

STENCIL DECORATION.

STENCILLING is one of the easiest methods of decorating a room, and one so simple that very perforated plate close to the surface to be marked, and with certain stiff-haired brushes

papering, if the walls have not been previously painted, but painting wears much longer, is more easily cleaned, and does not hold the dirt as most papers do. But the expense can be lessened by adopting, first, a combination of painting and paper; second, of painting and distemper; third, paper and distemper. Distemper is a better kind of white-washing. Ceilings are distempered, and if the distemper is tinted to some agreeable colour, it has a beautifully soft and harmonious appearance, and in country houses will wear a considerable time. In large towns like London the atmosphere is too impure to make distemper last more than three or four years, but as it is the cheapest form of wall covering, it would pay to have distempers renewed every few years. In fact, distempers ought to be seen much oftener than they are. They are cheaper, healthier, softer to the eye, and the fact of it being easily renewed is an advantage, as one can have a change every few years instead of living with the same surroundings year after year. It is a good plan to have the lower portion of the walls papered with some simple dado pattern. The lower part of the wall is termed the dado, and there are papers designed expressly for this purpose. In some rooms, especially in old houses, there is a wooden dado, and of course this should always be painted, and the upper part of the walls might then be distempered. The reason against carrying distemper



FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

little practice is required to give one facility in the process, and we hope in this article to make those of our readers interested in the subject

you brush the proper colour over the plate. The colour passing through the cut-out portion of the plate leaves an exact impression



FIG. 3.

acquainted with the method of cutting and using stencils.

of the pattern on the material underneath. Some people mark their linen by having their name cut in a thin sheet of metal, and brush-

Briefly then, a stencil consists of a plate



FIG. 4.

of thin metal, card-board, or paper, with a pattern cut out, and in order to transfer this pattern to any other surface you place the

ing marking-ink over it, and many firms mark their cases with stencil plates. Stencilling is, then, a very simple mechanical process for reproducing a pattern an infinity of times, and as much of the decoration of a room is based upon the principle of repetition, stencilling is largely resorted to by house decorators. But need it be confined to decorators? Have we not on several other occasions endeavoured to make our readers acquainted with other crafts, and why cannot we do the same thing now? If girls only knew how much they can do towards beautifying their rooms I am sure they would readily lend their aid to so laudable an object. House decorating sounds rather big, but it need not dismay one. We are sufficiently audacious to think that if our readers will listen to us for a brief space, we can show them how they can do a great deal towards decorating their rooms.

Stencil decoration is generally employed when rooms are coloured instead of being papered, and we may as well say a word or two on this subject. We will imagine you have a small room that requires painting, whitewashing, and thoroughly doing up, and the general arrangement is left to you. Perhaps the walls have previously been papered. You must first decide whether you intend to have the walls papered again. There is no absolute necessity for this. You might have the walls painted in nice quiet tones of colour and stencil a few borders and patterns to relieve the bareness. This is more costly than

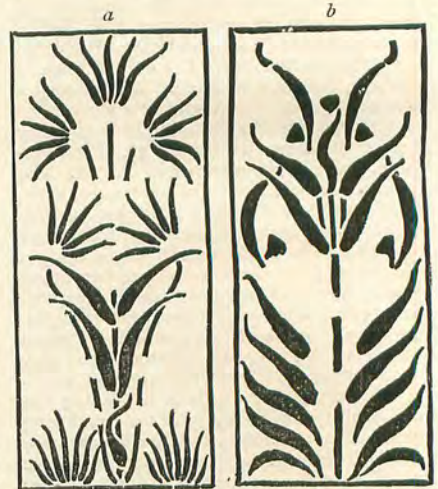


FIG. 5.

to the ground is, that the surface is very easily marked, and if it gets dirty or soiled nothing can be done to it, for as distemper is only whitening and size it cannot be washed. If you are in the enviable position of not being limited to a small amount in doing up your room, and wish for something that will last as well as look very handsome, you cannot do better than have a dado of some rich paper



FIG. 5.



FIG. 6.



FIG. 7.

(the Japanese gold leather papers are very handsome), and the upper portion of walls painted some nice light harmonious colour decorated with stencil borders. If your room is a fair height you might carry the dado as high as the



FIG. 8.



FIG. 9.

top of the doors and have a bold moulding put round the room, the top of the moulding level with the top of the door.

But to return to the subject we are immediately concerned with. Stencil patterns can be cut out of thick drawing-paper, and as that is the material most easily obtainable, it will be the one most generally used. Tinfoil makes good stencils. The knife should have a point, and be kept very sharp, and the stencils should be cut on a sheet

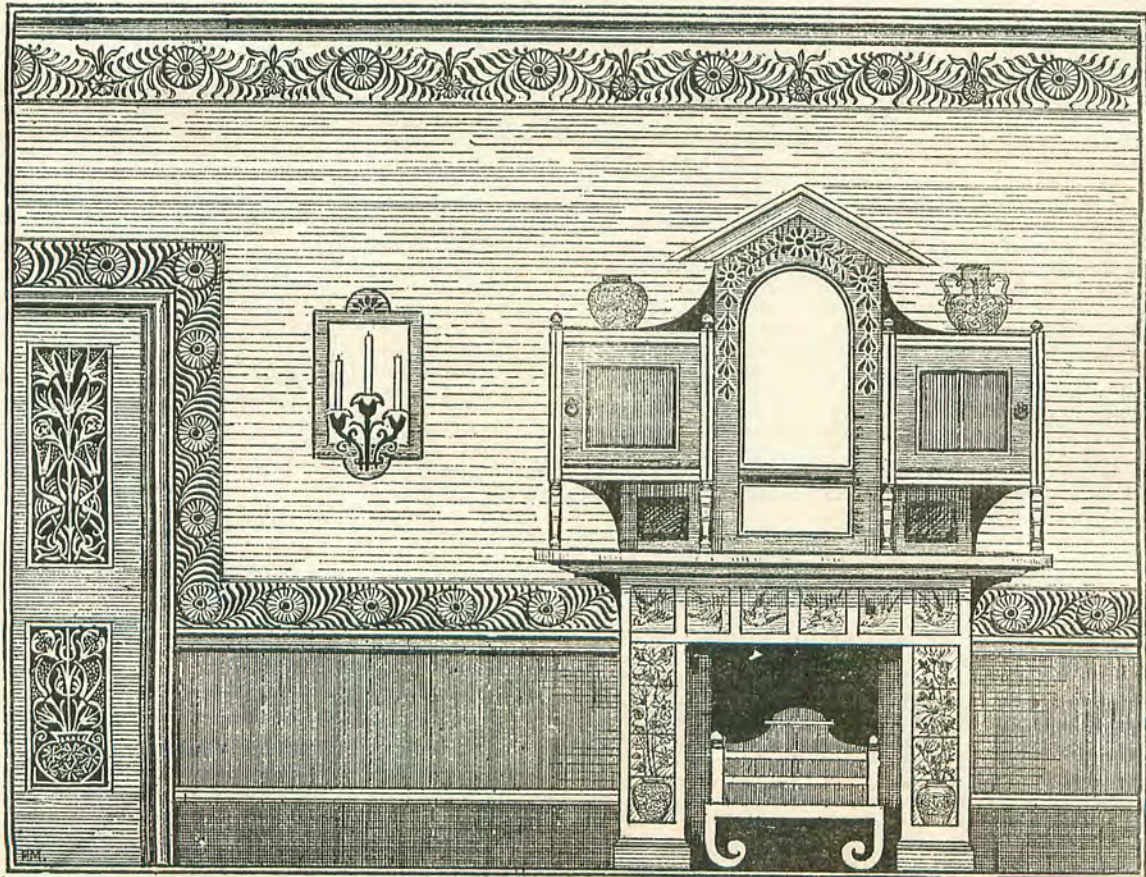


FIG. 10.

of glass to allow the knife to be moved with freedom. The designs should be simple, and a great point to be observed is leaving "ties," as they are called, to strengthen the stencil. We must explain what we mean by ties. Suppose you wanted to stencil the letter O. You can see that if you cut out the portion that is to be black, the inner part would drop out. To obviate this you leave a narrow strip top and bottom uncut, to fasten centre portion on to outer, and these two uncut portions are the ties. In all stencil designs the ties are a most important point to be observed. Without a sufficient number of ties your stencil would be too weak to last, and after a little use would collapse. The great thing, therefore, in designing for stencilling is to utilise the ties as far as possible in the design by making them form part of the design itself. Of course there are some ties that are unavoidable, and are only left to give strength. In good work these are touched in by hand, but as this touching-in takes a long time, decorators endeavour, as far as possible, to make the ties indispensable to the design. Fig. 1 is the simplest kind of stencil you can have. It consists of a series of cut-out triangular spaces, placed between parallel lines, and the white pattern is merely the result of the spaces left. In fig. 2 the same arrangement is kept, but the triangular spaces are made up of small parts, the ties again joining the design. The lines at top and bottom are run in by hand to give a finish. We shall describe how to run in lines later on. Fig. 3 is another example of a simple stencil. Some people are apt to think in looking at such a pattern that the white portion is the one stencilled. Recollect then, that it is the dark portion that is cut out. Fig. 4 is an ornamental rendering of a butterfly. It will be noticed that the wings have light markings. These are not ties. A moment's reflection shows that they could not be. These markings are put on with a second stencil. The first stencil only had the four wings, body, and antennæ cut out. The second stencil had the markings on wings and the ornamental portions cut to enable a second colour to be introduced. If all the patterns be cut out of one plate, only one colour can be used, but if one portion of the design be cut out of one plate and another out of a second plate, each plate can be stencilled in a different colour. This is shown more clearly in fig. 5, which requires the plate A cut out with the flowers and some of the leaves and stems, and plate B with the remaining portions. Here, although only two plates are employed, three distinct colours can be used, as the leaves that are cut out of plate A can be a different colour to those on plate B. The reason why two plates are required in this and other designs is, that in stencilling, say the flowers, it is impossible to prevent the colour spreading beyond the space to be stencilled, and if other portions are cut out too near the flowers, and these portions are required to be in a different colour to the flowers, you would find if you used a second colour that there would be a danger of the two tints mixing and destroying each other's purity. But this does not prevent two colours being used on the same plate, if the portions to be stencilled in different colours are sufficiently separated. For elaborate patterns three and even four stencil plates can be used, but for ordinary work three plates are ample. Care must be exercised in making the various parts of the design fit together in the completed stencil, and to this end it is better to transfer the whole design to all the plates, marking in the portion to be cut in some distinguishing colour, and when the first plate is cut, stencil that portion on the others before cutting them, so as to avoid cutting the same portion twice over. The white lines on leaves and flowers,

in fig. 5, are not supposed to be stencilled, but are done to show that a variety of colours should be used, lighter or darker, according to the part to be stencilled. The veins or leaves might be touched in by hand, for stencilled patterns finished by hand can be made very elaborate.

Fig. 6 is an example of how simple and yet effective a stencil can be made. Two plates might be used, one for the tall grass and the other for round dots and short grass. Such a stencil would do for the skirting of a room.

Fig. 7 is an example of a running border requiring two or three plates to complete it. It might be used round the doors and along the top of dado, as shown in fig. 10, while fig. 8 would do for the top of room or frieze. Fig. 9 is an example of a simple stencil border, made up of geometrical flower patterns repeating at every fifth flower.

Fig. 10 is given to show where stencil patterns can be most effectively put in rooms. The dado in this design is supposed to be of wood and painted, and the upper portion might be painted or distempered. The skirting at bottom of room might be stencilled in with such a pattern as fig. 6.

We will now assume that your stencils are cut. If they are out of paper, give them two or three coats, back and front, of knotting varnish, to be purchased at a good oil shop. This will make them waterproof and tough. Mix up your colour the requisite tint; if for paint, with oil colours, if for distemper, with whitening and size. In the former case it is as well to provide yourself with some flake-white ground in oil and some ordinary tube colours. Tint your white with the tube colours and use turpentine to thin the white, but be careful not to make your colour too thin. Stencil brushes are fitted on to short round stump handles, the hair being stiff. For large patterns use large brushes. Stencil brushes can be bought at any good oil or colour shop and are not expensive. Put your stencil plate against the wall in the proper position, and with one hand to keep it flat in its proper position use the brush in the other hand; hold it upright and gently tap it over the cut-out portion of the design until you have covered the wall with colour, shift the stencil on to the next place, and so on until you have covered the space to be decorated with the stencil. If another plate is required to finish it, go over the whole again with the second stencil. In running patterns, it is necessary to cut a small portion of the repeat, so that when you use it on the walls you have no trouble in placing it the proper distance from each impression. In fig. 7, for instance, you need not cut more than one portion of the design—that is, the flower on one plate, and leaves on another plate, but by cutting a portion of the second flower, as you shift your stencil you can always get the flowers the same distance apart by putting the cut-out portion of second flower over the flower previously stencilled.

In the leaf stencil you would not see where to put it unless you cut out say the centre of flowers on this plate, and that would guide you in placing the leaf stencil. The more plates in a stencil, the more particular you must be to have some key to guide you in placing the various plates in the right places, so that they fit accurately together and are the same distance apart. It is as well to cut two or three sections of a repeating stencil, as it avoids the continual shifting, and you get over the ground so much more rapidly.

You will find at first that the colour has a tendency to work under the stencils, but by keeping your brush tolerably dry and not too full of colour, you will with a little practice soon obviate this. Wipe the back of your stencils occasionally. Should the ties get broken, you can repair them by having some pieces of the varnished paper and varnishing

the stencil and the repairing strips. Don't stick them as soon as varnished, but when the varnish begins to dry and gets tacky.

In stencilling in distemper you must use powder colours, and mix them with hot size and whitening. Grind the powder colours up well before adding the whitening. We need hardly say you cannot combine oil and water colours. Distemper colours dry much lighter than they appear when wet, and it is as well to dry the tint you have mixed before the fire. Very frequently a colour that looks quite dark when wet dries very light.

In running lines at the edge of stencils it is as well to mark the line first of all with string rubbed with charcoal. When you have rubbed the string, get a friend to hold it down on the wall at one end and another at the other end, and by pulling it in the centre and allowing it to snap back an impression will be left by the string. You want a straight-edge, bevelled on one side, and you must use it the bevelled side against the wall. Have a nice stiff flat hog-hair brush, with the hair cut down and the edges trimmed off so that the brush is rounded. Fill it with colour and run it along the straight-edge by its flat side, putting as much pressure as is required to make the line the requisite thickness. If the line is to be very wide use larger brushes. Some shops keep lining fitches, and if you can get them it is better than cutting down brushes for yourself. Lining is merely a knack, and a little practice will overcome any difficulties you may encounter.

Stencilling need not be made as mechanical as some painters make it. I like to see a variety of colours in a stencil, and not just two or three tints. For instance, suppose you were stencilling the flowers in fig. 7 in white, you need not get all the flowers pure white. By making some a little yellower, some a little greyer, and slight variations of this kind, the general effect is greatly improved, for the eye soon wearies of monotony. For greens the same thing should be observed. Vary your greens as you go on with the stencilling, sometimes making them lighter, sometimes greyer, and so on. To effect this, have, say, two or three batches of different tints on your palette, and dip your brush into one and then into the other, and so blend two or three tints together. In filling your brush, spread the colour on the palette and knock the brush a few times on the palette. If your brush be too full, the colour will sure to run under the stencil.

One word about the colours of the paint or distemper. Let them be soft and subdued in tone, nor necessarily dark. Bright sunny colours, such as yellows, reds, warm greens, blue greens, and peacock blues, are so much more pleasing to the eye than crude blue, mauve, bright reds, and other staring colours. As we presupposed that the painting and distemping will be done by workmen, you should get them to leave their scaffolding for a few days, for stencilling is so much more easily done on scaffolding than on a pair of steps. You may find that you will have some trouble in getting the painters to mix up the colours you want your room painted in, but if you mix up the tint yourself they will usually match it if you insist upon having a certain colour.

In rooms where you have a high dado you can have this part of the wall rich and deep in colour, providing you have the upper portion of the wall very light. The light is reflected from the ceiling and frieze of a room and not from the lower portion of the walls.

Stencilling can be applied to many other purposes besides wall decoration, and we think it will well repay our readers to learn how to cut and use a stencil.

FRED MILLER.