

THE ART MOVEMENT.

THE QUAIN AND GROTESQUE IN COTTON DESIGNING.

BY FREDERICK DOLMAN.

THE British manufacturer in relation to foreign markets is often accused nowadays of lethargy. It was, therefore, very instructive to find on a recent visit to Manchester that in the highly important industry of cotton printing he is devoting, with the co-operation of the artist, an amount of attention to the tastes of some of his foreign



FOR INDIA.

customers which is probably little suspected by the general public. The bulk of our export of cotton fabric goes to Eastern countries, where the climate makes it the most suitable for everyday attire, but where likewise the artistic ideas of the people with regard to dress differ most widely from those of Western Europe. In satisfaction of these ideas the Manchester manufacturers, in alliance with the designers, now produce a startling variety in patterns such as can hardly be conceived by anyone who has

not visited their warehouses and *ateliers*.

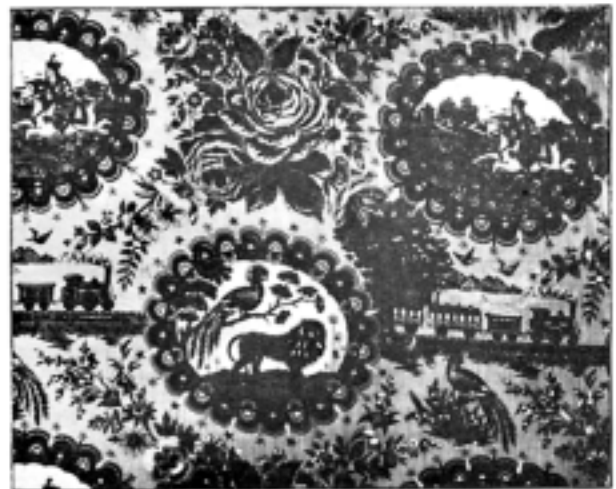
These designs are entirely the work of English "artists." The French designer is supreme in his own sphere—that of the highest European taste; and to some foreign countries, such as Argentine, only fabrics which bear the *imprimatur* of Paris, so to speak, can be sent. But his hand is said to lose its cunning when dealing with the brilliant colours and grotesque, bizarre fancies that are called for by the great markets of India and Persia, Turkey, China, Japan, etc. The work of furnishing fresh patterns for these Eastern customers of Cottonopolis is practically all done on the spot, in and around Manchester. Mr. Joseph Waterhouse, to whom I am much indebted in preparing this article, is in this way one of the bulwarks of the calico-printing trade. His studios, which have at the Cheshire town a better atmo-

sphere and a clearer light than could probably be obtained anywhere else so near Manchester, give



FOR CONSTANTINOPLE. (*Living Creatures not being allowed.*)

employment to over forty draughtsmen of various ages and abilities. For their home trade—which does not represent, however, more than ten per cent. of the whole—cotton printers rely greatly upon designers whom they specially retain in their own works; but to provide fully for the more varied requirements of foreign markets they



FOR NORTH PERSIA

must have recourse to many men's talents. Mr. Waterhouse, who is a member of the Manchester Municipal Art Committee, puts great faith in

special training and skill, and in looking through his studios you make the acquaintance of one designer whose *forte* is in the Indian trade,



FOR SOUTH PERSIA.

another who has been particularly successful in pleasing the fancy of the Persians, a third who is very familiar with the whims of the semi-savage African, and so on.

Commercially speaking, India is the most important of these Eastern markets for the cotton designer and his work; for India is, in some respects, comparatively easy. Ancient native art gives him a multitude of beautiful forms and fine studies in colour to choose from. For all classes of the people are very conservative in their taste; the ideas of ancient Indian art must be adhered to, although their application must be sometimes modified in accordance with the sentiments and



FOR SOUTH PERSIA.

feelings of different sections of the immense population. But, on the other hand, the artist is

seriously handicapped, as a rule, by the knowledge that the fabric must be produced at the minimum of cost. It has been observed by visitors to India that English cotton goods are often artistically inferior to the fabric of native production. But these English goods are much cheaper than the cheapest of those produced in India; if it were not for the manufactures of Lancashire, indeed, the masses of the people, wretchedly poor as they are, would have to go unclothed. Price for price, the fabric of English design compares most favourably with the home-made article from the artistic point of view, and the success of such a pattern as is illustrated on the former page indicates how well the Lancashire artist now understands Indian taste.

A man's figure, it will be noticed, is an important feature in this design. This fact would render the fabric quite unsaleable in Turkey and the Levant, supposing that any merchant were



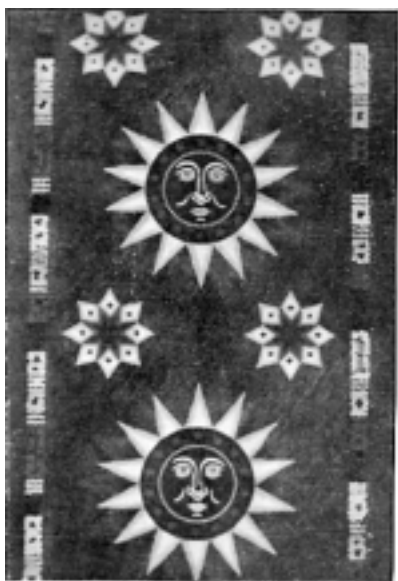
FOR CHINA.

foolish enough to send it there. For the Turks, under the influence of their religion, will not wear apparel on which life is depicted—whether it be in the form of birds, animals, or human figures. In these circumstances the artist, it may be supposed, will fall back upon floral designs. But floral designs are not enough to satisfy the Oriental love for colour and picturesque effect. So the hapless artist is obliged to introduce into his pictures such grotesque anomalies as boats without oarsmen, balloons without aëronauts, engines without drivers, and so forth.

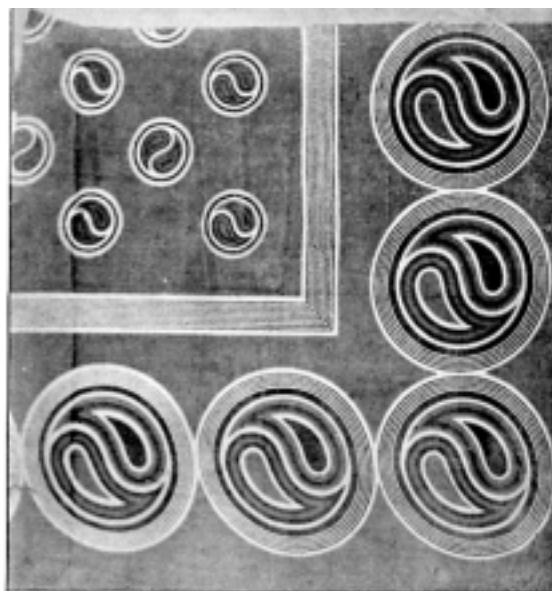
This embarrassing restriction—for the designer—does not apply, however, to the whole of the Mohammedan cotton-wearing world. The Persians, as followers of Abulika, instead of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, whose cause was espoused by the Turks, are not bound by this, among other religious tenets, although they are

just as much opposed to the pictorial representation of anything in the shape of a cross. The embodiment of life in design, on the contrary,

At one time China and Japan were regarded as practically one market as far as the English cotton manufacturer and designer were concerned ;

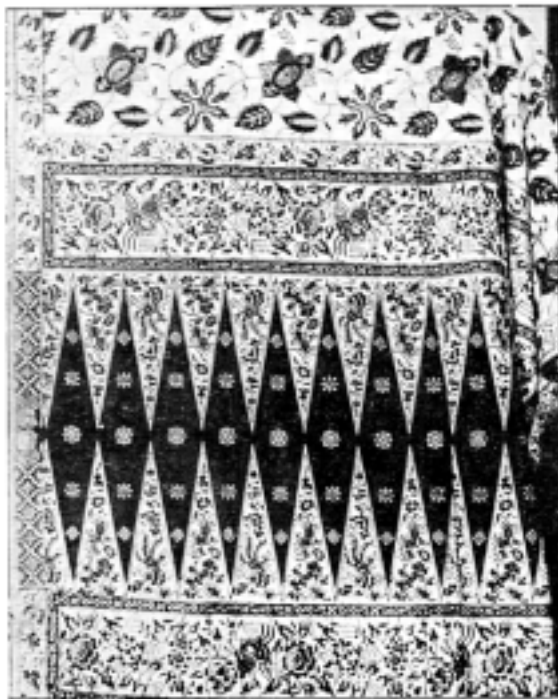


FOR ZANZIBAR



FOR ZANZIBAR.

when carried out in certain ways, find much favour in their eyes. The picture which contains such incongruous features as flowers and foliage, a lion and a peacock, a hunting scene and a railway, may be said to typify a large part of the popular taste. Even in simple floral designs, the Persian women like to have the flower grasped by the human hand. It may be added that in preparing their patterns the Manchester designers have derived great assistance from the old Persian shawls, which in some cases have been very successfully imitated. Probably the most gorgeous of all these Persian designs represent banquet scenes. In other parts of the Orient, notably in Syria, the common people of both sexes delight to don fabrics depicting architectural and scenic magnificence, such as towers, palaces, gardens, and fountains, and of their weakness in this respect English manufacturers have taken full advantage.

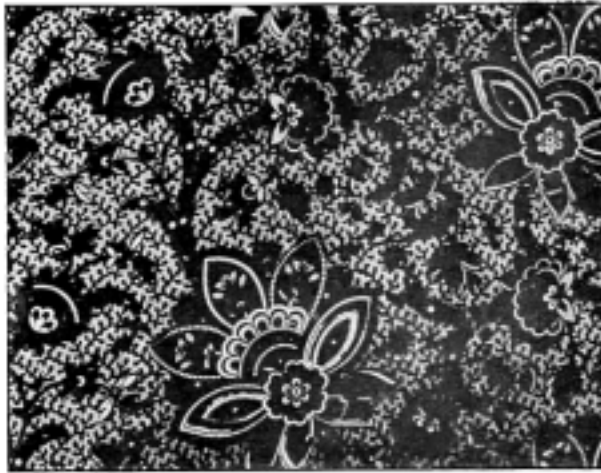


FOR JAVA.

but the important difference between the two, which always existed, is now recognised. I was told in Manchester, however, that the manufacturers found that they could best cater for Japanese taste by procuring, through their agents in the land of the Mikado the designs of native artists, although these had often to be revised in Manchester studios to render them of practical use for the looms. To China, on the other hand, it is found inadvisable to continue sending cotton goods having patterns that are simply based on the tastes of the Japs and their fondness for the chrysanthemum and the butterfly. The real taste of the Chinese people is still rather a doubtful quantity, I suppose ; but in working for the Chinese market to-day the Manchester artist endeavours, at any rate, to close his eyes to the art of Japan, with what result may be gathered from the accompanying illustrations.

In catering for new markets opened up by British enterprise the designer has at the outset to work in the dark, so to speak. In course of time, however, he obtains some conception of what will most appeal to semi-savage taste from specimens of native cloth, rudely made from fibre, or of rough wooden carving of heathen gods and other objects.

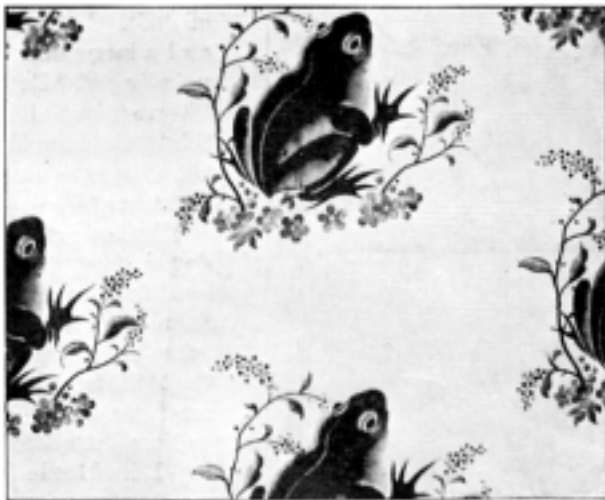
At first nothing but the crudest forms and the most brilliant colours are required, but in course of time the savage eye is cultivated to higher things. Two designs, reproduced on the previous page, for fabrics which will be distributed from Zanzibar exemplify the most advanced art education of the West African natives. Their colours would be red and yellow, which are almost in-



FOR CHINA.

to the cotton trade on its artistic side. By training artists specially with a view to the curious diversity of designs which the Eastern markets demand it has done much to enable the Manchester manufacturers to maintain the wonderful supremacy which Board of Trade returns reveal. The Altrincham studios are almost entirely recruited from the Manchester school.

Mr. Waterhouse himself claims it as his *alma mater*, although at the time he attended its classes it was not under municipal control. At that time there were but thirty or forty students, young men in situations, who worked in the class and the *atelier* from eight to ten every morning and seven to nine every evening. The students under Mr. R. Glazier, A.R.I.B.A., the head



FOR SINGAPORE.



variably the most favoured when a coloured race first acquires the habit of wearing clothes.

The Municipal Art School at Manchester has rendered, and is rendering, very valuable services

master, are now to be numbered in hundreds, and probably in no sphere do they promise to be more successful than in giving the necessary artistic support to Manchester's commerce with the Orient.

