

**A VISIT TO THE CABINET  
OF THE UNITED STATES  
MINT, AT PHILADELPHIA**

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A Visit to the Cabinet of the United States Mint, at Philadelphia by Elizabeth Bryant Johnston

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**ELIZABETH BRYANT JOHNSTON**

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## PREFATORY.

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It is not attempted in this little work to cover in detail the whole field occupied by the interesting subject of which it discourses. But it is believed that herein are embodied sufficient curious and important facts to satisfy the general reader's demand for information regarding the art—its history, uses, and elegancies—to which the following pages are devoted.

Thanks are due to the courteous officers of the Mint for the promptness, as well as patience, with which they supplied to the writer all information sought. From them, and from such other authorities as the works of ex-Director Snowden and those of Mr. W. E. Dubois, the distinguished numismatist, have most of the needed data hereof been derived.

E. B. J.

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# A VISIT TO THE CABINET OF THE UNITED STATES MINT.

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## INTRODUCTORY.

### HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF COIN.

It is impossible, in a cursory glance at the subject, to appreciate the importance or pleasure the numismatist realizes in his studies. That a thorough knowledge of coins and medals is a history of the world from that early date in which metals were put to such uses, will be admitted by all who have given time and labor to investigation. Coin is history epitomized. History engraven upon golden coins and medals lies hidden in tombs or buried in the bosom of mother earth, deposited there by miserly hands ages long past. All that was mortal in the sepulchre becomes dust, but neither worm nor mould can rob the golden witness of its testimony. It may have lain centuries in the sea, but salt water will not corrode it, and should nature, in convulsive throes, cast coin or medal upon dry land, the story it tells will be accepted, and possibly establish facts concerning which the learned have fought a thousand battles.

The rudeness or perfection of coins and medals furnish sure tests of the character and culture of the periods of their production. This is equally true of that rare specimen of antiquity, the Syracuse silver medal,—the oldest medal known to collectors,—and the latest triumph of the graver's art in gold, the Metis medal.

## THE SYRACUSE MEDAL

was given as a reward to a victor in the Olympian games. On the obverse is the head of Ceres, often spoken of as that of a young Patrician; which is erroneous, from the fact that no mortal's head was allowed on the coins of this period. The primitive Syracusan emblem, the dolphin, is a distinguishing feature. The reverse represents a chariot race,—four horses abreast, with Fame, or Victory, hovering over the driver. While this medal is interesting as a relic, it is marvelous as a work of art. The archæologist eagerly scans numismatic treasures as the landmarks of history,—a kind of legal tender of truth,—which all are compelled to accept. Whatever has been written upon vellum or found upon papyrus has a corroborative witness in a coin or medal. Many facts are testified to only by these undying witnesses, and many lost links are supplied. Gibbon says, "If there was no other record of Hadrian, his career would be found written upon the coins of his reign."

## COINS AND MEDALS

also mark the introduction of laws; for example, an old Porcian coin gives the date of the "law of appeal," under which, two centuries and a half later, Paul appealed to Cæsar. Another relic dates the introduction of the ballot-box; and a fact interesting to the agriculturist is established by an old silver coin of Ptolemy, upon which a man is represented cutting millet, a variety of Indian corn, with a scythe. Religions have been promulgated by coins. Islamism says upon a gold coin, "No deity but God. He has no partners. Mohammed is God's friend, God's apostle; God's apostle sent with command, and religion of truth to exalt it over all religions in spite of their upholders. In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful, this denarius was struck."

Persian coins in mystic characters symbolize the dreadful sacrifices of the Fire-Worshippers. Again, Henry VIII., with characteristic egotism, upon a medal struck for Henry by Henry, announces in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin: "Henry, Eighth King of England, France, and Ireland; Defender of the Faith, and in the land of England and Ireland, under Christ, the Supreme Head of the Church."

We cannot quite look upon coins and medals as fashion-plates; yet the costumes of all ages are stamped upon them, from the golden net confining the soft tresses of the "sorceress of the Nile," and the gemmed robe of Queen Irene, to the brodered stomacher of Queen Anne, and the stately ruff of Elizabeth of England.

In this connection may be mentioned the "bonnet piece" of Scotland, a coin of the reign of James VI., which is extremely rare, one of them having recently sold for £41. The coin received its name from a representation of the king upon it, with a curiously plaited hat or bonnet which this monarch wore, a fashion that gave occasion for the ballad, "Blue Bonnets over the Border."

#### HERALDIC EMBLEMS

are faithfully preserved through this medium; in truth, medallic honors may be claimed as the very foundation of heraldic art. We discover medals perpetuating revolutions, sieges, plots, and murders not a few. We prefer directing attention to the fact that coins and medals are not only the pillars of history, but a favorite vehicle of poetry—of the poetry of all nations. Epics are thus preserved by the graver's art in space inconceivably small. Poets turn with confidence to old coins for symbol as well as fact. All mythological and allegorical beauty have in coins and medals found sure retreat, and poetry a home protected from the tooth of Time or the changes of the ages.