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DECORATION AT
THE "AUDITORIUM," CHICAGO.

WE give below a few notes of the decoration of this remarkable building, referred to and illustrated in our last issue, and for which we are indebted to a supplement to the *Daily Inter-Ocean*, of the 10th ult., published in Chicago. The architects were Messrs. Adler & Sullivan, who have been recipients of unbounded praise from the citizens of Chicago for their professional ability.

Decoration, sometimes given an inferior position in the hierarchy of fine arts, on the basis of having nothing in common with them except outward appearance, from day to day is growing more important as a factor in the surroundings of civilisation. The laws of form and decoration, properly applied, raise the standard of any work from the lowest grade of industry to the highest standard of art. The axiom in decorative art of primal importance is, that "form must be perfect in itself, and should not resort to applied decoration, in order to conceal defects and incompleteness. The disregard of this principle explains the reserve so long entertained respecting industrial arts, where tasteful decoration is often applied to forms ill-constructed or insufficiently studied." This matter of form is one of the beauties of the interior under consideration. Every projection has been carefully studied in detail and in combination for harmonious ensemble; every line or sweep of curve apparently bases itself upon an artistic motive, carrying it to a successful and impressive conclusion; and all this apparently without hardness or traces of studied artificiality.

The architectural features of the "Auditorium" have been designed with the idea of destroying the effect of great space; it is vast, to be sure, but never distresses with the feeling of emptiness or amplitude. The ceiling is a series of four great flat arches, extending upward and onward from the proscenium parallel with the inclination of the floor, to a point nearly perpendicular over the rail of the first balcony, where concaved sides run up to an immense square skylight filled with stained glass. The upper rere concave of this skylight folding down as a false ceiling shutting out the upper gallery, when raised, forms a cove harmoniously adjusted to fit the architectural design in either disposition. The plaster relief work is in beautiful sympathy with the general design admirably sustained throughout. All of this plaster work, from the minutest beads or blocks of moulding to the large decorative plates of the proscenium front, were made in the building, after designs by Sullivan. There are 3,500 electric lights in this main hall and its vestibules, and each light is a centre for one of these decorative plaster plates, and this gives but a faint idea of individual pieces, the various combinations furnishing a dazzling figure. Pleasing geometrical designs, associated with graceful Arabesque, are the prevailing patterns in these light plates. About the capitals of every column are dainty designs involving acanthus and lotus leaf

with the twining vines of southern plants. This combination does not give the laboured effect so frequently seen in the conventionalised lotus leaf, but something more of nature and of grace, full of life and sunshine. These delicate floral forms are so ingeniously and harmoniously introduced, so varied, that they never weary, adapting themselves to every curve and cranny, for every light and shadow. Their unobtrusive but ubiquitous tracery twines in the roughened facing of every piece of metal work, from the door frames that lead into the outer vestibule, from the plates that hold the plate glass fronts of the box offices, to the last newel-post of the highest stairway. The plaster relief runs from the chapters across the front of the broad arches, its rich profusion awakening beautifully into life with the electric lights that scatter their magic over the delicate filigree in gold on the soffits of the ceiling, or give a mellow glow to the darkling shadows of the rich relief. The relief work is quite elaborate on the projections from the columns. This work sustains the gallery and the brackets of the eaves; and finds most elaborate exposition in the arched frames on the wall on either side of the balcony, and is equally chaste and attractive in filling the flat frame of the curtain opening with graceful design woven about the great names that have witched the world with music.

The decoration of the "Auditorium" is distinctly architectural in conception, with admirable harmony in both the plastic and the colour treatment. Mr. Sullivan has artistically designed its progressive pathway, and Messrs. Healy and Millet, the famous decorators, who had entire charge of the work, have environed it with the colours that make its delightful vista most inviting and restful, and rich with lambent lights. The plastic and colour decoration, through this artistic and harmonious adjustment, are everywhere subordinate to the general effect of the larger structural masses and subdivisions, giving to their heavy relief or sweep of curve a witchery of light and shade. Something of a daring but delightful innovation has been established as the basis of decoration, in the use of but one colour, and that colour associated with gold. In the "Auditorium" it is old ivory and gold—an enchanting combination. The colour is laid on a body of hard oil in thin coats, five or six, as the light or shade demand, and the metal (pure gold leaf) is added in the usual way. This is the treatment of the main ceiling. The handsome plastic design of the broad and sweeping arches that span the room shows a rich, solid metal basis throughout the span, the arrangement, as before remarked, of electric lights giving rare and rosette tinting to the splendid canopy. The relief work in other portions of the house is frequently given the rubbed effect, a dark shade of brown being the primary coat, succeeded by an overlay of gray, the heavy paint being deftly wiped off to show the high lights—a very simple but effective treatment. While the main auditorium is in old ivory and gold; the recital hall is white and gold; the restaurant brown and gold; the ladies' parlour blue and gold. In some instances the colour is graded with dark to light tones, in others colour and gold effects are intermingled, and again they are found individually and distinct. But in whatever combination, they tend to illustrate a high purpose—artistically conceived, skilfully executed.

The ceiling work of the foyers and vestibules and the walls back of the boxes is worthy of particular commendation, as its delicate stencilling of gold is most carefully finished, and challenges the closest inspection. The boxes have their metallic fronts slightly bowed, and their dainty designs in relief slightly touched with gold, in lovely contrast against the ivory ground. The sides of the proscenium are treated with excellent taste; the two great niches filled, in their hemispherical portion, below a fan-shaped trellis, gives lightness to the form. The reliefs in gold on the side are given to the portraits of Wagner and Haydn; on the opposite side Demosthenes and Shakespeare find a similar proud place in the ornamentation. The architects remark that "stained glass is moderately used"; there are 2,000 square ft. in the single skylight over this main hall. It is carefully harmonised with the prevailing tone of the decoration. The large mural paintings form the *pièce de résistance*. The most conspicuous and impressive is over the proscenium arch, and one on each of the side walls—daring departures in mural decoration and landscapes. It may be an item of interest to remark that the decoration utilised 26,500 pounds of white lead, and 46,875 square feet of gold leaf, or enough to more than cover an acre square.

Rich foreign marbles, onyx, and fine woods are much used in the treatment of the main public rooms, and from the beautiful natural colourings of these materials the applied colour decorations take their keynote in each case, and produce with them a well-balanced unity of effect, either through the contrast or analogy of their respective tones. Highly polished mahogany has a richness and solidity that will gain in grace with age, and always harmonise with the bronze framework of the doors. The entrance is walled with Georgia marble with grey granite base, handsomely striated, of rich brownish tint, complementing the bronze fronts of the box offices and the ruddy hue of the woodwork. The large vestibule has a dado of Siene marble of warm and pinkish tone, and Saint Beauce, that follows the line of the marble stairways as a base for the bronze balustrades. Rich red and pale yellow scagliola of Siene marbles are used to advantage, and the large fluted columns of Rouge Antique at the top of the central staircase are very impressive and ornamental features. Tall columns of cream yellow support the staircase for the two succeeding flights, and red columns with richly gilded capitals sustain the floor above. In the foyer on either side of the central staircase are fuglenous that will impress by their artistic beauty and practicability. The side walls are inlaid with a heavy band of mosaic, the back wall inside the handsome wooden mantel is filled with a single slab of Numidian marble 10 ft. 3 in. by 6 ft., the largest ever imported. One of these backs is a cherry red, the other agate jasper. A mammoth gas-log blazes in each 6 ft. fireplace. Associated with the woodwork of the mantel and extending out 12 ft. flush with the steps are carved oak benches, their carved newels ornate with handsome electroliers. The floors as well as the landings on the staircase are to be considered a part of the general decorative scheme, for they are of marble mosaic worked in simple geometrical and floral patterns on broad, plain fields, showing the soft, low-toned colours so characteristic

