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LATTEN SPOONS—AN APPRECIATION

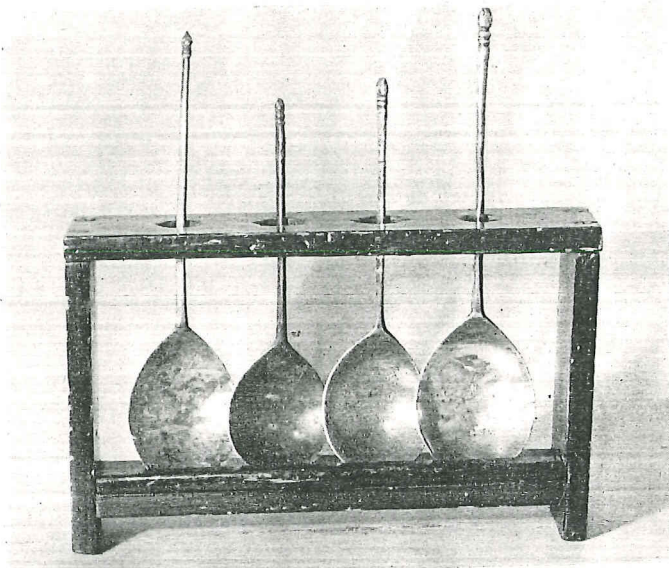
By A. V. SUTHERLAND-GRAEME, F. S. A.

FOR some reason latten spoons seem to have received little attention since the late Mr. F. G. Hilton Price, in 1908, produced his book *Old Base-metal Spoons*. At that time there existed two or three large private collections of spoons, which, though chiefly of pewter, did include many latten specimens. These collections have since been dispersed, and although the pewter portions have been readily absorbed by collectors of that metal, and their whereabouts, in the case of the choicest specimens, are well known, it is otherwise with those of latten and brass. Pewter collectors appear to have been unwilling to mix their metals, as, in all the collections with which I am familiar, I do not know of any latten spoons. It might be said that the yellow metal does not blend with the grey in a pewter room; but it cannot be said that there is no connexion whatever between the two which might be of interest to the collector of pewter, since some, at least, of the early pewterers did, in fact, turn out latten spoons, as will be mentioned later.

The spoons which figure in this article form part of a small collection which was given to me *en bloc* some years ago. Up to that date I had followed the general line, gradually adding pewter spoons to my pewter collection; the only latten spoons which I had seen were in museums, and, since neither they nor their pewter counterparts had been polished, but were for the most part nearly black, it was only by their descriptive labels that they could be distinguished.

I cannot here discuss at length the merits or demerits of cleaning and polishing, and am aware that on this point widely differing views are held. In the case of pewter, where corrosion has taken a deep hold cleaning is obviously impossible if the spoon is to be preserved at all; it is also most undesirable where a spoon is covered by the beautiful patina known as 'pigeon-breast', produced by chemical action in the earth; but, for the rest, I can see no merit in perpetuating the black skin which can quite easily be removed without damage. Let the backs remain as a guarantee of age in an era when clever 'faking' is not unknown, but let the fronts be bright.

The latten spoons of which I was the fortunate recipient were originally



No. I.—FOUR SPOONS OF THE CONE TYPE : THE SO-CALLED 'FINIAL' DIFFERS ONLY VERY SLIGHTLY FROM THESE : OF FOREIGN ORIGIN

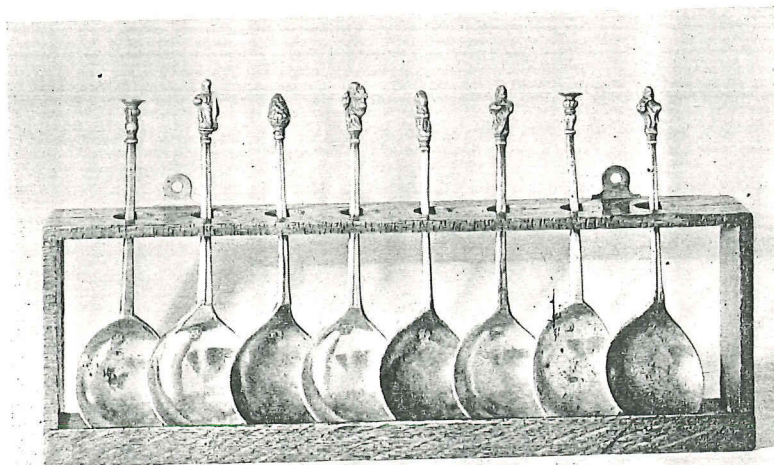
The earliest latten spoons which have come down to us are those which Hilton Price calls 'cones' and 'finials'. They were in use during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and were almost certainly imported. Incidentally, the name 'finial' is hardly an appropriate one. All spoons are known by their upper terminals, usually called 'knops' or 'ends'; 'finial' is a general term, applicable to any ornamental termination, and to attach it to any one type of terminal is misleading.

No. i shows four spoons of the Cone type, from which the so-called 'finial' differs but slightly. As these spoons are almost certainly not of English origin, we are not concerned with their makers.

The beginning of the base-metal spoon trade in England may be assigned to the Fifteenth Century, and the following types, well known in pewter, were made in latten: 'Acorns', 'Lion Sejants', 'Apostles', 'Balusters', 'Seals', 'Strawberries', 'Slipped-in-the-Stalks', 'Puritans' and 'Split ends'.

It is not now possible to say whether their manufacture came under any Guild control, but there is no doubt that some of the makers were, in fact, pewterers, whose existing moulds would possibly serve for certain types.

Hilton Price illustrates a very large number of 'Touches' (makers' marks) which were struck upon pewter and latten spoons, but as regards the latter it is not possible to say that they were struck by pewterers, as the earliest remaining record of touches (touch plate I



No. II.—EIGHT FINE SPECIMENS : SEAL, ST. SIMON, STRAWBERRY, MASTER, LION SEJANT, ST. BARTHOLOMEW, SEAL, ST. PETER AVERAGE LENGTH 6½ INCHES

LATTEN SPOONS

possessed by the Pewterers' Company came into use after the Fire of London (1666), although it includes the marks of men who were actually working some twenty years prior to that date, and this is much too late for the earlier types of spoon.

However, there are always certain exceptions, and, in analysing these marks, it is interesting to note that there are at least three cases in which the identical touch appears upon spoons of both metals. One of these is a small beaded circle containing the initials I.G. with a single dot above and beneath (No. iii).

In this connexion Hilton Price quotes the following extract from Welch's *History of the Pewterers' Company* dated September 23rd, 1567-8: 'it was agreed by the whole Company that there shoulde Be no spones made of Bras or latten or any yelow metall uppon payne that if any person hereafter be found that he doth make any suche spones shall forfeyt and pay for every spone iij s. iiij d. The said Spones were lately Invented by John God . . .'

It might be inferred from the above that John God was the only pewterer who worked in latten, but this is not so, for it appears that at least two other touches are to be found on both metals. One of these is a Gothic W within a beaded circle, which appears on pewter 'balusters' and latten 'seal tops', and the other the initials W.S. with two spoons between, the whole in a beaded circle; this appears upon a 'lion sejant' of latten and a 'slip top' of pewter. Incidentally, if the same maker was responsible for both of these, he must have had a fairly long career. Further, many latten spoons are unmarked; and it is likewise not impossible that pewterers used punches with different symbols from those which they struck upon pewter spoons. In all these circumstances it is difficult to escape the conviction that, to use a modern expression, some sort of 'under the counter' traffic in latten spoons existed among the pewterers, and that John God committed the unpardonable sin of being 'found out'. Incidentally, Hilton Price suggests very reasonably that he, God, may have been the possessor of the I.G. touch.

Latten is a far stronger metal than pewter, and no doubt for that reason the latten spoon became popular and, as Hilton Price says, encroached upon the trade of the pewter-spoon makers; and he gives that reason for the action taken by the Pewterers' Company in 1567-8, quoted above.

I cannot altogether agree with his reasoning; for if the members of the Company were indeed turning out latten spoons, they could hardly be doing it to the detriment of their own livelihood, but rather the reverse. Far more likely was it that the dignity of the Company, and its relations with other metal-working companies, were concerned. However that may be, the ordinance of 1567-8 appears to have had little effect upon the brethren of the craft, as it had to be repeated in 1586-7. After the latter date it would seem that there was a fall in output for a time, but after the turn of the century it increased again. It is, however, possible to discern a distinct difference between the types of touch which were used upon the two metals. Whilst symbols of varying kinds, with initials, continued to be employed for marking pewter, the latten workers made increasing use of larger marks containing one, two, or three reproductions of spoons; this cleavage became more and more marked until, in Charles II's time, the circular touch had been almost abandoned on pewter spoons, but had persisted to the end—and this was virtually the end—of the latten spoon. By this time, of course, the Company's control of the pewterers' craft had begun to show signs of decay, and there is little doubt that spoons were made in pewter, latten and brass by anyone who chose to make them. In any case the two prohibitions of the Pewterers' Company were laid only upon its own members, and there would thus appear to be nothing to prevent provincial spoon-makers from doing what they liked.

Finally, it has long been apparent to me that there is still scope for research into the history of these old spoons, and it is in the

hope that they may stimulate interest in that direction that these introductory notes have been written.

No. ii shows eight of the finest specimens; they are, reading from left to right: Seal, St. Simon (both these by G.P. with 3 spoons); Strawberry (R.B. with Heart); Master (I.G. with 3 spoons); Lion sejant (I.W. with 2 spoons); St. Bartholomew (R.B. with 3 spoons); Seal (P. in crescent upon shield); St. Peter (I.M. dated 1659). The average length is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches; numbers 5 and 8 have been tinned.

In the large spoon rack (No. iv) are, in the top row: Slip (Rose); Writhen, Acorn (both unmarked); Seal (Fleur-de-lys); Writhen (unmarked); Stump (indecipherable). Bottom row: Seal (Rose); Slip (R.B. with 3 spoons); Split (G.G. with Heart); Split (I.P. with 2 spoons); Slip (I.W. with Fleur-de-lys in shield); Seal (indecipherable).



No. III.—A TOUCH USED IN PEWTER AND LATTEN



No. IV.—(TOP ROW) SLIP, WRITHEN, ACORN, SEAL, WRITHEN AND STUMP; (BOTTOM ROW) SEAL, SLIP, SPLIT, ANOTHER SPLIT, SLIP AND SEAL