SOME CURIOUS FACTS.

The Origin of Amber, Crystal and Pearls Explained by an Expert.

"Amber is curious stuff," said a collector of curios to a Washington Star reporter the other day. "It is only comparatively recently that its nature has been known, and even at this day very few people seem to have any notion as to what it is in reality. The ancients regarded it as altogether mysterious and even magical. They found that it was rendered electrical by friction so as to attract light substances, and our word 'electricity' comes from the Greek name for amber, which was 'electron.' A favorite puzzle with them was how the insects so frequently found in amber came to be so situated. Not as a modern poet has phrased it:

—that the thing was either rich or rare,
But how the devil did it get there?

"I have myself seen a chunk of very transparent amber in which a small lizard with five legs was encased, looking as if it might have been alive yesterday, though, doubtless, it had been dead for thousands of years. The mystery regarding this sort of phenomenon is easily enough explained when it is understood that amber is actually the fossil gum of an extinct kind of cone-bearing tree. In the process of hardening it imprisoned the flies and other creatures preserved in the chunks of it that are found to-day. It is discovered plentifully by digging in certain parts of the great plains of North Germany, where the strange tree once flourished. It is also found in considerable quantities along the shores of the Baltic, in the yellow sandstone. At Palmicken, in East Prussia, it is dug in regular mines; elsewhere it is picked from cliffs, and a good deal of it is gathered in the shape of nodules cast up by the waves. The finest specimen of amber in Europe is a cup made of that material, now at the Brighton Museum, England. It was found at Hove some years ago, together with weapons and utensils of stone and bronze, so it is evidently very ancient indeed. In the fourteenth century, and before amber was made into knives and forks with one prong, which were used by princes and church dignitaries, it was more valuable than gold then. Now it is worth from $2 to $50 a pound, according to its quality. The most important use made of it is for meerschaum and other pipes. Meerschaum, by the way, is a material dug out of the earth in Turkey; it comes in boxes holding fifty pounds, and valued at from $20 to $300. The dust and chips obtained from it in the process of manufacture are worked into pipes, this material being called 'imitation meerschaum.' Amber dust is melted, and the product is what is sold as 'amberine.'"

"What a very beautiful sphere of crystal this is!" said the newspaper man, taking in his hand a cool globe that looked like a huge dewdrop, which the collector handed him for examination.

"Yes, that is a pretty specimen. I suppose you are aware of the theory entertained by the ancients regarding such rock crystal. They thought it was actually ice frozen to great density by duration of time, congealed beyond liquidation. 'Krystallos' in Greek means 'ice.' The famous writer on natural philosophy, Pliny, who wrote more facts that were not true than ever any man collected together before or since, says the crystal is undoubtedly water frozen by cold so intense that nothing can melt it again. Roman ladies of that time were accustomed to carry such spheres as this one in their hands during hot weather for coolness. It was the thing also to have the material worked into wine jugs and other vessels. Nero had two drinking cups of crystal worth $3,000 each, and a crystal ladle also; but when he learned that he had lost his kingdom he broke them, lest they fall into the hands of any one else. A crystal lens was employed in Rome to kindle the sacred vestal fire. Great care was taken not to put the crystal ware in a warm place for fear that it would melt. The most remarkable discovery of crystal on record was made in 1867 above the Tiefen glacier by a party of tourists, a single cave in the granite yielding 1,000 crystals of from 50 to 100 pounds weight."

"And what is this?"

"That," replied the collector, "is a diminutive Chinese god, covered with a coat of pearl by a real pearl oyster. On such parts of the coast of the Flowery Kingdom as produce pearl oysters a regular business is often made of manufacturing pearls artificially by introducing into the shells of the live oysters foreign objects of various kinds. You doubtless know that the pearl is a morbid symptom in the bivalve. A grain of sand or some such substance getting into the oyster produces irritation and the animal proteous itself by covering the objectionable particle with coating after coating of its own pearly secretion. The interruption of light by the successive coats of which the pearl is formed in this way gives it its beautiful luster. Taking advantage of this habit of the pearl oyster the ingenious Chinaman prices it gently open and puts in whatever he likes, may be a little figure of a god like this. The oyster goes to work and covers it with pearl, until after a few months the idol is a pearl idol."

FREAK OF A HAND.

Blown Through a Smoke-Stack and Caught on a Rod.

Friday, June 20, Frederick Miller and David Heller, two employes at the furnace at the rolling-mills, were killed by a premature explosion of Hercules powder while blasting out salamander from the bottom of the furnace, says the Brazil Times. Miller was standing directly over the drilled hole at the time of the explosion and was terribly torn and disfigured. Both arms were blown off, but one was found. Every effort to find the other arm proved fruitless until a month later. The workmen saw an object clinging to one of the stay-rods that help to support and keep in position the stacks on the top of the furnace. Through curiosity they climbed to the top and they saw a sight that not only filled them with horror but with wonder. There in full sight of all was a man's hand, with only the stub of an arm attached, tightly clasping the rod above mentioned. There can be no doubt but that the hand is that of the unfortunate Miller. The only theory known for the strange freak of the bodyless hand is that the hand was blown out the top of the high stack, and in coming down the muscles, still active, contracted when the hand struck the rod and fastened to it with a deadly grip. From the position in which Miller was standing the hand could not have reached the position it occupied other than in the above manner. The muscles could not have relaxed much after first contracting else the hand would have fallen.

Theory and Practice.

There is a good deal of difference between theory and practice, but no man can be a success without a sprinkling of both. Theory is the scaffold on which the laborers stand. It is the line which makes out the work; but without practice the edifice would not be reared, the work would not be done. Theory is the guide-board that tells the traveler where to go, but practice is the fellow that gets there. Both are necessary; both are good in their way; but too much of one spoils the other. Theory is a good thing to keep on hand for use in case of emergency, but it takes money to pay taxes. Without theory, though, you wouldn't have any thing to pay taxes on.—Ram's Horn.

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IN A ROMAN CONVENT.

The Life of Monks and Lay-Brothers Described by Dr. Parkman.

The lay-brother appeared at daybreak, and told me that in fifteen minutes I was to join the Italians in retreat, and go with them to mass, writes Dr. Francis Parkman, in Harper's Magazine. The mass was followed by another sermon, after which we were all summoned to coffee in the room where we had taken tea the evening before. The report of my heresy had got abroad, and I found myself an object of curious attention.

After coffee we were dismissed to our chambers for an hour, and then listened to another sermon in the chapel. This consumed the morning till eleven o'clock, when a bell rang for dinner, and monks and laymen together moved in solemn procession to the refectory. The monks went first, the Superior at their head, then followed the laymen, and while the procession was forming in the corridor they all kept up the dismal, unintermitted chanting. The refectory was a long, high, dimly-lighted hall. A table of bare wood was stretched across the farther end for the dignitaries of the convent, and was continued down both sides. Here, on right and left, sat the rest of the monks, forty or fifty in number, and the laymen sat below them, nearer the door. The seats were wooden benches, placed on the inner side of the tables only. On the wall over the heads of the dignitaries was a fresco of the Last Supper, as usual in refectories, while on the side walls hung grim pictures of saints with upturned eyes and palms pressed together. High up, near the ceiling, was a small pulpit. The entire hall was whitewashed above and panelled with oak below.

At the head of the tables stood the Superior, who was General of the whole order, a tall, portly man with a stern and austere countenance. The monks, motionless and in dead silence, stood ranged on right and left, robed in black from head to foot, and wearing on the breast the badge of their order—a heart surmounted by a cross. Their harsh, cadaverous faces bespoke the rigor of their discipline, which is extremely severe. When all were in their places the Superior raised his finger, and the whole assemblage broke out into an other chant. When at last it was ended the finger was raised again, and all took their seats. Not a word was spoken; but a monk entered the pulpit from a narrow door in the wall, and in drawling, monotonous tones read a Latin sermon, which lasted throughout the meal.

He had hardly begun when a file of lay-brothers entered, each carrying a receptacle formed of three trays, one above the other, connected by an upright wooden rod, and holding a great number of bowls and small dishes. The monks were served first. Before them were set bowls of a dismal-looking vegetable soup, along with dishes of dried pease boiled whole, and swelled to a wonderful size by the process. Each then drew a cup, a fork and a wooden spoon from a drawer in the table, and with a rueful countenance proceeded to eat, first filling the cup from an earthen bottle of cheap wine which stood on the board before him.

We of the laity fared better, being served with rice, eggs, fish and dried fruit. The Italians seemed little edified by the Latin sermon, which few of them could have understood. The meal was followed by a prayer, with low responses from the monks, after which they all filed off through the dim galleries to their dens, looking like living originals of the dreary portraits ranged along the walls.

When I had got to my chamber and was refreshing myself with the Pioneers, one of them came in to convert me. "My father," said I, "I am afraid your kindness will be thrown away."

But he clapped me on the knee, and exclaimed cheerfully: "Ah, figlio, you will be a good Catholic soon. No doubt of it."

There was an amusing vivacity in him, quite different from his extreme solemnity when at dinner. In the course of his talk, which was rambling, though pious, he kept offering me his snuff-box, freely using it himself meanwhile; and when he thought he had made a good hit in his argument, he would wink at me with a comical look of triumph, on which we both fell to laughing. At length the bell rang for more prayers and sermons in the chapel, and this sprightly old apostle went back to his cell.

After the sermon the laymen were turned out to walk for a while in the convent garden, attended by Padre Luca. He was not, I think, one of the Passionist brotherhood, but a secular priest, and his pleasant, plump, good humored countenance contrasted strangely with the dry, leathery visages of the monks. As we walked up and down the paths, shaded with olives and oleanders, he took me by the arm and talked of matters of faith, stopping from time to time at the little groups of Italians, who, after reverently kissing his hand, began to chat and laugh with him in an easy familiarity, gracefully tempered with respect. He seemed to have their full affection and confidence, at which, judging by what I saw of him, I did not wonder.

UNINVITED VISITORS.

It Is to Be Hoped That All of Them Will Read This Article.

It seems as if measures ought to be taken to put an end to promiscuous visiting; in regard to which there is evidently no difference of opinion, writes a correspondent of the Country Gentleman. In these days of incompetent servants and anxious housekeepers, even the dearest friends can not feel quite sure of a cordial welcome. But when a horde of uninvited guests precipitate themselves with colossal effrontery upon a quiet, and perhaps frugal family, it becomes a most exasperating and intolerable nuisance. It is worse, if possible, than taking boarders, because visitors expect to be entertained—and liberally entertained—in many cases.

One of the most hospitable of hospitable Westerners said that he gave up his home and endured a boarding-house, because he was "tired of keeping a hotel." Another gentleman declared that he would put a small-pox notice on his house if it would keep away undesired visitors. And one lady wrote to some friends urging them pathetically to visit her, because now she would like to have some one in her house "whose society she could enjoy." A Western man, traveling with his wife and niece, thought it would be very fine to visit the Governor of a certain Eastern State. He never had seen any member of the family, but a niece of his had married one of his sons. He drove up to the house, and had his trunks deposited before the door. The Governor's wife, however, was a woman of dignity and determination, and the Western travelers did not see the inside of that stately mansion. They departed with trunks unpacked, and also with a good deal of wondering astonishment.

Of course, this cruelly destroys the beautiful halo surrounding the hospitable home with open doors ever ready for the entrance of "angels unawares." But when good Robert Collyer naively declares that he does not wish to "monopolize those angels," sinners surely may be pardoned if they, too, rebel.

Supposing each person should put this notice on his house—"No uninvited visitors received"—would even that be effectual?

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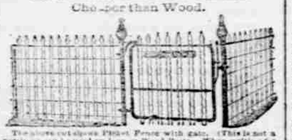

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Apr. 25, '90-1y

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CARE OF THE HANDS.

Little Things That Will Keep Them in Good Condition.

Probably there is no one thing that makes girls shrink from house-work more than the effect it has on the hands, especially in cold weather, says Health. It is a real trial to sit down to the piano and spread a stained, rough hand on the ivory keys; or to take one's pen in an unsightly hand to answer a letter; or to pick up a bit of embroidery, if it is only that on perforated hose, and use the needle when every thing that touches the hands sticks to them because of their roughness. Sewing on woolen or silk is at such times a severe penance. There are methods of preserving the hands measurably against the destructive effect of dish-washing, scrubbing and the like. They should be kept as much out of the water as possible, and when the work is done they should be washed clean and rubbed dry. Borax water is good for washing the hands. Coarsely ground oat-meal is a fair substitute for soap in washing the hands. White unscented soaps are the best, as the highly scented soaps are usually made of rancid fats. A solution of oxalic acid will remove fruit stains from the hands, but it must not touch an abraded surface. After washing and drying the hands thoroughly, glycerine and spirits of camphor in equal parts mixed together is good to rub over them. Cocoanut oil is a pleasant application. Wearing kid gloves two sizes too large is helpful in preserving the hands. One should have an old pair of gloves to take up ashes in, to sweep in and to wear in all dirty work that permits the wearing of gloves. If gloves are dipped in not very hot linseed oil they become waterproof, and may be worn while washing dishes. A pair of canton flannel mittens is pleasant to wear when hanging out the clothes on a cold morning. Frequent rubbing of the hands will promote circulation and keep the skin in good condition. To take the best care of the nails, soak the ends of the fingers in hot water for some time, until the skin is softened, then dry, and with a pair of nail scissors thin off all the dead skin about the nails and trim the nails neatly.

WOMAN'S HAPPIEST HOUR.

Love Has More to Do with It Than Any Thing Else.

I have had it suggested to me by a friend staying in the house at this time, writes "The Duchess" in the Ladies' Home Journal, that the happiest moment in a woman's life is when, having brought the man of her heart to the point of proposing, she makes him wait a minute or two for her answer. To know and feel his anxiety—to understand that the anxiety is all caused through love of her—this would constitute a bliss not to be rivaled, a bliss the sweeter for being so short-lived, and because of the fact that it can never occur again. But this strikes me as being a little feline in its nature, just a trifle cruel.

For myself, I should think there would be keener joy in that moment when a woman is able to say "Yes" to the most important question of her life, and to give herself freely and gladly to the one she loves.

I think, however, the question a difficult one to answer. There are so many different natures, that what would be extreme happiness to one woman might be only mild delight to another.

Some women, for example, have the maternal instinct more strongly developed than others, and for them the vocal cry of their first-born must cause an uplifting of the heart that no other feeling on earth could outdo. All in that supreme moment is forgotten!

The ambitious woman must find her best hour when she has attained the summit of her hopes, and victory crowns her with its laurel wreath.

To the woman standing over the sick bed that contains the one being dearest to her on earth, can there be an hour more rife with thankful happiness than when the doctor declares that there is hope? O, magic word! Hope that the adored one will be given back to her from the very jaws of death!

And yet, after all, I think Love, "that great master" as he has been justly called, has more to do with a woman's sweetest hour than any thing else on earth. To love, and to feel one's self beloved—that is, indeed, to know the best of life.

SYNONYMS FOR MOTHER.

Children of Culture Taught Love-Making Instead of Veneration.

Mother, that dear, sweet, matchless name, synonym for the tenderest, truest love man ever knew, has been eliminated from the fashionable vocabulary, says the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. In the revised edition of the gilt-edged lexicon it is bracketed obsolete.

Only a few years ago war was made on the common pronunciation of the word mamma, and in spite of usage the French method was carried, that is, with the accent on the last syllable. Now, mother, mam-ma, and old-fashioned "ma" have been set aside as commonplace and various terms of endearment substituted. One of the wealthiest ladies in New York has taught her two little sons to call her "precious." "Dear one" is the favorite address in the home of a rich and distinguished politician, and the scions of the largest estate in the country call the young mother "love of mine" and the proud father "Prince Charming." But the most common term of endearment among the children of the upper class is "sweetheart." Coming from the little folks, scarcely able to utter the sounds of the letters, it is very pretty, especially at table or in the nursery, when the small child has a grievance or a heartache. It is not, however, a convenient or callable name at the foot of the stairs, when the immediate presence or audience of a gentlewoman is needed. Since the abrogation of "dearest," which had as long a run as the Fauntleroy sash and collar, "dearie" has enjoyed considerable popularity, but of late intrenchments have been made upon the lovers' territory and all their tender appellations appropriated.

"Sweet one," "my own," "lovely," "heart's-ease," "dear heart," "queen," "darling" and "sweetness" are some of the pet names to which loving and lovable mothers respond. And after all there is something very tender and very sweet in this love-making of parents and children, albeit the dignity implied by plain "mother" may appear to be lacking. It is just possible that there is too much severity in our relations with the little ones, and that a better, truer, firmer friendship may accrue from this child worship. One thing is certain, that there can be no estrangement between the real lovers of home. It is the sweet privilege of every mother to be the idol of her daughters and the sweetheart of her sons, and she has only herself to blame if the child-lover tires of her and in the noonday of life forgets the glory that brightened his morning. "Mother" may do for the daughter and son that the marriage ties will bring to the roof tree, but if a sweeter, dearer name can be invented, by all means let us have it to use, to hear and to love.

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