

WAS THERE MANDRAKE IN THE CESTUS OF VENUS?

The article in the November number on the marble Aphrodité detected by a sharp-sighted Florentine in the Palazzo Altesse has had some echo in the archaeological press. The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester, England has a paper by Dr. J. Rendel Harris of Cambridge in which he advances a curious theory regarding the cestus, the magical weapon of Aphrodité, which this statue, now the property of Mr. John D. Rockefeller, carries draped over the right hand. It is Dr. Harris's belief that various gods of Greece can be traced back to certain trees or plants that were thought to have curative and magical qualities by the early peoples about the Mediterranean; in several articles he has maintained this thesis with regard to Apollo, Artemis and Dionysos. With respect to Aphrodité, it is the mandrake or mandragora so much mentioned by the ancients and by the poets and herbalists of the middle ages as a root endowed with dreadful powers, that he fixes upon as the "root" of the cult of Aphrodité.

If not entirely convincing, he brings together much curious and long-forgotten lore. He suggests that the "apple" held by many statues of Aphrodité in one hand is the round golden fruit of the mandrake. But with regard to the cestus, he advances the idea that its magical, love-dispensing qualities immortalized by Homer in the fourteenth Iliad may be carried back to the powers ascribed by primitive folk to this singular plant. One reason for the well-known virtues of the mandrake as a charm comes from the fact that occasionally the root is found bifurcated, and by skillful handling can be made to assume the rude effigy of a human being! In some cases the mandrake was used for love-magic. Hence Dr. Harris concludes that the embroidered strap that Aphrodité carried "in the belt of mandrake roots which the women of ancient times wore next their skin." To him, Homer was referring to magic-casting herbs when he spoke of Love, Desire and Persuasion among the powers of the cestus of Venus. In Derby's translation Juno says to Venus:

Give me the loveliness and power to charm

Whereby thou reign'st o'er gods and men supreme
and after Venus has gracefully acquiesced, we are told of the love-charm:

Then Venus spoke, and from her bosom leaved
Her brodered Cestus, wrought with every charm
To win the heart; there Love, there young Desire,
There fond Discourse, and there Persuasion dwelt.

So far we have no other instance of a marble Venus the size of life which retains the cestus, although small bronzes and terra-cottas and seals are known that show it; also several vase paintings; often it has been mistaken for a girdle, a necklace or a flower.

Among the January exhibitions few were more remarkable for beautiful objects than the collection of Chinese, Rhodian and Greek pieces of porcelain and pottery shown at the American Art Galleries prior to a sale. It belonged to Mr. Thomas B. Clarke and disperses a very large stock of the finest ker-

mise, such as are sure to make the mouths of collectors water. Particularly delightful were the vases in white with a discreet decoration in low relief, perhaps just a loop of flower-stalk across the highest swell of the vase-body, rising again into a simple flower or leaf ornament, the outlines of the vase exquisite in its refinement of outline, the proportions of neck, body and foot most satisfying, the combination stamped with an elegance rare of its kind. The blue vases, bowls and platters which rise above the high levels of ceramic art were numerous, most of them solid-color blues with effects produced by darker shades in a constantly varied series of patterns. The Rhodian platters with their bold flower decorations on cream ground, the lustre pieces from the Levant and Spain, the Greek vases for wine and oil, belonging, not to the greatest art period, but a later, in which the feeling for art still lingered among the decorators of pottery, the Italian vases of the later Renaissance—all of these contained specimens of singular beauty. It was the Chinese pottery and porcelain, however, which held the lead, not merely in quantity but quality. For many years Mr. Clarke has had a buyer resident in China whose taste and skill were notable. This buyer died recently and perhaps his death was one of the reasons for the disposal of the collections.

An exhibition of work by the late William M. Chase will be held at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, including loans of pictures from all parts of his career. One of his earliest and best paintings "Ready for the Ride," belonging to the Union League Club was lent to the Winter Show of the Academy of Design and held a favored position on the north wall of the Vanderbilt Gallery.

A PLAN TO AID SELF-RESPECTING ARTISTS

The arts in their beneficent variety have the merit of bringing relief to the humdrum that desolates life—that is merely to regard them from the humblest standpoint! Dextrously, suavely, without hurry, they edge our attention over melancholy passages, dim and vacuous, ravaged by Ennui. They supply subjects of interest to some natures that otherwise might turn to coarse pleasures like drinking and gambling, groping and war; beside that, they afford delight of the keenest sort to other natures more readily affected by objects of the kind.

Even do they go in certain cases so far as to compete with religion. For which reason they have found relentless foes among the reformers who have lacked the necessary breadth and humor to conciliate the two and make them friends—compare Erasmus with Calvin.

In fine, the arts are able to add so much to the joy of living, they may be called sweeteners of life.

This being pretty generally accepted, would not one imagine that the persons who are trained to create objects of the arts, and do produce them with more or less talent and skill, would occupy a privileged place in the community, analogous, let us say, to that of bards among the primitive clans of Gael and the British Isles?

Very far is this from being the case. In the rough and tumble of life we allow nothing to artists by way of advantage over laborers, tradesmen, artisans,