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THE association of colours with certain ideas may be considered a survival of one of those primitive fancies whereby the most curious theories were often started. Indeed, it has been frequently pointed out how, in the childhood of the world, our ancestors thought there

was a deep meaning underlying the varied works of nature—a notion which, it may be remembered, gave rise in a great measure to those mythological conceptions, the meaning of which has in many cases been gradually lost. That this is specially true in the case of colours may be proved by the extensive folklore which, in the course of centuries, has clustered round them : most of which, too, can be easily traced to a very remote period.

Amongst other causes, also, which invested colours with an importance that they still retain, may be mentioned the old and well-known doctrine of signatures, which connected in some mysterious manner the properties of substances with their colour ; hence white was regarded as refrigerant, red as hot. This fanciful idea further gave origin to the belief that medicinal substances bore upon their external surfaces the qualities or virtues which they possessed—an opinion which, as Mr. Pettigrew remarks, in his “Medical Superstitions” (1844 : p. 18), “led to serious errors in practice.” Thus, for disorders of the blood, burnt purple, pomegranate seeds, mulberries, and other red ingredients, were dissolved in the patient’s drink ; and for liver complaints yellow substances were recommended.

Some of the savage theories relating to colours, also, are worthy of notice. Mr. Tylor, for instance, points out, in his “Researches into the Primitive History of Mankind” (1865 : p. 71), how “people wanting a sense often imagine to themselves a resemblance between it and one of the senses which they possess”—a remark which equally applies to savage tribes, who are in the habit of forming their conclusions relative to colours, not from what they have been taught, but from the promptings and imaginings of their own minds. That this is so may be deduced from the circumstance that uncultured tribes, although often located in different parts of the globe, and in no way connected with each other, have similar ideas about certain things, which is probably accounted for on the supposition that the same train of thought in each case has been accompanied by a like result. Again, in perusing the history of colours, it is noticeable that entirely opposite views are frequently assigned to the

same colour, the luck or ill-luck supposed to be attaching to it depending on the nature of the object.

Animals, says Mr. Dalyell, in his “Darker Superstitions of Scotland,” became mystical from colour, particularly white, red, or black. Thus a prejudice against white cows has long subsisted among the peasantry of Scotland, on account of the alleged inferiority of the milk. The true source of this superstition may have originated in the veneration paid to white cattle in the East. Anyhow, it is interesting to note the widespread respect paid to animals of this colour, even too among uncultured tribes. Thus, in Africa white chickens are offered to propitiate woodland spirits ; and the chiefs of that country are in the habit of presenting a stranger with a white horse as a mark of honour. The antiquity, also, of the importance attached to white as a colour is further illustrated by Herodotus, who informs us how Cyrus, provoked at losing a sacred white horse in the stream of the Gyndes, drew off the river by three hundred and sixty channels, declaring that it should not wet a woman to the knee. The same author, too, says that a single white hair disqualified cattle for a sacrifice to the god Iris in Egypt. Tacitus, in his “De Moribus Germanorum,” speaks of the omens which were drawn from “white horses preserved in groves ;” and, indeed, the literature of ancient times abounds with similar illustrations. Survivals of this primitive notion still prevail in our own and other countries, it being considered unlucky in Northamptonshire to see a white mouse run across a room. In the Midland counties it is reckoned a bad omen to meet a white horse without spitting at it ; and many persons, without any apparent reason, have a strong aversion to buying a horse of this colour. Thus in Devonshire the following rhyme is current :—

“If you have a horse with four white legs,
Keep him not a day ;
If you have a horse with three white legs,
Send him far away ;
If you have a horse with two white legs,
Sell him to a friend ;
And if you have a horse with one white leg,
Keep him to his end.”

In the same way, it is a popular fancy in Cornwall that it is unlucky to meet a white hare ; and according to the legend current in the district, when a maiden who has loved not wisely, but too well, dies forsaken and broken-hearted, she comes back to haunt her deceiver in the shape of a white hare. This phantom follows the false one everywhere, mostly invisible to all but himself. It saves him occasionally from danger, but invariably causes the death of the betrayer in the end.

In Devonshire, the appearance of a white-breasted bird has from time immemorial been regarded as a certain omen of death ; and in the Midland counties, if a white pigeon is observed to settle on a chimney,

misfortune of some kind is anticipated. Without multiplying further instances, it is evident that white has from primitive days been a mystic colour, the strange awe attached to it in connection with certain animals being probably traceable to the reverence once bestowed on it in its association with heathen worship.

Then, again, blue is another colour to which a mystic significance has been given, perhaps on account of its being the colour of the sky. Hence it was held sacred by the Druids, and it is curious to find the same regard for it existing abroad at the present day. Thus the Arabs of Egypt throw salt into the fire before loading their camels on a journey, under a belief that as the blue flame arises every evil spirit is suddenly banished. This belief in some mysterious sympathy between evil spirits and blue formerly existed in our own country.

At a memorable convention of sorcerers, held in the year 1590, it is related that the light of a candle "aperit blew." Shakespeare too, it may be remembered, alludes to this superstition in *Richard III.* (Act v., sc. 3):—

"The lights burn blue—it is now dead midnight;
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
* * * * *
Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
Came to my tent."

So in *Julius Cæsar* (Act iv., sc. 3), Brutus, on seeing the ghost of Cæsar, exclaims—

"How ill this taper burns! Ha! who comes here?"

This, however, was not the only way in which blue was supposed to be associated with evil. Dalyell, in his "Darker Superstitions of Scotland" (1834: p. 119), alluding to the theory that malevolent acts were effected by means of a thread, relates how a certain lady, having dismissed one of her servants, was the victim of the following malicious treatment. It appears that on leaving his situation the servant forthwith invoked the aid of a sorcerer, who gave him a "blue threid," which he laid before the house of his late mistress, the result being that in a very short time she and her eldest daughter "took sudden sickness, and were both bereft of their natural life thereby."

We learn too, from the same authority, how in the year 1635 a man living in the Orkney Islands was supposed to be completely ruined by nine knots cast on a blue thread and given to his sister. On the other hand, blue was not always connected with witchcraft, having been held in repute as a charm for healing.

Green has generally been regarded as an ominous colour, and on this account is unpopular in Scotland at weddings; one reason assigned being that it is the fairies' colour, who resent as a mark of disrespect its use by mortals. Hence nothing green must ever make its appearance at a Scotch marriage, a custom which is so strictly adhered to, that even kale and all other green vegetables are very carefully excluded from the nuptial feast. This antipathy to green does not seem confined, however, to Scotland, being found in the South of England. Thus, Mrs. Latham, in her "West Sussex Superstitions," says she has known "several instances of mothers absolutely forbidding it in articles

of dress, or in the furniture of their houses." To be dressed in green and white, too, would, according to the popular rhyme, seem to be tantamount to wearing the willow, for

"Those dressed in blue
Have lovers true;
In green and white,
Forsake quite."

On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that green eyes have been praised by poets of nearly every land; and, according to Armado in *Love's Labour's Lost* (Act I., sc. 2), "Green indeed is the colour of lovers;" and the Nurse, in her description of Romeo's rival (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act III., sc. 5), says—

"An eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
As Paris hath."

It has been suggested that as green is the colour most suggestive of freshness and spring-time, it may have been considered the most appropriate lover's badge.

Again, black is a mystical colour, being generally found in combination with witchcraft; persons supposed to possess the faculty of transforming themselves nearly always taking the shape of a black dog, a black cat, or some animal of a kindred colour, illustrations of which may be found in the folk-tales of most countries. It is easy to discover why this should be so, when we remember that black, from a very early period, has been reckoned as the type of darkness, which again has been held to be the embodiment of evil. Thus, even among uncultured tribes, black victims are offered to demons, and in certain parts of Africa a black offering is the recognised propitiatory oblation on any important occasion. Clapperton, in his "Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa," tells us how, in a province on the east of the Niger, the inhabitants offer an annual sacrifice of a black bull, a black sheep, and a black dog, on a high hill. Among other instances may be mentioned one in Tartary, where Marco Polo informs us sheep with black heads were granted by the Khan for sacrifice. From the association of black with darkness may be traced the custom among us of using this colour as an emblem of mourning; for, as Mr. Dalyell has rightly observed, "Blackness is darkness, the place or picture of sorrow—the absence of joy and pleasure." To the same reason, also, may be assigned that ill-luck associated with black which in a variety of ways is witnessed in every-day life. It is a common saying in Scotland, for instance, when a man is ill and not likely to recover, or when he has lost one of his family or kindred by death, "The black ox has tramped upon him." To quote another example: we are told that in Sussex it is considered unlucky to take a piece of blackthorn in blossom into a house, this being regarded as a death-token.

Yellow is not without its folk-lore, being an epithet often applied to jealousy by our old writers. In the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (Act. I., sc. 3), Nym says he will possess Ford "with yellowness;" and in *Much Ado about Nothing* (Act III., sc. 1), Beatrice describes the Count as "civil as an orange, and something of

that jealous complexion ;” and, once more, Violet tells the Duke, in *Twelfth Night* (Act II., sc. 4), how her father’s daughter loved a man, but never told her love :—

“ She pined in thought,
And with green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like patience on a monument.”

In China, we note, yellow is the mystical colour—one of the five recognised in the Chinese cosmogony. Charms, therefore, on yellow paper are very common ; and we are told by Mr. Doolittle, in his “*Social Life of the Chinese*” (Vol. II., p. 308), how “sometimes a picture of an idol is printed or written on this coloured paper with red or black ink. It is then pasted up over a door or on a bed-curtain ; or it is worn in the hair, or put into a red bag, and suspended from a button-hole ; or it is burnt, and the ashes are mingled with tea or hot water, and drunk as a specific against bad influences or spirits.”

Lastly, red seems to be the colour around which the most extensive folk-lore has clustered ; there being a regard all over the world for things red. It was once held sacred to Thor, the god of Lightning, and Grimm suggests that the robin has been singled out for worship from among birds on account of its colours. In the same way the Highland women tie a piece of red worsted thread round their cows’ tails previous to turning them out to grass for the first time in the spring. It secures their cattle, they say, like the red berries of the rowan or mountain ash, from an evil eye and all kinds of witchcraft ; for, according to an old couplet—

“ Rowan ash, and red thread,
Keep the devils from their speed.”

It is interesting, also, to trace the same superstition abroad, as in Esthonia, where mothers put some red thread in their babies’ cradles as a preservative against

danger. And in China, something red is tied round children’s wrists as a safeguard against evil spirits. In the same country, red holds a prominent place in marriage ceremonies. Thus, red cloth is placed on the threshold of the bridegroom’s house, over which the bride must pass ; and at betrothals, says Mr. Dennys, “there are provided, in addition to the betrothment cards, four large needles and two red silk threads, and two of the former, threaded with one of the threads, are stuck into each card.” The red thread is supposed to represent that with which the feet of all mortals are in the spirit-world tied to those who are fated to be husband and wife ; in other words, it represents unalterable fate. A similar thread is employed to tie together the cups out of which the bride and bridegroom drink.

Sir Thomas Raffles, in his “*History of Java*,” speaking of a certain tribe, tells us how, previous to the equipment of the bride and bridegroom for the nuptial ceremonies, “it is essential that their bodies be rubbed over with the ashes of a red dog’s bones. Again, the antipathy to red hair may be traced to the fact that Thor’s beard and hair were red : a circumstance which, it has been suggested, caused it to be regarded with extreme aversion in the early days of Christianity. Hence arose the tradition that Judas had red hair. In cases of sickness, too, red has from time immemorial been a popular colour. Thus, in small-pox, red bed-coverings were used with a view of bringing the pustules to the surface of the body. At the close of the last century, the Emperor Francis I., when suffering from this complaint, was wrapped up in a scarlet cloth. Even in the present day, a Scotch remedy for whooping-cough consists in covering the neck with a piece of red flannel ; and for nose-bleeding persons in the Eastern counties are recommended to wear a skein of scarlet silk thread.

HOW TO PAINT DOOR-PANELS.



THAT “the present age is one of progress,” is strikingly illustrated by the fact that art education has made, and is making, rapid strides in this country. Girls and boys at school are no longer taught merely to produce imitations of copies, representing highly-coloured and conventional groups of flowers and fruit, and verdant landscapes, to be carefully touched up by the drawing-master, and afterwards gazed upon in wondering admiration by parents and friends ; but, thanks chiefly to the Kensington schools of drawing, they are encouraged to copy nature, to notice the growth of flowers and trees, and to aim at reproducing their exquisite tints. Even those students, however, who are real lovers of their art, are very often afraid to use it for what must surely be one of the highest purposes to

which art can be applied, namely, the beautifying of the home. There are many reasons for this. They have not learnt to design, or to paint on wood ; the paint of the woodwork is not delicate and pretty enough to decorate ; it would cost so much to have it re-painted ; the house has only been taken for a term, and it is not worth while to spend much money on another person’s property. Such is the feeling, and the very natural feeling, of those who have never tried how wonderfully even a slight knowledge of art rightly applied, and only the small expenditure which a scantily-filled purse can supply, will brighten and improve our rooms. Natural, however, as it may be, it is after all a mistake, and in this paper we shall try to show one way in which any one who has a moderate amount of taste can greatly beautify our homes, at but an inconsiderable cost, by decorating the door-panels.