

The Theory and Method of Embroidery.*

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Part I. Equipment.—How to Prepare for Work.

The art of Embroidery is worthy of serious consideration and its methods should be studied by those who attempt textile decoration. While admitting that a prescribed method is always secondary to the perfect product, yet one may insist upon a method which experience has proved will accomplish the result in preference to no method and results which are the opposite of success.

The art of embroidery has fallen into a state of dilettanteism for the reason that with the increased popularity of the work a mistaken popular idea has arisen that it is after all a thing to be "picked up" rather than conscientiously studied. No fault of this sort can be found with the old embroideries, because they were executed in convents with the serious purpose of church decoration, or by workers holding commissions of great value from the courts, and therefore received such attention as should be accorded a fine art. Modern embroidery as it is done and taught in the schools on the "other side," together with Japanese and Chinese work, is worthy of the history of the art, and there is no reason why our popular American work should not be as excellent.

The general adaptation of embroidery to household linens is distinctly American, and it is one of those cases in which a thing set apart as it were for a prescribed purpose has been translated, so to speak, into a popular form. This has had two results, one to lower the standard of the work, the other to bring the uplifting influence of such an art into everyday life. The latter result is sufficiently inspiring to appeal to those who attempt the work to make the former impossible by some serious attention to the theory of the work.

The object of the following paper is to fully explain the theory of embroidery and the method for carrying it out. The question of one's authority for laying down a system of rules may naturally arise. A very slight knowledge of the history of embroidery will answer all such questions. Experience has established a science which will convince the inquirer of the dignity of the art. We do not attempt anything new so far as the technique is concerned. We want rather to apply the perfected technique of antique work to our modern ideas and uses of decorated fabrics. The only decoration which is legitimate and, therefore, which is artistic on textile fabrics is embroidery. When we undertake any other sort the production is not one which has any place in art. Consistency is an element without which no art is possible. Woven threads are the only consistent materials to form a part of woven foundations. The absolute consistency of embroidery as a textile decoration is the secret of its continuous history, and the assurance of its future.

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