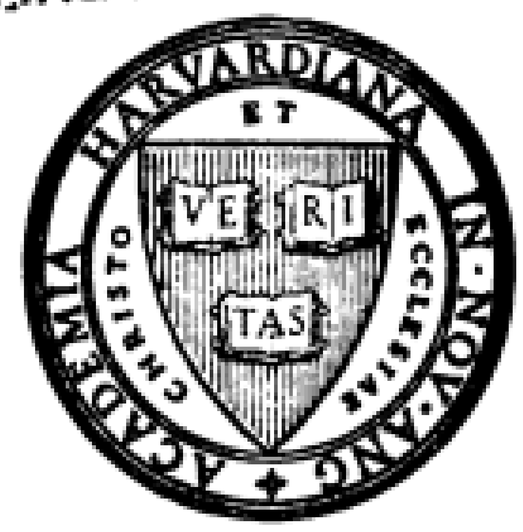
Digitized by Google
Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

FA 1207.4

TRANSFERRED TO
FINE ARTS LIBRARY



Harvard College Library

FROM

Moering Bequest

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ART

IN

ORNAMENT AND DRESS.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ART

IN

ORNAMENT AND DRESS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

CHARLES BLANC,

MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE, AND FORMERLY DIRECTOR OF FINE ARTS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

NEW YORK:

SCRIBNER, WELFORD, AND ARMSTRONG.

1877.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

H 2933
FA 1207.4

6 Sept. 1870.

Morning Session.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS.

THE GRAMMAR OF THE DECORATIVE ARTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION—THE GENERAL LAWS OF ORNAMENT	1
DIVISION OF THE WORK	47

PERSONAL ADORNMENT.

ON THE TENDENCY OF THE REPETITION OF VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL LINES TO ADD HEIGHT AND WIDTH TO THE HUMAN FIGURE	50
UNITY AN ELEMENT OF SIZE IN DRESS AND ORNAMENT	54
THE VALUE OF AMPLITUDE OR WIDTH IN DRESS	57
ON COLOURS AND THEIR EXPRESSION	60
THE HARMONY OF COLOURS IN DRESS	66
GENERAL REMARKS ON HAIR-DRESSING	73
HAIR-DRESSING AS A MARK OF CHARACTER IN MEN	74
ON THE VARIOUS FORMS OF HATS	85
HAIR-DRESSING IN WOMEN	98
CLOSE CONNECTION OF FASHION WITH THE HEAD-DRESS IN WOMEN	109
VARIATIONS IN MALE COSTUME	119
ON THE SELECTION OF THE MATERIAL IN A WOMAN'S DRESS	138
VARIATIONS IN FEMALE COSTUME	148
ON CHARACTER IN WOMEN'S DRESS	151
RULES TO WHICH THE ART OF DRESS IS SUBJECT	177

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

PAGE

ON THE ACCESSORIES OF THE TOILET—SHOES, GLOVES, THE FAN, ETC.—AND ON LACES, ETC. 187

ON THE VALUE IN ADORNMENT OF THE JEWELLER'S AND GOLDSMITH'S ARTS 226

ON DESIGN IN THE COMPOSITION OF A JEWEL 236

THE DECLINE OF SYMBOLISM IN JEWELLERY 246

ON THE UNSUITABILITY OF THE HUMAN FIGURE, CARVED IN RELIEF, TO BE WORN AS A JEWEL 249

ON THE USE OF ENAMELLING IN JEWELLERY. 252

ON THE ASSISTANCE TO JEWELLERS OF THE THEORY OF COLOURS 262

ON JEWELS IN THEIR RELATIONS TO SENTIMENT AND BEAUTY . 264

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS AN INDICATION OF MORALS AND OF THE REIGNING IDEAS OF THE PERIOD 267

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
VITRUVIAN SCROLL	4
GREEK FRET	5
TRIGLYPHS AND METOPES	10
EXAMPLE OF ALTERNATION IN ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE	11
EXAMPLE OF REPEATED INTERSECTION	17
SIMPLE INTERSECTION FORMING SYMMETRY	18
EXAMPLE OF REPEATED INTERSECTION	18
EXAMPLE OF A CIRCULAR PAVEMENT	20
EXAMPLE OF PROGRESSION IN PERSPECTIVE	23
EXAMPLE OF PROGRESSIVE ORNAMENT	24
JAPANESE ORNAMENT	29
EXAMPLE OF DECORATIVE CONFUSION	30
ORDER	45
BRUTUS, AFTER THE ANTIQUE	75
SARGON, KING OF ASSYRIA	78
CHARLES I.	80
BERRYER	83
BONAPARTE, CONSUL	84
HEAD-DRESS, SHOWING THE URÆUS, OF THE ANCIENT KINGS OF EGYPT	89
EGYPTIAN CAP	91
UNICORN CAP OF THE MIDDLE AGES	92
HAT OF CHARLES I.	94
EXTREME SEVERITY IN THE HEAD-DRESS	110
EXTREME COQUETRY IN THE HEAD-DRESS	111
HEAD-DRESS CALLED HENNIN	116

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

PAGE

THE HORIZONTAL STYLE OF HEAD-DRESS 117

THE OBLIQUE STYLE OF HEAD-DRESS 118

LOW ROUNDED BODICE 152

SQUARE-CUT BODICE 153

ODETTE BODICE 154

CORSELET AND BASQUES 155

DOLMAN, WITH PAGE SLEEVES 158

MÉDICIS RUFF 159

TURNED DOWN COLLAR AND BASQUES WITH FACINGS 160

GABRIELLE RUFF AND PUFFED SLEEVES 161

ODALISQUE SASH. DRESS WITH TRAIN AND GATHERED FLOUNCES . 164

MOBLOT 171

WATTEAU. SABOT SLEEVES; MARQUISE RUCHE 173

COSTUME DRESS 181

COSTUME CAMAÏEU 183

HAND SCREEN 195

DIFFUSED ORNAMENT 196

RADIATING DECORATION 196

SUNSHADE 198

RÉSEAU WITH SQUARE MESHES, USED IN VALENCIENNES LACE . . 202

RÉSEAU WITH HEXAGON MESHES, ALSO CALLED ROUND MESHES . 202

GUIPURE FOUNDATION IN BARRETTES 203

FOUNDATION OF FIVE HOLES, ALSO CALLED MARIAGE 204

FOND CHANT 204

POINT D'ESPRIT 206

POINT D'ALENÇON 211

BRUGES LACE 215

MALINES (MECHLIN) LACE 216

POINT DE GAZE, RÉSEAU AND FLEURS IN NEEDLE WORK . . . 217

BRUSSELS APPLIQUÉ. FLEURS MADE OF PILLOW LACE AND APPLIQUÉ ON TULLE 218

APPLIQUÉ MIXED WITH NEEDLE POINT 218

CHANTILLY 221

BLONDE 222

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

	PAGE
ROSE DIAMOND, FULL VIEW	229
ROSE IN PROFILE	229
BRILLIANT IN PROFILE	229
BRILLIANT, FULL VIEW	229
BRILLOLETTE	231
GEM CUT IN STEPS	234
GEM CUT TABLE SHAPE	234
STAR SHAPED CUTTING	234
PORTUGUESE CUTTING	234
SPECIMENS OF ALTERNATION AND RECURRENCE	239
PENDANT ATTRIBUTED TO BENVENUTO CELLINI	240
ENSEIGNE AND CARTOUCHE ATTRIBUTED TO BENVENUTO CELLINI	241
JEWELS RADIATING OR FAN-SHAPED	244
VARIOUS ETRUSCAN AND GRECO-ETRUSCAN JEWELS	245
EGYPTIAN JEWEL WITH HORUS EYES	247
ETRUSCAN JEWEL	248
GRECO-ETRUSCAN EAR-RINGS	251
JEWELLED PENDANT	252
JEWELLED BIRD	253
DRAGON-FLY IN DIAMONDS	254
IMITATION LACE NECKLACE COMPOSED OF BRILLIANTS	255
FASHION DURING THE REVOLUTION	268
FASHION DURING THE FIRST EMPIRE AND THE RESTORATION	269
HEAD-DRESSES DURING THE RESTORATION	271
FASHION DURING THE REIGN OF LOUIS-PHILIPPE	272
MODERN COSTUME	273

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ART IN ORNAMENT AND DRESS.

PART I.

THE GRAMMAR OF THE DECORATIVE ARTS.

INTRODUCTION.

THE GENERAL LAWS OF ORNAMENT.

NATURE, viewed in the grand spectacles, permanent or ephemeral, which she offers to our eyes, is not beautiful, but she is sublime. She is not beautiful, because she lacks the three conditions of beauty—order, proportion, and unity. Neither the stars in the firmament, nor the trees in the forests, nor the rivers in their courses, nor the ocean imprisoned within its bounds, nor the continents in the irregularity of their outlines, and the upheavals of their surface, present any apparent regularity or visible order. The immutable laws which govern both cosmical phenomena, and the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, only manifest themselves in the succession of ages, and exist but in mental contemplation and the record of history. Order then is wanting in nature seen on a grand scale, that is to say, a visible order, since it is impossible for us to seize at one glance,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

as in a picture, the alternation of day and night, the recurrence of the seasons, the periodical motion of the planets, and the rhythm which governs the universe.

It is only in her lesser works that nature begins to be beautiful, because in these only she exhibits order, takes pleasure in symmetry, offers to us perceptible unities and sensible harmonies. At the outset, in her lowest kingdom, she reveals in crystallisation an astonishing regularity, a mysterious geometrical design. Next, order is apparent in a more general, connected, and striking manner, when we observe the vegetable kingdom. Proportion is not there as yet, proportion, properly so called, that is to say, the condition of a body in which all its members have a common relation among themselves, and to the whole. We know that the size of a tree cannot be determined from the dimensions of its branches, as the stature of a man from the measure of his hand or his foot. Many plants, however, are regular in their forms, affect symmetrical arrangements, and are ornamented with admirable delicacy. Lastly comes the animal kingdom, in which proportion plainly declares itself, the law of numbers is manifest, symmetry is self-evident, and its very movements obey in their freedom, an intentional equilibrium, and an inexorable rhythm. So as creation rises in the scale, order becomes more complicated, abundant, striking, and marvellous.

But the word *order* is only used here as a generic term to express what is common to all things adorned by nature. The regularity of her lesser works, and the charm which she has thrown around them, proceed from principles, distinct enough, but very few in number;

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and as these distinct principles are the inevitable elements of all ornament of man's invention, it is of consequence to have a precise acquaintance with them, to distinguish them well one from the other, and to reduce them to their simplest elements, carefully avoiding confounding those that are *primary* with those that are not so.

Moreover, there can be no nobler satisfaction to the mind than to be able to unravel what is beyond measure complicated, to diminish what is apparently innumerable, and to reduce to a few clear points what was involved in a maze of obscurity.

Just as the twenty-six letters of the alphabet have been and will be sufficient to form the words necessary for the expression of all human thought, so certain elements, susceptible of combination amongst themselves, have sufficed and will suffice to create ornaments, whose variety may be multiplied indefinitely. In fact, the numberless methods which men have invented to this day, and which they will continue to invent for the adornment of their persons, their dwellings, or their temples, owe their existence to the application of one of the five following principles:—

REPETITION, ALTERNATION, SYMMETRY, PROGRESSION, AND CONFUSION.

Such are the primary sources to which we may reduce all ornaments of which the idea has been borrowed from nature, and which man has subjected to the law of his intelligence, and to his own free control.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

REPETITION.

However "*divers et ondoyant*" he may be, as Montaigne says, man is essentially a being all of a piece. The eyes of his body correspond to those of his mind. To act upon his mind we must use the same means as in exciting his physical sensations. A single prick of a pin is nothing, but a hundred such can rouse the sensitiveness of our organs. Thus it is that everything that appeals to our feelings acquires an astonishing power by the simple reiteration of the active cause. We see how the same mode of procedure is found in all the arts, in architecture, sculpture, and painting, as well as in music, literature, and poetry.

The simplest mode of decorating a surface is by the repetition of any given figure. Any form, however insignificant in itself, becomes interesting by repetition, at first because the artist by repeating it forces us to take notice of it, and reveals an intention which would have escaped our observation without this repetition; and next, because number often suggests thoughts which unity would not have originated.

For example, the repetition of a spiral ornament on a pedestal, a column, or the border of a panel, awakens in us the idea of one object pursuing another. Hence has arisen the name of *postes* (Vitruvian scroll), given to that

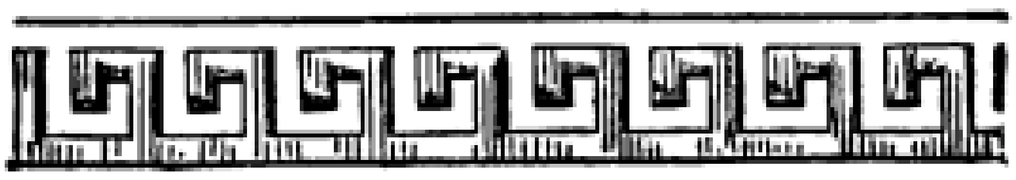
VITRUVIAN SCROLL.

series of running volutes which we meet with so fre-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

quently on architraves in architecture, and also in iron-work, goldsmiths' work, and pottery. These spirals also remind us of the succession of the waves of the sea, and the imaginative poet may see in them by analogy, a troop of maidens pursuing each other in space, not frivolously, but in cadence, as if executing a sacred dance. And if such an ornament be used round a large vase, the spiral seems endless, because the convexity of the vase hiding from us part of its leading lines, our imagination sees them in constant, nay, in perpetual pursuit of each other round the amphora.

Let us now suppose the succession of these curved lines changed into a succession of straight lines, and we shall have a different expression, owing its power, however, to the same principle, and appearing as severe as the other was graceful. Bent always at the same angle, and at equal distances, these bare lines form the winding ornament called the *Greek fret*, and they become imposing because they have a processional character, and



GREEK FRET.

seem to obey a mysterious order, or to conform to the rhythm of a grave, slow, and ceremonial harmony.

It is from repetition that all architectural ornaments borrow their external aspect, their interest in our eyes, and their sway over our feelings. A series of discs in relief, or of circles moulded hollow, at greater or less distances, adorn a frieze agreeably enough. The mere repetition of triglyphs produces a spirited and marked

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

decoration on the entablature of the Doric temple. It wanted nothing but a simple unbroken series of mutules to give animation to the cornice of the Parthenon, and successive rows of small cones called *guttæ*, to enrich the soffit. The dull square, the hard and frigid cube, become ornamental as soon as they are set in a row; so much so, that the architect employs them to form the tooth-like ornament in the richest of the three orders—the Corinthian. A repetition of roses, accompanied by a chaplet of beads, formed a sufficient decoration of the Ionic portico of the Erechtheum at Athens.

Is it necessary to speak of the part played in music by the recurrence of the first bars, that renewal of the theme, *da capo*, which is indispensable if one wishes to feel the effect of music in all its fulness? What do I say! To move us powerfully, nothing more is needed than rhythm, that is to say the repetition, accelerated or diminished, of a sound with vibration or without. The tolling of a bell sounding for a long time the same note, at equal intervals, may produce a profound and solemn impression, and there are moments when the three beats of the recall, repeated on the drum, cause all faces to grow pale.

But what then is rhyme, the talisman of the poet, save the intentional reiteration of the same sound, and this reiteration lends so much charm to poetry, that the pleasure of the ear is more vivid when the repetition is immediate, as in this stanza from "*Les Orientales:*"

"Elle est là, sous la feuillée,
Éveillée
Au moindre bruit de malheur,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Et rouge pour une mouche
Qui la touche
Comme une grenade en fleur."

Yes, this intentional repetition, which is rhyme, constitutes the ennobling power of the poetic vesture of ideas.

Every one knows the effect produced in literature by repetition, and how much it adds to the cry of passion, or to the fascination of oratory. The force of the imprecations of Camilla, in Corneille's tragedy, is owing to the repetition of the word *Rome*, and when Mirabeau cries; "La banqueroute, la banqueroute est là! et vous délibérez!" he just redoubles the striking effect of his eloquence.

So it is in the art of the painter, and in that of the sculptor. When we survey the ancient monuments of Egypt, abounding as they do in coloured reliefs or surface paintings, we are often arrested by a group of figures in simultaneous and rhythmical action, all executing the same movement, the same gesture, and the same sign. When this action is not purely material, such as leading animals, threshing out corn, or carrying bricks; when this action, I say, is in harmony with the sentiment, when it expresses for example, worship or prayer, or the humility of a band of weeping captives prostrating themselves at the feet of the conqueror, their hands raised to him in supplication, this rhythmic movement partakes of a religious character, and the repetition of the gesture seems to bring it within the pale of sacred rites. The spectacle becomes solemn, nay, almost sublime.

Can we wonder then that rhythm should have so much

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

influence on the decorative arts, and that the repetition of an unimportant figure, of a moulding insignificant in itself, should possess the marvellous property of forming an agreeable, significant, brilliant, and striking ornament.

Here we not only touch upon one of the most essential conditions of human existence, but upon one of the great laws of universal life, where we see years repeat themselves eternally, marked by the constant recurrence of the seasons; days, marked by the perpetual return of dawn and twilight; and nights, marked by the interval which separates the twilight from the dawn. Once more it is only by our inner consciousness and by our memory that we are cognizant of these great laws. The order which governs the progression of the universe, and in particular the movements of our own planet, does not fall within the range of our senses; while on the contrary, the order that nature observes in the creation of her lesser works, appeals to our bounded vision and yields it a refined pleasure. So the regularity which constitutes the ornament of the universe is a source of admiration to our mind only, while the beauty of the humblest flower gives enjoyment to our understanding and our sight.

There is no principle which appears more frequently in the ornamental works of nature than repetition, and next to repetition, alternation.

ALTERNATION.

Variety is, like repetition, one of the great laws of the universe, and these two great laws are combined in alternation, which is in fact a blending of repetition and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

variety. There may be repetition without alternation, but there can be no alternation without repetition. Alternation then, is the succession of two different objects recurring regularly in turn. If, for example, a circle be placed after a square, and this is repeated a certain number of times, we shall have an alternation of figures. If we put in a piece of stuff, a stripe of blue by the side of a stripe of green, and if this juxtaposition be several times repeated, we shall have an alternation of colours.

The order in which the appearance and the disappearance of light succeed each other periodically, is an alternating repetition which naturally brings about the invariable alternation of waking and sleeping hours, of activity and repose; and as this law is inherent in human nature, we must expect to see traces of it in everything that emanates from man. As the soil cannot long nourish the same plant, and requires a rotation of crops, so man is compelled from fear of satiety to vary the nourishment for his body, as well as the food for his mind, and the necessity of breaking through fixed habits is almost as closely bound up with his happiness as is the necessity of following them. Alternation therefore is to be found in other arts besides those which relate to decoration.

The poet, for example, will increase the spirit of his rhymes by crossing them, that is to say by making a feminine follow a masculine rhyme, as in these lines:

"Les vierges au sein d'ébène,
Belles comme les beaux soirs,
Riaient de se voir à peine
Dans le cuivre des miroirs."—V. H.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Not satisfied with variegated flowers, the gardener often likes to vary his borders with anthemis and helio trope alternately, or it may be with an alternation of scarlet and crimson geraniums.

Music, so despotically governed by the principle of repetition, owes sometimes a great deal to alternation. In the opera of the *Muette* when we come to the air written to these words :

" Conduis ta barque avec prudence,
Pêcheur, parle bas ;
Jette tes filets en silence,
Pêcheur, parle bas :
Le roi des mers ne t'échappera pas,
Le roi des mers ne t'échappera pas,"

the ear is pleased by a light phrase which alternates with a graver one, and the theme loses itself to perfection in a brilliant repetition.

The Greek architect gives animation to the aspect of the Doric frieze by a succession of triglyphs and

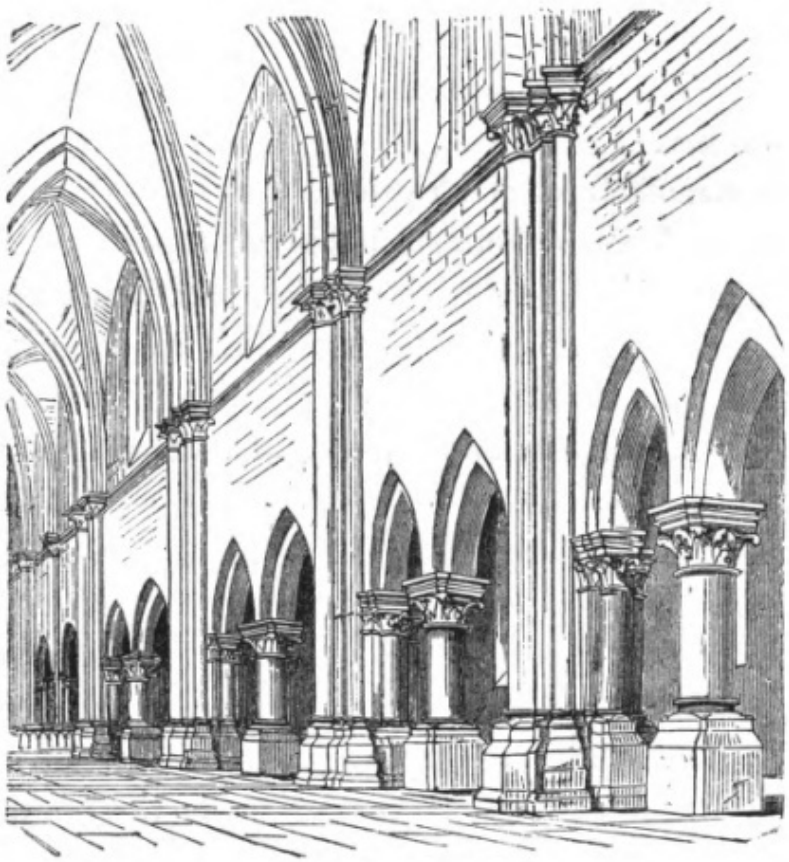
TRIGLYPHS AND METOPES.

metopes, and to give a marked distinction to the difference between these two repeated ornaments, he carves on the metopes, combats, horses, centaurs, or else pateræ or chaplets, so as to bring out more clearly by the opposition of curved lines the rigidity of the vertical lines of the triglyph. Moreover, we must not forget, that the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

word alternation comes from *alter*, another, and consequently owes its origin to that taste for variety which is perhaps as keen in the human mind as is the love of repetition. It is to meet this taste that the neck of the Ionic column is so often ornamented with palm leaves alternating with the "lis marin," and terminated by a border of beads, or more correctly speaking, by a chaplet composed of almonds and olives, each olive being followed by two almonds.

To the same principle may be referred the plan of



EXAMPLE OF ALTERNATION IN ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE.

construction so frequent among the Arabs, in which layers, alternately of white and black marble, or else

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

painted white and red, give variety to the appearance of certain edifices, such as the mosques of Cairo and the walls of Damascus. In Romanesque architecture, the artist loves to decorate his arcades, sometimes by an alternation of projections, sometimes by an alternation of colours. When he wishes to break the continuity of the massive pillars of a long nave, which would otherwise obstruct the view, he places an isolated column after each of the pillars flanked by four columns, and by thus piercing the line of supports he allows the eye to see through and lose itself in the obscure depths of the side aisles. In this manner he obtains by alternation a poetical effect as well as the pleasure the eye derives from variety.

The manufacturer of striped tissues makes use of two alternate colours, sometimes boldly contrasted, as in yellow stripes side by side with violet, sometimes alike in colour but differing in shade, as in dark and light blue.

Occasionally in stuffs of a single hue, variety is gained by the mere contrast of brilliancy and dulness, as when for instance, a black dress has stripes of a satin-like lustre, alternating with stripes of a dull tone like velvet.

The Egyptians who made more use of repetition than of alternation, did not however discard this latter mode of decoration in the ceilings and cornices of their temples, or in their pottery and jewellery. We find amongst them vases decorated all round the neck, with animals alternately red and black; and jewels composed of an eye and a cross alternately. Sometimes the alternation is so complicated that the same figure or the same colour only recurs after several others, but always in

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

regular order and at equal distances. A band of yellow for example, will be followed by three bands, one of light green, one of red, and the other light blue, and this order being repeated all along the scotia, the band of yellow, supposing it were the first in order, will re-appear the fifth, the ninth, the thirteenth, and the seventeenth.

Unity may in this manner alternate with different numbers, but only on condition that these numbers shall not exceed, or scarcely exceed, the numbers below ten; otherwise we should not be sensible of the alternation, and the periodical return of the same figure or the same colour, ceasing to arrest our attention, would only have the appearance of a caprice or a whim.

Lastly, the simple disposition of the subject may introduce an agreeable variety into that which is only repetition. This is the effect produced by a series of stars, bouquets, or flowers arranged in lozenges in the pattern of a wall-paper, imitating the order of trees planted in a quincunx. Each floret in this case will be at the extremity of a V or in the centre of an X, in such a way that it follows and forsakes alternately the vertical line on which it was at first placed. Thus it may happen that the distribution of the subject without any variety of either figure or colour, may break the uniformity of a decorated surface, so much so as to resemble an alternation. There are in the Basilica of Saint Mark, at Venice, pavements which represent white lozenges disposed on a red ground, following lines intersecting each other at right angles, in such a manner that the lozenge is sometimes on one line, sometimes on another, or if you will, sometimes vertical sometimes horizontal. From its

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

arrangement therefore, the design of this mosaic may be said to hold a place between the two styles and to belong to both of them.

We have already seen of what importance in decoration is the economy of its subjects, since the character of the design may be entirely changed without the slightest alteration of either the figures or the colours of which it is composed, merely by a movement as on a chess-board, and may excite different sensations, or awaken in the mind fresh thoughts simply by the inclination or the reversal of the figure.

In its relation to feeling, alternation is less elevated in its character than repetition: the latter may be almost sublime, the former never passes the limits of beauty. Variety in unity is in fact one of the sources of beauty, but if alternation has more piquancy and charm, repetition has more grandeur. When we hear in Egypt the monotonous music of the Arabs, which consists in the perpetual repetition of a few notes, and which has so happily inspired the author of *Le Désert*, the impression, at first gay and lively, becomes gradually grave, and finally solemn: one forgets the dance, nay, even the music itself, and the mind is plunged into a deepening reverie, which changes what at first was pleasure into a sort of mental intoxication, and leads the Almées on to the delirium of the dance and the dervishes to their ecstasy.

SYMMETRY.

Passing from the vegetable to the animal kingdom by means of those insensible transitions we so often

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

find in nature, we see a constant reproduction of a species of repetition which, without being absolutely new, is altogether singular,—I mean *symmetry*. When we are brought face to face with a living being, it seems to be composed of two parts which have been united down a central line, and these two parts, alike, without being identical, correspond in such a manner that the right side if folded over the left would cover it exactly, in the same way as one hand can cover the other. This similitude, or rather this perfect correspondence, is just that which we generally call symmetry.

But the original meaning of the word symmetry, according to its Greek etymology, meant the state of a body of which all the members have a common measure amongst themselves (*σὺν μετρόν*); that is to say, it signified what we mean by proportion. Moreover these two things have so near a relationship to each other, that the words proportion and symmetry are almost interchangeable, because a symmetrical animal is always well-proportioned, and a well-proportioned animal is always symmetrical. Lastly, in a more general and extended sense, we give the name of symmetry to any disposition of several objects arranged in a perceptible and pleasing order.

The human figure, I mean the external conformation of the human body, having been constructed on a symmetrical plan, man desires to find outside himself the order of which he is in his own person so striking an image. More than that, symmetry exists in his mind as well as in his body, since the organ of his judgment, which is reason, obeys a kind of moral equilibrium which

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

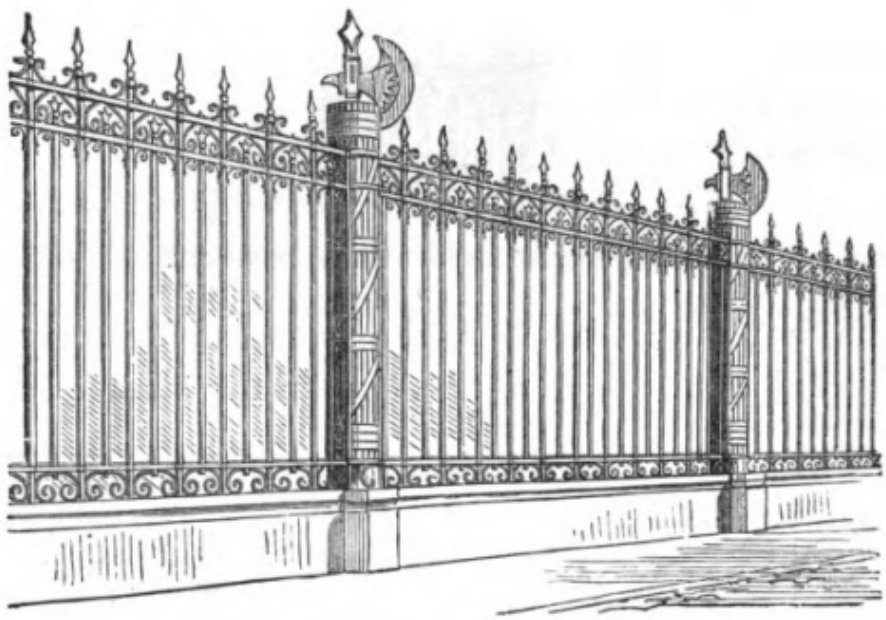
is logic. A decoration, without symmetry, or at any rate without a latent balance, would appear to us one-eyed or halting, and so would offend our sight as not being in accordance with our understanding. A temple having its principal entrance in a corner of the building, would seem to us outrageous, because its façade would bear no resemblance to the aspect of the human face. If it is the rule that the anterior peristyle of an edifice be always composed of an even number of columns, it is in order that the intercolumniations, three, five, seven, or nine in number, may have a centre where the great door should be placed.

This need of symmetry in an edifice is so imperative, and has been so keenly felt by artistic nations, that the Athenians the better to mark the central point of the façade of the Parthenon, took care that the space between the middle columns should be wider than between the others, while to right and left of the door the columns were closer and closer together. The architect, instead of making symmetry apparent by equal spaces as is done in the present day, accomplished his purpose in an artistic and striking manner, by the equal repetition of unequal distances. We are speaking here of the decoration of public buildings, for private houses may sometimes dispense with symmetry when there exists a necessity for its abandonment. We have an example of this in the Hôtel Pourtalès, at Paris, built near the Madeleine, from the design of M. Duban. This distinguished architect, having only a narrow plot of ground at his disposal, boldly and skilfully avoided placing the door in the centre of the building, lest

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

symmetry should oblige him to pierce the façade with apertures too mean or too near together, or the internal arrangement should be upset by the studied regularity of the exterior. But the world in general so keenly desire symmetrical arrangement, that we see houses every day with false windows, simply out of deference to public taste.

One method of introducing symmetry into an ornament which as yet is only marked by repetition, is by introducing *intersection.* Ziegler (*Études Céramiques*) gives this name to that style of ornament produced by one object intersecting another. For example, if the



EXAMPLE OF REPEATED INTERSECTION.

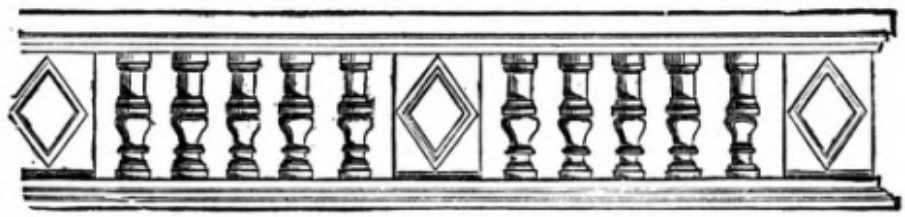
series of spears composing a railing be interrupted by a fasces or a pillar surmounted by a vase, the fasces or the pillar will form an *intersection.* So with the pilasters which break at regular intervals the continuity of a balustrade, like that with which Perrault has crowned

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the façades of the Louvre. The eye or the rose which cuts the horizontal divisions of the abacus in the Corinthian capital is a happy example of intersection, because while indicating a centre or a vertical line between two similar and corresponding parts, it introduces a perceptible symmetry on the face of the capital.

SIMPLE INTERSECTION FORMING SYMMETRY.

In fact, when the intersection is repeated, it may be regarded as a form of alternation, for the pilaster inter-



EXAMPLE OF REPEATED INTERSECTION.

secting a balustrade, and the fasces intersecting a railing, really alternate with a set of balusters and a set of spears; but, in this case, symmetry is made more apparent by means of repetition, since we have over and over

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

again two rows of spears equal in height and size, one to the right and one to the left of each fasces, which answers to the common definition of the word *symmetry*. It seems to us then that Ziegler is mistaken in reckoning intersection among the principles of ornamentation. It is clear in fact from the examples that we have given and from those that he gives, that the intersecting object forms a kind of alternation when it is repeated, and of symmetry when it is singular.

What is true of architecture, considered as decorative beauty, is no less true of those ornaments with which we enrich the objects that give a charm to our habitations and our everyday life. Pavements, carpets, hangings, wall-papers, pottery, and iron-work, are all subject to the same law, so much so that even those artists who seem to have purposely forgotten it, like the Japanese, are not without respect for it, as shown in their substituting with delicacy and taste, equilibrium for symmetry, for the love of order co-exists in the human mind with the strongest desire for freedom. If we compare a Greek or Chinese with a Japanese vase, however different the styles of decoration may be, they will bear a distant but appreciable resemblance to each other, in this sense, that the Japanese artist, much less faithful to symmetry than the Greeks and the Chinese, will nevertheless have preserved a secret balance in the extreme whimsicality of his composition. See him lay, as if by chance, on a lacquered tray or a porcelain plate, this or that design, which will extend over one corner only of the ornamented surface: he will seldom fail to put in the vacant space, a crane, a blackbird, or a line of thin clouds, which will

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

be enough to balance the picturesque view, and prevent it, so to speak, from falling to pieces.

The design of a pavement, whether it be simply repeated or its effect heightened by alternation, must be symmetrical, because the eye likes to find either in the intersection of the dominant lines, or in a central figure, the diagonals of the pavement if it is rectangular, and the point of convergence of its rays if it is circular.

EXAMPLE OF A CIRCULAR PAVEMENT.

By discovering a symmetrical arrangement in the pavement of a vestibule, for example, the spectator concludes that the axis of the pavement is identical with, or parallel to, the axis of the building. Made evident to him by this symmetry, the unity of one part of the building leads him to understand the unity of the whole. The better to comprehend this fact, which, however, scarcely needs demonstration, let us imagine in the pavement of a square hall, a star placed outside the centre, or else

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

compare a corner paved in squares with a semicircle the pavement of which is fan-shaped.

Symmetry, like repetition, whenever it strikes the eye, has something about it grave and imposing. It is, *par excellence*, the ornament of civil and religious ceremonies; it lends a national solemnity to the combined movements of a squadron, and to the evolutions of an army. This it is which gave an air of majesty to the gardens of Lenôtre, and which mingled dignity with grace in the minuet of our ancestors. This it is which, strengthening the spirit of order and of family union, makes us feel instinctively in a private house the calmness and worth of its inhabitants; this it is, lastly, which gives the greatest distinction to the festivities with which we wish to do honour to esteemed or illustrious guests.

PROGRESSION.

A poet stretched on the grass and indulging in dreams of reverie is gradually aroused by an indistinct noise, which though it as yet appears very distant, makes him listen attentively. It seems to him that this noise increases insensibly, and draws nearer. Casting his eyes around him, he perceives a storm gathering on the verge of the horizon, and which the wind is driving towards him. The clouds advance, the distant mutterings become more frequent and less indistinct. The sun disappears, the day grows gloomy, the sky is overcast, the darkness increases, the sound is more and more distinct; and at last the storm breaks forth, the clouds are rent asunder, and after a terrific rolling, the thunder clap bursts. . .

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Here we have a description of increasing progression in the sublime decorations of nature.

But such a progression is not perceptible all at once; for it we require the lapse of hours, and a continued series of impressions, which is not so in the case of ornaments invented by man: they must be seen like a picture, *d' une seule fenêtre*, to use the words of Leonardo da Vinci, or at least they must be perceived in their entirety, so that the mental gaze may have anticipated them before the eye has seen them in their completeness, otherwise unity would be wanting, and where unity is wanting there is no art.

Let us suppose a series of colours from the darkest to the lightest, disposed in stripes on a surface which we wish to ornament, ranging, for example, from the darkest violet to the most brilliant yellow, or, if we please, from simple black to pure white: we shall have here an increasing progression, which, viewed reversely, would be a decreasing progression. "When the branches of a plant," says Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, "are disposed on a uniform plan of diminishing size, as in the pyramidal shape of the pine, there is progression. And if these trees be placed in long avenues diminishing in height and colour, as each tree does in itself, our pleasure is redoubled, because progression here becomes infinite. It is owing to this instinct of infinity that we take pleasure in looking at anything that presents progression to us, like nurseries in different stages of growth, the slopes of hills retreating to the horizon at different levels, interminable perspectives. . . ."

Perspectives! these are nothing more than highly

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

attractive examples of progression, which, when made use of in the decoration of a theatre, produce an illusion always delightful. Here again the natural phenomena of optics have taught us a science of which the genius of ornament has made an art. When we see at the extremity of the great enclosed court of a palace, an avenue of trees lengthening out the space or the distance as far as the

EXAMPLE OF PROGRESSION IN PERSPECTIVE.

eye can reach, we experience sometimes a double pleasure, first of all that of being deceived, and then that of becoming aware of the deception.

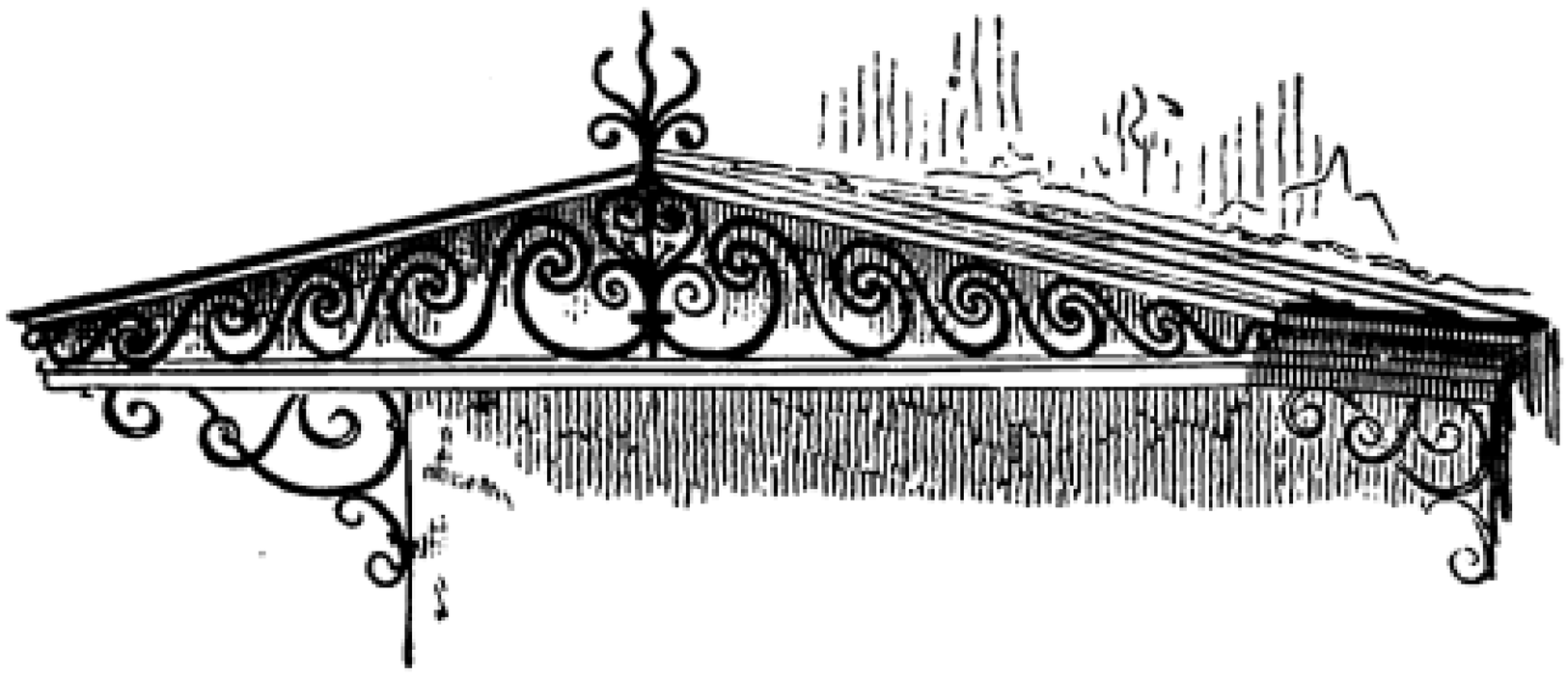
And if the illusions of a simulated perspective are especially attractive when they hide the bareness of an indispensable wall, and change the appearance of a solid surface which would have offended the sight—one sees many examples of this at Bologna,—how could we do without the illusion produced by progression in the real

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

perspective of a large garden, when a straight avenue leading to a group of statues, a summer-house, or a grotto, gives to the eye the poetic pleasure which belongs to the indistinctness of distant objects, and the mysterious effect of depth.

There is no more suitable decoration for pyramidal surfaces, such as pediments, than a progressive ornament. The triangle formed by the front of the awning which shelters, with its glass roof, the steps leading to a door would be more suitably ornamented by an increasing and decreasing progression of a single figure, than by an ornament of volutes, some in one direction and some in another: the former of these ornaments would add to the effect of progression that of an intentional repetition, made more remarkable by being progressive; the latter would simply be a meaningless jumble of twisted iron intended to fill up a blank space.

This artifice of progression is universally employed: the architect, the poet, the musician, and the orator



EXAMPLE OF PROGRESSIVE ORNAMENT.

make use of it to produce impressions which would be unattainable without it. Jacob's mysterious ladder was

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a progression that appeared to the patriarch in a dream and raised his thoughts from earth to heaven. The pyramids of Lower Egypt, built as they are in steps, are examples of the principle of progression, as are also the terraces in tiers of the gardens of Semiramis at Babylon, and the interminable stairs which led to the platforms of Persepolis—in fact the greater number of monuments designed in former times to embellish not only towns but also provinces. Again, have we not an example of progression in the swelling rhythm used in dramatic music, that *crescendo* which gently possessing itself of the least responsive soul, and warming it by degrees without giving it time to recover itself, causes it to rise with irresistible power to the paroxysm of passion as expressed by the crashes and outbursts of the orchestra?

In written and in spoken language, there are similar artifices made use of to carry away the mind from one extreme to another, from the most peaceful to the most terrible of ideas. A grave moralist, Boiste, in the dictionary which bears his name, gives this fine specimen of progression—"Temper leads to impatience, impatience to anger, anger to rage, rage to violence, violence to crime, and by this progression we pass from an arm-chair to the scaffold."

Smoother and more simple in character are the progressions made use of by the decorative artist. To speak correctly, this element is only employed in the decoration of buildings and towns, or else to give a lofty expression to national festivals, or to those great ceremonies intended to inspire a nation with a feeling of its dignity, and to give it an idea of its duty to justice and

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to itself. In the celebrated festival of the Supreme Being, of which Louis David had the arrangement, the altar of *la Patrie*, placed on the summit of a mountain, formed the termination of a progression which was imposing when the members of the Convention were seen advancing majestically and ascending slowly, carrying bouquets of ears of corn and flowers.

Progression then is only a mode of setting the mind in motion, and carrying it, in spite of itself, to a point where it will receive a strong impression which would not have struck it unawares or without preparation. It is for the artist a royal progress, whether he gives size to a garden by means of retreating lines, or imitates the skill of the Egyptian architect, who led the eye through solemn avenues of sphinxes to the portals of the Theban temples, and afterwards by rows of columns to the doors of closed and dim sanctuaries.

CONFUSION.

Although Order is the sovereign law of the decorative arts, Confusion may also play a useful part in ornament and even come into operation as an equivalent of Order itself. "A fine disorder is often an effect of art," says Boileau, but before he had said this, Nature had shown it. By the charm which she has thrown into the careless foliage of the trees, by the way in which she has spotted the granite, variegated the jasper, and embellished marbles with irregular veins and unexpected touches of colour, she has presented us with charming models of decorative confusion. Every day we see women pass by dressed in Astracan fur, the sole beauty of which consists in the

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

confused arrangement of the hair, which, naturally curled, is divided into irregular ringlets, turning in every direction, and forming brilliant wavelets on a black ground.

The leaf of the St. John's wort is ornamented with exquisite delicacy, when we see in the sunlight its little transparent points which give it the effect of being pierced with a thousand holes. But it is essential to remark that in this example, as in others, confusion should be balanced, that is to say, should have a latent equilibrium running through all the ornaments scattered upon the object ornamented. If these transparent points were not distributed upon the perforated leaf so as to shine a little everywhere, if all the large holes were on one side and all the small ones on the other, the balance would be defective, and the eye, therefore, offended. That which is a delicate ornament would be nothing more than a curious freak.

Looking at certain frescoes of Raphael as simple mural decoration, we become aware of this law, the knowledge of which the great painter possessed intuitively; and we admire the way in which the numerous figures of *The School of Athens*, which seem, some of them to be accidentally isolated, and others to be grouped by the mere chance of a sympathy of feeling or a casual encounter, really form masses which, in spite of their apparent want of arrangement, balance each other, and supply what was wanting in symmetry.

Let us remember, however, that it is not for man to employ confusion as a decorative element with the same freedom that appears in the works of Nature on a large

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

scale. The country, which in the spring is covered with buttercups, primroses, and blue hyacinths, has no regular boundaries of its own. If agriculture and the jealousy of property had not divided and enclosed it with formal divisions, it would present no order in its outlines. Confusion in this case is not only in the flowers sown in the tender green with no apparent regularity, it exists also in the whole plan of the meadows. So it is with the stars scattered by handsful in the skies by an invisible sower. So also with the woods with which Nature has covered spontaneously uncultivated tracts. If we look at them from an eminence we see a multitude of trees of different sorts, arranged at random, which have grown up in disorder close together or apart, scattered or in groups, and which nevertheless form an agreeable array, but as a decoration without beginning and without end. So the Confusion which embellishes the great spectacles of the universe is not redeemed by any design that we can possibly grasp: it forms part of a plan whose equilibrium escapes us, and whose immensity confounds us. On the contrary, the ornaments with which man embellishes his works would not have the appearance of disorder were they not circumscribed by a frame which marks the boundaries, gives regularity to the area, and thereby indirectly produces symmetry. When the Japanese artist ornaments the angles and corners of a box in black lacquer with a landscape in gold, he deems it useless to dispose his subjects in regular order, because he reckons on the regularity of the box to balance the whimsicality of a decoration so strangely distributed. The artist is at liberty to employ confusion because the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

cabinet maker had kept in view geometrical arrangement.

I have seen at Cairo carpets which the Oriental colourist had sown with chrysanthemums on a quiet

JAPANESE ORNAMENT.

ground, where varieties of green and dark yellow were blended, to imitate the effect of a meadow glistening with daisies like stars fallen from the sky on the grass; but the carpet was surrounded by a border, which framed, so to speak, this enchanting confusion.

Raphael, in that same fresco of *The School of Athens*, of which we have just spoken, has balanced, by the rigid lines of an architectural deception, the different movements which broke the uniformity of his plan. Michael Angelo also, in the ceiling of the Sixtine Chapel, has given the appearance of architectural compartments, to counterbalance, by the quiet of horizontal or vertical lines, the contortions of his writhing and tortured figures: in this

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY