DECORATIVE ART IN LONDON.

CHRISTMAS has always been a special season for decoration, and of late years there has been a marked improvement in the art of garnishing churches. Of old it was thought sufficient to tie up a few branches of holly and evergreen round the columns and gas fittings, but now something more artistic is attempted, and the lines of architecture in churches are often picked out with much taste. The Rev. Ernest Geldart has lately published a work on this subject, in which he lays down some very judicious rules which would be applicable to many other forms of decoration. The first of them is this: "A church when decorated should be at least as fit for use as when unadorned." How much so-called decoration breaks this rule! That house decoration at this season has much improved I am inclined to doubt, but we must allow that holly and laurel are somewhat stubborn materials to work with.

The numerous fires which have occurred lately both in London and in various parts of the country, have naturally formed a very frequent subject of conversation, and there have not been wanting those who are ready to view these fires as the work of incendiaries. When fire attacks old mansions and palaces the consequent loss is irreparable, but sometimes after warehouses have been destroyed a better system of building is adopted when they rise from their ashes. Thus it is now proposed to rebuild, in the form of a quadrangle, the large warehouses in Wood Street which were lately destroyed. I have often wondered why this system is not adopted in London, as it would be possible to increase greatly the value of property in the Strand and other main thoroughfares, by rebuilding the houses on the plan so commonly followed in Paris. It is only a question of time, however, and we see signs of improvement in Piccadilly, where suits of chambers are arranged over the shops, but with separate entrances, and a proposal has been made to rebuild Regent street from end to end, so as to replace the present mean houses by handsome buildings.

The Belt libel case, which has filled the newspapers with the details of a dispute as to whether a sculptor designed the works himself to which he attached his name, or had it done for him, has drawn particular attention to an ethical question which is frequently disputed but never settled. It is an opinion held very generally by artists, that the opinion of the public as to what is artistic cannot stand against that of their own. The real point is the distinction between beauty and technical skill. It is quite possible for one of the public to have a purer sense of beauty than a trained artist, but his opinion on a technical matter will be of no value as compared with that of an expert.

The death of Miss Rhoda Garrett at the early age of forty-one, is a great loss to the art of decoration. This lady, with much independence, set up for herself as a house decorator some years ago, and she wrote a little book on Home Decoration which has passed through six editions. She is described as possessing a great capacity for taking trouble, and to this she added a delicate and a refined sense of fitness.

It is gratifying to know that Mr. Ruskin will accept the appointment of Slade Professor of Fine Arts at Oxford, and will deliver a course of lectures on some branch of art during the coming term. It would be impossible to find a better instance of the right man in the right place.

The opening of the new building for the City of London School, on the Victoria Embankment, by the Prince and Princess of Wales, early in December, was an interesting ceremony. The school had previously been situated in Milk Street, and it has been under the government of the corporation since its original endowment in 1442 by John Carpenter, Town Clerk of the city. The building which has just been opened is in the style of the Italian Renaissance, enriched with carving and sculpture, in three stories, the façade being crowned by a balustraded stone parapet. Above this rises the great hall roof, which is high-pitched, covered with green slates and surmounted by a centre *flèche*. The floor of the entrance hall is laid with a pavement of marble tesseræ, while the walls are broken into panels by stone pilasters, many of the panels being filled with marble memorial tablets recording the names and gifts of former benefactors or the careers of distinguished pupils. The great hall is 100 feet in length by 45 feet in width; the open timbered roof is 38 feet high from the floor to underside of the beam, and 60 feet high to the ceiling. The floor is of oak, and the wood-work of all the lower portions of the hall of American walnut, the roof being of pitched pine, stained walnut. Round the hall is a high walnut dado. The building is arranged to accommodate 680 boys, and considerable attention has been paid to the sanitary arrangements. The cost is set down at about £100,000, and in addition there is the site, which was placed at the disposal of the committee by the corporation of London, its value being estimated at £90,000.

A very elaborate system of warming and ventilating has been arranged at the Royal Courts of Justice. The water intended for heating the building is heated on the low pressure principle in four fifty-horse-power boilers, situated in the crypt at the four angles of the great hall. There are two additional boilers of the same dimensions for the generation of steam to be employed for the engines in propelling air into the courts and for heating the coils in the ventilating shafts. For summer use an ether refrigerating machine has been erected in the crypt, which is capable of reducing 1,000 gallons of water per hour from 70 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The water thus reduced can be converted into spray by an atomizer and the air passed through it. The contract price for the heating and ventilating was £50,000.

Mr. A. J. Gale, the holder of the Godwin Bursary, read a paper lately before the Royal Institute of British Architects, in which he described his recent tour in the United States. He spoke highly of the sanitary arrangements of the various cities, which he considered to be in advance of those in England. He was also impressed with the completeness of American houses and the elaboration of their construction.

The Electric Light and Gas Light Exhibition has just been opened at the Crystal Palace, and there is at that place, as elsewhere, to be seen a healthy rivalry between gas and electricity. The improvements in gas lighting have not entirely been in the direction of increased brilliancy, but have had reference also to the reduction of its injurious effects.

The abatement of the smoke nuisance has been largely discussed, but now an advocate for smoke has arisen, who affirms that it is a blessing rather than a nuisance. Dr. Oldham has lately stated at a meeting of the Burslem Town Council, his opinion that smoke is of value as a deodorizer, because it blends with the smells of bad drainage, etc., and counteracts their evil effects.

Some prizes have been distributed at the West London School of Art for designs for tapestry hangings, for panels, for ceiling of a chapel, etc. Mr. Mundella, the Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education, gave an address on the occasion, and in it he said that it had appeared to him in 1857, and he held the same opinion still, that if all the British art work of the first half of the present century, with its wall-papers, its decorations, its hangings and its heavy furniture had been collected in one vast pile and burnt up, the world would not have been any the worse for it.

This year the competition for the Mence Smith Traveling Studentship will be for a set of designs for a decorative treatment of the sides and ceiling of a room.

I have alluded in a former letter to the Manchester Art and Industrial Exhibition. Some changes of exhibits were made during the time it was open, and one of the additions was a piece of tapestry woven by Mr. Morris himself, which consisted of a bold and flowing floriated design, made up of the vine plant and grapes, some birds being also introduced.

Messrs. Howell and James have opened their third annual Exhibition of Tapestry paintings by lady amateurs and artists which shows a considerable advance in artistic treatment. "Queen Esther," a copy from a tapestry panel in the Uffizzi Gallery, Florence, by Mrs. Alice Danyell is highly successful and a fine piece of decorative work. The "Judges" prize was awarded to this. Several distinguished artists have contributed pieces of tapestry although not in competition, thus Mr. Marks, R.A., sends a striking panel of "Touchstone, Audery and William," and Mr. Herkomer, A.R.A., a piece entitled "France." In these tapestry paintings we have an admirable form of wall decoration at a very moderate cost.

Herr Keim's system of mural painting has been reported upon favorably by the Royal Bavarian Acadamy of Arts, and if it is found in practice to be as trustworthy as it is stated to be it will prove a most valuable medium for wall decoration. The pictures produced by this process were very severely tested, and they remained uninjured after having been treated with alkalies and acids and subjected to severe heat and cold.

The Royal Academy have now opened their Winter Exhibition of pictures by Deceased Masters, which is noteworthy as containing two special collections of the greatest interest, but both these collections are seriously injured in effect by being crowded on the walls. Two rooms are devoted to the exquisite landscapes of Linnell, but the pictures are so close together that they lose much of their interest, more especially as the subjects are very similar. The collection of pictures painted by Dante Rossetti are even more injured in appearance by this close juxtaposition, and to make matters worse there are screens in the centre of the room with pictures and drawings upon them. I had the advantage of seeing these pictures on the press day when but few were in the rooms, but at the private view the crowd was so dense that little could be seen. This crowding was quite unnecessary, as there are several unoccupied rooms.

The artistic arrangements of pictures and drawings on a wall is a matter of the greatest importance in the successful decoration of a house. Every picture should have a space round it to keep it from being killed by its fellows, but unfortunately collectors are prone to cover their walls so that justice is done to none of the pictures. One of the most pleasing examples of artistic hanging is to be seen in some of the rooms at the South Kensington Museum where every picture can be seen without any disturbing influence from those around it.

In concluding this letter I must just mention two important additions to this national museum, although to do justice to them each will require an article to itself. The Jones bequest consists of a matchless collection of old French furniture which is beautiful enough to make an enthusiast of the most phlegmatic person. Besides the furniture there are fine specimens of old china, good pictures and marble busts and the whole is valued at £250,000 at least. The other collection has been formed by Mr. C. Purden Clarke in India and illustrates the domestic architecture of the natives. Good judges express the opinion that these specimens throw an entirely new light on a very interesting subject. This collection however will not be ready for exhibition for some few months.

ART SCHOOLS IN PHILADELPHIA.

BY S. C. JUDSON.

One of the best evidences of the interest of Philadelphians in decorative art is shown in the number of training schools now in operation here. There are no less than half a dozen such institutions. The "Philadelphia School of Technical Design for Women," with hundreds of pupils, is one; the Ladies' Decorative Art Club, 1512 Pine street, another; and there is a large and practical association in Arch street; but the Public Industrial Art School in the Hollingsworth Building, on Locust street, is developing certain original features which distinguish it from those of its kind in other cities.

The object of this latter school is to teach purely decorative design, and to apply it to the minor arts, such as embroidery, wood-carving, modelling in clay, with coloring and glaze, embossing sheet brass or *repoussé* work, decorative painting in oil and working in sheet leather, mosaic setting, inlaying and other branches.

The number of pupils in attendance is one hundred and fifty. The work of the teachers is to train boys to become practical mechanics, and to make both girls and boys familiar with work to use their hands; to give them some resource by which they can make money. It gives exactly the only kind of manual labor suited to girls as well as boys, and it opens a department of teaching especially to women, for which there is, at present, a very great demand, and, comparatively, no supply whatever.

The time is at hand when every school will embrace these minor arts among its studies, and those who understand them can easily find employment now.

The City of Philadelphia is the sole proprietor of the school, and through it has originated a reform in education which has never before been fully practiced either in Europe or America.

This experimental school has been frequently visited by distinguished foreigners, as well as by many Americans, who have come to the city for the express purpose of examining it.

The visitor will see about forty pupils engaged in studying designs, about as many more modelling vases, etc., in clay, with color and glaze, carving in panels, embroidering, and painting in oil, etc.

What these children are doing is to qualify them for the workshop or to teach. That the project is a success will appear from a few facts. A practical manufacturer has taken many of the pupils, and pays them well, as he regards them sufficiently well trained to be of use as designers.

A situation with good pay has been offered to a girl of fourteen, and one of the boy students during his vacation of two months, earned $218.

The Bureau of Education, Department of the Interior, at Washington, has recognized the school, and has caused a pamphlet to be prepared to serve as a manual of Industrial Art for teachers who desire to introduce it into their classes. In it are given in detail all the directions necessary for studying and teaching the minor arts, for single individuals as well as schools, societies, clubs and families. Any one may obtain a copy gratis, by application through letter, to General John Eaton, Commissioner Bureau of Education, Washington.

Gilded Panels are said to be again fashionable. The effect of these showy additions to decoration may be made very forcible and desirable, but they require the best taste in their arrangement and application, in order to avoid an appearance of gaudiness and *bizarre*.