

WHO STOLE THE BANK-NOTES?



“Who hides, finds,” says the proverb. Well, not always—not easily, at any rate, on some occasions. Here is a curious illustration of that fact which really happened a short time ago to a foreman builder, while engaged in superintending the demolitions taking place at the Tuileries, once the palace of the kings of France.

Every week it appears this man, Pickard by name, received a rather large sum of money to pay certain expenses connected with his work. On this occasion it was a sum of a thousand francs in bank-notes, one note being of the value of five hundred francs, the remainder in five notes of a hundred francs each.

Suddenly called upon to attend to some unexpected business in quite another part of the town, our foreman, being a cautious man, and well aware that the street thieves of Paris have an eye on his kind, thought it best not only to leave all this money at home, but to hide it from prying eyes in a safe hole, “to him be’nownst” in a corner of the wine-cellar.

He had used this spot as a private bank many a time, placing over it the most innocent-looking of casks, and about it the dirtiest handful of sawdust he could find.

Think of the honest Pickard’s horror, when the next day, upon taking his old portmonnaie out of its dark nest, he instantly discovered that though all the loose coin he had left in it remained intact and undisturbed, the whole of the bank-notes had vanished, and the big purse, which he now remembered was only unsnapped when he laid it there, was now gaping open before his unbelieving eyes.

Terrified half out of his senses, for such a loss meant ruin in more ways than one, poor Pickard ran up and down, seeking frantically in all sorts of unlikely places for what he perfectly well knew should be in that empty one under the tub.

It was no use calling for aid and assistance in the

matter—who would believe in so strangely suspicious and improbable a story? Once more he went down to seek, once more he came up with heavy lingering step, and eyes staring hopeless, when all at once his heart gave a big leap, and yet it was not much he saw, only one or two tiny scraps of paper, so small that at any other time he would not have noticed them at all. But “circumstances alter cases,” as the copy-books tell us, and *they* must be right.

It was a new game of hare-and-hounds. In a very short time the boards forming the stairs were removed, and after a long and close search, for the robber had hidden the booty well, and only abandoned it when she discovered that the pursuer was within a foot or two of her home, and very uncomfortably near the soft white layer she had exerted all her tender ingenuity to form, “regardless of cost,” or, at any rate, of trouble.

Yes, it was a little brown mother mouse, which had stolen, and gnawed, and kneaded, that precious thousand francs’ worth of soft flimsy paper, to make a nest for her babes, now squeaking anxiously for her presence. Just a little saucy mouse, which had well-nigh driven that big stout workman to distraction.

Who would have thought it possible?

She watched from a corner, while he carefully collected every crumpled and gnawed scrap. As notes, they were altogether unrecognisable; but the experts of “La Banque de France” can do wonderful things, even, perhaps, to the making “ship-shape” notes again, out of what appears to be merely a handful of fluffy paper.

Mice certainly do make their nests in the most unlikely places at times. The other day I found one in a kid glove in the drawer of a desk, that is often being opened and shut, and another time one of the keys of the piano became suddenly dumb.

On searching it was found that all the fine green cloth had been nibbled into a soft bed for a number of tiny creatures, whom their mother evidently meant to bring up as musical mice. It would have been a most uncomfortable noisy jarring place; but I suppose they would have grown up not to mind it.

These nests usually present the appearance of a rag ball, very loosely put together, and composed of odd bits of paper, rag, string, anything that comes handy, in fact, and in them flourish seven or eight mousikins, which seem as terribly afraid of the cold as by-and-by they will be of puss. C. L. M.