

History and Romance That Surrounds World's Famous Jewels

Americans are much interested in the recent importation of a wonderful blue diamond and speculation is rife as to the probable purchaser. The largest and most valuable diamond in the world, the Koh-i-Noor, is one of the crown jewels of Great Britain and will be worn by Queen Alexandra at the coronation in June next. Besides its great size, beauty and value, this gem has had a history with which romance has had something to do, and goes of blood have been shed for its possession. It came into the possession of the British crown as a part of the spoils of the conquest of India and it will doubtless remain as one of the English royal jewels as long as the empire shall last, for such jewels are indestructible and can only be wrested from Britain by force of arms, an event that is exceedingly improbable of occurrence, says the Denver Post.

Where this greatest of diamonds originally came from no one can tell. All that is authentic regarding it is of comparatively recent date. History first came upon its trail of blood and rapine in 1225, when it was in the possession of Bikramjit, rajah of Gwalior, India. The first written record of its existence was left by Bager, the founder of the Mogul empire in Hindustan, who left elaborate memoirs. Baber, a descendant of Timur, the scourge of Asia, invaded India from Afghanistan and in the battle in which Ibrahim was defeated Bikramjit lost his life. Baber, good Muslim that he was, plausibly says "Bikramjit was sent to jail." Baber's son, Humayun, surrounded Bikramjit's people in Agra and captured them, together with a large store of jewels and precious stones.

"Among these," wrote the great mogul May 4, 1526, "was one famous diamond, which had been acquired by Sultan Ala-ed-din. It is so valuable that a judge of diamonds valued it at half the daily expense of the whole world."

FAMOUS CENTURIES AGO.

It will be observed that Bager speaks of the stone as being already "famous." The Ala-ed-din of whom he makes mention has been identified with a ruler of the Khilji dynasty which reigned over a large part of Hindustan from 1277 to 1321, and there is reason to believe he took the gem from the rajah of Malwa, whom he defeated in 1304. Tradition says the stone was in the possession of the Malwa family for generations, possibly as early as Vikramaditya, who reigned 57 B. C. From the time of Baber the history of the Koh-i-Noor is tolerably well authenticated.

That oriental says Bikramjit's people gave it to Humayun of their own free will, but that statement must be taken with oriental allowance. Baber also says that after Humayun had brought it to him he returned it to the captor, but the son evidently understood that was only an eastern "bluff." When Baber had conquered a large area in India he set up his throne in Delhi as the first mogul emperor and there he kept his treasures. Humayun did not forget the great diamond and after two years of scheming he succeeded in stealing it. He was detected, however, and forced to make restitution. He lost the favor of his father, but gained possession of the Koh-i-Noor when he came to the throne.

FORMED PART OF PEACOCK THRONE.

It was Jehan's son, Shah Jehan, who constructed the marvelous peacock throne, rivaling the most extravagant fancies of the "Arabian Nights." This magnificent piece of royal furniture stood on six huge legs of solid gold set thickly with emeralds, rubies and diamonds. At the base were two life-sized peacocks with their plumage copied in precious stones. Between the peacocks perched a life-sized parrot, said to have been made from a single emerald. Over the throne stretched gorgeous umbrellas of finest silks, decked with gems, fringed with ropes of pearls and supported on twelve pillars of gold. The crowning glory of this magnificence was the eyes of the peacocks, which were four large diamonds. One of these is believed to have been the Koh-i-Noor and another may have been the Great Mogul diamond.

Shah Jehan's son, Aurangzeb, coveted the power and the riches of the mogul, and with characteristic oriental cruelty cast his father and mother into prison, where they remained seven years. Jehan managed to carry some of his jewels into prison, and among them was the Koh-i-Noor. After his death his wife delivered the jewel to her son, Aurangzeb, a French traveler who visited the court of Aurangzeb, said he was afforded a glimpse of the mogul's gems, among which was a great diamond believed to have been the Koh-i-Noor. Aurangzeb wore the stone in his turban and handed it down to Shah Alum. This monarch and his two successors were murdered and the mogul empire was fast going to pieces.

Ranjit had the Koh-i-Noor set in a bracelet and wore it on all public occasions. On his deathbed in 1839 an attempt was made to get him to present the stone to the shrine of Juggernaut to curry the favor of the gods. The priests claimed he consented by nodding his head, but the crown jewel refused to surrender the diamond without a written order. Ranjit died before the warrant could be prepared. The Koh-i-Noor, therefore, remained in the jewel chamber of Lahore, being worn occasionally by Ranjit's successors, two or three of whom died by violence.

In 1849 a mutiny of two Sikh regiments gave the English an excuse to interfere, and the Rajah Dhillip-Singh, a mere boy, was induced to sign a treaty of which he little understood the effect. It provided for the annexation of his dominion to the British possessions and for the transfer of the Lahore treasure to the East India company to reimburse it for the war expenses. There was a proviso that the Koh-i-Noor should be presented to Queen Victoria.

Thus in 1850 the great diamond of India reached England and became one of the crown jewels. It then weighed 186 karats, which corresponds with the weight mentioned by Baber.

IN AFGHAN HANDS.

The diamond passed down through

several generations of the Afghan royal family. Ahmed's grandson, Shah Zaman, was deposed and blinded by his brother, Shah Shuja. Shah Zaman, carried the Koh-i-Noor to prison and concealed it in the plaster of the wall. In the course of years the plaster crumbled away, leaving a sharp angle of the crystal exposed. A visiting official happened to discover the stone by accidentally scratching his hand upon it. Thenceforward Shah Shuja wore it on his breast. Deposed, blinded and exiled in turn, Shah Shuja clung to the glittering jewel and carried it with him to Lahore, the court of the famous Runjit Singh, the "Lion of the Punjab."

He was accompanied by his blind brother, Shah Zaman. From Mohammed Shah the Koh-i-Noor passed to a new dynasty. Nadir, who had usurped the Persian throne, invaded the mogul empire and demanded heavy tribute. Mohammed Shah handed over a great amount of treasure, but kept the precious diamond concealed. At last a woman of his household betrayed him, informing Nadir that Mohammed had the stone hidden in his turban. It was a custom of eastern monarchs to exchange turbans in sign of eternal friendship, and Nadir resorted to a clever trick to get the coveted jewel. He contrived a meeting

with his defeated enemy and without warning offered his own bejeweled turban for that of the mogul. Taken by surprise, Mohammed could do nothing but comply with the beggar's grace possible. He kept so good a face that Nadir feared he had been tricked and immediately ended the conference that he might satisfy himself. Retiring to his tent he hastily unwound the turban, and in his rapture at the discovery of the gem he called it Koh-i-Noor, "Mountain of Light." Up to that time it had been known simply as "the great diamond."

Other diamonds have acquired a world-wide celebrity. For many years

the Hope Blue, as a blue diamond in the collection of Henry T. Hope is called, has held a unique place as being by long odds the finest blue diamond known in the world. It weighs only 42 1/2 carats, but is of a beautiful sapphire blue, excellent in shape and absolutely flawless.

Mr. Hope bought it for £18,000, but it is valued today at £20,000. The origin of the stone has been wrapped in some uncertainty, as is the case with most great diamonds, but it is practically certain that the Hope Blue is one of three fragments into which the famous French Blue was divided after being stolen with the other regalia from the Garde Meuble.

THE GREAT ORLOFF.

Shah Jehan had owned many of the most famous jewels of the orient, among them the Great Mogul. This stone was found in the mines of Golkonda and fell into the hands of the Emir Jendia, who was the favorite of the rajah of Golkonda, and stole everything within sight, including most of the output of the Golkonda diamond mines. The Great Mogul weighed 800 carats in the rough and was a true diamond of fine water, shaped like an egg cut in half. The jewel disappeared with Aurangzeb and has never been traced, but it is believed that it was carried off by Nadir Shah in the sack of Delhi, and was broken up into smaller stones.

The Orloff diamond, which ornaments the Russian royal scepter, is larger than the Moon of Mountains, but not so pure, being slightly yellowish. It, too, was an Indian cut stone and weighs 192 carats.

Its first historic debut was made in the left eye of a statue of the great god Sri Ranga. A deserter from the French grenadiers drifted there and set his heart upon the big diamond. He assumed native guise and patiently worshipped the god day and night until his ploy won him a place among the guardians of the shrine.

On the night of a terrific storm he wrenched the diamond from the idol's head and escaped to the English army and on to Madras, where he sold the jewel to a sea captain for a small sum. The diamond was sold to a London Hebrew for £12,000 and bought by a Persian merchant who started to Kish in Persia. He met Prince Orloff, the favorite of Catherine II. Just at that time Orloff was in deep disgrace and had fled to allow the temper of his mistress to cool.

Pine diamonds were her hobby. Here was a chance to win his pardon. He bought the superb diamond and presented it to Catherine, who promptly forgave him and took him back to favor.

THE DRESDEN STONE.

Another famous diamond connected with Catherine II and her love affairs is the Eugenie. Catherine had this famous jewel in a hairpin. She gave it to Potemkin, who was then her lover. It was in his family until his grandniece sold it to Napoleon II, who gave it to Eugenie. It was the center diamond of the famous necklace which was afterward sold to the galkwar of Baroda.

This galkwar of Baroda was the greatest diamond collector of modern times. The English Dresden diamond went to him. It is a Brazilian diamond of amazing purity. None purer is on record. It weighs seventy-six and one-half carats cut, but weighed 119 1/2 carats in the rough.

An Indian rajah came from India to England in 1883 merely to buy the jewel, but the price, £40,000, sent him staggering home. An English merchant of Bombay had come with him. The merchant swore that if fortune ever favored him he would own that jewel. Shortly after the United States

war of rebellion sent the price of cotton soaring and made the merchant's fortune. The first thing he did was to buy the Dresden diamond. Later he lost his money and sold the stone to the galkwar.

The galkwar also bought the Akbar Shah, a remarkable engraved diamond, which had belonged to Shah Jehan, the mogul, but was lost in the French wars, and afterward appeared in Turkey and was bought by an English jeweler, to whom the galkwar paid £35,000 for it. It weighs 116 carats and is still in Baroda, but many of the galkwar's collection disappeared when he was deposed.

The French royal jewels have had varied careers and many of the best were lost before Eugenie, the diamond lover, came to power; but France has what is, perhaps, the most perfect diamond in the world—the Pitt or Regent diamond.

This diamond was a feature in one of England's great scandals. It was found by a slave in the Port of Spain mines in Kistina. The slave cut his leg, banded it, hid the jewel in the bandage and escaped to the coast.

There he confided in an English skipper, who agreed to take him on board ship and go ashore in the morning with the diamond. The skipper threw the slave into the sea and sold the stone to a merchant, then drank himself into delirium tremens and remorse and committed suicide.

The merchant sold the jewel to Thomas Pitt, governor of Port St. George, for £29,000, and Sir Thomas brought it home to England. Scandalous stories as to the way in which Pitt had obtained the stone were told and it utterly ruined his reputation and happiness.

He sold the diamond to the Duke of Orleans, regent of France in 1771, for £125,000, but he could not down the scandal, and at his death left a sworn statement denying the stories and defending his reputation.

ALL THE SUBJECTS OF STRIFE.

The list of famous diamonds might be stretched out much longer. There is the Nassak, which was stolen from a temple in Shiraz, and now shows its 89 carat beauty in the Duke of Westminster's sword hilt.

There is the Hastings diamond, which was part and parcel of the Warren Hastings scandal and inspired many a street ballad. There is the great Austrian yellow, weighing 139 1/2 carats, among the Austrian crown jewels.

There is the Dargah-Nur, which is the Shah of Persia's pride. It is the finest jewel in his regalia, weighs 136 carats and is set in a bracelet, with the Taj-e-Mah for companion. The bracelets are valued at £1,000,000.

The Pasha of Egypt, a 40 carat stone, is the finest diamond in the Egyptian treasury. The Green Dresden, in the green vaults at Dresden, weighs 48 1/2 carats and is Saxony's boast. The Nizam belonged to the Nizam of Hyderabad and weighed 340 carats, but nothing certain is known of it now.

The Pigott diamond, like the Regent and the Hastings stones, was connected with the Anglo-Indian scandals. An English merchant finally sold it to Ali Pasha, who treasured it mightily. When mortally wounded he ordered his favorite wife killed and the diamond destroyed in his presence. He would leave nothing to another man.

The first order was not carried out, but the second was obeyed and that diamond vanished from history.

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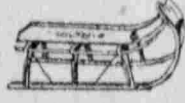
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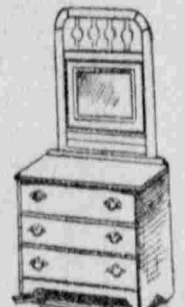
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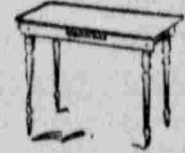
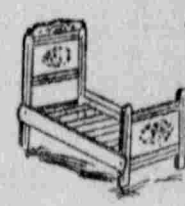
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