

The unit of repetition may be very simple, as in Fig. 5, where it is geometric in its character, yet, so far as it goes, quite satisfactory; but in the majority of cases a more elaborate form will be needed, which, if made purely geometrical will be apt to be intricate and uninteresting. For this reason we must look to some other source for suggestions—to nature itself, where we will find an abundance of beautiful forms almost ready to hand. But it will not do to take a leaf or flower just as we find it and copy and use it as a unit of repetition. A natural form is pleasing only so far as it is a perfect representation or picture, and the impossibility or absurdity of combining a number of pictures in order to form an ornament, is apparent. Yet we very often find in our floor and wall decorations attempts at imitations of natural flowers, fruit and

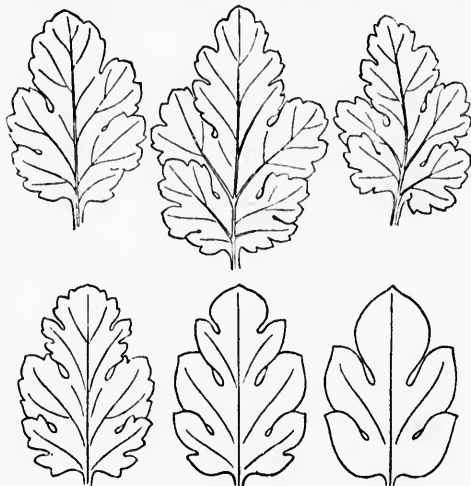


FIG. 4.

foliage, which may be pleasing to some, but are in reality evidences of very bad taste on the part of the designer and his admirers. The processes of manufacture a carpet or wall paper

has to undergo, are such as to preclude all possibility of anything but a suggestive treatment of natural forms. If the results were satisfactory there would be some excuse for using such forms, but when far better results are obtained with much less trouble we must admit that such patterns involve a waste of time and skill, not to say anything of the wrong done to the public taste.

The ancients, whose works are our guide as to beauty and truth, invariably used natural forms *conventionally treated*, that is until art with them was on the decline, and we find that with its decline they introduced a larger proportion of natural forms. At present our productions in ornament do not begin to compare with those of the Moors, Romans, Greeks or Egyptians, and until we can at least produce something which is even moderately good, we can do no better than follow in the footsteps of our masters, not servilely imitating them, but selecting from their works what is best, working on the principles that guided them, and impressing our work with the stamp of our individuality, adapting it to the circumstances as to climate and civilization in which we are placed.

Another reason why natural forms should not be used is that, being unsymmetrical, it is almost impossible to obtain with their use perfect repose without great difficulty, and hence we would be hampered at the very outset with a form not the one best adapted to our purpose.

Having decided that a natural form needs to be changed before being used for ornamental purposes we must decide what change shall be made. It should, first of all be symmetrical; it should retain all the characteristics of the natural form; all minor details should be omitted. Our form, whether leaf or flower, now becomes our standard or representative of every one of its class without being in any way an imitation, and is called a conventional form of the object which supplies us with our motive.

As an illustration of conventionalizing, three natural chrysanthemum leaves and three different conventional forms are given in Fig. 4. The leaves are all pinnately five lobed with a crenate margin. These common peculiarities are retained in the conventional forms, excepting the third, which hardly suggests anything more than a leaf of some sort. Its form approaches to the geometric. The first thing to be done in conventionalizing an object, such as a leaf, is to select the most satisfactory natural form and arrange it symmetrically about a line, simplifying it slightly. If this be too elaborate, some of the marginal indentations may be omitted as in the second conventional form shown in Fig. 4, and if necessary this may be still further simplified as in the third form shown.