COLLECTING is often the subject of ridicule and merciless criticism. But laughter and scorn do not abate the enthusiasm of the amateur. The chase after the beautiful the rare and the curious, continues with unremitting zeal. The impulse to collect is more than a desire to possess, more than the craving for notoriety, or the passion for hoarding precious things, or for overcoming difficulties standing in the way of possession, and for outwitting astute rivals. Still, it cannot be denied that all these elements are, to a certain degree, factors in the collecting problem. But it is possible to take a higher and broader view of the subject, and it is most significant that certain of our brightest and most active citizens devote their leisure to diligent search after some one class of the objects which may be the desire of the collector's mania.

Indiscriminate collecting is a mistake justly deserving censure. Intelligent collecting is often the work of a scholar, a man of the world, who, not content with the pleasures derived from foreign countries, and varied scenes, gladly burdens himself with relics and trophies of memorable occasions.

The unrestrained bibliophile, who is sometimes also unskilled and ignorant, is the type which is largely responsible for the harsh criticism so often made upon collectors. But this passion is, by no means, an unmixed evil. It has the negative value of keeping its possessor from less harmful extravagances. It has the positive value of increasing his information and of refining his taste.

The inconsistencies and vagaries of celebrities never fail to amuse those less highly placed; but many of these same censors possess in themselves the germs of the follies which they so criticise, and
lack nothing save means and opportunity to develop parallel cases of madness.

A list of noted collectors reveals tastes as widely different as are the stations and professions of the persons able so to gratify their desires. Richard Heber required eight houses in which to keep his books; four being in England, the others, in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, and Paris. M. Nestor Roqueplan, a French author and director of opera, who, as a critic and man of affairs, thoroughly satisfied the public, bequeathed to the nation a large collection of warming pans. His Majesty, George IV. of England, had a passion for teapots, Prince Bismarck for thermometers, Louis XVI. for locks, clocks and keys. The late empress of Russia and her grand-daughter, Princess Marie of Roumania, acquired large collections of scent bottles. The English Admiralty causes the figureheads of disused British warships to be sawn off and preserved as memorials. King Edward VII. and ex-President Cleveland are collectors of walking-sticks, a fact which would seem, at first thought, to be quite inconsistent with the ways of men held close by the confining duties of court and professional life.

Among collectors many have provided for the preservation of their treasures as a whole, but perhaps none save M. Edmond de Goncourt has asked that they be dispersed. This famous Frenchman, almost equally well known as an author and a connoisseur, gave directions in his will that his ceramics and bric-a-brac be sold; preferring that they should pass into the possession of those who should care for them, rather than be classified in a museum, there to await the cold glances of the indifferent.

The collection, which is the subject of the present paper is a very important one; whether it be judged from its claims to beauty, extensiveness and value, or yet again from the educative influence which it
exerts upon artists and craftsmen and the public taste. We shall now treat only of the section of brass and copper objects which are said to be the direct cause of the “brass fever:” a mania which is invading “society” and transforming many of its devotees into collectors and amateurs.

The Drake collection, precious as it is from the aesthetic point of view, has besides an appealing and pathetic interest derived from the people who fashioned these vessels and utensils, which are examples of what may be done with a few sheets of good metal and a mere handful of tools. In glancing through the collection, we find it to be largely the work of simple folk, artistic yet unlettered, of those who, ignorant of classic principle and academic rule, have yet perceived the vital essence of art and clothed it in visible form. If we study a simple water bottle from Arabia, Spain, or Poland, we feel that its maker has put his life into his work. Or we may take a lesson in the development of ornament from a Venetian bucket. Here, on the lower part of the utensil, the hammer blows are distinct, regular and sufficiently accented to keep them in sight. Then follows a deeply tooled line, practically straight. Then, the mood of the craftsman having changed, we find a quaint design hammered from the inside, with the ground set back in the front. This bucket, made by some humble worker, and intended for the common uses of laboring people, is full of interest for the student. For possibly it was suggested by some great mosaic glowing with voluptuous coloring, or drawn from a capital stone in St. Mark’s.

Perhaps it is the helplessness of these brave family servants which is the true cause of their salvation, which saves them from being lost or destroyed. It is mainly to metal that we look for the laws of classic proportion, and the preservation of many forms. Metal is long suffering and endures much.

Examine, if you will, that small hand brazier! It is punctured and perforated. It leans a
little to one side. Yet who would have it otherwise than it stands: a combination of dignity and insolence?

Observe also the large brazier from Madrid, and note the influence which it asserts over the great fire platform! It is not too much to say that centuries of thought could scarcely improve its outlines. Its handles are full bodied brass castings, strong and spirited, refined a little by the file, but without losing in the process anything of their vigor.

Furthermore, these examples of brass are of good, thick and honest metal: a substance which responds to the blow essential to shape it, and which is sufficiently thick to preserve the marks of the blow, and to resist a possible loss by the action of fire, by friction, or by accident. These qualities it were well for our young women workers to observe; for they are inclined to choose thin metal as the object of the gentle tappings. And here we venture to recommend fencing and the exercises of the gymnasium as preparatory work for their use of thicker, more resistant metal, to the end that both their designs and their execution may be improved.

But let us return to the collection before us, and compare a stamped silver bowl, purchased at a fashionable silversmith's, with a brass one coming from the cottage of a Russian peasant! The work on the latter vessel is distinguished by an infinite care which has guided the craftsman in his effort to accomplish by hand what he had no other means to do. Such is work that lasts! There is a sentiment of grandeur running through this epic poem of work. At times, also, there are signs of a gentle mood: a subtle, fleeting idea, as if the workman were reproducing a half-forgotten, hereditary art. There are curious signs on these little jugs, these Russian tea and cake boxes, which appeal and are known to lovers of art.

For example, look at this milk jug and note its handle, large and thick, cast solid, rough-
Venetian Well Bucket

Russian Bowl

Algerian Water Jar—This is carried on the shoulder by a leather strap which passes around the neck and bears the license tag.
Dutch Warming Pan
Brasero for table from Cordova, Spain
Spanish Tongues for Charcoal

Italian Scaldino

Hand Scaldino
A Dutch Milk Can—to be carried over the shoulder with a "yoke"
ly cut, and chased. Take care that you see the sparkle of color in that knob of enamel! The general expression of the object is in accord with its meaning and early use. The whole is simple and consistent.

Glancing at vessels of certain other forms, we conclude that whatever may be said to the discredit of hard drinkers, there is virtue in their pots, mugs, and tankards. There is wholesomeness in their proportion, and few things have suffered less by pernicious modification and caprice of fashion. In these vessels we find, at times, slight attempts at surface decoration wrought out with punch and hammer. And again the handles claim attention. They are firm, strong, with ends so hammered out as to give a firm grip, and they are secured by great rivets. Similar in execution to these vessels is the Dutch milk can from Haarlem. In this last named object, the long handle is made wide, and carried to the very bottom of the can. And where is the designer or craftsman who would venture to “improve” this simple object of daily use which is also an object of art? Here, there is no coquettling with petty details, no scratchings, polishings, or trifling extravagances of style. The problem set before the metal-pot worker is to produce from a sheet of rich, pliant metal, an article for daily use, strong and beautiful, which can be made with the most ordinary tools, and which, when made, shall last forever. And here the shape is of the first importance, and receives the undivided thought of the craftsman, who can not rely upon atmospheric influence, or any other natural cause, to soften his line, or modify the color, as happens when brick, stone, terra cotta, or wood is the working medium.

Among other homely utensils it is interesting to note an English beer-mug, a Russian samovar, an Algerian water-jar, a Dutch tankard, and a Spanish brazier, in all of which is accentuated the relationship between plain spaces and ornament of a plain, dignified character, such as piercing, chasing and molding.
These vessels might be studied with much profit by our army of factory workers in so-called ornament, who could learn from them a lesson in simplicity and restraint. Most attractive also are the copper kettles, for there are few things which bear so plainly written on them the history of their lives. Every pressure, every incident is shown. We can see how the metal sheet was handled, hammered, twisted, turned and then hammered again. And all these processes testify to the skill of the craftsman who used them! Furthermore, these domestic vessels appeal to those who love their fellow men; for years of human life have written their history upon them in the marks of daily service. Fire, water, feast, famine, trouble, pleasure have made but a surface impression upon them. They have survived them all. If bent, they can be straightened. If punctured, they can be soldered. They are philosophers, and they accept events as they come.

An Italian scaldino next invites our attention. It is in reality very simple, in spite of its rich appearance, which is caused by its well balanced design, evenly covered and centered. What a picture it would make, if filled with lighted charcoal!

And thus we might comment indefinitely, in praise of the qualities which characterize and dignify these household wares of the people of many nations and races; finding in them balance and exquisite proportion, richness and beauty of form. How tall these small pieces are! Only inches in height! But note the scale of them! They dwarf every day metal ware by their frank acceptance of laws of proportion which, although scarcely classic, still entitle them to be rivals of the jars and vases of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

The aesthetic value of this collection should awaken the enthusiasm not only to possess, but also to create similar objects. Any sincere craftsman can take up the study of metal work. There
is here no chemical or harassing mechanical difficulty to overcome. Nor does the enterprise require difficult and complicated technical manipulation. Any one who can patiently and intelligently hammer a flat surface, or acquire the art of riveting, can begin the work. But the use of the hammer must be well understood, before the craftsman may decorate. And great pleasure is found in the preliminary task, since copper is responsive to the touch of the workman,—more so, perhaps, than any other metal save pewter. So, while the use of the hammer is lacking in the passion, in the intoxicating happiness communicated by the forge, there is much in this work which strengthens and develops the craftsman. Brass and iron are not only of the people, as is iron, but they are mirrors of popular life. Their polished surfaces receive the impress of homely histories of pleasure, pain and toil.

Altogether the brass and copper vessels of the Drake collection are rich in lessons of art, history and life. They may be compared with a Shakespearean play in which tragedy and comedy jostle each other, in which idea and emotion are simply and grandly expressed.

Of Mr. Alexander W. Drake, the owner of the collection, we have not spoken, for we have felt that we could add no word to the tributes which have been already paid to him. Furthermore, his works praise him. For he has not been content to label, case and catalogue after the manner of collectors. By constant use, these brasses and bronzes gathered from foreign households have become to him as living guests who pay homage to their host, and add, each in greater or less measure, to the beauties of his home.