

**THE WADDESDON BEQUEST; THE
COLLECTION OF JEWELS, PLATE, AND
OTHER WORKS OF ART, BEQUEATHED
TO THE BRITISH MUSEUM BY BARON
FERDINAND ROTHSCHILD**

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The Waddesdon Bequest; The collection of Jewels, Plate, and Other Works of Art, Bequeathed to the British Museum by Baron Ferdinand Rothschild by Charles Hercules Read

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CHARLES HERCULES READ

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TO THE BRITISH MUSEUM BY BARON
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BARON FERDINAND ROTHSCHILD, M.P.

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Frontispiece. PORTRAIT OF BARON FERDINAND ROTHSCHILD.

(From a photograph by Russell and Sons.)

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Review 17. 7-27-26

INTRODUCTION.

BARON FERDINAND ROTHSCHILD, M.P. for Aylesbury, died on the 17th December, 1898. He was elected a Trustee of the British Museum on the 7th February, 1896, and until his death he took a keen interest in the business of the Museum, frequently paying visits to the various departments, while he was an assiduous attendant at the meetings of the Board. His father, Baron Anselm, had been a collector of works of art, and he himself continued the collection. His fine country house at Waddesdon, near Aylesbury, was full of choice French furniture, while the walls were covered with old tapestry and pictures of the highest quality. In one room in the house he had gathered together the smaller works of art, which were arranged in glass cases or on the walls. The contents of this room he bequeathed to the Trustees of the British Museum, on the condition that they should be kept in a room apart from the other collections of the Museum, to be called the "Waddesdon Bequest Room." The Museum did not possess a room which could at once be devoted to the display of the collection, and to build one would have taken a long time. The Trustees then decided that the room containing the Roman antiquities of Britain should be converted into the "Waddesdon Room," the bulk of the antiquities being consigned to the basement, while a number of the more attractive remains are arranged in the Prehistoric Saloon. Measures are being

taken for the ultimate re-arrangement of the whole under more worthy conditions.

Baron Ferdinand also bequeathed to the Museum a number of fine manuscripts, but these not being subject to the same conditions as the rest of the bequest, are preserved in the Department of Manuscripts, and will be on exhibition in the Manuscript Saloon on the ground floor of the Museum.

The collection, which is briefly catalogued in the following pages, is of exceptional richness, and of a kind that is only to be obtained by those who possess the amplest resources. In nearly all the classes of works of art of which it is composed there are pieces of the highest quality. The prevailing tone of richness and splendour of colour evidences a taste rather for the fully developed productions of the later Renaissance than for the more severe Gothic or quattro-cento styles, where the artist is fettered by the conventions of an immature art. The Classical period is represented by four examples only, but of these, two beautiful heads in high relief may well claim to be in the first rank, and their refined style shows that they date from the period when art had reached its highest point (No. 1, Pl. I). The serene beauty of these heads places them in quite a different category from the great proportion of the rest of the collection; the only other pieces that are at all comparable with them, though far removed in date, are the two busts which have been fancifully called Charles the Bold and his wife (No. 261).

The series of cups and vases of rock crystal and other hard stones is of a kind for the appreciation of which no special training is required. The brilliancy of the colours, the difficulties surmounted in the laborious hollowing of the intractable materials, and the richness and beauty of the enamelled mountings, are readily understood. Among these one piece stands pre-eminent—the mottled agate vase No. 68 (Pl. IV), of which the body is an example of ancient Roman cameo work while the mounts are in the most elaborate style of the Italian Renaissance, and the whole is in the most perfect state of preservation. The skill of the ancient Roman lapidary was fully equal to that of his later collaborator, though the nature of his material exacted a broader treatment. It is somewhat

rare to find an ancient vase of hard stone so symmetrical and graceful in outline, and it is probably this quality that led the goldsmith of the Renaissance to bestow his skill upon it. Others of these cups claim a classical origin, and it may be that one or two of them are of Roman times, and like this one with enrichments of a much later date, but none has such superlative qualities. Of the other vases, in which the cutting of the stones and the ornamental settings are more or less contemporary, several will repay a close examination, and one at least (No. 79) is notable for bearing the name of Akbar, the great Indian emperor, and was no doubt a gift to him from some European prince.

Closely connected with the crystal cups both by their attractiveness and their technical peculiarities, are the jewels and personal ornaments, and in quality of work, as well as in the rarity of the individual pieces, the two classes are fairly on a level. Here, again, one of the series stands far above the rest, both for its historical interest and for the beauty of the workmanship. This is the Lyte jewel (No. 167, Pl. XI), a superb specimen of the goldsmith's work of the early years of the 17th century, possibly from the hand of George Heriot himself, or it may be even by the painter of the portrait, Hilliard, who, it must be remembered, was a goldsmith as well as a painter. The skilful treatment of the white enamel on the back, with the thin graceful lines of gold, forms an agreeable contrast to the brilliancy of the face of the locket. The portrait of King James within is unusually well preserved, and is a good example of Hilliard's work. The king was so flattered by the pedigree that Mr. Lyte produced, in which the king's ancestry was traced back to Brut, that, as Anthony à Wood says, he gave him "his picture in gold set with diamonds, with gracious thanks." This "picture" was left by a later Thomas Lyte to a daughter, and it finally came into the family of Monypeny, and was sold. It was then purchased by the Duke of Hamilton, and was included in the sale of the Hamilton Palace Collection, where it realised £2835, and passed into the collection of Baron Ferdinand Rothschild. A number of the other jewels are of the kind popularly associated with the name of Cellini; but a comparison of the designs with those of the German engravers of ornament