



A VIEW OF THE ROOKWOOD POTTERY

FOUNDED BY A WOMAN

By Maude Haywood



PROBABLY there is no distinctively native industry of which Americans have more right to feel proud than that being so successfully carried on at the Rookwood Pottery in Cincinnati. It is a standing testimony to two important facts in the development of the national life and character. In the first place, being entirely local in origin and growth, it is in itself a decisive proof of the real existence of an artistic element essentially American. And secondly, in having been founded by a woman, it is a witness to the important and active share taken by women in the work of this country, a privilege peculiarly American, and not paralleled except in comparatively rare instances in the nations of the Old World. On the other hand, the proudest boast of Rookwood is that in no sense can the manufactory be said to owe anything of the principles of its existence to outside sources. Its development and growth, as in all true life, has been from within, although the founders have, of course, from time to time, as it seemed expedient, made use of foreign talent or profited by the discoveries and experience of foreign art. Hence an originality and an individuality in the work produced impossible under any other conditions, and thereby, also, has the pottery claimed and proved its right to existence on the highest and truest art principles. Asking nothing from without, and employing for material clay brought from their own Ohio watershed, shaped into simple but artistic forms, decorated with flowers modeled direct from nature and enriched with those wonderful and now well-known glazes, in less than ten years from its foundation this hitherto comparatively obscure pottery bore away the honors of an international exhibition, and commanded the wonder and admiration of Europe, where the vases there shown for the first time bore their part in an added revelation to the Old World of the unguessed-at powers and possibilities of American industrial art.



MRS. STORER

The situation and exterior of the original pottery were, perhaps, about as unsuggestive of the work carried on within the walls of the factory as any place could possibly be. Although the city of Cincinnati has gained for itself the reputation of being the art city of America, it does not certainly possess to the eyes of an ordinary observer the characteristic appearance of an art center. The city, which lies in a valley surrounded by hills, is composed almost entirely of factories and business houses, the dwellings of the better class being nearly all situated on the heights within the suburbs, but outside the city proper. The old factory, where all the ware has been produced until within the last few months, is situated at a railroad crossing overlooking the Ohio River at the rear. The original building was an old school-house, which stands now just as it appeared when first taken into use by Mrs. Storer, the foundress of Rookwood. As need required, the building was added to, and grew much in dimensions, but, of course, both in character and size the place has been for some time entirely inadequate for the purpose to which it was devoted. Last year a new manufactory, of which a view is given at the head of this page, was completed, which is in every way suitable and worthy both in architectural design and interior arrangements for the requirements of the manufactory. Its situation is most picturesque. It stands on one of the eminences just outside the city, and is reached by cars raised by hydraulic power up the steep incline. The view looking from the windows of the building over toward the city is very fine, and the varied atmospheric effects visible thence from time to time suggestive of Turner's happiest efforts. The building itself, as one approaches it, is very decorative in character, and the huge kiln chimneys, as forming a very necessary part of its construction, give to the whole a certain suggestive individuality not unpleasing from an artistic standpoint. The grounds have been laid out with a view to the cultivation of the flowers employed in the decoration of the pottery. Within, no pains have been spared to make the building all that it should be, with due regard to its artistic possibilities, but above all aiming that the accommodations and conveniences shall be as perfect as modern improvements and actual experience of the requirements of the pottery can make them. The new kilns have been built so that they may be heated by means of oil, vaporated by air pressure, which ignited makes a gaseous flame, giving a steady and equally distributed heat; by this means it is hoped that the results of the firing may be more certain and reliable than by the old methods. The details of all the arrangements could hardly be interesting to any except those actually engaged in pursuit of the art, but a visit to the pottery, where strangers are always welcome, could not fail to be a delightful and instructive experience to any who may have the opportunity of making it. In these days of mechanical manufacture, when steam or electric engines and all kinds of noisy but labor-saving contrivances do most of our work, there is a peculiar attraction about a pottery where, after the clay is pounded and mixed, all the work is carried on directly by human hands. After the clay is prepared, the vases are thrown on the potter's wheel, a most fascinating process to watch when done skillfully. When thrown or cast the ware has next to receive the modeled decoration characteristic of the pottery manufactured here, and in order to preserve the pieces in the proper degree of moisture during the subsequent processes, they are placed in a damp house,

until having passed through the hands of several artists they are ready to be dried, which must be done very thoroughly, preparatory to the first firing. When the form of the piece is satisfactorily made the coloring is next laid on, while the ware is still damp. Sometimes the design is wholly in relief, and in other cases portions of the design are flatly painted. Only about five colors are employed, and usually the utmost simplicity is maintained in applying them. At this point the ware is baked in the kiln for a period of about twenty-eight hours, and after the first firing it is described as "biscuit." It has to be dipped in the glaze and given another and a lighter firing, before the piece is finally completed. Sometimes two glazes and a third firing are required. Although every step of the process, from the first shaping of the clay, bears a more or less important share toward the perfection of the finished piece, nevertheless it is certain that in the secrets of this glazing lies much of the wonderful and peculiar beauty of the Rookwood ware. By its means the most varied and exquisite effects are obtained, unsurpassed for richness and brilliancy. Most of the ware is very highly glazed and deep in color, but lately experiments have been made resulting in the manufacture of pieces having a light ground and dull finish, and designed mostly for table use. As will be seen by the illustrations surrounding this page, the usual decoration of the ware is in flowers, treated in a naturalistic manner, the motives being copied directly from Nature. A few figure pieces have been made, but not very many, so far, and the subjects have been mostly grotesque or humorous, some of Caldecott's drawings having been utilized with happy effect. Occasionally small animals such as field mice, and also insects, are introduced, being likewise treated naturally, but the reproductions given here may be regarded as typical of the best and most characteristic of the Rookwood decorated pieces. It must, however, be remembered that in reality the glory of the ware lies greatly in the beauty of the color and glaze, which is impossible to adequately represent in black and white, however accurately the designs may be rendered, as in the present instance. A fact of which the pottery may justly boast is, that not only is the rule adhered to that no piece should ever be duplicated, but also the standard of excellence is kept very high, each piece being the subject of individual study, and made as perfectly as possible.

The story of the origin and rise of the pottery, which is now-days widely known, is not only interesting but should be both instructive and inspiring to the country of its foundress, Mrs. Maria Longworth Storer. It is often said, and well said, that what has been done may be done again. In the history of Rookwood the principles and reasons of its success may be very readily traced. It is undoubted that the key-note to that success lay in the first instance in Mrs. Storer's personal character. She is an artist by nature, with an intense love for the work which she undertook, and which grew up so wonderfully in her hands. She comes of one of the old Cincinnati families, whose history may truly be said to be bound up in the life and interests of the city itself. She received her art training originally at the local art academy, which owed much to the patronage and bounty of her father, Mr. Longworth. Unlike many other rich American women, Mrs. Storer preferred the pursuit of art to any other occupation or amusement, and she had the opportunity and means of gratifying her tastes. Without any idea of the ultimate development of her scheme she started to make pottery, simply for her own enjoyment, in a small school-house, no longer required for its original purpose, situated as before described on Eastern Avenue, in Cincinnati. Only a few were at first associated with her, and they were greatly aided by a practical potter, Mr. Bailey, who has continued in the works ever since, through all its rise and growth. It is not to be wondered at that he seems to recall with especial affection memories connected with the early days of the manufactory. Although almost from the first the ware was sold, and the enterprise conducted on business principles, yet it will be seen that the undertaking was started and carried on more for and in a love of the art than from any mercenary consideration. The same spirit has been maintained to a greater or less extent down to the present day, and is a further explanation of the well-merited success of the pottery. Later, as the business grew and widened so greatly, Mrs. Storer gradually withdrew from the more active management of it, contenting herself with using her interest and influence in the art department, to which the president of the pottery, Mr. W. W. Taylor, who joined himself to its interests in 1883, attaches no small value, attributing much of the peculiar character of the Rookwood success to her influence as a woman and an artist. In the new building a room has been reserved for her private use in experimenting.

The pottery is now formed into a company, comprising fifteen shareholders, people not only of wealth but more or less lovers of art, who are able and willing to uphold the best interests of the manufactory, whilst not altogether neglecting the question of pecuniary benefit. The management and direction of the works are entirely in the hands of the president, Mr. Taylor, whose practical business ability, united to his artistic judgment and his enthusiasm, is manifested by the increasing prosperity of the undertaking. The watchword of the pottery is improvement always. Experiments are being constantly made, and the day rarely passes in which something new is not either learned or discovered.

