



Spoon in the possession of Mr. W. H. Skinner. (Full size.)

NOTES ON A FIFTEENTH CENTURY SPOON.

By ARTHUR VICARS, F.S.A.

The spoon figured on the opposite page, the property of Mr. William Skinner, of Leamington, was exhibited by me at one of the evening meetings of the Institute at their annual gathering held at Leamington.

On account of its exceptional appearance arguing it to be of antiquity above the average of old spoons, I have been tempted at Mr. Hartshorne's suggestion, to bring a few notes on it before the readers of the *Journal*, and an accurate representation from the pencil of Mr. Skinner. The present owner of it informs me, that so far as he is aware, it is without any history, and came into his possession in the ordinary course of business; that being so we have nothing else to go upon but its rather unusual appearance.

The bowl, which measures $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches in length and $1\frac{7}{8}$ at the widest point is very much the shape of that of spoons of the sixteenth century, tapering slightly towards the handle, but the stem and knob are very different, and it is to this part of spoons one must generally look in attempting to fix their age, in the absence of a date letter. It appears to have been irregularly marked, for, however early, it would have had a maker's mark, but the only mark it seems to have is a leopard's head uncrowned, within a dotted circle, and placed in the usual position in the bowl.

The stem, which measures $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches, is hexagonal, and is terminated by a knob in the shape of a diamond or hexagonal pyramid, in continuation of the sides of the handle. The facets of the diamond top are gilt, but contrary to custom appear rather to have had the gold soldered on in plates than to have been gilt in the ordinary way. Indeed this seems beyond question.

Mr. Fallow, to whom I have submitted the drawing of the spoon under notice, and casts of the mark, is disposed to think that little stress may be laid on the shape of the diamond-headed end, further than to recognise that it is a form of finish not hitherto noticed. He takes it to be "the earliest hall-marked London spoon we have got," and alludes to a spoon, bearing an early York mark alone. This example was dredged out of the river Hull, and Mr. Fallow dates it within the first half of the fifteenth century. He considers that the absence of the maker's mark is due to the indisposition of many goldsmiths to mark their goods with their private marks, in accordance with the stringent rules so often laid down to that effect. Judging from the form of the leopard's head, Mr. Fallow puts that as earlier than 1478, and thinks the spoon may probably

be much earlier, and prior to date letters. In Mr. Fallow's views Mr. St. John Hope writes that he "entirely agrees."

Possibly some one has seen spoons of similar design before, but for my part I do not remember to have met with any other spoon which can at all compare with it in its peculiar features.

I have some difficulty in arriving at its probable date, but its whole appearance seems to bespeak antiquity in such a marked degree, that I am inclined to place its date at about 1480. The only description that I can find of spoons that might be said to correspond to some extent with the one in question is in the Inventory of Robert Morton, Gent., 1487 (add MS, 30,064), which mentions:—"ij dozen and vj sponys with dyamond pointes" (Cripps' Old English Plate, 1886 Edn. p. 201), under which designation I think this spoon might fairly come. Mr. Hartshorne has called my attention to the way in which the hexagonal plan of the handle of a spoon falls conveniently and works into the edges, the convexity and the concavity of the spoon, whereas an octagonal plan of stem could not run into the bowl with the same neatness and propriety. Having said thus much I leave this curious specimen of early domestic plate to the consideration of greater authorities than I pretend to be.

Since the following notes were put together I have heard from Mr. Cripps, to whom I had sent the spoon. He (as also Mr. Hartshorne) agrees with me as regards its probable date in considering the mark—the uncrowned leopard's head within a dotted circle—as one of the many of an irregular kind which exist, and simply the mark of a maker. In a letter dated November 5th the same eminent authority speaks of the danger of failing of the truth by insisting too much upon Hall Marks, which, he very truly adds "are good servants but bad masters." He further remarks that there is no good evidence that the leopard's head was ever used crownless at any time, though he does not lay too much stress upon this. And it so happens that he has lately become possessed of a spoon bearing the very mark that we have on Mr. Skinner's example. He describes it as "a spoon with pear-shaped bowl of about the normal size, but slenderer than usual, and with a slender and tapering handle, ending in a ball with traces of gilding. It has no marks on the handle but a leopard's head, without crown, in a dotted circle in the usual place in the bowl. This is of course identical with yours, and it adds to the probability of the mark being that of a *maker*, that the handle and bowl are of the same slender make which would be a *shop characteristic*. I may add that the ball end is not quite spherical but a little longer than it is wide, and that it is covered with a small pattern."

Thus, upon so slight a matter as a little spoon, room can be found for certain divergence of opinions, adding some zest and interest to a small matter of detail, without which, indeed, I should not have felt quite justified in placing the above notes into Mr. Hartshorne's hands.