

**A HANDBOOK TO
THE PRACTICE OF
POTTERY PAINTING**

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BY

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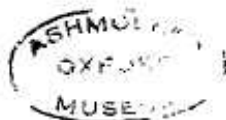


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INTRODUCTION.

THE singular interest that has been excited in late years in the subject of Pottery is at this time bearing remarkable fruit in the shape of a widespread effort to produce forms, and surface decoration on forms, that shall rival those done in such old times as are regarded as being peculiarly rich in artistic light and insight. The rivals to the ancient works are seen daily in increasing numbers and in varying beauty, and of most diverse colours and characters. Scarcely a month now passes but some addition is made to the number of wares decorated by new methods, which take the impress of the individual minds that have invented them. We thus have had revivals in Majolica, Faience, Lustered ware, &c. &c., and with all we may say truly, that as examples of pottery—that is, more especially in the mechanical and material construction of the new wares—they greatly exceed the old ones in perfect finish, durability, and chemical combination of their parts, both in body and glaze. But this is not everything; and it is well known and seen that the ancient works, and those of the Renaissance, excel our own in their taste, artistic freedom, and wealth of ideas; and in these particulars we have still much to do to equal, still more to do to excel, these old-world productions of the potter's art.

But the spirit is abroad, and in all European countries the same active interest in pottery is perceived. Among a large

class of amateurs in this country there is a want of practical information on the methods of work in pottery decoration ; and no doubt the absence of this practical knowledge is the reason why so much less china and pottery painting is done by amateurs in this country compared with Germany, for instance.

For these this little handbook is mainly intended, and the writer will feel well rewarded for his work in putting it together, if it should conduce to the spread of a wider appreciation and practice of the beautiful fictile art, that has from the most ancient times been the object of admiration to legions of persons of taste and of cultivated mind.





POTTERY PAINTING.

At the risk of saying what nearly everyone already knows, it must be made clear, at the beginning, what Pottery is. A pot is a vessel made of clay. Clay is that natural substance produced by the grinding and washing down into hollows, or places where it can settle, of many sorts of rocks; and as the varieties of rock are many, so are the varieties of clay; but to take a familiar example: the clay of the fields in the Weald of Sussex or Kent has a sufficient consistency to stick together. Its particles may be moulded with the hands, pressed into moulds or dealt with variously, and it is thus plastic by reason of the quantity of water that is in combination with the earthy particles. A flower-pot, for instance, made of this clay, and set aside to dry in the shade, would keep its form, and be precisely the same flower-pot as when it was wet, except that it would have shrunk a little. If this were exposed to the heat of the summer's sun, still more water would be expelled, and the clay form would become harder and closer in texture, and might be used for many indoor purposes, but would not allow of any use that involved the contact with water, as it would still be a mere clay pot. If, however, it were put into a fire, so that so much more of the water was driven out as to change its hardness to that of a tile or a brick, then fluid might be put into it without any risk of its falling to pieces; and when water has been thus driven out by fire it does not again enter into combination

with the clay, and the vessel remains a piece of pottery for ever. Thus, the art of so preparing clay, and forming it, and burning it, that it takes a permanent unalterable form, is that of the Potter.

The flower-pot that we have taken as an illustration may be, after firing, white, yellow, red, grey, blue, black, or any or all of these together: that is a condition dependent solely on the clay of which it was made, and the presence or absence of iron or other colouring matter in the clay.

Now the fired flower-pot has certain characteristics. It is insoluble, somewhat brittle, porous, gives a dry, adhesive sensation to the tongue, and is more or less rough and gritty to the touch, and on the whole not a very useful thing for the higher purposes of life. For many ages all pottery was in this rough, half-finished state, and it is very doubtful if the Greeks ever, or the Romans up to the age of Augustus, knew anything of any other pottery. But the remedy for these defects of texture is twofold: one is by skilfully compounding the body, so that it is rendered impervious; the other is by coating the porous body with a glaze, by which is meant a film of glass. By adopting this latter method we have the combination that is usually seen in a piece of useful pottery, namely, a 'body,' more or less rough and porous, covered with a 'glaze' which gives the piece smoothness—a gloss—and renders it quite impervious to moisture.

The first method, viz. that of rendering the body impervious, applies mainly to two kinds of ware: china, as it is usually called (which is porcelain), and stoneware; other wares are made impervious by their glaze.

It was a great event in manufacturing industry, when it was found that firing a form of clay made it indestructible. It was a second step onwards when a true glaze was

discovered. Certainly the potters of Babylon knew the process, as the remains of their tiles show. But many hundreds of years elapsed before the secret was given to the Western world, and this came either through the Moors by tradition, or was re-invented by them. In any case, in the ninth century glazed pottery was produced in Spain by the Moorish potters.

Glaze and glass are made out of the same materials. Flint sand and soda fused together make glass; the addition of metallic oxides gives colour, opacity, or a better power of cohesion to glass; and these are precisely the conditions of glaze as applied to pottery.

Here are now two essentials to the proper formation of a useful piece of pottery: first, the body; secondly, the glaze. The methods of making and applying these are questions for technical pottery, not for this little work.

Enough to say, that the form as it comes from the kiln, after its first firing, is called 'biscuit.' It is then dipped into a creamy looking mixture, consisting of the various materials which make the glaze, ground to a fine powder and mixed with water. When the porous ware is dipped into this mixture, a certain absorption of the water takes place, and a deposit of the solid parts of the glaze follows, and the vessel is again fired, when the heat of the kiln reduces these particles of glass to a smooth, shiny, and glossy surface, exactly fitting to the body over which it has been applied.

Leaving stoneware and china out of consideration for the present—although they may also be glazed or not—this piece of pottery is what is called earthenware, and is, in fact, the pottery of the middle ages, equally with the pottery of to-day. The red pans and pitchers of the English rural districts are of this construction, so is the ordinary earthenware of our dinner services. The decoration is of the most varied kind,