

that used by Darius at Babylon; and Herodotus tells us that the Babylonians used to wear rings. They were originally intended strictly for use as signet rings, and not as ornaments, and their use as such soon spread from the East into Europe. In the Homeric poems there are no traces of the custom of wearing rings, and the earliest rings used in Greece, about Solon's time, were signet rings, for use only. They soon became fashionable as ornaments, however, with precious stones set and engraved in them, dandies crowding their fingers with them up to the nails. The Lacedæmonians always wore iron rings. Some among the German tribes, in the time of Tacitus, wore rings of that metal until they had slain an enemy in war. As for the Romans, the best authorities assert that they received the fashion of ring-wearing from the Greeks, but it probably filtered simultaneously through to both nations from the Pelasgians, who in very olden times settled on the coast of the Mediterranean and kept up friendly intercourse with the Orientals. The Roman rings were always of iron and always strictly for use, but increasing luxury corrupted this primitive fashion. Still, such men as Marius and such families as held "high-toned" principles, never gave up the iron ring. The Roman fast young men made an improvement in the Greek profusion by introducing light rings for summer wear and heavier ones for winter. From the rings of the Roman knights and the officer who had the care of the emperor's state signet in later days, the history of rings comes down to our time without any other very noteworthy remark. Rings play an important part in many Oriental legends, especially Solomon's ring, which, among other marvels, sealed up the refractory Jins in jars and cast them into the Red Sea. A Lydian hero, Gyges, possessed a famous ring which rendered him invisible whenever its stone was turned inward. As Plato tells of the marvelous manner in which he acquired it we could almost fancy he had heard the story told by some Eastern storyteller, so exactly is it like an Arabian night's entertainment. It is remarkable showing the universality of legends which often are the fairy tales of rising generations, that this very same story comes up again in the Welsh romance of "Morte d'Arthur." One who is said to have a ring which possessed this virtue when so handled, and which with Guendolen's

chess-board, was reckoned among the thirteen wonders in Britain. Another famous Greek story tells of the ring of Polycrates. He was warned in the time of his greatest prosperity by a pious king of Egypt to sacrifice whatever article he most valued in order to propitiate Nemesis. Manning a boat, therefore, he rowed out to the open sea and flung into the depths his ring, which was of gold with an emerald gem, the setting of the renowned Theodorus. This being very dear to him, he grieved much over his loss. Five or six days after, however, a fine fish was brought to him, and inside this the royal cooks found the ring much to their master's delight. The chronicler naively adds that "his Egyptian friend, seeing it was impossible to rescue another from destiny," broke off their alliance on hearing of this piece of good fortune. It is curious that the story also had an earlier parentage. Legend there accounts for Solomon losing his wisdom by connecting it with the possession of a marvelous ring. This he one day, in a fit of fondness, intrusted to one of his wives, who flung it into the Kedar, and thereby for a long time rendered the king reckless and foolish. Luckily it was found inside a fish, and on being restored to the king his wisdom also returned to him.

I need not speak of the numberless rings of antiquity which possessed magical, musical, or medicinal virtues in the estimation of the credulous; can we not even now purchase galvanic rings? Nor need I tell how universally the ring has been adopted for the symbols of espousals, betokening eternity in its figure and the surpassing excellence of true love in its material, and how, being worn on the fourth finger, it thereby (so the ancients believed) pressed a vein that ran straight to the heart. It may be noted in passing from this that much curious learning attaches itself to the different fingers on which rings are worn. Originally, says that arrant gossip, Pliny, rings were worn on the fourth finger, then on the second, afterward on the last. Our ancestors who "ran wild in the woods" seem to have preferred the fourth finger. The Monkish verse Miles, "Mercator, Stultus, Marites, Amator," assigns them, counting from the thumb, to the soldier, the merchant, the fool, the husband, the lover. When it is remembered how Hannibal carried enough poison in a ring to kill himself when tired of life, no one need suppose that rings which contain hair per-

fume or a watch are modern discoveries. Ere now there has been a ring which held a familiar token inside of it. Numerous curious rings, or rings which once belonged to celebrated people, are to be found in most museums. I shall only mention one or two interesting specimens. St. Louis is said to have had a ring of flour de lis and daisies, with the motto, "Can we find love beyond this ring?" At an exhibition in London a very fine ring was shown, which was found by a laborer when digging among the ruins of a church, supposed to be of the middle of the sixteenth century. It was a massive plain band of pure gold, with a motto engraved within its hoop "*Deus Corpus, Ing Ver,*" and the initials C. M. entwined by a true lover's knot of peculiar form. What a life romance lay within that ring. Ancient rings were generally massive. Henrietta Maria's, the Queen of Charles I., is thick and large enough to be worn on any modern lady's thumb.

The mottoes on rings form a curious department of archæology. At the present day, perhaps because we are less sentimental than our great-grand parents, no one ever thinks of having more than a few initials engraved within a ring, but during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries it was a very common practice to have mottoes inscribed within the hoop of spousal, nuptial, or merely presentation rings. These were sometimes called "gypsy rings," the East having always been famous for such amulets. The motto itself was called the "posy" or "chanson." Numerous collections of such mottoes have been formed at various epochs.

Ring posies are neither double nor single. The double ones are generally serious, such as

"God our love continue ever
That we in Heaven may live together."

Or

"Let him never take a wife
That will not love her as his life"

Single posies are very varied. Here are two beautiful ones to head our list:—

"God above, and peace and love,"
"God and thee, my comfort be."

Several more worth quoting cannot be classified; I will give them all round, as Perdita distributed flowers to her guests:

"Sweet heart I pray, do not say nay."
"Love me little, but love me long."
"I bid adieu to all but you."
"For a kiss take this."
"Like and take, mislike or sake."
"This and my heart."
"True blue will never stain."

One more must be mentioned—Nerissa's ring—