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WALL COLOURING, OR "DISTEMPERING."



At this season of the year, when landlords are renovating the walls and ceilings of their houses with paint, paper or whitening, a few words on the process of colouring, white-washing, and painting in size-colours, otherwise called "distempering," may not be out of place. The term "distempering" is not generally understood by amateurs, and the process but little understood by many painters; in fact, there are really comparatively few painters who are thorough masters of the apparently simple process of distempering. The term

is generally applied to all colours mixed or diluted with water, and rendered firm or adhesive by the addition of glue or parchment size. Ceilings are ordinarily distempered and not painted. Painting in oil is too heavy in its effects for certain purposes. Ceilings require something of aerial lightness, especially in drawing-rooms, boudoirs, and such like apartments, as distinguished from the more substantial painting in oil colours.

To distemper well depends upon so many conditions that it is often very difficult, indeed, for the most experienced workman either to satisfy himself or his employer. Failure often is the result of a want of chemical knowledge; but whatever the cause, certain it is that painting in distemper colours is not always satisfactory; but, when skilfully executed, distemper work is much lighter and purer in tone than painting in oil colours. The whiteness, for instance, of distemper colours is not always satisfactory; but, when skilfully executed, distemper work is much lighter and purer than the whiteness of oil colours, and any tint that distemper will take will be purer than any corresponding tint of oil colours. It will be observed, however, that distempering, whatever may be its advantages in this respect, is not suitable to use on interior walls, which are liable to suffer from contact, or which are subject to rough usage, particularly in rooms that are in common use. In these

cases flattening is absolutely essential, unless, indeed, the walls are covered with paper-hanging.

The preparation of walls for distemper is of vital importance to the ultimate result, inasmuch that if they are not properly prepared they will rarely turn out well at the finish. The first thing is to stop the suction; if this is not done, the work is apt to be more or less rough, and will gather or accumulate more colour in one part than another, and, consequently, will look shady. It will be observed, as with the first coat of paint, that some parts are glossy while others are dry dead—that is, the paint has sunk into or been absorbed on the dead parts, while on the glossy part it remains on the surface, owing to the unequal finish of the plaster work. Of course, in oil painting this is remedied by successive coats of paint. The following has been recommended as a suitable preparatory coat:—Mix about a dozen lbs. of the best whitening with water, to the consistency of paste; add sufficient parchment, or other size, to bind the colour fast; add about two ounces of alum and the same weight of soft soap dissolved in water; mix well together in a pail, and strain through a coarse cloth or a metal strainer. The colour should now be tried on paper and dried before a fire, or otherwise, in order to test whether sufficient size has been used to "bind" the colour, and to prove that the tint is what is required. The finishing coat can be laid on without disturbing the first one. The alum and soft soap contribute to this effect in a great degree, and help to form a semi-imperious coating upon which the finishing coat will work cool and without suction. Caution must be observed not to have the size too strong, as it will be very liable to chip, especially in rooms where much gas is used.

An "Experienced Workman," in a practical periodical, gives the following directions:—"In order to produce good work, two things are essentially necessary in the mixing of distemper, namely, clean and well washed whitening and pure jellied size. The whitening should be put to soak with sufficient water to cover it well and penetrate its bulk. When the whitening is sufficiently soaked the water should be poured off, which will remove any dust or foreign matter from the whitening. It should then be beaten up or stirred until all the lumps are broken, and it becomes a stiff, smooth paste. A good workman will do this with his hand, and will manipulate it until it is quite smooth; but it may be done most