CUT LEATHER WORK.

Cut leather work is one of the most fascinating of minor arts, and has the great advantage of being open to amateurs as well as to skilled designers.

In this, as in every other pursuit, talent and originality produce an adequate result, but a

FIG 1

Nº 2
Nº 1
Nº 4
Nº 3
Nº 5

good copyist who can transfer or adapt the patterns of more gifted artists, can turn out very creditable work.

The cutting of leather is not an expensive pursuit. Two or three shillings will provide an ample supply of material upon which to begin, while the same remark applies to the tools, which once bought wear for a long time.

As regards the tools there is a very large choice before the worker, but it is better to start only with those which are absolutely necessary, and to gradually add others to the collection as increasing proficiency seems to warrant the expenditure.

Five tools are here shown, and they are all sufficient for early attempts.

Cut leather-work being, as its name implies, a process by which certain outlines are incised upon the material, it follows that the first requisite is a tool which will mark curves and angles evenly. The wheel (Fig. 1, No. 1) accomplishes this satisfactorily if used as shall afterwards be described. The bent awl (No. 2) should be employed to more deeply mark certain points in the design and to trace corners and small curves which the coarser tool cannot reach.

No. 3 is a modelling tool, intended to help rub and soften down the edges of the cuts made by the tracing wheel and awl.

No. 4 shows a punch, at one end of which is a mould of a star or other design which is

of great help in making little patterns over a leather background, to which it is held with the left hand, while with the right grasping the light hammer (No. 5) a sharp tap is given so that the pattern is transferred to the leather whereon it is used most commonly as a powdering.

There are many of these punches to be had, each, of course, made to stamp a different device.

A few specimens of punching are shown at Fig. 2, where sixteen punches have left as many impressions of crosses, stars, circles, trefoils, roses, triangles and other patterns.

Punching is easy and interesting, but the worker must not employ it too liberally, nor be tempted by the prettiness of the little patterns to invest too largely in these tools.

The next consideration is the leather. Of this there are two kinds which are more frequently used than others. There is cowhide and calfskin; the former thicker, stouter, suited for larger articles, and requiring greater firmness in handling than the latter.

They should be worked upon a flat board to which they can be fastened with drawing-pins, the cowhide being lightly but evenly sponged over the back before work is begun, and then, when dry and pinned down upon the board, should be again moistened with clean water over the face of it. Calfskin requires, if soft, no such preparation; but if firm, damping on the under surface only.

Whichever kind of leather is used will probably need a little rearrangement on the board before any pattern is marked upon it, as after being damped it is sure to stretch a little. The leather should be larger than is desired for the finished article, as the marks made by driving the pins through it can then be cut away.

It is to be supposed that the worker has from the first made up her mind what article she is going to make, and what design she means to emboss upon it. The pattern should be drawn upon paper and perfected, then this paper should be stretched over the leather, being fastened down with drawing-pins, and all the outlines gone over with a sharp bone knitting-needle, or even with a penknife, held so that only the point touches the paper.
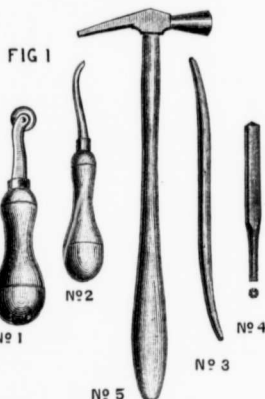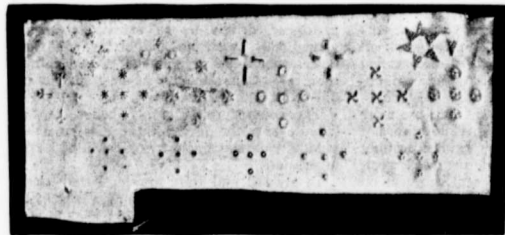
The pressure exerted should be sufficient to mark the pattern clearly, but rather faintly upon the leather. When the paper is taken away any mistakes can, in this part of the work, be corrected

Fig 2.

by rubbing out the erring line with any smooth and polished surface, as that of a knife-handle or agate burnisher. So far the surface of the leather has not been cut through, so judicious smoothing and, if necessary, damping, can thus be employed.

When the outlines are satisfactory, the wheel is the next tool required. Wheels are to be had in various sizes, but one only, of medium dimensions, is sufficient for a beginner.

The wheel is to be held in the right hand, firmly and upright, to be guided and assisted by the left hand.

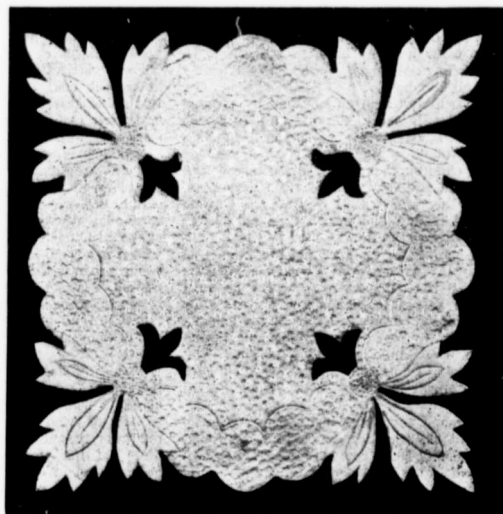The wheel passes over all the lines of the

Fig 3

design and should dent through the leather for about half its thickness.

The wheeling done the bent awl is taken up, and the use of this is to cut, as did the wheel, but especially all those portions of the pattern which could not be reached by the larger tool. This may seem a small purpose to serve, but such is not the case, as a study of the bends and curves of even a simple pattern will show.

When the lines seem ready for its use the modelling tool is applied to them to rub or bend down the edges of the cuts so that they have a rounder and more gradual slope than when, as at first, gashed straightly down into the leather.

There are few patterns in which one or more punches are not used as a speedy and effective way of ornamenting either the background of the work, or of certain details of it which it is desirable should have some such distinction.

As hinted above, punching is done by holding the punch pattern downwards on the leather and striking the head of it a sharp tap with the hammer. Each stroke should be of similar force that the marks may be of equal depth and sharpness.

When the work is finished as far as the tooling is concerned, it can be released from the board and made up.

For a beginner a penwiper is a good thing to make, as this consists only of a circular or other shaped piece of leather glued on the top of a pile of sections of cloth. The pattern may