

DECORATION OF THE NURSERY.

BY E. HUGHES-JONES.

“LET there be light” was the first great command of creation, and it seems to me that this is the first great essential in the decoration of the nursery. “The sunshine is a glorious birth” sings the great poet, and we must see that our children enter into their inheritance.

Therefore let us choose for the nursery a room where the morning sun may flood the whole place with light, for I know of nothing so conducive to the “shining morning face” that we would fain see our children wearing, as a cheerful sunlit room wherein to begin the work of their all-important day. Troubles may, and will, come to them through the day, as to their elders through the long day of life, but who has not experienced the help that comes from *starting* the day in a cheerful and contented frame of mind?

No matter of what temperament the child may be—the serious and sober, the slow and lethargic, are as much influenced by the “atmosphere” of light as the more naturally responsive and bright child, though, it may be, quite unconsciously so. Do let us remember the first great tenet of our P.N.E.U. creed, “Education is an *atmosphere*.” We cannot get away from the fact that we are very largely the creatures of our environment—and more especially is this true of our early childhood days. Cannot each one of us remember the extraordinary influence of *places* over us as children—of certain spots that have left an indelible memory, so that we can even experience over again the feelings, whether of joy or grief, that these places produced in us, when a chance word, a scent, a sight, calls them forth? Our great aim therefore in the decoration of the nursery is to help to create—in as far as this can be done by appeal to the outward senses—a good, beautiful and wholesome atmos-

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phere. I say advisedly, *help to create*, as there are other factors which go to the making of such an atmosphere, and notably the character of the “presiding genius” of the nursery—but that is apart from the scope of this paper.

Now as to the question of wall coverings. I have a strong predilection in favour of plain walls—white, a restful green, or any plain colour that is not obtrusive. In this connection I may be permitted to tell a story of actual experience, which made me feel more strongly in favour of plain walls than before. I had had the night-nursery papered with scenes from “John Gilpin,” which necessarily repeated themselves over and over again round the four walls. My small girl, being in bed with measles, exclaimed wearily to me one day, “Oh, Mummie, I do wish John Gilpin’s horse would stop!” Perhaps the choice of paper was not a good one, but I certainly felt there was much to be said for her point of view!

After all, walls may be considered from many points of view—for protection, warmth, etc., etc., but perhaps from the point of view of this paper we should consider them merely as backgrounds for pictures. Some people think that the walls themselves should provide pictorial decoration, but this seems to me to be the cause of many limitations and difficulties—as, to wit, in the case of John Gilpin! On the other hand, given a plain background, we can introduce what we will in the way of pictures, and the children can partake of a feast of form and colour, without being satiated and overdosed.

No two people will perhaps agree about the pictures suitable for the nursery, but I

would enter a plea for at least *one* of the beautiful Medici prints—one of the Old Masters—to be hung over every nursery fire-place, and I think this one should be a religious picture, as holding the chief place in the centre of the corporate life of the little community. Even before the child can understand the meaning of the picture, the beautiful colouring will appeal to its “outward eye,” and what matters it (as some may object) that an arm or a leg be not properly foreshortened? This is lost in the beauty of the colouring and “spirit” of the picture.

Let us beware, however, of the so-called “high-art” craze! Let us have nothing trashy for the nursery, but let us not eliminate a sense of fun and humour. There are so many good things in black and white, besides coloured pictures, which appeal to one’s sense of humour—by all means let room be found

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for one or two such pictures on the nursery walls. Life is full of contrasts—the tragic and the humorous, the grave and the gay jostle each other in daily life—and while it were better to eliminate the tragic element from the nursery, I would be as catholic as possible in the choice of pictures, always with the proviso that each one must be *good* after its kind.

Some delightful nursery wall decorations are the pictorial representations in colours, appliqué on linen, which kind uncles and aunts send the children from Port Said on their way out to India. I suppose these are obtainable somewhere in London, but they have an added glamour for the children when sent by a traveller from a far country!

As regards the furniture of the nursery let that be as simple as possible, and supplied on the principle that “Use be suggester of Beauty.” The nursery is a place to play in, therefore do not overcrowd with unnecessary furniture, but give the children room for their play.

An additional feature in the decoration of the nursery is the arranging of flowers and leaves in vases and jars. As soon as the child is old enough, encourage him to bring in wild flowers from his country walk and arrange them in a vase himself. He will soon learn, with a suggestion here and there to guide him, to do this very tastefully, and besides the pleasure it gives him it will help to cultivate his sense of the beautiful, and add to that general atmosphere of sweetness and light which we would see prevail in our nurseries.

After all, the importance of environment is so readily acknowledged in these days that probably most of the suggestions put forward in this paper are only a preaching to the converted! The days are gone by wherein the room that was wanted by no one else was good enough for the nursery, and the great idea was to get the children tucked away somewhere out of their elders’ sight and hearing! Possibly we err a little now on the other side, and yet even that shows that we realise that the *first years* of life are the most important of all. Therefore, let us not only take care of our own babies, but strive to bring that atmosphere of sweetness and light into the lives of the little ones born in less happy surroundings. They are a national trust, and one of the many lessons this great war has taught us is that nothing is more precious to the nation than the well-being of the babies and young children. Let us strive to live up to our responsibility!