

Lady Pinkerton's Jewels

Whitchell Record

I was swinging comfortably on the hind legs of my chair one forenoon in my room at Scotland Yard, when a telegram which had just arrived was put into my hands, with an intimation from the chief that I was to "take up the case."

"Lady Pinkerton, who arrived here this morning from London, has had her jewels stolen on the journey. Very valuable. No clue as yet. Send down competent man at once to assist local police. —Algernon Wade, Aidan Castle, Darnley, Northumberland."

So ran the message. It did not afford much information and it did not seem as if there were much chance of recovering the stolen property. However, it was perhaps too soon to judge of that. I telegraphed to Sir Algernon Wade, who, who, as I understood, was Lady Pinkerton's host for the present, asking that a description of the missing trinkets should be sent at once; and I arranged that the description should be printed and circulated among the pawnbrokers of the metropolis and the other large towns of the country without delay. These necessary matters having been attended to, I set out for King's Cross, and was soon on my way to the north.

It was late when I arrived at my destination, but I began at once to make some inquiries. First of all I saw Lady Pinkerton herself. Her story was very soon told. The set of diamonds which had been stolen consisted of a necklace, pendant, tiara and earrings. The stones were very fine ones—worth, she had been told, at least £60,000. Her engagements had compelled her, she said, to travel down from London by night. Her husband being in Scotland, she was attended only by her maid, who traveled in the compartment (a second class one) next to that in which Lady Pinkerton herself performed the journey. Before leaving town she had given the jewel-case to her maid, reminding her as she did so of the value of the gems which were entrusted to her, and charging her not to allow the box out of her sight for an instant. According to the maid's account, she never had allowed the case to be out of her sight, yet, as a matter of fact, when poor Alice Wright—that was the maid's name—came to open the jewel-case, it was empty. One or two common-place ornaments of little value in a drawer in the lower part of the case had been overlooked by the thieves; but the brilliants were gone.

I could not help thinking that things looked rather black for Alice Wright, and naturally asked how long she had been in the family, and what kind of character she had brought from her last situation.

"She has been only eighteen months with me," replied Lady Pinkerton, "but she came to me with an excellent character, and I have every confidence in her. She may have contributed to the loss of her jewels by her carelessness, but I will not believe for an instant that she is guilty of helping to abstract them."

This speech pleased me and rather surprised me. It was more generous than I had expected from Lady Pinkerton, who had struck me as being a cold and self-possessed woman of the world; and I could not understand how the diamonds could have been stolen without the maid's connivance.

I left Lady Pinkerton's sitting-room, and asked for an interview with the girl Wright. I found her a quiet, modest-looking and really lady-like young woman. There were traces of tears on her cheeks, and she trembled slightly, but that was only natural. I had been long enough in the police force to know that no presumption either of guilt or innocence can be inferred from such signs as these.

"Now, I am going to ask you a few questions," I said as the girl seated herself opposite me, "and you'll answer them or not, just as you think fit. It would be no kindness to conceal from you that a certain suspicion attaches to you in connection with this affair, and therefore it is my duty to caution you. If you are innocent, I think your best plan will be to answer frankly."

The girl merely bowed her head by way of reply, and I proceeded to put my first question.

"You brought Lady Pinkerton's jewel case with you from London?"

"I did."

"The whole way?"

"The whole way."

"When you got into the railway carriage, where did you put it?"

"On the seat of the carriage, close to me, I was leaning my elbow upon it nearly all the way."

"How many people were there in the carriage?"

"A good many at first—seven, I think when we started—but most of them left the train at Peterborough and the place we stopped at next after Peterborough."

"When you got to York, how many were in the compartment besides yourself?"

"Three—an elderly man and his wife, and one young gentleman."

"And after York?"

"The old gentleman and his wife got out at York."

"And the young gentleman?"

"He was going to Edinburgh, he said."

"So you and he traveled alone from York to Newcastle?"

"Yes; that was not my fault."

“Certainly not. By the way, what did you do with the jewel-case when you got out at York?”

“I never got out at York,” answered the girl rather sharply.

“Never got out?” I echoed.

“I never left the carriage, and might almost say I never had my hand or my elbow off the box from the time we left London till we got to Newcastle. At Newcastle Sir Algernon’s carriage met us.”

I felt considerably nonplussed, but concealed my thoughts, and put my next question with an easy smile.

“As the young gentleman and you were left alone together, I suppose he performed various little acts of politeness for you?”

“He got me a cup of coffee at York,” answered the girl readily.

“Do you know his name?”

“No.”

“Or his business?”

“No. He was quite a stranger to me.”

“You talked together a good deal?”

“Yes, a good deal.”

“And you told him who you were, and who was in the next compartment?”

“No, indeed.”

“Did you say or hint that valuables were entrusted to you?”

“Never; I am certain of it.”

“After you had the coffee did you fall asleep?”

“After we left York I remember closing my eyes, but I did not fall asleep. And I had my elbow on the jewel case then.”

“You dozed, then, or at least rested with your eyes shut—I am not blaming you, it was very natural on a long night-journey—till you got to Newcastle?”

“No; till we got to Darlington.”

“Did you feel very heavy and sleepy then?”

“Not more so than usual after a night journey.”

“One more question. The young man—would you know him again? What was he like?”

“Tall and fair, with slight whiskers and mustache. He wore a dark-gray overcoat. I should know him again in a moment.”

Here my examination ended. Already I had formed a theory on the subject. Alice Wright, I fancied, was innocent. Her quiet, composed manner had impressed me in spite of myself. My belief was that the polite young gentleman was a professional thief, that he had followed Lady Pinkerton from her house in London, that he had guessed at the nature of the receptacle which the maid was guarding so jealously, that the coffee he had brought her was drugged (so that, instead of being in a half doze, she had been in a deep sleep between York and Darlington), and that the jewel case had been opened with a pick-lock, robbed and closed again while she was sleeping.

Next morning Lord Pinkerton arrived at the castle, and I suggested that a reward should be offered for the recovery of the diamonds or for information. To my surprise the viscount seemed unwilling to offer a substantial reward, argued that large rewards only tempted thieves to commit fresh robberies, and ended by positively refusing to offer a larger sum than fifty pounds for the recovery of the jewels. I concluded that his lordship was inclined to be stingy, and afterward learned that he was, in fact, a notorious miser. In his younger days he had been very extravagant, but about two years after his marriage he had come into possession of a large fortune on the death of a relative, and the effect of his good luck was that he developed very much to Lady Pinkerton’s disgust, strong miserly tendencies.

My next care was to make a rough drawing of the missing jewels from Lady Pinkerton’s description. My sketch was not by any means so accurate as I could have wished, as her ladyship’s description was rather vague, and she seemed to have no idea of drawing. I then arranged with the local police that they should keep Alice Wright under an informal surveillance, and returned to London.

Not many days after my return to town I was informed by the Edinburgh police that they believed they had succeeded in tracing the young man who had traveled in the same carriage with Alice Wright on the night of the robbery. He was staying at one of the hotels in the city and called himself Charles Payne. The telegram added that Payne held himself out to be a medical student, and that he seemed to be on the point of returning to London. I replied that a strict watch must be kept on his movements, and shortly afterwards I was told that he might be expected to arrive in London by a certain train. Of course he was met upon his arrival by one of my men, who followed him to his lodgings. I then telegraphed to Lady Pinkerton and desired her to send her maid up to town in the company of a policeman in plain clothes. This was done, and I had no difficulty in arranging that Miss Wright and I should meet Charles Payne one morning as

he left his rooms for the day.

We passed close to him, and I watched his face as we met. I had instructed the girl to bow slightly as he went by. She did so, and he raised his hat with a slight smile, throwing a glance at me as he did so. There was no doubt about his identity. I turned round, touched him on the arm, told him that I was a detective officer, and asked him to go back with me to his rooms. He did so at once, and admitted readily that he had travelled to Edinburgh on the night in question and that from York to Newcastle he and Alice Wright had been alone together in the carriage: but he indignantly denied all knowledge of the diamonds. He furnished me with numerous references and consented that a policeman should wait with him in his room till the references could be verified. A little shaken in my opinion by his readiness to submit to this arrangement, I called on the gentlemen he had named and found that they all knew Charles Payne and had the highest opinion of his integrity. One or two of them, indeed, offered to become bail for him to any extent. This put a totally different complexion upon matters. Payne was certainly not a professional thief, and only a professional thief—and a very clever one, too—could have operated upon Alice Wright and the jewel-case in the way which my theory supposed he had done. There was really no evidence against the young man and I gave up the idea of placing him under arrest. Six weeks passed, bringing no tidings of the case as one of my failures. Lady Pinkerton had returned to town, and when I reported to her my inability to recover her property she seemed to have become resigned to her loss.

I happened one morning shortly after this to be in the shop of one of those West End jewelers who are in reality “swell pawnbrokers,” when the jeweler said to me.

“By the way, a pair of earrings were offered to me the other day which I might have fancied were part of Lady Pinkerton’s set. I half thought of detaining the lady and sending for you.”

“And why didn’t you?” I interrupted, almost angrily.

“Because the things were not diamonds at all—they were only paste.”

“Paste! Then they can’t have been Lady Pinkerton’s—but are you quite sure?”

“Perfectly sure. They were paste, but a very good imitation.”

I pondered the matter for a moment. Could the thief have taken out the stones, replaced them by imitation brilliants, and then tried to pass off the false stones as real ones by means of the setting? Possibly; but on the other hand, the setting was the very thing which any thief must have known might lead to his detection.

“Who offered you the trinkets?” I asked.

“An elderly woman—I think she was a Frenchwoman,” was the answer.

“Can you give me a drawing of one of them?”

The jeweler took a pencil and a piece of paper, and in a few minutes handed me a sketch of an earring, which certainly bore resemblance to the drawing I had made from Lady Pinkerton's description of her earrings.

I left the shop with the two sketches in my hand, feeling somewhat puzzled. On the whole, I thought it was worth while to call on Lady Pinkerton and show her the drawing which the jeweler had made.

I found her ladyship at breakfast in her boudoir, attended by her maid. In a few words I explained the object of my visit, and then handed her the jeweller's sketch, asking her if she recognized it. The lady took it with the tips of her fingers, and looked at it with a supercilious air; but I could see that, in spite of her affection of nonchalance, she was deeply interested in what I had said.

"No," she said with a careless air, as she laid the sheet of paper on the table. "There is a resemblance in shape, but that is nothing. If the earrings were paste, as you say, they cannot be mine; my diamonds were not paste."

As Lady Pinkerton was speaking, her maid, Alice Wright, approached the table with a cream jug in her hand, and as she did so she glanced at the drawing which lay directly under her eyes. A look of surprise came over the girl's face, and she seemed to be on the point of saying something. She turned away, however, without speaking, and at a sign from her mistress quietly left the room. I drew the conclusion, as certainly as if the girl had spoken, that, in her opinion, the drawing made by the jeweler nearly resembled, at least, one of the missing trinkets, and I also suspected that her mistress was desirous that the girl should keep her opinion to herself. It seemed necessary to me at the time to pursue the subject further. After all, there was nothing surprising in Lady Pinkerton's unwillingness to allow it to be supposed that her famous diamonds had been nothing but paste after all.

Next day, however, I thought I had better see the girl and question her, and I was on the point of setting out for Devonshire House terrace, where Lord Pinkerton lived, when I received a telegram from the officer who had been instructed to keep a watch on Alice Wright's movements. "Alice Wright seems to be leaving for the country. Shall I follow her?" said the telegram. "Certainly, and wire address when you reach her destination," I replied.

That evening I had the address—a quiet village in one of the Milland counties, and next morning I surprised Miss Wright by presenting myself before her.

"What do you want with me?" she asked, with anxious expression. "I know nothing about the diamonds—I don't indeed."

"I don't say you do—I don't think you do." I replied. "All I want to know is, what do *you* think of this drawing?" (I laid the sketch I had received from the jeweler before her as I spoke.) "It is a fair likeness of one of your mistress' earrings?"

"I don't know; it is not very like," she answered slowly.

“You thought it very like yesterday,” said I.

She started. “Perhaps I thought so at first,” she replied.

It was plain that the girl had been told to hold her tongue.

“Why did you come down here?” I asked.

“This is my home,” she answered with some heat. “My mistress gave me a month’s holiday yesterday.”

There was no more to be got out of her, and after telling my man that he need not devote himself to watching the girl’s movements any longer, I returned to London determined to clear up the mystery if I possibly could, whether the diamonds were real or not.

After some little thought I resolved to visit every one of the diamond merchants in the metropolis. I argued that if the Frenchwoman (who, as I believed, had had one of Lady Pinkerton’s earrings in her possession) had taken out the real diamonds and substituted paste ones, she would hardly make a second attempt to pass them off for real ones; but if she had been ignorant of the real character of the brilliants, it was more than likely that she would try and get another opinion as to their true value. With this idea in my head I visited one diamond merchant’s shop after another, till at last I found a man in a quiet street off Holborn who remembered an elderly Frenchwoman calling and showing him a pair of earrings, just about the time when the West End jeweler had had the trinket offered to him.

“Was it anything like this?” I asked producing the sketch which the jeweler had made for me.

“That is very like it, as far as I remember,” was the answer. “The lady said she did not want to part with the earrings—she only wanted to know whether the stones were real or not.

As the diamond merchant was speaking the door, and a short, stout woman, dressed in black and wearing a thick black veil, entered the room.

The jeweler threw me a glass as he went forward to meet the stranger.

“You were very kind,” she began speaking with a slight French accent, “as to give me an opinion about a trinket a short time ago. Will you be so good as to tell me whether these stones are real?” As she spoke she laid a cross of brilliants on the table. I just glanced at it. It corresponded exactly to the description I had had of Lady Pinkerton’s diamond pendant. The diamond merchant took up the cross.

“They are only paste,” said he, after a moment’s glance at the ornament. “I never saw better imitations, but not one of these stones is real!”

The lady seemed greatly disappointed. She thanked the jeweler and left that shop. Of course I followed her home and arrested her on her own doorstep. She was, I found, Madame Brancilleau,

a fashionable dressmaker. In one of her boxes I found a whole set of diamond ornaments—necklace, pendant, tiara and earrings, complete.

Madame Brancilleau burst into tears and loudly protested her innocence, but refused to give any account of the jewels until she was convinced that we meant to take her to the police station. Then the whole truth came out. The ornaments had been given her by Lady Pinkerton herself! Her ladyship had found it impossible to array herself as became a woman of fashion upon the very slender allowance which she received from her husband for that purpose and had run up a tremendous bill at Madame Brancilleau's. The dressmaker, who had lost money in some foolish investments she had made, pressed the lady for payment. Lady Pinkerton was at her wits' end. She dared not let her husband know of her extravagance, and as she did not believe that he would pay her debts, there was little use in applying to him. At last, on the very day of her starting for Northumberland, she gave the jewels to the dressmaker in payment of her debt, the French woman undertaking to dispose of the stones separately. Thus the trinkets had never been in the jewel case at all, and Lady Pinkerton gave out that she had been robbed, in order to account to her husband and the world for the loss of her diamonds.

Lady Pinkerton was astounded to hear that her magnificent diamonds were nothing but paste; and after some trouble she had persuaded madame to submit the pendant to an expert for examination. That, at least, she thought, might be real.

On hearing this story I took the Frenchwoman and the false diamonds straight to Lord Pinkerton's house. His lordship and Lady Pinkerton were together.

I expected a scene; but the lady was equal to the occasion. She went straight to the heart of the matter.

"John," she said, speaking to her husband, "you must have sold my diamonds and had paste put in their place soon after we were married. [Lord Pinkerton started, blushed violently, and said nothing.] You really ought to have mentioned it, and then all this fuss would have been saved. I think the best thing you can do now is to pay this good woman's bill, and give poor Wright a check for fifty pounds, as some compensation for the trouble we have been the means of causing her. Oh yes, I insist on it, Don't go madame, and Lord Pinkerton will write you a check."

Of course his lordship could not afford to let the story get abroad, so (after a severe inward struggle) he did as he was told. Shortly afterward Lady Pinkerton blazed forth in a splendid set of rubies, which, she said, her husband had been so kind as to give her in lieu of her lost diamonds.

As for me, I got my fifty pounds and was satisfied. I understood now why his lordship had been so unwilling to offer a reward for the recovery of his wife's diamonds.

Daily Alta California, Vol. 42, October 23, 1887