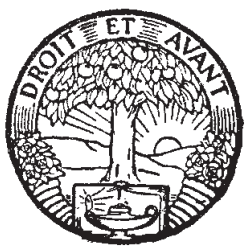
HONEST LABOUR

The Charles H. Hayward Years: 1936-1966



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FROM THE PUBLISHER

I HOPE I'M WRONG

Our series of books called "The Woodworker: The Charles H. Hayward Years" began with a big stack of books imported from the U.K., a box of magic markers and a few too many bottles of beer and wine.

(Actually, to be honest, "The Woodworker" books began as the germ of an idea after woodworker and toolmaker Don McConnell introduced me in the 1990s to Charles Hayward's books published by Evans Bros.)

The idea was that we were going to cull the best woodworking articles from the period when Hayward worked at the magazine, 1936-1969. To do this, we had to comb through 360 issues of the magazine and flag the best articles (for scanning, then OCR, then image processing, then…).

So over a series of long evenings, Ty Black, Phil Hirz, Megan Fitzpatrick, John Hoffman and I sat at my dining table and did just that. I thought the process would be quick. It wasn't. What slowed us was the content. After scanning an article and flagging it, we all became captivated by the quality of the articles themselves. These magazines were filled with pieces that you don't find in modern magazines. And so we read the articles instead of simply moving on.

The techniques demonstrated were many times far more advanced than a modern magazine would dare. But they were explained simply with excellent drawings. The articles made you ask: Well why couldn't I make a barred glass door with only hand tools?

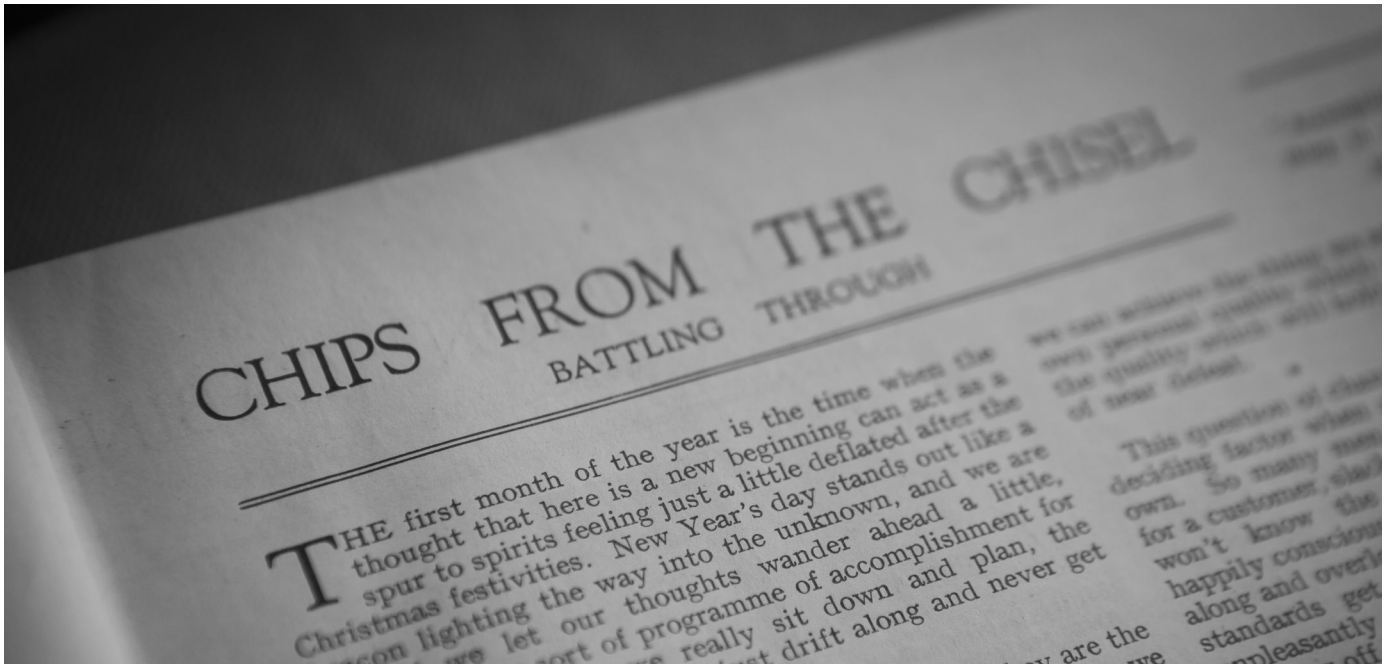
So it took months instead of days for us to work our way through the issues. And for me there was also an unintended consequence of revisiting these old magazines.

At that time, I was editor of *Popular Woodworking Magazine*, and I had to write an editor's note at the beginning of every issue called "Out on a Limb." I refused to make my column a simple rehash of the issue's contents ("... and if you love birdhouses, we've got some great ones by Steve Stevies from the Gopher State…"). I wanted to say something meaningful or useful.

So, I was keen to see how Hayward handled that task with the "Chips From the Chisel" column, which headed up every issue of *The Woodworker* magazine. One night when we weren't reading and flagging old magazines, I sat down and began to read those columns.

It was like walking into a different universe. "Chips From the Chisel" was filled with philosophy, history, poetry and the writings of a clear-eyed and experienced woodworker. It spoke to our fears and aspirations as people who work with our hands. It recognized the balance between the importance of handwork and the promise of machinery. It talked about things I had felt but could never put into words. It challenged me to become a better woodworker. (And a better editor and writer.)

For the lack of a better explanation, Hayward's work encouraged me to grow up quite a bit as an editor and a woodworker.


CHIPS FROM THE CHISEL

BATTLING THROUGH

THE first month of the year is the time when the thought that here is a new beginning can act as a spur to spirits feeling just a little deflated after the Christmas festivities. New Year's day stands out like a beacon lighting the way into the unknown, and we are let our thoughts wander ahead a little, sort of programme of accomplishment for really sit down and plan, the drift along and never get

It was like having a parent who never lectured you, but instead showed you how to live and work by example.

My first urge was to publish a book consisting entirely of the "Chips From the Chisel" columns and share this wisdom and great insight with the world. Then I realized that was a stupid idea. Who would buy a woodworking book from a woodworking publisher that didn't teach you a darn thing about building furniture? I shelved that book idea, and we spent the next five years or so getting the four volumes scanned, cleaned up, organized and printed into the four green volumes that I consult every week in my own work as a furniture maker.

Time passed, and in 2017, I read (no, devoured) Nancy Hiller's excellent book "Making Things Work: Tales from a Cabinetmaker's Life" (first published by Putchamin Press) and had some second thoughts about a woodworking book without plans, techniques or dimensions.

I showed Kara Gebhart Uhl some of Hayward's columns and she was intrigued. After reading a few of them, she came up with the book's title, "Honest Labour," and we were off to the races. Well, off to the turtle races. "Honest Labour" was a back-burner book since its inception. When you're a publisher, you're not supposed to express doubts about your books. But I was (and I still am) worried that this will be a years-long waste of effort and tree pulp.

I hope I'm wrong.

By the end of the editing process, Kara had become similarly enchanted with the "Chips From the Chisel" columns and became convinced that we should attempt to push this book outside of the woodworking category.

"You'd think I'd be over this book by now but I'm not," Kara wrote to me. "Actually, I love it even more. The premise alone is the start of a great book review: Hidden in back issues of a U.K. woodworking magazine are 30+ years of incredible writing on life, labour, leisure, nature, ancestry, art, politics and the world before, during and after WWII. What's more, it all holds up. I haven't typed ... an essay yet that doesn't directly tie in to life today in some way."

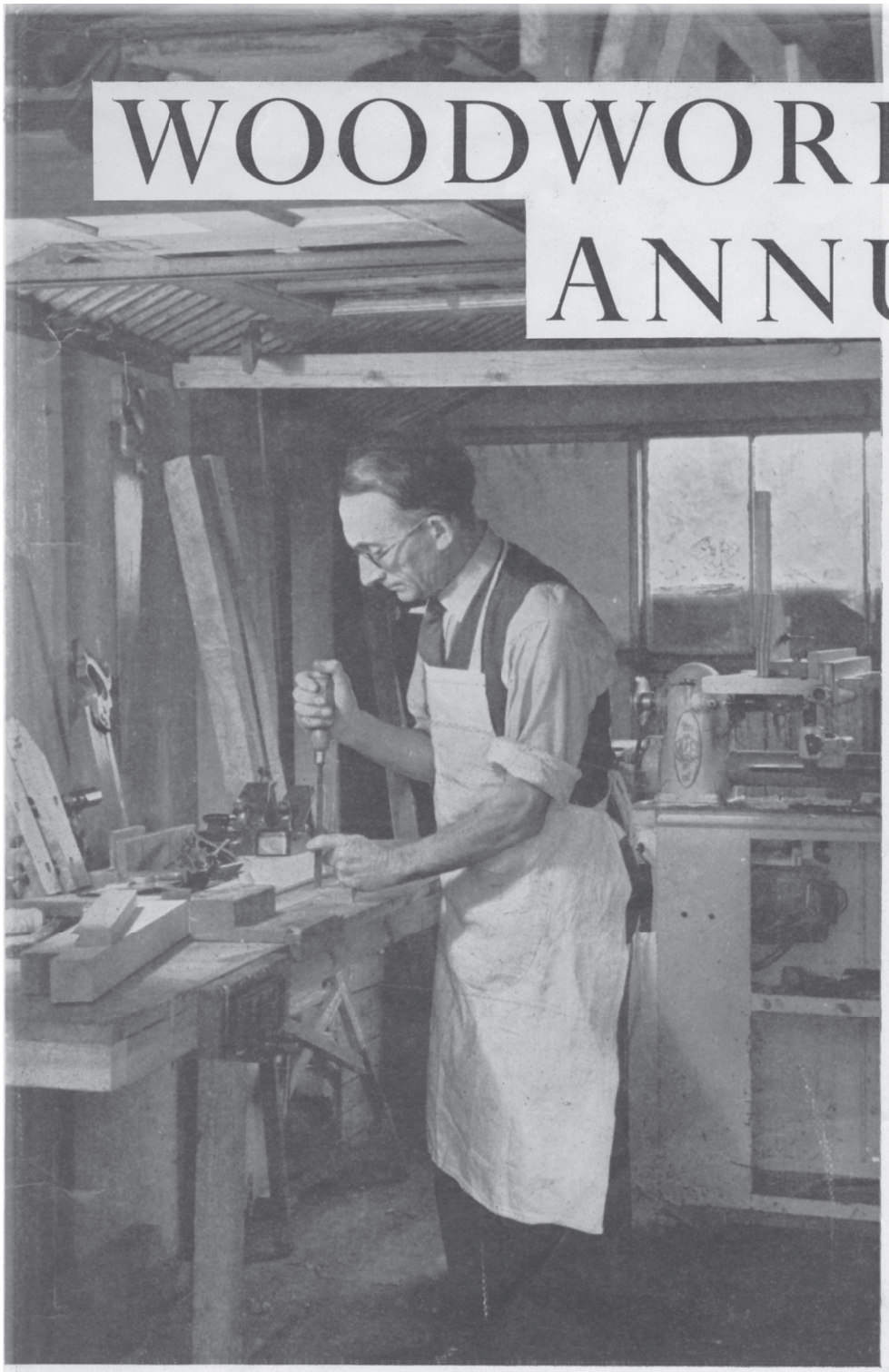
I agree with Kara, and I hope you will, too.

Oh, before you begin reading, I have one favor to ask. Please excuse or ignore the choices of pronouns and male-centric language. We are all products of our time, and Hayward (born in 1898) was no exception. It's interesting to note that as the magazine entered the 1960s, the language and pronouns began to modernize as well. (I'm sure my own writing will be interpreted as specist in 2243 by our squid overlords.) Hayward's insight and inspiration are legitimate, honest and important – no matter which pronouns are attached to the ideas.

Christopher Schwarz
Covington, Kentucky
February 2020

A note on the dates of Charles H. Hayward's editorship. Sources disagree about the exact dates of Hayward's term as editor. Most sources agree he joined the staff in 1935 and became editor in 1936. The year he left the magazine, however, has been reported as 1966, 1968 or 1969. The confusion might be a result of the fact that he contributed to the magazine after retirement. For this book, we have focused on the columns from 1936 to 1966.

WOODWORKER ANNUAL



FOR THE MAN WHO MAKES THINGS IN WOOD

VOLUME 63

CHARLES HAYWARD LOOKS BACK TO THE SEAMY SIDE

In the Spring 1980 issue of *Working Wood*, "an international journal for the committed woodworker," Editor Antony Talbot published an interview with Charles H. Hayward, a portion of which we included here. Later, also in *Working Wood*, Talbot published a three-part series written by Hayward about shop life in the early 1900s. These pieces provide insight into the life Hayward lived leading up to his years at *The Woodworker* magazine and help us better understand the ground in which his roots grew, informing his skills, work ethic, and astute observations of art, craftsmanship, nature, politics, people and society.

THE EDITOR TALKS TO CHARLES H. HAYWARD

by Antony Talbot, Working Wood*, Spring 1980*

... Born in Pimlico, London, in 1898, Charles Hayward was apprenticed to a firm of cabinetmakers whose business was carried on at premises in Victoria Street. He remembers this period well. The firm, the Old Times Furnishing Company, had workshops in Bloomburg Street, Vincent Square.

In the winter time we started work at eight and finished at seven, and in the summer we worked from seven until six. It was, practically, a hand-work shop, although we had a few machines. I recall that there was a very ancient planer, obsolete even in those days. It used to leave great tracks across the boards which you had to get rid of with hot water. We also had a bandsaw and a spindle moulder, but for the rest we did everything by hand. I suppose there were sixteen or seventeen cabinetmakers in the shop, and up above on the next floor was a polishing shop which employed about eight or nine men; we had an upholsterer, a packer and, of course, a machinist. And that poor, one, wretched machinist had to cover all the work of the cabinetmakers. Still, by and large, he got by. Sometimes you had to wait a deuce of a long time to get stuff from him – in the end you would often have to do the work by hand. Say you were making a cabinet of some kind, and the door stiles and rails had to be moulded, you would get on with something else; there was always something to carry on with, while you were waiting for the mouldings to go through and, hopefully, the work would turn up eventually. But very often it didn't and you just got on and did it by hand. There was no bother about it, indeed he was a very good man, the machinist. Tall, an Irishman I remember he was, a jovial man.

All the work turned out in the shop was made for the firm's own showroom in Victoria Street. They used to buy up furniture, usually Victorian stuff, and then convert it into 18th century pieces. Another big side to it, of course, was the repair work. Either their own stuff that they bought at auction sales, or customers' work that was brought in for repair. We also made quite a lot of reproductions as distinct from fakes, but a lot of the latter were being turned out at the time by less reputable firms. Most of our reproductions went out as new pieces though some customers wanted them antiqued. But now, of course, fifty years of wear might make it difficult to pinpoint when these reproductions were actually made. It is quite possible that some of them will be taken as originals now.

I was there for four years and then went into the army, and was away for three years. I was a driver in the Artillery—riding a horse. I had never been on one before and I've never been on one since. I wouldn't have missed it; it was quite a good experience.

When I came out of the army the problem was to earn a living. I decided to start out on my own; I had some cards printed and went out in the evenings, round all the squares in Chelsea and Belgravia, dropping cards in letter boxes. I remember being in, I think it was Burton Court, one evening when a couple of plain clothes policeman challenged me as to what I was doing there. "Only dropping a few cards."—"What sort of cards?" they said, and I showed them and—"Oh? well, that's all right then." But you know it gave you a curiously guilty feeling when you dropped a card in a letter box; made you feel as though you wanted to run away. I worked up a fairly reasonable business on repair work. After all, Chelsea and Belgravia were still wealthy residential areas—mostly gone now, of course. The big houses have been taken over as business premises or turned into flats and the like. In some ways it was a quite interesting time. On one occasion a customer had bought some panelling—found hadn't got enough to panel a room, and didn't know what to do with it. Eventually he asked me to make up a cupboard or wardrobe with it. What's happened to it since heaven above knows, probably it has changed hands half a dozen times. Likely enough whoever has it now is quite happy that he possesses a Jacobean cupboard. All the wood was old of course, and authentic in style and workmanship.

Although I'd got this business, I was never really happy with it, as I was no good at business. In the meantime I'd been practising

at drawing. I had always had an aptitude for it, and at about that time, it would have been about 1923, I think, Amalgamated Press was producing a series of fortnightly issues entitled The Wireless Encyclopaedia. *I knew nothing whatever about wireless but they wanted someone who would do all the illustrations, circuits, wireless apparatus and that sort of thing. So I went down to Horsham, lived there for about a year and a half, and did nothing else but draw wireless circuits and things. It was scarcely artistic work I suppose, but I learned a lot about technique, and this gave me a good grounding in illustrative work.*

It was a very intensive period producing these fortnightly issues. The Editor, who lived at Horsham, had to have all the stuff finished every Sunday night, ready to take up to London on the Monday morning. We often had to work through to two and three in the morning to make sure that everything was ready. It was very enjoyable in many ways. I lived on a farm as a matter of fact, but walking back in the pitch dark at about two in the morning wasn't much fun.

Well, the job came to an end. The Wireless Encyclopaedia *was finished, and the people I worked for closed down. I saw an advert in the paper that* Handicrafts Magazine *wanted someone to contribute and so on. I went up to see them (they were in Kentish Town) and they gave me the job. That would have been in 1925, I suppose. I stayed with them for ten years. About 1930, I took over the Editorship and ran it, and then that firm came to an end. In the meantime I had been contributing to* The Woodworker*, when Mr. J. C. S. Brough was the Editor. Anyway, when* Handicrafts Magazine *folded up, Mr. Edward Evans wrote to me and asked if I would be interested to go and see him—which I did. Following his invariable custom, he took me over to the Russell Hotel, gave me lunch, told me what a wonderful prospect was open to me, and offered me the job as associate editor with J. C. S. Brough. This was in 1935 and lasted until 1939 when war broke out. Poor Brough, whose wife had been ill, fled up to Scotland under cover of night. It was most extraordinary—I never saw him again from that day to this. When they went round to clear up his place afterwards it became obvious that the family must have risen literally in the middle of a meal. There was marmalade, jam and bread on the table just as they had left it. They caught the night train to Scotland for Brough was an elderly man then, and his wife had been very ill. She was a sick woman, and, in any event, his boyhood home was in Scotland. J. C. S. Brough was a very good man in his day; Evans Brothers bought him with* The Woodworker *magazine for £100. He was a very good designer—he had worked with* Hobbies *as a fretwork designer Marvellous work he did, but he wasn't a practical woodworker. Thus it was I became Editor of* Woodworker.

Charles Hayward stayed as Editor until his "retirement" in 1969, and soon after, Evans Brothers sold the magazine. During his long editorship the magazine prospered and it was at this time that Evans Brothers began publishing their renowned series of books on virtually every aspect of woodworking. Apart from one or two exceptions, Charles Hayward wrote them all ...

... There are few men who have the all-embracing ability of Charles Hayward—practical experience, technical knowledge, a superb illustrator, and a first class writer—who have been able to marshal these talents coherently to produce realistic and meaningful technical material. He is, thus, an authority whose opinion can be relied upon because his views are underwritten by long experience and study.

CHARLES HAYWARD LOOKS BACK TO THE SEAMY SIDE—PART 1

by Charles H. Hayward, Working Wood*, Fall, 1981*

Illustrations by Lorna Camp

Looking back over the years perhaps the most outstanding difference between a cabinet-making workshop as I remember it in the years before the war of 1914 and that of to-day is that, whereas in the early days a man made a piece of furniture from start to finish, to-day he may carry out just once process in a whole chain of operations. It is, of course, the result, partly of mechanisation and of specialisation. There are a few workshops in which a man may make up perhaps one of an individual piece for a customer, but in general the furniture of to-day is not only mass-produced but is the product of several specialised operations, one shop cutting parts to size, a second laying veneers, a third cleaning up, another assembling, and so on. To a man of to-day the day's work may be one long repetitive process, and he may never see the final outcome.

In the early years of which I speak, there were of course some machines in use, circular saws, bandsaws, planers, spindle moulders, and so on, but mass-production on a grand scale had yet to come, and it was still possible for an individual cabinetmaker to make a living, turning out one or perhaps two or three of an item.

I recall that remarkable district of Shoreditch as it was before 1914 when it was the home of the furniture trade. There were a few factories in which a dozen or so men might be employed in turning out bureaux tables, or whatever their speciality might be, but for the greater part whole streets of small houses were let out, sometimes in individual rooms to cabinetmakers, each self-employed. One man might be making the finest grade cabinet work, serpentine-front sideboards, or oval writing desks, etc., whilst his neighbor was turning out the cheapest grade flimsy stems made from cheap plywood faced with veneer. No one thought that there was anything strange about such curiously mixed classes of work, and each man went about his

"He leaned against the stand for support"

business sublimely indifferent to the works of his neighbours.

Of course, even in those days the necessity for machines to reduce costs had made itself felt, but few men had the room or facilities for installing even a basic machine, and so came the development of machine shops which undertook to do planing, fret-cutting, sawing, spindle moulding, turning, and so on. Thus a cabinetmaker could take his timber or partly prepared parts and have them moulded, rebated, or given whatever treatment was needed.

And even here the curious system often maintained in which, say, a woodturner would hire the use of a lathe for a day or more, and would then earn whatever he could on a piece of work basis from regular or chance customers. His clients would bring him their timbers with a drawing or note of whatever was wanted, and bargain for a price.

I recall as a youngster wanting a set of oak turned legs for a table I was making. One of the men from the workshop where I was an apprentice offered to take me to Shoreditch when he had finished work on Saturday at 12:30 p.m. He knew the district well, having worked there himself, and we went by tram to Old Street (there were still a few horse-drawn trams in those days, though they were mostly electric). The machine shop was a in dismal back street, and apparently had been the basement of a large house, for we went down four or five steps from the pavement. The turner must have been a master of his craft (as he needed to be for he was far from sober and was in the garrulous stage of drink). He leaned against the stand of his lathe for support as he finished off the legs and entertained us with a recital of his matrimonial difficulties. I have never seen a man work so quickly with gouge and chisel and still turn out a really clean job. When we paid him he made an elaborate bow, gave us his blessing, and picked up the next square timber for turning, apparently set for an afternoon's work. Maybe he found it more congenial to remain at work than face further contact with his life companion.

I cannot recall that there seemed to be anything odd about either the district or the people who worked there. Things in those days seemed to produce a species with curiously emphasised characteristics, and working conditions and sanitary arrangements were tolerated to a degree difficult to realise today. I remember being taken to the East End of London a day or two after the Sydney Street Seige to see the site of the street battle, and opposite the blackened building were two women, both drunk, fighting like furies, one with her blouse torn open up the front and both with black eyes and scratched cheeks. Eventually one fell into the gutter, and the last I saw of her was as she was carted off screaming, strapped to a wheeled hand-stretcher by two policemen, one of whom had his helmet knocked off. (These wheeled hand-stretchers, by the way, were used as much for the removal of drunks as for the use in street accidents.)

Many of the old houses in Shoreditch were in an appalling state of disrepair, for although built originally as humble dwelling houses in long terraces, their use as workshops had resulted in shocking deterioration. Woodwork was innocent of paint, locks were frequently broken and replaced by padlocks and staples, and inner doors were invariably missing altogether. Stair treads were reduced to almost paper thickness, and no one saw the necessity for handrails—indeed they would have been in the way when timber or furniture had to be taken up or down. I have since wondered how they ever escaped being burnt down, for quite frequently, when a man had a veneering job to do he would light a shaving blaze to heat his cauls almost beneath the staircase.

In the shops around the district you could buy anything needed in furniture making. Veneers were available in consecutive leaves both knife—and saw—cut, in mahogany, walnut, oak and many of the decorative hardwoods. There were also bundles of off-cuts, and sheets of marquetry in both 18th century patterns and (then) modern designs; ready-made turnings and legs of all kinds were commonplace. There were dozens of stores where metal fittings of all kinds were available; and there were polish houses where every kind of French polish and stains could be obtained; Scotch glue usually in cakes

to be broken up; and of course there were tool shops were Norris planes were almost commonplace, and believe it or not, you could still buy a wooden hand-brace with brass strengthening pieces let flush into the wood.

My own early workshop life in the pre-1914 days was in a workshop near Victoria. We reckoned ourselves as "West End" and were inclined to speak in a superior way when talking about Shoreditch, though in fact some very fine cabinet work was turned out in some of its workshops. Nearly all of our work was antique either reproduction or "fake," and I use the latter word in a general sense, since it is often difficult to decide when a thing is an outright form of forgery or has been altered in some way, possibly to save it from further deterioration. We did a mixed class of work. The more skilled craftsmen were engaged on first class cabinets—shaped front sideboards, pieces with elaborate barred doors, and in addition was a whole range of good quality but relatively simply items.

Memory is a curious thing. Even when it is retentive it can play curious tricks, not only with past events but in the way we come to regard bygone happenings. Sometimes something which at the time was distressing or painful can in retrospect be wrapped round with a sort of protective padding which softens the picture it conjures up. Not that all the past was really one-sided, but that it is only natural to recall the better aspects of things and forget that almost everything has its less perfect side.

Perhaps the chief difference between the attitude of life then and that of to-day was that things then seemed to be in a settled state forever. We thought and acted as though the next few decades would see us still in the same workshop, and quite likely at the same bench. There might be a few minor events such as a man changing his job, or possibly being sacked (redundancy was unknown in those days), but such things were trivialities and did not affect our general way of life.

Not that we didn't argue about things in general, often in a heated way. Politics and religion, I recall, were the chief subjects, and opinions, frequently backed with maledictory or profane references, were hurled across the workshop from one end to the other. But such observations were frequently so much hot air, and were accepted as a sort of bugger against the tedium of things in general.

So life went on in a sort of jog trot way to the accompaniment of the inevitable workshop noises of hammering, sawing, and planing with the occasional whine of the machine planer in the shop below, until the bell was rung for breakfast or tea break when a sort of uncanny silence descended on the workshop, argument and chatter being suspended by a sort of unspoken agreement in the immediate business of making and drinking tea and eating sandwiches. These intervals in general workshop life were largely a necessity in those days for we worked quite long hours. In summer time the working day started at 7 a.m., with a break of half an hour for breakfast at 8 o'clock, then on till 1 p.m. when the shop closed for an hour. The day finished up at 6 p.m. It was varied in winter by a start at 8 a.m., finishing at 7 p.m. but with the breakfast break replaced by a tea interval.

"a sort of uncanny silence descended"

Some of the men came from quite a distance such as Surbiton, and must have left home at 5:30 to catch the 6 o'clock train. Even so there was a walk of about a quarter of an hour at the end of the journey. I still recall the scene outside the workshop door in the early morning. I myself arrived on a bike, but nearly all the men either walked or came by tram, and stood about in doorways or leaned against railings, awaiting the arrival of the foreman to unlock the door. Five minutes later the door was locked again and any unlucky late arrival had to kick his heels for an hour in the knowledge that an hour's pay would be deducted from his pay packet at the end of the week. Indeed I have heard some choice, imperfectly smothered epithets uttered by an unhappy late comer as he arrived panting only to find the door locked.

Apart from the official breaks there was a highlight in the day about half past ten when there was a cry of "Water boiling" followed by a sort of stampede by men with cans or mugs to make whatever refreshment they fancied. It was scarcely a hygienic procedure for the same can was used for drinking tea,

"the shop boy 'Pongo'"

beer, or cocoa and was never properly washed, the dregs of the previous contents being merely swilled out with hot water from the manifold glue pot tank.

Speaking of beer reminds me that at mid-day the shop boy (known as "Pongo") had to make the rounds of the shop collecting cans, the tin wire handles of which he hitched over a long pole with French nails driven in at intervals to prevent the cans from slipping off. Each man's can had its own position marked on the pole so that there was no doubt as to which was which, for all the cans looked alike. This really was important for every man had his own special brand of bitter. And so the boy had to visit several pubs in the district. Sometimes a mistake was made and the wretched Pongo was reviled for an idiot and told some home truths about his physical make-up, to say nothing of his ancestry.

Occasionally it fell to my lot to go the rounds of the shop with can pole, and apart from the pubs I had to visit a cook shop for a ha'penny slice of dripping or marg, or a penny slice of cake (what profit the shop-keeper made out of it I can't imagine). Toward the end of the week the orders for sustenance grew steadily smaller, and frequently some of the men with more faith than success sought to borrow ha'pennies from anyone prepared to assist.

Indeed the rewards of skill and labour were not high in those days. The rate for a first class cabinetmaker was 11-1/2d an hour, but many of the men had only 9-1/2d. We worked a week of 52-1/2 hours. My own starting wage was 5s a week but for the first month it was withheld to enable a few fundamental tools to be bought. The second year I had 6s, the third 7s. 6d, and finally I was rewarded with 10s.

I suppose that in any gathering of people you get mixed types. They all have one thing in common, the trade which brings them together, but, apart from that, they may have little in common. Our workshop was certainly no exception for we were a curiously mixed crew. I still remember their names and the order of the benches around the workshop. Some were the highly respectable types, clean looking and decently dressed when they arrived, though they changed into older garments before starting work. Others seemed to have given up the struggle to maintain whatever concession to adornment they may have had in their appearance, and turned up unshaven in worn garments which they protected from further deterioration with an apron made from discarded canvas or hessian begged from the upholsterer. And as we varied in appearance so we were diverse in our language and conversation. Some appeared to have forgotten how to speak without swearing or making reference to the bodily functions, or one's ancestry. Others were more restrained and moderated their speech to occasional curses. Yet the former type never checked their language no matter to whom they were speaking, and the other class never seemed offended at the freedom with which others expressed themselves.

And the curious thing was (or was it curious?) that a man's skill as a craftsman did not tie up with any special type, either in appearance or way of expressing themselves. Some of the roughest and most foul-mouthed types were excellent craftsmen, and so were many of the others. I suppose all had begun life in different circumstances and no doubt atmosphere had influenced their way of life. Yet their natural ability for craftsmanship came through regardless of the circumstances.

I don't know quite why some men seem to stand out as characters. It seems to have little to do with their ability at their job but there seems to be something about them that impresses itself on the memory. There was, for instance, old Higgott, a man who couldn't have been far short of seventy as I remember him. Every Monday morning he produced a clean white apron from his Gladstone bag wherein was also his lunch done up in a neat white packet and a Thermos flask. He spoke with a soft country accent and I never heard a coarse word from him even when something went wrong with whatever he was doing. He seemed to accept both the rough and the smooth with equal equanimity and patience. Indeed it was almost exasperating at times, for I believe that occasional swearing when things go wrong does act as a kind of safety valve to pent-up feelings. But no, a sort of resigned grin would appear on his face and he

would patiently start all over again. One could not help admiring his self control, but if one happened to be involved in the same job it could be irritating even though it were only a contrast to ones own reactions.

I have always had an idea that on some Sundays he used to preach at a local chapel, though I cannot recall that he ever told me. But it could easily have fitted his character. I have sometimes wondered whether his chapel activity was a sort of natural sequence to his patient character. An excellent craftsman, everyone had a respect for him. He once sold me a handsaw for a few shillings. It had his name stamped on the handle, and even to-day when I occasionally use it I can recall his rather worn face with its faded smile. He must have ceased work long since and perhaps is able to express his ideas to more appreciative listeners in more congenial surroundings

Of a rather different type was one Lancaster (nick-named "Lanky" despite the fact that he was no more than 5 feet tall). He arrived each morning in a sort of frock coat with a cravat both of which he took off and carefully hung up before putting on his apron. He again was a very correct type who never indulged in abusive language or told doubtful stories, but who certainly did not owe his reticence to religious convictions, for he claimed to be an atheist, and developed his theories to anyone prepared to listen. He was probably the best cabinetmaker in the shop, and whenever a specially tricky piece of work had to be put in hand it seemed to fall to him to do it.

I have an idea that in his youth he must have been somewhat of a Don Juan, for when as a boy I was deputed to help him on some job or other, he used to tell me of certain adventures, though invariably in a negative sort of way as though they referred to someone else. At the time I accepted his stories as he told them, but looking back in after years I suspect that he was really speaking about his own experiences. Well, maybe his views were a form of justification or a sort of built-up defence against the consequences of his doubtful past.

Whenever I think back on Clarke it is with a smile. When he had a straight-forward job to do he was excellent, for he was a fast worker and at the same time really clean. His speciality was mahogany dwarf bookcase with barred doors, and he made a really good job of them. His mitres were cut straight from the saw, even large cornice mouldings, and so he gained a fraction of time. To me it was almost incredible for the kerfs in his mitre box had become enlarged with constant use, but it never seemed to worry him. It was the same with his coffin-shaped smoothing plane (it had a half-metal sole) which was so worn that the rear end was at least half an inch shallower than the front. He must have bought it when a boy when its sole was straight and flat, and he had never noticed the gradual wear. Yet he could clean up a table top with the best.

Occasionally, however, he was given an out-of-the-way cabinet to make, and almost at once he went to pieces and began to flounder. He would ask advice from everyone and then go wrong in the end. Yet he felt no sense of indignity, even when seeking advice from an apprentice. It appears that he originally had his own cabinet-making business which he had inherited from his father, but his ability as a business man must have been as limited as his imagination of construction for he failed to earn any sort of living. At one time he used to arrive at our workshops with a cart load of cabinets in the white, and I recall some of the heated arguments that took place with the foreman, for he needed the cash to pay for the cart, to say nothing of the bills he had to meet for timber, or the rent of his workshop. The upshot of it was that he retired from the unequal struggle and took a job as a cabinetmaker in our workshop, generally on a piece-work basis, and perhaps this accounted for the speed with which he worked.

Towards the end his wife used to meet him at closing time at the workshop door an Fridays (payday). It appears that poor Clarke was found floundering in a gutter incapably drunk but with a bag full of fruit and vegetables which he had acquired, heaven knows how. After that his wife took things in hand and took possession of the pay packet, and gave him each day a shilling for his dinner, 2d for his half pint, and sixpence for his fare. He once told me that his father had died at the workshop door sitting in a chair with a bottle in one hand and a spoon in the other, though he never explained the significance of the spoon.

I think some of the worst language I have heard came from Dick Waters, yet it was not used merely when things went wrong, but was spoken in general speech in a perfectly natural way. I cannot recall having seen him specially angry, and it is quite possible that if he were his speech might have been less picturesque. But his ordinary conversation was enriched Billinsgate or blasphemy spoken without special emphasis or reserve much as a lecturer might deliver an address.

He was a curious type of kindly disposition in that he would go out of his way to help any of the apprentices, yet his own children he neglected almost completely. One of his sons, I recall, was employed in a cook shop as a washer up, and used to try (sometimes successfully) to smuggle odds and ends of broken food to his father. Poor Dick has lived a troubled domestic life, and in his more garrulous moments would entertain the shop with stories of his matrimonial misadventures. His weakness for drink may have been a contributive cause, though by all accounts his wife was not averse to the bottle. But he was a first-rate cabinetmaker and specialized in shaped work—oval and kidney-shaped writing tables. He had a fine kit of tools, but when war broke out he decided to enlist, and went round the shop trying to sell tools to anyone who would buy. I myself, had this mahogany mitre shooting block for 5 shillings which he had made when a boy.

But I could go on about that crew, such as the two brothers

"Old Higgot"

who lived in Surbiton within a few doors of each other. They travelled up daily by the same train but never in the same compartment and never saw each other except in the workshop where they could hardly avoid contact. There was Selfe the fitter who augmented his income by lending odd amounts—shillings or sixpence—for which he charged a ha'penny interest per week. Another was "Dummy" the deaf mute who in an absent minded moment chopped all the wrong parts of a dovetailed cornice and had to conceal it from the foreman, and eventually hurriedly veneered it to hide his sins. Wilbe, the silent, who on one occasion turned up semi-drunk after dinner break and began to make offensive remarks to Dan who, though less than 5 feet in height was a powerful man. The sudden disappearance of both men behind a bench was the first intimation we had that things had progressed beyond the reasoning stage, and further investigations revealed the two men rolling about together amongst the shavings apparently trying to bite each other.

It is a rather sobering thought that practically all these men who once worked together in the same shop must now be dead. Some were elderly when as a boy I knew them, but even the youngest of them, if still alive, would have reached the age of senility.

The workshop near Victoria was an L-shaped two-storied building, the ground floor of which was taken up by the machine shop, upholsterers' shop, stores, and a large area in which were kept dozens of old pieces of furniture in various stages of decrepitude, items with broken frames, oddments which once were heaven knew what, chairs with loose joints, and quite a lot of old Victorian pieces awaiting resurrection in a more exalted 18th century state. In addition, of course, were many oak, walnut, and mahogany items of the 17th and 18th centuries all needing attention.

On the floor above was the L-shaped cabinet-shop with 18 to 20 benches grouped around the walls. When all were occupied there was not much space left, for every man had his job on which he was working, either a new item or a repair or conversion job, and in addition every man had his tool chest. At the head or back of each bench were crude tool racks made from battens fixed to the walls with screws or nails driven through distance pieces interposed to enable chisels, pincers, screw-drivers, etc., to be kept. Saws were generally held on French nails driven into the walls. Cramps (generally the old type made entirely of wood including the screw itself) needed something more substantial and were held on projecting battens screwed to the wall. The same thing applied to handscrews.

And here, a curious fact emerges, trestles were never used. They just weren't needed. Instead each man had his box made from oddments of deal nailed together, and used occasionally on which to rest wood when sawing, but more frequently to sit on during dinner or tea break. When wood had to be ripped down it was handscrewed to the bench with the edge side overhanging and the saw used by the cabinetmaker's overarm method. Of course, when any extent of such sawing was needed you took it down to the machine shop to be cut but for the odd cut it was quicker to do it by hand rather than carry it down below, wait for it to be done, and carry it up again. Most men claimed that the overarm method was less backaching than ripping on trestles, though I suppose that many carpenters would not agree for they prefer the more orthodox method of sawing on trestles. At the corner of the shop was the multiple glue pot tank holding some nine glue pots in a copper gas-heated water tank, and it was the shop-boy's task (the unhappy Pongo) to light the gas and prepare glue for the day's work. Cake glue in slabs was used, and it had to be broken up into pieces in sacking to prevent it from flying. This had to be done overnight so that it could be soaked and softened in water during the night in a large central pot. Next morning saw the unhappy Pongo stirring the congealed mass with a stout stick until it was sufficiently liquid to be poured into the small individual pots.

It is interesting to reflect on the system followed in those days. When a new reproduction had to be made the foreman would bring round a rough sketch with the chief sizes marked on it, or might merely say "a 5ft bow-front sideboard of standard pattern," or whatever the job happened to be. Men

used to period work knew within a little of what was wanted, though any special details would be specified. It then fell to the cabinetmaker to prepare a cutting list which would be the finished sizes plus working allowance. For narrow stuff such as rails or stiles there was no difficulty, but for wide parts such as tops or cabinet-ends etc. the list had to be adapted to whatever was available, for frequently it was necessary to join two or three pieces to make up the width. It is difficult now to realize that all this timber was solid stuff, and I think back with envy of the boards of 7/8 inch mahogany that was used. The timber was stored in an open space outside the cabinet shop and was normally covered with a tarpaulin. Thence it was taken down as required to be converted. It generally fell to the machinist to implement the cutting list, though it was usual for the cabinetmaker to note any special requirements. For some jobs an old decrepit cabinet would be cannibalised for the timber in it, and usually it was necessary to make good any blemishes such as old hinge recesses or screw holes etc.

CHARLES HAYWARD LOOKS BACK TO THE SEAMY SIDE—PART 2

by Charles H. Hayward, Working Wood*, Winter, 1981*

Illustrations by Lorna Camp

"doubtful stories in the polishing shop"

If the jobs were unusual, or complicated, a drawing was made in full size so that any special jointing or mechanical movements could be worked out, and this was done on a softwood board known as a "skid" or "rod," one edge of which was planed straight. Any lines parallel with this were drawn with the pencil held at the end of the rule, the fingers of the other hand used as a fence. Lines at right angles were put in with the square. All heights were in the actual finished sizes, but, since the "skid" was usually no more than about 11 inches wide, any widths greater than this were marked with broken lines, and the actual size marked in inches (metric sizes in those days were unknown). Such "skids" were kept for a while unless the job were "one off" in which case the drawing would be planed off so that it could be used again. Quite often a plan was also needed, especially for bow-front or serpentine-front jobs, but this would be prepared in exactly the same way.

It is clear from this that a component cabinetmaker had to have a good all-round knowledge. Of course, experience meant a great deal, and familiarity with the methods used in old furniture was essential, but it did occasionally happen that the job looked wrong or possibly did not meet with the customer's approval and then alterations had to be made and hopefully before it was too advanced. I recall one miscalculation or possibly a lapse of memory by the foreman, for a mahogany bedroom fitment consisting of a wardrobe with chest of drawers beneath. It was only when the job was nearly completed that it was realized that the wardrobe portion had to fit flush into a corner and consequently the wardrobe at the side had to be in line with the chest beneath. All the carcase parts had been dovetailed together in the orthodox way and some drastic alterations were necessary to bring the two portions together in line. I am afraid the construction methods in the final job were anything but orthodox. But the job was sent home and so far as I know there were no complaints for it never came back again. Where ignorance is bliss?

Above the cabinet shop was the polishing shop kept permanently warm by a couple of stoves fed with off-cuts and oddments from the machine shop. This was essential, at any rate in winter time, not for the men's benefit, but because French polish was liable to turn milky white with any trace of damp. At 8 o'clock then, the junior would gather an apron full of shavings from the cabinet shop and start a fire. It was the only warm place in the whole building, and when the foreman was out there would be a steady trickle of men up to the polish shop ostensibly to consult about some job or other but really to stand for a minute or so around the stove. Still more important was the curious fact that smoking was allowed (or winked at) in the polishing shop. Many men had a flat tin in which they kept half-smoked ends, and these would be brought out and finished as a sort of accompaniment to the retailing of doubtful stories, though come to think about it there wasn't any doubt about their nature, for they were delivered in the

most natural manner possible.

I have already mentioned the rich language used by many of the cabinetmakers, but for really florid speech the polishers were supreme. I have never known such uninhibited fluency of speech. The habit of smoking in the polishing shop I never really understood. Admittedly there was no carpet of shavings on the floor as there was in the cabinet shop, but even so there were many bottles of methylated spirit, and obviously a great deal of French polish sometimes in open containers which was highly flammable.

It was largely in the polishing shop that most of the antiqueing process was carried out, though in the case of early oak furniture the signs of wear on the stretcher rails of chairs and tables had to be made. Spokeshaves and rasps were needed followed by glasspaper in various grades of coarse to fine, and finally attentions with a steel burnisher to remove the scratches made by glasspaper and to give a smooth finish. In places where dust would normally collect such as the backs of drawers which would not be touched in the daily round of dusting and waxing, a thin coat of glue size would be given and dust shaken over it. All men in the shop in fact kept a tin of dust for the purpose. Some of the processes had to be carried out in the open. For instance sometimes paint had to be stripped off from say an old oak job. It could not be done in the shop itself because of the danger of other items being splashed. It was then a matter of waiting for a fine day, although a drizzle did not hold up the work. There was an open space outside the cabinet shop, and quite frequently the ground would be literally running with sludge and dirty colored water when the pickle was washed away.

Such jobs were unpopular with the polishers and occasioned some choice remarks, especially when some of the corrosive pickle was splashed on to a man's face.

Usually, however, the job was given to one of the boys, and if his face and fingers suffered, he was just learning the trade. I have seen old sections of panelling treated in this way. The original paint was green, and the stripping process left a greenish tinge to the bare wood, and I believe the salesman who eventually sold the panelling pointed to this as giving special value as wood having such a shade was very rare.

MATING

Quite likely the title of this chapter will give a deceptive idea of what it is all about. It is in fact merely the term for a variation of workshop life that occurred from time to time in the work of an apprentice. When a repair or an alteration had to be done in a customer's house a cabinetmaker was sent to do it, and quite often it needed a second pair of hands but it would not have been economical to have employed two men. Hence the apprentice who thus went out "mating."

"Dan would blandly enquire whether there was a cookshop in the district"

Looking back it was something we rather liked doing in that it made a change from the tedium of the workshop. To-day I realize also that it gave an insight into the life led by many of the wealthy and leisured classes, though I don't think such reflections occurred to me at the time. After all, it was a state of things that was generally accepted as the normal scheme of life.

Some of the houses we went to were in the fashionable districts of Chelsea and Belgravia, many of them large mansions, often with great Doric columns supporting a portico and always with railings protecting an area with a flight of stone steps leading to the basement for tradesmen and the less privileged sorts of callers. Some of the entrances had that relic of the past the torch extinguisher.

Mostly the houses were maintained by a retinue of servants rather like "Upstairs, Downstairs," governed by a butler, though occasionally a house was occupied by a family who were trying desperately to keep up with the Jones's. Such houses were usually understaffed so that the functionary who opened the area door to us had frequently to hurriedly don a black jacket to answer a summons from the more exalted realms above.

However, whichever house we were sent to our entry was down the area steps where we were received if not welcomed by one of the retainers. Indeed it occasionally became obvious that we were considered as highly suspicious by the dignitary who regarded our tool bags as likely receptacles for any portable items that might be lying around.

However, having shown our credentials, thus partly allaying doubts as to our intentions, our first concern (as was early impressed upon me) was to ingratiate ourselves with whichever member of the staff likely to have influence with the kitchen,

"At times the entire family, with guests, passed to the dining room in a sort of procession ... we were hurriedly shooed to the nearest doorway, out of sight, as the parade walked ceremoniously by, led by the solemn butler"

upon the principle that a cup of tea or coffee and possibly something to eat might be forthcoming when time for elevenses came, without having to be paid for. Indeed I used to find it of some interest to observe the approach made by the particular man I was mating. For instance, Dan would blandly enquire whether there was a cookshop in the district (knowing full well that there wasn't) where he could slip out without wasting too much time. Usually it came off. Another man would rely on innocent remarks on that delightful smell emanating from the kitchen. Both approaches had their occasional failures when we were reduced to the necessity of producing our own modest fare, or to stepping out to find the nearest pub or cheap eating house, if there was one.

On this score I recall one shop near Belgravia which was typical of a kind that has now apparently disappeared entirely. It offered hot pease pudding and boiled pork, the former heated in a great square vat right in the window of the shop, where its steaming mass encouraged by an occasional stir with a huge wooden spoon sent forth an appetizing smell from the oven door. In fact I believe that the purpose of the open door was to tempt passers, for I have observed men on passing the door to hesitate and return later with a basin, presumably to take some home for supper.

However, to return to our subject, the large mansions we went to usually contained some excellent woodwork and staircases, and indeed some first-class furniture. Sometimes the reason for our visit was to do some trivial repair when the cost of transporting the item to our workshop would have been too great. On other occasions it might be to make some alteration or other to a built-in fitment or possibly to fix some panelling or a wooden mantelpiece. It was then a matter of laying down some dust sheets to protect a polished floor, and borrowing any old kitchen chair or table or possibly a box on which to work, though if the operation involved much work a bench might have to be sent. On these larger jobs it occasionally happened that a junior servant would be sent with instructions to remain in the room with us, presumably as a safeguard against any temptation we might have to lift small items that might be lying around.

Our treatment varied widely however, and seemed to depend on the personality of the owner of the house. When of an open trustful nature something of the sort seemed to be reflected in the staff, and the way we were treated.

Of course the whole way of life in those days was vastly different from that of to-day. At times the entire family with guests passed to the dining room in a sort of procession, and it happened occasionally that we were on the staircase at the time, possibly carrying up some item or other, and we had to be hurriedly shooed to the nearest doorway, out of sight, as the parade walked ceremoniously by accompanied by the solemn butler.

Some jobs ran into several days, for instance when a room had to be panelled. Generally the panelling was old, possibly taken from an old house, and had to be adapted to its new home. Of course all major alterations were made beforehand in the workshop from drawings made by a draughtsman but even so there were invariably minor alterations to be made where, say, water pipes had to be allowed for, or awkward shapes negotiated.

A great deal of this work involved invisible fixing and the method commonly used was slot-screwing in which screws were driven into battens fixed to the wall, their heads projecting

about 1/2 inch. Corresponding blind holes were bored in the back of the panelling with a slot cut above each to take the screw shank. The panelling could then be pushed to the wall so that the holes in the back engaged the screw heads. It was then a matter of thumping the panelling down to the floor. Of course allowance for this final knocking down had to be made in the positions of the screws and holes.

If for some reason the slot-screw method was not possible a couple of battens with canted rebates were used, one fixed to the back of the panelling and the other to the wall. Thus the two rebates engaged each other so that the panelling hung as it were but was prevented from falling forwards. Occasionally direct screwing was the only answer and the dodge then was to place the screws behind any convenient decorative detail. If even this was not possible the screws had to be counterbored and the holes pelleted. The pellets had to be specially turned, the grain running crosswise so that they matched the surrounding wood.

One rather interesting job I recall was the making and erecting of a heavy oak frame to act as a sort of screen in a large room. It was about 10 feet square and was of 3 inches square oak rebated for glass at one side and moulded at the other. It had mullions and rails forming a ten-light frame. Ordinarily so large a frame would be made and erected at the time the house was built. Clearly it would have been impossible to bring the completed thing into the house afterwards. It would never have passed through doorways. Consequently it was necessary to so arrange the assembly so that the parts could be put together, and the final gluing-up done in the room where it was to be erected.

It will be realized that the advantage of partial assembling in the workshop was that, since all the joints had to be levelled and cleaned up after being glued, this was a job much more easily done in the workshop. That the remaining joints had to be levelled in the house itself was unavoidable, and in any case it was kept to the minimum. Apart from this it was necessary to heat all joints beforehand because Scotch glue was used (modern cold adhesives were still in the dim future).

In the manufacture of the frame the limitations of our machine shop soon became obvious. First the 3 inch oak had to be ripped down on the bandsaw (we did not have a circular saw), to form the stiles and rails, and then be surfaced and thicknessed on the planer, though the result soon revealed the limitations of the ancient machine which broke down periodically and at last gave up the unequal struggle when fed with hard English oak. Furthermore some of the long members assumed some curious shapes after ripping and had to be cut down and used for short stiles.

Rebating and moulding involved some heavy cuts, for both were done in a single operation on the spindle moulder, and I recall "Min" the machinist ordering me out of the line of fire as

"became obvious that we were considered highly suspicious ... a junior servant would remain in the room with us"

I gazed at him through the great shower of chips.

Tenons were sawn on the bandsaw and I recall that Min rigged up a wooden fence which enabled one side of every tenon to be sawn alike. He then reset the fence to enable the other sides to be sawn.

As we had no mortiser all mortises had to be chopped by hand and my own modest contribution was that of boring holes beforehand to ease the work of Nobby Clarke who was given the job of chopping the mortises. I can still picture him as hour after hour he crashed down his mallet on his mortise chisel.

It was scarcely "mating" in the ordinary sense when I went to the house to help in the assembling for there were three men engaged in the work, and our arrival met with the obvious disapproval of the butler. Indeed we were a motley crew as we alighted from the horse-drawn van with the parts of the frame, a large heavy cramp, several bags of tools, a sack of shavings, and a second sack of off-cuts of timber. Indeed my first job was that of lighting a fire in the empty grate, partly to enable a couple of glue pots to be heated, but also so that the joints could be heated.

I think this was one of the few occasions when the men went about their jobs in discreet moderations of language, for although we kept the doors closed we were visited now and again by various of the servants, and on one occasion the owner of the house, a highly decorative gentleman in frock coat and 2 inch collar who appeared to be in a state of astonishment at our being in the house at all. He gazed at me as I stirred the glue pots, apparently under the impression that I was preparing a

sort of stew which we would presently consume. Not a word did he utter but retired open-mouthed in company with the butler from whom he would no doubt receive enlightenment.

It seems that he had been away for some weeks (as we were confidentially informed by one of the maids), and had only just returned. Meantime his wife had given orders for the work to be done. Occasionally indeed we were involved in family altercations, an instruction given by one party in the morning being countermanded later by another.

On the whole, however, mating was a thing we rather looked forward to, and it certainly involved some interesting jobs which often called for personal resourcefulness and ingenuity for they had to be done without the facilities of the workshop.

CHARLES HAYWARD LOOKS BACK—PART 3

by Charles H. Hayward, Working Wood*, Spring, 1982*

Illustrations by Lorna Camp

THE REPAIR MAN

Although almost all men in the shop might occasionally have to do repair work on old pieces, there were some who specialized in the work and did nothing else. Indeed it was rather a specialized branch of work, and the men who did it frequently had special appliances and tools used for out-of-the-way purposes which do not arise in making new furniture. Their everyday tools often seemed to reflect something of the work they did. Old rusty screws and nails left their mark (literally) on chisels, plane soles, and screwdrivers. Only the man who has actually done repair work can realize the seemingly impossible places in which nails can be embedded, often with no apparent reason for their being there at all. To attempt to extract them would frequently involve damaging the surrounding wood, and attempting to punch them in was often the only answer, though frequently they were so rusted in that they could not be shifted. Sometimes a botched repair in the past had resulted in a nail being driven into a joint, and it just had to be removed to enable the joint to be reglued.

The man doing nothing but repair work invariably kept some old tools which he used in doubtful cases. Thus a screwdriver would be used as much for levering items apart or for forcing old metal fittings as for turning screws. Chisels with gashed edges would bear witness to their encounter with nails; and plane soles were frequently scored as a result of similar unhappy clashes with nails.

So far as saws were concerned most men had learnt their lesson and in any doubtful cases used a hacksaw. Even so there were occasions when the tenon saw or handsaw met an embedded nail or screw with disastrous results. Indeed when this happened the whole shop seemed to know about it for the horrible rasping sound as the saw teeth grated on the metal was unmistakable. Men from other branches would come round to see the extent of the damage, and quite often, with the natural cussedness of things, it would happen to a newly sharpened saw.

Next to saws I think the most hated mishap was when a twist bit struck a nail. Apart from damage to the cutters and nickers the screw thread itself would often be damaged beyond repair, and so the bit became useless. This was so feared that other men in the shop would hesitate before lending a bit to a repair man.

In the nature of things those doing restoration work had different problems from men engaged on new work. In the latter a man knew beforehand exactly the problems he had to solve. Thus he could make allowance for the application of cramps, (specially important in shaped work), whereas the restorer had to deal with parts needed attention without dismantling the rest of the job. Veneers too had often to be pressed down where they had risen in the form of a bubble, to say nothing of pieces of marquetry which were missing. On this score, one of the most disliked jobs was when brass inlay lines or decorative details had lifted. The usual trouble was that the wood ground beneath had shrunk whereas the metal inlay remained static, resulting in the inlay bellying out and needed to be cut, and then straightened to take out kinks.

One of the awkward problems facing the restorer was that of mending or replacing broken parts without dismantling other parts. For instance a chair back, say, had a broken cross-rail contained between the main uprights. If the main frame were sound it would be difficult and certainly unwise to attempt to take it to pieces in order to replace one minor rail. One trick was to fit a sliding loose tenon which could be pushed in flush to enable the rail to be inserted between the uprights, and then glued and pushed sideways into its mortise. This left only the gap formed by the sliding loose tenon to be filled. As this would be on the underside in any case it would not show.

In the case of turned members this method was impracticable and then a replacement turning would be made in two (sometimes three) parts in which a sliding dowel could be fitted, this being covered by a bulbous member which was split in two along its length and glued on afterwards.

Sometimes the restorer was faced with the impossible. For instance I recall a mahogany side table being brought in the top of which had been veneered. How it got into the state it was in I don't know, but probably at some time it had been left out in the dump and then left to the mercy of someone who apparently got pleasure out of pulling off strips of veneer, so that there were as many gaps as sound veneer. To have patched it would have been impossible because the grain could not have

"Old Price, the restorer"

been matched, and the result would have looked like a patchwork quilt. Veneering afresh was the only answer.

Talking of veneer repairs, there are some people who should be termed "pickers." Perhaps such a man is reclining in a chair and his hand wandering idly to a rail or leg finds a bubble in the veneer or an edge where the veneer has become loose, but is otherwise sound. Probably without realizing what he is doing, our "picker" begins to pick away at the veneer until it comes away in his hand. Having thus made a start he picks away at the surrounding veneer until that in turn becomes detached. And so what would originally have been a simple repair becomes much more costly to be put right.

Some blemishes in veneer are the result of faulty construction in the first place, and are invariably due to neglect of the basic fact that solid wood is liable to shrink as moisture dries out from it, or indeed to swell if it absorbs damp. Some shoddy furniture has been made in the past in defiance of this truth. Thus battens or rails may be glued across the grain of wide carcases or panels to cheapen the construction. They resist the shrinkage of the groundwork and so splits become inevitable. When faced with veneer it looks satisfactory enough for a while, but time takes its toll and eventually splits and cracks develop in the groundwork beneath and the veneer suffers with it. Such pieces frequently cost more to restore than soundly made similar items.

An item presenting at times the greatest challenge to the restorer's skill was the ordinary dining chair, because it had to go back into use and support the weight of people using it, and withstand the movement and use of daily service, to say nothing of the abuse it sometimes got. If only people used chairs for the legitimate purpose of sitting on them there would be little to go wrong. But consider how often the user tilts the chair backwards so that it is subjected to a tremendous racking strain, or how frequently it is used for parlour tricks. It is extraordinary that some survive at all. Inevitably however mortises are burst open or tenons snapped off and the whole frame can be rocked to and fro. Yet it is expected that it will go back for a further period of use.

I recall half a dozen or so chairs being brought up to the repairers, some of them almost entirely in pieces and requiring to be sorted out. In some cases so much was missing that six chairs became reduced to five, for the cost of making new parts would have been prohibitive. However this was seldom done because a set of six chairs was infinitely more valuable than five.

And so old Price, one of the restorers, would spend the first day or so in patching broken parts, fitting new loose tenons, and hopefully strengthening split mortises, etc. Then followed the assembling, first the backs, followed by the front legs and rails, and finally the side rails. When there was a loose seat frame it was often so pitted with tack holes, to say nothing of worm holes, that it had to be replaced entirely.

A set of chairs being finished, the foreman would test them by planting one knee on the seat and rocking the back to and fro. If it stood up to this it was passed as safe (as indeed it should for the force he used was almost enough to break any joint). I have seen the unhappy Price look out of the corner of his eye with a hopeful expression tinged with doubt as the chair creaked under the strain. As a rule the chairs survived the test, though occasionally the strain was too great and the unhappy Price had to start afresh and mark another hour or two on his time sheet.

Poor Price! He lived a faded life, amongst dilapidated furniture, worm-eaten wood, and dusty decayed oddments. His originally white apron was grey and faded with many sweepings and his attitude to life seemed to be a sort of reflection of his daily task. A tall, angular man with drooping moustache, he once in his more garrulous moments took it on himself (heaven knows why) to explain to me the mysteries surrounding child-birth. I suppose I must have been about fifteen at the time and accepted his description as the exposition of an authority, especially as he illustrated his graphic description with a realistic demonstration of the event. Indeed what it

"The foreman testing one of Price's repaired chairs"

may have lacked in accuracy it made up in picturesqueness. It appeared, according to him, that, although most women had a difficult time, others found it an almost casual passing event. In developing his theme he quoted the experience of a friend of his wife's who had called to spend a social evening, and following casual conversation, had suddenly risen to her feet with the remark that she felt "funny." Then a thought seemed to strike her and she casually observed (to use Price's characteristic words), "Oh, I think it is that kid coming," and without more ado stooped to the floor, gave birth, and immediately straightened herself up again. And Price solemnly assured me of the fidelity of his dramatic performance as he patted the dust from his knees and he refreshed himself with a drink from the square bottle he kept in his tool chest. Why I should remember such an episode when I have forgotten so much, I don't know.

ADHESIVES

It must be obvious that there is a wide range of adhesives to-day from which to choose for this or that job. What is not so often realized is that the process or method of assembly has been greatly simplified in many cases. To-day there are cold-application adhesives with varying properties, and in many cases, the assembling can be relatively slow and deliberate, giving ample time for the application of cramps, and testing for accuracy.

In this early period of which I am speaking Scotch glue was used almost exclusively. Occasionally casein glue was employed and this could be used cold, but it had the disadvantage of being liable to stain hardwoods, and most shops preferred Scotch glue.

Used correctly it is a strong adhesive but unless properly prepared and used it is useless.

First its preparation: It used to be sold in flat cakes about 10 inches square, and these had to be broken up into small pieces. They were quite brittle and if struck with the hammer would splinter and fly like fractured glass. To prevent this the cakes were wrapped in old sacking and hammered. This was done overnight so that the pieces could be put into a large pot and covered with water where they were left till the next day when they had absorbed the water, the whole turning into a thick congealed mass. Then came into action the unhappy Pongo who, having lit the gas, spent the next hour in stirring the mass with a stout stick. When reduced to a reasonable consistency it was decanted from the large pot into smaller ones. You could

tell the right consistency by lifting the brush a few inches from the pot when the hot liquid should run down in a stream free from lumps but without breaking up into drops. When left in the container for any length of time a sort of crust developed on the surface and this had to be removed.

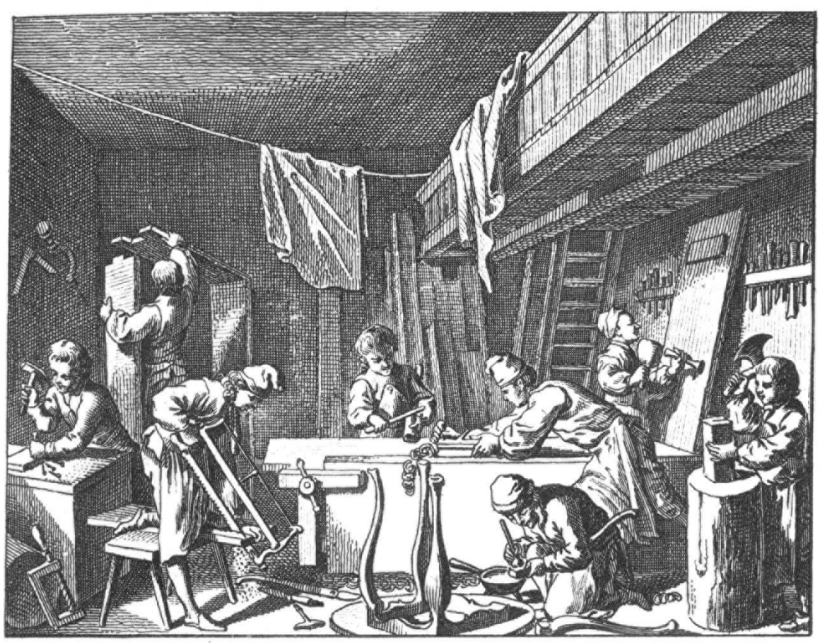
It is obvious that hot glue brushed onto a cold surface would rapidly congeal, especially in winter time in a cold shop. It is therefore essential to heat all joints beforehand. Indeed this was one of the first jobs to be given to an apprentice. Whilst the cabinetmaker was preparing cramps, etc., the boy would heat the joints over a gas ring with strict instructions not to scorch the shoulder of tenons, etc., as these would show as a black line after assembly and could not be planed out. Having heated the joints the boy would then give a hand at holding the softening blocks or holding the cramps whilst the man tested for squareness and freedom from binding. The whole basis of the idea was to work quickly yet without haste so that the entire process was completed before the glue chilled.

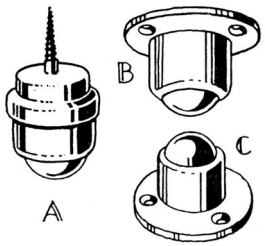
Small jobs presented no special difficulty provided they were gone about smartly, but when a large complicated item had to be assembled the man from the next bench invariably gave a hand as well as an apprentice; in fact a big job might call for the help of several men, and for a really elaborate assembly a sort of rehearsal might be necessary. The time of year to an extent affected the work, so that on a cold winter's day the gluing up was usually deferred until after dinner because the temperature of the shop was then slightly higher, although there was no heating in the shop apart from the glue tank.

Of course, in any elaborate assembly the work was done in stages as far as possible, partly because there were then fewer joints to be dealt with at a time, and also because a sub-assembly could be handled as a whole and regarded as a complete item in itself. In any case the order of assembly had to be considered otherwise you might end up in the unfortunate position that further progress was impossible. On one occasion I saw this happen so that the cabinetmaker had ignominiously to saw away an already assembled part as it prevented further assembly.

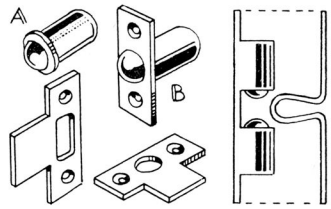
As a practical example of faulty assembling consider the case of the man in Fig. 3 who is apparently gluing up the parts of a small table, In the first place no experienced cabinetmaker would ever do the work on the floor, (and why the circular top beneath it?). This would not be added until later and in any case would not be glued. A table frame of this kind would always be put together in two or three stages. In the first a pair of legs with their rails would be glued up independently. The second pair of legs and rails would be glued separately in the same way. These would be left to set, and the remaining rails added thus joining the two assembled sides.

As a further commentary note that apparently no attempt has been made to heat the joints. But indeed the whole picture is full of inaccuracies. Note, for instance, the impractical single dovetail carcase joint the man to the left is assembling. Also the curious way the worker to the right is chopping a hole in a board leaning at an angle against the wall. On the other hand the picture is certainly a lively spirited drawing giving the impression of extreme activity in the workshop.





1962



SOME IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EVENTS OF 1962

The U.S. Navy SEALs forms. The Embargo against Cuba begins. John Glenn orbits the Earth. Wilt Chamberlain scores 100 points in an NBA game. Bob Dylan releases his debut album. The Century 21 Exposition World's Fair opens. The first Target opens. The Supreme Court rules mandatory prayer in public schools is unconstitutional. The first Wal-Mart opens. Marilyn Monroe dies. "The Jetsons" premiers. Johnny Carson becomes host of "The Tonight Show." "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" opens on Broadway. Dulles International Airport opens. The New York City newspaper strike begins, and lasts 114 days.

The European Space Agency forms. The IRA calls off the Border Campaign. Panda crossings are introduced. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act is created. The last London trolleybusess run. The first legal casino opens. Chichester Festival Theatre opens. The Rolling Stones debut. Prime Minister Harold Macmillian dismisses one-third of his cabinet. The Advertising Standards Authority forms. West Midlands race riots occur. Cymdeithas yr laith Gymraeg is founded. The Beatles play its first live show with the John, Paul, George and Ringo line-up. The Ford Cortina debuts. "Lawrence of Arabia" is released.

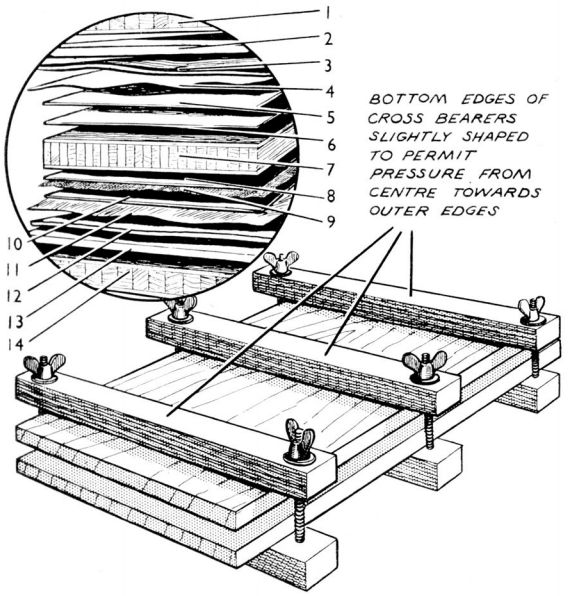
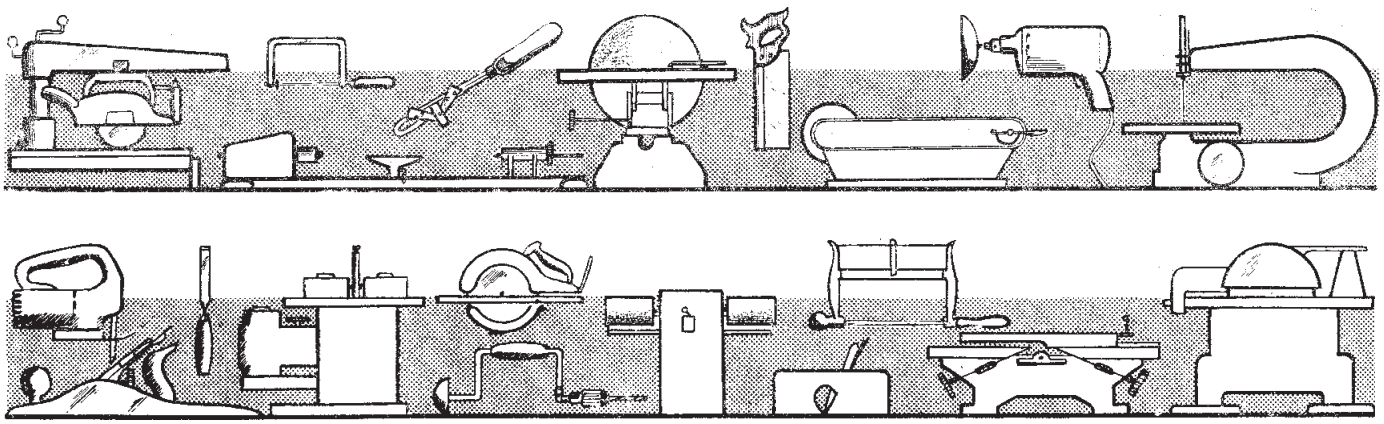


FIG. 2. SEQUENCE OF PRESSING

1. *Top caul*
2. *Top metal caul (heated)*
3. *Sheet of plastic or lino*
4. *Sheet of polythene to prevent sticking*
5. *Backing veneer, same direction as picture grain, opposite to groundwork*
6. *Counter-veneer, parallel to 8 and 45° to No. 7*
7. *Laminboard groundwork, crossgrained (opposite to picture direction)*
8. *Counter-veneer, parallel to No. 6 and 45° to No. 7*
9. *Muslin or silk, if desired, for best work*
10. *The actual Inlay, with taped face side downwards*
11. *Sheet of polythene*
12. *Sheet of plastic or linoleum*
13. *Heated metal plate*
14. *Lower wood caul*

SELECTED COLUMNS FROM 1962

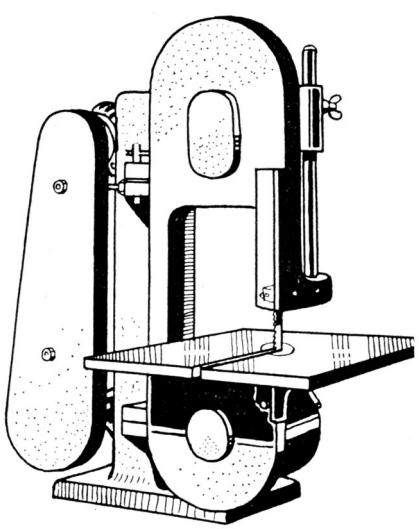
MOVING FORWARD



Something odd has happened to the New Year. Time was when it brought with it a host of pretty sentiments, nostalgic regrets for good times past, with poets and other whimsical folk vying with each other to express the hope of good things to come. And always, of course, the bells, first ringing out dirge-like the death of the old year, then ringing merrily as the new was born. They still ring, just as people still celebrate in more or less the traditional style on New Year's Eve, but something has gone out of our merry-making. We are not nearly so sure as we were.

Perhaps we are more conscious of the problems which lie tucked away, like skeletons in the cupboard, ready to fall out on us when we thoughtlessly open a door. And nowadays we are continually opening new doors. Change is in the air and comes so swiftly. It is not so easy as it once was to adjust ourselves mentally, to keep our minds in step with the physical impact of time upon us as we step forward into the New Year.

Not very long ago I saw a film, put out by a large industrial concern to document its modernisation schemes. Two pictures have remained vividly in my mind. One, a large up-to-date workshop in which young apprentices were using power tools with eager, absorbed attention; the other, a lecture room filled with middle-aged men assembled there to learn the new techniques of their trade. On some of their faces there was simple, utter bewilderment; on others, many of them of a strong and deeply etched intelligence and character, there was a look of bitter frustration and resentment. Things had come to a pretty pass. Here they were, men in their prime, conscious of their ability as craftsmen, who might reasonably have expected at their age to have a special niche of their own in any workshop, the acknowledged masters of their trade, forced instead to return to the classroom like any schoolboy, but without a schoolboy's elasticity of mind and delight in all things new. It is something which must be happening all over the country and it is a very hard thing for the older generation to bear. A young man just out of his apprenticeship may easily be ahead of them in the kind of knowledge and skill demanded by modern industry. They are left feeling that their world is in ruins about them, that their skills, toilsomely acquired, are unwanted, while the prestige which should have been theirs has passed to the younger men.



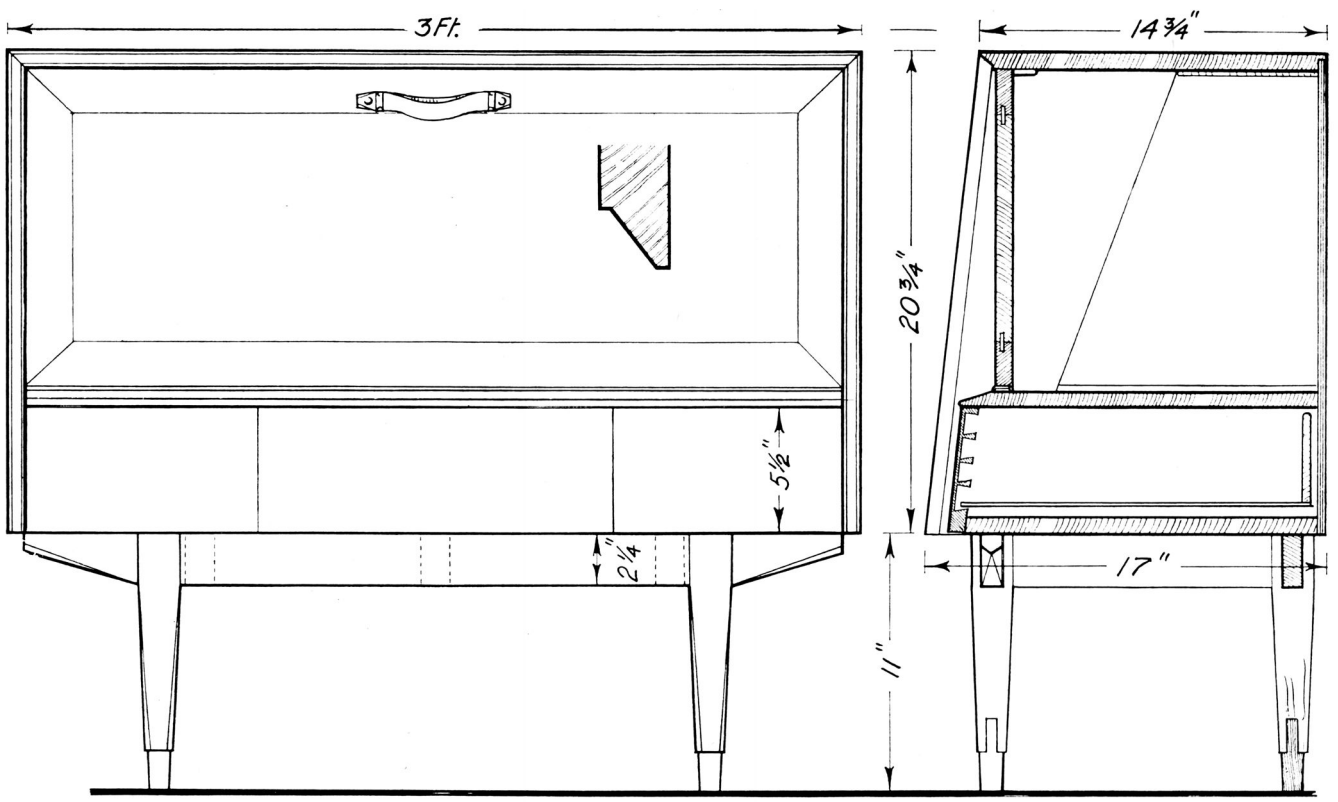
Some can adapt themselves to the new situation, but it is not easy. The methods we grow up with are bound to seem to us right and inevitable and yet, living in such swiftly changing conditions, it is a prime necessity for our own sakes to accept change with the best grace we can master if we are to maintain ourselves in the broad path of material progress. Otherwise we shall be doomed to drift into the side alleys and lose the chance of new horizons altogether.

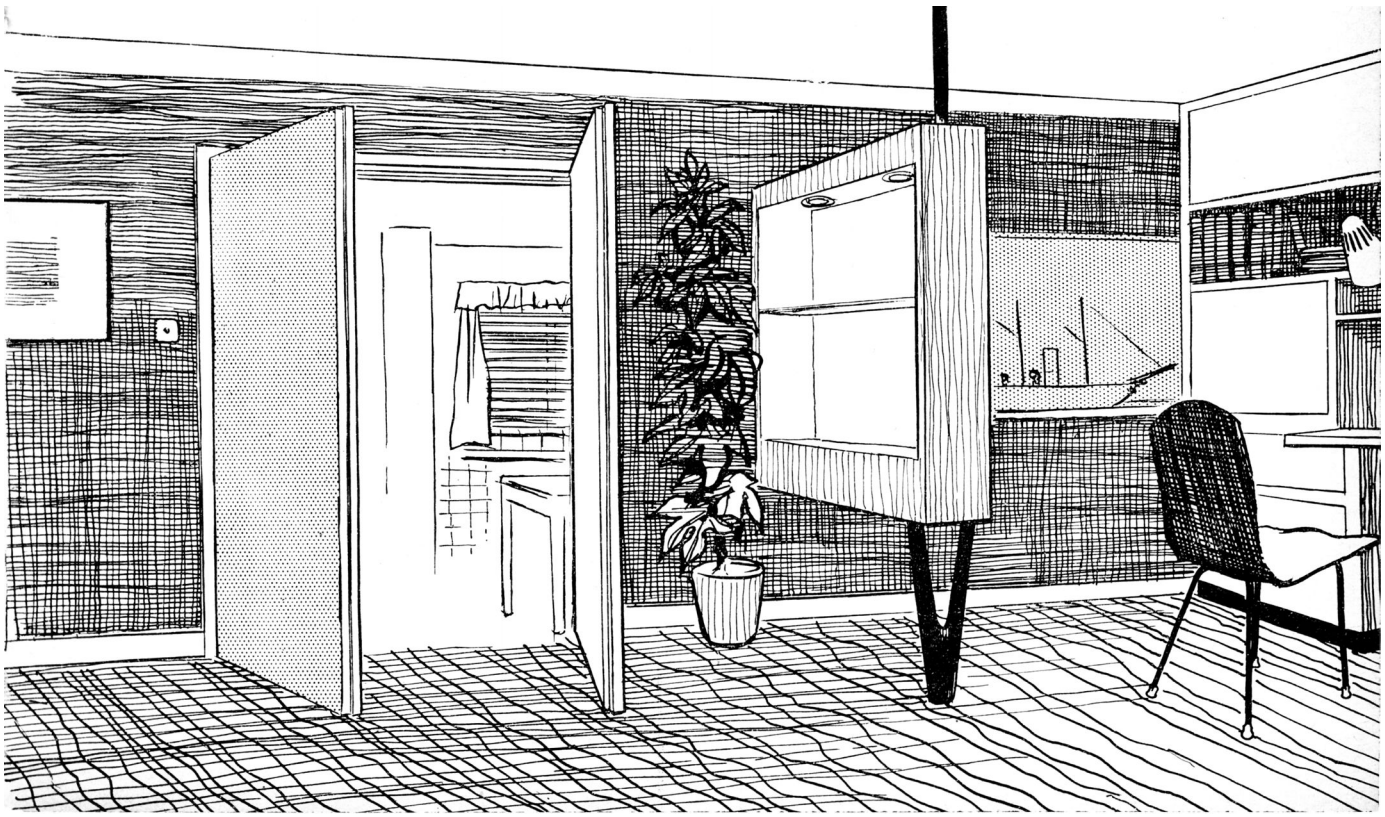
The true craftsman will find that the

qualities he has acquired over the years will stand him in good stead whatever the new techniques to which he is committed. A craftsman's qualities go deep and, provided he does not let them rust away in bitterness and frustration, can guide his maturity and awaken new interest. And for the man who has skill with tools there is always a release to be found in his own home. There we use the methods of our choice, drawing upon all our knowledge, old and new, to develop and enhance our surroundings till they become the good and satisfying background we would have them to be. To-day it is more than ever essential to take a hand in making and shaping our own lives; without it we could too easily drift into a futile routine. But, given the will to react sturdily in our own fashion, we can continue to be craftsmen in the best sense; men who are willing to dedicate their gifts at their most fruitful to the creation of beauty around them. To make furniture and household fitments of really fine quality, to plan and carry through improvements which put a high premium on thought and skill, all this would project us into still another new world, a world of our own devising.

The methods we grow up with are bound to seem to us right and inevitable and yet, living in such swiftly changing conditions, it is a prime necessity for our own sakes to accept change with the best grace we can master if we are to maintain ourselves in the broad path of material progress.

Here we shall have full scope for every atom of initiative, experience, and imagination we can summon to our aid. So used and developed these qualities do not go sour on us but instead open up new sources of interest and decent pride. With industry there is no coping. More and more it is establishing its own claims, which we are forced to recognise. But men who have fighting souls will keep intact their freedom to do and to be, and there is no better way than the craftsman's for safeguarding those things.





THE ADVENTURE OF LIVING

The very thought of monster and monstrous, giants, and suchlike, seem always to have exercised a magnetic attraction over the human race. It keeps on popping up so often, from the giants of folklore which partly thrilled and wholly enchanted my childhood, to the present-day "monsters" of the advertisers in no more sinister connotation than giant packages, or again in the wholly sinister monster bombs of Mr. Kruschev.

For years, and a good many years at that, there have been monster vegetable marrows figuring as show exhibits or reclining in plump majesty below pulpit and stained-glass windows at harvest festivals. They have also served other, less decorative purposes. There was a deep niche beside the chimney breast in the old-fashioned cottage kitchen of my childhood which was regularly filled each year with an array of giant vegetable marrows up-ended so that the warm air could circulate round them. They formed part of our precious winter store of vegetables, and kept perfectly in this fashion; rather tasteless, to be sure, when cooked and served up as a vegetable, but very good to my childish way of thinking when turned into marrow jam, flavoured so strongly with ginger that the taste, or lack of it, of the rest, was immaterial.

But now the giants are with us even more insistently. Seedsmen are busily producing giant strains in every conceivable direction, and those who, like myself, have been faced with scarlet runners literally half a yard long after only ordinary, reasonable cultivation, may well wonder why. The answer is probably to be found in the greater ease of picking for market growers, but this can hardly be the whole reason behind the production of giant strains of flowers, most of which are destined for the use of the private gardeners. Somehow, it seems, giant ideas are in the air. We like, or are credited with liking, the prodigious, the flamboyant.

The one thing no one seems to consider is size in houses. The new ones grow perceptibly smaller, with correspondingly smaller gardens, as land values increase.

Men, forced by industry to hobnob with giants, are able to maintain only a small and precarious foothold upon their mother earth. But how precious that little plot increasingly becomes! Near where I live a new family have recently taken possession of a house which had been allowed by its late owners to deteriorate into a state of chronic dreariness. The newcomers, envisaging its potential charm, flung themselves upon it, almost it seemed, at one time, pulling it apart and putting it together again. Day after day one heard the sound of saw and hammer, and gradually, inside and out, the new picture took shape—a home, looked upon as an adventure in living and reflecting the pride and joy of possession of its new owners.

To-day for many a man this kind of adventure forms the truest and most rewarding escape from the monotony of working hours that are tied to the assembly line or conveyor belt or some other form of an increasingly mechanised existence. Indeed for most men life tends to become either over-simplified and making too little demand upon their skill or over-complicated and making heavy demands upon their mental energies. In either case the remedy is the same, the use and development of a craft skill that will direct their energies into new, creative channels when their time is their own.

Working creatively with the hands is the most refreshing and absorbing occupation there is. But the further we advance into the push-button era, the more likely there is to be a considerable degree of inertia to be overcome before a man will fairly launch himself into manual work. When there is an incentive, such as the acquisition of a new house, the stimulus is strong; or a healthy, natural reaction against the boredom or strain of his everyday work may urge a man on. There is a practical type of man who will revel in the change, but there are also many who may find the new problems and difficulties that arise too irksome at first. Creative work of any and every kind demands patience. To the experienced craftsman this becomes habitual but there is almost certain to be a period, bound up with the use and development of skill, when patience is rather painfully acquired. It is easy to go to bed disgruntled, vowing to give the whole silly job up: the really important thing is to wake up in the morning determined to have another go and carry on.

Persistence and the courage that goes with persistence are needed, but as the work grows so does the interest. We end by finding ourselves entering upon a new and most illuminating heritage, illuminating because only by the intent, patient work demanded by a craft do we really discover ourselves, our possibilities, our strength, and our weaknesses. By committing ourselves to it we grasp a chance to develop as personalities, ready to act, to accept challenges and have a kind of endurance. We learn to reason our way out of the bad patches and with the help of a little ingenuity to rectify our blunders. Better still, we learn how to avoid them. Best of all, we discover the amount of quiet satisfaction that grows in us once our creative instincts have found an outlet. Fine furniture is always a joy to behold. It is a greater joy still to make it.

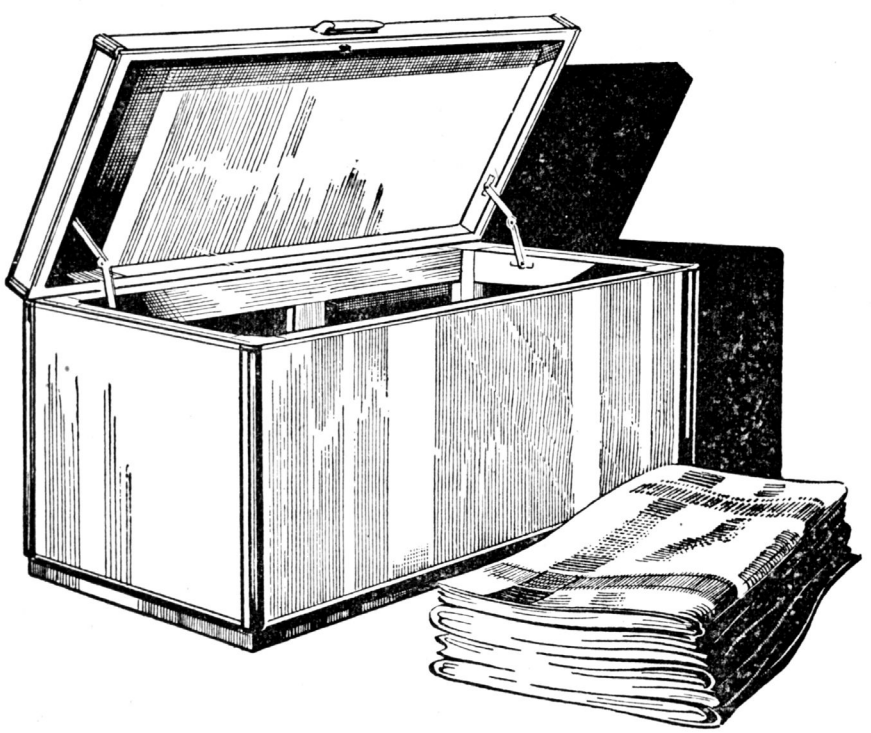
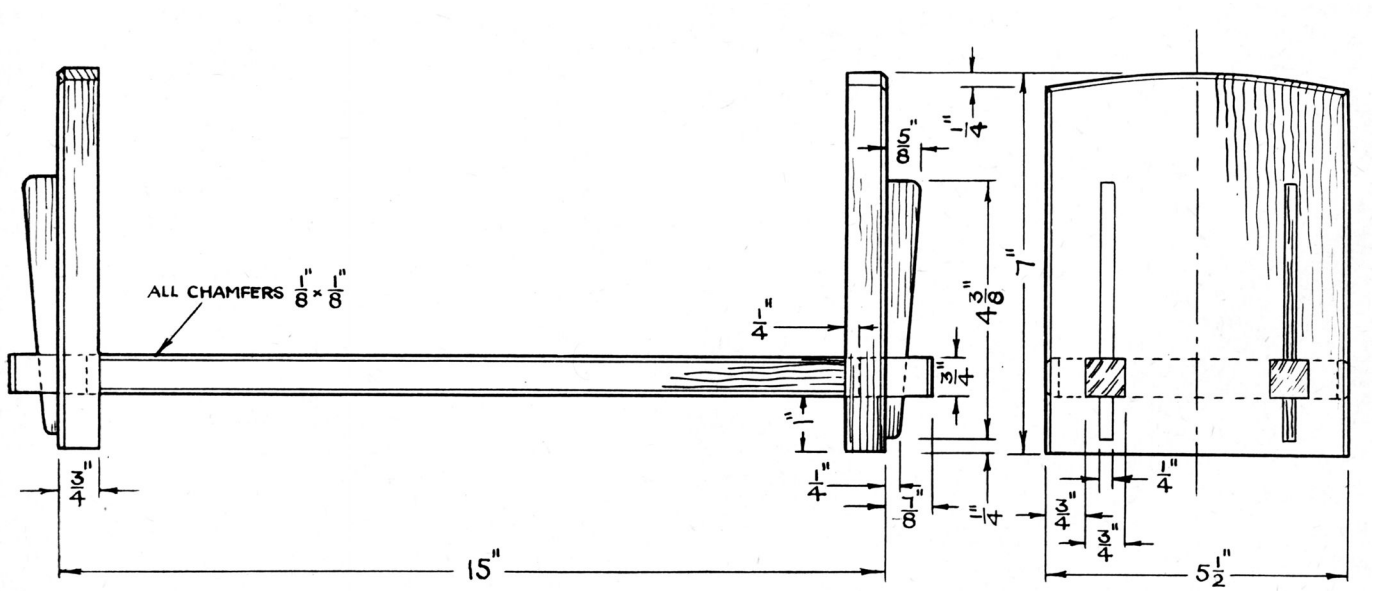


FIG. 1. CHEST WITH EXCELLENT ACCOMMODATION FOR BLANKETS, LINEN, ETC.

The main sizes are 3 ft. long, 18 in. deep, and 20 in. high. A most attractive touch is the covering of the corners with aluminium sections screwed on.

ON ZEST



Some time ago, on the radio, that lively veteran, Emanuel Shinwell, confessed to always getting up early in the morning. It was not, he said, that he liked getting up early—he did not—but, feeling that not many more years were left to him, he wanted to make the most of every remaining minute he had. What a marvellous expression of zest for life! I always think of zest as a gift which a good fairy, wanting to endow an infant in the cradle with a passport to happiness, might well choose. Generally, however, it is just one of those things a man has to win for himself out of experience of living.

If we have an overmastering purpose which gives sense and direction to our days, then zest will assuredly not be far off. No purpose is achieved without cost to a man's self, and as the spirit within him rises to meet the challenge, so does a new energy take over to give the colour of new life to his outlook. But such single-minded purpose is not within the province of everybody and we may acquire instead a number of interests, each one expressing a different facet of our nature; a side which can enjoy and appreciate art, music, sport or what you will; a practical side which can direct and do, a creative side that out of these accumulated ingredients can forge a new thing, something which will reveal our competence, our craftsmanship, our artistry alike to ourselves and to others. In some such way we shall achieve a relish for living which will fill "with sixty seconds; worth of distance run" each minute as it flies.

The outward showing is, I think, important. At heart we all like to have an audience, to have our own judgment reinforced by others on work we have accomplished. A weakness, perhaps, and yet how difficult it is to stand alone. The impulse to share, to invite praise or blame is a good impulse. We shall know, within a little, how much of the praise is justified and genuine. Criticism is not so easy to take but can teach us the most if we are prepared to look it steadily in the face before either accepting or rejecting it.

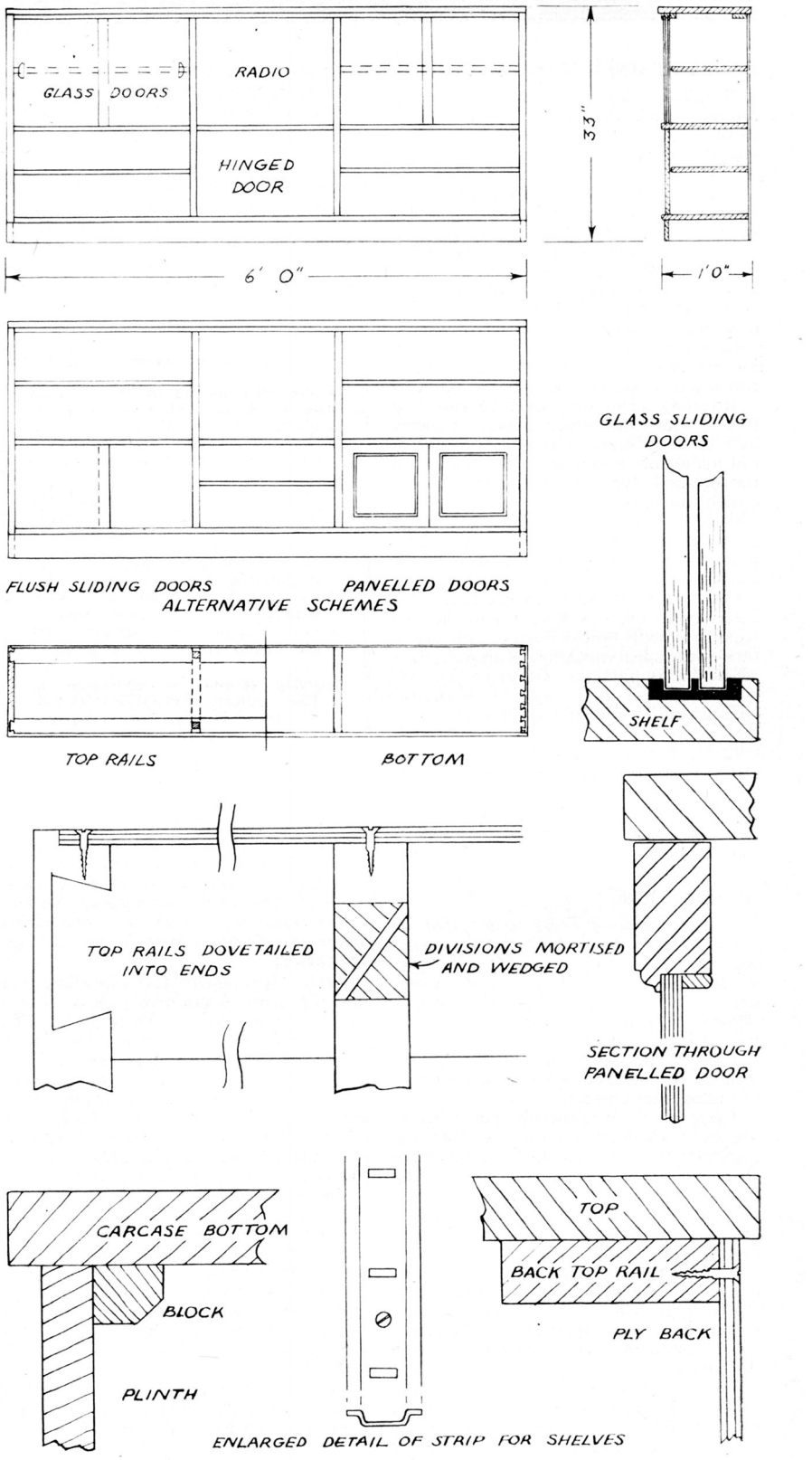
To lack experience in a handicraft is to lack experience in one of life's good things.

To lack experience in a handicraft is to lack experience in one of life's good things. There are so many qualities craftsmanship can bring into the open which otherwise might remain hidden for a lifetime. Unexpected talent, unexpected ingenuity are revealed only when we begin to draw upon them, and liberated from their dim lurking places within ourselves, they begin to live and grow. It can give heart to a man just to see his work taking shape. Many of us in the modern world have to live within our minds; many others are able to see only one small contribution made by their hands and to have no unique personal responsibility for the things we do if we are to feel fully satisfied. The claims made upon us by craftsmanship, the opportunity it gives, not only insist that we shall assume this kind of responsibility but help to develop and enlarge it. When we see what we can do,

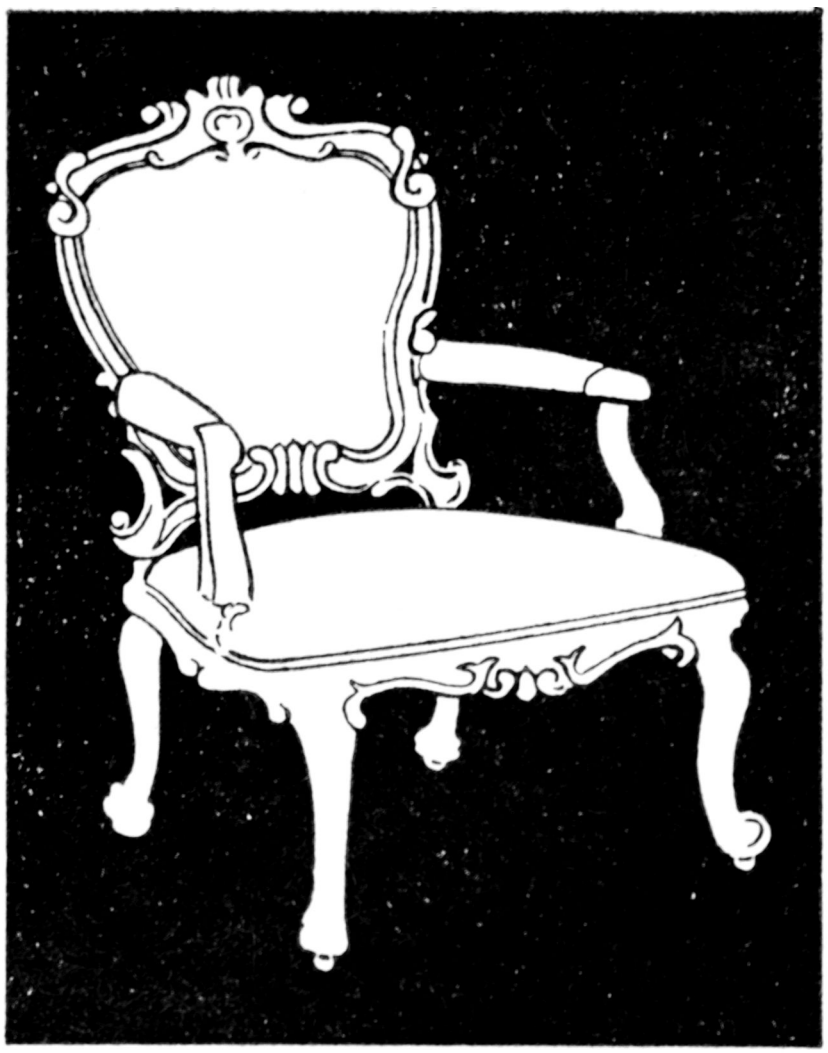
the earth begins to grow solid beneath our feet. The timid ghost that used to hover within us, never quite sure, is put to flight. Something good and creative has come positively into the open, and life is infinitely the richer, our experience infinitely broader and more rewarding because of it.

When zest flows in, other worries and problems shake down to a less demanding level. All of us have them at times to a greater or less degree: the art of living is to keep them in focus. Usually they are small enough, but they can work upon us out of all proportion to their size and immediacy if we are going to leave them a clear field. Frontal measures are no good. "I'm not going to worry," however determinedly said, means that that particular worry will keep nagging at us on every possible and impossible occasion, till the small cloud that was no bigger than a man's hand grows to look like a great inky blue on the horizon. But to be deeply interested in something else, to become absorbed in a ticklish piece of cabinet work which makes us hold our breath to get it just right, is to come out of our absorption at the end as from a trance, with only a hazy idea of what the rest of the world is doing. And what a comfort that is sometimes!

Arnold Bennett once complained that people did not meditate sufficiently on the books they read: it was only by reflection that one could really make a masterpiece one's own. The same kind of reasoning applies to our own best creative work. By thinking about it in our relaxed moments we can bring a cooler, a more detached judgment to bear upon its problems than when we were actually engaged upon the work, so that our hands will be more sure, our skill at its best when we resume. Moreover, with reflection joined to doing will come that kindling of the mind which only zest can know.



THE LIVING WITNESS



In a world becoming increasingly impersonal in its dealings with men, it would seem as if the small craftsman, the man who makes furniture and other things of domestic importance, as well as doing small jobs about the home, has become the final witness to personal, human skill. One of the more unexpected values of craftsmanship all through the ages has been its power to reveal mankind to itself. Beauty in fields and woods, hillsides and valleys, gladdened the hearts of men, teasing them into trying to impart something of its quality to the things they made. In so doing they discovered something of the height, depth, breadth of the world they lived in, discovered too, something of themselves. Quite ordinary men, they were yet able through their skill to put on witness something of the true value of the creative spirit which urged them to make things well.

Nowadays clever brains devise machines that make such skill unnecessary, and as the machines advance in importance men tend to become dwarfed in their own eyes. Growing up in this impersonal atmosphere, already so compulsive in industry, commerce, and trade, they may easily lose sight of the powers within themselves which were, and still remain, unique. They will have no chance to develop along natural human lines unless they make such chances for themselves and herein lies the value of the small craftsman in keeping flying the flag of the sturdy, independent human being.

There have been periods of history when the crafts have had an outstanding fineness of quality not always easy to account for. Something in the air has seemed to be at work, kindled it may be by a few craftsmen such as William Kent and Chippendale in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, but yet not always so easily explained away. Remains from classical Greece, for example, all have about them a beauty peculiar to themselves, not only the important historical remains but practically every object, however humble, that comes to light. Here we have small beauty of ornament but a sensitive beauty of structure, rightness and simplicity that discloses a high level of craftsmanship.

The terms "rightness" and "simplicity" ring a bell in this age of ours, which for many years now has been stressing both these qualities. But no one can call mass-produced modern furniture

beautiful. The bulk of it presents us with a dreary, unimaginative sameness in line and conception, simple enough to be sure but with nothing at all engaging in its simplicity. It needs the touch of the craftsman's hand, his mellowed, informed experience to bring to life the beauty even of a simple thing. And the more his mind is stored with a knowledge and appreciation of good craftsmanship, the finer and more effective will his handling be.

That is the problem for the small craftsman, working very often in isolation, without the stimulus of other men's minds and example to spur him on. If he wants to feast his eyes on good craftsmanship he has to go out of his way to find it, although there is nothing more rewarding when he does or more likely to give an upward swing to his own standards. It can entice him into experimenting with finishes till he gets something corresponding to the finest and it can teach him to notice the little things that add up to make perfection. It cannot teach him how to persevere and develop his own resources, because these depend upon the force of his own will and choice. But every one of us knows the secret thrill of pleasure which comes when we feel our powers expanding and the sense of confidence which grows in us, so reinforcing our will that in the end we are swept along on the tide of an enthusiasm that can transform our outlook and prove infectious to others.

This is the kind of work which will do much to maintain our own and other men's faith in human values. Our automatised world is already showing a tendency to turn men into a series of human problems with which it has no conception how to deal. If men are going to be turned into automata for the purposes of industry and commerce for a considerable portion of their day, it becomes increasingly difficult to interest many of them in creative activities during the rest of the time. But the craftsmen, the makers of good furniture and every kind of lovely thing, can still show, by doing, something of the nature and reality of a man's potentialities, and by keeping that tradition alive may help to restore other men's faith in it.

True growth as a human being comes through constructive, intelligent work which is able to draw out those qualities of mind and body that go to the development of skill and character. And by testifying to this in his own fashion the craftsman still occupies his old place as the stabiliser of society.

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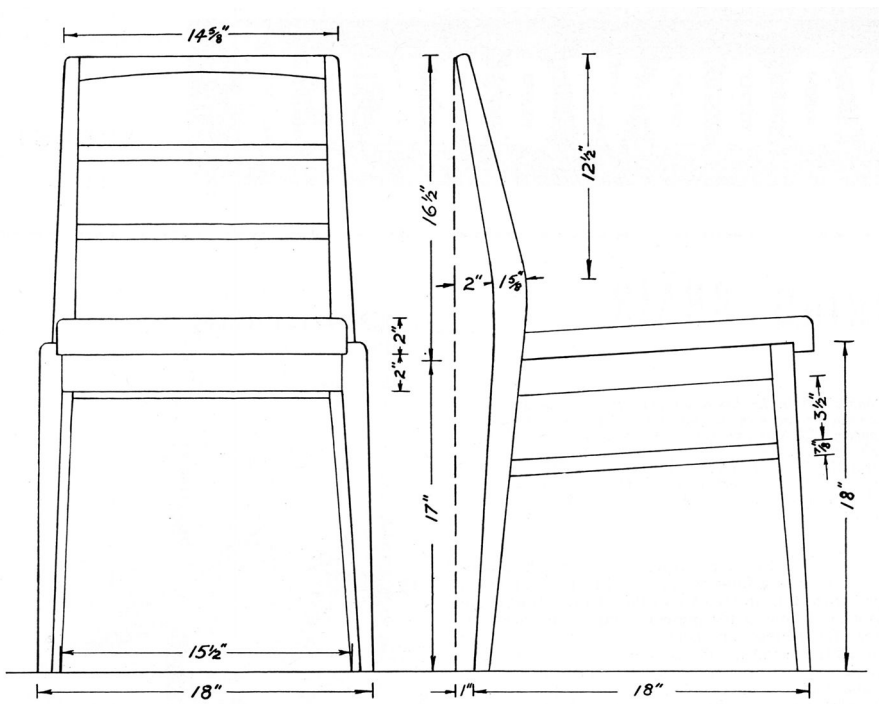
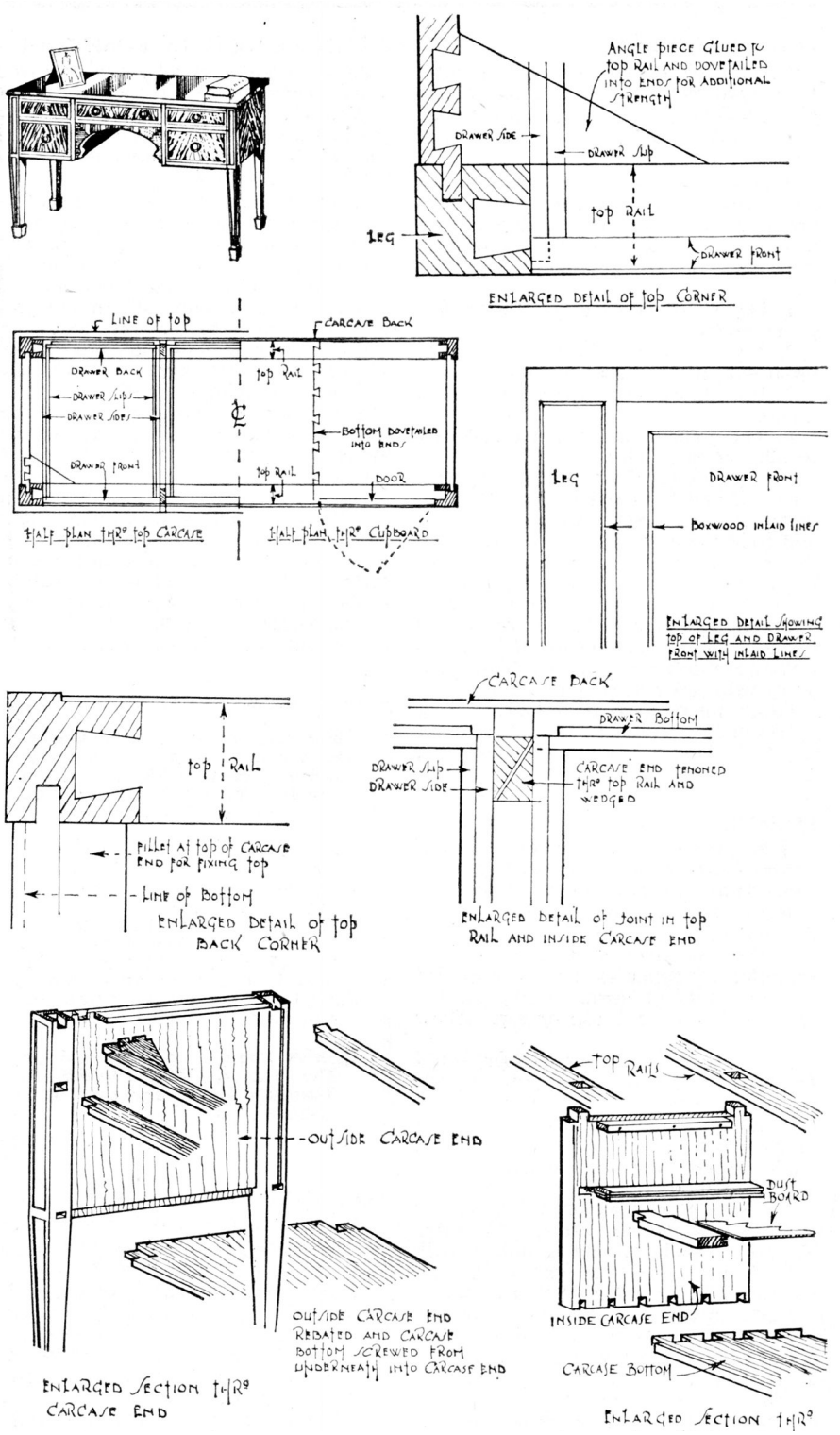


THE HIDDEN THINGS

It seems likely that we are entering upon a new era of craftsmanship, which may develop into something equally as fine as any of the great ages of the past. But this one will be confined to the craftsmanship of the home, which is becoming one of the features of our time. This of itself is an age-old thing, based upon the need of men to provide with the skill of their own hands first the primitive necessities, later the more comfortable amenities of rural homes. Industrialisation and the growth of towns changed all that, but now in the rapid developments of modern times the need is once more being felt for a new, domesticated craftsmanship, which bids fair to take the place of a popular art.

The visual arts of painting and sculpture as they exist to-day have few or no links with the lives of ordinary men and women. One gets the sense of a loss of direction, a bewilderment and confusion caused by the rapid changes in thought and development which artists are struggling to express in a way which breaks with all reality. The crafts on the other hand are tied to reality, particularly such crafts as woodwork, pottery and metalwork, which are linked with the home. To make a chair to a design so impractical that we prefer to sit on the floor rather than use it would soon set us longing for the functional. But if this means furniture looking too severely utilitarian we are again set longing for something kinder in appearance. We want elements of decoration, in short, we want beauty in our surroundings. And it is by striving to produce such beauty that the home craftsman will gradually increase his skill, until his craft becomes an art.

The start is so often almost an accident, the complete amateur thinking



one day: "I believe I could do that," and starting rather hesitantly to work on a simple fitment; or a trade carpenter, ripping his way expertly through a piece of timber, thinking not for the first time how much more interesting it would be to do some finer work and that one day he'd like to get going on a really posh sideboard for the missus.

The trouble is that these fleeting thoughts so often lead nowhere. Most of us are subject to them at intervals throughout our lives, the things we would like to do and don't really ever expect to do, because one life would not be sufficient to hold them all. But there are just a few which recur in a nagging, persistent kind of way, among them the urge to try our skill on something creative. We would like to be able to make things and can imagine the kind of satisfaction it would bring, but the small nagging voice is easily suppressed.

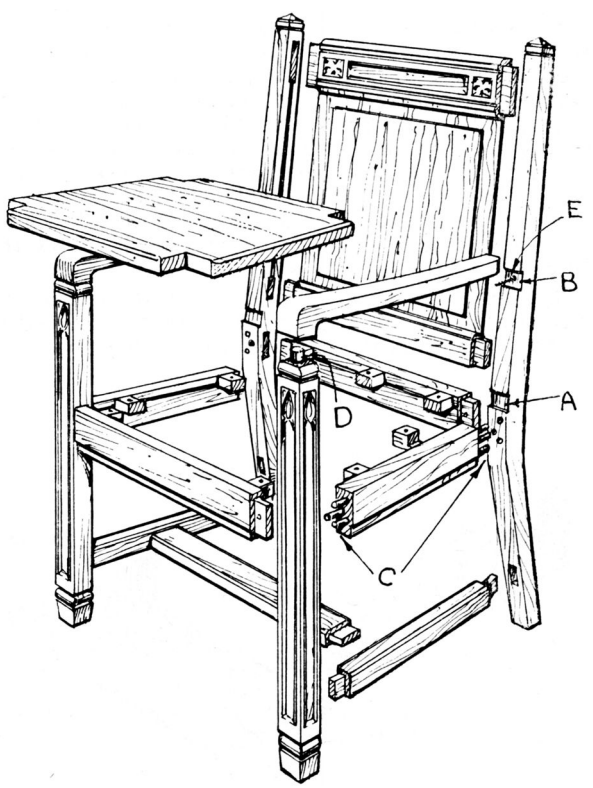
Then one day something jerks us into action and we make some kind of start. The result can be surprising. It had been such a still, small voice, nothing to warn us that here was a hidden urge of our nature clamouring for an outlet. It had not, in fact, clamoured at all. But once released it becomes the strong voice of a pent-up longing seeking fulfilment. It could so easily have been missed altogether and very nearly was, but now, with a marvellous release of energy and satisfaction, it brings new riches, new colour, into our lives.

This kind of experience brings with it the desire to make something really good, an ambition to produce really fine work. At one time, for me who lacked the day-to-day training of the cabinetmaker's workshop, it might have been difficult to keep the flame of enthusiasm alight. But to-day we are much more mobile, especially at holiday time, and going about the country, there are often opportunities for seeing the work of first-class craftsmen displayed in their proper setting, of forming shrewd, observant judgments and gathering a host of new ideas.

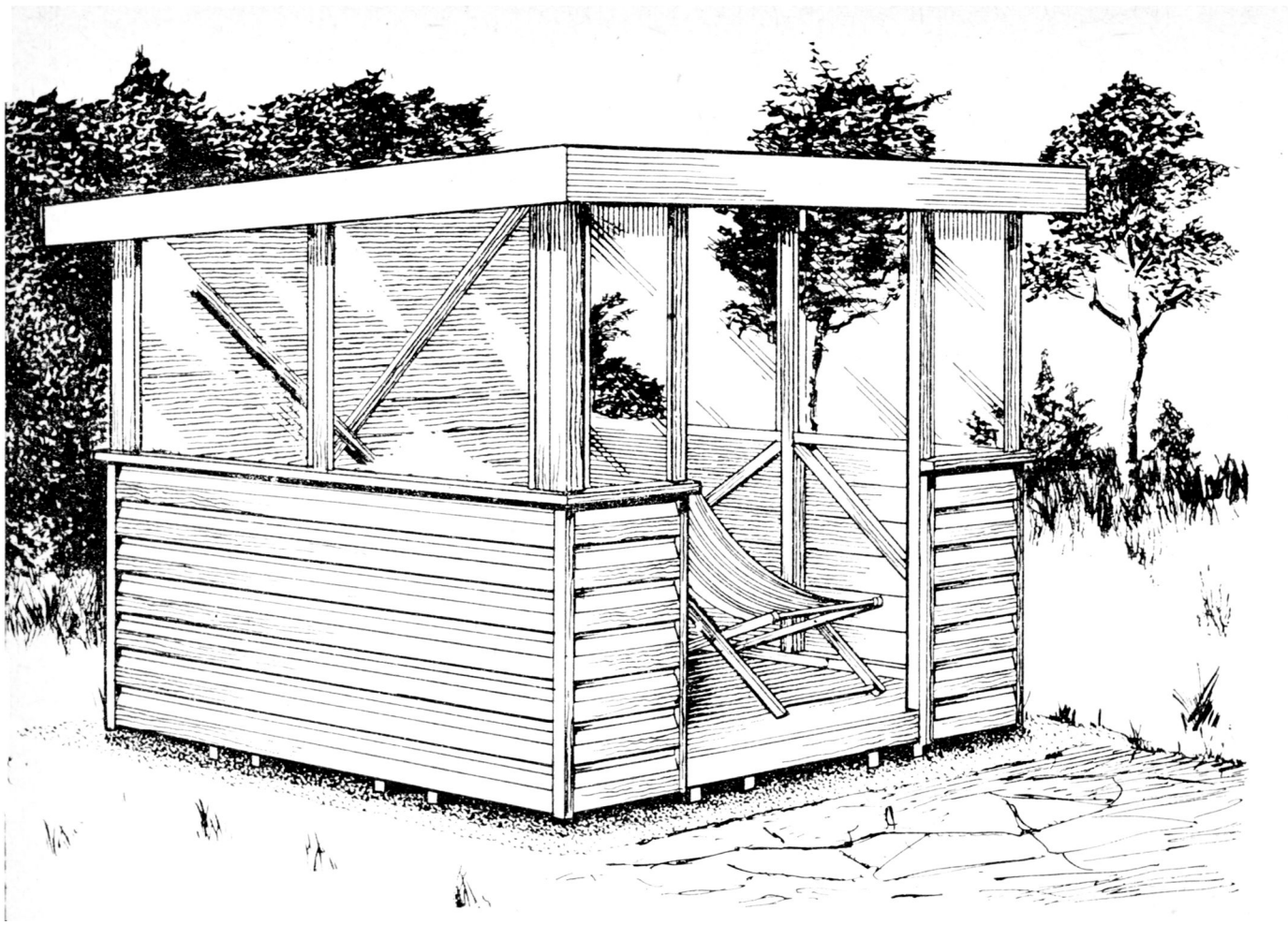
Some of the furniture items may be displayed, large-scale, in rich, large-scale surroundings, but any which especially attract us may be broken down mentally to the elements in their design and so simplified and with suitable proportions be adapted to our own needs, bringing the freshness of a new-old beauty into a modern setting. Even to become acquainted with the best work is stimulating. One cannot then be easily satisfied with one's own.

There are occasions, when preparing to start on a new and ambitious piece of work, one's heart can sometimes fail one. Not perhaps because of any doubts of skill, which may already be proven, but just because we are able to foresee the long weeks, perhaps months of work entailed, as one stage unfolds after another, each needing careful, patient handling. It will be a long time before we come to the final stages, when our beautiful piece will begin to beam upon the eye and we can look forward to every moment of bringing it to its finished perfection.

But if such a dismal mood occurs, we are forgetting all the small hidden things which star the path of every good craftsman: the moment of intense pleasure when the work is going well and, even more, that moment when a difficult problem has been solved and we can murmur: "That's it," as the obstinate piece slips easily into place. That is pure joy.



THE CHARMED CIRCLE



During the early summer months my garden became a battleground. For at least the past 20 years blackbirds had nested in the thorn hedge, but this year a pair of thrushes coveted the spot, and the battle was on. My sympathies, I may say, were entirely with the blackbirds who had probably been born in that hedge and were a friendly, trusting and beautiful young couple. Young Bossy, the male, was a fine, imperious fellow, his orange beak and the orange orbits of his eyes vivid flashes of colour against the glossy black of his plumage. Mabel, as we called his young bride, a sleek, lovely creature, would follow one round the border as tame as any robin. Meet her unexpectedly and she would show no fear but simply stop short with a polite "after you" inclination of the head. It always made me feel I had been waved on by a duchess.

They were building their first nest when calamity came. There were fights, skirmishes, every kind of hostile manoeuvrings as day after day Bossy fought to defend his home and territory. He became more and more battered in the process and in the end the enemy's persistence wore him down.

But not without a final flash of his old spirit. After a particularly savage fight, he was sitting on top of the fence by the thorn hedge, a bundle of sheer exhaustion, barely able to utter an occasional croak of defiance, when the female thrush sidled up to him with an unmistakable air of "You've had it chum."

The weary head turned like lightning and he gave her a vicious peck. With a shriek of rage the lady flew down into the flower border and let out a shrill stream of all the bad language she knew. Making a prodigious effort, Bossy stood up, flicked his tail with a faint return of

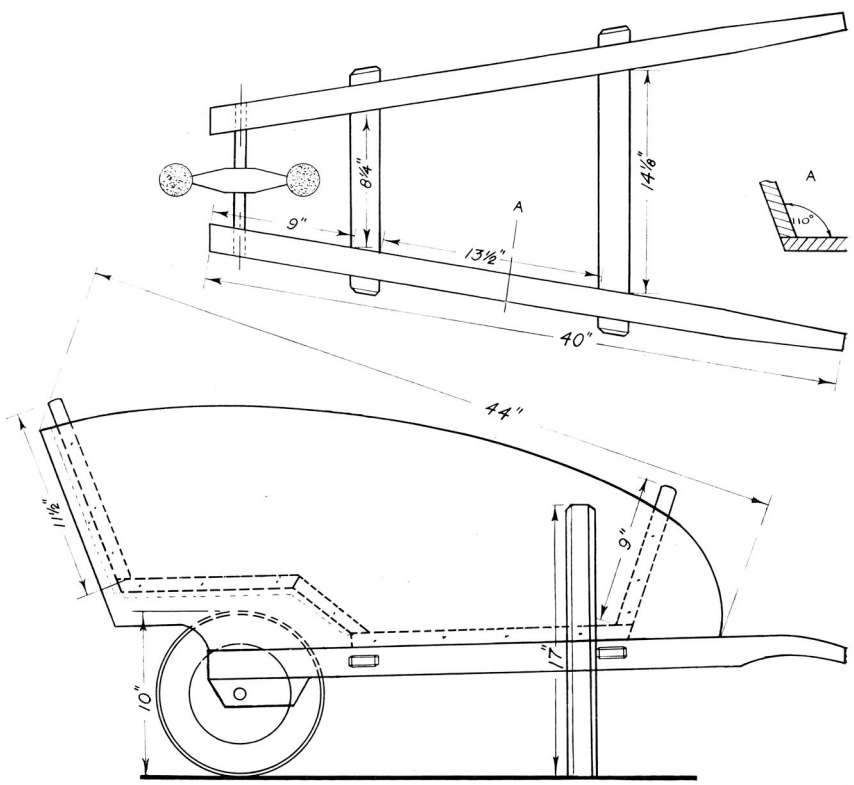
his old, imperious manner and croaked out a few bars of song, repeating them several times in hoarse but manifest glee, before subsiding once more into his misery. But that had done him a power of good.

Nevertheless, the happy days were over. Neither side won decisively. Nests were begun and abandoned as the fortunes of war swayed. In the end the thorn hedge became deserted and the garden a kind of "no man's land" into which neither party could enter without provoking a hostile reaction.

It seems that even creatures with wings must have their one small plot of earth, regardless of their hardier brethren who go winging their ways over the wide spaces of the world when the call comes to them. It makes up their pattern of life and they will fight to preserve it as men fight, wanting the known thing, the familiar thing, leaving the wide spaces of earth and air to those others. It is the way routine closes in on us, circumstances enmesh us, and who can say that for most men, too, it does not make a charmed circle? It can have very narrow confines, it can be deadly and deadening; only it need not. There can be wings in it, too, the wings of the mind, and men, who are creatures of conscious thought and endeavour, betray themselves if they do not learn to fledge them.

Because the issues are stupendous, they make all the difference between living to full capacity and simply continuing to exist. Living to full capacity means working where our true abilities lie and working to develop and extend them. The man of his hands works all the better for bringing his mind to it: the first-class craftsman's work is intelligent work in which skill is enhanced and developed by the living interest he brings to it. The best work may become instinctive and intuitive through years of experience: it never becomes dull. Truly creative work never is dull. It calls to some deep thing in us, answers to some need of our nature. Brings new growth, new harmony into our lives.

Nowadays, in spite of all the resources that are becoming so readily available to the ordinary man, life can be very empty. Whatever our material resources, it is still we ourselves who have to make our lives and we can only do this by using our own creative energies. The biggest, best resource is in ourselves. When we are working with all the skill it is in us to give, we are ploughing a furrow that will enfold living seed and bring good work to fruition. We are preparing a harvest for our later years that will have in it the good things we have found by the way, the living interests that have nourished us, the challenges accepted, the defeats surmounted and turned into triumphs. And if these things lead to more good work, leisured good work full of enjoyment, they will round out and complete that maturity of personality which enables a man to stand sturdily on his own feet and lead his own life still.



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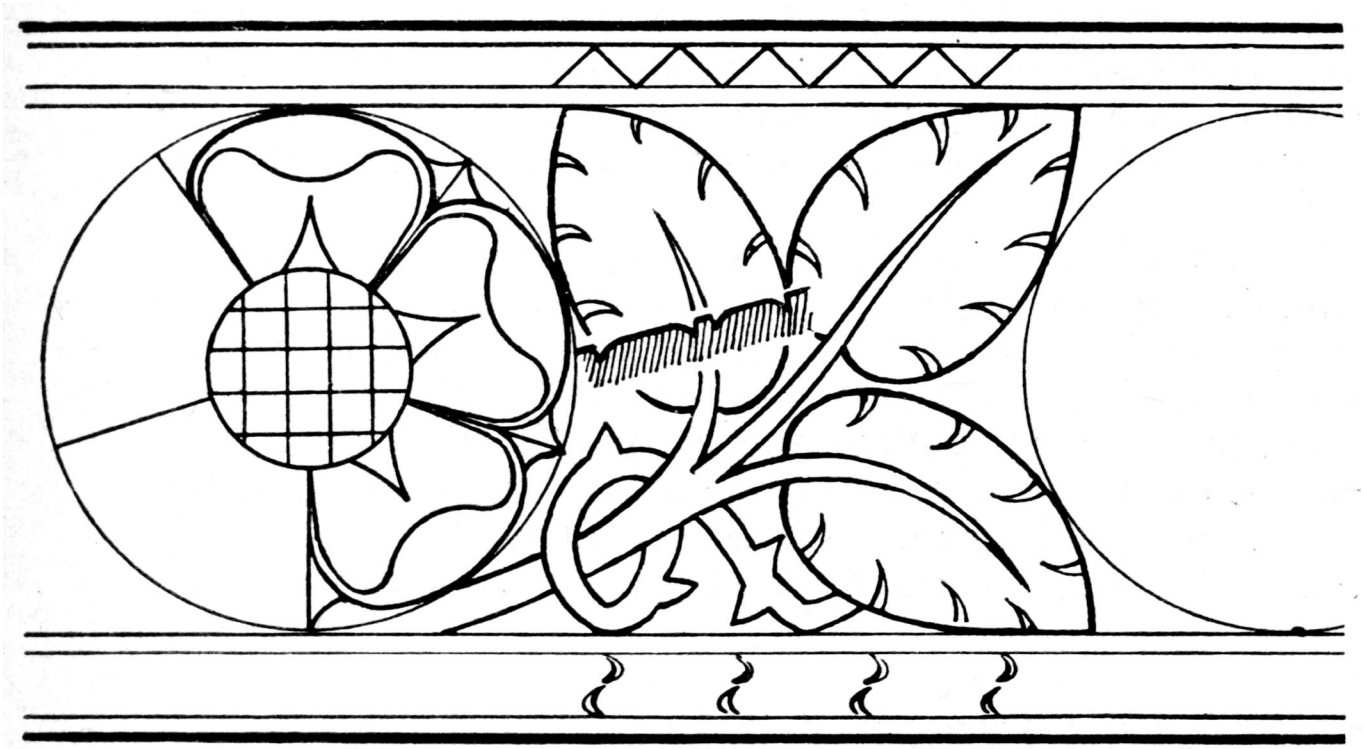
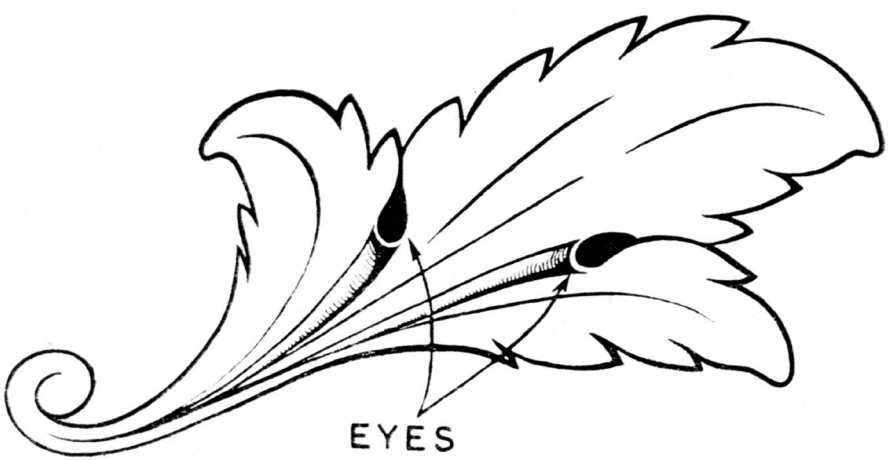


UNTO THIS LAST

There are times when one feels that beauty is receiving almost too much publicity. It is no longer a shy thing, taking one unawares but something that is so dinned at one through the media of books, television, and high-powered advertising, and is made—or seems to be made—so much easier of access by wider travel facilities, that people go further and further afield in search of it.



The trouble is that when beauty is too ideally pictured, the reality may be disillusioning. Ruins picked out with the spirit of the place brooding in an ancient hush upon them, porticoes and colonnades glimmering in virgin whiteness against a blue sky or bluer sea, glimpses of ancient art, of fascinating landscape, how they beckon. But when viewed in the company of a crowd of tourists or with the rush and noise of a modern city swirling about them, or when we find the colonnades not white at all but weatherworn and dingy, and the ancient art subdued by museum surroundings, then some of the magic goes. The beauty which gives the most abiding pleasure is the beauty we have discovered for ourselves. It may have stolen up on us and spoken in a still small voice which we have recognised with a thrill of delight. Or it may have come at us suddenly round the bend of a road or from the brow of a hill with a sense of shock, but always our joy is real and our own.

Some years ago, taking a group of children round the Tate Gallery in London, I was hurrying them through one room remarking that there was nothing

much there, the more interesting pictures were further on, when one child stopped suddenly. "On no, don't go on. There's a lovely picture over in that corner. Look!'

Her quick eyes had discovered the one picture of note the room contained. It was quite small, a boy's head sensitively silhouetted against a dark background, the best thing that John Opie, a fashionable portrait painter of the late eighteenth century, ever did.

We crowded round and the little girl planted herself in front of it and gazed her fill. "It's beautiful," she declared, stoutly and convincingly. "It's the best picture we've seen to-day." To her it would remain a lovely memory long after all the others had been forgotten. She may even have gone back to look at it as soon as she was old enough to take herself to picture galleries. It is the kind of thing we all do with our first loves among the arts. Actually some time afterwards a few of the more outstanding works of British painters in the Tate Collection were transfered to the National Gallery and, if I remember rightly, this picture was among them.

In the end, everything comes round to the person. If we are to be satisfied, we ourselves have to be the doers, the makers of things, even of discoveries, although we may have the wisdom of the centuries to guide us. Every man will not be guided into the same groove, nor see things with the same eyes, and it is well that it should be so, for hence comes the interest and variety of everything to which men set their hands.

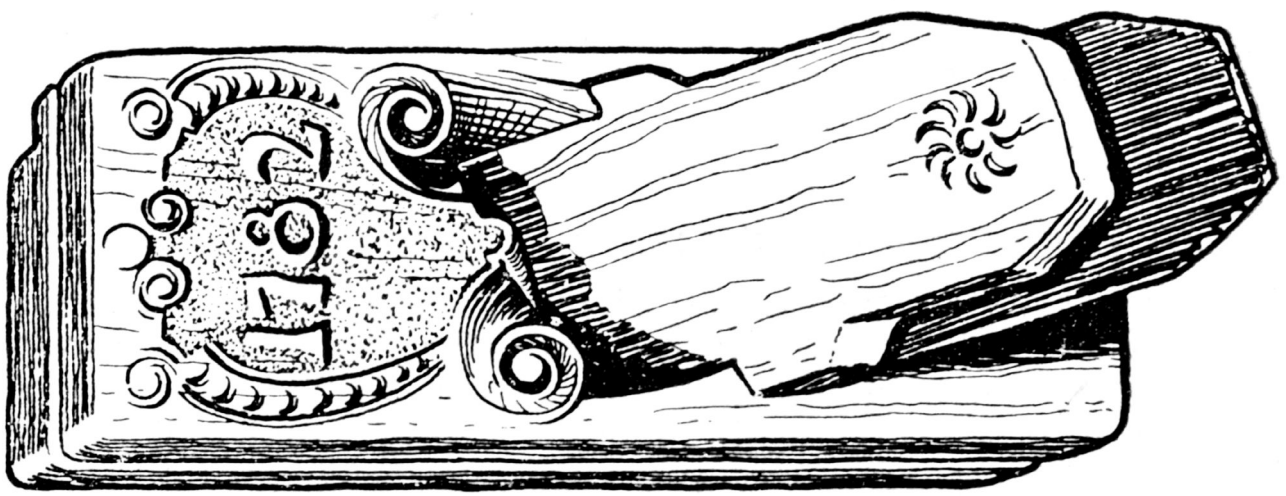
That is the pleasure which lasts, a man's joy in his own handiwork.

Nowadays, with a world panorama dangled enticingly before our eyes, ours, it would seem, for the taking it is easy to overlook the pleasures that are near at hand. First among these is our own power to create and through creation find enjoyment and satisfaction.

There is a painting on a Greek cup, dating back to the fifth century B.C., which is one of the very pleasant things in ancient art. It shows a woodcarver at work, gripping between his knees a pedestal surmounted by a man's bust, the whole being obviously shaped out of one piece of wood. He works busily with his gouge, sitting on a rush-seated stool such as is in common use toady; the adze with which he did the preliminary blocking out is close by and nearer to hand is his chisel. He is working with intense concentration, on his lips the dawn of a smile. He presents the picture of a thoroughly happy man, enjoyment in every line of him. Who the bearded subject of the bust was there is no indication, probably some official or local politician of less interest now than the woodcarver commissioned to commemorate him and who sits enthralled over the job.

That is the pleasure which lasts, a man's joy in his own handiwork. It has remained with us down the ages and is as potent to-day as ever it was. In some directions we have fewer opportunities, in others we have more, for the very fact of increased opportunities to gaze upon beauty is enough to stir into action everyone in whom the creative current runs strong.

Sometimes one feels that much of the architecture of the modern world in all its bleakness and aridity will be regarded with pity and contempt by our descendants in ages remote from us, until they find the small things here and there, the relics of fine furniture, fine carving and the like, which men will have gone on treasuring because true craftsmen made them and kept the instinct for beauty alive.

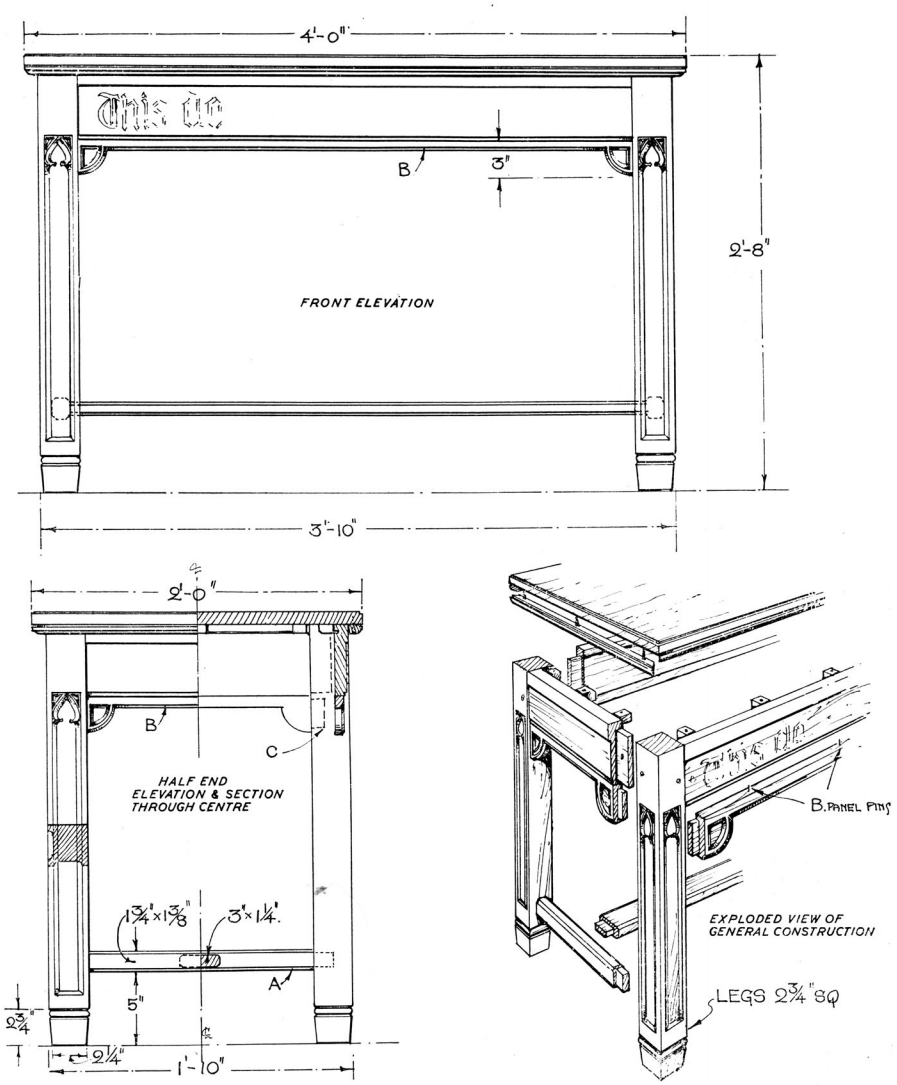


A RIPPLE IN TIME

Talking in millions is getting to be a habit. Politicians do it and Local Councils, architects, builders, developers, industrialists and the new up-and-coming peoples of the world. Scientists do it increasingly and it is these latter, perhaps, who shake us most. For in explaining the immensity of the universe in which we live they compel us to look into space and to encompass in imagination thousands of millions on millions of other worlds, the starlight from them taking some fifty million odd years to reach us. And imagination boggles.

They follow up by saying that mankind in general and ourselves in particular only came into being after countless other millions, so that the whole of human history to date is less than a ripple in time and ourselves, well, ourselves just nowhere at all.

It seems to reduce to utter nonsense the debate which goes on intermittently as to how we should fill our time. Even when a man's prospect of life has risen from the Psalmist's three-score-and-ten to the more generous modern estimate, it is comparatively so very little that one would expect to feel a passionate desire to fill every precious minute to the utmost.



But there it is. Man is a cussed created. He has it in his power to abdicate and let others try to fill his life for him. And sometimes he does. On the other hand, he may be so conscious of a creative urge to do things for himself that he wants to do everything at once. Then somehow things sort themselves out. One things leads to another and in the end a major interest emerges. But first he has, as it were, painted his picture in reverse. He has so busied himself with the background, filling in first that colourful object, then this, that he has never worried about the central figure, just blocks it out while he goes on painting. Then all at once the central figure takes shape and substance. He knows now what he wants to do.

These initial flounderings can widen our range of interests enormously. They are rarely wasted. They are even at times inevitable for those out of touch with any living craft tradition, as are most men in this country to-day, and subject therefore to any chance influence that may come their way. When we have truly found a craft that suits us, be it intellectual, artistic, practical or something, like woodwork, able to combine the elements of each, the creative urge in us has found its normal outlet and with its release we can develop as men and craftsmen.

It is the only sane reply we can make to heady statistics. On earth men may be crazing over their millions, in the depths of the mysterious universe an infinity of

life and movement may be working out its pattern around our home in space. But here am I, a living soul, with gifts, potentialities, a craving to accomplish things, and I will make it my business to explore these, to develop these as the work which comes nearest to my hand, and in doing so I will learn to live.

Woodwork reflects more than any other craft the changing face of history. From the first primitive tribesmen to hollow out the trunks of trees into seaworthy canoes, developing as time passed a fine feeling for line and speed, to the cabinetmaker some thousands of years later having at his finger tips all the technical skill of the workshop, is a long story of progress. It brings us from the forest clearing to civilised life, with written records to help our understanding of the changing fashions, at first sight so inconsequential and arbitrary. We find them ultimately based on some tangible influence, maybe foreign, maybe stemming from a new source of supply or a new technical development, such as the use of veneers. Social custom, fashions in dress, have all played a part. Today the main influence is that of the machine, standardising, simplifying, with parts designed for easy assembly, always excepting the few private workshops which are able to maintain their own patterns. But even these to some extent have to conform, for such is the magnetism of fashion that a man who needs to sell his goods cannot afford to stray from it too far.

But here the man who works at a woodcraft for its own sake, because he loves the skill of it, and the master of it, can be his own arbiter. He has made this way of creative expression his own and equally his own will be the form his work takes. If he wants to reflect the current fashion well and good, the one thing he will not reflect is the machine. Everything he handles will bear the stamp of his own individuality, his personal preferences will set their seal on every part of the work, just as every problem solved will set its own seal upon him. For so life acts and reacts upon us when we get down to the job and so will our days appear full and generous and, in intensity of living, not so short after all.

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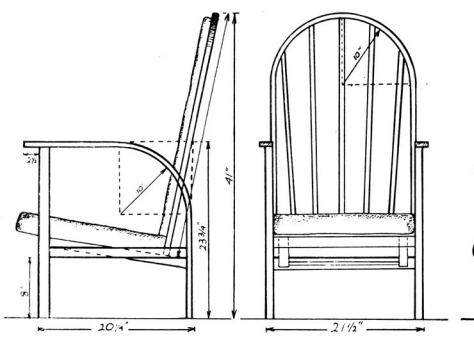


FIG. 3. SIDE AND FRONT ELEVATIONS OF LARGE CHAIR

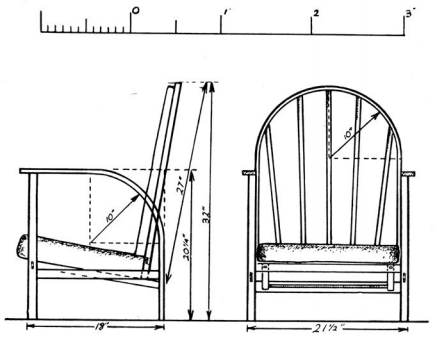


FIG. 4. ELEVATIONS OF SMALL CHAIR

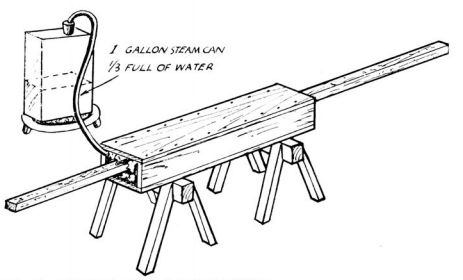


FIG. 5. HOME-MADE STEAM CHEST

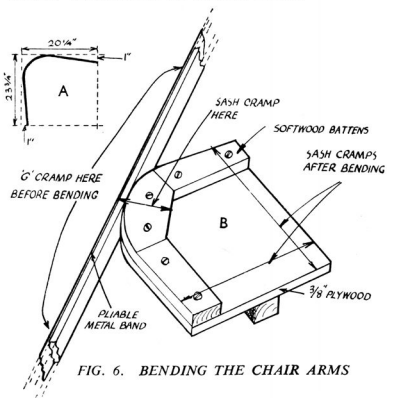


FIG. 6. BENDING THE CHAIR ARMS

FIG. 7 (below). HOW BACK HOOPS ARE BENT

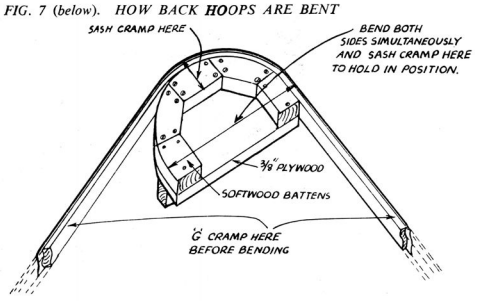
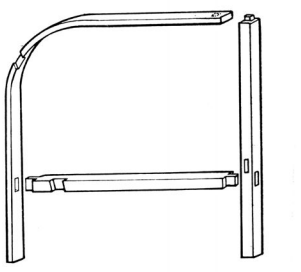


FIG. 8 (below). EXPLODED VIEW OF ARMS

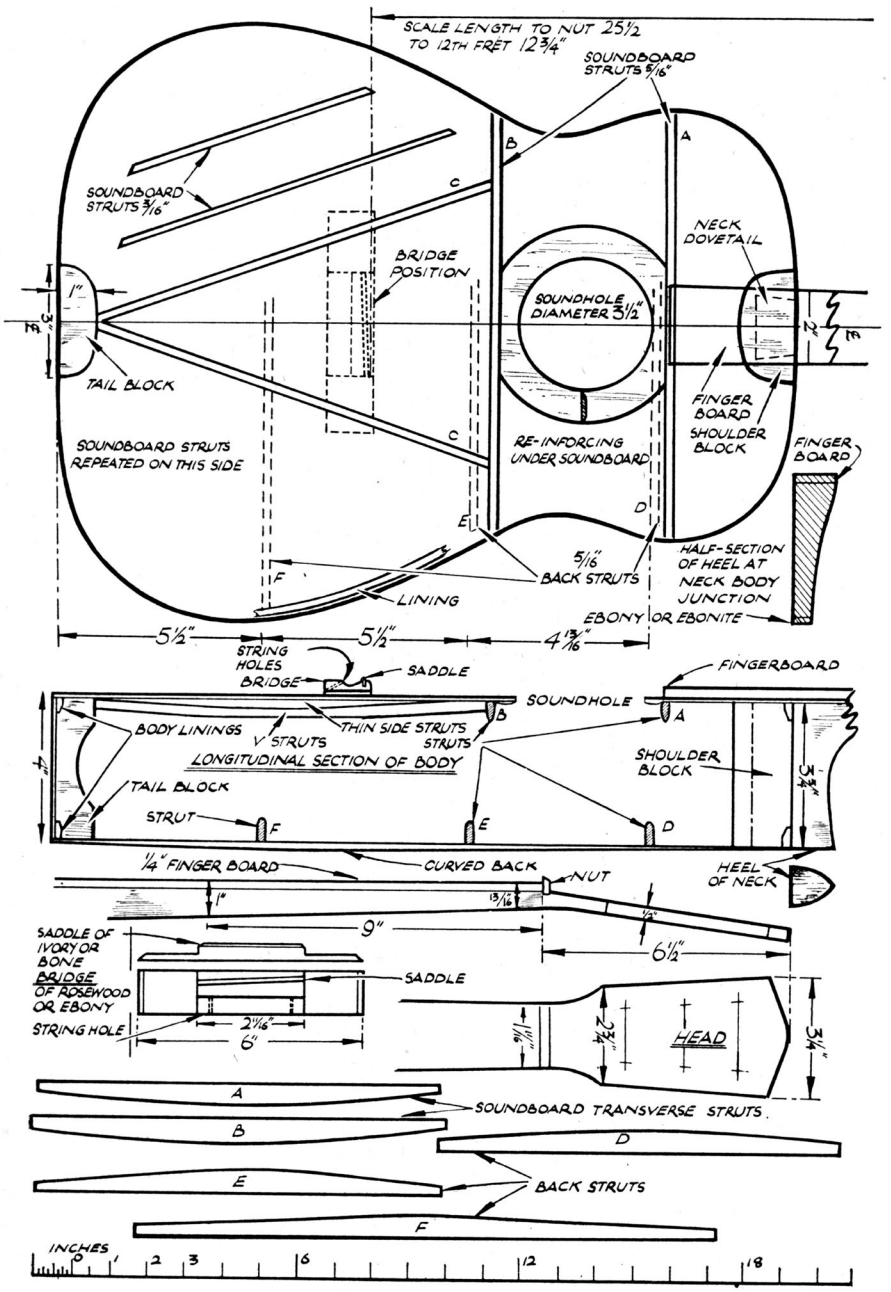


FOOTHOLD

Years ago I used to have a recurring nightmare. It was always set in the same place, a highly ornate Eastern building, like a great mosque or church, aglitter with gold and mosaic. And I would be lost, wandering through endless galleries, backstage as it were, until suddenly—I never knew quite how—I would be precipitated into the interior. But always my feet would find a ledge, my fingers some sort of tenuous hold, and there I would be, spreadeagled against the mosaic wall, clinging on for dear life. Then, oh so gingerly, I would manage to edge my way along to safety, as I thought, till with true nightmarish horror, the edge came to an end.

There would be a moment of petrifying fright, then complete and utter darkness. I must somehow have been wafted across the gap: I never knew how. Only that when I got my wits back I was stumbling down a twisting stair, such as one finds in the heart of a mediaeval tower, still in the dark but convinced that at the bottom I should emerge into the air and sunlight again. At which point I always woke up.

As one with no head for heights I did pretty well on that ledge, while it lasted. There is a good deal of reassurance in a ledge. The touch of a concrete thing under one's hand or foot makes all the difference. One may be working from an eminence no more giddy than a stepladder, but given an awkward job and an awkward moment a forward-reaching hand or foothold does much to preserve the balance of nerves and body.



There is a sense in which Christmas offers us just that. The true origin of Christmas becomes more and more lost to sight as time goes on, in the eyes of all but Christians, and even they are drawn, willy nilly, into the rather hectic, commercialised affair it has become. Nevertheless, the spirit of peace and goodwill does still shine through and somehow our foothold in life seems to become for the moment at least a little more secure because of it.

We rely more than we know upon the little things, the kindness of our friends, our memories. It is so easy during months of silence to let small clouds of imagined grievances or trivial circumstances of daily life, with small touch upon small touch putting us back into the picture, until the love which was sleeping stirs again and warms our

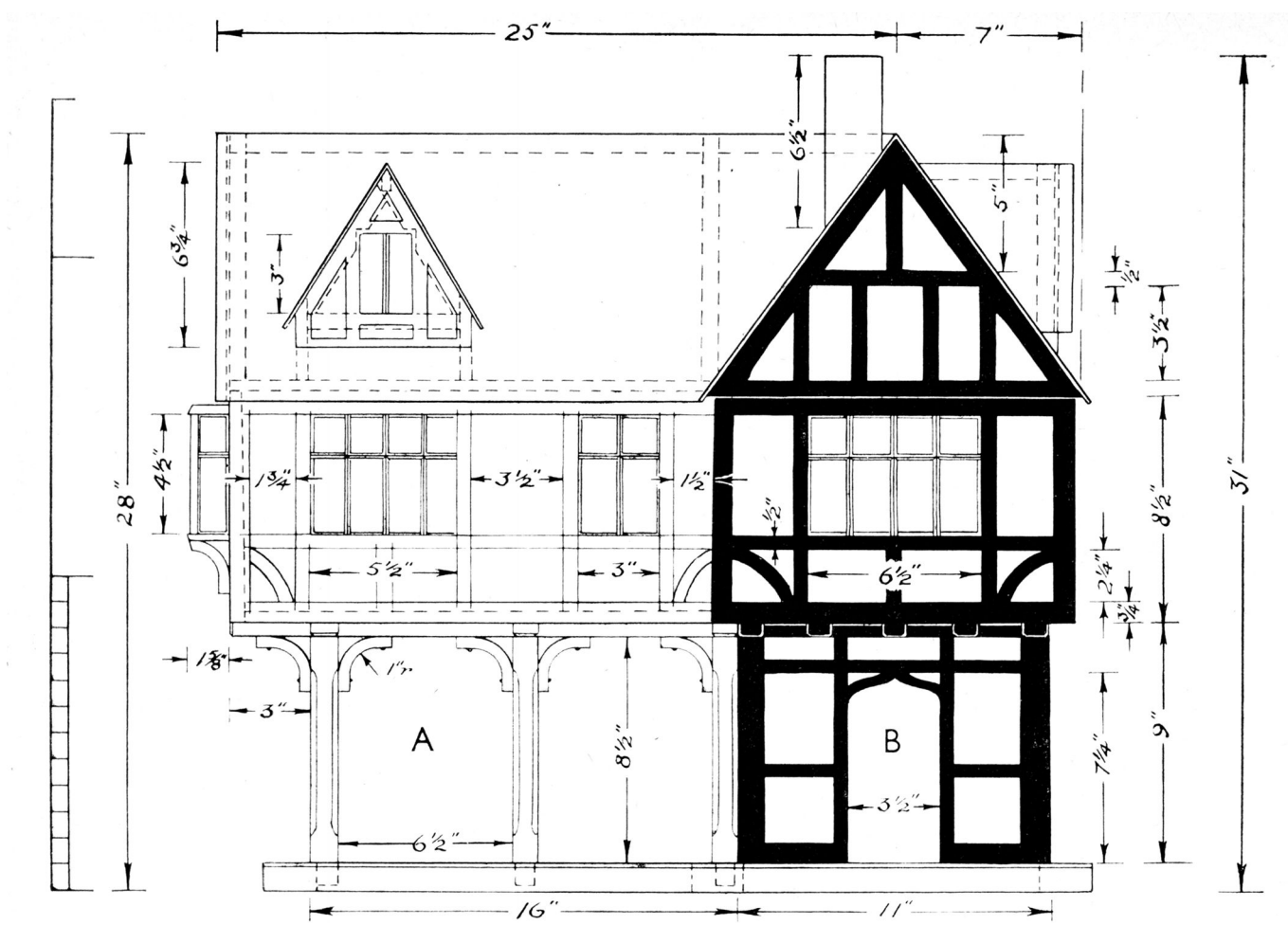
hearts once more.

Then the presents! The best of them so kindly and thoughtful, the worst of them good for a chuckle at least, for we all know what a problem present finding can be, and doesn't this one just shout it aloud?

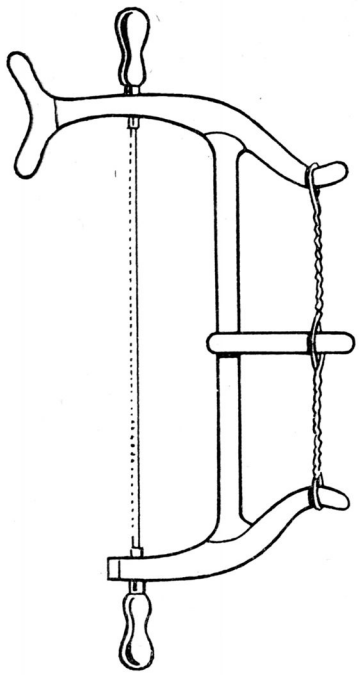
The reassurance that certain values still remain steadfast, that is the message of this Christmas as it was of the first, and it helps us to keep our balance and our sense of personal peace in a rapidly changing world.

Among the things which do not fundamentally change one can rate the woodworkers' craft. It is essentially a kindly craft, dealing with a material which is in itself kindly and linked with growing things. To the craftsman it represents his own foothold on reality, in a small way, perhaps, if he is working alone, but none the less vital. So much in our world is based upon chemical products, scientific formulae, synthetic substances and the like, that the value of real things is apt to be lost to sight. And yet to the individual they are the most important of all. A man's own skill, his own creative power, are of more concern to him as a person than anything else in the world. They help him to live more fully, more completely, more sanely. They help him to live as man with a man's challenging interest in a job to be done, in a thing to be made. They help him to find himself and to be himself, for in expending his powers he develops them and finds out what he can do. And there need be no end to the finding out. We are strange creatures, knowing so little really about ourselves, except by doing.

Craftsmanship provides the reassuring touch a man needs. One's view of life is the steadier when one's hands are ready with dependable skill. The pleasure which comes from using them is the more abiding because it is not an easy pleasure, but the product of slow growth and a patience which sets its mark upon a man. The pride and satisfaction which derive from a sense of achievement are like none other. If, at times, they make us just a bit puffed up we can always bring ourselves down to ground level by keeping a watchful eye on first-class work whereever we can find it. The comparison is always informative and challenging and, if we come out of it pretty well, then we really have got something to be proud about.

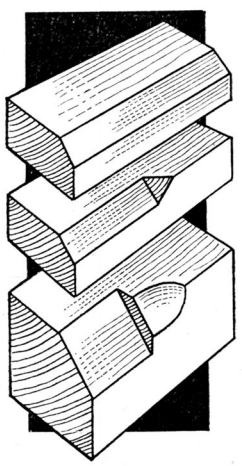


chairmaker's saw. Also known as Betty saw. Although used mostly by chair-makers, this saw is useful for dealing with large shapes in cabinet work. It is a bow-saw, but, unlike the latter, is used vertically, the timber being cramped down on the bench and projecting over the edge sufficiently for clearance. The longer top arm is held by the right hand, and the vertical bar with the left hand. The blade is ½ in. to ⅝ in. wide, and will cut medium curves in thick wood.

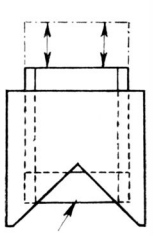


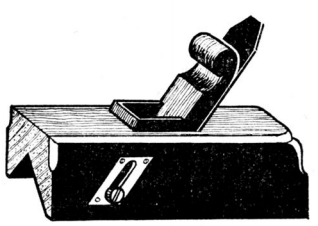
chaise longue. A low reclining couch, sometimes with wheels at one end for easy moving.

chamfer. An angle planed at an edge. Its purpose is chiefly to lighten the appearance and, in the case of wagons and other vehicles, to reduce weight. Frequently the chamfer is stopped at one or both ends, the stop being fashioned in various decorative ways. A distinction sometimes made between bevel and chamfer is that the latter is a small flat surface worked at an edge as shown in the illustration, whereas a bevel is a sloping edge running across the entire thickness of the wood.



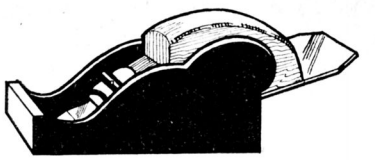
chamfer plane. A separate adjustable sole is incorporated, the position of which controls the depth of the chamfer. The plane is seldom seen today.





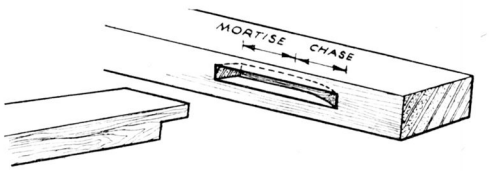
chaplash. (*Artocarpus chaplasha.*) East Indian wood, yellowish brown in colour, 32 lb. General utility wood.

chariot plane. Small metal plane with cutter near to front of sole. Will work up close to a stop. Cutter usually 1¼ in. Almost obsolete today.



Charnley Forest oilstone. A natural stone found in the Midlands. Gives fine edge but is slow cutting. Seldom used today.

chase mortise. A joint used when a member has to be fixed between two pieces which are already in position. At the side of the mortise is a slot or chase which enables the stub-tenon to be pushed sideways. The joint at the other end of the member is a normal stub-mortise and tenon.



chatter. Term applied to the digging-in action of a plane, usually caused by the cutter being ground at too low an angle, by its being at too high a pitch, or by not bedding properly on the frog. The cutting edge is bent back and downwards, flies up again, and so on, resulting in a series of unsightly marks across the wood. In a circular saw it refers to the noise set up when a piece of bent wood is being sawn hollow-side downwards.

check. A term sometimes used for a rebate. Also refers to a split along the length of a board, generally across the annual rings. Often occurs during seasoning.

cheek. A term applied to the sides of a tenon, or to the pieces sawn away in cutting the tenon. Sometimes also used for the sides of a mortise. It has also more general applications in various trades.

chenchen. (*See antiaris.*)

cherry, African. (*See makoré.*)

cherry. (European *Prunus avium*, American *Prunus serotina.*) Reddish colour, fairly hard, 33-45 lb. Used in chair-making, brush backs, etc., but seldom available.

chestnut, sweet. (*Castanea sativa.*) Similar in colour and grain to oak, but has no silver grain. Is easily worked and holds glue well. Weight 35 lb.

cheval mirror. A tall mirror giving a full-length view and supported on a frame. It occupies little floor space. An average size for mirror is 4 ft. by 18 in., this being so hung that the top mirrors have now largely been superseded by frameless glasses clipped to a wood back. There are many styles for standards, these being connected by cross rails and furnished with splayed feet or with a plinth set on toes. Position for pivoting is just above the centre line of glass.