Our Home Department

A Lesson in Practical Leather Work.

Leather is a delightful material to work with, and any boy or girl who is able to use ordinary tools and has the patience to work slowly and carefully can make various attractive and useful articles. One of the best qualities of leather is its durability—things made from it do not require to be wrapped in tissue paper and packed away to "keep them nice," and on this account articles selected to be made should be such as have to stand hard wear, desk pads, pillows, bags of various styles, and all sorts of little every-day things—like pencil cases, tag holders, etc.—which may be made from the scraps left from the larger work. The photographic illustrations show some articles made by a class of little boys in a Saturday Industrial School carried on by one of the large churches in New York city. Besides doing leather work, they repaired all the hymn books that were out of order in the church. The supply of money for leather was limited, so that every scrap had to be used, and in some instances the articles made are not quite so good in design as they might have been if made of larger pieces. The bags are designed by the boys, and are intended for various uses, some of them being for their own supplies of marbles, others for shopping bags and button bags for their mothers. The most interesting articles made were moccasins, perhaps because these seem to exemplify one of the most natural uses of leather, for footwear. Moccasins are comfortable for indoor wear, and are very useful inside of rubber boots.

For almost all the things in the photographs sheep-skin is suitable. It is not expensive, costing from seventy-five cents to one dollar twenty-five cents a skin; it is soft and easily handled, and keeps its color well, although the tan and brown shades are more lasting than the blues and greens. Red is quite satisfactory. The style of skin called velvet or ooz finish, such as is sometimes used for pyrography work, can usually be obtained at any fancy goods store, if no leather store is at hand. It is used velvety side out.

Tools such as are found in every household, a two-foot rule, hard pencil, eraser, pair of dividers, sharp knife and an awl are nearly all that are necessary. To these may be added a harness-punch, and, if possible, a wheel-punch like the one in the sketch, which makes holes of different sizes. A bone folder may be whittled out of a small ivory paper knife to the shape shown in illustration, which also shows the other tools required. A sharp potato knife, costing ten or fifteen cents, is good enough.

A "skin," as the piece of leather is called, conforms somewhat to the form of the animal, and the part along the back-bone is the thinnest. The work should be planned so that no strain comes on this part.

Suppose we begin with a pair of moccasins; similar to those made by the Maine Indians. These will take one end of the skin, and the remaining part will make a good-sized bag. The moccasins are made in two pieces, a tongue and a larger piece which forms the sole, the sides and the toe. In order to make a pattern, take a piece of manila paper and plant the stockinged foot on it as in the sketch, and draw around it. Then draw a straight line across the heel, and a curving line around the toe, connecting these with straight lines for the sides. The curving line for the toe
SMALL LEATHER ARTICLES, ALL MADE BY A
CLASS OF LITTLE CHILDREN IN A NEW
YORK PRACTICAL INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL.
IF DIRECTIONS GIVEN IN THIS ARTICLE ARE CAREFULLY FOLLOWED, THE MOST FINISHED LEATHER WORK CAN BE EXECUTED BY LITTLE CHILDREN.
The sketch which follows those of the moccasins illustrates two methods of cutting thongs. Cut two thongs one-fourth inch wide and one yard long. In the sewing, if necessary, holes may be punched with an awl to allow the needle to go through easily. When the thongs are ready, holes should be made in the form of vertical slits, one-fourth of an inch from the top, to allow the thongs to lace through. The awl may be necessary. The slits should be one-fourth inch long and arranged in pairs; the two slits one-fourth of an inch from each other, and each pair one inch from the next pair. This proportion may be varied according to taste. Sometimes the moccasin is cut extra deep, so that the top may be turned down and fringed, but this is too elaborate a style for ordinary wear. The simple styles shown in the photograph and sketches will be found more satisfactory. They are exceedingly restful to the foot, as there are no seams except on the top of the foot.

After the moccasins are finished, a bag may be made from the leather that is left. Two straight oblongs, say, eight by ten inches, laced around with thongs, with a leather double draw string an inch from the top, make a good shopping bag. If desired, round bags may be made for opera glasses, and small button and marble bags may also be made round. In general, the simpler the form the better the bag will be.
look, as the beauty of the work really depends on the color and texture of the leather, rather than on elaborate forms. It is well worth while to plan carefully a style of bag that is suitable for the use to which it is to be put.

The bags in the photograph may give some suggestions. When the general style is decided on, take a piece of paper, fold it in the middle, and cut a pattern. Open it out, and see how it will look gathered in a little at the top, as the bag must be when the draw strings are in. When a good design is obtained baste the pattern on the leather and cut it out very carefully. Cut the other side, and baste the two together. If they do not exactly match, trim off the extra part. To punch the bag evenly it may be necessary to mark off points with the dividers one-half inch apart and one-fourth inch from the edge. Cut plenty of good long thongs—three-sixteenths of an inch is a good size; splicing them wherever necessary with overlapping ends as shown in the illustration. Sew these ends firmly with waxed thread or silk, also when you begin to lace, sew the knot at the top inside the bag. Cut the thong pointed, and thread it into a tape needle, and the lacing will go much more rapidly. Cut two thongs for the top draw strings at least one-fourth inch wide and three-fourths of a yard long. One of these goes all around the bag, starting at the right hand side, and the two ends are knotted, about six inches from the bag. The other starts from the left side, going over where the first went under and the two ends are tied at that side, so an even pressure pulls the bag close. These draw strings should be about an inch from the top of the bag.

After the moccasins and bag are finished, the making of a sofa pillow will be found easy, the only advance step being the handling of large pieces of leather. One very large skin generally makes a pillow, with a little patience in piecing the thongs. The easiest way to measure the leather is to use a large carpenter’s or dressmaker’s square. When the two pieces are cut, baste them together all around near the edge, set the dividers to one-half inch, and mark points all around a quarter of an inch from the edge. Punch each of these points, and lace the thongs through these holes, either over and over or back stitch, around three sides. Put in the pillow, and then lace the other side. If it is not desirable to go to the expense of a down pillow, make a tick of the right size to fit in the leather cover and stuff it with hay or excelsior.

In using the pieces that are left try to find really good designs. The tag-holders, whisk broom case, etc., shown in the photographs were made by boys who had to use very small pieces of leather, and besides had seen very little Indian work. Nowadays almost any boy or girl can see good Indian work, or at least good pictures of it, and the various tobacco pouches, etc., used by the Indians, are often of excellent design, also the small wallets which may be used for money. A few beads may be used for decoration, but not too many of them, as the large beads are rather coarse and clumsy looking, and the small ones cannot be put on well by an amateur. In all these little things it is necessary to have the pieces thoroughly sewed together, as well as in marble bags, which, being intended to hold heavy objects, should be sewed around the second time, and made with extra heavy draw strings.

Every little scrap, even an inch across, may be utilized. A penwiper may be made of three concentric circles, one an inch in diameter, one two inches, and one three. These pieces are piled so the centers exactly coincide, and two holes are punched, a thong going down.
through one hole and up through the other and tied.

Little notebooks, pencil holders, fountain pen holders, and many other useful things may be made from small pieces. A boy or girl who has an Indian corner or den can make a leather frame for the post card portrait of an Indian chief, lacing the frame with thongs decorated with beads, which, while adding little to the beauty of bags or other useful articles, are entirely in keeping in such a place as this.

The desk pad illustrated is a little more difficult than the moccasins and pillows, as it requires very accurate measurement. Thin leather is needed for it, a small skin of morocco being the best. Red is always pretty in morocco. The desk in which the pad is to be used must be measured, so as to make the pad a little smaller; a good size is about fifteen by twenty-two inches. It is necessary to have a piece of very heavy book-board which will not warp for the foundation. This should be cut to size by a bookbinder, and ought not to cost more than ten or fifteen cents. Measure two inches from each corner on this, and between these points, along the two ends and the two sides, paste an inch wide strip of the morocco as a kind of binding. Use strong flour paste, put on one strip at a time and rub it down well with the flat side of the bone folder. When these strips are all pasted on put the board to press under a pile of heavy books or in a letter press. The corners are of leather lined with a small piece of heavy manila paper—what is called tag paper is the best. Make a square corner on the manila paper, and mark points on the sides of this corner four inches from it. Connect these points, and cut out the paper. Cut three other pieces like it.

To make the leather corners, cut out
a paper pattern six inches on a side, instead of four and cut the corners off as shown in the sketch. Cut four pieces of leather, and on each one paste a manila lining. Press these until they are perfectly dry. With a very sharp knife held flat pare off the edges so as to make them very thin. A regular leather paring knife is of course the best for this, but with care a small sharp potato knife may be used, as the leather is thin. Then turn the longest edge of leather back on the corner and paste it in place and press it again.

The corners are now ready to put on the pad. They should first be pasted up to the manila lining, and left till the paste is well soaked in. One should be put on at a time, with a square cornered card slipped in on the right side to hold the leather up so that, when dry, a blotter may be substituted for this card, which of course leaves a space when removed. When the corners are on, and well rubbed down with the bone folder, the fold of leather may be cut away as shown in the sketch, leaving just enough to lap over a little. The outer edge of the corner may also be cut away with a sharp knife. The pad may then be pressed again, and when it is perfectly dry, covered up to the binding edges on both sides with a thick piece of brown paper cut to fit. If both sides are covered with the same paper the pad will not warp. The blotter may then be put in. The binding edge should show about an eighth of an inch outside of the blotter, as illustrated in the photograph.

MERTICE McCRAE BUCK.