

FINGER RINGS.

Their Antiquity and Traditions of Magical Power—Some Ancient Rings.

Fashions in finger rings—if the passer-by may judge from the jeweler's windows of to-day—suffer but little change. Fashions in clothes come and go with a season; and at best do not seem able to outlast the century that created them. But everywhere to-day women are wearing rings that had their shapes fourteen hundred years and more, before Christ. It is not surprising that there is nothing new in this matter of rings for fashion, fancy, religion and love have combined to create styles and shapes in rings for thousands of years, from a time so far in the past that the rings shine there alone, all around in shades of darkness. Society observers remark with a displeasure on what they are pleased to call a "tendency" of ring fashions to a profusion of rings on one or all fingers. This is not new. At first the Romans only used a single ring, then one on each finger, then several on each. Afterwards, according to Aristophanes, one on each joint. Their foppish later carried them into the fashion of wearing different rings each week, a fashion that that funny wretch Helioabalus carried to its extreme, for, according to Lampadius, that Emperor never wore the same ring twice.

What is to-day original is only that which has been forgotten. The old metals, the old gems, the old motives are revived every day. Rings are given to-day with the same feeling, the same sentiment that animated the ring-givers of old, a sentiment and feeling which was best put by James I. of England on sending a diamond ring to Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, on the recovery of the latter from a dangerous illness. "That the favor and affection he bore him was and should be ever, as the form matter of the ring, endless, pure and perfect." Quite recently there was made by a New York jeweler a copy of the ring of Saphis or Cheops, King of Memphis, the Egyptian monarch who caused the great pyramid at Ghizeh—which struck the patriarch Abraham with such awe—to be built for his tomb and epitaph. The original ring of Saphis, which is owned in this country, was fashioned by some artificer in gold, B. C. 2000. The copy is now worn by a New Yorker who certainly has a taste for the original, in possessing what was a novelty nearly four thousand years ago. This ring of Saphis is the most valuable antique ring extant. Almost its equal in value, and quite its rival in interest is the ring of the Patriarch Joseph, now in the possession of the Earl of Ashburnham. There is seemingly no doubt but what this ring is the veritable golden circlet that Pharaoh gave to Joseph when "he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt." While the art work in this ring is superb it is naturally the historical value that renders it priceless. Historical rings are, however, by no means uncommon. For rings seems to be destined never to decay, their fate has something of the endlessness of their shape. In the British Museum is preserved an enameled gold ring bearing the name of Ethelwulf, King of Wessex, the second King of England. Its date is A. D. 836. The ring of Edward the Confessor was for a long time owned by Charles Kean, who wore it each time he appeared in the character of King Lear. The signet ring of Shakespeare was found by a laboring woman upon the surface of the mill-cloze, adjoining Stratford churchyard, March 16, 1810. It is of gold, weighs twelve pennyweights, and bears the initials "W. S." There is a connection or union of the letters by an ornamental string and tassels, known commonly as a true lover's knot, the upper band or flourish of which forms the resemblance of a heart. It was upon the finding of the ring that Hayden the painter wrote to Keats: "My dear Keats, I shall go mad! In a field at Stratford-upon-Avon that belonged to Shakespeare, they have found a gold ring and seal, with the initials 'W. S.' and a true lover's knot between. If this is not Shakespeare's whose is it?—a true lover's knot! I saw an impression to-day, and am to have one as soon as possible; as sure as you breathe and that he was the first of beings, the seal belonged to him. R. B. HAYDEN."

"Oh, Lord!" The fisherman's Ring used by the Pope to seal Papal Beliefs and Bull, is a steel seal made in the fashion of a Roman signet (signatorius annulus). When a brief is written to any distinguished personage, or has relation to religious or general important matter, the impression from the fisherman's Ring is said to be made upon a gold surface; in some cases it appears upon lead, and these seals are generally attached by strings of silk. Impressions of this seal are also made in ink, direct upon the parchment on which the brief is written. During the ceremonies attendant upon the death of a Pope, the figure of St. Peter upon the ring is destroyed with a file, and thereupon all the authority and acts of the late Pope pass to the College of Cardinals. When a new Pope is consecrated the renewed fisherman's Ring is presented him by the Cardinal Chancellor or Chamberlain.

The meaning attached to rings has been as variable as their shape. Charms and mystic powers have been connected with them from the first, and there exist still all over the world lingering superstitions connected with them. The Russians are particularly attached to turquoise and believe faintly or resolutely, that they preserve from bodily harm. Jasper set in rings took the lead of all other precious stones with the ancients for its supposed healing power, and this power was thought to be strengthened when combined with silver instead of gold. Many of the Gnostic or Basilidian gems, evidently used for magic and talismanic purposes, were of jasper. The diamond was held in high esteem, because it was thought to be endowed with divine vir-

tues. A species of the ruby was thought to restrain fury and wrath. The jacinth or hyacinth was said to have the faculty of procuring sleep when worn on the finger. Aristotle believed the amethyst capable of hindering the ascension of vapors, while Andrea Baccius says that it sharpened the wit, being at enmity with all impurity, a stone that Nichols in his Lapidary—published 1652—says "is of so excellent a viriditie, or spring colour as that if a man shall look upon an emerald by a pleasant green meadow's glorie by the glorie of that spring of viriditie which it hath in itself." The topaz is held as freeing men from passions and sadness of mind; the agate is thought to be good against poisons. The sapphire, according to St. Jerome, will procure the wearer the fame of princes and others, pacify enemies, free from enchantments, loose from prison and assuage the wrath of God. The opal is said to sharpen the sight of its possessor, and cloud the eyes of those who stand about him; for this cause it is revered as a safe patron of thieves. Cornelian is thought to gift its wearer with a cheerful heart, chaldeon procureth victory for its possessor; while the wearing of coral in a ring has been thought sufficient to "hinder the delusions of the devil, and to secure men from Incubus and Succubus."

In regard to rings there is a curious error common among all people, that the wedding finger was so chosen because of a vein running from the fourth finger of the left hand to the heart. Leivinus Lemnius quaintly says: "A small branch of the artery and not of the nerves, as Gallius thought, is stretched from the heart unto this finger, the motion whereof you may perceive evidently in all that effects the heart of woman, by the touch of the forefinger. I used to raise such as are fallen in a swoon by pinching this joint and by rubbing the ring of gold with a little saffron; for by this, a restoring force that is in it passeth to the heart and refresheth the fountain of life unto which this finger is joined. Wherefore, antiquity thought fit to encompass it about with gold." It is said thereon by Swinburn and others, that for this reason the fourth—by some people called the third—because the wedding finger. The priesthood kept up the idea by still keeping it as the wedding finger; but it was got at through the use of the Trinity. For in the ancient ritual of English marriages, the ring was placed by the husband on the top of the thumb of the left hand, with the words "In the name of the Father," it was then removed to the forefinger with the words, "In the name of the Son;" then to the middle finger with the words, "In the name of the Holy Ghost;" and finally it was left upon the fourth finger with the closing word, "Amen." A much less notable, yet more harmful, delusion in the matter of rings was contrived some few years ago, known as galvanic rings, which when worn on the fingers were said to prevent or cure various diseases. Although by the contact of the two metals of which they are composed, an infinitesimally minute current of electricity, hence, also of magnetism, is generated, still, from the absurd manner in which the pieces of metal composing the ring are arranged, and which displays the most profound ignorance of the laws of electricity and magnetism, no trace of the minute current traverses the finger upon which the ring is worn; so that a wooden ring, or none at all, would have exactly the same effect, as regards the magnetism or galvanism.

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