

A Thing that Glistened.

BY FRANK R. STOCKTON.

IN the fall of 1888 the steamship *Sunda*, from Southampton, was running along the southern coast of Long Island, not many hours from port, when she was passed by one of the great British liners, outward bound. The tide was high, and the course of both vessels was nearer the coast than is usual, that of the *Sunda* being inside of the other.

As the two steamers passed each other there was a great waving of hats and handkerchiefs. Suddenly there was a scream from the *Sunda*. It came from Signora Rochita, the *prima donna* of an opera troupe which was coming to America in that ship.

"I have lost my bracelet!" she cried in Italian, and then, turning to the passengers, she repeated the cry in very good English.

The situation was instantly comprehended by everyone. It was late in the afternoon; the captain had given a grand dinner to the passengers, at which the *prima donna* had appeared in all her glories of ornamentation, and the greatest of these glories—a magnificent diamond bracelet—was gone from the arm with which she had been enthusiastically waving her lace handkerchief.

The second officer, who was standing near, dashed into the captain's office, and quickly reappeared with chart and instru-

ments, and made a rapid calculation of the position of the vessel at the time of the accident, making due allowance for the few minutes that had passed since the first cry of the signora. After consultation with the captain and re-calculations of the distance from land and some other points, he announced to the weeping signora that her bracelet lay under a little black spot he made on the chart, and that if she chose to send a diver for it she might get it, for the depth of water at that place was not great.

By profession I am a diver, and the next

day I was engaged to search for the diamond bracelet of Signora Rochita. I had a copy of the chart, and having hired a small schooner, with several men who had been my assistants before, and taking with me all the necessary accoutrements and appliances, I set out for the spot indicated, and by afternoon we were anchored, we believed, at it or very near it.

I lost no time in descending. I wore, of course, the usual diver's suit, but I took with me no tools nor any of the implements used by divers

when examining wrecks; but I carried in my right hand a brilliant electric lamp, connected with a powerful battery on the schooner. I held this by an insulated handle, in which there were two little knobs, by which I could light or extinguish it.



"WAVING HER LACE HANDKERCHIEF."

The bottom was hard and smooth, and lighting my lamp, I began to look about me. If I approached the bracelet I ought to be able to see it sparkle, but after wandering over considerable space, I saw no sparkles nor anything like a bracelet. Suddenly, however, I saw something which greatly interested me. It was a hole in the bottom of the ocean, almost circular, and at the least ten feet in diameter. I was surprised that I had not noticed it before, for it lay not far from the stern of our vessel.

Standing near the rocky edge of the aperture, I held out my lamp and looked down. Not far below I saw the glimmering of what seemed to be the bottom of this subterranean well. I was seized with a desire to explore this great hole running down under the ordinary bottom of the sea. I signalled to be lowered, and although my comrades were much surprised at such an order, they obeyed, and down I went into the well. The sides of this seemed rocky and almost perpendicular, but after descending about fifteen feet, they receded on every side, and I found myself going down into a wide cavern, the floor of which I touched in a very short time.

Holding up my lamp, and looking about me, I found myself in a sea cave of some thirty feet in diameter, with a domelike roof, in which, a little to one side of the centre, was the lower opening of the well. I became very much excited; this was just the sort of place into which a bracelet or anything else of value might be expected to have the bad luck to drop. I walked about and gazed everywhere, but I found nothing but rocks and water.

I was about to signal to be drawn up, when above me I saw what appeared to be a flash of darkness, coming down through the well. With a rush and a swirl it entered the cavern, and in a moment I

recognised the fact that a great fish was swooping around and about me. Its movements were so rapid and irregular, now circling along the outer edge of the floor of the cavern, then mounting above me, until its back seemed to scrape the roof, that I could not form a correct idea of the size of the creature. It seemed to me to be at least twenty feet long. I stood almost stupefied, keeping my eyes as far as possible fixed upon the swiftly moving monster.

Sometimes he came quite near me, when I shuddered in every fibre, and then he shot away, but ever gliding with powerful undulations of his body and tail, around, about, and above me. I did not dare to signal to be drawn up, for fear that the terrible



"I STOOD STUPEFIED."

creature would enter the well-hole with me. Then he would probably touch me, perhaps crush me against the wall, but my mind was capable of forming no plans; I only hoped the fish would ascend and disappear by the way he came.

My mind was not in its strongest condition, being much upset by a great trouble, and I was so frightened that I really did not know what I ought to do, but I had sense enough left to feel sure that the

fish had been attracted into the cavern by my lamp. Obviously the right thing to do was to extinguish it, but the very thought of this nearly drove me into a frenzy. I could not endure to be left alone with the shark in darkness and water. It was an insane idea, but I felt that, whatever happened, I must keep my eyes upon him.

Now the great fish began to swoop nearer and nearer to me, and then suddenly changing its tactics, it receded to the most distant wall of the cavern, where, with its head toward me, it remained for the first time motionless. But this did not continue long. Gently turning over on its side, it opened its great mouth, and in an instant, with a rush, it came directly at me. My light shone full into its vast mouth, glistening with teeth, there was a violent jerk which nearly threw me off my feet, and all was blackness. The shark had swallowed my lamp! By rare good fortune he did not take my hand also.

Now I frantically tugged at my signal rope. Without my lamp, I had no thought but a desire to be pulled out of the water, no matter what happened. In a few minutes I sat divested of my diving suit, and almost insensible upon the deck of the schooner. As soon as I was able to talk I told my astonished comrades what had happened, and while we were discussing this strange occurrence, one of them,

looking over the side, saw, slowly rising to the surface, the body of a dead shark.

"By George!" he cried, "here is the beast. He has been killed by the current from the battery." We all crowded to the rail, and looked down upon the monster. He was about ten feet long, and it was plain that he had died for making himself the connection between the poles of the battery.

"Well," said the captain, presently, "I suppose you are not going down again?"

"Not I," I replied; "I give up this job."

Then suddenly I cried, "Come, boys, all of you, make fast to that shark, and get him on board; I want him."

Some of the men laughed, but my manner was so earnest, that in a moment they all set about to help me. A small boat was lowered, lines were made fast to the dead fish, and, with block and tackle, we hauled him on deck. I then got a butcher's knife from the cabin, and began to cut him open.

"Look here, Tom!" exclaimed the captain, "that's nonsense. Your lamp's all smashed to pieces, and if you get it out it will never be any good to you."

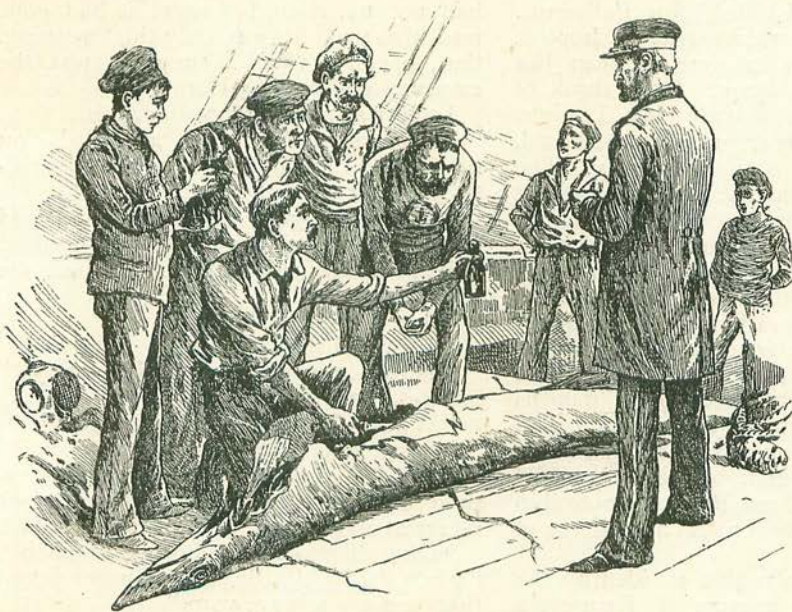
"I don't care for the lamp," I answered, working away energetically, "but an idea has struck me. It's plain that this creature had a fancy for shining things. If he

swallowed a lamp, there is no reason why he should not have swallowed anything else that glistened."

"Oh - o!" cried the captain, "you think he swallowed the bracelet, do you?"

And instantly everybody crowded more closely about me.

I got out the lamp—its wires were severed as smoothly as if they had been cut with shears; then I worked on. Suddenly there was a cry



"IT WAS A PINT BOTTLE."

from every man. Something glimmered in the dark interior of the fish. I grasped it and drew it out. It was not a bracelet, but a pint bottle, which glimmered like a glow-worm. With the bottle in my hand I sat upon the deck and gazed at it. I shook it; it shone brighter. A bit of oiled silk was tied tightly over the cork, and it was plain to see that it was partly filled with a light coloured oil, into which a bit of phosphorus had been dropped, which on being agitated filled the bottle with a dim light.

But there was something more in the bottle than phosphorus and oil. I saw a tin tube corked at each end; the exposed parts of the corks spreading enough to prevent the tin from striking the glass. We all knew that this was one of those bottles containing a communication of some sort; which are often thrown into the sea, and float about until they are picked up. The addition of the oil and phosphorus was intended to make it visible by night as well as by day, and this was plainly the reason why it had been swallowed by a light loving shark.

I poured out the oil and extracted the tube. Wiping it carefully I drew out the corks, and then from the little tin cylinder I pulled a half-sheet of note-paper, rolled up tightly. I unrolled it, and read these words:—

"Before I jump overboard, I want to let people know that I killed John Polhemus. So I have fixed up this bottle. I hope it may be picked up in time to keep Jim Barker from being hung. I did think of leaving it on the steamer, but I might change my mind about jumping overboard, and I guess this is the best way. The clothes I wore, and the hatchet I did it with, are under the wood shed back of Polhemus' house. HENRY RAMSEY."

I sprang to my feet with a yell. Jim Barker was my brother, now lying in prison under sentence of death for the murder of Polhemus. All the circumstantial evidence, and there was no other, had been against him. The note was dated eight months back. Oh! cruel fool of a murderer. The shark was thrown overboard, and we made best speed to port, and, before the end of the afternoon I had put Ramsey's note into the hands of the lawyer who had charge of my brother's case.

Fortunately, he was able to identify the handwriting and signature of Ramsey, a man who had been suspected of the crime,

but against whom no evidence could be found. The lawyer was almost as excited as I was by the contents of this note, and early the next morning we started together for the house of the Polhemus' family. There under the wood shed we found, carefully buried, a blood-stained shirt and vest and the hatchet.

My impulse was to fly to my brother, but this my lawyer forbade. He would take charge of the affair, and no false hopes must be excited, but he confidently assured me that my brother was as good as free.

Returning to the city I thought I might as well make my report to Signora Rochita. The lady was at home and saw me. She showed the most intense interest in what I told her, and insisted upon every detail of my experiences. As I spoke of the shark and the subterranean cave she nearly fainted from excitement, and her maid had to bring the smelling salts. When I had finished she looked at me steadily for a moment, and then said:

"I have something to tell you, but I hardly know how to say it. I never lost my bracelet. I intended to wear it at the captain's dinner; but when I went to put it on I found the clasp was broken, and, as I was late, I hurried to the table without the bracelet, and thought of it no more until, when we were all waving and cheering, I glanced at my wrist and found it was not there. Then, utterly forgetting that I had not put it on, I thought it had gone into the sea. It was only this morning, that, opening what I supposed was the empty box, I saw it. Here it is."

I never saw such gorgeous jewels.

"Madam," said I, "I am glad you thought you lost it, for I have gained something better than all these."

"You are a good man," said she, and then she paid me liberally for my services. When this business had been finished, she asked—

"Are you married?"

I answered that I was not.

"Is there anyone you intend to marry?"

"Yes," said I.

"What is her name?" she asked.

"Sarah Jane McElroy."

"Wait a minute," said she, and she retired into another room. Presently she returned and handed me a little box.

"Give this to your lady-love," said she; "when she looks at it she will never forget that you are a brave man."

When Sarah Jane opened the box, there

was a little pin with a diamond head, and she gave a scream of delight. But I saw no reason for jumping or crying out, for, after having seen the Signora's bracelet, this stone seemed like a pea in a bushel of potatoes.

"I don't need anything," she said, "to remind me you are a brave man. I am going to buy furniture with it."

I laughed, and remarked that "every little helps."

When I sit, with my wife by my side, before the fire in our comfortable home, and consider that the parlour carpet, and the furniture, and the pictures, and the hall and stair carpet, and all the dining-room furniture, with the china and the glass and

the linen, and all the kitchen utensils, and two bedroom suites on the second story—both hard wood—and all the furniture and fittings of a very pleasant room for a single man, the third story front, were bought with the pin that the Signora gave to Sarah Jane, I am filled with profound respect for things that glitter. And when I look on the other side of the fire and see Jim smoking his pipe just as happy as anybody, then I say to myself that, if there are people who think that this story is too much out of the common, I wish they would step in here and talk to Jim about it. There is a fire in his eye when he tells you how glad he is that it was the shark that died instead of him.

