

Some Experiments in Embroidery

For the beginner it is easy to discover what to avoid in this art of the needle. Firstly, there must be no competition with other arts. No realistic figures, with shading as subtle as a painting, should be attempted, and no *tour de force* of this kind, however its result may astonish the observer, seems quite justifiable in this particular medium.

And then it seems desirable that the Lamp of Sacrifice, which has been so much the guiding light of the embroiderer, should, perhaps, be dimmed a little in favour of the light which Reason brings. It is true that amongst the initiated in the mysteries of the craft the amount of work in a piece is considered very often as more important than the decorative effect, and a multitude of stitches is often admired as an evidence of the patience of the worker, who has sacrificed so many hours in producing a result which might have been obtained directly and simply by some other method. But the Lamp of Reason shows a

SOME EXPERIMENTS IN EMBROIDERY. BY M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT.

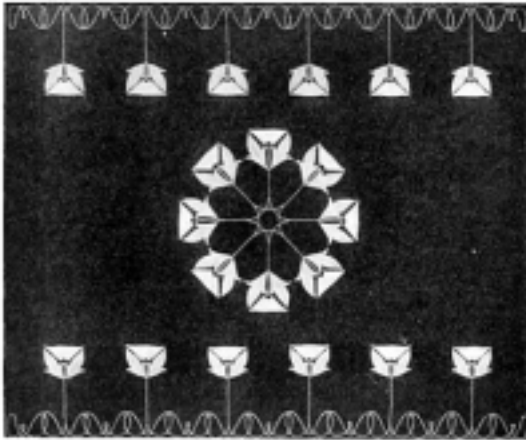
THE art of the needle presents several peculiarities which give it almost a place by itself amongst what are called the minor arts. To consult a handbook on the subject is to be somewhat bewildered and appalled by the many and intricate stitches which are used and recommended; and as in one of those old recipe books on how to sketch in water-colours one was informed that "burnt sienna is good for cows," so here certain stitches are recommended for certain flowers or leaves. As a beginner in the art, it seemed at any rate wise to restrict oneself in this matter of stitches—to adopt one, the simplest and most direct, and then only cautiously to admit the more intricate stitches into the scheme, learning and feeling the exact possibilities of each before proceeding to a more extended palette, feeling it better to maintain an assured command over a limited number than to be confused and bewildered by a multitude of methods.



PORTIÈRE

DESIGNED BY M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT; WORKED BY MISS BIRLEY

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BEDSPREAD
DESIGNED BY M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT
WORKED BY MISS EDITH ARNOLD

better way, and points out a short cut which leads to the same goal, which seems to suggest that the patient sacrifice which has been so admired may also be considered a little lacking in intelligence and reasonableness.

What is much to be desired in this as in other arts is not so much evidence of patience as evidence of the perception of beauty and an intelligent adaptation of means to ends.

What are the effects to be obtained by the needle which are peculiar, characteristic, and essential, and which can be obtained in no other way? That seems one of the first questions to be asked. If it is necessary to compete with the painter, what can we achieve with the needle that he cannot achieve with his brush?

There are many things. The sheen of silk, the glitter of jewels, the gleam of pearls, are not the least amongst them; and these jewels and pearls need not be "real," for the imitation jewel is not only cheaper, but generally quite as beautiful as the far-fetched original, which by some strange inconsistency is eagerly sought in remote corners of the earth when it could be quite easily manufactured at home.

It may be concluded that one of the essential features of the art of the needle is the display of the qualities of materials; and in considering a scheme for embroidery two ideas suggest themselves as the most obvious amongst its many possibilities.

The first is the idea of breadth of effect gained by the use of large pieces of material *appliqué*, and the second the idea of

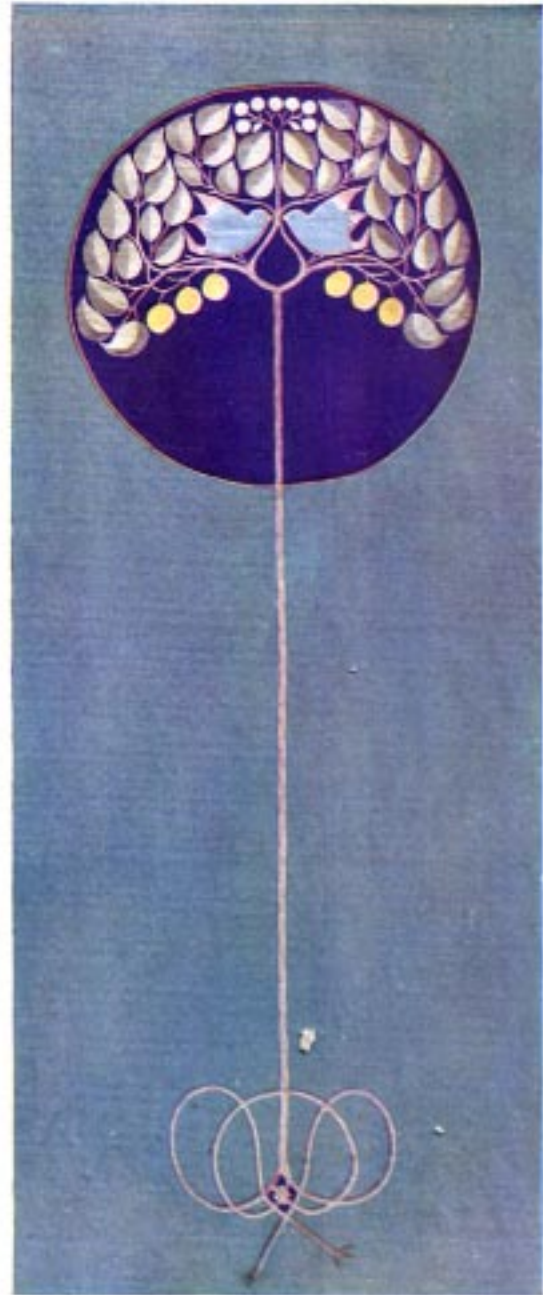
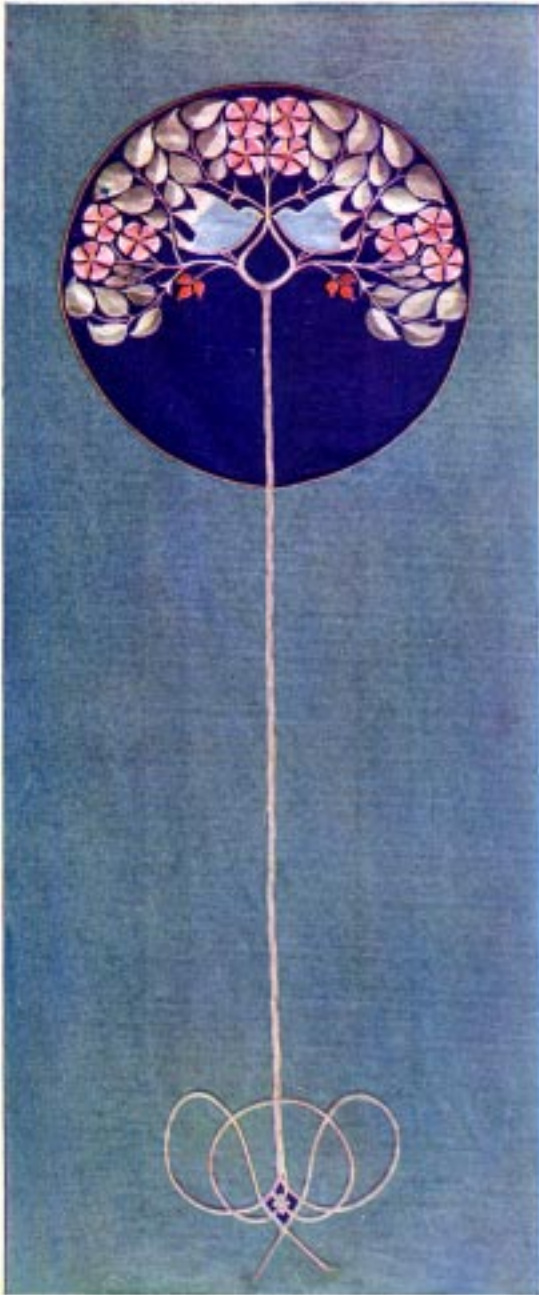
jewel-like preciousness to be gained by the concentrated use of gold and silver with jewels and silks. There would be many dangers and many difficulties, as well as much time not well lost, in squandering the richer and more precious effects over large surfaces; and so a reasonable basis for a scheme seems to be to use the simpler materials over the larger surfaces, and to concentrate in certain focal points the preciousness of the effect. In considering the matter from another point of view it may be as well to note that it is desirable at the outset to decide which of the three methods of decorative design is to be followed. Whether the design is to be (1) a dark pattern on a light ground, (2) a light pattern on a dark ground, or (3) a mosaic of tints in which neither ground nor pattern are relieved.

In the first two methods an outline may or may not be used, but in the mosaic method it is almost essential, to bind together and harmonise opposing tints. Combinations of all these methods may be adopted in the same piece of work, such as the introduction of a special piece of background to relieve more forcibly some portion of the design; but it is important to have this fundamental classification of methods clearly understood in deciding on a scheme, and, before thinking in colour, to think in light and shade.

In *appliqué* work it seems important that the applied pieces should be as large as may be and

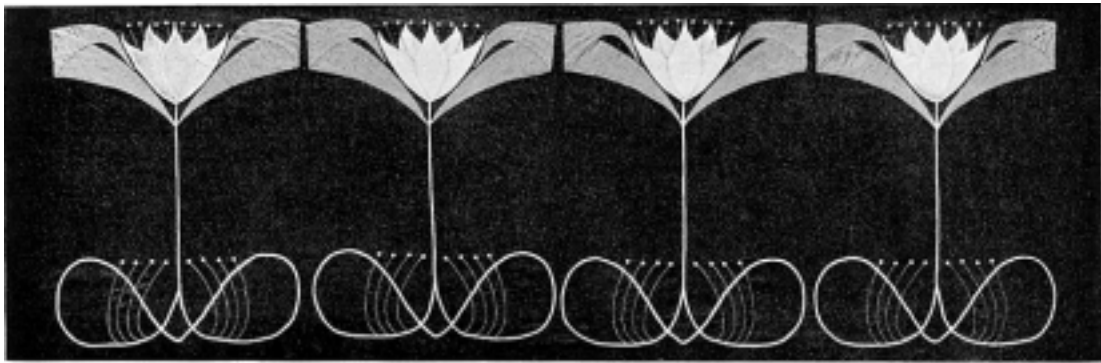


CUSHION COVER
DESIGNED BY M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT
WORKED BY MISS MILNE



EMBROIDERED PANELS DESIGNED BY M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT AND WORKED BY MRS. SCOTT.

Some Experiments in Embroidery



OVERMANTEL PANEL.

DESIGNED BY M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT; WORKED BY MRS. PEARCE

as simple in outline as possible. The method loses in reasonableness as soon as the pieces become small and the pattern more readily worked in stitches. The breadth of effect gained by using larger pieces is secured at the expense of richness, and the whole result may be a little tame and flat. And here the use of precious concentrated features will save the situation, and a green meadow, for instance, may be set with jewelled flowers.

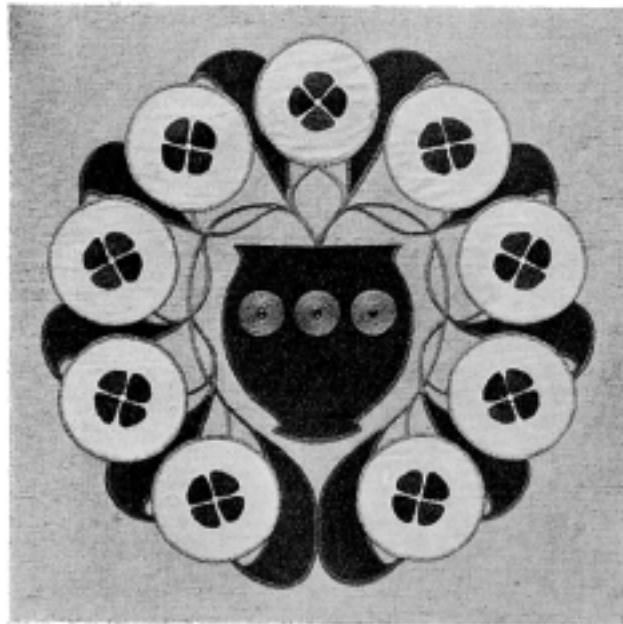
The most direct method of *appliqué* is to sew on the pieces with invisible thread, merely turning in the edges of the material. The next process is that which is sometimes called "peasant embroidery," probably because it is seldom practised by peasants and cannot be strictly described as embroidery. In this the outline is made a feature in the design, and, like the lead line in a stained glass window, separates the different materials. For such an outline there is safety in a neutral grey, but much variety of effect is to be gained by introducing various colours, though this more complicated system is not without its pitfalls for the unwary. The use of braids and ribbons, either of gold or silver or colours, at once suggests itself, and there is no necessity for classing the result of our labours as "Austrian ribbon-work," because it is found that the long stem which would need so many hours of stitching to embroider may be more readily executed with a braid or ribbon.

In turning to the consideration of embroidery proper, where the whole pattern is built up of stitches, a method which at once suggests itself is that one should take the individual stitch as

the unit of the design and build up patterns of that.

In this way much of the Oriental work was done, and there is something logical and reasonable in such a method that atones for the frittering away of the surface which it entails: it would be more suitable in connection with broad spaces of *appliqué*. Space will not admit or time allow of even an enumeration of the stitches used in embroidery, but the "satin stitch," as it is called, may be taken as the normal one to be used when in doubt.

In the consideration of the place of needlework in the house, it is necessary to remember that the embroidery should be made for the house, and not the house for the embroidery. It is this inversion, this



CUSHION

DESIGNED BY M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT
WORKED BY MISS MALLINSON

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topsyturvydom of modern ideas on decorative work which has turned the average house into a mere shelter for "art treasures."

Probably the reason for the melancholy which seizes one on entering a museum is largely due to the fact that one sees there a collection of objects divorced from their true use and function—treasures which were once the necessary household utensils of other days, and which were beautiful mainly in their adaptability for their uses. In the museum they are prisoned and doomed to idleness, like able-bodied paupers in a workhouse of the arts.

In the matter of embroidery, then, let our aim be to enrol the services of the needle in the great task of the adornment of the house, and so we shall find its first and most important use in the decoration of the walls of the rooms we live in; and here the use of broad *appliqué* will at once suggest itself. Or certain portions of the wall may be reserved for such decoration, notably over the fireplace, where the desirability of a rich background for ornaments may be noted. Next may be considered the advisability of embroidery on curtains, *portières*, and screens. Less desirable is decoration of this nature on such objects as upholstered furniture, and such things should be only so adorned in rooms which are for occasional

use or with patterns which are not easily soiled. In the bedroom embroidery may be used in the hangings and coverlet of the bed, and many smaller objects of household use may be adorned with needlework. Such are table covers, table centres, d'oyleys, and the like. In apparel, again, there is a limitless field for embroidery which can merely be mentioned here.

Embroidery in the garden may seem absurd at first; but much might be urged, if space allowed, for the use of simple and broadly designed flags, which in this cosmopolitan age need not, perhaps, be merely national, but some personal and individual symbol; and one may imagine the birthdays, for instance, of the members of a family each celebrated by the display of a particular and personal flag; while a further use for similar embroidery would be found in gay pavilions and tents.