OIL PAINTING FOR PLEASURE

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by

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LONDON
W. FOULSHAM & CO. LTD.
NEW YORK - TORONTO - CAPE TOWN - SYDNEY

W. FOULSHAM & CO. LTD.
2-5 Old Bond Street, London, W.1.

The Author and Publishers are indebted to Messrs. Reeves & Sons Ltd., Lincoln Road, Enfield, Middlesex, for their kind assistance, by whose permission the colour illustration on the jacket is reproduced.

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN
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FOREWORD

THIS is a straightforward book in plain and simple terms. No 'isms' are advocated and, indeed, are scarcely mentioned, for there is nothing abstract about the author's brand of art, if it may be described by such a grand term. The book is designed to point the way to those would-be amateur painters who do not quite know how to set about it—a position in which the author once found himself—so that they may get going along some sort of lines, whether the right ones or otherwise.

A very great interest in all forms of art has been aroused in recent years and I have, in fact, regarded with no little astonishment the variety and numbers of people going in and out of the art shops and also marvelled at the considerable trade which is being carried on in artists' supplies and materials. I think that the 1939-1945 war is responsible to a very large extent for this state of affairs. During those nervous times many people became interested in practical art as a means of escapism by which

they managed to forget, for a few peaceful hours, the tumult of war around us all. Others did so, perhaps, simply because there were fewer pleasures available for pursuit in the infrequent hours of leisure. Many of them discovered that they possessed latent artistic abilities or they acquired a measurable skill and so they have continued to cultivate their art during the ensuing years. Some of them have also infected others with their enthusiasm.

I suppose I ought to offer some sort of apology for having the audacity to attempt to write a book on oil painting at all. Perhaps I may be forgiven for feeling that this would be superfluous because I consider that an amateur has, nevertheless, something worthwhile to offer to his fellow travellers. Many things which the expert painter regards as commonplace and too elementary to be worth considering—if, indeed, they enter his head at all—may be a complete mystery to the novice. When I first began painting I read many books on various aspects of the art of painting in oils but there remained many questions to which I failed to gain any reply. In this book I have attempted to clarify all these points so that the difficulties which beset me will not be encountered by my readers. In my own justification I would like to invite attention to

the fact that neither Rembrandt nor Michaelangelo (to quote but two of the many) nor any of the more ancient of the Old Masters possessed any sort of artistic qualification which could be abbreviated and summarised by two or three capital letters. Between them, however, they managed to produce quite a number of very presentable paintings despite their academic shortcomings. I must confess, however, that if I stop to consider the point I am likely to become filled with horror at the thought of my own temerity in daring to write upon this subject. I must therefore proceed without further delay to some consideration of the technical aspects of painting in oils lest I become too filled with dismay to continue.

I. PRELUDE

EVER since the day when a primitive man lashed a stone on to a stick and thus fashioned a rudimentary tool, mankind has been seeking constantly to make something new. Man has been motivated by a continual desire to create. A work of art is the culmination of that desire and the ultimate triumph of the individual. A modern car, a printing press, a television receiving set and an electronic brain are all marvels of man's creative ingenuity in one or other forms of engineering skill. In each and every case, not only may all of these be imitated but they may also be, to all intents and purposes, exactly duplicated. On the other hand, a work of art may be imitated but it can never be exactly duplicated and reproduced stroke by stroke. Every original work of art is unique; this fact, coupled with the knowledge that the work was performed by an individual craftsman with his own hands and brain almost entirely without mechanical assistance of any kind, puts it upon a far higher plane than any mechanical device however elaborate and advanced this may be.

There is a certain satisfaction in being able to paint a picture which, although it may not be exactly a work of art, is at least recognisable and not unpleasing even to its most harsh critic—its creator. In this book, then, I propose to show how oil paintings of this sort may be produced by the most amateur of artists—even those who, in company with the author, have but little ability in free-hand drawing.

My earliest essays in the field of painting were in water-colours but, although they were not wholly bad, these were not an unqualified success. The art of water-colour painting is much more difficult than oil painting—at least I found it to be so. The difficulty lies in ensuring that one does not find oneself faced with the necessity of laying a light colour on top of a darker one. Transparent water-colours will just not permit doing this and in such circumstances there is nothing for it but to scrap the whole thing and begin again. When painting in oils, on the other hand, almost any number of layers of differing colours and shades may be placed one upon the other without difficulty. It is true that it does not work quite invariably because a few of the pigments, as we shall see later, are transparent or semi-transparent. Often, however, there is a suitable alternative pigment which is opaque or can

be made so. The correction of mistakes is thus usually an easy matter. I do not mean to infer that one may paint over and obliterate, for example, a building, and afterwards paint in a row of trees on top of it. Sooner or later the ghost of the building will show through the row of trees. The colour or tone of an object may, however, be altered without its form being changed, with every expectation of success, within the limits of the transparency or opacity of the pigments which are being used. It is also possible to scrape and wipe away wet paint down to the primed canvas and then start again in order to make a major alteration.

My early water-colours were produced by first making a lightly pencilled outline drawing and then colouring in, removing the pencilled lines as painting proceeded. This seemed to me to be something of a sham and deceit, not very far removed from the painting books of very early youth. Since, therefore, I felt incapable of painting straight on to the paper I hesitated to apply these shameful practices to the higher sphere of oil painting. In my ignorance I believed that all pictures worth the name were painted direct from life or nature straight on to the bare canvas. But while I was admiring a painting of a group of horses I realised quite suddenly that it could not have been

painted directly from living models, the artist sitting in the field while the animals obligingly posed for him. It became obvious that the artist had very probably sketched the horses quickly and roughly on his canvas or even in a pocket sketch-book and then returned to his studio and painted the picture there. If the masters of the art could do this legitimately could not I do something similar? But I still did not feel equal to the task of making the preliminary sketch and so I used photographs and prints in place of living models. It is still a bit fraudulent, I'm afraid, but I have, nevertheless, enjoyed countless hours of genuine pleasure in painting pictures in this way.

Thus I hope, in this book, to point the way to those who, as I did, want to try their hand at painting in oils but don't know how to begin to tackle it. There are those also who, for one reason or another, cannot afford to provide themselves with the necessary equipment. I shall have quite a lot to say about ways by which the impecunious may help themselves for I sympathise most heartily with them. Lest it be thought that my amateur methods of painting be beneath the dignity of one who aspires to the level of an artist, let me say here and now, and before we go any further, that it requires quite as much skill in the actual painting of

a tree or a cow or even a field of grass from bare outlines copied on to the canvas from a photograph as it does to paint the same thing from a line drawing made directly from nature in freehand. In some ways it would not be untrue to say that *more* skill is involved in painting a landscape in colour from a monochromatic photograph than in painting it from nature with all its natural colours and tints before one's eyes.

II. THE EASEL

I IMAGINE that it would be just possible to paint a sketch in oils with the canvas lying upon a table top but for serious painting, an easel, or at least some device by means of which the canvas can be held in an upright position, is essential. Before we can decide what type of easel will be required we must consider where and how we are going to do most of our painting. It must also be taken into account that our habits in this direction may undergo some alteration in course of time. If it is intended to paint entirely indoors it may be that a fairly elaborate easel will be considered necessary. On the other hand, if most of our painting will be fieldwork, done out of doors and away from home, then some sort of folding or portable easel will be best. It is possible, of course, to use a portable sketching easel at home or in a studio, but one which has been designed expressly for use indoors would be far too large and bulky to carry about.

The easel is the largest and most expensive single item of the painter's equipment, excepting only the

simplest types of sketching easels which are quite inexpensive. The type known as a studio easel is a very large piece of apparatus and therefore unsuitable for use in a normal domestic establishment, unless, of course, it is possible to press a spare room into service as a studio. Furthermore a studio easel costs a considerable sum of money and would probably be beyond the resources of the average 'pleasure' painter unless he is fortunate enough to discover a secondhand easel—at a reasonable price, of course.

Next to the studio easel, in both size and price, comes the radial easel. Again, this type is quite large and fairly expensive. Between the radial easel and the very simplest tripod sketching easel there are others of several types, sizes, and prices to be obtained. Most of them are sketching easels with more or less elaboration depending upon the price being greater or smaller. Some of the more elaborate types are designed so that the canvas-holding section can be folded down horizontally and thus be suitable for watercolour painting. This feature is unnecessary for oil painting and so a simpler and cheaper pattern would be adequate for our purposes.

The main requirements in an easel intended solely for painting in oils are that it must be capable

of holding the canvas upright (or even slightly tilted forward) and that it is adjustable to suit different canvas sizes. It should also be possible to raise and lower the canvas to such an extent that its entire surface may be worked upon comfortably from a seated position and also while the artist is standing upright. If, in addition, it is so designed that another canvas or a small drawing board may be placed above the one which is being painted upon, so much the better. This last requirement allows a picture which is being used as a model, to be held in a convenient position where it may be seen properly and compared with the working canvas as painting proceeds. If the original is in the form of a photograph, print or drawing on comparatively thin paper, it may be pinned to a small drawing board and fixed above the canvas.

I suppose one of the more elaborate portable easels would possess most of the required qualifications but they are still very costly. The cheapest and simplest models usually hold the canvas only in one position. There are also elaborate oil sketching boxes available, containing all the colours and small equipment and, in addition, the lid is designed so that it will hold the canvas in the necessary position for painting. Some of them are even made so that the canvas position is adjustable

vertically to some extent. These boxes are used while the painter is seated and are thus held with the tray portion resting on the knees with the lid open and upright. This infers that a stool of some sort is necessary for outdoor painting in comfort, but it should be fairly simple to fit the box with a neckstrap so that the whole thing can be carried at waist level like a street-vendor's tray and used both in a sitting and a standing position. Indoors the box can be placed on a table but it is not ideal and, in any case, these boxes are very expensive. A reasonably efficient easel would probably be less expensive and more comfortable to use although it might be more bulky to carry around.

If the question of expense is a serious obstacle there is, of course, and easy way round the difficulty—make your own easel. It may be that the easel makers would not approve of this but I am sure that the suppliers of artists' materials would much prefer to sell you colours, canvases and other expendable supplies regularly, besides the smaller tools—forgoing the sale of an easel—than that you should decide that you could not afford to paint at all and buy nothing.

If you make your own easel you may make it as simple or as elaborate as your fancy and woodworking abilities dictate. Plate I is a photograph

of my own self-designed and home-made easel. I have designed it primarily for use while in a seated position. Above the canvas another picture can be fixed or the top block may be turned up the other way and a photograph pinned to the small board which is fixed to it. The board may also be placed lower down on the easel, in the position normally occupied by the working canvas and where a sheet of oil sketching paper pinned to it may be worked upon conveniently. Below the canvas is fixed a hinged shelf on which the colour box and other things are placed while painting. This, however, would be improved if it were fixed lower still where it would be right out of the way of the bottom edge of the canvas. At one time I was in the habit of keeping my brushes in a glass jar standing on this shelf, but I have now relieved the congestion on the latter by putting them in a glass tube (a chemist's boiling tube) which is held by a clip fixed on one of the front legs. Similarly I have a (home-made) mahl-stick conveniently at hand in spring clips carried on the rear leg of the easel.

I will describe the making of this easel in some detail for it may be that some other prospective oil painter might care to make a similar one. The first step is to make the lower main frame in the shape of a truncated letter A with an extra cross-

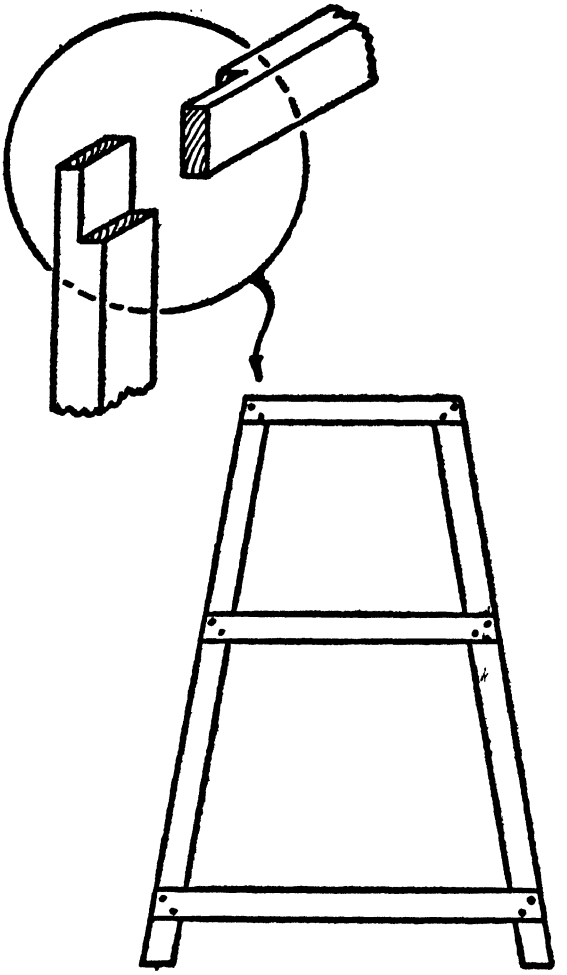


Fig. 1.
Framework of Easel.

bar near the bottom of the legs. The frame of my easel is 3 ft. 6 ins. high and the middle cross-bar is 2 ft. from the ground. The position of the lower cross-bar is immaterial but is actually 3 ins. from the ground. All the joints are of the variety known as 'halved' joints—sufficiently professional to be a workmanlike job but simple enough for my amateur carpentry (or is it joinery?). The method of jointing is of some importance because the frame—at least the top portion from 'waist' to 'shoulders'—must be of one thickness with no projecting parts in order that the bottom canvas clamping bar may slide freely up and down it. Since the frame is tapered towards the top there are odd angles to be dealt with and it is, perhaps, worth mentioning here that symmetry can be assured by first laying the parts of the framework out in position on a rectangular table-top and setting and marking them accurately by using the centre-line of the table top as a standard from which to measure. If there is any great difficulty about it, there are no practical objections to making the frame rectangular and again using the table top as a guide in squaring it accurately.

The upright stem on which the top clamps slide, is fixed to the frame as shown in Fig. 2, again using 'halved' joints so that all the parts lie flush and in

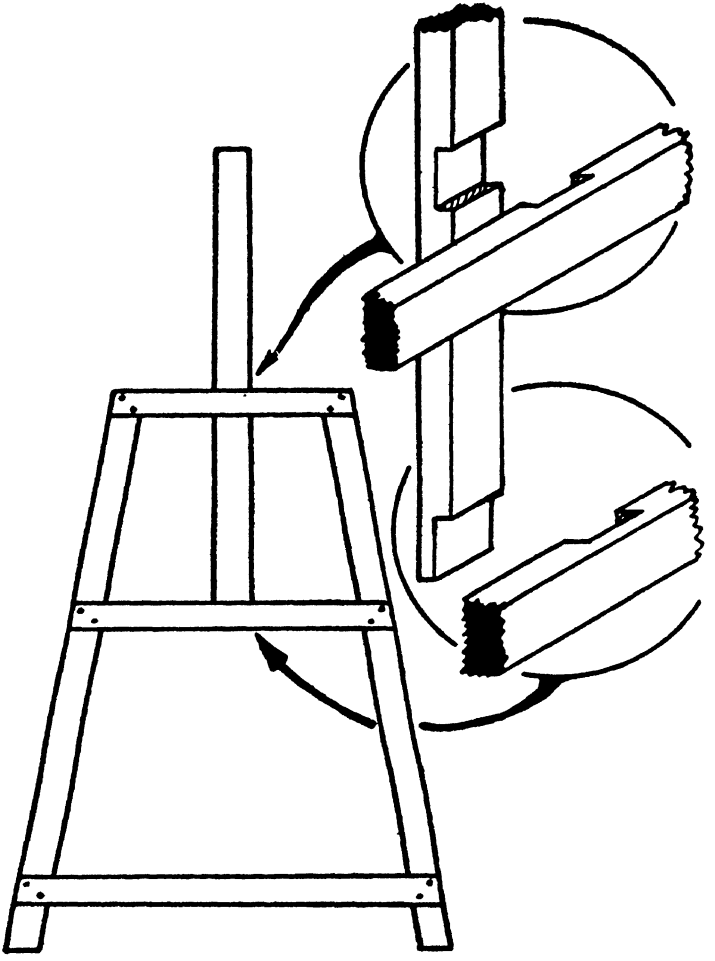


Fig. 2.
The spine for easel fitting.

one plane, at least upon the front face. The timber used for the framework should be fairly substantial but not too heavy. I suppose the proper material would be beech, but ordinary deal is much cheaper and if it cannot be said to be as durable is, at least, adequate for the purpose. I would suggest 2 in. by 1 in. timber for the main framework and 3 in. or 4 in. by 1 in. for the top upright stem or 'spine'. The rear leg is hinged on to the top of the main

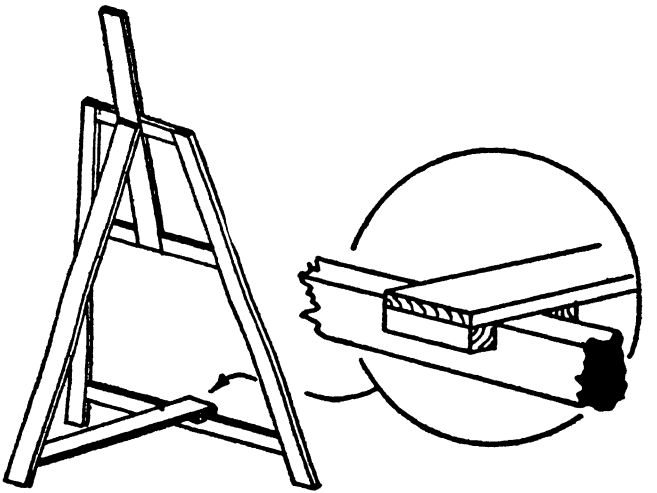


Fig. 3.

Rear leg and tie-bar.

frame where the upper cross-bar and the upright stem intersect and it is of a length which ensures that the main portion is upright or tilted only very slightly backwards to assist stability. It is best, perhaps, to make the rear leg a little too long and

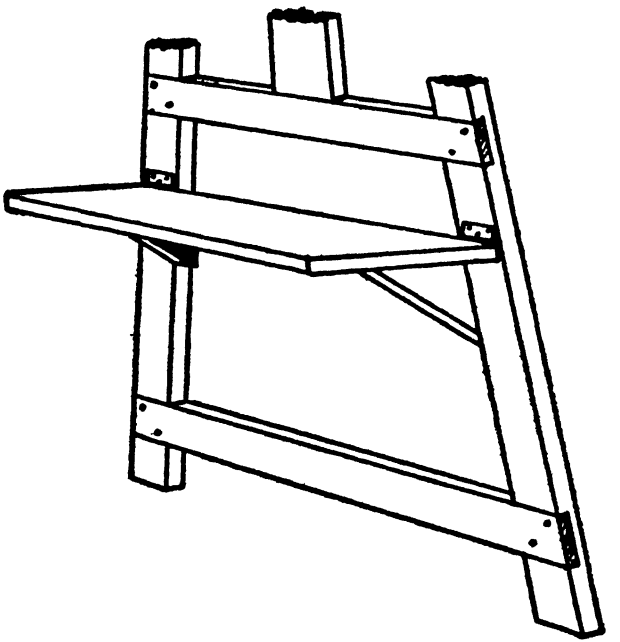


Fig. 4.
Easel shelf.

then adjust it after fitting by cutting a little off the lower end until it is correct. Some adjustment may also be made by regulating the distance to which it is permitted to open rearwards. To the lower end of the rear leg a tie-bar is hinged and arranged so that its front end hooks over the centre of the lower cross-bar of the main frame. This could quite as well have been simply a length of strong cord, since its only purpose is to prevent the rear leg from sliding rearwards and thus causing the whole contraption to 'do the splits'. The shelf, as I have said earlier, would be much improved if it were fixed lower down somewhere between the two lower crossbars. It may be hinged to the legs so that it is capable of being folded upwards, and supported underneath by two triangular brackets fixed on the inner edges of the front legs, one on either side. Alternatively it could be made a fixture by screwing it fast to the two brackets instead of hinging it. You may, of course, dispense with the shelf altogether and use a small table or stool placed near the easel instead. If the shelf is made to fold, a small flange fitted to the lower canvas clamping bar may be provided so that the shelf can be held in the closed position when the easel is folded. The accessories are held by tool clips of the type shown in Fig 5. These are obtain-

able from most ironmongers in a range of sizes varying from $\frac{1}{8}$ in. to about $1\frac{1}{2}$ ins.: the latter is the largest size I have encountered but there may well be even larger ones to be had.

The easel is now complete except for the canvas clamping blocks. The lower one is made as long as the frame is wide at the middle cross-bar in order

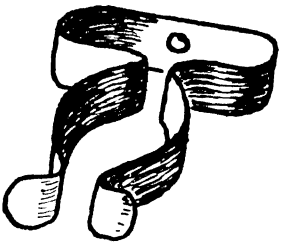
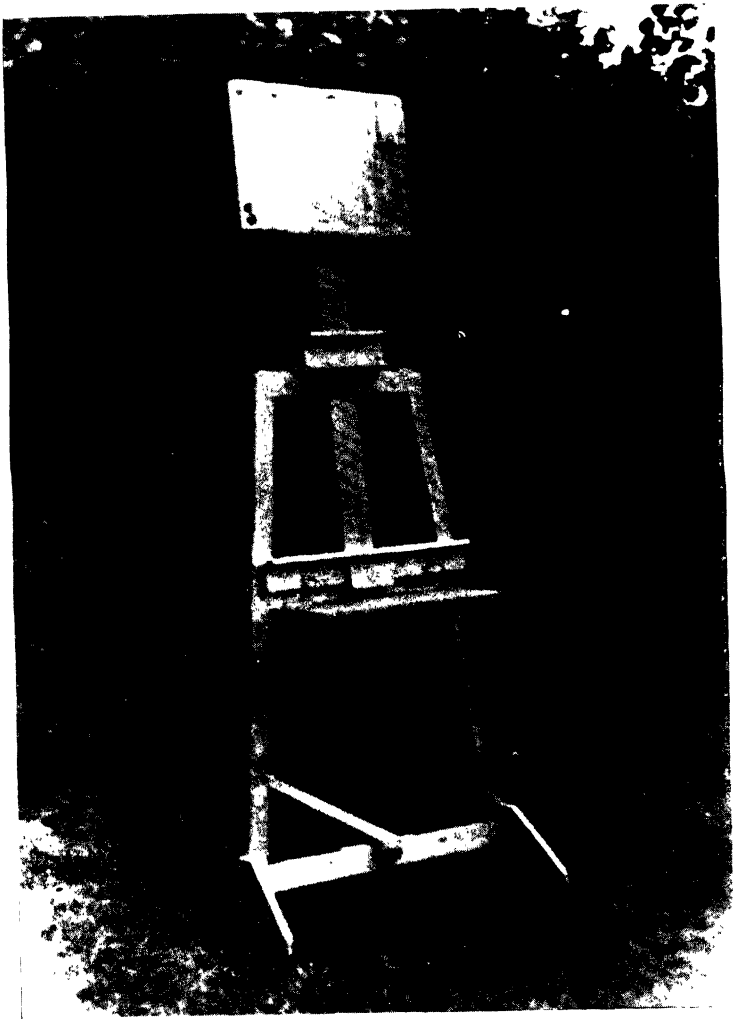


Fig. 5.

Tool clip used on easel.

to afford a large basis of support to the canvas. As may be seen from Fig. 6 it consists of two strips of wood which are clamped together with the easel frame gripped between them by means of two bolts and wing nuts passing through the strips. The top edge of the front strip is planed at an angle so that it slopes slightly backwards and thus



Author's own home-made easel

Original Photograph squared for enlargement

prevents the canvas from slipping off it. This may be widened if desired by screwing another strip on to it but this is not really essential if the main bar is made from wood of one inch thickness or thereabouts. The bolts can be about a quarter of an

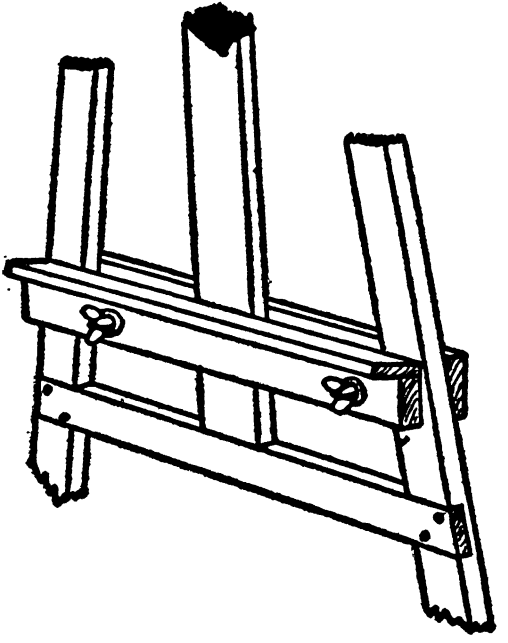


Fig. 6.
Lower canvas clamping bar.

inch in diameter and should be coach bolts—these have round heads and a short length of the shank under the heads is squared so that they bite into the wood and are thus prevented from turning. For this reason the holes through the wood portions of the clamping bar should be of the same size as

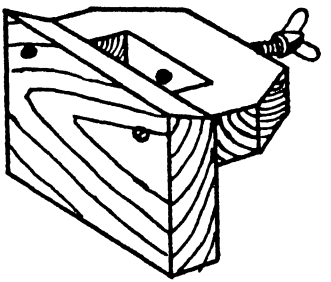


Fig. 7.

Upper canvas clip.

the diameter of the round portion of the bolt shanks. The wing nuts should bear on a washer placed on the bolt threads between the nuts and the wood in order to prevent the latter from being worn away too rapidly.

The upper clamp is shorter and is made as shown in Fig. 7. The front portion is angled on both top

and bottom edges so that it may be used to clamp a canvas above it and below. A strip of wood is fixed along one edge to widen it so that the top of the canvas can, if necessary, be tilted forwards. Sometimes it is necessary to tilt it towards the painter in order to eliminate undesirable reflections from the wet paint. An extra strip may also be fixed along the other edge if desired, as in the case of the bottom clamp bar, but this is not essential. The clamp is slipped over the top of the upright and is arranged to slide up and down the latter, being locked in any vertical position by means of a pressure screw passing through the back of the clamp. This simply consists of a bolt, preferably with a winged head, passing through a hole threaded to suit it, in a metal plate which is securely fixed to the back of the clamp. It would probably be necessary to have this made but a useful alternative can be contrived by using a square or hexagon nut of the correct size and thread and carefully letting it into the wood on the *inner* side of the back part of the clamp so that it is held tightly and is unable to turn in the wood. Perhaps a simpler method would be to make the clamp similarly to the bottom one, from two strips of wood clamped together by two coach bolts and wing nuts passing through them one on either side

of the upright stem of the easel so that the latter is gripped securely between them. My own model is actually made with some brass bolts which have large circular knurled heads and which fit into circular flanged 'nuts' which I happened to acquire

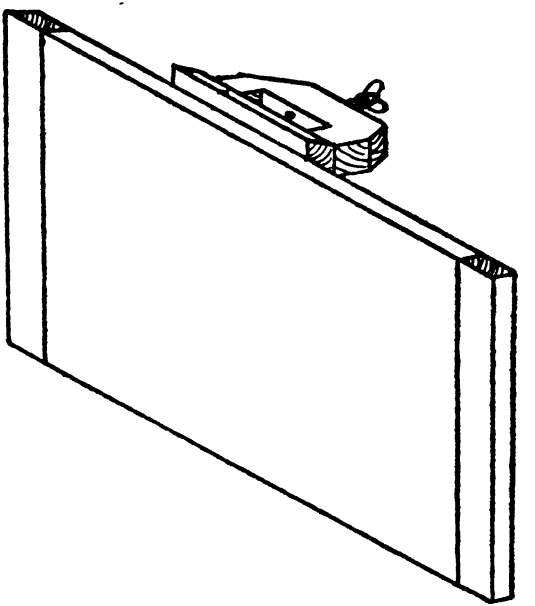


Fig. 8.

Drawing board and clamps.

very conveniently and very fortunately at the right moment from a quantity of scrap bits and pieces.

The clamp with the board attached is made in similar style (Fig. 8) but only one edge is planed to an angle and the board screwed on to it so that it does not interfere with the canvas being gripped. Again you may widen it with an extra strip if you wish. The clamps may be changed round so that any combination of canvases and paper may be placed on the easel. It will also accommodate a separate drawing board in either position if that should be necessary for any purpose.

When my easel was first put into service and all the weight concentrated on the front main portion I discovered that it tended to topple over in a forward direction when given the slightest opportunity to do so. This was remedied very simply by adding two feet at the bottom of the frame, arranged to protrude forwards. They consisted only of two triangular pieces of fairly thin wood screwed to the sides of the frame and they may be seen in the photograph (Plate I).

It seems to me that this easel might be redesigned entirely with some advantage. We might perhaps copy the principle of the radial easel as regards the method of making the clamping blocks and providing adjustment for them. Make the

main framework as sketched in Fig. 9 using 1½ in. square sectioned timber for the two main uprights and 2 in. by 1 in. for the legs and cross-bar. Use halved joints again, for neatness and strength, although you may, if you feel equal to the job, use the more superior tenoned and mortised joints of the professional woodworker. Fix the back leg on the bottom end of the double uprights with a hinge

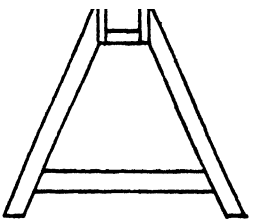


Fig. 9.

An alternative easel frame (Radial type).

and tie-bar (or cord) to the bottom crosspiece as in the first easel. As regards dimensions I would suggest making the overall height about 5 ft. 6 ins., with the bottom of the upright portion something in the region of 2 ft. from the ground. The two uprights might be two to three inches apart. A shelf could be fitted to the legs if desired as in the other case. The clamps, however, would be of a different type, arranged to slide up and down between the two uprights and designed to be clamped at any desired point. Make them as shown in Fig. 10. The blocks between the front and back parts—that is to say the bits which will actually be between the uprights when the clamps are in position on the

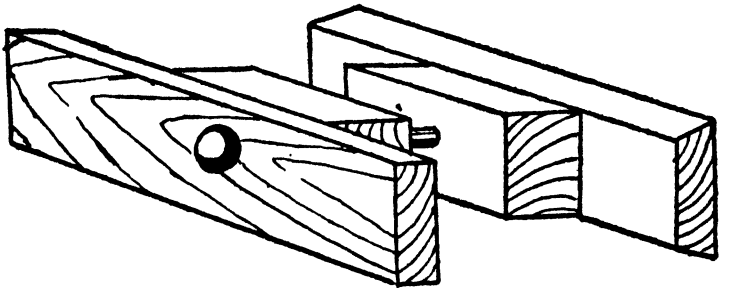


Fig. 10.

Canvas clamp for Radial type easel.

easel—should together measure a little less from front to back than the thickness of the main upright pieces. This is so that the bolts will not be prevented from drawing the two parts together really tightly so that there will be no slipping. In other words, if we are using 1½ in. square timber for the uprights, the blocks should be made about ⅝ in. thick so that there will then be a gap of approximately ¼ in. between them when the bolt is tightened up. If desired, two clamps may be made to hold the working canvas and another to go above these for holding the 'copy'. The latter may also be fitted with a small board to which a paper print or oil sketching paper may be pinned if required. In any case the edges of the blocks should be planed to a suitable angle to prevent the canvas from slipping out of place. The top and bottom blocks need be angled only on one edge but the centre one should be angled on both edges.

A table easel might be more suitable for some people whose storage space is perhaps too limited to accommodate a fairly large easel. What I have in mind is a device for holding the canvas in an upright position and which may be stood upon an ordinary domestic table while in use. So far as I am aware, it is not possible to buy a ready-made table easel, at least the appropriate catalogues do

not appear to include such a device as this. There seems to be no alternative, therefore, to making one, unless, perhaps, one has it made by a professional carpenter. I would suggest something on the lines of Fig. 11: it consists of little more than the upper

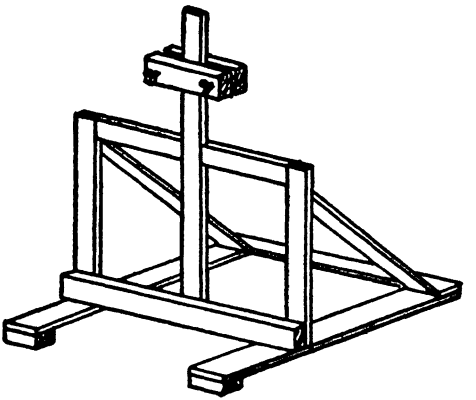


Fig. 11.

Sketch of table easel.

portion of our first easel, mounted on feet so that it will stand on a table. Make the main framework as indicated in Fig. 12, using halved joints—or tenons and mortises—except for those by which the bottom crosspiece is fixed. This should be screwed

on to the front faces of the uprights so that it projects and forms the lower canvas rest. Its top edge should therefore be planed to a suitable angle in the usual way and, if you like, it may be widened by fixing an extra strip of wood on to it. Screw on the two 'feet' with two little blocks on the undersides of the front ends so that they may be hooked over the edge of the table top when the easel is in use and it will thus be prevented from being

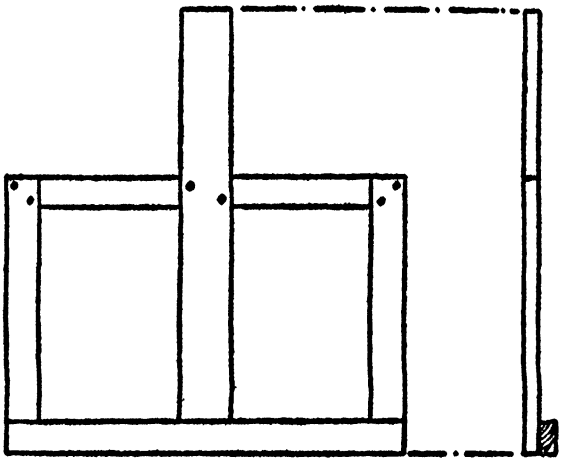


Fig. 12.

Table easel frame and spine.

pushed backwards. Add the rear cross-piece which is intended to keep the feet quite firm. Make and fit the two stays, one on either side, to make the whole contraption quite rigid. The top clamp may be most conveniently made as sketched in Fig. 13. It consists simply of two wood strips held together by means of two bolts with wing nuts and washers, one on either side of the central upright of the easel. This type of clamp is the best for this purpose as it may readily be placed below the top cross-bar when it is necessary to accommodate a small canvas. It would not be very difficult to arrange this easel to fold flat by hinging both the feet and the stays on to the frame and using removable bolts and nuts to fasten them together when the easel is to be erected for use.

I must also include a simple type of easel for use

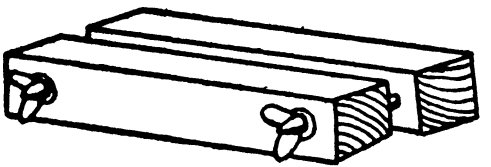


Fig. 13.

Table easel canvas clamp.

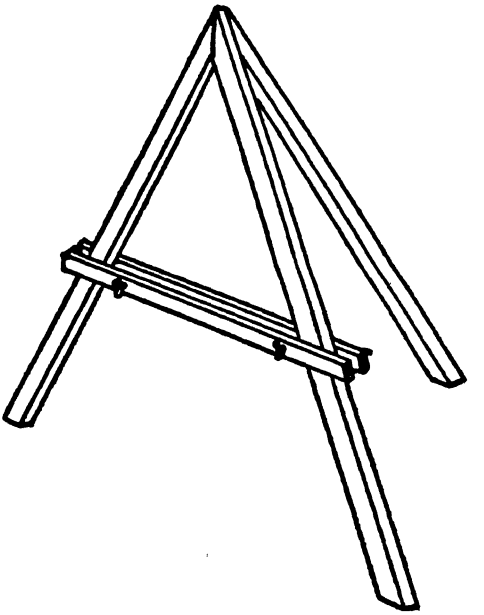


Fig. 14.

Simple sketching easel.

when sketching, or even as a makeshift indoor easel. This need be nothing more than a simple tripod easel with a very simple means of holding the canvas. If something more elaborate is required, with telescopic legs and similar refinements, rather more skill and better timber would be called for than for the easels already described. Anyone who is really capable of making a first-class portable folding easel will not need to be told how to do it, for his abilities are superior to the amateur status of this book and its author. Let us then consider the making of a simple easel suitable to my own unprofessional woodworking abilities (or inabilities), something on the lines of that sketched in Fig. 14. The tops of the three legs are cut to a suitable angle so that they all press together when the easel is opened and thus the whole thing is reasonably rigid without using any stays or cords between the legs. The metalwork hinge parts are sketched separately in Fig. 15 so that the action may be seen more clearly. The parts can be cut out of almost any stiffish sheet metal—even from a discarded tin can of fairly substantial build. The pins passing through are rivetted over at the ends or they may be in the form of nuts and bolts, but in this case the bolt ends should be burred over after they have been fitted so that the nuts cannot

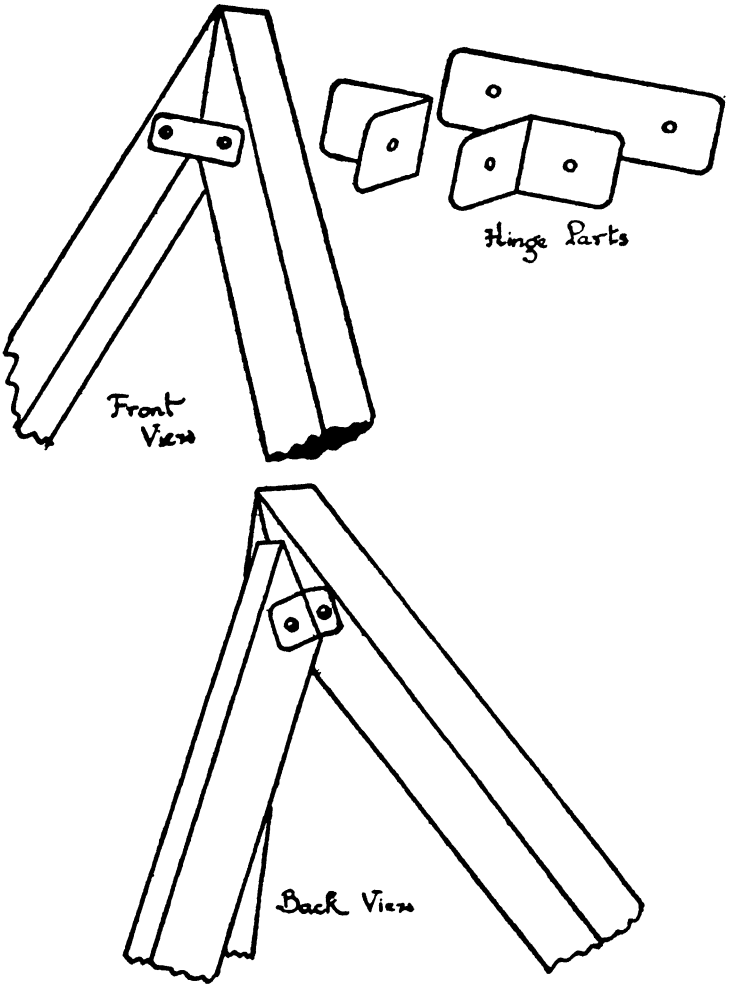


Fig. 15.
Top joint of sketching easel.

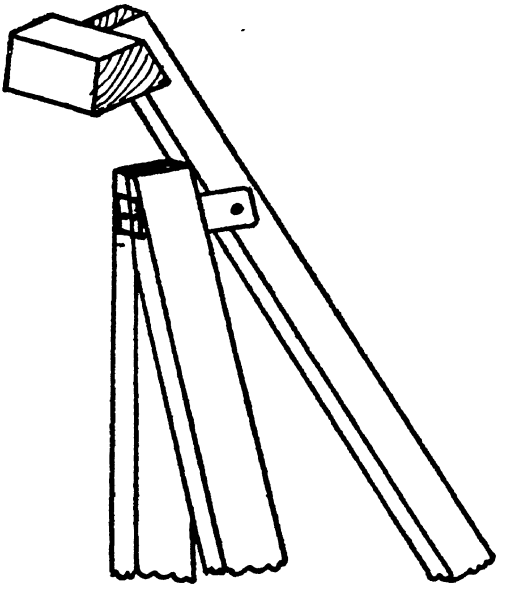
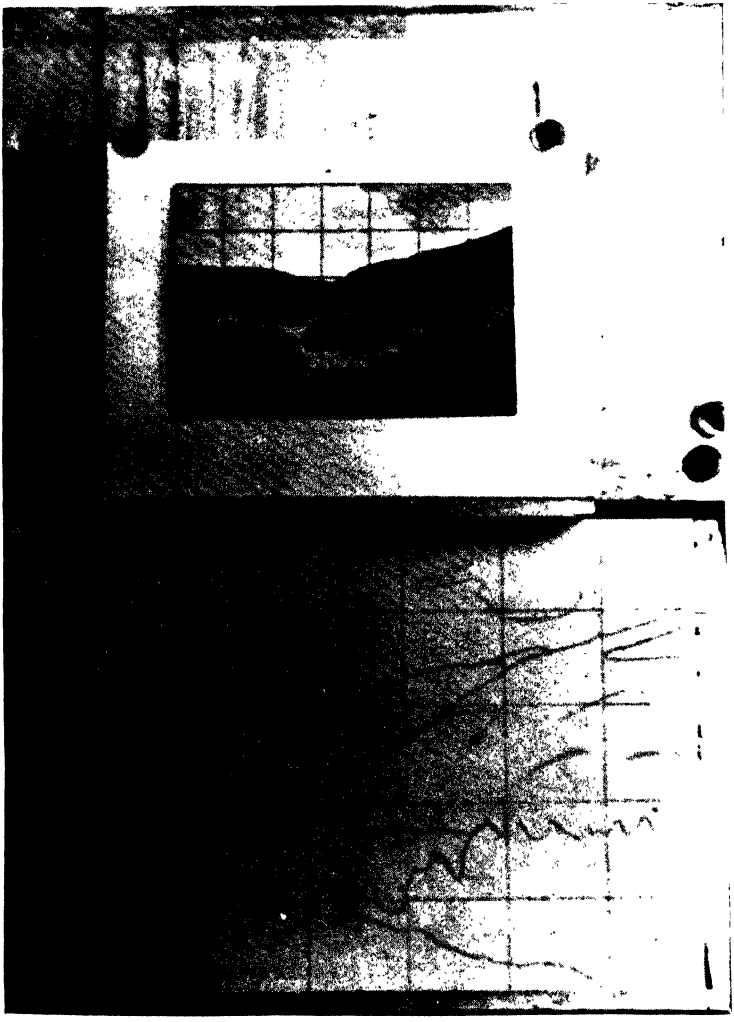


Fig. 16.
Alternative top for sketching easel.

become loose, fall off and be lost—and perhaps completely spoil a sketching expedition by the resultant breakdown. At the same time they should not be too tight in the timber as the latter is clearly intended to hinge about the pins. The rest for the canvas is simply two strips of wood clamped together with the two front legs between them by means of bolts and wing nuts. Thus there is a small measure of vertical adjustment for the canvas. The overall height may be safely left to individual choice but the rear leg should be of a length which will ensure that the front of the easel is almost upright, sloping backwards for the sake of stability only very slightly and no more than necessary for this purpose. This easel may be made of quite light timber—1 inch square would be adequate. Fig. 16 shows an alternative method of making the hinge portion at the apex of the easel. The rear leg is made so that it stands a few inches higher than the front legs. At the top of it is fixed a block which overhangs forwards and thus acts as a clamp for the top of the canvas. The latter is thus held securely at the top but is not adjustable at all vertically although the bottom rest is still movable in order to accommodate various sizes of canvases. That which you gain on the roundabouts therefore, you lose on the swings.



Canvas squared and outlines blocked in

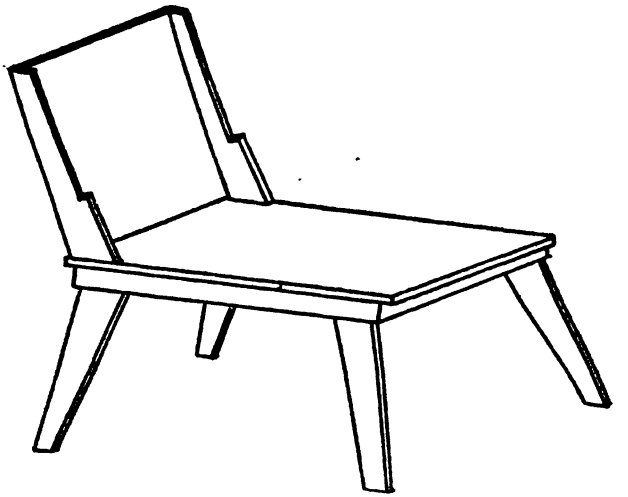
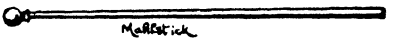


Fig. 17.
Artists' "Donkey'

Among the professionally manufactured easels there is a type called an "artists' donkey". It consists mainly of a stool of which the seat is comparatively long and narrow and at one end a sloping rest is fixed. The painter sits astride this contraption with his canvas lying against the rest, or, in some patterns, clamped to it. I do not personally recommend this device because the canvas is too

low for working upon it comfortably and therefore I do not propose to consider it as worth the labour of making. If anyone cares to make one, however, it is not difficult to see how to go about the job. It seems to me that the 'donkey' is not sufficiently versatile for use as a studio easel and it is too cumbersome for portable use.



III. THE TOOLS

BEFORE I attempted to begin writing this chapter, I made a list of the oil painter's tools and appliances and until I did so I hadn't realised that they are so few. This is the list :—

Colour Box.	Palette.
Brushes.	Palette Knife.
Dipper.	Brush Washer.
Mahlstick.	Straight Edge.

These are all essential with the possible exception of the brush washer, although some sort of container in which the brushes may be swilled is necessary. I shall, however, have more to say on this point later on because I prefer to deal with each item in the above list in order of importance.

Colour Box. Some sort of box is necessary if only as a means of keeping the tubes of oil colours in safety and where they may all be found easily. If you purchase a fitted oil sketching box you may find that you have purchased some oil colours

which you do not particularly want and may lack some which you regard as necessary. When you buy other colours, as you undoubtedly will, there may be insufficient room for them in the box. Fitted oil boxes are expensive and I suggest that it will be preferable to buy one empty and fill it with your own selection of colours and accessories. If you do buy a box, either empty or fitted, buy one which is rather larger than you need to begin with so that there will be room for the inevitable expansion later on. The boxes available range from the type already referred to in the last chapter which are designed to hold a canvas in the lid so that it may be worked upon, down to simpler wooden or enamelled tinplate boxes. The former cost something like £4 empty to £8 or £9 fitted with colours, etc. These boxes are very delectable and are large enough to absorb any reasonable expansion. I must admit that I have long desired to possess one of these luxurious boxes myself—perhaps I may manage to acquire the necessary cash if enough would-be oil painters are sufficiently charitable to purchase copies of this book! But to be serious again, enamelled tinplate boxes are sufficiently cheap to be within my limited means and are entirely satisfactory in all other respects. The larger ones cost about thirty shillings unfitted while

smaller ones are available at correspondingly lower prices.

I do not wish to give the impression that oil painting is an expensive hobby. It can be if you let it but not if you go the right way about it, making and improvising as much of the necessary gear as possible and buying only those items which cannot be made. Once the equipment has been gathered together the only expenditure is that for the consumable items—the colours, canvases, mediums, etc. This is true of a great many other, and less-worthy, pastimes and crafts. Admittedly some of the working materials are quite expensive but one is not painting a large canvas every day of the week and the colours do go a very long way, comparatively speaking.

To return to the subject of boxes, then, it is not *essential* to buy one at all because the colours and other items may be easily and quite conveniently contained in one or more cardboard boxes of suitable size and shape. It is often possible to beg small boxes from the art shops—boxes in which colour tubes are packed in bulk by the manufacturers are obviously ideal for the purpose. Indeed these boxes are frequently used to pack up the tubes when you purchase them. You may, therefore, use anything from begged cardboard boxes to large

and costly professional artists' outfits, but the choice is entirely yours according to your fancy and the obesity of your purse.

Palette. Some sort of palette is indispensable. Once again there is a choice of several different patterns. The makers offer three different types with certain reservations as to sizes. These are shown in Fig. 18; they are (a) the rectangular or oblong pattern, (b) hook shape, and (c) the balanced studio palette. The first two are both available in small to medium sizes while the studio pattern is obtainable only in large sizes. There is also a fourth pattern which does not appear to be very much in vogue although it appears to be as useful as the studio palette. The manufacturers of artists' materials and equipment do not include this type in their catalogues so it is not, presumably, in any great demand. A rough outline sketch of this pattern is shown in Fig. 18(d). The thumb-hole is nearer the centre of the palette and to some extent, therefore, it would be better balanced than the others. The cut-out for brushes is in the form of a curved slot which does, at least, enable the user to spread his brushes out well and he may readily select the one he wants at any time. My personal preferences are a large studio palette

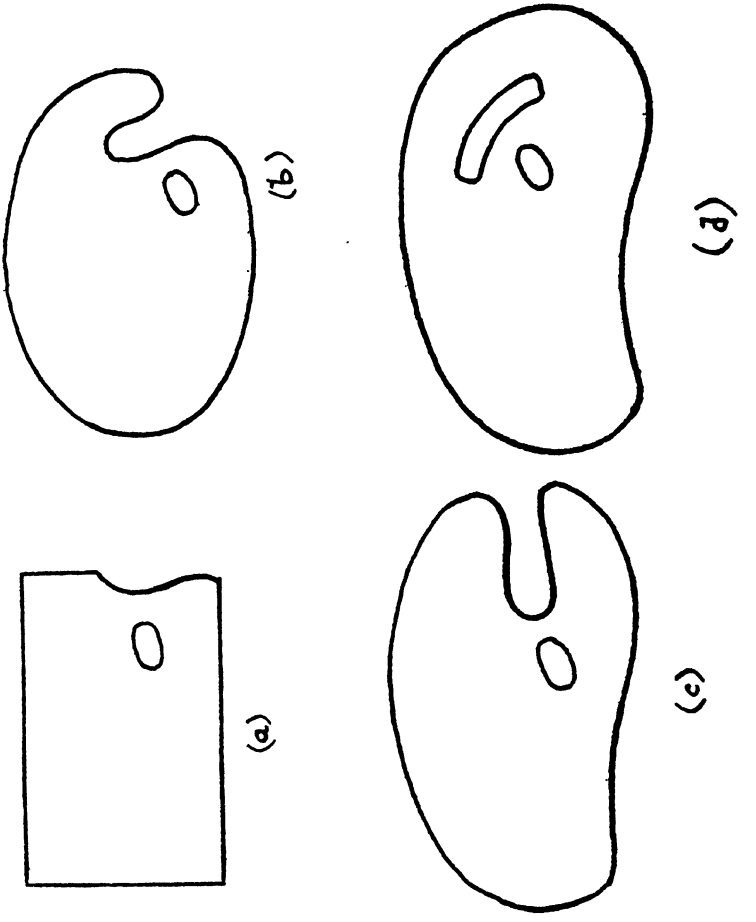


Fig. 18.
Palette patterns.

of at least an 18 inch size (that is the length) for work indoors, while the rectangular pattern is very conveniently carried inside a sketching box for outdoor painting. Most fitted sketching boxes are, in fact, provided with a rectangular palette and it is usual to purchase even unfitted boxes paired with an oblong palette to suit. I do not intend to suggest that there is anything basically wrong with the hook shape because I have said nothing about it—and I do actually possess one of this type and it is used occasionally—but I just prefer the studio pattern. The latter has, at least, the advantage of fitting comfortably on the forearm owing to the concavity of the near edge. In point of fact a palette can be almost any shape under the sun so long as it is flat, since its sole purpose is to provide a convenient surface on which the paints may be mixed. Large palettes are relatively expensive and, again, I would suggest that the cheapest form is one which has been home-made from a sheet of plywood or thin wood of some description. Hardboard, which is very cheap, makes an excellent palette and I imagine that many of the modern plastics including the plastic faced hardboards such as 'Formica' and 'Hardec' would also do so. Perspex would also be ideal but it is almost as expensive as buying a ready-made palette although

it would have twenty times the durability of a factory-made wooden palette. All of these latter materials would also be preferable to wood because they would not absorb the oil in the paints. For this reason a new wooden palette should be well dressed with linseed oil before it is put into use in order to pre-saturate it and thus reduce its absorption capacity. The wood need not, in the interests of lightness, be thicker than a quarter of an inch, while a stiffer material such as hardboard, either plain or plastic-faced, may be as thin as three sixteenths or even one eighth of an inch without detriment. I suppose the best tool for cutting out such an irregular shape from any of the materials mentioned would be a fretsaw, but if this tool is not available the job could be done by means of an ordinary hand saw or tenon saw, cutting off bits gradually all round the outline and finishing the edge by filing and sandpapering to smooth away the irregularities—this would probably need doing in any case, whatever the tool used. The thumbhole and brush cutout can be shaped by boring holes, two for the thumbhole and one for the cutout, and then chopping the remainder out with a small chisel but, of course, a fretsaw will do this job much more easily. Try to obtain the loan of one if you do not possess it.

Messrs. Reeves and Sons Ltd.—one of the oldest firms manufacturing artists' materials—have introduced a palette which consists of a block of fifty palette-shaped sheets of oil paper. When the top sheet is soiled it may be stripped off and thrown away. Thus a clean palette is always at hand at a moment's notice without the messy business of cleaning off waste paint. It is obtainable in two sizes, 12 ins. by 9 ins., and 9 ins. by 5¼ ins. andthese are priced at 4s. 6d. and 2s. 6d. respectively.

Brushes. These are very much a matter for personal choice, taking into account the work upon which it is intended to concentrate. Most writers on oil painting (at least those whose works I have read) advocate using large brushes. Now this is all very nice if it is intended to paint nothing but large canvases two feet or more in length, or it is intended to do only impressionist work. I fail to see how it is possible to paint small pictures and to paint the details which are so despised by impressionists having only large brushes to use. Therefore I employ a wide variety of sizes. Hoghair or sables? The latter are costly, in fact in the large sizes they are extremely expensive although they are, as might be expected, delightful to use. The

smaller sizes, on the other hand, are reasonably priced and so I suggest a compromise, using sables for the small sized brushes and hoghair brushes, which are very much cheaper, for the larger ones. There are available all sorts of patterns—round brushes, flat brushes, and filbert shaped brushes and the two last-named are supplied in a variety of bristle lengths and with other minor modifications. Filbert-shaped brushes are, to some extent, a compromise between the round and flat types and are thereby a very useful pattern. Besides those mentioned there are also two or three other specialised types which need not yet concern us. It is usual to suggest airily that the novice should provide himself with a selection of round and flat brushes in sizes 6 to 12, two or three of each size to begin with! I would not go quite so far as to make so definite a suggestion. Once again I must repeat that the brushes depend so much on the type of painting to be attempted. If there is any uncertainty on this point I would suggest the following as a useful selection for a beginner—three or four round brushes (hog-hair) from size 2 to size 6 together with a larger filbert-shaped No. 8 and a couple of flats, a small one, say about No. 2 and a medium size, about No. 6. This selection should see the beginner over his first essays. When

two or three pictures have been painted he will be able to form his own opinion as to what other types and sizes will be most suited to his own particular style and purposes. Round brushes are generally used to a greater extent than the others, at least, they are so far as I am concerned. Other people may use their brushes differently. I find filbert-shaped brushes useful for painting large areas of one colour—skies, for example—while the square edged flats are useful for painting straight edges and corners and angles in, for instance, paintings in which architectural features are included. While on the subject of brushes it is perhaps worth mentioning that brush cases are available. These are useful for carrying brushes in safety when painting outdoors. Oil sketching boxes are, for the most part, too small to admit the normal long-handled oil colour brushes. The brushes can, of course, be shortened but it seems a great pity to abuse them in this way. There is, therefore, no alternative to a brush case unless one is fortunate enough to possess one of the large carry-all cases already referred to covetously earlier in this chapter and the previous one. For painting indoors and also during periods of inactivity, the brushes are usually kept in a jar or pot of some sort, with the bristles pointing upwards, but, if you wish, you may

fit some sort of a brush holder on the easel as I have done to mine for use while actually painting.

Palette Knife. A palette knife is necessary for mixing colours on the surface of the palette and also for scraping waste paint from it when work is done. In addition it may also be used for scraping paint from the canvas when it is desired to erase a passage which has been painted incorrectly or for any other reason. There are two patterns, one shaped something after the style of a small table knife and the other is similar to a bricklayer's trowel on a small scale. There is also a painting knife which has a very thin pear-shaped or trowel-shaped cranked blade; this is really the proper tool for removing paint from a canvas but the ordinary palette knife will serve adequately for this job besides performing on the palette. The latter is therefore the more useful and the more used tool. Have one of each pattern by all means if you wish to do so but at least provide yourself with a palette knife.

Dipper. You will also need a dipper. This is a small circular vessel made of tinplate and underneath it a clip is provided by means of which it may be fixed to the palette. It is used to hold a small

quantity of the medium or oil for thinning the paint. Both single and double dippers can be obtained. The latter are very convenient for holding two different liquids at once but when the time comes to empty the contents back into their respective bottles it is found that one is spilled while the other is being poured out. I suggest therefore that if you feel you need a double dipper you will be better advised to buy two singles. In practice I find that I am apt to tilt my palette at times to the extent that I spill the medium from the dipper despite the provision of a non-spill rim on it. I have therefore modified the clip so that I can fix it on to the shelf of my easel where it is right at hand but does not inadvertently become emptied of its contents.

Brush Washer. Some sort of brush washer is a great convenience during painting. Oddly enough, none of the major suppliers of artists' gear seem to list this item in their catalogues. You may, therefore, wish to do the alternative of making one something on the lines of the device sketched in Fig. 19. It consists of an outer tin with lid and inside this is another, smaller, tin which is open at its top end while the bottom has been replaced with fine wire gauze, soldered into place. Wire

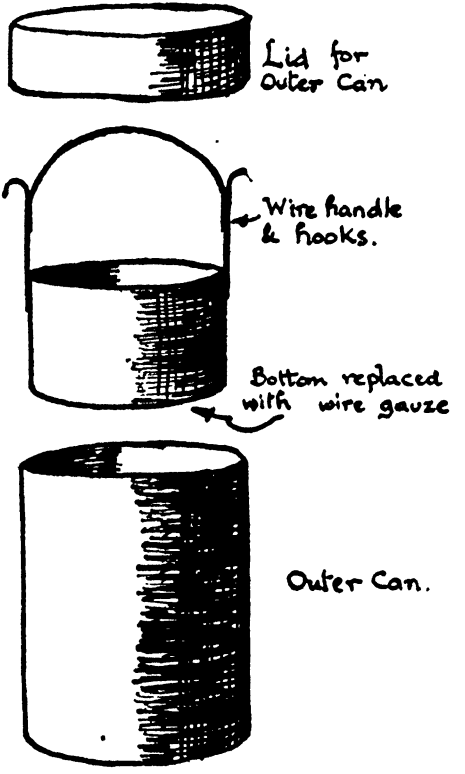


Fig. 19.

Brush washers.

handles are fitted to the inner portion so that it can be raised up inside the outer container and there fixed in position. The brushes are cleaned by scrubbing them on the gauze—the can being partly filled with a suitable paint solvent—which allows the paint to fall through into the bottom of the container and so the brushes are cleansed in the comparatively clean fluid inside the inner portion. I find that paraffin is quite efficient for this job and much less expensive than turpentine which would be wasted employed in this way. If you do not care for soldering you might procure a suitable tin for the inner part and simply knock some holes in the bottom with a nail and hammer. The holes should be driven through from inside the tin because the rough edges would spoil the bristles of the brushes if they protruded into the tin. When I am painting out of doors I frequently use as a brush washer a double dipper clipped on to the easel because it is much less bulky and therefore more portable. A double one is used so that the brushes may be rinsed twice. Most of the paint is removed by the first swill and then a wipe in a piece of cloth and the second immersion is therefore in cleaner paraffin.

If the brushes are laid aside to be unused for a longer period than two or three days, it is beneficial

to their health to give them a 'proper doing' in soap and warm water. Wet the bristles, rub them on a cake of soap and then scrub them against the palm of the hand to work up a good lather. It may be necessary to rinse and re-lather two or three times before the brush is properly clean. Finally rinse again in clean warm water, shake as much out of the bristles as possible and remove as much of the remaining water as you can with clean rag before putting the brush aside to dry. Mould the bristles into shape between finger and thumb and put the brushes, bristles upright, into a jar or vase or some such vessel. I suppose one of the modern detergent washing powders could very well be used instead of soap but I hesitate to use them on my precious good quality bristle and sable brushes. I am uncertain of the effects of the detergents on them, both immediately and as a long term effect.

Mahlstick. Although some artists think it beneath their dignity to use a mahlstick, it is often very handy. Its purpose is to act as a rest upon which the brush hand may be steadied while the smaller details are painted in. It can be purchased in the art shops but is very easily made. All that is required is a fairly stiff length of wooden dowel rod, bamboo or even an old billiard cue—a length of

three feet is quite sufficient although the factory-made sticks are usually four feet long. One end is upholstered with a knob of cotton wool or some similar soft material, and overlaid with a piece of cloth or soft leather secured by tying it with string round the stick over the cloth below the knob. The soft top may thus be rested upon a dry portion of a canvas without damaging the paint. My own mahlstick is a home-made article and is fitted with a cork 'knob' carefully sandpapered to a smooth finish and I find that this is quite efficient and easily cleaned if necessary.

Straight-edge. Some form of straight-edge will be needed and if it is one graduated in inches it will be all the more useful and more useful still if it is also graduated in centimetres as well. The ordinary twelve-inch ruler is not really long enough unless its use is confined to small pictures. Eighteen inch graduated rulers are available and are half as useful again, but a two foot ruler (if you can get it) would be better still. It will probably be necessary to compromise by supplementing a twelve inch ruler for measuring, with a plain 24 inch Tee Square. In any case the latter item, although not exactly essential, is very useful at times and well worth having. There is also a definite reason in having a

straight edge of some sort which is graduated in both inches and centimetres, a reason which will become evident in a later chapter at a more appropriate moment.

IV. THE COLOURS

In company with most writers on oil painting, I suppose I must include a list of those colours which —in my opinion—should be in an oil painter's colour-box. No two writers will give exactly the same list but almost all agree that it should be a short one, at least for a beginner. I think it is extremely doubtful, however, if more than two per cent of my readers will content themselves with my list, nor with that of any other writer. I may as well confess that my own box at this moment contains no less than thirty different colours besides the whites. I will also admit that they do not all bear signs of having been used. Oil colours simply cry out to be collected by those of us who find such fascination in using them. Even their names suggest a subtle richness and beauty. Just stop for a moment and think of them—umber, sienna, ochre, aureolin, cerulean blue, viridian, madder, ultramarine; all sparkle with the scintillation of precious stones. But we must put an end to this slightly poetical interlude and pass on to more practical things.

Oil colours are manufactured in two grades, those intended for the use of students being of a cheaper quality and those which, being of better quality, are referred to as "artists' oil colours". Some of the latter are relatively costly and in a few cases very expensive, but most are reasonably priced. If, therefore, it is felt worthwhile to have nothing but the best, it is not too costly to indulge one's whims in this direction. On the other hand, if it is necessary for any reason to practise a certain amount of economy a compromise may be arrived at by employing artists' quality for the cheaper colours and students' quality for the more expensive ones. The earth colours in artists' grade—the ochres, siennas and umbers, and also certain other colours are, in fact, only a penny or two more than the cheaper grade in the smaller tube sizes. The students' quality of those colours which in the artists' grade are in the more expensive range are, in most cases, synthetic tints, but much useful work is possible with them. Students' oil colours are available in 3 inch (No. 3) tubes, 4 inch (No. 8) which have twice the capacity of No. 3 size and No. 14 (Studio) tubes containing three times the quantity of No. 3. Whites are obtainable in all these sizes and also in half-pound (No. 20) tubes. Artists' oil colours are sold in all of the sizes already

mentioned and in addition there is a two-inch size (No. 2) which is used for some of the more expensive colours in the range. This permits the purchase of a smaller quantity at a correspondingly smaller outlay and in these cases they are not sold in No. 3 tubes, the next larger size available being a No. 8. Artists' quality whites are put up in Nos. 3, 8, 14 and 20 tubes and also in a larger one still, No. 40, which contains one pound of paint. In all cases the larger sizes from No. 14 upwards are slightly cheaper proportionately, so that colours which are in very frequent use can be purchased in these sizes with some small savings in cost. In the case of Messrs. Reeves' colours, they include a No. 24 size in their range; this seems to be the equivalent of No. 20 in other makers' lists.

Artists' oil colours are graded for permanence. It may be thought, perhaps, that this is a quality which matters very little since our work is of the strictly amateur variety. Nevertheless, any one picture, when it is completed, may well surprise even its creator and be well worth preserving for posterity. Hence it is worthwhile making sure that no colours except those which are durable are used on the palette. The pigments are graded into four degrees of permanence—permanent, durable, moderately durable and fugitive or impermanent.

In some cases colours which are permanent when used at their full strength may be no more than moderately durable when thinned with medium and used as a delicate stain. On my own palette I exclude all colours which are outside the limits of the first two degrees of permanence.

Before we go any further on this subject I must get down to brass tacks and present my list of essential colours. It is as follows:—

Ivory Black	Terre Verte
Cerulean Blue	Light Red
French Ultramarine	Vermilion
Burnt Sienna	Cadmium Yellow
Burnt Umber	Yellow Ochre
Viridian	Flake White

That, for what it is worth, is my list of colours which are adequate for almost every picture you may wish to paint. It may be found later on, however, that I shall suggest substitutes for some of these colours in certain circumstances. In any case I do not expect anyone to stick to my list. You will read other authors' works and will add to my list those colours which they mention but which are omitted from mine. By the time you have done this and also added anything from a few to a considerable number of your own choosing, you will

find yourself the proud possessor of a large variety of oil colours, many of which you may never find a use for at all!

Some of the pigments are poisonous in varying degree and these should be kept away from the hands of young children whether in tubes, on the palette or on canvases which are in course of being painted or are newly completed. Of those colours included in my list, Flake White is poisonous since it is prepared from basic lead carbonate, commonly referred to as 'white lead'. Vermilion, the genuine variety, not the students' colour known as Vermilion *Tint*, is made from a mercuric compound and although it is not usually marked as poisonous in the lists is, at least, under the same suspicion as are all compounds of mercury. Since we must have both of these colours we must and substitutes. I find that Zinc White and Titanium White, neither of which are poisonous, may be safely substituted for Flake White, and both are, in some respects, superior to the latter. Vermilion may be substituted fairly accurately by Cadmium Red toned down with a very little Light Red or Venetian Red. In fact Cadmium Red and Cadmium Scarlet are almost identical with Vermilion and Scarlet Vermilion respectively but in each case are slightly brighter in colour. There are some other poisonous

colours which have not appeared in my list and have not yet been mentioned. Emerald Green is one of the worst offenders in this respect: it is prepared from a complex compound of copper and arsenic and is exceedingly poisonous. This compound is also known by the common name of Paris Green and as such, is used in poisonous insecticides for horticultural purposes. It is a Schedule I poison which means that it can only be obtained against a signature in the Poisons Register. Cadmium Emerald, which is not listed by all colourmen, is a useful alternative but if this cannot be obtained, a useful and adequate substitute may be compounded from Viridian or Opaque Oxide of Chromium mixed with White. In any case Emerald Green is only moderately durable. Some of the mauve and violet pigments are also poisonous and so is Naples Yellow. Prussian Blue is not quoted as poisonous but I distrust it because it is of the cyanide group: Monastral Blue is a good alternative. The Chrome Yellows are made from Lead Chromate and the Chrome Greens are mixtures in varying proportions of Chrome Yellow and Prussian Blue and so all of these cannot be regarded as entirely harmless although they may not be deadly poisonous. However all the dangerously poisonous colours should be indicated as such in the catalogues so that anyone

who desires to do so may take evasive action. It is perhaps the wisest course to regard all the colours as harmful so far as young children are concerned and then there can be no accidents. In any case, whether children are liable to come into contact with the colours or not, even adults should use the very poisonous pigments intelligently and with extreme care.

Until I became sufficiently friendly with the colours to the extent that I was able to visualise each from its name alone, I found that a colour-chart pinned on to the easel was very helpful to the problem of deciding which particular pigment was required for a certain passage. Messrs. Winsor and Newton issue a colour chart which may be had free of charge on application to them. It does not, however, include all the colours in their complete range although it does show all the more commonly used ones. You may, therefore, make your own chart of those colours which are actually included in your own box. Pencil a table of squares and oblongs on a sheet of oil sketching paper and put a blob of paint in each square, inscribing each with its name in the adjoining oblong space as shown in Fig. 20. Draw each colour out a little so that the effect of a thin film of each can be seen besides its appearance as an opaque blob.

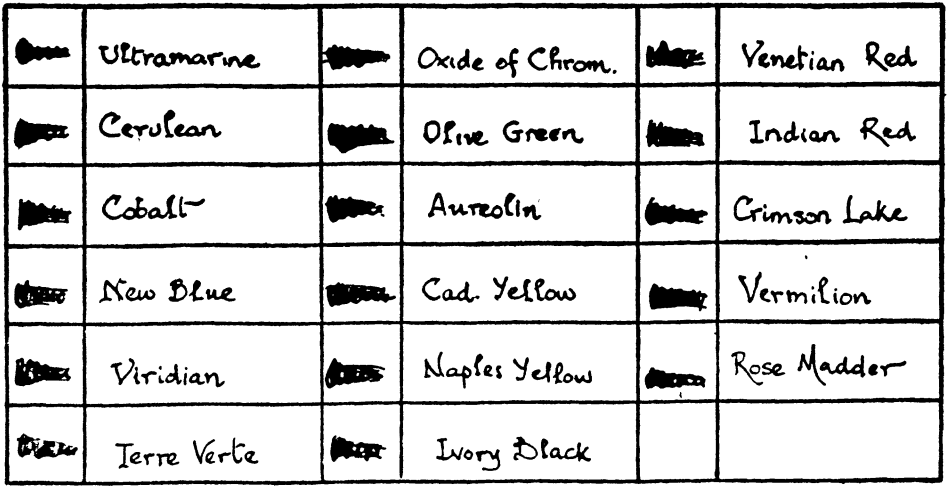


Fig. 20.

Colour chart.

If you find yourself collecting colours, remember that a number of the manufactured pigments are merely mixtures of two or more other colours and may therefore be prepared by the painter himself by mixing them on his palette as required. In particular the various greys and neutrals can be made by mixtures of black and white in varying proportions with lacings of blue or any other colour with which it is desired to tinge the basic neutral. The Chrome Greens are mixtures of Chrome Yellow and Prussian Blue as already mentioned. Sepia, once prepared from the 'ink' secreted by the cuttlefish, is now more reliably prepared by mixing Lamp Black and Burnt Sienna. Cadmium Green is a mixture of Cadmium Yellow and Viridian, while Cadmium Yellow mixed with Cadmium Red and Flake White in certain proportions, produces the colour known as Naples Yellow.

Again, some of the colours, although with differing names, are so very similar that they may scarcely be distinguished when placed side by side. An example of this is Venetian Red which is almost exactly similar to Light Red. There is a very slight difference but it is a very subtle one.

As regards the permanence of colours it does not necessarily follow that a particular colour possesses

the same degree of permanence when prepared by two different manufacturers, nor indeed that both samples are necessarily made from the same raw materials, although it is usually the case that they are. There are also some colours which are peculiar to individual manufacturers and not made by the others or are marketed under a different name, for there is also some divergence in the names of pigments. For instance, Veronese Green is given as a synonym for Emerald Green by one manufacturer and for Viridian by another. One colourman states that Transparent Oxide of Chromium is synonymous with Viridian while another offers both colours in his list although he admits in his literature that both are made of the same basic material—hydrated chromium sesquioxide. Permanent Blue and New Blue are also in the same category, both being a pale variety of Ultramarine and—to my eyes—indistinguishable from French Ultramarine.

The size of one's colour box may thus be limited to some degree by eliminating all colours which are very-near duplicates of others and, of the remainder, choosing only those which are of the first or second degree of permanence. Unless one does do something of this sort, the colour box of anyone other than the most strong-willed of amateur

painters, is liable to become of unmanageable size and variety.

Upon reflection it seems to me that the range of colours need include no more than a light and a dark colour in each main group in addition to black and white. That is to say, two each of blues, browns, greens, reds and yellows. From these it should be quite possible to mix any of the intermediate shades and any of the intermediate colours. It might also be necessary to add one or two specially favoured pigments but I would suggest the following as adequate (apart from the latter):—

Black	Burnt Sienna	Vermilion
White	Burnt Umber	Crimson
Cerulean Blue	Terre Verte	Cadmium Yellow
Ultramarine	Viridian	Yellow Ochre

With these pigments you would not go very wrong nor would you find many essential colours lacking from these or their mixtures. All of them are of the first or second degrees of permanence and each one is unlike any of the others.

Upon further reflection it seems to me that if it were really necessary the foregoing list could be still further and drastically curtailed to a mere half dozen with which all the other essential colours could be obtained by suitable mixtures. The list

would now consist of Black, White, French Ultramarine, Burnt Umber, Crimson Lake, and Cadmium Yellow. Black and White mixed with other colours would provide all the essential greys and neutrals. French Ultramarine could be deepened in tone by the judicious addition of black while, with equal ease, it could be lightened to any desired degree with white (but *not* Flake White). French Ultramarine, Crimson Lake (*not* Crimson Alizarin) and Cadmium Yellow — the three primaries—will supply the three secondaries purple, orange and green, all of which may not only be adjusted by varying the proportions of the constituent colours but may also be modified by dashes of the other pigments. Burnt Umber and Cadmium Yellow in varying proportions, with or without white, would provide all the tones from yellow to deep brown. The possibilities are endless but, of course, it would entail spending a great deal more time in mixing colours by trial and error than is necessary when a larger variety of pigments is available.

At this point it might be topical to say a little more about the greys and neutrals which may all be warmed or cooled by the addition of suitable pigments, reds or blues respectively. There are the simple neutrals prepared by mixing black and

white and there are also what may be called 'coloured neutrals', made up from this basic mixture by adding the necessary colour to it. Thus, grey-brown, grey-red, grey-green, grey-blue or any other coloured neutral can be prepared in any degree of tone.

Although I have been rather verbose on the subject of the colours we use I cannot yet conclude this chapter without talking about one or two points of special interest which have yet to be mentioned. Ultramarine—the genuine article—is extremely expensive, a small No. 2 tube costing very nearly £1. It may, however, be imitated by artificial ultramarines available in both pale (when it may be called Permanent Blue or New Blue) and deep shades. Alternatively the pigment known as French Ultramarine may be used. This is, I understand, of the same chemical composition as genuine ultramarine but it is prepared artificially whereas the genuine article is made only from natural *lapis lazuli*. All of the substitutes are quite permanent.

Vandyke Brown is a pleasant sounding colour and, so far as that goes, is of a pleasing warm appearance. The only snag is that, despite it being an 'earth' colour, its permanence is in doubt. For most purposes, umber will be found an adequate

alternative and it may be rendered deeper in tone when necessary by the addition of black.

Viridian is a pigment of great utility; it can be used mixed with yellow or blue in greater or lesser degree according to need in a great many circumstances and also toned down with white. It is also called sometimes, Emerald Oxide of Chromium and Emeraude Green besides Veronese Green and Transparent Oxide of Chromium as stated earlier; it is made from hydrated chromium sesquioxide. There is also another pigment called Opaque Oxide of Chromium and this is made from chromium sesquioxide; it is less blue than Viridian and is, of course, opaque, whereas Viridian is transparent.

Rose madder is another pigment which may be obtained in the genuine variety costing rather more than the artificial substitute, although the former is not really all that costly. The genuine variety is made from an extract of the root of the madder plant while the substitute is an artificially prepared alizarin lake. The Vermilions are also fairly expensive, less than genuine Ultramarine by a great deal but, even so, a No. 2 tube costs three shillings at the present time.

I have said earlier that since Flake White is poisonous it may, if desired, be substituted by Zinc

White or Titanium White, both of which are innocuous. There is also the advantage that both of the latter are slightly more permanent than Flake White and also they will permit mixture with certain other pigments which cannot be safely made with Flake White. Of the two I prefer Titanium White because Zinc White possesses a tendency to crack when dry. There is also Permanent White, which, since it is a mixture of both, possesses the advantages of both.

Finally, a little more must be said about the mixing of colours because there is need for caution with some pigments in certain mixtures. Certain small parentheses which have occurred earlier will now be made clear. First of all the degrees of permanence quoted by the colourmen are those applicable to the colours when they are laid upon the canvas just as they come from the tubes with the admixture only of a little medium. Mixture with another colour inevitably implies the dilution of a pigment and this alone may reduce its permanence although this quality may normally be deduced from the permanence of the individual pigments of which the mixture is composed. Similarly the dilution of a colour with a comparatively large quantity of oil or medium may decrease its durability in proportion to the degree to which it is

diluted even to the point of reducing its permanence to that of a pigment which is classified as fugitive, if the weakening is sufficiently protracted.

Some mixtures are likely to cause chemical changes and may not therefore produce the required and expected resulting colour, and of which the permanence may not be deduced from that of the original colours. Emerald Green is perhaps, one of the worst offenders in this respect—in addition to its other crimes—often blackening when attempts are made to mix it with any of the Cadmium colours, Vermilions and Naples Yellow. The Vermilions and Cadmium colours are also likely to result in impermanent mixtures with Prussian Blue and they may blacken the lead whites and other pigments containing white lead. The artificial Ultramarines are liable to bad behaviour when mixed with any of the Alizarin lakes or with Aureolin. Neither do they combine satisfactorily with the lead whites and they should therefore be lightened with Zinc White or Titanium White. It is unsafe to mix Aureolin with the Alizarin lakes or with Madder. Some of the mixtures referred to above are, however, held to be quite safe and in certain circumstances that may well be quite true. As I have already said earlier, colours which bear the same name but which originate from different

manufacturers may be prepared from differing raw materials although they appear to be identical. A certain mixture which is unreliable when composed of one manufacturer's colours may well be satisfactorily compounded from another colourman's products or even a combination of colours from each. It is best, therefore, to consult the literature of the maker of the colours which you favour on these points in order to be quite certain of the effects of mixing their particular pigments.

V. VEHICLES

To BEGIN with, it must be explained for the benefit of those readers who are complete beginners, that a vehicle or medium is a liquid with which oil colours may be thinned to make them more tractable. Mediums are also used to thin the colours down to the state where they may, in certain conditions, be used to lightly veil another colour, but more will be said of this process later on.

The simplest medium of all is turpentine, It tends to take all the shine and glossiness out of the paint and results in a matt-surfaced picture, but the gloss may be restored by applying a coat of picture varnish in due course. Vehicles are of two types—oils and varnish mediums. The most widely used is, I should guess, linseed oil, and although this is specially prepared for artists' use to render it pale in colour, it does tend to darken in course of time. It is also available under the name of 'Drying Oil', in which form it has been treated with lead oxide to cause it to dry more rapidly but it is even more liable to darken with age than the pure oil is.

At this point it is, perhaps, appropriate to say that it is by no means essential that a painting should dry quickly. Sometimes it is desirable, of course, when, for instance, it is necessary to overpaint a passage. Many painters like to keep their paintings 'open' for a considerable period with the paint remaining quite soft so that the colours may be blended together the more easily and thus the hard outlines can be softened.

Poppy oil is paler than linseed oil; it dries more slowly than the latter and does not darken so quickly. It is also obtainable treated with cobalt to accelerate its drying properties. Oil of Spike Lavender is also used but it is rather more expensive, costing about four shillings for a fluid ounce which is approximately three times the price of Poppy Oil and four times as costly as Linseed Oil.

Copal Oil Medium is very good when a moderately rapid drying medium is required. It does not darken appreciably and since it retains a certain amount of flexibility it does not readily crack when dry. Plain Copal Varnish may also be used as a medium but it is more useful as a picture varnish for coating a finished painting. There is also Oil Copal Varnish used for the same purposes but it is less rapid in drying. Presumably this is because the former preparation is made by

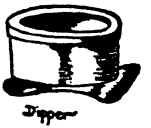
dissolving Gum Copal in drying oil and turpentine whereas in Oil Copal Varnish the solvent is plain oil. Japan Gold Size is sometimes used as a vehicle and in particular with pigments which are normally slow driers, in order tó increase their rate of drying. Yet another medium is Mastic Varnish which may be used in its normal state but is more often used as a constituent of the compound vehicle known as 'Megilp' or 'McGuilp'. This is made by mixing together equal quantities of Mastic Varnish and Drying Linseed Oil. Lastly there is a medium called 'Siccative' or 'Siccatif'. This may also be used on its own or it may be mingled with a little oil or turpentine in which event it will dry more slowly or more rapidly respectively according to which is added to it. This list practically exhausts the commercially manufactured preparations. There are others and also some home-made recipes but those which have been mentioned should offer a sufficiently wide field of choice. If we may simplify the choice a little, it is suggested that the following will serve most purposes adequately within their characteristic limits :—Copal Oil Medium for a quick drying vehicle and plain Poppy Oil when a slow drying medium is required. As you will see, however, there is a great deal of opportunity for experiment. Try any of them or,

indeed, all of them if you will and you will thus discover your own preferences.

When a picture has been completed the addition of a coat of varnish will usually enhance its attractiveness. More than that, however, it will certainly give the paint some sort of protection from atmospheric pollution and other dangers to its well-being. If the varnish is applied too soon, while the paint remains soft (although dry to the touch) the latter tends to become further softened by the varnish solvent. It therefore dissolves into the varnish and both become intimately united instead of the varnish forming a thin protective skin over the paint. In its worst effects it may cause the paint to run, one colour into another, and the picture may thereby be completely spoiled. Paint may appear to be dry a day or two after it has been laid and so it may be—on the surface. Underneath the dry top skin it will still be soft and semi-fluid. In course of time, however, it not only dries throughout but also hardens but this takes up a period of time which stretches into months. It is not entirely safe, therefore, to apply varnish to a picture until at least a year after it has been completed.

If you are impatient to add a gloss to a finished picture you may use a preparation called Retouch-

ing Varnish. Even this must not be applied too soon; leave the picture until the paint has dried thoroughly—but not necessarily hardened—before attempting to use it. As its name suggests, this varnish can be applied to a painting which may afterwards, when the varnish is dry, be retouched on top of it. It may therefore be used between successive layers of *dry* paint quite safely and as often as may be found necessary. Picture varnishes do not allow subsequent retouching satisfactorily without them first being removed, a process of some difficulty in certain cases. Both Copal Varnish and Mastic Varnish may be used for picture varnishing and for this purpose they are generally offered for sale as 'Picture Copal Varnish' and 'Picture Mastic Varnish'. Oil Copal Varnish may also be used for this purpose and there are available in addition, some other proprietary preparations possessing various advantageous qualities.



VI. CANVASES

HAVING gathered together all our equipment, colours and other materials there remains only 'something on which to paint'. Many different materials may be used as the bases of oil paintings. The earliest portable paintings (as distinct from murals) were executed on wooden panels; later came the stretched canvases and wooden panels covered with canvas. Nowadays the choice lies between paper, paper boards, hardboard, wooden panels, canvas boards and stretched canvases. The simplest and cheapest is oil sketching paper, the less expensive qualities of which may be obtained for as little as twopence for a sheet of 14 ins. by 10 ins. Not only because of its economy but also on account of its pleasant working surface, this material is ideal for the beginner's earliest attempts. Better quality papers are also available, prepared with roughened surfaces to simulate the texture of canvas more closely. These papers are also supplied stuck on to thin boards and are then described as 'oil sketching boards'.

There is a growing vogue for painting on hardboard, the modern substitute for plywood in many fields of operation, notably the manufacture of cheap doors, cupboards and inexpensive furniture generally. For painting purposes it is necessary to prepare the surface by giving it a coat of ordinary flat white paint or the 'foundation white' supplied by the colourmen. I am also told that the modern emulsion paints are very satisfactory for this purpose. Hardboard may also be rendered more like canvas by glueing muslin on to it and, when the adhesive has set, applying the usual white foundation. These home-made canvas boards are not at all to be despised and they are much cheaper than manufactured canvas boards if the hardboard is bought in large sheets and cut up as required.

Canvas boards are the happy medium between paper and the proper stretched canvases. In at least one respect, however, they are superior to the latter—the boards are comparatively stiff and therefore the canvas is almost unaffected by atmospheric changes. Furthermore they are almost entirely free from risk of mechanical damage which is not inconsiderable in the case of canvas on stretchers entirely unsupported over most of its area. At one time canvas boards were made up by glueing canvas on to wooden panels and it was

often solid mahogany at that, but in these more impecunious days stout millboard has taken the place of wood.

Whatever else may be said about stretched canvases it cannot be denied that they are the 'real thing'. The canvas may be susceptible to accidental damage and to slight slackening and tightening in reponse to dry and damp atmospheric conditions respectively, but there is a very pleasant feel about it, a delightful springy quality which reacts to the pressure of the brush agreeably, and which is entirely absent with solid panels and boards. Although all grades of canvas are available by the yard and wood stretchers are supplied separately, I do not really think there is much necessity for amateurs making up their own stretched canvases. If, however, you would like to try it, you will need a special tool called canvas pliers which will cost about fifteen shillings. These have wide jaws and are used to grip the canvas while it is pulled taut around the stretcher frame. Besides this only tacks and a small hammer are needed and the job itself should present no difficulties if a professionally prepared canvas is first examined to see just how the job is done. It will be necessary, of course, to prime the canvas with foundation paint before it is ready for use. Canvases purchased on stretchers

are already primed and prepared ready for use.

Artists' canvas is manufactured in many grades and qualities according to the purpose for which it is required. The better qualities and hence, the more expensive canvases, are woven from flax yarns while there are cheaper grades made from jute or a mixture of jute and flax and also from cotton, these last being the students' quality canvases. It is available in varying degrees of coarseness of weave and with greater or lesser 'tooth', a term which is used to denote the roughness or smoothness of the actual yarn from which the canvas is woven, and thus it indicates its ability to get hold of the paint. For instance, a canvas may be very coarsely woven from a smooth yarn and although it would be classed as having a rough grain (because of the coarse weave) it would, nevertheless possess only slight tooth (because of the smoothness of the yarn). Generally speaking the coarser canvases are suitable for large-scale pictures, particularly landscapes and marine work, and for pictures of any size which are executed with a bold technique. The finer canvases are more suitable for paintings which include a great deal of small detail and for small pictures in general.

VII. GETTING DOWN TO WORK

We can now get to grips with the actual job of painting a picture. Some writers advise beginning by painting some simple object against a plain background, for example, a plain coloured earthenware jug, as a still-life subject in monochrome. But I believe you will feel happier if you can manage to produce something of real pictorial value, right from the beginning. Do not, however, try to accomplish too much at once; choose some subject with very little detail in it because, for one thing, you may not yet have learned what to put in and what is best left out.

Let us, then, start with a photograph of a simple landscape, something in the style of that shown in Plate II. This measures 7 ins. by 5 ins. and since this is somewhat on the small side for an oil painting, we will enlarge it to 14 ins. by 10 ins., this being one of the standard sizes of canvases and oil sketching paper sheets. First we must decide if the proportions of the linear measurements of the original are in a direct ratio with the corresponding

dimensions of the enlarged picture. In this case, of course, the linear ratio is exactly one to two. It may always be ascertained, very simply, whether or not the enlargement ratio is correct by laying the original in the corner of the canvas. If a straight-edge is now laid along the diagonal of the original the proportions will be correct if it also passes exactly over the opposite corner of the canvas. (See Fig. 21).

We now divide up the original into one inch squares using a soft lead pencil. If it is necessary to avoid mutilating the original in this way, use a sheet of glass which has been coated with photographers' retouching medium (which makes it receptive of pencil) laid over the original. The lines may afterwards be removed from the teated glass by means of a rag which has been anointed with a few drops of paraffin. Thus it may be used over and over again indefinitely. Since the measurement of each side of the original is to be doubled, we must double the length of the sides of each square and thus we must divide the canvas into two-inch squares (Plate III). A rough sketch of the main outlines may now be made on the canvas, using the squares as a guide. The accepted thing for doing this job is a stick of charcoal but I have found in practice that a soft pencil is quite adequate

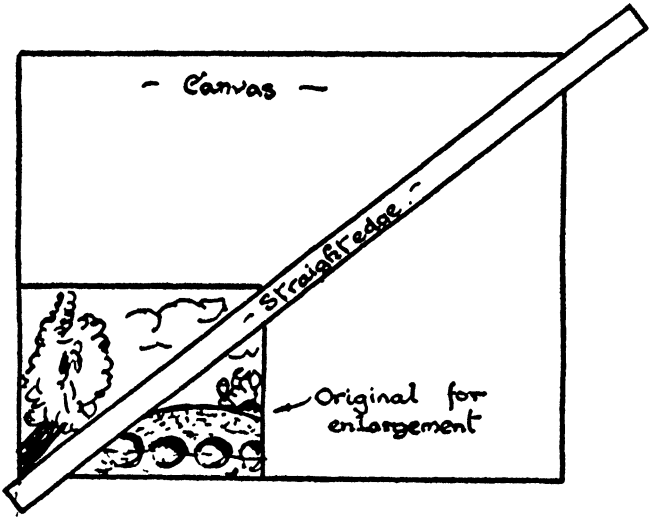


Fig. 21.
Checking for proportional enlargement.

and more convenient in many ways. It does not readily rub off the paper or canvas as does charcoal unless treated with a fixative. Unfixed charcoal also tends to sully light-coloured pigments painted over it. It is possible to purchase what are called 'carbon pencils', in which the 'lead' is much more black than in the ordinary lead pencil. One of these in a soft grade, BB or BBB, is a most useful

tool for blocking in the outlines; the result is very similar to that produced by charcoal but it does not rub off accidentally quite so readily and the pencil does not break nearly so easily as a stick of charcoal.

It is as well to make as few squares as may be necessary in the interests of simplicity because too many are liable to confuse the pattern. Where a patch of detail exists in the original, a larger square may always be subdivided into smaller ones and the corresponding square on the canvas subdivided proportionately. The squares must always be proportionate to each other but the ratio need not necessarily be a simple one if it is convenient to use a more involved one. An original measuring 8 ins. by 6 ins. may be divided into twelve two-inch squares and enlarged on to a 12 ins. by 9 ins. canvas divided into three-inch squares. If necessary two-inch squares may be enlarged to five-inch squares, or seven-inch squares or squares of any dimensions, even, if the occasion arises, to squares measuring some odd figure like $5\frac{7}{8}$ inches. At the end of Chapter III I suggested having a straight-edge divided into inches and also centimetres as well if possible; the reason for this now becomes apparent because the metric scale is often useful for this job of squaring. At times it is found that an

original cannot be squared exactly in inches but it may be possible to do so in centimetres. It is not absolutely essential, of course, to deal solely with squares. The subdivisions may be rectangles of any type provided that the dimensions are proportionate. For instance, rectangles measuring 1 in. by 1½ in. may be enlarged up to 2 in. by 3 in. or 1½ in. by 2¼ in. or 2½ in. by 3¾ in. or to whatever size may be necessary, provided always that the linear dimensions of each rectangle are in the simple relationship of two units to three units.

Now we are almost ready to begin applying some paint to the canvas or oil sketching paper, whichever we may be using. The first step in this direction is to put the colours on the palette, and if it is a new one (of wood) it should be given a rub with a rag soaked in linseed oil. The colours are squeezed out of the tubes in blobs placed around the outside edge of the palette. This leaves the central area and near edge clear for colour mixing. There is no need to put out all the colours at once, of course, they can be added to the palette as painting proceeds. Indeed, under the assumption that the picture will take at least several sessions to complete, it would very likely be the case that some colours put out at the beginning would not be needed at all until two or three days later and

would thus become spoiled and wasted. Incidentally, if any colours left on the palette are worth saving for another occasion not too far distant, they are best kept by scraping them off and placing them on a small sheet of glass immersed in water in a suitable vessel. The paint is thus kept from contact with the atmosphere which naturally tends to dry and harden it. Colour mixing is done with the palette knife which is used by kneading portions of colour together much in the way in which, on a larger scale, cement and sand are shovelled together and mixed with water to make concrete. A little of the chosen medium or oil is mixed with each colour applied to the canvas so that the entire paint film becomes interlocked as it were, into a single entity. When painting is ceased for the time being, the paint should be removed from the palette by scraping it off with the palette knife. If it is allowed to dry on to the palette it will be difficult or impossible to remove depending on the time it has been allowed to remain. The palette is best kept quite clean when not actively in use. Remove the last traces by means of a rag soaked in turpentine or paraffin and then rub in a little linseed oil before putting it aside.

To return to our painting once again after these digressions which, I submit, are quite necessary

and not at all out of place, we may now take up our brush and begin to apply some colour to the canvas. I always begin a landscape by painting the sky, the blue (if any) first, then the lightest parts of the cloud and finally the cloud shadows. It may be that my methods are all wrong from the expert standpoint, but I was ever the advocate of the policy by which any means are justified by the results achieved. I suppose I am led to start at the top of the canvas through force of habit, from the effects of much dealing with the written page. So it is that I start work at the top of the picture and work more or less downwards, although I do dodge about here and there to some extent—when I get going—whenever the same colour is necessary in several different parts.

In the painting shown in Plate IV, which is the completed painting of the original and outline shown in Plate III, I first painted the sky, then the distant hills in the left far background, the hills in the right middle distance, the lake, the dark trees in the right foreground in that order and, finally, the trees in the left foreground. The picture is quite a simple one and its execution is somewhat amateur; there are many faults and much room for improvement but it is recognisable and it does serve to illustrate the sort of thing which can be

produced by a raw beginner in his early attempts at oil painting. The original was an ordinary black-and-white photograph and thus it was necessary to translate the simple tonal gradations into colours and shades. The selection of colours is only a matter of commonsense and intelligence based upon observation. It will no doubt be noticed that my rendering of the sky is not in strict accordance with the original but that is artist's licence, of course.

I have said very little or nothing about the actual operation of laying the paint upon the canvas. In order to justify this, perhaps seemingly flagrant omission, I must say here that if I wrote enough words to fill a complete set of volumes the Encyclopaedia Britannica on the subject of painting in oils I should be no nearer to teaching a beginner how to paint than I am at this moment. Neither I nor any other person, however accomplished an artist, can teach anyone else how to handle the brushes and colours any more than one can be taught to drive a car in modern traffic conditions or use a typewriter properly or any other manipulative operation solely by the written word. We cannot do more than point the way, the general direction to follow, towards the ultimate goal; the would-be painter must teach

himself how to handle his colours and brushes by the only route open to him—by practice and endeavour. If he has any latent ability and artistic feeling at all it will soon reveal itself in the acquisition of an easy style of handling his brushes and paint by instinct alone.

As regards the actual handling of brushes, however, they should neither be held by the extreme tips of their handles nor should they be gripped and used as a pen or pencil is held for writing. You will probably discover the most comfortable and controllable grip to be about three inches or so from the bristles. If it is necessary to paint in really small details with a very fine brush it may be found easier to accomplish if the brush is held somewhat nearer the bristles and the hand steadied with the aid of a mahlstick. The way in which an artist lays his colours on the canvas is referred to as 'handling'. This is as much his autograph, his personal trademark, as is his signature in the corner of the picture, for the methods and styles of handling are infinitely varied and entirely individual. In general the brush strokes should follow the contours of the object represented; by this means the form of the object is more truly rendered. The truth of this statement may be seen by making two line drawings of a rotund jar or vase and paint

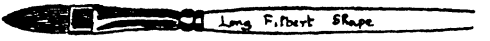
in one with strokes which follow its curves while the other is painted entirely with horizontal straight strokes; then compare the two. Handling does not refer solely to the way in which the brush is made actually to convey the paint to the canvas. It also concerns the way in which the paint itself is treated. Some pigments are transparent as we have already stated in an earlier chapter. These may be thinned with oil or medium and applied on a white or light-coloured ground so that the latter actually reflects light back through the thin film of transparent colour, or stain as it is usually called. These same transparent colours may also be thinned and thus lightened in tone, as opaque colours are, by mixing them with white. This, however, renders them opaque because the white itself is opaque. It is thus possible to take a transparent pigment and lighten its tone by both methods and if you care to experiment with this you will see how much richer is the effect of the thin transparent stain than the same tone and colour painted in opaque pigment.

At the other end of the scale is the method of handling called 'impasto' or 'impasting'. This is opaque colour laid on the canvas very thickly so that the form of the object painted is almost moulded and built up to a degree approaching low relief. Impasto is most often confined to the lighter

colours and apart from other considerations, there is, in these cases, a very practical reason for heavily loading the colour. This is because light colours tend to sink into the background and become lost or, at least, they lose a great deal of force thereby. Thus an extra ration of pigment is applied in order to compensate this tendency.

A minor point which often appears to trouble beginners, at least it does before they have actually attempted to lay any colour on canvas, is whether or not oil colours may be laid in juxtaposition without them intermingling. When you begin to handle paint you will speedily find that they can be, provided that the brush is handled firmly and decisively at the point of junction, but much depends also on the degree of fluidity of the paint itself. Any unnecessary fiddling with the brush will, on the other hand, inevitably agitate the colours and cause them to mingle. With the exercise of a little intelligence, however, a canvas can thus be entirely filled—but not necessarily completed—at one sitting if the occasion arises. There are times, very often in fact, when the intermingling of two adjoining blocks of colour is, at least highly desirable and possibly an absolute necessity. This is best done by painting both in with a sharp joining edge and then going over the

join again with a biggish 'moppy' brush, quite dry. Special badger-hair brushes are sold for the purpose but a large hog-hair brush with fairly soft bristles is quite as effective.



VIII. TOWARDS PERFECTION

THE shortest route to success in painting, or any other artistic activity for that matter, is concentrated attention on the job together with practice—practice, practice and, again, constant practice. Sooner or later the persistent amateur will surprise himself by the results of his endeavours. Do not be discouraged by early and temporary failure; if your work fails to satisfy, remember that no true artist, however eminent, is ever completely, fully and absolutely satisfied with his work—he can always see room for improvement somewhere. If you meet with but moderate success in landscape painting try doing a portrait and you may find that this—usually regarded as the most difficult branch of painting—is just your particular 'cup of tea'. The fact that you *want* to paint is three parts of the battle and is indicative of some inherent ability which needs only stimulating into activity and thence, by perseverance, to ultimate success. The great British painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds, once observed (so we are told) that "nothing is

denied to well-directed labour, nothing is to be attained without it."

Painting in monochrome is rather dull and uninspiring to me but is held by some to be a useful exercise. Practise this form of painting if you will, then, but by all means practise studies of different kinds of trees, of skies in all degrees and conditions of light, of clouds of all and every description. I have seen one delightful painting, painted by a famous artist, of superb pictorial value, which consisted of nothing more than light clouds against an otherwise clear sky and lit from behind by the setting sun—no land, no trees, just sky, clouds and light.

The accurate representation of the form of the object which is depicted is of far greater importance than accuracy of colour. If, for instance, a tree is painted in a colour which is obviously incorrect, say in some shade of red, it will, nevertheless, be recognisable as a tree if the form is truly rendered. On the other hand, if it is represented by a shapeless mass of green—the right colour—it will indeed be nothing more than a shapeless daub of green paint.

The colours are usually too rich in amateur paintings, too rich and too vivid; skies are too deep a blue, grass and trees too brilliantly green and so on. The beauty of oil painting is that these

mistakes can easily be rectified without discarding the entire picture and starting all over again. Colours can always be lightened by the addition of white and if you can, try in your first attempts to paint all colours a shade or two lighter than you think they should be. Look around you and contrast the tonal values of sky and land, sky and trees, trees and land, as they appear in Nature. Indeed a painter should not cease to observe all that may be seen around him; it is by this means that accuracy of representation of both form and colour is to be attained. Beware of falling into the trap of painting objects in their exact colours. To illustrate what I am driving at, let us take, once more, the familiar tree as an example. A tree is green (at least most of the commonest ones are)—every child of two years and more in age recognises that fact as a basic truth. So it is—in normal bright diffused daylight. In full and brilliant sunlight, particularly in early springtime when the leaves are new, or when the sunlight is shining through them, the same tree often appears a brilliant yellow-green, almost yellow in fact. On a dull grey day the tree—the same one—may look grey-green and dark in tone. Distance also neutralises colours out of all semblance of their true natures. Observe a tree close at hand and

compare its colour with that of a tree in the middle distance and another in the far distance. The nearest will be more or less in its true colours, depending on the prevailing light conditions, the second will appear more grey and of a slightly lighter tone while the furthest will be very much lighter and not at all green only grey. This applies, of course, only if all the trees are of the same species and are subject to the same lighting conditions. It may be that while the nearer trees are in sunlight, the more distant ones are shadowed by clouds which renders them much darker in tone. There are also those very infrequent days when the atmosphere is crystal clear, usually after a sustained period of rain which has settled all the suspended dust from the air. On such days the true colours will be visible at much greater distances, greyness only obtruding in the extreme distance, but it is very difficult to imitate these conditions in a landscape and give the impression of depth and recession at the same time.

I am reminded also of the story of the painting of a black horse which was commissioned by its owner who subsequently refused to pay for it on the ground that the horse was quite black and yet the artist had painted white patches of highlight on its oiled coat. No amount of argument would

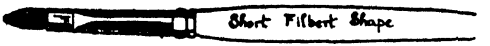
convince the owner that the horse could be painted in any other colour but jet black. Which goes to show, I suppose, that even black may sometimes be called white and white black.

When painting direct from Nature or from a still-life subject use may be made of the palette knife as a considerable, if not indispensable, aid to rendering both tone and colour truthfully. The colour is mixed on the palette in the usual fashion and a little is taken on the top of the palette knife. This is then held out at arm's length so that it appears to be side-by-side with the subject or that part of the subject which is to be painted with the colour on the knife. A comparison can thus be made and the colour or tone or both altered until a perfect match is obtained. By this means it will be found that very many things are not quite the colour they seem to be. For instance white clouds are very seldom pure white, they are almost always tinted either slightly yellow or slightly grey. At the very least, the use of the palette knife in this way not only aids the accurate rendering of tone and colour but also eliminates a good deal of experimentation by trial and error.

The question of colour, affected as it is by the lighting conditions in which the subject is placed, brings to mind the question of lighting the canvas

while painting. We are told almost invariably that a studio should be illuminated by north light only. Failing that, it should be a room into which no direct sunlight enters while painting is in progess. This is all very well, but what is to be done while one is painting out of doors, a subject which is north of one's standpoint on a sunny day and in a situation which affords no convenient shade wherein one may find shelter from the sun's rays. I don't know, quite frankly. I suppose one must do whatever seems best in the prevailing conditions. The reason for this preference for north light is because direct sunlight is liable to give a false impression of the oil pigments, particularly when the setting sun reddens all objects upon which its rays may fall. But I wonder if the effect is so drastic under normal daytime conditions of sunshine as is generally thought. Certainly it is very trying to the eyes to paint or sketch on a white canvas or paper which is reflecting a great deal of sunlight from its surface. We are also commended to attempt no painting in artificial light because this is an even worse offender in falsifying the appearance of the colours. I feel, however, that when one knows one's pigments intimately, allowance can be made for the deceptive appearances. After all it isn't every amateur painter who has the opportunity of doing

his painting during the brief daylight hours in winter. The sketch shown in Plate IV was partially painted in artificial (electric) light with reasonable success, at least so far as the colours are concerned; its rather amateur handling is another matter altogether.



IX. TRICKS OF THE TRADE

In course of time a general facility in the handling of oil paint will be acquired and it may well be that the amateur painter will also become able to make his own rough sketches from Nature instead of relying upon a photograph for 'copy'. In this connection, any time which can be spared from active painting will be well spent if it is used in practising the closely related art of pencil sketching, an art which can be learned only by the same process as painting, by constant practice. There will also come a time when you will have acquired the knack of seeing what parts of a wide expanse of landscape are, so to speak, capable of being cut out from their surroundings and made into interesting and artistic pictures. If there is any difficulty in selecting a portion of country which is of pictorial value, use may be made of an instrument which is available to photographers and is called a 'picture finder'. It consists simply of a rectangular reducing lens carried in a suitable mount and when it is held before one at arm's length, a small picture of

the view is framed within the rectangular mount. A similar effect may be obtained for a much smaller outlay by making a small frame of wood, metal, cardboard or even stiff paper and holding it before the eyes in the same manner but it will need to be somewhat larger than the frame fitted with a reducing lens, of course. A frame of this sort, made up to the same dimensions as the canvas and fixed to the easel at the side of the canvas, would provide a framed 'picture' of a subject being painted from Nature when viewed from a few paces' distance and it would be in the same proportion as the painting. In any case the measurements of the small frame should be in the same ratio as the linear measurements of the canvas which is used in conjunction with it, otherwise there may be some confusion and possible distortion of the painting.

In order to paint from a model, either living or still, or from Nature, the painter must have eyes which can see what there is to be seen. It is a strange fact, but none the less true, that many people, even with perfect eyesight, fail to see an object as it really is; it is that failure which prevents them from making an accurate representation of the object, whatever it may be. It will be found to be of great assistance if the eyes are half closed

when an object is being observed. By this means, not only is the light and shade contrast accentuated, but the colours also seem to be enriched as they do when a scene is viewed in a convex mirror when the colours appear to be condensed and crystallised, making them appear more brilliant. Much of the detail which is visible with eyes wide open, both in the lighted portions and in the shadows, tends to disappear when the eyes are half closed and the object is therefore simplified into patches of light and shade. Thus it becomes possible to see how it may best be imitated in paint and, if desired or if necessary, the detail may be added to the basic forms afterwards without destroying the overall effect. In this way much of the difficulty of deciding what detail needs to be included and which is best left out, is overcome. A picture in which too much detail is shown tends to become 'fussy', a state which is almost as bad as the opposite effect when the picture is too much simplified with little or no detail at all. Simplification seems to be the basis of impressionism. You view your subject with half-closed eyes, paint what you see and stop there, adding no detail at all. Everything is reduced to as few different forms and as few different colours as possible. Where two forms or two colours are almost identical they are caused to be identical.

I am told that it is correct for the impressionist's brush to be held at arms length, by the tip of the handle so that details cannot possibly be painted! The whole essence of impressionism seems to me—and I may be completely under the wrong 'impression' of course—to be designed so that paintings can be turned out in as short a time as possible, to enable the painter to rush on to something else without delay.

As I have said before, it is important to paint your forms accurately and truly. It is also important to go a little further than this and to ensure also that the perspective is correct. Unless the perspective is right a picture will never look right even despite expert handling of the paint and no matter how great the accuracy of colour. Perspective is important not only in pictures in which buildings are largely figured but also in pictures of open landscape. Our old friends the trees may once more be quoted as convenient examples. Look again at a number of trees of approximately equal height—in an avenue, perhaps—varying from some close at hand to some in the far distance. Observe how they appear the further they are from your point of observation. The more distant they are, the lower the tops appear and the higher the bases of the trunks. Perhaps a better example

would be a line of electricity poles in a straight line across a flat expanse of country, all of equal height. If an imaginary line were drawn joining all the tops, the row being viewed from one end, of course, and another joining all the bases, the two lines would meet at a point in the extreme distance at the eye level of the observer, the poles themselves appearing smaller and smaller the further they are away. Perspective lines *always* meet at the observer's eye-level whether he is on the ground or at the top of a skyscraper!

Portrait painting is generally regarded as the most difficult branch of oil painting, involving, as it does, the interpretation in oil paint of subtle gradation of tones. It is customarily held that a portrait painter needs a knowledge of the anatomical structure of his subject. I cannot wholly agree that this is so, for surely if one paints exactly what one sees, and provided always that one can see accurately, the results should not be without merit. If, also, this theory is correct, it follows that a landscape painter should be aware of the nature of the subsoil and rock formations which lie beneath his subject, not to mention the inner structure of living wood and vegetation, if he is to be successful in his rendering of it in paint.

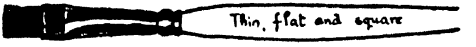
Water, both still water and the moving sea, is

difficult to paint with conviction. The sea is not often the pure deep ultramarine as it is described in cheap novels and depicted in children's books, travel posters and popular magazines. Around the coastline of Britain it is more often a muddy green colour but in certain places, notably the south coasts of Devon and Cornwall, it sometimes appears a pale shimmering exquisite blue. In certain weather and lighting conditions, particularly at sunset, it can appear like a sheet of creamy white milk. Reflections in still water or even in smoothly running fresh water, vary in appearance under differing conditions. Reflections are usually darker in tone and often greener in colour than the above-water objects of which they are inverted and reversed duplicates. As the water becomes ruffled by a breeze, the reflections are broken up by the ripples. They become elongated and lighter in tone and, as the water becomes rougher, they finally disappear altogether, being dispersed into tiny fragments too small to be seen.

The rough texture of canvas lends itself readily to two devices known as 'scumbling' and 'glazing'. Both of these processes imply the application of one colour over another, applied with a brush which is but lightly charged with paint and with a 'dragfed' touch, so that the pigment is laid only on

the high spots of the canvas. The original underlying colour in the hollows thus shows through the overlaid pigment. The same effect can be gained by painting the glaze or scumble on quite thickly and then wiping it over with a soft cloth or sponge, thus removing it from the high spots to reveal the original colour, and leaving the overlay only in the hollows. A 'scumble' is a light colour laid on over a darker one and a 'glaze' is its opposite number, a darker colour laid over a light one. Scumbling and glazing are of great practical value in softening hard outlines and edges, and particularly in merging clouds together and imitating the very thin cloud through which the blue of the sky breaks in places, fully or partially. It is very seldom that the atmosphere is crystal clear and most often the distant parts of the landscape are veiled by a light haze of greater or lesser density. This effect may be painted very simply and easily by scumbling the background with a haze made from white pigment diluted with turpentine or other medium. In this way the effect of distance is portrayed with ease and an air of reality. Both scumbling and glazing may be employed also as a means of painting tonal gradation and even gradation of colour, from one to another. A scumble or glaze can be laid only on top of an underpainting

which is completely dry, of course. If the latter is at all soft, the two may intermingle intimately and the whole effect is lost.



X. A LAST WORD

I SUPPOSE it ought to be superfluous to say that it is well worth while taking every opportunity of studying the works of other artists, both contemporary and recent and also those of the Old Masters. Much can be learned by studying the methods by which the colours have been handled and also the brushwork itself. Art exhibitions, art galleries, and art shops—all have something to offer which is worth the amateur painter's close attention. If nothing better is available, study any reproductions of original works of art which you can get hold of but, of course, the originals are more profitable sources of study especially as reproductions are most often considerably reduced in size. Don't despise the secondhand and junk shops. The nooks and crannies of these emporiums often conceal many worthy pictures which may be purchased very cheaply. Very occasionally a genuine Old Master is acquired from such sources at ridiculously small cost. At the very least, old canvases, which may be purchased sometimes for

next to nothing, can be cleaned and used over again by removing the old paint with paint solvent (or chloroform will do the trick) and preparing the canvas afresh with foundation white.

Observe constantly all that you can see around you—from the cloud formations in the sky above to the ground underfoot. You may thus find yourself so full of ideas for pictures that you may be tempted to paint away furiously—to its detriment—to finish one painting in order that you may get on with the next as soon as you can. Put away all such thoughts of haste and impatience! Paint each picture patiently and as expertly as you are able; It is only by careful and painstaking practice that the desired skill will be attained and not by haste. More than that, paint each bit of each picture as carefully and as accurately as you can. It has been suggested that when a particular part of a painting goes wrong and does not look right, it should be left and given up as a bad job with the hope that when the picture is completed, the bad bit may be lost among the remainder. While I do not entirely agree with this and would prefer to advise that each bit should be painted as well as possible and not just left like that, I would say that it is wise not to be too hasty to alter a passage which you only *think* may be wrong. A part which may

appear to be incorrect in colour or tone or rendering but you cannot say in precisely what, cannot be obviously wrong. It may well be quite correctly painted but not obviously so until it can be viewed in its surroundings of the completed picture—it is only in isolation that it appears wrong. Isolated bits on a partially empty canvas often do look peculiar, therefore do not be too hasty to paint out what may be quite right and which will be lost by altering it unnecessarily. On the other hand do not be afraid to retouch a completed picture where such treatment appears to be desirable. At the same time do not overdo it, once again, because you may lose what you have—"leave well alone" is a very good proverb for the serious attention of painters.

Be patient also if your general progress towards your ambition to acquire artistic skill is somewhat slower than you could wish. Remember always that even the greatest of artists began by crawling before they could walk and by walking before they learned to run without falling frequently. After all, if you are impatient to gain skill with the brush, you will not enjoy your painting. And if you don't enjoy it—every minute of it—you are making a labour of your leisure. In such circumstances you would be better advised to give up painting altogether and

look around for some other pastime. If your heart is in the art you will find that time stands still while you are practising it and there is no room for impatience in such circumstances anyway. Therefore be patient and painstaking. Above all, paint and keep on painting steadfastly, all that appeals to you as worthy of putting on canvas. Only by painting can you gain the ability and skill which we are all seeking.