

WALL PAINTINGS AT DEBENHAM.

By REV. H. A. HARRIS.

Some interesting middle-class wall paintings have been uncovered recently in a house at Debenham.

The coloured surface is of the customary palimpsest infiltration order and reveals three layers of colour, at least, super incumbent one upon the other differing in design and period. Owing to the friable surface of a wall no painting nor design had any permanency and required constant "touching-up" and restoring. Subsequently a time came when they were beyond repair and were rubbed out or lime-washed over and then repainted.

In this respect wall paintings differ from frescoes for frescoes are not surface paintings only, for in this more elaborate method the colour is applied to the wet plaster so that it is absorbed and sinks deeply into the substance of the wall, penetrating the plaster as ink penetrates into blotting paper thus becoming a stain permanent and ingrained in the plaster.

For this reason frescoes are more easily uncovered than English examples of wall painting such as Debenham supplies, where several films of colour are sandwiched between layers of lime-wash, merging imperceptibly into one another because the lime acts chemically upon pigment and medium, changing the former and disintegrating the latter and causing it to lose its viscosity.

The photographs taken by Mr. C. H. Gale illustrate the composite nature of this wall painting and reveal the intermixture of designs.

The undermost and possibly the oldest design consists of an olive green background with interlacing riband quatrefoils of rose madder. Over this is painted a design composed of rose and tulips which in turn has been overcharged with an ugly and crude design of pillars and columns, suggesting that the painter wished to give the room the appearance of a Greek temple.

These decorations appear to date from the late 15th or early 16th century but Apprentice Books containing stereotyped examples of designs for carvers, painters and cabinet makers to copy, were handed down to successive generations of workmen and many a cherished Tudor or Stuart "period piece" was issued from the workshop perhaps a century later.

Mr. Gale has obtained an excellent "close up" of the inscribed panel over the fire-place and upon it Miss Beatrix Creswell makes the following comments. The artist "uses a long s in the middle of his"

“ words and a short one at the end. He also uses i and y indifferently.”
 “ Note ‘ family.’ the word is quite clear, he wished to avoid two ys”
 “ for the sake of ornament but he has spelt Gyddyng with two ys,”
 “ perhaps he did not like the appearance when he had finished it.”
 “ Some of the words are not clear. Note the ornamental i of ‘ in ’—”
 “ the next few words are obscure—‘ be ’ is quite clear. I think this”
 “ reading gives the sense of the motto.”

“ LET EVERY MAN IN HIS WILL ? ? BE ”

“ GYDDYNG HIS HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY.”

“ It is most likely early 16th century when domestic ornament”
 “ and English began to be the fashion instead of church decoration”
 “ and Latin.”

