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THE APPEARANCE OF THE SCHOOLROOM

"St. Thomas, who was as simple as he was wise, defined the beautiful as that which, being seen, pleases—Id quod visum placet."

"The teacher is fortunate who has an ideal schoolroom; but perhaps the teacher is more fortunate who has not, for the opportunity to produce one with the co-operation of the children is not to be despised."

HENRY TURNER BAILEY

THE phone bell rang; I picked up the receiver; a distressed voice complained, "I am painting my furniture green and it is much, much too green. I have worked so hard. Oh! what shall I do?" Whereupon I donned my hat and coat, hurried to my car, and rushed down Main Street in order to answer the call and return before the next gong. The green was indeed green, and the housewife was near a nervous collapse as she said, "I have mixed black and then white and then gray with it, and I absolutely cannot make the green I wish." I poured a small portion of rose into the pure green, very much to the horriification of my companion, and the result was a very desirable soft gray-green. She was happy, and I went on my way rejoicing and forgot it in ten minutes—forgot it because this was only one incident of many similar ones.

One summer while teaching in a college in Ohio I made my home with the head of the science department, who possessed a passionate love for beautiful objects and surroundings. After school hours we divided our time between furniture, drapery, rug and paint shops. We mixed paint for

the living room walls and compounded paint by mixing five colors of the color card together to produce the desired color. This we poured, with a layer of oil on top, into several gallon buckets and stored them away in the cellar for safe keeping until a half year should roll around and bring ample opportunity for painting the huge sleeping porch which every night I enjoyed so greatly. On the lawn were small latticed structures, shaped like churns, made to hold up young shrubbery and vines. My friend rightly decided that they could be more pleasing in color, and consequently they were made to fade into the landscape. When this good lady asked me how much she owed me and I answered, "Nothing," as most art instructors would have answered, she said, "That is queer. I paid fifty dollars for doing only about a third of the work which you have done." Then I thought of the city doctor, who for a few seconds looks over his glasses at his patient, then administers some pills, and presents a bill for three or five dollars. Sometimes I should almost like to be that doctor.

An art instructor is asked numerous questions and receives many letters of inquiry regarding the appearance of the schoolroom. We shall review these simple problems which so often confront us.

Schoolroom walls are very often lacking in color, for generally they are a pure white. Even the most unattractive color is frequently more desirable than white, because no article of furniture, no pictures, no draperies hold their place, in the general harmony of the room as a unit against a white background. They all seem to jump forward as separate units, causing a disturbing and spotty appearance. This is because of the extreme contrast of value of the dark or half dark objects against a pure white wall. Note how the objects fade into the

background and become related and harmonious all together when a soft and appropriate color is added to the walls as an intermediate value note. White walls not only make impossible the harmony of the room but they are extremely undesirable from the physical standpoint. The white and the gloss, separate or combined, add greatly to the discomfort of the eyes.

What value (lightness or darkness) shall your schoolroom walls be? This depends mostly upon the amount of sunlight received and upon the woodwork coloring. If, unfortunately, the room is inclined to be shadowy, the wall color may be keyed high in the scale of values; however, the room with the average amount of light may take a color which approaches almost a medium. The general inclination is towards too light a color. Many walls are so high in value that there is no tying together of the integral parts to form a complete and harmonious unit, as in the incident of the white walls. The sum total is equal to the sum of its parts.

We know that any wall color should be grayed in effect to form a soft background and setting for the more interesting units placed against it. An old rule says the larger the area, the softer the color. The brighter and smaller dashes of pep and contrast should be found in the smaller objects—as pictures, pottery, colored chalk blackboard sketches, table covers, pillows, and drapery design. Kindergarten children often delight in painting their small individual chairs in very bright color, and the result is very satisfactory; however, this would not be advisable with grammar-grade desks or the teacher's desk, for these large-area articles of furniture should echo in a measure the woodwork or wall coloring.

Of necessity, there are many makeshifts in these small objects which give the note of color contrast. We may not be able to buy even the cheapest lovely bit of pottery, but there are plenty of glass jars of good proportion to be painted a beautiful color. If window drapes are desired, muslin and

dye coloring are cheap. There are many good makeshifts if one has the initiative to find them.

The wall color (hue) should be related to the woodwork. Much woodwork is stained a dark or medium brown which contains some red but much more yellow—hence soft yellow or yellow gray walls are always harmonious with it. Too often we see yellow walls which are keyed high, chalky and harsh. There is a certain gray green color showing much yellow, which is seldom used but which, when found, is very exquisite with the medium brown woodwork. Of all hues, soft gray green is the most restful and soothing to the nervous system. The Creator understood this when He so wisely clothed the earth in beautiful greens. If the woodwork is enameled in cream, light ivory, or light gray (few schoolrooms are), any wall color will harmonize with it. The most charming schoolroom I have ever seen had cream woodwork painted in a flat non-gloss, or almost non-gloss, paint. Why use the high gloss enamel, which is not half so lovely, when the non-gloss or slight gloss gives a lovelier effect and is equally serviceable and washable? Blue gray or soft yellow green is very desirable for walls with light cream or pearl gray woodwork; however, if the room receives insufficient sunlight, soft yellow or soft yellow-green is the color which will introduce cheer and sunshine. If the room receives a flood of bright light, gray and blue gray may be used to soften the light.

The expense of painting walls is not great. Two five-pound packages (fifty cents each) of good grade calcimine will paint an average-sized room. If purchased in bulk, the expense is less. Oil wall paint is more expensive but more durable. The larger boys can apply sizing and paint, and they love to do so. I twice painted the walls of my living apartment. The most desirable wall colors are made by mixing several colors; and, if one will remember the related and opposite hues in the spectrum, the mixing is not difficult. But it is unwise to trust

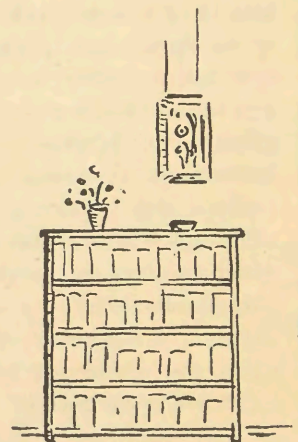
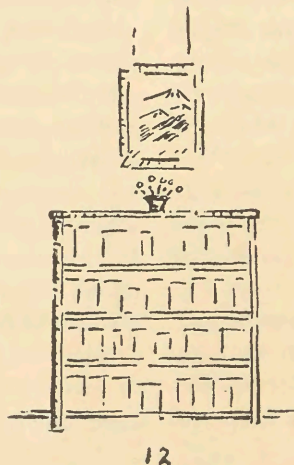
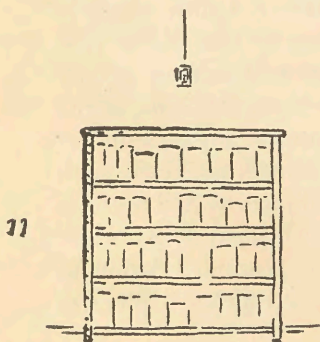
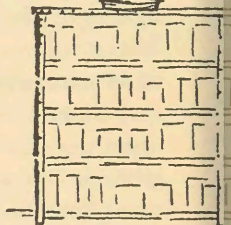
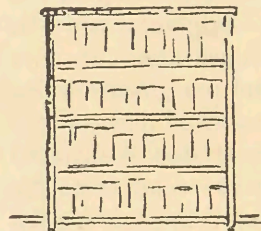
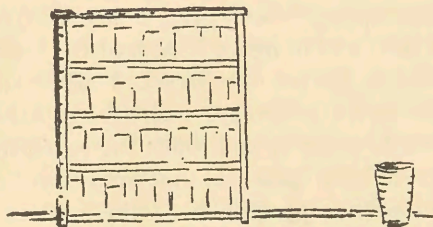
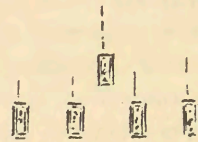
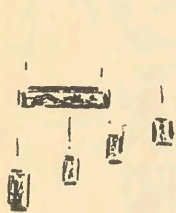
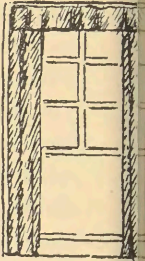
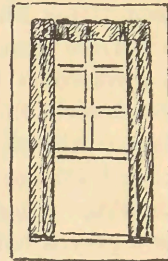
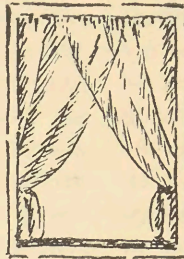
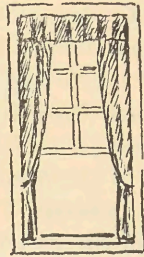
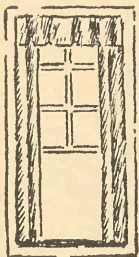
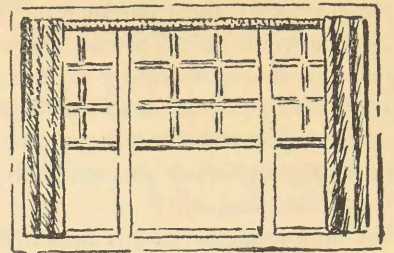
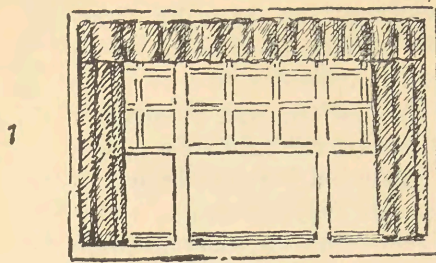
the mixing to most commercial painters. A few desirable colors are to be found on the color card which require no mixing. I was sorry on one occasion to see paint added to school walls when they consisted of a sand finish plaster, which was naturally a delightfully even, smooth gray.

Window drapery adds much finish, comfort, and hominess to the room. The great majority of classrooms which come to my mind are without drapes, although I receive many inquiries from teachers regarding them. I recall lovely ones in a first grade room made of unbleached muslin on which the children had stenciled a surface pattern of various colored animals. If one is in doubt about the drapery coloring, she may make sure that a grayed tan pongee or cotton suiting, unfigured, will harmonize with any yellow, tan, gray, or soft green wall, and also a soft blue wall if the tan is considerably grayed. When a patterned material is desired, one is safe in selecting a fabric in which the large color area, which is always the background, is related in color to the wall, with opposite coloring in the figures to give a note of brightness and life. If the room contains much dark furniture or is naturally dark and has gloomy walls, care should be taken to avoid dark or medium dark colors in the drapes. A material without figure, of opposite color from the walls, may be used if few drapes are needed and if kept subdued in tone; however, to use many of these would create discord, as it would cause the use of two opposites, both in large areas. White walls take drapes of no strong color value—perhaps cream, light tan, or light yellow. Window shades of soft tan are much more desirable than dark green, which is greatly used and is seldom harmonious. Glass curtains, which are generally made of cream marquisette, are practical only for the occasional schoolroom which receives too much light.

How should drapes be made and hung? Figure 1 is a window or group of windows which has a width in excess of its height; therefore, a valance in figure 1 is inappro-

priate, for it exaggerates the width. Number 2, with no valance, gives height to the wide proportion. A wooden pole, to which the drapery may be attached, painted the color of the drapes to carry the color across, may not have quite the horizontal effect of the valance (figure 2). Number 3 is a window much higher than wide, and may properly take a valance. The drapes in figures 1, 2, and 3 repeat the general line and structural form of the windows and therefore are completely harmonious with the window. In figure 4 the drapes form slightly curved lines, which have a tendency towards softness, and yet they still repeat the general structure of the window and therefore are quite harmonious. Figure 5 shows drapes with abrupt curves which do not repeat the lines of the window and are entirely inharmonious. This type suggests a draped costume to conform to the curves of the body rather than to a straight-line, rectangular window. It brings to mind the draped costumes of the Three Graces which were originally in one of the pediments of the Parthenon. Figure 6 shows much of the window casing, which gives a strong structural line; and in figure 7 most of the casing is hidden. Either is correct. I personally prefer figure 6. Drapes which hang below the window casing and touch the baseboard create a long, graceful line and serve to heighten the appearance of the wall in a schoolroom with a low ceiling, but if there is much sweeping and dust, they are generally impractical.

Furniture, pictures, and other objects should be arranged so as to form related units rather than a haphazard, unrelated, and inharmonious mixture. Unity, which is orderliness in grouping, is one of the first and simplest elements in design or in any other art problem. It is, in fact, one of the first requirements of almost any task undertaken. Figure 8 represents a bookcase, with a waste basket, a small picture, and a group of pictures, which are all separate units and are so arranged as to bear no relation to each other. In figure 9 the small pictures



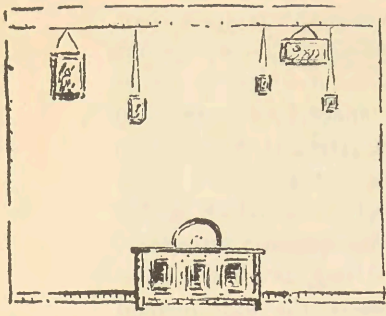
are so placed that they seem to belong to the bookcase as a unit. However, the whole unit is made very uninteresting because the four pictures are all the same size and the same distance apart and because they form a group the same width as the bookcase. Number 10, although it does not look so broken, again repeats the exact width of the bookcase, and the flowers are also arranged in a very horizontal line. In figure 11 the contrast in size between the bookcase and the extremely small picture is too great. Number 12 shows a picture which is in a desirable proportion to the bookcase, and the flowers have a slight vertical line to help tie the two objects together. This is a harmonious unit of a formal-balance type. In number 13 we have a harmonious unit of an informal-balance type. Very recently some fifth-grade children undertook the arrangements of their bookcase, pictures, and several small objects as a related unit. They did it successfully and with much understanding.

Now let us discuss not only the unity of objects, furniture, and pictures, as in the foregoing paragraph, but the proper hanging of pictures and their relation to wall spaces. Number 14 not only shows a lack of relation of pictures to pictures but to the wall space and also to the desk (as in figure 8). There are entirely too many pictures for the wall space, which causes a lack of desired repose and simplicity. They are hung so high that to view them would cause much straining of the neck. In order that we may enjoy the beauty of any picture, it should be placed on the eye level or very slightly above. The one wire which suspends each picture forms a triangle shape, which carries the eye to a point and upward and is not in harmony with the main vertical and horizontal lines of the pictures and the room. In figure 15 the picture is (as in 11) too small for the large wall space—the contrast is so great that it reminds us of a postage stamp upon the wall or a fly upon a horse. This very small picture may rightly be hung with one

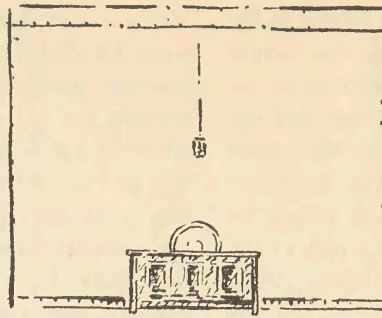
straight wire, but never with a triangle wire, as in 14. Number 16 shows a picture which repeats the wall space in shape, is large enough for the wall space, and is in good size-relation with the desk. It is hung, as any picture should be, except a very small one, with two vertical wires which repeat the vertical lines of the picture, furniture, and walls. I prefer strong, small cord, the color or near the color of the wall, instead of wire, and I prefer molding hooks, which hold the strings, painted the color of the molding. This causes the more unattractive accessories of picture-hanging to be made nearly invisible, and the attention is focused on the beauty of the picture. In figure 17 the two very slender pictures which are placed close together as companions form the same desirable effect as in figure 16.

Some rooms have blackboards which run almost around the room; therefore the only space left for pictures is above the blackboard, which is much above the eye level and causes them to lose much beauty and worth. However, it is better to place them too high than to have a room totally without pictures. This is illustrated in figure 18. Here, although in shape it fits the wall space, it rests upon the upper blackboard molding and hangs at a decided angle or slant from the wall. Why should a picture be so inharmonious as to hang away from the vertical lines of the wall, almost approaching a right-angular direction from the wall? This is like a twig which has been slightly broken from its branch and has lost the beautiful direction and harmony of growth as it is pulled downward by the laws of gravity. How very much better the picture appears when pushed a few inches above the molding and flat against the wall as in figure 19. A picture should always hang flat against the wall or with a slant that is hardly noticeable. These two mistakes are perhaps the most commonly found in the schoolroom.

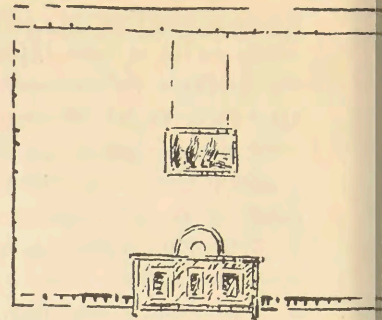
Exhibits should be placed in an orderly arrangement upon the bulletin board (figure 20). It so often happens that the only place



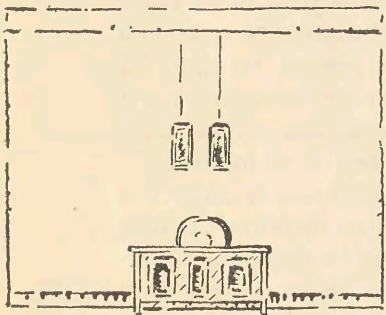
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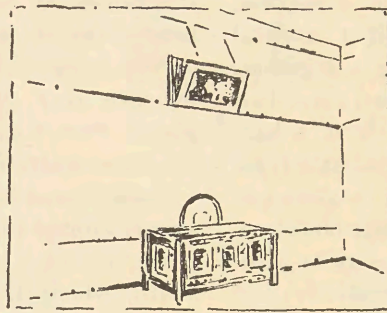
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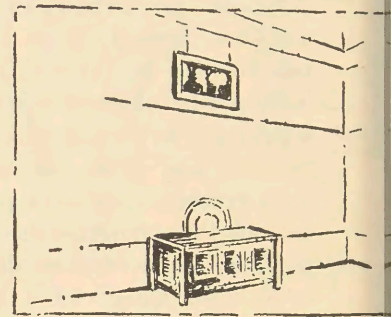
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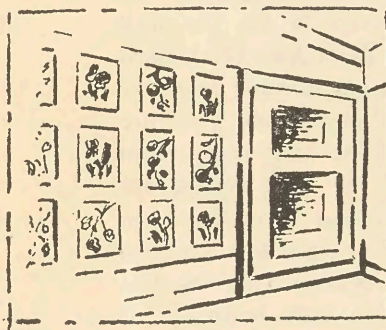
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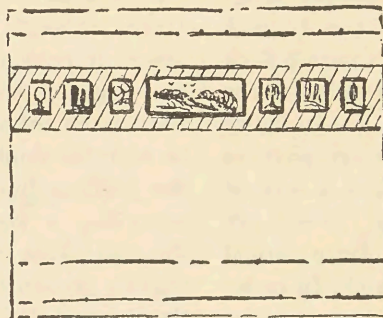
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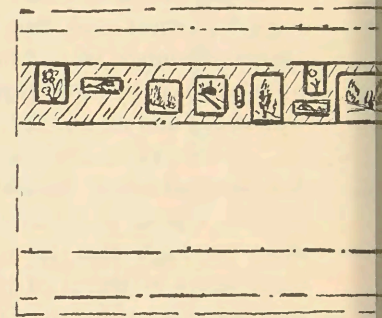
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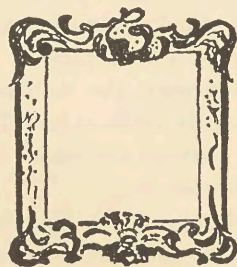
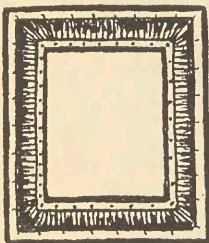


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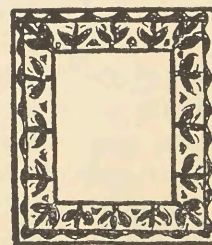


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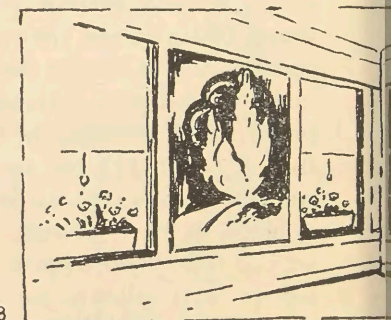
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to exhibit children's work is high above the blackboard but, though this may be a fact, the work can be arranged in some uniform, orderly, and balanced manner, as in figure 21, and not as in figure 22.

"How should my picture be framed?" This is a question frequently asked by housekeepers, professional people, and teachers. A frame should be so subordinated to and harmonious with the picture as to be hardly noticeable. If it is noticeable, then something is wrong. This is the test of good framing. It is the beauty of the picture that we wish to enjoy, and this can be accomplished only by the use of very plain moldings which seem to be a part of the picture (figure 26). Elaborateness in moldings (figures 24 and 25) cause one to see only the frame and hence destroy the merits of the picture. The color of the frame must harmonize with one of the prominent, medium, or dark colors in the picture and should be of medium or dark value according to the general value (darkness or lightness) of the picture as a whole. Oil paintings which are generally rich in color often require gilt or bronze frames which have been toned down in effect. Highly colored prints may sometimes take a colored frame containing gilt also. If a mat is used, it should be related in color to one of the leading colors in the picture and to the frame color but should, however, be lighter in color than the frame. It is better for the mat to have a slightly deeper margin at the bottom, for this gives a feeling of stability, as does the deep margin at the bottom of the printed page.

The American Federation of Arts asked, "What is the greatest service in the cause of art that can be rendered by a great national organization?" Mr. Huger Elliott, of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, answered, "See that every school in the United States, from the metropolitan high school to the smallest schoolhouse in the backwoods, has upon its walls at least one plaster cast of a superb piece of sculpture and one fine color print of a mas-

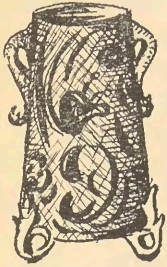
terpiece of painting." This great organization is now trying to work out a scheme by which this may in reality be accomplished. At present I hold in my hand a booklet which lists the art possessions of a public school system located in a town of six thousand population. This catalogue says: One hundred and thirty large colored master prints, three large mural paintings, sixteen large photographs, and five bronze tablets adorn the walls, and forty-two large plaster copies of masterpieces in sculpture are grouped about the corridors.

Pictures in the schoolroom should include more than framed wall pictures. The most successful teachers are those who hold the enthusiasm of the children by putting a new, bright, colored-chalk picture each month on a single blackboard or on the large blackboard in a space set aside for this purpose. Figure 23 shows a tree sketch for the month of October.

Most schoolrooms lack the life and sparkle which bright patches of color introduce into the drab interior. This may be accomplished by flowers in window boxes (figure 23), which children love so well, potted flowers, fernery, and cut flowers, which children bring as expressions of devotion to room and teacher. We know also how the children love to care for the plants and to watch them grow.

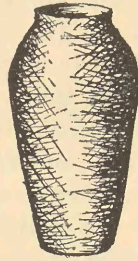
What kind of container should we use for cut flowers? The bowl and vase in 28 and 29 are surely too decorative. Like the picture frames in figures 24 and 25, the strong pattern kills the beauty of the flowers and draws the attention to the containers instead. While the general shape and proportion in figure 29 are very good, the same cannot be said about figure 28. See how much more graceful, with its long subtle curves, is figure 27 than figure 28. Figures 27 and 30 are appropriate and well proportioned flower containers—one for short stem flowers, the other for long—and because of the absence of pattern would, if subordinated in color, bring forth the elegance of the flowers. Figure 29 is in itself a beautiful and

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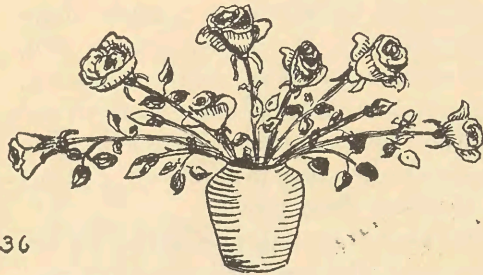


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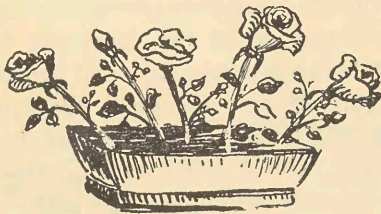
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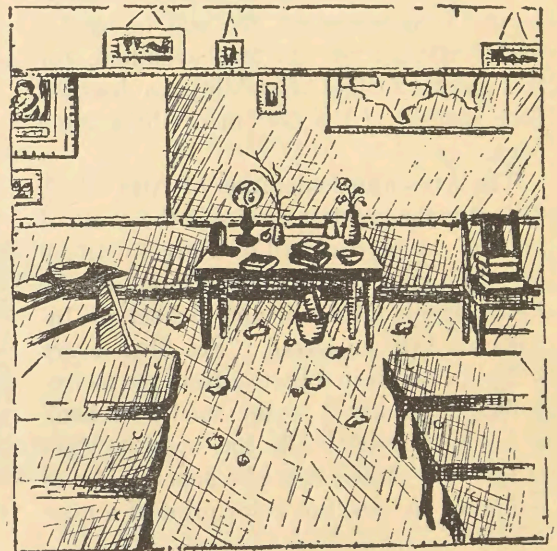
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beautifully decorated piece, ornamental in character, made to enrich the color and pattern of the room if placed in the proper atmosphere. However, it was never designed for a flower container. Flower containers should be very soft and subordinated in color. The colors harmonizing with most flowers and leaves are soft greens, blues, blue-greens, tans, and yellows.

Ikenobu, a Buddhist priest, several hundred years ago first started the art of flower arrangement in Japan; and the Japanese people, both poor and wealthy, with their inherent artistic natures, have made the most of this highly developed art at all times. At first the arrangements, although always based on art principles, had only religious meanings, with certain lines and shapes symbolizing heaven, man, and earth. Later, social significance and suggestions of history and legend were added.

In America, flower arrangement means simply beautiful line, balance, and vibration of color. In figure 32 a slender vase with long modulated curves is chosen to accommodate and harmonize with the long slightly curved stems and leaves. The stems, leaves, and flowers are arranged simply and gracefully to bring out the beauty of shapes and characteristics of growth of this particular subject. There is rhythm of line and good balance in this complete composition. Amateurs in flower arrangement many times make the mistake of cutting the stems too short and crowding the arrangement so that the effect is that of a very heavy mass in which one is unable to recognize any distinct shapes or characteristics of the plant (figure 31). Some flowers which depend more upon their rich and variegated coloring than upon the characteristics of growth for their beauty, as pansies and sweet peas, may be grouped in tighter masses. Another mistake often made is that of not only overloading the arrangement but spreading it in too vast an area for the container used (figure 34). Notice how top-heavy the composition appears in figure 34 and how very

pleasing is figure 33. One should watch also the vibration, or balance of color—that is, flowers of the same color should not occur in only one place in the bouquet but should be balanced throughout. One of my friends once placed a beautiful composition of roses upon the top of her upright piano (figure 35). She stated that they were too tall in composition for the top of the tall piano and out of harmony in shape with the environment, which was certainly a true statement. So saying, she spread them to a more horizontal arrangement in the same container (figure 36). You will agree with me, I am sure, in saying that while the bouquet (figure 36) does now take the shape of the top of the piano yet it is out of harmony again because the arrangement is overdone and topheavy with the container, inharmonious in shape with the container, and therefore inharmonious with the piano. The problem would have been adequately solved had she used a low horizontal container (figures 37 and 38).

Well do I remember the strong impressions created by my early childhood surroundings—the simple paneled woodwork of my bedroom with whatnot above, wall paper, vases upon the mantel, and portraits above; the walls of the schoolroom, and a picture of the gallant man, in the boat on icy water, whom I did not know, but met again years later and found to be George Washington Crossing the Delaware—by Leutze—not a very great masterpiece after all. The impressions of youth are the strongest and most lasting, and this is why the schoolroom should be near perfection in orderliness and beauty. Will your school children retain the memory of a room with foul air, mishung pictures and maps, cluttered table, unswept floor, misplaced furniture (figure 39), or will they remember you as one who believed with William Morris, "If you accept art, it must be a part of your daily lives and the daily life of every man."

Alice Mary Aiken