

NOTABILIA
OF THE
UNIVERSAL EXHIBITION.

THE COURT OF THE DESIGNERS.—

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear."

Singular as it may seem, there was one quarter of the French Department at the late Exposition which might have elicited the familiar quotation. It lay, too, in the very midst of the most attractive collections of the great display; but its aspect was not inviting; its walls seemed covered with decorative drawings, in which there was no flamboyant flash, and its sides below presented ranges of very modest cases. The trooping crowds of visitors wholly passed it by, but it gave a rich reward to those whose more discreet scrutiny led them into close acquaintance with its contents. In fact, it was a kind of repository for works of original genius, where you encountered, not the exhibitor of other men's creations, but the true man himself, the *deus ex machina*. Here were to be found in, it must be said, from the strongly contrasted nature of their exhibited stores, an heterogeneous reunion of individuals, with whom we have scarcely an analogous class in England—men of original genius, who toil like workmen in their humble ateliers, in a fifth-story attic, and, with a heavily-trying fortitude, win an appreciating connection, and finally, peradventure, an independence. They are at once artists, workmen, and dealers. Such men, from their intrinsic worth, from bearing the precious jewel in their heads, should have been honoured on this occasion, in the quarters assigned to them, with some significant external manifestation. But it was not so, and the French Commissioners in that spirit, so little akin to the elevated, by which their dispensations were frequently characterised, left them in the plainest, the least inviting place of settlement to be found in the wide quarter under their control. To complete this proceeding, they should have affixed up a conspicuous notice:—

"Voi chi entrate, lasciate ogni speranza."

On entering this retreat at one end, the eye of the prying amateur was at once arrested and held on at a *vitrine*, in which objects, obviously of high *virtu*, were closely clustered. Upon minute inspection this proved to be quite a feast. Here were carvings, and chasings, and enamels, chiefly on metallic grounds. Here were small boxes covered with an intricate maze of *fioriture*, mingled with dragon crests, all carved, lightly or deeply, some, indeed, with their substance thoroughly transpierced. Here, too, one might dwell, with long, lingering gratification, upon ebony boxes of most graceful form, whose sides were all entwined with foliage and flower, the one of silver, the other of ivory, wherein the figures of birds and beasts, *variarum monstra ferarum*, were most fantastically and picturesquely tangled. The same species of design, but in bolder development, was framed in an oval hand-mirror. In a word, all the winning mysteries of carving and enamelling were revealed in this case. They came, it appears, from the hand of a comparatively young artist, M. Emile Philippe, a gold medalist. It was assuredly gratifying to the British visitor to find, from significant notices attached to the choicest of these works, that they had been detected and duly appreciated by the accomplished taste of Earl Dudley and the mature judgment of Pro-

fessor Archer, the representative of the Edinburgh Museum.

Not far from this, a most agreeable surprise brought us upon a small case, in which were a few precious specimens of an unalterable metallurgic photography—a new variety of the wondrous process—a step forward towards its secured permanence. Here objects of gold or silver surface were faithfully represented in their true aspect, and those selected for the trial were all of singular beauty. Among them was a helmet of Francis I., from the Artillery Museum, covered with gilt relieve of the Renaissance period. Here also was an Oriental poignard from the Marquis of Hertford's Collection, or here it seemed to be—blade and rich velvet sheath equally identified in form, and surface, and tint. A golden plateau, in redundant relieve of the sixteenth century, one of the most precious objects of the Vienna Museum, had its very double; and a framed collection of gold antique coinage appeared to be within your grasp. The name of Boeringer is most honourably connected with this delusive marvel.

Gold again played a remarkable part in a neighbouring *vitrine*, small almost as a casket. It exemplified a special mode of producing an incrustation of that master-metal upon steel, different from, but equally effective with, the finest damascening. M. G. Perot has had the credit of this fine invention.

From gold to iron the transit is precipitate, yet here M. Fonguieres has made the homely metal play a noble part by the galvano-plastic process, which has been carried, by his scientific skill, to the furthest attained development. He has in that way given it pure, solid, and malleable. He has been successful, in a most important utilitarian point of view, in casing iron within a heavy coating of copper, and thus making screws for ship-building, wherein the strength of the one and freedom from rust of the other, are happily combined. Here also, by the galvano-plastic power, rigid, rugged iron was made to assume the finest form of Art, to offer the presentment of one of Cellini's choicest, most richly-worked basso-relievo cups. M. Fonguieres has been duly honoured with the gold medal.

Hard by, in an unassuming depository, we recognised the veritable conceiver and creator of sundry master-works under the form of *bronz argenté*, with which we have been familiarised in the shop-windows of sundry Parisian dealers in plate. The name of Meissner consecrated a rich and varied array of charming productions—the very poetry of metallic Art; diminutive, exquisitely-modelled figures, *patere*, *plattens*, sheaths and blades of poignards, or paper-cutters. Of the figures, what could be more charmingly fanciful and droll than those two *macaroni* of the middle ages, the one balancing a goose-quill, the other proud in his achievements of cup and ball? The liveness and animated action of these *facetiae* of sculpture, could not be surpassed. The relieve, both alto and basso, in the other objects from M. Meissner's hand, was also of striking excellence, more especially in delicate undulations, which sink and swell over the surface of foliage.

There was quite a cluster of cameo workers in this secluded quarter, all of great merit. Among these was conspicuous M. Guyelant, the centre of whose case presented the head of a nymph, a masterpiece of wondrous projection and infinite detail. This artist is a worthy descendant of that Italian Michelini who,

it seems, founded in Paris this refined Roman art. The names of Schmall and Bessinger should be united with his in fair rivalry. From the hand of Stanger came one of the choicest creations to be found in the whole Exposition. It stood alone—a small timepiece, some five or six inches high—its case of purest onyx, its plate a dark substratum, upon which each hour was indicated by an exquisite *spirituelle* draped female figure, soaring in a circle, and of finest cameo execution. This unique gem had not, we understood, found a purchaser to meet its justly-enhanced valuation. On the walls above and around these rarities, was an ample display of patterns for the French cashmere, from the ateliers of the men of mind, who lead into existence the gorgeous piles of this noble drapery, wherein the French toil so sedulously to emulate their Oriental model. The house of Gonelle Frères and Borrus Frères presented an ample display of exemplars of this infinitesimal mosaic of touch and tint—myriad of looped lines and rainbow harmonies. The gold medal has been awarded to the latter house.

On the same walls were copiously exhibited designs for the ornamenting of rooms, of the simplest and the most luxurious description, chiefly from the skilled pencil of M. Prignot. Singular elegance of style and plenitude of invention characterised these artistic drawings, from the most minute individuality of ornament to the most gorgeous compilation of cornice and drapery. The gold medal has been here, also, well awarded.

Among many other competitors in this class, the name of Wavoyren-Delafosse was conspicuous. Here attention was especially attracted by a panel in the style of Louis XV., wherein, on a golden ground, flower and foliage in broadest and boldest sway of form, and in glowing richness of contrasted tint, were executed with a masterly confidence.

In the centre of this secluded *officina* of originalities stood the, let us say, pavilion of an exhibitor, whose intelligence, energy, and perseverance have gradually and effectively secured for him a position of proud independence, Monsieur Collinet, the inventor of a new ceramic process, the results of which command universal admiration. These, in the form of vases of every variety, and of mural sheathings imitative of the finest Persian patterns, are most charming in their brilliancy, yet delicacy of tint, the fanciful elegance of their floral embellishment, and, in a word, their singular refinement. The career of M. Collinet, like those of many other, albeit not so fortunate, men of creative genius, has been not a little singular. He was one of a numerous family left with indifferent resources of capital by their father, a colonel in the French army. In his youth he tried to emulate the paternal career, and, for a considerable portion of his life, played well the part of a soldier. Some four years since he hung up his sword, became a civilian, and devoted himself to substantiate certain dreamings and speculations on the very theme which has now taken such felicitous realisation. He is a gold medalist, and decorated with the Legion of Honour ribbon. Special good fortune seems to crown the labours of M. Collinet, inasmuch as he has reason to conceive, that he has, in very truth, come upon, in Lorraine, a vein or deposit of that most precious clay, the *pâte douce*, which has been esteemed as golden ore at Sevres.

So much for the Court of the Designers in the late Exposition.