

VISITS TO ART-MANUFACTORIES.

No. 7.—THE ROYAL PORCELAIN WORKS OF WORCESTER.

OUR venerable, but ever vigorous contemporary, Mr. URBAN, has recently animadverted with just severity upon those elementary and popular volumes from which youthful students of the present day are in the habit of deriving what they very naturally suppose to be correct views of English history. Readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, however, have just discovered that these so-called "histories" are at best specious pretenders, being in reality, in a greater or less degree, either culpably imperfect, or tainted with gross errors. Mr. Urban has done good service to the cause of popular education by thus exposing the true character of this class of educational works. The next thing to be done is to associate with Parker's "Annals of England" a Student's English History, that shall be thoroughly sound, comprehensive also, and both simple and attractive.

The importance of portraying, in a clear and

graphic manner, the social and domestic condition of the people of England at different historical periods, is one aspect of English history that hitherto has been almost overlooked, but which we commend to the serious attention of those who may contemplate the production of future popular histories of England. With this view, such writers will do well to make themselves masters of the archæology of Art and Manufactures, as they have reference to English history. Thus they will discover the true value of genuine archæology as an ally to the historian. Let them take that one application of Art working in happy association with manufacturing industry which deals with ceramic productions, and observe with what telling effect it throws light over the pages of history. It is by no means an easy matter to picture to ourselves our own England, peopled by our own ancestors, in times with the leading and most characteristic incidents of which we have long been familiar, as being without any manufactory of earthenware of whatsoever kind (except for architectural uses), and destitute altogether of home-made fictile manufactures. And yet, if we would really pass in review before

our mental vision the England of the times of the Edwards and the Henries, we must advance a step beyond substituting armour for scarlet uniforms, and, walking in the gardens of our forefathers and entering their private houses, we must realize a condition of society which was almost, if not absolutely, ignorant of cups, and plates, and jugs, and porcelain chimney ornaments—ignorant even of flower-pots, *et id genus omne*—unless, indeed, they were obtainable, by some unknown means, from some equally unknown foreign potteries. It is certainly within the limits of possibility that some kinds of pottery may have continued in use from the Conquest till the Reformation; but if so, their use must have been rather exceptional than generally prevalent, since it is certain that we possess no such relics of the pottery of those centuries as would enable us to deduce from them any distinct and definite information with respect to ceramic manufactures during that period. Roman pottery yet remains in this island in abundance; and the rude relics both of the aboriginal Anglo-Celts and of the scarcely more refined potters of the Anglo-Saxon era, each tell their own historic legend. The potter's art in



WORCESTER PORCELAIN ENAMEL.

England evidently declined from the middle of the fifth century, nor did it show any decided indications of a revival until, in the middle of the sixteenth century, the brown stone-ware of Edward VI. made its appearance. The close of that century witnessed the introduction of the Elizabethan ware. Then another hundred years elapsed before the discovery of the salt glaze—an important step in advance in the development of our national fictile manufactures; but meanwhile an enamelled stone-ware had been produced (commencing about A.D. 1650) at Fulham and Lambeth, and in Staffordshire. About the year 1700 porcelain manufactories were established at Chelsea and Bow. The porcelain of Derby and Worcester date from the middle of the last century. And from about the year 1760, till his death in 1795, the English Palissy, JOSIAH WEDGWOOD, flourished.

Without attempting to do more than direct attention to the comparatively recent origin of the existing ceramic manufactures of England, it is our present purpose more fully to describe the career of

one great establishment which has uniformly enjoyed the very highest reputation. It was in the year 1751 that Dr. Wall, a distinguished physician, and a good artist, in connection with several intelligent and enterprising citizens of Worcester, formed a plan for introducing in that city the manufacture of PORCELAIN, a peculiar and beautifully translucent fictile production, which is universally admired and valued, and which at that period was engaging the thoughtful attention of both learned men and sovereign princes throughout Europe.

The Worcester Porcelain Company from the first have aimed at the production of such works as should command decided admiration, and secure extensive patronage. Their earliest efforts were directed to the imitation of the porcelain of the Chinese. Chinese patterns, accordingly, in blue and white, together with the forms in favour with the ceramists of the Flowery Land, were reproduced on the banks of the Severn. About the same time also Japan colours were introduced by the Worcester artists in their works—that is, they employed those conven-

tional arrangements of red, blue, and gold, which technically are distinguished as "Japanese," when applied to fictile manufactures. These early Worcester works, wherever examples of them (now precious as relics) are to be found, exhibit evident indications of that thorough appreciation of the true qualities of porcelain, coupled with so happy an artistic feeling, that they may justly claim to be regarded as the auspicious forerunners of a triumphantly successful career. The execution of the designs in this earliest Worcester porcelain, together with the gilding freely introduced into many of the patterns, are remarkable for their excellence.

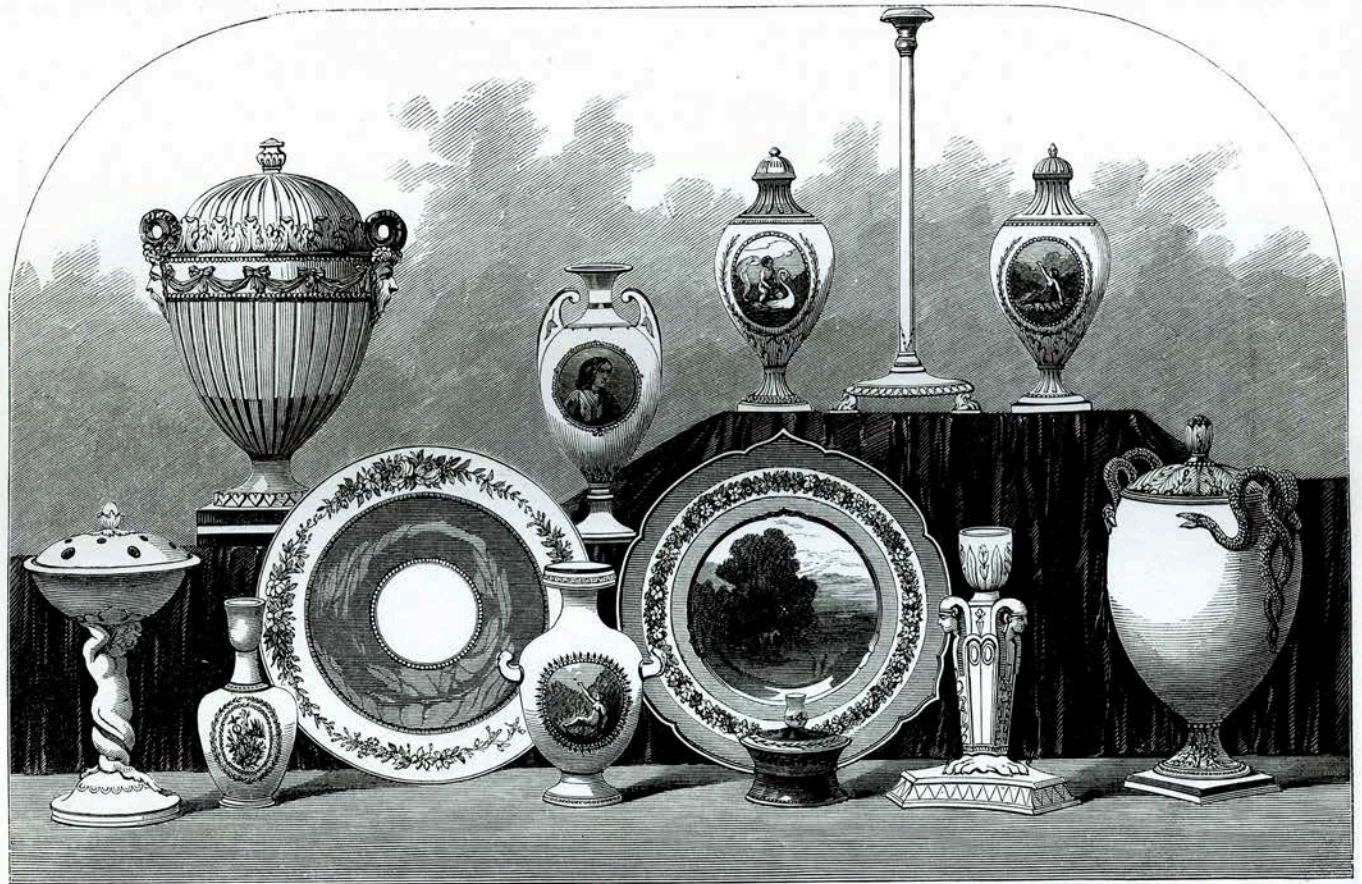
About the year 1756 the Worcester Company began the course of progressive improvement, which has distinguished their establishment now for more than a hundred years. At this time the invention of *transfer printing* was introduced, and it rapidly exercised a most important influence for good upon the ceramic manufactures of England. In fact, this process, discovered and first employed at Worcester in 1756, may be considered to have been the means

of extending the demand for British fictile productions more effectually than any subsequent discovery. As in the instance of the imitative Chinese and Japanese porcelain, the new transfer process was executed at Worcester with complete success. Of the engraved works executed at the period of the discovery many specimens are still in existence, which in themselves are truly beautiful, and as examples of porcelain manufacture remarkably fine.

The next incident which contributed in an important degree to advance the interests of the Worcester establishment, and to develop its practical powers, may be considered to have occurred in 1763, when the Chelsea works were closed, and the artists who had been there employed, were dispersed in search of engagements in other manufactories of porcelain. The more excellent of the Chelsea artists established themselves at Worcester, where their co-operation enabled the company to produce various works of considerable beauty after the manner of the old Sèvres and Dresden porcelain, but which, at the same time, were distinguished by certain characteristic peculiarities. The history of the Wor-

cester Porcelain Works does not supply any clue to the causes that, within twenty years of this period, brought about the first and only decided decline they have experienced. The productions of the year 1780, however, and of the few previous and succeeding years, are far less satisfactory than the works which preceded and followed them. They determine for themselves their own comparative value; and, when tested by comparison with both earlier and subsequent Worcester porcelain, they must be pronounced inferior in material, taste, and finish. But this decadence was speedily to be succeeded by such a change in the administration of the establishment, as might be expected to impart a fresh impulse to its productions. In 1783 the works were purchased by Mr. Flight, of Hackney, for his sons, and in the hands of those gentlemen they rapidly regained, and even rose above, their former reputation. At this critical period in the history of the Worcester Porcelain Works, an event took place which gave them an addition to their title, and very materially strengthened their powers of action. In 1786 King George III. paid a visit to the city,

when he granted the patent which gave to that city the first "Royal Porcelain Works" in England. This decided mark of royal favour, coupled with the abundant patronage which immediately followed it, placed the establishment beyond the reach of any future vicissitudes. Its success was indeed secured. Artists of the first talent were employed, under whose care a school of students was trained up in the study and the practice of the ceramic art. In 1793 Mr. Barr became associated with the works, and, in connection with the former proprietors, succeeded in introducing into all their productions the expressions of a pure and refined taste. About that time a second porcelain manufactory was established in Worcester by the Messrs. Chamberlain, which at once obtained a share of the popularity enjoyed by its rival. Both of these works were actuated by a similar spirit, and for many years the two may be said to have produced by far the larger part of all the important porcelain executed and purchased in this kingdom. Fortunate in being able to command the services of really able artists, and no less happy in the consciousness that their productions were



WORCESTER PORCELAIN.

duly appreciated, Messrs. Flight and Barr, and the Messrs. Chamberlain, made a large number of porcelain services for the Royal Family of England, and for many Continental princes, in addition to those which were sought from them by the nobility and gentry of this country. The patterns that still remain in the show-rooms attest the number and variety of the services executed during the forty-six years that succeeded the appearance of the second Worcester manufactory.

In the year 1839 the two establishments were united in that of the Messrs. Chamberlain, who, in their turn, were succeeded by the present proprietors of the one united manufactory—MESSRS. KERR AND BINNS—in 1852. Without doubt the emulation excited and stimulated by the presence at Worcester of a rival establishment, tended to act beneficially upon the art of porcelain making as it was practised in that city; and so also, on the other hand, it is equally certain that very decided advantages now result from the concentration of both talent and energy which has been effected by the existing arrangements.

From the time of the first production of porcelain at Worcester until the commencement of the present century, the artists of the establishment appear to have been influenced by an irresistible desire to imitate the most attractive works of other ceramists; and yet, despite of this imitative tendency, Worcester porcelain has always been distinguished by some decided Worcester speciality. If the class of designs were Chinese, they were executed not in the Chinese, but in the Worcester manner. If the style of decoration and the method of treatment were both adapted from some foreign specimens, the paste possessed peculiar translucent qualities that impressed upon the work some Worcester characteristic. This porcelain, consequently, is at all times easily recognised, notwithstanding the many features in which certain of its productions are assimilated to the porcelain of China and Japan, of Sèvres and Dresden. The exceedingly beautiful translucency of the fabric is the special characteristic of the earliest Worcester porcelain, when Chinese patterns were prevalent, and when the taste of the time attached peculiar importance to subjects

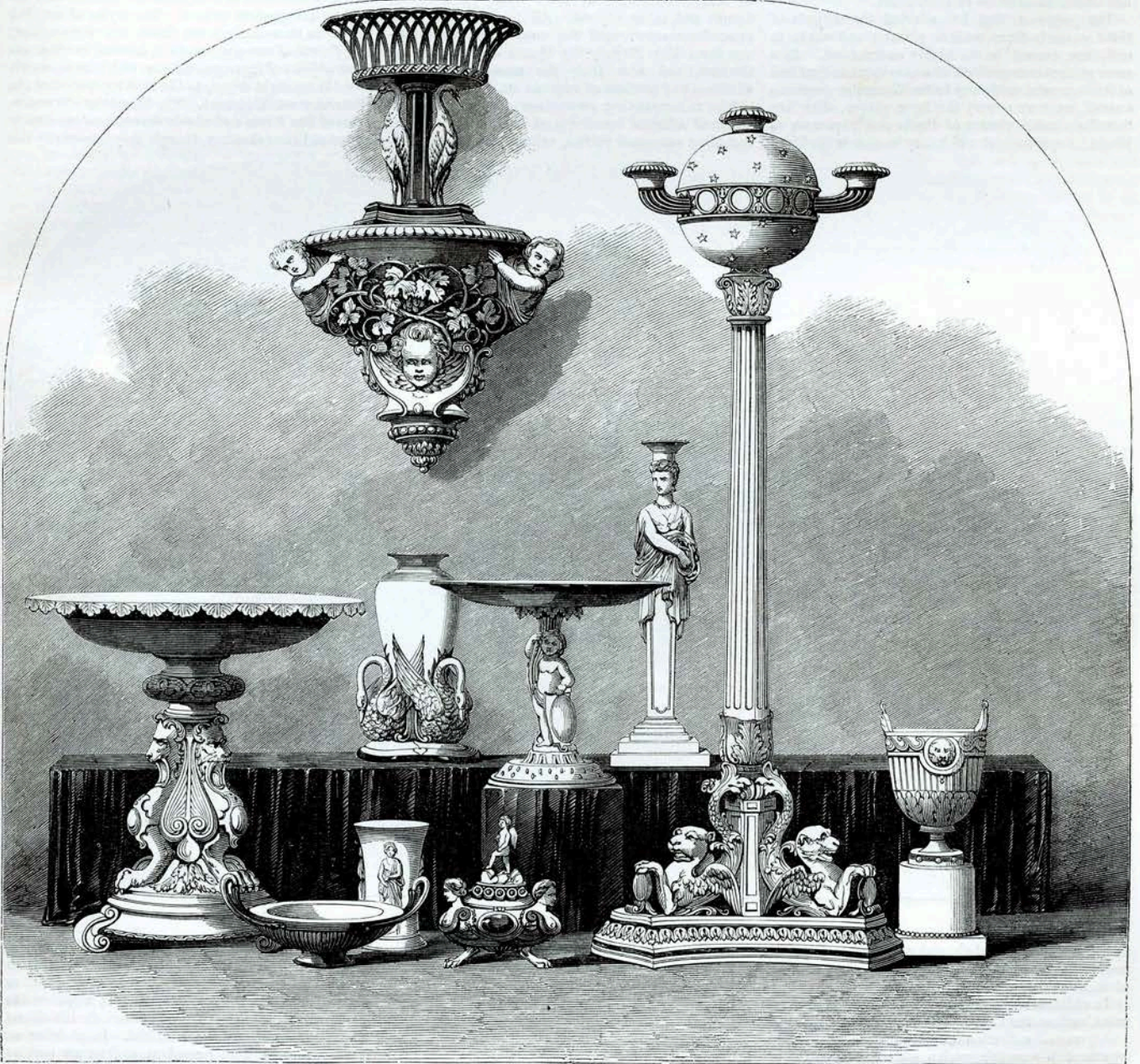
executed in black by the transfer process. Subsequently, as the last century advanced towards its close, the soap-rock body then used imparted a singular yellowness to the Worcester porcelain, which detracted very seriously from the effect of its finest specimens, at the same time that it stamped upon them all a Worcester identity. A corresponding distinctiveness of local character may always be observed in every variety of the finest Worcester porcelain: it is invariably Worcester, however studiously it may have followed the works of Sèvres, and of the German ceramic artists, in its gaily painted birds, in the rich variety of its beautiful flowers, its dark blue patterns and fine and lustrous gilding.

With the advance of the present century, the Worcester style has gradually assumed a more decided character. A succession of specialities has been superseded by a definite system; and, in the place of imitating foreign excellences, Worcester has studied how she might secure the universal recognition of excellent qualities intrinsically and permanently her own. The effect principally aimed at

early in this century appears to have been a gorgeous richness. Such is the effect produced both by the Japan patterns, executed for the royal family, for Lord Nelson, and others; and in the more classic, but still equally splendid, services that were made about the year 1815. Some of the paintings executed at that period by Baxter, Humphrey Chamberlain (great masters in their Art), and others, are still considered to be admirable specimens of the art of enamel painting. The gradual improvement in the practice of Art which has distinguished the succeeding years of the present century has not failed to exhibit its happy influences in that peculiar Art-manufacture, that has identified itself with the

city of Worcester. The ceramic productions of England have now risen to a position of the highest importance amongst our national manufactures, and an honourable rivalry exists, not between two establishments in a single city, but between a series of great works placed in various localities, and all of them conducted upon the same sound principles, and with the same aspiring aim. It is delightful to observe how this admirable manufacture has thus extended the range of its operations, not only without any falling away from the standard of its earlier excellence, but in increased power, and with more fully developed capabilities. And, at the same time, the present condition of the Worcester establishment

is a subject for special congratulation, since it still retains, nay, extends, its long-established reputation midst the group of its able confederates. A careful comparison between the productions of the various great ceramic works of the present day will confirm the high opinion of Worcester porcelain, that is excited by a visit to the establishment of KERR AND BINNS, at Worcester itself. Whether the material, or the forms, or the style of decoration, or its execution be investigated, in every one of these conditions the Worcester porcelain of the present day is prepared to endure the most searching tests. It bears about it evident tokens of care and thoughtfulness, expressing their action in association with a



WORCESTER PARIAN.

liberal spirit, and genuine artistic feeling. The more systematic course of action, that has so honourably distinguished the Worcester Porcelain Works during the last half century, and particularly in the latter twenty-five years of that period, has not by any means repressed the enterprising spirit which has made Worcester the scene of many fresh discoveries, and various new modes of treatment. The recent improvements, on the contrary, include many novelties of great interest and importance. Amongst these the honeycomb, or pierced porcelain, introduced in 1846 by the Chamberlains, may be specified as a characteristic example, which has since

continued to be a Worcester speciality. In 1854, a much more important class of new works were added to the Worcester productions. These consist of enamels, executed on porcelain in the style of the celebrated Champlevé metallic enamels of Limoges, but without their thread-like outlines in gold. These very admirable works, which exhibit the same beautiful tints with the enamels of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, have contributed beyond every other recent adaptation of the porcelain manufacture, to elevate the character of our existing ceramic establishments in their Art capacity. The enamels executed after this process have been applied

to various purposes of decoration with complete success, and many are the gems of Art of this class that have already been produced. These enamels are uniformly distinguished by an exquisite delicacy of touch, and that purity and refinement of general treatment which declare them to be the works of artists of rare talent. The author of the finest specimens claims a distinct recognition for his masterly productions, which would unquestionably have been regarded by the old enamellers of Limoges as triumphant expressions of their art. We should not accord justice to this establishment if we omitted honour to the artist—M. BOTT—who princi-

pally paints in this new, interesting, and very important department. He is not the only artist at these "Works" entitled to special mention: there are others whose merits are of the first order, and who are the valuable auxiliaries by which the supremacy of Worcester is maintained. There is no manufacturer in England better qualified to direct such Works than Mr. R. W. BINNS, F.S.A. It is most fortunate that its "Art" is under his direction; and assuredly to him we are largely indebted for the valuable results now universally admitted—that the prosperity of the manufactory at Worcester is secured. To Mr. KERR, also, we must give voice to public approval, for the energy and enterprise he has exercised over his establishment.

The judgment that has selected the subjects of these enamels from modern pictures and works in sculpture, cannot be too highly commended. As a most perfect example both of a consistent subject and of its successful rendering in the Worcester porcelain enamel, we may specify the large plaque, after Ary Scheffer's noble picture of Paulo and Francesca di Rimini, a specimen of which may be seen in the Cera-

mic Court, at the Crystal Palace. In the same case will be found a series of the "Worcester enamels," which exhibits fine and eminently characteristic specimens of every most important variety. These works we commend to the thoughtful study of all persons by whom the Crystal Palace is accessible. They will do well, indeed, to undertake a special pilgrimage to Sydenham for this very purpose. The beautiful material, now well known as "Parian," has not failed to be employed at Worcester, as the vehicle for producing a variety of graceful and attractive works. Others have appeared in which the surfaces exhibit the texture of ivory; and these have been very agreeably treated, in some instances, by the introduction of silver upon parts of the figures and other objects. All these artistic processes have experienced the most generous patronage from Her Majesty the Queen and the Prince Consort, and also from the most distinguished admirers and patrons of ceramic art.

The accompanying engravings represent some of the most admired specimens of Worcester enamels, including vases and patere, coloured and enamelled,

vases of the new ivory body, and candelabra, tazzi, and other objects in parian. The *first* of our series of four groups of Worcester productions comprises a collection of the most beautiful miscellaneous objects that have been executed in the porcelain-enamel; but it does not include the Di Rimini plaque. The plateau in the centre, with chalice, ewer, and dish, may be specially noted for the elegance of their design, and the exquisite skill and finish of their workmanship. A variety of pleasing forms, and of appropriate and effective decorations, is apparent in the *second* group, which consists of objects in painted porcelain. The *third* engraving is devoted to works in parian, and it exhibits several of the productions in this beautiful material that are held in the greatest esteem. The styles of art that appear in these designs are classic and Renaissance. The *fourth* of our engravings is devoted to those various objects of more general use, which have contributed in no slight degree to the high reputation of the Worcester establishment. The Worcester characteristics of fine forms and chaste decorations are clearly apparent in our sketches, though they necessarily fail



WORCESTER ORDINARY PORCELAIN.

to convey any ideas of the rich colouring which is so important an element in the complete effectiveness of these works.

In addition to the new porcelain-enamel, the Ceramic Court, at the Crystal Palace, contains a fine and richly-varied collection of the more choice works produced in porcelain, parian, and other materials at Worcester. The adjoining court, in the occupation of Mr. R. Hawkins, is also entirely devoted to the display, for the purpose of sale, of the more useful varieties of fictile productions, a considerable portion of the whole being from the Worcester establishment. We desire particularly to direct attention to those departments of Mr. Hawkins' varied collection which comprise the less costly works in porcelain, and are such as would provide for the ordinary requirements of domestic use. Here, as well as in the more decorative works of high prices, the same good taste and the same manipulative skill are apparent. In place of any detailed or lengthy descriptions of Mr. Hawkins' section of the Ceramic Court, we prefer to request that our readers will seek from Mr. Hawkins himself the opportunity of examining such

illustrative specimens as will most satisfactorily convey to them correct impressions of the *useful* porcelain of Worcester. They will not readily forget the beautiful forms, the exquisitely tasteful decorations, and the delicate material of the cups and plates, and dishes that will be put into their hands: and their sentiments will be abundantly confirmed by a comparison with the great majority of other works of the same class. This is a matter of the greatest importance, since it is in the more popular productions of any Art-manufacture, and in such as extend their influences far beyond the mansions of the wealthy, that the practical advantages of improved and really beautiful productions are to be most effectively displayed. Thus the public taste is to be cultivated and refined, if it is by any means to become susceptible of cultivation and refinement. Thus also the appliances of daily life are to be elevated into instruments of perpetual gratification, and life itself may derive a charm from the humblest and most unexpected agencies. In the natural world, all is beautiful as well as useful—everywhere the requirements of utility are accom-

plished by the most skilful adaptation of means to the proposed end, and in everything the eye is either soothed or delighted by the beauties of form, or colour, or groupment. We do well, when in the works of our hands we blend together, in the closest union, the useful and the beautiful. In so doing we are following a high precedent, and we are seeking to emulate the noblest of examples, when we regard the trifling appliances of common use as the means for displaying our own sense of external beauty. While, therefore, they point with justifiable and honourable pride to their costly enamels, and their delicate parian, and to the glowing tints of their translucent vases, let the proprietors of the Royal Worcester Porcelain Works continue to bear in mind that fully equal in importance with all of these is the character of their humbler and more useful productions. Here they may address themselves to the community at large, through the length and breadth of the land; here they can command opportunities for imparting fresh graces to ten thousand smiling homes, and thus they may excite, or at least convey, the first healthful stimulus to unnumbered sympathies with Art.