

WALL PAPER

PRESENT DAY MURAL DECORATIONS.

By Arthur Seymour Jennings

THE public taste in mural decoration fluctuates almost as much, if not as rapidly, as that in ladies' dresses. The requirements of to-day are very different from those of ten years ago, and, no doubt, in another decade other and dissimilar styles will be in vogue. Indeed, the demand for novelty, while not so pronounced in England as it is in some countries abroad—the United States, for example—is very real, so that art students and designers may always be reasonably sure of finding a market for their work, provided, of course, that it is novel and really decorative.

We may leave aside from present consideration those features of modern decoration which have proved to be but short-lived, and direct our attention to the styles which have remained in favor for a long time, or appear to be likely to do so.

Taking wall papers in their various grades first, the question has often been asked whether the fashion is set by the manufacturers, or whether it is distinct demand on the part of the public. Probably each contributes to the result. The wall paper manufacturer who produces a new style, or a series of hangings quite out of the ordinary run, usually "makes haste slowly." The production of a single new design means the risk of not a little money, as the cutting of the blocks or cylinders from which the design is printed is somewhat expensive. For this reason only a few patterns that are distinctly novel are brought out in one season. If they meet with favor—if the sales justify it—the "line" is largely increased the following year.

It is worthy of note that a custom of the wall paper trade, widely followed, is to reprint a selection of certain designs every thirty years or so. At present there is a demand for pearl, white morre, and striped papers that were popular in the "sixties."

We may now consider the new styles which are most sold to-day, and first among these must be placed "ingrain" papers, or those which are colored in the pulp from which the paper is made. This class of paper is usually either quite plain, or printed with a stripe, or with a small dotted pattern technically known as "powdering." This pattern is almost always printed in the same color as the ground, but a little darker. Often the difference in tint between ground and pattern is so small that the design can hardly be discerned. The wide use of these plain or nearly plain papers is generally admitted to be one of the best evidences of the process of applied art in mural decoration in recent years.

It may, at first sight, be thought that the use of plain papers does not give much encouragement for the artist. As a matter of fact, however, they are but rarely used, excepting in conjunction with a comparatively bright and often elaborate frieze. The reader who has studied design will be quick to understand why this combination gives such satisfactory results. We will take a well-furnished dining-room as an example. Here we probably have a good many pic-

tures upon the walls, and the plain background, if the proper hue is chosen, forms a setting or foundation for them, which adds to their beauty instead of detracting from it, as is almost invariably the case when a conspicuous pattern is employed. The "powdering" design, so unobtrusive, yet serves to nicely break up those portions of the surface where there are no pictures, while the broad, boldly-drawn frieze, probably full of coloring, gives a fitting cap to the wall surface, and forms a combination effective and decorative. And, be it observed, it hardly matters how strong the colors are in the frieze, because it is above the line of pictures, while the expanse of plain surface will probably require a firm coloring in order to produce a proper balance of parts and a satisfactory whole.

It is in the design of the frieze that the artist will find his greatest opportunities. We do not now refer to the ordinary patterned frieze or border, designed on what Mr. Lewis F. Day calls the "turn-over" principles—that is, of a pattern having its left and right identical—but rather to that class of design which is most sought at the present time. There are two divisions to this class, or perhaps they might be more properly considered quite separately. The first is the "landscape frieze," the second the "hand-stencilled frieze." Both may be recommended to the earnest study of the art student who has reached that satisfactory stage—although so often difficult to get over—of applying knowledge gained in a school of art to the wants of the manufacturer.

Landscape friezes have made steady progress in favor during the past year or two, and the writer is of opinion that they will continue to be used for some time to come. Provided that they do not become too common, and that the makers do not produce them in very cheap quantities—for it is here the danger lies—there is much to hope from them.

The use of all wall papers, both plain and those executed in relief, is open to the grave objection that, unless great care is exercised in hanging them, the ornament of the pattern will be mutilated. Sometimes this is the fault of the decorator, who has not taken the trouble to centre his pattern even in the case of the mantelpiece, which in most rooms is the most conspicuous feature. But frequently the pattern cannot be made to "fit in," and to place one feature of the design in the centre of the mantelpiece only means that a similar ornament would have to be cut at both corners. When a landscape frieze is used the space to be covered must be carefully considered, because the effect would be ruined if part of the design were to be seen "going around the corner," so to speak.

Stauntons Limited.

A very cordial invitation is extended by Stauntons Limited, wall paper manufacturers, 931 Yonge Street, to their customers and the wall paper trade in general to visit their factory during the Toronto Exhibition. The company will also have rooms at the King Edward Hotel during the exhibition, and all visitors will be made very welcome.