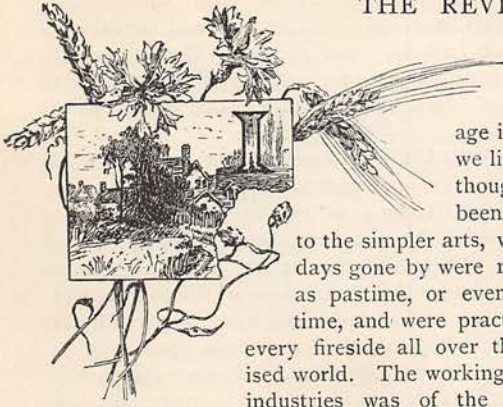


THE REVIVAL OF MINOR ARTS.



N this rapid age in which we live, little thought has been given to the simpler arts, which in days gone by were regarded as pastime, or even waste-time, and were practised by every fireside all over the civilised world. The working of such industries was of the greatest

possible value in exercising a moral and social influence on the people engaged therein. Thoughtful and artistic people, and those interested in the welfare of future generations, have at length awakened to the fact that it was time to prevent any further decay of these arts. With all due reverence and pride for the wonderful mechanical inventions of this century, we find ourselves drifting into the torrent of machine-wrought sameness which is destructive to an original and individual type of work. To stay this danger, and to revive the ancient arts, many ladies and gentlemen have formed an Association, which has its head-quarters and training studios in London. Careful training is all that is required, and this is now largely available. The Association has undertaken to teach the poor how to make prettily for themselves such things as they want, and to secure not only "art for the people, but by the people."

A few years back some Saturday classes were started in various localities, by some zealous amateurs, to teach working men and boys artistic handicrafts. Success crowned their efforts, and the "Cottage Arts Association," as it was termed, quickly developed into a larger and more important body of workers, and is now incorporated with the "Home Arts and Industries Association." There are branches open all over the United Kingdom, and all may be said to have gained a very firm footing. The teachers are trained at the chief office in London, and it is noteworthy that the teachers are almost entirely voluntary. Besides the training of teachers, the head office undertakes the distribution of chosen designs and casts, and leaflets of information, to the various branches, and the organisation of a yearly exhibition and sale in London, which gives opportunity for the comparison and criticism of the work done.

The value of this work as the basis of technical education, and in bringing within the reach of young people who are employed in our great manufactures the means of carrying on their education in the particular branches of business with which they are occupied, is widely recognised. The difficulty at first was, of course, to interest children in such occupations, and the teachers had to be trained to initiate them into successful methods.

The first art taught was wood-carving, for which the pupils in every little village or hamlet showed considerable aptitude, and attained great proficiency in carving. Evidences of such work as this are not yet extinct, even in machine-bound England and Wales, and many fine old carved panels are to be found at ancient farm-houses and cottages, which the farm labourers produced as the amusement of their long winter evenings. A great deal of the skill and beauty in artistic home work is, no doubt, due to their being hereditary family acquirements.

Wood-carving is thought by many to be a difficult art, but in reality there is little difficulty, except in holding the tools properly. It is very little harder to carve or indent a panel in low relief than it is to trace and transfer patterns to the surface of the wood; and with ordinary perseverance and intelligence, carving from the round may soon be acquired.

Besides classes for teaching design and drawing and wood-carving, there are classes for carving in hardened chalk, leather-work, basket-making, *repoussé* work in brass and copper, wrought iron, pottery, mosaic setting, modelling, embroidery, flax-spinning by hand, stencilling, &c. The majority of people can master these arts in a short time, and the delight of seeing the productions of their own hands arouses a desire to attain greater skill.

One of the most interesting revivals among these arts is that of the old leather-work. This does not consist merely in the common art of making leaves and flowers, but includes the old *cuir bouilli*, or boiled and hardened solid leather-work. Until the last two centuries this art was very popular in Italy and the East, and was used for a variety of useful and ornamental purposes, such as the cylindrical boxes made in Italy to contain family documents; bowls, or cups, such as the mazer bowls so common in the Middle Ages; sword-hilts, quivers, &c. For elegance, durability, and toughness and hardness combined, *cuir bouilli* is superior to wood, gutta-percha, or any other material. Objects equal to those, now rarely seen except at museums, may be made for a few shillings, for all that is required is a supply of cheap leather and leather-waste, old newspapers, wood, sheet brass, paste, glue, and tools. Beyond this, skill in manipulating it, so as to be able to model and mould it like wax, must be acquired, and this may be attained after a few days' practice.

Stencilling is an easy but effective art, and it would be well if the travelling workers who roam over the country could be prevailed upon to take up this form of art, and travel from village to village as cheap art decorators. It may be said that stencilling is a very low form of art, but this is only the case when bad patterns are supplied. The patterns supplied by the Home Arts and Industries Association are excellent, and the effects of them could only be good. By stencilling in distemper on coarse canvas

or linen, curious imitations of old tapestry for portières or curtains may be produced, and would become very popular amongst the masses.

Basket-making, again, is easily learned, and although excellent raw materials may be obtained in our own country, all the finer qualities for basket-work come from abroad, where regular schools exist, and village school children are taught the art. Women and children are most engaged in this industry.

Those who recollect the Exhibition of 1851 must be struck with the progress England has made in industrial art since that time. Then the art was in little better than a state of barbarism, and the condition of public taste was very low. In labourers' cottages, nondescript articles, called ornaments, were to be seen, which certainly were not so far advanced in art as are many of the works of the Fiji Islanders. The good work of the Association is at length beginning to be felt, and the humanising effect it has already produced on those attending the classes is highly gratifying.

We are all aware that the one characteristic which marks the English people is their intense love of home, and all in our power should therefore be done to render our abodes worthy of that little word "home." We have not implanted in each of our natures one special design, for which no training or preparatory education is required for its development, as in the case of such humble little workers as the bee and the spider. No one can help admiring the work performed unaided by rule or visible guide in the honey-cell of the bee and the net of the spider. There is displayed a miraculous accuracy of form, approaching

to mathematical correctness, and a marvellous adaptation to the circumstances of their surroundings. There is no bargaining between one and the other of these little workers, either as to the alteration of the plan or a blending or compounding of one design with the other. Men, on the other hand, are by nature imitators.

The Greeks left behind magnificent examples, which we certainly do not excel, although we have their experience and labours to aid us. The accumulated experience of the masters should, however, not be ignored. Wherever progress has been made it has always been in the direction to which the old ways led. Design and workmanship have risen to a higher point, not when materials and tools have been despised, but when apter, fitter, and more sympathetic treatment has been adopted, when more idiomatic expression has been found.

Popular interest in these minor arts appears to be growing, and there is some ground for hope that the change may be lasting, inasmuch as it is a recurrence to the catholic appreciation of the arts, which has characterised all periods when art has thriven. The Home Arts and Industrial Association are now assisted in their good work by the Recreative Evening Schools Association, whose desire it is to encourage social intercourse of an elevating character, by the opening of halls for girls and youths between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. They also hold attractive evening classes, and hope in time to prevent the enormous waste of money expended on our national system of education.

IN THE WILD WEST.

A STORY OF ADVENTURE. BY J. BERWICK HARWOOD, AUTHOR OF "PAUL KNOX, PITMAN,"
"WHAT THE CORAL REEFS GAVE ME," ETC.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.



R. JEFFREYS was as good as his word, and he and a sound constitution did pull me through the sharp attack of Missouri fever which I, in common with most natives of the North, had to undergo. The fever left me miserably wan and weak, and barely able to totter across the room with the support of Edith's arm. I had, I found, to be thankful to the doctor not merely for his skilful treatment of my case, but for his prudence in preventing my wife from injuring her own health by too constant attendance upon me during the prevalence of the worst symptoms of the fever. My illness, however, was an unfortunate thing, for it left me feeble and fit for little work; while, when the doctor and the nurse and the other expenses had been paid, there was not much left out of the hundred and fifty dollars that I had earned by planning and building the bridge at Ithaca Farm.

There was the silk, to be sure, the price of which would some day drop in, but both Nash and the horse-reporter had warned me that I should act wisely in not stipulating for ready money payments on account of it.

But I was myself out of the way, unluckily, of earning ready money. With my blanched cheek and shaking limbs I could scarcely hope to back and break in Harris the horse-dealer's half-tamed steeds, nor was I able to superintend the repairs of unroofed barns or crazy dwelling-houses leagues off, among swamp and forest. Now and then, as my hand grew steadier, I could sketch a mausoleum for Ephraim Hucks at the stoneyard, and once I earned thirty dollars by designing an extension to the State gaol, but it was seldom that an opportunity for exerting any skill I may have possessed in a strictly professional capacity presented itself.

I scarcely could tell where to turn for the means of tiding on at this period of my life. As accountant, artist, or engineer, I did manage at spasmodic intervals to pick up a few dollars; while Edith continued