

One cannot go wrong in taking for granted that plant-forms were the archetypes of all these patterns. Now we know that it holds good, as a general principle in the history of civilisation, that the tiller of the ground supplants the shepherd, as the shepherd supplants the hunter: and the like holds also in the history of the branch of art we are discussing,—representations of animals are the first to make their appearance, and they are at this period remarkable for a wonderful sharpness of characterisation. At a later stage man first begins to exhibit a preference for plant-forms as subjects for representation, and above all for such as can in any way be useful or hurtful to him. We, however, meet such plant-forms used in

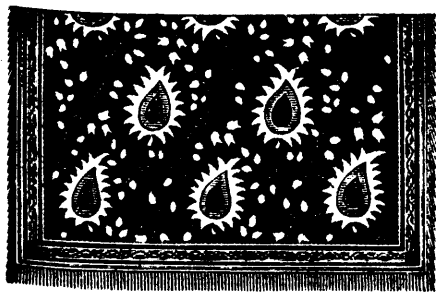


FIG. 2.

ornament in the oldest extant monuments of art in Egypt, side by side with representations of animals; but the previous history of this very developed culture is unknown. In such cases as afford us an opportunity of studying more primitive though not equally ancient stages of culture, as for instance among the Greeks, we find the above dictum confirmed, at any rate in cases where we have to deal with the representation of the indigenous flora as contradistinguished from such representations of plants as were imported from foreign civilisations. In the case that is now to occupy us we have not to go back so very far in the history of the world.

The ornamental representations of plants are of two



FIG. 3.



FIG. 4.

kinds. Where we have to deal with a simple pictorial reproduction of plants as symbols (laurel branches, boughs of olive and fir, and branches of ivy), *i.e.* with a mere characteristic decoration of a technical structure, stress is laid upon the most faithful reproduction of the object possible,—the artist is again and again referred to the study of Nature in order to imitate her. Hence, as a general rule, there is less difficulty in the explanation of these forms, because even the minute details of the natural object now and then offer points that one can fasten upon. It is quite another thing when we have to deal with actual decoration which does not aim at anything further than at employing the structural laws of organisms in order to organise the unwieldy substance, to endow the stone with

a higher vitality. These latter forms depart, even at the time when they originate, very considerably from the natural objects. The successors of the originators soon still further modify them by adapting them to particular purposes, combining and fusing them with other forms so as to produce particular individual forms which have each their own history (*e.g.* the Acanthus ornament, which, in its developed form, differs very greatly from the Acanthus plant itself); and in a wider sense we may here enumerate all such forms as have been raised by art to the dignity of perfectly viable beings, *e.g.* griffins, sphinxes, dragons, and angels.

The deciphering and derivation of such forms as these is naturally enough more difficult; in the case of most of

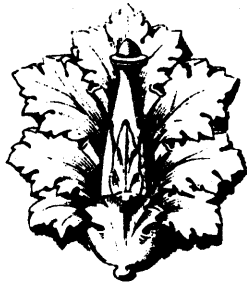


FIG. 5.



FIG. 6.

them we are not even in possession of the most necessary preliminaries to the investigation, and in the case of others there are very important links missing (*e.g.* for the well-known Greek palmettas). In proportion as the representation of the plant was a secondary object, the travesty has been more and more complete. As in the case of language, where the root is hardly recognisable in the later word, so in decorative art the original form is indistinguishable in the ornament. The migration of races and the early commercial intercourse between distant lands have done much to bring about the fusion of types; but again in contrast to this we find, in the case of extensive tracts of country, notably in the Asiatic continent, a fixity, throughout centuries, of forms that have once been

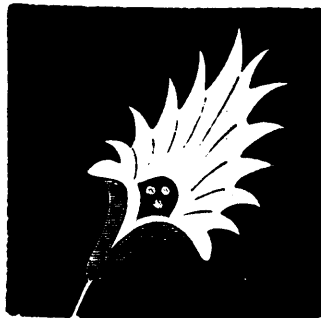


FIG. 7.



FIG. 8.

introduced, which occasions a confusion between ancient and modern works of art, and renders investigations much more difficult. An old French traveller writes:—"J'ai vu dans le trésor d'Ispahan les vêtements de Tamerlan; ils ne diffèrent en rien de ceux d'aujourd'hui." Ethnology, the natural sciences, and last, but not least, the history of technical art are here set face to face with great problems.

In the case in point, the study of the first group of artistic forms that have been elaborated by Western art leads to definite results, because the execution of the forms in stone can be followed on monuments that are relatively not very old, that are dated, and of which the remains are still extant. In order to follow the develop-