some one whispered in my ear that it was Mr. Amos Barton.

The name was pronounced so distinctly that I awoke. I discovered that a man and woman seated before me were conversing in a low tone together, and that one of them had pronounced Mr. Barton's name. I still pretended to be asleep, but examined my fellow travelers with a scrutinizing glance. I found they were common-looking people, evidently past the meridian of life. They were meanly clad. The man evidently was an habitual drunkard, and the woman, with her hard face, and dark marks under her eyes, led me to suspect that she was an opium eater. Mr. Barton's name aroused my curiosity. In spite of the old adage I determined to listen.

"I tell you," said the woman, in a tone of remonstrance, "you can't deceive him much longer. He'll find out that the boy ran away from us, and then good-by to our allowance."

"How can he find it out," returned the man, in a gruff voice, "if you only keep a quiet tongue in your head? But you always have such a confounded lot to say—"

"It's all very well, Ralph, your talking in that manner; but what would you do when he cross-examines you so closely if I didn't put in my say. I tell you he would floor you directly, and then we might hook for the money, that's all."

"I should like to see him dare to refuse it," returned the man, in a determined voice. "If he did I'd blow—blame me if I wouldn't—although he has that bit of paper that I signed his name to. I tell you, we haven't lived on him eighteen years for nothing."

"Suppose you tell him his nephew is dead?"

"Bah, that would be of no use. He's such a stingy beggar, he'd stop the supplies at once. No, no, you must leave me to manage him. I'll tell him that I know where he is, and that will keep him in dread, and he'll fork over without a word."

"Now, Ralph, suppose he should be determined not to give you any more, what would you do?"

"What would I do? I would say to him, 'Look here, Mr. Barton, if you don't send me the money you owe me to 222 East Broadway before three days have expired, then if you don't see the State prison looming in the distance, I'm a Dutchman.'"

"Well, I hope we shall be successful, that's all. I have my doubts, however."

After this they relapsed into silence, and did not speak any more until they reached their destination. I made a few notes of this conversation in my pocket book.

About two o'clock the next day I reached the end of my journey, and was at Doctor Lignon's house. I rung the bell and was at once shown up stairs. The moment I entered the doctor's bedroom I started back in horror. Familiar as I had been with scenes of suffering, I had never met with one equal to this. Eighteen years had elapsed since I had seen Doctor Lignon, and he was now scarcely recognizable. Time had not dealt very

kindly with him, for he was now an old, old man. What little hair he had left was snowy white, even his eyebrows were bereft of every particle of color. His body was attenuated to a most frightful degree. It was plainly to be perceived he was suffering from some painful organic disease. His face was unearthly pale, not a common pallor, but a sallow, waxy paleness, which it is difficult to describe, but which when once seen can never be forgotten. A dark circle enclosed each eye, and by the very contrast with the rest of his face, gave a fearful expression to it. His eyes shone brightly, but were sunk deep in their orbits. His cheeks had fallen in, his chin had become prominent, and his thin, wasted hands shook as if he were affected with palsy.

About a year prior to his present condition, he noticed for the first time a small pimple on his tongue. He thought at first it was occasioned by being grazed against his teeth. He applied caustic to it; but instead of healing it up, it broke out into a small ulcer. This showed no disposition to heal, and by-and-by he experienced strong lancinating pains through it. This alarmed him, and he went to New York to consult Doctor M—, and Doctor P—, the famous professors of surgery. The moment they saw it, they decided that it was cancer, and all that remained for that the invalid to do was to go home and prepare for death, an operation being entirely unjustifiable.

He returned home, and in spite of the surgeon's opinion, and his own experience in such cases, continued to hope against hope. The ulceration, however, continued to spread rapidly. Hectic fever set in, and his digestive powers gave way. He was obliged to keep his bed, and then it was that the conviction was forced on his mind that he must die. His sufferings now became frightful to contemplate. But physical pain was nothing compared to the pangs of his conscience. He felt that he must soon stand in the presence of his Maker. He knew he had committed a fearful wrong, and the sole idea of his mind now was to repair it. At last the thought struck him to apply to me, and for this purpose he sent me the telegraphic despatch, in reply to which summons I now stood before him.

"I know my days are numbered," said the old doctor, after he had given me the foregoing particulars of his case. "My disease is utterly incurable. But, James, I have a fearful confession to make to you, one which I fear will drag me down to perdition, unless I atone for it by endeavoring to make restitution. O, James, how can I summon up resolution enough to tell you what a guilty wretch I am?"

"Perhaps I already know something of the matter of which you would speak," I returned.

"Impossible! No living soul, save one knows it. O God, must I reveal my own shame? Must I tell how guilty I have been? I cannot, I cannot!" And the old man buried his head in the pillow.

I sincerely pitied him, and determined that I would begin the subject myself.

"Doctor," said I, "you had a companion in the transaction to which you refer."

“I had, I had! But how can you know anything about it? Can it be possible that you could have suspected anything at the time?”

“I know all; and to spare you the shame of confessing, I will repeat to you the particulars of the transaction which brings remorse to your dying bed. Eighteen years ago Mr. Stephen Barton died, leaving an only son heir to his immense wealth. Mr. Amos Barton was appointed his guardian. By some means, I know not what, he persuaded you to assist him in his nefarious designs. You administered a preparation to the rightful heir which produced the effect of simulated death. Amos Barton procured a body from the University Medical College in New York. While Henry Barton lay in an insensible condition, his body was removed from the coffin, and substituted by the one obtained from the city.”

“Great heavens, how did you find all this out? I had no idea that any mortal man, save the other guilty party, knew anything of the matter.”

I here related the manner in which I had ferreted out the truth, with which the reader is already acquainted.

“But what became of the boy, the rightful heir?” asked the doctor eagerly.

“I don’t know. If you remember at the time all this occurred I left your house and visited New York. I made every possible search, but without any success, except obtaining information from where Amos Barton obtained the substitute. I debated a long time whether I ought not to make known what I had discovered to the authorities. But I knew Amos Barton’s influence, and feared I should only bring disgrace on myself. Besides which I could not bear the idea of blackening your fair fame.”

“O, thank you for your consideration, I did not deserve it. But do you think he—”

The old man hesitated, as if he dared not give utterance to his thought.

“Murdered him, you would say,” I rejoined. “No; this very day I have discovered that he did not make way with him.”

And I here related the conversation I had heard in the railway car.

“God grant that he may still be alive,” said the old man, “and now, James, listen to my dying words. Promise me you will use every possible exertion to discover young Barton and re-instate him into his property. I want you also to draw up a plain statement of the facts of the case. I will sign it, and you shall witness it. In the event of the case coming before a jury, it may aid in establishing the rightful heir’s claim. Should you discover Henry Barton to be dead, of course it will be no use to make any movement in the matter, for the present occupant of Barton Manor House would be the heir-at-law.”

“I will do everything you require,” I returned, and I immediately drew up the paper referred to, which Doctor Lignon signed. This done he appeared to be more easy in his mind, and actually slept some hours, which he had not done for some days before.

Having settled all these matters, I took an affectionate farewell of my old tutor. I would willingly have remained with him until the last moment of his life, but my duties in New York required my immediate presence. Had I known the poor old doctor’s end was so near I would undoubtedly have stayed, for he died the next day, and was committed to the grave without one soul being in any way interested in the event. I make a mistake, there was one person interested, and that was Amos Barton, for he saved two thousand dollars a year by the physician’s death, that being the sum paid to him for his share in the nefarious transaction.

After I returned to New York, I debated in my own mind as to the means to be used to discover if Henry Barton was still alive; at the same time I set a watch on the premises, 222 East Broadway, giving orders for the messenger to inform me the moment he caught sight of the man who had been called Ralph, and with whom there could be no doubt Harry Barton had been placed after his removal from the Barton Manor House.

I had been home two days when my messenger informed me that he had seen Ralph just enter a restaurant in East Broadway. I immediately started for the place, and found the man of whom I was in search, seated in a box, and occupied in gazing very earnestly on a young man about twenty-two years of age, who was seated in another box exactly opposite to him. I placed myself in close contiguity for the purpose of observing all that passed. I was soon rewarded for my trouble.

Ralph at last seemed satisfied with his scrutiny, for he left his own box and advanced to where the young man was sitting. I could overhear all their conversation.

“Young man,” said he, carelessly seating himself by the young man’s side, “may I ask your name?”

The person addressed started, for he had not seen the man approach.

“What do you mean?” he replied. “Who are you?”

“Never mind who I am,” replied Ralph, in a gruff voice. “I ask you again what is your name? Are you ashamed of it?”

“My name is Henry Graham. What do you want with me?”

“No, sir, your name is Henry Murdock, and I am your father. It won’t do, you know, trying to disown me; although you did run away from home twelve years ago, I have not forgotten you.”

“Silence!” returned the young man, in a subdued voice. “It is true I ran away from your hateful roof. When I lived with you, child though I was, I knew you to be a miserable, drunken loafer, and find after twelve years’ absence that you have not reformed.”

“Well, come, young man, that’s a pretty way for a son to talk to his father.”

“You, my father! You know you lie. Do you suppose that when I had the sense to discover such was not the case when I was a child, you can impose upon me now?”

“O, it’s all very well for you to deny it, but I can prove that you are my son.”

“You lie again!” returned the young man with vehemence. “If I thought I had one drop of your ignoble blood in my body, I would open a vein until every particle had run out. Leave me – your presence annoys me – I wish neither to see nor hear from you again.”

“Ah, I see you are riding the high horse. I suppose you have been getting on a little in the world, and now want to disown your poor old father.”

“Have done, and leave me, or rather I will leave you,” returned the young man, rising from his seat, “and listen to me, fellow – if you presume to address me again, I will evoke the protection of the law, and should that not be sufficient to shield me from your persecution, I will take the law into my own hands.”

So saying he left the place. Ralph Murdock followed him, and I was not far behind. The young man entered the St. Nicholas Hotel. In ten minutes I sent up my card, and was at once admitted into his presence. In a few words I explained my business, and was perfectly satisfied that I stood in the presence of Henry Barton. The young man related his story to me, which amounted to substantially as follows:

His first recollections were of living with two persons in Avenue A, in the city of New York. His reputed parents were the very scum of society – the man was a confirmed drunkard, the woman a shrew. The abode in which he lived was wretched in the extreme. He never experienced any kind treatment from his pretended father and mother. Curses and blows were all they deigned to bestow upon him. His indifference to them soon turned into loathing.

Some years passed away under this wretched treatment, and by the time he had reached ten years of age, he was a poor, depressed, crouching thing, always on the defensive as if he expected a blow to be inflicted on him every moment, in which expectation he was too often correct. He was entirely unlike other boys of his own age. No children’s laugh had ever been echoed in his ears; no children’s games had ever released him from the terrible monotony of a miserable existence. His life was at that tender age shrouded over with the dark shadow of despair, and he seemed to have all the miseries of a lifetime developed in the age of a child.

One day the man returned home even in a worse state of intoxication than usual. It was rather late in the evening. When the man entered he gazed around him as if to find some object on which to vent his ill temper. His eyes fell upon the boy who sat shivering with cold in one corner of the room. The man rushed at him, and inflicted blow after blow on the boy's defenseless head. That night he ran away, and managed to reach Boston. He embarked as cabin boy on board a vessel going to the West Indies. He got employment in a mercantile house in Jamaica, and gradually rose to a responsible position. When he had saved a considerable sum of money, he determined to again visit the United States to try and discover his parentage, and was now here for that purpose.

When Henry Barton had finished his history, we entered into a long conversation as to the best means to prove his identity. The task was not an easy one, and I saw but one way, and that was to get Murdock into our power, and make him confess the truth. It was to this end that I devoted all my energies.

The messenger that I had set to watch Murdock informed me that the day after his meeting with Henry Barton, he had left by the Hudson River cars. I felt certain that he had gone to inform Amos Barton of the discovery of the heir. In two days he returned again.

My mind was made up what to do. I disguised myself as a denizen of the Five Points and threw myself in the man's way, frequenting the same haunts that he did, and ended by making him believe that I belonged to the same class as himself. At last he accosted me, and we became quite intimate. He then proposed to me a bit of business, which was no less than the murder of Henry Barton. I managed to draw out from him the fact that he had been promised five thousand dollars by Amos Barton to effect this piece of villainy. I seemingly entered eagerly into all his plans, and it was decided that he should give me one thousand dollars to assist him. I allowed the affair to progress to a certain point until I had him completely in my power. I then revealed myself in my true character, and threatened him with immediate arrest unless he would make an instant confession. This he did after some little hesitation, and it was properly witnessed.

Armed with this document, the confession of Doctor Lignon, and my knowledge, I presented myself to Mr. Amos Barton. When I had told my story he at first set me at defiance; but when I read to him the two confessions, he gave in at once. Henry Barton treated him leniently. The uncle resigned all the estates to Henry, and then left the country for France, where he lived on an annuity bestowed upon him by his much injured nephew.

Henry Barton is now one of the most respected and wealthy gentlemen in the neighborhood where he resides. Ralph Murdock a few years ago died of delirium tremens in the Bellevue Hospital, and Amos Barton only lived two years after the restitution of the heir to his rights.

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