

THE ART-JOURNAL.



LONDON, OCTOBER 1, 1853.

THE EXHIBITION OF DECORATIVE FURNITURE AT GORE HOUSE.

CONSIDERING the Exhibition of Decorative Furniture which was recently open at Gore House as of great importance to those engaged in this branch of manufactures, as well as to many others, we have thought it desirable to offer a series of engravings of the principal objects to our readers, to most of whom they cannot fail to be interesting; and in order to combine instruction with these pictorial illustrations, we have obtained from Mr. J. C. Robinson, F. S. A., of the Department of Science and Art, the substance of a lecture on the subject delivered by him in the theatre of the Institution, at Marlborough House on June 27th; to which he has added some valuable critical remarks on the examples of furniture here introduced. From the miscellaneous nature of the collection at Gore House, a strictly methodical selection of the several objects, as well as their arrangement to adapt them to our pages, was unattainable. We have taken what we think will be most suggestive, not omitting what may be regarded as the most beautiful, and although the prints may not appear in the exact order in which they are referred to in the text, there will be little difficulty in identifying them with the descriptions. The illustrations are from drawings made expressly for us by Mr. Henry Mason.



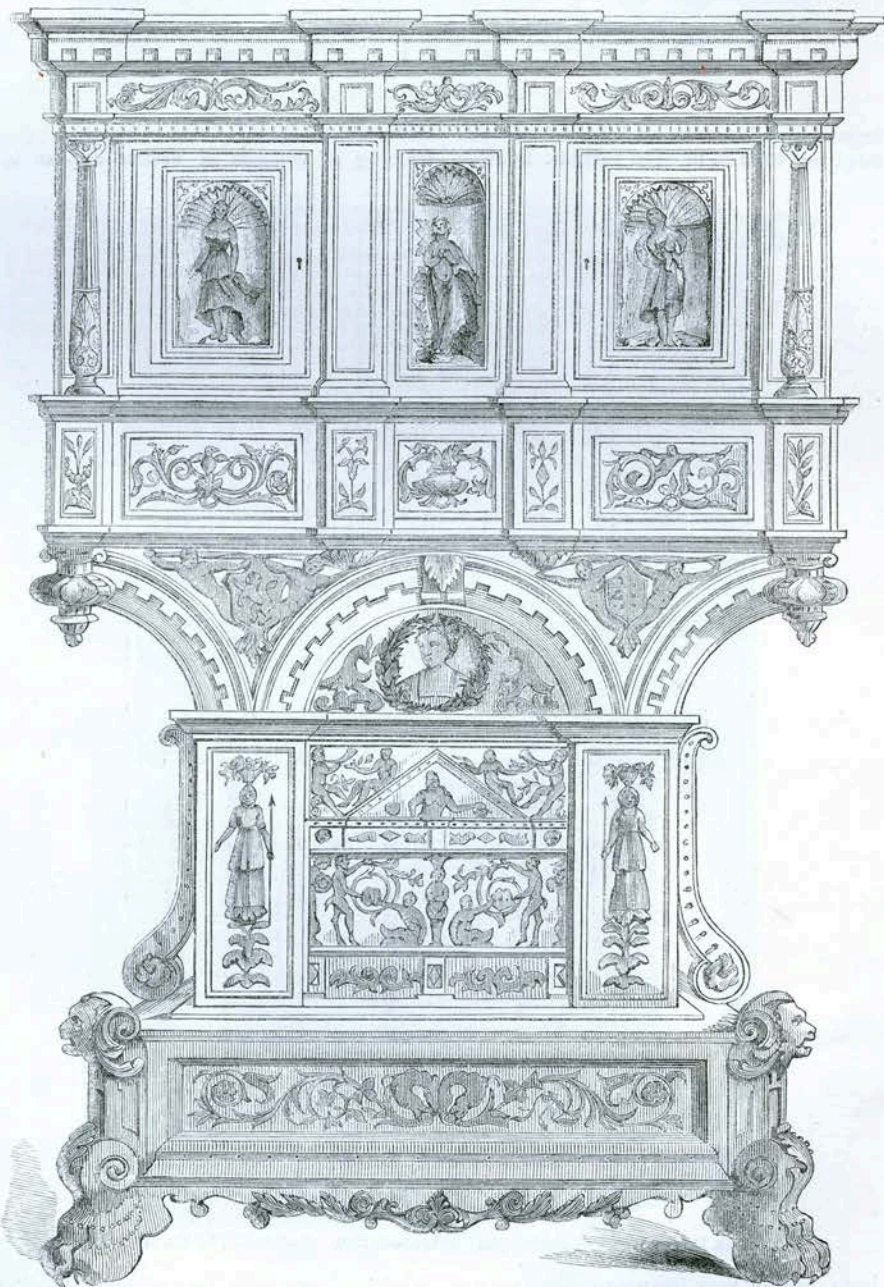
ABINET-MAKING, or the Art of Furniture, if it may be so phrased, most frequently necessitates in its manifestations the co-operation of so many other arts, that it is difficult to treat of it otherwise

than very discursively, though an investigation into the aesthetic conditions that regulate the union of utility and beauty in "cabinet work" would doubtless result in the establishment of special rules and canons enabling us to view it as a concrete subject. The exhibition at Gore House afforded ample materials for such abstract investigations as would be necessary to this end. The consideration of superadded decoration as it arises from, or is at variance with, constructional necessities—the influence of the characteristic expression of the materials employed, &c.,—these and many similar topics, fully illustrated in the extensive series of specimens there brought together, would, if clearly formularised,

have a direct and practical influence in guiding the inventive powers of the modern artist into the best channel for their legitimate development. But besides the treatment here indicated, this collection offers another not less interesting aspect, namely, the historical or archæologic view, and which, as the brief limits of this essay renders an attention to concise method very necessary, would perhaps offer the best bond of connexion for our remarks.

The most convenient mode, then, will be to treat the general question of decora-

tive furniture as the art developed itself chronologically, touching on the previous topics as they naturally arise in the gradual unfolding of the subject. In pursuance of this plan, it will be necessary to go back to a distant period in the history of art. From the earliest times there appears to have been a growing disposition to increase the quantity and variety of furniture in habitations, a tendency doubtless induced by advancing civilisation, alike the cause and the effect of increasing bodily comfort. The ancients, however, appear to have had very



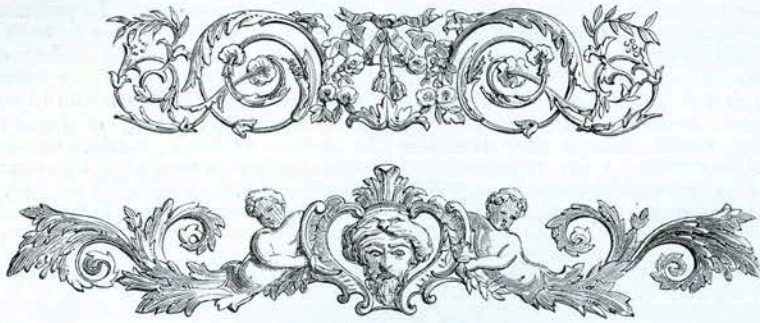
No. 1.—OAK CABINET OR BUFFET, in the Flemish style. Date 1530—40. Contributed by Mr. I. K. BRUNEL.

little furniture in their houses, and that little made of such permanent and monumental materials as seldom to need renewing; temporary fashions, which in modern times have been a great cause of the multiplication of articles of furniture, having, as might be expected, but little influence in early periods. Thus styles, materials, and prevalent methods of construction, became of traditional fixity and permanence; besides, nearly all the civilised people of antiquity were inhabitants of hot climates,

consequently they lived more in the open air and in public places than the modern nations of western Europe, and so had less occasion for the various comforts and appliances which an indoor life requires. To this day in the east, carpets, cushions, and curtains, are the staple of furniture, whilst in Italy even we are struck with the nakedness of the saloons of the vast palaces, in which the furniture so thinly scattered gives an impression of beggarly paucity to English housekeepers.

Very scanty remains of antique furniture, have come down to us. Of works in wood, as might be expected, we possess but the barest and merest relics : metals, chiefly

of these a considerable number of actual examples are preserved in the various public collections of Europe. In the British Museum we have the fragments of



No. 2.—ORNAMENTAL DETAILS.

bronze, were however much more frequently employed than in modern periods. Benches and tables of marble, stools, chairs, and the framing of couches of bronze appear to



No. 3.—OAK BUFFET, in the Flemish style. Date about 1520. Contributed by Mr. H. FARRER.

have been of very frequent occurrence ; of such objects many specimens are extant, whilst excavations in celebrated sites furnish abundant specimens of handles,

the bronze Nineveh thrones, perfect specimens of Egyptian chairs and stools, and a most exquisite Greek bronze stool (bisellium) ; whilst the fictile vases in the

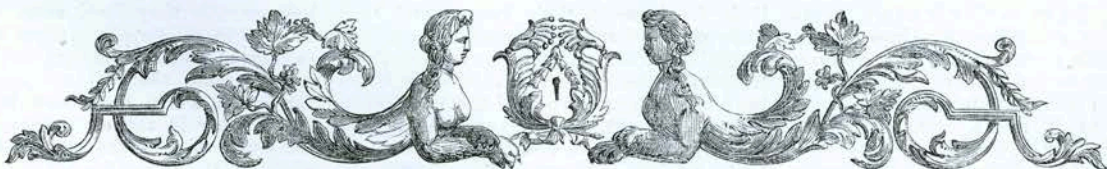


No. 5.—ITALIAN BELLOWS. Date about 1587. Contributed by Mr. H. MAGNIAC.



No. 6.—OR-MOLU MOUNTING, from an Ebony German Cabinet. Date about 1630. Contributed by the QUEEN, from Windsor Castle.

same collection offer numerous elegant designs of articles of furniture. Judging from certain indications in the supports and rails of bronze furniture, we may, by



No. 4.—ORNAMENTAL DETAIL.

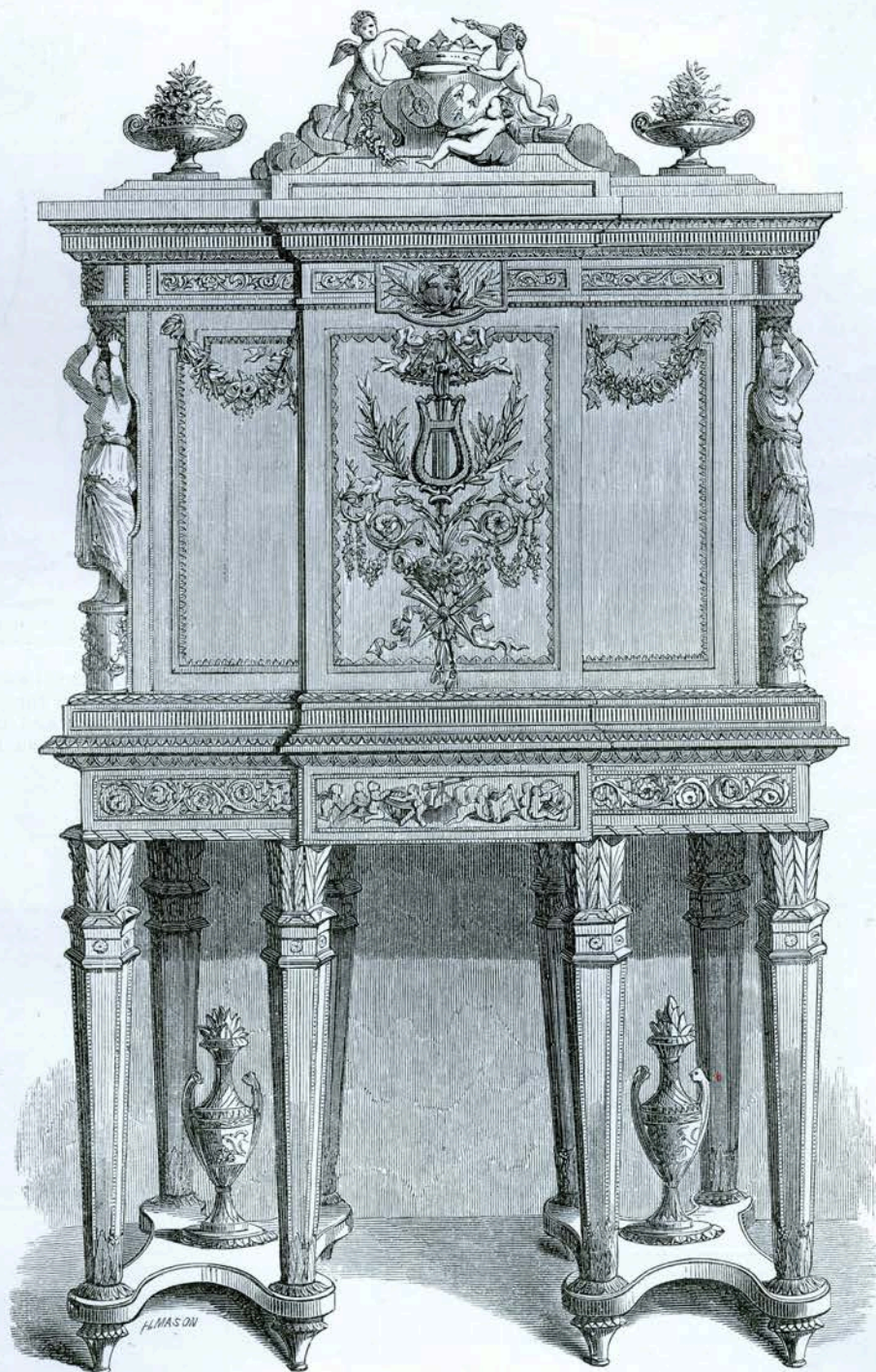
rings, knobs, ferrules, and other appurtenances of wooden objects. Stools and chairs are of the most usual occurrence in collections and in antique authorities ; analogy, infer that turned woodwork was much in use for chairs, the legs of tables,

couches, &c. ; whilst many bronze objects exhibit a system of prominently projecting circular mouldings, which would naturally be produced by the wood turner, from whose models, indeed, they were probably cast.

Generally, in the lighter and more graceful kinds of Greek and Egyptian chairs, we see a perfectly consistent and artistic use of

the material, the natural expression and tendencies of which are allowed free scope : the legs and framing are, indeed, sometimes disposed in elegant sweeping curves which at first sight may seem somewhat antagonistic to the natural rectilinear tendencies of woodwork, but these curved forms are so arranged as to conduce to bodily

comfort and stability of construction, and may have been suggested by the use and capabilities of the staves or small wood of such trees as the yew or the cypress. Every one must have noticed the constant occurrence of the legs and feet of animals as supports to furniture ; these are conspicuous in all antique epochs. Mr. Layard's



No. 7.—FRENCH CABINET, in Mahogany and Or-Molu. Date 1770—90. Contributed by the QUEEN, from Windsor Castle.

recent discoveries having shown us that they were favourite forms even in the ancient Assyrian empire.

With respect to the processes in use in antique times, we find metal inlaying, especially with silver and niello work, continually employed in the decoration of bronze furniture : and it is certain that the process of covering wood constructions with metal

plates was very early practised, especially amongst the Greeks and Etruscans, with whom embossed metal plating or "repoussé" work appears to have been adapted, if we may institute a comparison, much on the same principles as we see developed in the curiously incrustated furniture of the seventeenth century from Knowle House, of which an illustration is subjoined.

That wooden furniture was frequently painted and gilded, we know from numerous Egyptian remains ; and we have fragments of ornamental mouldings in wood, of Greek origin, in the British Museum, which likewise exhibit traces of gold and colours. Marqueterie, or wood inlaying, as is evident from many existing examples, was very popular amongst the Egyptians, and was

doubtless equally well known to the Greeks and Romans: in short it is highly probable that nearly every characteristic mode of decoration of furniture, which the collec-

tion at Gore House illustrates, has had its origin in antiquity. With respect to the employment of rich stuffs as cushions, hangings, &c., we have abundant evidence

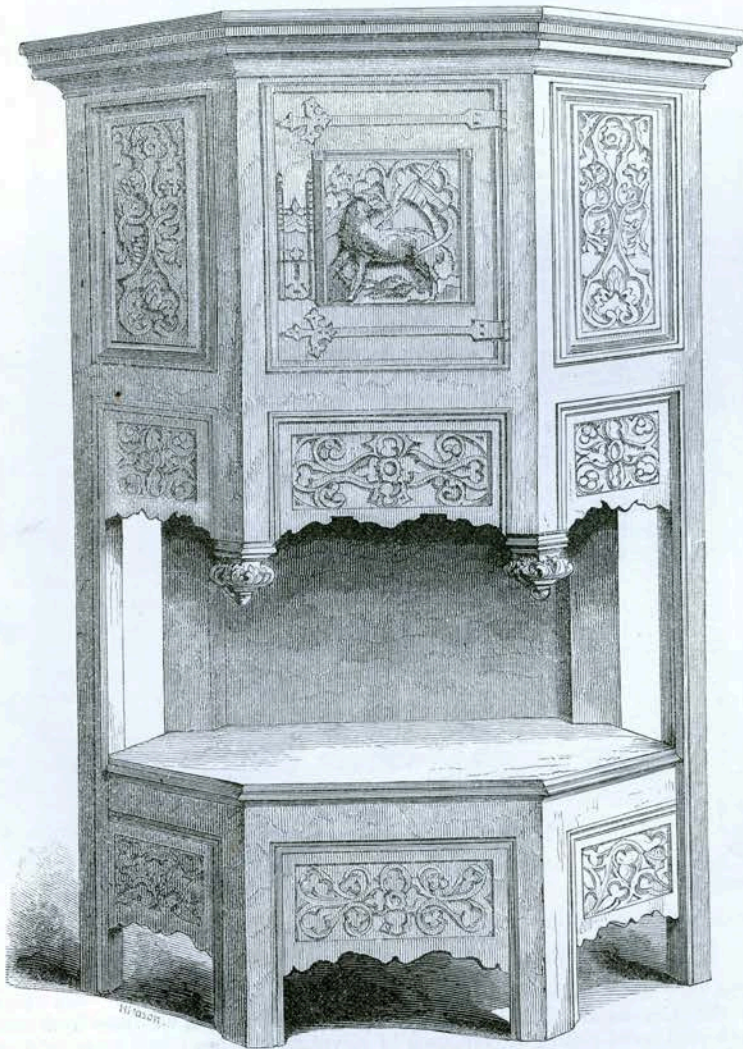
came popular. Doubtless in the East or Europe under the Greek empire, the traditions of antiquity lingered for a very long



No. 8.—VENETIAN STOOL. Date about 1670. Contributed by Earl AMHERST.

that their use was similar, indeed probably more universal than at the present day, for with the ancients drapery was an art, beautiful casts and dispositions being evidently admired for their own excellence.

Pursuing our historical illustrations, we come now to the mediæval periods, and here we are almost destitute of authorities: literally, no specimens of furniture have descended to us from the epochs usually



No. 9.—OAK BUFFET, in the German Gothic style. Date about 1480. Contributed by Mr. TALBOT BURY.

designated as the "dark ages." The illuminations of manuscripts afford vague indications of the characteristic forms; but the practice of painting the figure-

subjects on a gold background prevented the introduction of those interesting accessories which we see at an after period, when interiors and landscape backgrounds be-



No. 10.—Part of STAND to a German Cabinet. Date about 1650. Contributed by Mr. J. LEVEIN.

period; so that till a comparatively modern epoch, Byzantine furniture would evidently be but a rude and debased imitation of the antique. From the seventh to the



No. 11.—ENGLISH FIRE-SCREEN. Date 1580—1600. Contributed by Earl AMHERST.

eleventh century, however, there is reason to believe that furniture was of the simplest and rudest description. Turned-

work in rails and supports seems to have been in vogue; and it is probable that in Italy, from the constant use of mosaic, and the connexion of that country with Constantinople, marqueterie and inlays of various kinds were still practised. Carved work, judging from analogy with stone-carving, would generally be merely surface

work. In Italy and the south of France, rude imitations of classical ornamental details doubtless prevailed; the acanthus, treated in a flat stiff manner, being the staple decorative motive; whilst in the more northern countries of Europe, that peculiar interlaced fret-work called "Runic-work," zigzags, stars, and reticulations in various

well-known primitive forms, which reappear in all semi-barbarous epochs, would be more characteristic.

Wooden furniture of the earlier mediæval epochs seems to have been very heavy and massive; huge tables of oaken planks fixed and immovable in their places, heavy benches or settles, and large coffers, cupboards and



No. 12.—FRENCH CABINET, decorated with Distemper Paintings. Date from 1570 to 1590. Contributed by Baron L. ROTHSCHILD.

dressers, were the chief articles. The set of ivory chessmen of the eleventh or twelfth century, found on the coast of Scotland and preserved in the British Museum, exhibits excellent examples of the forms of chairs in use at that epoch; we see in them the simplest and most obvious arrangement of rectilinear massive wood-framing, the backs

of the chairs being elaborately carved with runic knots, fretwork, and the characteristic interlaced dragons, or monsters with foliated tails, so familiar to us in manuscript illuminations of the period. The direct imitation of architecture now manifests itself in furniture; and we even see instances in manuscript illuminations of chairs, thrones, &c., orna-

mented with several ranges of intersecting arcades one above another, with their respective little shafts, bases and capitals, and other architectural members. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, architecture is found to completely dominate over furniture; at which periods the Gothic or pointed style became a system

as complete and uniform as the ancient classical developments. The chief members of these latter styles were entirely constructional, massive, great, and special to building. In Gothic architecture, on the contrary, the leading features are made up of an aggregate of minor details; an exuberant richness and elaboration of parts veiled the necessary constructional forms, constituting, as it were, a superadded embroidery, which was as pertinent to the simplest article of furniture as to a church. Pinnacles, cusps, crockets, tracery, small buttresses, &c. &c. and all the leading decorative motives following, in their developments in furniture, precisely the same modifications and variations in style as the architecture of buildings of the several epochs. In these periods sculpture was the dominant art; consequently, ornamental furniture was generally decorated with elaborate carving, sometimes, however, enriched or picked out with gilding and colour. During this period likewise commences the more extensive employment of rich stuffs, brocades, and velvets, in the covering of surfaces. Canopies, as appurtenances of state and personal distinction, whether combined with curtains or surmounting chairs, stalls or couches, now also come prominently into use.

It is not, however, till the fifteenth century that we can proceed on certain grounds, aided by the study of existing examples. During this period, as the feudal system declined, and the arts of peace became more specially cultivated, an increasing luxury of furniture was everywhere manifested. The architect or the freemason, who, with his workmen, was in earlier times liable to be forcibly impressed by the monarch or his great barons, and required to build alike the castle, and to fashion its rude and massive furniture, was henceforth no longer the sole artist. Carvers and cabinet-makers, workers in metal, and weavers at their looms, all exercised their trades under the safe protection of their several guilds or companies, and became accustomed to co-operate in the production of elaborate works. Besides the ornate archi-

tectonic arrangements in wood-carving to which we have already alluded, the smith's or locksmith's work now became conspicuous

the chasing-tool, as in casting and *repoussé* work. In Italy, however, during the fifteenth century, a greater diversity of processes is seen in furniture; already in that country the *renaissance* had dawned, and various industrial arts, which had lingered on traditionally from the ancient epochs, were revived and greatly affected. Inlaid-work, ("Intarsiatura") became very popular; carved and incised ivory incrustation, veneers of rare polished woods, mosaics of glass and hardstones, gilded and lacquered wood-work, "Damasquinerie," or metal-inlaying, and numerous other special decorative processes were now in frequent use; whilst the looms of Venice and Genoa furnished the costly upholstery stuffs for all Europe. In other countries, however, as we have seen, relief-carving in simple wood, was almost the only mode of decoration; and this simplicity of means, as a general rule, continued, indeed, till the close of the succeeding century.

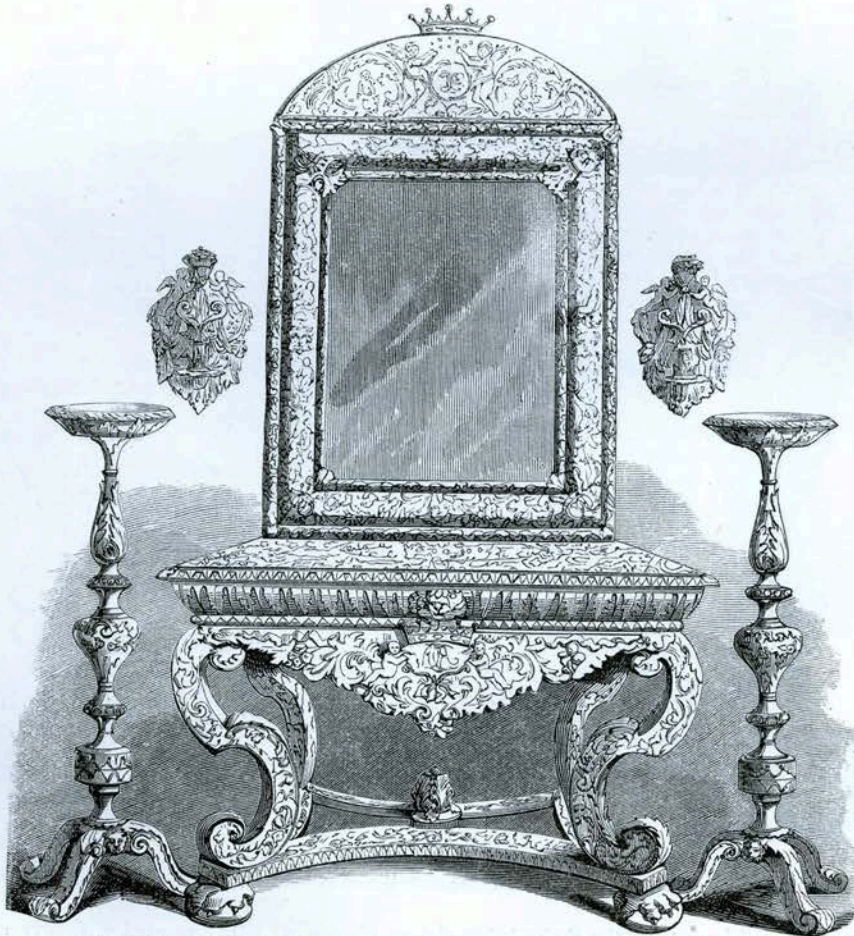
We now enter on the sixteenth century, the great age of the "renaissance." It is difficult to formalise this great generic division of Art—clearly transitional and eclectic—it has yet all the marks of a complete Art system. The "renaissance" was in fact the grafting of all that was beautiful, and genial, and intellectual in the antique developments on the complete and well organised system of Christian Art—the expressional. From this happy union then there was no dead formalism, no tame copying of the antique, such as we see everywhere and are wearied of in modern times—precedent was the rich storehouse, not as since, the rigid controlling bar to all original expression. The "renaissance" is probably on the whole more completely developed and more distinct as a style in furniture than in architecture; we have before noticed the predominant influence of archi-



No. 13.—COMMODOE, in Buhl and Or-Molu. Date about 1700. Contributed by the Duke of HAMILTON.

in articles of furniture; desks, lecterns, &c. in metal, being by no means uncommon; whilst the locks, hinges, &c. of wooden fur-

decoration: and this simplicity of means, as a general rule, continued, indeed, till the close of the succeeding century.



No. 14.—TABLE, MIRROR, CANDELABRA, AND SCENES, in Silver Repoussé. English work. Date about 1660. Contributed by Earl AMHERST.

niture, were often wrought with the utmost skill and beauty. It is worthy of notice while on this subject, that the metal-work of the Gothic periods is chiefly "wrought," the hammer and file working rather than

chitecture on furniture, the period has now arrived when this fact is often unduly conspicuous. There can be little doubt but that the obvious and continual use of architectonic forms and arrangements in

mediæval furniture, predisposed the minds of artists to consider this alliance as a

natural and legitimate one. It is needless however to say that every condition of

æsthetic propriety demonstrates the contrary, especially when classical motives are



No. 15.—DETAIL OF OAK ITALIAN CABINET. Date from 1520 to 1550. Contributed by Mr. J. AULDJO.

in question. In more than one specimen at Gore House we see columns, architraves, cornices, and pediments—in fact all the

inconsistent position in wood. In the great ebony cabinet, No. 15 (*Exhibition Cata-*

logue), for instance, we see columns with pedestals and entablatures complete, apparently supporting the upper part of the



No. 16.—FRENCH COFFER AND STAND, in Buhl. Date about 1700. Contributed by the Duke of Buccleuch.



No. 17.—FRENCH ENCOIGNURE, in Buhl. Date about 1740. Contributed by Mr. G. FIELD.

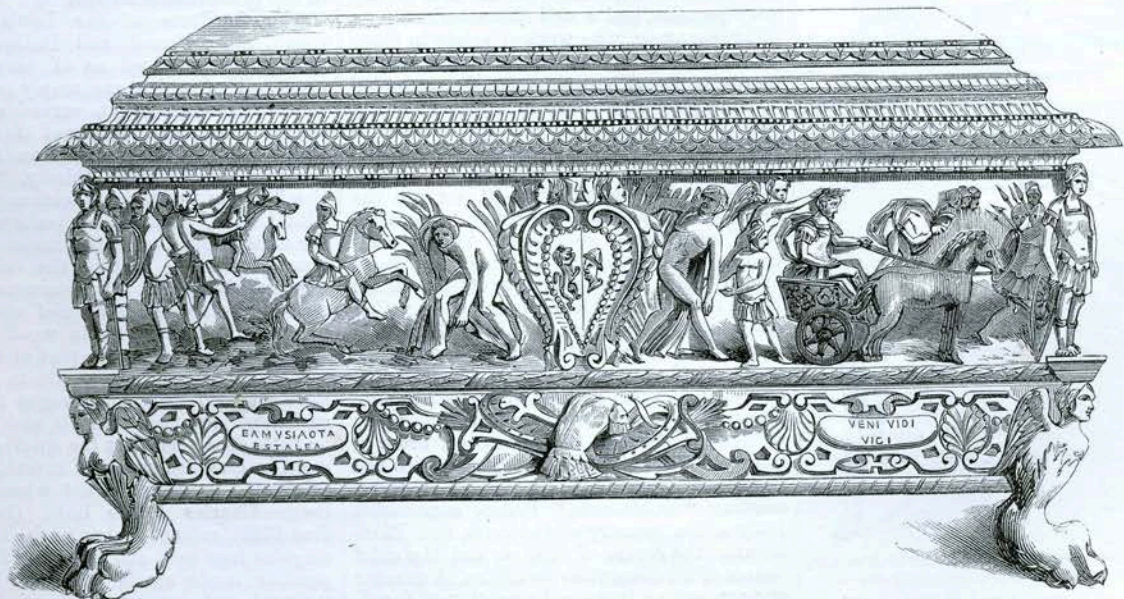


No. 18.—VENETIAN STATE CHAIR. Date about 1670. Contributed by the QUEEN, from Windsor Castle.

great constructional features of a classical order, mimicked on a small scale, and in

mass of the cabinet, which in reality are

mentally supporting the upper part of the



No. 19.—VENETIAN COFFER, in Chesnut-wood, in the Cinquecento style. Date about 1560. Contributed by Mr. H. MAGNIAC.

but ornaments attached to the doors, and open out along with them. It is not how-

ever in the outset that such mistakes as these were commonly made; a refer-

ence to the collection will demonstrate that nearly all the earlier specimens of the

"renaissance" are comparatively free from these drawbacks, which are only offensively manifested in the more pedantic period of the decadence of Art in the seventeenth century.



No. 20.—CLOCK AND TERMINAL PEDESTAL, in Buhl. Date about 1700. Contributed by the QUEEN, from Windsor Castle.

The CABINET No. 1 (No. 24 Catalogue) is a good illustration of this false style.

It will be impossible in the wide-spread extension of our subject, which is manifest at this period, to do more than touch on



No. 21.—A TULIP-WOOD TABLE, inlaid with Sevres Porcelain. Contributed by Earl SPENCER.

the most salient points of the various developments that arise, and in order to characterise as far as possible sixteenth and seventeenth century work, it will perhaps

be advisable to take for illustration some one of the more prominent articles of furniture in use in those periods.

The cabinet then seems best calculated to answer this end, for on this favourite article the utmost luxury of decoration was generally lavished, until indeed at last it was looked upon rather as a work for show than use. The Germans, in the early part of the seventeenth century, had even a distinct and sufficiently expressive name for the decorated cabinet, it was called "Kunstschrank" or "Art-cabinet." The cabinet, properly so-called, seems to have come into vogue in the first half of the sixteenth century; the early specimens were generally of oak, in most cases elaborately carved. The ITALIAN CABINET, (marked No. 7 in the *Catalogue of the Exhibition*) of part of which a detailed drawing of one of the panels, No. 15, is here given, is an excellent example of this phase, as likewise the one enriched with distemper paintings in the interior, No. 12, (No. 20 *Catalogue*). Somewhat later in date 1560-70, (No. 119 *Catalogue*) is a cabinet belonging to the Duke of Hamilton, also of Italian origin—here we have a different and most gorgeous development. It is of wood, encrusted with iron plates, elaborately embossed with figure subjects, and intricate arabesques, inlaid with gold, forming the process called "damasquinerie." Works of this kind, though of such very costly workmanship, were much in vogue, and were chiefly of Milanese manufacture. Another prominent fashion was that of cabinets in oak or ebony, inlaid with plaques of ivory, on which beautiful arabesques and figure subjects were engraved, the lines of the engraving being blackened as in niello work. Next, perhaps, come the works in "Pietra Dura," or cabinets inlaid with a beautiful mosaic, composed of precious stones, agates, jaspers, &c. which are chiefly of Florentine manufacture, and were more especially in vogue in the beginning of the seventeenth century. After these we have the carved ebony cabinets of Holland, Germany, and France; Mr. Holford's grand cabinet being perhaps one of the very finest existing specimens of this class, but which unfortunately is so extremely elaborate in detail as to defy representation on the small scale of our illustrations. Ivory carving and marqueterie were likewise at this period very popular, and a well characterised class of artists arose, who worked solely in these materials. Next we find metal enrichments in great vogue, generally appended to work in ebony. Her Majesty's CABINET, (No. 39 *Catalogue*), the metal mountings (No. 6) of which are extremely beautiful, may be taken as a type of these.

About this period, 1630-50, we see the first dawnings of the system of "Incrustation," afterwards so popular in the well-known "Buhl-work;" at this time however a habit of unbridled profusion of all kinds of rich materials began to prevail, a fragmentary heaping together of which, although it produced a rich and gorgeous general effect, annihilated all consistency of style; in short a chaos of indiscriminate elaboration took the place of art and unity of design. Out of this, however, arose a new and original phase of things; with the reign of Louis XIV. came, as it were, another "renaissance." France superseded Italy as the country of the Arts, and Paris became the centre of fashion, and the chief source of all decorative novelties. A greater variety and an increased quantity of furniture were now required in the dwellings of the great, and the cabinet, though still a most important article, no longer retained the prominent position which it occupied at

an earlier period. We now find every variety of *secrétaire*, *commode*, *encoignure*, *coffer* and stand, *couches*, *fauteuils*, *clocks*, *guéridons*, and tables of all kinds; in short, the special age of furniture has arrived. It will be necessary now briefly to allude to the reciprocal influence on each other of architecture and furniture; hitherto indeed we have seen furniture governed entirely by architecture, now however a change takes place and the contrary effect is seen. The natural expression of stone construction has hitherto more or less influenced the wooden constructions of furniture, hereafter we shall on the contrary often find the architect following in the wake of the cabinet-maker; so that what we may distinctly characterise as furniture styles arise in architecture.

As a general rule in furniture, rectilinear forms and flat surfaces are now superseded by every variety of capricious inflections of rich surfaces of marqueterie, rare polished woods and inlays; this curvature, apart from the mere desire for variety and novelty of form, being evidently prompted by the wish to display to the best advantage the rich materials employed, and to secure the general brilliant effect of the piece. The almost universal use of *appliqué* metal enrichments naturally modified all the constructional lines of the several pieces; curved and broken leading lines, salient points and undercuttings, and general ductility of appearance, constituting the natural characteristic features of metal-work. These features, it is right to say, were allowed full scope. From these causes then, the rectilinear stability and cubic formality demanded by architecture were soon entirely lost sight of, the tendency was more and more towards florid exuberance of detail. The shell and the scroll, masks, garlands, cartouche, and strap-work, were no longer confined to panels, pilasters, fascia, or the pediments of mimic architectural orders, as architectonic framework was no longer necessary. Colour, light and shade, abstract elegance of line and surface, agreeable disposition of space, and contrasts of material were aimed at, too often, it must indeed be allowed, at the expense of constructive truth, yet still with a genuine and original power of production not equalled in the present eclectic age.

The furniture of the Louis Quatorze epoch, alike French and Italian, may be briefly characterised as of three leading kinds, all of which are amply represented at Gore House. First, carved and gilded objects; secondly, veneered furniture in marqueterie, or inlays of rare and artificially coloured woods; and thirdly, "Incrustation," or as it is more commonly called "Buhl work." This last is perhaps after all the most original and characteristic development of this age, and as the collection is particularly rich in fine specimens we shall do well to dwell for a brief space on it. Inlays of metal work in wood we occasionally see in the earlier part of the seventeenth century, but this system seems to have attained prominent vogue not much earlier perhaps than 1660-70, and there can be little doubt but that the specific development in question was the invention of the celebrated industrial artist whose name it bears—Charles André Buhl, (born 1642, died 1732), cabinet-maker to the king. It is singular how soon and how completely this peculiar mode seems to have become a matured and concrete style of Art, for to this day even it is carried on without any material deviation from the original conditions; at this period, however, every conceivable application of materials and process