

THE KIMBERLEY MAIL.

"Perhaps the most mysterious, and at the same time the most remarkable, robbery ever recorded—and one, too, that had a peculiar fascination for most people on account of its unparalleled audacity and daring—was that known as the Kimberley Limited Mail Robbery. So that you may understand all the circumstances of the case, and as I quite unconsciously became the instrument for unravelling the mystery which so long enshrouded it, I will, if you are not averse to listening to the recital, give you the brief particulars of the felony."

We were a party of three, whiling away an idle half-hour at the club after dinner. Greville Matheson, the speaker, had at one period held what we always understood to have been a particularly good position in the Criminal Investigation Department, but in what capacity we never could quite determine. A great traveller, naturally he had a rich store of anecdotes far in excess of any we had picked up in our somewhat limited experiences. The conversation had somewhat drifted on to the undiscovered crimes of the last thirty or forty years, and when Matheson volunteered to enlighten us upon what was certainly one of the most sensational robberies of modern times, we naturally assented to his proposal.

"When I tell you," he continued, "that the robbery involved no less than \$1,000,000 of rough or uncut diamonds belonging to the De Beers Company, and that the thieves got clear away with their booty, you will understand the profound sensation it created in England and South Africa when it became known that the Kimberley Limited Mail had, notwithstanding the stringent precautions adopted, been robbed to that extent. The circumstances were the more extraordinary, as you will admit, after hearing the details attendant upon the manner in which the crime was planned and carried into execution."

"Huge quantities of precious stones of the value of over \$3,000,000 sterling per annum, are each week conveyed from Kimberley in the mail train, for shipment to England by the outgoing steamer from Cape Town. The custom is, or was—for it may be altered now—to place the diamonds in a huge fire and burglar-proof safe in the guard's van, the floor and sides of which were lined with half-inch steel. The safe was then locked by one of the resident directors of the company, whose authorised agents in Cape Town met the train on its arrival there, and opened the safe with duplicate keys provided for the purpose. In addition to these precautions, the train was escorted by a heavily armed guard, the safe was guarded by the long journey of 650 miles, and it was a part of their duty that one at least should always remain in the van during stoppage, so that, to all intents and purposes, tampering with the safe when the diamonds were in transit was a sheer impossibility."

"On the occasion in question, the mail train contained a larger parcel of the precious stones than was usual, consequently heavy purchases for America. It duly left Kimberley at 8 p.m. all secure, but on arrival in the grip of the locomotive, the next station beyond De Aar Junction, a playster called the attention of the guard to the fact that a hole was visible in the bottom of the van containing the safe. A careful examination was forthwith made, the result of which conclusively proved that the safe was empty. As you may well imagine, the excitement among the passengers and officials was intense. It was plainly evident that an inexplicable and daring robbery had been committed, and the safe ransacked of its precious contents, by drilling a hole through the bottom of the carriage and also through the steel plate covering the floor, and finally the safe itself."

"Not a clue to the perpetrators was ever discovered, despite the persistent efforts of the local police and the skilled assistance of Scotland Yard. Experienced engineers and craftsmen were all baffled in their attempts to explain how an entrance to the safe could be effected under the circumstances I have explained. The only marks on the bottom of the carriage were four holes about 2 in. to 2½ in. deep, as if screws had been inserted into the woodwork; but to our minds they explained nothing. Suspicion naturally fell upon the two guards, but their innocence was obvious when it was remembered that the safe had certainly not been tampered with from the interior of the van. Whoever the guilty persons were, it was generally conceded that the theft was one of the most remarkable in the annals of crime."

"The above particulars, which I have necessarily condensed, were all that was known of the robbery. As I was a resident in Kimberley at the time, having resigned my appointment at Scotland Yard on account of ill-health, I naturally took a very keen interest in trying to throw some light upon the modus operandi of the robbery, which a reward of \$5,000 for the discovery of the thieves undoubtedly stimulated. All efforts proved unavailing, however, and the subject was gradually forgotten as other and more exciting events enshrouded the public mind."

"And now comes the peculiar part of my story, which you may or may not consider to be one of those inexplicable coincidences that are constantly recurring in every-day life, to remind us that, in the end, ill-doing never yet escaped the punishment of God."

"About three years after the robbery of the mail, I determined to try my luck in the newly opened territory of the Chartered Company in Mashonaland. At that time it was practically a terra incognita, and to those not well versed in 'veldt' life the journey hither was attended with considerable risks, through the absence of water, etc. We had arrived at Tuli, where we were out-spanned, and in the cool of the evening I set out to replenish our diminished stock of food with the intention of shooting a few partridges and khorhan, with which the country abounded. Close off the wagon-track I can scarcely call it a road, I came across a riderless horse quietly grazing, and concluding that its owner must be near at hand, I followed its spoor or track, until it led me to a dense bush at the base of a small kopje, or hill. Lying under a small clump of mimosa trees I detected the seemingly dead body of a man, about forty years of age, whose dress I reckoned a long absence from civilization, and whose general appearance showed that prior to succumbing he must have suffered terribly from the ravages of fever, so common to those parts during the rainy season of the year. A closer inspection of the

body, however, showed that life still flickered, and I at once set to work as the sun just dipped below the horizon to restore him by bathing his lips from my water flask. My efforts were shortly rewarded by seeing him open his eyes, but he was apparently too enfeebled to rise. Fearful lest darkness should overtake us, and that I should be lost in the bush, I somehow got the sufferer on my back, and speedily came to the spot where I had left his horse. I placed him on the saddle before me, and quietly walked the horse to our camp, where the few simple remedies at our disposal shortly brought the stranger to a state of consciousness."

"Boss," said he, in a faint whisper, when he was able to talk, "you've come too late, and my span of life is fast ebbing. For days I have been on the road from Victoria, with this accursed fever on me, until it has got too strong a hold on me to fight against. Bad food and scant water have done the rest. Better not waste your time and precious medicines on me. I'm alone in the world, and it don't matter much, anyhow, whether I kick the trace to-night or ten years hence."

"As you may suppose, I paid no heed to his ravings, and as the night was once or twice thought I had succeeded in pulling him around. A faint utterance, however, led me to draw nearer to his side, and it was plainly evident that the end was not far off."

"Put your ear close to mine, boss. You've been very kind to me, and I want to do you a turn if I can before I die. Now—that's it—come closer. You've heard of the Kimberley Mail? Well, I did it with my pal Da Silva, and I've had nothing but bad luck since. We divided up the swag. He is now probably living in luxury at home on it, being a swell. You know who he is, don't you?"

"I nodded assent, for Da Silva had for years been one of the most trusted servants of the De Beers Company."

"Well," resumed the dying man, "we planned it together, and—a little more brandy, boss, got clean off with the swag, as you know. Being a rough card, my movements were more open to suspicion than Da Silva's, and to dispose of my share of the plunder was more difficult. I decided to wait a bit until the affair blew over, and so I buried the diamonds, boss, just as I had them, at a little place called Holpot in Griqualand West, and then he proceeded to give me minute directions as to where they could be discovered. 'I came up here with the pioneers,' he resumed, after a long pause, 'but didn't do any good for myself, and now the game's off. You do what you like with the stones, but make my tip and stick to 'em. They are worth having, even if only for the risk I ran to get them.'"

"Tell you how I did it? More brandy—there, I'll last to do that, and you may as well keep for the proof of it. Da Silva was well aware when every parcel of diamonds left the company, and on this occasion—you see, we waited for a big haul—it was decided he should resign his billet and go down in the same train as the diamonds, for, without his assistance, the attempt was impossible. His position with the company, for he was well known, would naturally divert suspicion from him. I was to take all the risk, and—well, I did. Da Silva procured a quantity of the best tempered tools and a change of clothing, which he took with him into a specially reserved compartment for which he had also secured a ticket for me. The night before the train left Kimberley, under the cloak of darkness, I went into the yard where the bogies are kept, and quietly sitting under the van containing the safe in which I knew the diamonds were placed, I bored four holes in the woodwork, into which I screwed a corresponding number of powerful steel screw eyes. I then withdrew. All the next day I spent in preparing for my long night ride on the Limited Mail. I constructed a small sliding platform which, when opened, the bottom of it, 6 in. by 2 ft. wide. To each of the corners I attached a strong flexible hook of steel about 18 in. in length. Five minutes before the train started, all I had to do, in the bustle and confusion incidental to the departure of the mail, was to drop on the line at the end of the train, and make my way under the carriages until I came to the bullion van. A minute's work sufficed to attach my suspending platform to the hooks placed in the flooring the previous night, and to ensconce myself thereon. I didn't dread the risk, boss, for I hung suspended within a foot of the ground. The slightest impediment on the line, and I should have been a dead man."

"Here I gave the man another glass of brandy, which revived him sufficiently to enable him to proceed."

"The train moved slowly from the station," he went on to say, "and with the tools in my pocket I soon had a twelve-inch hole cut into the wood-work of the van exactly under the centre of the safe, the position of the thieves undoubtedly estimated. I commenced on the steel plate, but it was fearful work, boss, with the train rushing along in inky darkness at thirty miles an hour; but that was not such an impediment as the constrained position was. At every halt Da Silva would leisurely stroll along the platform and place a fresh supply of tools under the carriage within easy reach, the worn ones being thrown in the veldt far beyond the track, thus avoiding the risk of being packed up later on."

"And thus we sped on, and before midnight I had cut a circular hole from the platform to the safe. Only four hours of darkness remained for me to secure the rich prize for which I was risking life and limb. At each station—you know what shanties they are—the safe was carefully inspected, and, of course, found intact. I was able to use greater force and deliver blows on the bottom of the safe because the movement of the train deadened all noise; but still it was awful work lying there on my back. Brandy? Thanks."

"At last the floor of the safe yielded, a few more minutes sufficed to pierce the thin compartments in which the spoil was, and the coveted diamonds were then safely stowed away in my pocket. It now wanted about three-quarters of an hour to daylight, so I carefully threw all tools away, and waited for the train to pull up at De Aar Junction, where it meets the Cape Town train to Port Elizabeth. We had calculated it would make a long wait of from twenty to thirty minutes, which enabled me to fold up my platform, extract the screws upon which it had hung with its living freight so long, and as the Port Elizabeth train dashed into the station I made a

bold dash under the cover of the darkness across the metals, and jumped into the first-class compartment, reserved by Da Silva for the occasion."

"Off we went with our spoil, the platform and my soiled clothes being discarded piecemeal as we crossed likely places in an hour or less I looked a changed man. In my new garb and spotless gloves few would suspect me from my appearance as having been engaged in the work of which I have told you. Da Silva travelled through Natal and the Portuguese possessions for some time prior to going home, whilst I—well, here I am. That's how we robbed the Kimberley Mail boss. I'm proud of it, but what I'm enduring now—water, please—is nothing to my sufferings on that long, cold, dark ride. Good-bye, boss."

"In a few moments after revealing the secret of the daring robbery, the unknown breather his last, unrepentant for the wrong committed, and unremunerated by a living soul. We buried him near Weil's store, and a simple cross now marks the spot where repose the remains of a brave—if a misguided—man."

"I turned back from my journey, and on my way placed myself in communication with the De Beers Company on my return to Kimberley. The directions given me by the dead criminal enabled me to recover his half of the diamonds, and I was rewarded by another £1,000, in addition to the £3,000 originally offered for the detection of the culprits."

"As for Da Silva, it was generally conceded that the evidence was insufficient to incriminate him, and so he has escaped scot-free. He is a member of two of the leading clubs—and is considered somebody in the city."

THE SHIPS AT RIO.

Canadian Sailors Carried Off by Yellow Fever.

AWFUL EXPERIENCE OF MERCHANTMEN AMID PESTILENCE AND REBELLION.

Captain Utley, of the St. John Bark Tamar E. Marshall, Tells a Thrilling Story.

During the last few months, a large number of sailors on Canadian ships, have been carried off by the yellow fever scourge at Rio Janeiro. No less than three vessels sailing from St. John N.B., lost their captains. Ships of all nations suffered and the delay of vessels caused by the rebellion greatly lengthened the list of victims of the fever. The bark Tamar E. Marshall, Capt. Utley, one of the ships of the fleet of St. John, N.B., and one of the handsomest wooden ships afloat, recently arrived at the latter city direct from Rio, and her skipper tells a sad story of the state of affairs in the pestilence ridden city during the last few months. The crew of his own vessel were smitten with fever and one man died. The captain himself experienced the painful duty of helping to bear the bodies of the captains of several other ships to their last resting place. As the rebellion was in progress, the merchant ships had great difficulty in getting supplies of water or necessities of any kind. Their boats were not unlikely to be fired upon by either government or rebel forces. The cabin of the Tamar E. Marshall was several times pierced by bullets, and the crew were in great dread of death from fever as the grim possibility of being picked off by marksmen of the rival forces. Capt. Utley was himself attacked by yellow fever, and it was feared that he too would succumb; but he finally rallied and was able to get away from the port alive, though in a greatly exhausted condition. On the voyage to St. John he suffered a relapse. His limbs became swollen, he could scarcely breathe, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he could save himself from actual suffocation. That the gallant skipper, who is a Nova Scotian, and one of the most skillful and popular of her sailor sons, has been restored to perfect health is due, he himself says, to Hawker's nerve and stomach tonic and Hawker's liver pills. But let him speak for himself on this point. 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