

Mystery of the Bedroom Safe and the \$75,000 Stolen Jewels

Fashionable Society at Aiken Much Disturbed Over the Disappearance of Mrs. Clarence W. Dolan's Rare

Gems from Her "Cottage" and the Possibility of Another Epidemic of Mysterious Robberies to Follow



Calico Cottage, the Dolan Aiken House, Showing the Rose Trellis, the Corner in Which the Safe Stands and the Always Open Window at the Right.

WHEN it became known at fashionable Aiken recently that Mrs. Clarence W. Dolan, wife of the millionaire Philadelphia gas and traction owner, had telephoned late the night before to the chief of police and reported the stealing of about \$75,000 worth of jewels from her bedroom safe, a shiver of apprehension went through the colony. Was this the prelude to another epidemic of robberies such as had occurred two years ago, when not only Mrs. Dolan then suffered a considerable loss, but a number of others, among them Mrs. Dorothy Whitney Straight, Josef Hofman and Lady Kemp?

At that time the thief showed a remarkable familiarity with the habits of those from whom he stole and an unusual discrimination in the matter of the jewels he took. Nor were the robberies done by servants—that was clearly proven. The evidence pointed to someone, unscrupulous and daring who moved among his victims as one of them. A Raffles, in short, who either did the stealing himself or furnished the information by which his aides could operate.

The details of the second robbery of Mrs. Dolan when they were secured only stimulated the uneasiness.

For the jewels had been taken from a safe in her bedroom; a safe that was hidden behind heavy curtains in the very room where she slept!

The gems consisted of a pearl necklace to which Mrs. Dolan was sentimentally attached, two pins and a pair of earrings. The necklace contained fifty-nine rare pearls, three very large. One pin she considered priceless because of its associations—it was a diamond and ruby service badge given her by the Government for teaching French to soldiers about to go overseas. The earrings were of extraordinarily large and perfect pearls set in rare old French gold. The other pin was a very valuable one of platinum and diamonds. Altogether the jewels were worth from \$75,000 to \$100,000.

The Dolan residence in Aiken is called Calico Cottage. Mrs. Dolan's boudoir is on the second floor. The safe, which is about four feet high, is placed near an open window looking out upon the second-story porch. Mrs. Dolan insists that this window be left open night and day no matter what the temperature. Up the porch runs, like the steps of a ladder, a heavy trellis for the climbing roses which act as a screen to the lower piazza. The safe is covered with heavy curtains.

Mrs. Dolan wore the jewels on the Sunday night previous to the Wednesday when the theft was discovered. She insists that she locked the safe when she put them in and arranged it according to a combination which she thought that only she knew. She keeps, however, a memorandum of the combination for use in event of memory failing or some other such emergency.

The servants are absolutely beyond suspicion; they are all old servitors on whom the greatest dependence is placed. If the safe had not been locked it would have been no hard matter for one who knew its location to pass, in the darkness, the night watchman; to climb the trellis to the top porch, crouch at the window, and without entering the room, wherein Mrs. Dolan might at the time have been sound asleep, have swung open the safe door and slipped away with its contents.

On the other hand, if the safe had been locked, as Mrs. Dolan believes it was, then it would have been necessary for the robber to have entered the room and manipulated the combination.

But—and this is what troubles not only society but the police—both of these theories presuppose the alarming fact that the thief must have known where the safe was, known Mrs. Dolan's whereabouts, known the combination if the safe was locked and—whether it was or was not locked—must have been possessed of information that no mere casual burglar could possibly have!

Where did the thief get this information? If the safe was opened, the work was that of a super-expert, for upon its polished surface there was not left so much as a pin scratch; nor were there any dis-



Mrs. Dorothy Whitney Straight, Whose Jewels Were Stolen in Almost Similar Fashion While She Was Entertaining Guests at Dinner at Her Aiken "Cottage."

tinguishable finger marks upon the knob. This, however, could be accounted for by the robber wearing smooth and thin rubber gloves—which is one of the up-to-date amenities of the advanced safe openers. Examination of the rose trellis showed marks which might or might not have been those of climbing feet. Outside of these there was no trace.

Probably there is in all America no greater concentration of wealth in the form of jewels than there is at Aiken. And, therefore, it must, like any other treasure house, attract the predatory minded. The dinner to which Mrs. Dolan wore the gems the last time was a large one given at a fashionable restaurant. At the tables hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of gems were on display. In fact, it is a common sight to see small rainbows of jewels flashing from the white throats and arms of the women in this exclusive dining hall. Though the shades are sometimes pulled down, they are more often left lifted, and only a seven-foot-high hedge of privet acts as a partial screen against the public gaze. It is, therefore, no difficult matter for anyone to mark down certain jewels and their owners without being under the necessity of being one of society.

But to see a thing is not to possess it, and there is no record of robberies of violence at Aiken. To secure the gems coveted would be, under the circumstances, far more difficult for the average cracksmen or burglar than it would be in a large city like New York. Inevitably the presence of strangers is noted in such fashionable gathering places and their opportunities are correspondingly limited.

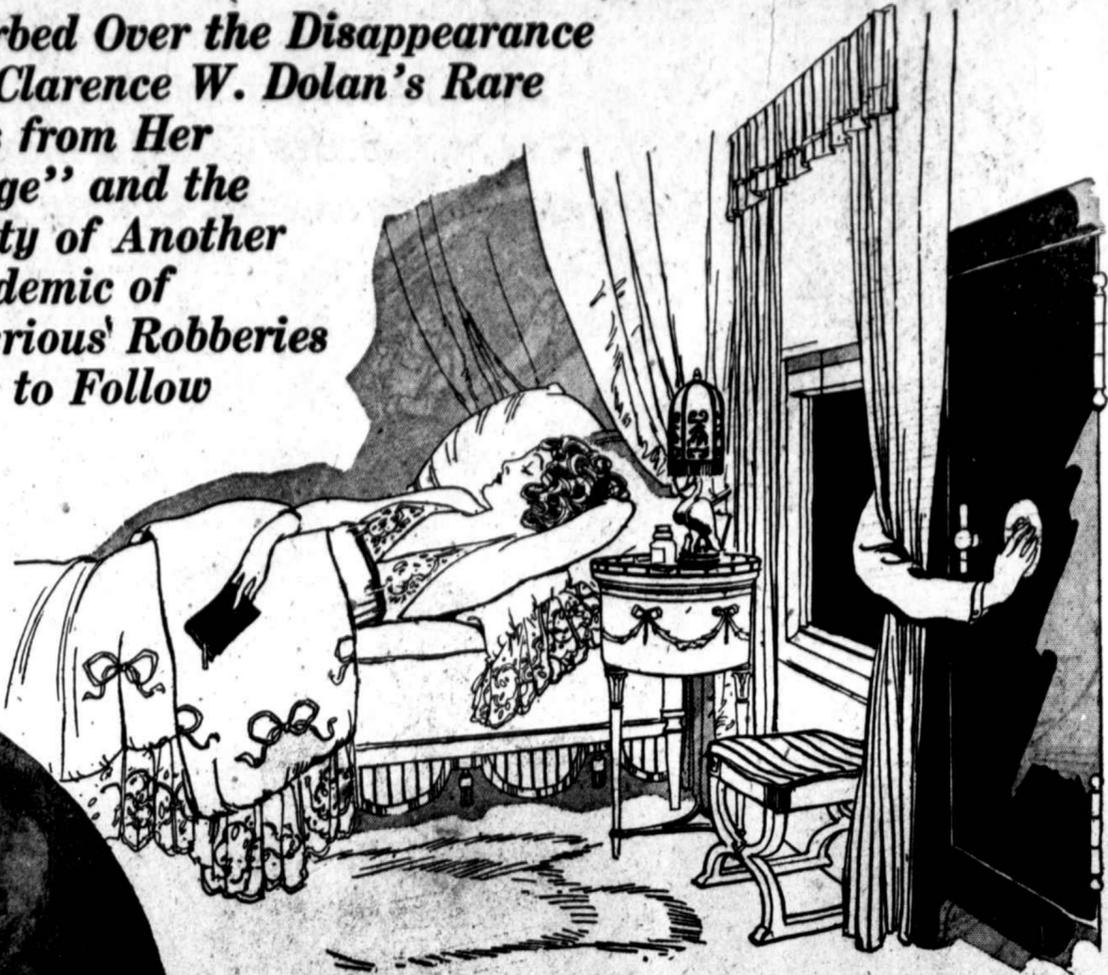
So much is this so that at Aiken the unusual custom of wearing jewelry even on the golf links has recently come into vogue. The pearl necklace that was stolen had been worn by Mrs. Dolan many times on the Palmetto links.

Investigators from New York went promptly to Aiken and a most thorough examination began of everyone connected with Calico Cottage. When it was ended no suspicion could possibly be attached to any of the servants, and one theory that caddies attracted by Mrs. Dolan's wearing the necklace on the links had shinned up the porch and gotten into the room and opened the safe was thoroughly exploded.

The detectives were very reluctantly forced to admit that the burglar had been carried out with extraordinary deftness. Their opinion was that it had certainly been done by someone in the colony who moved in the same circles as those he robbed. A reward of \$2,500 was offered by Mrs. Dolan and placards were placed in all the main parts of Aiken, telling the reader that no questions would be asked "positively," and that all communications would be held "strictly confidential." It was thought that if some caddy had really stolen the gems or some professional thief had been tempted to take them the large sum of the reward would bring them to terms of settlement.

The Dolan home, Calico Cottage, is situated to the right of the famous "Whiskey Road," past Tall Pines, the home of Colonel Anthony Guser, of Philadelphia, and not far from the home of the late Senator Augustus P. Gardner. The road leading to the place runs also past the entrance way leading to the Palmetto Golf Club, and is on a private roadway by itself looking down on Coker Springs. Parties passing the Gardner place would attract attention at once as being bound for the Dolan cottage, as the road ends at the place.

Since the Mrs. Willard Straight, Sandhurst and Josef Hofmann robberies last season the Winter residents have been especially guarded against trespassers of any kind. No one pretending to hunt or even actually hunting is allowed to enter any part of the colony domains aside from the public highways. The watchman force has been doubled in some instances, and



"Was the safe left open? If it were, then it would have been easy for the thief to slip his arm through the window, swing the door and loot it while Mrs. Dolan lay peacefully asleep!"

The robbery occurred on a Tuesday evening. Barney Craig, the Whitney private night watchman, reported at the usual hour to Groves, the head butler. Groves, with the silent dignity becoming his profession, signed the watchman's report for duty, bowed and closed the back door.

Craig made his first round of the premises at eight o'clock. No sound or unusual occurrences disturbed his walk. The Whitney cottage is surrounded by ample grounds with luxuriant shrubbery.

While Craig, the night watchman, strolled about the paths, the house was ablaze with lights. Mrs. Straight had two house guests, Mrs. Arthur Swann and Mrs. Harrison Tweed, both well known in the fashionable world of New York, Newport and Palm Beach. On the ground floor the big culinary department of the Whitney cottage was busy, and many servants were preparing dinner for a party of guests. At seven-thirty Mrs. Straight, the hostess, had finished dressing and descended from her rooms on the second floor and greeted the gathering of guests in the drawing-room. A few moments later Mrs. Arthur Swann was released from the attentions of her maid and, descending the stairs, joined the guests in the drawing-room. A moment later Mrs. Harrison Tweed had finished dressing and her arrival in the drawing-room completed the party.

At ten minutes of eight dinner was announced. The guests passed from the reception room into the big dining hall, both of which are on the ground floor and the busy bustle of the household was centered upon the kitchens, the pantries and the dining room. The lights still burned on the bedroom floor, but the maids soon left the ladies' rooms and either went to their own apartments in another part of the house or came downstairs.

Since the Whitney cottage is surrounded by its own ample grounds it is not the custom to pull the shades in the dining hall during dinner. In spite of the vigilance of the private watchman, Craig, it would have been quite possible for burglars to watch the guests at dinner through the windows and to have hidden behind the ample shrubbery if the watchman passed by on his rounds.

At any rate, whether from inside or from outside the house, somebody became very busy upstairs while the merry dinner party was in progress downstairs. Curiously enough, the wealthy hostess, Mrs. Straight, escaped the full force of the burglars' attentions because her maid had thoughtfully turned the key in her mistress's bedroom door when the hostess went down to dinner.

The dinner moved along smoothly. Groves, the head butler, saw that each servant was in his place and that the service was prompt and irrefragable. Barney Craig, the faithful old servitor, walked his beat around and about the premises. He did not, of course, search the shadows of each of the tall evergreens which screen the house on all sides. But nobody doubts the fidelity of the watchman, who had been employed for years as caretaker of the homes of the Hitchcocks and the Whitneys.

The Whitney estate is one of the largest in Aiken, the residence being right in the center of "Brooklyn," the curiously named quarter selected by the very fashionable set, and the very fact that the Whitney grounds are so considerable in extent makes it impossible for a watchman to be sure that intruders are not hiding in the hedges or the shrubbery.

Besides the jewels which the hostess wore to the dinner, it is not known what she left behind in her room. The door being locked, the thieves did not search it, so nothing was lost and, therefore, no list of Mrs. Straight's jewels was given to the police. Mrs. Harrison Tweed left on a dresser in her room a silver lace mesh bag which was rather valuable in itself. It contained four beautiful diamond rings, several jeweled brooches and a beautiful pearl necklace worth many thousand dollars. The silver bag and all that was in it was taken.

When Mrs. Arthur Swann went down to dinner she left in her room on a small writing desk two jeweled gold pins and several other articles of value in a jewel case. All were stolen. In a trunk in one of the upstairs rooms were some things belonging to the hostess, Mrs. Straight. The lock of this trunk had been forced open and bills to the amount of \$1,600 and jewels were taken. Everything in the upper tray of the trunk had been pawed over in a hurried search. The thieves closed down the lid of the trunk and hid the broken lock by a silk scarf which covered a part of the trunk. Did the thieves know that there was money hidden in this trunk?

The robbery continued for long to be a mystery in spite of all the efforts made to fathom it. It was not made known to the authorities until 10 o'clock the following Wednesday morning. From that hour till late in the afternoon the phone was kept busy ringing up the Sheriff, the Chief of Police and the deputies.

The loss was at first stated to be small, and it was not until the following day that it was learned that it amounted to at least \$50,000. Even then the loss from the trunk was not included.

A New York dispatch was sent to a detective agency in cipher describing the jewels, as the greatest anxiety was evidently felt to recover them before they had been divided up into fragments.

But neither jewels nor cash were ever found.



Mrs. Clarence W. Dolan, Whose Gems Have Disappeared So Strangely.

It would take at least three men, two lookouts and one worker, to get inside of the Dolan grounds unnoticed. The place is so private that strangers would at once be observed on the place.

The Dolan robbery has all the marks of the skill and super-criminal efficiency which two years ago caused such unrest and worry in the fashionable cottage colony.

The most unusual of these—that in which the jewels of Mrs. Dorothy Whitney Straight, sister of Harry Payne Whitney, of New York, and youngest daughter of the late William C. Whitney, were stolen—still remains an unsolved mystery.