

**BURLINGTON FINE ARTS CLUB.
EXHIBITION OF A COLLECTION
OF SILVERSMITHS' WORK OF
EUROPEAN ORIGIN**

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Burlington Fine Arts Club. Exhibition of a Collection of Silversmiths' Work of European Origin
by J. Starkie Gardner

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J. STARKIE GARDNER

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Burlington Fine Arts Club



(3)

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ON opening the present Exhibition of Silversmiths' Work to the Members of the Club and their friends, the Committee desire to place on record their grateful appreciation of the special favour constantly shown to the Club for many years by HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY QUEEN VICTORIA. The Queen was a willing contributor of works of art, and showed an example to collectors and owners from which not only this Club, but all lovers of the arts of the past as well as the workers in the arts of the present day, have derived much advantage.

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INTRODUCTION

NATURE has ordained that the world should depend, almost for its existence, on the sun and the moon. Civilization practically decrees that the existence of man should depend in a scarcely less degree upon the supply of gold and silver. It may be doubted whether the sun and the moon, with all their supreme importance to him, ever engrossed the thoughts of primitive man, as gold and silver fill the minds of his descendants to-day.

Though the Collection exhibited is actually confined to silver, the richer hues of gold pervade the cases: for the finest works in the less precious of the sister metals have commonly been gilt, not only to increase the splendour of their effect, but perhaps also to avert the liability to tarnish. In dealing with an assemblage of objects in one of these metals it is hardly possible to divorce either the idea or the actual presence of the other. This has been recognized in all ages, and the working of silver has always been placed under the control of companies of goldsmiths, on whom the duties of assaying and hall-marking silver have devolved.

Gold and silver have, so long as records exist, been set apart as the "precious metals." Until the discovery of certain extremely rare metals, in recent years, none compared with them in intrinsic value. Though possessing similar properties, and equally requiring alloys of other metals to fit them for use in the arts, gold, nearly twice as dense or heavy as silver, is

also by far the more malleable and ductile. Gold also stands alone in being the only metal yellow in colour, though the only other coloured metal known, copper, can be made, by mixture with white metal alloys, to simulate closely the yellow of gold. Gold also possesses the property of not readily combining with oxygen, so that it is often as resplendent when first found as when refined for use. Though sparingly and finely disseminated in its native rocks, the abrasions of time and its own high specific gravity have brought its particles into the beds of streams, where also nuggets are found at the bottom of the water-logged gravels. It was owing to these deposits of gold that early inhabitants found themselves in possession of the precious metal, even in regions such as Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, where little can be extracted directly from the rocks. Thus gold was known to early man, perhaps ages before the more readily oxidizable ores of silver and copper; and while gold is known to semi-barbarism, the use of silver may always be regarded as indicating a certain degree of civilization.

THE TREATMENT OF SILVER

To-day the thinnest film of gold can be electrically deposited, but formerly the object was coated with an amalgam of mercury and gold, the former being subsequently driven off by heating. This is called mercury gilding, and is comparable to the process used in gilding pottery, a definite film of appreciable thickness being the necessary result. No term in England distinguishes gilded silver, but in France it is "vermeil." Plate is known as parcel gilt when gold is applied to parts of the surface. Silver is sometimes partially enamelled with thin films of coloured glass, melted on, or with *niello*, a combination of lead and sulphur, in which heat is also used. Gold wire and plates are sometimes inlaid or pressed into the surface of silver, which is itself used to inlay baser metals. When the surface is to be left exposed it is often whitened by heating, when the copper alloy