

## CHAPTER X

### 'MASTERS' OF PIGMENTING AND THEIR WORK

WITH the close of the last chapter we have concluded our exposition of the technical methods of work and the æsthetic considerations which should guide our endeavours to produce pictorial results which will justify the expenditure of time and labour in acquiring a control of these valuable and significant processes. The reader will have gathered, after reading what has gone before, that the working methods are capable of infinite variation and modification to suit the needs of the individual. By following the concrete directions given, the learner will soon acquire the ability to produce a successful bromoil from a large percentage of prints pigmented. Even in these days of standardization there will be an occasional "waster," and it is naturally not possible to guarantee that every technical success will also be successful from the æsthetic point of view. Experience alone is of value in this case. To the author's knowledge, however, a good many workers who have arrived at this very desirable stage are hesitant as to how to proceed to adapt the process to their own particular inclinations, and it is here that some study of the methods adopted by the acknowledged masters and experts becomes valuable. It is, indeed, fortunate that these highly skilled workers are so ready to detail their own procedures for the benefit of others, because small though the variations from standard practice may be, they are frequently of great importance in securing just that characteristic quality associated with their work. It is probable that the same expedients will not prove in all cases equally useful to others trying to follow in their path, but they will, on the other hand, indicate other lines of thought and experiment which may be profitably followed.

Much of the most original and praiseworthy work in landscape is being done at the present day in Great Britain, and it is therefore not surprising that the great majority of famous workers in the pigment processes are British. We have but to think of such names among the younger generation of photographic artists as Bertram Cox, Arthur Banfield, W. J. Roberts, Murry Barford, A. W. Burgess, Herbert Bairstow, Chris. Symes, and others too numerous to mention, to see how strong is the appeal of Bromoil and Transfer to the English school of photographic landscape workers. That is by no means to say that there are no prominent workers of other nationalities. Otto Kurt Vogelsang, in Germany; Leonard Misonne in Belgium; Puyo, Demachy and De Santeul in France; Arthur Kales and the late Joseph Petrocelli in America have all produced work of the most important class, and a survey of the best work produced in photography would be incomplete without a mention of their names.

The plates illustrating this volume are from recent examples of the work of some of the foremost pigment artists, and they will well repay a little close study in conjunction with the notes contained in this chapter of the methods employed in their production. Plate II, "The Cornfield," by W. J. Roberts, is a typical landscape of the British school, redolent of the traditions of Constable, Turner and the other English landscapists. It is, indeed, true to say that in so far as the monochrome medium allows, Mr. Roberts has achieved a work distinctly comparable to the finest pictures of the brush artists. The author of this picture is himself an accomplished artist with the paint brush, but does most of his work from choice in the photographic medium. The fineness and originality of the composition needs no stressing here, beyond pointing out the important function of the two groups of sheaves, the nearer in shade and the farther in sun, both serving to support and underline the graceful uprights of the trees. A very telling passage is the beautiful distant hillside. This in the original print forms a fascinating point of rest for the eye, the beautiful correctness of the tone values giving a most delightful sense of the freshness and openness of the typical English landscape.

It is a matter for surmise whether these hillsides are photographic or the creation of the brush, but certain it is that the beautiful rendering is in no small part due to the skilful pigmenting.

The student of skies will here find much material for study. This is a hand-worked sky *par excellence*, with the cloud shapes admirably fitted to the compositional scheme of the landscape, and the tones again most adeptly managed. It is entirely to be doubted whether the panchromatic plate and correcting filter would ever yield a sky which, by direct printing, would give the sense of space and luminosity which characterise the original of this fine work. Naturally some of the spontaneity of the bromoil is lost in even the best of reproductions, but Mr. McSymon's hint of viewing the illustrations through a funnel of rolled-up paper will do something to convey the freshness and ease of the original pigmented tones.

Mr. Roberts' methods do not in all respects follow normal lines, and the following notes, kindly supplied at the writer's request, will therefore be of considerable interest. He writes: "I use Barnet paper more than any other, but it is much more difficult to ink up than Kodak or Ilford. I like a soft graded negative which will give a grey print when fully developed with amidol. This is bleached with a chromic acid formula, and dried before inking. I then soak for 5 minutes at 75° F. I use mostly Sinclair's ink. I find I cannot get much ink on at first, but get on what I can in the darks. I then put it back in the soaking water for about two minutes and go on still building up when required. When it begins to get dry again I put in my sky. I very rarely thin my ink even for the sky. Before starting on the sky we should very carefully consider what is required. The sky should be a part of the composition, and can often make or mar the picture. I usually work on the blue portion first, making the pattern to suit the picture. I then work the under parts of cloud forms, being very careful with the values of the lower portions. The print is then put aside until next day, and, the ink being still far from dry, I rub down my sky with a piece of flannel, and with a soft rubber work up the cloud forms and generally tone up the print. This may appear a lot of trouble and

may not suit all, but I, personally, do not like the print to be too literal, and to me working in this way gives more scope of expression. Of course, it does not follow that one gets what one feels every time, and sometimes the medium beats one. To me it is very fascinating, and I do not mind scrapping a few. One final thing is—one must have an idea of what is wanted, such as composition and tone values and colour perspective, and I feel if one is not fairly well up in these matters Bromoil may not be of much use, and there is a great chance of getting away from the truth."

It will be seen that Mr. Roberts, quite rightly, lays great stress on the necessity of knowing what is to be done before starting work, and advises a study of nature and the elements, at any rate, of perspective, values, etc. It is undoubtedly his own knowledge of these matters, coupled with his peculiarly refined sensitivity towards atmospheric effects in natural landscape settings, that gives his works their air of distinction and charm. Technically the most interesting points for the student are Mr. Roberts' preference for working with what is really only a partially soaked matrix, and his method of using hard ink only on even his skies, finishing up with manipulation of the partially dried ink after an interval. In this way he finds himself a little freed from the domination of the minutiae of the photographic image, and more able to infuse a little of his own imagination.

Turning now to Plate III, "Seasonal," by Mr. A. W. Burgess. Here we have an entirely different type of work, from a man with an artistic outlook of quite another kind. Mr. Burgess is imbued with the true spirit of the etcher and mezzotinter. In these processes the direct statement of emotional themes is difficult to achieve, except with sacrifice of much that is strong in these media. Mr. Burgess's work, therefore, relies more for its appeal on beauty of line and a broadly stated tonal scheme than on the sensuous and accurately reproduced subtleties of Mr. Roberts. Of all the bromoil artists now exhibiting Mr. Burgess seems to approach most closely to the position of producing a result which is to be regarded simply as a monochrome art-work, and not necessarily as a photograph.

Another cardinal difference between him and Mr. Roberts is that while all Mr. Roberts' work is in direct bromoil, Mr. Burgess invariably transfers. This is partly the reason for the different type of print which he produces. Transfer lends itself more to broad tonal statements than to the reproduction of tonal subtleties. Another characteristic of Mr. Burgess is his preference for a relatively small scale of print—usually not larger than  $12 \times 10$  inches. In this he is, in the author's view, quite correct. The large scale transfers of Chris. Symes, Bertram Cox and others do not, in the author's opinion, gain so much strength from the characteristics of the transfer process as do prints on a smaller scale. In other words, the advantage of transfer in these large sizes lies rather in the knowledge that the work is quite permanent (due to the absence of possibly unstable gelatine) than in any direct gain in luminosity or character. There will doubtless be many who will contest this view, but it is an aspect which has often been brought before the writer.

Considering the particular print reproduced herewith, it will at once be seen that it is a high-key study, depending for its main strength on an unusual and beautifully worked out composition. The long swirling line of the water edge sets the key to the picture, being doubled over part of its length by the darker line of the vegetation growing on the sand. The central motif of interest consists in the line of huts, the strong position of the last hut but one on the left behind the slightly deeper tone of the bush securing principality. The neat completion of this line by the two dark bathing figures is a point of some moment. It stops the tendency of the eye to roam out along the light-reflecting distant water. In looking at this picture, though, compositional analysis seems but a poor thing beside the genuine breath of invigorating salt air which blows across the scrub-covered sand. One can recall just such partly overcast yet bright mornings, say, at Rye Harbour or some similar small resort. After expressing the view that within limits inks and bleachers are quite subsidiary concerns in bromoil Mr. Burgess says apropos of "Light and Air": "The rendering of light and air effects is particularly suited to the bromoil transfer process. In this respect

probably no other process adopted by photographers can claim its equal. The exquisite white surface, with its accompanying reflective quality of a hand-made drawing paper, such as 'Arnold's Unbleached' employed as the transfer base, gets a start on any ordinary photographic base. Once the necessary skill is acquired in handling the brush, true regard paid to relative tone values—very essential in this class of work—economy of means adopted, minimum of ink employed, the whole expressed in terms of freshness and feeling, the total effect should result in a most acceptable thing of beauty and of a character not entirely dependent upon actual subject matter.

"Recognising these fundamentals these effects are, furthermore, comparatively easy to produce, given correct soaking at a suitable temperature of course. A clean well-gradated print on bromoil paper, decidedly grey, with nothing approaching black anywhere, will be found to bleach readily, and should offer no difficulties in inking. Indeed, such a print should be a sheer delight to approach.

"Great restraint must, however, be exercised, very little ink deposited anywhere, reliance being placed on a second or even a third inking (in parts that call for emphasis) to give added quality."

In some further notes on technical matters Mr. Burgess says: "For about 10 years I used the homely mangle for bromoil transfer (the big old-fashioned article with about 5 inch wooden rollers), and got along very nicely, seeing that I had (and still have) a decided preference for soft inks. An exact replica of the original print was not my objective, but rather I prefer 'loose' or sketchy effects to the literal rendering of the original. I have now, however, obtained an etching press to which has been applied a reduction gear. I used to damp the transfer paper between damp blotting papers inserted between plate glass, but nowadays I do not damp. I do not think there is much to choose between Hot Pressed and Not Surface paper, but I should prefer Not if the surface were as smooth as H.P. I reckon the latter comes out smoother in the same weight. Where a white base is employed I ask for nothing better than Arnold unbleached."

Mr. Burgess's preference for H.P. paper is worth noting, and is directly counter to the opinions of some other eminent practitioners. The use of soft ink in reducing the pressure necessary, and in enabling the use of makeshift pressure appliances, is a point which has already been raised in the text. That quality need not thereby be sacrificed is guaranteed by the high standing of Mr. Burgess's work.

An exhibitor of great merit, who is, however, better known in club circles than to the general public is Mr. Sam Weller. He has contributed Plate IV to this volume, entitled "April's Smiles and Tears." Although the reproduction of this print does not give the luscious quality of the original bromoil, it does convey something of the poetic conception underlying this and all Mr. Weller's work. Here again we have a skilled brush artist forsaking the graphic medium for bromoil, in this case always employed in the direct form, for the sake of the special quality it confers. A feature which distinguishes Mr. Weller's prints from those of most other bromoilers is the superb smoothness of finish which he achieves. By his delicate and sensitive brushwork all trace of grain is eliminated, and the texture becomes almost indistinguishable from that of a bromide print. Some workers would not consider this an advantage, but it suits the character of Mr. Weller's subjects, which are usually of the quietly poetic, sometimes slightly melancholy order.

Mr. Weller's skill in the construction of skies is a particularly strong feature of his work. The present plate demonstrates how the lines of the cloud forms may go to complete the swing of the curves of the landscape, in this case more particularly the lines of the stream banks. In the original, too, the distant trees, with their half-concealed vistas of fields and hills beyond, have been most beautifully handled. There is quite a similarity of feeling between some of Mr. Weller's subjects and those of Mr. Roberts, but the technical methods employed are different.

On the value of the bromoil process Mr. Weller says: "Nature gives us everything with a lavish hand, but in artistic picture making it may be necessary to mass up and simplify the material, and so gain harmony and repose.

It is not suggested that alterations to the photographic drawing of the subject should be attempted in a wholesale manner, but rather that simplification should be sought by reducing unrestful light or dark notes, obliterating disturbing small objects; introducing atmospheric quality into receding planes, and generally massing up the material so that the picture is not a merely mechanical statement of facts, but an artistic representation of the scene, depicting the artist's personal vision and impressions."

On working methods Mr. Weller has a few hints to offer. He prefers Kodak and Wellington bromoil papers, the former especially if inking is to follow directly after tanning and fixing, without intermediate drying. A large number of enlargements are made for subsequent bleaching and tanning; the inking should only be undertaken when in the right mood (this is a very important tip, especially to the more temperamental). Mr. Weller's swelling method is of special interest. He raises the temperature of the final fixing bath, and effects his swelling at this stage. The necessary temperature must, of course, be determined by experiment. About 65° F. suits most papers. Preferably the print is dried after this fixing and a subsequent short wash, as Mr. Weller finds direct inking at this stage leads to difficulties in securing quality and detail in the half-tones. Mr. Weller prefers Sinclair's "Encre Machine" and "Taille Douce" inks, or, alternatively, brown and brown-black colour by the same maker. In most of his pictures a high swelling temperature and a soft ink are used. To obtain a very soft ink for distant planes and similar passages, linseed oil (a mere touch on the end of a match-stick) is frequently used.

Our next plate is entitled "Blue Pool" and is a very impressive landscape by Mr. Murry Barford, one of the most successful exponents of the direct bromoil method. Mr. Barford is a close personal friend of Mr. W. J. Roberts, and although in general his methods of work are similar to those of Mr. Roberts, his outlook is completely different, and his work shows types of subject material which are but rarely handled by the other worker. The present plate is a case in point. The rather large scale landscape here depicted is clearly distinct from the Roberts style of subject,



which mainly relies on lighting effects on trees and homely fields. This subject is typically English landscape, but culled from those parts where nature has run rather more wild, and produced small scale imitations of the grander scenery of the Continent. Here we have one of those low angle lightings which turn all the greens and greys of mid-day to gold and russet, and lend an air of mystery and enchantment to even the most commonplace material. It is in such tonal grandeur that the mighty events of the "Götterdämmerung" took place, and this picture certainly conveys a vivid impression of Wagner's orchestral canvas, to those familiar with the beauties of the sister art.

The glowing walls of the quarry tower up into the clear but ominous sky, in which floats a thunderous suspicion of cloud almost like a fiery chariot. Down below, dimly resplendent in the reflected glory of the dying sun, all is marsh, sedge and sinister clumps of reeds. Just such a place might have witnessed the death throes of a Siegfried; with our West of England traditions in mind, we should certainly not feel astonished to see Excalibur rise from the waters. To resolve such a graphic poem into composition, lines, chiaroscuro and what-not would be an act of vandalism, and we refrain except to emphasize once more the power and force obtained from the massing of dark tones on the right, and the unearthly splendour of the sun glinted reeds—the product of the artist's hand and mind controlling the pigmenting brush.

The technical methods leading to the production of works so resplendent not only from the aesthetic, but also from the purely technical point of view must necessarily be of great interest. Mr. Barford uses Lechertier Barbe ink of ivory black colour, after having tried most available makes. The soaking of the print takes place for ten minutes at 70° F. A square of grease-proof paper is arranged on the damp inking support so that each strip just fits under the edge of the bromoil. In this way, inking may be pushed right to the edges of the picture without the brush picking up water. The hard Lechertier Barbe ink is let down with about one-third its volume of soft ink, and pigmenting is commenced with a large hog hair brush. As far as possible all the tones should be worked up with the ink at the same

consistency by varying the brush strokes. Smaller fitch brushes are used for working up the various dark areas. Mr. Barford allows himself two hours at least to ink a  $12 \times 10$  inch print, and three hours for a  $15 \times 12$  inch. To ensure that the print dries flat, it is placed on a level drawing board and strips of card are pinned parallel with and just overlapping the edges, by means of drawing pins about three inches apart. When dry the print will be free (from cockle. The final "pulling together" of the print is done with rubber and lightly charged brush, after the print is dry. It will be observed that these working methods tally closely with those of Mr. Roberts, but they are directed by another mind, and the results are accordingly correspondingly dissimilar.

Mr. Bertram Cox needs no introduction in the present volume, famous as he is alike for the remarkable quality of his large scale landscapes, as large in conception as they are in size, and for his pioneer work in the formation of a true English school of photographic landscape characterised by the impression of air and space. In Plate VII, "Hexworthy Bridge, Dartmoor," we have a rather more restricted selection of material than was usual in Mr. Cox's earlier pictures, mostly of far-flung stretches of hill, valley, and meadow. Here the artist has concentrated on portraying the luminosity of the water. In the background rises the somewhat sinister slope of a typical moorland hillside, setting off the clear limpidity of the water. The composition is on traditional lines, and what is particularly to be noted is the almost stereoscopic relief with which the bridge stands forth from the receding hillside. The secret of this is Mr. Cox's life-long study of tone values and colour values in nature, and the application of his knowledge during pigmenting. For the achievement of great work like this, the mechanical side of the inking must become almost subconscious, swellings and softening of ink being co-ordinated instinctively to achieve the desired result. For this the only recipe is experience governed by knowledge and observation.

Mr. Cox has of recent years forsaken direct bromoil for transfer, and the present illustration is a transfer on a rather rough cream-toned paper. His reasons for the

change over are firstly, that he finds it easier to secure just that result which he has in mind, by transferring, and secondly, that the transfers do not suffer by abrasion to anything like the extent common to direct bromoils, when being circulated from exhibition to exhibition. This second part is of some practical importance to those workers who submit work to many exhibitions, and transfer undoubtedly confers a certain amount of otherwise unobtainable longevity in this respect. Mr. Cox's methods of pigmenting by re-swelling at increasing temperatures have already been described in this book, and nothing further need be added here on this point. The absolute absence of double texture or tone from Mr. Cox's prints is a thing to note. The perfection of his technique could not have a better testimonial.

Our final illustration is a child study by that prominent portraitist and bromoil enthusiast, Mr. A. C. Banfield. There is an impression abroad amongst many pictorial photographers that bromoils, and especially bromoil transfers, are of necessity dull and vague. The present vivacious child portrait shows that this is very far from the case. Indeed, in portrait work the freedom conferred by the pigmenting processes may prove of especial value. The production of that degree of relief and solidity by what is commonly described by the artists as "losing and finding" is not easy to arrange in a straight print, but in the pigmenting operation its contrivance presents no special difficulties, given the necessary knowledge and skill. Mr. Banfield is, of course, one of the greatest living portraitists, and thus we may take it that he secured all it was possible to get in the negative, but what he could not secure was that freedom and looseness of texture reminiscent of a chalk drawing, which characterises this jolly little transfer. Not all Mr. Banfield's transfers are portraits—indeed the great bulk are landscapes of considerable power and beauty. Also, direct bromoils figure as well as transfers amongst his output, some of these running to very large sizes. A prominent characteristic of Mr. Banfield's landscapes is the great vivacity and truth of the working of the half tones. All his pictures are of a unified and very serious, but not melancholy type, and leave the observer in no two

minds as to the importance of their status in the realm of artistic photography.

In his technical methods Mr. Banfield has well-defined ideas of his own, and these are reflected in the personal quality of his work. He prefers to rely on a moderately soft ink, as this confers greater ease and certainty of transfer. He does not find that the papers of well-known makes which are suitable for direct bromoil are necessarily so for transferring. In fact, in his opinion, and this is backed by a wealth of experience, the most suitable bromide papers, if the ink is to be transferred, are undoubtedly those coated on to a baryta base. These are unsuitable for direct bromoil owing to the poor quality of the ink when drying is complete, but the ink comes away from the matrix with great readiness, and thus makes these papers very easy of employment for transfer. As regards papers for the final transferred image, Mr. Banfield uses quite a variety, including a medium rough machine-made drawing paper, and many other types. Even Japanese tissue he finds amenable to the process, and does not have to resort to waxing or spraying with turpentine. The transfer paper is always used dry.

Two experts in transfer who next call for a note are Chris. Symes and Herbert Bairstow. Mr. Symes's large pictures, mostly of town and building subjects, are justly world-famous, not only for their considerable artistic appeal but also for their brilliance of technical resource. Mr. Symes has a method of rendering the extreme highlights which at once distinguishes his work, and although this is sometimes carried to extremes, in general, it is a particularly pleasing feature of his pictures. Herbert Bairstow is another perfect technician, though making his works upon a somewhat smaller scale, and employing a softer and more poetic handling for his subjects. These range over most types of landscapes, from scenes in the narrow streets of Italian towns to the open coast scenery of Cornwall. In some of his recent work he has produced very pleasing results by the employment of a grey paper instead of the usual white or cream. Similarly, he has tried with success, a process of tinting the paper base of the picture with buff water-colour, leaving a white margin by contrast

round the outer edges. This treatment is very effective indeed.

Probably the most famous exponent of transfer for figure subjects is Mrs. Marietta Ralli. Her pictures are mostly of peasant types taken in various lands, and pigmented in a vigorous, granular style quite peculiar to herself. The transfer base is used damped, according to a published description of her methods. Figure work of another type, also in transfer, has been done by Arthur Kales, an American worker of great skill. Mostly his subjects are nudes, or partly draped figures in a high key. With these subjects he is usually extremely successful, presenting them in a bright and delicate style quite free from sentiment or undue sweetness. The transfer technique is extraordinarily fine.

Before concluding this summary of some of the leading figures in the pigmenting processes, we should perhaps include a mention of the pioneers of such work in France, Messrs. Demachy and Puyo. Demachy, in particular, first made a practicable process of "Oil" and was the inventor of transfer. His artistic work showed wonderful tone quality and strength of handling, and his freedom of execution has never since been equalled. Puyo's work, while equally distinctive is more purely photographic, and tighter in definition. Another outstanding figure arisen more recently in Belgium is M. Misonne, whose landscapes are justly famous. Actually he employs the oil process, and not bromoil, but as the results of the two processes are in themselves indistinguishable, we may logically include them under the same category. Misonne is, perhaps, the greatest master of skies that photography has produced. All his skies are hand-worked, but in such a way that they fit entirely into the pigmenting scheme, and their beauty is frequently so remarkable that they hold the attention by themselves, and the landscape sinks into second place. They are worked up partly on the wet print, but are refined and completed after partial drying.

Many other names might be included in any such estimate of the present position of work produced by the pigment processes, but at best only an outline can be presented here, and book illustrations, however excellent, are not a sub-

stitute for a detailed inspection of the works of the masters of the processes. All those aspiring to success in these media should take every opportunity of visiting the photographic exhibitions at which those works are to be seen. In this way they will see what has already been effected by means of bromoil and transfer, and will be able to set themselves a standard at which to aim.