

THE ARNCLIFFE PUZZLE,

BY
GORDON
HOLMES

Author of "A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE."

(Continued.)

"That will do for the present, Mr. Bradshaw. Call Samuel Barnes."

An asthmatic old man hobbled forward. "You act as village postman, I believe, Mr. Barnes?"

"Yes, sir, forty years come Christmas—", "Never mind that. Do you remember having delivered any letters at the Hall recently, letters bearing American stamps?" "Yes, sir, there was two of 'em. Once a few days ago, and one sometime back. I noticed them because we don't often have letters from America. Forty years come Christmas—"

"You can stand down, Barnes," interrupted the Coroner. "Now can any one tell me whose duty it was to receive such letters as were delivered at the Hall?" "Mine," answered Edith at once. The shock which caused her faintness had apparently passed away, but she was very pale, and her voice had lost its fire. "I went through all Lord Arncliffe's letters unless they were marked 'private,' but I am positive that I saw none from this gentleman—none, I mean, bearing an American postmark."

This closed the evidence, and the Coroner resumed his interrupted summing-up: "It can hardly be said, gentlemen, that the statement of Mr. Bradshaw throws any light on the mystery of Lord Arncliffe's death, but it is important in so far as it indicates the presence of some unknown person pursued an underhand course. Considering all the circumstances, this new evidence points to the deliberate suppression of certain of Lord Arncliffe's letters, for, had Lord Arncliffe by any chance received them, he would surely have communicated such news to his solicitors, and probably to the young lady he had chosen as heiress for his vast wealth. In conclusion, I may say that none of these facts will be lost sight of in the police investigations which must, of course, follow, and, if I may indicate the lines of your verdict, I think you will best aid justice at this stage by finding that Lord Arncliffe died from the effects of arsenic, but how, or by whom administered, there is no evidence to show."

"That's all very well, Mr. Coroner," objected the foreman; "but it seems to me that if we find the person who kept back those letters we shall not be very far off the murderer." "2"

The coroner raised his head in deprecation of such strong language. "Of course," he assented, "in a case of this sort, any one shown to be guilty of such an act would naturally be regarded with suspicion. But letters pass through so many hands that it is extremely difficult to fix responsibility. For instance, Miss Holt tells us she had charge of Lord Arncliffe's correspondence. Yet it is possible that before the mail reached her it might be scrutinized by a footman or some of the maids. However, as I have told you, gentlemen, none of these matters will be neglected, nor do they really concern you, and you may retire to consider your verdict, in confidence that everything possible will be done to further the ends of justice."

Justice usually do as they are told, sooner or later. Although the obstinacy of the foreman was responsible for an unconscionable waste of time, the twelve wiseheads ultimately returned a verdict on the lines suggested by the coroner. Lester and the stranger from America remained to dinner, at Angier's invitation. The lawyer was naturally anxious to look into the claims of Lord Arncliffe's self-styled nephew. He could not disguise from himself that if a suppression of letters had really taken place the young man had been hardly dealt with. Lord Arncliffe, whatever his regard for Edith, could not have failed to look upon his brother's son in the light of an heir.

Edith, too, had realized the same thing at once, and she lost no time in communicating her ideas to Angier. "If this gentleman is Lord Arncliffe's nephew," she said, "of course he is entitled to all the property."

"He is not entitled to sixpence," answered the solicitor, bluntly—"that is, legally speaking. As the same time, morally—and I hope I shall not be struck off the rolls for suggesting such a consideration—I think it is unquestionably your duty to make some handsome provision for the young man—always, of course, presuming that he establishes his claim."

"I shall give him everything," persisted Edith with Spartan determination, albeit a little tragically. Since inheriting forty thousand a year she had built castles in the air. Not having the best notion what so much money meant she could have fulfilled all her delightful schemes with a tithe of her income. At this moment the

relinquishment of her innocent plans brought with it something of a wrench.

"Pooh! Nonsense, my dear! Act as generously as you like, but do not talk in that way. After all, you have plenty and to spare, even if there are other Richmonds in the field, and I should be the last to advise you otherwise. But there is no need for you to be Quixotic. The terms of the will are so unambiguously favorable toward you that I am beginning to doubt whether, in any event, Lord Arncliffe would have allowed an utterly unknown nephew to affect your position."

"Is that your honest opinion, Mr. Angier?" asked Edith, looking at him with an open-eyed candor which caused him to laugh a trifle uneasily. "Oh, come, you must not ask a lawyer for an honest opinion. Your duty is to carry out Lord Arncliffe's wishes as you know them. For instance, how do we know that this young American would respect Lord Arncliffe's plans regarding the various researches in which he was interested? On the contrary, he might apply the entire fortune to the creation of some gigantic 'trust,' or 'trustee,' and you would find yourself indirectly responsible for debt, bread, or a rise in cotton, bringing loss and starvation to those very operatives whose condition Lord Arncliffe did so much to ameliorate."

"And then again," broke in a level voice, "how do we know that this young American would be such a mean skunk as to take money from an unprotected girl?" Angier and Edith sprang to their feet against a rise in cotton, bringing loss and starvation to those very operatives whose condition Lord Arncliffe did so much to ameliorate. "And then again," broke in a level voice, "how do we know that this young American would be such a mean skunk as to take money from an unprotected girl?" Angier and Edith sprang to their feet against a rise in cotton, bringing loss and starvation to those very operatives whose condition Lord Arncliffe did so much to ameliorate.

"I think, sir," stammered the lawyer, very red of face and striving to cover his confusion with an assumption of great indignation, "a private conversation such as this might have been respected by you. I don't know what the custom is in your country."

"Just the same as anywhere else," said Bradshaw, in the same unemotional voice. "You left me in here ten minutes ago, and asked me to excuse you and amuse myself with some of those old curies, and I could hardly suppose you would bring the lady here for a private conversation."

Mr. Angier almost struck his forehead in despair. In all the worry of the moment he had completely forgotten the circumstance, and now he found himself not only in the wrong, but, what was worse, looking somewhat ridiculous.

"Don't say a word," said Bradshaw, cutting short the other's rather lame apology. "As a matter of fact, I ought to have spoken directly I understood the conversation had reference to myself. As it was, I could not resist listening to this lady's benevolent plans in my behalf, because I never had a girl take so much stock in me before. And I should like to say right here," he added, stepping forward and addressing Edith directly, "that this gentleman has taken a very proper view of the situation. I am a business man, and, if I owned a place like this, just as likely as not I should turn it into a dime museum."

"He was goodly to look at, not essentially handsome, but endowed with the steady eyes and tenderly firm mouth that women like. Edith seemed to detect a lurking humor in his concluding lamentable confession. She held out her hand with a frankly friendly smile."

"We will go into business later, Mr. Bradshaw," she said. "Meanwhile, I hope you will consider Arncliffe in every way at your disposal."

"You two are providing quite a little romance," remarked the solicitor in a diplomatic attempt to learn something of the young man's credentials. "The amazing thing is that you should not have discovered your relationship until all these years had passed."

Bradshaw was far too shrewd not to see through the ruse, but he had no object in frustrating it. "It is very simple," he said. "I was not born until several months after my father's death. Naturally, my mother turned in her trouble to her own people, rather than to those of her husband. As luck would have it, I happened across some letters from Lord Arncliffe to my father—perhaps you would like to see them," he interpolated, and he handed Angier a packet of time-yellowed papers, "and I felt I would like to know something of my father's family. As a matter of fact, Miss Holt, most everybody in the United States has had a grandfather, though I know that some

people on this side will never believe it." Angier glanced through the letters. The handwriting was unmistakably that of Lord Arncliffe, though it had the etchedness of a man in full vigor. He noted that the letters were dated thirty years back, and his legal mind seized on the point at once.

"I see," he said, "that these letters were written from Manchester, long before Lord Arncliffe was elevated to the peerage. How did you learn that he was one and the same with your uncle William Bradshaw?"

"Miss Holt, promise you will never give me away!" said the American, who lost no opportunity of directing his conversation to Edith. "You must understand that in the little town where my mother lives, people don't have much to do, and some of the ladies have lately been causing considerable jealousy by discovering their ancestors were among the tanning millions who came over in the Mayflower."

Now, my mother would not have worried much about that, but somehow she got her grandfather. I mean they found out that he was a congressman, and people were always bringing it up against her. So with a thing like that on her side of the family, she reckoned it would be better to look up my paternal ancestors a little, and I rather agreed with her, because I thought I was just as likely as not to be descended from some aristocratic pirate. Anyway, a man in Boston undertook to establish my relationship to anybody, from a duke downward, on certain terms, and as I could not afford to go any higher than just a plain peer, he discovered that I was Lord Arncliffe's nephew. By the way, Miss Holt, if you really want to give me anything, I would be powerfully gratified by that battle-axe over there. I could tell the folks at home that my ancestor, Sir Galahad de Bradshaw, knocked out William the Conqueror's brains with it."

Edith appreciated the kindly badinage which endeavored to cheer her under painful circumstances. Though she was none the less resolved to make restitution, she felt that her task would be fraught with many difficulties and objections. It was the fault, perhaps, of her single-hearted honesty that she did not yet realize how slanderous tongues were already branding her as a schemer who had supplanted Lord Arncliffe's rightful heir. She had, indeed, grave misgivings that her purity of motive was being impugned, but the episode of the three hundred pounds given to her by Lord Arncliffe was more nearly in her mind. Had she only taken the experienced and trustworthy lawyer into her confidence in that matter, she might have saved herself many heartburnings.

She had a brother, two years younger than herself, to whom the affections of her orphan heart were given without stint. She had regarded him with a selfless devotion which governed her whole life. Lord Arncliffe had helped the boy, as he had helped her, and would have forwarded his career with no niggard hand had he shown himself worthy. But Lord Arncliffe, a man who had won a vast fortune by his own unaided efforts, would encourage no drones. Thus it was that the youngster, after receiving a sound

education, was placed in a commercial house on probation, with the ultimate prospect of a substantial position in one of the great enterprises under Lord Arncliffe's control, directly he should win his spurs in the arena of business.

And then came the old, old tragedy—a lad spending a little more than his salary so that he might "do as the other fellows did"—a loving sister making matters worse by sending him every penny she could save out of her earnings. And finally, a tampering with money-lenders, a juggling with accounts, a dread of disgrace, and a despairing threat that was not, perhaps, merely a threat, of suicide. It was only three hundred pounds, but Edith had already given him all she had, and it was at that moment, in a frenzy of anguish, she appealed to Lord Arncliffe. The old peer had, indeed, given her the money—he would have saved young Holt from the consequences of his folly, even without Edith's intervention—but he had no sympathy with one who transgressed the first rule of a business career. He was so angry that Edith, for the time being, supposed her benefactor to be hopelessly offended with her.

"You can have the three hundred pounds you ask for," he said, "but it will be the last money you can hope to receive from me. I had, of course, intended to make some provision for you after my death, but I should do you no kindness in giving you an income that would only be drained from you by your scamp of a brother."

Edith had not regretted her sacrifice. She felt that her brother, who was really a good-hearted lad, would yet show himself a worthy member of society. What ever happened, his lapse from rectitude should remain a secret. This, then, was the cause of her agitation when she had been questioned so searchingly respecting the check for three hundred pounds. It also explained her fainting fit when the witness from New York was announced. For it was to New York her brother had gone when Lord Arncliffe insisted that he should leave the firm whose confidence in him was weakened and make a fresh start. And for one unreasoning moment she imagined her brother had come forward to clear her reputation at the expense of his own.

She now slipped out on to the balcony, and left the two men talking together. Her thoughts wandered again to the rosy future she had mapped out for the bright, earnest brother. He was to return to college for a year or two, grow stouter under a good tutor, and then, perhaps, enter the army. And presently she would meet some nice girl, and Edith would buy them a pretty little place, and look after them until her reckless boy had learned to know the value of money so that he could be trusted with a great, great income of his own. And today it seemed that people were trying to drag that whole miserable business into the light—to ruin the boy's future all for one youthful folly.

"Never, if I die for it!" she exclaimed, bringing her little white teeth together with a snap. And then, womanlike, she began to sob hopelessly.

It was at this moment that Lester, who had been listening with exemplary patience to the placid recitations of Mrs. Angier, made a decorous escape. By some subtle instinct, he found himself on the balcony with Edith.

"May I intrude on your solitude, Miss Holt?" he asked.

Somehow she felt safe in his presence. She gave him a tremulous smile, and strove to frame an answer, but the smile took a downward curve, and she was fain to turn her head away, though she put out a nervous, detaining hand in unaffected appeal for sympathy.

(To be continued.)

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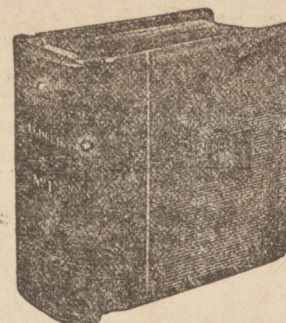
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One hundred eighty-five copyists copying policy holders' lists for International Policyholders' Committee.

ALBANY, N. Y., July 23.—Asking that criminal prosecution be at once begun against the officers of the insurance companies which filed defective or inaccurate lists of policy holders with the state insurance department, Samuel Undermyer, representing the international policy holders' committee, wrote to Superintendent Kelsey a letter in which he pointed out the methods used by the companies to hamper the committee in its work of in-

structing the insured as to the best plan to obtain control of the insurance education by electing their own trustees and officers.

It was not until the lists were turned over to the policy holders' committee at eight o'clock Wednesday morning that actual proof was obtained showing that full one-half the names sent to the insurance department would be of no value to the committee because of failure to attach the street addresses of those who live

in large communities, or because of such remarkable errors in the spelling of the names of cities and towns that it would be impossible to send letters which would reach those for whom they were intended.

There is a likelihood of more trouble for the policy holders' committee before it gets through copying the lists. Dissatisfaction has sprung up among those who have been employed to transcribe the names. They have learned that the copy-

ing and addressing company which has the contract to furnish the 1,700,000 names to the committee is to receive \$3 a thousand. Many of the copyists are receiving only seventy-five cents a thousand for the work.

The copyists are not all experts, and some of them discovered at the end of their first day's labor that they had earned only eighty cents. It is prophesied that half the force will quit unless a higher rate is paid for the work.

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