

CERAMICS.

PART I.

From the earliest period the potter's productions have been in constant demand and held in the highest estimation, and in none of the industrial arts can there be found one holding a more prominent place, or that combines in itself so much of the primary element of beauty we call form. As we lift the cup to our lips to quaff its fragrant contents of tea or coffee, seldom do we pause and reflect, that this now beautiful semi-transparent object was once simply a lump of clay, having scarcely any intrinsic value. But, through the power of science and skill, it has been converted into an article of the greatest utility and beauty.

Whether we look at the art of the potter from an economical or a sanitary point of view, we must be impressed with its wonderful importance. It adds to our daily comfort, cleanliness and health. Its utility has been recognized from the first dawn of civilization, and in itself it exhibits one of the most marked triumphs of scientific industry, from the very cheapness of the material upon which that industry is exercised, for it bestows a value upon the very dust beneath our feet. The plastic power of clay eminently fits it in the hands of the skilful artizan to be converted into the most graceful forms, and when to this we add that delicate semi-transparency and the beauty of the metallic colours it is capable of receiving, can we wonder that it causes us to acknowledge its claims to a foremost rank among the industrial arts. By the ancients it was held in the highest estimation, for we find representations upon the walls of the Catacombs of Beni-Hassan, and Thebes, which are supposed to have been executed nineteen centuries before the Christian era, where the various processes of the manufacture of pottery are detailed. There is the preliminary kneading of the clay, the formation of the article upon the wheel, the oven for firing, and the position of the hands, the peculiar rounding of the right arm of the men represented fabricating the ware, being in a great measure identical with the position assumed by the workmen of the present day.

We find frequent mention of the art of pottery in Horace, Homer, and the Sacred Writings, in Ezekiel this passage occurs: "Thou also son of man take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem." And long before Phidias created his wonderful types of beauty, or Apellés and the rest of his illustrious compeers had attained to that pinnacle of art, which has cast a glory over their names more lasting than the works they executed, was the potter's art, honoured in an eminent degree. The Athenians assigned a portion of their city to the manufacture of it. Nor was Athens alone in its production. The cities of Corinth, Ægina, and Samos were equally renowned, and executed works of surpassing beauty, which all the skill and appliances of the nineteenth century cannot improve upon, and barely succeed in imperfectly imitating.

From Greece the potter's art spread through Europe. But writers differ as to the exact people who were the first to introduce it into England, some asserting that they are indebted to the Romans for it, and as a proof of this point to the records to be found of the remains of a Roman pottery in the neighbourhood of Leeds, near which there is a village supposed to be built upon the site, and named Potter Newton; others again contend it was introduced by the Phœnicians in their trade with the early Britons, exchanging earthen-vessels for metals. Whoever introduced it into England, this fact in connection with it is very evident, that for a long time the potter's art remained in a rude state, and met with very little encouragement. This was not the case on the Continent of Europe, for there it became a princely pastime to encourage it. Its greatest triumphs in England were due to individual enterprise. Nor do we find scarcely any mention of it till the year 1671; then a monopoly for manufacturing earthenware, commonly known by the name of Porcelain of China, was granted to John Dwight, and shortly after this the pottery of Bow was established in 1730; those of Chelsea about 1745; and Derby, 1751. And in the history of Staffordshire, that at Burslem in the year 1688, when the two brothers, John and Phillip Eilers (Germans), manufactured a perfect white salt-glazed stoneware; but their secret being stolen by one Astbury, a potter, they left England in disgust, returning to Fatherland.

Often in the industrial arts some apparently trivial circumstance may escape the observation of the great mass, but some one keener than the rest will see a gain or advantage which they can turn to their own profit. Such was the case in the anecdote related of Astbury. For it is said that something being wrong with an eye of his horse he applied to an ostler at Dunstable for a cure. The man heating some flint in the fire, and reducing it to a powder, applied it to the horse's eye, which it is said to have cured. Astbury being an observant man, bethought him to try calcined flint with the clay used in the manufacture of his wares. The experiment proved a success.

After this we find the art rapidly improving, and the Bow Potteries advancing to a foremost rank, and those of Chelsea patronized by George the Second, which were ultimately removed to Derby. Then we find Plymouth coming forward claiming its place, and with it the name of Cookworthy is associated. These works were afterwards removed to Worcester. This pottery was noted as one of the earliest manufactories of porcelain. But the honour is accorded to Champion, of Bristol, for producing the finest kind made in

England about this period, and which is so highly prized by collectors. These and others were followed by the Worcester Porcelain Works, which claim the honour of producing the well-known willow pattern. These works received the first Royal patent in 1789. At this period it turned out many fine specimens of the potter's art, but after a time its usefulness declined. But at the present day the productions of this Pottery are noted for their novelty, taste and originality. But, wherever the works of the English potter have penetrated, there are but few people to be found who have not heard of that name so famous in the annals of pottery, Josiah Wedgwood,—a man whose life was so full of a gentle simplicity, always desirous of carrying his productions to the highest degree of perfection; who sought out and employed the best talent he could procure to attain this desired object. And with the name of Wedgwood will be ever linked that of Flaxman, the good and gentle, whose great genius and loving art spirit infused beauty, and beauty of no common order, into whatever he touched. The classic elegance imparted to the forms of the Wedgwood ware, and their advancement to a foremost rank, not surpassed by any time or period, are mainly due to the taste and skill of the gifted sculptor. Flaxman did not slavishly copy the Greek forms, but revived and worked in the same spirit which animated them; and no surer test of the enduring beauty imparted by the artists of Greece to all they touched can be found than in the oft revival, and the success attending it, of those glorious forms they have left for the admiration and study of succeeding generations. It has been truly said, "What is inherently beautiful is for all time." We may seek out novelty and be ruled by fashion and conventionalism, yet in spite of all this we must turn back and acknowledge the pre-eminence of Greek forms, whether displayed in their architecture and sculpture, or in those skilled productions of the potter's art.

The tendency of the decorative arts in America to day is, to produce without study or labour. Among the masses its desire is novelty, and it is a morbid taste to hunt after novelty, purely for novelty's sake. The search should be after the beautiful, and how to ally that beauty with the useful. It is an error to suppose these two can be found and blended together without earnest study and labour. Recollect the saying of the ancients: "Labour is the price the Gods have put upon everything truly valuable." Do not listen to that false dictum "that after all such things are a mere matter of taste." Beauty of form and good ornamentation is a matter of taste, but not of mere whim and caprice; they are as clearly defined and regulated as any other matter of art or science by well understood laws.

It is not requisite that we should dwell upon the many productions of the present day, emanating from the justly celebrated houses of Copeland, Minton, and Doulton, &c. &c., from whose manufactories the skilled hands and busy brains of England's workmen are yearly and daily sending out into the world forms of surpassing beauty, which are calculated to disseminate a taste in the palatial palaces of the wealthy, and repeat in commoner wares those same forms placing them within the reach of people of more limited means, for it by no means follows that because an article is cheap, it must necessarily be ugly. And you will perceive we have avoided any mention of the great potteries of Europe—Italian, German, Austrian and French—their very history appears like a romance. The struggles and privations of Pallisey, the discoveries and secrets of others, and the interest taken in the Potter's art by princes and nobles, can be found in the history of the art, and are not adapted to a short paper like this.

In the manufacture of pottery a large amount of capital is necessary. This combined with scientific skill in the mixing of the clays, glazes, and colours, to which we may add a thorough knowledge of design and artistic skill, upon this the beauty and ready sale of the wares greatly depend.

For the benefit of those who may never have seen a Pottery, we shall endeavour to convey some idea of its working. For what is considered a complete pottery, seven kilns are required,—three for the bisque, and four for the gloss. The component parts of the clay being mixed and properly pulverized, it is then placed in the hands of the dexterous modeller or turner, whose mechanical skill causes it to assume those various forms of beauty which delight us by their graceful proportion. It is next placed in the bisque ovens and there subjected to an intense heat from nineteen to twenty-three hours; this will vary according to the state of the atmosphere, &c. After this the wares undergo the process of dipping; the contents of the dipping-tub consist of a mixture of lead, borax, and flint, which are ground in water. Having passed through this stage they are removed to the gloss ovens. The value of the ware in the ovens generally consists of about \$1,000 worth; and the gloss ovens take on the average from fifteen to eighteen hours to fire. The man in charge of these ovens must possess nerve and experience, as any failure would entail heavy loss. It is true he is provided with tests, yet much judgement and experience are required upon his part to insure success. After the wares are glossed, the ovens must be allowed to cool, as any sudden entrance of cold air striking upon the goods would immediately destroy them. In the preparation and care of the ovens the utmost attention must be paid, as the least admission of sulphur or dust would render the wares valueless. After they are glossed, those intended for decoration are passed into the hands of the decorator,