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Patera in silver from the Hildesheim treasure.

Frontispiece.

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THE PRINCIPLES OF ORNAMENT

BY

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EDITED BY

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

As Examiner on the Principles of Ornament at the Science and Art Department, I found there was no good English text-book on the subject, so the necessary information could only be picked up by extensive reading and independent observation, and these are not to be expected from young students. Certain parts of the subject have been admirably treated by Moody in his *Lectures and Lessons on Art*,—in fact I know of no book where the subjects treated show such keen observation and profound knowledge, but they are embedded in lectures on other subjects, and the book has no index. Having written the original Syllabus on the Principles of Ornament, I was disposed to write a text-book, had not other avocations prevented me. Last year Mr. Ward's book on *The Elementary Principles of Ornament* was sent me, and though it was a useful book and had a glossary, it contained some doubtful passages, and being printed from a course of lectures it was a little too discursive. In writing the new Syllabus this year I could not recommend it for a text-book as it stood, but as I thought it would be unfair to Mr. Ward for me to write a text-book after

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the trouble he had taken, I consented to edit a new edition. I may here say that I have left Mr. Ward's musical comparisons as I found them, and have not revised his views on Ogham, and Runic, nor those on the symbolic ornament of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Siamese, Burmese, Japanese, Hebrews, Buddhists, and Brahmins.

GEORGE AITCHISON.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION

I HAVE carefully revised the book without altering its substance. I have also added an Appendix containing a few remarks on the Orders of Architecture, with illustrations of some of the best classical examples; believing that this would be useful, not only to carvers and modellers who have to execute enrichments on Architecture, but to all students.

The ornamented parts of the Greek and Roman Orders, figure sculpture apart, show how two cognate nations, each with transcendent abilities but of an entirely different range, abstracted the beauties of plants, and conferred them on stone and marble to emphasize and adorn the rigid forms of Architecture; how the Greeks seized on the exquisite beauties of flowers, and adapted them, so as to retain the greatest purity of form, and used them in the most sparing way; while the Romans, or Greeks working under Roman dictation, used them lavishly to procure magnificence; and eventually were so prodigal with their ornament as to defeat the end in view, as little of the architecture was left plain; to act as a foil to the enrichment; while from the

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quantity employed no time could be spared to perfect the ornament.

The power of abstracting and applying the beauties of floral form seems now to be entirely lost. The great art of the present day seems to consist in copying nature as exactly as it can be copied in hard materials to make a colourable imitation; but in such a way that its highest beauties are lost.

Mr. Ward has added several illustrations which his experience shows him will be useful to students, and he has added an Appendix on the construction of some geometrical figures, and the methods of drawing conic sections and spirals.

GEORGE AITCHISON.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IN the preface to the first edition of this book, I stated that the contents consisted of a series of class lectures given to art students. These lectures were not originally intended for publication. I was, however, strongly advised to publish them, and did so without any attempt at revision, under the title of *Elementary Principles of Ornament*. Although there are many excellent text-books on ornament published at the present time, there are none that exclusively treat of the theory, or what is known as the "principles of ornament"; this belief is shared with me by many of the principal art masters in the country, and by many gentlemen whose names stand high in the list of decorative artists, judging from the numerous letters and opinions I received after the publication of the first edition.

I was gratified to find that the book received a favourable recognition from the authorities of the Science and Art Department.

The present edition has been edited and revised by Professor Aitchison, A.R.A., the Government Examiner in the subject and Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy. To that gentleman I here

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desire to record my grateful thanks for his invaluable services in connection with the book, and, I am sure I shall be right if I add, the thanks of all students in ornamental art. Professor Aitchison has also written the new introductory chapter.

I wish here also to express my best thanks to John Vinycomb, Esq., F.R.S.A.I., for his valuable suggestions to me in the chapter on symbolic ornament.

The illustrations must only be accepted as blackboard diagrams, they are merely intended as aids in explanation of the text; more illustrations have been added to this edition, a few that appeared in the former edition have been left out.

J. WARD.

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

IT may not be amiss to point out the advantages of studying ornamental art even to those who do not mean to be artists. The course to be adopted, after acquiring the necessary geometry, is to draw or model plants and to learn their anatomy. This will make the student accurately acquainted with the forms of plants and of their parts, and as he progresses he will find out beauties which have escaped him in a cursory view; the further he proceeds, the more his admiration will be excited by those subtle beauties he finds so hard to render and so easy to miss. The student will then notice, how many illustrations of plants are near enough to the originals to be unmistakable, but that the grace of the plants has evaporated. As soon as he is sufficiently advanced to study with advantage the best examples of ornamental art, he will find out the difficulties the great ornamentalists have overcome in applying the beauties of nature to works of art; and will then take a deeper interest in these masterpieces, and receive a corresponding delight. He will learn from these studies to reverence the artists and to admire the nation that produced them; for "art is the mirror of a nation's civilization."

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I have spoken only of floral ornament, though the highest ornament is the human figure, and after that animal forms. The severity, however, of the requisite studies to become a figure draughtsman, which demand a knowledge of the skeleton and of the muscles, unfortunately deters amateurs, and not unfrequently ornamentalists, from learning to draw the figure, so that their works fall short of the excellence of the Greeks and Italians, who were above all things figure draughtsmen. Amateurs too will greatly aid the art, for as a rule excellence is only attained when there are many educated lovers of it, who can appreciate a beautiful creation, and reward the artist by their judicious admiration.

For twenty years I have pointed out that Nature offers her beauties gratuitously to mankind for its solace and delight; perhaps, however, the following words of Emile de Laveleye, in his book on *Luxury*, will have more weight:—

"Might not the man of the people, on whom the curse of matter weighs with so heavy a load, find the best kind of alleviation for his hard condition, if his eyes were open to what Leonardo da Vinci calls *la bellezza del mondo*—'the beautiful things of the earth'? . . . Pindar says, 'In the day when the Rhodians shall erect an altar to Minerva, a rain of gold will fall upon the isle.' The golden rain which falls on any people when literature and the fine arts are encouraged . . . is a shower of pure and disinterested delights."

I am tempted to say something on the prospects of ornamental art. Nothing in this world can be had without paying for it, but though we must all live,

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those who have devoted their lives to the creation of the beautiful, look more to the delight they give and the admiration they excite, than to mere pecuniary rewards. No art will ever flourish unless there are educated and enthusiastic admirers of its master-pieces. The artist will never devote his talents to an art, and undergo the ceaseless toil requisite to create beauty, unless he be rewarded by the praise of real judges. I fear we cannot as yet make the Greek boast "that we love the beautiful"; but until we do love it, we can hardly expect to rival those who did.

The whole ornamental art of the world is now before us, and it is not to be believed that artists would not elaborate something new and beautiful from all the knowledge they have gained, if there were a passionate desire for it among the people. This can never be so long as the public is content with paraphrases of deceased art, or merely asks for a jumble of discordant scraps. Novelty we must needs have, for this generation does not inherit the precise tastes of former days, not even those of its immediate predecessor, and it is this generation that wants to be charmed: it is true that it gets novelty, but it should want beautiful novelty, and not that which is common-place or ugly. Novelty in art is not an absolute difference from what has gone before, for that is sure to be bad, but only that difference and that improvement which one instructed generation can give to the past excellence it builds on. It is therefore necessary for the student who is born an artist, and hopes to create new loveliness, to be steeped in the beauties of nature and of art. To attain this a profound study

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of nature and the masterpieces of former art are wanted, for, as Sir Joshua Reynolds said, "Invention is one of the greatest marks of genius, . . . and it is by being conversant with the inventions of others that we learn to invent"; while to express our knowledge and invention admirable draughtsmanship is requisite.

We have a novel phase of ornament, which consists in twisting or arranging certain plants into the shape required, to make them fit their places. Much of this work is flabby or wire-drawn, and often omits the highest beauty of the plants it uses, but even when the beauty of the plant is not left out, the ornament is infinitely below the highest flights of former art, in which the artist had absorbed the graces of floral growth and had properly applied them. The highest ornament, by its abstraction, is closely allied to architectural art, while all its higher achievements are in conjunction with architecture; consequently there should be a harmony between the decoration and the framework. Natural foliage arranged on a geometrical basis makes a poor contrast to noble architecture.

All ornamental arts, that are not realistic imitations, must be founded on precedent art. We have only one complete system of decorative art that took an entirely new direction besides Gothic, and that harmonizes with its architecture—the Saracenic—and that art is not congenial to our taste, feelings, or desires. Gothic ornamental art is mostly too barbaric or too realistic to suit us, except when it is borrowed from Roman, Byzantine, or Saracenic sources; in fact, we have nothing but Roman, Byzantine, and

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Renaissance art to fall back on for ornament; of Greek ornamental art we have some carved stone-work, moulded metal-work, painting on vases, incised work, and the traces of painting. Little of secular Byzantine art remains, though it is not probable that it materially differed from the ecclesiastical art of its period; it was Roman art modified by the new religion and by Greek and Oriental taste, in which saints and martyrs, with their attributes or symbols, took the place of the antique gods and goddesses; while the Renaissance was an attempted revival of Roman.

We cannot expect to equal at once the master-pieces of Greek, Roman, or Renaissance art; we have neither the centuries of experience nor the cultivated public. Every artist, however, can, by the means before mentioned, be sure of having conquered the preliminaries of his art, and he can be sincere; he can give us those beauties from nature that have captivated him, and have been transfused into ornament by the alembic of his mind; such ornament will be sure to find some congenial spirits to admire it: and I think I may say that a public sufficiently cultivated to appreciate real art is gradually being formed. The highest art is undoubtedly that which is the simplest and most perfect, which gives the experience and skill of a lifetime by a few lines or touches; and this art is more calculated to captivate the best taste of the day than the complex or the intricate. However, there will even now be ample recognition of the creations of any skilled artist who is sincere, let his genius take him where it will. There is, too, this consolation for every true artist

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