

Pipe Stoppers Illustrated by Examples from the Collection of Colonel Horace Gray, V.D.

WHEN Sir Isaac Newton, that absent-minded genius, used the finger of the lady he was courting for a pipe-stopper, he gave to the little history of pipe-stoppers one of its few stories. Strange as it may seem, few pens have praised or poets sung the little friend of man. True, that the great James Boswell wrote a poem of some decent length, in which he cries:—

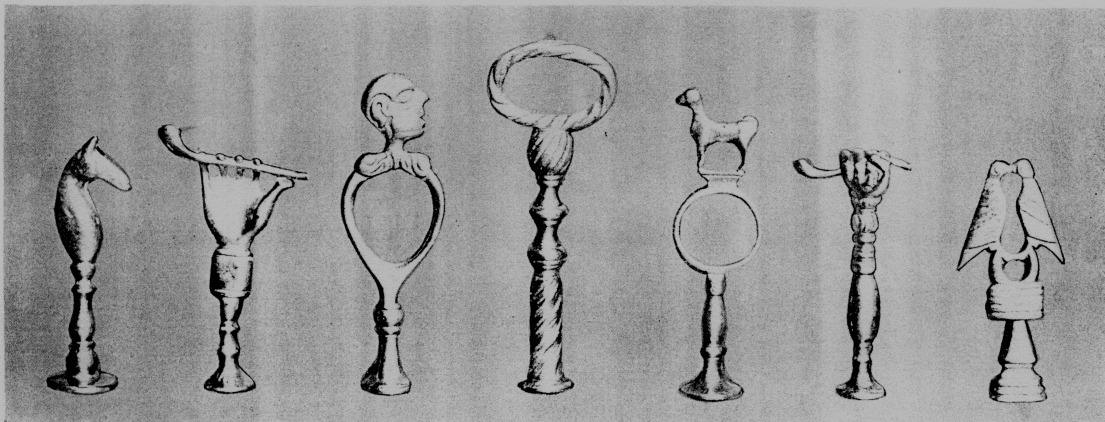
“the son
Of labouring mechanism here displays
Exuberance of skill.”

But to our knowledge Boswell is the only poet of the pipe-stopper. Will Wimble, Sir Roger de Coverley's friend, is the champion collector. “If Will Wimble were with us,” says Sir Roger, looking at the coronation chairs in Westminster Abbey,

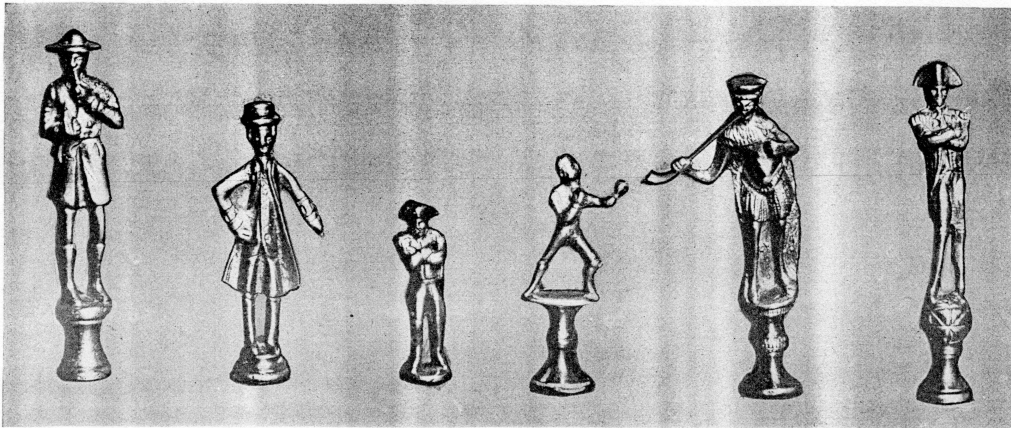
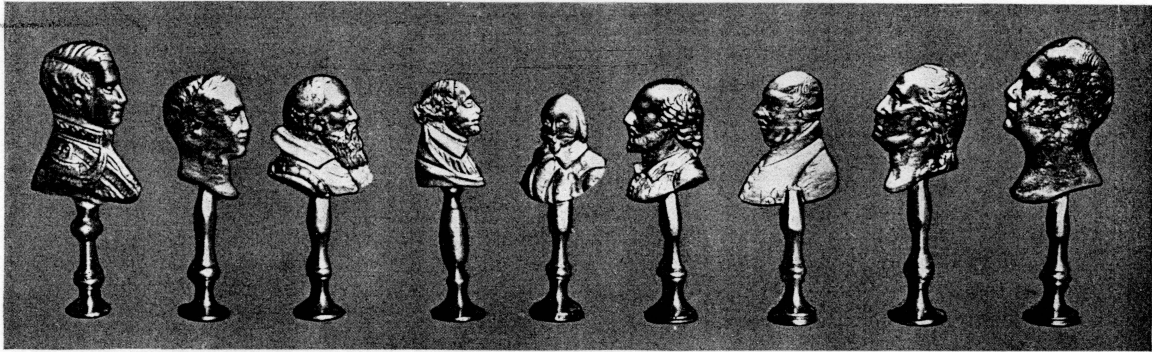
“and saw those two chairs, it would go hard but he would get a tobacco-stopper out of one or t'other of them.” This shows us how much of a craze was the collecting of stoppers at one time; no ship was broken up but a hundred or more stoppers were cut out of her timber; no gate with a history but ran its chance of a stopper enthusiast taking a peg away with him.

Brass and wood are the most ordinary metals from which stoppers were made—are, indeed, still made. Silver stoppers, however, are greatly prized, and are cut in innumerable shapes, from snakes twisted, pierrots, soldiers, open hands, to profile portraits or little busts of celebrated persons.

From the first moment that pipe smoking came into fashion came the pipe-stopper with it. It is an ornament to the pocket one would like to see



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more prized to-day. It is one of the few serviceable pieces of jewellery a man may carry, and, when we look at the amusing, quaint designs of other times, one thinks that to-day might provide something better than the flat, dull affairs one sees.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries abound with examples of stoppers made in every form and of

all kinds of hard substances—glass, mahogany, animals' teeth tipped with silver, brass, or plain silver or ivory. Some of the more curious are made in the form of rings for the finger, with a long neck to project to form the stopper; such a stopper may be seen on the hand of the parson in Hogarth's *Modern Midnight Conversation*.
D. C. C.

