

The Helicon Vase.

ILLUSTRATIVE MUSIC AND POETRY

IN REPOUSSÉ SILVER AND STEEL,
DAMASCENED IN GOLD.



HIS Centre Piece or Vase is wrought out of silver and steel by the *repoussé* process, and is further enriched with damascened tracery in gold. It is beyond all comparison the most important work of high art ever produced by Elkington & Co., and has taken six years in manufacture. The following remarks from the *Birmingham Daily Post* give a faithful description of the design:—

We would cite especially the grand Centre Piece, in oxydized silver and damascened steel, which ranks as the masterpiece of the eminent metal sculptor, M. Morel Ladeuil. Many and important as are the works which have issued from the hands of this accomplished artist, from his "silver table" to the Milton Shield, he has never before achieved anything approaching in beauty of design, fulness of elaboration, and mastery of technical execution, to this noble allegorical composition, in which are embodied, we understand, the fruits of nearly six years' unbroken application. The general form of the design, which is in the style of the Italian Renaissance, and devoted to the apotheosis of Music and Poetry, may be described as an elongated plateau enriched with sculptured plaques or panels, and supporting in its centre, between two seated figures, a tall and stately Vase. The Vase, which is of ovoid form, with upraised handles gracefully continuing the curve of the sides, is surmounted by a charmingly posed group of two boyish genii, the upper one bearing aloft Apollo's lyre, which forms the apex of the work, while the youth at his feet tests the purity of the strain with a tuning fork. A floral garland on either side connects this group with the handles of the Vase, and adds strength to the composition. On the body of the Vase, on either side, are large medallion reliefs in *repoussé*, representing the Nine Muses, four on one side, and five on the other; and the bases of the handles are covered by scutcheons bearing the names of illustrious poets and composers—Homer, Shakespeare, Molière, and Byron, on the one, and Handel, Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart on the other. Upon the pedestal on either side, facing the extremities of the plateau, are seated large semi-draped female figures, symbolizing Music and Poetry, and either nymph is attended by a youthful geni, whose action dramatically supplements the indications afforded by the pose, expression, and accessories as to the character and pursuits of the principal figure. Upon the shelving base of the pedestal, on either side, is an oval bas-relief, occupied, the one by a spirited representation of Pegasus bearing a geni typifying inspiration, the other by a griffin or hippograph,

carrying the geni of Imagination. Upon the sloping surface of the outer border of the plateau are a series of twelve bas-reliefs of various shapes, illustrative of the various descriptions of Music and Poetry, six of each kind; and the interstices of the design are filled up with masks, scrolls, and trophies of various kinds in beaten and oxydized silver, which is everywhere thrown up in admirable relief by the ebony black ground of the damascened steel, which forms the framework and setting of the composition. No words can well convey the chaste and harmonious beauty of the work, the charms of which, unlike those of modern metal work in general, are essentially sculpturesque as opposed to chromatic, and derived from elegance of form rather than from surface decoration. The modelling of the detached figures throughout is simply superb, combining the rare proportions and matchless symmetry of classical forms with French *esprit* and grace; and the figure work in the bas-reliefs, in which nymphs, cupids, and satyrs seem to be invested by the artist with an individuality and expressive power rarely found in such conventional embodiments, is scarcely less meritorious. As examples of happy invention, seconded by rare technical skill, we would cite the two smaller plaques illustrative of elegiac and satirical poetry, and the oval bas-relief on the pedestal symbolical of Imagination. In the first, we have a veiled recumbent figure, attended by mourning genii, in a landscape saddened by willows and cypresses—the whole composition breathing a sense of refined and touching sorrow. Satirical poetry is emblemized by a grinning satyr, who has just removed with one hand the comely mask, which lately hid his features, whilst scourging with the other a group of unsuspecting genii who had assembled to listen to him. The medallion symbolizing Imagination is exceedingly bold and spirited, and the care and finish with which every detail has been wrought out may be seen, with the aid of a magnifying glass, in the admirable rendering of the textures, and especially the fine gradations by which the feathers of the winged portion of the griffin pass into hair upon the body. Other examples of skilful tool work are to be found in the happy rendering of skin texture in the nude surfaces of the statuettes, and in the delicate chasing of the damascene work or inlaying of the black steel ground work with fine lines of gold and silver. After a careful consideration of these elaborate excellences, which, like all true ornament, it will be observed, serve to enrich and strengthen, not to enfeeble by overloading, the main design of the composition, the visitor will not be surprised to learn that the art labour alone bestowed upon this spirited and poetical masterpiece represents little short of £6,000.

