

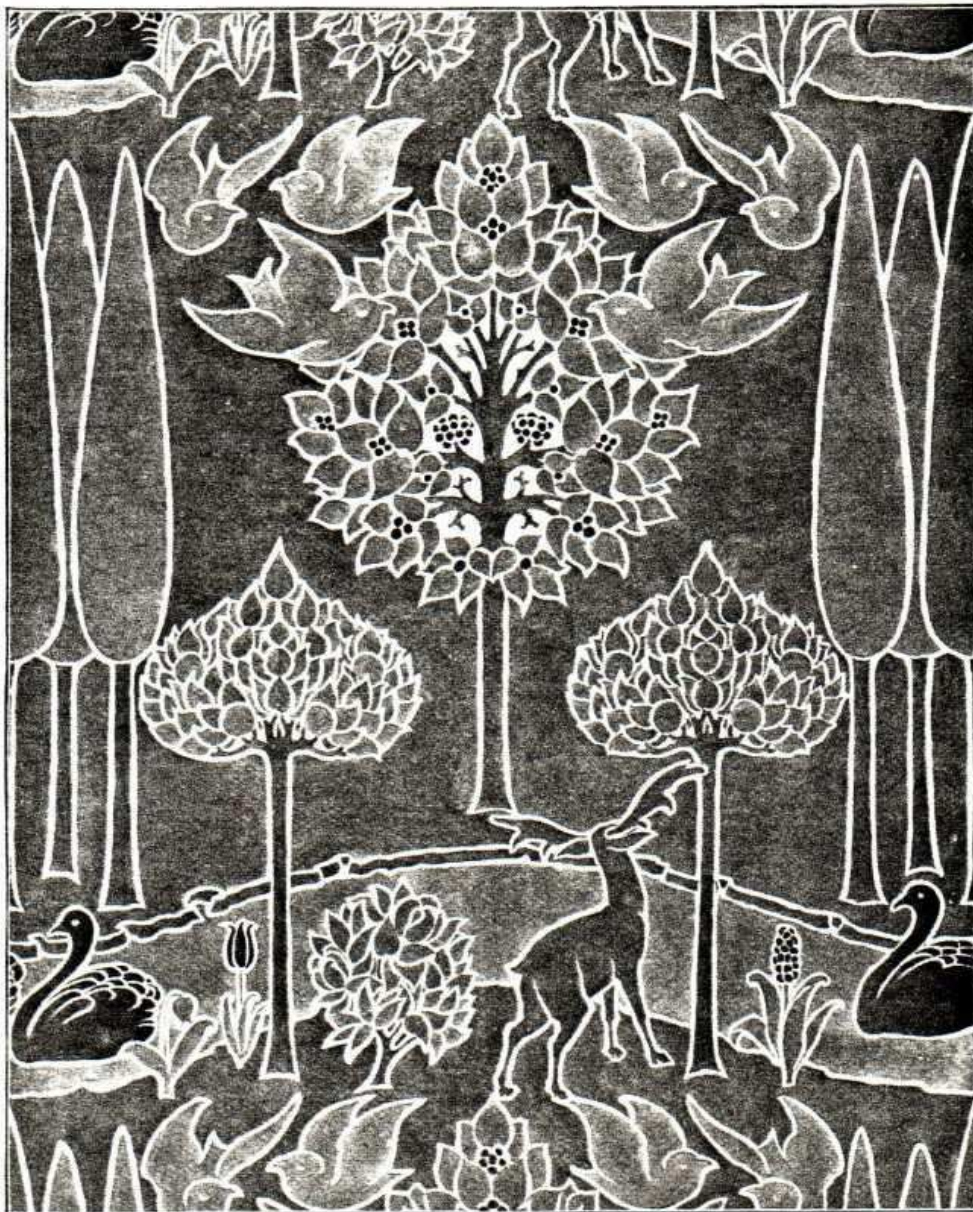
SOME RECENT DESIGNS BY MR. C. F. A. VOYSEY.

IT was nearly three years ago that an article on Mr. Voysey's wall-papers appeared in *THE STUDIO*. Since then his career has been marked, not merely by an increasing advance in the number and beauty of the designs issued, but by a wider recognition of their artistic merits from the general public. At that date Mr. Voysey was well known to artists of all schools, and to the comparative few who take thought for the decoration of their homes; but to the world at large he had yet to be introduced. Now a "Voysey wall-paper" sounds almost as familiar as a "Morris chintz" or a "Liberty silk." The fame which is implied by being raised from a personality to an adjective is somewhat doubtful, although "Wellington" boots and "Gladstone" bags show that at

least the intention is honourable. Only lately one saw the report of a law-suit to ascertain if a certain draper of Vienna had a right to use "Wagner" as an adjective for fabrics, and despite the odd association of ideas, the practice is widely established. But the two classes of nomenclature do not run parallel. Gladstone probably did not invent the bag, although the phrase "bag and baggage" is traceable to him; Wellington may or may not have been the first to wear high boots, and Wagner, although addicted to large-patterned dressing-gowns, is hardly likely to have designed the material for them. But the Voysey wall-paper, the Morris cretonne, the Walter Crane picture-book, is in each case the veritable handiwork of the man whose name it bears. And if a "Liberty" silk or a "Benson" lamp is not necessarily the actual handiwork of the one after whom it is titled, it is distinctly the result of individual taste and discrimination.

But in all these instances the name is conferred by the public as a rough-and-ready way of showing their appreciation. Nobody troubles to trace a design he does not like to any source.

But to consider Mr. Voysey as a designer of wall-papers alone were as foolish as to consider Mr. William Morris not as a poet, stained-glass maker or painter, but merely as a planner of fabrics. Mr. Voysey is an architect first and foremost. Like a few of the younger members of his profession, he is not only attracted by the possibilities of beauty in furniture and other complete, independent objects, but is peculiarly fecund in the invention of patterns. This is shown in his construction (which is the science and essence of good architecture), and in the finest examples of his work his inventiveness is so woven into the result that it cannot be regarded as a mathematical and cold-blooded science.



DESIGN FOR WALL-PAPER

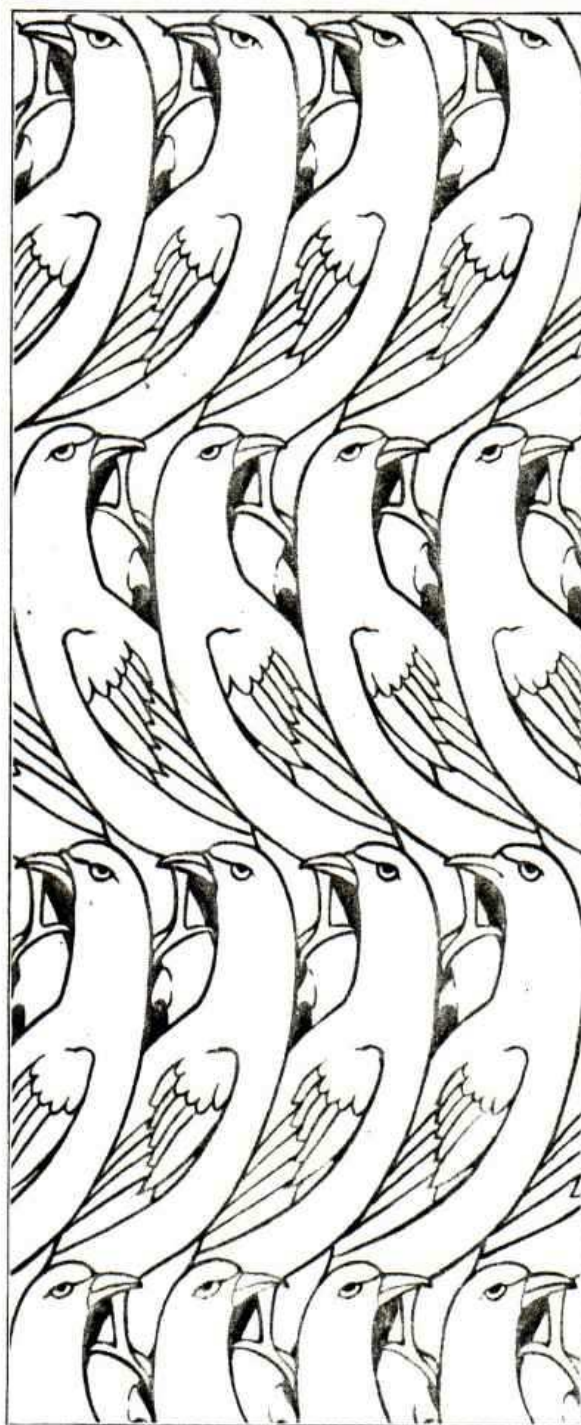
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

The knack of producing effective repeating patterns is by no means a common gift; and where it exists the power of distinct invention of new motives is not always present with it. Nine-tenths of the patterns of all periods are more or less ingenious rearrangements of stock motives, which have served a similar purpose ten thousand times, and will go on doing so for thousands more.

Once a designer introduces a new motive, as Mr. Voysey with his birds for instance, any one can do the same. But whereas the first designer drew his inspiration from Nature, and because of the pleasure he derived in adapting certain forms to the unconventional simplicity essential in flat design, achieved a direct success, it does not follow that it was the subject which attracted him that is responsible for the result. A really decorative artist will make an effective pattern out of the most commonplace motives. Some borders to a child's book, *Abroad*, published several years ago by Messrs. Marcus Ward, show great ingenuity. In the limited space Mr. Thomas Crane took the common objects of the café or the restaurant, the tram-tickets, and a hundred other foreign trifles which are just sufficiently unlike their English representatives to attract the attention of visitors, and made of them most effective and novel decorations. We all know the jumbled mass of "appropriate" objects, naturalistically treated, grouped with no regard for scale in the headings of papers devoted to sports and the like. In these you find a rose as big as a fishing basket, a horseshoe the size of a target. How not to make patterns from everyday motives is exemplified on every hand, but how to simplify the forms and arrange them happily in symmetrical lines and masses is not often met with in current products.

Yet every nation of the past has tried its hand at conventional ornament. Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Persian, Egyptian, Greek, Arabian, Italian, German, and French art have all left superb instances of their achievements in pattern. Why, therefore, should not England to-day do the same instead of binding itself always to the canons of dead art, and re-mixing the cosmopolitan motives from the above and other sources? Besides, the originals of the motives conventionalised in the older schools of pattern are, many of them, unknown in their natural forms to the man in the street to-day. Comparatively few people have seen the *lotus* in rank natural growth; laurel crowns are not common features at our athletic contests; harpies, griffins, and supernatural forms that were as real to those who used them as an

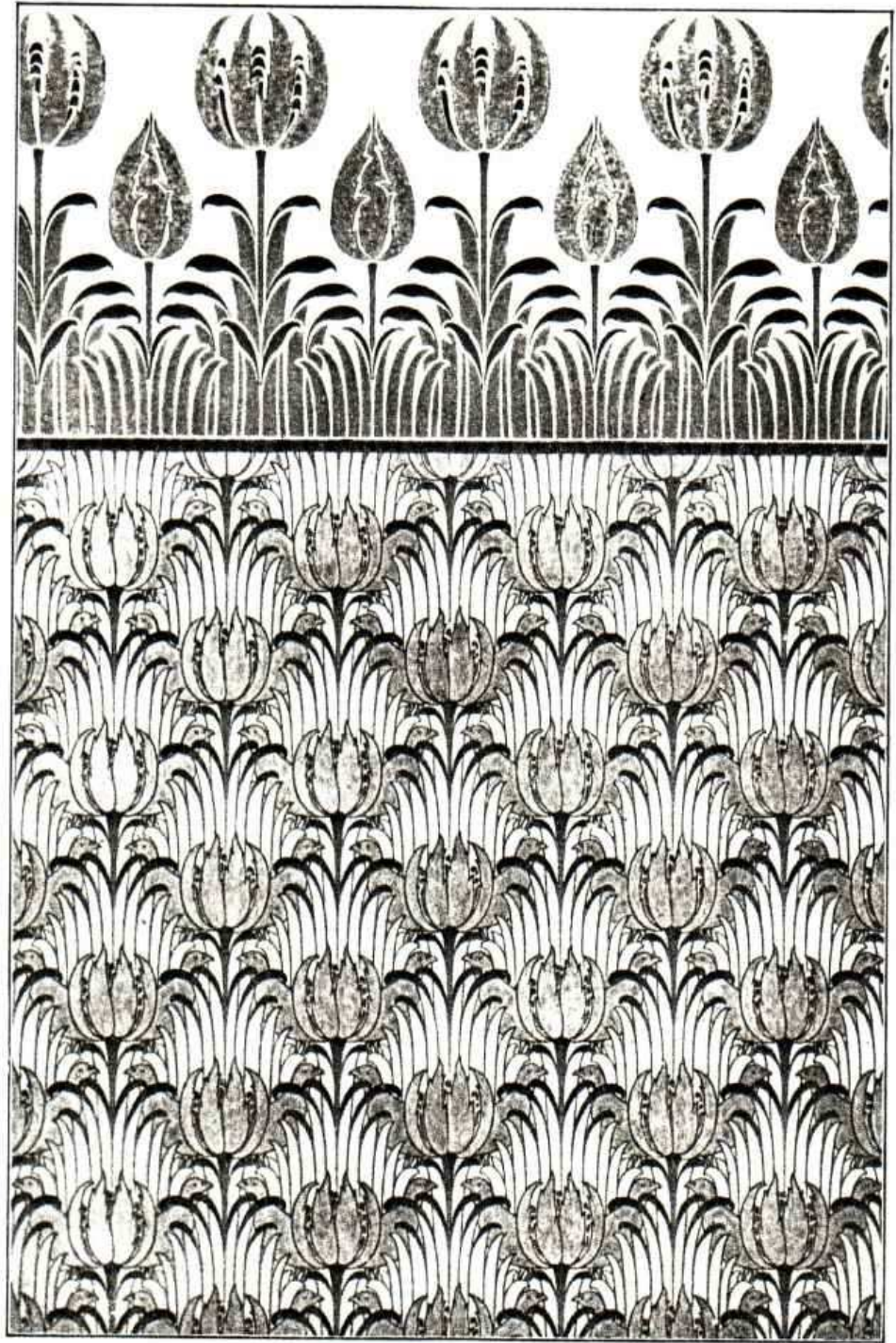
angel is to the orthodox Christian to-day, now appear to many people merely fatuous contrivances that fail to raise a smile much less inspire us with awe. Others always misunderstand the symbolism of earlier times. I know an estimable and not inartistic person, who always connects wreaths of any sort—laurel, floral, or what not—with funerals and with funerals alone. If we leave the hackneyed motives and go to Nature, who ever goes anew to her may find, as always, plenty of material. Toadstools and fungi, for instance, have, one suspects, never inspired decorators before Mr. Voysey was attracted by their quaint forms; but for you who



DESIGN FOR WALL-PAPER
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY C. E. A. VOYSE

read, or I who write, it is not incumbent on us to turn immediately to fungi for inspiration, but rather to pick and choose those objects which attract our sympathy on their own merits, not because some one else has chosen them. Dozens of typical flowers and plants have been overlooked hitherto, and others, notably the fuchsia, the dielytra, the foxglove, and a host too numerous to mention, have not become hackneyed by use like the sunflower, the rose, and the apple blossom. This advice, threadbare though it be, needs reiterating, especially when an artist with so strong an individual manner as Mr. Voysey is being discussed. For not only do a large army of designers feed entirely upon the fruits of a few, but manufacturers as a rule prefer a modified form of something which has caught the public taste, in preference to entirely new and untried schemes. There is danger lest a school should arise to imitate Mr. Voysey's patterns instead of his method of working, and copy his mannerism directly in place of striking out a style for themselves.

Nothing is easier than to vary a motive in decoration so that it escapes the reproach of being a pirated design, in the sense that a British jury would understand the phrase. Yet all the same everymaker of patterns would recognise in a moment the source of its origin, and identify the original that inspired its author. The very beautiful wall-paper (the *Bird and Tulip*) here reproduced, one of Messrs. Essex's new patterns for this season, is probably destined to be the progenitor of a long series of illegitimate descendants. And of these we may predict with safety that not one will surpass, and probably few equal, the original. But



DESIGN FOR WALL-PAPER

Bird and Tulip

BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

(By permission of Messrs. Essex & Co.)

even granting that another person takes the vertical lines of the foliage as a background for a diaper of flower-forms whose rich curves tell out all the more superbly by contrast with the stiff, almost angular lines of the leaves; granted even that such a one is as happily planned and as carefully schemed—yet it must needs be but an echo of a very simple and beautiful idea. The really wonderful printing of this design in a varied series of colour-schemes for which Mr. Voysey (in co-operation with Mr. Essex) is responsible, cannot be suggested even by the reproduction. One variety especially, in rich purples and greens, is more

lustrous and fine than any wall-paper which we can call to mind for comparison. For certain rooms nothing could be more sumptuous than this "peacock" harmony, and yet, strong and full as it is, it would keep its rightly subordinate place as a background.

Another pattern, *Fairy-land*, is even less adequately represented in black and white, which in this case confuses the detail and disturbs the repose of the pattern as it appears in colour. In this the festoons (which are really flights of birds) impart distinct sense of "style" to the work, and the most rigid purist would hardly object to the introduction of animal life could he but see a room hung with it. In yet another pattern (as yet unpublished) deer and swans are introduced naïvely and simply. Doubtless



DESIGN FOR WALL-PAPER

The Snake

BY C. F. A. VOYSEY



DESIGN FOR CHINTZ

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

in a sufficiently large number of repeats to lose the sense of the details in the larger pattern which Mr. Voysey had in mind.

One more repeating design, *The Snake* (reproduced above), dates from an earlier period. In it not only have we a most beautiful arrangement of lines, the subtle curves of the foliage contrasting with the more accentuated flexure of the snake-forms, but a no less exquisite arrangement of colours—one that could hardly be put in words, for descriptions of tints convey very little. It would be almost as easy to describe the flavour of a piquant *entrée*, or the odour of a mixed bouquet of

Some Recent Designs by Mr. Voysey

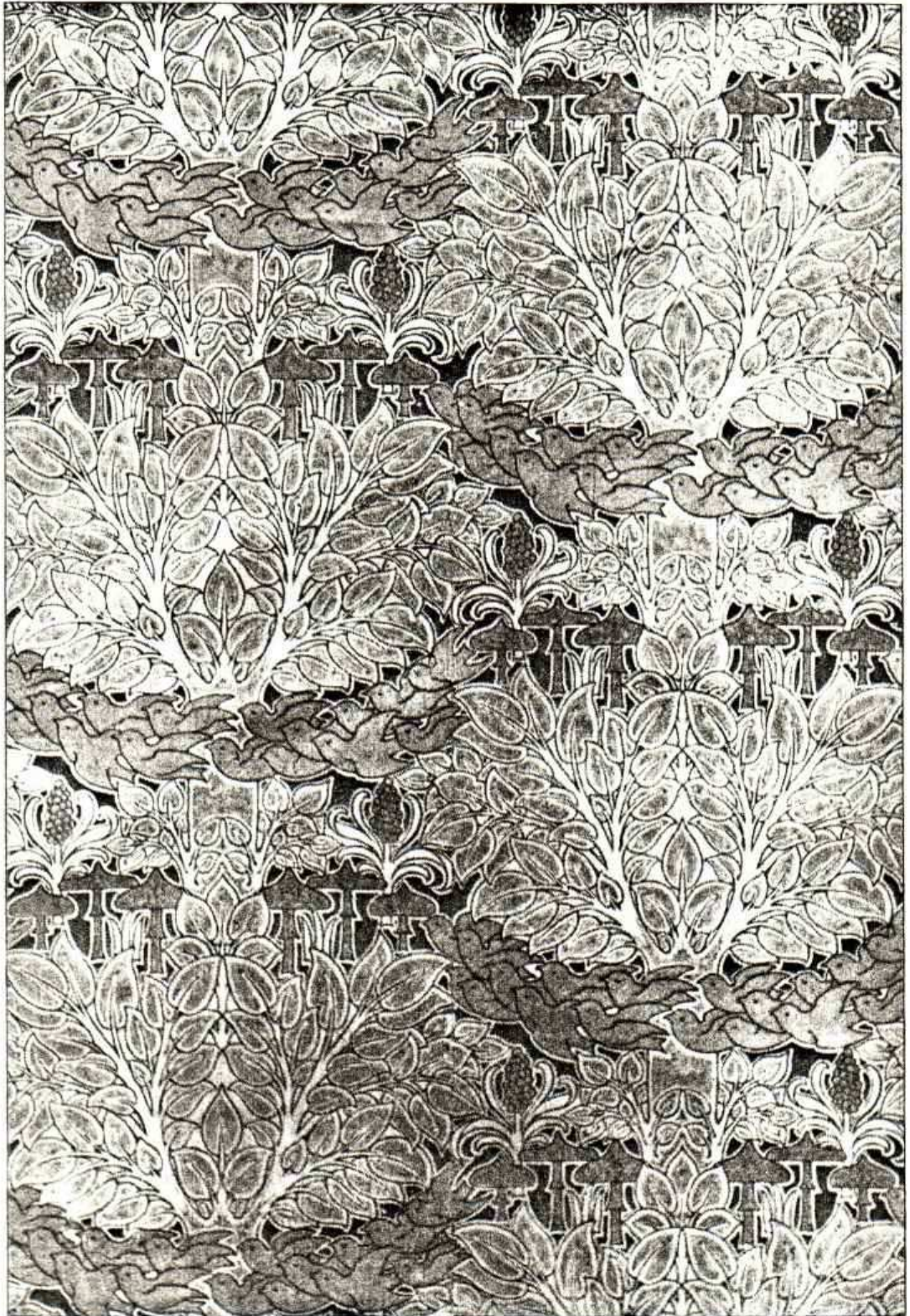
flowers as this harmony of yellow, green and blue.

The design for a fabric with leafless trees, birds, and sprigs of holly (page 212), and the very characteristic bird pattern (page 210), belong to a more severe and still more individual type, which has been distinctly created by Mr. Voysey.

The *Mimosa* pattern (page 208), whether intended for cretonne or paper it matters not, is as simple as the *Snake* is complicated. Its forms are apparent at a glance, its colours are just a blue-green for the foliage, and a golden yellow for the blossoms. This pattern was drawn directly from Nature, and in its simplified convention shows clearly power of selecting only those facts which are required for pattern, and ignoring all those which belong to pictures. This one design in its proper colour would afford a text which would be far more striking than any lengthened commentary upon it could be. For if the truth, stated so simply as it is in this design, fails to carry conviction, it is not likely that any didactic exposition of its purpose would be more easily understood.

But lately it was my good fortune to see these and other papers being

made at Messrs. Essex's mills, and also to be present when the head of the firm and Mr. Voysey were busily engaged in approving or rejecting the trial proofs of various schemes of colour for the publications of the coming year. Those who think that a good designer has completed his work when he has invented a pleasant pattern, and coloured it full-size in a single harmony, would be startled did they realise that this finished drawing is but the

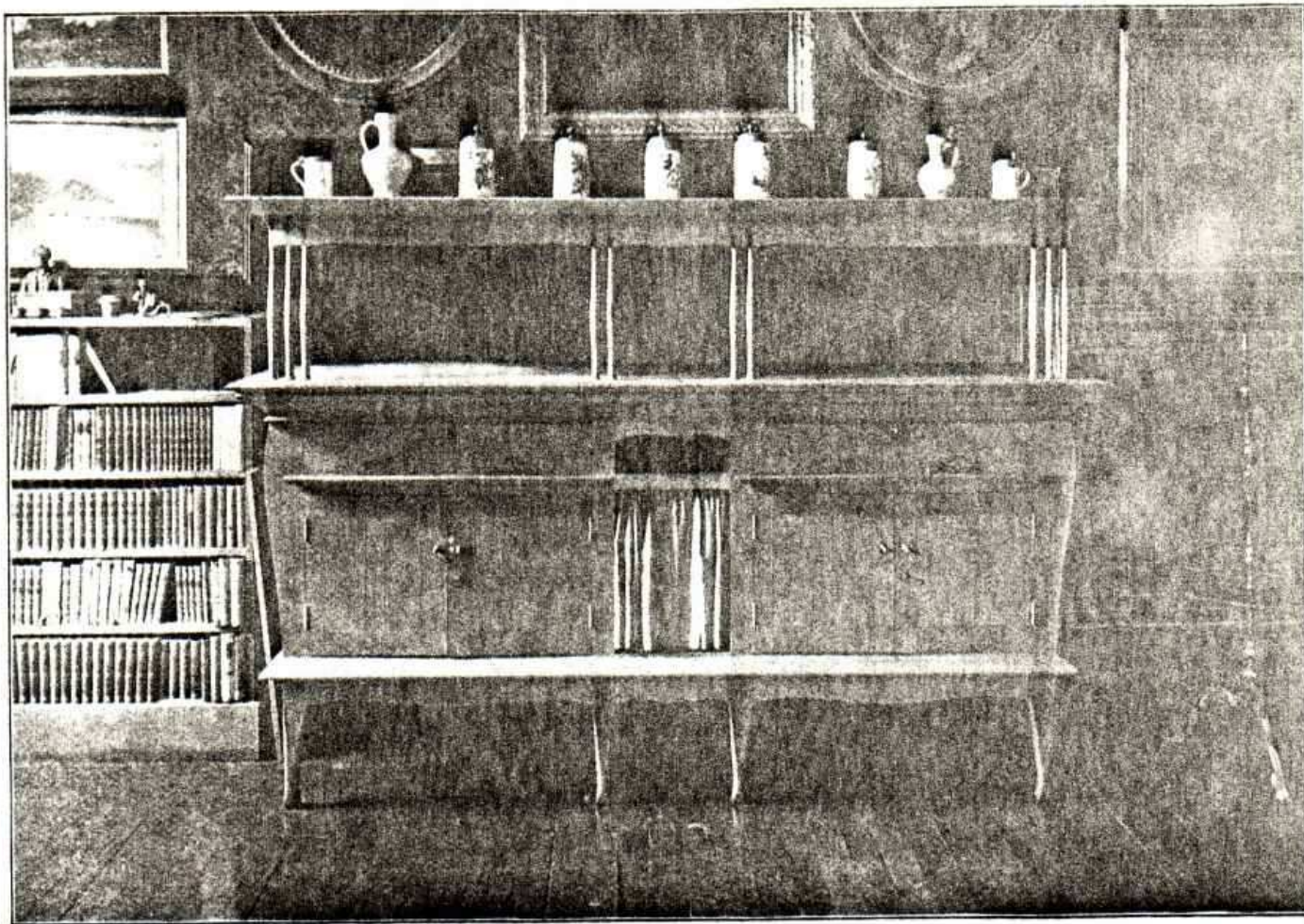


DESIGN FOR WALL-PAPER

Fairyland.

BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

(By permission of Messrs. Essex & Co.)



CABINET

DESIGNED BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

initial step to the practical working out of the idea. It is just because in these papers Mr. Voysey has followed his design to the factory—has mixed certain groups of colours for the printers to match, and in close co-operation with the maker himself has modified again and again, not merely the first scheme of colour, but a dozen alternative harmonies, that the final product keeps no little of the charm of the first design, although it may depart from it widely in many details. The letter is altered possibly, but the spirit is retained. In theory, the quietly evolved drawing should be finer than the printed fabric—be it paper, or a woven texture; but in practice it is just this unsparing revision and readjustment of the design which makes the resulting product, not a mechanical facsimile of the water-colour, but something far better—a product that is exactly suited for its intended purpose and one in many cases which is infinitely more artistic than would be a literal, and absolutely accurate facsimile of the autograph design, with all its charm of handling and the unequal density of its broken colour.

To prove how absolutely necessary it is for the maker of the design to be in close relation to the maker of the product, no better instance could

be adduced than Messrs. Essex's pattern-book. We meet every day with designers who complain that their work has been ruined by its translation to the intended material, and again we hear often manufacturers declare that, but for the alterations they had introduced, the design would have been impossible—or at least impracticable and unsaleable. Face to face with the exigencies of the method itself; hearing at first hand the reports of the craftsmen employed; seeing by actual experiments the need for strengthening this detail, toning down another; and above all facing directly the problem of the applied colour—in dye, pigment, yarn, or whatever form it is used. The academic precedent of water-colour or oils is set aside—and with the real pigments (be they actual dyes or fibres already coloured), the artist can re-build his pattern—not this time as a scheme, but as an accomplished fact.

To show that in laying stress first upon the necessity of the designer going straight to Nature for his themes, and next the practical importance of his working as a close ally of the manufacturer, one is not merely approving Mr. Voysey's method but echoing his own views, it will be as well to quote a few paragraphs from an admirable lecture

Some Recent Designs by Mr. Voysey

on "The Aims and Conditions of the Modern Decorator," delivered by Mr. Voysey in Manchester a year ago.

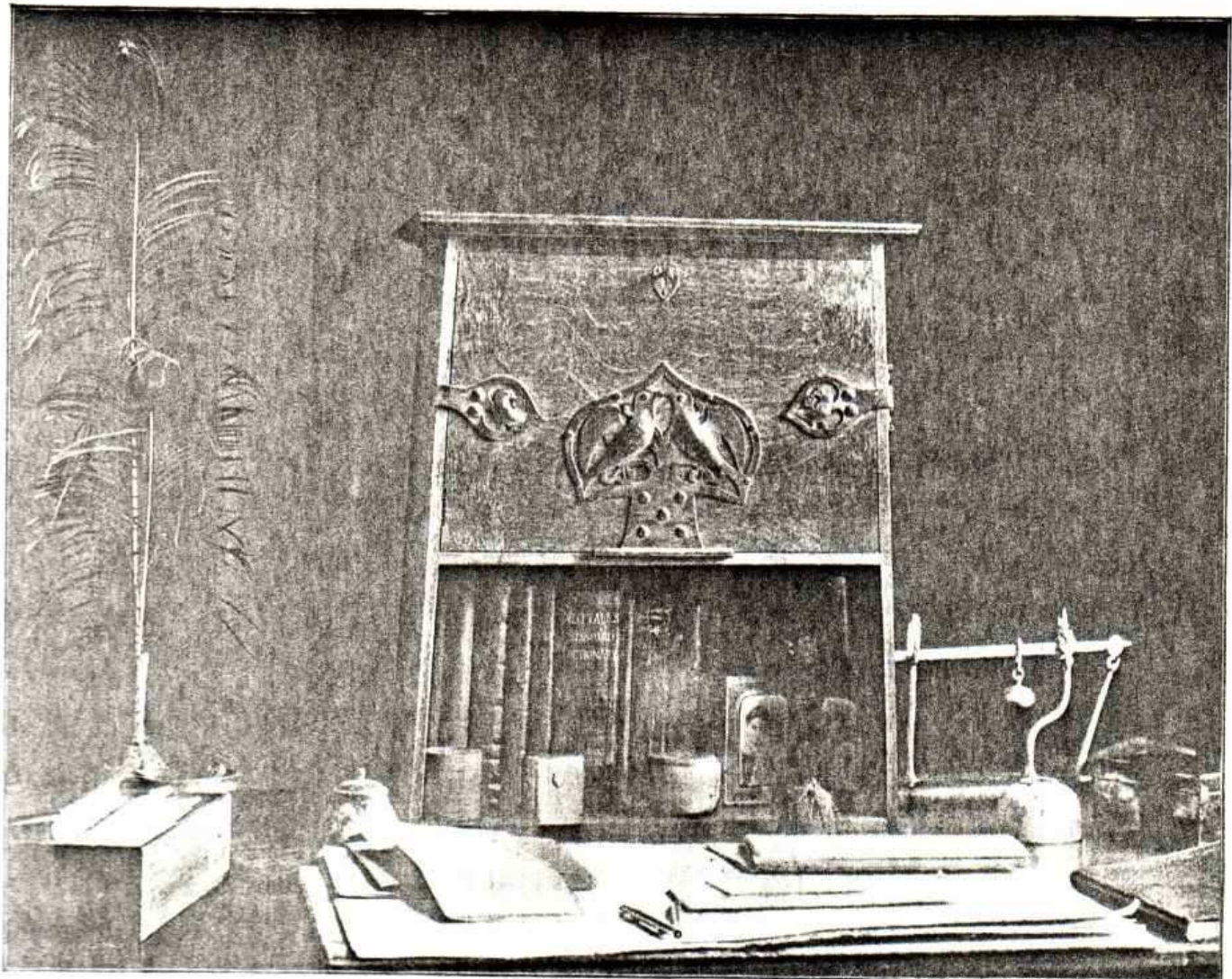
"Taking it for granted," he says, "that the highest position a decorator and designer can take up is that of a leader of public taste, what does this position involve, and how can it be upheld?"

"First, we must purify our motives, and seek to discover true principles as far as it is possible. Of course it is clear that if the decorator is to have motives higher than mere making of money, he must needs devote much time and thought to the study of colour, form and texture, and be in close communion with the designer, who, in his turn, should help the decorator on artistic lines. And most important it is to avoid the lazy and contemptible practice of relying upon precedent for justification of what is done.

"The revivalism of the present century, which is so analogous to this reliance on precedent, has done more to stamp out men's artistic common sense and understanding than any movement I know. The

unintelligent, unappreciative use of the works of the past, which is the rule, has surrounded us at every turn with deadly dullness, that is dumb alike to the producer and the public. This imitative, revivalistic temper has brought into our midst foreign styles of decoration totally out of harmony with our national character and climate. Also, the cultivation of mechanical accuracy, by close attention to imitation, has so warped the mind and feelings until invention to many is well-nigh impossible. Technically excellent imitations are still unduly applauded, to the exclusion or forgetfulness of the nobler powers of thought and feeling. The decorator must be freed from the mechanism of dull imitation, and be allowed to exercise his God-given faculties, at the same time reverently respecting and gaining inspiration and help from all faithful workers who have gone before him. Not for the sake of being original should men so work, but to fulfil the universal law in the exercise of their best and noblest faculties."

Later on, in the same lecture, we find Mr.



BOOKCASE AND STATIONERY CABINET

DESIGNED BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

Some Recent Designs by Mr. Voysey

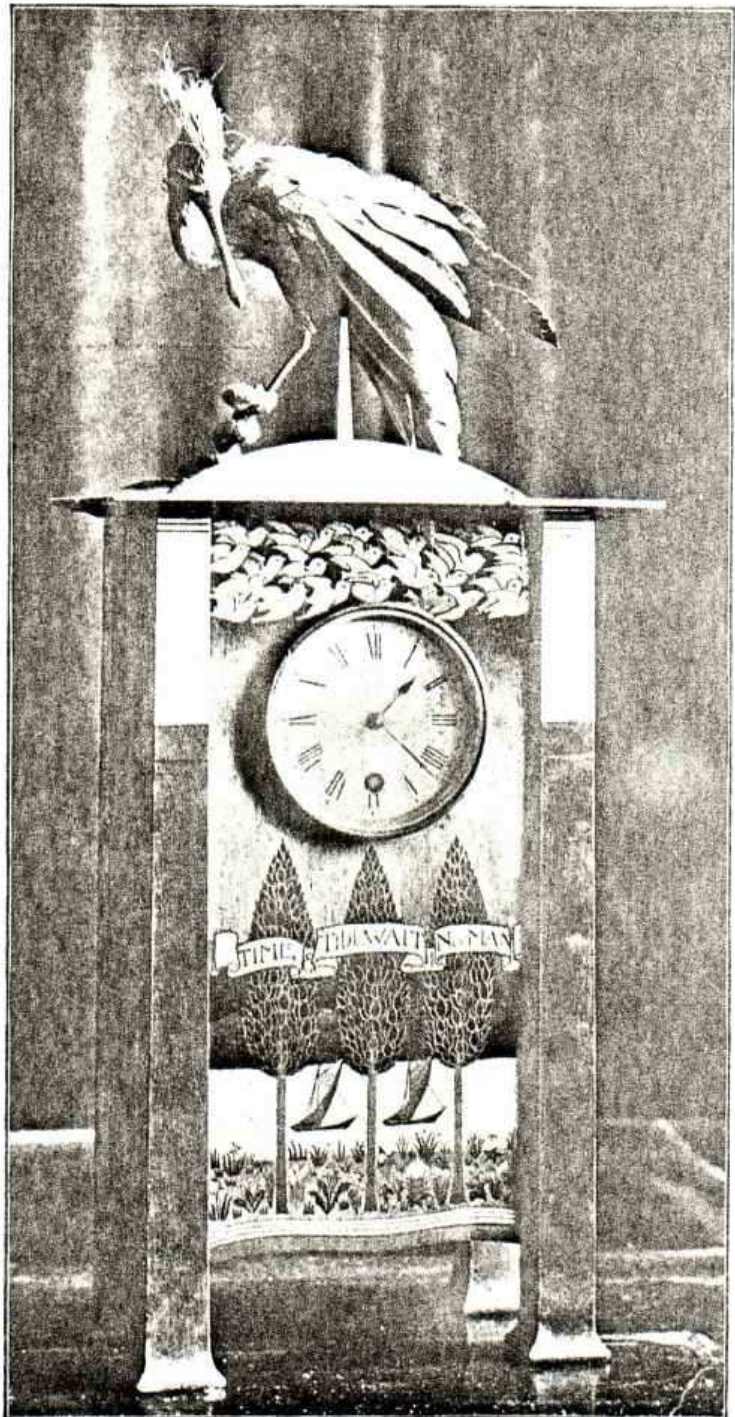
Voysey's creed tersely and admirably formulated. "Simplicity in decoration is one of the most essential qualities without which no true richness is possible. *To know where to stop and what not to do is a long way on the road to being a great decorator.*" Surely this last sentence, which I have italicised, deserves to be inscribed in letters of gold in every architect's office, in every designer's studio throughout the world. It is the summing-up of the whole matter, for, as the speaker went on to say: "It is well to pay particular attention to this quality of simplicity. Yet it is more often than not scoffed at. We hear it on the lips in tones of disparagement, and many are afraid of it. For well they may be, as its presence lays bare the true quality of things. Simplicity requires perfection in all its details, while elaboration is easy in comparison with it. Take what art you may, and you will find only the greatest masters can be simple, or dare to be simple."

Did but space allow, it would be interesting and instructive to quote much more fully from this paper, and from one perhaps still more important because wider in its theme and more analytical in its treatment, a paper on Art, read at Winchester in 1892. As an instance of his power to simplify natural forms to their direct essentials one might refer to some designs for elementary wood carving which, crowded out here, will appear in a future number.

Those who have followed Mr. Voysey's career will know how unswervingly he has kept to his definite programme. In his designs, now elaborate and gorgeous, now severe and almost archaic, he has never coquetted with the passing taste. It is true that not all his work seems equally fascinating at first sight, but it is always well thought out and concerned with definite problems and ultimately convinces; and were it so, it would be a deadly sign, for growth rarely progresses in unvarying degree. In plants as in men, energy lies dormant; at times it may even seem as if it were waning, but these periods are but storing up new vitality when the circumstances favourable to fruition occur again.

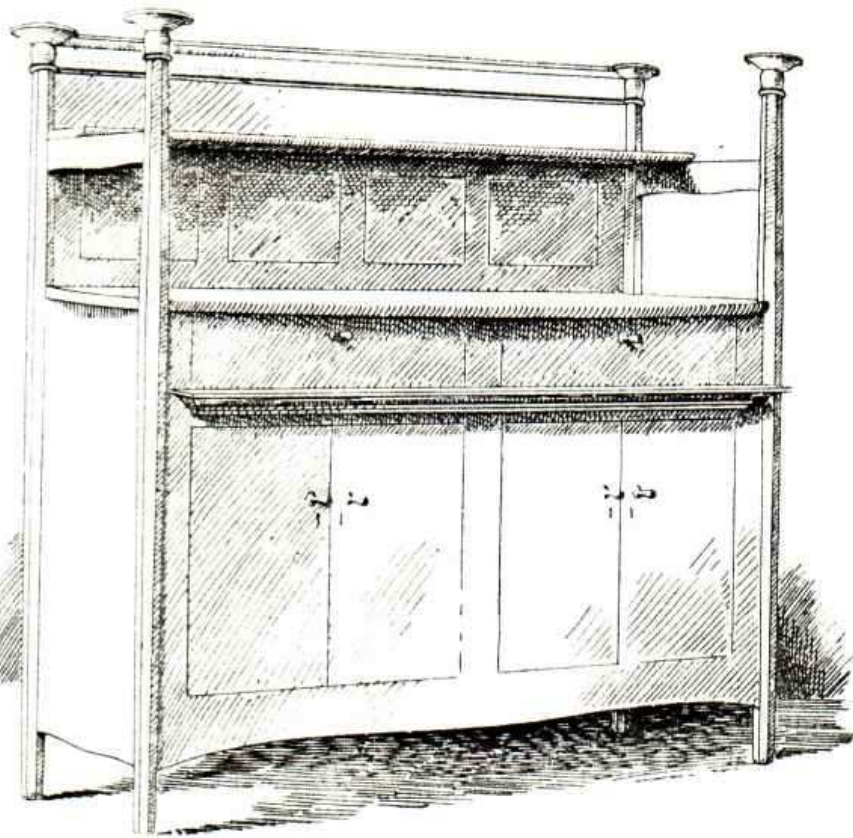
Although the designs for furniture which are included here deserve no less study than the designs for repeated patterns, in the nature of things they are likely to in-

fluence—directly at all events—a smaller audience. For if few people can afford to have furniture specially designed for them, there are still fewer who, having the means, possess also the taste to put the idea into execution and courage enough to face the result. To have a room furnished differently from those of one's neighbours would seem to be considered an affectation to-day—or at least the worst crime known to "society"—bad form. Otherwise we might find Mr. Voysey's services had been secured, not by a few here and there, but by many an owner of the palaces constantly springing up in



CLOCK

DESIGNED BY C. F. A. VOYSEY



SIDEBOARD

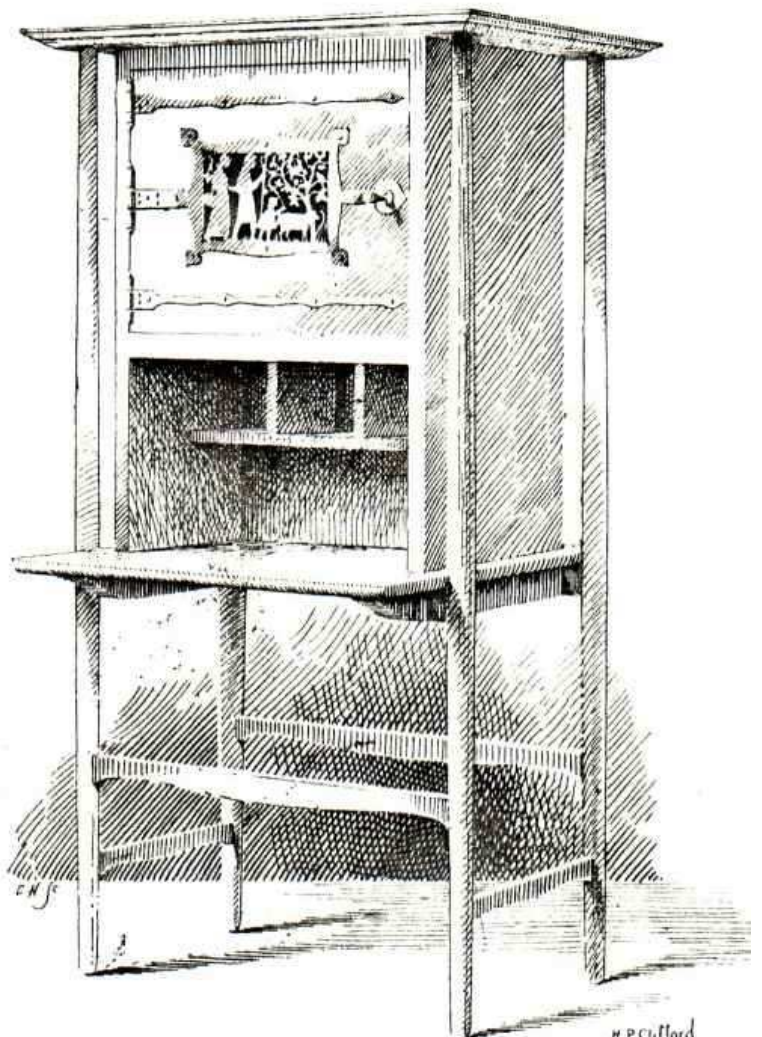
DESIGNED BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

London. For the fittings of these, Messrs. Somebody and Co. are usually called in, or else the lady of the house carries out what she is pleased to call her ideas, and the result is too familiar to need description.

But one thing is sure, that Mr. Voysey's furniture does not take kindly to its commercially produced relatives. To introduce one of these refined and individual objects—whether a dainty piece of colour like the painted clock, a simple and useful article like the writing-cabinet, the most refined and charming buffet, or a larger piece like the sideboard or the cottage piano (all illustrated here)—among modern cabinet work and upholstery is to introduce a discordant element. For "Early English" and Rococo monstrosities protest against such ungainly intruders. Among old-world simple furniture guileless of style it will easily make itself at home, but introduced into a room which is the ideal of the modern fashion paper, it is war to the knife. If you can appreciate the reticence and severity of Mr. Voysey's work, you can no longer tolerate the ordinary commercially designed product. His furniture deserves elaborate and patient study, for its one aim is "proportion, proportion, proportion," and that is a quality most elusive and difficult even to appreciate, much less to achieve.

Even the most sanguine believer in the advance of taste must recognise that the classic restraint

which marks Mr. Voysey's furniture could not hope at present to find a fit environment in every house awaiting its reception. But with its plain surfaces of wood, often enough stained green—with oil colour rubbed well in—its simple mouldings, and its decoration (if any) confined to certain structural features—these show elements of a new style, which may possibly be the germ of the coming Revival of Classic Art which those who study the evolution of taste most deeply agree is not far off. If so, in place of copying Greece and Rome, we shall try to make English homes beautiful with the subtle qualities of proportion and the absence of mere ornament that marked the best classic period, and in doing so, may perhaps completely discover that National style which is already beginning to attract recognition from



CABINET

DESIGNED BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

H. P. Clifford

foreign critics. It will be sad if fashion, tempted by novelty, neglects this new English awakening and does not recognise that the centre of artistic energy, in pattern and mass (if not, so far, in picture-making) has shifted, and that England, the pariah of the arts for years past, may, like the Ugly Duckling, become suddenly the cynosure and envy of her former detractors.

E. B. S.

THE SCIENCE AND ART DEPARTMENT, SOUTH KENSINGTON.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR.

SIR,—In the February number of *THE STUDIO*, an article on Private Schools of Art contained incidentally certain strictures on South Kensington which call for some comment at the present moment. Not that the writer's accusations were at all new; we have heard them often before, and often before have South Kensington teachers writhed under them. And this was doubtless to the public advantage, so long as South Kensington stood supreme. Now, however, that the Department is threatened with something like extinction, it has

become a matter of urgent public importance to inquire whether the hostility to it has been justified, or whether after all we do not owe to it so much as to make us eager to see its reign continued.

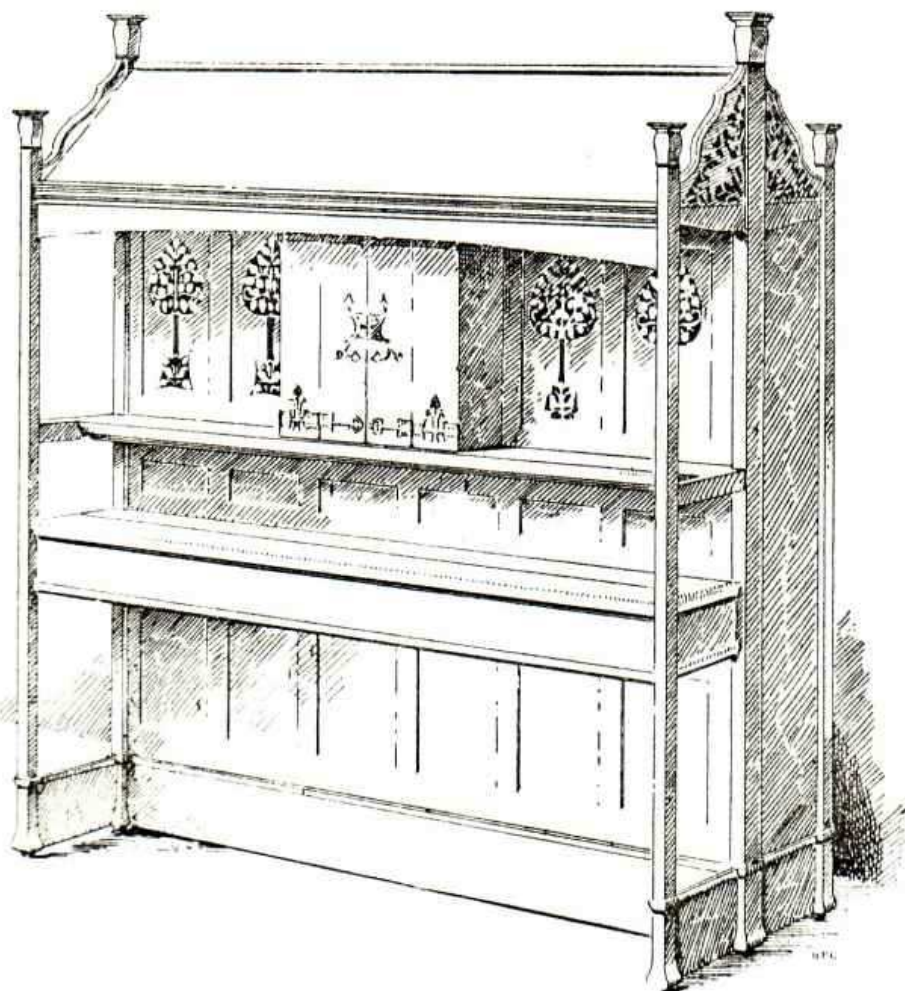
The charges brought against South Kensington may be classed into two groups; of which, broadly, the first condemns the System of the Department, while the second is contemptuous of the Work which that system fosters.

With regard to the system, we always hear that it is paralysed by "red tape." Not so long ago, I said as much myself to one of the officials at South Kensington. His rejoinder was suggestive of ignorance on my part. "The Department is a big thing," he said; and he told me how many thousands (I have forgotten their number) of Schools of Art are under its entire control, without counting the thirty odd thousands (is it not?) of elementary schools, besides the technical classes of the County Councils, all of which have been partially supervised from South Kensington. "If," my friend concluded, "we did not work by a cut-and-dried system, the work could not be done at all." (In passing, let me commend this to the consideration of those who approve the Government's proposal to hand a large share of this work

over to a multitude of disconnected authorities, who will have neither experience nor special knowledge to guide them, while, unlike the Department, they will have many other ends besides efficiency to consider.)

Again, the Department's System, its detractors say, has provided for teachers men who are not artists. Such assertions are too sweeping to be true; and yet, were there actually truth in this one, it would be beside the point. It could only be relevant if the work the nation expects of the Department could be performed solely by artists.

But is this the case? I think not, unless all that we require of the Department is to train men for painting exhibition pictures. Judged by that standard, South Kensington is worthless; but then that is hardly what it aims at doing. A great Government Department has very much else to do besides encouraging clever



PIANO-CASE

DESIGNED BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

The Etchings of E. W. Charlton

young men to study the nude. In fact, that duty may well be left to private artists. The work of South Kensington is vastly different; it is not the instruction of geniuses, but the education, the development of the national taste. And the

to be by far the most important part of the Department's work; a work of immeasurable value, perhaps even as important to the nation as that study of the nude so much vaunted by the writer in your February number! And, meanwhile, much

more than this has been accomplished by South Kensington. How much more is attested, perhaps, by the popularity of *THE STUDIO*, whose circulation must be not a little due to the Science and Art Department.

And further still, have not the pages of *THE STUDIO* again and again been rendered attractive by designs coming hot from South Kensington Schools? What of design we possess is surely mostly due to the Science and Art Department. Of course, the very best work is always original—due to individual genius; but genius could not lift itself so high had there not been a national raising of the level from which it has lifted itself. That national raising has been produced from South Kensington; without it the half-dozen or so whom we think of as “designers” to-day must have had a harder struggle for their proficiency—only to find themselves at last unappreciated. Even if they never studied under the Department, they yet owe much to it; but it is more than probable that most of them received their own earliest teaching in South Kensington Schools of Art.

Artists or not, the “Art Masters” and “Art Teachers” of South Kensington have much to be proud of in their past work. For the future, it seems, their work is likely to be hampered by Sir John Gorst’s “authorities”—his local vestrymen, and his county brewers,

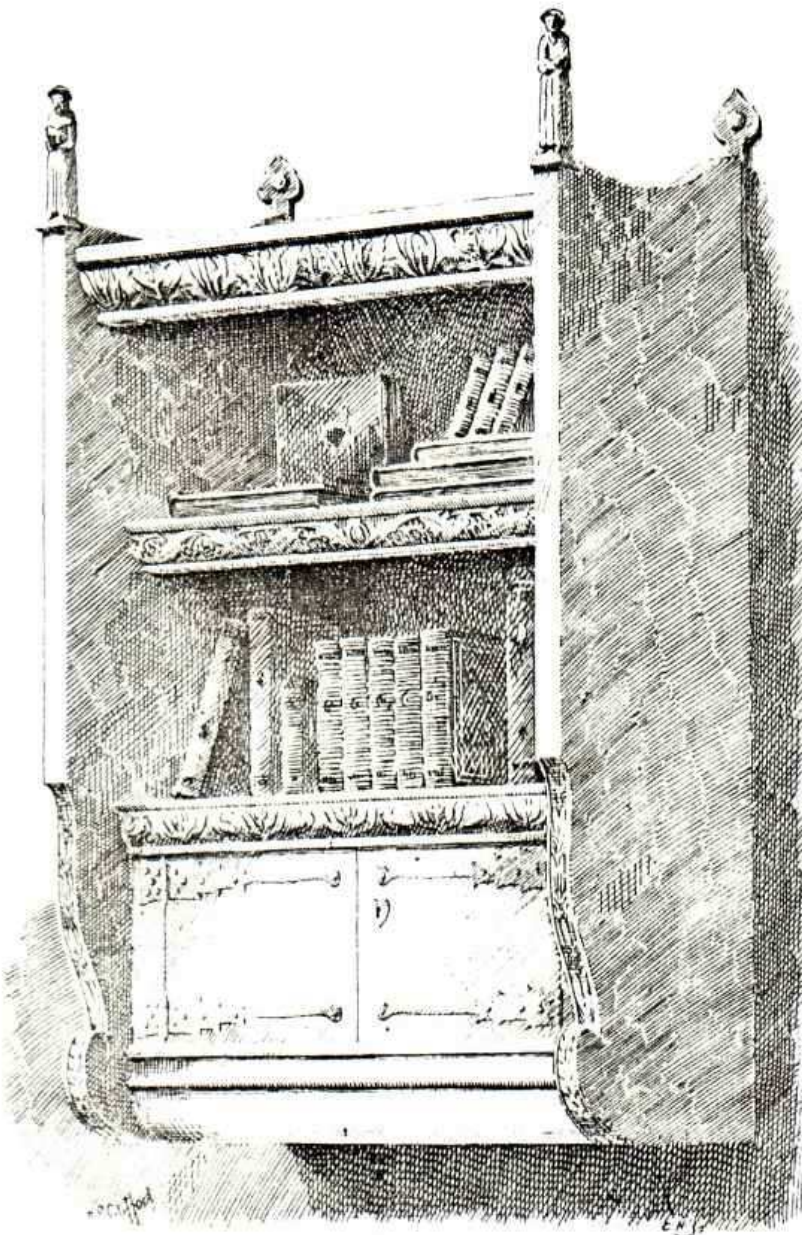
more eager to keep down the rates than to develop national taste. A pleasing prospect, is it not?

GEORGE STURT.

FARNHAM, April 10, 1896.

THE ETCHINGS OF E. W. CHARLTON.

IN no department of the arts is personal technique more important than in etching. That Mr. Charlton possesses this quality, so that after seeing but a few of his etchings you can pick them out instantaneously without refer-



BOOKSHELF

DESIGNED BY C. F. A. VOYSEY

question is, not whether the men engaged in this work may be called artists, but whether they are successful in their undertaking.

No one will ever know how much we owe to South Kensington. But its influence for good has been felt by every child who has passed the most elementary examination in freehand drawing. Because, to learn in however slight a degree to appreciate balance and symmetry by one sense is to learn to appreciate them by all the senses. The thoughts of those children will be better massed, their senses of proportion more true than as if that training had been withheld. This I take