



Poker Work.

By F. E. P.

THE origin of poker work probably lies far back in pre-historic days, when crude tracings by sharpened iron upon stone or wood marked the earliest form of art.

From cold iron to the heated metal was an easy transition, and the red hot bar that branded the slave became also the progenitor of brush and pencil, and fine pointed steel which work their fine creative skill in the present day.

It is a long step from the crude branding to the fine art of the modern etcher; but not so long to the pretty poker work of to-day. Yet, this art is not new, even in its later development, for Germany, Sweden, Holland all delight in it as a delicate and artistic handicraft; only we of the western and newer continent are slow to appreciate it. To German and Swedish women poker work is a decorative art taught in the schools, and their homes, even the poorest, bear witness to their skill in the delicate wood traceries of door, wainscoting and mantel. In England also it is a favorite art among society women. Several royal ladies, among whom is the Princess of Wales, being counted its devotees.

Canadian women are given over to china painting, also to silk embroidery. They have also taken up repousse work and wood carving. But few have turned their attention to poker work, which, indeed, is as pleasantly absorbing and effective in results as any of these others.

There is at least one artist in poker work in Toronto—Miss Elise Zauke, of the German Art School.

We paid her a visit recently in the interests of THE CANADIAN HOME JOURNAL readers, and found her busy at her work in a sunny south room on Wellesley street.

She sat at a table on which were jewel boxes,



picture frames, napkin rings and many other articles in plain wood awaiting her skilful decoration. Her "box of tools," as she phrased it, stood beside her, while beneath her foot lay the rubber ball which she pressed lightly and steadily while she talked.

The tools were simple, two or three platinum pen points of varying fineness, a small bottle of benzine, double tubed, and a spirit lamp.

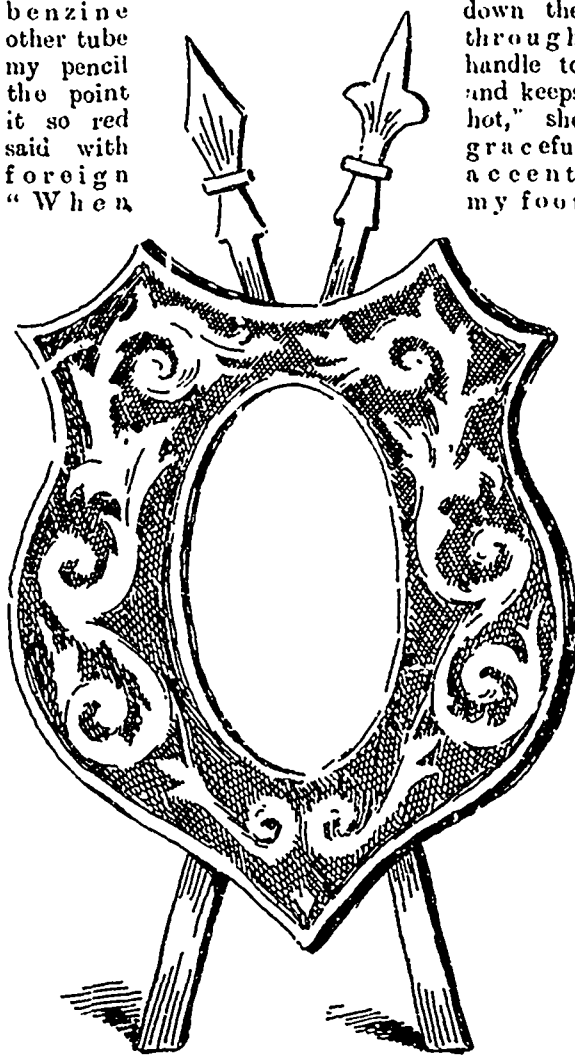
She rose to greet us and to show us some samples of completed work. At our request she sat down again and resumed her work.

"My pen has gone out," she said, smiling, "I must heat it."

Lighting the little lamp she thrust the platinum pen point into the flame until it glowed red as the iron bar on an anvil, then placing her foot upon the rubber ball she applied the pencil to the wood swiftly burning the faintly pencilled design upon the box-lid in her hand.

The young lady is compelled to work with her left hand, which she uses as deftly as we do our right.

"It is my foot that does press the air up through the tube, and it blows the vapor off the benzine other tube my pencil the point it so red said with foreign accent. When my foot



stops my pencil point goes out; then I have to light it again."

It was a pleasure to watch her work and mark the development of the design under the sure, swift touch of the little pen point that glowed like a finger of fire over the white wood surface.

"The carpenter makes my woodwork. He uses basswood chiefly. Poker work is decorative for cabinets, tables, stools, picture frames—all sorts of things," she continued. "I learned it at school in Berlin in Germany. No, I have not taught it out here. I think I did want to keep it to myself and sell my work," she said, smiling half apologetically, "but now I have one pupil, and think I will begin to teach it."

"One must be more or less of an artist to succeed in it, Fraulein?"

"O yes, it is better, of course," she said. "But the designs can be traced on the wood, or transferred. But I can copy almost anything—



scenes or buildings, mottoes or letters, and invent them too, which makes it nicer."

As she worked we looked and admired specimens of her handiwork in decorated cabinets and boxes. The conventional designs were especially handsome, giving the wood the appearance

of a cross section of ivory nut.

Laying aside the little napkin ring which her swift little pencil was decorating, Fraulein Zauke picked up a leather dressing case upon which she had outlined in pencil a rich border, and began defining it with her glowing pencil point. She showed us also some purses, card cases and note books which she had enriched most artistically in this manner.

"These are all orders," she said "They are nice for gifts, do you not think? I must work so quick and be very careful in leather else it will burn."

It is really a good suggestion for Christmas gifts—to have a glove box or jewel case thus decorated with some pretty design, scene or motto. While in leather the results are even more suitable. The purse or card case of plain, smooth leather may be given border and monogram that doubles it not only in artistic effect but in personal value to the recipient.

Poker work is a graceful form of decorative art that should commend itself to women.

It requires little outfit beyond the "box of tools,"—which once secured, lasts a long time—and the practice needful to acquire a skilful touch. If the pupil possesses artistic ability her progress is more rapid and she is able to enlarge and improve her work by original designs.

We illustrate several of the articles which we picked up from the Fraulein's table, but these show only the designs. Much of the effectiveness lies in the coloring of warm brown tint upon the creamy wood, which, of course, does not appear in the illustrations.

She states that in Germany and Sweden very effective decorative results are obtained for mantels, doors and wainscoting. A library where wood is wrought throughout in poker work of rich conventional design is also one of the beauties of a certain English home.

Through the early November twilight which came upon us as we talked and sketched, the platinum pen moved, a glowing dot; but presently the pen was laid down, and as the busy foot was lifted from the air ball, the cheery red died out and it became only a dull metal point.

