

## EMBOSSED LEATHER WORK.

IN proposing a work but little known in England as one that can be made available for helping the helpless, it may seem at first sight to lie open to the objection of being too artistic and too difficult for workhouse-pupils, but anyone who has learnt the process will be able to vouch for its simplicity and the many advantages it can claim. Any lady visitor to the "Idle-room" wards of a workhouse can see for themselves that some of the men retain all their mental faculties, and their infirmities, such as heart complaints, abscesses in the feet, or other bodily afflictions, are not of a nature to prevent their using their hands and minds when they are feeling a little easier from their incurable maladies. These moments or days free from pain are not sufficiently certain to enable them to leave the workhouse or earn much towards their own support, but they are long enough to give them time to learn to use their hands, and thus while away the tedious hours spent in a room where there are no amusements, and where a newspaper is as rare a visitor as a pinch of tobacco. In such a ward lately visited by the writer the men were found in several cases to be under forty-five years of age, and to have been carpenters, soldiers, and stone-masons. All these men's hands were supple from the use of tools or from indoor work, and they were quite capable of being taught to hold and use a pencil, or of raising and moulding leather, or making on it fine lines, and the work not being heavy or arduous would not tax their feeble powers. There is no great exertion or strain on the muscles, and no noisy hammering, as in brass work, and the moist leather worked upon, being intended when finished for book-covers or ornamental filling in of cabinet or other panels, is cut into pieces that can be moulded and worked upon any ordinary deal table without personal inconvenience to the other occupants of the room.

Embossed leather work has another merit; it is new to English buyers, having only been recently worked upon in this country, and it is for this reason likely to command a good sale. All who have tried to help the poor know only too well the difficulty of finding purchasers for handwork that is out of date and no longer fashionable; and as the sole aim of the Brabazon Society, or of the workhouse teachers, is to produce articles from which a speedy profit can be realised and expended for the benefit of the works, it will

be understood how acceptable is an unhackneyed art.

The art of ornamenting leather has been long practised in Spain and revived in Germany during the last few years, also in England for book-binding purposes it is well-known, but it is from Germany that the work as one suitable for the amateur has been introduced into London, and from Spain the extra art of colouring or gilding in conjunction with embossing comes. The plain embossing is used for book-covers, writing-cases, blotters, cigar-cases, etc.; the gilded and raised surfaces for dados, door-panels, and leather hangings.

The leather used is cow and calf-skin. The tools but few and inexpensive, and need not all be bought at the first, the designs easily

marble at a stone-mason's, as the exact size is not essential. The one expensive tool, and which most workers do without unless they pick it up second-hand, is a proportional compass fitted with pointers above the hinge. Its use is a great help when drawing the lines at the back of a book, or the diamond or other trellis patterns frequently produced as the ornamentation for the under side of any article that is more copiously decorated upon its upper side. Its use saves a good deal of measuring.

The leather is sold by ordinary leather-dealers, and when used in large quantities it is better to purchase from these shops the whole calf-skin, or half cow-skin, which are the smallest pieces they cut, but smaller pieces cut to the exact size required are obtainable

from the two London firms that keep all the materials for the work.

The best lesson in the art is a practical following out of some given design, and as the first trial should be of an easy nature, we will follow the working out of Fig. 1, which represents a squirrel upon a branch of ivy. The article when finished would make a blotter; size of design when enlarged  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 6, size of blotter 12 inches by 8, size of leather 24 inches by 18. Having traced the design upon fairly stout tracing paper, lay it upon the leather, and the leather on the marble block. Fasten down the edges of the tracing paper beyond the pattern to the leather with the help of stamp-paper,



FIG 1.

and take the pointing-tool and mark every outline of the design through to the leather. Remove the tracing-paper and examine your lines; if not perfect, touch them over with the pointing-tool. The next process will be to open out the lines thus made, and this is done with a knife held in a peculiar way, and run along every line so as to cut it and to widen it. Take the knife in the right hand, hold it firmly upright and yet lightly pressed on the leather with its points touching the leather. Push it along the given lines away not towards yourself, placing the left hand on the leather, the thumb on the blade of the knife and pushing the knife with this left thumb. Keep it in position and upright with the right hand. Let it run without being lifted from the leather round all curves, such as are shown along the back and tail of the squirrel, the lines of the boughs, and the curves of the ivy tendrils, but lift it at the point of sharp leaves (such as the ivy) and put it down again a little

copied from the many good publications treating upon ornamental design should a set pattern be required, while for decorative flower and fruit subjects there are no lack of copies in every art paper. The tools are of iron and shaped like modelling tools; they are small. The most important are the following. The modelling tool, price 1s.; the pointing tool, price 1s.; the knife, which is a small short blade set in a fixed handle, price 10d.; and a set of tin shapes, price 1s. 4d.; these four are absolutely necessary. Besides these are the punches for depressing the backgrounds, and costing 8d. each. There are many kinds of impressions given by these punches, such as stars, a large circle, a small circle surrounded with dots, a large oval, smaller ditto, etc. Two or three punches and a hammer are sufficient to commence the work with. Another requisite is a piece of smooth marble an inch in depth and twelve inches square. This can be bought from the waste

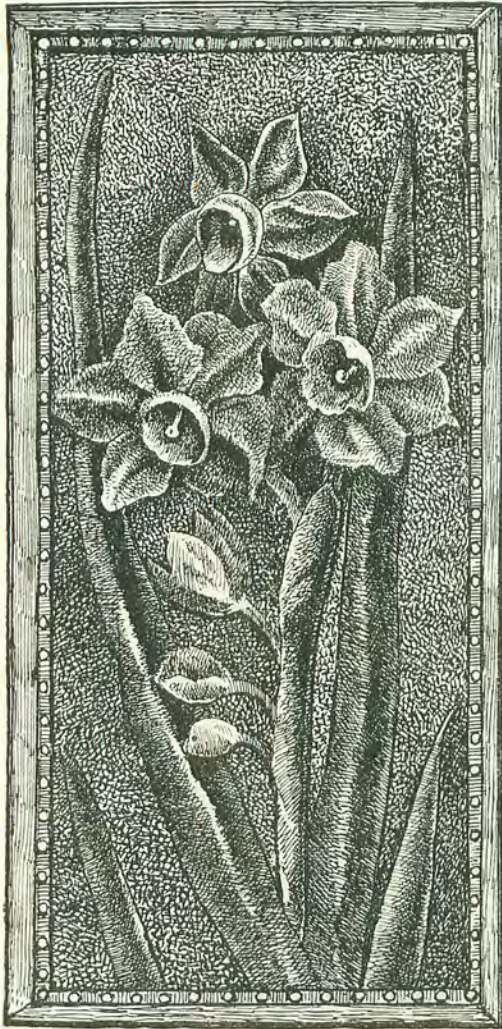


FIG. 2.

way away from where it was lifted. This little space between the two strokes giving the point of a leaf is done to prevent the leather being under-cut when more fully opened out in the next stage of the work. The correct holding of the knife, and position of the left hand, etc., should be practised carefully, as it is necessary by this process to cut the lines into the leather at one even depth, and not to jag deep into it at one point and scratch it only in another. Having "cut" the whole outline, the chief leaf-veins and the more important strokes on the fur, damp the leather with a clean sponge and widen out the cut lines. Take the pointing tool and run it along every outline and as it runs along open the edges of the leather away from

each other. Keep the leather fairly damp, but never in a sloppy or pulpy condition. Take up the modelling-tool and help the clearness of the outlines, etc., by pressing the backgrounds down close to these lines. Use the broad end of the modelling-tool for the chief strokes, the narrow for corners and curves, such as round the ivy-berries, the slighter tendrils, the head, ears and feet of the animal. Use the modelling-tool as a flat instrument, holding it in the right hand and guiding it with the left, and work with a firm and even touch without raising ridges on the leather surface. Endeavour to make the outlines clear and the patterns sharp, but do not waste time in lowering the background, as that work is accomplished when the design is raised or embossed, while the work done by the punches will give it the proper surface. The embossing comes next; for this the leather is damped but not made very wet, and one of the set of tin shapes taken and held in the left hand close to the outline of a leaf that it somewhat resembles. The tin shapes are small

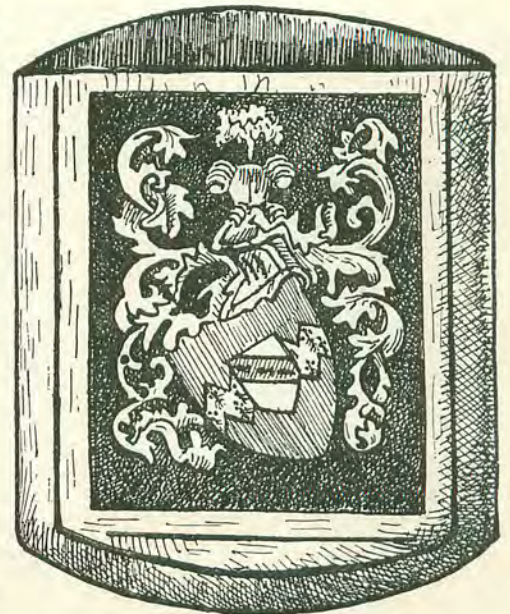


FIG. 4.

wedged-shaped pieces, curves, rounds, pointed edges, and though they never exactly fit the outline they are held against, they will do their work, which is to hold down and retain

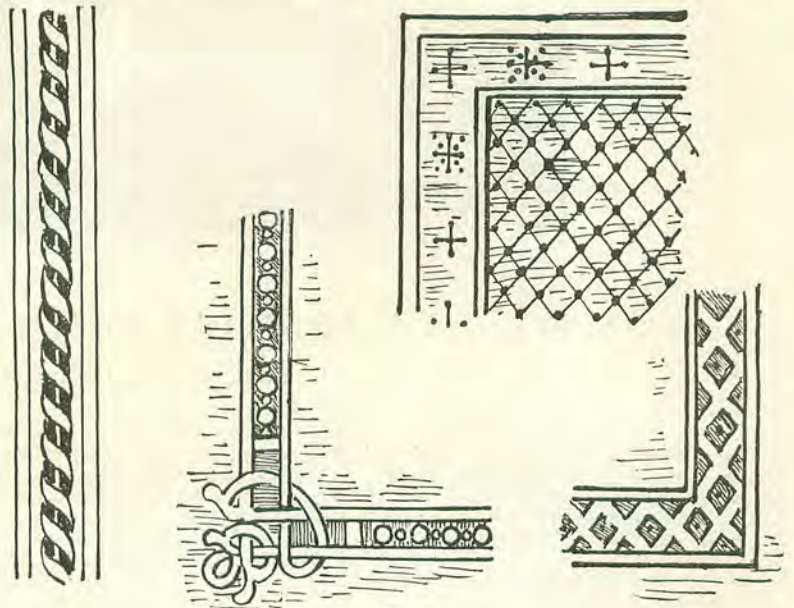


FIG. 5.

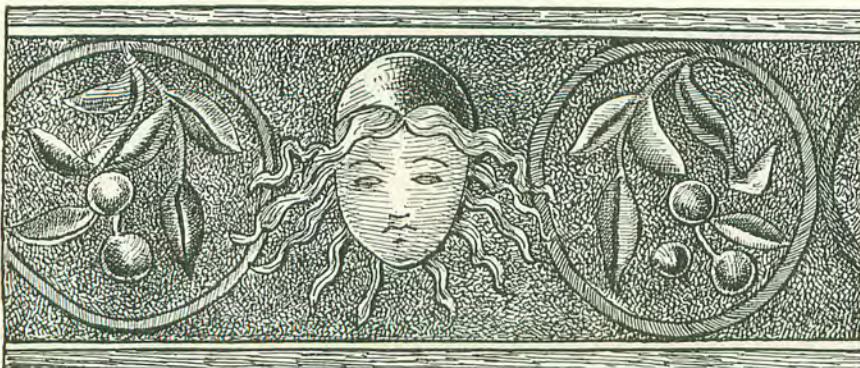


FIG. 3.

in shape the background and edge of the leather pattern that is in the process of being raised. Hold the shape pressed to the outline with the left hand, keeping the leather firm, with the broad end of the modelling-tool work underneath the leather, gently stretch the part to be raised working backwards and forwards, up and down, until it is pushed up quite one-eighth of an inch above the background. Raise up not more than four leaves at first, using different tin shapes so as to alter the outline of each, keep the leather damp and mix a composition of rye-meal, white sawdust and water in a saucer; slowly rub it down until it is quite smooth and even and fairly thick, then turn the leather over on its wrong side, and fill up with the paste all the stretched parts. Do not fill up the spaces with the paste to make a hard mass, but fill them in

carefully and leave an even surface that is flat to the unembossed leather. While the paste is still wet, turn the leather right side upwards, and with the two modelling-points go over the raised leaves, etc. Mark out all outlines clearly, raise one side of a leaf, press downwards the other work at the various veins, gently model little depression and stroke into shape parts that should catch the eye or form shadows. When working at the squirrel be very particular about the lines round the eye, the prominence of the cheek bone, nose, and eyebrow, also the height of the upper part of the tail and the modelling-lines for the lower. It is more effective to raise one or two places fairly high, and keep the rest of the space lowered than to have an entirely even and raised surface. As the paste underneath hardens quickly, the work of modelling must be done quickly and at once, a leaf or stem once wetted and filled in at the back must be finished off without delay. The chief veins of leaves look well opened out and enlarged, and side veins indicated by lines branching from them. When engaged on modelling the centres of such flowers as are shown in Fig. 2, great care is needed, as they contain three different heights; thus the outer petals are raised from the background and their centres raised above their edges, then the inner cap is raised

very high on the side where the light is shown and is depressed deeply at the spot where the one pistil is shown, in fact the markings of the whole of this flower are done most carefully.

Having raised up and modelled the chief parts of the design and marked out with the modelling tools such parts as are required to be in low relief, the background is next finished. Wet the leather and take one of the punches, hold it perfectly upright, quite even, and close to the surface, then give it a light firm tap with the hammer. Look at the mark made on the leather; if the punch has not been held straight, one part of the impression will be much deeper than the other; if it is held correctly, the impression will be perfect and not too deep. Continue to fill up the space with the design on the punch, but let every mark be at even though close distances from each other, and none overlapping. The straight lines enclosing the design are made with the aid of a ruler, the small rounds that edge the same in Fig. 2 with one of the round punches.

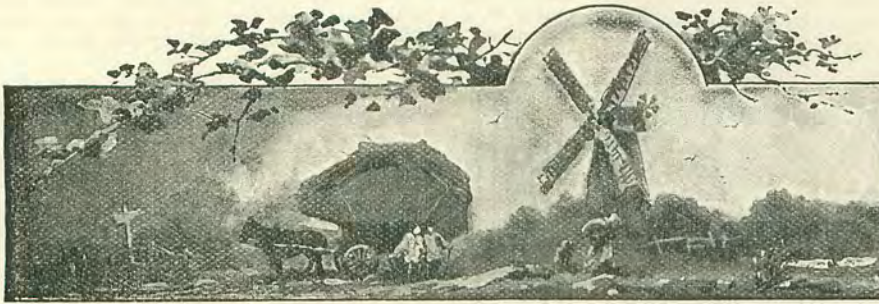
In Fig. 3, a design for the upper band of a dado, there is a more even and conventional system of embossing used than in flower subjects. The parts raised are the head and hair of Medusa and the centre branches of leaves and berries. The modelling of these

parts is but little raised, and the lines that are afterwards made over it are few in number but deeply marked. The background is punched in with a large punch.

In Fig. 4 an example is given of the finer description of leather work that should only be attempted when a perfect mastery of the tools has been acquired. The centre represents a coat of arms, and can be used either to ornament book-covers, cigar-cases, or card-cases. The modelling is very fine, and the parts in high relief—the crest and coat of arms; the helmet and the drapery are in relief, but are subordinate to the rest of the work. The background is well depressed, and the markings on the leather made with a small punch.

In Fig. 5 some designs are shown for use upon the underside of books and blotting-cases. They are chiefly taken from old illuminated manuscripts, where they form borderings. All lines and workings without much relief as to backgrounds and without the help of embossing require great care in drawing and cutting, therefore this part of the undertaking is about the most difficult. The lines and the design are cut and not raised up with rye meal and white sawdust, but punches are used to depress the rounds and crosses.

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## POLITICS FOR GIRLS.

By FREDERICK RYLAND, M.A.

### PART I.

*Women and Politics.*—Some words of apology seem to be necessary before I begin these papers, since a conventional opinion exists that women ought to know nothing about politics. I call it a conventional opinion because I do not believe that it is seriously held by the vast majority of those who affirm their agreement with it.

As a matter-of-fact, women always have taken an interest in politics, and have been most powerful factors in political life. Passing over illustrious female monarchs, like Elizabeth of England and Catharine of Russia, it is only necessary to remind the historical student of the great parts played in the History of England by the great Whig ladies in the last century, and by the dames of the Primrose League in this. And in our own day, women have already been admitted to a share in all matters of municipal and local interest. They help to elect members of the Vestry, which look after the affairs of the parish, and members of the County Council, as well as the Guardians of the poor and the members of the School-board. They may even become members themselves, if they convince the electors that they are fit and proper persons to discharge the duties laid by parliament on these several bodies. Though not in the

limited sense "political," yet in the wider sense of the word these duties are political duties. They have to do with the government of the State, though only in a somewhat restricted sphere. And in fulfilling them, questions constantly arise which run up into politics in the strictest sense of the term. There is no clear line of division. The woman who is called on to form an opinion about the administration of the laws which relate to the destitute and the insane can hardly help having to consider points with which Parliament has frequently to deal. She cannot help considering whether greater restrictions should not be put on the sale of intoxicating liquors, whether some better provision should not be made for the relief of the aged and honest poor, whether a fairer method of local taxation would not enable the burdens to be more easily borne. The State then may be said to almost oblige a woman to consider political questions.

And a greater duty seems likely to be laid upon women before long. It seems probable that before the girls who read this page grow into full womanhood, the Parliamentary franchise—that is, the right and duty of voting for Members of Parliament—will be given to women in the United Kingdom as it has already been given in some of the Colonies.

Many of the most influential members of both our great parties—the Conservatives and the Liberals—are in favour of the change; and in all probability it will be carried into effect within ten or twelve years.

If, then, women already do take part in politics, and are likely, before long, to be called on to take a more important part, is it not worth while for girls to give some little attention to the subject?

At present it is hardly too much to say of women in general—of course, there are many and notable exceptions—what Burke said of ministers of religion in his day, "They know nothing of politics but the passions they excite." They are frequently ignorant of the most ordinary and important facts as to the constitution of the country. They know little or nothing of the working of the machinery of Government, what the machinery is intended to achieve, or how far it succeeds in achieving it. They have never given a moment's thought to the great political ideals for which men strive so earnestly and so persistently.

To think over these matters and to acquire something like accurate knowledge on all these points seems to me a clear duty of every citizen of the state. However limited our sphere of direct action we influence numbers of others; and to some extent we must regard