

**THE ART OF FURNISHING
ON RATIONAL AND
AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES**

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The Art of Furnishing on Rational and Aesthetic Principles by H. J. Cooper

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BY
H. J. COOPER.

*FIRST AMERICAN FROM THE SECOND,
ENGLISH EDITION.*



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1881

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FROM AN ARTICLE BY FREDERICK WEDMORE.

“THE little volume is full of excellent suggestions for general guidance, and these suggestions may be applied almost as well to work in one style as to work in another. There is much, that is, which the possessor of a Gothic villa may turn to account; there is much that will be useful to the dweller in a house of the new Queen Anne style, and still more which will be of service to those who, living in the common terraces of our suburbs, desire to make their “interiors” as comely as they may be made without special adherence to a particular style, which circumstances make impossible, but with a general regard to good taste. The writer of this book seems very much impressed with the fact that in the making of our furniture right principles of construction will keep a thing valuable and pleasant, so that we may stick to it all our lives without fear of the caprice of fashion; and it is one of the merits of his book that, while very fully appreciating the great strides that have been made in the art of furniture and decoration during the last half-dozen years, he does not seek to impose on us the adoption of the style that at the moment of writing may chance to be the most fashionable. The writer is a man of practical experience and artistic feeling. He treats first of such matters as painting and papering—the preparation, that is, of the background against which every figure and every object in the rooms will have to be seen; and then he takes us to the furniture itself, suggesting of course, not each particular piece, but a scheme of general arrangement. We would rather take the opportunity for putting even more strongly than he has himself put it the absolute necessity in furnishing a room of first attending to the paint and paper—bringing these things to your

liking, because they must be your habitual background. Half measures in art-furnishing, or in tasteful furnishing, as we should prefer to say, are always useless ; but never so useless as when they take the form of accumulating beautiful objects and harmonious hangings in a room of which you leave the paper and paint just as you found it, because these are passable, or because they are the landlord's business and not yours. It is really very much your business, and very little the landlord's, to see that the general effect of your interior shall be enlivening or soothing, not depressing or irritating ; and it is impossible to get a good general effect if you are content to let your landlord's choice of paper and paint be permanent. One mistake, we know, is almost as great as this one, and it is made, not by those who are furnishing, but by those who have furnished. The time comes for renewing paint and paper. Perhaps the landlord pays for it. At all events you have your choice about it. You choose, at the right place, the "green diaper" or the "dark pomegranate:" the paper-hanger hangs them, and you keep the furniture which you bought ten years since of a West End upholsterer, when grandeur was aimed at and sham grandeur was attained, and nobody thought of that cosy simplicity which is now the ideal. Your rooms will never look enduring ; there are many things in life you can manage to do by halves, but furnishing is not one of them. Let no foreign element, we should say, intrude upon your old surroundings. Do one thing or the other. Either sell what you have for what it will fetch, and replace it with things that together will perfectly harmonise, or else, as you value your happiness, let it all alone. But the mania for decoration being upon you, you will not let it alone. The best thing, then, is to buy this little book, which will be your guide through a difficulty."



PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

SINCE the first edition of these hints on Furnishing was published, the subject has received much literary help at the hands of both professionals and amateurs ; until, it is to be feared, the intending householder is in danger of losing his or her head amidst the whirlpool of conflicting "suggestions" so lavishly strewed along the pathway to domestic felicity.

It is not claimed for the following notes, made in the course of busy practice, that they are in any sense exhaustive or complete, but simply that they are a framework or skeleton on which to construct a scheme of decoration and furnishing—a fairly reliable thread on which to string the pearls of individual taste and thought and culture in the arrangement and beautifying of our homes.

Without some basis of procedure, showing a "why" and a "wherefore" for every tint laid upon a wall, or

fabric used, or "moveable" placed in or about a house, we are at the mercy of the first shallow recommendation to follow this or that fashion.

Already the "New School" in matters of decorative art is becoming the fashion, and it is dispiriting to note the decadence of all vital freshness and vigour that inevitably sets in whenever this is the case.

It is for this reason we have avoided any strong advocacy of a particular style or epoch, preferring to take our stand upon the reasonable necessities of house-furnishing, at the same time insisting on the fact that everything may be beautiful or the reverse, according as it is wisely or unwisely thought out, rightly or wrongly applied.

After all, we must not blame the artistic growth of a nation for the errors and exaggerations which, so far as we are able to observe, accompany any and every revolution of thought and feeling. These are signs of activity, but they are the mere bubbles on the surface; there is a real and solid work going on beneath if we will only give it time to settle.

Meanwhile the subject of furnishing will always demand and deserve some measure of consideration, until the time has arrived when, by a gradual upward process, our countrymen and countrywomen shall have become imbued with a native spirit of art, leading them involuntarily to the perception and choice of sound form and colour, and a right adaptation of both.

SOUTH HAMPSTEAD,
August, 1879.