Craftsmanship versus Intrinsic Value

F. WALTER LAWRENCE

The display of my work, in the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions recently held in Syracuse and Rochester, N. Y., may be divided under these heads: Baroque Pearls, Gold Modeling, Phoenician Glass Jewelry, Silverware and Objects for the cabinet; although in all the articles exhibited the metal work was a distinct feature.

Within the past few years, the value of regular pearls has increased so rapidly as to place them beyond the reach of the great majority. Therefore, to satisfy the demand of those who could not afford to purchase the regular gems, the dealers have procured from the fisheries malformed, or irregular specimens, or, as the French call them, baroque pearls. So the adoption of the baroque pearl has been the result of a peculiar condition of trade. It is a substitute, and, as a substitute, is used as the regular pearl in usual forms of jewelry. This seems to me to be all wrong and unfair to the baroque pearl, which, because of its possibilities of form and color, has an artistic value far beyond the regular gem. For this reason it should be considered as "the pearl without price," and valued for this priceless reason. The baroque pearl should never be used in conjunction with the regular or perfectly formed pearl, or regular forms of precious or semi-precious stones, unless because of its form and color, it be an integral part of the design.

In the olden days, when the goldsmith was not simply a merchant, he used the baroque pearl, not because it cost less, but because it meant more in the pieces which he wrought. In the Grüne Gewölbe of the Royal Palace, Dresden, there are wonderful examples of the use of the baroque pearl, in which the suggestive form created the design, or the tinting completed a color scheme.

In the Mermaid Ring exhibited, the baroque pearl suggested the design. The thought of the sea is carried out in the mounting by the swimming mermaid and by the dolphin supporting the pearl. In the Swan Brooch, the bodies of the swans are pearls, just as they were found; the design being carried out by modeling in green gold the heads, necks and wings; the whole being accentuated by the enameling of the background representing water, and the framing with pond-lilies and grasses.
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In the *Collier*, the infinite variety of shades of the baroque pearls chords with the old rose finish of the gold scroll work, and the whole effect is brightened by very small brilliants and olivines. The baroque pearl Pendant, in the Butterfly Design, is used to complement the tints in the opal matrix wings.

The Kiss Ring and the Three Graces Brooch are exceptional specimens of the goldsmith’s art. The former is an adaptation from a picture, “The Kiss,” which had a conspicuous place in the Paris Salon. The figures in these pieces are first modeled in wax, and then cast by a secret process, after which they are chased to a delicate finish. The detail is so carefully wrought that, with a powerful magnifying glass, every feature is seen to be perfectly reproduced.

In the application of Cyprian or Phoenician glass fragments to modern forms of jewelry, silverware and objects for the cabinet, I was impressed, after thorough experiment, with three peculiar advantages: first, its practicability; second, its attractiveness and beauty; third, its evident uniqueness.

These fragments of glass are parts of bowls, vases, tear-bottles and cups, found in tombs, in the ancient city of Jerusalem, and brought to this country by Ayeez Kayat, probably the greatest authority on ancient glass in the world, certainly, in this country.

The ancient glass was originally clear, and either white, pink, green, violet, amber or blue. The beautiful iridescence which makes it so attractive, is due to the decomposition and disintegration of the glass, caused by the gases generated in the tombs from which the glass is exhumed.

The disintegration of the surface of the glass produces not only beautiful coloring, but frequently suggestions, which become, through a thoughtful framing, positive and distinct pictures. Fearing the possible accidents incident to goods in transit, I did not send to the Exhibitions all the pieces of glass which possessed picturesque characteristics; but particularly those which, because of their settings, were least liable to breakage.

The accompanying illustration of the Desert represents the most remarkable piece of the collection. This kind of glass is known to collectors as the Ruby, the rarest of all ancient glass.
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This particular fragment is slightly concave. It was probably part of a bowl.

In the decomposition of the surface of this specimen, the disintegration has caused a brilliant, glowing light in the right hand corner of the glass, when it is held directly in line of vision. But if one turns the glass at angles, this light travels across the dome of the glass and disappears in the left hand lower corner. In a reverse position, the coloring is entirely changed, and the surface is suffused by a silvery light. With these suggestive features, it did not require much ingenuity to discover that, by a proper mounting, this fragment could be transformed into a real, almost living, picture of the sunrise and sunset, and even of the moonlight night on the Desert.

There are several other pieces in the collection which permitted relatively the same treatment; forming Nile scenes, jungles, etc. But the only specimens in the Syracuse and Rochester Exhibitions possessing significance apart from beauty, were the Egyptian Head ring, the Egyptian Head buckle, the Cleopatra scarf pin, the Sphinx brooch and the Egyptian boat. In these fragments, because of their peculiar conformation and colors, I found the motifs for the compositions; but, in the other articles, the fragments are simply incidental to the design. However, in every instance, the composition is cohesive; the mounting being absolutely Egyptian, and in the silver pieces, the designs are taken directly from illustrations of objects excavated in the very places where the glass was found.

In effect, the glass suggests the transparent enamel that has been employed by Lalique and other famous jewelers, during the past few years; but the glitter of its shimmering, changeable colors makes it far more beautiful than enamel, and admits of results impossible through the use of other material. And, apart from all that is superficial, it is an impressive thought that, because of the glass, each bit of jewelry, or silverware, or bronze exhibited, had absolutely required from three to four thousand years for its full completion, and that it is beyond the realm of speculation ever to find its exact counterpart.

In this age, when we are striving for individual expressions of
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craftsmanship, an object which has intrinsic significance and beauty of form, and which precludes duplication, is sure to meet an appreciative reception, whatever its material composition. It is very encouraging to me to have had my antique glass jewelry, silverware, and bronze so kindly received at Syracuse and Rochester. I am persuaded that the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement in America is dissipating that old discouraging criticism of the layman: "It does not look its price," and that it is educating the public beyond the dollar mark.

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**THE EYE SURPASSES NATURE, INASMUCH AS THE WORKS OF NATURE ARE FINITE, WHILE THE THINGS WHICH CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE HANDIWORK, AT THE COMMAND OF THE EYE, ARE INFINITE.**

Leonardo da Vinci
Ancient Phoenician Glass in modern jewelry

F. Walter Lawrence