



"SUCH A COMICAL WORLD!"

WOOD-CARVING.

BY JOHN TODD HILL.



ALREADY hundreds of young Americans have taken up wood-carving as a pleasure and recreation, and hundreds more intend to practice the art. Some hints from a fellow-worker as to methods of work and uses of tools may therefore be of service to them. There is no art in which a little talent counts for so

much. Within certain limits it is the easiest of the arts. You must draw and paint for years, before you can attain excellence. But you may begin carving a chest, or chair, or book-case, with your first lesson, and finish it so well that it will be a valuable piece of furniture a hundred years hence.

Some of you may have seen the state bed at Haddon Hall, in England, in which Queen Elizabeth once slept. Its hangings were perhaps the best

specimens of English embroidery of that period, but now the beautiful colors have faded into one dull hue. The result of years of skillful labor is valueless, save for its associations. But the carved oak paneling in the adjoining ball-room is today as fresh as when it was finished, and time has added only a richness to its coloring.

The Bishop's Palace at Durham is stripped of its former luxury, and its walls are bare save for a few fragments of faded tapestry. But the magnificent staircase, with its great, carved balustrade, is unchanged and helps us to realize what the palace may have been when bishops lived there, and "held court like kings." The carving is not finely executed, and on close examination suggests rather the ax than the gouge. But the design is bold and striking, and the effect admirable.

When I was a little boy, I remember hearing one amateur wood-turner say to another:

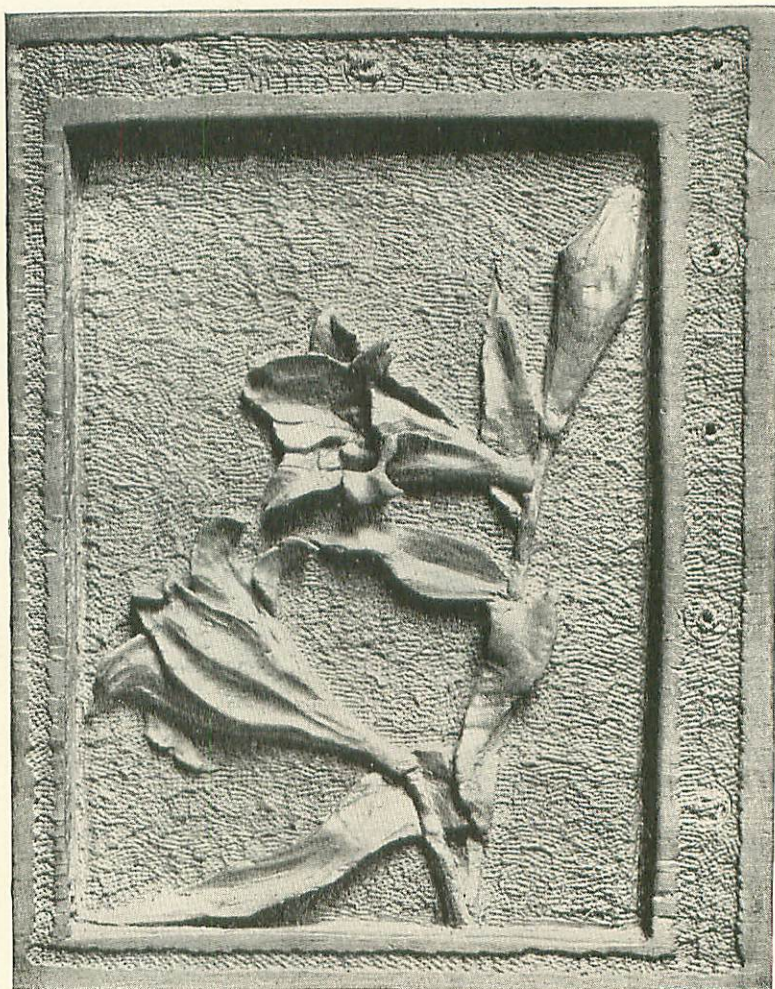
"The secret of all good workmanship is to have sharp tools."

I was so young that I thought I had surprised a professional confidence,—one of the hidden mysteries of the craft. But though an open secret, it is none the less important. To know when your tools are dull and to keep them sharp is your first duty. When you have accomplished that, half your task is done.

You should have a *soft* oil-stone, a "slip" for the inside of the gouges and V tools, and a leather strop. Have the tools carefully ground, "long bevel," by an experienced man, and after that, unless some accident occurs, you yourself can keep them in order for a year or more. Never use a tool without first ascertaining that it is free from nicks. By and by, you will learn to make it literally as sharp as a razor. You will have much less sharpening to do if you are careful not to let

one tool hit against another when taking them from the bench or replacing them; for they are so highly tempered that they will be chipped by the slightest knock.

The necessary tools are chisels, gouges (see p. 47), and parting-tools; and they are made in such forms and sizes as may be required by the value



PANEL DESIGNED AND CARVED BY C. MALCOLM FRASER.

or nature of the work undertaken. "Addis" tools are the best, and are sold by most large dealers. By all means avoid "sets" of tools put up in boxes of six and twelve, and labeled "For Amateur Wood-carvers."

The cost of the tools you will need, together with the oil-stones and a mallet (which should be shaped like a potato-masher), is little more than four dollars.

In so short an article as this must be, only a few

hints can be given. In beginning, select a large and bold design. Let us suppose that you are about to carve a chest. Take some simple design and enlarge it so that it will cover the whole of an end panel. You will thus have room enough to work freely, and there will be less danger of breaking the wood. Besides these advantages, you are likely to obtain a more effective result. In the choice of his design, the beginner should freely avail himself of the best things he can find, as original designing requires much experience and practice.

When carving is to be on furniture, or used simply as a decorative feature, avoid realistic and choose conventional forms. A natural spray of wild roses on a bureau drawer, or a fragment of a blossoming apple-bough over a mirror, is as much out of place as it would be if carved on the façade of a building. The smallest piece of furniture should be in accordance with architectural principles, and the decoration should harmonize with the whole design, and not throw it into confusion.

If you carve a molding, your object is not only to beautify that particular molding, but to emphasize the line which the molding makes. If a beading be carved on a corner, it helps to soften the sharpness of the angles. A pilaster may be carved and adorned without interfering with its office of a support. But can a twisted bunch of ferns support a heavy burden, and should it be made to seem to do so? If a conventional, vine-like pattern run around a panel, it may form a beautiful border, and seem to frame the carving in the center; but a bunch of plants, growing from nowhere and spreading over the panel, will always give an unbalanced and unpleasant effect. In the same way a panel of flying swallows, covering the back of a settle, is misplaced. We don't wish to lean back against flying birds. On a chimney-piece they would seem well placed.

If, therefore, you wish to make a piece of furniture, see that its design is fitting and agreeable. Then your carving will add to it, and appear to good advantage. In the numberless variety of publications on the subject of furniture and deco-

ration, there will be no difficulty in finding useful suggestions.

For carving, it sometimes will be easier to draw your design on paper and paste it on the wood, than to draw on the wood itself. If the pattern is to be in relief, do not cut too close to the design in taking out the background, but allow yourself a little margin, and trim off the edges after you have reached the necessary depth. As a rule, beginners cut too deeply, seeming to think that the higher the relief the better will be the carving. Go over the whole piece once and take out a moderate depth. Then, if need be, go over it a second or third time. In taking out the background you will find the chisel, not the gouge, the best tool for cutting straight down. When you have removed most of the wood, the gouge will complete the work by trimming off the edges. Always select one that just fits the required curves. Thus you will work faster, and avoid breaking the wood. When the background is taken out, roughly model the design, going over the whole, so as to get the general effect. Then see whether the work promises to look as you wish, remembering that unless it is well modeled as a whole, no amount of "finishing" will make it satisfactory. It will be a help to set up your work from time to time, and to look at it from a distance. In finishing, turn the piece (or the bench it is on) as you work, so the light shall strike first on one side and then on the other, that no ragged edges or splinters may escape your notice.

No great exertion, and no great amount of strength, are necessary; for if the tools are sharp they will cut easily, and if you take off thin shavings the work will go on smoothly and rapidly. A long clean cut, running in the direction of the main line, should be used for drapery, acanthus leaves, and a hundred other such things. This is made, not by cutting in deeply at once, but by taking off a little at a time, and by often repeating the cut.

Strength not being needed, women have had no little success in wood-carving, having done much work that will bear the test of severe criticism.



CARVED PANEL — SWAMP-ROSE.
(BY A STUDENT OF THE CINCINNATI
ART-SCHOOL.)



CARVED PANEL — HAWTHORN.
(BY A STUDENT OF THE CINCINNATI
ART-SCHOOL.)

Some of my own pupils, in spite of their small hands, have made me proud of their beautiful productions. As an example of woman's work and of a good reproduction in wood, a copy of a portrait carved by Miss Eggleston, after a relief by Mr. St. Gaudens, is given below.

For example, the drapery on a figure may be carved with all the tool-cuts running with the various folds, so that the figure will seem almost to move underneath the drapery, but if the drapery were filed or sandpapered smooth it would look as solid as a piece of pig-iron.



PORTRAIT OF DR. J. G. HOLLAND. PANEL FOR CENTER OF MANTEL. CARVED BY MISS ALLEGRA EGGLESTON.

Wood-carving has remained the most backward and neglected of the arts, because it was left so long in the hands of unthinking men, who were content to do the same things generation after generation, continually lessening the number of designs used, and losing the spirit in those carved, till their work became lifeless. Even the execution grew void of all individuality. One man's carving was exactly like another's. All Italian work looks alike. All German work looks alike. Much Italian carving is, indeed, exquisite in finish, but it too often reminds one of the sugar and paper decorations on wedding-cake. The acanthus leaf has done duty on everything. Then, to conceal poor workmanship, files and sandpaper have scoured it down till the carving appears as hard and stiff as if cast in iron. All wood-carving should be cut out clean, leaving the tool-marks. In this way you get variety of surface, and your work will look fresh and free.

Wood-carving was once a great art, and men of genius and imagination devoted their lives to it. Their thoughts were beautiful, their labor was conscientious, and the freshness and charm of their work are to-day as wonderful as ever. If we are to have such work again, we, too, must have ideas and give our best skill to our work.

At the very outset, put into your work as much thought as possible. Then, as you increase in skill, your ideas will grow in value. Avoid decoration that looks as if it were meant simply to fill so much space, and strive to have all ornament harmonize in idea with the thing it is intended to beautify. For instance, a panel in a sideboard would be appropriately decorated if surrounded by a simple border of conventional holly, the center space being occupied by a boar's head on a platter. Do you think a jar of sunflowers or a cherub's head would seem as fitting?

I remember a cabinet for birds' eggs, made by an amateur. The front was of glass, and the pilasters and side panels were beautifully carved. The lowest panels were decorated with wading birds—a pelican on one, and a crane on the other—for these birds would naturally be low down. Above came two panels containing a jay and a hawk; and last, a skylark and a swallow at the top.

I hear you saying, "Such designs are suited only to those well skilled in the art." Very true, but the principle applies to the simplest carving. Variety will add interest to your work. Perfect

ferent, and the beauty of the designs well repays study. By securing variety in design, your work will never become tiresome while you are doing it, or after it is done.

When we have learned the rudiments of the art and begin to have more complex ideas, we shall wish to carve figures. Here, really, we leave simple carving behind, and advance into the field of sculpture; for sculpture in wood is as truly sculpture as if its material were marble or bronze.

We must now take up modeling in clay, and henceforth our carving will be good exactly so far as our modeling is good. Carving can not excel its



"LYCIDAS."—A PANEL DESIGNED AND CARVED BY MISS ALLEGRA EGGLESTON.

harmony can be preserved in a piece, though no two parts are carved alike. There is a splendid example of this in Melrose Abbey,—a long row of tiles carved in stone, which, at first glance, seem to be alike, the amounts of light and shade being equal. In fact, however, every tile is dif-

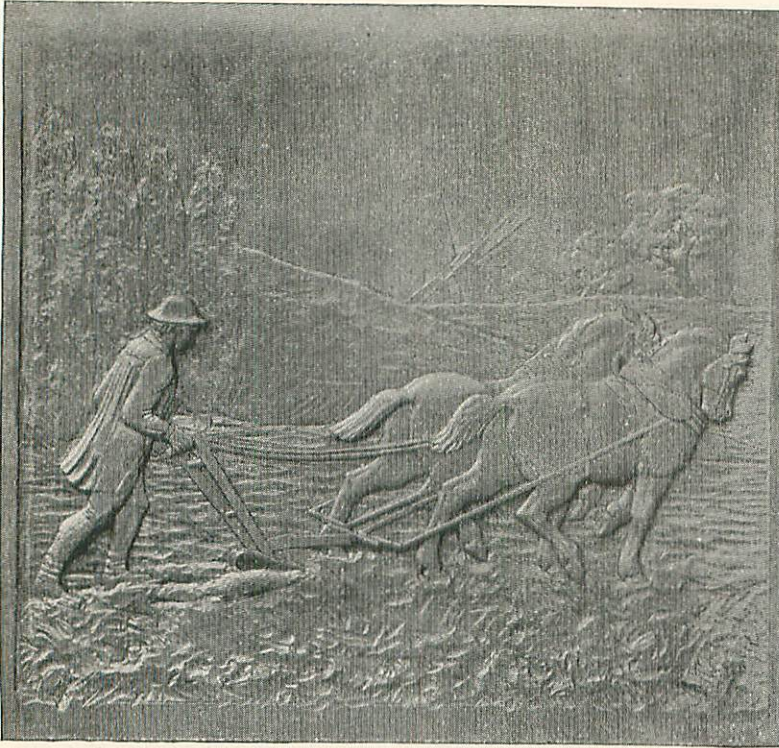
ferent, and the beauty of the designs well repays study. Hence the processes which lead to success are the same for one material as for the other. The work is modeled in the clay, a plaster cast is made, and then a close copy of it may be cut in marble or wood, or cast in bronze. Of clay

modeling I shall say only this: When you have grasped an idea, even if a conventional one, go to nature for your help in working it out. Suppose you are doing a horse's head. Do not rely on casts and pictures, but make studies in the stable, and see how quickly you will learn. You can not hope

not project and throw the rest into shadow. When the work is deeply recessed, high relief is effective.

An illustration of low-relief carving is given in the engraving, one of four panels from a series which I made for Mr. H. G. Marquand's "Snuggery," in his Newport house. These pieces average sixteen inches by eighteen inches, with the highest relief but a quarter of an inch.

You can learn almost as much from studying good pieces of wood-carving as from a teacher; for, if the carving was properly done, you can tell just what tools were used to produce every effect. But, as good work is very rare, and as you are surrounded by bad examples, you must be careful not to be led astray. A great part of the wood-carving in the market is done by machinery, and only touched up by hand, though often described as hand-carving. Then, too, so much of the rest is spoiled by sandpaper and files that you can get no instruction from



ONE OF A SERIES OF PANELS DESIGNED AND CARVED BY THE AUTHOR.

for success in figures or draperies without models to work from. Every material makes a different fold, and though you may not exactly copy any fold, you will need to study from the real object.

One word in regard to high and low relief. It is commonly thought that there is something intrinsically more artistic in low than in high relief, because the low relief requires a more delicate and subtle treatment; and that the variations are so slight, and the whole thing so nearly flat, that a little has to count for much. But, in reality, one work of art is just as artistic as another, if it be as well done, and the question of high or low relief should be settled by the place the completed carving is to occupy. When it is to be looked at from a distance with the light coming from all sides, as on the gable of a house, high relief is proper; but for interior work, low relief gives the better effect. The indoor light being generally a side light, in low relief one part of the work does

it. However, you can learn much by examining good stone-carving. This branch of carving is further advanced than work in wood, and, in spite of the fact that the materials are so different, the one will serve as an example for the other. In a good piece of stone-carving all the tool-marks are left, and you will notice how they run; and how, by allowing the outside edge of the design to disappear here and there in the background, an effect is obtained almost as soft as if the design were modeled in clay. On the newer houses in New York city there are many good examples.

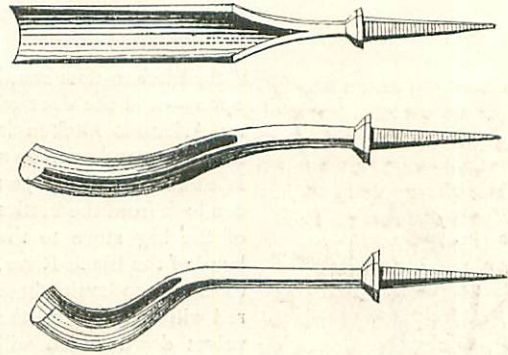
The best woods for carving are oak, cherry, and mahogany. Oak is rather hard, but it is so strong that it will not break unless you get a "stringy" piece. Cherry is quite strong and not so hard; and if it be not daubed with stain, but simply left to itself, it will soon become beautiful in color. Always get the reddest piece you can. If you can obtain a good piece of well-seasoned mahogany,

you will find it a delightful wood to use for large work, though it will not prove strong enough for a fine pattern. Beginners are often discouraged because they start with poor wood. I advise you to take especial care and pains in this particular, and be sure you have a piece with straight grain, free from knots and imperfections. Try the wood before you begin, for it is almost time thrown away to carve a "curly" or cross-grained piece.

To finish, with a brush or rag put on raw linseed oil. When it has soaked well into the wood, wipe the work clean with a woolen cloth, and apply a coat of *thin* shellac. Next day, take one of those little scrubbing-brushes used for the hands, and rub the work hard. This rubbing will remove the unpleasant shine, without taking off the shellac which protects the carving from dust.

My friend, the late John L. Hayes, of Cambridge, was one of the busiest lawyers in Boston, yet by his own handiwork he made his house a marvel to all who see it. Working sometimes but fifteen minutes a day, he accomplished an almost incredible amount and variety of work. This is the more surprising because he began wood-carving in middle life, without any previous artistic training. The cabinet for birds' eggs, mentioned before, is his work. Another example is a circular mirror-

frame, composed of a wreath of the flowers mentioned by Ophelia. Winding around throughout the circle of flowers, and ending at the bottom



SPECIMENS OF TOOLS FOR WOOD-CARVING.

in a knot, is a flowing ribbon, on which is carved the quotation: "There 's rosemary, that 's for remembrance, pray you, love, remember; and there is pansies, that 's for thoughts."

If our young wood-carvers find a few difficulties removed by the brief hints I have offered them, I have accomplished all I expected.

NOVEMBER IN THE GARDEN.

BY GRACE WINTHROP.

The sunflowers in the garden
Are bending limp and low.
The cornstalks, brown and withered,
Stand rustling in a row.
"We were so fine," they murmur,
"A little while ago!"

The sky is gray and gloomy
Without the sunshine's glow.
There is no smiling anywhere
Unless — Oh, gladsome show!
Twelve plump and golden pumpkins
All beaming in a row!

They say, "Why so despairing?
We're always here, you know,
At this unpleasant season
Expressly sent to show
The need of glad Thanksgiving,
In spite of frost and snow."