

# Your Old Silver Spoons--- Do You Know Them

By CONSTANCE CHISHOLM.

AT this season, when wedding invitations come so thick and fast that the mere matter of selecting suitable bridal presents taxes one's resourcefulness to the last degree—mentally, at least, not to mention financially—one's best judgment seems in the majority of cases to decide in favor of silver, believing it to be the gift that appeals most strongly to the appreciation of new homemakers.

Not only by reason of its beauty of design and workmanship, but because of its sterling quality of durability, do they see in their silver gift an object of constant use that will endure throughout their day and generation, growing richer in interest to those who may inherit it after them. Everyone knows of homes where various other sorts of wedding gifts have migrated, in the course of time and their owners' evolution, from the parlor to the third-story back room; but the silver remains in its intimate relation to the family, daily adorning and furnishing the table around which centres the life of the household.

Not only, however, does the bride welcome the artistic new silver presented by her dearest friends, but she is overjoyed at receiving pieces that have been long in the service of forebears; charmingly quaint in their old designs and of rare interest in their hall marks; for there are no heirlooms more coveted than family silver. And yet old silver pieces need not be heirlooms to be eagerly accepted gifts. During the last decade Americans have become as keen collectors of old silver, for its beauty and rare marks, as the amateur collectors of European countries, and many fine specimens are being got together on this side of the water.

Especially is this true of spoons; and it is old silver spoons as cherished inherited possessions or carefully acquired ones that are, in this instance, the subject of comment and limited interpretation; for any person who owns even one old spoon, and has the slightest appreciation of it, never rests till she finds out all she can about its date, maker, history and significance of decoration.

We read of golden spoons for the Tabernacle in Exodus, but the earliest silver ones we know of are those in the British Museum that belonged to the early Christians—little anointing spoons probably used in the third or fourth century. The spoon holding the consecrated oil with which the Archbishop of Canterbury anointed George V at his coronation is 600 years old. Spoons are therefore an ancient institution for sacred purposes, and Laborde, the archaeologist, says that "if not as old as the world, they are as old as soup."

Yet silver spoons were only for the great ones of the earth or for rare gifts until the seventeenth century, when they began to have a more general home use, though not until the eighteenth century were they ordinary family possessions. Most of our earliest colonists contented themselves with pewter, horn and wooden spoons, laurel being known at the time as spoon-wood. But soon thereafter the better-off families had a few silver spoons in their "chests" when they emigrated. Those first brought over were, according to Montagu Howard, an English authority, the large spoons used before the Restoration—what we would now call tablespoons—and Albee Morse Earle says some of them were baluster and seal head patterns, the assay mark in the inner part of the bowl. The next pattern was known as the "hind's-foot," having three clefts, or points, on the end of the handle, and these are said to date earlier than 1714. This spoon was strengthened by the handle extending down under the bowl in a narrow tongue or tail—hence its name of "rat-tail" spoon—and highly is it prized today. About the time of William and Mary (1688-1702) there was a style called "wavy-end." A spoon common in the seventeenth century had a flat handle and nearly round bowl. This became popular with the Roundheads and was known as the "Puritan" spoon. You would be wise to look among the silver of your Puritan ancestors of New England for one of these. Dessert spoons were not popular till after the Restoration, and teaspoons were very rare in the early part of the eighteenth century, Pepys recording his first cup of tea in 1660.

The first teaspoons were very small, more like the modern after-dinner coffee spoons, reaching somewhat of a standard proportion about the time of George I (1714-1727).

Extremely early spoons were marked on the inside of the bowl, but from about 1666 it became the rule to place the mark on the back of the handle near the bowl. From 1781 they began to be near the other end of the handle. In the reign of George II appeared the "Onslow" pattern, the end of the handle grooved and turned back. Earlier than this, in Queen Anne's time, a little ridge was raised just below the rounded end of the handle, which was bent forward. About 1750 was introduced what is usually called the "Old English" pattern, the end of the handle rounded but bent back and generally perfectly plain, although it sometimes has a little ornamented border. As in the seventeenth century the shape gradually changed from pear shape to oval, having the point nearest the handle, so in the eighteenth century the oval changed to egg-shaped, having the point at the other end of the bowl, continuing thus to the present time.

Perhaps you may have inherited an Apostle, a saint or a monkey spoon, as the early New Amsterdamers zealously observed the old custom of the sponsors' presenting the first-named to a child at the christening. These spoons had the figure

of an Apostle standing out on the end of the handle, and sometimes it was a patron saint instead. Or perhaps you may find it a pleasant pastime to collect them—if your purse has a goodly length and breadth.

Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan has had this fancy, among others, and one of his most interesting collections is his complete set of Apostle spoons, consisting of 13, the Master spoon having the figure of our Lord. One of these spoons (date 1617) was bought in London in 1903 for \$5,300. Another set sold in the same year, also in London, brought the incredible sum of \$24,500, while a St. Nicholas spoon went to a glad purchaser for \$3,450. This was then called a record price for one spoon, but 10 years have doubtless added many hundreds to its value. This has the saint's head on the end, and down the front of the handle is inscribed "St. Nicholas, pray for us."

While the Apostle spoon was given at both weddings and christenings, the earliest use of the monkey spoon was as a funeral souvenir exclusively, some supposing the device of the ape to be copied from an ancient amulet which associated the monkey with death; while as it was equally as frequent a wedding gift in old New York, others believe that it took its name from a Dutch phrase which meant great conviviality. Rare, indeed, are monkey spoons, and few are there even in old Manhattan families. The "fiddle-back" spoon was introduced early in the nineteenth century and Howard attributes the salt spoon to the same period. During the eighteenth century there were many shapes and variations of tea caddy spoons with short handles.

This article has aimed only to treat of the forms and characteristics of spoons within certain years, so as to give the possessor of old silver spoons some intimation, from the patterns, of the general period to which they belong.

The subject of hall marks is not taken up because it is in itself a theme requiring such minute descriptions and definitions that only in the extended space of a volume is it ever attempted. There are authoritative books in the libraries in which hundreds of hall marks are shown and their relative dates given. Those, therefore, who know or believe their spoons to be old and interesting should consult such standards as Howard, Chaffers, Cripps, Morgan and Earle; and by comparing marks they can often verify the date and maker. It is a great delight to make such a find oneself. And not only may old spoons made in England, Holland, Italy and other countries have come down to you by inheritance, but there may be fine old spoons made by American silversmiths of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; and while the marks on these are very different, as they usually bear the maker's name instead of a symbol for it, it is no less interesting to "study up" on these and find just where and when they were made.

Moreover, early American silver is now highly prized as heirlooms, and collectors will soon be seeking it as eagerly as the old clocks and mahoganies by our own craftsmen.