

colors, and visitors to the Smithsonian's hall of gems and minerals, where the jewel will be displayed, are not likely to forget its sinister past.

Most experts believe the gem was brought to the Western world in 1642 by a French adventurer, Jean Tavernier. He claimed he had stolen it from the brow of a Hindu idol in India despite a native belief that possessing the stone brought doom to its owner. On a subsequent journey, Tavernier was ripped to death by mad dogs on the Russian steppes.

In 1668, the diamond came into the possession of France's "Sun King," Louis XIV, who soon contracted an incurable disease and finished his glorious reign in humiliating defeat. His heirs, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, wore the diamond as part of the crown jewels before losing their heads to the guillotine.

The Bourbons called the gem the "French Blue" and cut it from its original 112½ carats to 67½. In the turmoil of the French Revolution, the diamond was stolen from the Royal Treasury, to reappear about 50 years later in London, weighing its present 44½ carats. An English banker, Sir Henry Thomas Hope, purchased the jewel for a reputed \$500,000 and gave it a new name.

Within two generations, the vast Hope fortune was wiped out and the stone eventually passed to a Turkish sultan,

Abdul Hamid, for his harem favorite, Subaya. The exotic beauty soon displeased her master, and he murdered her. Later his throne was toppled by revolutionaries.

The late Edward B. McLean, owner of a Washington newspaper, purchased the Hope diamond for his wife, one of the capital's foremost hostesses with a penchant for weighing herself down with jewels.

Mrs. McLean scoffed at the legend of doom, yet had the stone blessed by a priest "just in case." She never let her beloved grandchildren touch the gem. Still she could not avert tragedy. Her husband died in a mental institution after becoming involved in the Teapot Dome scandal. Her daughter died in 1946 from an overdose of sleeping tablets. Her oldest son was killed in an auto accident.

Upon Mrs. McLean's death, the stone was purchased by Harry Winston. Its uses changed, and so did its history. No longer a symbol of personal aggrandizement, the Hope diamond went on tour for charitable purposes. In nine years, it traveled some 400,000 miles and raised millions of dollars.

Although he had scores of offers for the diamond, Winston presented it to the nation as a gift to help the Smithsonian build an unrivaled collection of gems.

Romantics say nobody needs fear the curse any more. The fabled jewel has been returned to a place where its beauty can be admired by everybody.

