

TEXTILES

THERE are several ways of ornamenting a woven cloth : (1) real tapestry, (2) carpet-weaving, (3) mechanical weaving, (4) printing or painting, and (5) embroidery. There has been no improvement (indeed, as to the main processes, no change) in the manufacture of the wares in all these branches since the fourteenth century, as far as the wares themselves are concerned ; whatever improvements have been introduced have been purely commercial, and have had to do merely with reducing the cost of production ; nay, more,

the commercial improvements have on the whole been decidedly injurious to the quality of the wares themselves. Textiles.

The noblest of the weaving arts is Tapestry, in which there is nothing mechanical: it may be looked upon as a mosaic of pieces of colour made up of dyed threads, and is capable of producing wall ornament of any degree of elaboration within the proper limits of duly considered decorative work.

As in all wall-decoration, the first thing to be considered in the designing of Tapestry is the force, purity, and elegance of the *silhouette* of the objects represented, and nothing vague or indeterminate is admissible. But special excellences can be expected from it. Depth of tone, richness of colour, and exquisite gradation of tints are easily to be obtained in Tapestry; and it also demands that crispness and abundance

Textiles. of beautiful detail which was the especial characteristic of fully developed Mediæval Art. The style of even the best period of the Renaissance is wholly unfit for Tapestry: accordingly we find that Tapestry retained its Gothic character longer than any other of the pictorial arts. A comparison of the wall-hangings in the Great Hall at Hampton Court with those in the Solar or Drawing-room, will make this superiority of the earlier design for its purpose clear to any one not lacking in artistic perception: and the comparison is all the fairer, as both the Gothic tapestries of the Solar and the post-Gothic hangings of the Hall are pre-eminently good of their kinds. Not to go into a description of the process of weaving tapestry, which would be futile without illustrations, I may say that in contradistinction to mechanical weaving, the warp is quite

hidden, with the result that the colours are as solid as they can be made in painting. Textiles.

Carpet-weaving is somewhat of the nature of Tapestry: it also is wholly unmechanical, but its use as a floor-cloth somewhat degrades it, especially in our northern or western countries, where people come out of the muddy streets into rooms without taking off their shoes. Carpet-weaving undoubtedly arose among peoples living a tent life, and for such a dwelling as a tent, carpets are the best possible ornaments.

Carpets form a mosaic of small squares of worsted, or hair, or silk threads, tied into a coarse canvas, which is made as the work progresses. Owing to the comparative coarseness of the work, the designs should always be very elementary in form, and *suggestive* merely of forms of leafage, flowers,

Textiles. beasts and birds, etc. The soft gradations of tint to which Tapestry lends itself are unfit for Carpet-weaving; beauty and variety of colour must be attained by harmonious juxtaposition or tints, bounded by judiciously chosen outlines; and the pattern should lie absolutely flat upon the ground. On the whole, in designing carpets the method of *contrast* is the best one to employ, and blue and red, quite frankly used, with white or very light outlines on a dark ground, and black or some very dark colour on a light ground, are the main colours on which the designer should depend.

In making the above remarks I have been thinking only of the genuine or hand-made carpets. The mechanically-made carpets of to-day must be looked upon as makeshifts for cheapness' sake. Of these, the velvet pile and Brussels

are simply coarse worsted velvets woven Textiles.
over wires like other velvet, and cut, in
the case of the velvet pile ; and Kidder-
minster carpets are stout cloths, in which
abundance of warp (a warp to each
weft) is used for the sake of wear and
tear. The velvet carpets need the same
kind of design as to colour and quality
as the real carpets ; only, as the colours
are necessarily limited in number, and
the pattern must repeat at certain
distances, the design should be simpler
and smaller than in a real carpet. A
Kidderminster carpet calls for a small
design in which the different planes, or
plies, as they are called, are well inter-
locked.

Mechanical weaving has to repeat the
pattern on the cloth within compara-
tively narrow limits ; the number of
colours also is limited in most cases to
four or five. In most cloths so woven,

Textiles. therefore, the best plan seems to be to choose a pleasant ground colour and to superimpose a pattern mainly composed of either a lighter shade of that colour, or a colour in no very strong contrast to the ground; and then, if you are using several colours, to light up this general arrangement either with a more forcible outline, or by spots of stronger colour carefully disposed. Often the lighter shade on the darker suffices, and hardly calls for anything else: some very beautiful cloths are merely damasks, in which the warp and weft are of the same colour, but a different tone is obtained by the figure and the ground being woven with a longer or shorter twill: the *tabby* being tied by the warp very often, the *satin* much more rarely. In any case, the patterned webs produced by mechanical weaving, if the ornament is to be effective and worth

the doing, require that same Gothic Textiles.
crispness and clearness of detail which
has been spoken of before: the geo-
metrical structure of the pattern, which
is a necessity in all recurring patterns,
should be boldly insisted upon, so as to
draw the eye from accidental figures,
which the recurrence of the pattern is
apt to produce.

The meaningless stripes and spots
and other tormentings of the simple
twill of the web, which are so common
in the woven ornament of the eighteenth
century and in our own times, should
be carefully avoided: all these things
are the last resource of a jaded invention
and a contempt of the simple and fresh
beauty that comes of a sympathetic
suggestion of natural forms: if the
pattern be vigorously and firmly drawn
with a true feeling for the beauty of
line and *silhouette*, the play of light and

Textiles. shade on the material of the simple twill will give all the necessary variety. I invite my readers to make another comparison : to go to the South Kensington Museum and study the invaluable fragments of the stuffs of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of Syrian and Sicilian manufacture, or the almost equally beautiful webs of Persian design, which are later in date, but instinct with the purest and best Eastern feeling ; they may also note the splendid stuffs produced mostly in Italy in the later Middle Ages, which are unsurpassed for richness and *effect* of design, and when they have impressed their minds with the productions of this great historic school, let them contrast with them the work of the vile Pompadour period, passing by the early seventeenth century as a period of transition into corruption. They will then (if, once more, they

have real artistic perception) see at once Textiles.
the difference between the results of
irrepressible imagination and love of
beauty, on the one hand, and, on the
other, of restless and weary vacuity of
mind, forced by the exigencies of fashion
to do something or other to the innocent
surface of the cloth in order to distin-
guish it in the market from other cloths ;
between the handiwork of the free
craftsman doing as he *pleased* with his
work, and the drudgery of the “opera-
tive” set to his task by the tradesman
competing for the custom of a frivolous
public, which had forgotten that there
was such a thing as art.

The next method of ornamenting
cloth is by painting it or printing on it
with dyes. As to the painting of cloths
with dyes by hand, which is no doubt
a very old and widely practised art,
it has now quite disappeared (modern

Textiles. society not being rich enough to pay the necessary price for such work), and its place has now been taken by printing by block or cylinder-machine. The remarks made on the design for mechanically woven cloths apply pretty much to these printed stuffs: only, in the first place, more play of delicate and pretty colour is possible, and more variety of colour also; and in the second, much more use can be made of hatching and dotting, which are obviously suitable to the method of block-printing. In the many-coloured printed cloths, frank red and blue are again the mainstays of the colour arrangement; these colours, softened by the paler shades of red, outlined with black and made more tender by the addition of yellow in small quantities, mostly forming part of brightish greens, make up the colouring of the old Persian prints,

which carry the art as far as it can be carried. Textiles.

It must be added that no textile ornament has suffered so much as cloth-printing from those above-mentioned commercial inventions. A hundred years ago the processes for printing on cloth differed little from those used by the Indians and Persians; and even up to within forty years ago they produced colours that were in themselves good enough, however inartistically they might be used. Then came one of the most wonderful and most useless of the inventions of modern Chemistry, that of the dyes made from coal-tar, producing a series of hideous colours, crude, livid—and cheap,—which every person of taste loathes, but which nevertheless we can by no means get rid of until we are able to struggle successfully against the doom of cheap and nasty which has overtaken us.

Textiles Last of the methods of ornamenting cloth comes Embroidery: of the design for which it must be said that one of its aims should be the exhibition of beautiful material. Furthermore, it is not worth doing unless it is either very copious and rich, or very delicate—or both. For such an art nothing patchy or scrappy, or half-starved, should be done: there is no excuse for doing anything which is not strikingly beautiful; and that more especially as the exuberance of beauty of the work of the East and of Mediæval Europe, and even of the time of the Renaissance, is at hand to reproach us. It may be well here to warn those occupied in Embroidery against the feeble imitations of Japanese art which are so disastrously common amongst us. The Japanese are admirable naturalists, wonderfully skilful draughtsmen, deft beyond all others in

mere execution of whatever they take Textiles.
in hand; and also great masters of style
within certain narrow limitations. But
with all this, a Japanese design is ab-
solutely worthless unless it is executed
with Japanese skill. In truth, with all
their brilliant qualities as handicraftsmen,
which have so dazzled us, the Japanese
have no architectural, and therefore no
decorative, instinct. Their works of
art are isolated and blankly individual-
istic, and in consequence, unless where
they rise, as they sometimes do, to the
dignity of a suggestion for a picture
(always devoid of human interest), they
remain mere wonderful toys, things
quite outside the pale of the evolution
of art, which, I repeat, cannot be carried
on without the architectural sense that
connects it with the history of mankind.

To conclude with some general re-
marks about designing for textiles: the

Textiles. aim should be to combine clearness of form and firmness of structure with the mystery which comes of abundance and richness of detail ; and this is easier of attainment in woven goods than in flat painted decoration and paper-hangings ; because in the former the stuffs usually hang in folds and the pattern is broken more or less, while in the latter it is spread out flat against the wall. Do not introduce any lines or objects which cannot be explained by the structure of the pattern ; it is just this logical sequence of form, this growth which looks as if, under the circumstances, it could not have been otherwise, which prevents the eye wearying of the repetition of the pattern.

Never introduce any shading for the purpose of making an object look round ; whatever shading you use should be used for explanation only, to show

what you mean by such and such a Textiles.
piece of drawing ; and even that you
had better be sparing of.

Do not be afraid of large patterns ;
if properly designed they are more rest-
ful to the eye than small ones : on the
whole, a pattern where the structure is
large and the details much broken up is
the most useful. Large patterns are not
necessarily startling ; this comes more
of violent relief of the figure from
the ground, or inharmonious colouring :
beautiful and logical form relieved from
the ground by well-managed contrast or
gradation, and lying flat on the ground,
will never weary the eye. Very small
rooms, as well as very large ones, look
best ornamented with large patterns,
whatever you do with the middling-
sized ones.

As final maxims : never forget the
material you are working with, and try

Textiles. always to use it for doing what it can do best : if you feel yourself hampered by the material in which you are working, instead of being helped by it, you have so far not learned your business, any more than a would-be poet has, who complains of the hardship of writing in measure and rhyme. The special limitations of the material should be a pleasure to you, not a hindrance: a designer, therefore, should always thoroughly understand the processes of the special manufacture he is dealing with, or the result will be a mere *tour de force*. On the other hand, it is the pleasure in understanding the capabilities of a special material, and using them for suggesting (not imitating) natural beauty and incident, that gives the *raison d'être* of decorative art.

WILLIAM MORRIS.