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Keynotes on Collecting

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KEYNOTES ON COLLECTING.

BY SIR FRANCIS H. CRAWLEY-BOEVEY, BART.

(WITH SEVEN FIGURES).

YOU will I hope forgive me if I appear, as indeed I feel, somewhat dismayed at my own audacity in attempting to address so distinguished an audience who are sure to know more about most archæological subjects than I do myself. As I said this morning I am more than grateful for the honour you have done me in making me your President for the year, and I take my election not only as a great and undeserved compliment to myself, but, what pleases me even more, as a recognition of the historical and archæological interest taken by members of the Society in my old home Flaxley Abbey. I had the pleasure of welcoming many members of the Society there last summer when several of you were good enough to express appreciation of a certain sense of fascination that undoubtedly haunts the place, partly due no doubt to its woodland setting down in the valley, which in Saxon times was so aptly named "Castiard" or the Valley of Peace. I can make no apology for feeling proud and privileged to own so much beauty and antiquity, for although of course we were all brought up to regard pride as one of the deadly sins, yet I think that particular species known as "house pride" might well be omitted or at any rate receive a special absolution. I would even go further and say it should be encouraged, since it implies an intense affection for the home and all that it contains, and spurs its owner on to find out as much as possible of the history and value of everything belonging to it. Such an enquiry inevitably leads one further afield. Many articles of interest for their artistic

merit or antiquity, originally belonging to the old house, have become dispersed among members of the family who have left and settled in new homes. Sets of old china or glass have been diminished not only by the inevitable housemaid's brush, but also from the fact that when a son or a daughter has married and left the old home they have almost invariably taken with them some of the old treasures to which they were particularly attached, the result being that often on a visit to relations one may recognise odd pieces of some home set of, say, an old Worcester tea service, and looks at them with rather envious eyes. I would add, by the way, and most gratefully, that in my own case some of my relations have been sufficiently self-denying to let me take such odd pieces back and put them with the rest of the set, where they belong, and where they are of course of more value than they would be by themselves. In shops too you occasionally happen on something which exactly matches another in your own possession or perhaps completes a set. Thus the love of your own inheritance leads you on, almost instinctively, to become something of a collector. And it is of collecting, which one might perhaps call the playful offspring of archæology, rather than of its more austere parent, that I would speak briefly to-night, and if this address were worthy of a title at all I think I would call it "Keynotes on Collecting," why keynotes you will understand later. Many people collect something or other nowadays. Collecting like betting is very much on the increase, and I venture to think that the former is almost as exciting and certainly more worth while and cheaper in the long run than the latter. When all's said and done collecting is something of a gamble, and appeals to the gambling instinct inherent in each one of us. Every time you pick up what you think is a treasure at what you consider a bargain, you are backing your knowledge against another's knowledge or possibly ignorance.

When you are asked one pound for what you think is worth five pounds or even more, you back yourself to know better than the man who sells it. It is not given to all of us to collect pictures by old Masters, Sèvres, or Oriental porcelain, fine period furniture, Stuart, Queen Anne, Chippendale, or Sheraton. For in collecting, as in other forms of expenditure, one has to cut one's clothes according to one's cloth—and nowadays most of us have mighty little cloth to cut.

But there is just as much excitement and interest in small things as in great for those who can temper their ambition to the limit of their purse strings. "Details make perfection and perfection is no detail," as Michael Angelo said. The work of the honey bee is just as wonderful and useful as that of the horse or the elephant, only on a different scale, and I maintain that collecting even on comparatively small and inexpensive lines contributes *something* to the world's store of knowledge, and is not a waste of time, apart from its possible advantage and certain enjoyment to the man or woman who indulges in it.

There are certain general rules which should be observed in collecting anything, which I might perhaps remind you of. One is, never to put in your collection anything that has been broken and mended. Mending is a fine art at the present time and very difficult to detect at first; but the mending of china, especially good as it is, becomes ever more apparent with time; the part substituted for the missing original and painted over almost invariably changes colour as time goes on and declares itself irrevocably after a few years—if not less.

Secondly, never collect anything but what is hand made. Where machines step in, Art—as a rule—ceases, and it is the tiny differences in a set of hand made things, be it china, glass, embroideries, or what-not that constitutes their worth as works of art and make them valuable

contributions to the world's stock of treasures. Everything made by hand has an individual touch, reflects the personality of the maker and therefore is of human interest. Machine made things have no individuality and therefore are of no interest in the realms of Art, except of course in so far as the machine is controlled by hand and subject to the will or brain of the operator.

Thirdly, never collect inferior specimens even from a celebrated workshop. Let your motto be: "The best is good enough for me." To do that implies a certain amount of knowledge, but no collector can be successful without knowledge, which can as a rule only be gained by experience.

Nowadays more than ever, the collector is beset with pitfalls often so well concealed as to entrap even the connoisseur. For there are in France and Germany, potteries where they quite openly manufacture, not only old Sèvres and old Dresden, but old Chelsea, Lowestoft and Worcester china as well. To those whose eye and hand are trained to know the *colour* and *feel* of the real old English china, these foreign imitations need present no difficulties, for I think I am right in saying, in every case—or at any rate every one that I have come across—the paste of the foreign imitation is hard, cold to the touch, and white in colour; whilst that of the Old English is soft, cool, but not chilly, and a more creamy white in colour, the gold of the imitation is not so good, and the dark blue (notably in the imitation Worcester) is of a brighter shade than the rather black blue of the original.

Again there are factories in England, as well as abroad, where old *furniture* is made, also quite openly. I went over one on the East coast a few years ago, whose proprietor boasted with pride that some of the furniture turned out was so old and decrepit that it came back within a few months to be restored! When confronted with such masterpieces, the sense of *touch* is usually a

much surer method of detection than that of *sight*, for although the new may look exactly like the old, there is a subtle difference in the feel of the two, which, though difficult to define exactly, becomes with practise a kind of instinct, and is well worth cultivating. This applies not only to furniture, but to china, glass, plate, old pewter, bronzes and other things as well.

If only we could look into the future, and see things of little value now, all the rage in, say, twenty years time, what fine investments we might make! It is, of course, mere speculation, yet there are some rare things now which have certainly not reached their highest value yet. Mezzotint engravings are now fashionable, but woodcuts and line engraving, and lithograph are nothing like as much sought after, and yet in these days when photo printing has nearly killed such laborious methods of reproduction as cutting wood blocks or steel plates, or making lithographs, the really beautiful specimens of these are certain to come into greater favour sometime or other as they get scarcer. Really well made Victorian furniture—and some of it *was* well made, though by no means all—will come into favour again some day. I have a set of six chairs, made by William Morris for his friend the painter, Ford Maddox Brown, which though quite simple in design, are light and extremely comfortable to sit in, and are certainly worth more than the few shillings I paid for them, at the sale of Ford Maddox Brown's things after his death in 1893. William Morris, the great "poet upholsterer" as some one described him, was himself a most ardent collector, as the following true story will show you. A cousin of mine—the late Lord Aldenham (who by-the-way himself told me the story)—collected old illuminated Missals, and on one occasion, when travelling in Italy, acquired what he thought was a fine specimen, though not quite perfect, as a few pages were evidently missing. On his return to England with his prize, he found that

the Burlington Fine Arts Club were about to show a collection of such things at their annual exhibition. And so he sent his treasure up to see what expert opinion on it would be. The Secretary wrote to him saying it was considered quite the finest contribution they had received, and would be given a case to itself in the centre of the room, in spite of its lack of a few pages. A little while after this, the Secretary again wrote to this effect. "I am sure you will be interested to hear that I have found that the missing pages of your Missal are in existence, and are possessed by Mr. William Morris. I need hardly point out, that it seems a pity that the different parts of such a work of art should remain in separate hands." Then, of course, followed a correspondence between the two collectors; Mr. William Morris declined to part with his pages, and Lord Aldenham naturally did not care to give up his major portion. So the correspondence ceased until some time (it may have been years) afterwards when my cousin received a letter, with an Italian postmark, and from William Morris. It was worded something like this:—"Dear Lord Aldenham, I am on my death bed and feel you will not refuse a dying man's request when I ask you to let me have your part of the Italian Missal. I enclose a cheque for so and so (I forget the exact amount) and shall be infinitely obliged if you will post it to me here at once." I need hardly say the request was granted. I quote this little anecdote to show how strong the love of collecting may become, even to one whose life held so many other interests, in poetry, art and politics, as did that of William Morris.

Harking back again to the old home and its influence on collecting. Probably there is no more interesting and exciting place in any old house than the lumber room. I have certainly found it so at Flaxley. It would take much too long to tell you half the treasures I have reclaimed from a dusty slumber amongst its shelves and

boxes, or on its floor. Chippendale chairs with one leg damaged, but easily repairable. A mezzotint engraving by Valentine Green, in a frame with a broken glass lying face downwards on the floor, an inlaid knife box full of its original 18th century steel knives and three pronged forks with pistol handles of Worcester china. Large things and small, even to sets of those large studs our great grandfathers wore, which are certainly no use for the modern dress shirt, but make excellent waistcoat buttons.

One day a few years ago, looking around, with an electric torch (electric light, by the way is a great revealer of secrets in a dark lumber room) I happened to look up and hanging on the side of one of the low beams of the ceiling I saw a bunch of old keys on a piece of wire. The next time I went to London, I took four of them to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where I found similar ones dated early 17th century and valued at five or six pounds apiece. With these as a nucleus I started a small collection. Small, because I find they are extremely difficult to come by. The reason of that, I imagine, is that though people have very often had a new key fitted to an old lock, they very seldom have a new lock made for an old key, however beautiful the latter may be. The old keys, therefore, get mislaid and lost, or are left in the hands of the local blacksmith, who, being a thorough vandal, has merely treated them as old iron and as such melted them down or broken them up.

I need, perhaps, make no apology for giving a brief history—as far as I have been able to trace it—of key-worth collecting, and though it is somewhat difficult to do so without many illustrations, I will try to make it as intelligible as I can. When you come to think of it the key is one of the most important things in the world. A safe would be anything but safe without one. The security of the world rests upon them. They are quoted,

and form an integral part of ancient mythology and Holy Scripture. Hecate, we know, was said to hold the keys of the underworld wherewith to open the gates and set free the imprisoned spirits. She is represented as holding a key in one hand, and a serpent in the other. Janus, the keeper of the gates of Heaven, entrusted his wife Jana with the key to give exit to Aurora, and the life and light giving Phoebus, as well as to close the gates at night. Whilst to come to the Christian era, St. Peter was expressly given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew, xvi, 19). He is represented with two keys, one of silver, the other gold, as the emblem of the Papacy; whilst on all our ecclesiastical ceremonial robes, the crossed keys are embroidered, as the main emblem of our Church's authority—to come nearer home, the arms of the See of Gloucester are, of course, golden crossed keys.

Although one may be specially interested in keys, it is impossible in speaking of them not to mention locks as well.

In Egypt, where so many mechanical contrivances seem to have made little or no progress for thousands of years, the modern wooden lock or "Dub'beh" (fig. 1) is considered to be identical with that in use four thousand years ago. In a description of a wall painting in the temple of Abydos, the late Miss Edwards writes of Rameses II, as being represented "in the act of opening the door of a shrine by means of a golden key, formed like a human hand and arm" (fig. 2). This agrees with an account given over a hundred years ago, by Mr. Denon, of a painting in the great temple of Karnak, and both descriptions might apply to a wooden lock and key, now in the possession of my friend, Mr. Emery Chubb, a senior member of our premier firm of locksmiths and safe makers, which lock and key formed one of the many interesting specimens in the fine collection made by his father.

Going back to the earliest days of Egyptian civilization, we find the doors of houses, temples and palaces were usually double ones, stained so as to imitate rare and foreign woods. These were not hinged on the side posts, as doors are at present, but opened and shut on pivots, fixed in sockets in the lintel above, and the threshold below. In the stone lintels and floors at the entrance to the tombs and temples, are still frequently to be seen the holes in which these pivot pins turned, and recesses to receive the opened valves or doors.

The earliest fastenings of these doors were quite simple, and appear to have been directed against horses and cattle, rather than man, for they consisted merely of one or more bars or beams, fixed on the outside of the doors, which either working on a pivot dropped across the opening into a socket (on our latch bolt system) or slid in staples. But as cattle were evidently just as clever in those days as they are now, at lifting or pushing latches and bolts with their noses or teeth, the next precaution was to have a peg or wooden pin, which either was pushed through the cross bar into the door, or dropping vertically into a hole through staple and beam, kept the beam in place.

When at first this beam was on the outside of the door, it became, in course of time, necessary for men to protect their houses or temples, not only from their cattle, but also from their fellow men, and to do this, something more ingenious than a mere peg or pin was necessary, so the Egyptians shortened the beam into a long bolt, and made it hollow for part of its length, so that the pin, hidden in beam and staple, might be reached through one end of the beam itself, with a wooden key. The key, which was pushed up the hollow, had pegs on it, to match the pins which held the bolt, for the one pin was, in course of time, multiplied into three or more. When the key had been pushed well home, it was raised, and the pegs on it lifted

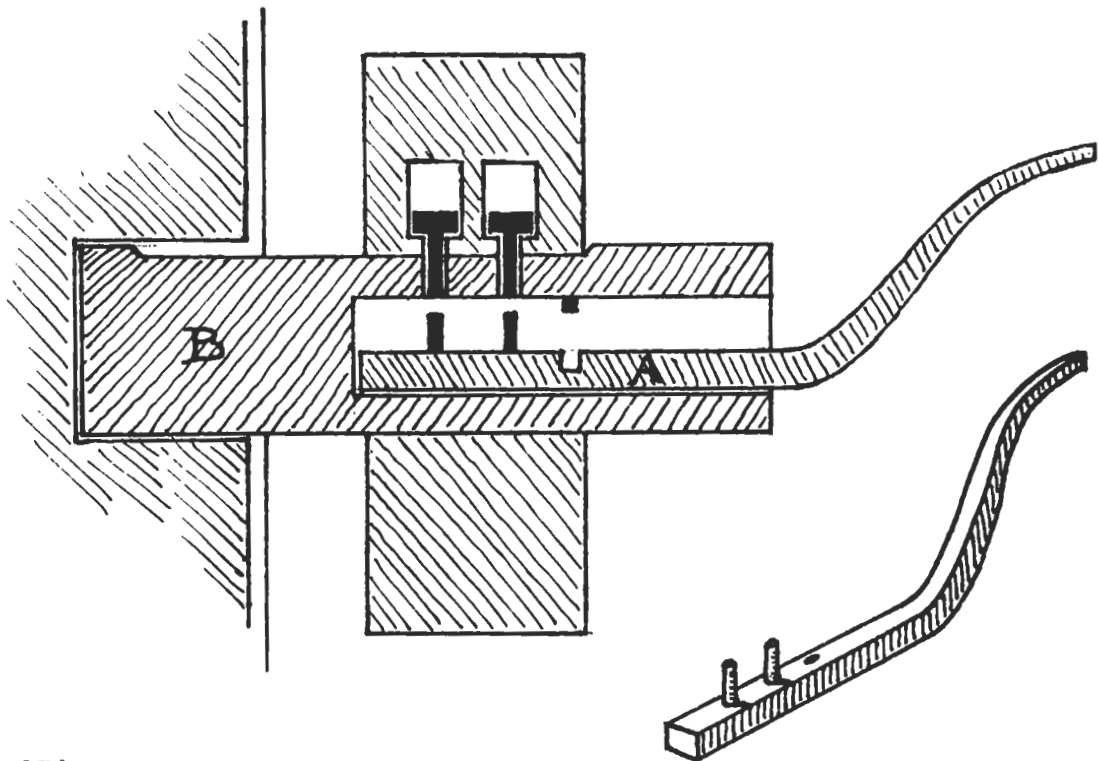


Fig 1.
 Modern Egyptian wooden lock & key
 Longitudinal Section showing pegs down
 + Bolt (B) locked. Key A.

up the pins out of the way, and allowed the bolt to be thrown back by the key. So in the case of Rameses opening the shrine, the shank of the key is the arm, and the pegs are the fingers of the hand.

The more modern lock and key, in Mr. Chubb's collection, is identical in action, only that the lock is to be fastened on to one of the doors and is not part of a bolt. One rather curious feature about it, however, is that although large and clumsy from our modern point of view, it works on exactly the same principle as one of our smallest, neatest, and most up-to-date locks, the "Yale."



Fig 2.

The Yale key, with which you are of course all well acquainted, works in a small barrel which revolves so as to move the bolt. But before it can revolve, several small steel pins have to be raised to exactly the right height (and each one is a different length) and each of the teeth on the jagged edge of the key engages one of these pins and lifts it just so far and no farther than is necessary. And after the barrel has revolved and released the bolt, a spring takes it back again into the right position, for the pins to drop down into place again. The great claim for its security, is that the keyhole is so small, that it is

quite impossible for lock picking implements to be inserted such as would be required, one to raise the pins and the other to turn the barrel, at the same time. A Yale key is usually corrugated along the entire length of the blade, which prevents any up and down motion of a lock picking instrument to raise the pins, and even if this were not so, a lock of seven pins, all of different lengths, has ten million possible combinations, so it would take rather a long time to happen on the right one.

Mr. Chubb has also in his collection an ancient Chinese wooden lock, of still finer workmanship. Whereas the Egyptian one was the forerunner of the "Yale," this Chinese lock undoubtedly inspired the "Bramah" lock, for it is founded on exactly the same principles with flat pieces of wood, sliders, or what in these days are of metal and are called tumblers, of different lengths, which had to be raised by the key to the proper height and no higher before the lock bolt could be drawn.

I am not proposing to explain the different characteristics and excellencies of modern locks and keys, which do not concern us from a collector's point of view, but merely mention these two, to show how strangely history repeats itself, and the most ancient may inspire the most modern.

The next class of primitive fastening is that in which the beam or bolt was mounted on the *inside* of the door or doors. In this case, where the beam was secured, by a pin dropped vertically into it, concealment would not be so necessary as when both were on the outside of the door. Access was gained to it from the outside through a hole in the door above the bolt, by means of a metal hook (in the Greek, "Κλεις," and in Latin, "Clavis,") sickle shaped, and either having the business end carefully shaped to fit into a hole in the pin, to pull or push it up, or it caught a leather thong attached to the beam, and lifted it up, very much after the fashion of our old English bobbin and latch fastening. General Pitt Rivers, in his admirable

treatise on the history of locks and keys, gives an illustration of some such keys which he found at Lewes. He ascribes them to the late Celtic period, and mentions that they were often carried over the shoulder (fig. 3), quoting Isaiah xxii, 22. "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." Another class of primitive lock was again for controlling *outside* bolts,



Fig 3.

but shows a decided advance on the ends just mentioned, inasmuch as the pins were reached by the key, through a hole in the *staple* in which the bolt slid, and not through the bolt itself, or the pin which fastened it. In this type of lock (which is the immediate forerunner of the box lock taking the place of the staple) the hole in the staple through which the key was introduced, is a horizontal one just above the bolt. The dropping pins are square in section, and are notched on their side to allow the key to pass and get into position, before they can be lifted up. The key is flattish, with little side projections which engage the pins. After the pins are lifted up with the key by one hand, it is necessary to pull back the bolt with the other, thus showing a marked difference between

this lock and that of Egypt, in which the bolt is withdrawn by the key itself.

Now we come to the fourth primitive type of lock, the bolt or beam being now again on the *inside* of the door. In this type the bolt was kept out by the projection of a spring or springs which spread out against the sides of the staple, in the same way that a school boy would spread out his arms and legs against the jambs of a doorway, through which his school fellows tried to push him. The first

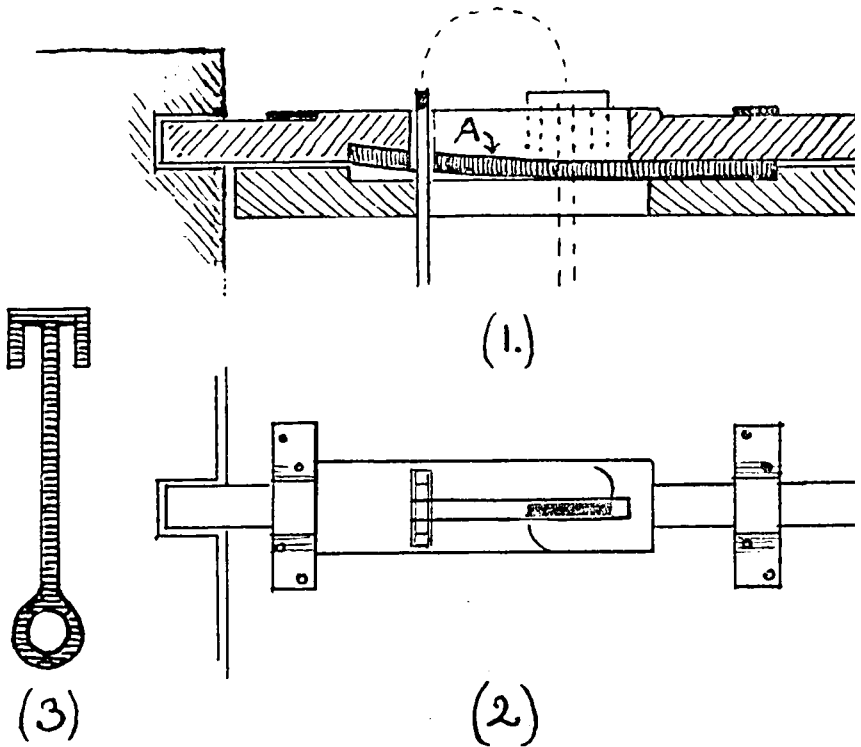


Fig 4.

- (1) Longitudinal Section. Spring
 (2) View showing keyhole.
 (3) Key.

function of the key is to compress the springs. It is a flattish one, T shaped with return prongs or hooks on its end. It is passed through a horizontal slit in door and bolt; then turned a quarter circle and pulled. The pull brings the prongs to bear upon the outspread spring of the bolt, flattens it and allows it to clear the fixed obstructions at its end. The bolt is then free to slide back, and this is effected by simply sliding back the key, whose prongs are now embedded in the bolt. This lock and key are Roman, and the keys are frequently found among Roman remains. (Fig. 4).

Sir Ernest Wallis Budge, the head of the Egyptian section of the British Museum, told me he did not know of any evidence of the existence of metal keys of purely *Egyptian* origin. There are some shown in the cases of exhibits in this section, but these, he thinks, date from after the Roman occupation of Egypt, 30 B.C., and are really Roman.

Of these and such like Roman keys the larger ones are of iron, the smaller of bronze, the bow of which was almost always "annular" or plain ring shaped.

The locks are as a rule based on that of Egypt, but the bolt is now a small one often in bronze, and the dropping pins that hold it are of various shapes, round, square, or triangular in section, and are pressed downwards by a spring. The projections on the key are shaped so as to correspond with the ever varying shapes and positions of the pins. The keys do not pass into the end or side of the bolt, but into a casing, as in modern locks, and catch the bolts on their lower surface.

When the key has been introduced through the keyhole, and has been given a quarter turn to push up the pins out of the way, a horizontal extension of the keyhole allows the key to be slid sideways, and so move the bolt into its unlocked position.

Some years ago I was told by an eminent Egyptologist a pretty story which I have since found, from my own investigations in the British Museum and elsewhere, contained a considerable substratum of fact, but possibly a little fiction as well. He asked me if I knew why the church key was used, at a marriage service, if the bridegroom had come without the wedding ring. The obvious answer, of course, was that the key bow constituted the handiest form of ring procurable at the moment. However, he maintained that it was not entirely for that reason, but that in reality it was a survival of a very ancient custom. A key, he said, and not a ring, was in ancient times given by the bridegroom to his bride as a sign of marriage, the master key of his house. This key she wore on a chain round her neck. Then, as time went on, someone invented the idea of putting the key on a ring which she wore on her hand, the key lying flat along the first joint of the finger. The next step in the evolution of the wedding ring was that a small hinge was provided, the key folded back on it and lay hidden behind a seal—the origin of the signet ring. Eventually seal and key were discarded, and the plain ring kept as the marriage sign. Well, that is as I said before a pretty story, but certainly parts of it, unfortunately, do not altogether coincide with the writings on locks and keys by the greatest authorities on the subject, or from one's own observations. The more correct story would seem to be, that a bride, in ancient Roman times, was given by her husband, not only one key but several, the keys of the house in fact. But with one exception, and that, even as it is not unusual nowadays, was the key of the wine cellar! This her lord and master kept himself, and was very particular to do so. The penalties for any infringement of his rights in this respect were sometimes terrible. Pliny (H.N. xiv, § 89) quotes a story by Fabius Pictor of a wife who was starved to death for picking the lock of a cupboard, where

her husband kept his cellar key! On most of the ring keys in the British Museum, and elsewhere, the rings are so large, that they appear to have been made for a *man's* finger, rather than a woman's, which possibly accommodated this very special wine cellar key. One such ring key was found here in England, at Colchester, and many have been discovered elsewhere.

False, or skeleton keys, used by robbers, were not unknown in ancient Rome, examples of which have been found from time to time. The latin word for these is—curiously enough—“*Adulterae.*” Most Roman keys are devoid of ornamentation of any kind, the round bow, and stem, and bit (or web) being plain, and rather uninteresting from an artistic point of view.

It is not until we come to Mediaeval times, that locks and keys are treated as works of art, things of beauty as well as utility. Then we get to types of keys which worked more like our own, the sliding and pushing giving place entirely to turning movements; ward locks appear for the first time, that is to say, locks with fixed obstructions, and keys with corresponding slits, or holes in the web to pass these obstructions. The keys are now made either pipe fashioned, to slide into a fixed pin in the lock, or else made solid, terminating in a projecting pin, or “broach,” which fitted a socket, or hole, cut in the back plate of the lock. Later on, in Renaissance times, the section of the pipe was not always circular, sometimes it was triangular, and the pin on which it was pushed was shaped to fit it. Of course, provision was then made for the pin itself to turn with the key. The outside of the key, too, was sometimes fluted, and the lock pin then became a barrel as well, revolving on bearings at either end.

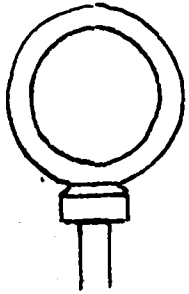
In the 12th century, metal work of all kinds begins to be far more artistically treated than ever before. The church, sharing in the world's increasing wealth, not only engaged the services of the best laymen, but increased the

number of her monastery schools in which the arts were taught and practised. With a love for the sacred edifices they were to adorn, many a masterpiece of iron, silver and gold emerged from these monastic workshops. And even in their own times these works of art excited considerable admiration and wonder. Take for instance the case of the Frenchman Biscornette, who made the hinge work for the doors of Notre D ame in Paris. We read how people said of him, that, to make such wonderful and beautiful work, he must have invoked the help of the Devil. And when one fine day he disappeared, and was never seen again, no doubt his jealous friends said that he had been taken to his friend and fellow worker's own workshop. (Burty. *Chef-d'oeuvres of the Industrial Arts.*)

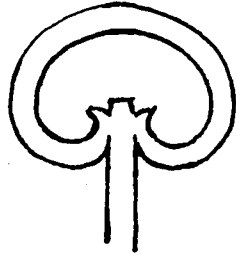
Keys of this early date have their bows in symbolical, or speaking generally, in ecclesiastical shapes, trefoils, quatrefoils, etc.. Most of these which have remained to us through the ages are of bronze, and therefore, like many of the finely wrought iron or steel specimens of a rather later date, have escaped the melting pot, that from time to time, as coffers got empty, engulfed art work made in the more precious metals. Their locks are often the ancestors, in direct and unbroken line, of the ordinary tumbler lock of to-day. For they had a bolt prepared with a notch in it, for the key to actuate—a notch which locksmiths call a "talon"—and it was held in place by a tumbler. The tumbler instead of moving vertically, was hinged, and so the word "catch" perhaps describes it better than tumbler. A part of it came down over the bolt to reach the key, and the first thing the key did, as you turned it, was to lift up this catch; then as you continued turning, the key caught the bolt by the notch and thereby moved it.

The work of English locksmiths, during the Mediaeval and Renaissance Periods is not as noticeable as that on the Continent. The Victoria and Albert Museum, for instance

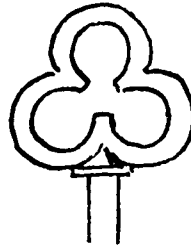
Fig 5
Bow shapes



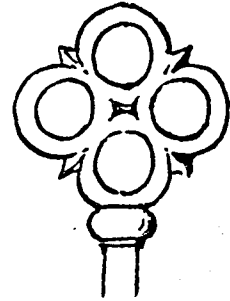
Annular.



Reni or Kidney.



Trefoil.



Quatre foil.

has many more examples of French and German locks and keys than it has English. Many of the French keys are so beautiful that I only wish I could describe them, but it is

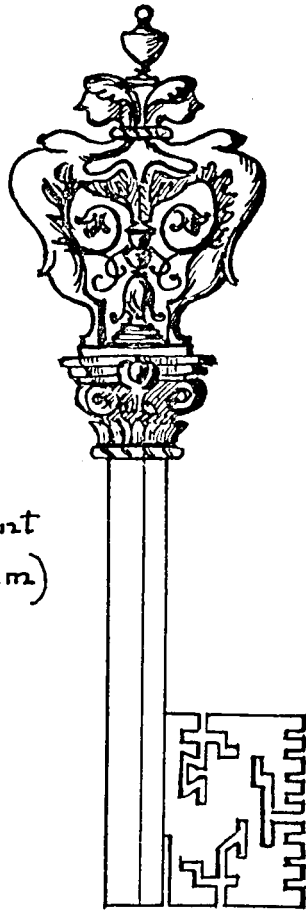


Fig 6.
French 17th Cent
(V. & A. Museum)

impossible without several illustrations to do so. As a very rough rule I think most of their bows are lyre shaped. Mathurin Jousse, a locksmith of Paris, published a book

on his trade, in Paris in 1627, full of elaborate details and some wonderful illustrations.

English Renaissance keys seem to have kept much to the same design in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. I have two keys, one a facsimile of those at Rousham House, Oxfordshire, built in Elizabeth's reign, and another, which is one of those I found in the lumber room at home, of almost exactly similar pattern, which fits the lock of an inlaid cabinet I have, the date of which is probably about 1660 (fig. 7). The 17th century sees the height

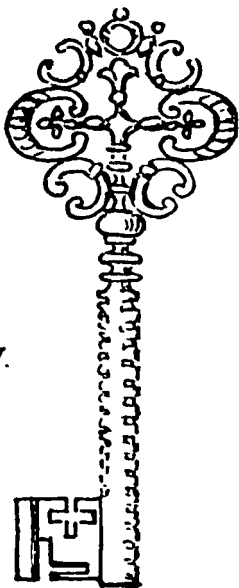


Fig 7.

of the locksmith's art in England, as far as the artistic beauty of their bows is concerned, and consequently, to my mind at any rate, their interest to the collector. A good idea of the keys of the last century can be obtained from the collection of Chamberlain's keys bequeathed by Mr. Octavius Morgan to the British Museum. They are beautiful in their way, but hardly so spontaneous and individual (being very precise and somewhat finicking) as those of earlier times. The official and emblematic idea in them is always paramount. Talking of emblems of office reminds one that symbolical ideas have hung about keys

in all ages. A key was, and is, presented to a Jewish Rabbi on his institution as a sign that in future it is his duty to unlock and exhibit sacred truths to the people. To those Doctors of the Law, who failed in their duty, came the condemnation:—"Woe unto you lawyers!

for ye took away the key of knowledge." There are of course very many details of the locksmith's art that I have not touched upon at all: the large range of ancient padlocks for instance, which though full of ingenuity and quaint devices, have from my particular point of view (which is that of the beauty and workmanship of keys rather than locks) little or no special interest. And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, in conclusion, may I be permitted to say with what great diffidence I have read this paper to you to-night. To have elected me your President—as I have said before—is an honour that I fully appreciate, but the necessity for me to read a paper in my capacity as such, to the Society, seemed to be binding upon my shoulders more than I could bear. "Ars longa, vita brevis" is an old and trite saying, yet applicable in its entirety to everyone who pursues knowledge, whatever the field of pursuit may be. To me it has been given, only to act the part of the neophyte in the world of antiquarian science—to some of you who soar in the Olympian heights of Archæology, it must appear that I tread but the lowest plain—yet, "Art is long," and "life is short" and therefore, had my whole life been dedicated to my subject, I could not be complete master of my art. To ransack the realms of religion, mythology and history; to scrutinize the castles and the cottages, the boxes and the cabinets of all countries and ages; to peer into the very depths of the tombs of the past, to read their mysteries for the gathering of materials for an elaborate history of keys, is beyond my time, and perhaps my ability—in fact I am astounded at my own temerity in daring to address you on such a subject. But as I look around me I see those whom, perhaps, some day I may venture to call old friends—and it is for this reason that I hope that whatever paucity of matter there may be in my

paper, it may receive the kindly criticism of friends, and, after all as Austin Dobson so truly writes:—

“ Old books, old wine, old Nankin blue,
All things in short to which belong
The charm, the grace, that time makes strong,
All these I prize, but (entre nous)
Old friends are best.”