From the estate of the late J. Pierpont Morgan the Museum has recently purchased a superb group of five pieces of Chinese porcelain of the Wan Li period (1573-1619) with contemporary English silver-gilt mounts. As porcelain these pieces rank among the best blue and white of their period. As examples of Elizabethan silversmiths’ work, they have even greater claim to our attention, for the mounts, which bear the mark of a silversmith working in London about 1585, are not only ambitious in point of design but unusually fine in workmanship. Then, as though beauty and excellence of craftsmanship were not enough, four of the five pieces have the further merit of a distinguished lineage, associating them with William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Lord Treasurer under Queen Elizabeth and one of the most powerful figures of his time. Of the fifth piece we have not as yet been able to find any record before it came into Mr. Morgan’s possession, but as it is similar in style to the other four, has the same silversmith’s mark, and is the largest and handsomest of the lot, there can be little doubt that it too has had an illustrious history. As a group they reflect the interests of the man of great wealth and learning at the court of Elizabeth, and open up a vista of the English world of the time, with its fast expanding horizons.

Men like Drake, Frobisher, and Raleigh gave to the age of Elizabeth its bold enterprise and high spirit of adventure, but it was William Cecil whose vigilance and steady patriotism brought the nation through the perils of religious conflict, internal plots, and foreign invasion. To the volatile and often irresolute queen he was a tower of strength, her “leviathan” as she affectionately called him. Faithfully did he live up to her charge: “This judgement I have of you, that you will not be corrupted with anie maner of guifte, and that you will be faithful to the State, and that, without respect of my private will, you will give me that conseile that you thincke best.”

William Cecil (1520-1598) was “in his infancie, so pregnannt in wit, and so desirous and apt to lerne, as, in expectation, foretold his greate future fortune.” He was educated at St. John’s College, Cambridge, and not long after began his eventful public career. Under Edward VI he served as a secretary of state but resigned from this office during the reign of Queen Mary. With the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 he began another term in this capacity, which was to continue forty years, until his death. In 1572 he was made Lord Treasurer. His rank and prestige required that he maintain himself with appropriate magnificence. Most of the time, in order to be in close touch with the court and affairs of state, he lived in his London house in the Strand, but he also had two important country seats. At one of these, Theobalds, in Hertfordshire, he frequently entertained the queen, when in the course of her royal progresses she graciously accepted his hospitality for herself and her train.

Cecil’s other country seat was the large manor of Burghley, near Stamford in Northamptonshire, which came to him by inheritance and where his mother lived until her death in 1587. He had renovated the old house on this land and considerably enlarged it, but after he was created Baron of Burghley in 1571, he undertook even more extensive additions, which were not completed until about 1587. These incorporated the old house into a new structure of renaissance design, almost certainly the work of John Thorpe, a prominent architect of the period. Set in the midst of a spacious park with carefully laid out gardens
Chinese blue and white porcelain of the Wan Li period with English silver-gilt mounts, about 1585. The ewer and the pieces on the following pages are said to have belonged to Lord Burghley. Height of bowl 8½ inches, of ewer 13⅛ inches
and walks, this mansion was one of the imposing houses of the period. Beyond a doubt its owner spent vast sums not only in building it but in furnishing it. Chinese porcelain, richly mounted in silver-gilt, would have seemed to a cultivated Elizabethan the perfect ornament for such a house.

Chinese porcelain reached England at this time by indirect and devious routes. Much of it was brought to Europe through the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, thence by caravan to the Mediterranean. For a long time the Venetians largely controlled its distribution from the ends of the caravan routes, but when the English were granted trading privileges at Constantinople and in 1581 established the English Levant Company, they were able to engage more directly in trade with the Orient. The Portuguese, soon after their discovery of a route round the Cape of Good Hope in the late fifteenth century, had made their way to China, succeeded in establishing good trade relations there, and devoted themselves to building up a vast monopoly in the East Indian trade by sea. England obtained Chinese goods by friendly intercourse with them, or, when she was at war with Spain and Portugal, by encouraging her privateers to prey upon their shipping. Thus, whether it came by way of the Levant or in Spanish and Portuguese bottoms, a considerable amount of Chinese porcelain reached England.

In this era of bold exploration and rapidly growing commerce, many rare and excitingly new things were presented to the delighted eyes of the people of France, Holland, Germany, England. Some materials, like porcelain, were treasured for their beauty. Some, like crystal, were thought to possess magical properties. Still others, such as ostrich eggs or coconuts, were merely objects of great curiosity. All of them were eagerly seized upon because of their novelty. Their charms were set off by elaborate mounts of silver-gilt or even gold, for which the most inventive and resourceful craftsmen made designs.

Silverwork in England in the sixteenth century was strongly influenced by French, Dutch, and German designs. As early as the middle of the thirteenth century the Hanseatic League had established one of its settlements in London. The German community living there, in a district which later came to be known as the Steelyard, enjoyed special privileges of trade, by virtue of which it became a powerful group and offered keen competition to native mer-
chants and craftsmen. Eventually, in 1598, all its privileges were withdrawn and it ceased to exist as an independent organization. But during most of Elizabeth's reign, it was the center of German influence. Undoubtedly many German and other foreign silversmiths came to London at this time, lured by the assurance of patronage. The dissolution of the monasteries and the distribution of their property in the reign of Henry VIII had led to the rise of a new group of rich landowners who not only built princely houses but wanted magnificent cupboards of plate for their furnishing. There was plenty of material for the craftsman in the great store of silver yielded by the mines of Peru and Mexico. And royalty and nobility indulged extravagantly their taste for silver plate.

On the Continent at this time books of engraved patterns for the use of craftsmen were widely circulated. The designs of such artists as Jacques Androuet Ducerceau and Étienne Delaune in France and of Virgil Solis, Hans Brosamer, and Peter Flötner in Germany were extensively used by silversmiths. While the influence of engraved designs is apparent in English silver, the native craftsman generally made free adaptations rather than precise copies, often blending the French, Flemish, or German ornament with English, and it is seldom possible to identify the exact sources of his inspiration. The German influence, which tends to predominate, is manifest sometimes in the profusion of ornament, more often in the use of cast and repoussé decoration, of garlands of flowers, masses of fruit, and terminal figures, and in the taste for silver-gilt.

To illustrate the English silversmith's skill in adapting such designs to mounts for Chinese porcelain, one could not find more impressive examples than the five pieces just acquired from the Morgan estate. But before considering the mounts, one should look first at the porcelain. All of it is blue and white and of excellent quality. The largest bowl, illustrated on page 267, is decorated inside with landscapes separated by flame-encircled flowers alternating with jui-head motifs and outside with panels of scrolls and a border of sea horses galloping through waves. Birds and flowering shrubs cover the paneled sides of the ewer. A river scene with buildings and figures, within a border of lotuses and herons, fills the interior of the dish shown on this page, and

*Chinese porcelain dish with English silver-gilt mounts. Diameter 14 3/8 inches*
English silversmith has called into play his own high talents. The dish and three bowls are all fitted with bands of stamped ornament at lip and foot, connected by four cast straps in the form of caryatids. The bowls are furnished with handles, each in the shape of a mermaid with two entwined tails, bold in conception and expertly wrought. To emphasize the panels on the ewer the silversmith has cast six narrow vertical straps with designs suggesting wreaths of foliage and cherub heads at intervals. Round the base are stamped borders with repeating ovolo and Tudor rose patterns. The mounts at shoulder and neck are delicately engraved with birds and flowers. As though inspired to offset one kind of decoration with another, the silversmith has added a cover embossed with fruit and cherub heads, topped it with three small dolphins, set a tiny frog beside the hinge, and completed his achievement with a mermaid handle similar to those on the bowls.

The repeating designs in the stamped borders, with their pleasant variety of ovolo, foliation, interlace, and Tudor rose, are very characteristic of English silver of the period, though comparable ornament is common in continental work. The embossing on the lid of the ewer is similar to German and Dutch decoration. While it is hazardous to suggest possible sources, there is at least an interesting similarity between the caryatid straps, especially the one shown on page 271, and some French renaissance designs, as, for example, a series of terms engraved by Hugues Sambin of Dijon and published at Lyons in 1572. In this detail, the mounts of the Morgan porcelains seem somewhat more closely related to French renaissance architectural elements than to the decorative motifs popular with the German craftsmen.

The mounts of four of the pieces have the same silversmith's mark, three trefoils voided within a shaped shield (the oblique line crossing the shield suggests that there was a flaw in the die). The mounts of the fifth, the bowl which is not illustrated, are somewhat coarse and less ex-
properly finished and are unmarked. The identity of the silversmith who used the trefoils as his device has not yet been discovered. He did not even include his initials with the device, as was often done. But the real obstacle to identifying him lies in the fact that many of the early records associating the names of the silversmiths with their individual marks have been destroyed. That he worked in London there can be little doubt, as his mark occurs several times in combination with the regular London hallmarks of the lion passant, the leopard's head crowned, and a date letter. On various occasions Queen Elizabeth sent presents of silver plate to the Russian czar, in the hope that he would continue to grant liberal trading privileges to English merchants in Russia. Not only do contemporary records of these princely gifts remain but a considerable number of the actual pieces were still in the national Russian collections in recent years. Among them it is most interesting to find a silver-gilt cup with the London hallmarks of 1585-1586 and the maker's mark of three trefoils in a shaped shield.

In this year our silversmith fashioned the mounts for another piece of Chinese blue and white porcelain, a wine jug now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. In the same museum there is a Siegburg stoneware jug with silver mounts bearing his mark of three trefoils but no date letter. His mark occurs again on the mounts of a Siegburg jug dated 1589, which in 1936 was in the collection of Lord Lee of Fareham.

When a silversmith's mark is lightly or unevenly struck or when it is marred by wear, it is often difficult to distinguish its outline or its devices. Quite possibly other pieces described as having marks varying slightly from the three trefoils voided in a shaped shield may be credited to our silversmith, for instance, the silver-gilt mounts on a Chinese porcelain bowl in the Franks Bequest at the British Museum. The mounts on a blue and white Wan Li ewer in the collection of Baron and Baroness Bruno Schröder, though unmarked, have caryatid straps and ornamental bands so similar to those on the Morgan pieces that one

*Strap of the bowl shown on page 267*
is tempted to speculate that these too may have been made by our silversmith.

The tradition which links four of these handsome pieces with Lord Burghley has been generally accepted and frequently quoted. They must then have continued as part of the furnishings of Burghley House from the time it passed to his eldest son, Thomas, first Earl of Exeter, until a descendant, the fourth Marquis, put them up at auction at Christie's in London in 1888. The advance notice of this sale, under date of April 28, 1888, announces that Christie's "will sell by auction . . . early in June, by Order of the Marquis of Exeter, a large collection of old Oriental porcelain including . . . some with silver-gilt mounts of the time of Queen Elizabeth." The four pieces in 1890 were in the possession of William Agnew, the well-known London dealer, who quite possibly was their purchaser at the sale; in that year he lent them to the Exhibition of the Royal House of Tudor, at the New Gallery in London. In the catalogue of this exhibition they appear as "Four pieces of Nankeen blue and white china, with silver-gilt English mounts, circa 1570. From the Burghley Collection." Five years later they were shown by Mr. Agnew at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in an Exhibition of Blue and White Oriental Porcelain. Cosmo Monkhouse in his introduction to the catalogue comments upon them at some length, reiterating the tradition and suggesting that "perhaps it was out of the same 'parcel' of china that the Lord Treasurer Burghley offered to Queen Elizabeth one porringer of 'white porselyn' garnished with gold, and Mr. Robert Cecill 'a cup of grene purselanye,' as New Year's gifts in 1587-8." Before 1906 J. Pierpont Morgan had bought these four famous pieces and had lent them to the Victoria and Albert Museum. E. Alfred Jones, in his catalogue of Mr. Morgan's collection of old plate, published in 1908, illustrates and describes them. With Mr. Morgan's death in 1913 they passed to his son, from whose estate the Museum has recently acquired them.

Although such elaborately mounted Chinese porcelains might well be considered suitable gifts for royalty, in the course of three centuries few pieces have survived the hazards of breakage or the demand for newer fashions. Those which still exist count as landmarks in the story of English silver and the development of porcelain in Europe. Particularly significant are those to which, because of their marks or their historical associations, a fairly definite date can be assigned. To this series of extremely rare pieces, which begins with the Warham Bowl at New College, Oxford, and the bowls given to Thomas Trenchard in 1506, belong the Burghley pieces and the large bowl which accompanies them. The Metropolitan Museum is extraordinarily fortunate in acquiring them.