



AN EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SILVER-MOUNTED WOODEN BOWL.

AN EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SILVER-MOUNTED
WOODEN BOWL; WITH SOME NOTES ON
AN OLD CITY COMPANY.

By H. D. ELLIS.

The bowl, an illustration of which is given on plate 1, is made of *lignum vitae*. It is 9 inches in height and the same in width, with straight vertical sides, and it stands upon a low broad foot $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches in width. Round the mouth is a silver rim, one inch in depth, of which the upper third is plain, the middle third is of a foliate design, and the lower third is an engrailed fan-pattern border, each third being divided from another by a plain narrow band in relief. Affixed to the body of the bowl at equal distances apart are four oval silver medallions, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in vertical diameter and 2 inches in the horizontal. These are (1) the double-rose and crown of England; (2) the thistle and crown of Scotland; (3) the harp and crown of Ireland; (4) the coat-of-arms of the company of Merchants of Muscovia, afterwards called the Russia Company. Each of these four devices is surrounded with conventional floral sprays in the early seventeenth-century taste, and is contained within a bordure of foliate design similar to that upon the silver rim. The date may be placed at about 1615 to 1630, and the bowl was probably made for or presented to the company soon after their revival in 1614 under the auspices of Sir Henry Neville.

The origin of the Muscovia or Russia Company, which was the earliest of the great mercantile corporations trading to distant parts, is curious and interesting. Its birth was the offspring of an accident.

Following upon the fortuitous discovery of the western hemisphere towards the end of the fifteenth century by navigators intent upon finding a direct western route to the Indies, a term embracing all the eastern parts of the

eastern hemisphere, attention had been directed to the problem of a north-eastern route to those countries in lieu of rounding the Cape of Good Hope. Nothing in regard to this matter of a practical nature appears to have been effected until about the middle of the sixteenth century, when, owing probably to the urgent representations of the veteran Sebastian Cabot (who had by this time become an English pensioner, if not an English subject) the interest and the patronage of king Edward VI were gained. Eventually, on 14th February, 1553, the king addressed a letter "to all kings, princes, rulers, judges and governors of the earth," notifying that he had issued a commission to Sir Hugh Willoughby, knight, and other trusty and faithful servants, to visit unknown countries for the purpose of establishing commercial and friendly relations with them, and praying the goodwill of the aforesaid powers and potentates. Thus commissioned, Sir Hugh set sail in search of the unknown with a squadron of three tiny vessels, the "Bona Esperanza" commanded by himself, the "Edward Bonaventure" commanded by master Richard Chancellor, and the "Bona Confidentia," and he steered for the Arctic seas. Arrived there he met with foul weather and was driven into the ice-pack, where he and his crews of the "Bona Esperanza" and the "Bona Confidentia" perished miserably. But Chancellor and his "Edward Bonaventure" were more fortunate, and after sundry buffetings they strayed or were driven into the bay of Archangel and eventually found themselves at what then represented the modern town of that name. Chancellor appears to have been a born diplomatist in tact and discretion, for he was not only treated with humanity by the people of Archangel but was actually conducted to Moscow and was there received with singular marks of distinction by the duke Ivan Wassilowitz, afterwards better known in England as the tsar Ivan the Terrible. This formidable autocrat appears to have been most favourably impressed by king Edward's representative, and the latter returned to London the bearer of a letter from the tsar cordially reciprocating the English monarch's proffer of amity and his desire to enter into commercial relations. Edward VI had died in the meantime, but the project continued to receive royal support at the hands of

his successors, Philip and Mary, who, on the 6th February, 1555 (n.s.), granted a charter of incorporation to the "company and fellowship of the merchant adventurers . . . who have discovered and founde a traffyck with strange nacions as Rustia and Muskovia," and the first governor of the company was "Sebastian Gabotta, esquier."

Thus the accident which defeated Willoughby's search for a northern route to the Indies fortuitously produced the Russia Company.

In the same year, 1555, a treaty was made with the tsar whereby he granted extraordinary privileges to the English merchants trading to Muskovia. In 1556, a Russian ambassador, Osep Vafeoff, came to England. In 1557, Anthony Jenkinson was sent out to Russia and penetrated as far as Bokhara. After a variety of adventures, he returned home in 1560 by way of Kasan on the Volga, having first had the honour of hoisting the English flag on the Caspian Sea. The next year queen Elizabeth sent Jenkinson out again armed with a letter dated 25th April, 1561. With this missive he visited Persia, but was not able to advance trade much. But the personal relations initiated by Chancellor between the courts of London and Moscow had so flourished that in 1579 the terrible tsar made a formal proposal for the hand of queen Elizabeth in marriage, which, as we know, that sagacious lady thought fit to decline.

Notwithstanding the royal favour extended to them in both countries, the Russia Company encountered many difficulties and vicissitudes, and early in the seventeenth century their fortunes had fallen very low. In 1614, under the leadership of Sir Henry Neville, the company effected a considerable recovery, obtaining a confirmation of their charter and an enlargement of their powers, but in the troublous times of Charles I they were again brought face to face with many trials and disappointments, the rivalry of Dutch competitors being a potent factor adverse to the company's prosperity. From this time its history is not a matter of national concern, but one or two incidents in its career throw a light upon collateral points of interest.

A petition for the enlargement and encouragement of the company addressed to William III in 1695 recites that "The Russes have no ships of their own." It is

strange that for 140 years the trade between England and Russia should have been carried on in English ships alone. By the light of this fact, Peter the Great's resolute action in 1697, when he came to England to learn the art of shipbuilding and worked as a shipwright at Deptford, is rendered the more intelligible.

Merchants and planters interested in the plantations of Virginia and Maryland desired to have facilities for trading with Russia, and in their petition they stated that "His Czarish Majesty himself and the great men of his court do already take tobacco. If the trade were open, the people would be very forward for the consumption of it."

In a case of about 1750, it is recited that "the Russia merchants traded to Persia through Russia about 200 years ago; before there was a Turkey company or any trade to Turkey."

The grant of arms, crest and supporters to the company, dated 2nd April, 1555, is interesting. The following is a copy of the grant :

"To all Nobles and Jentylls these pntē lres Redyng or Heryng Thoms Hawley als Clarencieux principale Herauld & Kyng of Armes of the Sowth Easte & West ptes of this Realme of Englande from the Ryver of Trent southwarde sendeth Dew and humble comendacion & gretyng forasmuch as w^t grete reason & eqytye it hath ben of auncient tyme ordeyned that valiaunt noble & couragious psons for their grete exellent actes & entreprises ached for the Imitacion and folowing of the like laudable vertuous & couragious procedyngs in this most brief and transitorius lyf. Therefore the Kyngs & the quenes most Roiall ma^{ty} tendryng the Estate of the right worshipfull company & felawship of the mchants adventurers who lately haue to the grete Dainger of their lyves and goods sowght & traveled for the discovery of strainge lands territoryes Isles & seignoreys unknowen & nat before this late adventure comenly frequented and have allredy discovered and fownde a traffyck wth strainge nacions as wth Rustia and Muskovia and for the furder encouragement of the saide mchauntes and their successors have erected established & made them a bodye pollityk and Incorporated them by the names of Governors Consulls & assistents and also the successors in the saide corporacion as mchauntes venturers for the discoverye of strainge Lands Isles & seignoryes as aforesaide Wherefore the pmisses considered I the saide Clarencieux for a furder manifestacion of the same and also for that it maye apere unto all men how natable & lawdable their courages be and wth what Diligence they do entend to use the maintenaunce of their feate enterpryse and adventure nether for ambicion ne p'vate lucre or comoditye but rather as much as in them is to the laude & glory of allmighty god the Illustrating of the kyng

and the quene their ma³ honors and publick weale of this their naty cowntrey the noble Realme of Englande and grete comendacion of the noble Citye of London At the earnest request and desyer of the Governours Consulls and Assistents w^t other of the saide corporacon to have the tokens & Enseigns of hono^r that is to say Armes considering also their Request to be bothe iust & reasonable by thauctorytye & power annexed attributed given & graunted to me & to my office of Clarencieux Kyng of Armes by expresse wordes under the most noble grete seale have devised ordeyned given & graunted to the hole bodye of the saide corporacion whereof at this pntē tyme is Governo^r Sebastian Gabotta esquier Sr Geore Barne knight Mr. Willm Gerrard Aldermen Anthonye Hussey John Sowthcote esquyers Consulls Sr John Greshm Sr Andrew Judd and Sr Thoms White knightes Mr Thomas Offley senio^r Thoms Ledge Henry Herdson Sr John Yorke Willm Clyfton Willm Watson John Hopkyns Richard Poynter Richarde Malerye Richard Chamberleyn Thoms Palley senr Richard ffaulkes Rowlande Jaiyande George Hetene Willm Alleane Henry Bechare Geffry Waldeken John Elyott John Sparke Blase Sawnders Myles Mordaing Assistents of the saide felawship and corporacion and to the resydew of the saide ffelawship named and resyted in their saide corporacion as by the same may appere and to their successors in the saide corporacion hereafter The Armes & Creste with the Supporters in man^r as hereafter foloweth That is to say Asur & silver unde of syx pecys on all a shippe under saile the mastes sable the Gonnes apperaunte the Deck p^rffled¹ golde the sailes & pensells² silver on eche one a Crosse geules betwene thre besauntes in a chef golde on a Delffe³ betwene two Roses geules leved vert a lyon passant golde armed asur langued geules upon the hearme on a torse golde & geules a lysarde hedd Rasye in his prop^r couller about his neck a crownall geules po^rffled golde manteled Asur dobbled silu^r supported by a lysarde & an Apres in their prop^r coullers abowte every neck a Crownall geules po^rffled golde As more plainly appereth depicted in this m^rgent. To haue and to holde to them and to all those of the saide corporacion & to their successors in the same and they hyt to use and enjoye for evermore In Wittness whereof I the saide Clarencieux have signed these pntes w^t my hande and set thereunto the seale of my Armes with the seale of my Office of Clarencieux kyng of Armes yeven and graunted at London the second daye of Aprill in the first & second yeres of the Reigne of our Sovereynes Phillip & Marye kyng & quene of England ffrance naples Jerusalem & Irelande Defenders of the faythe &c.”

With reference to the crest of the lysarde's head and the lysarde and apres supporters, Joseph Edmondson, Mowbray herald extraordinary, in his *Complete Body of Heraldry* (London, 1780) says: “The lyzard here mentioned is an animal of the lynx or wildcat tribe, and of a dark brown colour, spotted black; the ears and tail are short. These animals are frequently seen in the woods of Sweden,

¹ Purfled = bordered.

² Pensell = penoncel.

³ Delffe = a square-cut sod of turf..

Denmark and Norway, where they are usually called *lizards*. The apres is a heraldic figure drawn like a bull, except that his tail is short, and without testicles." In the margin of the original grant the lysarde is coloured white, spotted black. It may be observed that the "proper" colour of this semi-arctic animal would naturally be white in winter. In Edmondson's work and in Wallis's *London's Armoury*, 1677, the motto of the company is stated as "God be our good guide," but elsewhere it is to be found as "In Deo est refugium nostrum."

In the church of St. Andrew Undershaft, London, are fine monuments erected to Sir Thomas Offley, who (as Mr. Thomas Offley) is named in the grant of arms as an original assistant of the company, and died in 1582, and to Sir Hugh Hamersley, a governor of the company, who died 19th October, 1636.