

For Luck!

A CURIOUS COLLECTION OF GAMBLERS' MASCOTS.

BY LEWIS PERRY.

LT has been the writer's lot, during many years of journalistic wanderings, to gaze upon a number of collections of curiosities, some beautiful, some weird, some gruesome.

Several of these have cropped up in all sorts of unexpected places, where the ordinary citizen would never dream of looking for them. And all have been in the possession of enthusiasts, whose varied tastes in selecting a particular subject to which to devote time and earnest attention are worthy of the reflections of sage or cynic. Only a week or two ago, by a mere accident, I came across what I might term a unique little lot of genuine curiosities, inasmuch as the originality of the subject cannot be disputed. For where can the second collection of gamblers' mascots be found? I should like to know.

In one of the most picturesque hotels in the beautiful Isle of Wight a guest, as a special favour, may be invited to look upon some very curious charms, which have been carried about by a number of the most successful visitors to the gambling palaces of the Continent.

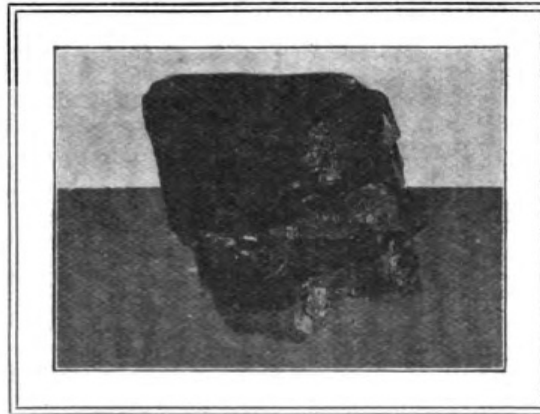
This collection is the property of a once well-known and now retired cross-Channel captain, a typical seafaring, tempest-tossed worthy, whose good-humoured features and hearty laugh are calculated to make the most morose of his guests begin to look out for the better side of life.

Sojourning for a little rest in Shanklin, I happened to hear of the captain's quaint collection, and in the interests of the readers of this Magazine I soon discovered its whereabouts. It certainly proved worth the trouble of tracking. Besides being unique as a

collection, the items on view suffice to throw a strong side-light on the curious superstitious notions of the confirmed gambler.

During the captain's cross-Channel paddling many thousands of visitors to Continental gambling-tables came under his charge. Were this the place for such items I could reproduce many remarkable incidents of the gambling world now stored away in the capacious memory-box of the man who talked with winners and losers alike. But I must keep to my subject, for to every article in the captain's collection of mascots is attached a little history sufficient to fill any space at my disposal in these columns.

Take, for instance, the piece of common coal which is illustrated on this page. There is nothing extraordinary in its appearance; but the gambler to whom it once belonged would not, at one period of his life, have parted with it for a big sum of money. And for a very good reason. A regular visitor to Monte Carlo, infatuated with the gambler's passion,



THE LUCKY PIECE OF COAL.

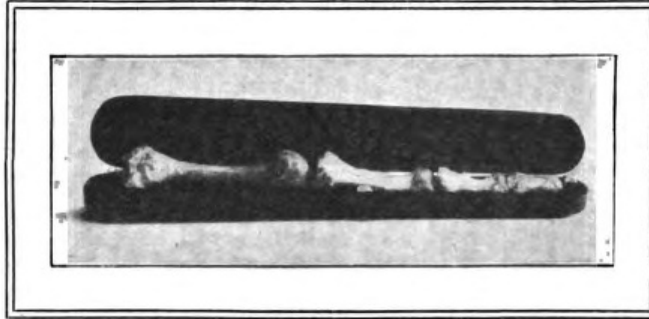
he had found luck entirely against him. He lost, and lost again and again, but his passion increased with his losses, and after several visits he was all but ruined. One evening, whilst wandering, morose and despairing, along the quay, even contemplating suicide, he passed a barge from which some coal was being unloaded. As he walked under the swinging crane a little bit of the shiny mineral fell from the carrying bucket and landed--*in the gambler's coat-pocket!* As superstitious as most gamblers are, he concluded it was a lucky omen, and hastened away to raise a little money for the night that was either to save or ruin him. Next morning he left the tables with over 30,000 francs in his

possession—his night's winnings. From that time his luck turned—he never left the tables except as a winner, sometimes of a small sum, more often the amount was considerable and occasionally huge. He never failed to carry his lucky bit of coal about with him, stowed away in a secure corner of his safest pocket. That man is now immensely wealthy, with an estate in Scotland. Returning from France eleven years ago, determined to be satisfied with his earnings and to settle down at home as a country gentleman, on saying "good-bye" to the captain who had safely piloted him so many times across the Channel he presented him with a handsome cheque and his wonderful mascot, told him the story of his luck, and bade him go and win a fortune. The worthy captain accepted the presents with thanks, but, not having been born with the gambling instinct, he simply introduced the mascot to his collection of curiosities, where it remains to this day.

A somewhat gruesome little item in the mascot collection are the right forefinger bones of a man who was the seventh son of a seventh son. This, strangely enough, was carried by a well-known theatrical lady in the form of a brooch when she visited the tables at Monte Carlo or Aix-les-Bains, and she asserted that it always brought her luck. But one night, as she stretched across the table to rake in her winnings, the ornament fell from her throat, and, striking the edge of the table, broke at the knuckle. She had it immediately repaired, but, according to her story, the charm had departed from it, and

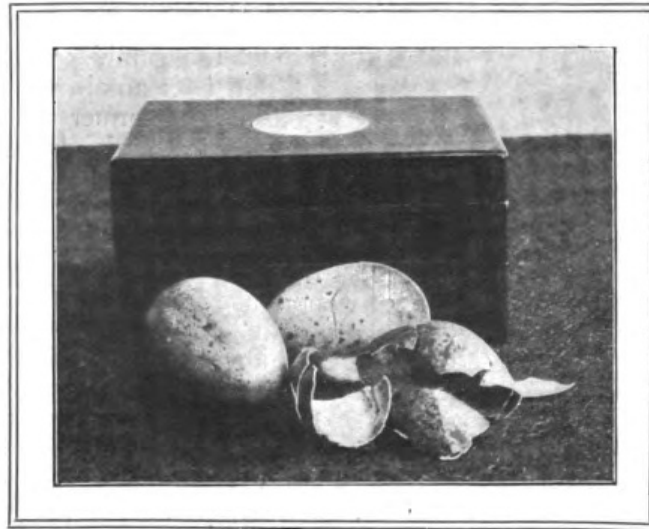
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she was so unlucky as to lose all her money in a few days. Then, having to return to England, whilst crossing the Channel on her way home she presented the charmless mascot to the captain as a contribution to his collection of similar curiosities.



THE RIGHT FOREFINGER BONES OF THE SEVENTH SON OF A SEVENTH SON.

one amongst the captain's collection. To this one, however, a tragic history is attached. The former owner had frequently boasted of his luck in the cafés, attributing his good fortune to the possession of the mascot, which he would exhibit for the admiration of the bystanders. He carried the eggs in a well-padded gold case of great value, and was most particular lest those who inspected it should crush the contents, for the superstition runs that luck departs immediately when even one egg is broken. One night the owner was not at his accustomed place for *rouge-et-noir*. He was missed from his hotel next morning, and on search being made his dead body was found bruised and beaten almost out of recognition. The mascot was missing; but it was anything of



THE THREE RAVEN'S EGGS WHICH LED TO A MURDER.

a mascot to the murderer, for through it he was traced, arrested, and condemned. The case was locked when recovered from the murderer, and on being opened one of the eggs was found to be broken. The mascot came into the possession of an English detective to hand over with other things to the murdered man's

There is an ancient gambling superstition which holds in the highest value the possession of three raven's eggs—necessarily the first three of a young bird.

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THE CLERGYMAN'S CHINESE COIN.

relatives. The captain having expressed a wish for the eggs, the detective conveyed his message to the legal owners, who very graciously sent them to the collector.

About ten years ago there was a certain English clergyman who occasionally "did a flutter" at Aix-les-Bains, and was usually in the best of luck.

Unfortunately for the said cleric, people



THE THREE SALT BAGS WHOSE OWNER WON A FORTUNE.

were apt to talk of such doings when they returned to England. A communication from his superior was dispatched in hot

haste. The poor clergyman, you may be sure, did not wear his usual winning smile when he read it. He at once set out homewards, determined to give up for ever his nightly search for healthy excitement—and hard cash. On his way across from Havre he confided the secret of his gold-winning success to our worthy friend the captain, handing him over, at the same time, the ministerial "mascot"—a very old and very large Chinese coin—to be added to the collection.

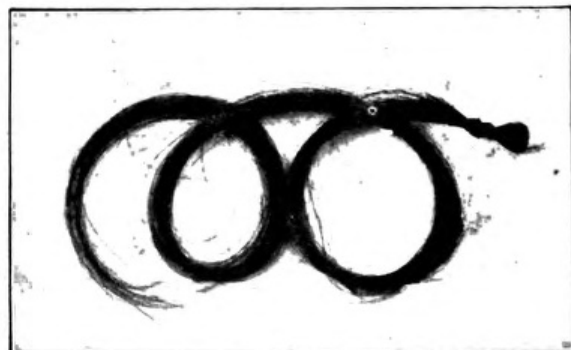
One of the most quaintly curious of mascots is that one formed of three little silk bags (whose colour was once white) filled with salt, and suspended on a finely-plaited catgut cord. This extraordinary "charm" was worn around the neck and next to the



THE LADY'S THUMB-RING WHICH BROUGHT WEALTH.

skin of the gambler whose particular fancy selected it as an aid to the fortunes of the tables. The former wearer was a Spaniard residing in England, who never failed to visit regularly one or other of the Continental towns where play is *the* thing. For many years, however, he has retired to his native land rich enough to assume a position of importance amongst his countrymen.

An oddly-shaped thumb-ring is also included in the collection. It was once the mascot worn by a very young and charming lady, who, it is said, brought back wealth to



THE "GOLDEN HAIR MASCOT,"

an impoverished estate, but died shortly afterwards, her constitution having been ruined through over-excitement and late hours.

Readers with retentive memories for such things will scarcely need to be reminded of the sensation caused some seventeen or eighteen years ago at Monte Carlo when a beautiful lady of good family plunged to such an extent, and so successfully, that she came as near as may be to bringing about that little event known as "breaking the bank." She was accounted so lucky by her gambling friends that it became quite a usual thing for an application to be made by one of her hundreds of friends for a lock of her hair as a mascot. Her beautiful golden tresses must have suffered severely, so numerous were the mascots of this particular brand. Some indeed whispered that, for the sake of her personal appearance and the retention of the good-will of her friends, the stock of a well-known Nice wig-maker was called upon pretty frequently. Be that as it may, the luck of the holders of the "golden hair mascot" was not always remarkable. Several who carried them and won large sums of course put their good fortune down to the mysterious influence of the mascot. Those who became broke themselves had another opinion to vouchsafe on the subject. The lock of hair which through the art of photography we are enabled to reproduce in these pages was carried by an elderly relative of the lucky lady, and proved a mascot

to him inasmuch that, although he did not make an enormous fortune, he succeeded in closing a two months' battle with the bankers with the loss of only a few francs. Which is good luck of a sort!

A piece of common boot-leather cut in the shape of a horseshoe would not seem at first glance likely to make a remunerative claim on the attentions of good fortune. But as this particular mascot at one time formed portion of a shoe worn by a poor woman who tramped eighty-nine miles in three days on the Lourdes pilgrimage, its worth as a luck-giver may not appear so trivial. At any rate, it and a prominent representative of



THE HORSESHOE MADE FROM THE BOOT OF A LOURDES PILGRIM.

English law and order were at one time inseparable companions during the Long Vacation. It is many years, however, since this mascot was added, by consent of the owner, to the collection.

There are several more knick-knacks included in the captain's interesting little museum, amongst others being a one-pie piece, value about the tenth of a penny, but which the former owner once declined to part with for one thousand francs! Poor fellow, he placed too much trust in that mascot, plunged, and never rose again!

Another coin mascot is an English halfpenny set with diamonds and other precious stones. The lady who carried it, after a run of unaccountable bad luck, sold the "lucky" trifle to find money to go on with, and lost every franc of the price within ten minutes of the sale.



A ONE-PIE PIECE—A MASCOT WHICH FAILED.



A HALFPENNY SET WITH JEWELS.