



AN OLD COLONIAL CHAIR USED BY WASHINGTON.

### HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, OLD AND NEW.

Architecture has frequently been called the mother of the arts. The laws which govern the designing of decoration and furniture are closely related to those which govern the building art. The greater art encloses the lesser.

In the work-a-day world we can hardly imagine a successful designer of furniture, without any knowledge of architecture. And those who have this knowledge primarily, before taking up the designing of decoration and furniture have an immense advantage over their fellows in the grasp of general principles and sense of fitness. Let it not be thought that the architect can drop his architectural work one day, and the next day blossom out as a full fledged furniture designer. In every art the technique has to be learnt, an apprenticeship has to be served.

The designing of such pieces as cabinets, bureaus, drawers and bookcases, naturally comes easiest to the architect, whilst the designing of chairs will be more difficult to master. Indeed the designer who can turn-out a chair that is at once the acme of beauty and utility, comes nigh to perfection in the art of furniture designing.

If we were asked to define in one word the measure of the highest art and skill in this branch of applied art, we should unhesitatingly say, "proportion" first, last and always, proportion. The balance of solid to void of curved forms with straight forms, and so on all through the gamut of form, and color also, if varied color is employed on the object.

Twenty years ago, the writer, having served an apprenticeship of twenty years to the art of architecture, entered upon another apprenticeship to the art of furniture designing, in which he still continues. These

notes are largely the cumulative result of his experience during that time.

In the year 1883, Richardson the architect of Boston, was in the zenith of his power. The influence of his style pervaded furniture also to some extent. A revival of "colonial" work had also then set in. To-day Richardson's influence is dead, but the "colonial" revival has grown and broadened. The art of England of the eighteenth century is to-day in the ascendancy and almost paramount in its influence. This has not come about wholly as a mere fashion, such as affects our dress, but rather as a matter of selection; we have sought those old types because we found they suited our mood and the thought of the day. Moreover we found them comfortable and pleasing to the eye, and last of all they have saved us the trouble of much thinking for ourselves in these hurried times.

It cannot be denied that the desire to possess old furniture as home furnishing or to copy direct from old examples has been inimical to the progress and development of original design.

It must be dampening to the ardor of a designer, brimful of new ideas, to be told by one patron to copy an old chair, the property of another patron. Occasionally this is done without as much as asking the owner's permission, amounting to a barefaced act of piracy.

While the current trend of late years has been more and more to copy from old examples there has recently been evolved a freer style known as L'Art Nouveau. This undoubtedly sprang from the first work of the Arts and Crafts Society in London. The French and Germans caught the prevailing new ideas until now we have travesties of the originals and things produced that might be appropriately called "nightmares" of design, worse in form than the most debased rococo work of the Louis XV period. A reaction from this towards simpler and severer forms will assuredly follow.

With the second half of the eighteenth century a change in the prevailing style of English furniture set in. Sir William Chambers, R.A., an architect, and later Robert Adam, another architect, designed furniture. Many of the latter's designs were carried out by Gillows, a firm of furniture makers still in existence in London under the name of Waring Brothers. Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton were designers and makers of furniture, whose names have become associated with the work done in England during this interesting period. Robert Adam, who had travelled in Italy, shows in his work the influence of Pompeii and Roman architecture. One of the most beautiful examples of furniture belonging to this period is a dressing table of satinwood with painted decoration, in the South Kensington Museum (see illustration pages). Towards the end of the eighteenth century satinwood from the East Indies came into use in England. It soon became a favorite wood for pieces which were decorated with color.

There were several artists who had come to England from Italy who were employed in decorative painting on panels of walls and ceilings, and who also painted decoratively cabinets, tables and chairs. Sometimes a darker colored wood was used for oval medallions, on which were painted figure subjects classical in charac-