

**ART-STUDIES FROM
NATURE, AS
APPLIED TO DESIGN**

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Art-Studies from Nature, as Applied to Design by F. E. H.

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PREFACE.



NATURE may be studied in many aspects; her wealth of service and beauty is freely open to all who seek; and while the man of science, by patient study and assiduous toil, may learn something of her mystery, and gather from her not unwilling hands rich treasure of knowledge for the benefit of humanity (for without the midnight watch and the elaborate calculation of the astronomer navigation would yet be in its infancy; without the enthusiasm of the botanist as he toils in the tropic forest the virtues of many a healing plant would be unknown; without the keen perception of the geologist the miner's task would be in vain), so the man of art in no less degree may find in her study richest elements of beauty, loveliest suggestions of colour, forms of infinite grace. A delight in the study of Nature, a desire to realise something of its grandeur, is a source of unbounded pleasure to its possessor, for to him no walk can be a weariness, no season of the year dreary, no soil so sterile as to be barren of interest:—

"The meanest flow'ret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise."

The lichen on the rock, the wayside grass, the many-coloured fungi, are no less full of beauty than the forms that more ordinarily attract attention, and are no less worthy of study. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein;" and Nature has ever to the devout mind, from its own inherent beauty and its testimony to Him its creator and sustainer, been a study of the deepest interest. Some who glance over these opening remarks before entering upon the search for such material in the body of the book as may seem available for their immediate purpose, may consider that this view of the subject is unpractical; but we would remind such that all art, pictorial, sculptural, decorative, or what not, is only noble and worthy of the name so far as it affords food for thought in the spectator, and testifies to thought in the artist, and that the nobility of the work is in direct proportion to such evidence of inner life. Art that is æsthetic and sensuous, though pleasing to the eye, must ever in the nature of things hold a subordinate place to that art which is symbolic, to those forms in which an inner meaning may be traced; and though one work of art may perhaps necessarily contain less of this reflected thought than another, yet this proposition we think will hold good, that no work of art that does not in some way testify to this can be altogether satisfactory, for while pleasing for a time to the eye, it yet leaves the mind unsatisfied: the reverse will equally hold good, and we may safely repeat that in proportion to the thought bestowed and expressed by the artist will be the enjoyment and profit to be derived by others from it. The true artist will not consider with how small expenditure of trouble he

may attain his end; he will, on the contrary, have a heart full of sympathy with all that is beautiful. This will become a wealth of knowledge, will prove a precious possession to himself, and the result must be visible in his work, and stamp it with Promethean fire. To the artist then who is worthy of the name, nothing can be too petty for regard, nothing that the Creator has pronounced "very good" too insignificant for notice; for in Nature beauty is scattered with a lavish hand, and the fungus that passes through all the stages of its existence during a summer's night, and the snow-flake still more transient in its duration—

"Frail, but a work divine:
Made so faintly well,
So exquisitely minute,
A miracle of design!"—

have a charm of their own no less than the higher forms, while to give but one other example from the many that present themselves, the *Foraminifera*—animal remains met with in chalk cliffs—though only visible with high microscopic power, have the curves of their shells as graceful, designs as varied, markings as intricate, as perhaps any other natural objects whatsoever. We therefore appreciate the quaint fancy, the studied thought of the designer who in some old glass that we have noticed at Ockham Church, in Surrey, while making some of his quarry designs of columbine, rose, and other lovely forms, chose for one of them a little fungus surrounded by cup moss, and springing from the turf; frail creatures of a day, meet emblems—like the withering grass, the

fading flower—of the short estate of man, the transience of all his glory.

In the endeavour to suggest something of these humbler types of beauty to the artist, the designer, the architect, and the manufacturer, the following papers have been collected from the pages of the *Art-Journal*, the periodical in which they originally appeared, and after careful revision by their several writers, have been published in this detached form, in order that they may be still more commonly accessible.

The first article is an endeavour on the part of the author to indicate something of the profusion of beautiful form that may be met with in our hedges and skirting our roadsides, to point out the source from whence the mediæval artists gathered their inspiration, and to plead for its greater use by their successors, that by a like loving appreciation we too may create like forms of beauty.

The second essay deals with marine forms of vegetable life, and dwells on the immense variety of form that may be met with in the sea-weeds that surround our shores, and the applicability of many of the species to the varied purposes of the designer. It is curious that these wonderful forms should not have been employed more largely in the decorative work of any people. With the exception of the singularly waved and bossed foliage seen in the stone carving and metal-work of the later years of the Decorated period of Gothic, and which may possibly have been originally suggested by the *Fucus vesiculosus*, one of our commonest shore weeds, we know of no instance of their introduction into orna-

mental art. Hence here at once a wide field is open to the designer, and this essay cannot fail to be full of valuable material.

As the first and second articles have striven to illustrate the beautiful forms that inhabit the land and the sea respectively, so the third article, leaving

"The deep's untrampled floor
With green and purple sea-weeds strewn,"

and the more familiar forms of earth, deals with those delicate forms of the air, the flakes of falling snow, and points out the immense variety of graceful forms afforded by their crystals.

Symmetry and geometry are both so commonly met with in ornamental art, and are also so conspicuously present in the forms of snow crystals, that the application of those forms to design cannot fail to follow when once their beauties are brought under the notice of the designer and manufacturer.

Symmetry shows itself in a general beauty of proportion, and balance of masses in a composition; or, in the more limited sense in which we now use the word, in the likeness of one half or part to another in the unit of design. We speak of a design being bi-symmetrical or tri-symmetrical, or if it goes beyond this, as in snow crystals and in many other cases where the ornament may be bounded by a circle, it is termed multi-symmetrical. Bi-symmetrical arrangements will be found most appropriate for the decoration of upright surfaces, as wall-papers or curtains, which will always be seen one way, while multi-symmetrical star-like forms are more suitable for floor-cloth or carpet patterns, because