

RICE-PAPER FLOWER-WORK.

A LOST ART REVIVED.

THERE are many occupations in which our grandmothers used to spend a great deal of their time which are almost, if not entirely, unknown to their granddaughters, and whose only record remains in faded bits of needlework, odd-looking jars, or mystic books of receipts. Forty years ago, or thereabouts, such strange arts as potichomanie (or the decoration of glass jars and bottles with cut-out pictures, set off with a groundwork of silver sand), the making of woollen and wire-work baskets spangled with parti-coloured crystals of alum, and very fearful and wonderful shellwork on boxes and trinkets, were part of most ladies' accomplishments. And there was one art, perhaps worthy of the name, not by any means so widely practised as these, and which has left hardly a record behind it, probably owing to the perishable nature of its materials, I mean rice-paper flower-work. Not painting flowers on rice-paper—that is a very beautiful kind of work, and one of itself well worth practising—but modelling tiny groups of flowers out of the paper itself.

Strictly speaking, the name "rice-paper" is a misleading one, as the material is neither a paper (though it looks like one), nor is it made of rice or any part of the rice-plant. It is the pith of an Eastern tree, the *Aralia papyrifera*, which grows in swamps in the island of

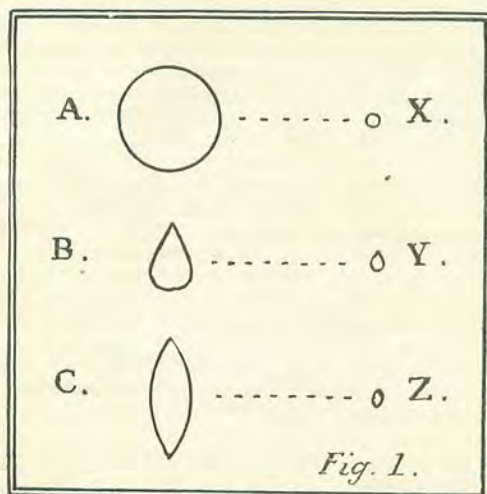
description. Any clever tinsmith will make them for you for a few pence, or if you are out of reach of such a handy man, you can make very fair substitutes for yourself (except for the larger sizes—and for these you can use the scissors) out of quills from the feathers of birds, from the goose down to the sparrow. Please, though, do not accuse me of instigating any kind of unnecessary bird murder or torture.

Here are the most useful shapes for your punches. They should be of the sizes given in the diagram. You will require about half-a-dozen of each shape, varying from the largest to the smallest; and you should have some extra leaf punches for leaves narrower than those shown at B . . . Y. You can make leaf and oval punches out of quills by pinching them; though if you split the quill in doing this you must throw it away, as it would tear the rice-paper instead of cutting it. You will find it useful also to have two or three pins or needles of different sizes, set in wooden handles that you can easily make by cutting up a penholder; and you must have a small piece of thick india-rubber cloth to lay the paper on when you are punching it. These, with a bottle of the strongest gum (not any kind of cement), some cardboard, and a well-fitted paint-box, will complete your equipment.

I do not believe that the dear ladies to whom I have referred practised this art of flower-modelling in any but its very simplest forms; and I think I may, without loss of modesty, claim to have found in it possibilities that few, if any, of them dreamt of. In any of the work that I ever saw in the old times, the stems of the leaves were not modelled, but only painted on the cardboard, and no punches, but only the scissors and knife, were used.

Now (even at the risk of repeating my former article) I will begin by describing the simplest flower you can make—a rose. It may be a white one, and if not, you should colour some of the paper to the tint you wish for before you begin, and then let it dry thoroughly. This advice applies as well to all leaves, save such variegated ones as those of begonias or zonal geraniums, which must be painted after they are cut out. To make your rose, punch out of the dry paper five or six discs, from the size A, Fig. 1, to three or four sizes smaller. Put a tiny drop of gum upon your cardboard mount, and then, after slightly moistening the largest disc, pick it up with your agate—the tip of which you must wet slightly between your lips—by its centre, and press it firmly down on the gum. Then put another drop of gum in the middle of the disc, and press down another disc on it in the same way, going on until you have put on the smallest. You will find that as you do this the paper will begin to crinkle a little, and this will help you in modelling the flower. When all the discs are thus built up, keep the agate point pressed down in the middle of the topmost one with your left hand, moisten the flower well with clean water and a soft brush, and then do your modelling as best you may with the finest blade of your penknife, or (what is much better) with the point of a pin set as I have described. I say, "as best you may," because no directions, but only a little intelligent observation of how the petals are set in a natural flower, can teach you how to do it. When you have shaped it to your satisfaction, touch the core of the flower with a little deep cadmium paint, taken up rather thickly on the tip of your finest brush. For some roses you will find that a little colour, a shade darker than that of the petals themselves, applied lightly to their edges while they are still wet, greatly enhances their effect. The general shape of each disc of your rose, after it has been modelled, will be something like A, Fig. 2.

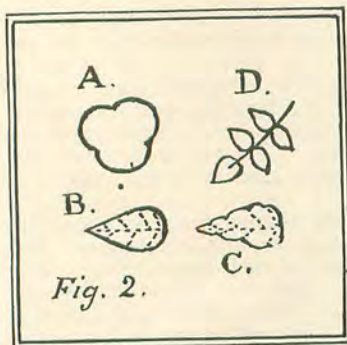
Having finished your rose, you should try its accompanying leaves next. Punch out five leaflets a size or two smaller than B, Fig. 1, from a piece of green paper. Moisten each of these, and, as it lies on the rubber cloth,



Formosa, shaved into very thin slices, and pressed flat. Owing to its cellular structure it is extremely brittle when dry, and for the same reason it absorbs moisture greedily, when it becomes tough and plastic. In the work I am about to describe, it can be cut easily and cleanly with a knife or a punch as long as it is dry, and with a pair of scissors when it is wet; when dry, the scissors would break it. Your scissors must be very fine and very sharp, and your knife and punches must be keen-edged, too. The rice-paper is not very easy to find, but any of the leading stationers would get it for you, if they had none in stock; or you might find it at the "Oriental" shops; and it is not expensive—I have made many hundreds of flowers and leaves out of a shilling's worth.

In an article published some time ago in this magazine, on "What can be done with an Agate," I gave a few directions for the simplest kind of this work, as an agate burnisher plays an important part in its execution. Not a curved burnisher, such as illuminators sometimes use, nor yet a flat one, but the common agate stylus, such as is supplied by stationers for a "manifold writer." You can buy one for about sixpence. Your other necessary tools are (as I have said) a fine pair of scissors and a penknife, with divers punches, which last demand a detailed

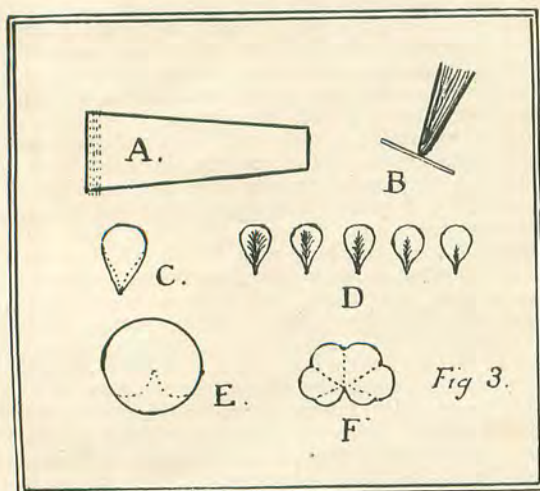
draw a line down its middle with the back of the tip of your *smallest* knife-blade, with smaller lines branching out alternately at each side from it (as shown at B, Fig. 2)



to represent the ribbing of the natural leaf. Indent the edge very slightly where each rib ends (as at C, Fig. 2) with your pin-point. Then make the leaf-stem. To do this you must cut a very fine strip of dry paper with your knife, wet it well with gum, and roll it carefully with your finger on the palm of your left hand until it is like a fine twig. Gum four of these leaflets on to this by their bases, in pairs,

and the fifth at the tip of the twig, imitating the arrangement of the natural leaf. You will find it easiest to do this by placing each leaflet face downwards on the cloth, and pressing the twig down upon it with the agate-point, which must be kept well wet to prevent the leaf sticking to it and so being destroyed. The under side of your spray will then appear as shown at D, Fig. 2. Making leaves thus successfully will require a good deal of practice, but the result will be infinitely more satisfactory than that attained by simply gumming the leaflets to the cardboard and painting in the stem. These more carefully formed leaves should be attached to the mount by the end of the stem only.

Quite as simple and easily imitated as roses are asters and chrysanthemums. Take a slip of white or coloured paper of the shape shown in Fig. 3, A, and cut it across, while quite dry, with your knife into fine strips, as marked by the dotted lines. If you like, you may tint the edges of the white paper with some colour worn by these flowers, so that each strip shall be coloured at both ends. You should have at least twenty-five or thirty of these strips to make a flower—a greater number for an aster than for a chrysanthemum. Put a spot of gum on your cardboard, and then take up your strips one by one with the agate point, as shown at B, Fig. 3, beginning with the longest ones, and press them down across and across each other in a star pattern, adding a little gum to the centre when necessary, until you have



built up a satisfactory flower. You can pick out the petals and arrange them to lie naturally with a pin-point; and if you are making a chrysanthemum you can give its petals a curl by pressing them here and there with the back of your knife-blade before you take them up with the agate. Some of the flowers may be tinted in their centres,

which should be done carefully after the modelling is finished.

Pelargoniums, too, are easily made, and are very effective. To make one, cut out five leaves with one of your larger punches, and narrow off the smaller end of each with the scissors, as at C, Fig. 3. Colour the set of leaves in regular gradation (D, Fig. 3), as in a natural flower, and make a very light rib-line, as with the rose-leaves, on the narrower part of each. Place a spot of gum as before, and then take up each petal by its narrow end with the agate, and press it into place. If you take great care that no gum gets on any other part of the petals, they will rise up from the cardboard towards each other as those of the flower itself do. Then press a few tiny shreds of white paper ("paper" always means the rice-paper, remember) across and across each other into the centre, to represent the stamens, etc., which in such tiny flowerets need not be modelled with strict botanical accuracy. White, scarlet, and pink geraniums are made like pelargoniums, with smaller petal leaves, the pink and scarlet being punched out of paper coloured beforehand.

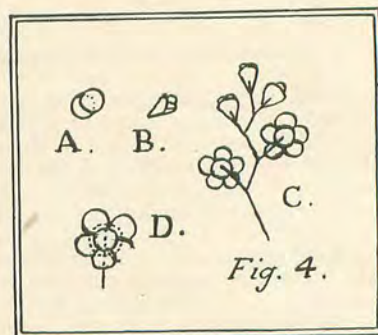
The leaf of the pelargonium is a very easy one to imitate. Punch out one of your largest discs of paper, coloured previously, and cut it with your scissors as the dotted lines show in Fig. 3, E. Make the rib-lines as before where shown at F, and indent the leaf with your pin at the outer end of each rib. If you give the pin-point a little extra downward pressure (it is difficult to describe, but you will soon find it out) when you are doing this, you will find that it makes the leaf swell up in the middle of each of its divisions, as the natural leaves do. You may give these leaves short stalks, made like those of the rose leaves, or simply (as I always do) fasten them down on the cardboard at the place where their stalks would join them.

Zonal geranium leaves are modelled in the same way as those of pelargoniums; but they must be cut out of white paper, and painted before the rib-marks are made. And here I must say what I should have said before—that all the colouring should be done on both sides of the paper.

There is no prettier flower to imitate than a spray of forget-me-nots, but it is more difficult than those already described. Of course you can simplify it by gumming the flowerets down on the cardboard and painting the stalks, but the more perfect imitation is well worth the trouble it gives. For each floweret punch out, with one of your smaller circular punches, five little discs of blue paper and one of white, then, with a larger punch, one of green. Make a stem as already described, and punch out a few discs of blue and of green to form the buds with. You will

also need some bits of rolled green paper for the shorter stems.

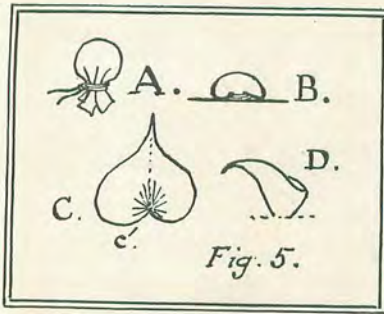
Begin by laying a green disc on the tip of your left fore-finger. Put a little gum on its upper side, and lay a blue disc on it as in Fig. 4, A. Then by rolling it carefully between your finger and thumb, you may form the green disc into a tiny cone, with the blue paper peeping



out at its wider end, imitating an opening bud as at B. Fasten the tip of your main stalk to the bud at the side where the least blue shows. By using slightly larger green discs and two or even three blue ones to each, you may make your buds look further and further opened. Fasten each bud to the stalk by a short stem, giving the main one a little bend, while it is still moist with the gum, where the short one joins it, as at C, Fig. 4. D shows how the full-blown flowers are modelled, the dotted circle being the green disc bearing the five blue ones, and the inner circle being the white disc, which should be pressed well down with the agate and then coloured in its heart with a tiny

touch of bright yellow. The dotted line shows the position of its stalk. You must not be disheartened at not succeeding with your forget-me-nots at once, as they—especially their buds and stalks—require much persevering practice.

“Snow-balls” and hydrangeas are very pretty work.



For the groundwork of these you must cut out rather a large circle of white or pink paper, and make this, while wet, into a kind of ball, as in Fig. 5, A, about the size of a small pea, by stuffing it with any odd shreds of the paper and tying it, where gathered, with fine silk. Cut off the

ends of the silk and paper very closely, and gum it down upon the cardboard, flattening it with your finger until it looks like the top of a little button-mushroom, as shown in section at B, Fig. 5. When it is quite dry, cover it with gum, and having punched out a hundred or so of the smallest discs of paper, white, pink, or lilac, set them over it in groups of five, like star-shaped flowerets. The gum will dry very quickly, so you must moisten it again for each floweret with a paint-brush. Keep the top of your agate wet, unless you wish the petals to stick to it and not to the “mushroom,” which (I need hardly say) must be quite hidden by the flowerets.

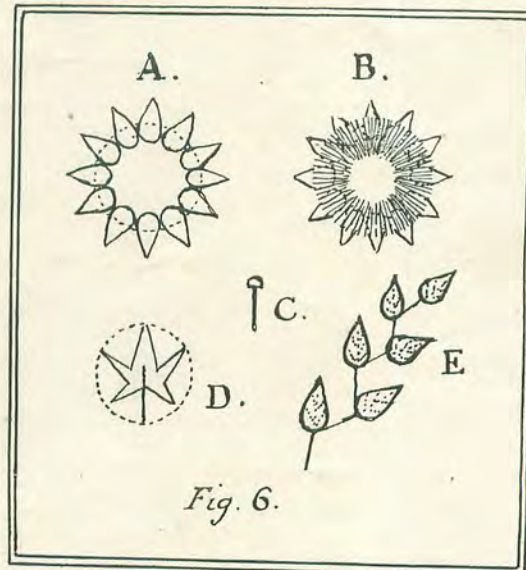
The modelling of even a rose is hardly simpler than that of an arum, which is a very effective flower in decorative groups. For it you only require two pieces of paper, one of white and one of deep cadmium yellow. The white paper you must cut with the scissors to the size and shape of C, Fig. 5, or perhaps a little larger. Tint the part shaded in the figure, on the inner side only, with pale green, and make a central rib-line as dotted. Then put a little gum along the edge, at C, and model the flower with the help of your agate. When the gum is quite dry, cut the lower part of the flower off, as at the dotted line in D, and having moistened it again (remember that the paper must always be moist when cut with the scissors), give its lip the proper curve. Then fasten it down, upright, upon the mount. The yellow paper you must make into a thickish roll, as you make the leaf stems, and set it in the middle of the flower to imitate the large pistil.

Arum leaves need hardly any directions, they can be so easily modelled, especially when one has become fairly expert at the smaller kinds. Of course, being so comparatively large, they must be cut, not punched out. Begonia leaves are made like those of the arum, but out of white paper, coloured at the same stage as the zonal geraniums. I need not insist that they are extremely effective in anything like a large group; but they should not be too freely used, as the ease of their construction is so manifest.

Perhaps the most effective flower you can set yourself to imitate is the passion-flower; but it requires great patience and very fine workmanship. I have often used more than one hundred and fifty separate pieces of paper in building one blossom alone. You must begin by punching a pale-green disc with your largest punch, and twelve small leaves to set round it, as in Fig. 6, A. Each of these petals must be marked with a rib-line. Having put these together, cover the centre with gum, not too thickly; and

then cut out from seventy to a hundred strips of white paper, tinted purple (but at one end only) as if for an aster, but only half the length of the longest aster petals, and all of the same size. Set a fringe of these on, as in B, purple tips outwards, and then gum down another pale-green disc, about half the size of the first, so as just to cover their inner ends; and on this arrange another and smaller fringe. Next make five stamens—fine strips of green paper, with half a bright orange-coloured disc at the end of each, the size and shape of C, and set them radiating outwards over the fringes. At this stage of the flower's formation you may set it on the cardboard, preparing a seat for it by gumming on five or six discs of paper, one above the other, as raising it thus adds greatly to its effect. Now build up the seed-vessel in the centre of the flower, of half-a-dozen little discs of pale yellow-green paper, decreasing in size. This you must do very slowly and patiently, allowing each disc to take a good hold before you gum the next on top of it. Finally, fix the three stamens, which it will do to make the same as the pistils (or a tiny bit larger) on top of the seed-vessel, curving them slightly downwards. Sprays of the leaves may be made by cutting them out of discs of pale-green paper (as at D, Fig. 6) in decreasing series, marking their ribs, and fastening them to stalks as one does the forget-me-not sprays. Other leaf-sprays you may make in the same way; but with ordinary leaves you may save yourself the trouble of putting a separate stalk to each, by giving the main stem a zig-zag bend and gumming on a leaf at each angle.

When putting together more than a very few flowers and leaves in a group, it is well to build up your mount with four or five thicknesses of cardboard, decreasing in size, fastened one above the other. Colour them a light green, and set the little models well together so as to hide all the joinings. I generally make my groups of a crescent shape. Of course much of the effect of the whole will depend upon how you group your models according to their sizes and



colours. Always use natural flowers and leaves to guide you, if possible; but failing them, or costly books delineating them, you will be greatly helped in your work by studying well-executed Christmas and birthday cards, which are easy enough to obtain.

BARRINGTON MACGREGOR.

