Wandering Griffin

By LOUISE SCOTT

(On seeing an Italian jug in the University Museum)

The Adriatic shore of Italy
across the sea from the Illyrian coast
once saw the heyday of a pottery
called Gnathia ware, Apulia’s ancient boast.
It may be there a Grecian griffin went,
cast in perpetual bronze. Such feral face,
part bird, part snake, aggressive ornament
immobilized with ibex on a vase
or cauldron, jug or oriental tomb,
recalls a gargoyle from whose vulture beak
gush seasonal rains, while from this classic flume
flowed wine to cool the throat of early Greek.
Italian potters modelled myth and beast
in handing down the spirit of the East.

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about 1800 tablets of the Third Ur Dynasty, as
well as taking an important share in the Royal
Inscriptions.

It was through the Ur Expedition and all the
work which grew out of it that the writer of these
lines was privileged to know Legrain, who visited
London (and his native land) both at the ends
of his seasons in the field and at other times in
furtherance of work upon his publications, and
also to represent Philadelphia in the division of
the Ur antiquities allotted to the Expedition after
deduction of the major share retained by the
Iraq Museum. When the splendid objects from
the Royal Tombs were in the balance these oc-
cassions were sometimes exciting. Particularly re-
membered was the decision about the celebrated
mosaic ‘standard’ of Ur; it had been carefully set
against a number of objects held to be collectively
its equal, but both sides naturally hoped for the
‘standard,’ and it was decided in the end, after
much discussion, that it would be fairest to toss
for the choice. When the hazard went against
him Legrain took this with the perfect urbanity
and good temper which he brought unfailingly
to all these passages, whatever their issue, often
ending with a joke in the manner and accent
which added so much to the wit and charm of
his conversation, never more pointed than when
detailing his experiences on the ‘dig,’ commenting
styly upon the little oddities of his companions, or
complaining with half-serious indignation about
the young Philadelphians who were allowed to
meddle with the exhibition of his beloved antiq-
ities. All his friends would wish to have been
remembered, especially in this vein of mischief,
during the latter years of a man and a scholar
in both characters so memorable himself, and so
unmistakably a child of the happy country of his
birth.

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