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AMERICAN SILVER FLATWARE 1837–1910

Noel D. Turner

Noel Turner never dreamed that inheriting several pieces of Victorian silver flatware would propel him into the search that resulted in this book. His curiosity about Victorian silverware led him to look into its nomenclature, profusion of patterns, manufacture, and the ways in which its styles mirrored its era. He pored through newspaper clippings, advertising materials, mail-order catalogues, books on etiquette and accounts of the period's pursuit of business and pleasure.

Now, thirty five years after he began his meticulous research, Mr. Turner's efforts emerge again in this reprint of his classic treatise. *American Silver Flatware* is unequalled as a reference work. It contains dozens of carefully chosen illustrations, an alphabetical listing of 3,000 Victorian silversmiths, 400 manufacturers and their trademarks, and upwards of 2,000 sterling and electroplate patterns with their dates of introduction.

Mr. Turner begins with a look at the history of eating utensils. He goes from their primitive beginnings, through special adaptations such as folding traveling sets, and then to the formal silver pieces of the eighteenth century. He presents a retrospective of some of the early Victorian silversmiths. These include Samuel Kirk, the Rogers brothers and Jabez Gorham, as well as less familiar names such as John Moore, Clement Oskamp and members of the Mix and Frary families. He also looks at the introduction of machine manufacture and retailers' marks. A chapter is devoted to some of the metal crafts from which the silver flatware industry grew, notably pewter, Britannia, and brass. Subsequent chapters take up the topics of hallmarks, miniature or "toy" silver as evidence of apprentices' skill, production methods, and early American electroplating.

Amusing glimpses of nineteenth-century manners are provided in a chapter on promotion, including quotations from florid sales pitches aimed at hotels, steamships, railroads and boardinghouses. He also shows how the marketing of silver increasingly relied on catalogues, coupons, and the use of fairs. There is a chapter on the esthetics of silver, and the many influences upon silver patterns and design: travel, interior decoration, literature, and the passing vogues for the Classical, Oriental, French, and Colonial Revival styles. Later chapters focus on specialized silver pieces—their bewildering diversity, the popularity of gift sets, patented pieces which included ingenious combinations of existing pieces, as well as mustache and medicine spoons, and special children's utensils.

Mr. Turner concludes with helpful pointers for collectors, including tips on establishing a pattern's age, choosing flatware to complement collections of china or glassware, and the proper care of a silver collection. It is hoped that *American Silver Flatware* will not only serve as a kind of encyclopedia of flatware, but that it will also spur interest in collecting these fascinating items.

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