

# **THE CLAIMS OF DECORATIVE ART**

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The claims of decorative art by Walter Crane

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**WALTER CRANE**

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## PREFACE

OF the papers included in this volume some of the shorter ones had their origin in fireside discussions in the studios of brother artists; others have been addressed to larger and various audiences; but all have been written under the influence of that new-old view of art, which has revived during the last quarter of our century, which regards it not only in relation to use and material, and seeks for its vital root in the handicrafts, but also in its connection with common life and social conditions.

Believing that art, looked at rather from the creative side of design, is as essentially a mental and emotional language as poetry and music, while it seeks expression through a variety of processes and materials, and under natural limitations, which limitations, in so far as they are frankly acknowledged, give to art in all its forms a peculiar beauty and charm: believing further that an art which appeals to the eye must be influenced for good or ill by external and social environment, just as a tree takes its character

from certain qualities of soil and climate, it follows that I think it is hardly possible to attach too much importance to these external and social conditions, affecting as they do both art and its producer.

While maintaining the first importance of the arts and crafts of design as contributing to the formation of a fine sense of beauty—a sense which grows by what it feeds on, I have dwelt upon the necessity of harmonious relation in all the arts, and a return to their primal unity in architecture. In this fraternal unity none is before or after the other, none is greater or less than the other.

If I may have succeeded in making out a case for the arts now called Decorative and Applied (though “there is but one art”); if I have made good their claim to consideration in an age given largely to place pictorial and graphic power first; if even any of the following papers induce my readers to follow the clue for themselves, and especially to think out further the relation of art to labour and to social life, whether they reach the same conclusions or not, my book will serve its purpose.

Some few of the papers have been printed in various journals, and I have to thank the editor of the *Art Journal* for permission to reprint “The Claims of Decorative Art.”

WALTER CRANE.

EDGEWATER, ILLINOIS,  
*January 1892.*



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## THE CLAIMS OF DECORATIVE ART

**A**N archbishop at an Academy dinner, doubtless with an amiable desire to administer consolation to those less favoured ones whose works did not adorn the walls around him, is reported to have said, in effect : " Never mind. It is not given to every one to be a Raphael, a Phidias, or a Michael Angelo (the exhibition being, by implication, of course full of them) ; but let them not therefore despair, let them turn their attention to Decorative Art, for there was a large field in which they might yet distinguish themselves."

Now, although I do not suppose that even an archbishop could be found now to say anything of this kind, so rapidly have we advanced, yet it struck me at the time as the expression of a very curious view of art. It was not the unfortunate selection of names, all of which stood for artists pre-eminently decorative ; it was not the placid assumption that the Academy represented both the best judgment upon, and the best work in, art which the country produced ; it was not this so much as the assumption that