

## TABLE DECORATIONS.

**N**o social custom do we see a wider or more marked contrast between the present and the past, than in the manner in which we, in modern times, decorate our tables, and the meagre fashion in which the dinner-table was spread centuries ago. It is strange to see how bare

the board was in the far-off olden days, and to trace how gradually it became the custom to put on it more and more of the useful, the ornamental, and the ornamentally useful, until, as at this present moment, the laying of the table is most elaborate, may be most varied, and should be most artistic.

Breakfast being one of our principal meals, we will first consider how to decorate the table for that matutinal repast. The decorations should be of a simple character, very different from the diversified and elaborate display on the dinner-table. A china bowl of flowers, a flowering plant, or a pot of ferns forms the best centre ornament. The principal decorations are more or less entirely of the useful kind, and consist mainly in the prettiness of the breakfast service—the butter-dish and egg-stand, the marmalade-pot and toast-rack, the salt-cellar and sardine-dish. In the breakfast services of Danish china (an inexpensive ware, by the way) we can get an immense variety of dishes for meats, hot or cold, for cakes, fresh fruit, toasts, and jams. There are bowls on high pedestals and bowls on low stands, dishes oblong, round, oval, square, and in the form of leaves; with a supply of these there need be no sameness or stiffness of appearance on a table.

The decorations of the luncheon-table should also be unostentatious, although a little more adornment may be introduced than at the earlier meal. An ornamental flower-pot, or a group of glass flower-troughs, containing moss and flowers, can be prettily arranged either in geometrical pattern, or to embrace closely the base of the flower-pot, where stood the castors in days of yore. But the beauty of the luncheon-table, and indeed of all

tables set for meals, consists in attention to many details which may not strictly come within the term "decorations." At the risk of being accused of travelling out of my province, I must declare that chiefly upon a snowy, spotless, creaseless table-cloth, neatly-folded serviettes, brightly-polished silver spoons and forks, well-cleaned knives, sparkling glass—upon these does the general effect greatly depend.

Whoever saw a table look well, however beautiful the fruit and flowers that decked it, if they rested on a soiled or crumpled cloth? Whoever admired a table, whereon the glass was dim and the silver dull, however elaborate and artistic its ornamental decorations might be?

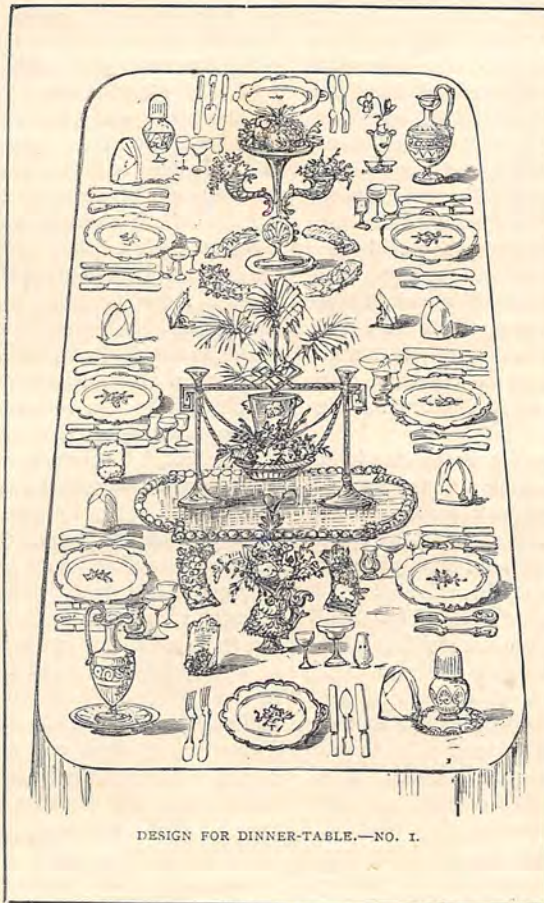
No; depend upon this—these and many other petty details, such as the exactness and precision with which the knives and forks, and other etcetera, are placed on the table, are of infinitely more consequence than the majority of people, more especially servants, appear to think them.

Another repast has edged itself into our day, and that is "five o'clock tea." It hardly pretends to call itself a meal, I should think; but it must not be passed by in si-

lence, for it has so firmly established itself among us, that one would imagine that it had been an institution from time immemorial. No such thing; it sprang up but yesterday.

We shall find that our ordinary tea equipage looks too large and capacious for these occasions; therefore, we must seek for one specially dainty. We need not have a complete set, but may pick up a cup and saucer here and another there, and buy a little tea-kettle somewhere else, until we have collected all our requirements, for "odd sets" are quite allowable at this small meal.

I will now try to enumerate all the requirements of a modern dinner-table, premising that this description is for what is termed "a dinner;" what has been said respecting the luncheon-table will suffice for ordinary



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every-day dinners, where the dishes find their way on to the table.

It is quite reversing the order of things to put ornament before use, but as the centre of the table must be arranged first, I shall speak first of decorations.

All of these ought to be low in stature. Folks at dinner no longer play at bo-peep, hidden behind high and massive silver *épergnes*, or tall aspiring flower-vases. No ornament or dessert-dish should intercept the view.

The centre-piece is the first consideration. For this, fancy has supplied many ideas. Our grandparents thought nothing looked better than a plateau of silver, on which they were wont to set an immense *épergne* laden with many fruits, and a couple of ponderous candelabra holding many lights, and capacious wine-coolers. This centre-piece looked grand, but it also looked heavy and stiff.

But to come to our own tables. One idea, which has been carried out by some people, is that of having a fountain in the middle of the table. It only requires that a hole be cut through the table-top, or that a leaf having one be inserted, for the passage of a pipe which is to supply the rose-water, that rises and falls with gentle refreshing spray. But this pretty splish-splash is very apt to fall on the table-cloth, and make it look wet and untidy. Another device is to have a plateau of plate-glass, bordered by a bank of gay flowers arranged in the glass troughs, which have been in use some year or two for table decorations. On this sea of glass, china swans sail, bearing a light burden of flowers on their backs; and lilies float, and the whole scene looks charmingly cool and refreshing.

We need hardly remark that the largest design should occupy the centre; if the table is set for many guests, then two or more groups must be placed down the middle of it, the smaller ornaments being put here and there, according to the taste of the person who is arranging the table. An attempt has been made to introduce Japanese monsters—monsters in ugliness, not in size; we sincerely hope they will not appear on many tables; let our eyes be feasted with beauty,

and not fall upon grotesque hideousness grinning at us from every corner.

We have seen a pretty device in glass; the stand is a mirror, its edge studded with glass globules; specimen-glasses grouped round a centre ornament, such as this, or placed in defile before each guest, are elegant additions; or in lieu of these, low cup-shaped glasses, each containing a lovely orchid. There is a prejudice against specimen-glasses, because, whether tall or short, they have the bad habit of falling over with the slightest touch. Some wise person has lately devised two methods for preventing these catastrophes, and now you can procure them with solid glass stands like a letter-weight, or placed in a little glass trough, which trough is filled with salt.

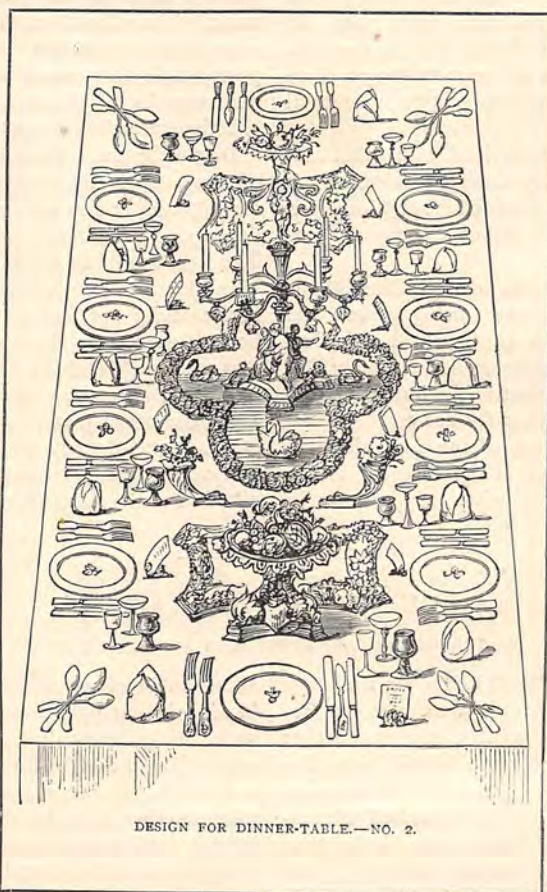
Latterly we have had an additional decoration to our tables, in the shape of small stands for the *menu cartes*. Several ideas have been brought forward, but as yet nothing specially pretty. Full-blown pansies, butterflies with half-closed wings, bivalve shells, and balls of cut glass have been designed as holders, and doubtless other varieties will appear anon; but meanwhile these must be used, for *menu* cards are indispensable, either one for each person or one for the use of two people.

There is great choice in these cards, as well as in the name cards which have also taken an im-

portant place at our dinner-table. The prettiest we think, which have at present appeared, are those which resemble china dishes and plates in miniature—the *menu* on a white oval dish, with gilt rim and monogram of host and hostess, the name card representing a plate of the same description.

Another quaint introduction is that of the old-fashioned willow-pattern: the *menu* card exhibits the well-known design on its edge, the centre being white for the inscription of the *menu*; while the name card is a small fac-simile of a willow-plate, with a white band across the centre, whereon to inscribe the name.

Instead of the old-fashioned water-bottles and their attendant tumblers, we have sets of water-caraffes, accompanied by glasses to match in pattern; these



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are put either at each corner of the table, or two sets are placed down the middle.

For clarets and light wines, ruby-coloured glass shows in good contrast to the white cloth.

There is no doubt that more and more increasingly glass will be used on our tables for every available purpose, its sparkle, its glitter, its brilliance, add so much to that scenic effect which it is our great aim to produce.

At the same time, I cannot but think that china seems the most suitable for dessert-dishes and plates. There is a kind of unreality about a glass plate. It gives you the uncomfortable feeling that it may disappear any moment. It does not seem in the province of glass that it should bear anything more substantial than ice.

The ceramic art has been revived with great success, and many are the lovely dessert-services which can be bought in the various productions of Worcester.

Dainty d'oyleys of lace are fitting accompaniments to these dessert-plates.

So much for the dinner-table and its decorations. I lately heard of two rival dinners being given; and the palm was accorded, not to the host who had decked his table with every delicacy and elegancy that nature and art could supply, but to the host who provided his guests with cool chairs for dessert.

Suppers are not quite a thing of the past, although they may almost be reckoned in the category of by-gones. There are occasions when suppers are a

"must-be;" therefore, before concluding, we must give a few words to the decorations of the table at that meal. We have not very much room for extraneous ornaments, because at supper the meats make their appearance, and game-pies and lobster-salad, jellies and creams, cakes and trifles, all claim places. We therefore transfer much of our work to the cook. We must not, however, allow all the space to be occupied by the edibles. We must have a certain display of plants and flowers. There are always little vacant spaces where a small vase or specimen-glass can find room to stand. Then the dishes themselves can be ornamented—cray-fish, barberries, bright-coloured jelly, Italian paste, single blossoms of scarlet geranium, wild briony, and wreaths of the never-to-be-tired-of parsley, are effective garnishes for our supper-dishes.

In conclusion I must remind you that one and all of these many and beautiful decorations will be lost entirely—or, at any rate, will lose half their effect—if the supper and dining rooms are not properly lighted. The light should be brilliant, and yet soft and pleasant. Many kinds of lamps have been invented, and gas has had a trial; but one and all have again and again been discarded by those who can have the luxury of wax candles. Without doubt the light produced by a number of these is the pleasantest and most effective. Light the other part of the room with what you will, but have wax candles on the table. The candlesticks and candelabra now in vogue are those made of silver-gilt, and of oxydised silver.

E. C.

## OUT WITH THE WAITS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE."



“I WAITED for the train at”—well, not at Coventry, but at another town whose name begins with C, farther east. I had reached the station some little time before midnight, and found that the mail did not leave until 2 a.m. It was not worth while to go to an hotel; it was impossible to wile away the time at the station, whose lowered gas-jets looked like sepulchral lamps just going out. Accordingly, leaving my traps in charge of a sleepy porter, I started for a walk.

The moon came up as I tramped along the stretch of road which divides the station from the town. It was a bitterly cold night. The ground was as hard as the iron of the little bridge I crossed, spanning the little river. It was not frozen over, but the moon

shone on sheets of ice that were fast coalescing. The black bristling pollard-willows, with their toes in the water, looked most drearily uncomfortable—as if they were taking a foot-bath to get chilblains. I met scarce a soul. Lights in upper windows were going out one after another, and the thought of the warm blankets between which the dousters of the glims were about to snuggle was rather tantalising.

At the top of a narrow lane the beetle-browed Blue Boar was just about to close. I could see the dashing marine recruiting serjeant, with his silver-banded cap cocked knowingly on one side, lighting his candle at the gas which flared above the laughing bar-maid's head—laughing, doubtless, at some gallant remark as to the extravagance of burning gas in a place illuminated by her eyes.

The usual beer-bibbers were dispersing with a gait like that of cart-horses afflicted with the staggers. The golden and ruddy patches that spotted the shadowed uneven pavement disappeared, as the red-blinded windows were shuttered in turn. The only persons left standing in the lane were the Blue Boar's drowsy landlord—built, as far as his “first-floor,” very much like his house; a little band of musicians in seedy top-coats and dingy comforters, and the present reporter.

“Don't begin your n'ise here. I want to go to sleep.