

## CHAPTER IX

### PIGMENTING FOR PICTORIAL PURPOSES

**The Approach to the Picture.** Probably the great majority of pictures shown in photographic exhibitions are the result of running back over old negatives and working up those which appear to offer the best chance of exploitation. This is rather like an artist running through portfolios of past sketches in search of something to stir his imagination, and act as a peg on which to hang his inspiration of the moment. One of the main purposes of employing such a process as bromoil is to allow a somewhat more positive policy in the production of finished work.

When a little facility in the medium has been achieved it is a good plan to make as many pictures as possible by direct and immediate action under the stimulus of the contact with the actual subject. Having seen the picture in the making, and exposed one or more plates, a few notes, mental or, better, graphic, should be made to assist the mind in recalling later, when pigmenting is attempted, the exact aspect of the subject matter which is to be stressed, and the manner of treatment. A much higher percentage of pictures conceived and executed in this way are really virile and spontaneous, than of those made after a diligent hunt through stocks of negatives. Indeed, it is possible to go one step further with advantage, and to conceive the picture first of all, then rummaging about the countryside, or seeking the right type of model as the case may be, to enable the negatives to be made and used as a base for the final pigmented result.

**Adaptation of Technique to Subject.** According to the type of preconceived picture to be aimed at, the best technique to be adopted will be decided. If a strong and virile rendering of contrasts is appropriate, then it will be

advisable to employ a hard ink and to aim at very direct pigmentation, the original broad massing of the subject under the brush being allowed to remain unsoftened by further work with the same or a more fluid ink. Possibly, too, the decision as to whether to leave the print as a brom-oil or whether to transfer will depend on the presentation of the subject. Further, if a transferred print is desired, the character tint and surface of the paper will play a great rôle in the appeal of the final picture. A vibrant sunlit subject, such as a street scene in some old town like Bruges or Rothenburg, will be best treated with hard ink applied in granular fashion and transferred to a paper of ivory tint (or even white if the whole thing is to be in high key) with a crisp granular surface. A paper such as Allonge is excellent for this purpose.

Taking, on the other hand, a sunlit evening landscape, peaceful in type, with cattle grazing on the reedy banks of pools, an entirely different technique must be adopted. A soft ink, at any rate in the later stages, will give that indefiniteness of outline which adds to the delicate and peaceful mood. Skilful use of the plastic rubber will enable the glints of the setting sun among the reeds to be picked out, while soft ink will allow of a good deal of work being put in on the sky. In some cases the addition of some warm toned ink to the standard brown-black will be suitable with this class of subject.

All sorts of other variants will occur to the enthusiast, and not only will the choice of suitable methods of presentation increase the artistic appeal of the picture at least a hundred per cent., but will contribute to an enormous degree towards the formation of that individual style which should be the aim of every serious worker. It cannot be emphasized too much that the style of presentation of a subject is of at least equal importance with the subject itself, and, indeed, that the works of the great exponents of the process are distinguished more for their manner of presentation than for their choice of subject. This is exactly the same as with the great painters. The subjects of Corot are, in the main, very similar to those of Constable, but what a difference lies in the methods of presentation of the two masters!

Hence, *always have a clear idea, not only of what you are going to do, but of how you are going to do it, before starting a picture.*

**Control.** In the making of any picture worthy of the name, by photographic means, control of a sort is being exercised right throughout the production. The control which we wish to discuss here, however, is of quite a different nature, and much more restricted. It relates mainly to those alterations of tone and form which remove the jarring notes of the negative, and go to complete the more important missing links in the pictorial plan of the subject matter. In general a warning must be given against indiscriminate alterations in the picture yielded by the negative, because alterations of colour of ink and surface texture may easily become apparent, and general falsity of the altered passages is a real danger unless a good deal of knowledge of the appropriate tones in nature is available. Thus, ink forced on to an unwilling base in excess of that normally accepted by the tanned gelatine shows quite an unmistakable quality which at once causes it to betray the careless pigmenter. Again, while it is good to emphasize one point of light as outstanding in the composition, this cannot be done successfully by mere plastering of excess ink all over the picture.

We will proceed at this point to discuss one or two of the most frequently occurring problems in the elimination of the undesirable, and to touch on the best methods of keeping any necessary alterations in leash, so that falsity of effect is not brought about. Trees offer two main difficulties; the toning down of jarring highlights among the foliage, and the elimination of leaves, overhanging boughs, etc. The toning down of jerky highlight spots is best done by means of small brushes charged with soft ink, but if the picture is to be transferred they may be left untouched on the bromoil and worked out with Conté crayon on the finished transfer. Care must be taken, in using the soft ink, to see that this does not spread over on to the surrounding dark tone, or unpleasant rings will be produced, quite difficult to work out again. The elimination of undesirable overhanging boughs and leaves is most easily carried out by shading in making the enlargement. A light

patch in the sky results, which should be prevented from showing definite edges by keeping the shading card moving gently. This light patch may then be filled up during the sky inking, or may even be left slightly lighter than the surrounding areas until the print is dry, and may then be evened up by the use of ink diluted with, say, paraffin, and applied with a lightly charged bromoil brush, or, alternatively, with Conté crayon powder applied with cotton wool in the usual manner. This second method is not so easy to do well enough to escape detection.

In cases where the overhanging parts are not very complicated in structure it may be possible to print them in the usual manner, and either to refrain from pigmenting them, or else remove them after pigmenting, with the plastic rubber. The difficulty in this case is fully to conceal the removal of the boughs and to render the sky tone absolutely even. Against a background of irregular tone the matter is proportionately less difficult.

Another problem of removal which often confronts the worker is the case of unfortunate figures in the mid-distance of street scenes. If the figures are in the foreground nothing very much can be done, but on a moderate scale they may be removed with small brush and plastic rubber, and the background filled in to match the concealed portions, either by adding ink with small brushes, or by allowing the print to dry, and working in with Conté crayon. The addition of small figures may likewise be attempted on a very restricted scale. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that even very small figures can be drawn without a good knowledge of figure drawing. If this is not possessed it will be risky for the bromoilist to attempt very much in this direction. It is likewise well to remember that if the figures are in a sunlit portion of the street, they will themselves have to be worked on in full light and shade. In similar way, there will be cast shadows to be negotiated on the ground, and possibly on walls and other objects.

In the work of the more advanced bromoilists much more ambitious alterations and additions are carried out, and sometimes whole stretches of country are added. The introduction of passages of sunlight into otherwise

cloud-shadowed landscape can frequently be attempted with success, provided the tone values are carefully watched in the light of knowledge resulting from observation.

**Skies.** Many workers who would regard the modifications just discussed as distinctly difficult and risky do not hesitate to carry out the construction of a sky. Yet in reality the working in of clouds is a much more difficult proceeding than any sort of structural modification of the landscape. One of the chief obstacles to success in delineating clouds is their indefiniteness of form. Yet, in spite of this lack of conformity with any regular model, they must necessarily be drawn in correct perspective and in correct tonal relation. Here, indeed, is a problem if ever there was one. Even experienced and trained artists do not find it easy of solution.

In general the "bromoil sky" consists of a few cotton wool-like dabs hopped off the tone representing the blue of the firmament. Although small clouds are to be seen frequently floating in the sky, it will be noticed that these are always illuminated in a complete system of light and shade, and consequently could not be represented by an indefinite shape of light tone.

As a first exercise in getting a little nearer to truth in sky drawing, let the shadowed side of the cloud be deepened to a tone slightly deeper than the blue tint. The change wrought by so simple a means is really quite extraordinary, but here again it is necessary to be careful not to over-model the clouds. This will result in an appearance of too great solidity, reminiscent of the Italian primitives. Actually, the tone differentiations in a normally illuminated cloud system are of the slightest, and far less than would be thought adequate by a beginner. A point particularly to be observed is the lighting of clouds. This must naturally be consistent with that of the landscape, although with a flatly lit landscape a good deal of latitude is possible with the clouds, provided always that these are not strongly sunlit.

There are several ways of securing correctness of skies. In the first place, all problems of hand working may be avoided by utilising cloud negatives and combination printing. It is necessary in this case to print the clouds to

a moderate depth, because if all the tone variations occur right at the top of the paper scale, it will be difficult to secure adequate differentiation in the bromoil. A high degree of swelling and a soft ink will be almost a *sine qua non*. This will usually be the case, even when the sky is being hand-worked.

If this latter course is to be adopted, and if well done, hand-worked skies can be used to tremendous effect in enhancing the value of the landscape, there are one or two methods by which correctness of drawing and tone values may be cultivated. The first is observation of clouds in painted pictures by the great masters. Constable, Gainsborough, Diaz and many modern painters will give excellent material. Secondly, a certain amount of sketching from nature in chalk or pencil will be found quite useful, particularly as regards cloud-shapes. Thirdly, cloud negatives, or rather prints from them, may be used as a guide in the hand-work. This is, perhaps, one of the best methods, except that it will often happen that no really suitable sky is available.

A line of thought may, perhaps, be indicated here in regard to skies, which may serve to lighten the labours of any who feel that the working in of clouds is really beyond them, or is undesirable for other reasons. There is a great wealth of beauty in a perfectly gradated sky bereft of any cloud forms at all. "Perfectly graded," in this connection means more than technically perfect; it means that the gradations must be true to nature in the mood depicted in the bromoil. Thus, a clear sky faintly clouded with haze will assume quite different tone values in relation to the landscape, from a dull even-toned sullen sky. Yet both can be rendered by a suitable gradation of tone, ranging from the medium grey of the zenith to the much lighter values near the horizon. Skies of this sort can be worked by anyone once the bromoil technique of getting clear untroubled inking of large areas of even tone is acquired. This is mainly a matter of perfect care and cleanliness at all stages in handling the print, so that all adventitious unevenness is ruled out. Into such a sky, vague and almost imperceptible lighter areas may be introduced, in positions helpful to the composition, with telling effect. It will be

observed that in all hazy skies in nature such unevennesses, or almost vibrations of note occur.

The question of the relation of the lines of the cloud composition, and of the tone masses of the sky light and shade, to the general scheme of the picture needs very careful consideration. In the contrivance of a worked-in sky the photographer has to do a little constructive manipulation in the sense that he has a plain sheet of paper to work on instead of the partially assimilated material of the negative. To the man with ideas this added freedom will be a continual source of delight, but to him who has not trained his thoughts to fly beyond the trammels of the lens image it may well be a source of embarrassment. One of the stock schemes, which, even in these days of pattern and design in graphic art, is still a tower of strength is to bring the main point of emphasis of the landscape in almost complete silhouette against the lightest area of the sky. The light area may be made to consist of a bank of cumulus cloud, or simply a brightly illuminated area of the general cloud scheme. Alternatively, the tonal scheme of the sky may be quite subsidiary to some more important scheme included in the landscape part, but the *lines* of the sky may be used to complete those of the remainder of the picture. A peaceful horizontal scheme of lines in the landscape will be supplemented by horizontal lines in the sky. The upper half of an elliptical composition may be formed in the sky, the lower curves lying in the landscape. Masses of cumuli lend themselves to inclusion in pyramidal schemes.

The exact methods employed in the construction of a sky may be detailed with advantage. It is not meant to imply that there is only one method of working, but rather to give a method which may serve to introduce the new worker to the possibilities of the situation. It is not a bad plan to commence work by laying in a graduated tone starting from the deepest portion at the top edge and approaching the values of the horizon of the landscape as the joining line is reached. This at once establishes the sense of recession, space and perspective, without which the final sky will appear more like a curtain background. Be careful not to get the top portion too dark, and forget all about blue skies rendered with panchromatic plates and

deep filters. These may or may not be visually correct, but there can be no question that aesthetically they are frequently false.

Having got the evenly gradated tint worked down to a moderately fine grain, decide what type of clouds are to be added. If these are cumuli, raise the tone of the general outline of the main masses by very gentle hopping. Do not, on any account, make the contrasts too great. Remember that as the clouds approach the horizon they are receding from the observer, and get rapidly smaller in scale. Now take careful stock of the direction and angle of the illumination, and raise the tone of the more strongly lit part by removal of ink with one or more of the very small brushes. At the same time apply a very lightly charged brush to the shadowed portions and work in the shaded areas. The clouds will now have assumed an appearance of solidity, and should be carefully reviewed to see that the modelling is not excessive.

At this stage the details may be sharpened up a little by working with the plastic rubber suitably shaped, and by wiping strokes of the small brushes. Only the very highest lights should be touched with the plastic rubber, as this is the most powerful means of accent available. The shaping of the edges of the shadowed parts is done very gently with small brushes and subsequent careful evening with an almost clean larger brush.

After the print is thoroughly dry and hard a good deal of refining work can be done after rubbing down with a soft cloth pad, by means of hard rubber and local application of diluted pigment, or crayon sauce. The rubbing down with the cloth pad is in itself a very good means of getting perfect clarity of tone, and smoothness of texture.

**Grain and Definition.** Two inter-related means of imparting a special character to bromoil prints are the coarseness or fineness of grain, and the sharpness or softness of definition. To a certain extent the two factors are interdependent because sharpness of definition cannot be obtained in conjunction with a coarse grain. The production of a controlled degree of granularity in pigmenting bromoil prints is a sign of complete mastery of the processes. In



the finest work produced in the medium the grain is entirely suited to the style and manner of treatment of the subject. To cite two workers whose characteristic treatment of their material depends largely on the production of a quite individual granularity, we may mention the names of Otto Kurt Vogelsang, and Mrs. Marietta Ralli. The former artist achieves an almost brutal strength of effect by employing a very coarse, but exceedingly beautiful, because deliberately controlled, grain, while Mrs. Ralli achieves a quality of image, finer in grain it is true, but quite different in effect, and equally individual.

The first essential for the production of even grain is an absolutely spontaneous pigmenting. The brush must be evenly charged, must deposit its ink in position on the paper at the first application, and must then be removed for good. Any laborious working on portions of the picture to bring out detail or coax tone values will at once produce a finer stipple, and make the coarser portions look unpleasant by contrast. It is, therefore, necessary to get the print to the exact degree of swelling to suit the ink in use, and pigmenting should not be commenced until such is found to be the case on trial on a small and inconspicuous portion of the print. If a finer grain is to be aimed at, more working on the print will be possible, but in order to avoid losing the grain altogether by merging into a continuous tone, the ink should be used as hard as possible. Soft ink naturally shows a much greater tendency to run together than does the less fluid consistency. Something of which to beware in producing prints of a granular description is undersoaking. The grain appears all right in this case, but is forced upon the bromoilist because of his inability to get the ink on to the print except by sheer force of brush work. It is accompanied by a very unpleasant greyish (or on cream paper, yellowish) tint in the darker passages, which utterly ruins the quality of the result.

A very delightful type of work may be produced by pigmenting in the usual manner, and evening down the work to a fine grained smooth texture, and then superposing upon this an even stipple produced by inking over with a very soft ink applied lightly with a fully charged brush.

The idea is not to attempt to get the ink to take in proportion to the image but to get an all-over stipple of unworked ink. Any attempt at smoothing out will be fatal, and everything depends on the first-off production of an even tone in stipple. It requires very considerable skill to bring this off, but the results are very fine, and, in any case, if failure is the outcome it will not be difficult to work in the soft ink without detriment to the tones of the smooth-worked image, which will then have to be accepted *faute de mieux*.

The question of definition is again associated with ease of pigmenting. If the image has to be laboriously worked up fine definition is the inevitable result, except in so far as it may be blurred over by subsequent treatment with very soft ink. Generally speaking, if a smoothly inked, softly defined result is desired it is best to start with a moderately high degree of swelling, and to work with soft ink from the beginning. If hard ink is to be used, looseness of definition is only to be obtained if the pigmenting be carried out in a spontaneous and rather grainy style. This, of course, may be equally fine for some subjects and effects. An exceptionally pleasing result may be secured by pigmenting in loose style, but with occasional passages of tighter crisper definition at the points of interest. This is quite a well-known trick in certain styles of painting, and can be worked with considerable success in monochrome. In fact, to a limited degree, it supplies that element of appeal which is contributed in graphic work by the variations in quality of line which distinguish the work of the best artists. However, only a limited amount of scope is available in this direction by photographic means. The *modus operandi* will, of course, be to pigment the whole print first of all in a loose vibrant style, and then to tighten up the definition of the selected parts by gentle working of the ink, or even by judicious hopping. This latter can form a most valuable means for securing sharp definition over small areas. The hopping will, of course, be carried out with a moderately well charged brush, as general lightening of tone is not desired, but rather removal of ink from the lights and depositing on the darks. In general the well-defined points will occur in the foreground of

landscapes, but some fascinating experiments can be made in the direction of sharpening up the interesting spots of the distant planes. Likewise, the sharpening of the head and face of a portrait will at once suggest itself as a particularly valuable application of this method.

#### THE PIGMENTING OF A REPRESENTATIVE SUBJECT

In order to see how some of the considerations which have been discussed in this chapter actually come in in practice, it will be useful to deal with a concrete example of the pigmenting of a typical subject, in this case the main street of an old-world and exceedingly picturesque village. The type of bromide print yielded by the negative is seen in Plate VIA, while the bromoil which the author made therefrom is reproduced in Plate VIB. This example is specially chosen to show how the few simple modifications of tone which have been introduced have given it a style and interest not possessed in anything like the same degree by the straight print, and also to point out how the pigmenting may give a definite character to the picture, which could not appear in the bromide print, because this is necessarily a pure record of the scene.

When the exposure was made the street was quite evenly illuminated by a rather dull and overcast sky. There was no opportunity to wait for favourable lighting effects, which would not have been available on the day in question. The exposure was a full one, and development was calculated to yield a soft and well-graded negative, with plenty of detail all over. If every tone and object which can possibly be wanted in the final print is caught and recorded on the plate, then the production of the result entails only the suppression of what is not wanted. A soft and greyish print was made from the negative, on a smooth cream bromoil paper, and was developed to a factor of 10 in the standard amidol developer given. This was not fixed, but was treated by the abbreviated method, being merely rinsed free from developer, bleached, tanned, washed for 30 minutes, fixed in 10% hypo, and finally washed for 20 minutes. The size of the original print was kept down to 10" x 8", as it was judged that such a subject, in which

the quaintness of the old street was the leading feature, would not be suited by a greater degree of enlargement.

In planning the tonal scheme of the picture, use was made of a rough charcoal sketch, and it was decided to concentrate on the light-toned half timber cottage on the right. This threw the main point of interest a little too far to the side, so that the taller house beyond, with the stone steps in front was included in the same contrasty tonal scheme, and fused into a single mass with the cottage. The contrast of tone of the dark roofs secured ample predominance for this point of the composition. Without some balancing tonal mass this would lead to a lopsided arrangement, so that the buildings on the left were marked down for emphasis. This would also help the recession of planes by throwing back the end of the street.

With so much decided, the inking was started. The paper was swollen at 70° F., and pigmenting was commenced with a 1½" fitch brush lightly charged with Sinclair's Brown-black ink. Only the dark buildings on the left, the cottages as far as the tall house on the right, and the near foreground of roadway were touched at this stage, but these were worked up until the differentiation of shadow tones was judged satisfactorily rich. A full deposit of hard ink was got on to the shadows of the white cottage and the house beyond, but the whites were kept quite clean by gently hopping with a clean small brush. At this point the print was beginning to dry, and to take ink more evenly, so that a re-soaking was decided upon. This was carried out for two or three minutes at the same temperature, no extra relief being sought for.

Inking was now resumed after allowing the dabbed off print to dry a little on the inking pad (it is a mistake to try to start inking too soon after a soaking, as if the ink is soft enough to take at once it will soon be too soft as the image dries) with an ink slightly thinned with Roberson's medium. This was chosen because it dries rapidly, and leaves shadows with a beautiful glossy depth. The softer ink was first worked over the already inked portions, giving new depth and sparkle to the shadows. When it was found to be taking easily and without too much contrast, it was carried over the more distant parts of the

street. Great care was taken not to introduce any vigour into the brushwork on these parts as all the tones had to be kept subdued to give the effect of distance.

Having got thus far, the picture was more or less like the bromide, except that the sky had not been touched, and the near cottage stood out more brightly. The ink was now made very soft indeed; so soft that if applied with a full brush it would have easily taken all over these parts where any image existed. The brush was charged very lightly indeed, carefully evened up on the palette, and was then practically cleaned on a sheet of writing paper. In this condition it was used to work up a graduated tint over the sky, starting at the top, and carefully working downwards, always cleaning the brush off well before using it on the print. The sky tone was worked right down over the houses, so that no join shows. The distant cottages and trees were similarly toned down and pushed farther back in the receding planes. The near shadows were given quite a liberal treatment with the dilute ink, to enhance still farther their depth and richness. The whole picture was now complete, and was thereupon put back in water at a slightly higher temperature prior to the final touching up.

After a few minutes' soak, during which the whole picture was well turned over in the mind's eye, the print was once more replaced on the inking support, and dabbed off very carefully. Even so, a few marks developed which were worked out with a lightly charged brush. The tone of the near cottage was once more hopped up to its true brightness, with a clean brush, and the little balancing highlight down the street was introduced on a more gentle scale. The streak of faint sunlight was put in with a small brush to provide a horizontal motif binding the two sides of the composition, which were tending to drift apart. Faint catch lights were put in on the far distant inn, and the sky tone near the hills on the horizon and over the houses was lightened, producing a recession in the sky plane. Reluctantly the brush was put down, it being realised that the end had been secured and the pleasant task achieved.

The quaintness of the village street, it is thought, had been brought out in a manner not found in the bromide print, nor present in the subject when taken (owing to the

dull matter-of-fact lighting). The faintly reflected glow of a setting sun had lent an air of quiet content and tranquillity which, as a matter of fact, does characterise this pleasant old place at such times, and which was present in the author's mind when he saw the street for the first time, when the negative was made. The negative gave the material ingredients of subject matter; the photographer's imagination supplied the guess at what the place would be like under more attractive conditions of light; the bromoil process allowed the photographer to graft his imagination on to the hard facts, and make what the reader may or may not consider is a work of art, but must at any rate admit, is a personal presentation, containing some elements not intrinsically associated with the original scene.