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Ashbee's own copy, printed at the Essex House Press, 1906. Bought at his sale, 1942.
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ON THE NEED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COUNTRY SCHOOLS OF ARTS & CRAFTS.



NE of the ways of attaining once again to that higher standard of work and life in country crafts at which many of us are aiming in these days, is the establishment of country schools of art and craft; & the object of this paper is to indicate what should be their purpose and service for the community, and what they should mean for us in England in

our present state of development. I postulate country, not town, conditions—that is to say, the conditions of any community where the population does not exceed from 4,000 to 5,000 souls—and the school I have in mind should be possible in villages where the population is not less than 500. Where there is energy & earnestness and a little intelligent enthusiasm on the part of resident landlord or parson it can be carried on in a humbler form with even smaller numbers.

Now, while I would look at such a school first from the point of view of the producer, & in more particular detail from that of the builder and his allied crafts, its service must not be for the producer alone. The net must be spread for the whole village. The art we have by modern education to find is, as it always has been, the art of life; and to build well or to do anything else well, means first and foremost that we must well live. All that I have said in other writings of mine as to craftsmanship, tradition, the failure of industrialism, the need

*The Art in
Modern
Education is
the Art of
Life*

for the sense of beauty as a recognised factor in life once again, points to the desirability of instituting such schools. We need give ourselves no concern as to the number of their pupils. If the population of our village be growing, tending toward the town, there will be the more scope for classification of students and variety of subjects. If the place be small, there will be the morescope for the human quality which made for the greatness and sweetness of old work.

*The Three
Conditions of
a Rightly
Educated
Life*

Often has it been insisted that all social reconstruction, like the serpent devouring its own tail, begins and ends with education. We cannot give good education until we have citizens sufficiently intelligent to see the need of it: we cannot attain to a high ideal of citizenship until we educate. Or, looking at the circle from the other side, we cannot give work to the unemployed because he is unemployable; he is unemployable because we have never rightly educated him to work. Education and workshop reconstruction must proceed side by side. Now there are three conditions for a well educated life, and they are these—health, joyousness or interest in our work, and good citizenship. They are not unlike the tests by which we judge a good piece of work when we come across it; and it is curious to observe how the Christian *morale* is one and the same, whether we apply it to the things we make or to the men that make the things.

It will be seen that I rule out religion. I do so because I regard it as the basis of all education. No educated life is possible without it. But we have to be sure ourselves what we mean by it. Among my friends I count members of the Church of England, the Church of Rome, a dozen different English sects, Agnostics, Unitarians, Positivists, German Lutherans, Scotch Calvinists, Mahometans, and Japanese. I find they all have definite views on varying doctrinal questions, but that, when they make each their own reservation upon them, there are certain fundamentals in education on which they agree. "I find nothing in Christianity," a Japanese educationalist once

said to me, "that conflicts with Bushido." If then we rule out doctrinal religion, I think all those of us who are educationalists can say with the Japanese: "I find nothing in Christianity that conflicts with the right education of the citizen." But we must set aside our own pitiful squabbles as to whether the egg should be eaten from the big or the narrow end.

Now the assumption upon which rests our judgment of the old workmanship of the past is perhaps a faulty assumption, but it is this—that the Christian *morale* which once underlay the organisation of the workshop was sound. That *morale* we have lost. On the hypothesis, then, that its practical reintroduction into industry, and more particularly the industry of building, is not only a thing to be aimed at, but a means towards the attainment of some of the things I would like to plead for, let us ask ourselves from the point of view of the art of building and the village crafts what should our objective be.

*The Christian
Morale
in the Reor-
ganisation
of the
Workshop*

I would plead for good country building as the expression of practical needs in life. I would plead for the human quality in it and for the checking and limitation of waste, the waste particularly of machine production. I would plead for tradition, for its reverent regard in old work, and its carrying on into the new work we have yet to do. I would plead for an awakened understanding among landlords & country builders of these questions that affect the craft, and for an intelligent examination of their economic significance. And, finally, I would plead for a definite study of the right and wrong in machine production—for the treatment of the machine as an ethical, not merely an economic, problem.

To bring all this about will take a long time and means much work in other lines of life besides building, but it will come; and one of the ways of bringing it about is by the formation of schools of art and craft in country districts—the secondary as distinct from the elementary school developed in a sane, comprehensive and practical manner.

The Necessity of the Secondary School under Modern Industrial Conditions

Its Function in the Village and in Reference to Building

Now it is not only possible to establish such schools of arts and crafts in most country districts, but it is educationally sound and serviceable. We cannot reconstruct the old workshop system, but we can adapt what remains of it to modern conditions and use it as part of our educational material to work upon. In every place of over 500 inhabitants there is almost certainly a blacksmith, a builder, a carpenter, perhaps a plumber, perhaps a few other crafts; there are certainly labourers & boys of no training; there are constant repairs and object lessons in construction to hand; there are long winter evenings unemployed. It should be the object of our village schools of craft to get hold of these fellows, to observe these local needs, to employ these vacant hours. The newer developments of our Educational legislation make the work of constructive experiment in villages much easier; and the doing of this sort of work will more help to keep people on the land than all the theories, will more help to improve & cheapen our building than all the architects. It will do something else too. It will help to pick up again the broken threads of building tradition. Terrible it is to observe how, owing to the disintegrating forces of machinery, craft after craft has been driven out of the villages, not necessarily to be destroyed, but to be swept up & centralised in the factories of large towns. Thus simple pieces of plumbing, portions of smith's work, the leading of casements, joinery framing, indeed numberless things about a building that one could mention are now no longer practised in English villages at all: they have died out. If they are wanted they have to be sent for from afar. In my district of the Cotswolds, where the tradition of centuries has been to lead light the beautiful stone work, it was, until we revived the industry, practically impossible to get lead glazing done, and when we needed it we sent the dimensions up to an "art factory" in Birmingham; or if we could not, as impoverished landlords, small shopkeepers or cottagers, afford that, we had to do worse — we made shift with stock patterns formed of zinc bars,

and produced also in a factory, without even the "art" as a solatium.

Thus do we ruin what is left of our building tradition, and at the same time waste what we have of the good human stuff in our villages—the stock that would only be too willing, if given the opportunity, to be allowed to work at such simple crafts once again.

I am sanguine enough to believe that this will not continue. For human reasons, if for none another, it must not be allowed to continue. We have got to a point in the development of the history of machinery in this country where, as I have insisted, it is quite possible for us to say that development in one direction is right, in another wrong. The problem of machinery has become an ethical one, and as such must be dealt with in our educational, in our social legislation. When once the County Councils are sufficiently enlightened to see this, & the county ratepayers sufficiently far-sighted to appreciate the need of spending more money in order to keep the people out of the towns, it is likely that great reforms may ensue. To the craft of building in our villages, this problem of determining the limitations of machinery is vital.

What then is to be the plan upon which we are to build up our educational work, our country school of arts and crafts—based, as it should be, upon the elementary school system?

I think we should set before ourselves a four-fold objective, and it is this. We should, in the first place, get into direct touch with local wants. We should, in the second place, be frankly experimental, always trying something new and testing ever the changing value of old methods. We should, thirdly, teach citizenship, making this a definite end and giving all our practical & technical subjects a bearing upon it. We should, fourthly, make the last object of our study the ethics of production.

☞ To take the first: By getting into touch with local wants, I do not alone mean what these wants appear to those in power—the kindly and benevolent landlords who reside upon their

*The Four
Objectives
of a School
of Arts and
Crafts*

1. *To get into Touch with Local Wants* estates, the humdrum parsons, the often excessively conservative farmers, who for the time being have the future of our country districts in hand. Still less do I mean what his wants appear to be to the labourer. Beyond an immediate increase in his weekly wage, the latter poor fellow does not know what he wants ; and it is affectation to pretend that we shall get from him a far-seeing constructive policy in education. When you are supporting a family on 12s. a week it requires every bit of your brain to do it well.

To discover the local wants we must examine closely what are the actual social conditions. What do the people live on? what do they earn? what land have they that they can till? what is the family budget? what social ramifications are there with other grades of life? is there a carpenter cousin, a sailor brother, a colonist away? We must look at the boys standing at the street corners, and ask why they stand there and what we can do to stop it. We must ask at the same time why so many fields are covered with thistles, & why the roofs of so many cottages are falling in. Any conscientious examination of local wants will quickly reveal what they are; and we shall then be able to discriminate the particular wants of certain districts: the craft, the trade, the special wants of farmer, labourer, carpenter, builder, plumber and so forth, and the general wants that go to building up character and fitness, and that apply to all alike.

Now whether they be special or whether they be general, these wants will vary in all places. They will vary with the standard of intelligence and the occupation of the people in each case; but we shall find that in most places there is a percentage of the population who are badly fed, badly clad, badly housed, and as far as secondary education goes, not taught at all. We shall find that the agencies of local charity, however well administered, are often inapplicable to these wants, and that the parochial system is an inefficient & obsolete method for dealing with them. The parochial system, excellent in its day, rested on the assumption that industry and the conditions of labour

were static, whereas they have been disintegrated by machinery. Industry and the conditions of labour are now fluid. In old days the squire and the parson were the units round which the little community turned : now the squire often looks to outside means for making his estates pay, the parson is often left high and dry in his pulpit, while the people are drifting away. In my part of the country the ratio of permanent employment to acreage is given as one family unit to every 100 acres of land.

☞ Thus there will always be wants that our school can supply. We shall find, for instance, that the teaching in cleanliness, order, intelligence, inventiveness, national history, social duties, are always wanted ; we shall find that teaching in such things as cookery, hygiene, physical drill, life saving, and all that is implied in these, is always popular.

Our second objective is the experimental. We must, as I said, be perpetually trying new methods and testing old ones. In an age of fluidity such as ours, no educational system can have any permanent value; the quickly changing wants of modern industry, the equally rapid changing of our ideals of life, make a frank experimentalism necessary. Moreover, to boldly do this is a check upon the uniformity and dull levelling of modern democracy. We want, in our schools of art and craft, variety, diversity, individual character, both in system of teaching and in the boy or girl product.

I would like to give a practical example of what I mean. I have often thought that the somewhat rigid system of definite classes in particular subjects is not sufficiently educative, and that it should be supplemented by something that will give more freedom to individual invention. To this end I started at our village school an experimental shop, which was open at all hours, under certain restrictions, to any student who cared to use it. Metalworkers, plumbers, carpenters used it at different times, and produced some quite good pieces of work there. But two village lads had been observed with much mystery for some time experimenting in various mechanical details of their

own. Finally, after three months' hard thinking, and much collecting of odd scraps of copper, brass, zinc & wood, a model ship appeared, whose boiler was a disinfectant tin. She was a really beautiful little craft, who did several knots an hour by means of methylated spirits on the miller's pond. I was formally invited to the launching, and no cruiser created more excitement on her first trip. The peculiar interest attaching to this example is that neither of the young constructors had ever seen a ship or been far out of the county. I could no more construct a model steamship myself than fly, & yet it was a product of my experimental shop. While my heart was set upon building and the allied crafts—lead glazing, metalwork, carpentry, smithing—those two boys were thinking of something quite different. I anticipated we should turn out good examples of the builder's craft, we did as a matter of fact; but we did better still, we turned out two boys who were using their own brains and invention in a manner that was entirely original & entirely off my lines. That is as it should be. But no class system would have quite provided this.

3. *To Teach Citizenship*

Our third objective is the teaching of citizenship. This I conceive should not merely be done by classes in the rights and duties of the citizen, but by showing the bearing of everything taught in the school upon life. Our school, therefore, should be so comprehensive as to include every form of village activity from the highest to the lowest. There should be in it something for everybody.

I have found in our Cotswold village of 1300 inhabitants that it is quite possible to get together some 200 to 300 students, men, women and children, in various branches of secondary teaching, and teaching often that leads indirectly to a better understanding, not only of the crafts but their relation to life. Cookery, needlework, laundry, gardening, hygiene, carpentry, physical drill, life saving, carving, drawing, various branches of craftsmanship in metalwork, music, lectures and discussions on a number of different topics—all these subjects are dealt with in

different ways. We spread the net as wide as we can, with the result that we can show cases of the labourer's lad doing his course of physical drill and attending biographical lectures in the same week, and the village plumber's apprentice keeping his school garden, and attending a class on lead glazing one night, and music on another. The school, in short, is getting to have a definite meaning in life to these lads; and that also is as it should be. In the appendix I show some pictures of this little school of craft which illustrate what I mean. The main building, which has been carefully repaired and which stands in the village street, is given on the cover. The workshops and technical school proper are at the back, and have been formed out of a derelict malthouse and stables.

Few things are so distressing in modern English social conditions as the waste of educational opportunity observable in boys and girls of from 13 upwards—lads when they leave the elementary school, when the loafing period begins; girls of the same age when there are several in the family. The facts of the craft, the realities, must always be taught in the workshops, on the jobs, in the household. But in these days, when machinery has centred industry into factories and taken the home crafts away from the home, the principles, the theory, and above all, the taste, or as I would prefer to call it, the feeling, for what is right and wrong in workmanship must be taught in the secondary school. It is the school that must be the bulwark against the brutalising, the ugliness, the uniformity of the machine.

☞ And this brings me to the fourth objective of our village schools of art and craft, the need for a wise study of the ethics of production. This is a thing we can only attain to by slow degrees. We have not yet come as a community to realise that the complete destruction of the handicrafts which has resulted from the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries has transformed the whole purpose of education. From the universities, so remote from the practical wants of life, at one end of the scale, to the elementary schools, so equally remote

4. *To Study
the Ethics of
Production*

from the higher wants, at the other, the relation of men to things is no longer understood as of old; and the ethical meaning of the things we touch and use is lost to us. Of old it was not so. Almost all old handicrafts were educative in themselves: they contained within them that graded skill and thought which is necessary for the right development of the individual; they had in them a direct connection between mind and hand; they touched life immediately. Not only this, life was so constituted that everybody came into direct contact with the crafts practised by others; human beings were nearer to one another in consequence. Hundreds of stories from the workshops, all well authenticated, might be quoted to illustrate this. The story of Caparra the blacksmith and the municipality of Florence, of William of Wykeham the master mason of Windsor and his repartee to Edward III., of Hans Sachs the cobbler of Nuremberg singing over his shoes, of Caradosso the goldsmith piqued by the haughty Spanish nobleman over his fine jewel in the little shop in Milan, of Ucello the cabinet-maker and his humiliation at the shrunken panels of his priceless cabinet, of Grinling Gibbons and his pot of carven flowers before the queen. The tales are innumerable to show how the man was educated in and by his craft. The artist can see it in the work; to him who has no eyes to see it thus, let him read the written record in Theophilus, in Cennino, in Vasari, in Cellini, in Henry Eveleigh, in Rabelais, in Sir Christopher Wren, in Sir Joshua Reynolds. Nay, let him study again those English poets who more particularly sympathise with the craftsmen—Chaucer, Langland, Blake—let him do this and he will realise how the crafts of old contained in them those fundamentals of education which we are seeking to reintroduce into modern life. Sometimes we term the object of our search humanism, sometimes technical skill, sometimes labour organisation, sometimes merely efficiency; but all these things were stored as a treasure in the crafts of old before the coming of the machine.

To go back is impossible ; and why should we repine ? The machine has brought immense good with its evil ; but it is necessary to understand, and above all it is necessary to determine, how much of what is lost we can and should consciously reintroduce into our educational system. In short, we have to diagnose the good and bad, the right and wrong, in the things we make and handle ; the problem of the ethics of production is the ultimate problem of our schools of art and craft.

I have pictured our secondary education school from the standpoint of the village craftsman and the country builder. I am an architect, hence my practical bias. Educationally any other craft or calling would have done equally well. The school may start at a single craft, a single interest : it must become universal ; it must embrace everything, everything *in petto* ; it must give the little citizen the opportunity of making himself. To repeat—the art we have in modern higher education to rediscover is the art of life.

C. R. ASHBEE.

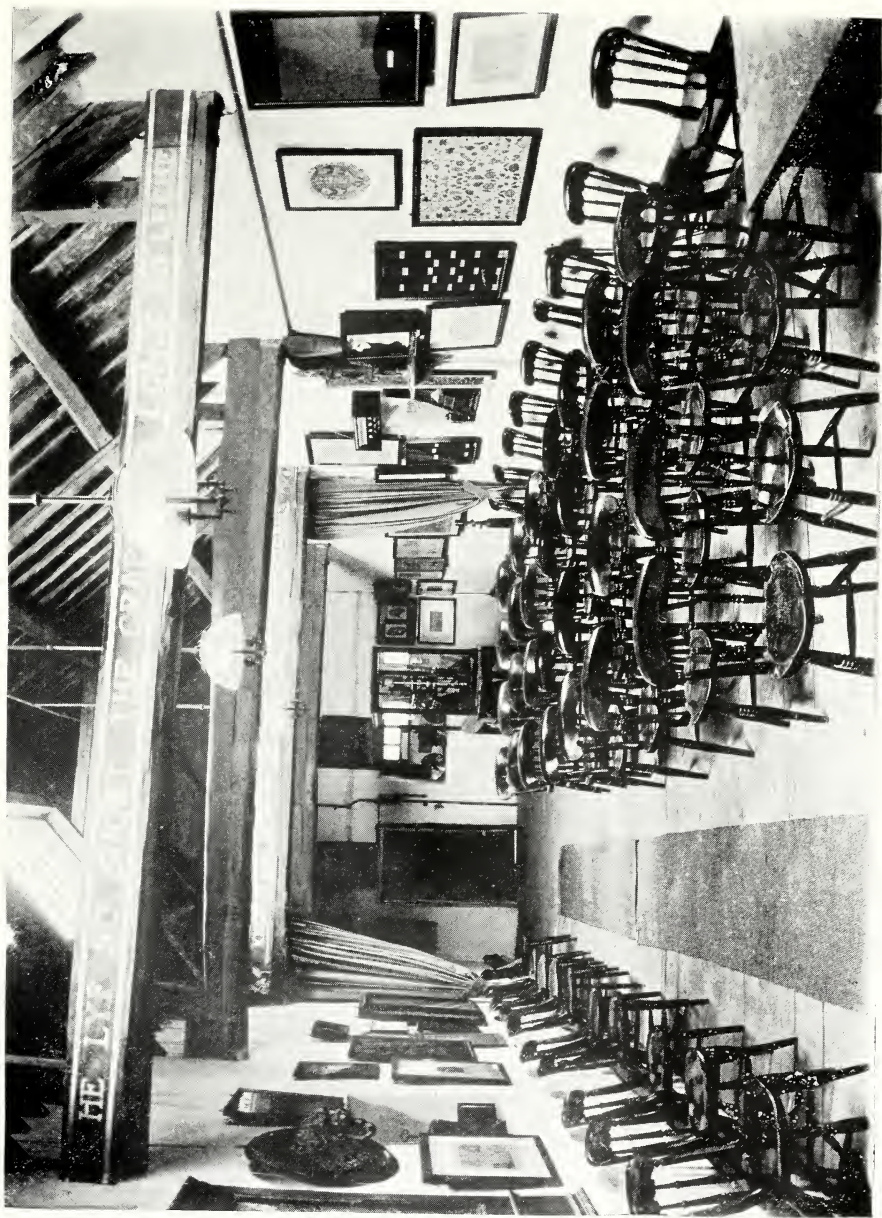
Campden, Glos.
1906.

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APPENDIX OF
ILLUSTRATIONS





Camden School of Arts & Crafts, showing interior of a malt-house reconstructed as a gallery.





Campan School of Arts & Crafts gallery from another point of view.





Cookery Class at the Campden School of Arts and Crafts.





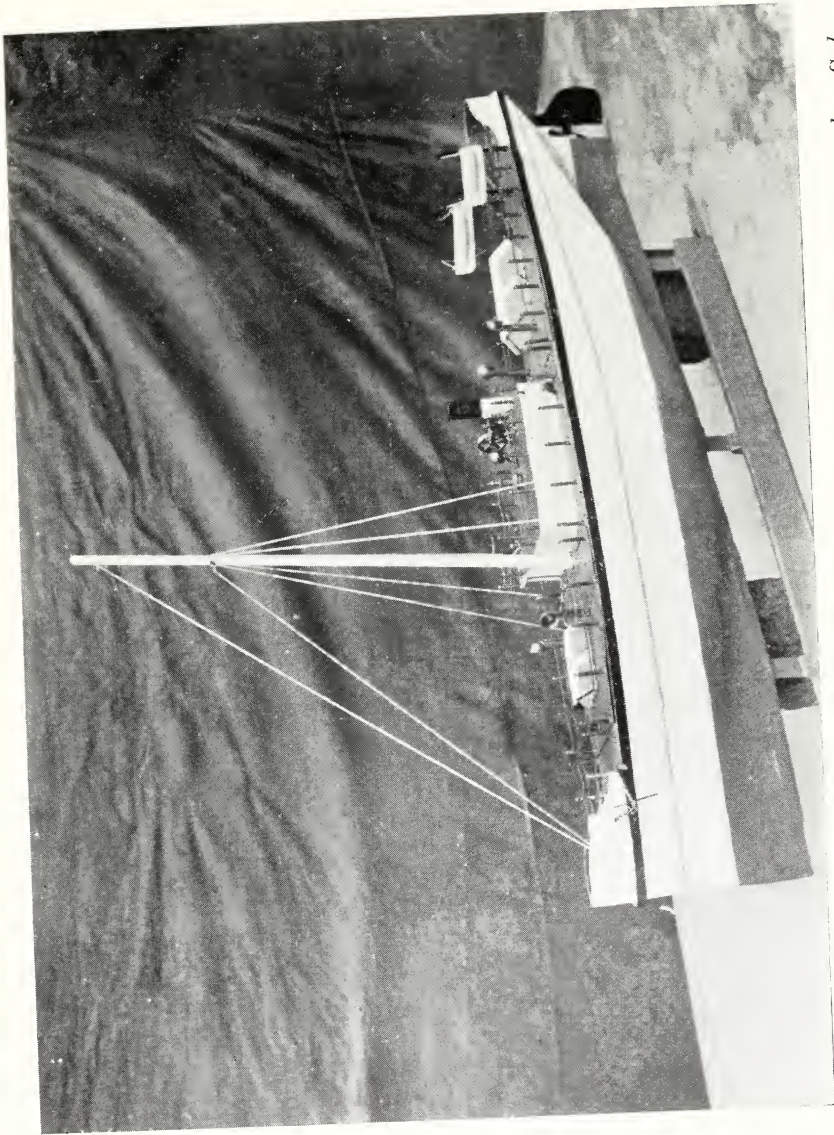
Gardening at the Camden School of Arts and Crafts.



Physical Drill at the Campden School of Arts and Crafts.



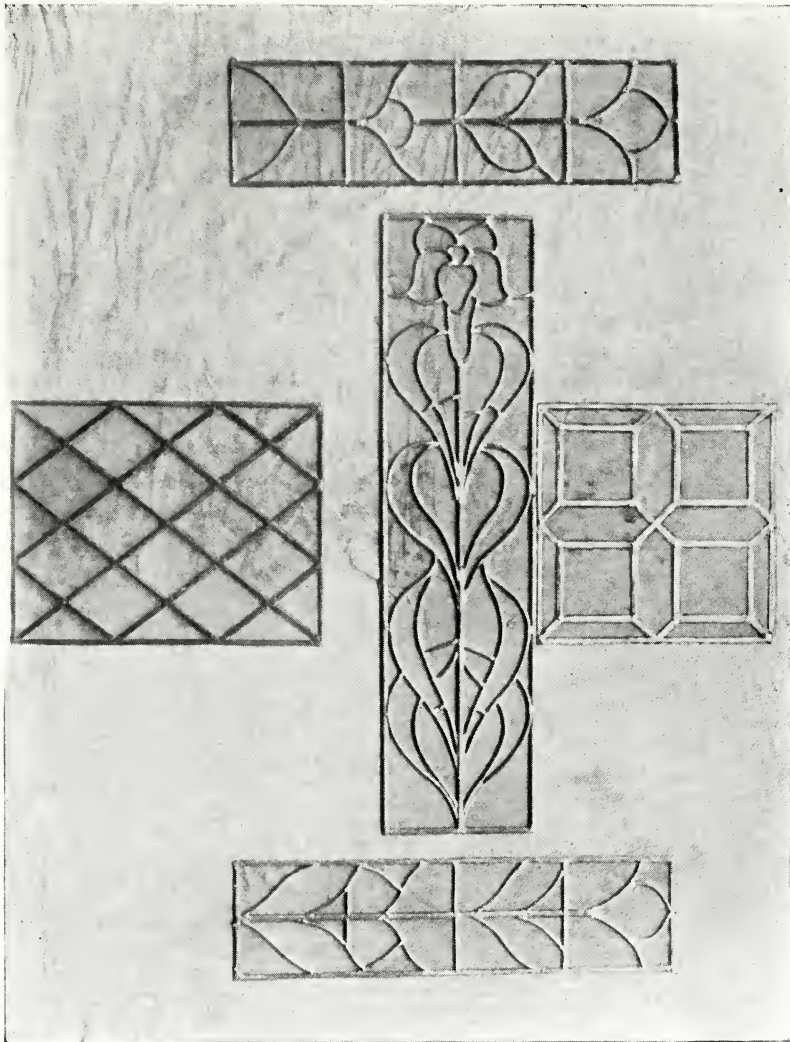
Physical Drill at the Campaen School of Arts and Crafts.



Model steamship made by two lads in the experimental shop of the Campden School of Arts and Crafts.



Cup designed and executed by one of the students and sent up to the National Competition from the Campden School of Arts and Crafts, 1906.



*Examples of the work of the Lead-glazing Class at the
Camden School of Arts and Crafts, 1906.*



Large carved panel designed and executed by one of the students and sent up to the National Competition from the Campden School of Arts and Crafts, 1906.

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Jewel designed & executed by one of the students and sent up to the National Competition 1906, from the Campden School of Arts and Crafts.



