
BURNE-JONES AS A DECORATOR

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BURNE-JONES AS A DECORATOR.

"To my mind," says M. Chesneau—that able and most just French critic of English art—in his book on "The English School of Painting," "Mr. Burne-Jones's work gains a singular importance from the fact that he is the only artist whose high gifts in designing, arranging, and coloring, are equal to his poetical conceptions." In the Western world this highly gifted painter is known only by reputation. No American collection has any example of his work. Indeed we have heard of but one picture of his that has been seen in the United States, and that is "The Dark Tower," which in 1874 was exhibited by the owner in New York, at the spring exhibition at the National Academy of Design.

Some of the artist's admirers, however, visiting London, have found their way to Pembroke Square, where in a little private house without business sign of any kind, they have unearthed Mr. Hollyer, that most artistic of English photographers; and, if they have come with the authority of Mr. Burne-Jones, they have been allowed to buy photographs of his work. These photographs, artistically considered, are of themselves of no small value; for they are made by the beautiful platinotype process, which gives to each print the look of an India-ink wash-drawing. Done in this way is the noble decorative work "The Six Days of Creation," a series of narrow panels which we have seen lovingly framed as a frieze for an over-mantel.

But if, in this country, one is denied the privilege of seeing the paintings of the master, we are fortunate, at least, in having some admirable examples of his work as a decorative designer—and in the present brief notice it is only as such that he will be considered. In New York, he has a window in Grace Church—it is near the gallery, on the left hand as you enter—and he has also one in St. Peter's Church in Albany; but his most important work in America is a window in Trinity Church, Boston. The reader understands, of course, that the designs only are by Mr. Burne-Jones. The painted glass is all executed under the direction of his friend, William Morris, the artist-poet. "David giving instructions to Solomon for building the Temple" is the subject of the window in Trinity Church. The centre shows the venerable figure of the warrior king, partly clad in armor. He is seated on a throne, holding in one hand the open plan of the building, and with the other he is admonishing his stripling son, who, in a cloak of many folds, is seen in profile, with uncovered head. The portions of the design shown herewith respectively represent the extreme left of the picture and part of the top of the right-hand corner; but, fragmentary as they are, they give a good idea of the artist's decorative treatment of the human figure. We could wish that the anachronisms of the design were fewer. In the conventional treatment of the drapery, a sufficient reason is not wanting; but the anachronisms in costumes and accessories it is less easy to forgive. The old masters naively clad their sacred personages in contemporaneous costumes. To be consistent, Mr. Burne-Jones should array his David and Solomon in the apparel of today, which would not be more out of place than the mediæval armor and banners, and the Gothic throne, and other accessories, with which he has invested this scriptural story. But, as an English critic has well remarked, "in most of his works there are faults within the correction of any tyro, and in all of them beauties beyond the attainment of any master but himself."

It may be interesting to note that the fragments we give of the design of the window in Trinity Church were

photographed for The Art Amateur directly from the original gigantic cartoon which, carefully glazed, almost covers one side of the spacious hall in the artist's charming home in West Kensington, on the interior decoration of which, by the way, William Morris seems to have lavished his best efforts. Some studies were photographed* for the magazine at the same time, from Mr. Burne-Jones's sketch-books, to show how conscientiously



STUDY OF DRAPERY. BY E. BURNE-JONES.

thously he works from the draped model, and that, notwithstanding ignorant impressions to the contrary, the adjustment of folds and masses is always based on actual fact. The novice can find no better lesson—excepting the observation of the draped model for himself—than is afforded by some of these studies. The

*The reproductions of these studies were all executed by the Typographic Etching Company of London. Mr. Burne-Jones was much pleased with the proofs and asked for the address of the engravers.

unfinished study of a cluster of rose-buds is taken from another sketch-book. The leaves, it will be noticed, are barely indicated, and there is the slightest possible memorandum of the dentation; but before it will be utilized, each detail will be recorded with the characteristic minuteness of the school to which the artist must claim kinship. No floweret or blade of grass, no eyelash or finger-nail is too insignificant for faithful representation by the true pre-Raphaelite. Living almost in the heart of London, Mr. Burne-Jones has a large garden where he grows the stately white lilies, and, indeed, almost every variety of flower or shrub he introduces into his paintings. In this garden, or in the spacious glass studio at the end of it, he passes much of his time. It is difficult to conceive of a more peaceful, elevated life than that led by this most poetical of artists, and most amiable of men. There is in his personality a peculiar fascination; his mobile, sensitive face, soft voice and gentle manner, make one feel at once the presence of a nature of unusual refinement. In his youth he was "intended for the Church." He was destined, however, to serve Art, the handmaiden of Religion. To her have been consecrated the best fruits of an elevated imagination and a fervid devotion to Truth; but he would be a bold man who should venture to affirm that Religion, in its most exalted sense, has not profited by his ministrations.

HINTS ON DRAPERY.

THE consideration of drapery as an artistic resource should receive fuller attention than is given to it at our art schools. Instruction is almost confined to the study of the undraped figure from the cast and from life; and, consequently, while the student often emerges from the period of apprenticeship, fairly equipped for the most difficult branch of his profession, he is the veriest tyro in the less exacting, but also important matters of accessories and drapery. It is very trying, for instance, for a young portrait-painter who can present his subject with considerable success in coloring and feature, to be troubled in painting a fold of cloth, or a shimmer of silk. And this embarrassment is only the technical one of producing the texture of the stuff. The equally essential element in good portraiture—the disposition of the material upon the sitter in such a manner as to contribute to the æsthetic interest of the picture—is, as yet, scarcely known to the student. A portrait is often marred by the failure of the painter to avail himself of lines which would emphasize the impression, or add to the grace of the composition. The use of drapery affords an opportunity of producing an effective balance of light and shade, while the element of color and charm of texture which it lends to a canvas prove that, as a decorative agent, drapery is an important factor in a picture. The consummate skill with which some of the old painters rendered textile fabrics indicates plainly that they were not above mastering this as well as the other resources of their art.

There are draperies in art that have become historical. The breadth and vigor of garments by Tintoretto remain in the memory as distinctive characteristics of that robust painter's work, while the splendor of figured velvets and brocades, and the fascinating surfaces of silk and satin in the canvases of Paul Veronese show the æsthetic value set by great men upon drapery as graphic material.

The draperies of the earlier primitive painters were characterized by quaint angular folds and unrelenting outlines, suggestive of little manual skill. Their work, however, possessed a certain spiritual significance and intention despite great technical deficiencies. Botticelli,