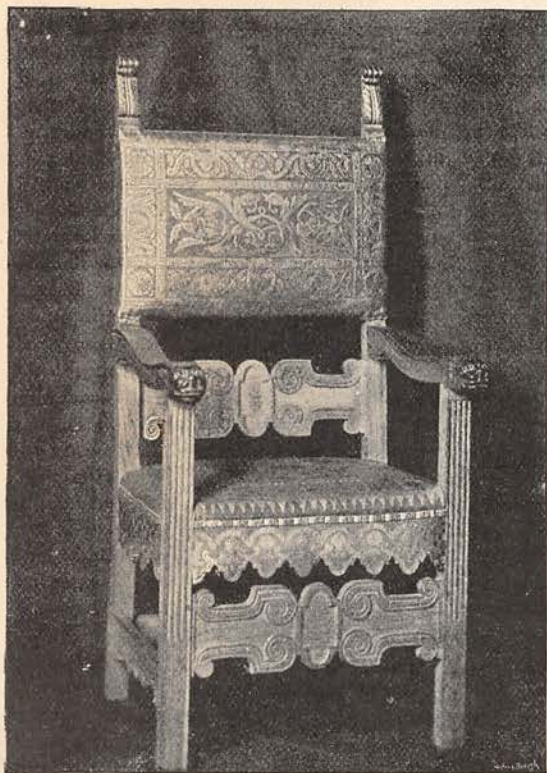


insanity, or premature death, and are only happy when their darlings are at play. They are making a serious mistake. Mental exercise is good for young and old, and freedom from it means either arrest in development or decay. I do not refer to very young children, who are best out of the schoolroom; but mental exercise is as necessary for older children as the physical exercise involved in any game, as tennis, cricket, rowing, football, etc. It is only excess which is harmful. Trying to do six months' work in a week is the cause of "breaking down," not six months' steady work. And those who are familiar with school and university life know that it is not the steady workers who break down, but those who attempt to get through arrears of work under the stimulus of a rapidly-approaching examination. The causes of over-fatigue of the brain in older people are similar. It is impossible to emphasise too strongly the fact that deliberate patient effort with due regard to the maintenance of bodily health, results in more work—and work of better quality—being accomplished, than results from sudden and spasmodic fits of industry at high pressure.

The treatment of fatigue consists in rest, which must sometimes be long continued. Change of scene is often desirable, and even change of occupation (temporarily, at least) may be necessary, more especially for the recovery from certain forms of local fatigue involving a particular set of muscles. For recent physical over-fatigue, much benefit is derived from a hot bath. The feeling of fatigue is at once diminished and recovery is hastened, as the bath tends to expedite the removal of the waste products by producing free action of the skin and kidneys.

Lastly there is a feeling of weariness which is due to altogether different causes. I refer to *ennui*, which arises from satiety and an incapacity to be entertained. It is almost a disease. Those who suffer from it are irritable, their memory is defective, they lose their power of application, they are restless and dissatisfied, they are always tired. They have neither employment nor useful occupation. The treatment of this form of weariness is very simple. The tonic required is neither quinine nor iron—nor any other drug, in fact. It is work.

LEATHER WORK, OLD AND NEW.



CHAIR IN SPANISH LEATHER WORK.

(Photographed at the Chiswick School of Arts and Crafts, Bedford Park, W.)

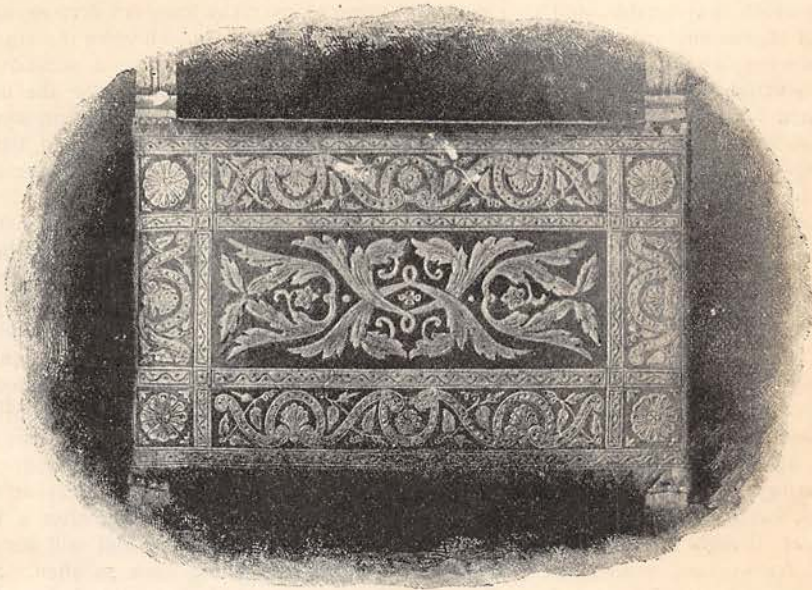
HERE is but a limited number of antique specimens of the beautiful decorative art, known as Spanish leather work, in England.

A few country houses can boast of some panels on their walls that have been treasured for generations; but, as a rule, the English know very little of the charms of the old art work, which there is a decided inclination now to revive amongst our artists here. South Kensington Museum includes in its delightful hoard of examples of the productions of foreign artists some panels of furniture richly tinted. There is a lovely curtain which in its best days must have been a perfect gem of decorative colouring. It dates from the sixteenth century, and time has mellowed the many hues that were laid with so lavish a hand. Subdued in tone as it is now, its noble owners, could they see it once more, would hardly recognise it as the same brilliant curtain that hung in their castle, but for the coat-of-arms that forms the centre decoration. This shows a lion rampant on red ground on half the shield; on the other half are roses, with three stars above on dark ground. The foliated pattern which surrounds the shield is mostly wrought out with gold and silver, relieved with touches of red on a ground of very dark green. It is a fine bold design, with free curves, which show a master hand. Many of the gold portions of the design are diapered.

Totally different in effect is a furniture panel with pale green ground, the decoration consisting of diapered scrolls and medallions of gold, red and dark blue. On another panel is a rococo scroll and flower

pattern. Cupids and birds are occasionally introduced on leather panels, but the simple foliated patterns with interlaced bands or with medallions satisfy

on the panel, whilst pines, black and white grapes, and other fruits complete the design, and somewhat lessen the formality. Conventionalised tulips and roses



BACK OF THE CHAIR.

(Photographed at the Chiswick School of Arts and Crafts, Bedford Park, W.)

artistic taste best. Nevertheless, there is a little panel shown which will please many; it is elegant rather than massive and handsome. The ground is white, well covered with gold designs of Cupids, birds, pomegranates, and flowers. An example of seventeenth century work has a ground of gold basket-work with many-coloured flowers trailing over it; the flowers are slightly conventionalised, but this panel is not one which we should care to see reproduced.

When we turn to the collection of Florentine leather work, we find some splendid designs. Waved and interlaced ribbons are very general. The decoration oftentimes consists of a pattern with repeats, surrounded with broad border. This is the case in a charming panel with red ground. Medallions are formed on it with wreaths of bay-leaves, two bows meeting at each junction. Enclosed by the wreath is a vase with flowers, conventionalised almost beyond possibility of classification. Only three flowers spring from each vase. The pattern, done in blue, gold, and silver, is repeated continuously over the large space. Another pretty pattern with repeats is of twisted ribbons forming diamonds. These have grounds alternately of blue and red, the design in each being of the contrary colour. A second design, light and delicate, fills in the intervening spaces.

A quaint piece by a Florentine artist shows four young boys holding scrolls. Stiff wooden-looking birds—parrots among the number—with plumage of all the hues of the rainbow, are set at regular intervals

make a pleasing subject, with diapered ground of different patterns.

The Florentine work reminds one of fine Persian carpets, allowance being made for the difference in the style of design; the medallions, the borders, and



DETAIL OF THE CHAIR SEAT.

(Photographed at the Chiswick School of Arts and Crafts, Bedford Park, W.)

the "repeats" recall memories of mosque carpets and beautiful old shawls; the designs, however, are much more free, and not so stiff.

This brief description of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pieces will be useful in helping readers to choose subjects which are suitable, and to compose some successful harmonies when they commence work. All cannot have an opportunity of seeing these highly-prized productions of men who were masters of the art, so I have felt that it would not be wasted space to mention them. We may learn from them that it is a fallacy to imagine that the employment of many colours is a necessity; the most beautiful amongst them are those in which the fewest colours are seen.

I hope that no one will choose a very large panel to begin upon. It is a great pity to put ourselves in the way of getting disheartened at starting, and leather work, easy as it is in its first stages, cannot be accomplished at cycling rate. Most amateurs, though slow workers compared with professionals, do not like work which is long about. There is a little failing to which they are nearly all subject: impatience; they tire of anything requiring continued application. Well, leather work can, fortunately, be set aside at any time without detriment, though it cannot be done in a hurry. Only clever workers could make a living by it alone, and they, not by the great number of pieces, but by getting a fair price for the comparatively few they would be able to execute.

A small panel, which may be used when finished for the decoration of a cabinet door or for a fire-screen, is an excellent thing to commence on. I will first show how this is to be embossed, then how to colour it. The same process will be followed in carrying out all the designs illustrated. I will give suggestions for the colours to be used in these later on.

Having chosen a good piece of leather—calf answers best for the generality of articles—at a leather manufacturer's, place it on a wooden table or board. You will need also a few of the steel tools sold for leather work by artists' colourmen; these are of different shapes. A burnisher costs 1s.; a plain wheel, 1s.; a beveller, 4d.; and punches about 4d. each. Mark out on the leather the size of the square you intend to decorate, but leave a margin beyond. This can easily be cut off partially afterwards if it is too wide, but some margin is wanted for mounting. Sketch the design to right size on drawing-paper, and get it quite correct before proceeding further, as mistakes on the leather cannot well be rectified.

Arrange the design so that it may all come perfectly within the square; no tips of leaves or scrolls should be hidden by the mounts when it is fixed in the door or screen. It may be composed of a foliated pattern with surrounding border; or it may be an arrangement of conventionalised leaves radiating from a boldly drawn centre. When the sketch is completed, take it off on tracing linen. The leather must be slightly damped; for this, use a sponge and water. Next take the tracing, and place it on the face of the

leather square; fasten it at the top corners with pieces of gummed paper.

With one of the tools, or a style, or a wheel, follow out all the lines of the tracing, using sufficient pressure to mark the leather. Raise the tracing now and again to see if the lines are deep enough for you to be able to follow them well when the tracing is removed. The leather may require a second damping. The tracing being finished, go over the lines which need it with a tool; still, on the pressure you give the strength of the lines will depend, but they need not be very deep now, as they will have to be all re-done later.

Turn the leather, and start embossing. Press out with the tool—fruit, leaves, flowers, birds: in fact, all the design. All must not, of course, be equally raised in a fruit or floral design, though set patterns may be of uniform relief throughout. When Cupids or birds are introduced, they will be in slightly higher relief than the subordinate scroll or foliated pattern which accompanies them. Beginners will not be rash enough, let us hope, to try figures; these should be left until some proficiency is gained. The leather should be turned over constantly at first, to see how the embossing is going on; after a time the worker will get more used to it, and will not need to examine the progress of the work so often. Should the piece be put on one side for a time before the embossing is completed it should be covered with a damp cloth. Look at it well from a distance every now and then; you will be surprised to find how different then is its appearance to what it was when you were poring closely over it. Very possibly you will find the relief is much lower than you thought. Articles that will be seen from a distance should be in higher relief than those close at hand; and the same holds good for large articles in contradistinction to small. The relief admissible on a wall panel would be in barbarous taste on a book cover. Petals of flowers and leaves will be more embossed than their stems. When, as in one example I have mentioned above, vases form part of the design, they are not strongly embossed; if they were, they would make the decoration of questionable taste; vulgarity must be avoided at all costs. I doubt if the vases I speak of are in more relief than the flower petals. In decorative work, we fail if we strive to give naturalistic effects.

When the embossing is ended, place the leather face upwards again, and go over all the outlines, to strengthen and burnish them. The tool is used with the upper edge leaning slightly inwards, and it bevels the leather. All the curves should be perfect, the outlines showing decided and firm handling of the tool. The work is now ready for the colouring, but for this a silver ground must be prepared with a good deal of care, that the lacquers may look as brilliant as possible when they are laid on.

Silver-leaf is used for the ground. This is sold in books. One containing twenty-five small silver leaves costs sixpence. The price of gilders' tips, without which the silver cannot be laid, ranges from threepence

to eightpence. A gilder's tip is simply made of one thin row of hairs set in a wooden handle, shaped like a "flat-wash" brush. Several sizes are made. If we attempt to touch the leaf without one, it will be useless; when it comes in contact with the finger it cannot be removed without being torn and crumpled up. When silver has to be cut to shape, a gilder's cushion will be needed. The leaf is turned out of the book on to the cushion, then cut to a convenient size with a gilder's knife; it is next picked up with the tip, and transferred to the article which is being silvered. A dabber with a flat top is yet another requisite which cannot be dispensed with by the leather worker who follows this mode of colouring his panels.

The whole of the leather is now coated with gold size. This must be left for a short time until it will take the silver well; this state is technically known as "tacky." The silver is now, with the tip, laid on until the whole of the design and ground is completely covered, the dabber being used all over the surface, to make it adhere evenly. Leave it again for a while, and then burnish it with a burnisher until it is as bright as you can possibly make it. The brighter it is the better the coloured varnishes will show on it; for to make them brilliant the ground must be shining beneath.

The coloured varnishes are sold in bottles at one shilling each. A few to commence with are sufficient, but as many as three dozen are made. The list includes orange, violet, rose, blue, green, crimson, and

deep gold. For laying on the lacquers, use fitch or camel-hair brushes. Be sure the silver ground is quite dry before you commence, and remove all dust



MIRROR IN SHEET LEATHER WORK.

from it. Hold it before the fire, but at a good distance off, that it may get slightly warm, then apply the lacquers very thinly with the brushes. If you fancy a silver ground for your piece of work, you must get a bottle of colourless varnish, and give the silver a coat of this, to preserve it from tarnishing. In the old pieces the ground is generally coloured. Red, blue, dark green, all make effective grounds, and they throw up the coloured and gold and silver designs well. A gold ground can be produced by laying a coat of gold lacquer over the silver. Rich colouring is a characteristic feature of the work, and a background of deep tint is a great aid in securing this; still, the old workers sometimes chose pale tints, and for certain pieces we may do the same with advantage.

A gentle heat, after the lacquers are applied, is advised, but the slight warming, as before, must be done carefully. This is to make them adhere well, and also to harden them; they only take a few minutes to dry.

After they are all laid, the work is complete, but it is better not to use it at once, more especially if it is anything likely to be handled or rubbed against when in use. There is no after-varnishing required, as in oil painting, because the colours are already incorporated in the varnish.

A rich effect is gained by diapering portions of a design. Sometimes it is a scroll which has a small pattern stamped on it. When a design is founded on floral and leaf forms, the diaper is seen on the large foliage, and even two diapers on the same leaf are occasionally seen. For these, punches are sold of different patterns. One may be like a tiny watch



PHOTOGRAPH FRAME IN SHEET LEATHER WORK.

gold of two shades, the one pale, the other a deep tint. The former is the colour of Australian coins; if we want a rich old gold, we can use two tints of the

spring ; another of square within square. The stamping is done by holding the punch in the left hand, with the diaper on the face of the leather, and tapping the top of the punch with a mallet. The ground may be stamped instead of the design ; but to my mind the diapered design looks richer.

The uses to which we may put our work are many. A room might be gorgeously decorated with a black oak dado having panels of Spanish leather let in, and frieze to correspond, the door being also panelled with the same. But this is a very ambitious scheme, and we may be well content if, after some practice, we can show a tall four-fold dining-room screen as the result of our labour. Many small pieces of furniture may be enriched with leather panels ; chairs may be upholstered with our work. A simple plan is to decorate two panels, and have them mounted on an oak folding chair ; this is by no means a costly affair, and yet it is charming and uncommon. For smaller work, I may mention caskets, blotters, book-covers, newspaper cases, and all kinds of frames and photo boxes.

Some forty years or so ago sheet leather work was an art fashionably followed by English ladies, and quite recently it has been again taken up. Most of the modern examples are mounted on dark-coloured or black velvet, but we can hardly say this plan is satisfactory. Articles composed entirely of leather are preferable ; not only is the effect more pleasing, but they look fresher. Velvet catches all the dust it possibly can, and it is difficult to brush it so constantly as is necessary without disturbing the leather decorations, and the interstices between the leaves and tendrils seldom look quite speckless. Leaves, flowers, stems, and berries are cut out of a sheet of skiver or basil. It is best to work from Nature, taking a spray of passion flower, for instance, and copying it as nearly as may be in leather. This will decorate a frame charmingly ; if used on a bracket, the leaves and flowers must be arranged more closely together.

It is necessary to damp the leather with salted water before the veining and shaping of the leaves and flower petals are done. A fine tool, or even a knitting pin, is used for veining and marking. Take a natural leaf, lay it on the leather, cut out its form exactly, next damp the leather copy, veining it accurately, and then mount it on fine wire, covering the stem with soft leather. There are many inexpensive tools of different shapes for moulding leaves to the desired forms, but a great deal can be done with the fingers in giving them natural-looking curves. Little wooden moulds are sold, and, when covered with leather and wired, they serve for various kinds of berries.

Some workers use no wire at all. They cut the stems and leaves in one piece, then double the stem so as to make it look round from the front view ; they pinch up the leaf at its junction with the stem, and tuck a tiny bit of it in at the back of the stem, this gives it the appearance of growing from the stem.

When a flower has to be added to a spray, it is fastened in place with light brown thread. The backs of leaves and flower petals are sometimes stiffened with glue or coaguline. Then, again, some workers, when the veining and shaping is finished and the leaves are dry, brush them over with parchment size.

To give an idea how flowers are made, take a passion flower. First cut a circle out of the leather, then shape the petals, but do not separate them entirely ; keep the circle still intact at the centre. The cut must only reach about two-thirds of the way from the edge of the circle to its middle. There will be five petals on this circle. Now repeat this again on another of the same diameter. Make a little round hole in the middle of each for the stem to pass through, then take a much smaller round of leather and strip at the edge like a fringe. Form the stamens from a still smaller circle, then the pistils. Slip the rounded stem through the three circles, letting it rise about half-an-inch above them. Into this half-inch slip the styles of pistils and stamens, which should be first touched with coaguline. Stiffen the back of the petals, and let the flower dry.

To fasten the sprays to wooden brackets, or to photo frames, small steel pins without heads are best. Avoid all varnish ; it makes the work look like a bad imitation of carved wood.

It is easy to think of many novel ways of treating sheet leather work. For instance, a frame could be covered plainly with leather on which an incised pattern had first been executed (or the incising can be done after covering if preferred), and a spray of flowers or hops thrown across one side. On the lid of a box covered with heliotrope leather there might be a spray of tan-coloured flowers, and the edge could be finished with a row of tan-coloured berries or buttons. For this purpose button moulds will serve. A frame, bought ready covered in antelope skin, could be decorated with a spray of tan flowers slightly tinted with architects' inks. There is no end to the ideas that crop up if once we take up thinking of adaptations from other kinds of art work, so we leave our readers with the advice not to let their work run exactly on the old lines, but to endow it with the charm of novelty of treatment.

E. CROSSLEY.

