

## DIAMONDS AND CRIME.

INSTANCES OF WHERE THE GEMS HAVE LED TO DARK DEEDS.

Extraordinary Crimes Brought About by the Precious Stones—Each Noted Diamond has a Story of Blood—Famous Gems that have Strangely Disappeared.

There is a famous diamond now in the crown regalia of Russia which has a most extraordinary history of murder and blood, says a St. Louis paper. How many murders were done for its sake before it came into the possession of the great Nadir Shah of Persia, will never be known, but from that time until it was purchased for the Russian Empress, Catharine the Great, its story was one of crime. Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1747 by four of the officers whom he intended to put to death, and after they had done their work they hastily appropriated such of his jewels as they could easily conceal and decamped. One of the stolen gems was the Shah, which Nadir wore in his turban. The nobleman to whose portion fell the Shah fled into Afghanistan, and was never heard of again. Four or five years later a jeweller in Bassora was visited by an Afghan, who offered the Shah, together with an emerald, a ruby, and a sapphire, all of great size, for sale at a very modest figure. The jeweller did not have the money at the moment, and made an appointment to meet the Afghan the next day, but the latter did not return. Four years later the jeweller, an Armenian, was in Bagdad, where he again met the Afghan and learned from him that the gems had been sold to a Jewish merchant for 65,000 francs. Shafra, the Armenian, enlisted the services of his two brothers, the three murdered the Afghan and the Jew, threw their bodies into the river, took the gems, and made off. Somewhere in the desert between the Euphrates and Armenia, the oldest of the brothers murdered the other two, possessed himself of all the gems, and went on to Constantinople. Fearful of attempting to sell the jewels there, he went by sea to France, and, failing to find a buyer, visited most of the capitals of Europe, finally offering the diamond to Catherine the Great. She refused to buy at the figure he demanded, and he at once disappeared, being heard from ten years later in Astrakhan, where he was seen by some of the Russian courtiers. He refused to negotiate save at Smyrna, and started thither, but was murdered on the way by the Russians, the gems secured, and sold to Catherine for \$650,000.

The great Orloff diamond, presented by Prince Orloff to Catherine the Great, by a curious coincidence is also associated with the history of Nadir Shah, to whom it once belonged. When it first appeared in history it was in Delhi, and was set in the eye of a large idol in one of the temples of that city. A French soldier, travelling disguised as a Hindoo fakir, or holy man, formed a design of stealing it. His assumption of piety gave him ready access to the temple, which he frequented daily for months under pretence of prayer. Suspicion being finally aroused, he succeeded one night in abstracting the idol's eye and absconded. Early in the morning the theft was discovered, and the enraged Hindoos sent runners in every direction to apprehend all suspicious persons, and among those brought in was the Frenchman. The gem was found in his possession, he was torn to pieces by the rabble and the eye restored. It remained until the city was taken by Nadir Shah, when it formed part of the spoils, being appropriated by Nadir Shah himself, who not long after presented it to one of his Generals. This man was sent to govern a part of Afghanistan, where the splendid diamond worn in his turban soon secured his assassination by two Afghans. What became of one is not known, but a year later the other turned up in India, where he offered the gem for sale to a native prince. The latter wanted the stone but did not want to pay for it, so the Afghan was quietly strangled, the gem set in a sword handle, and the prince congratulated himself on having done a very clever stroke of business. Soon after his dominions were invaded by the British, and the sword formed part of the spoils. It fell into the hands of a private soldier, who sold it to Lord Edingham, then Governor-General, and the latter on returning to Europe, disposed of it to a jeweller in Paris. Several times more it changed hands, then came into the possession of a Greek merchant, who took it to Russia and disposed of it to Prince Orloff for \$450,000 cash, a life annuity of \$20,000, and a patent of nobility. Orloff gave it to the Empress, and it is still among the imperial regalia.

The "Mountain of Light," too, has had its share of romance, though its history is, in some respects, a little more definite than that of some of the other famous stones. Strangely enough, it, too, was once the property of Nadir Shah, and was one of the stones taken away at the time of his assassination. It had been set in the turban of the Great Mogul, and was carried away from Delhi by the Persian conqueror in 1739. It was a Golconda stone, but its history from the time it was taken from the earth until placed in the Great Mogul's turban is a mystery. Even since then there are several gaps in its history, its annals being unknown from the time of the murder of Nadir Shah until it appeared on the

arm of the King of Cabul. The crimes that were perpetrated for its sake in this interval are unknown, but it passed from the arm of Shah Soujah of Cabul to that of Runjeet Singh by sheer robbery. The former was driven from his throne and fled into India, carrying the diamond with him. Unluckily for himself he took refuge with Runjeet Singh, who determined to get the diamond, and imprisoned Shah Soujah until the latter was willing to sell. His compliance was hastened by a pretty strong hint that if he held out too long or asked too much Runjeet would probably have him strangled for the sake of the stone, so he sold it for £65,000, not a penny of which was ever paid. Runjeet, when dying, intimated his wish to present the gem to the temple of Juggernaut, but died before he could execute a will to that effect, and the stone remained in the royal treasury until the occupation of the Punjab by the British, when it came into the possession of the latter and was presented to the Queen of England by the East India Company. In India there is a superstition that this diamond brings ill fortune to every royal possessor, and until it came into the hands of the English sovereign, the superstition was justified by the facts, every owner being either murdered or losing his dominions. It is a singular fact, but not more so than that these three great diamonds, the Shah, the Orloff, and the Kohinoor, should all have once been in the possession of one man, Nadir Shah.

Three diamonds have been known as the Sancy, the name being given to each gem from that of Baron Sancy, the famous collector of precious stones. Of these, the first, a splendid sum of thirty-three carats, was also associated with the fortunes of the noted Burgundian Captain, Charles the Bold, and also of Henry IV. of France. The former was a connoisseur in diamonds, and had an exceedingly valuable collection, which he always took with him when campaigning, and, like Suvoroff, enjoyed watching the flashes they gave forth from the light of the camp fire. He would better have left them at home, however, when he started to conquer the Swiss, for at Grandson he sustained a terrible defeat, and barely escaped with his life, leaving all his jewels behind. His camp was sacked by the Swiss, and the gold box containing the Sancy was captured by a soldier, who looked inside, and, finding what he supposed was a piece of glass threw it away and put the box in his knapsack. Several days after some one told him that the glass was probably valuable, and he returned had the good fortune to find it, took it home, and sold it to a priest for a florin. It changed hands a dozen times after that, each holder realizing a fortune on it, and was finally purchased by Henry IV. Desiring to employ a body of Swiss mercenaries, he sent the gem to Switzerland by a trusted envoy as security for their pay. On the road the man was waylaid and captured by robbers, but before he was searched he managed to swallow the gem. Finding nothing of value on his person, the enraged robbers shot him and left his body lying in the road. When Henry learned of the fate of his servant, the idea occurred to him that the man might have concealed the gem, the body was disinterred and opened, and the Sancy was recovered. It was sent on to Switzerland, was never redeemed by the French Government, was pledged to a banker of Metz as security for a loan, and at that point it disappeared from history.

Like most men whose rise to power seems a work of destiny rather than of human courage or foresight, Napoleon was superstitious, and among his numerous private beliefs was a devout trust in a diamond talisman. The gem was one of unusual size and splendor, weighing 25 carats, of the shape of an almond, and cut in the Oriental style, with a great number of small facets following the natural shape of the stone. One side, however, had been ground flat, and on this patient lapidary of the Orient had engraved certain cabalistic characters that no scholar could interpret, nor even ascertain the language of which they were a part. Napoleon obtained the gem in Egypt, but how or from whom he would never divulge. He frequently alluded during the height of his power to his talisman, but only those most intimately associated with him knew what it was, nor did they make their knowledge public until after his fall. He wore the gem in a golden setting, so as to show both sides of the stone; a chain passed round his neck, and the amulet was carried, suspended in a morocco leather case, next to his bosom. He never took it off, even in the bath, though he was very careful to guard it from the water, and once or twice a year he cleaned it with his own hands and put it in a new case. From Egypt to Waterloo he wore the precious amulet, but on the night of that fateful day the gem, case, and chain were gone. How the loss occurred was never ascertained; no search was made for the stone, which has never been seen since, and it probably now lies in the earth of some field or among the stones of some road between Waterloo and Paris. Napoleon evidently believed that his good fortune went with his talisman, and never alluded to it again.

That valuable gems should disappear in the far East is not remarkable, particularly when we remember that almost in our own time a large collection vanished, most of them never being recovered. In 1791 the French Assembly commanded a list to be made of the crown jewels, and there were found 9,547 diamonds, with an immense number of other gems, the whole being valued by a moderate estimate at over 30,000,000 francs. The collection was placed in a special building, which was closed to the public. The doors were

locked, barred, and sealed, and a guard was set, but on the night of Sept. 16, 1792, the whole collection was mysteriously stolen by persons who had evaded the sentinels and broken open the doors. Everybody was astounded at the boldness of the robbery, and the entire detective and police force of France, stimulated by the offer of large rewards, made diligent search for months, but not a trace of the thieves or their booty was discovered for years. Long afterward an anonymous letter gave word where a portion of the spoil was hidden, and, upon search, the Regent diamond and one or two others precious objects were found in the spot indicated. Twelve years after this incident a soldier of the empire, arraigned for robbery, declared that he had given the information which led to the discovery of the Regent, and claimed the credit of Napoleon's early successes, the First Consul having pawned the jewel to the Dutch bankers to obtain funds to carry out his schemes. During the empire several magnificent gems, of which the holders either could not or would not give a satisfactory account, were offered for sale in various European courts, but none of them could be certainly identified with the missing stones. Among those which disappeared was a famous blue diamond weighing sixty-seven carats, which has never been recovered. The suspicion was entertained that this and the Hope diamond are the same, and as the latter weighs forty-four carats it is surmised that the loss was occasioned by recutting to prevent identification. The thieves who carried off the French regalia have never been discovered, though suspicion has pointed strongly to the Orleans family as having some share in the business.

As the French revolution ended with one diamond scandal, so it began with another. The story of the diamond necklace passed from mouth to mouth at a time when party spirit ran high, was used as a powerful political weapon against the King and Queen, and probably contributed in no small degree to bring on the revolution. Briefly told, the tale of this historic scandal is this: In 1785 one Bohmer, a Paris jeweller, collected a number of fine diamonds and made a necklace valued at 1,600,000 francs. He offered it to the Queen, who was unable at the time to purchase, and bemoaned the fact so loudly that it became a matter of common gossip in the court, and finally reached the ears of Prince Cardinal de Rohan, at that time in disgrace, and anxious to be restored to royal favor. Rohan saw his opportunity, and determined to improve it by securing the necklace and presenting it to the Queen. Among his other faults, however, Rohan talked too much, and a couple of rough intimates, for he had many such, resolved to turn the matter to their own advantage. This precious twin were Mme de la Motte, a dashing woman of bad reputation, and her husband. Playing on the hopes of Rohan, they exaggerated the Queen's desire for the necklace, and went so far as to gain for him an interview at night with a woman named D'Olive, who bore so striking a likeness to Marie Antoinette that Rohan, in the gloom of the Versailles gardens, was completely deceived. Rohan purchased the necklace and gave it to the Countess to turn over to the Queen, but instead it was then taken charge of by De la Motte, who hurried to London with it and turned it into cash.

Many months passed before the fraud was unearthed, the discovery coming about through the jeweller, who failed to get his money, and finally approached the King. The whole story then came out. Cardinal Rohan was arrested as he was on his way to sing mass at court, and hustled off to the Bastille. Mme. de la Motte was tried, convicted, branded on the shoulders, and sentenced to imprisonment for life. La Motte never ventured back to France, and after a year or two the madam escaped and went to England, where she printed pamphlets about the wickedness of the French court. The people, however, who hated Marie Antoinette, were not so convinced that she was innocent of the affair, and the story of the diamond necklace was cited to her discredit at her trial and shouted after her on her way to execution.

Some years ago a Paris jeweller told a story of one diamond which had passed over his counter no less than eleven times. It was a beautiful stone of nearly four carats, of perfect color and lustre, but easily identified by means of a small "feather" in the tip of the lowest part. He bought it from an East India dealer and had it set in a ring. It was sold to a Countess in 1869, just before the outbreak of the Franco Prussian war. The Countess died in a few weeks, and the ring was worn by her husband. He was killed in the siege of Paris, and a few days after his death the ring was brought into the store for sale by a common soldier. He was arrested and the ring sent to the family of the dead Count.

Before the siege ended they brought in the ring and sold it to the dealer in order to procure money to buy food. Directly after the siege it passed into the hands of an English tourist, who visited the city to get a look at the ruin wrought by the Communists, and a year later the firm, who, on being written to and desired to tell how he got it, stated that it had been the property of an English tourist hunter who had been killed by a tiger, and his friends sold the ring to get means to send the body home. The stone was reset and sent to a purchaser in a prominent member of the demi-monde, who not long after was murdered in her room. Among the articles taken by began to wonder how soon it would turn up. They had not long to wait for all their people had by this time learned about the stone, and were on the look-out for it. After six months it was found in the showcase of a jeweller in London, who had bought it from a firm in Amsterdam. It was bought by the Paris agent and sent back to be started afresh on its travels. It was purchased again by a woman of the town, who six weeks later was drawn out of the Seine with the gem on her finger, and by a strange coincidence, it was offered to the firm that sold it by the police agents, the court having jurisdiction having offered it to be sold. And so it went from hand to hand, attended with misfortune at every change, and usually bringing death to the possessor. Laborers in the Golconda mines used to say that when a stone was baptized in blood when first taken from the earth it caused the shedding of blood wherever it went, and the story of one such ill-omened gem goes far to confirm belief in such a superstition.



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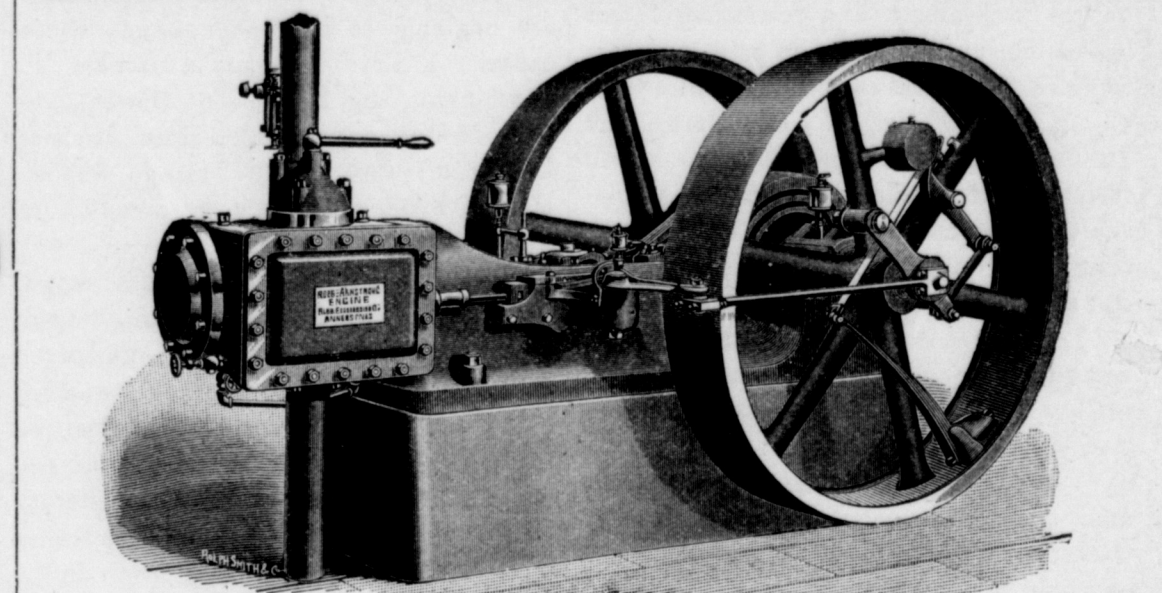
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