

*James Allan Duncan*

deliberate intention; the snakes and cat-fish, when they appear as recurved human legs (Fig. 16), forming the only piece of fancy we have observed, are undoubtedly symbolic and hence deliberate, but belong to neither category.

We must, however, remember that there are considerable foreign elements in Bini decorative art which will account for many contradictions.

Part of these elements consist of European forms which the native mind, so prone to copy, has not failed to hand down to us, and part, if not the actual foundation of the art, has been introduced from other portions of Africa. Speaking generally, the art may be said to be characterised by boldness, freedom, clearness in execution, originality, due perhaps as much to a grotesque mixture of subjects as to the method in which they are handled, variety, a want of fantasy, and, excepting a few special cases, by primitive designs. It has not by a long way reached the stage attained for instance in New Guinea,\* for it limits itself to the delineation of isolated portions of religious or court ceremonial, historical events, and individual peculiarities of human, animal, or artificial form, and hence it belongs to that early period so aptly described by Henry Balfour as "the age of realistic representation."†

HY. LING ROTH.

**M**R. JAMES ALLAN DUNCAN, DESIGNER AND ILLUSTRATOR.

MR. JAMES ALLAN DUNCAN is a young Glasgow designer who has recently settled in London. Although of the same city as many whose works have been noticed in THE STUDIO, his manner is entirely unlike that of the group wherein figure the Misses Macdonald, Messrs. Mackintosh, McNair, and Talwin Morris. For he is

\* "The Decorative Art of Brit. New Guinea." Dublin.

† "The Evolution of Decorative Art." London, 8vo, 1893, p. 7.



DESIGN FOR A BOOK-COVER

BY J. A. DUNCAN



A CHRISTMAS CAROL  
BY J. A. DUNCAN

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evidently one who believes in precedent and established styles, and tries to work them in new ways instead of supplanting them by totally fresh conventions. It is necessary to say this much by way of explanation, lest the accident of Mr. Duncan's work being hitherto produced in Glasgow should lead those who see it to infer that he is one of the artists already named. But, as the illustrations here reproduced make vividly clear, his style, excepting perhaps a certain love for Celtic interlacings, owes nothing to Scottish influence.

The two Christmas Carols he has decorated show entirely different conceptions: in the one the Virgin Mother with the Babe and the oxen around are pictured in the stable of Bethlehem in

the way painters have loved to imagine the incident. For the border Mr. Duncan has taken Sir Joshua's cherubs and mixed the type with that of Lucca della Robbia, with not quite convincing effect, nor is one certain whether the due proportion between the size of a baby's face and that of a passion-flower blossom need have been disturbed; as it is, the tendrils of the passion-vine seem to be choking the cherubs at their song, an effect no doubt quite unintentional, but one that forces itself on a spectator.

In the other carol a group of demurely clad children are marching down a well invented street, all open mouthed, and voicing their song to the evident delight of the onlookers. The "conceit" is undeniably " quaint," and the masses of black and white are harmoniously contrasted.

A book-cover for "Children's Rhymes" in flat colour is a good example of the thick white line which has found favour of late. When (as in the case of the geese) it is accompanied by a black outline the difficulty of explaining its presence is one that may be shirked here. For a large poster it helps to fulfil the Owen Jones rule that almost any colours in juxtaposition may be harmonised by the separating line of black or gold; but one fancies that black *or* gold (which is here represented by white) should suffice, and that a double outline, popular although it be to-day, is not on the whole desirable in work on a small scale. This is a matter of taste, and casts no reflection on Mr. Duncan's dexterous use of a convention which, since its first use (not many years ago), has been frequently employed.

Mr. Duncan has done good things in posters—one that is probably familiar to most collectors,

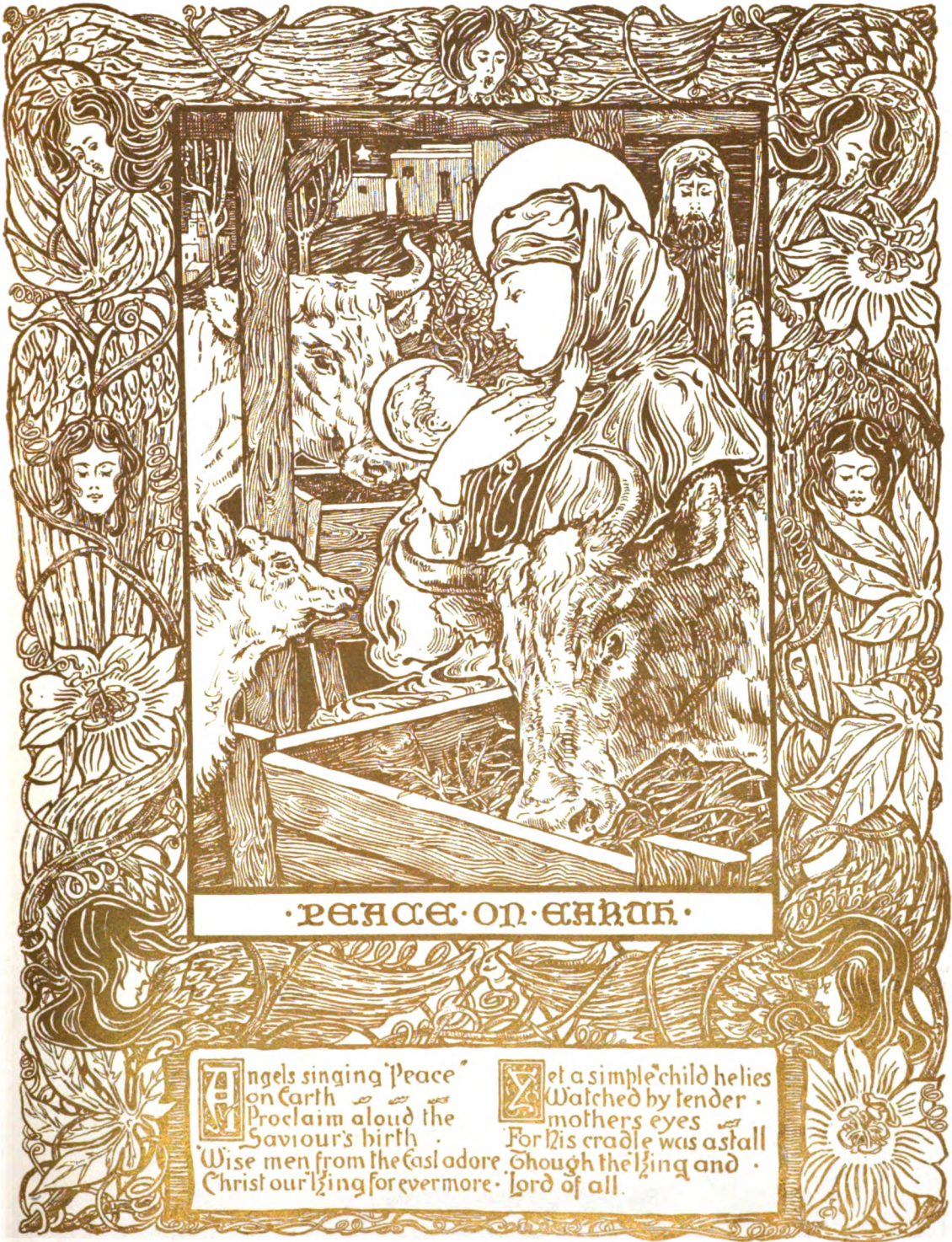


DESIGN FOR A BOOK-COVER

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DESIGN FOR A CHRISTMAS  
CAROL. BY J. A. DUNCAN





· P E A C E · O N · E A R T H ·

<p><b>A</b>ngels singing 'Peace' on Earth Proclaim aloud the Saviour's birth Wise men from the East adore Christ our King for evermore</p>	<p><b>L</b>et a simple child helies Watched by tender mothers eyes For his cradle was a stall Though the King and Lord of all</p>
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## Studio-Talk

and others less well known. From his hand are two beautiful alphabets of initial letters, designed specially for the use of the Chiswick Press. These display the strong fat "line" which goes so well with the printed page. Indeed, it is the mastering of this simple line which entitles Mr. Duncan's work to praise. Dozens employ it tentatively and hesitatingly; he uses it firmly and with vital force in its curves and volutes; above all, he often carries it consistently through to the end, and does not shirk the difficulty which it imposes by resorting to thin and fragile lines for the sake of expressing minute detail more realistically.

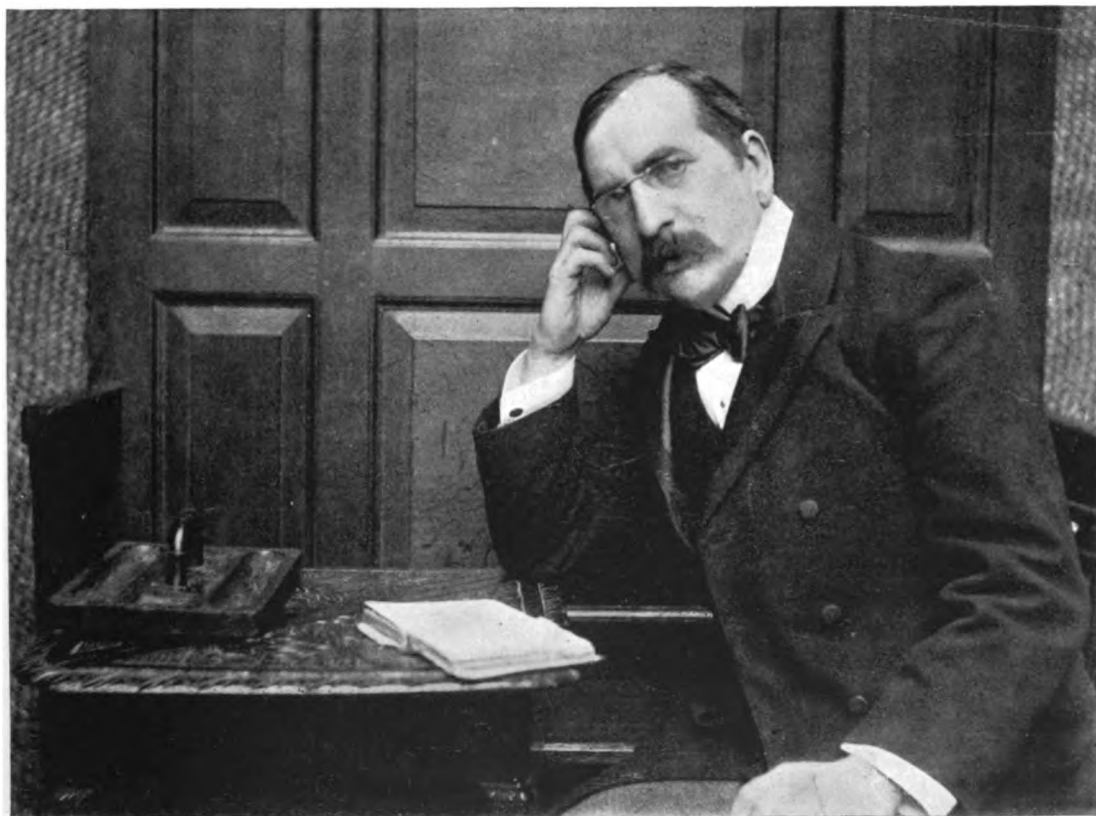
The merits and limitations of his work are so openly expressed in the examples here reproduced, that it seems superfluous to have written even these few words about them; but two or three important points are involved, some wherein he is notably successful, and others of which (after the fashion of many fellow-designers) one doubts the abiding charm when the novelty has grown stale. It is a matter of little moment whether a convention be as old as that of Dürer or as new as that of Aubrey Beardsley; but having chosen it the crafts-

man must abide by its demands; and Mr. Duncan is so evidently convinced of this fact that it seemed worth while to make the question the central argument of a desultory comment upon his work.

### STUDIO-TALK.

*(From our own Correspondents)*

LONDON.—We have received the following communication from Mr. H. R. Hope-Pinker, the Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the "Gleeson-White Memorial Fund":—"The late Mr. Gleeson White, Member of the Art Workers' Guild, &c., was widely known as a writer and lecturer on art, as a practical designer of much skill, and as editor of art books and magazines. He had a great influence at home and abroad in all branches of design and applied art, and helped, more almost than any man of our times, to encourage and further the interests of decorative art in this country. His unexpected death, on October 19, at the early age of forty-six, precluded the making of any adequate provision for his wife and two children. At a meeting



PORTRAIT OF THE LATE MR. GLEESON WHITE

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY MR. F. HOLLYER