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per a S R

POTTERY WORSHIP.

The fallen idols.

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149577

JACOBAS KANNETJES.
THE PERPETUAL LAMPS.
THE MURRHINE VASES.

With best compliments

L. Tolouy

JACOBAS KANNETJES; or,
The Jugs of Countess Jacqueline.

Vyse & Hill, Stoke.

JACOBAS KANNETJES ;
Or: The Jugs of Countess Jacqueline.



HE legendary jugs of "Countess Jacqueline" have little, in their external appearance, which will court the attention of the lover of ceramic art. They are of uncouth shape, rough material, and rude workmanship. The common grey marl, of which they are made, has been submitted to a fierce fire, through which the mass has become hardened to such a degree that, under a sharp stroke, it sounds like a metal bell. Thrown on the wheel, they scarcely show the use of any tool; from neck to foot concentric ridges have been traced by the

finger of the potter; the basis is waved and indented by the impression of the thumb, applied on the flat projection of the foot to re-establish the stability of the pot after it had been violently snatched from the wheel's head.

None of the coarse and vile earthen vessels, affected to the most vulgar uses in a wealthy household of Old Netherland, could look coarser and viler than an authenticated example of "Jacoba's Kannetjes." Yet it was not amongst the crocks of a scullery that a Dutch collector of the last centuries would ever have thought of looking for it; he knew too well that such a piece had found its place amongst the treasures and heirlooms of the family. Worthless as it looked, a deep sentiment was attached to this wretched jug. It embodied the recollection of a time when Holland was struggling for liberty; it was a national relic dear to all those who kept in their heart the love of their country.

This short preamble will justify our introducing the "Cannetes of the Countess

Jacqueline" as illustrating a distinctly well qualified instance of what we have called Pottery worship.

To form an idea of the place they occupied in the estimation of the patriotic Dutchman, we cannot do better than glance through the pages of the works on national antiquities.

Adrianus Pars was the first to institute a course of researches respecting the origin of the valued pottery so eagerly collected by his contemporaries and their forefathers. The original edition of his work dates from the end of the seventeenth century, but we have only seen a posthumous issue reprinted at Leyden in 1745, under the title : "The antiquities of Katwick and Rynsburg." It contains much interesting information, largely drawn upon by subsequent writers, and one plate representing a few specimens of the ware.

In the "Celebrations of the banqueting festivities of old Netherland," published at Amsterdam in 1731, by K. van Alkemade and P. van der Shelling, we find a descriptive account

of the ancient and curious drinking vessels belonging to the State and the civic corporations, or in private possession. They comprise antique cups of rock-crystal and vases of roman glass ; mediæval ivory horns of marvellous workmanship ; Renaissance golden tankards and tazzas of precious stone enriched with chased and enamelled mounts ; a number of these being reproduced on the plates. One could scarcely understand how those two unseemly jugs of common clay have been admitted to figure in that distinguished company, had not the authors taken the trouble of apprising us of the commanding interest they present by virtue of their historical associations.

Poets have not disdained to seek inspiration in the contemplation of these suggestive jugs. Jacob Spex caused six of them to be engraved for his handsome volume of poetry ; and he has celebrated them in laudatory verses.

An anonymous pamphlet entitled : A first letter . . . on the Bottles called Jacoba Kannetjes. Arnheim, 1755 ; and the exhaustive

and excellent essay on the same subject, written by G. van Hasselt, Amsterdam, 1780, may also be consulted.

The castle of Teylingen, situated between Harlem and Leyden, has always been regarded by the loyal Netherlander as a memorable place, for it was within its walls that, according to tradition, the unfortunate Jacqueline, Countess of Hainault, lingered in imprisonment up to the day of her death. Earthen pots of a singular shape were, occasionally, dug out from the muddy moats which surrounded the castle. It wanted but little stretch of imagination to connect these pots with the name of the popular heroine; they gave rise to a touching legend readily accepted by credulous sympathisers. It narrated how the fair prisoner was wont to while away the weary hours of her captivity in fashioning coarse vessels of clay with her own hands; and, also, how she used to throw them into the water which slumbered under the walls of her prison, in the expectation that, in future ages, the casual discovery of these dumb testi-

monies of her ill-fated existence, would bring to posterity the recollection of her sufferings.

If not absolutely true, the anecdote was, certainly, well imagined, and it is not to be wondered at if it was promptly added to the store of familiar tales preserved by pottery lore ; there is scarcely a hand-book on ceramic history in which it is not repeated.

Jacqueline of Bavaria, Countess of Hainault, stands out as a most romantic figure in the stirring annals of the troubled epoch in which she lived, and in the chief events of which she took a leading part. The sympathy excited by the spirited resistance she opposed to the blows of adverse fortunes, remained attached to her memory long after she had been laid into the grave.

She was born in the year 1400. A direct descendant of Wilhelm V., King of Bavaria, in whom the sovereignty over Holland had been invested in 1345, she inherited from him the rights to the Earldom. At the age of fourteen, this prerogative was still consolidated by her

marriage with the Delphin Johan. The young prince lived only two years, and he left her, still a child, burdened with the care of the Government and the arduous task of pacifying the troublesome factions which, ever since Holland had fallen into the possession of the House of Bavaria, had not ceased to contend for the ruling power. Her opponents were numerous and powerful; but she could depend on the support of a force of partisans devoted to her cause. She succeeded in making a vigorous stand against the repeated attacks of her enemies, and in protracting the struggle until the marriage she contracted with Johan, Duke of Brabant, brought about a momentary truce between her divided subjects. The union did not turn out a happy one. Her husband separated from her, and placed himself at the head of a rebellion, which attempted to wrench the power from her hands; and he continued to carry on the hostilities, until poison put an end to his life. But the troubles and dangers which threatened the Countess were in no ways

diminished by his death. The fighting had to be resumed against her uncle Johan of Bavaria, who, in his turn, put forward a claim to the Earldom of Holland, and after his demise, which occurred shortly afterwards, against Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, who had inherited these claims. At last peace seemed to have been secured by a treaty she concluded with Philip. By the terms of this treaty she obtained to be left in the full enjoyment of her possessions during her life, on condition that she would not marry again, and that, at her death, her inheritance would revert to the Duchy of Burgundy. She soon violated the treaty, however, by becoming the wife of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, in 1423. Gloucester was then Regent of France; his union with the Countess had been effected for political purposes. He expected to wrest from his wife the abandonment of her rights over Holland, and to place the country under English domination. Jacqueline opposed, with all her might, the realisation of this scheme,

which had no other result than to sever the alliance which existed between England and Burgundy. While Gloucester was still cunningly preparing the success of his plan, she obtained a divorce from him, and, shortly afterwards, gave her hand to Frank von Borsellen, a dutch nobleman.

From that moment Jacqueline de Hainault withdrew altogether from political life. Thoroughly exhausted by the unequal struggle she had so gallantly sustained against her powerful foes, she agreed to retire with her husband to the castle of Tylgen, and to give up the fight for good and for ever. It was, in truth, voluntary exile, rather than enforced captivity. Prisoner on parole, she was free to ride and hunt in the neighbouring forests, and to hold a sort of court composed of the faithful lieges and servants who had chosen to follow the dispossessed Countess in her banishment. *in /*

The time she spent at Tylingen has, probably, been the brightest part of her chequered life.

It was a love match ; Borsellen devoted the whole of his life to the happiness of his wife. Days were spent in fêtes and pleasures. Large hunting parties were constantly organised, which many old and new friends were invited to join ; the wooded country which stretched around the castle, and along the banks of the Rhine, affording princely sport. At night a sumptuous banquet awaited the party ; many a noble guest met at the convivial board ; the Countess, still in the full glow of her beauty, sitting at the head of the table. When the repast was drawing to its close they all stood up to drink, with enthusiasm, the health of the beloved hostess, pledging their troth to fight again for her cause when the hour should come, and never rest until they had seen her restored to her rights. It was imperative that a vessel which had served to drink such a loyal toast, should never be used on any other occasion ; as soon as emptied the jugs were, accordingly, flung away through the open windows. The custom of breaking the vessel after an emphatic

toast had been drunk, was general at that time. Household account-books show entries of the cost of crockery smashed at the conclusion of a banquet. Cheap pottery jugs were, of course, provided for that purpose; they contrasted curiously with the display of drinking vessels of precious metal and costly workmanship which adorned the table of the great and the wealthy. Although the jugs found in the moats of Tylingen Castle were of the coarsest description, the banqueting board was by no means deficient in tankards, goblets, and bottles of gold, silver, and glass. A very large number of such valuable vessels is mentioned in the inventory of the household goods, drawn up after the death of Borsellen's son, of which Van Hasselt has given a transcription.

Alas! for the pathetic legend of the Countess Jacqueline and the pots which she fashioned, in durance vile, with her own fair hands, the scepticism of modern historians has—in this case as in many another—disrespectfully snatched away the daintily-embroidered web ir-

which popular tradition had swathed the naked truth, and demonstrated that the earthen pots discovered in the Teylingen moats, must be taken only as testimonies of the importance of the convivial festivities which were held at the castle, and of the numerous toasts that were drunk in honour of the hostess. These "cannetes" are, in no ways peculiar, either as to shape or workmanship, to the locality to which all specimens of the same order were ascribed at one time. Far from it; jugs perfectly identical in all points are frequently dug up all over Holland, and particularly at Gouda, where the manufacture seems to have been centralised. In some places they are found associated with coins, or other objects, which denote an epoch much anterior to the fifteenth century.

The "Jacobas Kannetjes"—if we may continue to designate them under that name—are represented in all the museums of the north of Europe. But the rude and unattractive jug has to hide itself behind some more elegant and

elaborate pieces of Flemish and German stone-ware more worthy of the collector's attention. It has lost all claims to the character of a patriotic relic ; and if, by any chance, a loyal Dutchman happens to refer to it, it will be with the slight contempt one feels at the sight of a fallen idol noticeable only on account of the unconceivable and undeserved consideration which had in former days been accorded to it.

THE PERPETUAL LAMP.

N most of the Greek and Roman tombs are found a number of earthen lamps, the symbolical homage and parting gift that the ancients were wont to deposit with their dead. Specimens of the kind have become so common in our collection of antiquities that, with a few exceptions, they fail to attract any special attention.

How different was the feeling that an antique lucerna is said to have excited during the middle ages ! It was firmly believed that, in many instances, they had been discovered, still burning, within the sepulchre where they were lighted more than a thousand years before. In the reverential estimation of the old alchemist, the mortuary lamp, possessed of such a marvellous faculty, offered an indisputable

evidence that the philosophers of antiquity, had so deeply penetrated into the secrets of creation that they had gained the power of setting certain laws of nature at defiance. For in that insignificant-looking bit of terra cotta the adept of the occult science saw the embodiment of an abstract principle, the elucidation of which engrossed his preoccupation to an equal degree with the discovery of the philosopher's stone, the perpetual motion, the elixir of life, and other kindred problems ;—we mean the principle of Perpetual Fire.

A fire finding within itself a feeding element which combustion could not diminish, was supposed to have been known in the olden times. The loss of the secret of its constitution was lamented by many learned writers. They hinted with so much earnestness at the possibility of recovering that secret, that such a notion was bound to be recognised by their enthusiastic disciples as one of the long-expected scientific achievements that unswerving researches could not fail to accomplish.

No one has done more to urge his contemporaries into sharing his staunch belief in the existence of inextinguishable lamps than the antiquary Fortunio Liceti. His work : "De Lucernis antiquorum reconditis . . . Utini, 1652," a folio volume of more than 1,200 pages, illustrated with hundreds of engraved reproductions, presents a singular mixture of sound erudition and transcendental Hermetics. The author has gathered, in support of his hazy theories, a great many facts and evidences which he regarded as conclusive, and from which we shall quote the following :

When the tomb of Zulliola, the beloved daughter of Cicero, was opened in 1345, the man who first entered the mortuary chamber saw it lit up by a burning lamp ; but the flame was extinguished as soon as it came into contact with the outside air.

In the year 1500, two peasants who were digging for buried treasures in the neighbourhood of Padua, came across the tomb of Olybius. The two illiterate explorers reported

that, in that tomb, they had found a lamp emitting a bright light which went out when they set hands upon it. It was enclosed, according to their testimony, within two earthen jars, and on each side of it lay two phials full of liquid gold and liquid silver. Maturantius, who secured possession of the marvellous find, valued it so highly that after describing to one of his friends the objects of which it was composed, he says that he would not part with them for a thousand crowns of gold.

Another famous example of perpetual lamps was the one discovered, still alight, in the grave of Pallas, son of Evander, and which would, consequently, have been burning for three thousand years.

The anxious antiquaries who presided over the excavation were exulting at the idea that an examination of that wonderful lamp would soon reveal, at least, a part of the secret; but the precious object was handled so roughly by the workmen that it crumbled into dust between their hands.

It is needless to observe that little confidence would be placed, now-a-days, upon the reliability of reports of this sort, arising either from deluded vision, or a deliberate tale of mystification.

Many passages found in the works of ancient historians and scientists have lent their support to the propagation of the mediæval belief in perpetual fire. Saint Augustine seems to recognise the existence of the phenomenon in his own time. He speaks of a lamp he had seen burning under the portico of the temple of Venus, to which the flame was so inseparably attached that it remained unaffected by the most violent storms. As the causes of such miraculous light could bear of no natural explanation, he estimated that it was kept up through the intervention of some familiar demon of the heathens.

References are made by other writers to the sacred fire of several sanctuaries which had never been known to be fed by human hands. In such cases the accounts were either too

literally accepted, or intentionally misinterpreted. It is true that popular superstition attributed to these sacred fires a supernatural origin, but, in all probability, the flame was put in communication with a cleverly concealed mechanical contrivance by which the supply of fuel was renewed as soon as it became exhausted.

We may often have an occasion of examining a collection of antique lucernæ, but the recollection of all that we have narrated, will not be of much practical application. Indeed, were we able to point out the very lamps of **Tulliola** and Olybius, the wonderful tale we might tell about them would not receive any more credit than if we were speaking of another well-known talisman, the enchanted lamp of Aladdin.

THE ENIGMATIC MURRHINE VASES.

Read at the Meeting of the North Staffordshire Literary and
Philosophical Society, March 26th, 1897.

THE ENIGMATIC MURRHINE VASES.

Tis not through want on our part of an adequate sense of the paramount interest which attaches to the mystery of the Murrhine vases if they do not occupy the foremost place in our gossiping examination of the historical enigmas of the fickle art. The order in which we present our sketches is bound to be an arbitrary one, being subservient to the occasions we have had of making of such subjects as independent study.

A Murrhine vase is unquestionably a star of the first magnitude in that imaginary firmament of which we are endeavouring to retrace the fading constellations. That the star shone resplendently at one time upon a crowd of admirers, dazzled and enraptured by its beauty, is a point on which no doubt can be enter-

tained. Clouds have risen since which have veiled its splendour, and their ever-increasing thickness has at last completely concealed it from our view. So many trustworthy testimonies, however, bear witness to the existence and the renown of the Murrhine vases that, lost as they are to us, their name cannot be forgotten. Many a student of Roman history has felt his attention aroused by the occasional mention of these highly-valued vessels by the Latin writers ; and their descriptions, which now cannot agree with any object of antiquity one may call to mind, have helped to sharpen the inquirer's curiosity. Many are the learned and laboured treatises which have been written with the view of making good some more or less extravagant speculation as to the probable nature of the Murrhines. All possible hypotheses have been presented and discussed, and we are as far as ever from knowing what was the material, natural or artificial, of which they were made. As a matter of fact, no one has ever been able to point out from among the

relics of Roman antiquity a vase, or any other vessel, which could be taken with certainty as an example of Murrhines as they are described by classic authors.

Whether Father Time has especially directed against these frangible treasures the baneful blows of his all-destroying power, and wiped away from this world the last remaining example, or whether they are still represented, misnamed and unrecognised, amidst the minor monuments of ancient art preserved to our admiration, still remains an open question. The tangible and convincing proof—the actually identified Murrhine—by means of which the truth of one of the many theories framed on the subject could at last be substantiated has not yet been produced, and without such a support the most skilful fabric falls to the ground.

It is in vain that antiquarian controversialists endeavour to establish that Murrhines were made of pottery, of porcelain, or of glass, or that others contend that marble, precious

stone, steatite, or mother-of-pearl were their constitutive substance. However ingenious and erudite may be the arguments developed in each of their more or less sophistical essays, the impression they leave on our mind is the same in all cases. The theories presented with the largest display of acumen, and, on the other hand, the most superficial conjectures appear equally untenable. Truly it is somewhat disconcerting to find that, while modern research has placed us in possession of so much interesting information respecting the origin and manufacture of many an inferior class of Greek and Roman pottery, the question of Murrhine vases—the most highly celebrated and valued vessels of corresponding times—has not advanced one step. In this particular instance documentary evidence proves to be of no avail. Far from assisting us in solving the problem, the descriptions to which we can refer have hopelessly complicated the difficulty.

Perhaps we could find in modern ceramics one case, at least, which would serve as an

illustration of the perplexing embarrassment we are ourselves preparing for the historian of the future. We may readily imagine, for instance, how it will fare two thousand years hence with the inquisitive collector who, having met in some antiquated record a mention of the Henri II. faïence—the reigning idol of our days and of which scarcely 60 examples are in existence—undertakes to discover, among the unnamed varieties of ceramic productions which will be the accumulated legacy of extinct civilizations, the kind of pottery which corresponds in all points to the obscure description given by the old writer. Now, in regard to the Murrhine vases, we stand in exactly the same position as the collector of the coming ages will probably stand with respect to the Henri II. faïence.

When we meditate upon the unaccountable disappearance of such memorable objects, once considered as more precious than precious stones, our cogitations are bound to take a philosophical turn. We remember that when Fame—the hundred-voiced goddess—seizes her

trumpet and throws a new name to the four winds of heaven, it is not always to sanction the unanimous verdict of grateful humanity acclaiming one of its glorious children. Too often it is but the consequence of an artful comedy enacted round the object of their sycophantic adulation by a group of partizans interested in bringing about a well-prepared apotheosis. The comedy is soon over ; the curtain falls ; the fagged comedians retire and make room for fresh performers ; and the trumpet of Fame is heard once more, playing another tune in quite a different key.

In political history this applies to many a now-forgotten hero, the popular favourite of an hour. In the history of art, and in consequence of the evolutions of taste, we have repeatedly seen a momentary excitement created by an inexplicable infatuation for some rare production of the potter, assuming the proportions of actual madness.

The farce of "The Glorified Earthen-pot" reappears at intervals upon the world's stage.

Each time the pivot upon which revolves the action and the names of the actors who take part in it undergo the alterations commanded by modified circumstances. But whether the scene is set in Imperial Rome, and the personages move about draped in togas and shod with sandals of purple, or whether they wear the frock-coat and the patent leather boots of the modern amateur of London or Paris, plot and cast are strikingly similar in all instances.

Let us look at the *dramatis personæ* of the antique comedy of "The Murrhine Vase." We shall recognize at a glance the very same characters which we saw, but the other day, acting a fashionable play, of which we prefer not to give the precise title, and the interest of which was centred upon the sublimation of a so-called phenomenal rarity of the ceramic art. We see at first a wealthy collector—an extravagant and capricious lord ; he possesses all that money can buy, and yet his cravings are not satisfied. Then comes a curiosity dealer—a person of under-rated importance in all that

concerns the fate of works of art. He panders to the erratic whims of the fastidious collector ; he knows when and how to apply the sting that will stir up any coming indifference. His business is to create new fetishes when the old ones have ceased to excite feelings of adoration in the minds of his patrons. Lastly, we have an art critic—the influential Aristarchus, who heralds the advent of a new fad in art circles, and who, reducing the gist of much current comment, verbose disputation, and specious paradox into high-sounding theories, lays down the tenets of the newly-born creed. The part he has to fulfil is to mediate between the over-confident collector and the astute dealer ; but it is not uncommon to find that while he firmly believes himself to be working for the benefit of the former, he is only fostering the latter's interests. Let us add to these chief characters a chorus of believers, prattlers, and applauders, supported by a host of idlers, and we have got all the elements of the antique as well as of the modern performance.

The prologue of the Murrhine play opens with the triumphal progress of Pompey and his victorious army through the Roman Forum. They return, after having vanquished Mithridates and placed a large part of Asia under the sway of Rome. Priceless treasures, the spoils of the King of Pontus, are carried in the train of the victor. They comprise marvels of all kinds ; but none among them excite greater curiosity and admiration than a number of curious vases to which the name of Murrhine has been given. This is the first time that the refined amateur is afforded an opportunity of gazing upon those rare gems. It is said that they come from the East, but the material of which they are made has not yet been determined. Pompey has selected six of these vases to form the votive offering he dedicates to the Temple of Capitoline Jupiter. The glitter of gold and the sparkling of precious gems pale by the side of the indescribable hues of the surface and the iridescence of the edges of their opaline substance. Every opulent collector

stares at them with covetous eyes, resolving in his mind that he will obtain at any cost, and before any of his hated rivals, some select specimens of Asiatic Murrhines.

The next act takes us into the Via Sacra, close to the Septa, at the place where is situated the emporium of the curiosity trade for the Roman Empire—we might say for the whole world. It is a vast quadrangle, the four sides of which are occupied by covered galleries. There, under the shade of the arcades, lies exhibited a dazzling assemblage of riches of all descriptions, the tantalizing stores of the wealthiest merchants of the city. Greek antiquities, bronzes, marbles, vases, and cameos of inestimable value ; bewildering silk fabrics, gold-spangled muslins, velvety carpets from the distant East—all are to be seen there, heaped up in confusion, together with innumerable other objects of costly material and exquisite workmanship. In the farthest penetralia of the house, secreted in the treasure chamber, where only a privileged client is admitted, Murrhines

are already waiting for a purchaser. The public report that certain vases of surprising beauty have been seen for the first time amongst the Ponticean treasures brought over by Pompey, has had scarcely time to spread before a large number of vases of a similar kind have found their way into the stores of the Roman emporium. Does not this fact alone yield a striking evidence of the commercial genius of the curiosity dealer in antique times? Is it not calculated to make even a Spitzer—the Napoleon of our modern auction-rooms—feel himself very small when he contrasts his most venturesome speculations with the business temerity of these inimitable masters? One glance by the shrewd merchant of the Septa has been sufficient for him to foresee that these new-comers, unspoken of the day before, are going to be the lions of the morrow. His clients stand much in want of some fascinating novelty; they begin to feel tired of Corinthian vases, of amber figures, and of citrine tables; ewers of rock-crystal and cups of lapis or of

amethyst fail now to excite between them the same spirit of reckless competition. He hails the Murrhines as the long-awaited rarity, which a skilful treatment at his hand shall endow with sufficient qualities to turn them into an irresistible temptation, and he trusts to this new-fangled caprice to place once more the Roman collector at his mercy.

Truly he has no conquering army to send over to foreign lands and snatch by force of arms the coveted treasures ; but he is in regular communication with a swarm of agents who are soon busy scouring the country and squandering gold in his service. Not one moment is lost, and with an amazing rapidity all obtainable examples of the required curiosity respond to his call and accumulate in his hands. The greedy collector shall have his Murrhines, but not before they have passed through his mercenary clutches. To release them from the fast custody in which they have fallen, the intending purchaser shall have to pay for one vase a sum equivalent to a prince's ransom.

The collecting of works of art as a recognised luxury and an entrancing pursuit originated at Rome. The Greeks, surrounded as they were by the masterpieces of their national art, enjoyed and discussed them in the temples and the public buildings in which they were placed for their gratification. Their private dwellings were, it is true, adorned with paintings, statues, and vases; but they never were collectors in the proper sense of the word. A private collection composed of miscellaneous objects, gathered from all sources for the sake of their rarity and curiosity, was a thing unknown in Greece. If the Romans never produced a great artist, they were none the less endowed with a keen sense of the beautiful, and their unbounded wealth drew into the Empire the most splendid art treasures of the whole world. At no period of ancient or modern history has the lavishness and extravagance of art amateurs approached the ostentatious munificence of a Roman collector.

The Emperor—the most exalted patron of

the merchant—is given the first choice when Murrhines appear in the market. He pays, with lofty unconcern, prices which would deter anyone who has not uncounted millions at his command to compete against the whims of Cæsar. Pliny tells us that for a single cup Nero gave 300 talents, a sum representing about £72,000 of our money.

A visit to the Septa in the afternoon is one of the fashionable occupations of the Roman patrician. Juvenal and Martial have sketched from the life some of the best-known characters of the time, as they go about from shop to shop in search of a new marvel to add to their collection. They live again in the writings of the Latin satirists ; each followed the bent of his own mania ; from the eccentric group we shall select the Murrhine collectors.

Here comes Petronius, the *arbiter elegantiarum*, carried in his ivory litter and surrounded by a long retinue of parasites and slaves. He stops now and then to exchange a few words with some obsequious merchant, but

he affects to turn away a weary glance from anything that is submitted to his appreciation. At last, a rare Murrhine is produced, and he rises from his couch with an unmistakable sign of interest. The specimen is unique in its kind; he sees that it equals if it does not surpass in beauty the tazza which Nero is proud to possess. For his tazza Nero is known to have paid 300 talents, and this one cannot be obtained for less. But money cannot be taken into consideration when Petronius' fancy has been aroused ; no other man, be he Cæsar himself, shall have the tazza. Accordingly, the bargain is struck, and the exultant purchaser retires with his trophy. History tells us that he was not to enjoy for long the possession of this jewel. Shortly afterwards he was on his deathbed ; tormented with the idea that Nero could acquire or seize the tazza after his demise, he had it brought to him and ordered it to be crushed into powder under his eyes.

The next figure of a Roman collector is a

Consular personage, of whom the chronicler has neglected to report the name. He is talked about as having wasted millions on his Murrhine collection. So important is that collection that he has filled with it the small theatre which Nero built in the Transtever. "It is in that very room," says Pliny, "that I saw him gather religiously the smallest particles of a broken vase, and, in his grief, express the intention of burying them under a sumptuous monument as fine as the one which had been erected over the mortal remains of Alexander the Great." At the sale of his collection, which took place after his death, one special article raised a fierce competition between frantic bidders. It was a drinking-cup, holding about three quarts, for which he had originally paid 70 talents. So much enamoured had he been of his favourite cup, so often had he drunk out of it, that the rims showed traces of having been gnawed all round by his teeth. Pliny, who records the anecdote, ends by saying, "Such curious marks of dilapidation enhanced greatly the value

of the object, and at the present day no other Murrhine can offer such an illustrious certificate of origin."

Among the Imperial collectors we must place Augustus Cæsar, who, after the capture of Alexandria, retained nothing but one single Murrhine cup from all the precious vessels which enriched the Royal palace. Marcus Aurelius is reported to have possessed a collection of gold, crystal, and Murrhine vases; but he sacrificed them all when he parted with his most valuable treasures.

Ludicrous and whimsical characters of antique collectors are not wanting in the series. Juvenal tells us about one Eros, who is depicted as the disconsolate admirer of all the costly objects he cannot afford to buy; he remains lost in admiration before a set of agateized Murrhines, and sheds tears at the idea that they are too expensive for his purse.

Martial traces the portrait of Manurra, the prototype of another class of collectors; he is the impecunious speculator who spends the day

looking out for a bargain that he never finds. The plague of the curiosity shops, he overhauls the whole stock without finding anything to his taste. Occasionally he pauses, smitten by the beauty of some Murrhine vases. He rubs with a loving palm their silky surface; convinces himself that they give off the proper sort of odour. He cannot be expected to carry in his purse the money which is asked for such valuable objects, but he will return on the morrow and complete the purchase. In the meantime, he directs that they should be faithfully set aside for him. The evening puts an end to his fruitless expedition. Fatigued, but not discouraged, he turns his steps towards his suburban dwelling and as he makes it a point never to return home empty-handed, he buys on his way two small saucers of terra cotta of the value of one penny.

We might borrow from the same sources several other portraits of Roman collectors, painted in still more sarcastic colours. These sketches are, in some cases, so true to nature

that at the present day they have lost nothing of their reality. Indeed, by reproducing them here we might run the risk of being prosecuted for libel by certain living amateurs, as having shown an evident intention to make a scurrilous attack upon their personal character.

A last and indispensable actor in our trio is the one who neither buys nor sells, and yet assumes a leading part in the game played between buyers and sellers. It is he who fans the spark into a flame, makes mountains of molehills, and furthers in this way the end for which they all work in concert. We have named the fashionable art critic, the minor poet, the oracle of his over-refined circle. Let him talk or let him write, the words that fall from his lips, the lines that flow from his pen, shall be preserved as guiding rules by his admiring disciples. His decision sanctions the correctness of the latest evolution of tendencies in art; his opinion influences the market value of the contents of a newly-formed collection. He appears to have earnestly improved the oppor-

tunity offered to him by the spreading of the Murrhine fever, the subject affording a fresh scope for the display of æsthetical oratory. We fancy we hear his mellifluous voice expatiating upon the recondite beauties of some select specimen, the deep gorgeousness of each colour, and the subdued and harmonious effects produced by their blending. We lack the actual text of the discursive addresses of the art lecturer of ancient Rome. What may have been the exact drift of his convincing arguments is a point left to our imagination. But the influence they exerted upon the taste of his hearers cannot be over-stated. It is clear that the inconceivable infatuation which had seized the amateurs of this time could scarcely have reached such proportions had it not been excited and maintained by the support of his persuasive eloquence. We might as well imagine that in our own days it could have been possible for us to see the eccentric admirers of old Chinese porcelain lost in extatic rapture over some ginger-jar with the

rare “crushed strawberry” ground, or raving before a milky-white flower-pot with hawthorn pattern of the true blue, had not their fashionable craze been effectually stimulated by the poetical ejaculations of Postlewhaite, Bunt-thorn, and their æsthetic friends.

The final scene of the Murrhines comedy has long been enacted. As soon as the curtain was down, the art-lecturer had nothing more to say on their subject; the wealthy collector looked down with contempt at the last remaining specimens; and the wise dealer took to a more profitable line of business. And so it happened that the Murrhines sank into utter oblivion, a fate which awaits the idols we are ourselves worshipping, as well as those which shall be worshipped after us.

It might justly be observed that we are somewhat wandering from our subject, and that it is time we should approach the question most important to consider when one attempts to deal with the enigma of the Murrhine vases—namely, What is a Murrhine vase, and of what

material were these vases made? Many a puzzled antiquary has addressed to himself this simple question, to find, on further inquiry, that it had proved too hard a nut to crack for all those who had previously attempted it, and that the riddle was still challenging elucidation. Then he turned back to the classical authorities, expecting that they would help him to frame a satisfactory answer. He cogitated, as others had done before him, on the pages of Pliny's "Natural History," which contain particulars on the subject of such an apparently accurate and exhaustive character that they seem amply sufficient to meet all possible inquiries and clear up all uncertainty. But no one has found it an easy matter to make the chief features of Pliny's description agree with one another, and to apply the whole account to any material in existence. Ingenious commentators have deluded themselves with the idea that they had discovered the word of the enigma by picking and choosing in the original text such parts as suited their own scheme, and

each has settled the point to his own, if not to the general satisfaction.

We shall analyze the numerous and irreconcileable opinions which have been entertained at various times ; but before we pass them under review it is necessary that we should quote the passages in Pliny's work upon which they purported to be grounded.

"The Murrhina substance, like the rock-crystal, is extracted from the earth. Crystal originates from a liquid element solidified by intense cold. Murrhina is also produced by the condensation of a liquid, but through the effect of subterranean heat."

It is needless to say that this opinion, accepted by the ancient physicists, is not endorsed by modern science.

"When cut into slabs, the Murrhina never exceeds the size of a small tablet ; blocks of it are seldom so large as the diameter of an ordinary drinking class."

This is not corroborated by Juvenal and other Latin writers, who speak of the *Murrina*

maxima adorning the dining-table of the great Pliny himself mentions, at another place, a cup holding more than three quarts.

"The surface does not shine brightly ; it has a fine polish, but no brilliancy. Its value lies in the quality of the colours which run into each other in veins of red, purple, and white, so as to produce by their blending graduated tints going from fiery purple to milky rose."

"Some amateurs admire the iridescence of the edges, on which all the colours of the rainbow seem to be reflected ; others prefer the dull spots, which contrast with the gloss of the ground."

"Translucency and paleness of the substance are considered imperfections, and so are any grains or blisters which are not raised upon the surface, but lie encysted in the mass, like tumours in the human body."

"The natural perfume inherent to the material enhances greatly the value of a vase."

"It is with Murrhines as with rock-crystal—their very fragility renders them all the more precious."

Murrhines are sent to us from the East. They

come from several parts of the Parthian kingdom, chiefly from Caramania."

The notion we might deduce from the above is that the Murrhine substance extracted from the earth was a kind of precious stone. It is therefore surprising to notice that in the chapter where Pliny names and describes all the precious stones known in his time no mention is made of the Murrhina. Yet, when treating of glass-working, and telling us that the Roman artificers had become so expert in the imitation of all kinds of gems that it was often impossible to distinguish the counterfeit from the original, he does not forget to record the name of the Murrhine glass. Hence arises the question—Is it not possible to assume that the material of which the Murrhines were made, although it offered all the characteristics of a natural stone, was, after all, an artificial product? Such a view is obviously strengthened by the testimony of Propertius, who speaks of the "Murrhine cups baken in Parthian furnaces."

This last statement has been sufficient to

divide the commentators into two camps, one which takes Pliny as the best authority and stands for the theory of a natural material, while the other holds that Propertius' testimony indicates, unquestionably, an artificial material.

The controversy began early in the 16th century with the revival of the study of Roman antiquities. Johannis Palmerius was the first to fix his attention on the Murrhines and to make an attempt to determine the material of which they were made. He believed that the name was derived from myrrha, and had been given to such vases because they were formed of potter's clay mixed with that perfume. His assertion was grounded upon what Pliny says of the natural perfume with which the Murrhines were impregnated, and which greatly enhanced their value, and also upon a passage of Atheneus, in which are spoken of certain highly-scented vases made in Asia out of a mixture of myrrha and potter's clay.

Jerom Cardan, in his work "De Subtilitate. Nuremberg, 1550," started a bold

hypothesis suggested to him by the allusion Propertius makes to "the Murrhine cups baked in the Parthian furnaces." The Parthian country was situated in Persia, on the road through which the Romans had established direct communication with China. It had become the store-place where importations from the far East were centralized ; consequently, the Murrhines which came through the Parthian country were considered by Cardan as having been imported there from China and to be nothing else but Chinese porcelain. One serious objection could be raised against this theory ; it was that Chinese porcelain does not in any way agree with Pliny's description. But he made light of this difficulty, saying that we knew only of the modern style of porcelain manufacture, and that the fictile productions of the Chinese, at the time of the Roman Empire, were of a completely different character. The Oriental origin of the Murrhines seemed to have rallied the greater number of adherents. Julius Cæsar Scaliger, and after him his son Joseph, warmly

supported Cardan's opinion, bringing out in its favour many specious arguments. Salmasius, who wrote in 1529, speaks of the question as having been definitely settled by previous research, saying, "Nothing is, truly, nearer the antique Murrhines than our porcelain." This theory, abandoned for a time, was taken up again with renewed energy by Roloff of Madgeburg in 1810. Two of the most learned antiquaries of the same period, Mariette and Caylus, have also adopted the notion of a Chinese origin.

Among the partizans of the opposite opinion, who hold that the Murrhine vases were carved out of a natural stone and not formed of an artificial substance such as clay or glass, we count N. Ghibertus. His essay on the matter is an attempt to establish that onyx and sardonyx were the materials employed.

P. Bellonius had his attention arrested by the part of the description which speaks of the iridescence of the edges, and he inferred from that fact that they were either natural

shells or vessels adorned with mother-of-pearl. This assertion obtained no more credit than the one advanced by a contemporary writer, who pretended that in the Murrhina described by Pliny one could easily recognize the substance known under the name of meerschaum.

The first dialectic scrutiny of the subject will be found in a lecture delivered by Johan Christ, before the Leipzig Academy, in 1743. His essay contains a critical examination of all previous interpretations, which he denounced as unsatisfactory and improbable. He does little himself, however, towards helping the solution of the problem beyond arguing in favour of a natural substance and suggesting that the substance was probably some kind of onichite or alabastrite of difficult determination, rather than regular onyx or sardonyx.

In a pamphlet published at Catania in 1781, by Prince Biscarri, we find a return to the earliest notion entertained by Italian writers, which was that the perfuming powers of the Murrhines should be considered as their

most distinctive quality. As to the material of which they were made, Biscarri considers the point as having no real importance ; he believes that it may have been marble, agate, alabaster, or some other stone. In his estimation, they were first intended as receptacles for a costly salve or balsam, of which myrrha was the chief component ; when empty, the drug-pot was turned into a drinking vessel. The wine poured into such vessels was scented by the perfume with which they were impregnated ; hence the special value which was attached to them. Two examples, taken from the author's own collection, are shown on the plates engraved to illustrate the disquisition. One is a large marble jar, the other a small tazza of opal ; both are equally irrelevant to the case. A look at these plates is sufficient to upset the stability of a lengthy argument.

Abbé Le Blond a member of the French Academy, displayed much erudition and ingenuity in a memoir, dated 1782, in which he endeavoured to demonstrate that Murrhines

could not possibly have been made of anything else but sardonyx.

Larcher, his colleague at the Academy, contested the accuracy of Le Blond's conclusions, asserting that no precious stone could be found within the whole range of those which have come to our knowledge answering to the description given by Pliny.

Brotier, on the other hand, observed that the notion of a precious stone could not so easily be repudiated, because the Murrhine stone might have been so rare that of the few examples of it known in antiquity none has been preserved to us. To accept such an opinion, we should have to forget that Murrhines were by no means uncommon at Rome, where large collections have been formed of them.

The most damaging argument against the probability of any gem having been the constitutive material of the Murrhine vases is found in the fact, recorded by undeniable authorities, that many were of a comparatively large size. It is difficult to admit that vessels of such

dimensions could have been carved out of a single stone.

H. Von Veltheim took up again, in 1791, the theory of Oriental origin. He discarded the idea of any Chinese porcelain having ever been known by the Romans ; but the antique vases, also coming from China, which he proposed to substitute for any ceramic ware, have at least the merit of agreeing in their chief features with the description given by Pliny. Some of these vases may be seen in public museums, and particularly at Dresden. They are made of steatite, or soap-stone. The surface is highly polished, without being brilliant ; the substance is not opaque, but it is only partially translucent. It is veined with streaks of red, purple, and white, and the colours, running into each other, produce by their mixture, a great variety of graduated tints. Moreover, steatite can receive applications of enamels and be passed through the kiln, so that the natural colours of the stone can still be artificially modified. There is such a striking similitude

between the above particulars and the only descriptive account we have of the Murrhines, that we cannot be surprised that another learned man, Abel de Remusat, has developed still further the theory of Veltheim in his essay "Upon the Mineral Substance called Yu-stone by the Chinese. Paris, 1820."

Quite a new hypothesis was presented in the "Classical Journal" for 1810 by an English antiquary, who wrote under the initials "A.M." It is grounded upon Pliny's statement that the Murrhina substance is formed within the earth under the action of subterranean heat. As the Derbyshire fluor spar offers the required peculiarities of being translucent and streaked in the mass with veins of variegated colours, and as these colours were considered by some mineralogists as having been developed by intense cosmic heat, the writer had confidently come to the conclusion that the Murrhine substance was beyond a doubt identical to Derbyshire fluor spar.

We must pass over many other articles and

pamphlets, all differing in their conclusions, and come to the most exhaustive and, in some respects, the most intelligible summing-up of this intricate controversy. We refer to the treatise published at Munich in 1835 by F. Thiersch, under the title "*Vasa Murrina der Alten.*" The learned writer demonstrates, with the support of a clear and consistent system of comparisons and inductions, that, in opposition to Pliny and all his partizans, the theory of natural stones must be abandoned. He maintains that all inquiries into the true nature of the Murrhines should rest upon the testimony of Propertius, who says that they were "baked in Parthian ovens," and that they could therefore be nothing else but artificial products.

We regret to be unable to follow here the train of his cogent argument, which, after all previous hypotheses have been reviewed and disposed of as inadmissible, goes on to establish that one may safely take as having been the true Murrhina substance certain vitreous pastes and opaque glass, showing the appearance of a

precious stone, but with no pretension of imitating any particular kind, for the making of which the Phoenicians and the Romans were so justly celebrated. The assumption is substantiated by the fact that many a vase of vitreous paste has been found in the sepulchres of the Romans, while the same cannot be said of Chinese porcelain or steatite, no more than it applies to vessels of opal or of sardonyx. We know on good authority that it was customary to deposit in the grave of the dead the Murrhine cup he had valued the most during his life, and also that it was a branch of the trade of the Alexandria glassmakers to supply with cheap imitations the thrifty relatives of the deceased who were unwilling to devote to funereal purposes a valuable original. Are we not warranted to infer from this record that it was a common practice to deposit Murrhines in the graves of the dead? If so, it is in the graves that we must expect to find them.

The examples reproduced by Thiersch to illustrate his disquisition are two fragments of

dark-blue glass streaked with brown and decorated, in the highest style of art, with reliefs of figures in white paste. They are of the same order as the Portland Vase, and, like this latter, were discovered in a Roman sarcophagus. We should feel inclined to range ourselves on the side of the believers in the theory of vitreous paste, but we confess that some objections can be raised against it which we are not prepared to answer. It may be said, for instance, that no mention has ever been found in ancient texts of the surface being embellished with white reliefs, and that in the list of the colours entering into the variegated marbling of the mass, the blue—which invariably forms the ground of the vases of that order—is not specified. Moreover, as we have said from the first, we do not intend to side with one party or the other, still less to lengthen by one more far-fetched theory of our own an already too long array of unsatisfactory conjectures. The task we have imposed upon ourselves is merely to prepare, to the best of our ability, a digest of the

whole question. A more enterprising spirit may feel inclined, after the perusal of our imperfect sketch, to plunge deeper into the subject and strive to find out a solution to the problem which has baffled the sagacity of his forerunners. Let him return to the original documents from which we have given but a few desultory extracts. He will see that we are far from having exhausted the multifarious aspects of the still unsettled controversy, and he may find many things to say that have not yet been said.

As for us, bewildered by such an amount of conflicting theories, all born of a mistaken interpretation of the same often-quoted and mis-quoted passages, we can only express our misgivings as to whether these passages—uncorroborated, when they are not actually negatived by each other—are not responsible, after all, for the whole mischief. So far, the absolute trustworthiness of Pliny's statements has not been questioned. At the risk of being taxed with audacious irreverence towards a highly respected classic, we venture to ask whether too

much reliance has not been placed upon his veracity. His work is held in high esteem, as we all know, for the light it throws upon some branches of the scientific knowledge of the ancients, but it has never been denied that it is also full of inaccuracies and errors. To write, as he did, upon every subject connected with natural history, and depend only on the result of personal experience, would require an omniscience denied to human nature. In many cases he had to obtain enlightenment from foreign sources, not being always sufficiently on his guard against the incorrect or ambiguous information that was communicated to him. The Murrhines were the talk of the town at the very time when he wrote about them. In all likelihood, plain truth was intermixed in a very small proportion with a great deal which was, intentionally, marvellous and sensational in the reports that were current on the subject. He may have noted down as sound and valid information all he heard either from the enthusiastic and credulous amateur

who had been taught to entertain extravagant notions regarding the nature and the value of his gem-like Murrhines, or from the artful dealer of the Septa, whose interest it was to conceal from all the name of the country from which he obtained his supply of rare vases, and to throw a veil of mystery over the material of which they were made. We are therefore warranted in surmising that the particulars Pliny collected under such conditions may have been derived from a dubious source, and that they embody as much gossiping levity as truly scientific knowledge.

Howbeit, one point may be considered as fairly established, it is that considering the irreconcileable conclusions arrived at by the most serious commentators, no satisfactory end can be gained by taking Pliny's description as a basis for a fresh course of investigations. All sorts of substances have been found to correspond to certain of his statements ; but on closer examination we recognise that each of them is short of some important feature, without which

this material has no more chance of being accepted as settling the question than any of the others which have been proposed.

We do not think it probable that the ancient Murrhines have all been destroyed and that no example of them will ever be discovered. We feel confident that a course of systematic and comparative examination of the whole range of Roman antiquities belonging to the first centuries of our era will one day cast an unexpected ray of light on a field of research where all is now confused and dark. Lost among a crowd of nondescript vessels—whole or fragmentary, despised outcasts which have no history—the fallen prince, the estranged Murrhine, has been waiting these two thousand years for the clear-sighted observer who, struck by some indefinable signs of nobility discernible even in the midst of such abject surroundings, will deliver the captive from his long entombment and ask us to pay homage to his restored dignity.

But if this aim is to be attained, it must be

through a series of inferences and deductions grounded upon the teachings of object-evidences, and not by any further manipulations and distortions of the unreliable and misleading texts which have so far thrown so many conscientious inquirers out of the right path.

