

"WHAT IS TRUTH?"

BY CHARLES F. HINNE.

A recent issue of a prominent trade journal devotes two inches of its valuable space to the announcement that from an American pottery there are issuing "two distinct novelties in steins. One represents a football, and the other a bowling ball. They are splendid specimens of modeling. Their striking resemblance to the real article is further intensified by the leather-like coloring which clothes the ware. Not a detail is lost in the painting of these steins—the seams, thread, and other apparently subordinate features being brought out with astonishing naturalness." This paragraph would be amusing if it were not so serious.

Certain thoughts are suggested by the statements made, and, though it may seem like flogging a dead horse, a consideration of the matter will, perhaps, be pardoned because there are always some people who need to be reminded of obvious truths. It would appear, first, that the potteries are employing modelers who are not artists. This may seem a strong statement but what artist, what person who had any sense of art would consent to put his hand to such work? The second point is that there is a terrible paucity of ideas among manufacturers and their designers. The revelation that those who are supposed to produce beautiful things are driven to such expedients is perfectly startling. Thirdly, it is plain that behind the fact of production is the question of demand. If objects like these did not sell they would not be made.

To make the issue plain it must be pointed out that not only is it offensive to the principles of construction to imitate one material in another but it is doubly so where a fit and proper material is disguised by a surface colored to represent one which is unfit.

To illustrate. Suppose the porch of a large building is supported by stone columns. By some freak of

fancy the owner instructs his workmen to carve the stone into an imitation of reeds and rushes and then, to heighten the illusion, the growth is painted in proper colors and "with astonishing naturalness." It does not need an educated eye to see the folly of, apparently, upholding a structure with a bunch of reeds. This is perhaps, an extreme instance but the principle is exactly that involved in the case under discussion.

A stein made of pottery is a perfectly suitable and appropriate object. It is firm to hold and to use, impervious to liquid and easily cleaned. It is true that at one time steins or "black-jacks" were made of leather, but that was when pottery as now known did not exist and as soon as the proper material was available, the improper disappeared.

Now the bon-vivant is invited to drink from a leathern vessel a "splendid specimen of modeling" but which pretends to be, not a stein but a football! Obviously, too, there must be a handle to this football or it could not be used, and so, at one and the same time, a material clean, fit and appropriate is masked under the semblance of one which is unclean, unsanitary and offensive, and an excrescence foreign to the subject must perforce be added in order to make it possible of employment.

The basis of art is truth and it is a sad pity when manufacturers are driven to unworthy expedients in their search for novelty.

The public must, after all, be charged with a large measure of the responsibility, for if the producer can say "it sells," the last word has been spoken. A glance through the stores where bric-a-brac is sold only confirms this view. It is lamentably true that articles which are an imitation of some well-known object are popular. The vase in the form of a bird's nest which, as naturally built, is utterly unfit for holding water; the cream jug with a cat for a handle, or even con-

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