

## FREEHAND ORNAMENT.

(From VERE FOSTER's work on Drawing.)

Freehand, though perhaps not so interesting in its nature as many other branches of drawing, is an essential feature in art-training, since by its means the eye is educated to a due perception of form, and the hand gains power in its delineation. Hence a double advantage is gained:—first, the power to appreciate beauty or to detect error, and, secondly, the faculty of producing really accurate representations of such forms. Thanks to the felt need of technical education, that time is now rapidly approaching when drawing will cease to be classed as an accomplishment merely. Seeing, then, this growing demand for art instruction, it becomes a matter of grave importance that examples of a suitable kind, and proper methods of instruction, should be provided, if drawing is really to possess that practical value which is now claimed for it. On the other hand, it is no less needful that the student—such examples being provided—should bear in mind that perfection is a plant of slow growth. Hence arises one of the difficulties of the teacher; for, while many are willing to undergo what we may call the drudgery of the earlier lessons—those attempts that seem so disheartening before the interest is aroused and the mind encouraged by progress made—others (and they are not few) cast aside such restraints. They see no value in their work: they are machinists, and want at once to draw plan and elevation of a locomotive; or they are cabinet-makers, and they must begin at once to design for furniture; or they may be amateurs—persons who need not study drawing with a view to increased efficiency in their business, and the corollary of such additional power, more wages to receive—and, therefore, they think that, to them at least, no such course of study is necessary. Thus many a pupil has come to me desiring to sketch in water-colors who was unable even so much as to outline correctly, and yet too proud to learn. Such do not realise that the loftiest buildings have the deepest foundations; that the tree must be tended many a year before its fruit is gathered; that the facile touch they admire so much in some eminent man's work has been acquired by dint of long years of devotion to his art; and that the clever sketch they saw done in some twenty minutes was but the gathering in of the fruit of many months of previous practice.

While thus cautioning the student, however, I may also dishearten him: for he will say: "How can I now give years of my life to this pursuit?" I would, therefore, hasten to add that, while eminence can only thus be attained, yet, if only the foundation be truly laid, enough art-power may be speedily acquired to become both pleasure and profit to its possessor.

Freehand drawing possesses this great advantage over many other kinds of art-work, that it impresses on the beginner the necessity of scrupulous accuracy. Beginners are frequently set to a much more seductive kind of work—little picturesque details of gables, rustic gates, and so forth; but these, though more attractive, and therefore more dangerous, are not nearly so good for the preliminary practice. When the hand has acquired the needful accuracy, then the freedom of touch will come in due course; but the attempted freedom without firm basis is only hurtful and mischievous. For this same reason, geometry makes an excellent study in alternation with the freehand work, as, in that too, the most careful work is required. In geometry, as in freehand drawing, the eye readily detects error, even when the hand, from want of present skill, is unable to remedy it. The pupil must be careful to keep the two modes of working quite distinct. Freehand drawing is so called, because it is quite independent of any such mechanical aids as the ruler or compass; in fact, their use is not permissible, as it ceases to be freehand if they are employed. On the other hand, geometry absolutely requires their use; and it is as much an error (and one commonly indulged in) for the student to sketch his geometrical problems by hand as to use any artificial helps in overcoming the difficulties he may encounter in his freehand. I have seen many a student, after sketching a problem freely on the black board, utterly unable to work it rigidly out with his instruments on a sheet of paper, the two things being so very different in their nature. In the same way, the student who allows himself the use of compasses or ruler while engaged in so-called freehand becomes their slave: their use cramps his progress, and he is under a painful feeling of restraint directly a stroke has to be attempted without their aid.

While anything like ruling, or bending the paper down the middle, or such-like little subterfuges, are thus, from the nature of the work, inadmissible, it is a question in my own

mind how far an occasional measurement, after the completion of the work, is at times allowable. If resorted to at all, it should always be in the order just named—not first the measurement and then the drawing made to fit it—but first the drawing honestly striven for, and then, if at all, the measuring test. The temptation to resort to its use, even under these limited conditions, is very great; but its only value lies in this, that where a beginner's untrained eye fails to show him how grievously he may be wrong, and the teacher fails to convince him of his fault, a strip of paper judiciously applied, first to the copy and then to the student's work, is an irresistible argument—an umpire whose decision cannot be impugned. Bear in mind, however, that it can hardly be too little used, and that its use may very easily degenerate into an abuse.

It will not in all cases be necessary for the pupil to go through the whole of these examples. Some will show more natural aptitude than others; and while a few may find it necessary, not only to go through the entire set, but even to draw some again and again, others will feel justified by their progress in missing one occasionally, while the great number to select from will be a welcome feature in the present course. Be the number attempted few or many, let the work, so far as it goes, be thorough. If at any time the task grows wearisome, either subdue the feeling by sheer force of will, or failing that, let the work be put aside for a while, as half-hearted work is of little value. Above all, beware of that constant temptation to young beginners—the desire to get a thing done and out of the way. This is doubly wrong; for, first, to finish one drawing is but the first step towards beginning another; the subject truly has altered, but the next subject brings its own share of difficulty and labour to be gone through no less than its predecessor; and, secondly, it raises a false standard in the pupil's mind: quality should be striven for rather than mere quantity. The practical question is not "How many done?" but rather, "How well done?" Let the student conquer as he proceeds. If his first attempt is a failure, let that rather spur him to a fresh endeavour. There is nothing heroic in being beaten, and, if any of these examples present an amount of difficulty that seems hard to overcome, the learner must not rest satisfied with the sense of failure, but try again.

Practice frequently rather than for any considerable time at one sitting. Drawing is so essentially a thing of practice and habit, of hand and eye, that he who is half-hearted enough to put it aside for a few weeks at a stretch, must be content to find, when he resumes his work, that his faculties have rusted somewhat, that his eye has lost its nice discrimination, his hand some, at least, of its old cunning. By little and little, if steadily adhered to, the sense of growing power will arise, and thus the student, having tided over the earlier days of disappointment, will begin to see some show of fruit, some return for days of disappointment, some return for his labour. Let him beware, however, of an overweening confidence in himself. No student is worthy of the name who does not realise that the road to perfection stretches before him for many a mile to come; and such an one will hardly care to repose on his laurels at this early stage of the journey. In requiring the student, so far as our influence extends, to retrace his steps, and try again and again at any of these examples which he fails to manage at first, I am aware that the teacher is imposing a somewhat heavy burden on him; but I have nowhere throughout this little essay told him that drawing is all sunshine: I have, on the contrary, tried to impress on him, without discouraging him, that drawing is real work. A boy at school will go through the same French exercises time after time, till he has mastered them; the girl will sit at the piano for hours together, going over the same scales; the child has many a fall before it runs alone: why then expect that drawing alone should be an exception, and that, in this, to attempt is to achieve?

In looking carefully through this book, the pupil will easily discern that the examples may be conveniently divided into two broad classes: the first consisting of representations of natural leaves, the second of arbitrary, ornamental forms, more or less based upon such natural growth. During the time he is at work upon the first of these sections, he will find it a pleasant variation in his task, if he occasionally try a real leaf instead. He will find it a more difficult study than the other; but as it is perhaps pleasanter, and also the sort of thing his practice in these outlines ought speedily to lead to, it will give him a sense of greater reality in his labours. We do not want him to feel that these few outlines sum up the whole of what we may legitimately call freehand. When I once again remind him that freehand, in the broad sense of the word, means any