



A FUNGUS ETCHING, REPRESENTING LOROLLES'S "SHEPHERDESS."

Pictures on Fungi.

BY GEORGE DOLLAR.



HERE is hardly a thing in Nature which may not be turned to a beautiful or a useful end. Witness, for instance, the beautiful illustrations in this article. At first sight you would think them to be the product of the potter's art, decorated by the deft hand of some designer. They stand out boldly on the page, and the lover of figure and landscape feels a passing pleasure when looking at their delicate and graceful lines. Had we not already told you in our title what these pretty pictures show, you would be surprised to find that they are not a potter's work, but merely etchings on the fungus growth of trees.

They are, moreover, but a few of a remarkable collection belonging to Mrs. Martha P. Cooper, a portrait painter, who lives in Concord, New Hampshire. She has been at work upon her collection for nine successive years, and has spent her summers and her leisure time visiting the primeval wilds of the New England States, hunting tirelessly for these curious canvases, which Nature provides all too rarely. In a letter she tells us of a visit to the Bradford Sulphur Springs in September, 1891, with a party of ladies and gentlemen. "During the visit," so Mrs. Cooper writes, "the gentlemen of the party came to me and said they had found some very

wonderful formations upon the dead wood, which they were waiting to gather for me. They had seen something marked upon them which led them to think that, by careful manipulation, a picture could be worked out very effectively; and would I take up the work?"

The idea did not appeal to the artist, but after deliberation she decided to see what could be done with the fungi. Her friends brought her not only beautiful formations of



THE "OLD MAN" OF THE WHITE MOUNTAINS, ETCHED ON FUNGUS.



LANDSCAPES ON FUNGUS.

fungi, but pictures to be reproduced thereon. "I shut myself in my room," she writes; "day after day I studied, getting acquainted with the quality and character of the pigment that lay beneath their creamy surface. I gradually learned to be fascinated with their sepia tints, and wondered what it all meant—that after the stump and tree became lifeless

these unique formations came out. Some of them," the writer sympathetically adds, "were fan-shaped, child-like, and pure as the lily that springs up from the muddy waters in symmetrical beauty, sensitiveness, and complexion."

Others were grotesque and incapable of being engraved upon.

But enough perfect formations were found to keep up her interest for weeks. These, with the additions of future years, have formed a collection of great value, and one undoubtedly unique in the United States.

The illustrations reproduced show a variety of subjects mainly connected with familiar New England scenes. The head-piece to our article is a graphic copy of Lorolles's "Shepherdess." The illustration at the



A NEW ENGLAND HOMESTEAD.



ANOTHER FUNGUS LANDSCAPE.

bottom of the first page represents the famous "Old Man" of the White Mountains, and a New Hampshire lake scene depicted on a fungus 5 in. wide. The others possess little except a local interest to justify a title. They are all landscapes, because, as Mrs. Cooper says, "nothing but a landscape is in harmony with the growth." None, again, is desirable except that fungus formation which has a white frame around it, a feature prominently shown in all the photographs produced.

Unfortunately this quality of fungi is very rare. "I have hunted over miles and miles of forestry," adds Mrs. Cooper on this point, "without finding one reliable formation. I have been rowed over the waters of Lake Winnepiseogee and Lake Sunapee, in expectation of finding superior formations, for I had been told they grew abundantly upon the banks of these waters. Yet I found none."

The pictures are drawn by running sharp steel points through the creamy-coloured face of the fungus, furrowing up a brown tint thereon. The design is roughly marked out, and the detail put in afterwards just as an ordinary painter works upon his canvas. All of the fungi are of an exceedingly sensitive nature, and the woods which afford the best material on which to work are the yellow and black beeches, and the yellow, grey, and black birches.

Mrs. Cooper's collection cannot be duplicated, simply because Nature never repeats herself. "I have," she says, "some growths an inch and a half across, others a foot and a half, yet all fan-shaped. I value them from three dollars to seventy-five dollars each, and enjoy preparing them as I have never enjoyed any other branch of art. I have sold many of them to travellers, and my work

gladdens the homes of the West as well as the East." There are many, we may add, in the United States to-day who, under Mrs. Cooper's care, have learnt to use the fungi for decorative purposes, but none more skilfully than she. With her it has been mostly a labour of love, and it grows to greater beauty each succeeding year.



MRS. MARTHA P. COOPER—THE ARTIST AND OWNER OF THE COLLECTION.
From a Photo. by Lothrop & Cunningham, Lowell, Mass.