

AN EARLY REFERENCE TO CHINA MAKING.

By A. L. THORPE.

THERE has recently been deposited in the County Record Office of the Hertfordshire County Council a number of papers relating to the Cowper family including a series of letters written by the second Earl Cowper (1709-1764) to his sister whilst he was on tour of England in the autumn of 1728. In a letter from Derby dated 22nd September 1728 there is a postscript which reads: "I have bespoke a set of China from the Man who makes it here in England."

Now this sentence is at once interesting, puzzling and tantalising. It is of great interest not only because it is much the earliest reference to the manufacture of ceramic ware (either pottery or porcelain) in Derby but also because if it really does refer to china, i.e. porcelain and not to glazed stone-ware which from the end of the 17th century to almost the middle of the 18th century, was often called, or perhaps we might say "claimed as" porcelain, then it is the earliest known reference to china making in England. The earliest known pieces are those of the Bow factory in 1744 and Chelsea in 1745. It is puzzling to understand what the writer can mean by the words "the Man who makes it here in England". On the face of it one could conclude that china was only made at one place in England and that was Derby. But if a man with the secret of china making, either the true oriental hard paste porcelain or even the English soft paste variety, came to England in or before 1728 why should he come to Derby? Or was a native of Derby the first man in England to make china? And how tantalising that the Earl did not go on to give the name of the man and some description of his wares. Unfortunately, search into family papers of the period and inspection of the large collection of 18th century china still in the possession of the family sheds no light on the mystery.