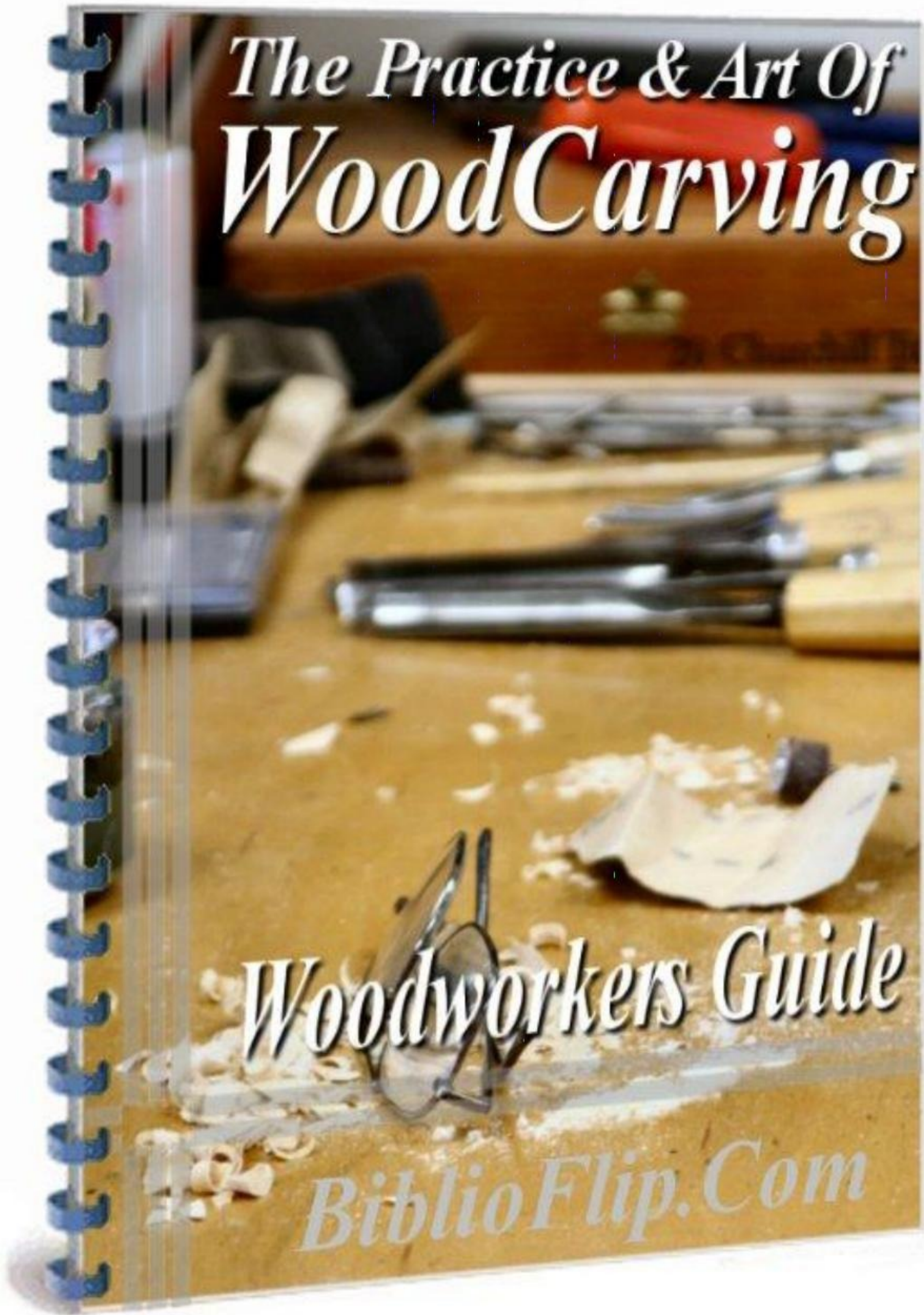


The notebook cover features a photograph of a woodcarving workshop. In the foreground, a wooden workbench is covered with wood shavings. A pair of safety glasses and a carving knife with a wooden handle are visible. In the background, a wooden toolbox with a brass latch is partially visible. The text is overlaid on this image.

The Practice & Art Of WoodCarving

Woodworkers Guide

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A black and white woodcut-style illustration of a bear standing on its hind legs, leaning against a wooden post. The bear is looking to the left. The post has several rectangular blocks attached to it, and a small wooden board is visible behind the bear's back.

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[illegible]

EDITOR'S PREFACE

In issuing these volumes of a series of Handbooks on the Artistic Crafts, it will be well to state what are our general aims.

In the first place, we wish to provide trustworthy text-books of workshop practise, from the points of view of experts who have critically examined the methods current in the shops, and putting aside vain survivals, are prepared to say what is good workmanship, and to set up a standard of quality in the crafts which are more especially associated with design. Secondly, in doing this, we hope to treat design itself as an essential part of good workmanship. During the last century most of the arts, save painting and sculpture of an academic kind, were little considered, and there was [8] a tendency to look on "design" as a mere matter of *appearance*. Such "ornamentation" as there was was usually obtained by following in a mechanical way a drawing provided by an artist who often knew little of the technical processes involved in production. With the critical attention given to the crafts by Ruskin and Morris, it came to be seen that it was impossible to detach design from craft in this way, and that, in the widest sense, true design is an inseparable element of good quality, involving as it does the selection of good and suitable material, contrivance for special purpose, expert workmanship, proper finish, and so on, far more than mere ornament, and indeed, that ornamentation itself was rather an exuberance of fine workmanship than a matter of merely abstract lines. Workmanship when separated by too wide a gulf from fresh thought—that is, from design—inevitably decays, and, on the other hand, ornamentation, divorced from workmanship, is necessarily unreal, and quickly falls into affectation. Proper ornamentation [9] may be defined as a language addressed to the eye; it is pleasant thought expressed in the speech of the tool.

In the third place, we would have this series put artistic craftsmanship before people as furnishing reasonable occupations for those who would gain a livelihood. Although within the bounds of academic art, the competition, of its kind, is so acute that only a very few per cent can fairly hope to succeed as painters and sculptors; yet, as artistic craftsmen, there is every probability that nearly every one who would pass through a sufficient period of apprenticeship to workmanship and design would reach a measure of success.

In the blending of handwork and thought in such arts as we propose to deal with, happy careers may be found as far removed from the dreary routine of hack labor as from the terrible uncertainty of academic art. It is desirable in every way that men of good education should be brought back into the productive crafts: there are more than enough of us "in the city," and it is [10] probable that more consideration will be given in this century than in the last to Design and Workmanship.

This third volume of our series treats of one branch of the great art of sculpture, one which in the past has been in close association with architecture. It is, well, therefore, that besides dealing thoroughly, as it does, with the craftsmanship of wood-carving, it should also be concerned with the theory of design, and with the subject-matter which the artist should select to carve.

Such considerations should be helpful to all who are interested in the ornamental arts. Indeed, the present book contains some of the best suggestions as to architectural ornamentation under modern circumstances known to me. Architects can not forever go on plastering buildings over with trade copies of ancient artistic thinking, and they and

the public must some day realize that it is not mere shapes, but only [11] *thoughts*, which will make reasonable the enormous labor spent on the decoration of buildings. Mere structure will always justify itself, and architects who can not obtain living ornamentation will do well to fall back on structure well fitted for its purpose, and as finely finished as may be without carvings and other adornments. It would be better still if architects would make the demand for a more intellectual code of ornament than we have been accustomed to for so long.

On the side of the carver, either in wood or in stone, we want men who will give us their own thought in their own work—as artists, that is—and will not be content to be mere hacks supplying imitations of all styles to order.

On the teaching of wood-carving I should like to say a word, as I have watched the course of instruction in many schools. It is desirable that classes should be provided with casts and photographs of good examples, such as Mr. Jack speaks of, varying from rough choppings up to minute and exquisite [12] work, but all having the breath of life about them. There should also be a good supply of illustrations and photographs of birds and beasts and flowers, and above all, some branches and buds of real leafage. Then I would set the student of design in wood-carving to make *variations* of such examples according to his own skill and liking. If he and the teacher could be got to clear their minds of ideas of "style," and to take some example simply because they liked it, and to adapt it just because it amused them, the mystery of design would be nearly solved. Most design will always be the making of one thing like another, with a difference. Later, motives from Nature should be brought in, but always with some guidance as to treatment, from an example known to be fine. I would say, for instance, "Do a panel like this, only let it be oak foliage instead of vine, and get a thrush or a parrot out of the bird book."

In regard to the application of carving, I have been oppressed by the accumulation [13] in carving classes of little carved squares and oblongs, having no relation to anything that, in an ordinary way, is carved. To carve the humblest real thing, were it but a real toy for a child, would be better than the production of these panels, or of the artificial trivialities which our minds instinctively associate with bazaars

W. R. LETHABY.

September, 1903.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO THE READER,

Be you 'prentice or student, or what is still better, both in one, I introduce the following pages to you with this explanation: that all theoretical opinions set forth therein are the outcome of many years of patient sifting and balancing of delicate questions, and these have with myself long since passed out of the category of mere "opinions" into that of settled convictions. With regard to the practical matter of "technique," it lies very much with yourself to determine the degree of perfection to which you may attain. This depends greatly upon the amount of application which you may be willing or able to devote to its practise.

Remember—the laws which govern all [16] good art must be known before they can be obeyed; they are subtle, but unalterable. The conditions most favorable to your craft must first be understood before these laws can be recognized. There yet remains at your own disposal that devotion of energy which is the first essential step, both in the direction of obtaining clearer views and in conquering technical difficulties.

I have to thank the following gentlemen for their assistance in providing photographs for some of the illustrations: Messrs. Bedford Lemere & Co.—H. Sandland—Charles C. Winmill—W. Weir—J. R. Holliday and F. K. Rives.

G. J.

September, 1903.

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CHAPTER I

PREAMBLE

Student and Apprentice, their Aims and Conditions of Work—Necessity for some Equality between Theory and Practise—The Student's Opportunity lies on the Side of Design.

The study of some form of handicraft has of late years become an important element in the training of an art student. It is with the object of assisting such with practical directions, as well as suggesting to more practised carvers considerations of design and treatment, that the present volume has been written. The art of wood-carving, however, lends itself to literary demonstration only in a very limited way, more especially in the condensed form of a text-book, which must be looked upon merely as a temporary guide, of use only until such time as practise and study shall have strengthened the judgment of the student, and enabled [26] him to assimilate the many and involved principles which underlie the development of his craft.

If the beginner has mastered to some extent the initial difficulties of the draftsman, and has a fair general knowledge of the laws of design, but no acquaintance with their application to the art of wood-carving, then the two factors which will most immediately affect his progress (apart from natural aptitude) are his opportunities for practise, and his knowledge of past and present conditions of work. No one can become a good carver without considerable practise—constant, if the best results are to be looked for. Just as truly, without some knowledge of past and existing conditions of practise, none may hope to escape the danger of becoming, on the one hand, dull imitators of the superficial qualities of old work; or on the other, followers of the first will-o'-the-wisp novelty which presents itself to their fancy.

If use of the tools and knowledge of materials were the only subjects of which a carver need become master, there would be no way equal to the old-fashioned one of apprenticeship to some good craftsman. [27] Daily practise with the tools insures a manual dexterity with which no amateur need hope to compete. Many traditional expedients are handed down in this way that can be acquired in no other. There is, however, another side of the question to be considered, of quite as much importance as the practical one of handicraft skill. The art of wood-carving has also to fulfil its intellectual function, as an interpreter of the dreams and fancies of imagination. In this respect there is little encouragement to be looked for in the dull routine of a modern workshop.

There are, therefore, two widely separated standpoints from which the art may be viewed. It may be looked at from the position of a regular craftsman, who regards it primarily as his means of livelihood; or it may be dealt with as a subject of intellectual interest, based upon its relation to the laws of art in general. As, in the first instance, the use of the tools can not be learned without *some* accompanying knowledge of the laws of art, however slight that acquaintance may be, the method of apprenticeship has the advantage of being the more practical of the two; but it must be accepted with all the [28] conditions imposed upon it by the pressure of commercial interest and its usages: conditions, which, it may easily be imagined, are far more favorable to the performance of dull task-work, than to the adventurous spirit of curiosity which should prompt the enterprise of an energetic student.

Tools—Position when in Use—Acquisition by Degrees.

We will suppose that the student is anxious to make a practical commencement to his studies. The first consideration will be to procure a set of tools, and we propose in this place to describe those which will answer the purposes of a beginner, as well as to look generally at others in common use among craftsmen.

The tools used by carvers consist for the most part of chisels and gouges of different shapes and sizes. The number of tools required by professional carvers for one piece of work varies in proportion to the elaborateness of the carving to be done. They may use from half a dozen on simple work up to twenty or thirty for the [32] more intricate carvings, this number being a selection out of a larger stock reaching perhaps as many as a hundred or more. Many of these tools vary only in size and sweep of cutting edge. Thus, chisels and gouges are to be had ranging from 1/16th of an inch to 1 inch wide, with curves or "sweeps" in each size graduated between a semicircle to a curve almost flat. Few carvers, however, possess such a complete stock of tools as would be represented by one of each size and shape manufactured; such a thing is not required: an average number of, say seventy tools, will always give a sufficient variety of size and sweep for general purposes; few pieces of work will require the use of more than half of these in its execution.

The beginner, however, need not possess more than from twelve to twenty-four, and may even make a start with fewer. It is a good plan to learn the uses of a few tools before acquiring a complete set, as by this means, when difficulties are felt in the execution of work, a tool of known description is sought for and purchased with a foreknowledge of its advantages. This is the surest way to gain a distinct knowledge of the varieties of each kind of tool, and [33] their application to the different purposes of design.

The following list of tools (see Figs. 1 and 2) will be found sufficient for all the occasions of study: beginning by the purchase of the first section, Nos. 1 to 17, and adding others one by one until a set is made up of twenty-four tools. The tools should be selected as near the sizes and shapes shown in the illustration as possible. The curved and straight strokes represent the shape of the actual cuts made by pressing the tools down perpendicularly into a piece of wood. This, in the case of gouges, is generally called the "sweep."

Nos. 1, 2, 3 are gouges, of sweeps varying from one almost flat (No. 1) to a distinct hollow in No. 3. These tools are made in two forms, straight-sided and "spade"-shaped; an illustration of the spade form is given on the second page of tools. In purchasing his set of tools the student should order Nos. 1, 2, 3, 10, 11 in this form. They will be found to have many advantages, as they conceal less of the wood behind them and get well into corners inaccessible to straight-sided tools. They are lighter and more easily sharpened, and are very necessary in finishing the surface of work, and in shaping out foliage, more especially such as is undercut. [34]

common occurrence to find many of the tools manufactured of late years unfit for use on account of their softness of metal. There is nothing more vexatious to a carver than working with a [40] tool which turns over its cutting edge, even in soft wood; such tools should be returned to the agent who sold them.

With a selection from the above tools, acquired by degrees in the manner described, almost any kind of work may be done. There is no need whatever to have a tool for every curve of the design. These can readily be made by using straight chisels in combination with such gouges as we possess, or by sweeping the curves along their sides with a chisel used knife fashion. No really beautiful curves can be made by merely following the curves of gouges, however various their sweeps, as they are all segments of circles.

Tools generally come from the manufacturer ground, but not sharpened. As the student must in any case learn how to sharpen his tools, it will be just as well to get them in that way rather than ready for use. As this process of sharpening tools is a very important one, it must be reserved for another place. Should tools be seriously blunted or broken they must be reground. This can be done by the carver, either on a grindstone or a piece of gritty York stone, care being taken to repeat the original bevel; or they may be sent to a tool [41] shop where they are in the habit of grinding carving tools.

Catalogues of tools may be had from good makers; they will be found to consist mainly in a large variety of the tools already mentioned. Those which are very much bent or curved are intended for special application to elaborate and difficult passages in carving, and need not concern the student until he comes to find the actual want of such shapes; such, for instance, as bent parting tools and back bent gouges.

In addition to the above tools, carvers occasionally use one called a "Router." This is a kind of plane with a narrow perpendicular blade. It is used for digging or "routing" out the wood in places where it is to be sunk to form a ground. It is not a tool to be recommended for the use of beginners, who should learn to make sufficiently even backgrounds without the aid of mechanical contrivances. Carvers also use the "Rifler," which is a bent file. This is useful for very fine work in hard wood, and also for roughly approximating to rounded forms before finishing with the tools.

A few joiner's tools are very useful to [42] the carver, and should form part of his equipment. A wide chisel, say about 1-1/4 in. wide, a small iron "bull-nose" plane, and a keyhole saw, will all be helpful, and save a lot of unnecessary labor with the carving tools.

CHAPTER III

SHARPENING-STONES—Mallet and Bench

Different Stones in use—Case for Stones—Slips—Round Mallet Best—A Home-Made Bench—A Makeshift Bench—Cramps and Clips.

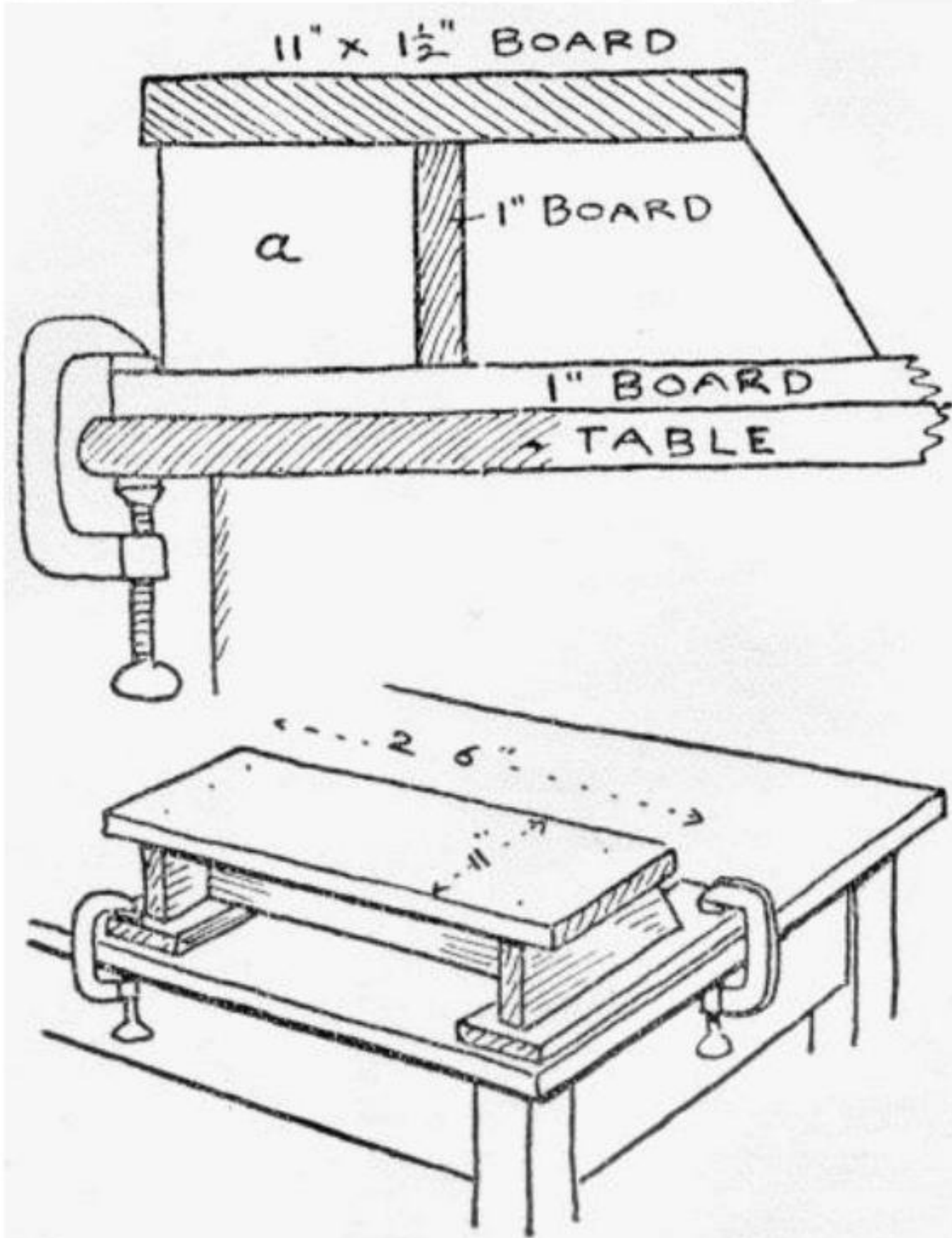
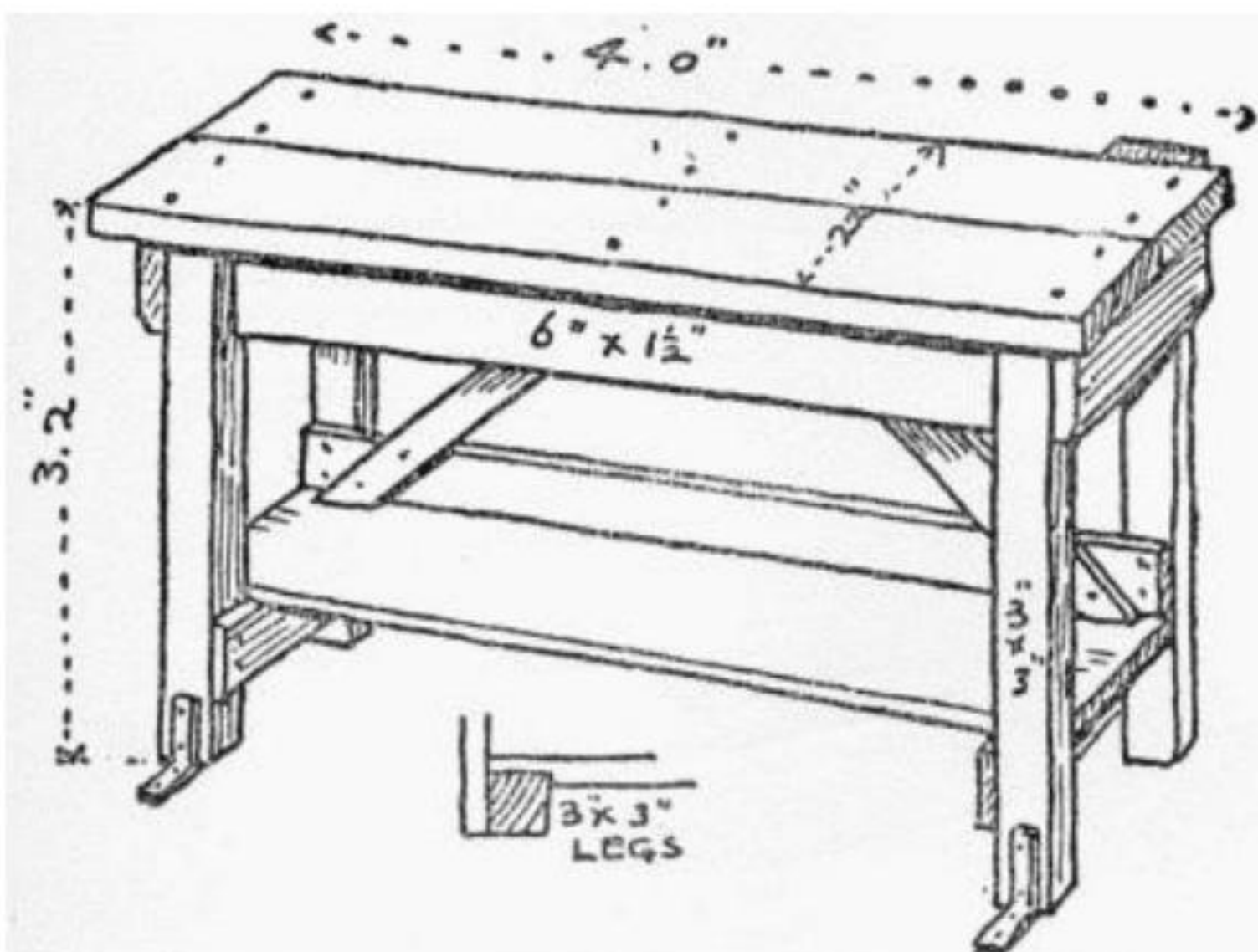
The stones which are most generally used for the purpose of sharpening carving tools are "Turkey" and "Washita." There are many others, some equally good, but "Washita"

A diagram showing a rectangular stone block with diagonal hatching. The block is labeled "STONE" and "BLOCK". It has a "NOTCH" on its right side. Two "PIN"s are shown: one on the left side and one on the right side, both passing through the block.

FIG. 4.

THE BENCH AND Mallet

The Bench.—Every carver should provide himself with a bench. He may make one for himself according to the size and construction shown in the illustration, Fig. 5. The top should be made of two 11 x 2 in. boards, and, as steadiness is the main feature to be aimed at, the joints should have some care. Those in illustration are shown to be formed by checking [45] one piece of wood over the other, with shoulders to resist lateral strain. Proper tenons would be better, but more difficult to make. It must have a projecting edge at the front and ends, to receive the clamps. The bench should have a joiner's "bench-screw" attached to the back leg for holding work which is to be carved on its edges or ends. The feet should be secured to the floor by means of iron brackets, as considerable force is applied in carving hard wood, which may move the bench bodily, unless it is secured, or is very heavy. Professional carvers use a bench [46] which is composed of beech planks, three or four inches in thickness, and of length according to shop-room.



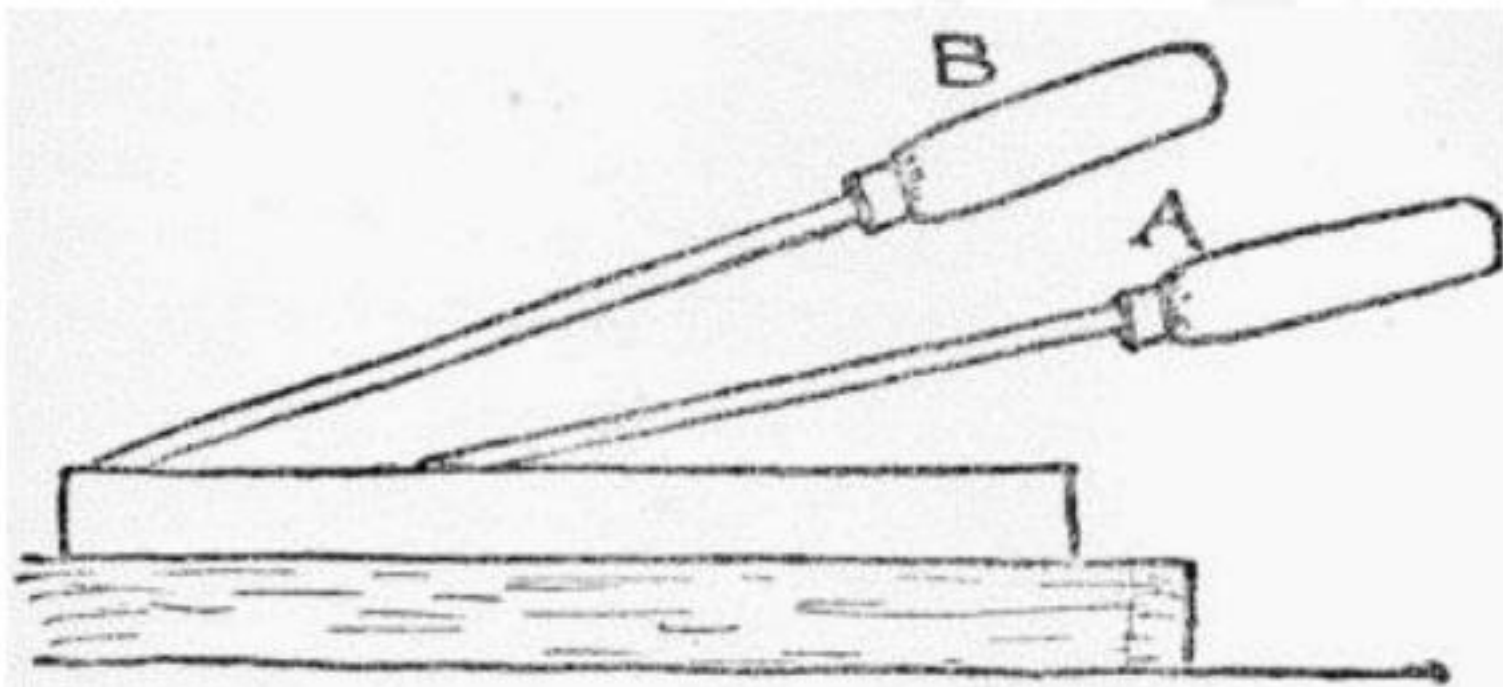
Should it not be possible to make or procure a bench, then a substitute must be used. Fig. 6 gives a suggestion for [47] making such a temporary bench. The top is composed of one piece of board, 11 ins. wide and 1-1/2 in. thick. It should be about 2 ft. 6 ins. long and rest on two blocks fixed about 1-1/2 in. from the ends, which must project, as in Fig. 6. This may be used on any ordinary table, to which it should be secured by

CHAPTER V

SHARPENING THE TOOLS

The Proper Bevel—Position of Tools on Oilstone—Good and Bad Edge—Stropping—Paste and Leather—Careless Sharpening—Rubbing Out the Inside—Stropping Fine Tools—Importance of Sharp Tools.

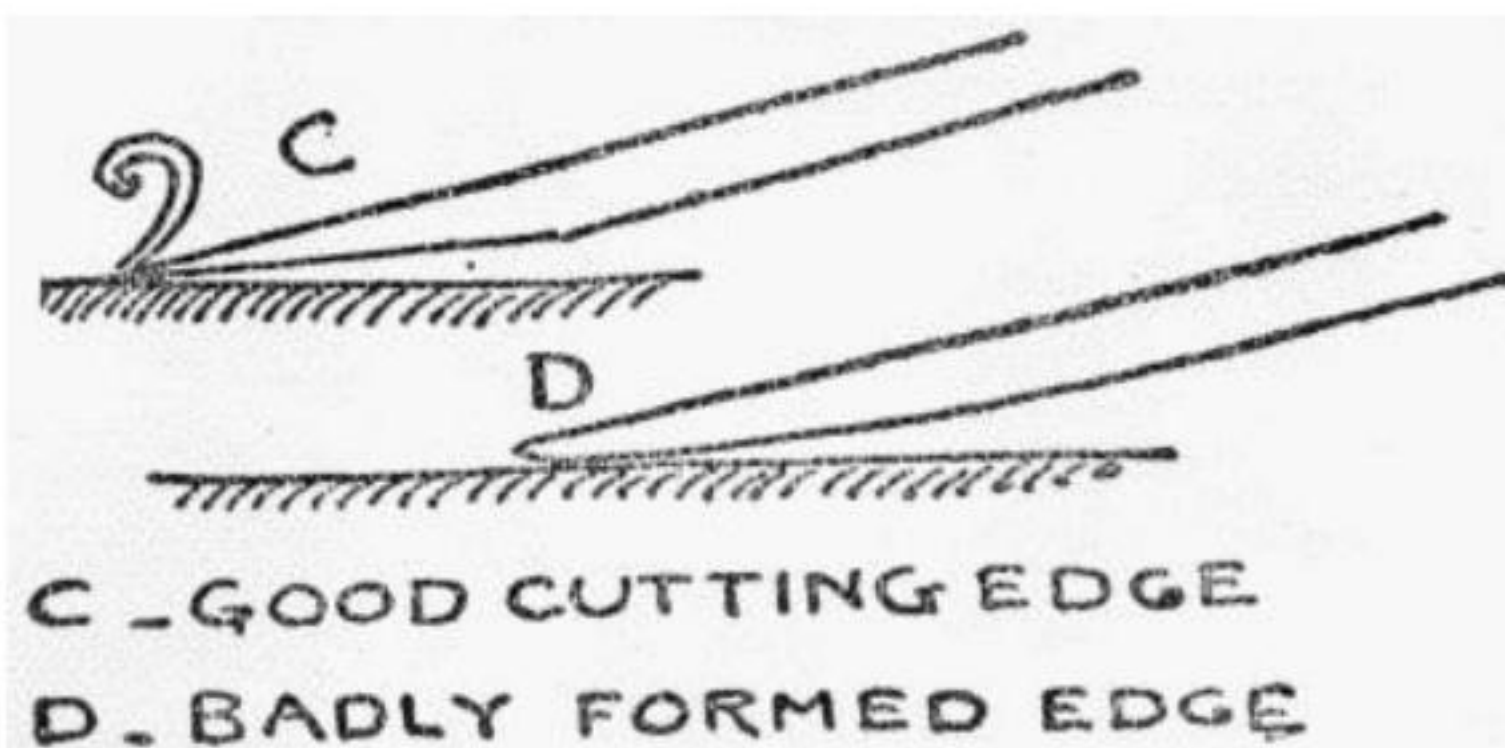
Having given this brief description of the tools and materials used by carvers, we shall suppose a piece of work is about to be started. The first thing the carver will require to do is to sharpen his tools. That is, if we may assume that they have just come from the manufacturer, ground but not yet brought to an edge. It will be seen that each has a long bevel ending in a blunt ridge where the cutting edge should be. We shall take the chisel No. 10 and sharpen that first, as it is the easiest to do, and so get a little practise before we try the gouges. The oilstone and oil have already been described. The first thing is to well oil the stone and lay it on the bench in a position with its end toward the operator.



A. ANGLE FOR SOFTWOOD B.

ANGLE FOR HARDWOOD Fig. 8.

Tools which are going to be used in [53] soft wood require rather a longer bevel and more acute edge than when they are wanted for hard wood. Both angles are shown in Fig. 8. Lay the flat of the tool on the stone at an angle of about 15° , with the handle in the hollow of the right hand, and two fingers of the left pressed upon the blade as near to the stone as possible. Then begin rubbing the tool from end to end of the stone, taking care not to rock the right hand up and down, but to keep it as level as possible throughout the stroke, bearing heavily on the blade with the left hand, to keep it well in contact with the stone. Rocking produces a rounded edge which is fatal to keenness. [54] C (Fig. 9) gives approximately, to an enlarged scale, the sections of a good edge, and D that of an imperfect one.



C. GOOD CUTTING EDGE D. BADLY

FORMED EDGE. Fig. 9.

Practise alone will familiarize the muscles of the wrist with the proper motion, but it is important to acquire this in order to form the correct habit early. It should be practised very slowly at first, until the hands get accustomed to the movements. When one side of the tool has been rubbed bright as far as the cutting edge, turn it over and treat the other in the same way. Carvers' tools, unlike joiners', are rubbed on both sides, in the proportion of about two-thirds outside to one-third inside. When a keen edge has been formed, which can easily be tested by gently applying the finger, it should be stropped on a piece of stout leather. It will be found, if the finger [55] is passed down the tool and over its edge, that the stoning has turned up a burr. This must be removed by stropping on both sides alternately. A paste composed of emery and crocus powders mixed with grease is used to smear the leather before stropping; this can either be procured at the tool shop, or made by the carver. When the tool has been sufficiently stropped, and all burr removed, it is ready for use, but it is as well to try it on a piece of wood first, and test it for burr, and if necessary strop it again.

Before we leave this tool, however, we shall anticipate a little, and look at it after it has been used for some time and become blunt. Its cutting edge and the bevel above it are now polished to a high degree, owing to friction with the wood. We lay it on the stone, taking care to preserve the original angle (15°). We find on looking at the tool after a little rubbing that this time it presents a bright rim along the edge in contrast with the gray steel which has been in contact with the stone. This bright rim is part of the polished surface the whole bevel had before we began this second sharpening, which proves that the actual edge has not yet touched the stone. [56] We are tempted to lift the right hand ever so little, and so get rid of this bright rim (sometimes called the "candle"); we shall thus get an edge quicker than if we have to rub away all the steel behind it. We do this, and soon get our edge; the bright rim has disappeared, but we have done an unwise thing, and have not saved much time, because we have begun to make a rounded edge, which, if carried a little farther, will make the tool useless until it is reground. There is no help for it: time must be spent and trouble taken in sharpening tools; with method and care there need be very little grinding, unless tools are actually broken.

To resume our lesson in tool-sharpening: we can not do much carving with one chisel, so we shall now take up gouge No. 2 as being the least difficult. This being a rounded tool, we must turn the stone over and use the side we have determined to keep for gouges, etc. We commence rubbing it up and down the stone in the same manner as described for the chisel, but, in addition, we have now another motion. To bring all the

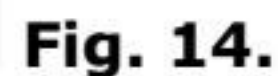
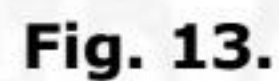
FIG. 12.

SECTION

Fig. 12.

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As you have not got your design made, I shall, for convenience' sake, explain how Fig. 13 should be begun and finished. First having traced the full-size design it should be transferred to the wood by means of a piece of blue carbon paper. [73]



Then with either the Veiner or V tool outline the whole of the leaves, etc., about 1/8 in. deep, keeping well on the outside of the drawing. Ignore all minor detail for the present, blocking out the design in masses. No outline need be grooved for the margin of the panel at present, as it should be done with a larger tool. For this purpose take gouge No. 6 (1/4 in. wide), and begin at the left-hand bottom corner of the panel, cut a groove about 1/16 in. within the blue line, taking care not to cut off parts of the leaves in the process; begin a little above the corner at the bottom, and leave off a little below that at the top. The miters will be formed later on.

In this operation, as in all subsequent ones, the grain of the wood will be more or less in evidence. You will by degrees get to know the piece of wood you are working upon, and cut in such a way that your tool runs *with* the grain and not *against* it; that is to say, you will cut as much as possible on the up-hill direction of the fiber. This can not always be done in deep hollows, but then you will have had some practise before you attempt these.

Now take chisel No. 11, and with it [75] stab into the grooved outline, pressing the tool down perpendicularly to what you think feels like the depth of the ground. The mallet need not be used for this, as the wood is soft enough to allow of the tools being pressed by the hand alone, but remember that the force must be proportioned to the depth desired, and to the direction of the grain; much less pressure is wanted to drive a tool into the wood when its edge is parallel with the grain than when it lies in a cross direction; small tools penetrate more easily than large ones, as a matter of course, but one must think of these things or accidents happen.

When you have been all round the design in this way with such gouges as may be needed for the slow and quick curves, get the wood out nearly down to the ground, leaving a little for finishing. Do this with any tool that fits the spaces best; the larger the better. Cut across the grain as much as possible, not along it. The flat gouge, No. 1, will be found useful for this purpose in the larger spaces, and the grounders for the narrow passages. This leaves the ground in a rough state, which must be finished later on. [76]

Now take gouges Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and chisels Nos. 10, 11, 12, and with them cut down the outline as accurately as possible to the depth of the ground, and, if you are lucky, just a hair's breadth deeper. In doing this make the sides slope a little outward toward the bottom. If the gouges do not entirely adapt themselves to the contours of your lines, do not trouble, but leave that bit to be done afterward with a sweep of the tool, either a flat gouge, or the corner-chisel used like a knife.

Now we have all the outline cut down to the depth of the background, and may proceed to clear out the wood hanging about between the design and the ground all round it. We shall do this with the "grounders," using the largest one when possible, and only taking to the smallest when absolutely necessary on account of space. This done, we shall now proceed to finish the hollow sides of the panel and make the miters. Again, take No. 6 gouge and drive a clear hollow touching the blue line at end of panel, and reaching the bottom of the sinking, i.e., the actual ground as finished, see *a*, Fig. 15. To form the miter at top of left-hand side of panel, [77] carry the hollow on until the tool reaches the bottom of the hollow running along the top; as soon as this point is gained, turn the tool out and pitch it a little up in the way shown at *c*, Fig. 15, in which the tool is shown at an angle which brings the edge of the gouge exactly on the line of the miter to be

and generally remember that they are dangerous implements, both to the user and the work. Never put too much force on a tool when in the neighborhood of a delicate passage, but take time and eat the bit of wood out mouse-like, in small fragments. [80]

Now we are ready to finish our panel. Take the grounders, according to the size required, always using the biggest possible. Keep the tool well pressed down, and *shave* away the roughness of the ground, giving the tool a slight sideway motion as well as a forward one. Work right up to the leaves, etc., which, if cut deep enough, should allow the chips to come away freely, leaving a clear line of intersection; if it does not, then the upright sides must be cut down until the ground is quite clear of chips. Grounder tools are very prone to dig into the surface and make work for themselves: sharp tools, practise, and a slight sideway motion will prevent this. Tool No. 23 is useful in this respect, its corners being slightly lifted above the level of the ground as it passes along. Corners that can not be reached with the bent chisels may be finished off with the corner-chisel.

Now we come to the surface decorations, for the carving in this design consists of little more. This is all done with the gouges. Generally speaking, enter the groove at its widest end and leave it at the narrowest, lowering the handle of the tool gradually as you go along to lift the [81] gouge out of the wood, producing the drawing of the forms at the same time. A gouge cut never looks so well as when done at one stroke; patching it afterward with amendments always produces a labored look. If this has to be done, the tool should be passed finally over the whole groove to remove the superfluous tool marks—a sideways gliding motion of the edge, combined with its forward motion, often succeeds in this operation. To form the circular center of the flower, press down gouge Nos. 5 or 6, gently at first and perpendicular to the wood. When a cut has been made all round the circle, work the edge of the tool in it, circus-like, by turning the handle in the fingers round and round until the edge cuts its way down to the proper depth. (See A, Fig. 15.)

Carve the sides of the leaves where necessary with flat gouges on the inside curves, and with chisels and corner-chisels on the outside ones. These should be used in a sliding or knife-like fashion, and not merely pushed forward. Finish the surface in the same manner all over between the gouge grooves and the edges of the leaves, producing a very slight [82] bevel as in section *a*, Fig. 13, and this panel may be called finished.

Fig. 14 is another suggestion for a design, upon which I hope you will base one of your own as an exercise at this stage of your progress.

Before we begin another, though, I shall take this opportunity of reading you a short lecture on a most important matter which has a great deal to do with the preparation of your mind in making a suitable choice of subject for your future work.

CHAPTER VIII

IMITATION OF NATURAL FORMS

Difficulties of Selection and Arrangement—Limits of an Imitative Treatment—Light and Distance Factors in the Arrangement of a Design—Economy of Detail Necessary—The

Word "Conventional."

Broadly stated, the three most formidable difficulties which confront the beginner when he sets out to make what he is pleased to call his design for carving in relief, are: Firstly, the choice of a subject; secondly, how far he may go in the imitation of its details; thirdly, its [83] arrangement as a whole when he has decided the first two points.

Just now we shall deal only with the second difficulty, that is, how far may likeness to nature be carried. We shall do this, because until we come to some understanding on that point, a right choice of subject becomes practically impossible, consequently the consideration of its arrangement would be premature.

There is, strictly speaking, only one aim worthy of the artist's attention, be he carver or painter; and that is the representation of some form of life, or its associations. Luckily, there is a mighty consensus of opinion in support of this dictum, both by example and precept, so there is no need to discuss it, or question its authority. We shall proceed, therefore, to act upon it, and choose for our work only such material as in some way indicates life, either directly, as in trees, animals, or figures, or by association, and as explanation thereof, as in drapery and other accessories—never choosing a subject like those known to painters as "still life," such as bowls, fiddles, weapons, etc., unless, as I have said, they are associated with the more important element. [84]

You have already discovered by practise that wood has a grain which sets bounds to the possibilities of technique. You have yet to learn that it has also an inordinate capacity for swallowing light. Now, as it is by the aid of light that we see the results of our labor, it follows that we should do everything in our power to take full advantage of that helpful agency. It is obvious that work which can not be seen is only so much labor thrown away. There is approximately a right relative distance from which to view all manner of carvings, and if from this position the work is not both distinct and coherent, its result is valueless.

Then what is the quality which makes all the difference between a telling piece of carving, and one which looks, at a moderate distance, like crumpled paper or the cork bark which decorates a suburban summer-house? The answer is, attention to *strict economy in detail*. Without economy there can be no arrangement, and without the latter no general effect. We are practically dealing, not with so much mere wood, but unconsciously we are directing our efforts to a manipulation of the light of day—playing with the [85] lamps of the sky—and if we do not understand this, the result must be undoubtedly failure, with a piece of wood left on our hands, cut into unintelligible ruts.

But what, you will say, has all this to do with copying the infinite variety of nature's detail; surely it can not be wrong to imitate what is really beautiful in itself? You will find the best answer to this in the technical difficulties of your task. You have the grain of the wood to think of, and now you have this other difficulty in managing the light which is to display your design. The obstinacy of the wood may be to some extent conquered, and indeed has been almost entirely so, by the technical resources of Grinling Gibbons, but the treatment demanded by the laws of light and vision is quite another question, and if our work is to have its due effect, there is no other solution of the problem than by finding a way of complying with those laws.

If I want to represent a rose and make it intelligible at a glance from such and such a

lost to sight, except where, in vanishing into a shadow, creating confusion.

discovery a clue to the meaning of the word "Conventional method has been "agreed upon" as the best fitted for its work to most advantage with a minimum of labor. Not that ing to do with the invention of the method. Strange to say were based upon an unquestioning sense that no other mpts were made to change it until in latter days temptati s, the effects of which have entailed upon ourselves a cooaring the results of the many subsequent experiments.

e this subject further, I shall give you another exercise, w er resemblance to natural forms, bearing in mind the whi a sparing use of minute detail with reference to its visible gn attempt some shaping on the surface of the leaves and ich [88] may add interest to the work. In my next lectur to say about another important element in all designs for es taken by the background between the leaves, like the ee.

comparing the results of the many subsequent experiments. On this subject further, I shall give you another exercise, with a greater resemblance to natural forms, bearing in mind the whole, with a sparing use of minute detail with reference to its visible form. I shall attempt some shaping on the surface of the leaves and veins, which [88] may add interest to the work. In my next lecture I shall say about another important element in all designs for book covers, namely, the space taken by the background between the leaves, like the space between the leaves of a tree.

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ee.

Apparently I have been led into giving you another lecture; we must now get to work on our exercise.

In setting to work to carve this exercise, follow the same procedure as in the first one, up to the point when the surface decorations began. In the illustration, there is a suggestion for a variety in the background which does not occur in the other. In this case the little branches are supposed to lie along the tops of gentle [92] elevations, and the plums to lie in the hollows. It produces a section something like this, Fig. 17. There is a sufficient excuse for this kind of treatment in the fact that the branches do not require much depth, and the plums will look all the better for a little more. The depth of the background will thus vary, say between $\frac{3}{16}$ in. at the branches and $\frac{3}{8}$ in. at the plums. The branches are supposed to be perfectly level from end to end, that is, they lie parallel to the surface of the wood, but of course curve about in the other direction. The leaves, on the other hand, are supposed to be somewhat rounded and falling away toward their sides and points in places. The vein in the center of the leaves may be done with a parting tool, as well as the serrations at the edge, or the latter may perhaps be more surely nicked out with a chisel, after the leaves have received their shapes, the leaves being made to appear as if one side was higher than the other, and as though [93] their points, in some cases, touched the background, while in others the base may be the lowest part. The twigs coming out from the branches to support the plums should be somewhat like this in section, and should lie along the curve of the background, and be in themselves rounded, as in Fig. 18, see section *a a*. The bottom of the panel shows a bevel instead of a hollow border: this will serve to distinguish it as a starting-point for the little branches which appear to emerge from it like trees out of the ground. The plums should be carved by first cutting them down in outline to the background, as A, Fig. 19. Then the wood should be removed from the edge all round, to form the rounded surface. To do this, first take the large gouge, No. 2, and with its hollow side to the wood, cut off the top, from about its middle to one end, and reversing the process do the same with the other side. Then it will appear something [94] like B (Fig. 19). The

Here it may be observed that the fewer tools used the better, as if many are used there is always a risk of unpleasant facets at the places where the various marks join each other. Before you try the plums, or apples, or other rounded fruit which you may have in your design, it would be as well to experiment with one on a piece of spare wood in order to decide upon the most suitable tools. The stems or branches may be done with flat gouge No. 1, or the flat or corner chisel. A very delicate twist or spiral tendency in their upward growth will greatly improve their appearance, a mere faceting produced by a flat gouge or [95] chisel will do this; anything is better than a mere round and bare surface, which has a tendency to look doughy. The little circular mark on the end of the plum (call it a plum, although that fruit has no such thing) is done by pressing gouge No. 7 into the wood first, with the handle rather near the surface of the wood, and afterward at a higher inclination, this taking out a tiny chip of a circular shape and leaving a V-shaped groove.

[96]

THE PATTERNED BACKGROUND

Importance of Formal Pattern as an Aid to Visibility—Pattern and Free Rendering Compared—First Impressions Lasting—Medieval Choice of Natural Forms Governed by a Question of Pattern.

CHAPTER XI

CONTOURS OF SURFACE

Adaptation of Old Designs to Modern Purposes—"Throwing About"—Critical Inspection of Work from a Distance as it Proceeds.



Fig. 22.

Here are two fragments of a kind of running ornament. Fig. 22 is a part of the jamb molding of a church in Vicenza. If you observe carefully, you will find that it has a decidedly classical appearance. The truth is that it was carved by a Gothic artist late in the fourteenth century, just after the Renaissance influence began to make itself felt. It is an adaptation by him [104] of what he remembered having seen in his travels of the new style, grafted upon the traditional treatment ready to his hand. It suits our purpose all the better on that account, for the reason that we are going to re-adapt his design into an exercise, and shall attempt to make it suitable to our limited ability in handling

quality that effects of richness are produced. You can hardly have too much monotony of surface, but may easily err by having too much variety. Therefore, whatever system of light and shade you may adopt, be careful to repeat its motive in some sort of rhythmic order all over your work; by no other means can you make it rich and effective at a distance.

It is well every now and then to put your work up on a shelf or ledge at a distance and view it as a whole; you will [107] thus see which parts tell and which do not, and so gain experience on this point. Work should also be turned about frequently, sidewise and upside down, in order to find how the light affects it in different directions. Of course, you must not think that because your work may happen to look well when seen from a little way off that it does not matter about the details, whether they be well or poorly carved. On the contrary, unless you satisfy the eye at both points of view, your work is a partial failure. The one thing is as important as the other, only, as the first glance at carved work is generally taken at some little distance, it is the more immediately necessary to think of that, before we begin to work for a closer inspection. First impressions are generally lasting with regard to carved work, and, as I have said before, beauty of detail seldom quite atones for failure in the arrangement of masses.

The rounded forms in this design may give you a little trouble, but practise, and that alone, will enable you to overcome this. Absolute smoothness is not desirable. Glass-papered surfaces are extremely ugly, because they obtrude themselves on [108] account of their extreme smoothness, having lost all signs of handiwork in the tool marks. We shall have something to say presently about these tool marks in finishing, as it is a very important subject which may make all the difference between success or failure in finishing a piece of work.

CHAPTER XII

ORIGINALITY

Dangers of Imposing Words—Novelty more Common than Originality—An Unwholesome Kind of "Originality."

I told you that I should have something to say about originality. Almost every beginner has some vague impression that his first duty should be to aim at originality. He hears eulogiums passed upon the individuality of some one or other, and tries hard to invent new forms of expression or peculiarities of style, only resulting, in most cases, in new forms of ugliness, which it seems is the only possibility under such conscious efforts after novelty. The fact is that it takes many generations of ardent minds to accomplish what at first each [109] thinks himself capable of doing alone. True originality has somewhat the quality of good wine, which becomes more delightful as time mellows its flavor and imparts to it the aroma which comes of long repose; like the new wine, too, originality should shyly hide itself in dark places until maturity warrants its appearance in the light of day. That kind of originality which is strikingly new does not always stand the test of time, and should be regarded with cautious skepticism until it has proved itself to be more than the passing fashion or novelty of a season. There is a kind of

This work may be used for the crestring of some large piece of furniture, or may be adapted to fill screens or partitions, stair newels, and balusters, or it may be used as a cornice decoration in the manner [115] suggested by No. 26, where the pierced work can be backed by a hollow cornice which it fills and enriches.

CHAPTER XIV

Carvings can not be Independent Ornaments—Carving Impossible on Commercial Productions—The Amateur Joiner—Corner Cupboards—Introduction of Foliage Definite in Form, and Simple in Character—Methods of Carving Grapes.

There is no more inexorable law relating to the use of wood-carving than the one which insists upon some kind of passport for its introduction, wherever it appears. It must come in good company, and be properly introduced. The slightest and most distant connection with a recognized [116] sponsor is often sufficient, but it will not be received alone. We do not make carvings to hang on a wall and be admired altogether on their own account. They must decorate some object. A church screen, a font, a piece of furniture, or even the handle of a knife. It is not always an easy matter to find suitable objects upon which to exercise our wood-carving talents. Our furniture is all made now in a wholesale manner which permits of no interference with its construction, while at the same time, if we wish to put any carving upon it, it is absolutely essential that both construction and decoration should be considered together.

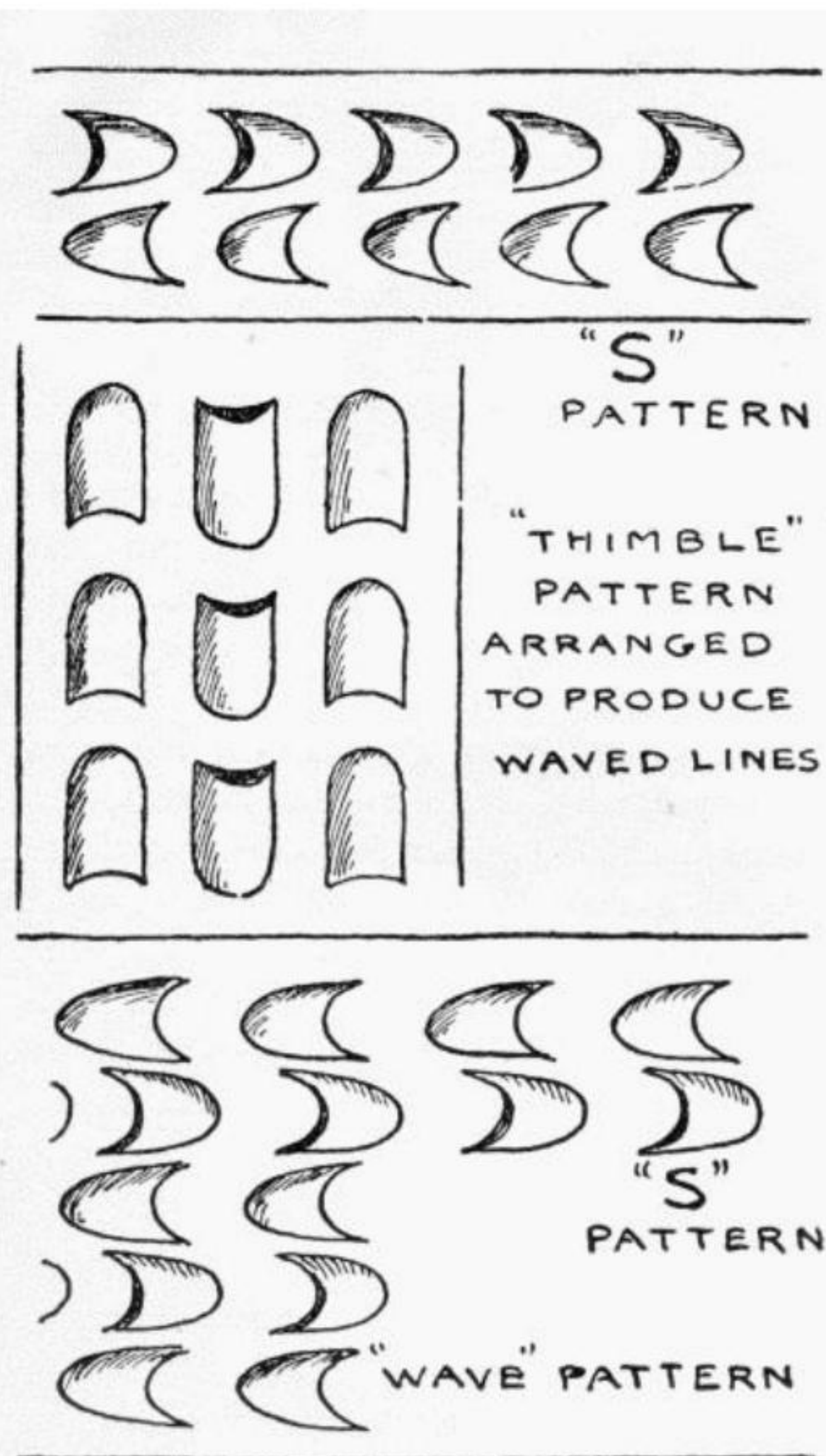
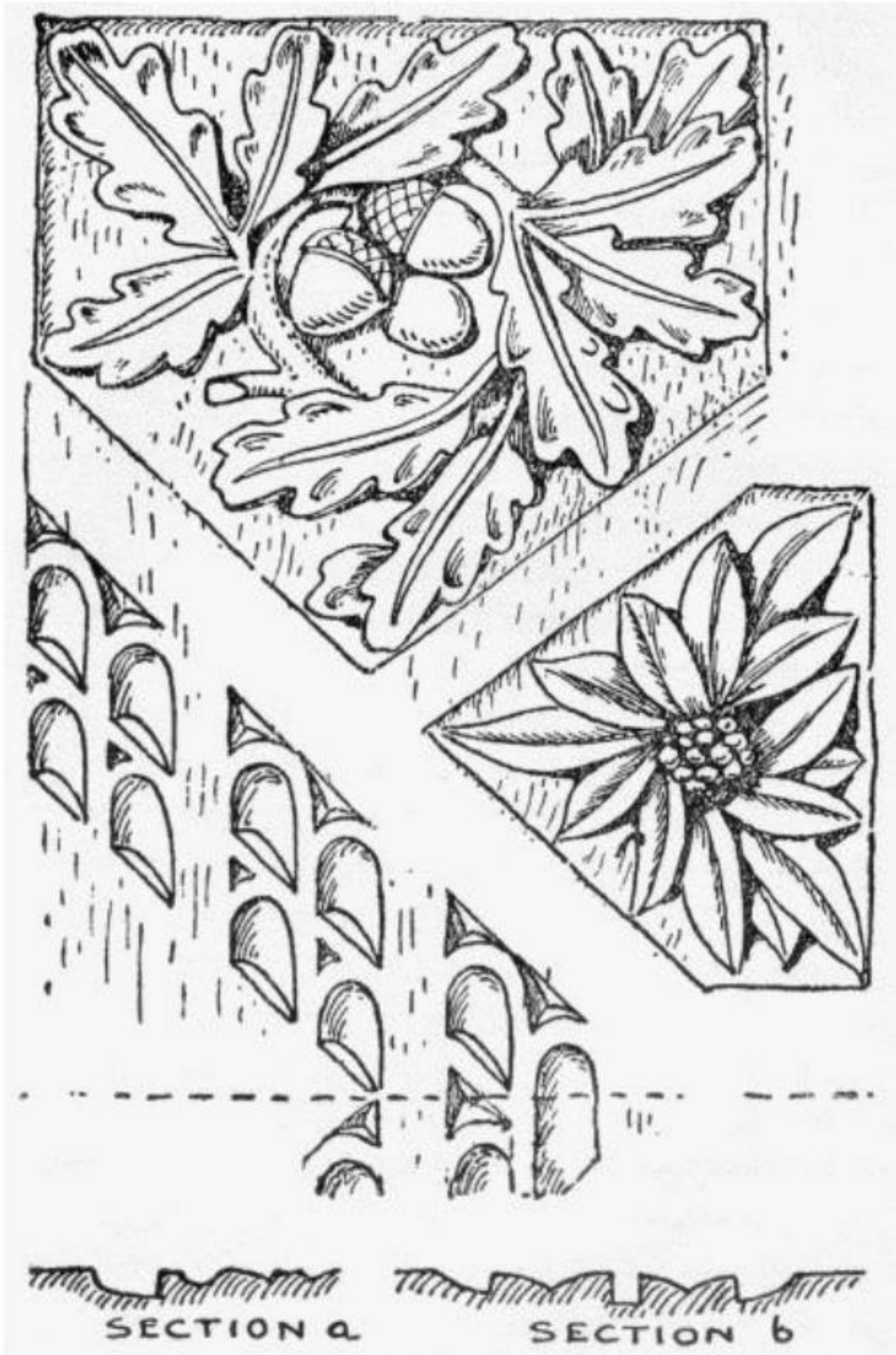


Fig. 31.

Fig. 31 is a detail of a kind of gouge work which you must all know very well. One perpendicular cut of a gouge driven in with the mallet, and one side cut, should form one of these crescent or thimble-shaped holes. They should not be too deep in proportion to their size. Their [122] combinations may be varied to a great extent. Two or three common ones are shown in the illustration. This form of ornament was in all likelihood invented by some ingenious carpenter with a turn for art and a limited stock of carving tools. His humble contribution to the resources of the carver's art has received its due share of the flattery which is implied by imitation. In all these patterns it is well to remember that the flat surface of the board left between the cuts is really the important thing to consider, as all variety is obtained by disposing the holes in such a way as to produce the pattern required by means of their outlines on the plain surface. Thus waved lines are produced as in Fig. 31, and little niches like mimic architecture as in Fig. 34, by the addition of the triangular-shaped holes at the top, and the splayed sills at the bottom. (It is obvious that an arrangement like the latter should never be turned

effect of solidity in the material, and serves no purpose which can not be attained in a much better way. [126]



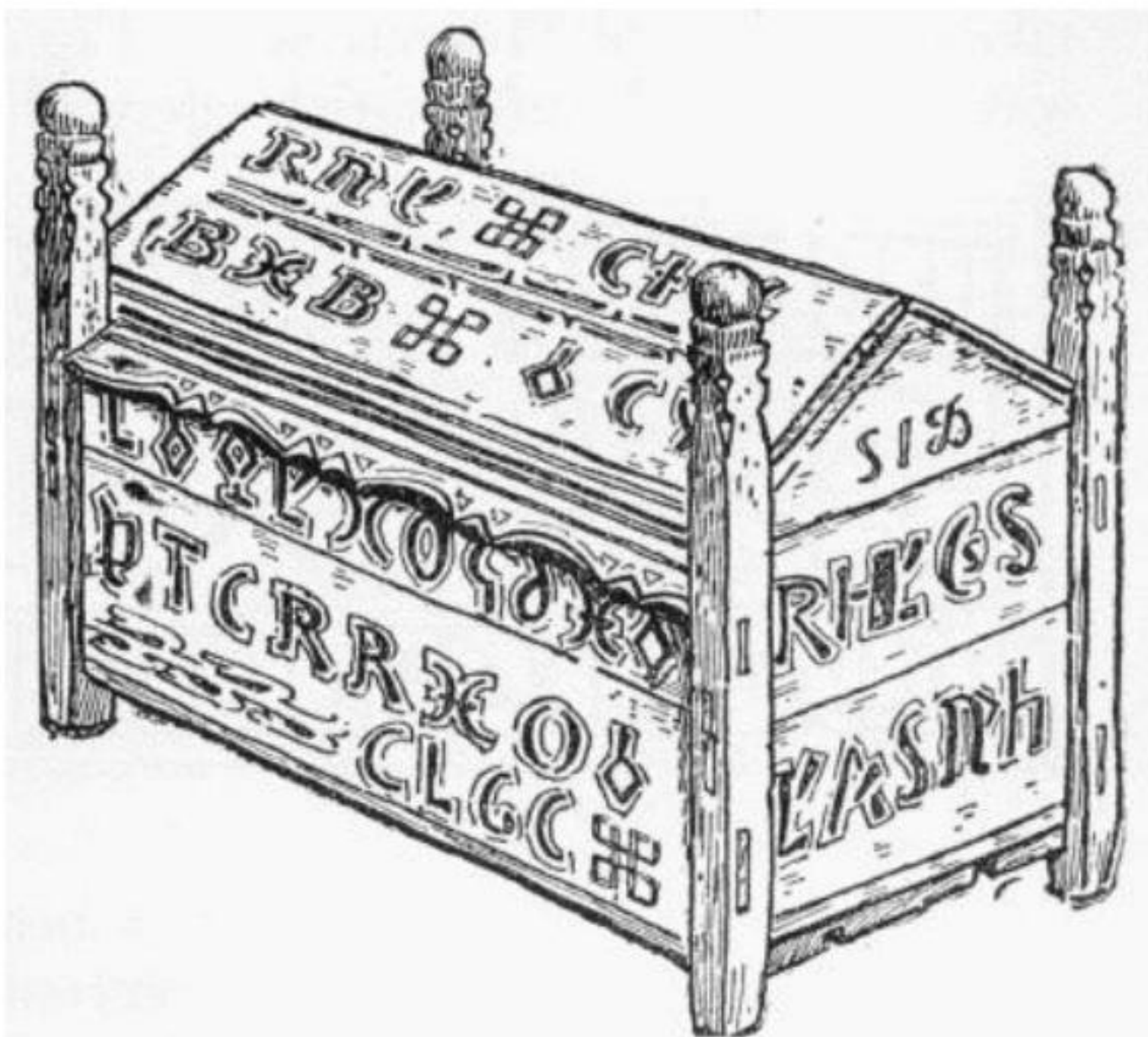
CARVING IN PANELS OF FIG 33

Fig. 34.

[127]

Expedients have been invented to overcome the difficulty of making a fresh start in each panel, one of which is shown in Fig. 34, where the beginning of the bough is hidden under a leaf. It is presumable that the bough *may* go on behind the uncarved portions of the board to reappear in another place, but we need not insist upon the fancy, which loses all its power when attention is called to it, like riddles when the answer is known.

Fig. 37.



Then we come to the sketch of a chair (Fig. 52), or combined table and chair. The richly carved back is pivoted, and forms the table top when lowered over the arms, upon which it rests. The points to be noted in this are, the general richness of effect, the contrast of wavy and rigid lines, and the happy way in which the architectural suggestion of arch and pillars has been translated into ornament. As this sketch was not made so much for the chair itself as for its enriched back, no measurements have been taken; otherwise chairs, as such, depend very much upon exact dimensions for their

Fig. 52

composed of three boards, a wide one for the picture, and two narrower ones for ends and feet. [148]

The object in making these sketches should be mainly to collect a variety of ideas which may brighten the mind when there is occasion to use its inventive faculties. Suggestive hints are wanted; rarely will it be possible, or wise, to repeat anything exactly as you see it. These sketches, if made with care, and from what Constable used to call "breeding subjects," will give your fancy a very necessary point of vantage, from which it may hazard flights of its own.

As much of our knowledge must necessarily be gained from museums, and as they now form such an important feature of educational machinery, I think it will be well to devote a word or two of special notice to the drawbacks which accompany their many advantages. This I propose to do in the following chapter. [149]

CHAPTER XVI

MUSEUMS

False Impressions Fostered by Fragmentary Exhibits—Environment as Important as Handicraft—Works Viewed as Records of Character—Carvers the Historians of their Time.

A new world of commerce and machinery, having slain and forgotten a past race of artist craftsmen, makes clumsy atonement by sweeping together the fragments of their work and calling the collection a museum. From the four corners of the earth these relics have been gathered. Our hungry minds are bidden to make choice according to fancy, for here is variety of food! Here are opportunities, never before enjoyed by mortal, for an intellectual feast!—and of a kind which might be considered god-like, were it not for the suspicion of some gigantic joke. That out of all this huge mass of chaotic material we have not as yet been able to make for ourselves some living form of art, must indeed be to the gods a continual subject of merriment.

Museums of art are in no respect the unmixed blessings which they appear to [150] be. They have, to be sure, all the advantages of handy reference; but at the same time, on account of the great diversity in the character of their exhibits, they tend to encourage the spread of a patchy kind of knowledge, far from being helpful to the arts in the interests of which they are established. It must be remembered that, in these collections, all specimens of architecture and architectural carving are invariably seen in false positions. All have been wrenched from their proper settings, and placed, more or less at random, in lights and relationships never contemplated by their designers. To the environment of a piece of architecture, and the position and surroundings of carved decorations, are due quite half of their interest as works of art. Deprive them of these associations, and little is left but fragmentary specimens of handicraft, more or less unintelligible in their lonely detachment, misleading to the eye, and dangerous as objects of imitation, in proportion to the dependence they once had upon those absent and unknown associations.

The educational purpose which these collections are intended to serve is liable to be construed into an unreasoning assumption [151] that every specimen exhibited is

equally worthy of admiration. How often the plodding student is to be seen carefully drawing and measuring work of the dullest imaginable quality, with no other apparent reason for his pathetically wasted industry!

It would be strange, indeed, if all in this vast record of past activity was of equal value; if merely to belong to the past was a sure warrant that such work was the best of its kind. Far from this being the case, it requires the constant use of a more or less trained and critical judgment to separate what is good from the indifferent or really bad in these collections, for all are usually present. There is inequality in artistic powers, in technical skill, and a distinction of yet greater importance, which lies in the significance the works bear as records of the inner life of their creators. Artists, carvers in particular, are the true scribes and historians of their times. Their works are, as it were, books—written in words of unconscious but fateful meaning. Some are filled with the noblest ideals, expressed in beautiful and serious language, while others contain nothing but sorry jests and stupidities. [152]

As all the works of the past, whether good or bad, are the achievements of men differing but little from ourselves, save in the direction of their energies and in their outward surroundings, there is surely some clue to the secret of their success or failure, some light to be thrown by their experience upon our own dubious and questioning spirit.

What better could we look for in this respect than a little knowledge of the lives led by the carvers themselves, a mental picture of their environment, an acquired sense of the influence which this, that, or the other set of conditions must have imposed upon their work. With a little aid from history in forming our judgments, their works themselves will assist us—so faithful is the transcript of their witness—for, with more certainty than applies to handwriting, a fair guess may be made by inference from the work itself as to the general status and ideals of the workman. The striking analogy between its salient characteristics and the prevailing mood of that ever-changing spirit which seeks expression in the arts, is nowhere more marked than in the work of the carver. [153]

CHAPTER XVII

STUDIES FROM NATURE—FOLIAGE

Medieval and Modern Choice of Form Compared—A Compromise Adopted—A List of Plant Forms of Adaptable Character.

It is high time now that we had some talk about the studies from nature which are to furnish you with subjects for your work. I shall at present deal only with studies of foliage, as that is what you have been practising, and I wish you to carry on your work and studies as much as possible on the same lines.

Between the few abstract forms, representing a general type of foliage, so dear to the heart of the medieval carver, and the unstinted variety of choice displayed in the works of Grinling Gibbons and his time, there is such a wide difference that surely it points to a corresponding disparity of aim. Although there is no doubt whatever that such a striking change of views must have had its origin in some deeper cause than that which is to be explained by artistic and technical development, yet I think that for our immediate [154]

purpose we shall find a sufficiently good lesson in comparing the visible results of the two methods. Broadly speaking, then, the medieval carver cared more for general effect than for possibilities of technique. He therefore chose only such natural forms as were amenable to his preconceived determination to make his work telling at a distance. He had no botanical leanings, and rejected as unfit every form which would not bend to his one purpose—that of decoration on a large scale—and which he aimed at making comprehensive at a glance, rather than calling for attention to its details. He invented patterns which he knew would assist in producing this result, and here he further handicapped his choice by limiting it to such forms as would repeat or vanish at regulated intervals, reflecting light or producing shadow just where it was wanted to emphasize his pattern.

The more modern carver, on the contrary, offered an all-embracing welcome to every form which presented itself to his notice. He rejected nothing which could by any possibility be carved. Nothing was too small, too thin, or too difficult for his wonderful dexterity with the carving tools. His chief end was elaboration of [155] detail, and it was often carried to a point which ignored the fact that nearly all of it would become invisible when in position, or, if seen at all, would only appear in confused lumps and unintelligible masses.

Now, for many reasons, I think we had better take the medieval method as our model up to a point, and make a certain selection of material for our studies, based upon some relation to general effect, but not necessarily imitating a medieval austerity of rejection, which would be the merest affectation on our part. Upon these principles, and taking somewhat of a middle course, I shall here note a few types of foliage which I think may be useful to you in the work upon which you are engaged.

Leaf forms, with their appropriate flowers or fruit, afford the carver a very large proportion of his subject material. They serve him as principal subject, as bordering or background to figures of men or animals; they occur as mere detached spots, to break the monotony of spaces or lines; and in a thousand other ways give exercise to his invention.

As a general rule, those leaves with serrated, or deeply cleft and indented edges, [156] lend themselves most readily to decorative treatment. Large, broad leaves, with unbroken surfaces, and triangular or rounded outlines, are less manageable. Those most commonly taken as models are:

The Vine, with its Grapes.—This was freely used by medieval carvers, at first for its symbolic significance, but afterward even more on account of its rare beauty of form. The play of light and shade on its vigorous foliage, the variety of its drawing in leaf, vine, and tendril, and the contrast afforded by its bunches of oval fruit, caused it to be accepted as a favorite subject for imitation in all kinds of carving. It lends itself kindly to all sorts of relief, either high or low, in almost any material. It is so recognizable, even in the rudest attempts at imitation, that its popularity is well deserved.

The hop-vine shares some of these qualities, though much less strongly marked in character.

The Acanthus.—This leaf was first adapted for the purpose of ornament by the workmen of classical Greece. The inspiration was one of the few which they took directly from

For Close and Intricate Designs.—Periwinkle, [160] winter aconite, trefoils of various kinds.

Many valuable hints on this subject may be gleaned by a study of Gerrard's Herbal, which is full of well-drawn illustrations, done in a way which is very suggestive to the designer.

A careful study of the outline forms of leaves is a schooling in itself, so much may be learned from it. It teaches the relation between form and growth in a way which makes it possible to use the greatest freedom of generalization without violating structural laws. The same causes which govern the shaping of a tree are present in the leaf, settling its final outline, so that, however wandering and fantastic it may appear, there is not the smallest curve or serration which does not bear witness to a methodical development, and to every accidental circumstance which helped or hindered its fulfilment.

You could not do better than make a collection of suitable leaves, press them flat and trace them very carefully, keeping the tracings together in a book for reference. Accompanying this you should have in each case a drawing of the leaf as it appears in its natural state, always [161] being careful to do this from a point of view which will accommodate itself to carving the leaf if you should have occasion to use it.

CHAPTER XVIII

CARVING ON FURNITURE

Furniture Constructed with a View to Carving—Reciprocal Aims of Joiner and Carver—Smoothness Desirable where Carving is Handled—The Introduction of Animals or Figures.

FIG. 55.

A. BACKBOARD
B. FRAME
C. CORNICE

[illegible]

The image contains two technical drawings. The top drawing is a perspective view of a decorative finial, which is a tapered wooden post with a series of small, square-shaped holes along its length. It is labeled "6.0" long". The bottom drawing is a cross-section of a bench, showing the internal structure and dimensions. The dimensions are as follows:

- Overall width: $1.6\frac{1}{4}"$
- Overall height: $1.8\frac{1}{4}"$
- Seat height: $1.1\frac{3}{4}"$
- Seat thickness: $\frac{3}{4}"$
- Seat width: $2\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4}"$
- Backrest height: $1.9"$
- Backrest width: $1.5\frac{1}{8} \times 1\frac{3}{4}"$
- Backrest thickness: $2\frac{1}{2}"$
- Backrest to seat distance: $10\frac{1}{2}"$
- Backrest to seat distance (inner): $1\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{8}"$
- Backrest to seat distance (outer): $2\frac{3}{8}"$
- Backrest to seat distance (inner): $1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2}"$
- Backrest to seat distance (outer): $1\frac{1}{2}"$

SECTION OF BENCH

bench or settle, the proportions of which village inn. The actual measurements were followed. It is a well-known fact, that fully designed on paper with any hope of lightness, and stability. Making seats is a matter of many years of successive before be selected and copied, with such as to be introduced. The main lines should

FIG. 58.

A detailed black and white line drawing of a Gothic clock face, labeled FIG. 58. The clock is octagonal with Roman numerals and is set within a highly decorative, pointed Gothic frame. Below the clock face is a small, ornate structure supported by a carved figure.

Fig. 58.

FIG. 61.

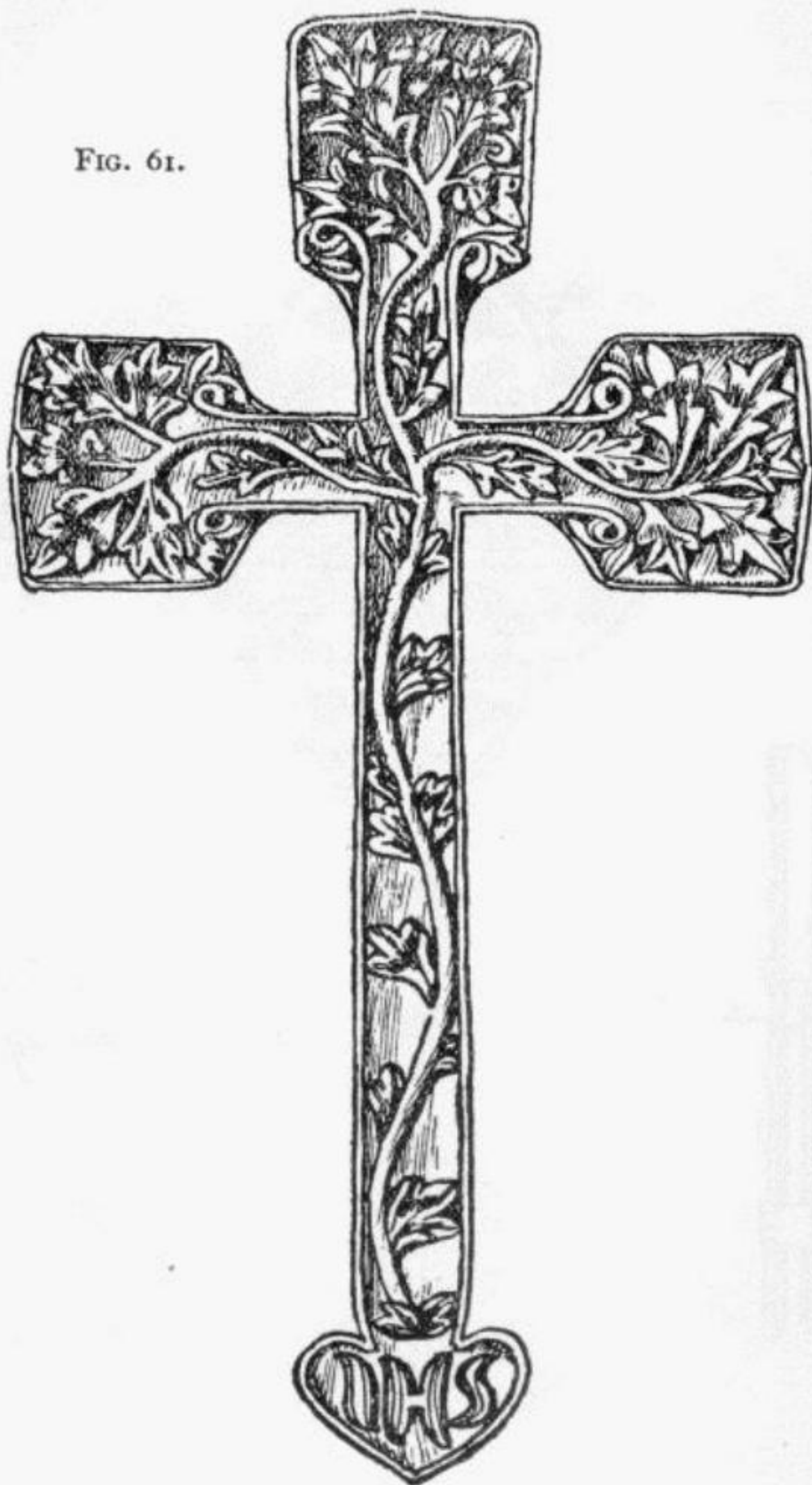


Fig. 61.

FIG. 62.

(a) thin pieces with trefoil piercings

(c) thin pieces with
trefoil piercings-

[180]

THE GROTESQUE IN CARVING

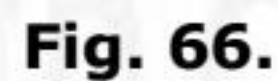
The dullness which comes of "all work and no play" may be said to affect the carver at times. He tires of carving leaves and ornaments: what more natural than to seek change and amusement in the invention of droll figures of men or animals? The enjoyment

which we all feel in contemplating the outcome of this spirit in ancient work, leads us to the imitation of both subject and manner, hoping thereby that the same results may be obtained; but somehow the repetition is seldom attended with much success, while of original fancies of the same sort we are obliged to confess ourselves almost destitute. Who can behold the fantastic humors of Gothic carvings without being both amused and interested? Those grotesque heads with gaping mouths recall [181] the stories of childhood, peopled with goblins and gnomes. It is all so natural, and so much in keeping with the architecture which surrounds it, the carving is so rude and simple, that it seems absurd when some authority on such matters makes a statement to the effect that all such expression of humor has become forever impossible to ourselves.

This important part of the question must be left to your own meditation, to settle according to your lights; experience will probably lead you ultimately to the same opinion. Meantime, the point I wish to impress upon you is this, that until you feel yourself secure, and something of a master of various branches of your craft, you should not attempt any subject which aims at being decidedly grotesque. There are very good and practical reasons for this; one is, that while you are studying your art, you must do nothing that may tend to obscure what faculties you have for judging proportion. Now, as all grotesque work is based more or less on exaggeration, it forms a very dangerous kind of exercise to the beginner, therefore I should never allow a pupil of mine to so much as attempt it. Do not think [182] that I wish to discourage every effort which has not an ultra-serious aim. On the contrary, I am but taking a rather roundabout way to an admission that the humorous element has, and must have at all times, a powerful attraction for the wood-carver; and to the statement of an opinion that it should not be allowed to take a prominent place in the work of a student; moreover, that it is quite possible to find in nature a varied and unfailing source of suggestion in this respect (more, in fact, than we are ever likely to account for), and which requires no artificial exaggeration to aid its expression. Some tincture of the faculty is absolutely necessary to the carver who takes his subjects from birds or beasts, in order that he may perceive and seize the salient lines and characteristic forms, of which the key-note is often to be found in a faint touch of humor, and which, like the scent of a flower, adds charm by appealing to another sense.

The same argument applies to the treatment of the human figure. Let no student (and I may include, also, master-carver) think that a grotesque treatment will raise the smile or excite the interest [183] which is anticipated. The "grotesque" is a vehicle for grim and often terrible ideas, lightly veiled by a cloak of humorous exaggeration; a sort of Viking horse-play—it is, in fact, a language which expresses the mixed feelings of sportive contempt and real fear in about equal proportions. When these feelings are not behind the expression, it becomes a language which is in itself only contemptible.

Before we leave this subject, look at Plate II, in which you will see a curious use of misproportion—intentional, too, in this case—and used for quite other than humorous purposes. This is a little ornamental figure from the tomb of Henry IV, in Canterbury Cathedral. You will see that the body is out of all proportion; too small for the head which surmounts it, or too big for the feet upon which it stands. Now, what could have induced the carver to treat a dainty little lady thus? It certainly was not that he considered it an improvement upon nature, nor was it a joke on his part. It could only be done for some practical reason such as this: that the little figure does part duty as a bracket, hence, more appearance of solidity is required at the top, and less at the foot, than true proportions would [189] admit. It is all done so unostentatiously that one might look for hours at the figure without noticing the license. Not that I should advise you to imitate this [190] naive way out of a difficulty. The childlike simplicity of its treatment succeeds where conscious effort would only end in affectation.



CHAPTER XX

STUDIES FROM NATURE—BIRDS AND BEASTS

The Introduction of Animal Forms—Rude Vitality Better than Dull "Natural History"—"Action"—Difficulties of the Study for Town-Bred Students—The Aid of Books and Photographs—Outline Drawing and Suggestion of Main Masses—Sketch-Book Studies, Sections, and Notes—Swiss Animal Carving—The Clay Model: its Use and Abuse.

Nothing enlivens or gives more variety of interest to wood-carving than the introduction of animal forms. They [192] make agreeable halting-places on which the eye may rest with pleasure. They are, in general, both beautiful in their shapes and associated with ideas which appeal strongly to the imagination, thus affording in masses of abstract ornament the pleasantest kind of relief by adding to it points of definite lineament and meaning.

To carve animals as they ought to be carved, one must have something more than a passing interest in their forms; there must be included also an understanding of their natures, and some acquaintance with their habits. A cattle-drover is likely to know the salient points of a bullock, a horse-breeder all those connected with a horse, and so on. We students, however, not having the advantage of such accurate and personal knowledge, must make shift in the best way we can to discover and note the points so familiar to trained eyes. To see animals in this way, and, with knowledge of their forms and habits, treat their sculptured images according to the laws of our craft, is no light task. If choice were to be made between a rude manner of carving—but which familiarity with the subject [193] invested with lively recognition of character—and a more cultured and elaborate, but lifeless study in natural history, there should be no hesitation in making choice of the former method, because animal forms, without some indication of vitality, are the dullest of all dull ornaments.

It is quite impossible to describe in words the kind of "action" which is most appropriate to sculpture, it being much more a question of treatment, and the guiding spirit of the moment, than a subject which can be formulated. As a broad and general principle which may be taken for guidance, you will always find yourself on surer ground in the attempt to indicate the *capacity* for energy and the suggestion of *movement*, than you will if your aim is the extremity of action in any direction. You may, with some justice, point to the illustration given in Fig. 65, and which appears to contradict this statement, as being an example in which violent action is the key-note. You must notice, however, that the two figures, although struggling, are for the moment still, or may be supposed so. There is enough suggestion of this pause to excuse the attitudes and save the composition [194] from restlessness—even the raised hands may be supposed to remain in the same position for a second or two. This imaginary pause, however infinitesimal, is essential to the dignity of the sculptor's art, as nothing is more irritating to the mind than being forced to recognize the contradiction between a motionless image and its suggestion of restless action. It is necessary to observe the same rule in the expression of actual repose, as some clue must be given, some completed action be suggested, in order to distinguish dormant energy from downright inertia. I should like to impress upon you the importance of making a special study of the characteristic movements of

animals. You will in time become so far familiar with them that certain standards of comparison and contrast will be established in your mind as aids to memory. Thus you will be all the better able to carve with significance the measured and stately action of a horse, if you have in your mind's eye at the same time a picture of the more cumbrous and slower movements of a cow; and you will be helped in the same way when you are carving a dog, by remembering that the movements of a cat afford a [195] striking contrast, in being stealthy where the other is nervous and quick.

For the unfortunate town-bred student or artist, who has had few opportunities to study birds and beasts familiar to the country schoolboy, there is no other way but to make the best of stuffed birds, photographs, etc. Much may be done with these aids if a little personal acquaintance with their habits and associations is added like salt, to keep the second-hand knowledge sweet and wholesome.

In the absence of opportunity for study from the life, no pictures of animals can compare in their usefulness to the carver with those by Bewick. They are so completely developed in essential details, so full of character and expressive of life, that even when personal acquaintance has been made with their various qualities, a glance at one of his engravings of birds or beasts conveys new meaning, either of gesture or attitude, to what we have previously learned. Every student who wishes to make a lively representation in carving of familiar beast or bird should study Bewick's engravings of "Quadrupeds" and "Birds." [196]

Drawings made for the purpose of study need not be elaborate: indeed, such drawings are only embarrassing to work from. The most practical plan is to make a drawing in which the main masses are given correctly, and in about the same relative position that they will occupy in the carving. I give you in Plate VII an example of this in a drawing made by Philip Webb, who, by the study of a lifetime, has amassed a valuable store of knowledge concerning animals, and acquired that extraordinary skill in their delineation and the expression of character which is only to be attained by close observation and great sympathy with the subject. The drawing in question was made for myself at the time I was carving a lion for the cover of a book (given in Plate VIII). It was made, in his good-natured way, to "help a lame dog over a stile," as I had got into difficulties with the form. This drawing is all that a carver's first diagram should be, and gives what is always the first necessity in such preliminary outlines—that is, the right relationship of the main masses, and the merest hint of what is to come in the way of detail; all of which must be studied separately, but which would be entirely useless [197] if a wrong start had been made. In Fig. 68 I give you tracings from some notes I made myself while carving the sheep in Plates V and VI. The object was to gain some definite knowledge of form by noting the relation of planes, sections of parts, projections, etc., etc. The section lines and side-notes are the most valuable part of the memoranda. In the same manner the illustration, Fig. 69, shows diagrams made from a heron, giving section lines of beak, etc.

The side-notes about the colors are valuable, as, although not translatable into carving, they do to some extent influence the manner of interpreting forms.

Photographs must not be despised, but they are only of use if read by the light of previous knowledge. For this reason you can not make too many notes of sectional structure through heads, necks, and legs, which will help to explain the mystery

The bear shown in the frontispiece is traced from a photographic illustration which appeared in the Westminster Budget some time ago. By the merest accident it is suggestive of a subject almost ready for the carver's hand. [198]



The opinions of the well-known wood-carver, Mr. W. Aumonier, on this subject, will be of value to you; he says with [204] regard to the best method of going to work: "A fresh piece of wood-carving executed without a model is distinctly a created work," and that much good work may come by "chopping boldly at a block without any preconceived design, but designing as you go on." But he thinks it is best to work from drawings; "rough, full-size charcoal cartoons, which give the effect wanted by their light and shade." He also says that he "strongly protests against the too frequent use of clay or plaster models, because they are often worse than useless, and not infrequently absolutely immoral in their tendency, because they absorb time and money, which ought more legitimately to be spent on the carving itself." [205]

FORESHORTENING AS APPLIED TO WORK IN RELIEF

I have spoken of the necessity for careful balance between the outlines of subject and background: that both should be agreeable in shape. This becomes complicated and more difficult to arrange when we admit into our design anything resembling what painters call foreshortening, and the awkwardness is felt even in the placing of such a small thing as an apple-leaf, which may be treated in such a way that the intention of the drawing is entirely lost in the confusion which arises between the inferred and the actual projection.

Every kind of work in relief develops a species of compromise in the expression of form, lying somewhere between the representation of an object on a perfectly flat ground, as in a painting, and the complete realization of the same form, copied from nature in some solid material, without any background whatever. In proportion to the amount of actual projection from the background, of course the necessity diminishes for that kind of foreshortening which is obtained by delineation. It might be inferred, therefore, that in very low relief—which is more nearly akin to the nature of a picture—more liberty may be taken in this direction. It is not so, however, for where actual depth or projection exists, as in carving, be it only so much as the depth of a line, it makes foreshortening well-nigh impossible, except to a very limited extent. There must be, of course, *some* appearance of this quality, so a certain conventional standard has been set up, beyond which one only ventures at one's own risk. Thus, care is taken that every object

and small, that they fall easily into groups, each having some relation to, and share of the background, is a true carver's artifice. A skilful use of this arrangement makes it quite unnecessary to encroach upon the [212] domain of another art in the imitation of an effect which may be successfully rendered with the pencil, but only so to a very limited extent with the carving tools.

You have all seen the actors, when called before the curtain at the close of the play, how they pass before it one by one, and perhaps joining hands make their bows *in line*, to all appearance, on a very narrow platform. The curtain is your background, while the footlights may stand for the surface of your wood. In illustration of this principle, let me call your attention to the arrangement of the animals in Plate VI, where economy of space, and a desire to display each detail to advantage, are the leading motives. I give it as the readiest example to hand, and because it fairly illustrates the principle in question. You must excuse the apparent vanity in making choice of one of my own works to exemplify a canon of art. The sheep at the top is supposed to be scampering over rocks; the ram below may be any distance from the sheep that you choose to imagine—the only indication of relative position is *separation*, by means of a ridge that may pass for a rock. The head of the ram is somewhat foreshortened, but there was enough thickness [213] of wood contained in the big mass of the body to allow of this being done in the smaller mass of the head, without leaving too much to be supposed. The heads of the sheep in the fold have been as closely packed as was consistent with showing as much of each as possible, as it was considered better to give the whole head and no body than to show only a part of both: most of the bodies, therefore, are supposed to be hidden behind the wall, only one showing in part.

It is a general axiom of the craft, that every mass (be it body or leaf) must be made as complete in itself as the circumstances will allow; but, if partly hidden, the concealment should be wilful, and without ambiguity. Thus, a dog's head may be rightly carved as being partly hidden in a bucket, but ought not to be covered by another head if it is possible to avoid it.[214]

CHAPTER XXII

UNDERCUTTING AND "BUILT-UP" WORK

Undercutting as a Means and as an End; its Use and Abuse—"Built-up" Work—"Planted" Work—"Pierced" Work.

By undercutting is meant the cutting away of the solid portions of projections in such a manner as to make them invisible, thus throwing the carved surface work into more complete relief by detaching it from the background. This device has often been carried so far, where the projection was sufficient, that entire groups of figures and foliage have been practically detached from the background, like pieces of separate sculpture carved all round. This desire for completeness of relief was more or less a departure from the orthodox aims of the carvers' craft, and led ultimately to what is known as "built-up" work—that is to say, work in which the projecting parts were composed of many different pieces of wood, each carved separately, and afterward glued or pinned together

to form the composition. Many [215] of the most elaborate carvings by Grinling Gibbons are of this kind; they have a charm of their own, but it is one of quite separate interest, and belongs to a category entirely removed from the art of carving objects in a solid piece of wood. Apart from this distinction, the difficulty of the method requires the most accomplished mechanical skill and a highly trained eye to either carve or compose such work in a way to command respect. I shall therefore dismiss this branch of the subject as being outside of our present limits.

Undercutting, on the other hand, is an expedient distinctly characteristic of solid wood-carving, and some experiments ought to be made by you in designing work in which it can be used. It may be either partial or complete—complete, of course, only up to a point; that is to say, the connection with the background must in every case be not only maintained but visibly demonstrated. Partial undercutting applies to such portions as the sides of leaves, the receding parts of heads, wings, etc., where the wood between the object and its background is cut away on an inward bend, either completing the [216] projecting form, as in the case of a head, or merely to hide the superfluous wood in the case of a leaf. All this presupposes a certain amount of elevation in the relief; indeed, it is only in such cases that the process is necessary or can be carried out. The use of undercutting of this kind is like every other technical process, liable to abuse through too much being made of its effects. Fortunately the time it consumes is a safeguard against any tendency to run riot in this direction. The point at which it should in all cases stop, and that relentlessly, is where it begins to cause a separation between any entire mass of ornament and its background. If *portions* are thus relieved almost to complete detachment, but visibly reconnect themselves in another place, a certain piquancy is gained which adds charm without destroying character. A curious use is made of undercutting in the bunch of leaves given in Plate XI from a Miserere seat in Winchester Cathedral; it may be said to be completely undercut in so far that the whole bunch is hollowed out under the surface, leaving from 1/4 to 1/2 in. thickness of wood, in which the leaves are carved, so that you may put your finger [217] in at one hole and see it at the bottom of another. The only end all this extra labor seems to have attained is that of changefulness in the shadows of the holes between the leaves, in which one sees dark rims with light at the bottom, a condition which certainly adds a mysterious lightness to the whole mass. It is a very refined and appropriate use of undercutting, but would only be possible where time could be spent to secure a variant of such epicurean delicacy, as all the superfluous wood must be taken out through the spaces between the leaves, and in this case they are not overlarge for that purpose.

Work which has its background entirely cut away, and which is afterward glued or "planted" on a fresh background to save labor, can not be called "undercut"; this method has generally a cheap look, as it is used with the object of saving time and expense. Carving which is treated in this way, but instead of being "planted" close to the background, is fixed at a little distance from it (as is the case with the lace-like designs fitted into the hollow moldings of fifteenth-century choir-screens), is of quite a different order, although even in [218] this case it can not be strictly described as undercut: it is more nearly akin to pierced fretwork. It has, however, all the general effect of undercut work, and is the only possible way of obtaining this effect in wood where a large quantity of such ornament is required. The face of such carving is generally a little convex, while the back is hollowed out to give an equal thickness of section. The ornaments in Figs. 75, 76, and 77 are of this description, and are calculated to give

Undercutting in the strict and more laborious sense must be reserved for occasions where the labor is repaid by the additional charm. It must be considered in the light of a *tour de force*, which, on account of its cost in the matter of time, should only be used under exceptional circumstances, care being taken to make it clear that it is an *exception* to the general rule of solid carving on a solid background. [219]

PICTURE SUBJECTS AND PERSPECTIVE

Those vague and shadowy boundaries which separate the domains of the different arts are being perpetually called in question. By what landmarks such indefinite frontiers may be distinguished, and how far they may be extended or transgressed, will always be a matter of dispute. Excursions of conquest are continually being made, and conspicuous among these, one which animates the hopes of many sculptors and modelers. Its aim is the appropriation of those charms which are the peculiar property of the graphic arts, more especially their power of expressing the effects of distance by means of linear and aerial perspective.

All this, of course, forms no argument against the use of explanatory landscapes with trees, buildings, etc. It only means that all such features must be treated in a way entirely different to that adopted by the painter—that is to say, in detached groups, each

CHAPTER XXIV

ARCHITECTURAL CARVING

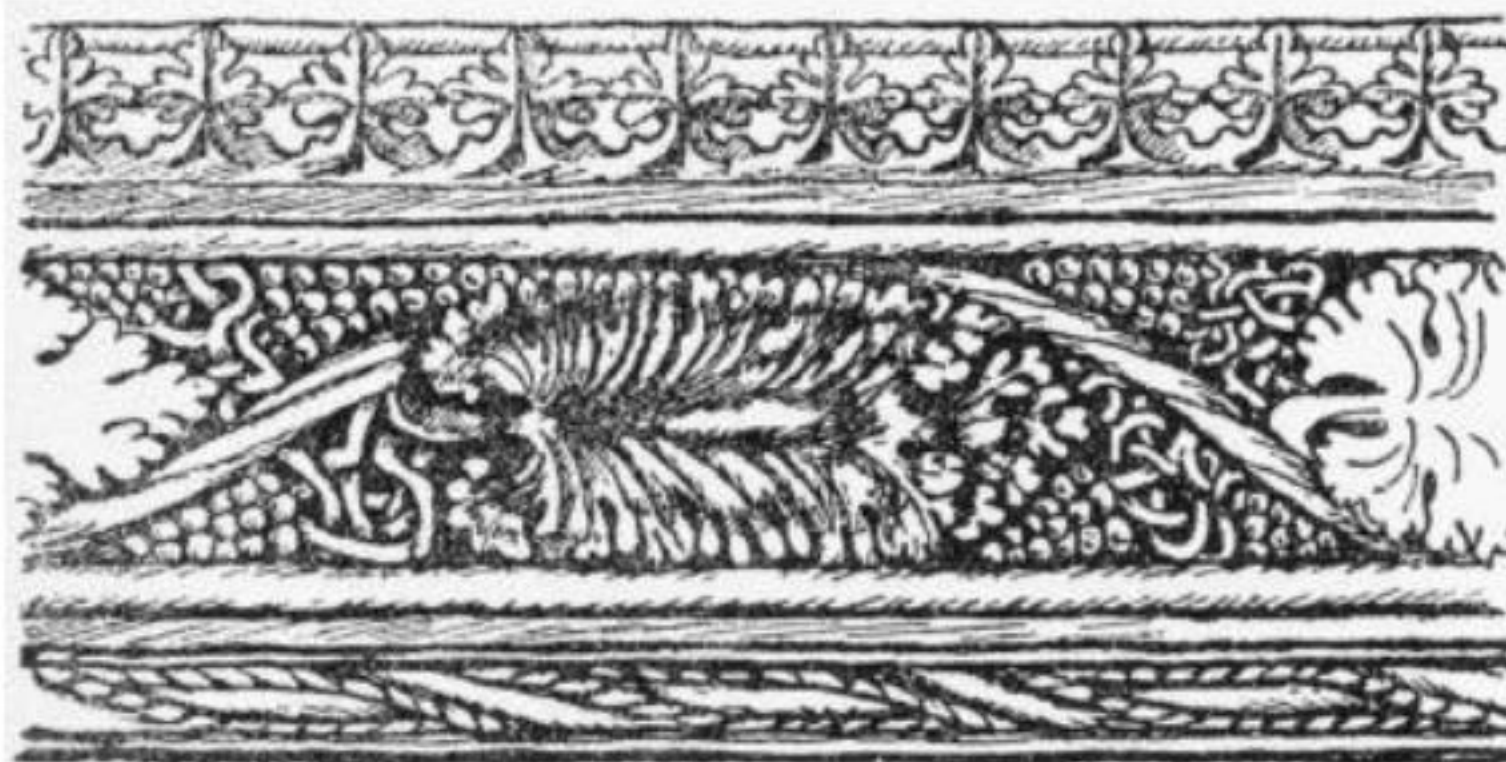
The Necessity for Variety in Study—A Carver's View of the Study of Architecture; Inseparable from a Study of his own Craft—Importance of the Carpenter's Stimulating Influence upon the Carver—Carpenter's Imitation of Stone Construction Carried too Far.

That the study of wood-carving should be confined to the narrow field of its own performances would be the surest way to bring contempt upon an art which already offers too many temptations for the easy embodiment of puerile motives. Such a limited range would exclude all the stimulating lessons to be derived from the many other kinds of carving and sculpture; forgetful that they are, after all, but different forms of the same art, differing only in technique and application. It would take no note of the stately sculptures of [224] Greece—the fountain-head of all that is technically and artistically perfect in expression of form—or of the splendor of imagination displayed in the ivories of Italy. Many another source of inspiring impetus would be neglected, including the greatest of all, the influence of architecture, and through it, the dignified association or the carver's art with all that is noble in the life of mankind.

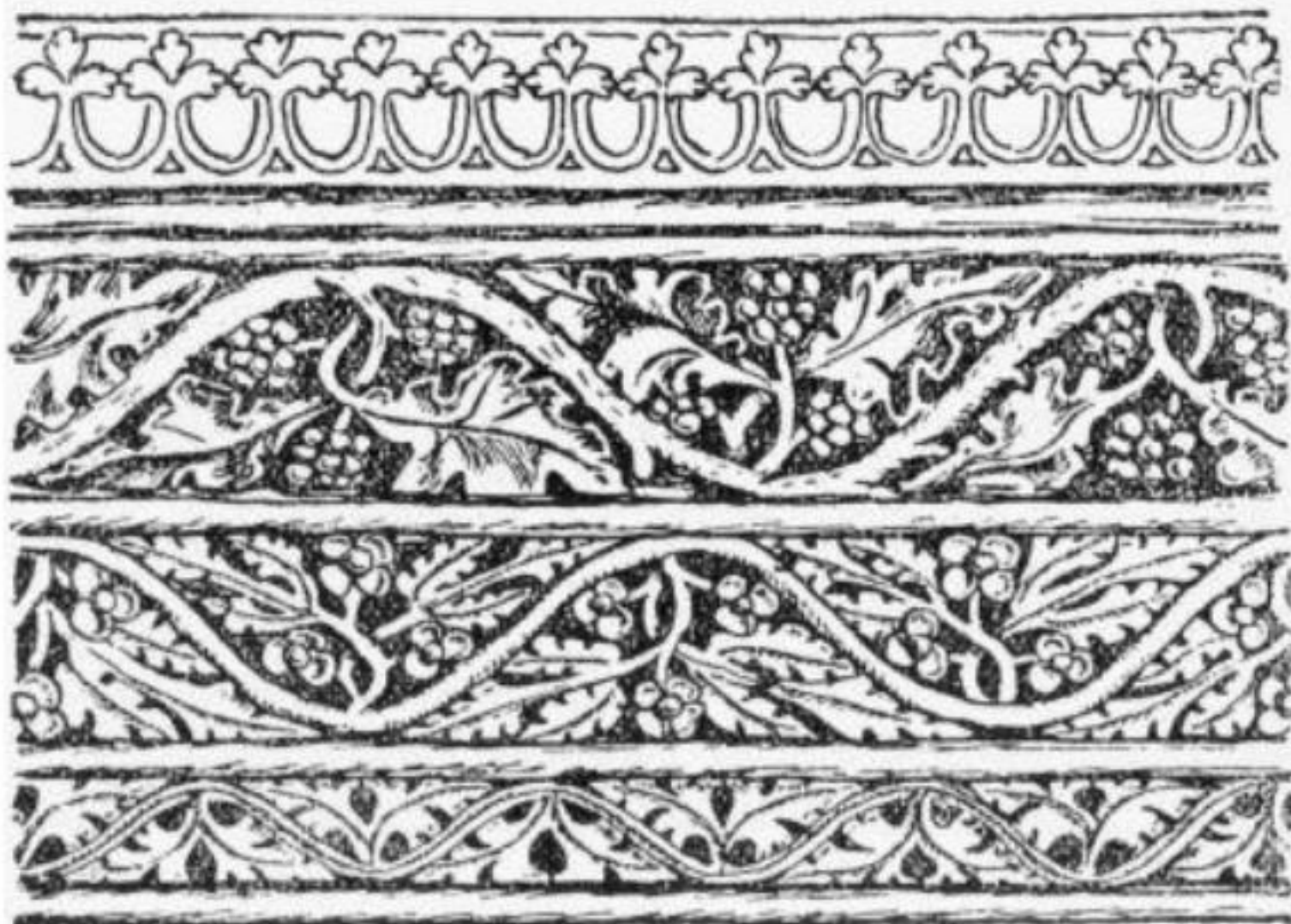
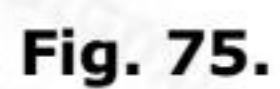
The dry and uninviting aspect which a serious study of architecture presents to some minds is such that it is too often avoided as both useless and wearisome. Much of this diffidence is due to a misconception of the aims which should govern the student of decorative design in making an acquaintance with its principles. The study should not be looked upon as pertaining exclusively to the functions of an architect, nor as having only an accidental connection with particular crafts. It must be remembered that in the old days mason and carpenter were both craftsmen and architects, and the sculptor and wood-carver had an equal share in creating every feature which gives any distinction of style to the buildings that were the outcome of their united efforts. So, instead [225] of looking upon the subject as only a study of dates for the antiquary, and rules of construction for the architect, the carver should take his own view, and regard architecture for the time being as what in some sense it really is: a very large kind of carving, which includes and gives reason for his own particular branch. The importance of the subject is proved by the experience of centuries; history showing plainly how the two arts grew in strength and beauty only when closely associated, and shared each other's fate in proportion to their estrangement.

In this place I can say but very little upon such a vast subject; all I can do is to call your attention to one or two examples of carved work combined with structural carpentry, in order that you may see for yourselves what a power of effect lies in that union, and how by contrast it enhances the value and interest of both. I do this in the hope that it may possibly lead you to a more complete study of architecture, for which there is no lack of opportunity in books and museums, but more especially in what remains of the old buildings themselves, with which a familiar and personal acquaintance will be much [226] better than a theoretical or second-hand one.

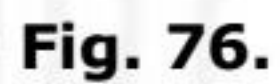
No carver with a healthy ambition can long continue to make designs and produce them in wood without feeling intensely the want of some architectural occasion for his efforts. Had he only a barge-board to carve, or the canopy of a porch, it would be such a relief to turn to its large and general treatment after a course of the panels and ornaments



COMBINATION OF CONTRASTING
FORMS - FIFTEENTH CENTURY -



COMBINATION OF REPEATING CURVES
OF SIMILAR CHARACTER BUT VARIED IN
SIZE - FIFTEENTH CENTURY WORK.



The carved work, on the other hand, is marked by a strong craft character, essentially *woody* both in design and execution. The illustrations referred to are typical examples of this kind of work, and, although the execution can not be indicated, they at least give the disposition of parts, and some idea of the contrast obtained by [233] the use of alternate bands of ornament differing in scale, or, as in some cases, the agreeable monotony produced by a repetition of almost similar designs, varied slightly in execution.

SURFACE FINISH—TEXTURE

The term "texture" is sometimes applied to the quality of finish which is characteristic of good carving; it has a somewhat misleading sound, which seems to suggest that the final treatment of the surface is the work of a separate operation. However, it is a right enough word, as the texture which wood-carvers aim at is that of the wood in which they are carving. One might naturally think that this texture must necessarily appear when the work was finished, but that is not the case, as it is only rescued by the most skilful use of the tools, and easily disappears under the mismanagement of clumsy or unsympathetic hands.

[illegible]

A good quality of finish may exist in the most divergent kinds of work, each having its own characteristic texture. Thus a broad treatment on a large scale will make much of the natural texture of the wood, enforcing it by crisp edges and subtle little ridges which catch the light and recall the momentary passage of the sharp tool, while elaborate work in low relief may have a delicate texture which partly imitates that of the details [236] of its subject, and partly displays the nature of the wood. In either case, the texture must be consciously aimed at by the carver as the last but by no means least quality which is to give vitality to the work of his hands. A sense of the capabilities of his wood in this respect is one of the best aids to the carver, as it reacts on his sense of form and compels him to precision.

Manual dexterity alone may succeed in making its work clearly intelligible, but that is all, and it generally leaves a surface in which there is little indication of any feeling for the material in which the work is carved, nothing, in fact, that marks it specially as carving in wood, or distinguishes it from a casting in metal.

The technical operation which is most immediately answerable for the making or marring of texture is the disposition and nature of the final tool marks. These should be so managed that they help the eye to understand the forms. They should explain rather than confuse the contours of the surface. Just as in a good chalk drawing the strokes and cross-hatchings are put in with method, and if well done [237] produce the effect of something solid, so in carving, the tool marks should emphasize the drawing without in any way calling attention to themselves.

It is quite impossible to explain in words that will not be open to misconstruction the subtle commingling of qualities which make all the difference between good and bad texture. We may succeed better by describing those conditions which are unfavorable to it. Thus work which is very much cut up into minute detail, and which lacks a proper contrast of surface, or, for the same reason, work which is too generally bald and smooth, rarely exhibit a good surface texture. Again, work which is overlabored, or where delicate details have been attempted on a coarse-grained wood, or finally, work which, although done with success in the matter of mechanical dexterity, is deficient in feeling for its woody possibilities, are all likely to fail in the matter of texture.

Punch-marked backgrounds have undoubtedly a legitimate place among the expedients of the carver for obtaining contrast, but on the whole, as such, they are of a somewhat meretricious order, and [238] in almost every case their use is fatal to the charm of fine texture, as this always depends on an appreciation of the homogeneous connection of carving and background. If they are used at all they should be made to form patterns on the background, and not put down promiscuously. Little gouge marks are still better, as they are not so mechanical.

I shall conclude this part of my subject with a quotation from the words of Mr. W. Aumonier, in a lecture delivered at the Royal Institute of British Architects.

"All carving to be treated according to the position it is to occupy. Not only the design, but the actual carving itself, should be considered with a view to the position it is to take and the light it will receive. Thus, even if quite close to the eye, where, of course, its position warrants or demands a certain amount of finish, it must be remembered that real finish rather means perfection of form than smoothness of surface, so that even there it should still show its cuts and its tool marks fearlessly, and be deepened in parts

Beware of putting a wrong interpretation upon the word "rough"—refer to what he says of the points to be regarded, i.e., the "varieties of planes, and depths." If they are right the "roughness" is not likely to be of the offensive kind.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Country Craftsman of Old Times—A Colony of Craftsmen in Busy Intercourse—The Modern Craftsman's Difficulties: Embarrassing Variety of Choice.

William Morris, with no less power as a [241] craftsman, was the first to give practical embodiment to this newly awakened impulse by a modified return to the older methods of production. His rare knowledge of medieval history, and manly sympathy with all that is generous in modern life, made it impossible for him to become a superficial imitator. His work is an example of what may be achieved by a union of high artistic instincts with a clear understanding of the conditions of modern life.

[illegible]

Opportunities for study are now afforded to an extent never before dreamed of: in [242] books and schools, and in museums; but division of opinion mars the authority of the two first, while the last is confessedly but a kind of catalogue, which may only be read with profit by the light of considerable experience.

A certain amount of success has undoubtedly attended the progress of the new system, but it must always be more or less at a disadvantage; firstly, by reason of its divided aims; secondly, because the system is more theoretic than practical, and is often based on the false assumption that "design" may be learned without attaining a mastery over technique, and *vice versa*.

Until students become disillusioned on this latter point, and are at the same time permitted to follow their natural bent with as little interference as possible from the exigencies of public taste, uniformity of aim will be impossible, and consequently the system must remain artificial. It can never, under any circumstances, entirely replace that more natural one adopted by our ancestors. How can its methods compare for a moment with the spontaneous and hearty interest that guided the tools of those more happily placed craftsmen, [243] whose subjects lay around them, of daily familiarity; whose artistic language was ready to hand and without confusion, affording an endless variety of expression to every new and individual fancy. Many of these craftsmen were, owing to their invigorating surroundings, gifted with a high poetic feeling for their art—a quality which gives to their work a transcendent value that no learning or manual cleverness could supply. They acquired their technical knowledge in genial connection with equally gifted members of other crafts, and in consequence expressed themselves with corresponding and justly proportioned skill in execution.

Conditions that can not be altered must be endured while they last, but the first step toward their improvement must be made in gaining a knowledge of the facts as they are. This will be the surest foundation upon which to build all individual effort in the future.

Who that has felt the embarrassing doubts and contradictory impulses, peculiar to modern study, can have failed to look disconsolately away from his own surroundings to those far-off times when craft knowledge was acquired under circumstances [244] calculated to awaken the brightest instincts of the artist? The imaginary picture calls up the ancient carver at his bench, cheerfully blocking out images of leaves and animals in his busy workshop, surrounded with the sights and sounds of country life. His open door frames a picture of the village street, alive with scenes of neighborly interest. From the mill-wheel comes a monotonous music making pleasant cadence to his own woody notes, or the blacksmith's hammer rings his cheery counterpart in their companionable duet.

Short as is the distance between workshop and home, it provides a world of beauty and incident; suggesting to his inventive mind the subjects suitable for his work. Birds, beasts, and flowers are as familiar to him as the tools with which he works, or the scent and touch of the solid oak he handles daily. There, among the aromatic chips, he spends the long working hours of a summer day; varied by the occasional visits of a rather exacting Father from the neighboring monastery; or perhaps some idle and gossiping acquaintance who looks in to hold a long parley with his hand upon the latch. [245] Or it may be that the mind turns to another carver, at work in one of the many large colonies

of craftsmen which sprang up amid the forest of scaffolding surrounding the slow and mysterious growth of some noble cathedral. Here all is organized activity—the best men to be found in the country have been banded together and commissioned to do their best, for what seems, in modern eyes, a ridiculously small rate of pay. Some are well known and recommended; others, as traveling artists, are seeking change of experience and daily bread. Foreigners are here, from France, Italy, and the East. All have been placed under the direction of competent masters of their craft; men who have long since served their apprenticeship to its mysteries, and earned an honorable position in its guilds.

Here the carver works in an atmosphere of exhilarating emulation. Stone-carver and wood-carver vie with each other in producing work that will do credit to their respective brotherhoods. Painter and decorator are busy giving to the work of their hands what must have appeared to those concerned an aspect [246] of heavenly beauty; the most precious materials not being considered too costly for use in its adornment.

What an interchange of artistic experience!—interchange between those of similar craft from different countries, and the stimulating or refining influence of one craft upon another—sculptors, goldsmiths, wood-carvers, and painters, all uniting in a sympathetic agreement to do their utmost for the high authorities who brought them together; with a common feeling of reverence, alike for the religious traditions which formed the motives of their work and the representatives of that religion in the persons of their employers.

What an endless variety of interruptions must have been common! all of a kind eminently calculated to stimulate the imagination. Municipal functions, religious festivals with their splendid gatherings and processions, the exciting events of political contest, often carried to the point of actual combat, to say nothing of the frequent Saint's day holidays, enjoyed by the craftsman in jovial social intercourse. All and every scene clothed in an outward dress of beauty, [247] ranging from the picturesque roughness of the village inn to the magnificent pageantry of a nobleman's display, or the majestic surroundings of an archi-episcopal reception.

From dreams of the past with its many-sided life and background of serious beauty, we turn with feelings almost bordering on despair to the possibilities of the present. Not only has the modern craftsman to master the technicalities of his business, but he must become student as well. No universally accepted form of his art offers him a ready-made language; he is left fatally free to choose style, period, or nationality, from examples of every conceivable kind of carving, in museums, photographs, and buildings. As proud but distracted heir to all, he may cultivate any one of them, from Chinese to the latest style of exhibition art. For his studies he must travel half a dozen miles before he can reach fields, trees, and animals in anything like inspiring conditions. He must find in books and photographs the botanical lineaments of foliage and flowers, of which he mainly seeks to know the wild life and free growth. With but [248] one short life allowed him in which to make his poor effort in a single direction, he must yet study the history of his craft, compare styles, and endeavor with all the help he can get to shape some course for himself. Can he be assured of selecting the right one, or out of the multitude of counselors and contradictory views, is there not a danger of taking a false step? No wonder, if in the cloudy obscurity of his doubts, he sometimes feels a tired desire to abandon the problem as too intricate to be resolved. [249]

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN BUILDER AND CARVER

The Infinite Multiplicity of Styles—The "Gothic" Influence: Sculpture an Integral Element in its Designs—The Approach of the so-called "Renaissance" Period—Disturbed Convictions—The Revival of the Classical Style—The Two Styles in Conflict for a Time; their Respective Characteristics Reviewed—Carvers Become Dependent upon Architects and Painters—The "Revival" Separates "Designer" and "Executant."

The prevailing architectural fashion of a time or country, known as its style, has generally been determined by the influence of more advanced nations on those of a ruder constitution; each modifying the imported style to suit its own climatic and social conditions, and imbuing it with its own individual temperament. The foreign idea was thus developed into a distinct and national style, which in its turn bore fruit, and was passed on as an initiative for other nations and new styles. [250] The current of this influence, generally speaking, trended from east to west as though following the course of the sun, upon whose light it depended for the illumination of its beauties.

There are so many styles of architecture, and consequently of carving, both in wood and other materials, that a history of such a subject would be a life study in itself, and be quite barren of results except those of a professional kind. It would include the characteristics of carvings from every country under the sun, from the earliest times known. Engravings on boars' tusks found in prehistoric caves, carvings on South Sea Island canoe paddles, Peruvian monstrosities of terror, the refined barbarity of India and China, the enduring and monumental efforts of Egyptian art, and a hundred others, down to times and countries more within reach. In fact, it would only be another name for a history of mankind from the beginning of the world.

Nothing could be better for the student's purpose than to begin his studies of history at that point where the first indication of the Gothic or medieval period of architecture makes its appearance. For it was [251] from this great and revolutionary change in the manner of building that all the subsequent variety of style in carving as well as building in medieval Europe took its origin. The first rudiments of the great school of art, which has been broadly classified as having a "Gothic" origin, began to make their appearance in Byzantium some three or four centuries after the birth of Christ. This city, said to have been founded by a colony of Greek emigrants, became the seat of Roman government in their eastern empire, and is now known as Constantinople: it contains a noted example of ancient art in the great church of St. Sophia. From the date of the building of this church in the sixth century A. D. to the beginning of the fifteenth century in Italy, and about a hundred years later, more or less, according to distance from that center, we have roughly the period during which the "medieval" spirit ruled the arts of Europe.

The work of this long period is distinguished beyond all others by the varied beauty and interest of its carvings, a preeminence it owes in part to the strong bias in this direction which was given [252] by its early founders, but still more to the unbroken alliance maintained between builders and carvers throughout the entire period. An inherited talent for sculpture, handed down, no doubt, from their classical forefathers, distinctly

fine dust which has served for centuries as the principal ingredient in the manufacture of an endless succession of moral puddings and pies, known in modern times as "art criticism."

To earnest minds in all classes at that time, any enthusiasm for architectural styles, old or new, must have appeared as futile as an anxiety about appearances while one's house was burning.

To the art of this period the title [256] "Renaissance" has been foolishly applied. When used in association with the arts of architecture and sculpture, it is essentially a misnomer. For these arts it was merely a time of revival, not in any sense one of rebirth, as the word implies. In no way can this period claim to have conferred vitality along with the resuscitation of outward form. The revival of a classical style in architectural design, which began in the early years of the fifteenth century, was the sequel to a similar "revival" in the study of Greek and Roman literature, then occupying the interests of cultivated scholars. It was but a step further to desire also the realization of those architectural splendors which were associated with these studies. Such dilettante dreams can not be supposed to have deeply interested the general public, with whose concerns they had but a remote connection; so under these circumstances, probably the classical style was as suitable as any other, chosen on such narrow and exclusive grounds. There was even a certain fitness in it, a capability of much expansion on theatrical and grandiose lines. Its unbending demeanor toward [257] craft talent of the humbler kind at once flattered the vanity of the cultured, and cowed uneducated minds.

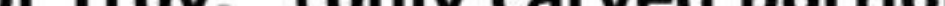
The Duomo at Florence was finished early in that century, and was one of the first buildings in which the new style was adopted. In this case it was used mainly in the completion of a building already well advanced on lines based upon the older traditions. The character of its design, although not of a strictly imitative kind, was distinctly based on a classical ideal. Imitations followed, mingling, as in the case of the Duomo, Gothic and classic elements, often with fine effect. It is quite possible to believe that, had this intermarriage of the two schools continued to bear fruit, some vertebrate style might have resulted from the union, partaking of the nature of both parents; but the hope was of short duration. Its architects, becoming enamored by the quality of scientific precision, which is the fundamental principle of classical design, soon abandoned all pretense of attempting to amalgamate the native and imported styles. They gave themselves up wholly to the congenial task of elaborating a scholarly system of imitation; so that, [258] by the middle of the sixteenth century, no trace whatever remained of native feeling in the architecture of its important buildings.

During the progress of this revolution in style, the old medieval habits of cooperation between master mason and sculptor were slowly being exchanged for a complete dependence upon a special architect, who was not necessarily a craftsman himself; but whose designs must be carried out line for line with the most rigid adherence to measurements.

For a moment in history, the rival spirits of the two great schools of architecture stand face to face like opposing ideals. The classical one, recalled from the region of things past and forgotten, again to play a part on earth with at least the semblance of life; the Gothic spirit, under notice to quit and betake itself to that oblivion from which its rival is reemerging.

[289]



 VIII.—Book Cover Carved in English Oak
—"Tale of Troy." (only carved portion shown.)

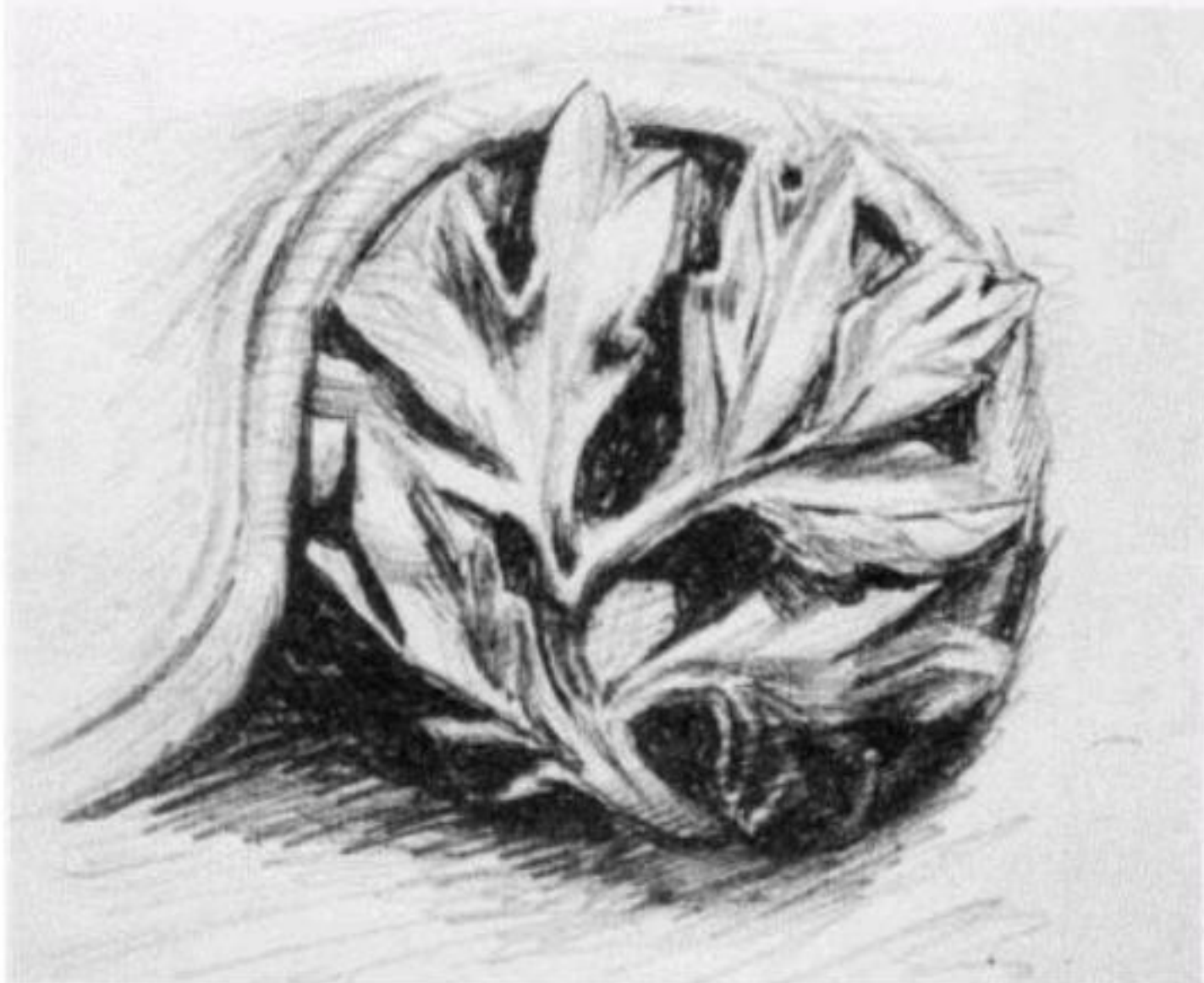
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X.—Book Cover Carved the Fox. (only carved portions shown.)



X.—Book Cover Carved the Fox. (only carved portions shown.)



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