HUMAN NATURE AS SEEN IN A SAFE DEPOSIT VAULT

Queer Traits of Character Shown by Owners of Boxes That Furnish an Odd Series of Stories.

You'd be surprised," said the officer in charge of the safe-deposit vault of the largest banking institution downtown for a Times reporter, "at the opportunity I have to study the queer and certain phases of character among our patrons who rent boxes. There is no mistake; it is one of the finest places for this sort of study, as the environment of heavy doors, steel bars, time looks and all that, a room is a window in the way of the ordinary individual. It is not only that one may observe and note the way people handle cash, or really must handle it, but it shows many things.

In these vaults we have nearly 1,000 boxes in use at any time during all my experience—I've been here some years, too—have been little windows into the peculiarities of human nature as it is presented in a little aside, perhaps, as regards the manner in which they act when visiting their boxes, either for the purpose of putting in valuable, taking one out, or just for the fun of looking over what they have stored away.

"Why, some of them stay for hours when they enter the big vault that they can hardly place the key in the lock of their box and remember what they wanted to get, such as it greatly regretting the temporary parting with their possessions. Some will take their box and tip-toe to the booth, as if they thought someone were there, and actually had something of worth and necessitating the use of a strong box.

"During the panic of 1907, he conformed to the New York business world—you'd know him, if I were to mention his name—came into the vault, and, at the time, he had others elsewhere, but he took one he just said the same, and among the things that he did, he paid the bank bills—there was probably $30,000.

"Don't worry too much, for that matter—what people place in their boxes. It's not my business to know; but this particular man did not hesitate to let me understand just what was in his. In fact, he brought it in and told me that he knew that he had money in it, for it sub-
sequently developed that he felt, there was probably $30,000 in ready cash would be mighty hard to get and he was taking time by the forelock.

"Well, he would come in very often—about once a week—get his box and go, and never came near the vault again. Every time he would go to one of the booths as most people do.

"Then he'd take out the bills and count them over a couple of times, a smile on his face, and then placed the money in his box. When finished, he would return the box to its little space; but before actually locking the door would pull out the box about three times, lift the lid, gaze fondly at the stack of bills, and then gently placed the bills back in place.

"Can you beat that? Yet them! He was absolutely oblivious of my presence. It seemed. Even after he had paid over the box and was going through the big door he would look over his shoulder toward the location of his possessions.

"No, indeed, he wasn't the only one who belonged to a deposit box in those days. In fact, during the three months from November, 1907, to the end of January, 1908, I reckon I looked over the deposit boxes to different people, and I'm morally certain that most of them were used to holding on to their money, either they gave up their boxes—after the trouble was over—that is what caused me to have that opinion.

"Yes, I suppose those little things, in there," he added, pointing to row upon row of shining brass boxes, "contain many millions of securities, and I shouldn't be surprised to find by the way. A man of joys and sorrow, too, for that matter, of the world may never know.

"One of these days I'll get a box, in which he keeps just one thing. It is a very intense type of his mother.

"He had partitioned it very often, took his box, sits over yonder in that corner and just looks at that picture. He is a man who will sit for hours and think he's feeling sad, so, at his third word, said to him: 'That looks like an old-fashioned daguerreotype the kind we used to have when I was a boy.'

"'It is,' he responded, 'a picture of my mother—she's dead now. Would you like to see it?'

"I handed it to me. It was the picture of one of the sweetest and quietest looking women, I have ever seen, and dressed in the style of half a century ago.

"The man seemed pleased. I wanted to look at it, and even now, at each visit, he makes, and after he has eli-

gently gazed at it for some minutes—on a fancy I see tears in his eyes—he hands it over to me, without a word.

"Finished? he asks a few moments later, and then takes it gently in his hand, and then places it back in its box.

"No, I don't know anything about the man personally, but the touch of sent-
manship is the pleasant I have known.

"Certain evidences of economy on the part of 'wealthy men' who rent, boxes, made my heart say, 'Why, they've got some, to rent a five-dollar box, then change to a ten, then to a fifteen, and as they were to go to their box and go back, to a ten, or a five. just to save the few dollars.'

"This by men of wealth, mind you! And, furthermore, I've seen some of them fuss for a long time sorting and resorting their papers and securities so they would not have to get a larger box.

"One man, I believe, to be honest, to be regular, takes his box, sits over yonder in that corner and just looks at it. He is a man who will sit for hours and think he's feeling sad, too, although we are a bit more particular, and sometimes take a little time to reason the gentle sex as a rule is controlled by emotions, and it is hard some-
times to make them understand or appreciate conditions. We had a fair ex-
ample of that here not so very long ago.

"Down in Vesey Street there is a Jewish woman by the name of—well, never mind her name. It's enough to know that she made a big fortune in the sale of celery.

"No, you wouldn't think, to look at her, that she had a lot of money and dia-
monds, but she has, just the same. She came here well recommended and rented a box. Among the things she put in it was a number of diamonds, and she told her niece when she became of age,

"Some weeks later she came in again, and asked for her pass key, which as you know only half opens the lock and necessitates the use of her own key. She put in her key, turned it around, pulled out the box, lifted the lid, and—

"'The diamonds are gone!' she cried.

"'Gone? I repeated. 'Why, that can't be! No one has been in the box but yourself—no one could get in.'

"'But they are not there,' she wailed, 'and my nephew Davy saw me put them in—Davy saw me!'

"She was getting more excited every minute, so I told her to lock the box and send for Davy. Then I reported the mat-
ter to the President.

"We waited for Davy. He came along after a while and the box was reopened.

"Davy put his hand in it and drew out the key. It was there.

"The celery woman made a motion to get Davy's hand off the key. She then pointed to the diamonds the moment she opened the box first and jumped at the conclusion that Davy had stolen them. Davy explained the emotional makeup of some women.

"'By the way,' asked the reporter, 'What do you think of Davy?'

"'He is a good boy,' said the woman, 'who comes in here, says once a year, and has forgotten his box number, but has his initial entered in the key cell for.'

"That's where our character study comes in, the answer. If the man comes here but once a year I may be able to have forgotten his name, course, and people, as a rule, do not like to be forgotten.

"He can generally get him to talk, and if he hasn't told me his name I generally get it before putting my pass key in the lock, and I get it in rea-

"As to the person who was the case may be. Of course, if I am still in the dark and every boxholder, and I could call upon the man or woman to write his name on a key or some such thing as yet, I have never had to resort to this.

"No, you who are out in the hustle and bustle of the street can't just do this. I might not think this is interesting work, but it is, just the same, and when I tell it down here, I very likely the unusual characters of some people I meant what I said, and new samples of them—there are many more.