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DECORATIVE PAINTING.

Our article on this subject,* we are glad to find, has created some interest among a few of our painters. Several have applied at the free Library of the Board of Arts and Manufactures for works which treat on the subject, and others have expressed a desire for some practical hints that might be useful to beginners. One, a native of Germany, thinking our previous remarks imply a slight on what he seems to consider his national art, has written us a long and discursive letter on the subject, which, had it been in shape for this Journal, we would have gladly published.

The species of decoration to which we alluded as having been introduced into the Province by German painters is no more to be likened to the ancient frescoes of Germany, where such exist in its cathedrals and palaces, than one of our lager bier saloons to the palace of the Alhambra. The pseudo-fresco painting, which has been generally accepted as an improvement on anything which may have preceded it in the Province, we said was "a laudable attempt" to supply a defect in our public buildings, namely, the absence of interior ornamentation. We deprecated the selection of mere architectural details for the purpose of a high style of decoration, at the same time admitting a talent for drawing on the part of those who practised this kind of painting.

We thought it patent to every reflecting mind that painting, architecture, and sculpture possessed distinct aims, and objects frequently combined to produce harmonious effects, but not of necessity to repeat, or reflect each other. Yet, oddly enough, our correspondent advocates his favourite style of ornamentation by claiming for it a superiority, not in point of taste, but a greater economy over similar adornments in plaster. He asks, whether it is not as much a sham to construct cornices, pillars, and pilasters of stucco, which, from the nature of the material, cannot support what they would seem to be intended for, as to represent them by painting; and argues that, if they were properly represented by lights and shadows, the effect would be the same, and would be obtained at much less cost. He says, he could paint a cornice in water colour at one-tenth the price of one in plaster, and in oil, which, he remarks is more durable than plaster, at one-fourth

of that cost. It is not strange that the perpetrator of one set of shams should fall foul of another labourer in the same rank field. Were we on the subject of architecture, the plasterer, who is generally a wholesale dealer in shams, would not escape severe criticism. For the present, we have only to do with house painting, and are desirous of pointing out, for the benefit of those who may wish to profit by our remarks, some of the abuses at least of the art, if we do not succeed in defining its proper use.

Truth is said to be the first great principle in art. If we so far forget this important axiom as to pursue a system founded on untruth, we prostitute and debase the art, especially where we lend it for the purpose of apparently implementing architectural construction. We do this when we paint sham pillars, sham cornices, mouldings, panels, and other details, which ought to have been done by the architect in some solid substance. If such things were not necessary, as the fact of leaving them out would tend to show, why not leave the painter to exercise his legitimate calling, where his art might have a fair chance along with that of the architect of being duly appreciated? Surely there are better subjects for the painter's pencil than bad architectural details. If he should be so cramped up in cities that the stones, and bricks, and mortar of our dingy dwellings have crushed out of his mind all other ideas of art, give him a holiday—let him go to the forests and study the autumnal-glow of the maple, the rich brown of the beech, the bright sunny yellow of the linden, and let him bring with him armfuls of foliage, and paint their graceful fronds. Let him weave them into coronals, and work them into his arabesques. What have we to do with drab, the universal colour with our house painters? Where is it in nature, unless in the buried sandstone; and, when we bring it to light, does not nature kindly shed over it the bright day colours, or the golden sunset, as if ashamed of its unnatural tint?

Drab, however, is the very life and soul of the house painter. It is drab, drab, eternal drab! It came into use with the Puritans, a gloomy and austere race. It has been ever the badge of the Quakers. There must be, indeed, something congenial to sourness and moroseness in *drab*, for we believe that painters, an unusually musical class, are scarce ever heard to sing or whistle at their work under its influence. We can only account for its extensive use on the ground of its comparative cheapness, being more easily adulterated with gross earthy substances than other pigments.

It is a well ascertained fact that colours have peculiar influence on the human mind. Many highly curious and valuable works have been published on the properties and harmony of colour. It is said

* Page 225.