

THE CASKET OF DIAMONDS.

(CONCLUDED.)

MY trip over the Old Colony, the Boston and Maine, through the White Mountains, the valleys of the Saco, the Ammonoosic and the Passumpsic and by the Green Mountains of Vermont, till we reached Richview, was uneventful enough, but all my efforts to appear unconcerned failed to deceive my fellow travellers. They could not avoid seeing that I was anxious about my valise. I would not leave it in charge of the porter of the drawing room car, but took it to the hotel table and kept it at my feet while eating. My nervousness increased as we approached the Canadian border, and when the Customs officer asked if I had anything dutiable, my hesitation in answering led to an examination.

"What have you in that leather case?" he asked.

"Some jewels I am taking to Montreal for a friend who has gone home by another route," was my answer.

"My duty compels me to take charge of these goods. You can, no doubt, explain the matter to the satisfaction of the authorities when we get to Montreal," said he.

Reinonstrate as I would, the officer of Her Majesty's Customs bore off with him the valise containing the diamond casket, having locked it and returned me the key. My feelings by this time may be more easily imagined than described. I had at least got myself into a scrape with the Customs, and as regards the diamonds I conjured up all sorts of accidents. What a fool I had been to undertake such a commission. Arrived in Montreal, it was too late to interview the superior officers of the Customs, and I was compelled to pass the night in feverish anxiety about Madame Beltier's diamonds.

The matter was not so easily disposed of as I had hoped, and some days elapsed before negotiations for the restoration of the valuables were concluded. In the meantime the fair owner and her husband arrived in the city and assisted at the appraisalment. Picking up one, a diamond necklace, from the casket, she appeared to examine it critically. With a little cry, she rushed to a window, and in a moment, with eyes almost bursting from her head, shrieked out,—"These are not my diamonds—they are only paste. Mr. Eldridge, where are the diamonds I gave you to bring home for me?"

"I assure you, madame, these are the articles entrusted to me by the hotelkeeper at N——"

In the wildness of her gesticulations, Madame Beltier seemed to forget that she had her arm in a sling. M. Beltier seemed also to be suffering from a severe shaking up, and wore a hat which though of late style, appeared to have been damaged over the left ear. He explained that the injury to madame's arm was caused by a railway accident. "I suppose you wish to have this matter settled out of court?" "was the remark at length made by the husband. "I am quite indifferent, sir, how it is settled," was my reply, a feeling taking possession of my mind that I was the victim of a deep laid plot.

It was finally arranged between us that, to avoid publicity, a mutual legal friend should be entrusted with the circumstances of the case. In a few days I was made acquainted with M. Beltier's decision. In order to avoid any exposure he had persuaded madame into accepting two-thirds of the value of the diamonds, which, if I would pay over, the matter would go no farther. This, under the circumstances, the lawyer did not deem excessive. In the face of the receipt I had given the hotelkeeper, I felt myself without any loop-hole of escape. The lawyer stipulated for a fortnight's delay. It was not everybody who could raise such a sum at a moment's notice. To this proposal, after some hesitation, the Beltiers acceded. To make the best use of this interval, one of the shrewdest detectives in Montreal and another in Boston were made acquainted with the facts of the case and instructed to leave no stone unturned to discover the character of the diamonds,—if madame had ever possessed such valuable gems, where were the imitations substituted? Several days elapsed and I was thinking of disposing of certain bank stocks to raise the money, when an incident occurred that deserves the term Providential as fully as anything I ever read of in fact or fiction.

One Sunday morning about nine o'clock a shabby looking creature applied at the side door of a house in the upper part of the city for

something to eat. Having been supplied, he remained to devour it, and amused a little boy of five or six years of age with the voracity with which he ate. The little fellow seeing the man bolting his food, asked—"Does 'oo want a dink?" "Yes," replied the tramp. The lad entered the house and returned with his mug full of coffee. Having emptied the mug, the man began to move off slowly, but after walking a few paces returned and handed the child a paper parcel which on unfolding, he found to be a purse. Opening the latter, he took out some folded papers and immediately rushed into the house asking if it was money. One of the papers much worn at the folds, appeared to be a lithographed receipt for goods bought of a jeweller in Paris. He put the paper in his pocket, and meeting me on our way to church, described the tramp's visit and the gift of the portemonnaie to his little boy. "Here," said he, "is a curious bit of paper which was in the purse." Spreading out the document and reading it over, I startled my friend by the excitement of my manner. I asked him to lend me the paper, and turning aside my steps, rushed, although it was Sunday, to the house of the lawyer in the matter of the diamonds. I met him going to church, and lost no time in explaining the object of my wish to see him. The document proved to be an invoice receipt for 150 francs from Garnier, Bernadel & Cie., jewellers, Rue Rivoli, Paris, dated 13 July, 1888, for a number of imitation diamonds, bought by Madame D. Beltier of M——, Canada.

"This is most extraordinary," remarked the lawyer. "The next thing to do is to find that tramp." We lost no time in seeking out the father of the little boy. A visit to all the low resorts in the city however, failed to discover the giver of the purse. Keeping all knowledge of the document a secret, we arranged for a further delay of ten days "till I could sell some stocks," my broker being out of town. About a week had elapsed and no trace of the tramp, when one morning my friend, whose little boy had received the purse, had another visit from the same man, with a request for something to eat. The child recognized him and rushed into the house exclaiming that "the hungry man want mo' beddy-buttie." While his wants were being satisfied my friend sent me word. I lost no time in reaching the house and persuading the tramp by promise of a reward to accompany me to the lawyer's office. The tramp explained that he had been in the neighborhood when the smash up on the——Railway west occurred a few weeks before. There had been several narrow escapes, and some of the occupants of the sleeping car had flung their clothing and valuables out the windows; others rushed half dressed through the only door not effectually barred. He slept by a haystack the remainder of the night. Going to the scene of the accident at daybreak, he found the purse he had given to the little boy. It contained a two dollar bill and a few silver coins, and some receipts. In the course of the day M. Beltier was confronted with all the evidence we had obtained as to the character of the diamonds. After a consultation with his wife he consented to let the matter drop so far as I was concerned, but would take action against the other persons through whose hands the jewels had passed. Arrangements were made to have them restored by the Customs authorities, and I heard nothing further of the claims of Madame Beltier or of her diamonds. The amount of the loss I sustained did not exceed a couple hundred dollars, three-fourths of this being the amount of Madame's bill at the hotel, and which in view of so large a number of precious stones no one could question as being perfectly safe. I sent M. Beltier a demand for the amount but he has never from that day to this honored me with a reply. Neither he nor madame have been seen at that popular resort ever since.

THE END.

GEORGIA, the mother of magnetic girls and other freaks, now comes forward with an Irish Chieftain who talks pigeon English with a brogue. The "New South" is bound to keep up with the procession.

If Hamlet's father's ghost had been a live American of the present day, he would not have claimed the ability to unfold a tale that would make the hearers "hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porcupine." He would be more likely to put it in some such way as this: "I could pompadour your hair while you wait."