

IN THE DIAMOND FIELDS.

INSTANCES OF LUCK RELATED BY
A FORMER DIGGER.

Who Have Made Rich Finds on Ground
Where Others Had Spent Their All—First
Discoveries of Diamonds—Laws Against
Illicit Diamond Buyers.

'The first diamond discovered in South Africa,' said Henry A. Kratoch, who spent several years in the diamond fields, 'was purchased in 1867 by a trader, an Irishman by birth, named John O'Reilly. While returning from the interior with his cattle he stayed for a few days, in order to recuperate, at a large farm on the banks of the Orange River owned by a Boer named Schalk van Niekerk. A peculiar stone had been picked up some time previously by a Bushman boy. O'Reilly bought it for a trifle out of curiosity, not knowing himself what it was, and took it with him to a town called Colesberg and handled it to the resident Civil Commissioner, who in turn forwarded it to Dr. Atherstone in Graham's Town Cape Colony. This gentleman after careful examination, pronounced it a veritable diamond 2 1/4 carats in weight and worth \$2,500. It was subsequently purchased for this price by the Governor of the colony, Sir P. Wodehouse. When the find became known a search for diamonds was instituted throughout the Hope Town district, but it was not until 1869 that the existence of diamonds in paying quantities was proved beyond a doubt. Then a great rush of diggers from all parts of the globe was made to the Orange River and its vicinity. It is a curious fact that, though the earliest finds were made in the Hope Town district, no mine was discovered there. In the latter part of 1870 a lot of miners who had gained valuable experience in California and Australia discovered a mine about 100 miles due north of Hope Town, nearly 1,000 miles from Cape Town, which they named after the then British Colonial Secretary, the Earl of Kimberley. At the beginning of 1871 10,000 men had found their way to this spot. The extensive farm on which the Kimberley mine and town are situated was property of one Van Wyck, from whom it was purchased for about \$25,000.

'The actual diamond mine is a hole of twenty-five or thirty acres. The mining was so-called gravel digging until 1878, when the hard rock was reached at the depth of 270 feet from the surface. There were then about 320 claims on which licenses were paid. The yield of diamonds from this big excavation since the opening of the mine in 1871 probably exceeds eight tons weight of precious stones, in value about \$240,000,000. After years of progress all the individual small diggers and claimholders sold out to gigantic syndicates of which the late Barney Barnato and Cecil Rhodes were the promoters. This company employs at present about 1,700 white men and about 14,000 Kaffirs, and its expenditures for labor, material, &c., are not less than \$12,000,000 annually. The finest diamond ever found in South Africa was the famous Porter Rhodes, discovered in claim No. 375, near the centre of Kimberley mine, on Feb. 12, 1880. It is a pure white octahedron, weighing 150 carats and valued at \$300,000. A splendid yellow octahedron was found on March 27, 1884, at the east end of the mine. It weighed 302 carats. The largest diamond ever found in this mine was discovered near the west end of the mine on Sept. 29, 1885. It was a large irregular octahedron, slightly spotted, of yellow color, and weighed 404 carats, or nearly three ounces. In the month of February previous to a similar stone of 352 carats was found near the east end of the mine. The former of these stones is probably the largest diamond the world has yet produced, excepting a very imperfect stone of some 500 carats found in Jagersfontein, Orange Free State, in 1881.

'About twenty miles to the westward of Kimberley the Vaal River is met. Diamond mining is in active progress on its banks. These mines are generally termed the poor man's diggings, because any man with a little capital can go there and stake off an unoccupied claim 40x40, pay his monthly license free of \$7.50 to the Government mining commissioner and go to work. The only mining implements necessary for his undertaking are a pick and shovel, a large gravel sieve and a smaller hand sieve, two tubs, generally obtained by sawing an ale barrel in half, and a provisional table to sort on, as well as a large pale in order to carry the water for washing the sand from the gravel in the tubs. As a rule one of these prospectors, accord-



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ing to his means, hires two or three Kaffir laborers at about \$5 a week and keep, the rations being regulated by law. These men perform the most laborious work in the sun, the prospector generally limiting himself to the actual washing and sorting. The digging is purely surface, as at a depth of about two feet a solid rock is met. I have known instances during my sojourn there where men have expended their last cent and savings probably ranging from \$500 to \$1,000, endured all kinds of hardships and never found anything.

'On the other hand, I have also met men who, after a few weeks' work, found stones to the value of \$20,000. I can recall one instance where a man whom I personally knew had accumulated about \$2,000. He took chances and went to the river to try his luck. He employed several natives and took out a license for three claims. He worked unceasingly for about two months, without ever finding a single stone. Then he abandoned his claims and returned broke to Kimberley. A week or two after his departure a Scotchman named Cameron staked off one claim in the centre of where the former three had been, hired one Kaffir and started to work. On the fourth day when he was washing up, he found a pure white octahedron of 147 1/2 carats, which he sold to a visiting broker on the spot for \$30,000, cash. The largest diamond found on the Vaal River surface diggings, known as the Spalding or Stewart diamond, was discovered in 1872. It weighed 288 carats and was valued then at \$25,000. It has been cut and weighs now 128 carats. These diamonds found on the banks of the river are of a decidedly superior quality to the Kimberley mine diamonds, being generally perfectly white. All commodities of life here are very expensive, owing to the great difficulty of transportation. I have often paid \$1 for a can of condensed milk, 60 cents for a loaf of bread, 50 cents for a small tin of sardines, 25 cts. for a pound of sugar, and 75 cents for an ordinary glass of Irish or Scotch whiskey. The only food which is cheap is goat's meat, which must be consumed within a few hours after slaughter, owing to the hot African sun and the utter absence of ice. This meat can be purchased as live stock from the constantly travelling Kaffir herds for about three cents a pound. The climate is fairly healthy for Europeans and especially beneficial for pulmonary weaknesses. Female society is out of the question, as far as white women are concerned. During my first two years of residence there I saw only one white woman. She was travelling through to join her husband, a missionary. When the presence of this so-called angel became known in the city everybody quit work in order to gaze upon her.

'From the discovery of diamonds in South Africa until the present day one great obstacle the diggers and the company have had always to contend with has been the enormous loss annually of rough diamonds stolen by the native Kaffir laborers while at work in the claims or on the despoiling floors. These thefts reached such enormous proportions and the diamonds found such ready market among the unscrupulous element of the white population that it became necessary to enact special laws to cope with the evil. In the earlier days, upon conviction the Kaffir was simply punished for the theft by about twelve months imprisonment, and the white buyer, for receiving stolen property, was subject to a fine of about five times the actual value of the diamond and three months imprisonment with hard labor. The profit to the buyer was so great that this punishment proved to be utterly inadequate. Trial so far has been by a magistrate. It became now necessary to create a special court. Under an act passed by the Cape legislature commonly called the Illicit Diamond Buying or Diamond Trade act, this court consisted of three Supreme Court Justices, doing entirely away with trial by jury. Upon conviction the maximum sentence for a Kaffir, the thief, was fifty lashes upon the bare back with the cat-of-nine-tails and to undergo imprisonment with hard labor for a term not exceeding ten years. The receiver of illicit diamond buyer upon conviction received as a maximum sentence fifteen years' imprisonment at hard labor, the first one-fifth of the term to be spent in isolation and in chains, and he was also liable to a fine not exceeding \$5,000 as well as confiscation of all real and personal

property which he held at the time of his arrest within the diamond mining area. The ground taken was that the criminal had accumulated this property from the gains of his illicit traffic. Isolation in prison consisted in being kept apart from all other prisoners as well as not having the privilege of seeing a visitor or writing a letter or communicating with any one. The prisoner was herded with about fifty others, consisting of Baffirs and Bushmen, in a large dormitory cell about 100 feet long by 12 feet wide, was obliged to work twelve hours a day in the hot sun in a stone quarry, and had chains weighing from seven to eighteen pounds riveted on his legs. His behavior during this part of his term had been exemplary; otherwise it was prolonged at the discretion of the prison superintendent. Upon my leaving the colony there were about 300 hundred whites thus undergoing sentence. There was no appeal from this sentence excepting to the Privy Council or House of Lords, and this was hardly within reach of the average convict.

'This law checked to a certain extent illicit diamond buying, but it must be remembered that the inducement to commit a crime was enormous. For instance, a Kaffir was induced to steal a diamond, say of about 40 carats, which he could easily conceal in his mouth or even swallow. The native runner or go-between in the employ of the white buyer would pay him about \$10 for this stone, which might have a market value of from \$1,000 to \$2,000. The runner received a present about \$5 in addition to a weekly salary of about \$25 and his board. Upon conviction the runner faced the same as his master. Many fortunes have been made in this traffic and the buyers have slipped from the colony in the nick of time on the eve of being trapped. Trapping is the mode of procedure resorted to by the detective department in order to catch the buyer. The detectives get hold of a runner, who is induced to betray his master. A trusted Kaffir is procured and thoroughly searched and stripped by a number of detectives, so that he has nothing in his possession. A rough and uncut, well identified and accurately weighed stone is then handed to him. The runner takes in turn and introduces him to his master. These two are followed and watched by a number of disguised detectives. The white man will ask to see the stone, which the Kaffir takes from his hiding place. A bargain is struck for a few dollars, the money is paid over, and the Kaffir departs. As soon as he reaches the open a signal is given to the detectives, a rush is made, and the diamond buyer is arrested. Upon search being made the diamond is found in the buyer's possession and the money in the Kaffir's. The runner turns Queen's evidence against his employer and is held as a witness. The detectives corroborate all details and a conviction is certain.

HOW TO GET TO PEKIN.

Changes in Methods of Travel Brought
About by the Railroad.

There are many interesting things to see in Pekin, and not a few white men, diplomats, tourists and traders, are all the while going to or coming away from the Chinese capital. In the past two years several causes have combined to make the journey to Pekin quite different from what it was, and travellers are telling about their new experiences.

In the first place, it is no longer possible to go by steamer clear to Tientsin, the well-known treaty port of north China and the port of Pekin. This great city lies some distance up the Pei-ho, and formerly steamers from Shanghai went direct to the city; but a great change has occurred in the conditions of navigation at all the ports of North China bordering on the Gulf of Pechili. The turbulent Yellow River carries down to the sea immense masses of yellow sediment which for years has been piling up mud banks a little off the coast. On account of this obstruction it is now almost impossible for a vessel of considerable draught to enter any part of North China. Cebu as well as Tientsin is suffering from this impediment. The steamers that formerly went up the river to Tientsin now have to anchor off Tongku near the mouth of the river, where the passengers are taken off by a small and dirty tug to the train that conveys them to Tientsin, and the cargo is placed on lighters and towed up the river to the city.

Shanghai is the starting place for Pekin. One may go to Pekin by way of Yokohama but the Japanese vessels stop at Chemulpo, the port of Seoul, and other places. The ten days' journey is not popular among passengers, for the boats are all freighters and do not give comfortable accommodations to tourists.

One peculiarity of the trip from Shanghai is that the traveller is not sure when he is going to start until the steamer has actually cast off her moorings and is puffing out to sea. The vessels are advertised to sail for Tientsin on certain days, but they never start until they are full of cargo, and that may be from one to three days after the advertised time. The boats of the three companies engaged in the Shanghai-Tientsin trade are all cargo boats, and passengers are merely incidentals of the business. The result is that the journey is not a very comfortable one.

After leaving Shanghai the traveller does not know when he will reach Pekin, for there is cargo to unload at Cebu; and if a strong north-easter blows and prevents the

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discharge of cargo the vessel simply gets under the lee of Cebu bluff, five miles away, and waits till the wind has subsided so that she can land her Cebu freight. It accordingly takes anywhere from three days to a week to reach Tientsin from Shanghai.

They have an Astor House at Tientsin, a pretty good hotel for a caravansary in China, and at the railroad depot a Chinese porter is waiting to conduct the travellers to a hotel. Two or three trains run daily from the city to Pekin, but tourists and diplomats as a rule travel by no train except the mail, which leaves Tientsin at 11:30 A. M. The railroad business is not well systematized in China yet, and trains on the Pekin Railroad are not running with Occidental smoothness. The mail train is the best of the lot, for it is managed by the Customs Department, at the head of which is Sir Robert Hart.

The crowning excellence of the mail train in the eyes of foreign travellers is that no Chinese passengers either of high or low degree, are permitted to travel on it. This concession to Europeans was not obtained without much difficulty, but the persistence of the white men at last secured the desired exclusion of the Chinese from this train. Passengers, however, have to pay dear for the privilege, as double first class fare is charged. The reason they insisted upon having this exclusive train was because the first-class cars on the ordinary trains have only uncushioned wooden seats, and not only the holders of first-class tickets are admitted to these cars, but also Chinese passengers who have second and even third-class tickets. White travellers complain that the manners of these persons are not agreeable and that their proximity is often uncomfortable.

The distance from Tientsin to Machiapu, the northern terminus of the railroad for Pekin, and four miles from the gate of the capital, is eighty miles. The mail train covers this in four hours if it sticks closely to time-table rate of speed. Sometimes it runs on schedule time, but just as often it fails to do so. Sometimes it starts an hour late. As yet railroad trains in China cannot be depended upon to fulfil the promises of the time table.

If a traveller wants a special conveyance to meet him at the Pekin terminus of the railroad to take him to his hotel, he must telegraph for it from Tientsin. It frames his telegram on an economical basis and does not use more than eight or nine words the telegram will cost him only about \$1.25. This is rather steep, according to Western notions of the service, but then the telegraph is as yet comparatively new in China. Travellers say it is best to telegraph for a special covered cart, for this conveyance somewhat mitigates the discomforts of the trying four mile ride over one of the worst roads imaginable. At the city gate the visitor begins to get acquainted with the smells of Pekin, and life in that city means the perpetual endurance of unpleasant odors.

Travellers usually resort to the Hotel Tallien, which everybody agrees in saying is on a dirty street, has small stuffy rooms, indifferent cuisine and service and high charges. Although there is much interest in Pekin, there are many discomforts, particularly during a temporary visit. If some enterprising person or company would start a good hotel in a roomy enclosure the traveller would be able to find rest and comfort and refuge from the foul sights and smells which he must endure whenever he goes into the streets. Mrs. Bishop says she thought Seoul was the filthiest city in the world till she saw Pekin. Major A. C. Tate says he is glad he visited Pekin, but he has no wish to repeat the visit in the near future. Another traveller says that there are two most satisfactory moments in the visit to the Chinese Capital. One is when he first sees the city from afar, and the other when he takes his last look at it. Major Tate says Pekin is a repulsive place, but well worth visiting, for all that; and no unpleasantness with the natives need be anticipated. The instances have been rare when the Chinese of the capital have been rude or insolent to foreigners, whether men or women, and there is no need nowadays to apprehend such occurrences on visiting the city.

So Knowleg.

There is a class of persons who seek credit for wisdom by repeating, as if original, what they have recently heard or read. For perfect success in this attempt it is important that the rehearsal be accurate. Those who are careless are in danger of

making themselves ridiculous. This is well illustrated by the following incident, which occurred in Pompeii, and is vouched for by the traveller who witnessed it. A party of perhaps thirty English ladies and gentlemen, under the care of a 'personal conductor,' were entering one of the famous old houses which modern excavation has brought to light. As the foremost of the party entered the pillared remains of the ancient hall, graced by one or two faded frescoes, the guide began his regular discourse by saying, 'This, ladies and gentlemen, is the atrium'—spraking the word, of course, with the Continental pronunciation. He had got no further before a young man, somewhat over dressed, noticing that a young lady in the rear of the party had not heard the guide, seized the opportunity to impress her with his antiquarian knowledge by remarking, with a wave of his hand toward the frescoes—

'This is the art room, my dear.

'My dear' bit a smile in two and thanked him.

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