WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH AN AGATE.

Not in the way of such thauomistry as our forefathers attributed to the inherent virtues of this beautiful stone, nor yet in the way of cameo and intaglio cutting; for which it is so well adapted; but in that of such works of minor art and decorative work as any girl with fine-fingered hands and good eyesight may accomplish. And when I say fine-fingered hands, I am not referring to beautiful appearance, but to dexterity and delicacy of touch.

And the agate in question is a burnisher, or style, such as is sold by stationers for use with a “manifold writer.” You need not pay a large price, such as is sometimes asked by artists’ colourmen, for one; but you must see that the stone is long, finely tapered, and perfectly free from any external roughness or internal flaw, and that it is firmly set in a light but rigid handle; elobate is too flexible, and bone, or ivory will do. My present instrument, the best of many I have used, cost me sixpence.

One generally connects the agate burnisher in amateur hands with the art of illuminating manuscripts. For this, most writers on the art recommend a flat burnisher as well as a pointed one; the former to be used for brightening flat surfaces of “shell” gold; the latter for traces. In this advice there are two assumptions that seem misleading; first, that flat surfaces of gilding should always be brightened; secondly, that when leaf gold is not used, “shell” gold will be substituted. Now, with regard to the first of these, let me advise young illuminators to study the burnishing effect of those who may be producing by the judicious introduction of masses of matt gilding, especially about initial letters. Fig. 1 gives a suggestion for the decorative treatment of such a mass, which surrounds the letter A. To illuminate such a letter you must proceed as follows:—first go over your tracel or pencilled outlines very lightly; secondly, use those of the letter with its predominant colour, and those of the gilding with a little pale cadmium or other yellow. Then, clean off the marks of tracing, as, after the gold is put on, the contact of india-rubber or broad-crembs would be disastrous. This being done, lay on your gold, not too thickly, but at the same time liberally enough to form a rich, even surface. Many amateurs put on gold too thin, and then complain of not being able to produce a brilliant effect. And here, with regard to the second position I have noticed—don’t buy your gold in shells, but get a cake that will cost four or five shillings to begin with, but will end in a very great saving of money and trouble, besides being cleaner and giving you an even supply.

Having laid on your gold, let it dry thoroughly before you proceed further; if there is any perceptible moisture, it will hinder the burnishing. You may then shade the matt gold (as at A A’ in Fig. 1) with burnt umber; and, when this is dry, take your agate, and holding it firmly nearly perpendicular to the paper, draw the line that is indicated by the dots just within the edge of the gold. To get the best effect, your work should rest on a polished tile, or a sheet of thick glass. The dots (B B’) made by holding the agate quite perpendicularly, and twirling it between your thumb and forefinger, while maintaining a steady pressure; they will shine like tiny fires if properly done. Inside the letter (at C) I have indicated a very effective tooling, consisting of a close ribbing of lines, which you should draw with the aid of a parallel ruler. This ribboning may be carried outside, or, if you prefer it, you may introduce a delicate scrollwork, as at D D’. Do not be afraid of pressing too hard, as the agate will not rub the gold off; and the harder the pressure, the brighter will be your result; though of course violence will tear your vellum or paper. If you use paper for your work, Whaitman’s hot-pressed will be found the best, if not too heavy. The extra thick kinds are not suitable for burnishing, as the substance of the paper does not offer sufficient resistance to the burnishing point.

There is a very pretty and effective style of decoration (represented in Fig. 2), that may be introduced into large illuminations, and will be found most useful for filling spaces that are sometimes a little difficult to dispose of. I have taken the idea of it from a peacock’s feather. The unbroken lines should be first drawn (best with an “Owl” pen) in bold, sweeping curves, with Indian ink, the “eyes” should then be filled with gold, and made to shine in the same way as the dots at B B’. In Fig. 1, this peacock-feather pattern is capable of almost infinite variation, and, if very lightly executed, the groundwork for lines of black-letter writing.

There is another delightful occupation in which the agate point comes into prominent use, namely, that of rice-paper flower modelling, which seems to be very little practised now, but used to be in great favour with our grandparents. To teach it would be, as with illuminating, require a separate treatise; but I may say here that simple flowers and leaves, such as those of the rose, may be easily modelled in this material, with the help of a pair of sharp embroidery scissors, a penknife, a pin, and an agate. Suppose a rose is to be modelled—and these models are only on a very tiny scale—you must cut from your sheet of rice-paper a circular piece about the size of A, Fig. 3, and six or seven similar pieces, decreasing in size. Then, having clamped the paper to a register it tough, wet the tip of your agate, and lift your largest round by touching its centre (A) with the tip, and press it firmly down on a tiny drop of strong with A E, and place it where you wish your rose to be. When the first round has adhered, touch its centre with the gum-brush (a fine sable is the best to use), and place it in the series in order, one over the other. Let the gum harden, and then damp the whole flower fresh; and in doing so, you may give the flower its colour, unless you prefer to paint the flowers beforehand, which I certainly do in the case of the green leaves.

Then, holding the agate perpendicularly on the centre of the rose with your left hand, take a rather blunt pin, and a little filling with a circumcurrence of each round here and there, as at B, beginning with the topmost and smallest piece, until you produce the effect indicated at C. The green leaves should be cut out, as shown at D, and their ribs marked with pressure by the back of a small penknife-blade, while they are damp; and their edges may be notched with the point of the pin at the same time. E shows the leaflet thus modelled. Paint the leaf-stalk, as at F, on the reverse side—on are decorating, and then, lifting each leaflet at E with the wetted agate, press it down on a drop of gum in its proper place, arranged, each set of five leaflets at G. From simple roses, you may go on to imitate almost any flower or foliage, from the solid-looking corn, to the fairy-like maiden-hair. I have modelled fern leaves that had each more than a hundred leaflets, and yet were occupied, less space than a sixpence, the stalks being of rice-paper too, not painted as above; and passion-flowers containing more than ninety separate pieces each, yet not so large as a threepenny bit; and in doing these my agate was in constant use.
HINTS ON HOME NURSING.

Preparation of the Sick-Room.
Clean thoroughly beforehand if possible: hot sand well rubbed in and brushed off will clean boards when scrubbing is impossible, oil all locks, and soap window cords to make them work easily. Dry blackhead often causes woodwork when it sticks, especially drawers.

A Fire-Place is most essential in the room, for the sake of ventilation as well as warmth. Allow plenty of fresh air, and in lighting the sick-room avoid if possible the use of gas, which burns moist oxygen than many other kinds of light; wax candles are best to use if possible.

In ventilating the room remember that warm air always rises, therefore an outlet for the impure air should be given at the upper part of the room, and the inlet is best above the heads of people, in order to avoid a draught, and for this reason in its entering it ought to be given an upward direction. The temperature should be from sixty to sixty-five degrees. Keep the register, if there is one, always open, and do not allow the grate to be stuffed up with curtains, or other furniture; when a fire is not needed. When a fire has to be kept in while a patient is asleep, strew sifted ashes or earth upon the hearth, to deaden the sound of falling coals, remove the fire-irons, and stir with an old stick instead. Put the coals into paper bags or parcels so as to be able to lift them on to the fire noiselessly, the paper burns and the coals are equally distributed all over. Old corks, or sugar will often revive a fire that has nearly gone out.

Flowers should always be kept fresh in the sick-room and the water ought to be frequently changed; a small piece of charcoal, or half a teaspoonful of Condyl's Fluid helps to keep the water sweet. Avoid having flowers with too strong a scent.

In Making a Patient's Bed. If they have to remain in it all day, it is best to have a draw-sheet, i.e., a sheet folded crossways, and tucked across the bed, placed so as to reach from the shoulders to just below the knees; it can then be drawn through in the course of the day, so that the patient has a cool place to lie on. But the bolster in a case of its own, as the under-sheet is less likely to get into ruts. Pillows should be put to the fire while the bed is made, it renders them soft and springy; if the person requires support, two pillows in one case are most effectual. A bed rest may be made with a child's clothes placed upside down with the legs tied to the top rail of the bed, and a mug or pillow placed over it.

The bed-clothes should be light, but if the patient complains of them as tiring to him, support them with an exiguous cradle, or a piece of wire or string stretched under the head-clothes, and tied firmly to the head and foot of the bed. Do not place the bed opposite to the light, and if possible away from the wall on either side. A wire-woven bed with a mattress on the top is the most comfortable kind of bed for most cases, but in infectious illnesses it is sometimes well to use bedding made of long straw placed lengthwise in a bag; or seaweed used in the same way; this can be easily destroyed when infection is over, as it is very cheap to replace. Macintoshes should be placed under the patient when there are any discharges from the person likely to get into the bedding, a piece of oil cloth, or a busman's cape, or apron to make a good substitute, or turned brown paper, price one penny a sheet, answers the purpose well if macintosh is not at hand.

A cord from the ceiling or head of the bed is a help when lifting a helpless person, or to lift them in a sheet or a couple of strong towels.

Linseed Tea is an excellent drink for invalid children. Take one ounce of sugar, add the juice of one lemon, one ounce of whole linseed, and half an ounce of liquorice root. This mixture should be placed in a jug, and two pints of boiling water poured over it. The mixture should remain in a warm place for four hours, after which it should be strained and used.