

The Collecting Of Old Lustre Ware---Now Is The Time

BY CONSTANCE CHISHOLM.

AS most amateur collectors specialize on some one survival which most appeals to their interest, an increasing number are found seeking old lustre ware, and as it becomes rarer and harder to find, lustre is now a dominant fad both in England and America.

This is just the time to hunt it successfully, when the vacation outing takes you into the byways of the "really-truly" country and among the descendants of the people who bought the lustre ware in the early days of its coming here. It will be, with rare exceptions, the English lustre of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that you will find, for that is the lustre our forebears used and which has to some extent survived in good condition. The earlier and finer lustre of Italy and Spain is now so rare that all specimens of it have long ago found their way into museums or private collections of millionaires. It is not impossible, however, to happen on a piece of lustre from Holland, Germany or Belgium in certain sections of the country.

One writer and collector claims that the lustre used in the Thirteen Original States, in the early days of our young republic, sent over from the English potteries, rivaled Lowestoft as "best china" in the estimation of our great-grandmothers. All the lustre ware was made by coating the surface of the pottery with metallic solutions, put on with a brush before the last firing. The metals used were gold, platinum and copper, hence there is gold lustre, silver lustre and copper lustre to be hunted, and, in addition, there was made at the Sunderland pottery by some subtle admixture of the solutions a beautiful pink or purple lustre used in touching up raised patterns or ornamentation or put on in a spotted decoration. Pieces ornamented with the pink lustre that shades to purple are now pronounced rare, and Moore says that they are not only as eagerly sought as silver lustre, but sometimes bring a higher price.

The copper lustre was made as early as 1770, so doubtless there was some of it in our homes before the Revolution, though most of it came in after the close of the war. This early copper lustre had as its body or base a coarse earthenware of a brown or reddish color and this was entirely covered with the solution. Later there was a gray body used and sometimes it was pure white, like porcelain. Some pieces were left plain and undecorated except for the coating of lustre, but many were beautified with relief ornament in white or colored by hand. While jugs—as pitchers were then called here and are still called in England—are the pieces the collector is most likely to find, many surviving because of having been kept for ornament merely, there are also to be found tea sets, mugs, goblets, bowls, tankards and many other pieces in ordinary use, though dinner sets were not made of it.

Among the most desirable specimens to be hunted in copper lustre is a Cornwallis jug. One one side is shown the surrender at Yorktown and beneath the picture runs the ingenious inscription "Cornwallis resigning his sword at Yorktown, Oct. 17, 1781." It is evident that the pride of the English potter would not allow him to impress the word "surrendering" on this his-

torical jug even though it was in the American market that he hoped to sell it. There is one of these in the Virginia room at Mount Vernon, brought from England soon after the Revolution by one of Washington's officers named Dangerfield. With what a grim smile these men must have poured bumpers from their Cornwallis jugs!

There was very little gold lustre made, and it is too rare to be considered by the average collector. Silver lustre, introduced in 1785, is now the object of the china hunter's quest, and while not easy to find, Moore tells of having seen 138 pieces gathered together by one English collector. It was made in the first place to imitate silver and followed the sterling silver shapes to some extent, notably the tea sets, ribbed or fluted, in the Queen Anne style. Later the pieces had beautiful decorations in silver lustre on a gray, buff or white ground; usually foliage, fruit or birds.

But your greatest find in silver lustre is a piece of "resist ware." On the white or cream colored ground a design was drawn with a fine brush dipped in an adhesive mixture which "resisted" the application of the lustre when the piece was dipped in the platinum solution. After the lustre had adhered by burning, a second firing burned away the "resist" mixture, leaving

the pattern showing in white or cream. Dyer, the well-known writer and collector, says that fine examples of "resist work" are rare and valuable.

Wedgwood made silver lustre from 1791 till his death in 1795, and his sons continued to make it at the same pottery. It is claimed that he made both gold and copper lustre in 1776. A piece of this would be a trophy worthy of your active pursuit.

You are fortunate if you find an old fruit stand, or compote, of cream-colored ware having a raised design of grapes and leaves touched with silver lustre, or a vase of gray pottery on which is modeled graceful dancing figures in low relief and having at the top and bottom a raised floral ornamentation in silver lustre—that is, if these pieces are genuinely old ones.

About 1800 was the time of the finest lustre wares. A second period of copper lustre came in about 1830, and while these are not equal to the early wares, some of them are well worth having. The second period of silver lustre was from 1840 to 1850, usually a gray body with lustre decorations. Very few pieces of old lustre were marked, though it is known that it was made at Staffordshire, Longton, Sunderland, Leeds, Preston, Pans, Dillwyn, Swansea and other places where the old English potters worked.