



FIG. 7.—WALL-PAINTINGS FROM COLCHESTER (NOW IN THE MUSEUM THERE).
From a Photograph by Mr. C. E. Baskett.

Early in 1910, other mural decorations—later, probably, and less extensive than those at Saffron Walden, but of better design—came to light at Colchester. At the beginning of April, during the demolition of Hill House, on North Hill (the site of which was required for a new Technical Institute), the workmen removed a number of thicknesses of modern wall-paper and some deal wainscoting (the latter apparently of the time of Queen Anne) from the walls of the principal down-stairs room, when they came upon the paintings in question, which extended nearly all round the walls of the room. A day or two later, the paintings were inspected by Mr. Christy and other members of the Essex Archaeological Society who were attending the annual meeting at Colchester.

Fortunately, Mr. T. R. Parkington, the contractor for the removal of the house, instead of ordering his men to continue the work of

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demolition forthwith, as many contractors would have done, communicated at once with the authorities of the Colchester Museum and offered to present them with as much as they cared to have of the painting and the plastering on which it is, provided they would make proper arrangements for its removal. His offer was accepted; a large portion of the plastering and studding, measuring 10 feet high by 6 feet wide, was carefully removed to the Museum; and this interesting specimen of the work of some Colchester artist-decorator of several centuries ago may now be seen there. The greatest credit is due to the Museum authorities for the removal, absolutely uninjured, of so large, heavy, and fragile an object as a piece of the walling of a house, no less than sixty square feet in superficial area, and constructed of materials very difficult to handle and transport.

The work may be, perhaps, as early as the late-Tudor (Elizabethan) period; but it seems, on the whole to be rather later, and the appearance of the house itself suggested that it was most likely Jacobean. The design is painted on a thin coating of fine white plaster, containing much fine hair, which is spread over both the timbering and the coarse daub of which the house is constructed.¹ The painting has the appearance of being executed in water-colours, but it is believed, nevertheless, to be in oils; for the medium (whatever it is) is impervious to the application of water and did not suffer from the rubbing it underwent when being cleaned.

The design itself (fig. 7) is in fair condition and more elegant than that at Saffron Walden. The lower part represents a dado, painted in panels, each bearing a four-pointed star or flower. Above this is, not a stiff interlaced arabesque pattern, but a graceful flowing design representing conventional foliage, flowers, and fruit. This portion is executed in no fewer than *nine* colours (black, yellow, orange, red, brown, violet, pale blue, pale green, and dark green), all of which are still fairly bright and of good depth. The entire design is outlined narrowly in black, the other colours being used merely for the filling-in of details. Above this floral portion is a kind of frieze, representing a row of rafter-ends (as they appear beneath the eaves of a house), painted in yellow, red, and black.

¹ In this case, the filling between the upright oaken studs is not of daub merely, but of what is known in Essex as "wattle & daub" :—That is to say, there is, inside the daub, a strengthening core of "wattles" (i.e., branches of trees, ranging in size from the thickness of one's wrist downwards, and having the bark still on them), tied together with string or withes, the daub being laid over, and held in position by, this core. The studs are each 5¹¹/₁₆ inches wide and are set 28 inches apart.

These are just below the ceiling of the room, which appears to be supported by them.'

The accompanying illustration is from a photograph taken by Mr. C. E. Basket, Principal of the School of Art at Colchester, at the time of the discovery of the paintings and kindly contributed, by him. Unfortunately it does not show the uppermost portion of the design, including the row of rafter-ends; for it was taken whilst the design was still in position, when the rafter-ends were almost completely obscured by dirt. Since the removal of the large fragment to the Museum, its surface has been most skilfully cleaned by Mr. A. G. Wright, the curator, who has also slightly touched up the black outlines; the result being that the entire design is now far more distinct than it was before.

Mr. Wright has been good enough to call our attention to the extraordinary resemblance which exists between some small fragments of this design and some other fragments of painted wall-plaster, taken from a Roman house excavated recently in the Museum grounds. Fragments of both are now placed together in one show-case for purposes of comparison. The designs painted on both are painted on a thin skin of fine white plaster (the recent example containing, but the Roman one lacking, hair); the colouring of both is closely similar; and the design of both is by no means dissimilar, even to the narrow black outline.

' Above this frieze, on the portion of walling now in the Museum, are what Mr. A. G. Wright, the curator, believes to be panels, painted to represent Sienna marble. If so, these panels probably belonged to the dado of an upper room; but they show so faintly that I am not confident they represent anything more than water stains.