

WOOD CARVING.

In a well written article on Wood Carving in the "Timber Trades' Journal" are the following pertinent remarks:—

Scheleg regards wood-carving as "the original and oldest form that fancy took" to gratify the artistic longings of the spirit stirred by the desire to communicate somewhat of its own immortality to the objects of its delighted apprehension; and as preceding sculpture among human exertions of skill. There seems to be little room for hesitancy in believing that it is the first-born of the imitative and decorative arts. The notices we have given seem to substantiate as a fact that wood-carving was one of the earliest means of giving "invention light," while—

'In scorn of Nature, Art gave lifeless life.'

In Egypt and in Greece carving assumed a high position among the arts; and among the Jews, as we have seen it, it was the subject of divine inspiration. Thus, in Judea it was put under restraints which did not affect it in the countries on the north and south of the Mediterranean, where art ran into idolatry. Beauty was to be admired, not worshipped, by the Jew. The sensuous Greek idolized, and the sensual Egyptian worshipped it, till imitative art became a peril and a snare. Rome, with a less keen sense of the beautiful, but with a kinder grace to imitation, made imitative and decorative art an article of luxury, and wood-carving was a lucrative employment. Not only in the house-furniture, but in the ornaments of vessels, the adornment of curule chairs, of instruments of music, &c., the carver's art was in great requisition, but also in the production of statues for theatres, the forum and the *lares* and *penates* of the mansionly *penetralia*, as well in the formation of images of the *Dii Selecti*.

Among the Arabians, who, like the Jews, were prohibited from the making of carved images for worship, the carver's art was restrained by religion on one side, but it took its revenge on the other by passing beyond the bounds of fancy into the byways of fantasticality. At first Arabian art was confined to the imitative reproduction of foliage, flowers, fruit, and tendrils of plants and trees curiously interwrought and elaborately intricately; yet often so producing illusions of the senses as to be mistaken for realities, like the "painted grapes" of Zeuxis. Eventually, however, art scorned the trammels of reality, and proceeded to produce all sorts of fanciful combinations, including and grouping tree, plant, and flower life with that of birds, beasts, and reptiles, and sometimes introducing the human figure in its bas-relief. These fantastic excursions of imagination have got the name of Arabesques. Two richly-carved doors were sent from Constantinople as a present to Charlemagne in 803. Towards the close of the middle ages, wood-carving became a favourite art among the Germans, who still maintain a singular dexterity of hand and skill of workmanship in that department of ornamental industry. Elaborate and highly artistic carvings were employed on altars, pulpits, and reading-desks, in the cathedrals which then arose, and the chisel was used upon the woodwork of the interior to harmonize it in effect with the sculptured ornamentation of the exterior. For the interior of a Gothic structure the wood-carver is the right man in the right place. Marbled sculpture is too cold and classic to gratify the eye amidst the grotesque elaborations to which Gothic architecture lends itself so readily. In many of the churches of Pomerania, particularly in the churches of Erfurt, Altenberg, and Prague, there are splendid specimens of sculptural wood-carving. Nor should we omit to mention Bruggeman's great altar in the cathedral of Schleswig, or the marvellous transubstantiation bas-relief in the church at Tribbers. Albert Durer's fame as a wood-carver is unrivalled; but it is impossible that the immense number of works of high-class art attributed to him can be really his. Michael Wohlgemuth and Veit Stoss are names of eminence as wood-carvers; and who is there that has ever seen the medallion portraits cut in box-wood by Hans Schwartz, of Augsburg, can doubt the skill of the artist or fail to see possibilities in wood-carving which have not been sufficiently developed? Among the churches of Belgium there are many admirable oak carvings. In the cathedral of Antwerp and the churches of St. Jacques and of St. Paul there, there are several precious ones. Among artists in wood no name in England equals in reputation that of Grinling Gibbons. It is one of the unforgettable things in a visit to Chatsworth to have seen Gibbons's wood-carvings. Such combinations of games, sporting tackle, fruits, and flowers, have surely never been matched for variousness, ingenuity of grouping, and delicacy of execution! In Windsor Castle and at Hampton Court a good deal of his work may be seen; but the choir of St. Paul's is the most readily accessible specimen of his

cunning workmanship. Very excellent specimens of wood-carving have graced the Exhibition of 1851, the Manchester Fine Arts Exhibition, and the more recent exhibition of 1862. At Manchester Fine Arts Exhibition, in Brussels, held in 1861, the Belgian talent for wood-carving was most interestingly shown. Few visitors who have passed through Dieppe can have forgotten the singular dexterity of the wood-cutters—rather even their carvers, who ply their vocation in the vicinity of the harbour. The recent popularity of furniture after the antique has given a considerable development to the art of the carver. The turn taken of late in regard to ecclesiastical ornamentation tends in the same direction, and cannot but aid in reviving this highly ingenious and skillful form of timber industry. But we require a large development of taste for the decorations of the wood-carver in the splendid mansions of England. Even in princely palaces we have too few analogues of the old oak chest of which Roger sings as—

"Richly carved by Antony of Trent,
With Scripture-stories from the life of Christ."

In the production of ornamental furniture for our households, of deed-chests, and library fittings, of wardrobes, room-panelings, doors, mantel-pieces, staircase railings, and all large articles of plenishing, there is much room for the introduction of the statuesque and the sculptural, and for the application of the fine arts to the enhancement of timber articles. All pieces of furniture made of pear-tree, lime, maple, box, oak, American pine, lend themselves readily to the artistic operations of the gouge and chisel, and give opportunity for the application of the carver's art. Artistic household furniture, uniting beauty with utility, the addition of carved art to cabinet work, might all be made much more advantageous to the development of taste if the art of wood-carving were liberally patronized among us.

With the foregoing remarks by way of introduction, we will now enter upon the subject of wood-carving, bearing in mind the resolution in a previous chapter to be as explicit as possible, so that the reader will not be so liable to err in manipulation, or require to ask any questions for elucidation.

TOOLS.

The illustrations of Tools on the accompanying page shows the leading kinds of carving tools, and there are several sizes of each kind as well as a variety of curves for the gouges.

No. 1.—*Carver's Screw*, a description of which, with its use, will be found in another page.

No. 2.—*Carving Chisel*.—Useful for grounding, also in cutting round the pattern on commencing a piece of work.

No. 2.—*Carving Gouge*.—Used in cutting curves, &c., useful in cutting out the design.

No. 4.—*Skew Carving Chisel*.—This is a very useful tool to clear out corners, and it is sometimes called a "Firmer." It is made on the skew for right or left hand corners, and called right or left hand Firmer.

No. 5.—*Bent Carving Gouge*.—An admirable tool for "bosting" leaves, &c.

No. 6.—*Spoon Bit or Entering Chisel*.—This tool will be found to produce smooth work in grounding, &c., where a straight chisel would not be of any use.

No. 7.—*V, or Parting Tool*.—Used for veining leaves, outlining designs, and bringing up prominences in various subjects.

No. 8.—*Bent Parting Tool*.—This tool, by being bent, reaches situations in the work the straight tool will not touch.

No. 9.—*Spoon Bit or Entering Gouge*.—Used for bosting foliage, and any subject requiring cutting into undulations, such as a ribbon design.

No. 10.—*Maccaroni Tool*.—A beautiful tool, often used in carving the mid-rib of a leaf, &c.

No. 11.—*Table, with Carving*.

A *Bench or Work Table* is necessary on which to lay the work. It should be strong and not easily shifted, as the work will be secured to the top by means of a screw or cramp. The whole force of the cutting operations will have to be resisted by the bench. It would be as well to screw it down to the floor or place it against a wall.

If the amateur invests in a strong bench it need not be very large, and should have several holes in the top so as to be able to secure the work by screws or cramps.

The illustration represents a table used for domestic purposes, with the work fastened to a board and cramped to the edge. A hole about four or five inches from the edge would be handy if a screw is employed, and near the middle for a cramp.

The following gouges should be purchased:—Half-inch gouge (straight), quarter-inch gouge, half-inch flat tool, quarter-inch flat tool, eighth flat tool, a parting tool, a half-inch firmer, a