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HOW I FELL AMONG THIEVES.

(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

I am a single lady of good position and independent means—say from four to five hundred a-year. I have no near relations and no settled home, my health making it generally advisable for me to spend the winter abroad. In summer and in autumn I am glad to be in my "ain countree," and my friends kindly assure me that I am always welcome at their various houses. I deserve no pleasanter way of passing the time I am able to spend in my native country; and my means have hitherto enabled me, with due economy, to prevent my visits from becoming burdensome to those whose fortune is less wide than their hospitality of heart. I am anxious to make this clear, because it may be thought that, in the tale I am about to tell, there breathes a spirit of niggardliness unworthy the possessor of the comfortable income I have mentioned. But every one knows their own affairs best; and though I am aware that many even of the friends who are acquainted with the exact amount of my fortune, think it must be more than sufficient for my solitary wants, the estimate is unfair. My own personal expenses, indeed, are moderate. I must, of course, dress well. I must have a maid. I must travel like a lady, which too often means, in this country, that my maid must travel like a lady also. I must be ready with a perennial stream of loose silver for guards and porters, with handsome vails for servants, meaning not only the housemaids and coachmen—who once on a time were the only terrors in one's path—but the butlers, footmen, and pages amongst whom my lot may be cast. I have my hotels, boarding-houses, and traveling expenses abroad; and I like, of course, to bring little presents when I come home to my friends and their children. Then there are one's charities, doctors and church dues. Still I admit that for all this I have enough and to spare—only people think I have more than enough. I am alone in the world; I have neither husband nor children to think of; I have no poor relations openly and directly dependent on my purse; no household to provide for, no visitors to entertain, no taxes, say the thoughtless and superficial, to pay. What can I do with my money? What, but be ready to give it to anybody who chooses to lay claim to it, my creditors being all the more numerous because not one has any special right to the post.

When I say that I have been lately in Italy, it may be supposed from the title of this paper that the following is a tale of brigandage abroad, in which my own courage and presence of mind are to call for the admiration of all who may read it. Let me at once state that I never met with any vulgar robbers—they are vulgar enough now—even in Italy, and I have never risked my maid's life or my own in imprudent expeditions in search of the picturesque. And let me confess at once that I showed neither courage, presence of mind, nor even, perhaps, common sense, in the circumstances I am about to describe. Indeed, but for a faint hope that the recital of my misfortunes may induce other sufferers to join me in protesting against a tyranny becoming year by year more dangerous and oppressive—which is injurious, moreover, as much to the moral characters of those who inflict it, as to the purses and tempers of those who writhe under it;—well, if I did not hope that others, as weak, singly, as myself, might yet be found collectively strong enough to denounce and revolt against the blackmail system, of which I am going to give an instance, I should prefer to submit to it in silence, and only try to forget what I was helpless enough to endure.

On my return from the Continent last year, I went to pay my usual round of country visits, beginning with one to some people whose acquaintance I had only made the previous summer, having met and taken a fancy to one of the girls at the house of a mutual friend. While abroad I heard from her that she was going to be married, and, of course, I wrote to offer my congratulations. In reply came a pressing invitation to pay the family a visit, and to be present at the marriage, which was to take place at their country-seat in Scotland. This invitation I at once rashly accepted, and as I was going to a wedding, I determined not to go empty-handed. Indeed I had already, I thought, provided myself with the needful wedding-present, having, while at Naples, been tempted into buying an extremely pretty little bookstand in carved olive-wood—not, I grant you, a very costly thing, but really very pretty and useful; and more expensive—for it was beautifully inlaid—than an ignorant person might suppose. It was somewhat cumbrous to carry, and endless was the bother my maid and I had to make it fit into its proper corner of my trunk. The damage its sharp edges did to my frills, laces and dresses, nearly led to a rupture between my "faithful Abigail" and myself; and as for the worry and anxiety it caused me on a rather roundabout homeward journey, when my dread of its being injured by rough usage was constantly bringing down on me the suspicions of *douaniers* and *gendarmes*, I should never have done if I began to chronicle my adventures. Behold it, however, happily over, and myself arriving, with my troublesome but precious convoy, safe at the home of my friends the MacIvors, let us call it Loch Cateran. I pass over the arrival itself, and my welcome, which was all that a weary traveler could desire. Indeed it must be understood that, except in one particular, I have no cause but to feel grateful for my treatment while in the power of this amiable though ruthless gang. Each member of it individually is charming. Nevertheless I have been despoiled, and a bitterness must now mingle with my recollection of what should have been a cheerful and agreeable visit.

My maid and I had unpacked the terrible bookstand for, as we fondly hoped, the last time. Its diabolical propensity to evil induced it, on taking its departure for ever from the vicinity of my long-suffering wardrobe, to spring out of my maid's hands on to the top of my best cap. We smothered our groans, however, in songs of rejoicing at being at last rid of our imp of mischief; and as we unwrapped it from its coverings, and set it on a table, overjoyed to find its delicate tracery, clear-cut corners, and polished surface unharmed, we felt almost repaid for our trouble.

"Well, to be sure, it is pretty," said my maid. "I'm sure, ma'am, there won't be a prettier wedding-present than that amongst them all."

"I hope they will like it," said I modestly. How glad I felt afterwards that I had not betrayed to my maid my own secret, proud anticipations on the subject!

I settled in my own mind (most fortunately—no, perhaps I should say most unfortunately) that I would defer the presentation of my gift until the next day. The first evening there would be so much to talk of—so much to hear and tell. My beautiful bookstand (now that I had nothing more to do with its transport, I could heartily appreciate its perfection) would add too much to the excitement of the evening. Pleasure would almost become satiety. Better enjoy for a few hours longer the prospect of the happy, grateful looks which to-morrow should be centred on my present. Probably the pleasure would be enhanced by surprise. They could hardly expect me to give a wedding-present, seeing that there was not the most distant shade of relationship between us, and that our friendship was of such short standing. But how delightful it is to confer unexpected benefits! Did I grudge the money and trouble this present had cost me? Far from it.

At dinner we talked a good deal of my travels. "How charming! What a delightful winter you must have had, dear Miss Fairgame!" said one after another of my listeners, as, in the innocence of my heart, I told where I had been. "How I should like to travel about as you do!"

"Ah!" said I, "but you know that I travel for health as much as for pleasure."

"Well, I shouldn't mind traveling for health, too. But one must be rich to do that, especially nowadays, when as you say, prices have risen so much everywhere."

"Yes," I replied, incautiously; it is shocking the way in which prices have risen. It is the fault of these Americans. Now, at Naples, where I was for a short time——"

"Oh, were you at Naples?—were you really at Naples?" exclaimed Flora, the bride-elect, who had hitherto seemed to take a less vivid interest than the others in my humdrum travels, being very naturally preoccupied with her own approaching honeymoon trip. "Oh, tell me, did you see an——"

"An eruption of Vesuvius? Yes," said I, with all a traveler's satisfaction, in finding the conversation drift so naturally towards the most impressive point of my narrative. "You would like to hear about it—well——"

"Oh, very much; but—I was going to ask did you see any very pretty coral when you were at Naples? Can you tell me about the prices there? People say you can pick things for nothing; and in this country, you know, coral is so expensive."

"Well, said I, after a slight pause of mortification—for I could see from the really grave anxiety in the girl's face, as she waited for my answer, that the grandeurs of the volcano had little chance beside this trumpery question of coral—"I can't say that I found one could pick up anything quite for nothing. But if you are going to Naples——" I paused, thinking what shops I could recommend.

"Oh no, I'm afraid there's no hope of getting so far. But one could commission it—the coral, I mean. The truth is," she added confidingly, "one of my uncles has given me some money as a wedding present—it's just ten pounds—but I thought I might get some handsome coral ornaments with it. Unfortunately I've got so little jewellery among my presents, and one can't do without jewellery now, you know. Now, would you advise me to write to a friend of mine who is coming home from India through Italy to buy me ten pounds' worth of coral? Of course I should expect to get a very nice set for that money."

"Should you?" said I, doubtfully. "Well, I should advise you not to give your friend the commission." I was thinking of the difficulty I had had in executing a very similar one with which I had been charged by a friend for whom I had brought home some coral ornaments, which, however, had cost more than the sum named by Flora.

"But why not? Do you really not think, Miss Fairgame, that ten pounds will buy nice coral, even in Naples? Then what in the world am I to do with it? And I do so want jewellery of some kind. Only think how provoking it is; people have given me such heaps of useless things—traveling clocks, I've just got three; and six inkstands, and two sets of salt-cellars; isn't it too bad?"

I was silent, partly with surprise at the number, partly, I must own, with alarm at the cool and practical estimate which was evidently put on friendship's offerings. A dim distrust was rising in my mind about my own present. Would it not also be classed with the useless things?

"Couldn't you give me some idea, Miss Fairgame," of what I could do with ten pounds? I don't care for trumpery garnets, for I know one can get them cheap enough."

"Really I—I can't advise. Only don't send for coral," said I, emphatically, as our hostess moved, and we rose from table. But what were my sensations when, as I paused on my way to the drawing-room to look at a family portrait, I heard a hurried whispering in the passage behind me,—"Oh, do you really think so? How lucky you haven't spent Uncle John's ten pounds!" and Flora's answer, "Yes, I'm sure of it. She told me not to send for coral. I wonder if I shall get it this evening. I'm dying to see it. But perhaps she hasn't had time to unpack it ——"

I fled on to the drawing-room before it could be discovered that I had overheard them. Here, alas! was my mistake number one. He would not any well bred person have done the same? Besides, I was too confounded to consider what I was about.

Now what had I said or done to lead Flora to imagine—what right had she to imagine—that I meant to bestow on her anything so expensive as coral, or jewellery of any description? I cannot remember what happened during the first ten minutes after making this horrible discovery. I found myself at last sitting staring at a photograph-book which somebody had brought me, and wildly trying to recall what had passed at dinner. It flashed on me that I had been spoken of as "rich," and that I had not repelled the insinuation. My heart sank as I remembered every trifling little boast I had made about the places I had gone to, the sights I had seen. I shrank like a detected thief when some of the girls came about me, admiring my lace, studying my few ornaments. I felt as if my value was being calculated, my goods appraised. I glanced fearfully in Flora's intelligent face, expecting to read in it her knowledge that I actually had in my possession the very coral she coveted. For it was so. I was taking it to a friend who had commissioned me to bring it for her, and whom I was by and by going to visit. I had meant to show it to Flora that she might judge of the value of coral. But could I do so now?

For the rest of the evening I was really miserable. I know how silly it may appear to say so, but I must tell the truth. I hate to disappoint people, and I can't bear to seem shabby. There are women—I am becoming almost inclined to envy them—who are not troubled by such sensitive scruples; women who will go into a shop, turn over everything and buy nothing; women who will pay off their obligations to servants and railway guards with a bland word and a brazen-faced smile; women who even pride themselves on getting through the world at anybody's cost but their own. Of such Becky Sharps I am not yet one. I confess my weakness and seek not to palliate it.

The evening passed on. To cover the discomfort which had seized me, I tried to talk. The wedding was now the subject to which everything else converged.

"To-morrow," said my hostess, "you must see all Flora's presents. Dear child—our friends have been so kind; she really has got some lovely things; and with a few exceptions, all very useful. Of course there are the usual duplicates. Some people seem to have no ideas beyond these everlasting writing-table sets, and hideous ormolu candlesticks; and there are a few bits of trumpery, which one must make the best of, you know," she added, laughing. "But, on the whole, the presents will make a very good show on Thursday. That, you know, is quite one of the features of a wedding nowadays, and, indeed, I don't know what we should do without it sometimes. Such a relief to the dullness and *gene* which used to prevail! Now there are the wedding-presents to look at, and talk about—and, by the by, that reminds me, Mary" (to the second daughter), "we must write these cards to-morrow. Cards" (to me) "with the names of the donors are put on the presents, so every one knows what everybody else has given. The difficulty is to arrange them so that everything is properly seen. It wouldn't do at all if people were to go about saying, 'I see nothing from the So-and-sos'; or 'I wonder what the Somebodies have given.'"

"So that is the fashion now," said I, faintly trying to smile. "It's so long since I happened to be at a wedding."

"Oh then, I assure you, you'll find a great change for the better."

"That depends, aunt," laughed a bridesmaid-cousin who was staying in the house. "At the last wedding I was at—you remember, Flora, when you and I were Julia MacFinn's bridesmaids—what a business we had! You know the MacFinns, don't you, Miss Fairgame? Yes, I'm sure I've heard them speak of you."

No doubt she had. A guilty blush rose to my cheeks in spite of my real consciousness of innocence. I knew the MacFinns very well. When Octavia, the youngest one was married about a couple of years ago, I gave her a very nice wedding-present. But I was abroad at the time of Julia's marriage; and of course—as the MacFinns had no actual claims on me—I remember being very glad to be, as I thought, out of the way.

"Well, you know, when Octavia MacFinn married she got lovely presents. She made such a good match, and people thought, I suppose, that, as she was the youngest, there was no chance of the other seven going off. But, to the horror of everybody, Julia, the eldest one, married the very next year. Flora and I were her bridesmaids. It was a very poor affair of a wedding. She married the clergyman, you know—a poor incumbent of the English chapel. Well, you should have seen the shabby turn-out of presents we had to show off. I was quite ashamed. Knitted scarfs, and sofa blankets, as if it had been a charity bazaar; and books—fit, I suppose people thought, for a clergyman's wife; and rubbishly scent-bottles, and paper-weights; and there was even one of those little bookcases—those ugly carved things, you know, that one picks up quite cheap, and never thinks of putting on a drawing-room table now."

Will any sympathizing person try to imagine my feelings at this crisis. The talk went on, but I followed it not. As it buzzed in and out of my ears, the words "trumpery," "shabby," "absurd," "not worth giving," seemed alone to force their way to my brain.

We went to bed at last. My hostess and her daughters escorted me to my room. "I hope you will be comfortable," said the former.

"Oh, most comfortable," was my mechanical reply, as I seemed to look around on the luxurious appointed chamber, while my eyes fastened only on something, loosely covered with its brown wrappings, which was placed for safety on the top of the drawers.

"Is there anything you want?" said Flora, earnestly, perceiving, no doubt, the hidden anguish in my tone.

"Oh, nothing, I am sure ——" I stopped short. Was not this the moment to seize for hurling at her my unfortunate present, and at once destroying her illusion about my intentions? I might have seized it, for I was desperate; but at this juncture my ill-starred maid, who was busy over one of my boxes, chanced to take from it the very case of coral which I was afraid of Flora's catching sight of. In my alarm I hastily thrust myself in front of it to conceal it; and while I thus stood guard over it, not daring to move, they bade me good night. Yet as they did so, was it only my terrified fancy which made me see in each face bent to kiss me a wolfish look of curiosity to find out what my maid was doing with the box behind me? Was there a covert smile lurking round Flora's mouth? Was there a tone of still tenderer interest in her mother's voice as she begged me to ring for anything I wanted? I cannot tell. I will not let my prejudice carry me too far. But I know that I had little sleep that night as I lay pondering over my situation. I went down to breakfast next morning, my perplexities still unsolved. But I knew that to-day something must be done. My tribute must be paid in some shape, and, alas! I already knew the only form in which it was likely to be acceptable. As I entered the breakfast parlor, an ominous silence, different from the friendly cheerfulness of the night before, seemed to prevail; and I half shrank back, as I remembered that the banditti awaiting me—I beg their pardon, but I must give a faithful description of my feelings—might expect me to appear provided with the ransom they had set on my head. But, to my relief, I found that the post had come, and they were all busy with their letters. One was for me, and I took it and slunk to my place as quietly as possible, so as not to attract the attention of the fortunately preoccupied brigands towards my empty-handed condition.

My letter was from a cousin, and it told me that her daughter—my godchild—was engaged to be married. You may be surprised to hear that this news came to me at first rather a pleasure than a shock. But, chiefly, I was really fond of my goddaughter; secondly, one has a sort of insane satisfaction in announcing a wedding; thirdly, a wild hope crossed my mind that the evident necessity of my giving some handsome present to my godchild might induce the Macivors to abate their own inferior pretensions. Armed with this last thought, I now ventured to raise my eyes and to listen to what was going on. I was seated beside my host; but he, good man, was so engrossed with his *salmi* of grouse, that though I was supposed to be talking to him, any incoherent observations did very well, and I was able to catch—with hearing that had become painfully sharp—the conversation carried on in a half-aside at the other end of the table.

FLORA (First Robber). Such a nice note from dear Mrs. Brown Richardson! She's coming over to luncheon some day.

FLORA'S MOTHER. That vulgar woman! I hope she won't come. I really can't stand her purse-proud airs.

FLORA. But, dear mother, just listen. She asks what I should like best—a Dresden tea-set or a bracelet? Now that's what I call being real friendly.

THE MOTHER (relenting). Well, so it is.

SECOND ROBBER (a younger sister). Which will you take, Flo? The bracelet, I should say. You want jewellery awfully.

FIRST ROBBER. Well, I don't know. I should like a lovely Dresden tea set. Let me see what jewellery I've got (counts on her fingers). Two silver card-cases——

THE MOTHER. You needn't count these as jewellery. Stupid things, too, nowadays.

FIRST ROBBER. Well, then—three brooches, two bracelets——

SECOND ROBBER. They're only morning ones. Hardly worth counting.

FIRST ROBBER (nettled at these aspirations on her success). I've got a pair of pearl earrings and three lockets.

A CONFEDERATE (the bridesmaid-cousin whom yesterday I took for a sweet, pleasing girl, but who now turns out to be the most daring and dangerous of the gang). Only three lockets? Helena Macgregor had six. Not to speak of the whole set of family cairngorms; and Blanche de Bois-Guilbert had the loveliest diamonds.

THIRD ROBBER (a youthful but promising villain of sixteen). I don't see why the Brown Richardsons shouldn't give both the bracelet and the tea-set. They're so tremendously rich.

FIRST ROBBER. Oh! talking of diamonds. Mother, isn't that a letter from Aunt Dives at last? Oh, what does she say about ——

THE CAPTAIN OF THE BAND (gloomily). Nothing. She doesn't even mention.—Well, it's a kind letter. She sends you her love, and her blessing, and ——

CHORUS OF ROBBERS. But the diamonds! Didn't she say she would give us her diamonds when we married? Oh, what a shame it will be if she doesn't!

THE CAPTAIN (soothingly). Oh, I daresay it will be all right. She certainly told me she meant to do so.

FIRST ROBBER (with emotion). Surely she might send me a brooch, or even a ring or two. She would never miss them.

THE CAPTAIN. Perhaps, dear, she means to give you something when you go to visit her.

THE CONFEDERATE. But that won't help us on Thursday. Oh, I wish some more jewellery would come in before Thursday! To be sure there will be——(She pauses suddenly, as she sees me listening, and the conversation turns all at once upon the weather.

"I must ride over to the Hermitage, to-day," says Flora, as we leave the table. "I may as well go to luncheon. You see, dear Miss Fairgame, I have to go and say good-bye to a dear old lady—Miss Monypenny, one of our neighbors—so you won't mind my running away this morning?"

"Oh, not at all. Pray don't think of me." say I, with heartfelt earnestness. Here was an unlooked for respite.

"But what shall we do to amuse Miss Fairgame?" says her mother.

"Oh, I daresay you would like to see all dear Flora's presents."

"Oh, so much; but—I think I've letters to write this morning."

So I got away to my room and sat down to reconsider the terrible question weighing on me. By this time, indeed, the question was narrowing itself—the alternatives before me drawing closer and closer. My poor friend's coral was doomed, or, at least, she was doomed to lose it. The idea of appropriating it to meet my own exigencies was no longer contemplated with even a shudder of remorse. My downward course had begun. But the perplexity still before me was, could I rescue the coral from Flora even by pleading my obligation of giving it to my goddaughter?

Oh, why could not I say at once, plump and plain, "I am not rich, in spite of my five hundred a year. I can't afford to make handsome presents to everybody. You are not a relation, and have no claims on me. I bought you this bookstand; accept it with my best wishes, but hope for no more"?

I confess I was getting so angry and disgusted with the mercenary spirit which seemed to have seized on the girl who, when I first met her, was pure, generous, and open as the day, unstained by cupidity, and to whom the vice of ingratitude would have seemed as a mythical monster, that I would willingly have heard her addressed in this fashion by somebody else. But how could I bring myself to make such a speech?

Time passed on. I heard the sound of horses' feet, and from my window beheld Flora and one of her sisters ride away. I calculated how long it would be before they could return from what I shrewdly guessed to be a foraging expedition. At least I was now safe till after luncheon, and, summoning courage, I boldly descended to the drawing-room. There I found my hostess and her accomplices busy writing the cards of which she had spoken last night.

"Oh, here's Miss Fairgame!" cried the bridesmaid-cousin as I appeared. "She'll help us, perhaps. A blank card, please, for Miss Fairgame. Now, let us see, whose name is to be written next?"

I set my teeth and steeled my resolution I suppose one always does on the first application of torture, and so for the moment I came off victorious. I waited to be told the name I was to write.

"We may as well have a card ready for Miss Monypenny," said one of the robbers. "She's sure to give something." I wrote down, with a sensation of fiendish malice, the name of Miss Monypenny,

Happily, before things went further, some callers arrived. They stayed to luncheon, after which there was an exhibition of the presents. I don't remember what these new victims contributed, but I know something was disgorged by them, for I heard murmurs of dissatisfaction after they had driven away. "Well, I do think, with their fortune, they might have given something better than this." I took care to hear no more. I also joyfully accepted an invitation from the governess and some of the children to go and look at the poultry and the rabbits. Amongst these innocent dumb creatures I should surely no hear of wedding-presents.

Towards five o'clock I went to the house, too sick of the rabbits and too weary for my tea to think of the certainty of Flora's having returned from her raid on the Hermitage. As I approached the drawing-room a clatter of teacups and a Babel of voices drowned the sound of my steps. The door was open. Shall I be condemned if I confess that I stood still and listened? The full peril of my situation had returned to my mind, and were not any means fair which might help to extricate me from my dilemma?

"O Flora! and you really got that delicious quaint old cream-jug! But how did you manage it? I thought nothing would make Miss Monypenny give up that old silver cream-jug."

FLORA. Well, I thought so too. Really I never hoped for this. But what do you think it was she did mean to give me? You'll never guess. A copy of Milton's "Paradise Lost!" I saw it lying on the table. (Howls of execration.) Well, you know, when she began talking of my being fond of poetry, I really couldn't help it. I said, "Oh, dear Miss Monypenny, I can't bear poetry!" Of course I said it quite naturally, and the dear old thing never suspected I had noticed the abominable book. And then, after luncheon—and at luncheon I had been admiring the cream-jug so—well, she took Kitty aside and asked what I had got, and which I would like best—the book or something else. And Kitty was so clever, and said, "Oh, you know, Miss Monypenny, a book just lies on the table. Now, something that Flora could use every day, and think of you." And then she gave me the cream-jug. Wasn't it nice of her?

THE COUSIN-BRIDESMAID. Yes, yes; very nice. And now, if Miss Fairgame would only make haste with that coral she's to give you. I was quite provoked that we hadn't it to-day to show to those shabby ——s. Perhaps if you had stayed at home to-day, Flora—— But still, it was worth while going to the Hermitage for this.

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I am once more in my room. They bring me my tea. I say I have a headache. My maid comes to ask me where she is to put the bottle-imp which still stands on the drawers. "It's so in the way, ma'am." "Put it in the fire," I reply, with savage gloom. My maid looks frightened. She has heard that there's a sort of "low fever" going about.

My headache is forced to yield to the multiciplicity of remedies pressed on me by my brigand hosts, all anxious, no doubt, to keep me alive long enough to let them carry out their designs on my property. The Captain nurses me like a sister. The robbers take it in turn to sit by me and "amuse me." Once more I am offered a sight of the wedding-presents, and I hear the tale of Julia Macfinn's wrongs. By and by, the afternoon post has brought news of a reported engagement of another of that hitherto unfortunate sisterhood.

Let me hasten over the painful conclusion of my tale. The next morning, after another night of mental struggle, I succumbed to my fate. The case of coral passed into the hands of my foes. As I yielded it up, I tried hard to wear a face of smiling calm, but the effort was too great for me. I saw, too, that Flora failed equally in calling up on her face an expression of pleased astonishment. There was a certain relief and triumph in her eye—that was all. She seemed even to have some difficulty in finding suitable words of admiration for the very ornaments on which I thought she had set her heart. I don't know what she had expected them to be like. It was altogether a rather awkward scene, and we were all glad, I am sure, when it was ended.

Then, when all was over, I retired again to write my letter of apology and explanation to my injured friend—my letter of congratulation, such as I could make it, to my godchild, whom, for the first time, I wished somebody else's godchild—a letter of uneasy inquiry into the truth of the reported Macfun engagement. I used to feel a kindly pity for these poor girls; now the remaining six pass before my mind's eye in a procession terrible as Banquo's kings, and I prefer not to be forced to state my real wishes regarding their future.

Before concluding, I might have described the wedding with all its attendant festivities, which I am bound to say, passed off to perfection. But I will only chronicle one more incident. I had been mortified, as I think may have seen, with the reception accorded even to the beautiful coral ornaments which I had at last screwed myself up to sacrifice on the alter of friendship. After the wedding, and while we were waiting for the breakfast, I was standing in a corner near the table, round which buzzed the crowd of wedding-guests, loudly admiring, and no doubt, like myself, secretly criticising, the gifts thereon displayed. Amongst them I beheld my poor coral, pushed rather aside to make room for Mrs. Brown Richardson's sumptuous, showy bracelet, which, to the joy of the whole family—whose credit seemed to be staked on the due splendor of this exhibition of, I had wellnigh said, stolen goods—had just arrived in time to add its lustre to the show. My present had got wedged in behind a plated silver teapot, milk-jug, and sugar-basin of the most florid type, hideous in design, and utterly useless to Flora in her future home, but which, as a tribute, gathered from her father's tenants—as was duly set forth in the inscription emblazoned on them—held a post of honor in the centre of the table, along with a great silver and pebble brooch, the offering of the household retainers. Do I sneer at the idea of inviting our humble friends to show their sympathy with us in our rejoicings? Surely not; but as I looked at the expensive and ugly trophies, I could not refrain from wondering if the poor housemaid, who must have subscribed her five shillings or so for the purchase, had been allowed even as free a choice in the matter as had been left to myself. Is a tyrannical social pressure brought into play in the kitchen as well as in the drawing-room? And why, in the name of taste and fitness, must her present take the form of a testimonial so vulgarly ostentatious? But go back for a moment to my coral.

"And Miss Fairgame—where is her present?" I heard somebody say. "Ah," as the bits of coral were one by one thrust forward, "pretty enough; but I should have thought she would have given something really handsome. A rich woman like her, with nobody to think of but herself."

Let me conclude this melancholy story of extortion and injustice by making an appeal to our legislators and rightful protectors. Will no benevolent M. P. move for the introduction of a bill, specifying the exact amount of the tax which may be levied on people when, for their misfortune, their friends get married? Should not a certain rule of consanguinity determine its amount, as in the case of succession duty? If this were so, one could easily estimate one's liabilities. We should have to allow so much for our cousins, first, second, or fiftieth, whose numbers and even chances of matrimony we might determine by a simple calculation. So much for our acquaintance. (A very small percentage might suffice for them. Of course there need be no attempt to limit our liberality to real friends.) So much for people we have nothing to do with. So much for people we absolutely dislike. This system may seem at first sight alarming, but I am persuaded it would really be cheaper and more satisfactory than the present one. The money could be paid down, a due notification of the sum required being forwarded with every announcement of a wedding. There would be a positively incalculable saving of fuss, bother, and worry, not to speak of what I believe would be the saving in money.

Is any one anxious to know what I have done with my bookcase? I have it still. It is the skeleton in my cupboard—at least in my portmanteau. I dare not give it away as a mere *gage d'amour*, for such causeless generosity would too surely confirm the general hallucination about my wealth. I must not leave it in any one's charge, or allow any one to see it, for I have resolved that it must still fulfil its mission as a wedding-present. I think of the six Macfanns, and I say to myself, "It will do for one of them."

It shall do.

THOSE MASONIC RELICS.

Views of Prominent Members of the Order.

NOTHING VALUABLE DISCOVERED.

General Albert Pike, whose connection with Freemasonry is well known throughout the United States, stated that when the first dispatch was received relative to the discovery of ancient Masonic emblems in Egypt he naturally felt some curiosity as to what the emblems were. He supposed they were the common traditions among Masons, who had from time to time made their mark upon their work. Later it appeared that the symbols were solid representations, and, taking the facts as reported, he thought that the proper way to approach the subject was to say that it was "a mare's nest." He had read the description of the articles found and was free to say that they did not bear any semblance whatever to Freemasonry.

THE EMBLEMS CONSIDERED.

Mr. Pike then took up the cable telegram and said:—

As to the altar, it is simply the Hebrew altar, and has no relation to modern Freemasonary whatever, except that its dimentions are recognized as belonging to any degree of Masonry, operative or speculative. The apron is so peculiar that no Freemason of any ordinary degree of intelligence could possibly mistake its meaning. It would be unnecessary to say that in its proportions it bore the closest possible relation to modern Masonry. If he went into details it would be only a demonstration of the problems of Freemasonry, and would allow what is accepted by every Mason. The square said to have been found was not a Masonic square, because every Mason's square represents the figures three and four of the two arms, being a symbol used by Pythagoras, and before his time by Zoroaster. As to the symbols of any higher degrees, nothing yet published shows that they have anything to do with them. General Pike then said that he did not believe that the present system of Masonry or anything like it was in existence at the time the obelisk was put up. Some of the symbols of Masonry are very ancient, because they were used by Pythagoras, and were borrowed from Babylon, and have been adapted to modern Masonry, and it was due in this connection that some of the explanations had really been forgotten. General Pike then said that some of the symbols now used by Freemasons came from the hermetic philosophers who took a part in arranging the present degrees, and among these are the square and compass and the double headed eagle, all of which are the old hermetic symbols, with all the triangles and double and triple triangles are Pythagorean. Then there were some other symbols entirely modern. The crux ansata, the Egyptian symbol of life, which appears on Egyptian monuments in the hands of many of the deities, is not a symbol of blue masonry, but has been borrowed, and is used in some of the higher degrees. Masonry, Mr. Pike said, has not got any emblem of the sun, so that Fanton may have some peculiar symbolism which is not known to us. We have the point in the circle, but not as an emblem of the sun, and we have the blazing star also, but not as an emblem of the sun. While Dr. Fanton's observations may be correct, where he is, we lack on this side of the water the exact knowledge of the facts, and in the absence of those facts it would be useless to speculate.

NOTHING VALUABLE FOUND.

General Pike, in reply to the question whether he thought any good would come out of the discoveries, said not a particle. Nothing valuable had yet been found, and he did not see where the Masonic fraternity could possible derive any advantage from these discoveries. In conclusion he said:—"I have not the slightest idea that Freemasonry, in its present form or shape, had any existence older than the seventeenth century. All attempts to prove that it existed at an earlier date are nonsense. I have expended a large sum of money in the purchase of books, and have studied the subject to see if there was anything in the records of history to show close connection with Masonry, and all I have ever been able to discover is a bare relation of the symbols. The degrees, signs and symbols as now understood among Masons are comparatively modern. I think the Egyptian relics belong to a veritable 'mare's nest.'"

DR. MACKEY SCEPTICAL.

Dr. Albert G. Mackey said that nothing he had read had changed his mind since he had expressed an opinion on the subject a week ago. Nothing of a Masonic character had been revealed. The square, or what is called the square, as decribed, does not in shape accord with the Masonic implement of that name. Its large dimensions prove that it never could have been used as an implement of architecture. Dr. Mackey thinks probable that it was a stone worked up by the builders of the monolith, and for some reason not being applied to its original destination, was left in the foundation where it was found. The trowel is not exclusively an implement of Masonry, and though adopted by the Masons as a symbol, must have been used in all ages by any workman who used mortar. The two altars and the marble said to represent the apron he was satisfied were not Masonic relics. Dr. Mackey says that Dr. Fanton's allusion to the eighteenth degree is inapplicable to the question, because that degree was an offshot of Masonry fabricated just before the middle of the eighteenth century. The most credulous writers do not pretend to trace them beyond the beginning of the seventeenth century, but their theory is not accepted. The same may be said of all the higher degrees. In 1723 the only Masonry known was that of the first three degrees, so that any discovery of relics in a monolith or any other structure erected at so early a period as Cleopatra's Needle could not be referred to high degrees, which were not fabricated until at least two thousand years after. Dr. Mackey says that he feels confident in his original scepticism of the so-called Masonic relics.

—A whip with a lash six feet long and an inch thick is used to drive hogs in the Chicago slaughter houses. An experienced man can take out a piece of a hog's tough hide at every stroke. Another instrument of torture is a pliant strip of wood with a heavy knob at the end, with which the brutes' snouts are whacked. A wagon follows every drove to pick up the disabled hogs.

—A number of Irishmen hold commands in the armies both of Chili and Peru. The chief officer of the Peruvian artillery is a Col. O'Horgan, and according to the gazette of Lima, there are five Majors, thirteen Captains and over two score of officers of inferior grade, either Irish by birth or descent, fighting in the army of Peru, while the Irish element in the victorious forces of the hostile republic is even greater.

—The Statistics Bureau at Rome estimates the population of the Eternal City at the close of the past year at 296,232. The number of deaths in 1879 averaged 24.7 per thousand, which goes far to show that the climate is not so unhealthy as is generally claimed. At Naples the averaged number of deaths in the same year was 26 per thousand, at Trieste 35, at Paris 24.9, at Brussels 33, London 27, and Buda-Pesth 32.

MASONS DISAGREEING.

The Antiquity of Their Order Again Stoutly Affirmed—Colored Men's Masonic Lodges—The Phrase "Free and Accepted Masons" Elucidated.

(New York Herald.)

Mr. Jerome Buck, editor of the *Spirit of the Times*, sat at his desk on which he does so much of his work in his library in the rear parlor of his home in East Eighteenth street. He was surrounded by statuary and paintings and engravings, not the least noteworthy of which is a fac-simile of Shakespeare's tombstone. Surmounting the bookcases are masks, taken immediately after death, of the great Napoleon, Pitt, Sheridan, Curran, Grattan, Sir Isaac Newton and Haydn, and on the shelves underneath are law books and works on Masonry, poetry, fiction, travels, biography, politics, sporting and even theology—in short, an editor's library. Mr. Buck dissents from the views that are taken by those Masons who find the origin of Masonry in the seventeenth century, and his dissent might be assumed to be that of a mere bookish man were it not that he is Grand Master of St. Nicholas Lodge, No. 321, F. and A. M., and has been for three years the representative in New York of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and representative of the Grand Chapter of Pennsylvania and is Eminent Commander of York Commandery, Knights Templar, and Orator of the Ancient and Accepted Rite, thirty-second degree. "No, sir," he said, taking down the "History and Articles of Masonry"—a book, by the way, that he bought from the British Museum—"Masonry is not the modern institution that some of the brethren believe it to be, as I shall prove to you before you have read the title pages of half the works on Masonry that you see in this unique library of mine. Here is a reproduction of the original black-letter text of manuscript, No. 23,198, in the British Museum, and the editor of this book, after careful study, infers from the character of the handwriting and the form of contractions employed by the scribe that the manuscript was most probably written in the latter part of the fifteenth century. By whom or for whom it was originally penned there is no means of ascertaining; but from the style it may be conjectured to have belonged to some master of the craft, and to have been used in assemblies of Masons as a text book of the traditional history and laws of the fraternity. Now, sir, here is a quotation from that black-letter MSS. on vellum, in the British Museum, that every Mason will recognize:—

And his brother Jubal or Tubal was (the) founder of music and song, as Pythagoras saith in (the) "Ethemologica," and the same saith Isidore in his "Ethemologies," in the sixth book; there he saith that he was the first founder of music and song, and of organ and trumpet, and he found that science by the sound of ponderation of his brother's hammers, that was Tubal Cain.

"Now, there is another work," Mr. Buck said, closing the "Articles of Masonry" and taking down a larger volume. "Here is David Vinton saying:—'As Christianity and civilization progressed Masonry also rose into esteem. We find that it was early introduced into Great Britain by the Romans; Cæsar particularly and the other Roman generals who succeeded him were reckoned patrons and protectors of the craft.' So you see," Mr. Buck continued, laying down his books and lighting another cigar, "we have documentary proof that Masonry existed in England anterior to the reign of Edward IV. I will give you more of it before you go. The *Herald's* investigations, evolving the diverse views of Masons," Mr. Buck went on to say, "are drawing into our great Order men of scholarship and distinction who have not heretofore dreamed of becoming Masons."

WHAT MASONRY IS.

Mr. Buck was not, it is inferred, altogether favorably impressed with some of the Masons whom he found in his travels in Europe, for, turning aside from the antiquity of the institution, he said:—"Abroad Freemasonry is an aristocratic institution; here it is democratic. Its purpose, however, all over the world, is or should be to teach the immortality of the human soul and the existence of a living God, and to inculcate charity and humanity among all mankind. It is an allegory veiled in symbols—'the handmaid of religion,' as Lord Bacon very prettily says. Indeed, the daughter of the bosom of the Catholic Church, and when Rome was the focus of civilization the Church originated it. There were slaves in those days, and it was forbidden to make a slave a Mason, hence the word 'Free'; and there were freeman who were not builders, but some of those freemen were admitted to this Order, as the ex-President was admitted to the Society of the Cincinnati, and they were known as Accepted Masons. So we have the phrase 'Free and Accepted Masons.' We don't recognize slaves as Masons. In South Carolina the masters make their slaves Masons so that they might accompany them to the lodge as servants; but these bondmen were made Masons in violation of the old and accepted faith. Nor have we had any connection with either the French, the Spanish or the Italian Masons since they banished from their altars the Holy Bible and abolished the tenet that there is a God. And here let me say that the Pope was right in launching his encyclical against Masonry after the Masons of France, Spain and Italy had begun to meddle with the religion of either of those countries. Still, notwithstanding the Supreme Pontiff's anathema, any good Catholic can be a Mason and yet enjoy his fealty to his religion and his country."

Recurring to the antiquity of Masonry—for which Mr. Buck is a stout as well as vivacious champion—he said:—"I fancy that the Elensinian mysteries were a kind of Masonry, intended, as modern Masonry is, to teach the immortality of the soul. I have seen Masons among the Winnebago Indians, and they have