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PRECIOUS STONES.

WITH the artistic advance which this country has made during the past ten years, and with the wider distribution of wealth, men and women have become more critical and exacting in their tastes, and a much higher art standard now prevails. In nothing is this more noticeable than in the matter of personal adornment, in which precious stones play so prominent a part. Sharp contrasts in the arrangement of colors are seldom seen, and instead of incongruous and lavish decoration there are shown a love of harmony and an art in arrangement which satisfy the eye and are in keeping with the principles of beauty.

In the list of precious stones, the diamond, the ruby, the emerald, and the sapphire may be said to hold an equal place in public estimation. The American people are not only the most critical judges of fine gems, but are also the largest purchasers. So far as diamonds are concerned, they buy more perfect stones than do the people of any country in Europe. European purchasers are more inclined to be satisfied with the good general effect of a precious stone, not demanding that perfection required here by the same class of buyers. Twenty years ago \$25,000 would have been considered a large sum for any family in this country to have invested in diamonds, while to-day more than one family holds gems valued at \$500,000. In 1867 the value of diamonds and other stones imported into the United States was \$1,318,617, in 1875 it rose to

\$3,478,757, in 1884 it was \$9,139,460, and in 1886 it reached \$8,259,747. From 1867 to 1886, inclusive, the total value of imported diamonds and other stones can be set down in rough numbers at \$85,000,000. That fine diamonds hold their value well has been evidenced by sales of collections of gems which were appraised for inventory more than a century ago, when stones, bought by dealers to be sold at a profit, brought astonishingly high prices. Regarded simply as a profitable investment, diamonds are a safe purchase. They are not affected by political changes or social disturbance, as many securities are; and, although in times of financial stringency the owners of valuable stones may often have been compelled to dispose of them at a great sacrifice, this has been generally due to special circumstances, rather than to any depreciation in the value of the gems themselves.

In spite of the enormous number of diamonds which have been thrown upon the market by the opening of the South African mines, there never was a time when fine diamonds were rarer or when the prices of perfect gems were stiffening more perceptibly; and people who own this class of stones may feel assured that they have made advantageous purchases. To a great extent, of course, the laws of supply and demand regulate the price of diamonds, just as they do that of any other commodity. Still, as with all other luxuries, the prices are largely a matter of fancy and are not governed by any commer-

cial schedule or known rule. A great deal has been said as to the immense number of diamonds which have been thrown upon the market from the mines of South Africa, and as to the means which have been adopted by the owners of these mines to restrict the output within the bounds of legitimate demand, so that something like a standard value might be established, while, at the same time, measures would be taken to prevent the products of the mines from reaching the market through illicit channels. It should be remembered, however, that thousands of these stones are of an inferior grade. The output of really fine stones is very limited. The South African mines are the chief source of the world's supply, and a fluctuation in or lowering of values of fine gems need not be feared.

There is nothing the proper purchase of which calls for more care or judgment than that of diamonds. There must, of necessity, be implicit confidence between the dealer and the buyer, for few people who are not experts can detect all the minute differences which go to make up the flawless or the imperfect diamond. American buyers run great risks by purchasing stones in Europe, as these, when examined afterwards, are likely to show some defect which had not before been noticed by the purchaser.

New cuttings have lately been introduced, the proportions of each part being based upon scientific principles, and bringing out a brilliancy and beauty of which the same stones would not have been thought capable ten years ago. The final effectiveness of a true gem is a work of art to which expert knowledge and skilled handi-

craft contribute in no less important degree than the original stone. By the latest improved cutting there is a great gain, a diamond being given about one-fifth more brilliancy than by the old methods, due to a more exact compliance with the laws governing reflection and refraction, in proportioning the "spread" of the stone to the depth below the girdle, to the height above it, and to the faceting. Even the polish is a matter of careful scrutiny,—unless perfectly done marring to some extent the beauty of the cutting and its resultant brilliancy. Attention of this character is, however, bestowed only upon stones of the highest grade. The business in really fine gems in this country is confined to a few houses, although there are many dealers in inferior stones.

The combinations of diamonds with other gems largely need an eye for effect in arrangement, so as to give the appearance of rounded harmony and completeness. Several American houses that have devoted themselves to work of this character have been able to produce combinations which in harmony and delicacy are equal to any that have come from the famous workshops of Europe. Emeralds are now sought after, as, in fact, are all colored stones,—rubies and sapphires especially. Rubies which come from Burmah are scarce, while prices are phenomenal; and a really blue diamond is unusually rare and of great value. What is believed to be the most perfect blue diamond in this country is owned by Messrs. Bailey, Banks & Biddle.

In the United States, although government reports place the estimated production of precious stones as fol-

lows: 1883, \$74,050; 1884, \$82,975; 1885, \$73,450; yet this is made up of semi-precious gems; or, if any of the real precious stones be included, they are of such poor quality as to be of no practical use for the finer purposes of the jeweller. In Maine and North Carolina systematic mining has been carried on to some extent, but without profitable result. The geological formation of Elliott County, Kentucky, is singularly analogous to that of the South African diamond district; but search there has not proved fruitful. Many semi-precious stones are, however, found in the United States,—beryls, aquamarines, and hiddenites in North Carolina, topazes and agates in Colorado, and in Arizona, Montana, and New Mexico the finest garnets in the world.

Yet, notwithstanding the encouragement that some writers find in these facts, and in the general mineral wealth of the country, for indulging the patri-

otic hope that the United States will become an important contributor to the world's supply of precious stones, the few competent American experts generally see no substantial basis at present for such expectations. This view is shared by Mr. Joseph T. Bailey, who is not only one of the best judges of gems, but who has also made himself thoroughly familiar with those sections of the United States that show any signs of being the natural abiding-place of gem-stones.

It is sometimes suggested that much might be accomplished were the State and national governments to offer encouragement to systematic prospecting for precious stones in certain promising localities; but the universal experience is that such development is best committed to private enterprise, and, unfortunately, there has been little to induce the investment of money or time in it as a business.

JOHN V. HOOD.

GLIMPSES.

WITH dull, cold face the opal faintly gleameth;

Its shimmering light grows dimmer,—will expire,—
When sudden, lo! the wondrous glow that streameth
Betrays a hidden heart of crimson fire.

In every human soul, however shrouded

In dull, cold apathy, or vain disguise,
By fierce despair, or sin however clouded,
Burns yet deep down a spark that never dies,

And lo!—as through the opal's pallor stealing

Those flaming messengers of light outgleam—
In rare, grand moments flashes forth, revealing
A glimpse of Light whose depth we may not dream!

CHARLOTTE W. THURSTON.