DOMESTIC ART IN LONDON.

The lecturing campaign is now being carried on in London and in the Provinces with considerable vigor, and artistic matters are receiving their fair share of attention. Mr. Maurice Adams has been discoursing upon "Everyday Life and Domestic Art," and we may judge of the view he takes of the subject when we find him speaking of the "cultured joy of domestic art." Mr. J. H. Chamberlain continues his lectures at Birmingham, to which I have already alluded in a former letter. He enunciates the dictum that "admiration is the mainspring of art," and if we consider the matter we shall find that there is much truth in this view. It is admiration of Nature that induces the artist to attempt to transfuse its spirit into his own art, for no true artist ever lived who was not an enthusiast. I may remind my readers that a few years ago Mr. Felix Slade, a rich and scholarly art collector, died, and left money for the foundation of professorships of art. It is somewhat strange that these foundations have been highly successful in London and at Cambridge, but the one at Oxford has been a comparative failure. Mr. Ruskin was the first professor, and he was succeeded by Mr. W. B. Richmond, who has just resigned. Hopes are entertained that Mr. Ruskin may again undertake the professorship, but even his splendid genius will be ineffective unless the University of Oxford takes a lesson from the sister Universities and makes the teaching of art a living reality, and not as at present, a mere "extra."

Specialised exhibitions now find much support in the chief towns of the Kingdom, as well as in London, and the one proposed to be held shortly at Glasgow promises to be one of considerable interest. It is to consist of some of the finest examples of decorative art, and the contributions of the Science and Art Department will be of great value. The Queen will send the famous Cellini shield, a magnificent sword and dagger, some groups in bronze, and two bronze plaques illustrative of Summer and Winter. The collection of shields, helmets, swords and other exquisitely ornamented pieces of armor is expected to be specially rich.

The architect cannot complain of neglect in these days of big buildings and of church decorations. At the opening of a country parish church, after a thorough restoration, the Bishop of Durham remarked that "it had been said that the dread of the biographer added another pang to death, and he was sure that the dread of the antiquarian critic added a new pang to church restoration. They got a generous donor to put his hand into his pocket, but then up came the critic, and warned him against taking any part in a horrible piece of Vandalism. Consequently, the man took his hand out of his pocket, as if it had been stung, and gave no contribution." This reminds me of a story a friend told me the other day. He was groping about an old church to find a tomb which had been removed from its original position, when he made some inquiries of the female attendant. She answered, "Oh, that was some years ago! We daren't move anything now, for fear of *them archologists*, who can't abide any alterations, and made such a fuss about these things."

The Natural History Museum at South Kensington, although it has been finished for some time, is only partially filled. The Zoological collections are now in course of removal from the British Museum at Bloomsbury. This splendid building exhibits in a very remarkable manner the growth of the taste for internal decoration in England. When the new portion of old Montagu House were built, nearly sixty years ago, no ornamental coloring was used, and the whole effect was obtained from the architecture itself. Some years after, when a new building had entirely replaced old Montagu House, the ceilings were ornamented with gold and color, and the British Museum was one of the first buildings to be so decorated. The rich brown color of the terra cotta used at the Natural History Museum is beautiful in itself, but does not afford sufficient contrast to the fossils which are exhibited in some of the galleries.

While I am writing this, on Monday, December 14, London is in holiday guise, and the main thoroughfares of the West End are crowded with men and women who are waiting to see the Queen pass on her way to open the new Courts of Justice. So much interest has not been exhibited in a public ceremonial for many years, and the crowd considerably exceeds that gathered a short time back to see the troops who had returned from Egypt. The houses are gaily decorated, and bunting is flying in every direction. It does not seem to matter whether the flag exhibits the "Union Jack," the "Stars and Stripes," or the "Red, White and Blue," so that it is a flag. I think there is a good opening for an artist who would plan out some pleasing arrangements of color for the decoration of house fronts on these occasions. Nothing has yet been done in this way that I know of.

The woodwork of all the Courts is of solid oak, but at present it has been left unpolished. Now, that the whole building can be seen, the astonishing versatility of Mr. Street's genius is brought out in strong relief, for every detail, both outside and inside, is worthy of study. The spirit of the architect pervades the whole place, and nothing was too small for his minute attention. Door hinges, escutcheons, fenders, fire-irons, window quarries, hat stands and chairs, are all of his devising. In fact, he did too much, and it is the firm belief of those who know the late Mr. Street that he killed himself by his unremitting attention to this vast work.

These large buildings have not exhausted the desire for architectural effect, and much change is still contemplated; new streets are planned, big hotels, new markets and new theatres are to be built. The attention that has been drawn of late to frequency of fires in theatres has had this good effect, that several of those which were specially dangerous have been condemned. I have more than once alluded to the revival that has taken place in art metal work, and the interest in this revival does not seem to slacken. Designs, both original and copied from the antique, are being published, and there is considerable promise of a vigorous growth of public taste in this direction. The Society of Arts have lately put up an elegant iron scroll by Messrs. Gardner to carry an outside lamp. Finger plates are now being made of papier maché, and the Lincustra Walton is being applied to many other purposes besides wall decoration, for which it was originally adopted. It is used for splash screens, table and other mats, and is found very effective when used as decorative panels for cabinet work. Screens are now being prepared in a great variety of designs, and few articles of furniture are having more attention paid to them. Some are fitted with plain glass others with looking-glass, but those with Japanese designs appear to be general favorites. The addition of a shelf to some of these screens is useful. One of the latest pieces of imitation that has been introduced is the paper plaque. These are chromo-lithographs on thick cardboard, but made to resemble hand-painting on china.

The destruction of artistic work by fog and smoke is so great that when this disadvantage is added to the discomfort which these great evils occasion, we need not feel surprised at the constant attempts which are made to combat them. Unfortunately, at present the fog and smoke still remain winners in the fight. However, the defeated will not acknowledge themselves conquered, and a Smoke Abatement Institute has been formed. Let us hope that we may soon be able to chronicle some cheering progress in this important contest.

The electric lighting of the interior of public buildings is now becoming somewhat more general, and in those cases where the incandescent lamps have been introduced, great satisfaction has been expressed by the audience. I cannot help thinking that here is a great opportunity which has not as yet been sufficiently grasped. The lamps are being attached to chandeliers (or electroliers, as they are called) without any proper realization of the fundamental difference between all former kinds of illumination and that produced by electricity. What is required is an entirely new series of designs. The lamps might be made to hang singly or in groups from the ceiling, in a natural manner, as if tied together. It will be a great pity if the heavy and totally inappropriate chandelier is continued as a medium for the use of the electric light.

THERE have been many suggestions made concerning the use of Alianthus wood for furniture purposes, and without having given sufficient thought to its adaptability, it has found many advocates, mostly on account of its attractive appearance when finished. A thorough test was concluded a few days ago, and it was found that the wood was hard to work and failed to retain its shape. Aside from the desirability of possessing another good furniture wood, this failure is unfortunate in an artistic sense, for the delicate tint and the irregularity of the grain would make rich effects.

Why not employ alligator skins for furniture coverings? Where there are children it would, we think, be especially valuable. Its durability is remarkable, and it might outwear several young ones.

FURNITURE IN THE AGE OF THE FRENCH RENAISSANCE.

(*See opposite page.*)

The triumph of art and taste in France began with the reign of Francis I., and from his time through that of Louis XVI., is regarded as the age of the French Renaissance, though in truth it may not be termed a renaissance (in the strict meaning of the word) in any particular, as no decay had overtaken French industry, no stagnation in art had been the accompaniment of the stirring incidents in the history of the years preceding the accesion of Francis.

But the growth from the ordinary to the perfect was so sudden, so complete and so unexpected, that it appeared to be an awakening from the imperfection of an artless age, instead of the attainment of a fine perception in taste, toward which France had been surely working. The neglect with which furniture had been treated was realized, and architects made its designing, with that for hangings and interior decorations, an important branch of their profession.

Louis XIV. had the true conception of magnificence, and his palace at Versailles, though famous for its architectural outlines and for the design of its surrounding parks, was as completely unique and admirable in its interior fittings and in its furnishings, these latter due to the incomparable skill of Le Brun, as artist, and Boulle as designer and executor. Ebony and tortoise-shell were common appliances with Boulle for body work and inlay respectively. Thin brass was gracefully shaped in vines and scrolls, while heavy bronze and gilded panels were chased and elaborately carved. Consoles and cabinets, covered as they were with the most expensive work of the skilled artisans, and bearing vases or ornamental urns and clocks inlaid with precious stones, conformed with the surroundings of the palace, but were no richer than the piers and niches and alcoves they were designed to fill, and hardly more expensive than even the highly polished floors of wood, herring-boned, upon which they stood. The shape, too, of the furniture was peculiar; it swelled into almost ungraceful curves, its legs were wandering and uncertain in their continuity, and this fashion paved the way for the still more grotesque styles of the age of Louis XV.

In his reign, ormolu ornamentation was popular and brilliant marqueterie work, dyed to increase its color, was used upon surfaces that were even more protrusive and unnatural. The bulk of the articles was increased, commodes were heightened, and so were chiffoniers, writing desks were filled with multitudinous drawers, and had cylindrical fronts that concealed their contents, and likewise shelves that might be drawn out to serve as tables, upon which the inkstand and paper might be found. The apartments were smaller than had been the custom theretofore, and the tendency toward privacy in the living-rooms was more decided than had shown itself under the reign of the Grand Monarch. This influenced in some degree the style of the furniture, and may have had something to do with the attempted perspective in stands and desks and the like, when the sides sloped outwards as they sloped back.

With Louis XVI. came a fashion entirely new in its treatment of wood. Metal and porcelain, said to have been first used by a son of Boulle, had received more or less favor as panels, and the lacquer or varnish of Martin was a favorite with Mme. de Pompadour. It remained for Louis XVI. to popularize the natural wood itself, painted white and lined with gold. The solid mahogany and ebony of Louis XIV. was discarded, the panels of tapestry and Cordova leather were ignored, and the era of massive gilt, of Florentine mosaic tables and porphry slabs, of unpolished walnut and symbolical inlays was over; with Louis XVI. everything was light, brilliant, and, we might add, brief.

Whatever may be our taste now, certainly the effect of carved wood or slender legs, covered with a pure white glossy surface and enriched with gilt, makes a bright picture with the accompaniments of lilac, violet, pale blue or yellow upholstering, and in a room crowded with the elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen of that most unfortunate court, a court whose king and queen were destined to suffer for the expenditures of their predecessors, at the hands of wretches who considered cleanliness to be reckless extravagance.

Why not make sofa bedsteads more than "three-quarters" wide? Surely the inventors, if they ever were invented, must have known that some full grown people might be forced (of course they would never do it from choice) to use them.