

DECORATION METHODS AND MATERIALS.

BY W. H. ELLIOTT.

In attempting a short description of the methods and materials employed in interior house decoration at the present time, I shall endeavor to be as concise in my statements as possible—describing the material, its advantages and disadvantages, where it may or may not be used satisfactorily: and so of the methods employed.

As in other things decoration has its fashions—styles come and go in public favor, and in five years the decorations of a house may be quite out of date. This would be unfortunate if it were necessary. Many styles are never out of date and they are usually the most desirable, temporary styles having their destruction inherent in themselves. It is quite possible to carry out a scheme of decoration which if entirely appropriate to its position will always give lively satisfaction both in color and design.

I might also refer to some notions at times prevalent about the use of color which do duty for the time as decorations. Not long since I heard a lecture in which the theory that each color symbolized an abstract idea was gravely set forth—as that red was love—yellow, aspiration, etc. The folly of attempting to embody such ideas in schemes of decoration would be apparent to any one giving only slight attention to the subject. Of equal value was a scheme for the decoration of a church in which the color of the lower wall represented the bark of trees, higher up the leaves, then a golden sunset, and above all the pale green and blue of the evening sky. Very fanciful no doubt and possibly resulting in good hands in a harmonious arrangement of colour, but on what ground are we to transfer bodily the outer landscape to the walls of a church?

The possible scheme of colour is not objected to, but the gravity with which these and similar fads are presented as principles of decoration. The principles of decoration are worked on other lines. The amount of light usually governs the strength or depth of colour; the presence or absence of sunlight has its due weight, the purposes of the room, the tastes of its customary occupants and a hundred other considerations which are not fanciful, but very practical, influence the decorator in his work.

To follow some of these theories would be to tie ourselves to a certain arrangement for certain conditions in every case. For example a very cheerful room may be carried out with blue as its motive color (no matter what its signification may be) and a very dismal room may result from a badly balanced scheme in yellow. And here let me say that in most cases one color should strongly predominate when a successful effect is desired. Too positive colors in nearly equal proportions are fatal to repose of any room. The exception to this is of course when the color is thoroughly broken up as in the Moorish or Romanesque styles. Another rule which is very safe is that all three primary colors should be represented in every scheme of decoration, otherwise a tame effect is certain. The red or yellow may be very much subdued in a blue room, and so of the other combinations, but their presence if ever so quietly introduced, is unconsciously felt as a satisfying impression.

Looked at from the standpoint of durability many of the materials employed are far from satisfactory, but happily or unhappily, durability is not often considered

in present day decoration. The universal surface material, plaster, is anything but durable. Various attempts have been made to produce substitutes, but thus far without conspicuous success. For small surfaces what has been named plaster board is something of an improvement. It is usually a thickness of plaster-of-paris or asbestos in which coarse canvass or scrim has been incorporated. When this material is cast in ornamental forms such as cornices, friezes, centres, &c., it is called staff. Lightness and strength are obtained by this method and some comparatively large sections have been cast in this way.

For finer ornament various compositions are used which admit of plastic moulding to a limited extent. Ornament of this nature has become necessary on account of the extensive use of the French styles of the Empire, Rococco, etc. As a practical substitute for plaster the sheet metal designs so largely placed on the market at present are very satisfactory where the decorative effect is of little importance. They can hardly be classed as decorative material.

Where any work of importance is contemplated it is advisable to first cover the plaster surface with a strong cotton or burlap, so that cracks may not eventually injure the appearance of the work. Burlaps of various degrees of coarseness are now used extensively for covering wall surfaces and are invaluable for the purpose—the texture giving an excellent surface for color or decoration. The color is obtained either by painting the burlap after it is fixed or by using the ready dyed materials which may be obtained in all desirable colors. Burlaps, cottons and other similar materials are applied to the wall with ordinary flour paste, the wall being pasted instead of the material. Joints should be overlapped about an inch to allow for shrinkage, left several hours, then cut through both thicknesses with a sharp knife, the strips removed and the two edges brought neatly together. Dyed material does not require overlapping as it is already shrunk. For painting, a rather open weave is preferable, the color not filling it so as to hide the texture.

Decoration in glaze colors, outline relief work, and other methods are employed with excellent effect on the painted burlap. Silks and woven tapestries are also used to a limited extent for covering the walls of the more important rooms of the house. The cost of these both in material and application is of course much greater than that of other coverings, and it is questionable if the results gained justify the additional cost. These materials are usually tacked to thin strips of wood which have been nailed on all angles of the wall, the joints being concealed by silk cord gimp or rounded strips of wood which have been covered with the wall material. A lining of ordinary cotton or Canton flannel is usually applied first to the wall to protect the more expensive material from dampness and to give a softer surface. Hand-woven tapestries are only possible to the very few, so that practically we are confined to the products of the machine loom. All of these are closely reproduced in the many beautiful wallpapers now to be had. I have always maintained that such imitation is perfectly justifiable, as the material or groundwork is only a medium for transferring the design to the wall and of no importance in itself beyond its suitability for the special work in which it is employed. Ordinary silk will not retain its appearance on the wall as long as its reproduction in wallpaper, its