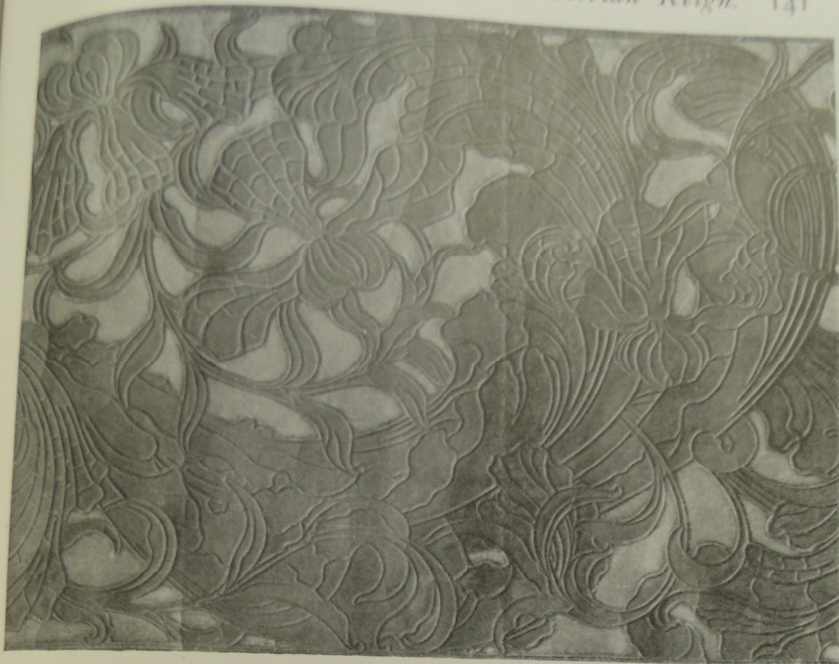


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FRIEZE IN RAISED PAPER.

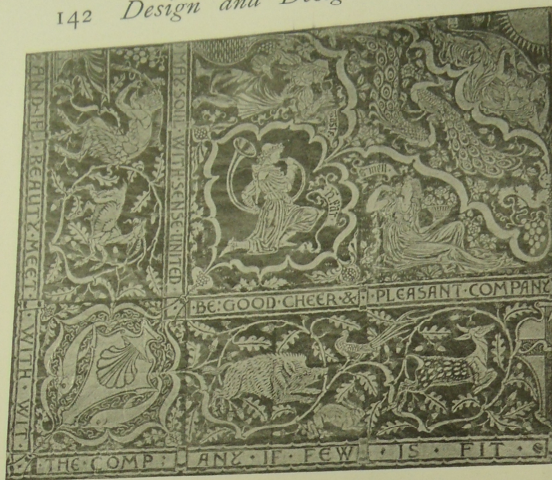
DESIGNED BY ARTHUR GWATKIN FOR WYLIE AND LOCHHEAD.

ON THE DESIGN AND DESIGNERS
OF THE VICTORIAN REIGN: BY
GEO. C. HAITE, R.B.A., PRESI-
DENT OF THE SOCIETY OF
DESIGNERS: PART TWO.

My recollection of these old designers is a sad, albeit pleasant, one. My first remembrances are interwoven with the sound of the rubber down and the smell of tracing paper; and I recall how I was sometimes allowed to perch on a stool by my father's side while he worked, as my own child delights to do now. During the first sixteen years of my life (my father died ere I was that age) I saw most of the leading designers of those days. I recall how particular they were in their dress; how reserved and quiet in their demeanour. Their ideas would be very old-fashioned now, I fear. They were, as a class, remarkably exclusive—unobtrusive, often poor, and always very proud—qualities which may doubtless evoke our admiration, but may account for the lack of recognition they and their work received. I shall feel that I have not altogether failed in my mission if I only recall the names of those neglected workers, whose forgotten graves are to be found in the village

churchyard in the immediate vicinity of London, upon whose labours and efforts so much of the stupendous manufacturing industry of the country is erected.

In their time, as already mentioned, there was no national recognition of, support, or sympathy with, British design. The public possessed no taste based upon reason or knowledge. The worship of foreign goods had become an established fetish; and it is a fact that many of the best designs by British designers were introduced here as of French origin. It is true that most of our native work possessed no character, but was frankly imitative of foreign work, with which we had no real sympathy. Every shopman decorated his windows with goods labelled "French patterns," "French fashions," etc., etc., and the manufacturers, who should and might have fought against it, accepted and pandered to it, thus retarding a national expression of design, and preventing the designers of those days from taking delight in their work—in the expression of their own taste—and disgusting them with a calling which only a sincere love, and exceptional devotion, could have enabled them to acquire proficiency in. So keen was this disgust and disappointment, that my father declared, over



DIAPER DESIGN BY WALTER CRANE,
FOR JOHN WILSON AND SON.

and over again, that nothing would persuade him to allow me to follow design as a means of livelihood; and—consistent with that position—refused me the most elementary information or assistance. He recognised that they were the slaves of the fashion of the hour, the style of a season, and the middle man who—reaping all the benefits, he could afford to be indifferent—blew hot or cold as the market demanded, and insisted upon the adoption of his own views. It would be as instructive, as I am sure it would be interesting, if space permitted, to trace the decadence of design and the sacrifice made in obedience to fashion. One example in the shawl trade will suffice. It will be seen from the illustration how the same designer who created this cashmere pattern, which is absolutely a beautiful specimen of Design apart from its workmanship, was compelled to vitiate his taste, and to set his judgment at defiance by executing B, thus humbling, if not degrading, his Art, and marking the beginning of the end.

Very much the same thing indeed, but in a modified way, goes on at the present time. The young designers are often persuaded by the most plausible arguments to outrage the true principles of Design, and destroy its fitness by the introduction of some meretricious feature or novelty in order that the manufacturer should attract public attention, and score off a rival. It is only a few years ago that a large manufacturer of cretonne showed me with pride, a design he had procured for a chintz for furniture covering or window-curtains, representing birds' eggs, in natural colours—sug-

gestive enough without further comment.

Deliberately, and at the expense of giving some wit the opportunity of saying that no article on Art could be written without reference to the '51 Exhibition, I am going to allude to it, because, if it did nothing more, it is surely fair to record that it brought before the public, by comparison, the lamentable condition of our own work. A great deal of immediate good was, perhaps, hardly to be expected; for, although the conviction may have been brought home, and doubtless was to the manufacturers, the public as a body were not prepared to avail themselves of the opportunity. They were very much like the child at its first pantomime, bewildered more than

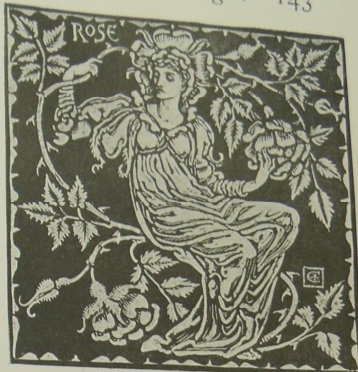
delighted, but it was unquestionably the first note to awaken dormant energy.

We must also gratefully recognise that the sympathy shown, and the personal interest taken by the Prince Consort, gave the first great impetus to the forward movement, which, in spite of its having gone astray for a time, has never ceased to make progress. And although we may have had, as a matter of conscience, to question the methods adopted by, and doubt the benefits derived from, the National Schools of Design, the inauguration of the same and their existence has on the whole been educational, and has kept before a few of the leading workers the necessity for effort, while the collection of Art treasures at Kensington has, to our designers and artisans, been of inestimable value.

A great deal is being said just now about the formation of a national collection of British paintings, to mark the Diamond Jubilee year, and with such I am in sympathy, but what is to be said for the claim of Design? We have no permanent gallery of Designs or collection of examples for reference by Manufacturer or Student.

It can be scarcely a matter for wonder that while all other professions have advanced, Design for so long made little progress. The wonder is that it made any.

No one who has only a great principle at heart, and no personal aims to advance, cares to court either being snubbed or ignored; but one must be prepared to risk both in approaching, as I propose to do, the authorities on this question of



DESIGN FOR TABLE D'OYLEYS
BY WALTER CRANE, FOR JOHN
WILSON AND CO.



CEILING DESIGN BY GEO. C. HAITÉ, FOR
ARTHUR SANDERSON AND SON.

a national collection of designs. The suggestion may, however, receive the consideration it deserves, and the anomaly removed—that, whereas Science, Literature, Medicine, Botany, and the Arts of Architecture and Painting have their collections and institutes, a national collection of pattern Design does not exist.

In the foregoing pages I have sought to compare the position of Design and designers of sixty years ago with that of to-day; and have ventured to give expression to what, in my opinion, may have been some of the causes for its unsatisfactory position then and until a few years ago, and the improvement during the last twenty-five or thirty years. The subject is one destined to be brought even more prominently before us in the near future than it has of late, inasmuch as we are now awakening to the advantages of leading the van in Design and decorative Art expression, and, apart from its

aesthetic and educational aspect, or even its commercial value, it is, as I have said, one of the greatest national educational importance.

Design has been ignored and neglected by public and State alike, although possibly not thinkingly or intentionally, yet it has often been the medium by which its sister Arts have benefited.

But it would seem that the time has arrived when the claims of Design as a distinct phase of Art expression should be proclaimed and must be recognised; especially as the Artists of to-day are desirous of being considered designers, while the designers themselves have been so long denied the right to the title of Artist. While in the past the ready and ungrudging recognition given to painting, and the possible honours accruing from its pursuit, robbed Design of many of its most promising workers, the Art of Design is now being recruited from painters and sculptors; but the advantage to Design is not to be immediately derived, inasmuch as the majority of such, having only received training for pictorial Art, find their first essays in Design very closely allied to failure.

We must rely upon the steady advance in public taste and judgment. Owing to the absence of such, the expression which Pugin and Talbot gave to their furniture fabric, and ornament generally, although pregnant with what we claim as national characteristics, and which should and does appeal to educated judgment, has either been ignored or positively disliked by the public.

Their designs were pronounced ugly, crude, and unfinished. Heaven only knows what this term *lack of finish* has not been responsible for. It really meant that their work was *simple and fit*. Crude and angular meant solid and *constructional*. Public opinion, such as it was, had been created by, and was based upon, a vitiated taste which had itself been created by those who for years had supplied it with the cheap *Naturalesque French*. There, in the excess of elaboration, they could see something for their money; the instinctive desire of the British to get quantity and not quality, a desire which doubtless still exists, and to which even our manufacturers are not indifferent.

But we have arrived at what I have ventured to call a true Victorian expression of Design and applied Art, by a process of advance and lapse, from the *Naturalesque French* and its periodical recurrence sandwiched between the Gothic of Pugin, Talbot, and Burgess; and the *Japanesque* influenced by E. W. Godwin, Dresser, and Silver; the *Mediæval* of William Morris and Brophy; the semi-Classic of

Lewis Day, Adolf Jonquet, and Owen Davis. So the tide of advance ebbed and flowed, sometimes benefited by the vagaries of fashion, at others retarded, for, during this period of sixty years, the craze for novelty has found expression in the æsthetic cult, in the draped furniture, in the painted mirror, and in other directions more or less objectionable, a sop to public prejudice and demand being ever and anon made by the introduction of the Naturalesque flower treatment, or the Empire period; but we were nevertheless progressing towards a style of Design and Decoration which, as I have said, is something by itself, exhibiting a robust growth of line and mass, a richness of colour, an effect which is characteristically British. This is not only so in relation to patterns and the process of weaving and printing, but equally so of our metal, our glass, our wood, and pottery, and our decorative Art generally.

We are apt to declare, and some may like to believe, that Art knows no nationality. But the Art expression of a country stamps a nation with character and individuality, and it would scarcely be too much to advance that the country which has no national Art has no history.

The Art of Albert Dürer and his time gives us a keener desire for knowledge of its general, political, military, and social history than we otherwise should have. As the Art of Michael Angelo, Benvenuto Cellini, and Raphael colours the history of their time and country, Rembrandt and the Flemish painters give the occupations and pursuits of their day, as truly as Watteau conveys better with his brush the polish and grace of the French Court, and more convincingly than any written description or eulogistic verse. In the same way our own Hogarth lampoons the follies of his age better than the most exhaustive description by the most gifted pen.

If this can be said of painters, it is equally so of decorative workers. The examples of Handicraft in wood, iron, fabric, glass, furniture, and costume of a country and period existing to-day among us mark its history in no less a degree, and comprise the history not only of princes and the well-to-do, but the simple history of the peasant and the burgess.

In brief reference to the illustrated examples, the designs by my late father—for the Cashmere shawl trade—will illustrate the class and style of work of that period, about 1850. I regret that I am

not able to give examples of the work of S. Drew and some other designers of the old school I have mentioned, but I have found it impossible to get anything like representative examples of their work in the time at my command.

The heraldic design by the late A. Welby Pugin the elder, designed about 1849 or 1850 for the Houses of Parliament, shows the introduction of the Gothic style, and was really the foundation of much that followed.

The late Bruce J. Talbot followed on with his



CEILING BY A. JONQUET FOR THE ANAGLYPTA COMPANY.



DESIGN FOR PRINTED SILK: T. SCARRATT-RIGBY:
FOR LIBERTY AND CO.

"Gothic forms" as applied to decoration and furniture, and the fruit frieze, designed in 1877, will illustrate the subsequent enrichment of the Gothic foundation.

The complete wall decoration of frieze filling and dado by the late Sir Digby Wyatt can only be properly appreciated when it is compared with the general productions of the period.

The work of the late E. W. Godwin is characteristically shown in his bamboo filling, designed in 1873, wherein he makes no attempt to disguise the influence Japanese work had with him.

The example of the late Owen Jones's work illustrates his leaning to the Oriental, and we must not overlook the claims his *Grammar of Ornament* has upon our consideration, for if it did nothing more it gave the manufacturers and designers an insight into the Classic styles of ornament.

The example by the late William Morris will show how much he was influenced by his admiration for Mediaeval work, indeed, to the exclusion of all other.

The example by the late Arthur Silver gives a good idea of the freer and more legitimately *Naturalesque* lines Design has of recent years taken.*

The other examples by Walter Crane, A. Jonquet, T. Scarratt-Rigby, and Arthur Gwatkin, may be said to be fairly representative of the Pattern Design of to-day, and are given as such.

In conclusion, I can only repeat what I have already said. I have sought to compare the position of Design and Designers of sixty years ago with that

* Owing to an omission by the printer, Mr. R. Stanway's name was omitted as owner of the example of Design by the late Arthur Silver.

of to-day. I have ventured to give expression to what, in my opinion, may have been some of the causes for its unsatisfactory position then and until a few years ago, and for the improvement during the last twenty-five to thirty years. I cannot hope to have carried conviction to all, and I fully realise that much more could be urged for and against many of the points. Some may think I have exaggerated the claims Design has for your sympathy and national support. Others, again, may feel I have not claimed enough.

We are all too much given to emphasise our own particular phase of Art expression as the most important; the best and possibly the only curative to this is to essay several. I have done so, and if it has done nothing more for me it has qualified me to speak with more conviction than I otherwise should have ventured to do.

A "WEDDING CAKE."

ONE would like to know the motive that "inspired" the building of the new Birkbeck Bank, now rapidly approaching completion, on the east side of Chancery Lane. The first glance suggests a huge toy just unpacked and set up on the nursery floor. A closer inspection makes it seem incredible that a design so meaningless, so lacking in distinction and repose, should have been passed by any Managing Board. One looks at this iced wedding cake, these rows of mock-heroic pillars with their capitals draped in flimsy china lace, these odd niches and panels, neither of stone, brick, nor honest tile, with their curious, cenotaph-like, filigree carving, and their still more curious "cockle-shells all of a row," with dismay. Though bulky, the structure has no "size"; though lofty, it has no height; though profusely ornamented, the spirit of the design makes true decoration impossible. The radical defect of the present structure is that its body-plan has no intrinsic charm or value; it conveys neither beauty to the eye nor purpose to the imagination; but is merely used as a ground on which to spread a mass of ornament supposed to supply a meaning and interpretation to the whole. This method is, of course, the reverse of the true one, ignoring, as it does, the fact that no super-added ornament can do anything but vulgarise a building not essentially beautiful in design. It has been said often, but not yet often enough, that beauty in architecture must start with the ground plan, and be embodied in every line that follows it; the external decoration serving only to emphasise the inherent seamliness and suitability of the structure, both to its surroundings and to the purpose for which it is required.

E. W.