

HAND-WORK IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.



MR. LELAND'S MODELING CLASS AT WORK.

THE visitor to Philadelphia, who will on Tuesday or Thursday afternoons enter the Hollingsworth School Building, next door to the Academy of Music, may see an interesting sight which is at present without its exact counterpart anywhere in this country or even in Europe, namely, sixty or seventy public school children, from ten to sixteen years of age, girls and boys, engaged in different kinds of decorative work. At one long table the little ones are busy modeling, painting, and glazing faience, or ornamental clay-ware, which when finished will go to the pottery to be fired, and return as elegant vases, grotesque monsters for match-safes, flower-baskets, or such other caprices as the fancies of the juvenile artists may dictate. And what they execute is no bungling work; it brings a good price in the market. One little damsel, small for her twelve years, has a giant Frankenstein of a frog before her, which she is deftly shaping, and which with its gaping jaws seems almost able to swallow her. There are others, nearly all without even a drawing to guide them, covering cups with flowers, and making curious wares with all the confidence of the

most experienced workmen. After all, it is nothing more than many a visitor has seen done by little children in the art-potteries of Spain; but, strange enough, one never thinks of American youth as able to do what seems natural in foreigners.

At the next table are girls engaged in art-needle-work. This certainly is natural enough employment for such little maids, yet if the stranger will look into it, he will find even here a novelty. All the pupils are obliged to draw their own patterns. Another strange idea is also promulgated here: to those who say that plain sewing should be the first needle-work for children, Miss Elizabeth Robins and Miss Moss, the teachers, will reply that crewel-work and outline embroidery are much easier, and that by familiarizing little girls with the needle in what they most readily learn, they do better in the end with more practical work. There is also another reason for not putting plain sewing strongly forward: of late years in every ragged school and drunkards' children mission, such work has been given so much prominence that the parents of pupils in the public schools have a not unnatural aversion to having it said

that their children are taught it gratis. "Let us respect prejudices," as Mirabeau said, and also the method by which these little damsels are led from æsthetic art up to housekeeping. We shall find this principle cropping out again in the school in all its branches.

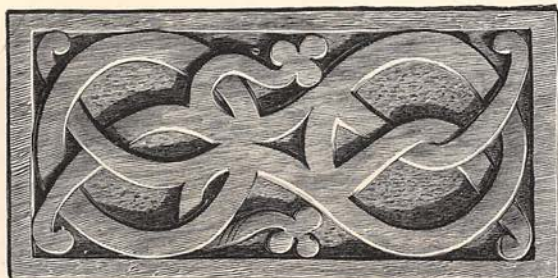
Near them boys are carving walnut wood panels, which will be made into cabinets. They are not of the most elaborate Italian or French finish, but they are quite as good as the old Gothic originals which they imitate. It is a curious fact that the average boy, when accustomed to the same kind of designs, turns out very much the same kind of work as the grown-up artisan of the middle ages. He is readily familiarized with the best style of design, but it is hard to teach him machine-finish. This is even more perceptible in the *repoussé* work, brass plaques for the wall, made by these boys. They can produce admirable imitations of old German brass salvers, quaint and curious or beautiful, but without long practice they do not approach anything like the stamped brass plates which are now so common. It may be worth observing, however, that the revival of sheet brass *repoussé* work, in these plaques, and in this country, dates from this school. As the art is spreading extensively and rapidly, I trust that I may be allowed to mention that Mr. Karl Krall, of the firm of Barkentin and Krall, the famous artists in hand-made metal work of Regent street, London, has given me credit for reviving, in a book called "The Minor Arts," this interesting industry for amateurs. Embossed sheet brass is used for finger plates to doors, for panels in cabinets or chests, for strips or borders by fire-places, for bellows, and in fact, wherever ornamented surfaces are required. These boys have frequently filled orders for such work, and there is more than one in the class who has earned five dollars by three hours' labor.

At the next tables a number of boys and girls are engaged in drawing. The system pursued here is somewhat peculiar. The newcomer is first carefully taught how to draw a free-hand line with a hard pencil. Are there



BRASS REPOUSSÉ WORK.

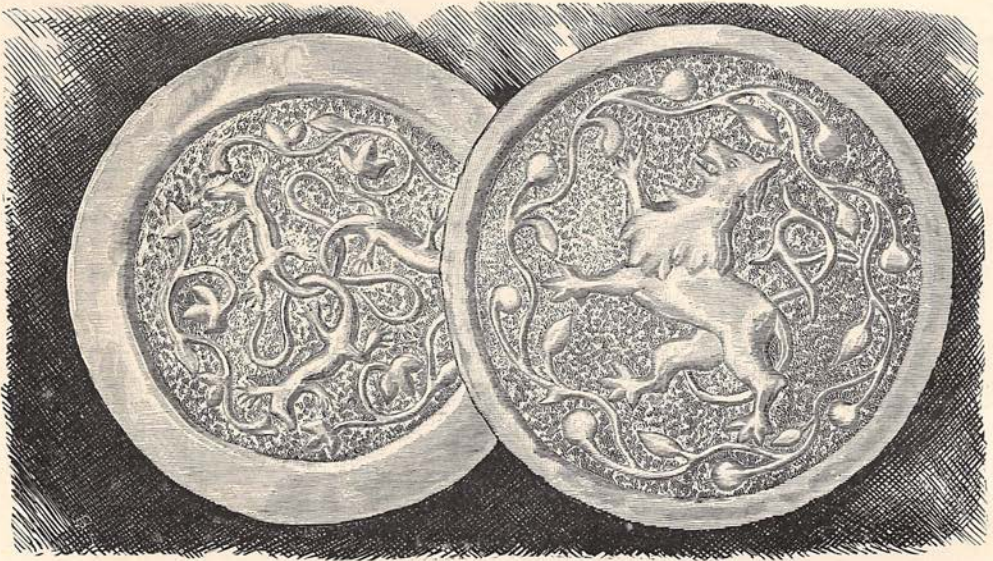
many of my readers who were taught anything of the kind under the old methods? I certainly was not, even by the best drawing-masters. The pupil is told to make a line fine as a hair or a cobweb, free-flowing, without rubbing or "stumping," "painting" or "scratching." In the first stage, tracing on ground glass slates, or on thin paper, is encouraged, until the pupil can hold the pencil with ease. As soon as he can copy a simple leaf accurately and lightly, he is told to make a circle and repeat the leaf twenty times in different positions and in different sizes, so as to make a wreath. Compasses and rulers are allowed, or rather their use is encouraged to verify the work. It is rather remarkable that when pupils are obliged to use these forbidden aids, they soon get tired of them. Those who draw in light free-hand, or what may be called the Callirrhoe, or "fair-flowing" style, learn to draw accurately in half the time which was required by the old method. It is said that in mountain passes the fastest mules are the surest footed, and those who draw most rapidly are the most exact. It is almost needless to say that in elementary decorative drawing like this, no shading whatever is allowed. There is no copying of worn-out lithographs of cows and castles, landscapes and bouquets. The development of simple outline from spirals and waves into lines of construction, and so on to Gothic, Moorish, or Renaissance arabesques, form the first step, and from the beginning, the pupil having the final given, or selecting one, develops all the design without aid. I have known one very exceptional case in which a girl at her third lesson designed in free-hand a very elegant pattern. It is not unusual for the pupils to manifest a perfect ability to design, even before they can draw the lines respectably. It is also a curious fact that, taking one with another, there is a greater fondness for, and most ability manifested in, the Moorish or Oriental styles of design. My own taste inclines to Anglo-Saxon and Neo-Celtic in decoration, and I find that the elder pupils follow me in this, but that their instincts are Eastern.



WOOD-CARVING.

It may interest the reader to know that in drawing and design the two sexes are, as regards skill, absolutely equal. The original design of a vase, from this school, which has been justly regarded as one of the most graceful works

of it being nothing but simple drawing worked out with tools, the fact that girls design quite as well as boys is very significant. Beyond this I have a still more interesting general



TWO BRASS PLAQUES.

of art executed by a child, was by a boy; but there is a girl of fourteen in the class who is his superior. In modeling there is nearly an equality, but on the whole the boys are the cleverer. In sheet-brass work the boys have the excellence all to themselves. Even in a class of grown-up ladies, I have never known one to produce so good a plaque, after many trials, as I have seen a boy make at a first effort—the reason being that boys are in this more deliberately careful, and far more desirous of being skilled than of merely producing something to show. For the same reason boys are better wood-carvers than girls, though there is not so much difference here as in brass. I incline to think that, in the long run, in wood-carving girls would equal boys. I once gave a few lessons in carving to a young lady in England,—a near relative of one of the cleverest women who ever lived,—and in less than a year at exhibitions my pupil took two prizes for her work. In modeling in clay the sexes are, however, again nearly equal as to ability, the boys being somewhat in advance, especially as regards original ideas. There is, however, one young girl—a German—whose faience work is equal to any made in the class. From all that I have observed, I should say that on the whole there is no difference whatever as regards the average skill of the two sexes in decorative art. As design is the

conclusion. I have for many years closely observed children as regards their capacity for such pursuits, and I have arrived at the conclusion that the American, while quite as clever as the European, and almost equal to the Oriental, is sadly handicapped by an impatience which in many cases entirely precludes real excellence. This is especially the case with women. I have spoken of Oriental children as excelling in decorative art. I have never seen anywhere children who were capable of such work as I have looked at by the hour being made by little girls and boys of six and seven years in Cairo.

It was in Cairo, and at Miss Whately's school, that there came upon me, as by inspiration, the solution of a problem which I had been seeking for years. This was the possibility of training children of both sexes, while yet in school, to learn how to make a living, or at least to teach them to use their hands. That this was allied to developing quickness of perception, or cleverness in general, I also believed, for great writers long ago held that this might be true. The first and most natural thought to a practical man would be to teach "trades"—shoe-making, carpentry, printing, and filing metal. But I found on inquiry that the practical men had tried all these in schools, and in vain. Such work required too much muscle, and brain, and

time. And though they might succeed with sturdy boys, what were the weak ones to do?—and, above all, what could be done for the girls? Men always can, or ought to, take care of themselves; but women! It used to be said that whoever makes two blades of corn grow, for one, is a benefactor. What then is he who provides independence for one woman?

In this school I saw children, almost babes, working *vis-à-vis*, with a frame between them, the most beautiful double embroidery “out of their heads,” without patterns. Subsequently I saw this in the bazaars, where I also found small boys with tools as rude as those of English tinkers, making exquisite jewelry. I had before, in Switzerland, Bavaria, the Tyrol, and in Italy, found children quite as young carving wood with exquisite skill. I learned that it was the same as regarded *papier maché* in Persia, pottery in Spain, and soap-stone and varnish work in India. Children could also set mosaics and inlay wood. In fact, I found that all the decorative arts, such as make a house beautiful, were all within the power of women and children and the *weak*—of those who in this life are generally mere idle dependents. But it was necessary to test all this. Of all these arts I knew nothing practically but a little wood-carving and a very little drawing. I went to work to verify my theory. I hammered brass and worked in waxed leather. Mr. William Morris spoke to me of the latter as a lost art. So it was; but by research and inquiry I found how to revive it. I experimented with young pupils. I came to the conclusion that as the flower precedes the fruit, so, in education, decorative work must



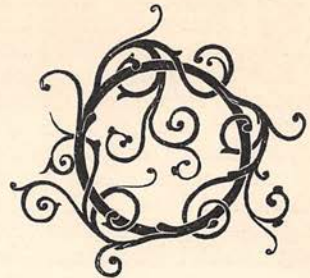
VASE WITH DRAGON HANDLES.

precede the practical, simply because it is easier. We can set children of six years, profitably, at modeling in clay and setting mosaic cubes, the latter being indeed akin to some of their favorite games. Very soon they will carve wood or embroider. All the time, they are becoming gradually familiar with working drawings or patterns and tools. The different arts are so easy that within a few months many pupils can master several of them. As the boys grow older they can be advanced, step by step, to technology or the most practical mechanical pursuits. Even if a boy has only carved panels, or modeled in clay, he does not find himself like a cat in a strange garret when taken into any kind of a work-shop or factory to learn a trade. It has been said by experienced and practical men that, in nine trades out of ten, a boy who can draw well has a vast advantage over one who can not. It has been demonstrated in the Philadelphia school that every child can not only learn to draw, but to use tools; nay, to earn money while at school. Little effort has, it is true, been made to sell the work of the pupils, but we have often had the pleasure of handing to one or another, as the result of sales, sums which were doubtless acceptable. The gratitude of the pupils and their general good behavior are remarkable. There are among them representatives from every public school in Philadelphia, and their quiet demeanor is remarked by all visitors. They are all little ladies and gentlemen.

There are many strangers who come to see the school, and they are, without exception, gratified, and generally astonished at the



VASE WITH WHITE GLAZE LIZARDS.



ORIGINAL DESIGNS.

ORIGINAL STUDY BY A GIRL OF FIFTEEN.

work performed by the children. On one occasion, however, I had to deal with a lady who, to everything shown, replied: "Yes, it is all very fine, but what is to come of it?" And to every argument there came the same answer: "What will come of it?" She did not know who would buy brass plaques or walnut panels if all of the one hundred and five thousand school children of Philadelphia were to make them. I might have answered to this that, in the rapidly increasing demand for home-made decoration for houses, such of the one hundred and five thousand as would be obliged to work for a living might find occupation. Ornament may even become as common as it was in Rome, Florence, or Nuremberg. Any one must be blind who does not see that increasing wealth is bringing us rapidly toward such an era. Day by day the cultivated are scorning more and more the machine-made. But beyond this is the consideration, which was too abstruse for my visitor, that even if the children should never make any money by selling their wares, the education of their fingers and brains is worth all the time and money it costs. One thing is at least true: in the thirty or forty varieties of decorative art which are practicable to anybody who has mastered two or three, there is always a resource—however slender it may be—by which any one can live. There is always the possibility for any boy or girl who can carve, inlay, design, and model, to obtain employment. In fact, at present, manufacturers find it a very difficult thing indeed to obtain just such young employes as the Philadelphia school is preparing for them. This is "what is to come of it." I pointed out long ago in a published lecture which I am happy to learn has given a suggestion and an impetus to others, that the present decay of the apprentice system is rapidly rendering industrial education in schools an absolute necessity. The education of the future will embrace hand-work at every stage, from the kindergarten upward. It will be artistic at first, because art is easy, but gradually it will ripen into the practical or technologi-

cal. It is proposed in this Philadelphia school gradually to enlarge the scope of instruction with the annual appropriations, until all that is most practical which can be taught shall be included in the course.

It was due to Mr. Edward J. Steel, the President of the Board of Education, and Mr. William Gulager, with his colleagues of the industrial art committee of that board, that this experiment was established, and that the funds were appropriated to carry it on. So little was then known of the subject that the fact that these gentlemen at once grasped it in all its possible results, is very much to their credit, and testifies to their fitness for the influential positions which they occupy. In England the great art schools had been tried and found insufficient, and then came the industrial schools in Russia, England, France, and Boston. This was better—but something still remained to be done. This something was to make hand-work a part of education in *all* public schools. And this is what the Philadelphia experiment has demonstrated to be perfectly practicable.

A beginning in this direction had been made by a lady in Shropshire, England, who, following a suggestion made in a book by me called "The Minor Arts," had succeeded in establishing several corresponding village art-schools. To this lady—Mrs. Jebb—belongs the credit of having first practically attempted to establish art-education generally on a grade below the great school, or on a popular basis. Recently a long letter in the London "Times," and a leading article in the London "Standard," as well as notices in several other English journals, have called attention to the Philadelphia experiment. It is now no longer an experiment but a success, and I am happy to say that it is now generally regarded as such. The appropriations made for the current year are all that could have been expected, and public interest in the school is rapidly increasing. One of its results has been the formation of a Ladies' Decorative Art Club in Philadelphia, with the same teachers of the



ORIGINAL DESIGN BY A GIRL OF FOURTEEN.



ORIGINAL DESIGNS.

same branches, and with the same director. The club, having taken a building, has most kindly offered to dispose of the work of the pupils of the Industrial School, and has in every way manifested an earnest interest in the latter. As work for women forms an important factor in both, this interest will be readily understood. As may be supposed, there is also an understanding and a community of feeling between the ladies of New York and Philadelphia, the latter having profited not a little by the example of the former. Let us trust that the time is not far off when all the cities of the Union will boast of teaching in their schools all that can be practically taught, while each has, in its association of women devoted to industry and art, another protest against the old prejudice of allowing the weaker sex to work.

Somebody has said that the attempt to do good in this world is always a history of disillusion. It does not seem, however, as if the effort to make industrial art a branch of education in the public schools is to be

added to the number of "ideas dissipated." From the first lesson, all that was anticipated has been realized, and a great facility which was not anticipated came most unexpectedly into the account. This is the interest which the children themselves take in the work, and which is so great that when I have been asked as to the discipline of the school, I have replied that there is no discipline whatever, none being needed. The pupils are too much absorbed in their work to talk; when they do converse it is usually to communicate ideas as to what they are engaged in. As a reward in a few special cases, some are allowed to attend twice a week. It is not unusual for them to ask permission to come on holidays. All of the sheet-brass work is of a voluntary character, being done only on Saturday afternoons.

It has been clearly demonstrated by this experiment, that if rooms and furniture can be provided, the work of the pupils could be sold to such advantage as to meet all other expenses. The gentlemen of the school board have, however, wisely refrained from urging prematurely this part of the experiment. In the words of William Gulager, "if a branch of study is worth teaching, it is worth paying for." It would have greatly embarrassed the direction if shop-keeping and sale had in the beginning formed a part of its duties. It is, however, established beyond question, that no objection can be raised to the introduction of hand-work into public schools on the score of additional expense, since, under judicious and honest management, the expenses may be reduced to almost nothing. Neither can it be said that hand-work is an additional tax on the brain, since it is accepted by the pupils as an amusement or relief. Let it be remembered, too, that every girl or boy should have some pocket-money, and that it depends entirely on the will of our pupils to make as much as they need.

It has been said that the greatest social curse of modern times is that of "gentility,"



STUDY IN OIL, FROM LIFE.



EMBOSSSED LEATHER PANEL.

or rather the false gentility which makes a man ashamed to work. It is to escape manual labor that so many of our youth fly to counting-houses, quackery, anything in fact which will enable them to be "gentlemen," and not "vulgar mechanics." Now, if they were all familiarized with work in school, if it had been associated in their minds with art and design, it is possible, or rather certain, that all prejudice against it as *work* would disappear. In this antipathy to hand-labor the ordinary American shows himself to be practically the least republican of all civilized beings. In no country have I ever met so many men who boasted to me that they had never done a day's work with their hands, in their lives. If there is anything which can gradually dissipate this feeling or prejudice, it will be the making the young at first familiar with art-work, and then gradually leading them from that, by means of it, to trades.

In his late annual report before the School

Board of Philadelphia, President Steel says that "Mr. Leland has been assisted to demonstrate the feasibility of making industrial education part of the training of the public schools. It is now generally conceded among enlightened people that manual training must form a part of every system of education which aims at developing the faculties. This manual training must, of course, be of a preparatory character—the training of the eye and hand in design, and the principles of construction. The progress of the work has been steady and promising." Mr.

Steel here announces a truth, which he was one of the first to grasp, that such work is inevitably destined to form a part of all public school education. Some years ago, in England, when I was engaged in studying and experimenting on this subject, I discussed it with Mr. Antony J. Mundella, M. P., who at once suggested that the subject should be brought before Parliament, and expressed a hope that he himself might be the means of doing so.

It is no extravagant prediction that the time will come when every legislative body in the world will take cognizance of manual labor, based on drawing, design, and decorative art, as an essential part of education in every school.

Charles G. Leland.



YELLOW JAR WITH GREEN LIZARD.



WOOD-CARVING IN LOW RELIEF.