

A Big Stake

A Father's Plot to Secure a Wealthy Son-in-Law.

A Mysterious Disappearance—A Family Afflicted With Bigamy—Some Very Clever Detective Work Which Restored a Missing Son.

The writer finds in his note-book the subjoined story as related to him by the detective, from whose diary many narratives already published in these columns have been taken:

“Rev. Dr. Gleig was the son of a man of good family, but poor. Dr. Gleig went into the church and had to content himself with a small living. He married an amiable but portionless girl, and the result of the marriage was one son.

“About a year before the beginning of this narrative Dr. Gleig had been smitten with paralysis, two strokes in succession depriving him of the use of his limbs, and leaving him an almost helpless imbecile. The physicians were at first in hopes of his restoration, provided he could be tidied over a year or two without another attack, but at the expiration of nine months an unfavorable change occurred, and it was evident he might be taken off suddenly at anytime.

“When Dr. Gleig married he was about the tenth removed from the heirship to a large estate. One by one the nearer heirs died off. The sickness of Dr. Gleig had diverted his family's thoughts from all other subjects, and they were, therefore, somewhat astonished when they were notified that there was but one person between him and a vast property, and that one an old man of seventy-nine.

A DISAPPEARANCE.

“George, the doctor's son, was at Oxford, where he had only recently matriculated, being in his nineteenth year. On February 25, 1863, he disappeared, leaving behind him no clew. His mother used every means to discover the whereabouts of the boy, without, however, giving the matter publicity. Three weeks later Dr. Gleig came into possession of the estate worth twenty thousand pounds sterling a year, with a fine mansion in Yorkshire and another in Leicestershire. From that time his wife spent large sums of money to find out her missing son. In June she employed me, through a London attorney, to undertake the task, and I at once went to work.

“The first thing I did was to go to Oxford and make inquiries among his associates there. They knew positively nothing, and referred me to the servant who had waited upon the young man. I found him living in a comfortable dwelling, and answering to the name of Binker. He had a shy way with him and did not seem to enjoy my questioning him.

A SPECIAL MAN.

“‘To tell you the truth, sir,’ he said, ‘I was very sick at the time Mr. Gleig disappeared, and had been for over a month, so that I was relieved from duty and another man was put in my place. That is to say, another man did his own work and part of mine, too, but as Mr. Gleig was very particular, I employed a special man to attend to him.

“‘Who was he?’ I asked, thinking it very strange at the outset that George Gleig, whose father had had to scrape and hoard to send him to the University and who was described by all as a youth of such modest and careful ways, should have gone to the expense of an other servant—for of course he would have to pay him.

“‘His name,’ said Binker, ‘I forget. He was recommended by a particular friend of mine, and that was all I knew of him.’

“‘Who was the friend who recommended him?’ I inquired; ‘perhaps he might know more about the man.’

“‘Ah,’ said Binker, ‘my friend went to London, where he got a situation about the docks.’

A SLIGHT DIFFERENCE.

“‘What sort of a looking man was this person who waited on Mr. Gleig?’ I asked.

“‘He was short and thin, I believe,’ replied Binker, ‘and about twenty or thirty years of age, with red hair and a clean-shaven face, and spoke like a foreigner.’

“‘I went back to the college and saw one of George's most intimate associates. The description he gave of Binker's substitute was the very reverse of that furnished by Binker. The man, said the student, was over fifty, tall and stout, with black hair and a full black beard, and spoke excellent English.

“‘I went to Binker's once more and asked him when he resumed his duties after his sickness. Singularly enough, it was the very day after George Gleig had disappeared—February 26.

“‘Did you see your substitute after your return?’”

“‘No, I did not,’ was the answer.

“‘And you have never seen him since, or heard of him?’ I asked.

“‘I have not,’ he answered.

“‘Further inquiry showed that George Gleig and Binker's substitute disappeared from public gaze at the same time. After some trouble I found the place where the substitute had lodged, and discovered that he passed under the name of Brown. A crown piece put me on pleasant terms with the old lady who kept the house. She said that all the time Brown staid there with his

daughter, Binker was a frequent visitor, sometimes staying late into the night. She allowed me to see the room occupied by Brown, and you may depend upon it I rummaged for some fragment that might help me to a clew. But I didn't find any. On leaving the house, however, I found the old lady with a letter in her hand.

“‘This,’ said she, ‘came for Mr. Brown the very day after he left.’

“I examined the envelope. It was in a lady's hand, and bore the Shrewsbury postmark. I should have liked to see the inside, but that couldn't be, and so I gave it back to the old lady, after a very careful scrutiny. I went to my hotel and set to work to reproduce that envelope and all it contained. With a little ingenuity I made an envelope that would pass muster. Then I manufactured an inside, and the letter I returned to her was the counterfeit. When reached my hotel I slit the envelope and drew forth the paper it contained. It was a blank! I scrutinized it closely, and finally held it up to the light. The riddle was solved. These words were distinctly visible:

“‘We are very anxious about you. Why don't you write? JANE.’

”This told me nothing, but the envelope showed me that the letter came from Shrewsbury. Thither I went—of course, I was not such a fool as to believe that Mr. Brown at Oxford would be Mr. Brown at Shrewsbury, but I was in hopes that something might turn up at the latter place to throw light upon the mystery I was attempting to solve. The day after my arrival I saw a gentleman enter a bank whom I determined to examine a little more closely. On his returning to the street I scrutinized him, and thought he answered Brown's description.

“I ascertained that his name was Bignall, and that he resided in the suburbs. I found further that he was formerly a strolling dentist, going from one town to another practicing his profession, and that while at Shrewsbury he had had for a patient a widow, who resided with her son and two daughters in the outskirts of the town, where her husband had left her an annuity of six hundred pounds sterling a year. He had married the widow and resided there ever since. I laid a little plot. I wrote a note to Mr. Bignall and signed it Binker, telling him that business of the utmost importance to him had brought me to Shrewsbury, and that he must meet Binker at the Red Cross Inn at seven o'clock that evening. True to the minute, Mr. Bignall appeared, and seemed greatly perturbed when no Binker was forthcoming. After making many inquiries, and waiting for over two hours, he went away.

“Naturally after he was gone, the townspeople in the bar began to talk about Mr. Bignall.

“‘It was a lucky thing for him when he married the Widow Gleig,’ some one said.

“I started and unwittingly exclaimed, ‘The Widow *Gleig!*’ Then it was explained, and I soon learned that Mrs. Bignall was the widow of the younger brother of Rev. Dr. Gleig. Here was a most unexpected discovery, and, be sure, I made the most of it. On Dr. Gleig's death, which might occur at any moment, his son George would fall heir to the property, and if George was removed the next heir would be the son of Mr. Bignall's wife!

“I felt now that I was on the right track. I went to Leicestershire, whither I heard Dr. Gleig and his wife had removed, and saw Mrs. Gleig. Had she a photograph of George? Unfortunately she had not. Could she describe him accurately? She thought she could, but sadly blundered over it. Was he like her or Dr. Gleig? Like her? Yes, she had a photograph of herself taken just before her marriage, to which George bore a striking resemblance. I got the likeness, went to Leicester and had a dozen copies made. I took with me to Dr. Gleig's residence, near Sileby, the best portrait painter I could find in Leicester. He cut out the face of the photograph and pasted it on card-board. Then he drew and painted the bust of a young man to match the head, using a coat of George's to go by. Next, following Mrs. Gleig's description, he added the hair as George was accustomed to wear his, and painted it a light brown. A touch here and there, and Mrs. Gleig declared that it was the image of her son. Domestic servants recognized it instantly, and, when shown to Dr. Gleig, his dim eye brightened, and he made a painful effort to clutch it. There was no doubt in my mind that I had got a good likeness of the missing youth.

”Half a dozen likenesses were prepared in the same way, and I departed. I went straight to Shrewsbury, to find that Mr. Bignall had left by train that very morning for London. He was three hours ahead of me. I rushed to the telegraph office and sent this message to my assistant:

“‘Look out for a man; six feet; stout; black hair; full, black beard; well dressed, with a prominent nose. Follow and watch. He will reach London and N. W. Depot by train due at 3:48. I will be on by 6:03. Send word, so that I may find you.’

“I had an hour or so to spare, and so I went to Mr. Bignall's residence and asked to see him. He was not at home. Mrs. Bignall wanted to know my business, and I said it was private. She grew fidgety and put many questions, but all to no purpose. Then she said she didn't expect Mr. Bignall home for a week. I bade her good-day, and went to the depot. The train was on time, and I reached the London depot at the hour specified. Here a messenger awaited me with a note. Mr. Bignall had gone to No. — Chapel street, Islington, and my assistant was on the watch. At that number I ascertained lived a Mr. Brown and his wife and daughter. The daughter had recently got married and gone away, said the grocer. Had he seen the bridegroom? O, yes; he was a very young, good looking fellow. Anything like this portrait? That was the man without a question. What like a man was Mr. Brown? Tall, stout, dark hair and beard, and so forth. Was he much away from home? A great deal, and he had just returned that afternoon, after a long absence.

THE LITTLE PLOT.

”Then Mr. Bignall was Mr. Brown in reality, and had two wives, and he had married the heir to a handsome estate to his daughter! That was the little plot.

“I called on Mr. Brown and saw Mr. Bignall. His son-in-law, I said, requested me, as I was coming to town, to hand Mrs. Brown that likeness of him. Mrs. Brown was delighted. Mr. Brown smiled all over, and offered me gin. I was going back that evening—had they anything to send? Yes, certainly, if I would be so kind. A parcel was put up and handed to me.

“Suppose, now,’ I said, ‘I was to forget this on the train. It has no address, and would be thrown aside or appropriated.’

“That is so,’ said Mr. Brown, and he wrote an address upon it in a bold hand:

“MRS. GLEIG,
“No. 23 St. George's Terrace,
“Gravesend.’

“I bade them good-by, and was on my way to Gravesend in two minutes I caught the 7:30 train at London Bridge, and at 8:15 was standing at the door of No. 23 St George's Terrace.

FOUND.

“The next minute I was in the presence of George Gleig. Fortunately his wife was not present.

“Mr. Gleig,’ I said, feeling justified in lying, ‘your father is dead, and your presence at home is required immediately.’

“The young fellow burst into tears and upbraided himself bitterly for not being at his father's bedside in the last moments. I urged him to control himself and come away with me at once.

“But my wife,’ he said; ‘I must take my wife with me.’

“You must not,’ I said; ‘I know you are married, but your mother does not, and in her present condition it would be unkind to inflict upon her more pain than you have already done by your unexplained disappearance.’

“I can not leave her here to starve,’ he said.

“I have made ample provision for that,’ I said; ‘you can leave with her a couple of hundred pounds which I will give to you.’

“But she is out and won't return before midnight,’ he said, almost peevishly.

“Write a note and inclose the money. [Here] is the paper. Now sit down and I'll tell you what to say.’

"He sat down and wrote from my dictation. The notes were inclosed and the letter sealed and delivered to the landlady. Then we started for the depot, and reached London in time to catch the express train north. We stayed in Leicester till the morning and then went over to Sibleby.

“I can't describe the meeting between mother and son. He was somewhat surprised to find that his father was still alive, and still more gratified to see that his father recognized him.

THE SEQUEL.

“Well! Can’t you guess the rest? Bignall or Brown was a bigamist, to begin with. After he married Mrs. Gleig, he learned all about the estate to which Dr. Gleig, her brother-in-law, was heir, and his condition toward the last. When he was gone George would inherit, and suppose before then he married Miss Brown? Brown went to Oxford, put up the job with Binker. and once with George Gleig under his eye, he soon managed the rest. He brought his daughter, who was a dashing blonde, to Oxford and took care that George should see her. The girl had learned her lesson and knew what a big fish she might hook. She led the youth on until at last he yielded and made him her abject slave. Then in came the outraged father, weeping and forgiving, and was about to tear away his daughter and send her to an institution. She wept and clung to George, and George swore he would never leave her, and then it was proposed he should marry her. They took the midnight train for London, disguised, and next day the father took care to see his daughter safely married. That done, he dispatched the new couple to his sister's at Gravesend to await developments.

“What became of George's wife? Well, it so happened that she had another husband with a prior claim to George's. In hunting up testimony against Bignall for bigamy, I found it ran in the family. We let the girl go, but the father was convicted at the Old Bailey and went into retirement for seven years.” *Cincinnati Enquirer*.

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