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THE FRENCH POTTERY INVASION.

One night last winter in Paris, my friend Peters came home carrying a round bundle. He put it down cautiously on the salon table and having locked the door and made sure that there was nobody present but Mrs. Peters and me, said in a whisper,

"I've made the greatest bargain on earth." Naturally we showed a lively interest in the undoing of the package.

"What do you think of that, and of that and of that?" he demanded excitedly, holding up one after another three very interesting looking plates. "Rouen à la corne an exact mate to a piece in the Oluny which cost ten times what I paid for all three, and that Moustier, genuine old Moustier, and here, Nevers of the Italian period, look at those blues and yellows. And do you know," he added in a tone of solemn self-admiration, "I only paid 100 francs for the whole lot?"

After a moment's contemplation of the new acquisitions Mrs. Peters looked at her husband gravely and said,

"And that, my dear Peters, was just 76 francs more than you ought to have paid. We have been looking into the subject of

old French wares to-day and have secured a point or two which may be useful to you in the future."

It took several days of excursions and arguments to convince Peters that he had paid one hundred francs in an antiquary shop for three plates which he could have easily bought in an ordinary store for from twenty to thirty and that he was simply another added to the numerous victims of the Pottery Invasion which Paris has suffered in the last few years. "Invasion" is the ^{only} old word which expresses the extent of the inroads made by the vast business in imitations of old French wares which is done in France.

It began some twenty years ago in Bretagne at Quimper, when a pottery which in the 18th Century had attained considerable reputation for its ware, began to reproduce ^{by} ~~on~~ following with fidelity and intelligence the old methods and formulas, all the favorite wares of the last Century. Their success encouraged others at Quimper and elsewhere to undertake the same reproductions. So great had the industry become by 1889 that Garnier declared in reviewing the faience of the Paris Exposition of that year, that there was nothing to be seen anywhere but "old Rouen, old Nevers, old Moustier, old Delft."

The favorite subject is the old Rouen, naturally, for none of the old French wares equal it in originality and beauty. The styles which are most copied are those which prevailed in the golden age of the Ware ~~from~~ ^{from} about 1710 to 1760. The most effective of these is the rayonnant (Fig. 1), so called from the arrangement of the pattern around a common center, the motive being repeated. The designs used in this style of Rouen are drawn from all the decorative arts of the period, from Marquetry, iron work, laces, damask, from the patterns of Boulle and Bérain. Nothing in faience excels their grace, their elegance, their purity. The decorations of Rouen were not all up to the level of the rayonnant. About 1725 the Chinese influence which affected the English and Dutch wares so strongly at the same time, began to show itself at Rouen and we have pagodas, peaked hats, flat parasols, and bamboo summer houses, taking the place of conventional patterns. Later the prevailing decorations of large numbers of pieces are baskets of flowers, cornucopias, quivers, bows, birds, flowers and butterflies (Fig. 2).

The ground of the Rouen is white and the usual decoration blue, though red, yellow and green were included in the palette. The ware has always been a favorite with the French, collectors

ransacking the country for it and at least two museums that of the Cluny at Paris and the Ceramique museum at Rouen making specialties of it. Naturally good imitations are able to pass with nineteen-twentieths of the buyers so that when the modern factories began to study it closely and intelligently and copy it faithfully they made ready sales. Indeed so good are many of the imitations that nobody but ^{an} ~~a~~ very expert ~~and experienced~~ judge can detect the difference. Chamfleury declares that certain pieces turned out by the factory of la Hubeaudière at Quimper might be put into the same case with the genuine specimens and the difference strike no ordinary observer. I have examined at one of the most intelligent dealers in imitations at Paris - M. Véret, rue Richer - a large collection of pieces made after well-known specimens in the museums of Rouen and Paris. The copies are perfect to the variations in the shading of the glaze and to the irregularities in the laying on of colors. For pottery students - not collectors - interested in styles and treatment these imitations have the same value as casts to the student of art. For decorative purposes they are quite as effective as the originals.

After Rouen the favorite wares for imitations are Moustier, Nevers and Strasbourg. In Monstier the favorite design

is that which the French pottery took from the laughing, graceful Italian ware known as à la grotesque (Fig. 3) and made at Urbino. A good collection of this style of Moustier in blue and white is owned by the Musée Cluny of Paris and many of the pieces may be had in imitations at the higher class pottery shops of the city. Copies are also made on order but it is rather expensive.

One of the most amusing phases of this invasion is the amount of Revolutionary ware it has brought down on the City. To see the quantities of it one could believe that the patriots of 1789 spent most of their time decorating plates with the emblems of the period. The business was, in fact, very brisk from the opening of the States-General until after the Terror. There was a sufficient reason for this. The pottery industry had been nearly ruined in France by the commercial treaty with England which allowed the free entry of English faience. The only method of competing was to turn out a cheap ware which took the popular taste. At Rouen, Quimper, Lyons and especially Nevers there was produced a crude but immensely popular table ware decorated with the emblems and the legends of the times. An admirable collection of this faience is to be seen at the Carnavalet Museum of Paris. (Fig. 4).

The imitations made to-day are by no means faithful. The demand for something "rare" tempts the dealers to order from the factories subjects which though certainly connected with the period yet were never reproduced on the faience. The emblems and mottoes are also changed and re-arranged sufficiently to give them a touch of novelty. Much of this ware beside being inexact in its subjects is very coarsely done. The imitations found in the antiquary shops are generally better than those in the ordinary booths which do not pretend that their ware is anything but a copy, but the antiquary must be very trustworthy and well-informed for a buyer to afford to take his word on the authenticity of Revolutionary faience.

Of the old Straus~~bourgh~~ there is the same reckless imitation. The modern production is much prized especially by the poorer people. The style is familiar, a clear white ground with bright, usually red, decorations - the patterns flowers of the frankest, most unconventional style (Fig. 5). Most of the imitations which I have seen are purely travesties made for the humblest households or for prizes at the lotteries of the Gingerbread Fair. As prizes they do not compare favorably with even the offerings of the American tea-store.

Twenty or more years of this imitation has led to an overstocking of the crockery market and naturally the richer and more intelligent potteries have tried to develop in place of the copying, new and original styles. In Bretagne, at Quimper, there has been a certain success. One result, not very pleasing - is an adaptation of the old Rouen. The designs especially the cornucopies, quiver, insect, flower and bird, are employed in blue, red and yellow on a white ground but the work is much weaker than even the poorest of the old Rouen, possessing none of its naïveté and individuality. Quantities of this ware are sold all over France as "Rouen Ware," An especially good market for it is the summer resorts of Bretagne, such as San Malo.

Better worth attention is the attempt to get away from imitations which has been made by M. Porquier of Quimper. On a ware which resembles in the texture and tint of its glaze to the ancient faience, this potter employs as decoration, the Breton peasant in his national costume. Whole dinner sets are produced in this style, no two pieces being alike. So various and picturesque are the costumes of the country that there is no lack of material for the artist. The attempt is in a sense patriotic for much to the regret of every true Breton the costumes of the

country are gradually being replaced by the monotonous and unmeaning dress of the rest of the world, and unless art preserves them on pot and plate they will soon have passed from the memory of man.

If we except this Breton ware - the pottery invasion has really done nothing towards developing French ceramics unless that it has set conscientious ^{amateurs} ~~Amateurs~~ to studying seriously the real characteristics of the old styles.

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