

## THE CARVED WOODWORK OF BRITTANY.

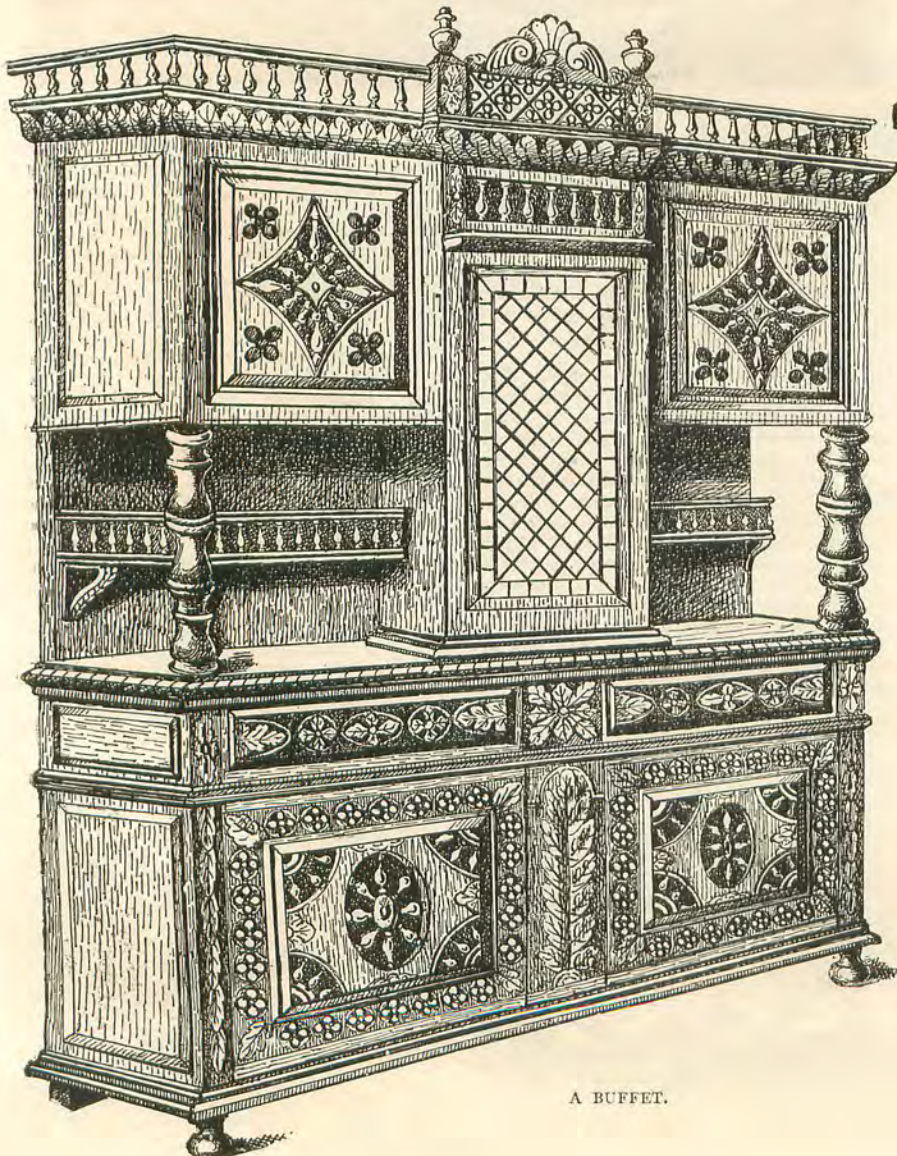
By HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

THE carved woodwork which is the speciality of the picturesque old Breton town of St. Malo and its suburb St. Servan, to which we have lately given much attention, is not as a rule of oak; a softer wood is used, occasionally pine, but most often sweet chestnut. The latter is very durable, as well as soft; it is easily stained with the colouring matter of other woods so as to represent oak of all shades, and is capable of taking a natural-looking polish when rubbed with beeswax, which completes the resemblance, so that a novice is almost invariably deceived, and goes away with the impression of its being really oak.

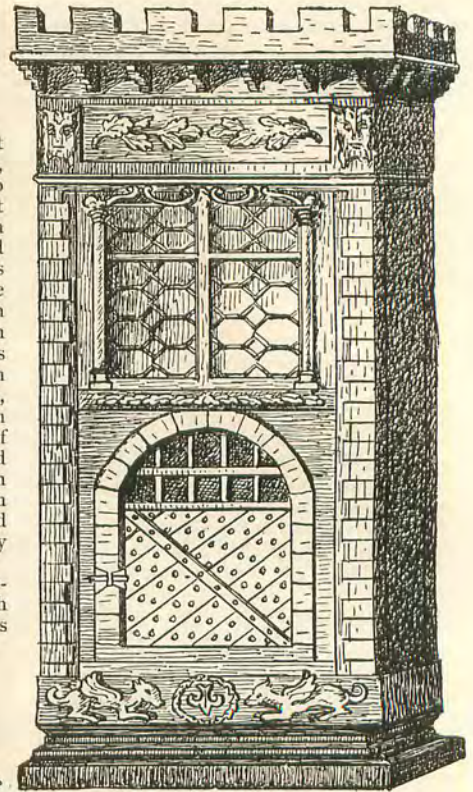
The buffet of which we give a sketch in Fig. 1 is modern in design and form, and almost black in colour; it is a combination of "flat" and "fret" wood-carving; the little "galleries" of pillars and the decorative panels of the cupboard doors are "fretted," whilst all the borders and the fronts of the doors are "flat," though first taking form as "fret"—that is, instead of the design being

carved from the solid wood, it is, in most cases, cut out of thin board with a fret saw, glued on to a flat surface, and then worked up with a chisel. We do not mean to assert that this simple manner of producing a design in relief is always resorted to. A skilled and cultivated artist in wood-work would not as a rule condescend to such an illegitimate method of obtaining an effect; but Breton wood-carvers are seldom anything better than skilful craftsmen, who turn out reproductions of the same design in great quantities, from which the article of furniture is, so to speak, built up, under the superintendence of an intelligent master spirit. In that portion of the design formed by little pillars the ground is cut away to its entire depth, which gives an effect of lightness to the finished work which would probably be lacking if so large and cumbersome an article were decorated entirely with flat carving.

Breton carved work is comparatively inexpensive, and it is owing to this fact, as much as to its intrinsic merit, that it has made its



A BUFFET.



CABINET.

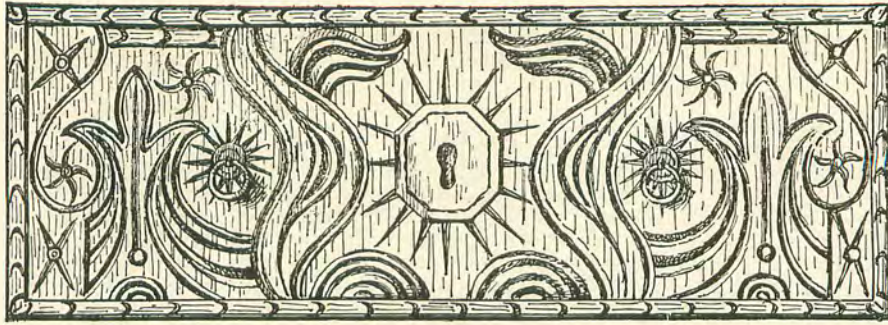
mark, and won a certain reputation for itself in England. This is proved by the fact that much of it has been already brought over by private individuals, and that the quantity thus imported is steadily on the increase.

We have seen truly magnificent bedsteads in the St. Servan warehouses, carved in the pure Gothic style which was the glory of the Middle Ages, and even the closest scrutiny did not reveal to us that these were not carved in relief: indeed, we are very much mistaken if they are not so carved.

The cupboard or cabinet (Fig. 2) is Mediæval in design, though modern in workmanship; the quaint decoration is very simple, but the wood used is really old; and the whole thing is so solid and durable that it is almost as expensive as the more elaborate and much larger modern buffet. It is all "flat" carving, and like the buffet, has lattice window-like doors of thick greenish glass.

Fig. 3 is sketched from a drawer belonging to a very old chest, seen by the writer in a private house: which period it belongs to, or if exclusively to any period, it is scarcely possible to tell. It is evidently of ancient construction, and the wood is itself so old as to be partly destroyed by dry rot, but such of the surface as is intact is so dark and glossy that it cannot be distinguished from true British oak. The design is very rough and uneven, as if carved without any previous drawing. It is neither in relief nor fretted, but is deeply grooved or scored in the wood, in much the same manner as a schoolboy would carve his name on a bench or tree; and the effect is not unlike that of the "hot poker" work now so much in vogue, only that it is more deeply scored.

In many of the peasants' cottages in Brittany one may come across wood-boxes, wardrobes, clock-cases, etc., carved in this manner, and the articles thus decorated appear to be so little valued by the owners that they gladly sell them for trifling sums. But on the other hand, in the better class houses there are carved panels and bedsteads of



A DRAWER BELONGING TO AN OLD CHEST.

the Gothic period which are handed down from father to son through many generations as precious heirlooms. Some of the box beds or sleeping-places opening with sliding panels in the wall are also beautifully and curiously carved. We have seen some of them so high up in the wall that it is necessary to use a step-ladder in order to get into them. Where

find were more expensive than either of the more sober and dignified Medieval and modern styles, possibly from being more intricate, and in part requiring more delicate manipulation. There is greater scope for fancy and ingenuity in thus stringing together with ribbons, masks, vases, birds, animals, and musical instruments, and there is a light and

work in black and white, because all the delicate and refined touches of the chisel—which is the soul of the art—must be left out, and the technical work is so impossible to describe; we have therefore confined ourselves to an endeavour merely to indicate the leading styles of this particular branch of the craft, which seems to have made for itself such an interesting centre in these small Breton towns.

It seems necessary to add, that almost all the articles are finished with very quaint and ornamental metal work, in the way of hinges, handles, and locks; there are often very elaborate finger plates about the key-holes, which greatly add to the beauty of buffets, wardrobes, and cupboards. These are sometimes of brass, but most frequently of unpolished steel.

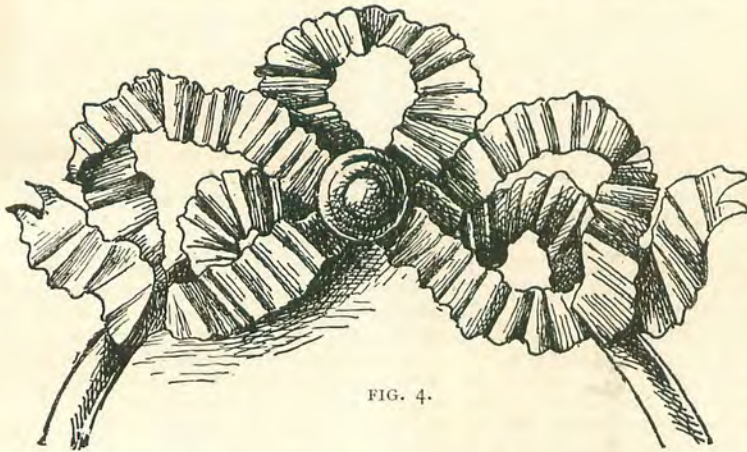


FIG. 4.

the wood-carving is really appreciated by its owner it is sure to be kept glossy by constant rubbing with beeswax.

Figs. 4 and 5 are scraps sketched from the carvings of the Renaissance school, which is perhaps the most unsatisfactory of all, because so lacking in unity and meaning. Strange to say, the best specimens of it that we could

find were more expensive than either of the more sober and dignified Medieval and modern styles, possibly from being more intricate, and in part requiring more delicate manipulation. There is greater scope for fancy and ingenuity in thus stringing together with ribbons, masks, vases, birds, animals, and musical instruments, and there is a light and

symmetrical effect about it which doubtless commends it to French taste. The carving is executed from carefully-drawn designs, which appear to us to be a heterogeneous jumble of all manner of articles, and when looked into betray their weakness by their utter want of *motif*.

It is very difficult to give an idea of carved



FIG. 5.

## THE SECRET OF ROUGEMONT.

By LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

## CHAPTER XI.

ALCIBIADE did not trust himself to speak as he conducted Valentine home. She was thankful for it, for the choking contraction of her throat was such that she could not have answered him.

Poor old M. de Lemprière was seated huddled up over the stove trying to warm his trembling hands; he was completely unnerved. He sprang up when they came in. "Is it all right?" he exclaimed. "You have made all secure? You remembered your promise?"

"Yes, I remembered it," answered

Alcibiade. "I have fulfilled it. I have had your name erased from the proscribed list. I have done more. I have procured a signed protection from Robespierre for you; and now you have had your turn, I claim mine. Be seated, Citoyenne," he went on, as he saw her shrink and shiver at his words. "Prisons are ugly sights. I am not astonished that you tremble. But we will banish such gloomy thoughts, my fair friend, and discuss a pleasanter subject. This evening your *corbeille* will arrive—diamonds and *cachemires*."

"And lives of men," said Valentine, fixing her eyes on his face.

"Agreed," he answered, rubbing his hands together. "And now as for the day—to-morrow will not do, but Thursday. Shall we say Thursday?"

"Impossible," cried Valentine. "I must have time; you cannot mean it?"

"You can have time," said Alcibiade, speaking slowly; "but remember that the time you spend in hesitation is spent by de Riancourt in all the horrors of a living tomb."

"But, oh, your promise!"

"My promise? Why, Citoyenne"—and his voice grew loud and rough—"do you expect to gain everything and to give nothing? My promise is binding