

DECORATIVE NEEDLEWORK.

BY M. A. LEITH WRIGHT.

THE subject of Embroidery, or Decorative Needlework, treated as an art, opens up a field so limitless, both in the past and present, perhaps, also, in the future, that one feels it hopeless in a single paper to do more than touch on some of its more salient features, and consider some of the practical applications of it which are being made at the present moment.

The wide catholicity of the styles now practised and taught in the different schools of embroidery, and the numerous decorative societies, both in Europe and America, as well as the very marked originality displayed by some of them, seems to form our strongest ground for believing that the revival of the ancient but almost entirely extinct art of Decorative Needlework, may have come to stay with us; and, of course, under ever-varying conditions, influence the work of our women for at least some time to come. Of set purpose, I avoid the use of that much enduring and long-suffering term, Art Needlework, always spelled with a large A, and often so sadly misapplied; sounding in our ears, till we have grown weary, and fain to take up hemming dusters instead.

When I speak of this craft as having been totally lost for some centuries, I only mean, of course, as far as Great Britain is concerned: ecclesiastical embroidery, at least, having always existed in continental countries, as well as the domestic and national work of each country, among its peasantry.

Decorative Needlework contains within itself all the necessary elements of art—and as one of the tangible expressions of the Science of Beauty, it is strictly subject to all

the laws which govern that science, whether of color, harmony, proportion or composition—just as painting and sculpture are. We may possibly only be allowed to claim for it a secondary place as regards these sister arts, but certainly our ground is sure when we claim for it an antiquity beyond theirs.

Time with us is too short in these *fin-de-siècle* days, life is too hurried and densely crowded, to allow us to spend time, labor, and money as lavishly as they did in the old days on this art, which is a craft as well. Whether our work is done merely for pleasure and relaxation, or for money, needs must be that we study the quickest, most effective ways of working out our ideas, so as to obtain the best possible effect with the fewest number of stitches—a proceeding, however, apt to prove disastrous without the needful training of the eye and the skill of a practised hand—and not in any way to be identified with haste or careless stitchery.

Some great authorities of the day do not, however, approve of this concession to the spirit of the age; notably, Mr. William Morris, in whose work-rooms the most wonderful and lovely wall-hangings, and other large pieces of embroidery, are executed, under the direction of a well-known lady; pieces, of which the whole ground is worked in the finest cushion stitch, in silk, so that not a thread of the material worked on is shown. The effect is very beautiful, and much more real and lasting than a woven tapestry—but the stitches used, varieties of the ancient *Opus Pulvinarium*, are so close and regular that even a practised hand can only do a few square inches in a day. Of course,