Pamphlets on Art Teaching. No. 7
EDITED BY HENRY T. WYSE, LECTURER IN ART
EDINBURGH PROVINCIAL TRAINING COLLEGE

EMBROIDERY DESIGN

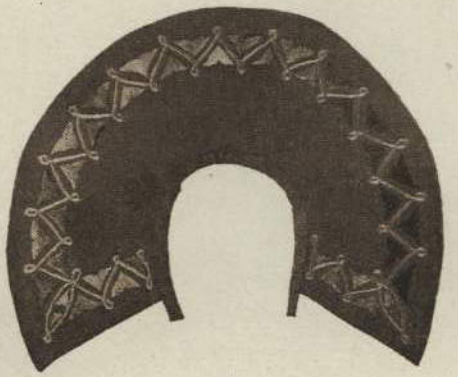
By HENRY T. WYSE

EDINBURGH: ANDREW BAXENDINE & SON,
15 CHAMBERS STREET.

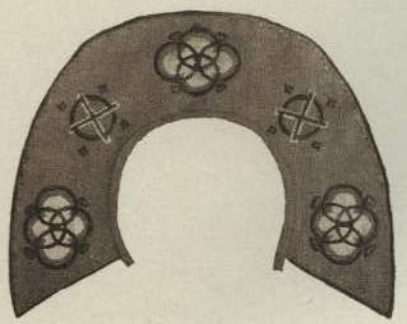
Price Sixpence net

1

3



2



4

PLATE I.

Pamphlets on Art Teaching. No. 7

EDITED BY HENRY T. WYSE, LECTURER IN ART
EDINBURGH PROVINCIAL TRAINING COLLEGE

EMBROIDERY DESIGN

EDINBURGH: ANDREW BAXENDINE & SON,
15 CHAMBERS STREET.

EMBROIDERY DESIGN.

EVERYTHING which is made, must first be designed. Cathedrals and other public buildings, houses, furniture, clothes and domestic utensils; as well as ships, machinery, aeroplanes and motor cars all exist in the mind of their creators before they can be materialised. The designer is usually also a draughtsman who prepares plans, elevations and sections upon paper. These drawings are translated into actual materials by builders, engineers and craftsmen. When a cathedral is to be built, the architect must draw the plans, elevations and complete details, before the foundations are laid. In the case of many crafts, the idea or design exists only in the mind of the craftsman; the form and decoration taking shape as the work proceeds, as in the case of the potter or basket-maker. Or the general plan may be committed to paper to be modified, improved upon or added to, as new and better ideas occur to the mind of the worker during the progress of the work. Such is the method advocated here for embroidery.

It is imperative that the embroidress should know whether she is designing a cushion or a bag, and that she should decide the material, size and ultimate form of the piece she proposes to make. It is not, however, necessary —or even desirable—that the complete design with all its details should be finally fixed before the work is begun. If this be done, the joy of creation is confined to the earlier part of the work only. To divide the process of embroidery into two distinct operations—design and stitchery —is a purely commercial idea, where the designer has no part or interest in the actual craftwork, which is carried out by an embroidress who has no responsibility or interest in the design. This unfortunate division of labour is the cause of much industrial unrest. The operatives or hands of modern industry are mere machines. The ideal embroidress expresses herself through her work, which contains her ideas, her sense of colour and her skill in stitchery. It

may not be perfect, but it is individual, a part of herself and all her own.

Embroidery consists of the application of threads to a woven fabric; it also includes the choice and colour of that material, the form of the piece, its construction and decoration. The construction or making of the piece may be left to the embroidress, guided by adequate knowledge and instruction. The decisions in regard to the shape, choice of materials, colour and pattern, are matters which come within the scope of art craft. Small rather than large, simple rather than elaborate pieces, should first be attempted. The scheming and working out of a large piece of embroidery involves so much concentration, perseverance and time, that beginners are apt to lose interest before the work is complete. This is especially true if the same units have to be repeated several times. This need not happen if the embroidress has a fertile imagination. Exact repetition is a necessity of the machine, but not of the human mind and hands. Similar but not identical repeats may be employed. The slight variations of form and colour of apparently similar repeats in any craft, add interest and subtlety to the work.

A simple beginning may be made with an eight-inch square mat. As the central part of a mat is covered in use, it is desirable to concentrate the decoration where it may be seen—that is round the edges. The ornament may consist of four simple units placed about an inch away from the corners, or of a frame or border, or of both. The material itself and its colour, call first for consideration. Linen is a very suitable and lasting material. Whatever colour is chosen, it should not be unduly bright. The completed mat with its stitchery ought to present a well considered scheme of colour and pattern. As the fabric itself will form the largest colour item of the harmony, it should be the most modest and least attractive. Such colours as cream, fawn, grey and other neutral tints—either light or dark, make very effective and suitable backgrounds for the more brightly coloured stitchery. The

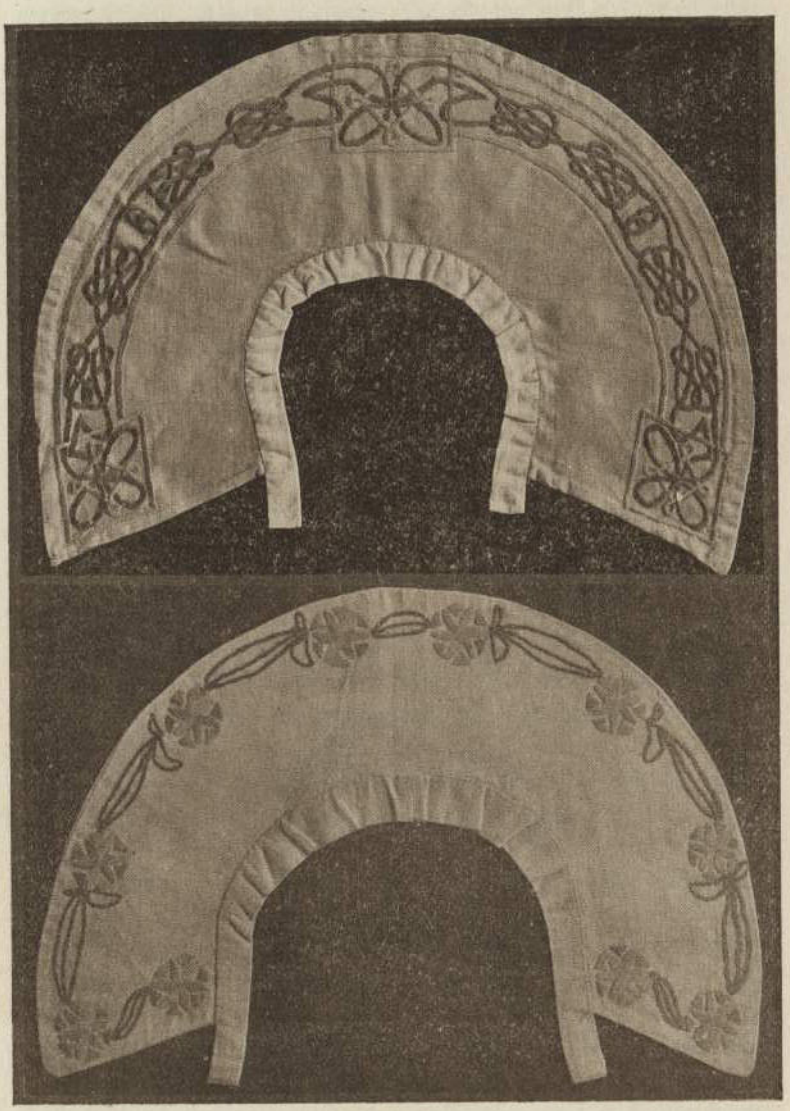


PLATE II.

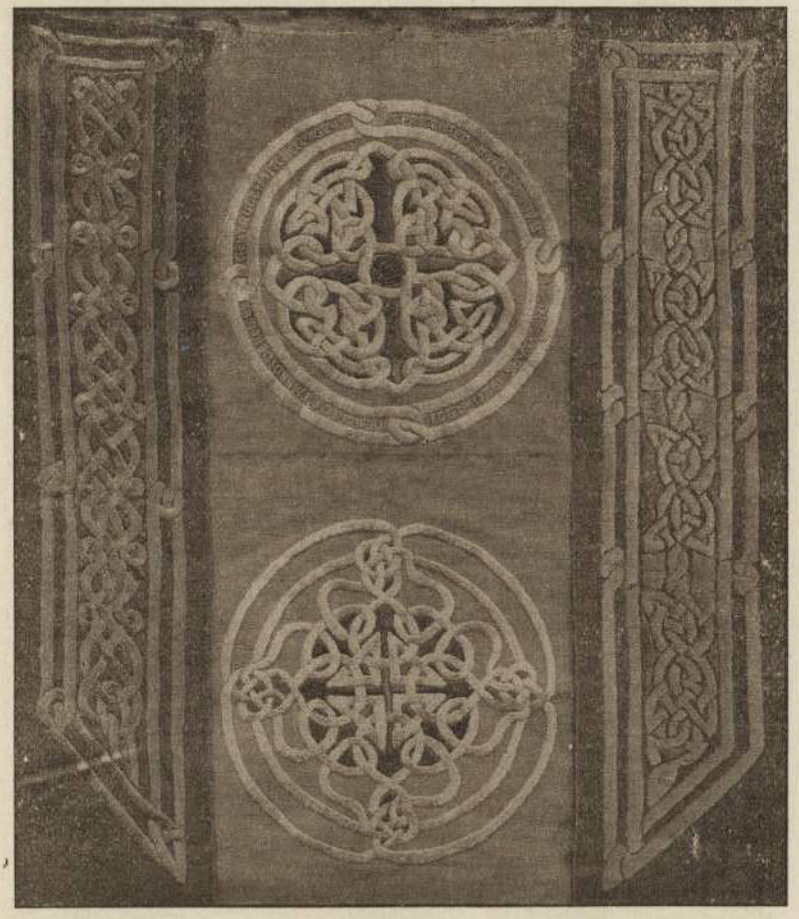


PLATE III.

hemming and finishing of the mat should be done after the embroidery is complete. Having selected the material and cut it to the size—allowing for hems—the pattern should be traced down with carbon paper. For light grounds ordinary typwriting carbon paper is excellent. For dark materials, special white or yellow carbon paper may be obtained from most artists' colourmen. The paper design should be fastened with two ordinary pins along the top horizontal edge to the material. The carbon paper should now be placed between the paper design and the fabric—loose—not pinned. A hard pencil should be used for tracing. The hands should rest as lightly as possible on the paper design, as their weight is apt to transfer more than the lines of the pattern. The next questions to be considered are the colour and material of the embroidery threads. Both depend upon the colour and material of the fabric which is to be decorated. The thread should not be less rich in effect than the material to which it is to be applied ; therefore silk thread is suitable for a linen fabric, but wool thread is not appropriate for a silk or satin ground. The larger and more important parts of the design should be comparatively dull in colour. Allowance should be made for the relative brightness of silk compared with linen. That is, silk threads of the identical colour of a linen fabric are much brighter—they reflect much more light. The general body of the embroidered design should consist of comparatively quiet and similar—but not identical colours. Upon this quiet scheme of background and embroidery, small quantities of more brilliantly coloured threads should be superimposed. That is where the embroidress may employ her taste—and daring. If such a piece of embroidery as is being described, already consists of violent contrasts of colour, no effective additions of brighter and more positive colours can be made. If the main parts of the decoration consist of quiet though interesting coloured threads, each bright stitch now applied, is effective and telling. The colours to be used will depend upon the general colouring of the

ground and stitchery. Each piece of embroidery should be based upon some colour scheme which exists in the mind of the embroidress. Varying brightnesses of *one* colour may be applied for the completion of the scheme. *Two* related colours—such as blue and green—may be used in *unequal* quantities; or brilliant contrasting colours may be employed in small quantities.

The choice of embroidery threads is of some importance. For small pieces of embroidery, finer and more twisted threads should be used than for large pieces. Silk thread substitutes should not be used. Care should be taken that the thread does not become unwound in the process of using it.

Realistic representations of roses or violets worked in embroidery threads are quite inappropriate decorations, and always invite comparisons with the plants they pretend to imitate. The form and colour inventions of the craftswoman on the other hand, ingeniously applied in the form of stitches arranged in an orderly manner, really do enrich a well-made piece of work. Every craft has its own special qualities and limitations. What is a suitable decoration for a canvas—by means of oil paint and brushes—is not necessarily translatable into stitches by means of a needle. A decoration suitable for stencilling may be an inappropriate enrichment for a carpet. The craft of the embroidress consists of the construction of things made of woven fabrics, such as bags, mats, cushions and wearing apparel. The art part of that craft includes planning the shapes and applying suitable and interesting enrichment. This enrichment is produced by means of coloured threads applied in the form of stitches. It is evident then that stitches are the units of embroidery decoration; just as brush-marks are the units of painting, and hammer-strokes are the units of repousse or metal raising. Stitches may be employed—the one following the other—as in outline stitching, or stitches may be sewn parallel and close to each other as in satin stitch; or they may be sewn parallel to each other, but with spaces between

as in darning stitch. Very few kinds of stitches are necessary in simple embroidery. Much traditional village embroidery consists of one kind of stitch only. The ingenious embroidress may invent stitches for herself. They may be employed for purely constructional purposes only, or may be used according to an arranged plan—as decoration. Stitches are therefore not an appropriate means of imitating the form, light and shade and colour of anything of visible nature. Their special beauty will be developed, however, if they are used to create interesting forms arranged according to a harmonious plan. These shapes if repeated side by side in one direction form *borders*. If grouped together in more than one direction they may form *panels*. Borders may consist of one separate unit repeated, or of two or more separate related units repeated alternately. The units themselves may consist of geometric forms—such as links. If these links are interlaced they will form a chain border. Instead of links, interlacing bands may be employed as in 1 and 2, Plate I. Panels consisting of similar elements may be formed by grouping them as in 3 and 4, Plate I. Interlacing bands may be made into panels as in Plate III. Such patterns, consisting of interlacing links or bands, are characteristic of the Celtic decoration of the seventh to the ninth centuries. Examples of these may be seen on the stone crosses scattered throughout Scotland and Ireland, and in the decoration of manuscript books such as the Book of Kells. The interest which such ornament has excited in the minds of cultivated art lovers during the last seven centuries, stamps it as being permanently worthy of study and appreciation.

Only the principal features of such decorations should be drawn and transferred in embroidery. The embroidress should be able to complete her decoration by fillings, outlinings and spots of her own invention. Half the interest of the completed piece, as well as the working of it, consists of the infinite variety of the fillings.

The same principles of order, repetition, and variety are employed when the units used are reminiscent—but not

imitative—of organic growth. No palpable imitation of any recognisable plant should be used. The embroidress in designing her forms, works upon nature's principles of root, stem, leaf, flower and seed—she invents but does not imitate. A circle divided into four parts by intersecting diameters is a simplified generic "flower." Nature has used this identical plan for the formation of the "cruciferæ" and the "papaveraceæ." In designing a four petalled rosette the embroidress is entitled to take nature's hint, but she should not plagiarise nature's copyright. The centre of such a rosette may be accentuated by stitches of a different colour, or simplified shapes suggesting sepals may appear in the form of stitches or knots. Such a rosette is still generic, not particularised. Rosettes of this character, consisting of from three to eight petals, may be combined with appropriate leafage, seeds, and stems, to form organic and possible—but not probable—growths. The colour of such ornamentation is governed by the same principles of ordered harmony which we see in nature. Something has already been said about the principles of colour. Stated briefly, an interesting and harmonious colour scheme depends mostly upon the quantities and variety of its tints. The fabric itself—being usually the largest quantity—should for that very reason be the dullest colour of the whole scheme. The larger parts of the embroidery should be in brighter, but still quiet related tones. The smallest parts—because they are so small—should be the most brilliant. This arrangement of different quantities of varying brilliance produces variety, an important element in design and life. Too many dull colours produce monotony and boredom. Too many brilliant colours produce competition and unrest. The use of dull or bright colours only, prevents dominance, which is the essence of harmony. The embroidered enrichment should never be in such violent contrast to the colour of the ground as to seem to be apart from it. It should appear to be—as it is—a part of the fabric. The general tone—darkness or lightness—of the stitchery, should be closely akin to the tone of the fabric.

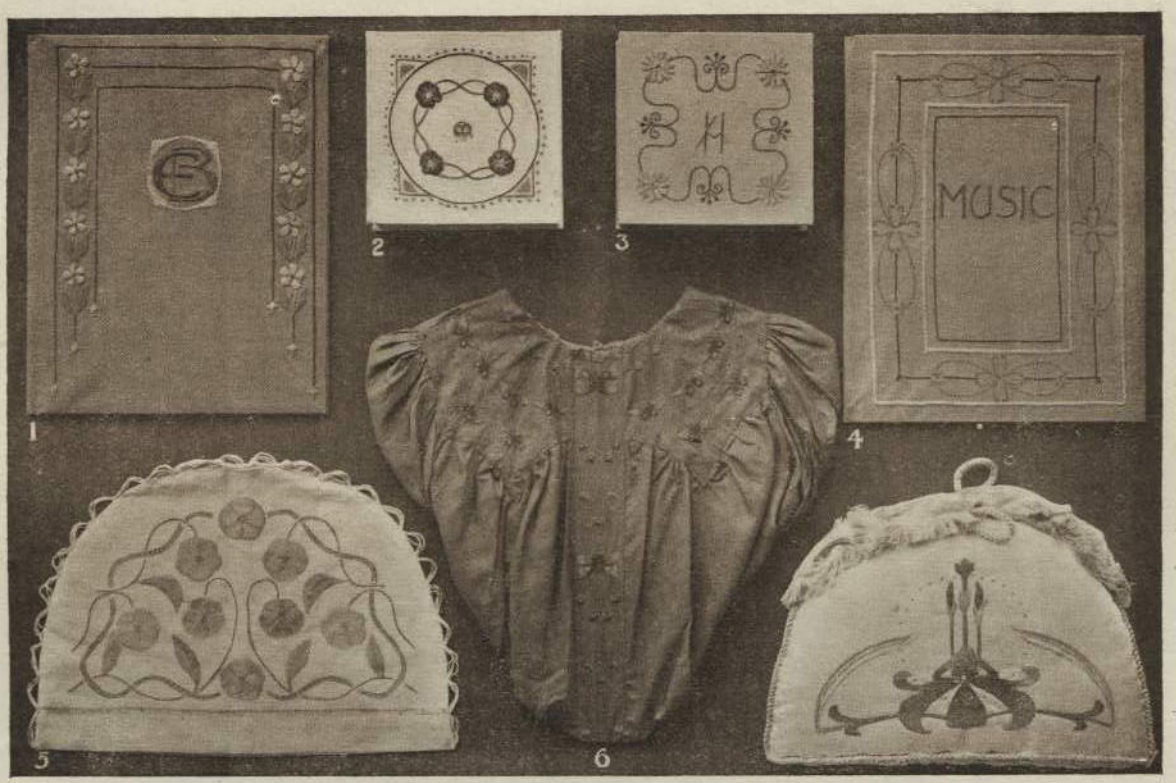
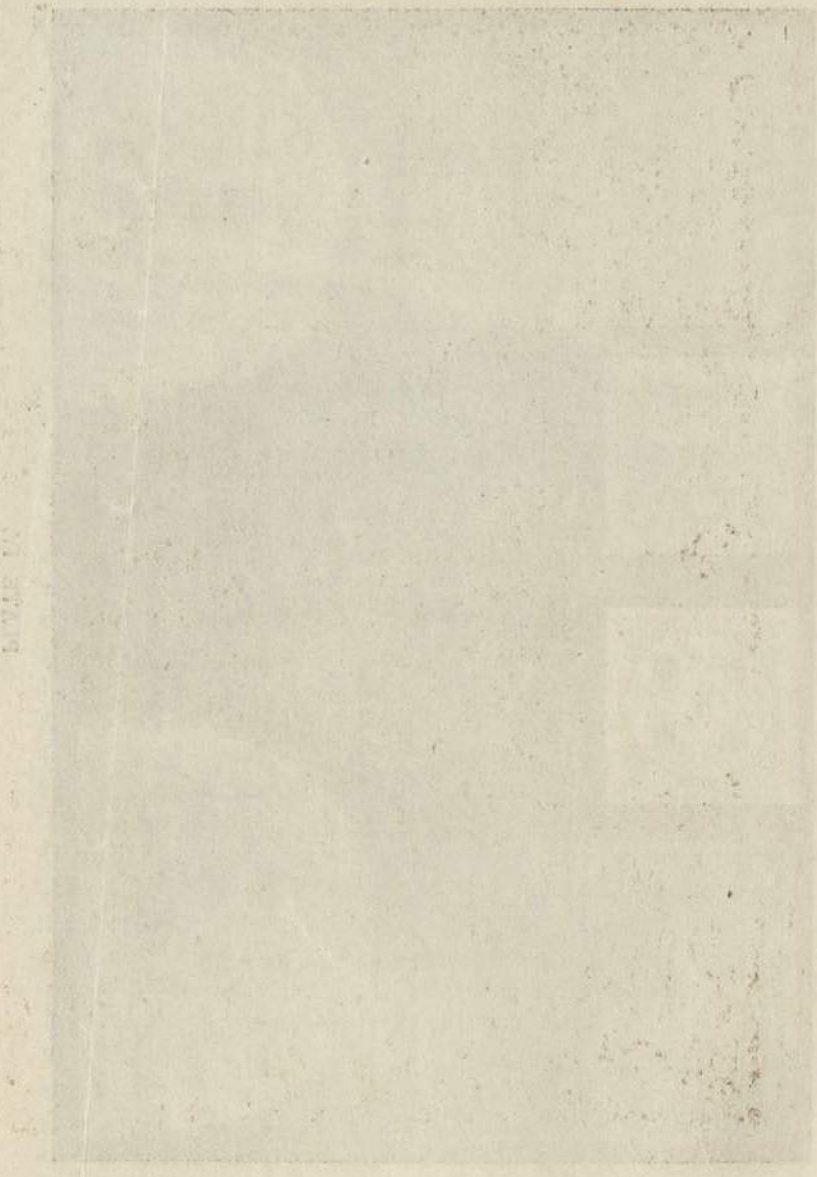


PLATE IV.



Pamphlets on Art Teaching

EDITED BY HENRY T. WYSE, LECTURER IN ART
EDINBURGH PROVINCIAL TRAINING COLLEGE

NOW READY

1. The Representation of Objects.
2. Memory and Imaginative Drawing.
3. Blackboard Drawing and Writing.
4. Formal Writing (Pupils' Copy Books).
6. Stencilling.
7. Embroidery Design.
8. Simple Pottery.
9. Art Printing Processes.
10. Art Appreciation (General).

IN PREPARATION

5. Script Writing (Pupils' Copy Books).
11. Colour Harmony.
12. Architecture Appreciation.