TREES

AND HOW TO PAINT THEM IN WATERCOLOURS

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From an original book by W.H.J. Boot 1883

RLB-Publishing
52, New Street,
Milnsbridge,
Huddersfield.
HD3 4LD.
England.

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TREES AND HOW TO PAINT THEM IN WATER-COLOURS

"I DON'T know how it is, but I can't do trees" is a remark an artist frequently hears; and it is too often justified by the poor and crude attempts at tree painting that accompany it.

And to the regretful exclamation perhaps something is added about "want of knack" the "right sort of touch" as though, in order to successfully draw or paint a tree (as distinct from the painting of any other object) some extraordinary gift or sleight of hand were necessary, some special cleverness of manipulation that should enable its possessor to accomplish "tree-work" perhaps without effort, and certainly without very much study.

"I'm very fond of out-door sketching, nothing is so nice; and although I love trees, and have tried to paint them many times, somehow or other I can't manage it," continues the disconsolate artist. This idea of natural inability in regard to tree-painting perhaps becomes in him a settled conviction and he goes floundering on for of course he cannot give up his sketching, blotting in his trees with meaningless and inartistic dabs (which by-and-by become his recipe) and from this very hopelessness, making little or no attempt at reproducing the forms, which, as a matter of fact, he sees quite plainly, and is perfectly conscious of.

Now, this theory of spontaneous foliage-cleverness we entirely disagree with. Of course a natural love of art is quite essential to success in any kind of painting, but we hold that, given the artistic ability, it is just as capable of being turned in the direction of tree-painting as in any other; and with success, if only the study of tree form be set about in a right manner and with conviction.

"Freedom of handling" we are told, and "lightness of touch" are necessary to tree-painting. This is undoubtedly true, for a tree is an object that is continually on the move, swayed by the wind first one way and then the other and through which a bird can fly. It is only with certain dexterity that this appearance of life and motion can be given.

But "freedom of handling" is only another name for that sureness of brush which results from practice, and from the knowledge obtained by the mastery of the subject from its elemental stages upwards. When painting a tree it should always be kept in mind and never forgotten, that it is a tree, composed of delicate, feathery leaves, and not a solid, immovable substance like brick or stone. It ought to be the painter's aim to portray the quality and material of the tree as well as its form and colour.

Remembering these all-important matters, the dexterity will come in time; and to the sketcher who has tried and failed and to the novice who is not yet conscious of his power and is uncertain how to shape his course or what method to pursue, we would say, "Start at the beginning; do not think any bit of tree form too trivial for study, or any labour too great.

In this book we are learning to paint trees in water-colour, but we would advise the pupil, in order to make himself thoroughly conversant with the character and formation of the different kinds, to execute careful studies of them with pen and ink and under all conditions of leafage.

By this means, as he has no medium but black and white to work with. He learns to draw, which is the very first essential in painting, and to see and look for form, without which all his efforts in colour will be unsatisfactory and disappointing.

We know of no help to tree-painting superior, or even equal, to this practice with the pen and we would strongly urge the pupil to pursue it simultaneously with his work in colour: not, however, confining himself simply to trees in leaf, but making drawings of them at all times of the year, even when they are quite empty of leaves.

Let him take a tree in winter and anatomize it, drawing carefully the trunk and all the intricate ramifications of branch and twig, noting, its various and peculiar characteristics of growth; then with the coming of spring let him draw it with its myriad of bursting buds; in summer, its grand masses of foliage, and its half-clothed frame in autumn; and we are sure he will have gained a practical knowledge of tree form, to which he would never have attained had he been content simply to try to paint the tree in summer, in almost utter ignorance of what its skeleton was like.

We attach the greatest possible importance to winter study, for when a tree stands mapped out in all its nakedness against the sky, and every line of it can be followed from root to tip of the furthest branch, its distinctive appearance and shape can be readily seized upon, and set down. We may note the difference of growth of the different species; the wordy, stubborn zigzags of the Oak can be compared with, say, the dignified beauty of the Elm, or the flowing graceful lines of the Ash.

In making pen and ink studies, which we think you will find extremely fascinating work, ordinary ink and note-paper may be used, but liquid Indian ink and Bristol board are better; Indian ink flows evenly and Bristol board always preserves a nice flat surface to work upon, and does not “crinkle”. As for pens, any kind will do. When drawing the trunk and larger branches of a tree, a broad-nibbed pen is very useful.

As we do not intend to enter into the very wide field of landscape painting generally, but only to give a few hints on sketching trees, we shall endeavour to make our remarks as simple and practical as possible, avoiding diffuseness; and following, up this idea of simplicity, we would recommend the use of only such materials as are quite necessary to the work, not overburdening the palette with colours we do not want. But first, we should perhaps talk about the different kinds of paper. Of course hand-made papers are those invariably used, but the ordinary kinds, which can be purchased at any good craft shop, are good enough. We would not recommend the hot-pressed, smooth paper, (although for certain purposes it would be excellent to work with) nor the very rough paper, but one having a fairly smooth surface, and not showing too much tooth, in fact, one we would call a "medium paper". Sketching books are now very much used, and can be bought in any size and texture from A8 to A4. When it is only intended to make small drawings, these books are excellent, and possess the advantage of being always ready to work upon, but for large drawings it is better to buy the paper by the sheet or get yourself an A1 or A2 size sketchpad.

Now when it comes to the colours, lots of pigments are not necessary for good work, but very frequently a hindrance and distraction. The aim should be to obtain as wide a range of colours, with as few intermediate tints as possible; half-tones and greys can be readily made by mixing one colour with another.

We think the following palette will be sufficiently wide in scope to satisfy the requirements of even the most ambitious sketcher:-

Lemon Yellow	Vermilion	Indigo
Gamboge	Rose, or Pink Madder	Raw Umber
Indian Yellow	Light Red	Madder Brown
Yellow Ochre	Cobalt	Vandyke Brown
Raw Sienna	Antwerp, or Prussian Blue	Sepia
Burnt Sienna	French Ultramarine	Black

Moist colours are the best, and the ordinary folding japanned sketching-box the most portable and handy.

Each colour should have its appointed place in the box, and we would recommend the same order of arrangement as is observed in the list above.

For the more experienced, sable brushes are those used for water-colour painting: we prefer the red sable, as we think it rather firmer and more elastic than the black, but there is little difference between them. Large brushes are better than small, we do not mean in quality, but to work with and give fuller and more satisfactory touches. Sable

brushes are not a necessity though and quality brushes can be purchased from most good craft shops.

An HB pencil is perhaps the best for outlining. B is too black, and can dirty the paper, while H is too hard, and is prone to scratch, although it is nicer in tone than HB.

Having now settled on the tools and paints we need, the first tree to which we shall turn our attention will be the Oak. We have selected it because it is capable of bolder treatment than any of the others of which we give examples, as its foliage is not so delicate a character as that of the others. It is a great tree for the pupil to begin with.

THE OAK

IT is generally considered that of all English trees the Oak is the noblest, by reason of its great size, strength, and rugged beauty; and from the days of its sapling youth to the period of its old age and decay, in all seasons and under all circumstances, it is picturesque and paintable.

We will first make a study of the trunk. Our sketch was done in Richmond Park, which contains many fine specimens of the Oak and is an excellent sketching ground for those who live in London. The trunk of the Oak is usually an excellent object for study and although all Oak stems bear, of course, a striking resemblance to each other, it

is quite surprising how much variety of form and growth they present. Sometimes the trunk rises from the ground in one straight stem, and is hardly to be distinguished, either in form or colour, from that of the Elm, while at other times it will, as in our sketch, divide itself near its base, sending out several huge limbs, any one of which would seem to be strong enough for an ordinary good-sized tree. Frequently little or no root is seen, and just as often the roots show well above the earth for several yards around. The colour too of the Oak stem varies a good deal. In one case it may be a simple dull grey, unrelieved by any expression of definite colour, and in another almost every hue and tint, from purple to orange, appears to find a place.

But returning to the immediate subject of our sketch, let us imagine that we are seated in front of the tree itself. After settling how much of it we intend to paint, we must take great care to get the proportions correct (the width as compared with the height) and until this is done we need pay no attention to the details of the outline. This matter of proportion is really our first priority, for however much detail we put into our sketch, it will never look right until our proportions are true. In passing, we may mention that it is as well not to use the lead-pencil more than is absolutely necessary, as random lines are seldom helpful, and spoil the surface of the paper.

Before beginning to colour, it may be necessary to slightly damp the paper, in order to induce it to receive the colour comfortably; but of course this proceeding may be dispensed with when the paper shows no sign of resistance.

In our first wash, we start with the lightest patch of grey, which is got with cobalt, pink madder, and a little yellow ochre, and putting this down as near to the colour of nature as we can get it, and observing its form, we proceed with the different tones by which it is surrounded, and so on with the other tints, until the whole is filled in.

Sometimes a piece of tone will be so strongly marked-that is to say, its edges will be so clearly defined-that it will be necessary to allow the colour to dry before we work up to it; at other times, one tone will graduate itself into another so imperceptibly that the two may be fused as we go along. The different degrees of grey will be readily obtained by adding now a little of one colour, then another, warm or cold as occasion may require, to those we commenced with. On one side of the trunk we get a dark purplish-grey, when cobalt and light red or pink madder are useful; in other parts yellow is a rather predominating influence.

Some very pretty greys are made with the different yellows and black, adding reds and blues in the various degrees of strength, which may seem necessary.

But in this first painting, as indeed, in all stages of the sketch up to its completion, we must strive to give an impression of the general tone of the object we are engaged with; if this is neglected we shall be sure to exaggerate certain bits of colour, or light and shade, and get patchiness, instead of breadth, and naturalness.

When we put down our first touch of colour, it looked almost too heavy, but now that we have got in the whole mass we find it appears quite weak, and will require strengthening; even the parts in the brightest light will have to be made stronger.

Before we proceed in this direction, however, we will indicate the shadows, and try to get a little idea of the roundness of the tree; and when these darker parts are put in our first painting will look even more flimsy and thin. But as we progress with our second painting a good deal more fullness of colour will ensue, and we must be careful, in getting strength, not to lose light, without which the drawing will look heavy and lifeless.

From this point onwards we have the nicest portion of the work. Every touch now seems to "tell" and while still persevering in our efforts to get tone, and the relative values of light and dark, we may begin to put in little bits of detail, and the markings of the bark; and as, of course, our success or failure in having caught the character of the tree will depend in great measure upon the way in which the bark is painted. Great care must be taken with it. The grain of the bark must be accurately drawn and to make our tree look round we must be careful to give the perspective of the grain. The markings will appear widest just opposite to the eye and diminish as they recede and it will be noted that they are darkest where they come against the strongest light. We have now got so far with our sketch that the finishing touches will come rapidly on.

Here perhaps the colour is a little crude, and wants grey breaking over it; there it may be too neutral and will want a little more richness; the greenness of this moss must be intensified, while that light will have to be heightened; and looking at our darkest pieces of tone, we must be sure that they are of the right strength, as compared with our brightest lights.

Our sketch should now be a fair representation of the original, and have about it a solidity and look of realism, which only serious work from nature can ever possess.

We have not yet said anything in regard to the foliage: that portion of the tree which is always found so difficult to paint and which must, of course, be set about in just the same careful manner that we have observed in our study of the trunk.

In the following illustration on the next page, the trunk and foliage are part and parcel of the same drawing and indeed, in making a study of the trunk of a tree, leaves will nearly always come into the composition, and the two will naturally be proceeded with together, but we have preferred, for the sake of clearness and to avoid confusion, to treat the painting of the trunk and foliage as separate matters.

It has been the common practice for certain drawing masters to recommend this or that particular stroke for this or that particular kind of foliage; but if we are ever to paint a tree, and make it look like a tree, and like the tree we intend it for, we must entirely discard and set aside all fabled and fallacious ideas whatsoever of artificial tree manufacture. We must not think of our strokes or flourishes at all, or consider whether they are artistic or inartistic. Let us try to draw what we see; and to do any good we must pin ourselves down to the hard facts of drawing.

We take a single spray of foliage of a dozen leaves of any tree, say the Oak, and hang it up against a light background, and what do we see? Why, as a matter of drawing, there are no two leaves alike. One leaf shows flat with its face towards us, another gives us only its edge, thin and cutting like a knife; and between the two extremes we have the whole range and gamut of foreshortening and perspective. We shall find that nothing save real drawing, doing the thing bit by bit; quite unconscious of any acquired "stroke" will be better for us.

This plan of drawing leaves (making close studies of them) either in pen and ink, or with pencil, or in colour, will help us to know the tree, and in a little while we shall discover that we are better able to draw a whole branch, and get something of its swing and lightness and character. It follows that as this branch is one of the many that go to make the whole tree, we shall have done something towards the mastery of the entire leafy structure.

In the painting we have commenced, Antwerp Blue and Gambol will give us the brightest greens we shall be likely to want, and the same blue and Raw Sienna, the darkest. Cobalt and Raw Sienna, and Cobalt and Yellow Ochre, will make pleasant greens, and of course these may be varied, when necessary, with, perhaps, touches of Burnt Sienna or Indian Yellow, Black, or Vandyke Brown.

We do not propose to do more than give simple indications of the way a few of the primary tints are obtained, as the pupil will soon find out for themselves what colour a certain combination of pigments will produce. Indeed, for the numerous greys and half-tones it would be quite impossible to give written instructions, as so much depends upon the different quantities of the colours used and the way they are mixed.

We will paint first the leaves in the strongest light, as nearly up to their full strength as possible, for if we get the form right we shall not want to disturb or damage it by too frequent painting over. And to get the form, we must make our touches as definite as possible, striving to make each movement of the brush express drawing.

Of course, this first painting will not be with one unbroken wash of green; we may vary it gently, as we go on, with the grey reflected lights that play about the leaves, and with suggestions of the little changes of local colour. We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that we are here painting somewhat of a *mass* of foliage and not single leaves, forgetting, in our efforts to obtain drawing and detail, the breadth and general form of the mass.

Having painted in the light parts of the foliage, we add the branches, and connect, by means of the smaller stems and twigs, the various detached sprays of leafage. Then we proceed with the darker parts, giving, as our colour dries, strength in one place, detail in another, till the whole is finished.

The light and shade of the masses is strong and well defined in the Oak, and there is a twisted angularity about the branches of which we cannot be oblivious to. The leaves, which, being somewhat bright and polished of surface, carry a good deal of reflected light and are always a pleasant colour. In the spring, following the buds warm yellow, they are a light delicate green, which becomes much fuller, but greyer, with summer, while in the autumn they are usually very rich in tone, yellow and orange and perhaps even reddish in colour.

The pupil will, of course, understand, that although we have so far been engaged only with the Oak, the method of procedure will be the same in all cases, whatever tree we may happen to be painting, and we have given, in dealing with the whole tree, examples of the work in two stages, which will, we trust, in some measure, speak for themselves, and be of more assistance than the repetition of instruction that would perhaps have been necessary if this plan had not been adopted.

Following the same principles in painting the entire tree that have guided us so far, we will, before passing from the Oak to the Elm, and so on, permit ourselves one or two last general remarks.

In making our outline, we should not sketch or paint what we do not see: that is to say, where the course of a stem or branch is hidden by the foliage in front of it, we should make no attempt to follow it. Let us draw it as far as we can see it, leaving it when it becomes hidden from view, and taking it up again where it emerges from behind the leaves. Where we get a strong dark marking, we had better fix it accurately, and with decision, as it will serve as a guide to our quantities and spaces. We have sometimes seen a tree in full leaf outlined as though it were quite bare, and the leaves added afterwards, but we hold that this method is wrong, and for the reason that as no two branches of a tree are alike although, of course, all preserve the individuality of their species, it is merely guess-work and can serve no useful purpose to draw them where they are not visible.

It will be observed that in these studies of the complete tree, the sketch is carried as far as possible with the first wash, and that all the large masses are put in simply and broadly, and we would stress to the pupil the great importance of always striving to keep the mass, and avoid cutting it up with too much detail. It is the mass, and not individual leaves, that strikes us most forcibly when a tree is seen at the distance necessary for us to paint the whole of it, and although individual leaves may be detected if they are looked for, it would be an almost impossible task for us to paint them, and yet preserve the mass, and get anything approaching the breadth of treatment.

A "first" and "second" painting have several times been mentioned, but we do not mean to imply that a sketch of necessity requires only two, or, indeed, any definite number of courses. If the work looks right at first, then let it stand (do not disturb it) but it very rarely happens that way and we make the distinction between "first" and "second" paintings because it is almost imperative that the first lay-in should be allowed to dry before the study is proceeded with. And it must be carried on till it looks right, however many paintings it may require.

One more word in reference to *roundness*. Of course the foreshortening of those branches which come out towards us will be more apparent in near than in distant views; but our tree should never look as though it had been flattened out between the pages of a book, or as though the branches sprang only from two opposite sides of the stem.

Sometimes, when finishing a drawing, it will be found necessary to introduce a few high lights, or brighten those already there; indeed, it may be desirable to take out a portion of the work altogether; and this can easily be done by wetting the part with the brush and taking off the colour with a piece of blotting-paper, or when this means is not effective, a smart wipe with a clean paint-rag will bring away as much as we want to remove. But it will be much better for us to make up

our minds what we are going to do before we begin to colour than to trust too much to washing out, for, once lost, the whiteness and brilliancy of the paper can never be recovered. It is not at all an uncommon thing for the highlights to be put in with body colour usually Chinese White but we do not recommend the practice, as it is apt to make a drawing look "chalky" and destroy that transparency of tone which is one of the most charming qualities of water-colour work.

THE ELM

THIS tree is always a favourite with the painter.
It sometimes rises to quite a stately height, and is usually well proportioned and picturesque. The trunk, being strongly marked and agreeable in colour, makes a very good and pleasing subject. The roots frequently show in a very striking manner, particularly when the tree grows on uneven ground and are quite irresistible. The branches take easy flowing lines, and the lower ones often send out pendants of light foliage, which move gracefully with every breath of air.

The leaves are of a dull green in summer, but late in the year are richer in tint sometimes, indeed, quite yellow. They mass well, giving good broad surfaces of light and shade.

THE ASH

THE gracefulness of the Ash stands out in marked contrast to the characteristics of the tree we chose for our first study, but we trust that our practice with that and the Elm, has in some measure prepared us for the more delicate beauty of certainly one of the loveliest of the many trees of which England is so justly proud.

The foliage, drooping and lightsome, will be found somewhat difficult to render, and we would advise the pupil to make very careful studies, first of single sprays, and then of clusters of leaves. The delicacy of the colour of the foliage a greyish green seems in perfect consonance with its form; in the autumn it changes to a very luscious yellow-green.

The stem of the tree is a pearly grey, often enlivened with bright patches of lichen and moss; and the markings of the bark are distinct but not very deeply incised.

THE SCOTCH FIR

As "variety is charming," we will now take a tree in most respects the very antithesis of the last. The foliage is dark and heavy-looking, of a bluish-green tint, and is composed of an infinity of long, thin, sharp leaves which grow on the upper side of the branches, and, we believe, fall every fifth year. The trunk is straight until it nears the top, when it frequently becomes twisted and bent, and the branches being exceedingly picturesque and fantastic, form a very interesting study for the draughtsman. The bark is of a scaly character, the furrows a reddish tint, and the scales a bluish-grey. Towards the top, the trunk is much smoother and redder than at the base.

THE WILLOW

WHEREVER we find water, we naturally expect to see the Willow, though happily it does not confine itself to the edges of ponds and streams. It is always a picturesque object, with its stunted polarised trunk, and its shimmer of cool, silvery-grey foliage. The bark is somewhat strongly marked, and is usually warmish-grey in colour, with, frequently, splashes of moss about it. The branches are long, pliant, and delicate, and it is very pretty study to paint a network of loose willow foliage on a grey cloudy sky, or coming against a dark background. In painting it in the mass, and at a little distance, it is not possible to get all the details of leafage. The general form must be scumbled in, and a few of the most prominent outside leaves delicately indicated; to give point and meaning to the whole.

THE BEECH

ONE of the most handsome of trees, surely.

It varies a little in its manner of growth, sometimes being seen rising in quite perpendicular fashion to a great height, at others parting its stem not far from the ground. The bark is smooth and rind-like, and the branches are long and attenuated. The trunk is usually very picturesque and excellent practice. It is of a slaty, but very pretty grey, and is often adorned with brilliantly coloured lichens and moss. The foliage is somewhat strata-like in character, and has a very glossy appearance. In the autumn it is vivid with yellow, which, glowing into brightest red, dies a russet brown. The buds in spring are a refined suggestion of the later glory of the leaves.