



GRAMMAR OF ORNAMENT



THE  
GRAMMAR OF ORNAMENT

BY  
OWEN JONES.

ILLUSTRATED BY EXAMPLES  
FROM VARIOUS STYLES OF ORNAMENT.

ONE HUNDRED FOLIO PLATES,

DRAWN ON STONE BY

F. BEDFORD,

AND PRINTED IN COLOURS BY  
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## P R E F A C E.

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It would be far beyond the limits of the powers of any one individual to attempt to gather together illustrations of the innumerable and ever-varying phases of Ornamental Art. It would be barely possible if undertaken by a government, and even then it would be too voluminous to be generally useful. All, therefore, that I have proposed to myself in forming the collection which I have ventured to call the *Grammar of Ornament*, has been to select a few of the most prominent types in certain styles closely connected with each other, and in which certain general laws appeared to reign independently of the individual peculiarities of each. I have ventured to hope that, in thus bringing into immediate juxtaposition the many forms of beauty which every style of ornament presents, I might aid in arresting that unfortunate tendency of our time to be content with copying, whilst the fashion lasts, the forms peculiar to any bygone age, without attempting to ascertain, generally completely ignoring, the peculiar circumstances which rendered an ornament beautiful, because it was appropriate, and which as expressive of other wants, when thus transplanted, as entirely fails.

It is more than probable that the first result of sending forth to the world this collection will be seriously to increase this dangerous tendency, and that many will be content to borrow from the past those forms of beauty which have not already been used up *ad nauseam*. It has been my desire to arrest this tendency, and to awaken a higher ambition.

If the student will but endeavour to search out the thoughts which have been expressed in so many different languages, he may assuredly hope to find an ever-gushing fountain in place of a half-filled stagnant reservoir.

PREFACE.

In the following chapters I have endeavoured to establish these main facts,—

First. That whenever any style of ornament commands universal admiration, it will always be found to be in accordance with the laws which regulate the distribution of form in nature.

Secondly. That however varied the manifestations in accordance with these laws, the leading ideas on which they are based are very few.

Thirdly. That the modifications and developments which have taken place from one style to another have been caused by a sudden throwing off of some fixed trammel, which set thought free for a time, till the new idea, like the old, became again fixed, to give birth in its turn to fresh inventions.

Lastly. I have endeavoured to show, in the twentieth chapter, that the future progress of Ornamental Art may be best secured by engrafting on the experience of the past the knowledge we may obtain by a return to Nature for fresh inspiration. To attempt to build up theories of art, or to form a style, independently of the past, would be an act of supreme folly. It would be at once to reject the experiences and accumulated knowledge of thousands of years. On the contrary, we should regard as our inheritance all the successful labours of the past, not blindly following them, but employing them simply as guides to find the true path.

In taking leave of the subject, and finally surrendering it to the judgment of the public, I am fully aware that the collection is very far from being complete: there are many gaps which each artist, however, may readily fill up for himself. My chief aim, to place side by side types of such styles as might best serve as landmarks and aids to the student in his onward path, has, I trust, been fulfilled.

It remains for me to offer my acknowledgment to all those friends who have kindly assisted me in the undertaking.

In the formation of the Egyptian Collection I received much valuable assistance from Mr. J. Bonomi, and from Mr. James Wild, who has also contributed the materials for the Arabian Collection, his long residence in Cairo having afforded him the opportunity of forming a very large collection of Cairean Ornament, of which the portion contained in this work can give but an imperfect idea, and which I trust he may some day be encouraged to publish in a complete form.

I am indebted to Mr. T. T. Bury for the plate of Stained Glass. From Mr. C. J. Richardson I obtained the principal portion of the materials of the Elizabethan Collection; from Mr. J. B. Waring, those of the Byzantine, and I am also indebted to him for the very valuable essays on Byzantine and Elizabethan Ornament. Mr. J. O. Westwood having directed especial attention to the Ornament of the Celtic races, has assisted in the Celtic Collection, and written the very remarkable history and exposition of the style.

PREFACE.

Mr. C. Dresser, of Marlborough House, has provided the interesting plate No. 8 of the twentieth chapter, exhibiting the geometrical arrangement of natural flowers.

My colleague at the Crystal Palace, M. Digby Wyatt, has enriched the work with his admirable essays on the Ornament of the Renaissance and the Italian periods.

Whenever the material has been gathered from published sources, it has been acknowledged in the body of the work.

The remainder of the drawings have been chiefly executed by my pupils, Mr. Albert Warren and Mr. Charles Aubert, who, with Mr. Stubbs, have reduced the whole of the original drawings, and prepared them for publication.

The drawing upon stone of the whole collection was entrusted to the care of Mr. Francis Bedford, who, with his able assistants, Messrs. H. Fielding, W. R. Tymms, A. Warren, and S. Sedgfield, with occasional help, have executed the One Hundred Plates in less than one year.

My special thanks are due to Mr. Bedford for the care and anxiety which he has evinced, quite regardless of all personal consideration, to render this work as perfect as the advanced state of chromolithography demanded; and I feel persuaded that his valuable services will be fully recognised by all in any way acquainted with the difficulties and uncertainties of this process.

Messrs. Day and Son, the enterprising publishers, and at the same time the printers of the work, have put forth all their strength; and notwithstanding the care required, and the vast amount of printing to be performed, the resources of their establishment have enabled them, not only to deliver the work with perfect regularity to the Subscribers, but even to complete it before the appointed time.

OWEN JONES.

9 Argyll Place,  
Dec. 15, 1856.

LIST OF PLATES—*continued.*

CHAP. XII. Indian Ornament.

- Plate. No.  
 49 1 Ornaments from Metal-work from the Exhibition of 1851.  
 50 2) Ditto from Embroidered and Woven Fabrics and Paintings on  
 51 3) Vases exhibited in the Indian Collection in 1851, now at Marl-  
 52 4) borough House.  
 53 5) Specimens of Painted Lacquer-work from the Collection at the  
 54 6) India-House.  
 55 7 Ornaments from Woven and Embroidered Fabrics and Painted  
 Boxes exhibited at Paris in 1855.

CHAP. XIII. Hindoo Ornament.

- 56 1 Ornaments from a Statue at the Asiatic Society's House.  
 57 2 From the Collection at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham.  
 58 3 From the Collection at the India House.

CHAP. XIV. Chinese Ornament.

- 59 1) Chinese Ornaments painted on Porcelain, and on Wood, and from  
 60 2) Woven Fabrics.  
 61 3)  
 62 4 Conventional Renderings of Fruits and Flowers.

CHAP. XV. Celtic Ornament.

- 63 1 Lapidary Ornamentation.  
 64 2 Interlaced Styles.  
 65 3 Spiral, Diagonal, Zoomorphic, and later Anglo-Saxon Ornament.

CHAP. XVI. Mediæval Ornament.

- 66 1 Conventional Leaves and Flowers from Illuminated MSS.  
 67 2 Borders from Illuminated MSS. and Paintings.  
 68 3 Diapers from Illuminated MSS. and Backgrounds of Pictures.  
 69 4 Stained Glass of various periods.  
 70 5 Encaustic Tiles, ditto ditto.

ILLUMINATED MSS.

- 71 1 Portions of Illuminated MSS. of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Cen-  
 turies.  
 72 2 Ditto Thirteenth and Fourteenth ditto.  
 73 3 Ditto Fourteenth and Fifteenth ditto.

CHAP. XVII. Renaissance Ornament.

- Plate. No.  
 74 1) Renaissance Ornaments in Relief, from Photographs taken from  
 75 2) Casts in the Crystal Palace, Sydenham.  
 76 3)  
 77 4 Enamels from the Louvre and Hôtel Cluny.  
 78 5 Ornaments from Pottery at Marlborough House.  
 79 6 Ditto from ditto, Hôtel Cluny and the Louvre.  
 80 7 Ditto ditto, ditto.  
 81 8) Ornaments from Stone and Wood from the Collections of the  
 82 9) Louvre and Hôtel Cluny.

CHAP. XVIII. Elizabethan Ornament.

- 83 1) Various Ornaments in Relief from the Time of Henry VIII. to  
 84 2) that of Charles II.  
 85 3 Painted Ornaments and Ornaments on Woven Fabrics, ditto.

CHAP. XIX. Italian Ornament.

- 86 1 Pilasters and Ornaments from the Loggie of the Vatican, reduced  
 from the full-size Paintings at Marlborough House.  
 87 2 Ornaments from the Palazzo Ducale, Mantua.  
 88 3 Ditto from the Palazzo Ducale and the Church of St. Andrea,  
 Mantua.  
 89 4 Ditto from the Palazzo del Te, Mantua.  
 90 5 Ornaments from Printed Books.

CHAP. XX. Leaves and Flowers from Nature.

- 91 1 Horse-chestnut leaves, full size.  
 92 2 Vine-leaves, ditto.  
 93 3 Ivy-leaves, ditto.  
 94 4 Leaves of the Oak, Fig-tree, Maple, White Bryony, Laurel, and  
 Bay-tree, full size.  
 95 5 Leaves of the Vine, Hollyoak, Turkey Oak, and Laburnum, full size.  
 96 6 Wild Rose, Ivy, and Blackberry, full size.  
 97 7 Hawthorn, Yew, Ivy, and Strawberry-tree.  
 98 8 Various Flowers in Plan and Elevation.  
 99 9 Honeysuckle and Convolvulus, full size.  
 100 10 Passion Flowers, ditto.

LEAVES AND FLOWERS FROM NATURE.

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PLATE XCI.

Horse-chestnut Leaves. Full size, traced from Natural Leaves.

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PLATE XCII.

Vine Leaves. Full size, traced from Natural Leaves.

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PLATE XCIII.

1. Ivy Palmata. 2, 3, 4, and 5. Common Ivy. Full size, traced from Natural Leaves.

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PLATE XCIV.

1. Scarlet Oak. 2. White Oak. 3. Fig-tree. 4. Maple. 5. White Bryony. 6. Laurel. 7. Bay-tree.  
All full size, and traced from Natural Leaves.

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PLATE XCV.

1. Vine. 2. Holly. 3. Oak. 4. Turkey Oak. 5. Laburnum. All full-sized, and traced from Natural Leaves.

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PLATE XCVI.

1. Wild Rose. 2. Ivy. 3. Blackberry. All full size, and traced from Natural Leaves.

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PLATE XCVII.

Hawthorn, Yew, Ivy, and Strawberry-tree. All full size, and traced from Nature.

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PLATE XCVIII.

Plans and Elevations of Flowers.

1. Iris.  
2. White Lily.  
3. Daffodil.  
4. Narcissus.  
5. Onion.  
6. Dog-Rose.

7. Mouse-ear.  
8. Honeysuckle.  
9. Mallow.  
10. Ladies' smock.  
11. Speedwell.  
12. Harebell.

13. *Glossocomia clematidea*.  
14. Convolvulus.  
15. Primrose.  
16. Periwinkle.  
17. Clarkia.  
18. *Leycesteria formosa*.

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PLATE XCIX.

1. Honeysuckle. 2. Convolvulus. Full size.

PLATE C.

Passion Flowers. Full size.



## LEAVES AND FLOWERS FROM NATURE.

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WE have endeavoured to show in the preceding chapters, that in the best periods of art, all ornament was rather based upon an observation of the principles which regulate the arrangement of form in nature, than on an attempt to imitate the absolute forms of those works; and that whenever this limit was exceeded in any art, it was one of the strongest symptoms of decline: true art consisting in idealizing, and not copying, the forms of nature.

We think it desirable to insist rather strongly on this point, as in the present uncertain state in which we are, there seems a general disposition arising to reproduce, as faithfully as may be possible, natural form as works of ornament. The world has become weary of the eternal repetition of the same conventional forms which have been borrowed from styles which have passed away, and therefore can excite in us but little sympathy. There has risen, we say, a universal cry of "Go back to nature, as the ancients did;" we should be amongst the first to echo that cry, but it will depend much on what we go to seek, how far we may succeed. If we go to Nature as the Egyptians and the Greeks went, we may hope; but if we go there like the Chinese, or even as the Gothic artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we should gain but little. We have already, in the floral carpets, floral papers, and floral carvings of the present day, sufficient evidence to show that no art can be produced by such means; and that the more closely nature is copied, the farther we are removed from producing a work of art.

Although ornament is most properly only an accessory to architecture, and should never be allowed to usurp the place of structural features, or to overload or to disguise them, it is in all cases the very soul of an architectural monument.

By the ornament of a building, we can judge more truly of the creative power which the artist has brought to bear upon the work. The general proportions of the building may be good, the mouldings may be more or less accurately copied from the most approved models; but the very instant that ornament is attempted, we see how far the architect is at the same time the artist. It is the best measure of the care and refinement bestowed upon the work. To put ornament in the right place is not easy; to render that ornament at the same time a superadded beauty and an expression of the intention of the whole work, is still more difficult.

Unfortunately it has been too much the practice in our time to abandon to hands most unfitted for the task the adornment of the structural features of buildings, and more especially their interior decorations.

The fatal facility of manufacturing ornament which the revived use of the acanthus leaf has given, has tended very much to this result, and deadened the creative instinct in artists' minds. What could so readily be done by another, they have left that other to do; and so far have abdicated their high position of the architect, the head and chief.

How, then, is this universal desire for progress to be satisfied—how is any new style of ornament to be invented or developed? Some will probably say, A new style of architecture must first be found, and we should be beginning at the wrong end to commence with ornament.

We do not think so. We have already shown that the desire for works of ornament is co-existent with the earliest attempts of civilisation of every people; and that architecture adopts ornament, does not create it.

The Corinthian order of architecture is said to have been suggested by an acanthus leaf found growing round an earthen pot; but the acanthus leaf existed as an ornament long before, or, at all events, the principle of its growth was observed in the conventional ornaments. It was the peculiar application of this leaf to the formation of the capital of a column which was the sudden invention that created the Corinthian order.

#### LEAVES AND FLOWERS FROM NATURE.

The principle of the foliation, and even the general form of the leaves, which predominate in the architecture of the thirteenth century, existed long before in the illuminated MSS.; and, derived as they were, most probably, from the East, have given an almost Eastern character to Early English ornament. The architects of the thirteenth century were, therefore, very familiar with this system of ornamentation; and we cannot doubt, that one cause of the adoption so universally of this style during the thirteenth century, arose from the great familiarity with its leading forms which already existed.

The floral style, in direct imitation of nature, which succeeded, was also preceded by the same style in works of ornament. The facility of painting flowers in direct imitation of nature in the pages of a missal, induced an attempt to rival them in stone in the buildings of the time.

The architectural ornament of the Elizabethan period is mostly a reproduction of the works of the loom, the painter, and the engraver. In any borrowed style, more especially, this would be so. The artists of the Elizabethan period were necessarily much more familiar with the paintings, hangings, furniture, metal-work, and other articles of luxury, which England received from the Continent, than they would be with the architectural monuments; and it is this familiarity with the ornamentation of the period, but imperfect knowledge of the architecture, which led to the development of those peculiarities which distinguish Elizabethan architecture from the purer architecture of the Revival.

We therefore think we are justified in the belief, that a new style of ornament may be produced independently of a new style of architecture; and, moreover, that it would be one of the readiest means of arriving at a new style; for instance, if we could only arrive at the invention of a new termination to a means of support, one of the most difficult points would be accomplished.

The chief features of a building which form a style, are, first, the means of support; secondly, the means of spanning space between the supports; and, thirdly, the formation of the roof. It is the decoration of these structural features which gives the characteristics of style, and they all follow so naturally one from the other, that the invention of one will command the rest.

It would appear, at first sight, that the means of varying these structural features had been exhausted, and that we have nothing left but to use either one or the other of the systems which have already run their course.

If we reject the use of the column and horizontal beam of the Greeks and Egyptians, the round arch of the Romans, the pointed arch and vault of the Middle Ages, and the domes of the Mohammadans, it will be asked—What is left? We shall perhaps be told that all the means of covering space have already been exhausted, and that it were vain to look for other forms. But could not this have been said in all time? Could the Egyptian have ever imagined that any other mode of spanning space would ever be found than his huge blocks of stone? Could the Mediæval architect have ever dreamed that his airy vaults could be surpassed, and that gulfs could be crossed by hollow tubes of iron? Let us not despair; the world has not seen, most assuredly, the last of the architectural systems. If we are now passing through an age of copying, and architecture with us exhibits a want of vitality, the world has passed through similar periods before. From the present chaos there will arise, undoubtedly (it may not be in our time), an architecture which shall be worthy of the high advance which man has made in every other direction towards the possession of the tree of knowledge.

To return to our subject, how is any new style of art or new style of ornament to be formed, or even attempted to be formed? In the first place, we have little hope that we are destined to see more than the commencement of a change; the architectural profession is at the present time too much under the influence of past education on the one hand, and too much influenced by an ill-informed public on the other; but the rising generation in both classes are born under happier auspices, and it is to them we must look for hope in the future. It is for their use that we have gathered together this collection of the works of the past; not that they should be slavishly copied, but that artists should, by an attentive examination of the principles which pervade all the works of the past, and which have excited universal admiration, be led to the creation of new forms equally beautiful. We believe that if a student in the arts, earnest in his search after knowledge, will only lay aside all temptation to indolence, will examine for himself the works of the past, compare them with the works of nature, bend his mind to a thorough appreciation of the principles which reign in each, he cannot fail to be himself a creator, and to individualise new forms, instead of reproducing the forms of the past. We think it impossible that a student fully impressed with the law of the universal fitness of things in nature, with the wonderful variety of form, yet all arranged

#### LEAVES AND FLOWERS FROM NATURE.

around some few fixed laws, the proportionate distribution of areas, the tangential curvatures of lines, and the radiation from a parent stem, whatever type he may borrow from Nature, if he will dismiss from his mind the desire to imitate it, but will only seek to follow still the path which it so plainly shows him, we doubt not that new forms of beauty will more readily arise under his hand, than can ever follow from a continuation in the prevailing fashion of resting only on the works of the past for present inspiration. It will require but a few minds to give the first impulse: the way once pointed out, others will follow, readily improving, refining upon each other's efforts, till another culminating point of Art shall be again reached to subside into decline and disorder. For the present, however, we are far enough removed from either stage.

We have been desirous to aid this movement to the extent of our power; and in the ten plates of leaves and flowers which accompany this chapter, we have gathered together many of those natural types which we thought best calculated to awaken a recognition of the natural laws which prevail in the distribution of form. But, indeed, these laws will be found to be so universal, that they are as well seen in one leaf as in a thousand. The single example of the chestnut leaf, Plate XCI., contains the whole of the laws which are to be found in Nature: no art can rival the perfect grace of its form, the perfect proportional distribution of the areas, the radiation from the parent stem, the tangential curvatures of the lines, or the even distribution of the surface decoration. We may gather this from a single leaf. But if we further study the law of their growth, we may see in an assemblage of leaves of the vine or the ivy, that the same law which prevails in the formation of the single leaf prevails also in the assemblage of leaves. As in the chestnut leaf, Plate XCI., the area of each lobe diminishes in equal proportion as it approaches the stem, so in any combination of leaves each leaf is everywhere in harmony with the group: as in one leaf the areas are so perfectly distributed that the repose of the eye is maintained, it is equally so in the group; we never find a disproportionate leaf interfering to destroy the repose of the group. This universal law of equilibrium is everywhere apparent in Plates XCVIII., XCIX., C. The same laws prevail in the distribution of lines on the surface of flowers; not a line upon the surfaces but tends more surely to develop the form,—not a line which could be removed, and leave the form more perfect; and this why? Because the beauty arises naturally from the law of the growth of each plant. The life-blood,—the sap, as it leaves the stem, takes the readiest way of reaching the confines of the surface, however varied that surface may be; the greater the distance it has to travel, or the weight it has to support, the thicker will be its substance. (See *Convolvulus*, XCVIII., XCIX.)

On Plate XCVIII. we have shown several varieties of flowers, in plan and elevation, from which it will be seen that the basis of all form is geometry, the impulse which forms the surface, starting from the centre with equal force, necessarily stops at equal distances; the result is symmetry and regularity.

Who then will dare say that there is nothing left for us but to copy the five or seven-lobed flowers of the thirteenth century; the Honeysuckle of the Greeks or the Acanthus of the Romans,—that this alone can produce art,—is Nature so tied? See how various the forms, and how unvarying the principles. We feel persuaded that there is yet a future open to us; we have but to arouse from our slumbers. The Creator has not made all things beautiful, that we should thus set a limit to our admiration; on the contrary, as all His works are offered for our enjoyment, so are they offered for our study. They are there to awaken a natural instinct implanted in us,—a desire to emulate in the works of our hands, the order, the symmetry, the grace, the fitness, which the Creator has sown broadcast over the earth.



LEAVES FROM NATURE N°1

HORSE CHESTNUT



LEAVES FROM NATURE N° 2.

VINES



LEAVES FROM NATURE N°3

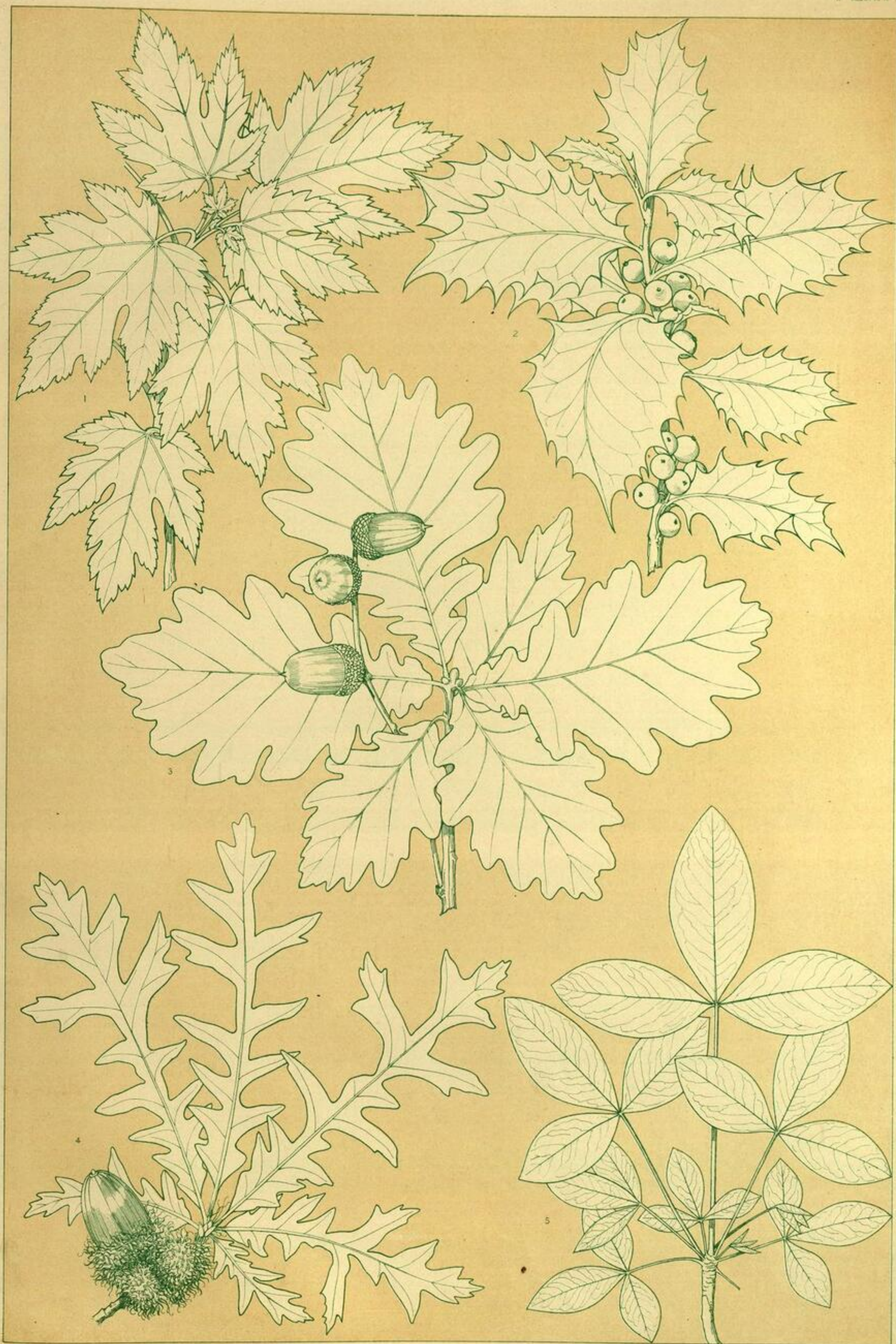
N°1 IVY PALMATA

Nos 2 3 4 & 5 COMMON IVY



LEAVES FROM NATURE N° 4

N° 1 SCARLET OAK N° 2 WHITE OAK N° 3 FIG TREE .  
N° 4 MAPLE N° 5 WHITE BRYONY N° 6 LAUREL N° 7 BAY TREE.



LEAVES FROM NATURE. N° 5.  
N°1 VINE. N°2 HOLLY. N°3 OAK. N°4 TURKEY OAK.

W. S. PARSONS



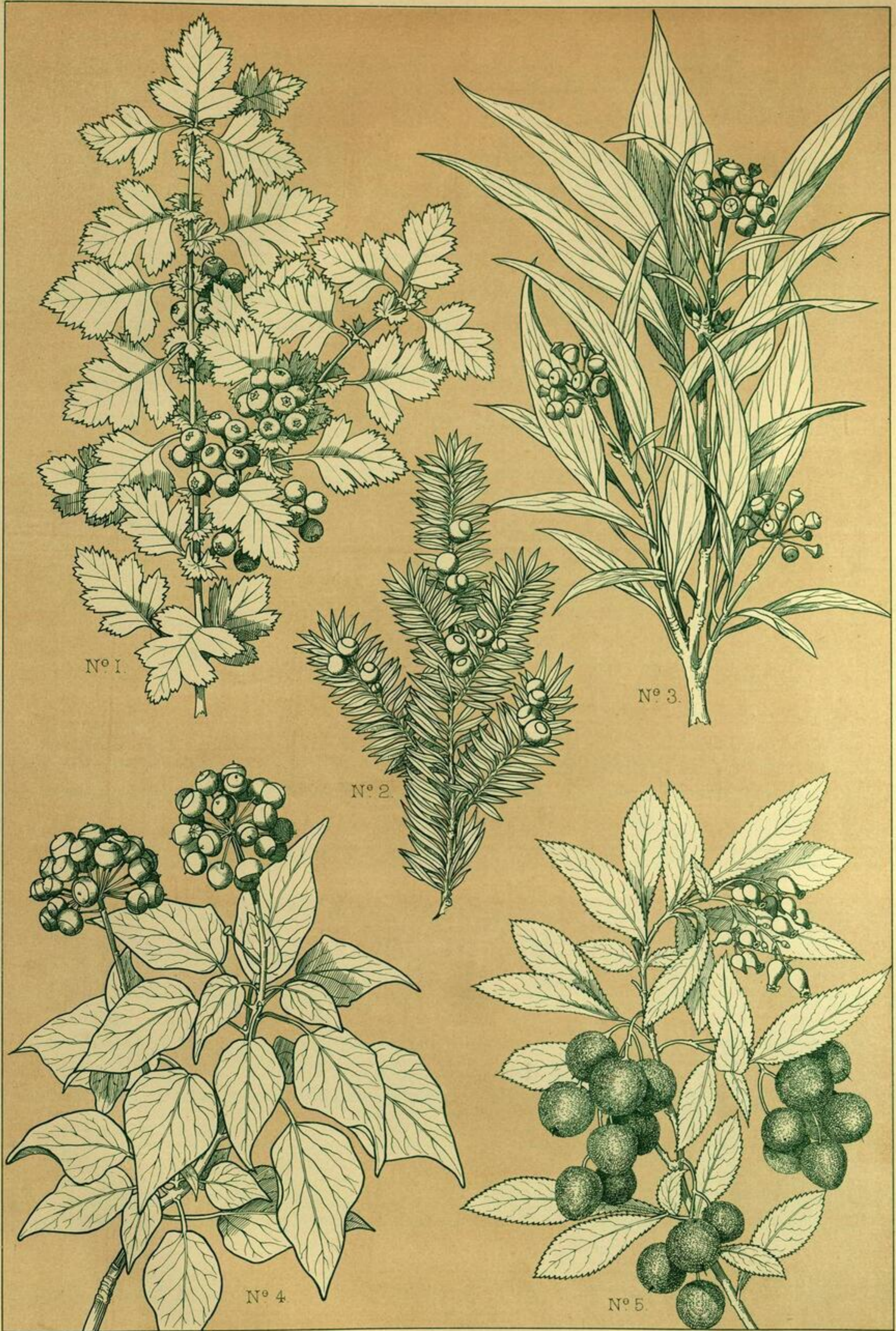


LEAVES FROM NATURE N°6

N°1. WILD ROSE.

N°2. IVY

N°3. BLACKBERRY.



LEAVES FROM NATURE N°7

N°1. HAWTHORN. N°2. YEW. N°3. IVY. N°4. IVY. N°5. STRAWBERRY TREE.



Nº 1. ONION

Nº 3. DAFFODIL

Nº 8. HONEYSUCKLE

Nº 4. NARCISSUS

Nº 18. LEYCESTERIA FORMOSA

Nº 11. SPEEDWELL

Nº 2. WHITE LILY

Nº 1. IRIS

Nº 10. LADIES SMOCK

Nº 12. HAREBELL

Nº 7. MOUSE-EAR

Nº 16. PERIWINKLE

Nº 6. DOG-ROSE

Nº 14. CONVULVULUS



Nº 9. MALLOW

Nº 17. CLARKIA

Nº 15. PRIMROSE

C. DRESSER, DEL.



LEAVES FROM NATURE N° 9

N°1 HONEYSUCKLE

N°2 CONVOLVULUS.



LEAVES FROM NATURE N°10  
PASSION FLOWERS

