

GEORG JENSEN

AN ARTISTS BIOGRAPHY BY L. C. NIELSEN



FR. BAGGE PRINTERS
(BY APPOINTMENT TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING)
COPENHAGEN 1920

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ROYAL COPENHAGEN PORCELAIN
AND
DANISH ARTS
615 FIFTH AVE.
NEW YORK

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(BY APPOINTMENT TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING)
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Georg Jensen private portrait 1920.

GEORG JENSEN

I.

THE ARTIST

„A thing of beauty is a joy for ever —“.

THE JOY of beholding a beautiful thing, of dwelling on a lovely creation, where utility as well as beauty are combined in a higher unity, this primitive joy which dates back to the first progress of the civilization of mankind, seemed, during the latter half of the 19th century suddenly

to have disappeared, drowned as it were, in a deluge of inferior taste and badly manufactured products, which have, owing to modern technique flooded the world. This rapid development spread its destruction throughout the communities, and with the political victory of democracy, came the downfall of the sense of beauty.

These new rulers seemed as it were to have acquired only the soulless technique; the ancient combination of art



Georg Jensen's workshop 36 Bredgade. 1908-09.

and handicraft was split assunder, the productive position of the artist, both as artisan and artist was made impossible, the spirit of the age was for cheap wholesale goods, and in this stifling atmosphere the artist could not exist.

Every downfall, as well as every regeneration has its historical influence, but one can say that the downfall of industrial-art showed itself most poignantly, and developed with the greatest rapidity, as the influence of industrial Germany spread and made itself felt throughout Europe.

German cheapness, german lack of taste were beauty's

deadliest enemies; the joy of the beautiful thing was pursued as a luxury, there was no time for it, such was the spirit of the age.

However, this state of affairs did not come into being without protest, from more than one side, notable artists who sensed im- pending peril, the deluge of either by their trying to pre- tistic interest art, and poin- tistic worth by termovement new under- new style, or passive way by interest in the den times.

England and the chief fore- campaign and England, head- asWalterCrane Morris.

too, men of no- ve the problem,

ving the tradition of handicraft-art or by reviving it, and several artists made valuable minor contributions to the cause.

The name of Th. Bindesbøll must be mentioned, for by his characteristic personality and power, he more especially contributed to the revival of the independence of Danish art and handicraft, but no artist had as yet taken up in



Candelabrum.

G. J.

France were runners in this preeminently ed by such men and William

In Denmark te tried to sol- either by sa-



Tea machine.

G. J.

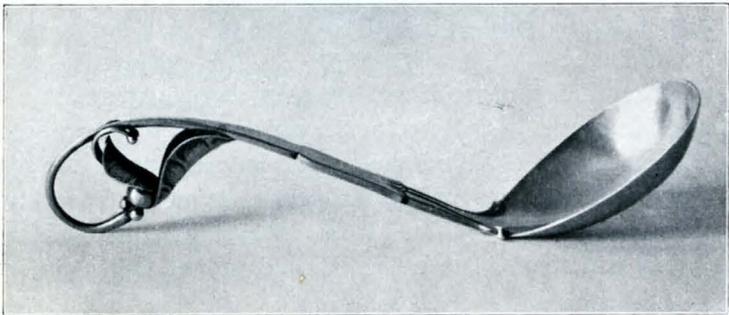
its entirety a handicraft with the sole idea of enobling it, and through it winning a broader basis for his art. The first one in Denmark to take this step was the sculptor Georg Jensen.

* *

The name of Georg Jensen is now known far and wide, it is no longer only the name of an artist, it has become, one might say, a style. »A Georg Jensen« indicates a useful article

in silver executed in the style created by him the »Georg Jensen style«. In London, Paris, Berlin, and New York the name has the same ring, the artist has become identical with his work, his personality is hidden behind it and pervades it.

This achievement came to him quicker than one might have dared to hope. The tide of fame had achieved a quicker



Sauce spoon.

G. J.

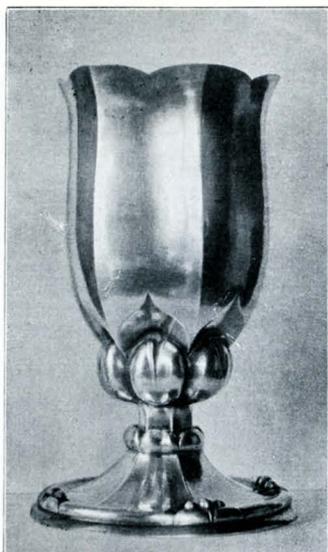
pace, and few artists have so quickly gathered the fruit of recognition as Georg Jensen, though not without watchful toil, there lies the work of a life, many industrious and strenuous years of struggle, his creative power always on the alert, his incessant craving for learning, in fact, the faithful patience of the true artist.



Bowl.

G. J.

Georg Jensen was born 1866 in Raavad, where his father was employed at the local knife factory. Here, surrounded by the beauties of nature, woods, lakes and meadows united in a constantly changing picture of true Danish nature, he drank in from childhood his first impressions of beauty; this early intimate knowledge of nature became later a well of beauty from which his art has drawn again and again.



Goblet.

G. J.

In many of his works his characteristic vegetative ornamentation, the organic up-building of those things he represents, one can trace the influence he gathered unconsciously as a boy from fertile Raavad.

One of his first ornaments acquired by the Danish art Museum Copenhagen, the well known dragon-fly clasp, owes without doubt its origin to Raavad.

* *

The boon of being badly off has before shown its advantages; that it was a boon to Georg Jensen was chiefly due to the fact, that as a boy he had to be apprenticed to the jewellers trade although his artistic dreams had already made themselves felt. That art pure and simple might have taken possession of him had not his first acquaintance been a handicraft trade, is not improbable.

In 1884 his apprenticeship was at an end, simultaneously he had pursued studies at the technical school, but not before these studies were at an end did he enter the academy of art, where he in 1892 took his final examination as sculptor.

In the same year he exhibited his first work of art, at the Charlottenborg Exhibition of art: »The Harvest Boy« with its healthy power and remarkable composition raised great hopes for his artistic development.

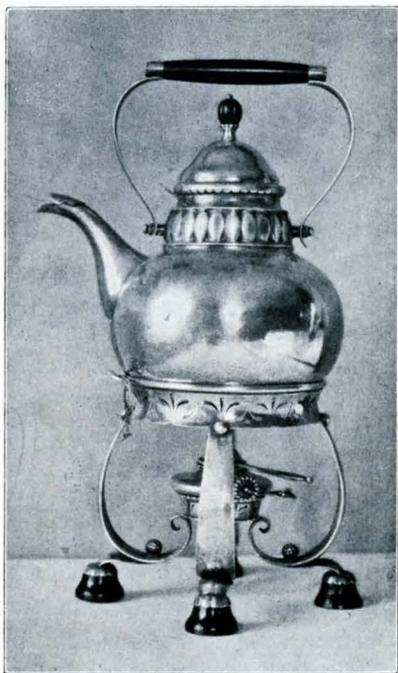
True to the prevailing realism of the time was »The Har-

vest Boy«, this figure was not only a realistic representation of a harvester, it was enobled with that sense of harmony handed down from Thorvaldsen. An inward and outward balance could be detected in everything created by this young artist and later in the works of the mature art-handicraftsman.

In spite however of his successful debut, at the close of the exhibition the »Harvest Boy« had perforce to return to the studio no buyer had appeared.

At this period the artisan stood aside for the sculptor and he like many others little dreamt that there waiting for him was the problem of the art-handicraftsman, the solving of which would be his life's work, through which, he would contribute so richly to the artistic development of his time.

He exhibited yet a few more works, busts and the refreshing »Wild Boar Hunter« which gained for him his first acknowledgement, the Academy's gold medal, and a large travelling stipend. Happy at his artistic success and spurred on by the future which rolled itself out fantastically before him he started on



Tea machine.

G. J.

his first travels abroad to France and Italy. — He was then nigh upon 30 years of age, there he stood a mature man, doubly armed as artisan and artist, little realising that he was ready to meet the great task which would soon call upon him; with the brightest hopes of his career as a sculptor he set out.

A happy instinct led the father at that time to apprentice his son to the jeweller's trade, although the daily routine



Bonbonnière.

G. J.

of this trade, perhaps more especially at that time did not aspire to great heights, it was however in closer connection with the fine arts than most other handicrafts. Not without reason did the great artists of the Renaissance study this branch, the materials used are beautiful in themselves, and the budding sense of form can easily find expression in this work.

Although at the outset it had not dawned on father and son that the goldsmith's handicraft might reach to higher and wider spheres, it was not long before Georg Jensen came to this understanding, and probably during his early instruction

in drawing he conceived the idea of going further ahead. As above related, unusual luck attended him, and his heart and soul were wholly bent on the sculptor's art when he started on his travels; indeed, with the presumption of the young artist, came very near to slighting the handicraft he had bidden farewell a few years back.



Butter dish.

G. J.

But fate willed it otherwise, witnessing as he did in Italy and Paris artists working as artisans, preserving at the same time their artistic reputation, standing face to face in the museums with supreme artistic works of handicraft or more than ever experiencing the widening of his artistic horizon, the opening of his eyes to the fact that many of the greatest names in art have started their careers so, working simultaneously as artist and artisan. Realising this, the jeweller woke again to life in him, and he then studied the cases of



Sugar sifter.

G. J.

gold and silver articles with the same interest as the sculpture and paintings.

From Paris where he had made the acquaintance of many contemporary artists, the road led to Italy, this world of beauty made a deep impression on him, without in any way depriving him of any of his characteristic Danish personality. — It was the child from Raavad drinking in the beauty of Italy, developing but not changing.

Filled with rich new impulsive ideas, he at last wended his way home. A young sculptor could not at that time

hope for more work than at the present day, and the necessity of gaining a livelihood forced him to seek for work in another field. Already before his travels abroad he had taken some interest in ceramic art in conjunction with his fellow student from the academy the painter Joachim, now the well known artistic leader of the Fajance Factory »Aluminia«. This he now took advantage of and with Joachim he built an oven for ceramic art in the farther end of Nørrebrogade.

In the daytime however, in order to obtain his livelihood, he worked sometimes for »Aluminia« doing the most ordinary work, such as designing household basins and jugs. Later he worked for the bronze moulder Rasmussen, also for Ipsen's Terra cotta factory being entrusted there with the modelling of figures.

After this strenuous day he met his friend, who lived in much the same way, at their modest little workshop, where the two gave themselves up to the artistic joy of creating at will and experimenting in the capricious ceramic art.

In the silent evening and night hours, they sat in front of their oven like two alchemists watching with enthusiastic expectation the result of their experiments; hoping always that the long desired result might this time be attained, and again and again they had to admit that as yet they had not reached the object of their artistic desire.

It was no mere accident that brought these two young artists together, both destined in their own way to become creators in the sphere of Danish industrial art; a mutual sympathy and fate united them, and their cooperative ceramic work was not in vain, although it did not bear the fruit of their expectations; artistic experience was gained. In the World Exhibition of Paris 1900, they exhibited for the first time their works and from connoisseurs won much recognition, besides which, many of their works were sold. The head of the Danish Museum of Industrial art. Pietro Krohn gave attention to their ceramic art, securing for the museum some specimens.



Bowl.

G. J.



Sauce boat.

G. J.

But the profit they gained, the profit which was to cover their very modest expenses, and enable them to continue the necessary experiments was far too small. After another visit to Paris,

during the World Exhibition, and later to Italy Georg Jensen returned home a more conscious art-handicraftsman than ever.

As sculptor he exhibited his last work in 1897 a very finely executed and graceful figure of a young girl as »Spring«.

The ceramic artist had become one with the jeweller, and he now saw clearer than ever the way which pointed to his goal. — A short time after his return he settled at Birkerød which was also the home of Joachim, and there they continued their ceramic studies; during their long tramps through the fertile country, their imaginations became enriched with impressions from the world of nature; animals, insects, plants, impressions which blossomed again in their



Candlestick.

G. J.

art; out there Georg Jensen again commenced to take up his original handicraft, and his first jewelry, amongst others the above mentioned Dragon-Fly Clasp were created there — spurred on by the recognition which he obtained for these first silver works of art, of which several were secured by Pietro Krohn, for the Industrial Art Museum, he threw himself more and more into this work which seemed to offer him greater chances than ceramic art, which at that time was constantly ignored by the general public.



Jardinière.

G. J.

At length the two artists agreed that the ceramic efforts which still failed to bring them the necessities of life must needs cease, and they took up the line of work which was to be theirs, richer in experience than in personal gain.

In the spring of 1904 Georg Jensen opened his first jeweller's workshop, a very humble room at 36 Bredgade; from that moment he knew his own field of endeavour and has never left it since.

At the time Georg Jensen resolutely decided to devote himself wholly to the silversmith's trade he was a man in his prime, the youthful dreams of the artist were dreamt, and manhood's consolidated understanding of facts were pre-



Jug.

G. J.

eminent; not that he lost anything by this step, only it was clear to him now that his activities would find their right scope if he united in a higher unity his experiences as sculptor and art-handicraftsman. This unity was the silversmith.

With the early triumphs he had reaped as sculptor, he might easily have secured and widened his po-

sition as such, but drawn as he had always been to industrial art, and tired of the indifference shown at that time by the public to Danish sculpture, it was no big sacrifice on his part to lay aside the marble and take up the silver, to cast aside the chisel for the silversmith's hammer. Well and good, the step was taken, the workshop in Bredgade opened up a new phase in his artistic career, one might almost say a new phase in the history of Danish industrial art. The Georg Jensen style was created.

The prestige of gold and silversmiths work was at that time not very high, it lacked power and original style, it seemed on the whole to be under the influence of German industrial art; lack of character not to mention lack of taste seemed its doom. It flourished in a dismal atmosphere of a memorable character, golden-wedding spoons, Christian IX forks, germanic speculations in current events, the source

of their origin springing not from the impulse of the artist, but from a commercial motive — a barren calculated creation, not one enobled by a fantastic imagination; the tradition of the first half of the century, when distinguished artists such as Hetsh and several others stood by with their drawings and aided industrial art, was at an end, and although such a significant artist as Bindesbøll had through a lengthy period been working for the improvement of industrial art, the goldsmith's craft had not come under this influence, it persisted in tastelessness of an insipid order. Here was a wide field for Georg Jensen to work on. The fact that the painter Mogens Ballin at the same time took up similar work only strengthened the conviction that there was a craving for greater beauty and that judgement was about to fall on this imported lack of style.

In this branch Georg Jensen was the pioneer, because he like no other man possessed the needed qualifications, and it therefore became his lot to solve the problem.

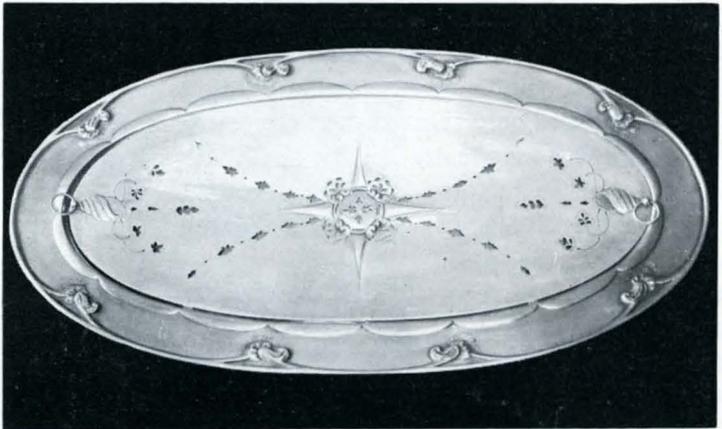
That he met with little sympathy and understanding from the leading masters of this trade was only natural, they had no interests in common with him; they felt that their power was at stake and their com-



Wine can.

J. R.

plete lack of talent demonstrated. — It is characteristic to note that before Georg Jensen took the step of opening his workshop, he approached one or two of the most well known goldsmiths of Copenhagen with plans and drawings which he wished to have carried out, but none of them dared take the risk of working in conjunction with him — they shook their heads and rejected the offer of his services. The goldsmith's guild, perhaps guilds on the whole, here as well as



Fish dish.

G. J.

there, thrive better without the aid of art; in an age of democracy materialism seems almost to become a law of nature.

What the goldsmiths did not understand the public soon commenced to realise, from the little workshop ornament after ornament wandered forth, it became the fashion to wear them, the Georg Jensen style secured for him in the course of a few years many admirers especially amongst the fair sex, many imitations cropped up, the »style« almost threatened to become the cause of its own death. It is one of the laws of fashion, that what everyone wears goes



Tea pot.

G. J.

out of fashion. However, Georg Jensen was in no way restricted to ornaments, the reason that he at the outset perhaps deliberately produced them, is chiefly due to practical reasons.

buyers were more easily found and the capital required for execution was not greater than what the young master was in possession of. He had however from the beginning commenced to work on silver articles, which come under the category of table silver; forks, knives, spoons, salt cellars, sugar sifters, teapots etc, and as his workshop became known and his art time and again at exhibitions — several years at the Danish Free Exhibition — won public recognition, customers for table silver appeared and the production of this grew from

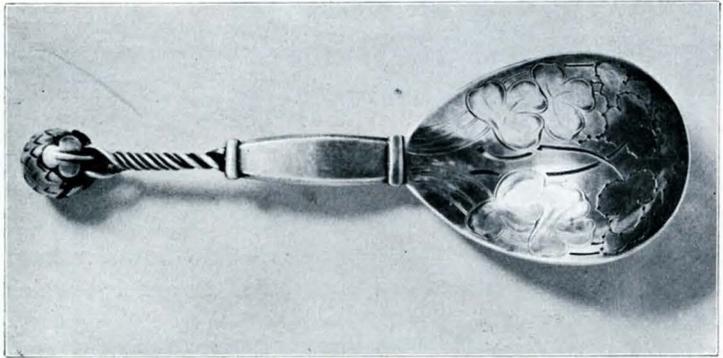


Jug.

G. J.

year to year. — At an exhibition in Hagen Germany in 1905 he gained his first recognition abroad. As the work grew, the artist grew, without losing any of his originality, he created one beautiful thing after another, his designs become finer and richer, and his moulding still nobler.

At the World Exhibition in Brussels 1910 the artist won the gold medal, his success was at once established



Strawberry spoon.

G. J.

and his leading position could not be disputed either at home or abroad.

* * *

The secret of the victory won by the Georg Jensen art, lies in his understanding of the intimate connection between the artist and artisan; when he adopted the silversmith's trade, he brought with him the good artisans understanding and love of his material, combined with the experienced artist's sense of expression and sense of form; therefore it became a veritable joy to witness his handling of silver, or in his jewellery to dwell on the picturesque handling of amber and precious stones united with silver, his in-



Sauce boat.

G. J.

tensely beautiful moulding, the designs of his perfectly controlled ornamentation; his technique was perfect.

A glance at the illustrations will show his pure and simple style. It is possible that the

style of his earlier productions, this refers chiefly to his jewellery, was a trifle massive and heavy, the proportion not always equally balanced, but he soon worked towards more distinctive forms, and the more he left the jewellery behind him, and concentrated on the silver ware, the nobler became his style. Original as it is, it does not however break the tradition of the finest of the old Danish silver ware. He was however not content to renovate the old models, he created new ones, but being as an artist in league with the ancient Danish art, it followed that his new forms and ideas were allied with them.

For 20 years he has continually found new ideas, and

Chairman's Bell.
Ivory and silver.

G. J.



Sauce boat.

J. R.

has alone, until the last few years been able to supply a constantly increasing staff with the necessary designs; as a poet he has conceived many ideas, his pictures, his rythms

being born again in the beautiful silver substance hammered out by his own hands or those of his fellow workers. His was the victory, because the power of expression, the understanding and the imagination were united.

Farther afield than most of his colleagues, his reputation has spread; English, French and German art critics have long ago stamped him as the pioneering master of his branch. — Thus in the french monthly journal of modern art »Art et Décoration« of July 1914, and in »the Studio« of February 1920 where the notable critic Gabriel Monrey amongst other things writes: »This rare artist is without doubt not alone one of the most remarkable in Denmark but in all Europe«.

His victory has been won step by step, bringing not only honour to him, but to Danish industrial art, the latter reaching through him as never before great recognition abroad.

II. THE INDUSTRY

MANY will remember the little show case which suddenly appeared outside 36 Bredgade; insignificant as it was one could not altogether pass it by; exhibited on pale grey velvet, were about 20 silver ornaments in a new still somewhat heavy style, which seemed almost to suggest its origin from the growth of the algae.

Many passers by stopped in order to study them more closely. If one wished to meet the master, one could find him in his workshop, a low cielinged room with a large half bay window near the ground — here he worked alone with an apprentice, seated at his table, hammering his silver into the contemplated designs or soldering it by the bluish flame of the soldering lamp.

This interior was very characteristic reminding one of the Renaissance; perhaps it was the



Sugar basin.

J. R.



Cream jug.

J. R.

peculiar lighting that made it so, the meagre daylight came through the low window and only the lower part of the room caught the light, whilst that part which as a rule first gets the benefits of light lay

in semi-darkness, a mild «clair obscur» which almost imperceptibly influenced the mind with impressions from the workshops of olden times.

The staff at the outset of this business consisted of the artist and his apprentice, when a customer put in an appearance Georg Jensen rose from his work drew out a drawer from a table near by, and brought forward for inspection his contemplated ornaments and useful silver ware, for, from the beginning he had as before mentioned, realised the significance of working on articles used in the daily routine of life, especially table silver.

He then returned to his work to carry



Sweetmeat basket.

G. J.



Goblet.

G. J.

out his designs; the ideas, motives, drawings, in fact the principal part of the work was personally executed by him.

Everything was in his favour, the benefit he had won 20 years ago as an artisan, the enrichment gained by his artistic training, all that, which he consciously and subconsciously drank in from nature as a boy in Raavad, as a young man in Birkerød, from all that, he now reaped the benefits. Behind

him was a fund of riches, hardly realised by him before, and from this he created and formed with happy imagination and lightness of touch. Victory was his before he realised it, and very soon the first extension of his business was necessary.

In the spring of 1904, at the same time as he opened his workshop, he won further fame for his name at an exhibition in the Museum of Industrial art — previously he had won the interest of the then director Pietro Krohn, and he found now as also later faithful support from the directors of this museum.

The exhibition secured for him the sympathy of several art connoisseurs, and increased the still modest number



A portion of the chasers workshop in Haraldsgade.



A portion of the silversmiths workshop (Corpus department) in Hamillsgade.



Ladle.

G. J.

of his customers. It was not long however before he had to have more help at the workshop, in order to cope with the work, more assistants were required, it was his wish as far as possible to personally train his assistants, but as the applications of aspiring apprentices continued to come in he decided to establish a training school; the workshop was extended and removed to a side building, whilst the former workshop was used for the school. In this way he was able to bring an influence to bear on his industry as no other of his contemporaries, and if there exists now in Copenhagen several silversmith's workshops of a similar character, they more or

less owe their origin to him, their style being chiefly an inferior repetition of his. Other museums in Europe followed the example of the Copenhagen Industrial museum, and bought from him several particularly beautiful examples of his art, such as the museum in Bergen, Cologne and several others, but the great capitals still remained in the background, although in 1909 he exhibited by request in the Paris »art decoratif's« exhibition and here met with much recognition, this did not enable him to obtain a firm footing in the capital of the artistic world.

The following year at the World Exhibition in Brussels

1910 he blossomed forth to European fame, and with that he saw the dawn of a great industry, such as he has now realised. After the success in Brussels which was furthermore confirmed by the gold medal of the exhibition, he exhibited in the yearly »Salon« Paris, became a member of the »Salon d'Automne« and »Art décoratif«, exhibited in 1913 at the big exhibition in Ghent, and also at Glasgow.



Bonbonnière.



J. R.

The first time he exhibited in England was at the Crystal Palace Exhibition London, and later he has had a permanent exhibition and sale in the Danish porcelain art galleries London. In Germany he exhibited in several places; at the World Exhibition San Francisco 1915, where amongst others the »Newspaper King« Hearst became his good customer; he then decided to launch his art on the American market.

Meanwhile the business in Bredgade became enlarged from time to time as circumstances required. A staff



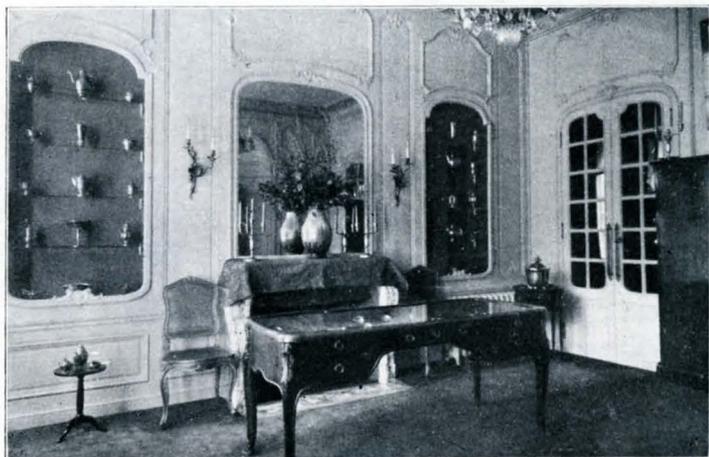
Brooch.

G. J.

of 10 men had now replaced the one apprentice of 1904, and as the rooms of the workshop in the side building became too small the whole concern was moved in 1912 to light roomy premises in Knippelsbrogade. Georg Jensen's working staff now numbered 22 men. Simultaneously with this change the retail branch which had become an independent branch was now moved to a beautiful shop in 21 Bredgade — where it still exists.

Up to this time Georg Jensen had personally composed and designed the multitude of beautiful things that in the course of time had gone out from his workshop; personally he had directed the daily work, undertaken several journeys abroad to aid his art or to gather new impressions. On the whole an activity blossomed forth, so much more praiseworthy because his power to work remained just as fresh and youthful as ever. But the extension of the workshop was necessary; the 22 men soon increased to about half a hundred and this made artistic help necessary; he had earlier come into contact with the painter Johan Rohde who in his interest for industrial art had designed some articles for construction in silver, and on that occasion approached Georg Jensen after having in vain applied to a few of the most prominent goldsmiths in Copenhagen. A collo-

boration ensued between these two artists, and from 1916 Johan Rohde was permanently connected with the business as designer. A better help Georg Jensen could not have obtained; with his refined Danish culture, his sure sense of style, his understanding of the material, Johan Rohde became an acquisition to the firm, and many excellent things of later years are due to him. However the war put an end



A Corner of the shop in Paris.

to Georg Jensens plans abroad, contemplated exhibitions had to be postponed, plans for the opening of shops put by until better times, the goal he was striving towards which seemed so near since the Brussels Exhibition, namely to bring to Danish industrial art and Danish silversmiths work useful recognition abroad, to produce it at a price which would enable it to compete with the ordinary styleless silver ware, and so in a way hitherto overlooked but not to be despised, contribute to create beauty in the home. This goal now seemed threatened by the war. In spite how-

ever of the years of war the industry grew; in 1916 a limited company was formed, a new self owned building started, and the number of workers again increased. A short time



Wine tray.

G. J.

after the close of the war saw the removal to the new building in 118 Haraldsgade, and with a staff of over 125 men and the most modern machines, the firm of Georg Jensen was armed to take up the fight in the European market.

About the same time the shop in Paris Rue St. Honoré 237 was opened.

Cork for wine bottle. *G. J.*

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AND
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615 FIFTH AVE.
NEW YORK