

## LINES FROM A FRIEND.

By MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS.

GOOD and evil! What are these?  
Mystery of mysteries!  
That we deem our highest good  
Might be *evil*—understood:  
That we blindly evil call,  
Be the best that could befall.  
Ours the darkness—there is light  
Only with the Infinite.

Let this consciousness sustain  
In our weakness, in our pain,  
When our souls are overwrought,  
When our projects come to nought;  
When joy fails, and woes abide,  
Let our rebel tears be dried:  
We see darkly—there is light  
Ever with the Infinite.

## A CHAT ABOUT CHINA, NEW AND OLD.



THE subject of pottery, china, and ware of all

sorts is a wide subject, and one upon which, the last few years, much has been said. China has been very near to the hearts of the upper classes; and a good many gentlemen and most ladies of fashion know the distinctive marks of the principal makers of modern porcelain, and can tell at a glance the birthplace of each cup or saucer that hangs upon their neighbours' walls. Yet names of makers and dates of production are, after all, but the dry bones of ceramic knowledge, whilst a discursive gossip may interest both the initiated and the unlearned.

I wonder what ingenious semi-barbarian of prehistoric times it was that, having lit his fire as usual upon the bare ground, first noticed the damp clay hardening beneath the embers, and, seized by sudden inspiration, laid hold upon the docile earth, fashioning from it the first rude dish or earthenware vessel? Great must have been his own elation and the congratulations of his neighbours.

The earliest historic mention of pottery we possess is in the Biblical description of the building of the tower of Babel. From the Bible, too, we learn that the Egyptians were probably among the first to make extensive use of the art of pottery. From them it spread—constantly improving and perfecting itself—to Babylonia, Phœnicia, Greece, Persia, China, and Japan—in fact, to all the then civilised quarters of the globe. The Arabs were of much use in diffusing the knowledge

of early ceramic art, for they, when they conquered Persia, found the young plant flourishing, and during a long series of restless campaigns, scattered its seeds far and wide. One of the first and most curious uses to which the ancient Egyptians applied their knowledge of pottery was the making of inlaid cases in which to conceal their mummies. Many of these may be seen at the British Museum, and, rough as they are, show a certain advance in primitive art. But it was not only the human mummy which they thus hermetically encased. The ibis, a sacred bird, was not unfrequently treated in the same way after death. Its body, after due preparation, was neatly wrapped up in linen bandages, folded in the shape of a large tongue or heart, then placed in a conical pot, formed like an inverted sugar-loaf, which was put into one of the usual mummy pits. These mummy pits were subterranean galleries, full of niches about eight feet high and ten feet wide. In these niches all the jars—usually made of coarse red pottery, but sometimes also of glazed ware—were ranged in order, like bottles in a cellar.

An idea which may possibly have sprung from this custom is to be seen in old Brazilian pottery. There the dried corpses of chiefs have occasionally been found, dressed in full war-costume, placed in a sitting posture in a large vase.

This old American pottery, Peruvian and Brazilian, is remarkably curious and interesting, partly, perhaps, from the fact that its age is so very uncertain. Some of the many pieces found date from the time of the Incas; but others seem to belong to far remoter times. There was no lack of skill, however, amongst these antique manufacturers, and many of the artists who planned the designs appear to have possessed not only delicacy of touch, but a strong sense of humour. Some of the Peruvian water-bottles are called "whistling jugs," owing to a curious contrivance by which they are made to emit a sound not unlike that of a bird. On these jugs the handle runs from the spout on one side to a similar projection on the other, on which is the head of a bird or animal. In the head is a small hole, through which the air rushes as the jar is emptied or filled, thus causing the whistling noise. Many of the figures worked upon the Peruvian and old Indian water-bottles are clever and comic to an extreme degree. One jar is in the form of a grinning human head, with long curls; another is a prim-looking person of attenuated features, portrayed as far as the waist; a third, from Cuzco—irresistibly funny—is the representation, apparently, of a fat old lady, who leans back with folded arms in the enjoyment of a doze, her face surrounded by a species of classic nightcap!

But perhaps the most remarkable of these many Peruvian antiquities is the likeness of a certain native monster called Ruminhany, a sort of Peruvian Nero, of whom history tells us something more or less authentic. The jar is nine inches in height, and portrays only the face and head of the cacique, who lived his life of crime amongst the Incas of the sixteenth century. Ruminhany was an ambitious and unscrupulous pretender, who on the execution of Atchualpa, the King of the Incas, by Pizarro the Conqueror, schemed to succeed him as the local ruling power. To the furtherance of this project he committed wholesale murder, inviting the brother and children of the dead king to a feast, where he treacherously caused them to be assassinated, by this means hoping to cut off all legitimate aspirants. But, like Nero, in his latter days, Ruminhany did not murder merely for self interest, but also for fiendish amusement; and it is related of him that on more than one occasion he gratified his inhuman cruelty by gathering together a number of defenceless women, young and old, and ordering them to be buried alive. Finally, however, one rejoices to hear that the Spanish Invaders became too strong for their opponent. They drove him, step by step, before them to the mountains, where at length he perished miserably. The face, with its glaring, crafty eye, low forehead, hooked nose, and cruel, grinning mouth, is eminently characteristic, and one feels sure that the artist must have drawn a faithful portrait of his infamous model.

Double jugs, or two jugs united by a common spout or handle, are common relics of old American ware, one of the most striking of these representing the cleverly-delineated forms of two animals, intended for stag and doe. The Peruvians also, like many other primitive nations, were in the habit of placing various pieces of pottery in the graves of their dead. With every Inca were interred his cooking utensils, some of silver, some of gold, and more of ware.

In Germany have been discovered some curious sepulchral urns fashioned of pottery. These, unearthed from time to time, prove that the ancient Teutons were in the habit of preserving the remains of their more illustrious compatriots in a peculiar manner. The urns were made in the form of small huts or dwelling houses of ware, into which the ashes of the dead were introduced by means of a hole in the roof. A very singular specimen of this Teutonic mode of sepulture is to be seen in the Munich Museum, representing a lake colony, consisting of seven huts and a porchway.

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of old Roman pottery was the enormous size of many of their vessels. Some of the amphoræ, or water-bottles, were, we are told,



so large and heavy that two oxen were required to draw them. The dish made to hold the leviathan turbot of historic celebrity once presented to the Emperor Domitian is calculated to have been more than seven feet long; whilst from another Roman author we hear of a celebrated vase so big that it required a ladder of twelve steps to enable a man to reach its mouth!

The ancient Greeks, as we all know, brought ceramic art to a high degree of perfection, but some of the uses to which they applied their pottery strike our modern minds as eminently peculiar. We are apt to consider Diogenes as a very eccentric individual, and his choice of a habitation as unique; but his conduct probably appeared by no means so extraordinary a light to his neighbours. The "tub" (*i.e.*, pithos, or cask) of Diogenes was a large earthenware or terra-cotta jar, a style of domicile not unknown to the Greeks. These large casks, originally made to contain wine, were in use long after the time of Diogenes as dwelling-places for the very poor; and we are informed that during the Peloponnesian War the Athenians frequently took up their abode in similar vessels. This strange habit was, indeed, not confined to the early Greeks. It is more than probable that it was shared by the ancient Romans, if not by other nations, for several gigantic pithos have been unearthed in Italy, whilst others, of pale red ware, four feet four inches in height and two feet two inches in diameter, were found not many years ago by a Colonel Munroe during some excavations made near Sebastopol.

Another whimsical fancy of the Greeks was the making of terra-cotta dolls or marionettes. Many of these have been found in old Athenian sepulchres, where their presence denotes some curious superstition. Their ordinary destination, however, was simply for the show. They were cast in a mould, the bodies and limbs being made of separate pieces, pierced by holes, by means of which each part could be made to move at will on the pulling of a string. The marionette exhibitions were by no means despised by the refined and cultured Greeks. Xenophon, in one of his plays, makes mention of them. Socrates is described as entering into conversation with a doll showman, and inquiring of him upon what he chiefly relied in life. "A large number of fools," is the ready answer, "for they, by appreciating my performances, are my support." Whereupon one of the guests present remarks, "Ah! I heard you the other day praying that wherever you went, there you might find a plentiful supply of bread and wine, and a plentiful lack of common sense!"

The sentence of ostracism amongst the Greeks was worked by means, not, as is commonly supposed, of shells, but of pieces of baked earth or pottery, and from this fact derives its name, "ostrakon," *i.e.*, a potsherd. The veto was written upon a bit of terra-cotta or the fragment of a vase, and it was this sort of ostrakon which, as Plutarch tells us, was presented to Aristides by an ignorant citizen, with the request that he would inscribe thereon his own name. "Why?" asked Aristides. "Has he, then, done you any injury?" "None," replied the other; "but I am weary of hearing him everywhere styled 'the Just.'"

A game called "ostrakon" was common amongst the Greeks, deriving its name from the same word. It was played by means of pieces of lusted vases, black on one side and red on the other, which were thrown up into the air, and decided the position of the players according to the colour which came uppermost—in fact, a species of classical pitch and toss.

Porcelain or translucent pottery is by no means a modern discovery; that is to say, it

was an art well known to the ancients, and probably in use two thousand years ago amongst the Persians and the Chinese, but unknown to more recent manufacturers, and only re-discovered in Europe a few centuries ago.

The life of Bernard Palissy is a strange illustration of the enthusiasm of a ceramic devotee. Palissy was born, of poor parents, early in the sixteenth century, at which time the art of enamelling was not unknown in France; but, either oblivious of this fact, or determined upon a discovery of unique perfection, he devoted fifteen years of his life to a study of the ancient Chinese or Persian enamel, and to the invention of a porcelain which should rival these *chefs-d'œuvre* of former art.

His career was as eccentric as it was romantic, and was a succession of trials, privations, triumph, and persecution. He was an enthusiast to whom the love or even life of wife and child were matters of little moment compared to the progress of his one cherished project. In its pursuit he neglected his trade, leaving his family to starve without compunction. When he was too poor any longer to buy firewood for his furnace, he seized upon the household furniture and tore up the very flooring for fuel, yet, even then, at this stage of penury, refused to sell imperfect specimens of his half-discovered art. To posterity he has often been held up as an example of perseverance, but to those of his own household he must have appeared little better than a heartless maniac. He finally succeeded in his object, and succeeded triumphantly, but not without leaving behind him landmarks of a cruel significance. The laurels of fame were gained, but reached across the graves of his neglected little ones. Palissy became rich and famous, and removed to Paris to enjoy his honours; not, however, without interruption. He had become a Protestant, and only escaped death in 1559 through the intervention of the king. Later on, this protection failing him, he fell into the hands of the leaguers—men who cared little for his discoveries or his devotion to a graceful art—and was immured in the Bastille, where he died at the age of eighty.

The manufacture of the famous Dresden china commenced only in the beginning of the eighteenth century, a little later than that of Sevres. The method of making this delicate porcelain was discovered, it is said, by a curious accident. A certain young chemist named Böttcher, whose love for drink was only equalled by his ardour for work, had for some time set himself to the re-discovery of the lost art, incessantly mixing together all kinds of different pastes; but in vain. One day, however, having sent his servant into Dresden to buy a new hair-powder, Böttcher was struck by the unusual weight of his wig. With a sudden inspiration he seized upon the powder, and, mixing it in his preparation, found at last that the difficulty was solved.

True porcelain was the result of the process! The hair-powder was made from a peculiar kind of clay, which, alone of all clays, succeeds in the composition of what is called hard paste, or real porcelain. The land where this clay was to be found was immediately monopolised by the German Government, and every effort made to keep the discovery a profound secret from the public. The "kaolin," as it is called by the Chinese, was put into sealed casks before its transmission to the manufactory at Meissen. Here the workmen were sworn to silence, and, indeed, were, after a fashion, kept prisoners in the castle, on the walls of which were everywhere written these words of warning, "Secrecy to the grave." But secrets such as these are too valuable to have long life, and

before many years were over the discovery was known and practised in various other European cities.

Our English china, until within the last century, was not a manufacture of any very considerable distinction or importance. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries we hear of some whimsical ceramic conceits—among others, the so-called "puzzle jugs." These jugs were so constructed as to empty their contents by an unobserved channel when lifted to the lips. There were usually three spouts to each jug, two of which had to be covered by the fingers in order to make drinking feasible.

We may, however, as a nation, feel considerable pride in our Wedgwood china, as unique as it is beautiful. Josiah Wedgwood was the son and grandson of men engaged in the earthenware trade. His family, however, were only in a small way of business, and by no means distinguished above their compeers. Then, in 1823, he was made a partner in the shop. Clever and energetic, the young man worked hard at the composition of new designs, and set himself to the discovery of richer colours than those ordinarily in use in the ceramic manufactories. He brought out an exquisite ware which he called "Cream Ware," but which afterwards, when Queen Charlotte had ordered a complete service of it, became known by the name of "Queen's Ware." Later on he invented his famous "Jasper Ware," which he describes as being "a white porcelain, capable of receiving colours in a manner which no other body, ancient or modern, has been known to do."

The art of Wedgwood was, after the inventor's death, more or less lost to the world, and, indeed, few have been as yet found to imitate the rare delicacy of his exquisite designs. The sums given of late years for perfect specimens of this beautiful ware show the consideration awarded it in public opinion.

At a sale in London at a certain Dr. Gibson's, seven years ago, a vase, 14 inches in height, sold for 120 guineas, whilst another of "black jasper, relief in white," 25 inches in height, with pedestal, went for no less a sum than £735. Even these prices, however, cannot compete in extravagance with those frequently offered for works done in Sevres china; as, for example, at Captain Rickett's sale in London a few years ago, when a *bleu de roi* vase, 16½ inches high, was knocked down to a china collector for the enormous sum of 1,350 guineas.

In conclusion, let us remark that, if we love pottery, so did many of our forefathers; if some of us opine that a plate is oftentimes worth a fortune, and that blue china is a thing so perfect as to require "living up to," the sentiment was one which, although less aesthetically expressed, yet was practically demonstrated by our ancestors. How can we think otherwise when, in 1758, the King of France ordered for his royal neighbour of Denmark a china service costing 30,000 livres; when, in 1787, the Spanish Ambassador received a like gift of the value of 48,252 livres, and the very next year the Sultan of Mysore became the proud possessor of a table service, vases, and cups valued at 33,126 livres? Whilst, if we need encouragement from yet earlier days, we may reflect upon the eccentric example of Vitellius, that old Roman china-maniac, who, once upon a time, took it into his ingenious head to manufacture a single plate so enormous that its cost was a million sesterces, or about £8,000; and for its sole use and perfection a huge furnace had to be specially constructed in the country. Truly, whether china be a "perfectly holy thing" or no, the whims and oddities of the human mind ever go on repeating themselves, even as the sparks fly from a revolving wheel!