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The Crime of 1902

FROM Paris comes the terrible news that M. Verneuil, a chemist, has succeeded in making rubies at no considerable cost. This will doubtless prove a sharp affliction to many persons addicted to display of rubies on their surfaces, as well as to some who have them under lock and key for sale to the others; for of course the value of the natural stones must eventually fall to that of the artificial, if the two kinds are identical in composition, hardness and color. Rubies will perhaps go out of use altogether, for gems accessible to the poor are worthless to the rich, and gems worthless to the rich are not wanted by the poor. The beauty of the ruby will remain, but so will human nature.

Having few rubies and, I trust, not much human nature, I am disposed to regard M. Verneuil's crime as a public benefaction. If he will pursue his experimentation to its "logical conclusion," giving us cheap diamonds, pearls, emeralds, turquoises and the rest, many of us will rise up (from our seats away back) and call him blest.

Victims of the habit of wearing pretty pebbles have always accounted for their affliction by affirming the beauty of the pebbles. If that is why they wear them they will continue to wear them when they are common and cheap—when M. Verneuil and his anarchist co-workers in the laboratory have put them "within the reach of all." Does anyone believe that they will? Why do they not now wear (and confess it) the paste microscope only?

The "preciousness" of these things is their cost. A woman "ablaze with diamonds" is a woman silently shouting: "I am rich!" If her jewels did not say this, and say it plainly, she would throw them into the nearest gutter—nay, her contempt of them might receive such avowal as giving them to the poor.

Lo, the poor Indian whose untutored taste persuades him to personal adornment with porcupine quills, eagle feathers, bear-claws and the tail of a wildcat! They are lovely—no doubt of that—but if porcupines, eagles, bears and wildcats were abundant, accessible and amiable he would make himself a thing of glory and consequence with something less easily acquired. Please to consider the peculiar significance lurking in the good old word "bravery" applied to the fine attire and ornaments of the lowly. Does it not distinctly point to a primitive state when personal adornment was the prize of courage in the chase? "Bravery" is the finery of persons not far removed from a state of nature; our own finery we do not call so, not even in poetry. A fairly good name for it is "pursery."

In the progress of the race away from primitive conditions and barbaric modes of thought and feeling, the female contingent does not walk at the head of the procession. Women are more "conservative" than men: they are last to renounce the habits and customs of the ancestral savage. Witness their addiction to powder and paint. We have all inherited the tendency to daub our faces, a once useful custom, for by differing designs tribes and families were distinguished from one another at a glance. Attentive to other matters, mostly nonsense and mischief, men have suffered the practice to fall into disuse, but women—whom God bless!—continue it as

when knighthood was in flower, accounting for it by hardily affirming its service to the complexion. Let it go at that; that is a better reason than can be urged for defacing the female periphery with pebbles, candidly inutile and in open apostasy to the gospel of Beauty Unadorned. Wherefore, that we may have surcease of the pretty-pebble habit in the otherwise supportable female of our species as she has been handed down to us from her noisy sessions in primeval tree-tops, let us pray for success of M. Verneuil and his accomplices in their hardy effort to discredit and vulgarize the product of gem farm and pearl pool.