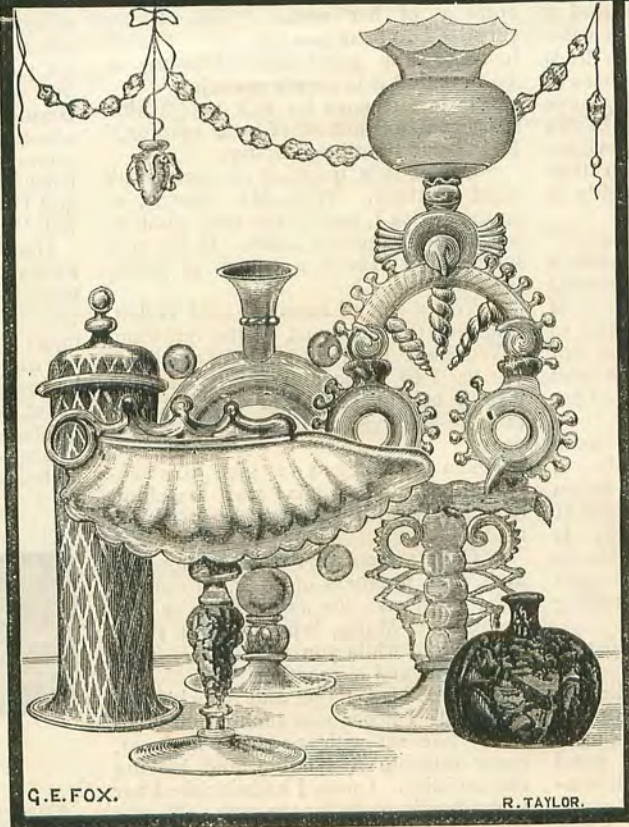


## VENETIAN GLASS



LET us take our stand, after a long climb of over three hundred feet, in the belfry of the Bell Tower of St. Mark's, which rises in the middle of Venice, near the famous church of that name. We shall be well rewarded for the trouble of the ascent by the wonderful view over sea and land which meets the eye. Almost beneath us, below, on the broad waters by the Ducal Palace, all is bustle and movement. The big vessels are anchored there, gondolas ply from point to point, and heavy market boats lie moored in groups, like water fowl on a lake. Let us now turn northwards. The salt lagoon stretches far away to the mainland, and the vision is less assisted by nearer objects than in our other outlook. The broad waters extend for miles, glittering beneath the intense light of an Italian sky, to the purple hills of the mainland; and here and there from their surface rise islands, small compared with the open extent of sea, and resembling ships at anchor on the bosom of the waters, the bell towers of the churches upon them showing as their masts. Each island is a little settlement, and the one nearest to us is Murano. That little island of Murano holds a town famous for its glass works all over Europe. At first these glass works were established in the parent city, in Venice itself, but, perhaps owing to the disastrous fires they caused, on account of their furnaces, it is believed that the manufacture was, as early as the close of the 13th century, transferred to the safer spot (Murano), where it has ever since been practised.

In process of time the beautiful products of these famous furnaces were carried far and wide by the adventurous Venetian mariners. The earliest notice we have of them in England, where they are now so well



known, is of the time of our Richard II. In 1399, two Venetian galleys anchored in the port of London, probably close to London Bridge. They had run the gauntlet of the pirate rovers of Tunis and Algiers and the storms of the ever-restless Biscayan seas, with their frail cargo, and their captains had now permission from the English king to sell their wares on the decks of their galleys in the port. There were then no big establishments in London town for their display, but no doubt Andrea Jane and Jacopo Dandolo, the merchant adventurers, found many and good customers in the nobles of Richard's court, and doubtless many a gilded cup or glittering goblet of strange form was reserved for the King himself.

At a later date a list of household articles belonging to Henry VIII. shows that prince in possession of over four hundred vessels of glass of all kinds, the greater number of which were pretty certainly from the furnaces of Murano, and figured, no doubt, in the gorgeous banquets of that splendour-loving and luxurious monarch.

Quaint and odd as were many of the forms of the Murano goblets—some shaped like fishes, others like galleys and gondolas, others again like lions—they were, it appears from the account of an old French writer, intended for occasional use at least, and at great festivals would be handed round to the guests, as the "loving cup" still is at the Lord Mayor's banquet. In the time of our Charles I. and Charles II. these wonderful productions would figure as valued treasures amongst the gold and silver plate which on state occasions loaded the *beaufets* of our principal nobles. MSS. in the British Museum show that vases such as these were

in request in England in the middle of the seventeenth century.

So wide at last did the fame of the glass of Venice spread, that rulers of England, Spain, and Flanders enticed workmen from the Venetian State to introduce the manufacture into their various countries. The Government of the City of the Lagoons tried by every means in its power to retain the secrets of so profitable a trade in its own keeping, and not only ordered home all those workmen who had been tempted abroad, but kept their families in prison as hostages for their return. It is even said that emissaries were employed to assassinate the rebellious workmen if they did not obey the summon of the State to quit the service of foreign princes. But the crafty republic did not rely on threats alone. It granted the glassmakers many privileges, among them the much-prized patent of nobility, by which "their daughters were considered equal matches for the sons of the best patricians."

On nights of high festival, the halls of some of the Venetian palaces were lit by huge lanterns whose richly carved and gilded framework was filled with a very peculiar glazing. Instead of panes of plain or engraved glass, the spaces were filled with twisted rods of glass placed closely side by side. To those who have not seen them, the wonderful brilliancy which this method of glazing gave to the light within can scarcely be imagined. Then, too, the mirrors, adorned with elaborate glass frames, and chandeliers of the same material, their branches covered with flowers of every hue, must have made the ballrooms of the Venetian nobles a very fairyland of joyous light and colour.

Competition arose, however, in other countries, and this trade as well as much else died out at last, and the principal branch of the glass manufacture finally practised at Murano in the last century consisted chiefly in the making of beads of all kinds in enormous quantities. Large consignments were made to Liverpool about that period, and no doubt many a ship trading from that port to the African coasts bartered away these products of the Venetian lagoons with the savage negro tribes of the Congo, the Gold Coast, and the Gaboon, and the hundred-hued beads made by the deft fingers of the Murano workmen became the royal treasures of savage slave-hunting kings.

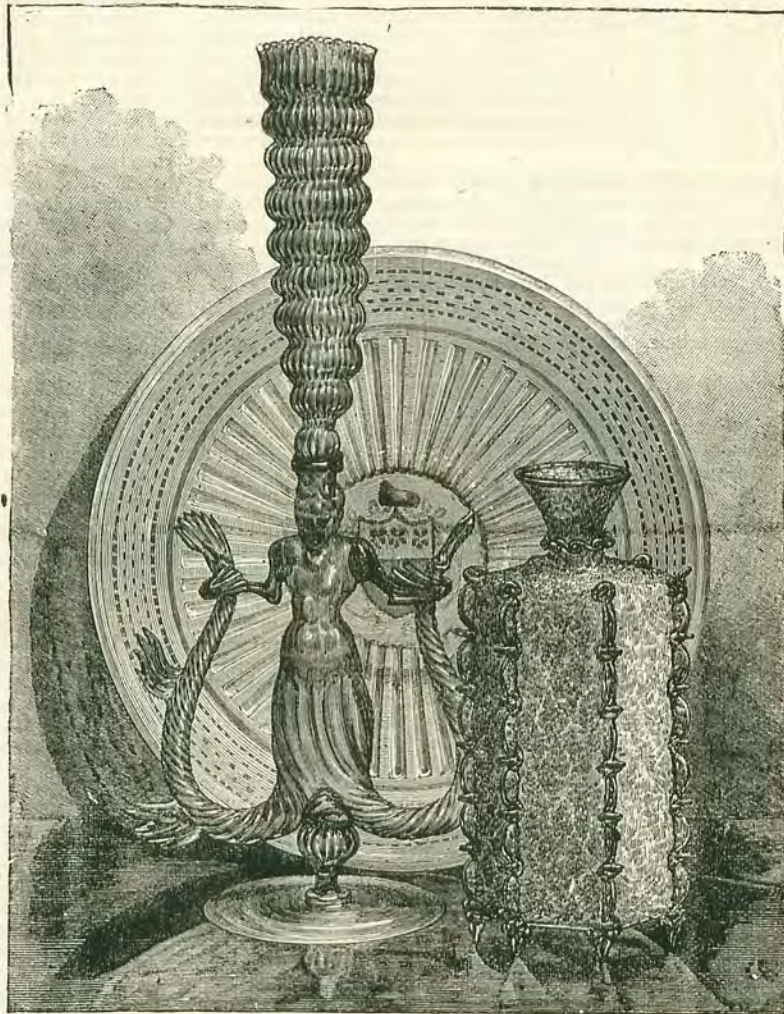
The making of beads has survived to this day, but the beautiful vases of Murano glass work, in imitation of those of the sixteenth century, of late years brought to our notice, may be considered a revival of the ancient manufacture due to the enterprise of Signor Salviati of Venice, and others.

These modern copies yield in no respect to the old originals in beauty of form and colour. Even the strange forms of the old vases, of which some examples are shown in our illustration, have been successfully imitated. Not only the forms but the colours of the different vessels are very varied. We have, besides clear white glass, blue, purple, green, amber, ruby, and a semi-transparent opal white, the most beautiful of all. Also clear glass covered with the most delicate network of gold or milk-white lines, called "Vitro di trina;" crackled glass, whose surface is ridged and intersected by minute divisions like tiny cracks, and the lovely variety imitating all kinds of

there, where they will find also many examples of old Murano work.

Of course, very many of these modern vases can only be considered in the light of ornaments, and very exquisite ornaments they are. But as it is always pleasant to combine utility with beauty, we may press some of the simpler forms of this glass from the lagoons into our service for the dinner table. Wine glasses of clear glass dotted with tiny coloured beads like jewels, tumblers of the lovely milky hue of opal, and flat dishes of the speckled gold kind, or of the "vitro di trina," will add brilliancy to our feasts and sustain and heighten the effect of the flowers, which must always remain the most beautiful ornaments of our tables. Discretion, however, is required, for too lavish display of colour in the various vessels is to be avoided as too glaring. Those of opal glass we are inclined to think the best, and are tempted to fancy that it is of goblets such as these the wondrous tales are told that they had the quality of changing colour and breaking if poison was poured into them—an invaluable quality at the banquets of princes in the treacherous times when the Venetian glassworkers made their great and deserved reputation, a reputation amply sustained by the lovely shapes and images of delight their descendants have brought again before us within the last few years.

GEORGE E. FOX.



VENETIAN GLASS.

precious stones, such as jasper, calcedony, and lapis-lazuli, and including the kind called "Mille fiori" (the thousand flowers), a little bottle of which is shown in our illustration. This is an opaque glass, sometimes with a ground of dark blue, speckled and dotted over with tiny flowery spots of all sorts of colours.

This latter kind may be considered as a direct descendant of the magnificent cups and vases which the ancient Romans prized above silver and gold, and deemed worthy to be buried in imperial tombs. To those who love the sight of beautiful colours, we could not offer a greater pleasure than a visit to the great glass room at the British Museum will afford, and we recommend to our readers a few hours' study of the splendid collection

this eminently successful composer quite come up to the expectations we had formed from his previous compositions.

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