

ANTIQUES

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Cobwebs & Dust

The Frontispiece

PROBABLY the best introduction to the subject of sculpture in wax which the average collector is likely to encounter is an unassuming little book by Ethel Stanwood Bolton entitled *Wax Portraits and Silhouettes*. It was published in Boston in 1914; a second edition appeared in the year following.

Much of the merit of this book lies in its conscious limitations of treatment. The general subject is almost unbelievably vast. Wax figures, either as votive portraits or as statues of deities, are as old as the oldest civilization. They continued to constitute an important and highly esteemed form of sculpture until, within little more than a century, a false conception of classicism declared against colored statuary as contrary to the canons of art—a notion which, however, found some justification in the tawdry naturalism characteristic of most of the wax-work shows which flourished so abundantly in the nineteenth century.*

In her consideration of the subject Mrs. Bolton confines herself mainly to the miniature relief portraits in wax which have been produced by American artists, or by foreign artists working in this country. Of these, John Christian Rauschner, a Dane, who lived and worked in many states of the eastern seaboard of America early in the nineteenth century, appears to have been most prolific. Mrs. Bolton records fifty-three known examples of his work.

Among these are the portraits of Joseph Conover and his wife, Elizabeth Brown Conover, both now in the possession of a direct descendant of the Conovers, Mrs. S. Megargee Wright, of Philadelphia. Although listed, these portraits have not hitherto

been published. For opportunity to present them here, ANTIQUES is indebted to the generosity of Mrs. Wright.

The two portraits are not quite identical in size, that of Mr. Conover being three and one-half inches high, while that of his better half measures an inch taller. Both are of colored wax, whose tint is here and there accented with brush color, and to whose verisimilitude a bit of real ribbon, a gem stone in a ring, and shiny buttons on a coat lend authority. They date from the year 1810 or thereabouts.

Both examples may be considered as thoroughly representative of Rauschner. He was not a master whose work achieves the almost monumental quality which Patience Wright attained in her wax relief of Washington or reveals the subtle beauties which infuse the medallions of Robert Ball Hughes at his best. Yet Rauschner's portraits possess a good deal of rugged dignity, while their fidelity to fact is quite astonishing. One has to spend very little time in examining these two presentations of Joseph and Elizabeth Conover to realize that he is confronting two well-defined personalities, delineated with unmistakable accuracy by a competent hand.

Acknowledgment Overdue

THE first of a series of articles on pewter by Mr. Howard H. Cotterell, which appeared in ANTIQUES for April, has stimulated inquiry sufficiently active to justify a special word concerning the author.

Mr. Cotterell's residence is at Edgbaston, Birmingham, England. For twenty years or more he has made a special study of old pewter and pewter marks. As a result he occupies something of a special niche of his own in the pewter historians' hall of fame, and is frequently called upon to serve in expertising processes. On the formation in London of the Society of Pewter Collectors, of which Mr. Antonio de Navarro was elected first president, Mr. Cotterell was

*The reader who is curious to dip deeper into the subject of wax portraits will find an excellent treatise, well illustrated, by Julius von Schlosser in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Oesterreichischen Kaiserhauses*: Vol. XXIX, p. 173 et seq. A French discussion, without illustrations, by Spire Blondel, occurs under title of *Les Modeleurs en Cire* in *Gazette des Beaux Arts*: Vols. L & LI.

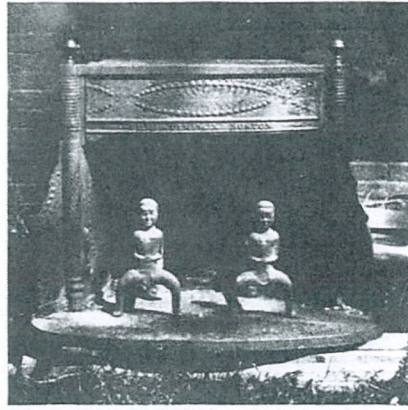
elected first vice-president. He is now president of the society for the year 1923.

Mr. Cotterell is, further, the author of several careful monographs covering certain specific aspects of English and Irish pewter. A definitive work by him, now in press, promises to surpass in authoritative completeness anything on the subject of pewter hitherto published. It is entitled *Old Pewter: Its Makers and Marks*, and is to be brought out by Messrs. Batsford of London.

Mr. Cotterell was asked by ANTIQUES to prepare material calculated to throw definite light on the indices of nationality in old pewter. That he has accomplished his task with rare knowledge and exactitude will be generally and cordially agreed by readers of ANTIQUES. The complete series will occupy three or four issues,—not necessarily in immediate succession.

Heredity in Andirons

In partial reference to previous discussion, a word as to andirons has reached the Attic. Of course everybody is aware of the tradition that the iron Hessians who support the flaming logs of many a New England fireplace were first designed in Boston, or its vicinity, and were cast from the metal of captured British cannon. The early examples of this design have had a numerous progeny, quite undeviatingly alike in appearance.



CAPE COD ANDIRONS
Reprinted from ANTIQUES for July, 1922.

An old time iron foundry on the James River, in Virginia, once turned out andirons fronted by a dignified figure, whose identity is a matter of dispute. The first models may have dated from the very early years of the eighteenth century; but they have since been innumerable cast and recast at other times and in other places. The Cape Cod irons bearing the extraordinary human finials, which Mr. Kent illustrated in ANTIQUES, July, 1922,* seem to bear witness to an ancestry that may be traceable to seventeenth century England. But the design is too frequently encountered today to admit assured recognition of any great age in local examples.

*Vol. II, p. 30 and above.

In the same way the handsome George Washington andirons, here illustrated through the courtesy of Miss Louise Murray, are produceable, and are produced to-



WASHINGTON ANDIRONS
A handsome pair of which duplicates are not uncommon.

day in close duplication, by one or more foundries. In some ways these are among the best of the early cast figures for andirons. Despite some inadequacies of proportion, they are exceptionally well modelled. The pose of the figures is easy and dignified; the form of the heads and the nobility of the features betray a skilled hand on the part of the anonymous wood carver who cut the first pattern. The drapery above the star, too, displays considerable richness of well studied folds.*

This pattern of andiron has been pictured by the Shackletons in their book on collecting,—though without special comment. There is a word-of-mouth tradition that the design and the first casting originated in Pennsylvania. Probably someone really knows the fact of the matter. The pair here illustrated are, without doubt, close to the original wood pattern. Later castings, so the owner states, are often coarser in the texture of the iron, and are clumsily put together. Furthermore, they lack something of clear nicety of detail.

The Art of Cast Iron

On the subject of cast iron, as an art product, much remains yet to be studied and written. It was long since laughed out of polite society, because a vulgar commercialism attempted to elevate a humble material to lofty uses in soldier's monuments, garden statuary and monumental fountains. Yet the pattern makers, whose vaulting ambitions came a cropper in the leap for majestic effects, are, after all, to be reckoned as small masters, whose carved wood models, translated into iron portrait medallions, decorated fire frames, door knockers, foot scrapers and a hundred other minor things, frequently deserve both admiration and praise.

*The Editor has recently encountered a pair of these andirons in cast brass.