

## The Forged Bank Note.

CONCLUDED.

"**A** LAST! how true it is that no one can tell what a day may bring forth! Before those few months had elapsed Dibden had got hold of their secret. Of course he stormed and raved—the more, as he felt his power was ebbing fast. He tried persuasion, reproaches, threats—but to no purpose; George's determination was fixed, and the anger of his employer knew no bounds.

"At this juncture a circumstance occurred which completely changed the aspect of affairs. One day, immediately after an interview with Dibden, and while George was still a good deal excited by what had passed between them, a stranger came up to the counter and asked to be favored with change for a ten pound note. He was a respectable-looking gentleman, well advanced in years; and as George was the only one of the clerks who happened to be in the counting-house at the time, he attended to him. In the office cash-box there were two five-pound notes and two or three half-sovereigns; and as the stranger was anxious to have half of his money in gold, and there was not enough in the box, George opened his desk, and took therefrom five sovereigns which he had that morning placed there with which to pay his landlady. Putting one of the five-pound notes into his desk in the place of the sovereigns, he handed the latter, along with the other five-pound note to the stranger, who thereupon thanked him courteously and withdrew. The ten-pound note which he had received in return George placed in the cash-box without bestowing upon it any particular examination, but went on with his work, still meditating over the rather sharp words he had had with Mr. Dibden.

"Nothing happened of any consequence till later on in the day, when a message was received from the bank that a ten-pound note which Mr. Dibden had sent to be lodged there along with some other moneys was a forged one. The note in question was that which George Hamilton had received from the elderly gentleman, in the course of the morning and which Mr. Dibden had himself taken from the cash-box and forwarded to the bank. The message was brought by a private detective in the employment of the bank; and no sooner was Mr. Dibden made aware of what had occurred than he charged George Hamilton with having placed the note there. George admitted that he had taken two five-pound notes from the cash-box, and put in their place the ten-pound note in question; but he maintained he had given them in change for the ten-pound note to a gentleman who came in. This was his explanation when taken before the magistrates. On the other hand, Dibden swore that he found one of the five-pound notes in George's desk. This George accounted for by saying that the person who had left the forged note asked him to let him have five pounds in gold; and that that sum not being in the cash-box, he changed one of the five-pound notes for five sovereigns of his own. As against this, however, one of the junior clerks stated that, on the morning of the occurrence, he had asked George for the loan of a sovereign, who replied, 'I'd lend it with pleasure, my dear fellow, but I have not a sixpence to swear by.'

"In answer to this, George said that he absolutely had at that moment five sovereigns put away in his desk to pay his landlady; and that he felt justified in saying that he had not a sixpence, as he considered that the money so appropriated to pay a just debt was not at his disposal."

"The magistrates asked him if he fancied the person who got the change had given the forged note innocently or fraudulently. That was of course impossible to say; but George thought innocently. Having heard all the evidence; after a careful consultation, they came to the conclusion that they must commit him for trial; but they would accept bail. Strange to say, the Dibdens went bail to the full amount—I believe myself, with the hope that he would break it, by quitting the country.

"I must tell you, however, that before any proceedings were commenced, young Dibden coarsely offered to Clara not to prosecute if she accepted his proposal of marriage. To this she indignantly replied that she knew Mr. Hamilton was innocent, and they knew it too; and that if he were not she would not save him.

"At the time of these occurrences I was away on the continent. My wife had been delicate, and the doctors said she must have change of air, and had fixed on Italy; which accounts for my not having seen the advertisement which appeared in the *Times*, and which I shall now read to you:

"If the Elderly Gentleman with the Blue Pocket-book, who received change for a Ten-pound Note at the Offices of Messrs. Dibden, Knollys & Dibden,

Bellyard, Doctors' Commons, on the 2d of September, 18—, will communicate with Messrs. Smith & Oliver, Solicitors, Brick Court, Middle Temple, he will confer a great obligation.

"I suppose I need scarcely tell you that I was the elderly gentleman with the blue pocketbook. Well, as I say, traveling about from one place to another, I did not see a paper regularly, and therefore missed this advertisement. In the meantime the assizes drew on; and George Hamilton stood in the dock charged with felony. I have the trial in this paper before me. I shall read to you the leading evidence, which was all unfortunately against the prisoner. The charge was, that George Hamilton did feloniously attempt to pass a forged ten-pound note, knowing the same to be a forgery."

"The elder Dibden was the first witness called up. He deposed that the prisoner was his head clerk, in whom had always placed the greatest confidence; that a cash box was left under his care, containing generally a limited amount of money, principally for the purpose of giving change; that larger sums were also frequently deposited there, if none of the principals of the house were in the way to lock it up in the money-safe; that on the morning in question he himself had placed in the cash-box two five-pound notes and three pounds in gold; that in the afternoon he wanted to pay some money into the bank; and the safe being deficient of the sum he needed by five pounds, he opened the cash-box to take that amount therefrom; that instead of the five-pound notes which he had placed there he found a ten-pound note, which, when presented at the bank, was declared to be a forgery; that when he asked the prisoner to account for the note, he said he had received it from a stranger in exchange for the two five-pound notes; that on examining the prisoner's desk, he found one of the five-pound notes which he had placed in the cash-box that morning."

"Cross-examined—No one had access to the cash-box but the prisoner, himself and his son. Each had a key.—The lock was a Chubb's patent, of the best description. He knew the five-pound notes by their being indorsed in the name of 'William Day.'"

"The next witness was William Simmones, junior clerk of Messrs. Dibden, Knollys & Dibden. He swore that on the morning of the discovery of the forged note he had asked the prisoner to lend him a sovereign; that the reply he received was, 'I'd lend it with pleasure, but I have not a sixpence to swear by.' Had been two years in the office with the prisoner; never had any quarrel with him."

"Eleanor Parker deposed that she knew the prisoner well; he had lodged with her the last eighteen months.—Paid his rent quarterly—always paid honorably, but used to be a little behind-hand. He was due her fully five pounds at the time of his apprehension. Had always paid her with good money, at least none of it was ever returned to her. Prisoner was out mostly all day; usually spent his nights reading."

"This was the principal evidence for the prosecution. For the defense, a few witnesses were brought up to testify to the excellent character the prisoner always bore. But his counsel took his stand not against any of the facts, which he allowed, but on the ground that they proved the act of the prisoner was done innocently and in ignorance."

"Just for a moment consider, gentlemen of the jury," he said. "Here is a gentleman who for several years managed the business of a firm of attorneys, large sums daily passing through his hands. The utmost confidence has been placed in him. Do you think—gentlemen, I put it to you in the name of the common sense which beams this moment on your faces—do you think that he would risk his position, honor, and name for a paltry ten-pound note? He foolishly—yes, I say, very foolishly, and without carefully examining it, took a note from a complete stranger; and the only excuse he can give for this is that he thought that Doctors' Commons was the last place in the world a swindler would go cadging about in—and that the stranger bore a most respectable appearance. For this act he deserves the reproof of his employer; and that is all.—As to the evidence of the junior clerk, I must say that stronger could not be brought in favor of a man's character than, when asked by a friend for a trifling loan, at the risk of being thought mean or of confessing his poverty, he refuses, although he has money by him, because he has put it away to pay a just debt. Gentlemen, I leave my case in your hands, and I do so with confidence as I know you will exercise that intelligence and discrimination which at all times distinguished British jurymen, and prove to me and my client that you are not only able but determined to separate truth from error."

"I need not read to you the summing up of the judge; he merely directed the jury to go by the evidence, and explain-

ed to them a few points of law. But I am sorry to tell you that Sergeant Olliver's flattery failed with the jury; for in half an hour they returned with a verdict of 'Guilty;' and George Hamilton was sentenced to five years' penal servitude, and was sent to Millbank prison to commence his punishment for a crime he never committed."

"The very day after his sentence was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Clara Brierly's birthday; and on the following morning this advertisement appeared in the *Times*:

"**FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.**—Whereas, on the 2nd day of September, 18—, an elderly man, of respectable appearance, who carried about with him a Blue Pocketbook, presented a Forged Note, and got in exchange good money at the offices of Messrs. Dibden, Knollys & Dibden, Bellyard, Doctors' Commons, the above REWARD will be paid any one proving that such a transaction took place.

(Signed) SMITH & OLIVER, Solicitors.

"Brick Court, Middle Temple. "Clara was now free. She had waited anxiously for the result of the trial; but never for a moment doubted the entire innocence of her lover. On the morning of her twenty-fifth birthday she had the newspapers sent up to her room, where she remained. She read the whole trial over without missing a word. When she came to the verdict 'guilty,' her agitation overmastered her directness of purpose. At length, however, she calmly rose from her seat with these words, 'Innocent as I am.—I am now more certain than ever.'

"Without a tear on her pale face, she dressed herself to go out; then packed up the things that she wished to take with her, and left the house without a word to any one except the servant to whom she gave the remaining property of her own that was in her room, desiring her to tell her master that she had gone away, and should not return.—Then calling a cab, she drove to Smith & Oliver's, the solicitors, who had been recommended to her by George. It is wonderful how they appear to know everything in those dusty rooms in the Temple. She had not got through more than half a dozen sentences in explanation of her business, before they told her they knew the entire circumstances, and accepted her proposal to place her affairs in their hands; offering to supply her at once with any money she needed. The first thing she did was to direct a large reward to be advertised—as I have just read to you; and receiving what she required, intimated her intention to take lodgings in the city till the mystery should be cleared up. To this proposal, however, Mr. Oliver demurred suggesting that, instead of going into lodgings, she might take up her residence for the time in his house. He had no family, and his wife would be delighted to have her for a companion. To this suggestion Miss Brierly cordially assented. In order to commence those inquiries to which she was prepared to devote her life if necessary, she, acting through her solicitors, obtained from her unfortunate lover a written description, as closely as he could remember, of the stranger. This she had printed and distributed, with the offer of a large reward, not only through London, but to every police station in England."

"A month passed and not the slightest clew had yet been found; and another month, and another. All this time she never lost sight of her object. She scrutinized every elderly gentleman that she met, and more than once she even followed through the streets people whom she thought suspicious, with the hope of their exhibiting a blue pocketbook, her chief mark."

"All this time I had never heard of the advertisement with the large reward, nor suspecting the mischief I had so unwittingly caused. We had been wandering about the continent; my wife's health had recovered wonderfully and my daughters wanted to go to Egypt. Of course I had to consent.—Here we stayed several weeks, 'doing' the Pyramids and everything else that it behooves travelers to do; However, with advancing spring, we began to wish for the cool breezes of old England; so we turned our steps homeward, taking Paris on the way. We arrived in Paris in early May, where in spite of all persuasions, I determined to remain only a few days. We had, therefore, to make the best of our time."

"Repairing one morning to the reading-room, to see the English papers, being naturally anxious to learn what was going on at home, I found a file of the *Times* for the past month or two stitched together; and while casually perusing the agony columns, my eye fell upon the advertisement I have read to you, as also to an appended description of myself. The transaction flashed upon me. I at once looked up the entries in my pocketbook, and found that the date when I got change at Dibden's corresponded with that given in the advertisement. You see here are the entries 'August 29— Bank of England note 37299, £. 10, from Roberts & Co.—

And—'September 2—Bank of England note 65982, £. 5, from Dibden, Knollys & Dibden.'

"I need scarcely tell you that I lost no time in leaving Paris for London; and when I arrived there I at once found my way to the office of Messrs. Smith & Oliver. At the very moment I was about to enter their chambers a young lady was in the act of leaving them.—Her eyes no sooner met mine that she seemed fixed to the spot. Thinking she might possibly have recognized in me an old acquaintance, I raised my hat, and was about to speak, when she eagerly inquired: 'Did you see the advertisement?'"

"I replied that I had seen an advertisement in the *Times* which I believed referred to myself, and that I was there that morning in consequence."

"The strained and anxious expression on her face seemed to become intensified as she asked: 'And was it you who gave him the note?'"

"You will see I was up till now quite ignorant of what had taken place with regard to that ten-pound note, or even why any information was wished from me regarding it; I did not therefore, quite understand the question, and looked, I dare say, somewhat taken aback. Ere I could reply, however, she spoke."

"Oh," she said, 'I beg your pardon; but something dreadful has happened in connection with that note, and I spoke as if you must have known all about it. Will you kindly come in and see Mr. Oliver?'"

"I went in, and a very few minutes' conversation with the solicitor was sufficient to acquaint me of the very distressing occurrence to which the young lady had referred. I observed that she was still much agitated, and seemed to await my reply with something like impatience; and as I drew forth the blue pocketbook, her eyes were riveted upon it with an eagerness painful to behold. Then I exhibited the entries which I have already shown to you, and placed the book in the hands of Mr. Oliver.—Both he and the young lady examined and compared them without speaking a word. He took from a bunch of papers on the table a folded sheet, which, when he had opened out, I saw was a criminal indictment. Glancing it over for a minute, he read out slowly and distinctly the number '37299,' comparing it figure by figure with the first entry in the pocketbook."

"'Thank God!' said the young lady, 'that is it.' During this time her face had changed from being pallid to a hue like that of death; and now, as the tears started from her eyes, she sank, half-fainting into a chair. I was not surprised at the nature of her excitement when I came to know all, and that when I met her she was leaving the chambers in a state of despondency almost bordering on despair—day after day having passed, and no reply being received to her repeated advertisements and appeals."

"Mr. Oliver spoke kindly and encouragingly to her, and in a little she had so far recovered as to allow him to prosecute the inquiries which naturally arose out of the information I had given him.

"'I have already mentioned to you,' he said, 'that the note which the young gentleman received from you and placed in the cash-box was a forged note; I trust the fact that you had that note in your possession can be satisfactorily explained, as we should be very sorry indeed if the information that promises to give such relief to us should in any way reflect upon you.'"

"I said that I hoped not. I had received the note as entered in the memorandum, from a firm called Roberts & Co.; but I knew nothing further of them, the firm having been a strange one to me, and the transaction—the first and the last I had with them—a cash one."

"He asked if I remembered the address of the firm. I told him as nearly as I could; whereupon, again referring to his papers, he showed me a cutting from a newspaper containing the detection and conviction of a gang of bank-note forgers, who had transacted business under various cognomens, one of these being 'Roberts & Co.,' and he stated what was after verified, that the persons from whom I had received the note which had caused all this trouble to innocent people were in all probability connected with the forgers referred to."

"It was thus that I first made the acquaintance of my heroine, Miss Brierly; and may say that I never felt prouder of my old blue pocketbook, with its mass of apparently trifling entries, than when the Secretary of State, after hearing the statement we made to him, accepted my pocketbook memoranda as evidence, and in due course issued an order for George Hamilton's liberation. The very day the order was received I went to Millbank to take him back; and in two hours he was sitting at dinner in the place you now occupy, with his handsome bride-elect at his side.—The only atonement that I could make

him for the suffering I had innocently caused him was to take the place of a father, and give her away on her wedding-day."

"You will now, I hope, perceive the value I place upon such memoranda as my old pocketbook contains. To make such entries perhaps is the work of a minute; and when made, there is no knowing what useful purpose they may serve. There can be no reasonable doubt that, if I had not had the transactions above referred to, trifling as at first sight they may have appeared, duly entered in my memoranda, my statements to the Secretary of State would have been of no avail, as they would have looked like the trumped-up fictions of a later hour, concocted for the purpose of defeating justice. As it was, the entries stood in my book under their proper date, and were sufficient of themselves apart from my parol evidence, to prove that the person to whom I gave the forged ten pound note on the 2nd of September was not the utterer of that forged note, whoever may have been the guilty party; consequently, I was thus able to free an innocent person, not only from prison, and from a long and degrading course of penal servitude, but from the life-long stigma of having uttered "The Forged Bank Note."

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