

A CURIOUS CASE OF KLEPTOMANIA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM," "A FOSSIL-UP," ETC.

Messrs. Maspré & Co.'s famous Magasin de Joaillerie in the Rue de la Paix is literally the most brilliant emporium of brilliants in Paris. They have *parures* there ranging in price from five thousand to over fifty thousand pounds.

It is well known that Messrs. Maspré, who figure among the largest importers of rough stones from India, Brazil, and the Cape, keep one clear sixth part of the revolving disks in the great Amsterdam grinding and polishing mills in constant operation to supply the requirements of their extensive business, most of the more important transactions in high-priced jewelry being effected at least through their intermediary. In fact, the establishment in the Rue de la Paix is the almost universal resort of all opulent visitors to Paris who wish to purchase jewelry, from a simple ring or set of studs up to a complete *parure*.

So it was by no means an extraordinary occurrence, but simply in the customary run of the house's business, that on a fine morning in June, 1875, an elegant sumptuously-appointed chariot, drawn by four splendid grays, with coachman and two footmen in blue and silver to match, drew up at the grand portal of this resplendent palace of gems. The panels of the chariot had painted on them for armorial bearings a hand half closed clutching at a diadem, with the single word "Prendo" for motto. The sole occupant of the carriage was a tall handsome gentleman, dressed with elegant simplicity.

The two footmen hastened to open the coach door and let down the steps. The gentleman descended, and entered the emporium, where he was received with obsequious politeness by M. Joannot, the acting chief partner of the firm, and manager of the show and sale department, who saw at a glance that he had before him a fresh arrival in the gay city, obviously a man of substantial wealth. The gentleman asked to be shown some rings. He spoke with a strongly-marked English accent, but with perfect propriety and fluency of language, quite in keeping with his distinguished aristocratic air and manners. He proved himself at once one of those model customers in whom merchants delight, rapid in selection and decision, and disdaining all paltry attempts at cheapening; for in less than five minutes he had purchased a diamond-and-ruby ring for fifty pounds, paid for it with a Bank of England note, left the shop with a courteous half-bend of the head, and re-entered his carriage, which immediately drove off in the direction of the Place Vendôme.

The chariot had hardly proceeded some twenty yards on its way, and M. Joannot was still engaged in replacing the cards with the rings from which the purchase had been selected, when another aristocratic-looking stranger, dressed with scrupulous neatness in faultless black, hastily entered the place, and, addressing M. Joannot, asked, with some slight embarrassment, whether the gentleman who had left this moment had not perchance inadvertently omitted to pay for his purchases. The manager was just going to reply in the negative, when his eye, chancing to fall on one of the cards, detected the absence of a costly diamond ring. He felt considerably surprised. He briefly told his questioner that he missed a gem worth two thousand francs.

"I thought so," said the gentleman, who also spoke with a strong English accent. "My friend, Mr. Chester, is a little absent-minded occasionally. Will you kindly permit me to pay for the ring?" and he drew from his breast a bulky portfolio crammed with Bank of England notes, from which he selected a hundred pound one, and handed it over to the manager. Having received his change, he hurriedly left the place, and jumping into a tilbury, obviously waiting for him, in charge of a diminutive tiger, on the opposite side of the street, which at once drove off rapidly in the track of "Mr. Chester's" carriage.

"Rather a queer go—very!" muttered the manager. "Absent-minded! 'Um, ha! Well, it matters not. People who can afford to pay for it may surely be permitted to indulge in absent-mindedness," he added, with a slight chuckle.

Some three or four days after, the new aristocratic slightly absent-minded customer paid another visit to the emporium. M. Joannot, happening to glance accidentally over the way, just when "Mr. Chester" was entering the place, saw the same tilbury with the same diminutive tiger and the same gentleman in black stopping on the other side.

"Mr. Chester" bought a small diamond cross this time, for which he paid eighty pounds in two thousand-franc notes. The manager watched him closely, but he did not see him touch any other article besides the one purchased by him. Yet when, after "Mr. Chester's" departure, his friend made his appearance and put his query in the same as before, M. Joannot discovered, to his intense amazement, that another valuable trinket was gone. "Mr. Chester's" friend paid at once cheerfully the amount demanded for the missing gem.

The same thing was repeated several times, until the amount of "Mr. Chester's" purchases, overt and covert, reached twelve hundred pounds, and "Mr. Chester's" friend had come to drop all preliminary inquiry, contenting himself with a simple "How much?" and unquestionably handed over the sum demanded.

One day, when "Mr. Chester's" friend had just disbursed another cool hundred for another of the absent-minded man's covert purchases, a gentleman entered the emporium, and came up to the said friend, whose hand he most warmly shook with manifestations of intense delight.

"My dear Sir Jonathan," he cried, in English, "this is an agreeable surprise, indeed. I saw your tilbury, and Tim told me you were in here. What are you doing in this Tophet of perdition?"

"Ah, delighted to meet you once more, my dear prince," responded the gentleman addressed as Sir Jonathan. "How is her charming highness, the Princess Olga? Is she with you?"

"No, worse luck. Monaco holds her still in its Armida's garden of *trente-a-quarante* and *roulette*. In the last two months she has dropped fifty thousand roubles. Well, she can afford it, and we all have our foibles. I am in treaty for the Hôtel Guébriant; and, when everything is arranged, she will join me here for the season. But let me repeat my question, what are you doing here, Sir Jonathan?"

"The unhappy old game, prince, I am sorry to say, has brought me to Paris. Lord—, my poor brother-in-law, has another fit upon him—you understand me—and I am here to guard against any untoward consequences."

"What a sad pity! Happily, with his and your unlimited wealth, it does not matter so much."

"True, one must make the best of it. Fortunately, he is much more reasonable now than he used to be. In London I had to pay forty thousand pounds once for a *parure*, which fetched only eighteen thousand when sold by us afterwards. There were twenty-two thousand clean gone. Not a flea-bite even to a millionaire."

"Why, Sir Jonathan, that is almost as bad as Paul Demidow's purchase of the Sancy diamond, for which he gave half a million roubles in 1835, to sell it for 625,000 francs the year after here in Paris, as my father used to tell me. Where is the earl staying?"

"We have taken the Hôtel Choiseul in the Rue St. Dominique for the season. We shall be delighted to see you. Will you come to the countess's—I mean Mrs. Chester's—*soirée* tonight? For we are here in the strictest *incog*. Permit me to hand you our card for your guidance. What say you, prince; may we expect you?"

"My dear Sir Jonathan, I accept your invitation with the greatest pleasure. You may depend upon my coming. If you are disengaged now, you will perhaps do me the favour to look at a new carriage which I have just had built for the princess. I know you are an exquisite judge of such matters."

"Delighted, my dear prince. My Tim will drive us where you order."

The two gentlemen left arm in arm. M. Joannot, who was a pretty good linguist, had paid close attention to the conversation between the two; so had another gentleman apparently, who had come to have a valuable bracelet repaired, and a large sapphire put in the centre, in lieu of the one which, he said, had dropped out accidentally, and been lost.

"Do you know those gentlemen?" asked this customer of M. Joannot.

"Not much," replied the manager. "The one is an Englishman, the other a Russian, I think. This much I gathered from their conversation."

"I knew both of them in London when I was over there some years ago. The Russian is Prince Baryatinski, who owns no end of square leagues of the finest estates in South Russia, and whose wife, the Princess Olga, only daughter and sole heiress of the late Prince Trubetzkoi, is even wealthier than her husband, but who drops a large portion of her princely revenue on the *tapis-vert*. The Englishman is Sir Jonathan Carruthers, the opulent banker, who owns some fifty thousand hectares of the best land in Yorkshire and Lancashire. He is said to be worth three million pounds sterling. His only sister and heiress—he is a bachelor—is married to the Earl of —, well you can easily find out the name for yourself. I do not like to mention it here, as the noble Lord is travelling incognito, as I understand. Poor Lord—! He is smitten with a formidable moral disorder, they say, which, despite his unnumbered rent-roll of five million francs a year, has more than once threatened to get him into serious difficulties. He is what is called a kleptomane."

"A kleptomane! O, that's it!" cried the manager. "A curious fancy for one of the real lords of creation to indulge in."

"*Tous les goûts sont dans la nature*," replied the other, with a true French shrug of the shoulders. "Why, quite recently, one of the scions of the imperial family of Russia stripped his own mother of her jewelry, even taking out the sapphire eyes of the image of the holy Virgin in his imperial mamma's private chapel of devotion; they have shut him up, I understand, to make him sensible of the heinousness of his offence. Poor fellow! as if he could help it. It runs in the family. They are all afflicted with kleptomania, only that the supreme chief of the clan steals lands and men instead of gold and gems."

M. Joannot laughed. "There you are right, sir. The King of Prussia certainly labours under the same affection. He stole our milliards from us, and unhappy Alsace-Lorraine."

"Yes, and he sticks to his acquisitions. With the Earl of — it is very different. He simply cares about the taking; he never troubles about the keeping. He is always willing to pay even

double the value of the thing if he can only cleverly manage to—annex it. It was the same with poor Prince Nicholas Constantinowitch. What he realised one day, he gave away the next to Fanny Lear or somebody else, which is the character of your true kleptomane; whilst with his Prussian grand-uncle takings are keepings."

"Well, never mind! We have got pretty nigh over that little trouble. The hard necessity of the times has given our industry a marvellous impulse. See how our clock trade is flourishing."

"Ah, that we owe to the Prussian officers. By Jove, how they liked our clocks! They seemed to be seized with universal pendulomania. There was once a King of Sardinia, a grand-uncle or great-uncle of Victor-Emanuel, I think, who had a most inordinate affection for watches and snuff-boxes. He robbed all the ambassadors accredited to his court. But he, just like the Prussians, would never part again with the acquisitions of his nimble fingers."

"This latter sort of kleptomania," cried M. Joannot, laughing, "I must confess, I like much less than that of your English earl. If I wanted so speculate in the article, he would be the man for my money."

"I should think so," laughed the other. "He might be a good customer for your place. Egad! Five o'clock, by Jove!" looking at his watch. "I must be off. Will you kindly send the bracelet to the Avenue de l'Alma, No. 6, au premier. Here is my card. *Au plaisir*, M. Joannot."

"Vicomte MacMahon de Kergarouet de la Treille," muttered the manager. "A most pleasant gentleman, and so chatty. Good old Irish and Breton blood, and evidently related to the Marshal President. I am rather glad to know now who Mr. Chester is. He may, indeed, turn out a good customer to our place. Five million francs a year—and a kleptomane! Well, well, he can afford it."

Human nature is human nature all over the world. It is hardly to be expected that a merchant should reject or neglect an easy and promising way to dispose advantageously of his wares. So it came to pass quite naturally that "Mr. Chester" had soon some tempting bits of rather high-priced jewelry placed within his reach; and the gentleman availed himself cheerfully of the opportunity thus generously afforded him, so that poor devoted Sir Jonathan and the countess—for after a time that lady would occasionally replace her brother in looking after "Mr. Chester's" surreptitious purchases—had some heavy disbursements to make. However, neither of them ever hesitated or bargained, but paid cheerfully what was demanded. In about two months' time Messrs. Maspré had thus found a profitable market for some seven thousand pounds' worth of jewelry. One day "Mr. Chester" informed the manager of Messrs. Maspré's business that it was his intention to leave Paris soon for America, where he intended to pass two years.

Now at this very time the house had a magnificent diamond necklace, with several very large brilliants of the purest water, of a marketable value of a million and a half francs. The temptation to sell this, if possible, for about two millions to the eccentric Englishman was overpoweringly great, and the manager could not resist yielding to it.

But, strange to say perhaps, "Mr. Chester" resisted the temptation the first time it was placed before him. On another visit, a few days after, when the gentleman's fingers were just tentatively advancing towards the tempting treasure, Sir Jonathan and the Countess came in rather precipitately, which they had never done before, and entreated "Mr. Chester" to leave the place with them at once.

"Look here, Edward," said Sir Jonathan, who seemed not to have the least notion that there might be third parties present who could overhear and understand what he was saying, "you had better come along now with Ada and me. I am afraid you may once again plunge in a little too deeply. I should not like you to have to drop twenty or thirty thousand pounds over another such transaction as we had once before in London, you remember. *Est modus in rebus*, my boy; we must draw the line somewhere."

"I do not understand you, Jonathan," replied the other, a flush of angry passion suffusing his face. "I will go with you and Ada, as I do not wish to have any words with you in her presence. But I would really advise you to mind your own business, and not trouble about mine. If I choose to drop thirty or forty thousand pounds, what is that to you, so long as it pleases me? Have I not two hundred thousand a year, and half a million lying idle now at Childs? What need can there be, then, to interfere with me? However, I will go with Ada and you; so come along at once. *A demain*, M. Joannot." And, linking his left arm in his brother-in-law's and presenting his right arm to his wife, "Mr. Chester" left the place, and the three got into the carriage at the door, which drove off at once.

When the manager, a few minutes after, turned to the table on which the necklace had been placed, he found, to his intensest surprise, and, to tell the truth, to his inward gratification and gratulation, that the precious article was gone! So it appeared that, though he had all the time, as he thought, been closely watching "Mr. Chester," who had had moreover the eyes of his wife and his brother-in-law upon him, yet that remarkably expert gentleman—or rather nobleman—had succeeded, nevertheless, in gratifying his kleptomanic *pénchant*.

Of course, it would be all right, thought M. Joannot; Sir Jonathan would take the first opportunity to slip away from the Earl and pay, however reluctantly, for the kleptomaniacally abstracted article.

Still, strange to say, perhaps, all things considered, there arose some slight and undefined misgivings in the manager's mind. It seemed suddenly to strike him that a million and a half was, after all, rather a large risk to run even for millionaires like him and his partner in the business.

So when, after two hours' waiting, no Sir Jonathan made his appearance, M. Joannot had a cabriolet called to the door, and drove to the Rue St. Dominique.

At the Hôtel Choiseul, where everything was apparently conducted on the largest and noblest scale, he learnt that the carriage had been dismissed and sent back, with orders to the coachman and footmen to take up the family at the opera at about half-past ten in the evening.

This was satisfactory so far. Still somehow M. Joannot could not get rid of an indefinable feeling of disquietude, which led him about nine o'clock to the opera. Unable to secure a place commanding a view of the whole front of the house, he had to wait patiently till the end of the performance. He found the carriage waiting outside, as ordered, but no "Mr. Chester" made his appearance, nor Sir Jonathan or the lady.

The servants told him, however, that Monsieur, as they respectfully called their master, was rather eccentric, and that this was not the first time they had known him to change his mind, and that most likely the family had by this time returned to the Hôtel.

M. Joannot went back to the hôtel, where he waited till three next morning, when his increasing anxiety induced him at last to make a carefully guarded application to the Rue de Jérusalem, where he was recommended to await the coming day patiently.

Well, the morning came, and there were a great many more people eagerly and anxiously inquiring after "Mr. Chester" and Sir Jonathan Carruthers. There was M. Holbein, the great general agent, who had hired and splendidly furnished the Hôtel Choiseul, and supplied carriages, horses, and servants for the eccentric millionaire, and who, having been paid a month in advance, had allowed two more months to run on and out. Indeed, he had been desired to call on this identical morning for his money. There was the great Chevet, with a long bill, and speedily a longer face. In brief, there were no end of purveyors of all kinds, who had all been desired to call that morning for a settlement of their accounts, and who had called accordingly.

As the distinguished family could not be found anywhere in Paris, not even at the Morgue, the sagacious police opined, with truly marvellous acuteness, that they had "mizzled," and set to work to track the fugitives, if possible.

The French police enjoy a high reputation for particular sharpness; but after all they can only see through a brick wall when there is a hole drilled through it; now there was no such hole in this brick wall, you see, so they stood before it as blind as bats.

The Vicomte MacMahon de Kergarouet de la Treille was anxiously sought after; he was *en voyage*, it appeared, and he had forgotten to settle his bills before his departure. You see he was such an extremely pleasant fellow, as M. Joannot had remarked, and paying bills may not be a very pleasant occupation. The Marshal President indignantly repudiated all and every and any relationship to the Vicomte. It is ever thus: people in the full glare of sunshine will always ignore those under a cloud.

Prince Baryatinski must have changed his mind about the Hôtel Guébriant. He was nowhere to be heard of in Paris. At the Russian Embassy they basely pretended not to know him. Perhaps he had gone back to Monaco to join the Princess Olga, and to tell her about the new carriage.

The head partner and manager of Maspré & Co. went well-nigh crazy, not so much perhaps over the fearfully heavy loss sustained by the house, as over the sad reflection that he had been shamefully and ignominiously done. As the old, though much disputed saying hath it, "Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat," so he who deals in brilliants should surely himself be rather bright; and M. Joannot had certainly shown himself the dullest of dullards, and as gullible as any fool who falls an easy prey to the "confidence trick." At least, such was his own desponding impression.

And, as time wore on, and no more was heard of the noble lord, or the baronet, or the prince, or the vicomte, or—the worst of the matter—of the costly necklace, the conviction grew confirmed in M. Joannot that he had been the victim of what is technically known as a "plant"—cleverly devised and skillfully executed by some high graduates of the Academy of Crime, with capital at their back.

"Prendo!" he will occasionally mutter, with a tremulous voice, whenever his mind reverts to the sad experience of the past—"Prendo! I know now what he meant by it, the dashed impudent thief. Only he ought to have had a necklace painted in his armorial bearings in lieu of diadem."

If we had no pride we should not complain of that of others. Send for samples and card for self-measurement, and get six of **Treble's Perfect Shirts** for \$12. TREBLE'S, 8 King Street East, Hamilton.