

## A PEEP INTO MY GRANDMOTHER'S WORK-BOX.



"THE evil that men do, lives after them." So said Shakespeare, but happily there is much besides evil that survives us. Women's handiworks, perishable as they are, still exist for centuries, and could old lace and old tapestries but tell of the hopes and

fears which actuated their workers, what a new reading would be thrown on those tranquil, eventless lives of domestic seclusion, of which we know so little in our busy, restless age!

The great human drama is continually repeating itself. When we are dead and gone, indifferent eyes will regard with scant sympathy the needlework which has cost us so much time and trouble, while maybe some who love us will linger with passing tenderness over what "a dear dead hand" had wrought in the days of old; for the labour of our hands seems a part of ourselves, and partakes somewhat of our individuality.

It is the sight of my grandmother's work-boxes that has set me thinking of all this; and large and substantial they are, for work was no child's-play in her time. One is rosewood, a good fifteen inches long, with a bordering of inlaid woods, ponderous brass feet, and large brass handles on either side in the form of a ring, passing through the mouth of a grotesque head like an ancient architectural gargoyle. There is one a little smaller, and an octagon of the Tunbridge ware so fashionable then; the former has an inlaid top of cube-like patchwork in wood, the latter displays a landscape in black and gold, with a rustic shed and cows; round brass buttons along the edge for ornament, and bunches and scrolls of flowers on the sides.

Within, the fittings are all much on the same plan. In the trays there are narrow receptacles for silk winders, of which I find a great store, with silk of the dull, artistic, hazy shades we value now. They are made in cherry and birch wood, in shapes which would be easy to cut; two inches is about the usual size. Some are in the form of stars with eight points, each point half an inch deep, or with six points, rounded at the tips, and more or less indented; others are square, with the corners rounded or of a trefoil shape. They are also made in cardboard bordered with gold and a tiny painted scroll, and would be useful now-a-days, and easily made.

Beneath the tray I find winders of another kind, pointing to the time when cotton was sold in skeins, and not, as now, conveniently on reels. They are made in pairs, to screw on to the table of unpolished mahogany. The cup at the top, for the ball to rest on if required, in the course of winding, revolves at will; below this are two circles of wood, one smaller than the other, united by seven upright sticks, one in

the centre, the others at the extreme edge. The cotton goes round this and its fellow, which is screwed on to the table the distance of the skein's length. Wool and knitting-cotton could be thus conveniently wound now, and they are still sometimes used.

What a store of pin-cushions there are (some half made) in these old boxes! and the pins upon them differ materially from those in use now: the round head not flattened at the top, and lacking the finish of the present pin. These cushions are round and oval, and some have one end pointed. They are made of some twenty layers of flannel tacked together, and covered with cardboard, silk, and flannel; or a strip of flannel half an inch wide is rolled round, as we roll tape, to form the foundation; and as I look at it, it occurs to me, list might be thus utilised. There are several varieties to screw on to the table, for no worker then could do without them, though we rarely use such things now. I find other pin-cushions, just the thing for our boudoirs and drawing-rooms. The top is four inches square, covered with silk, a bow at each corner, while the base is only two inches square and the sides two inches deep. The stuffing is introduced from the base, so that the top stands up well.

N.B.—The sewing which unites all these pieces is so fine, thick-set, and regular, no cord or other finish is required. Still, it seems to me, a great expenditure of ingenious industry in those days was spoilt by the want of artistic skill and better materials. For example, I find another of the same shape, but covered with red paper and gold bordering, and mounted on brass feet; the sides are made to project, so that there is space round the cushion for rings, solitaire, studs, and similar knicknacks, which makes it convenient for the dressing-table; but happily we have made a stride in our modern days, and our handiworks of the kind would be more workmanlike and less clumsy, and the paper is better. To aid any who might care to try and make one, I give the dimensions. The base, two and a half inches square; the top, four; the height, two and a half. Covered with silk or muslin, it would be very pretty. A housewife in the form of an old-fashioned chest of drawers, three inches high, three broad, and one and a half inch deep, is made in the same red paper bordered with gold, which defines the several drawers, handles, &c. The top, which overhangs slightly, lifts out, and to it are attached two cardboard flaps two inches deep, a needle-book with needles and runnings for cotton on the one side, a mattress cushion on the other, leaving space below the flaps for a thimble.

Our grandmothers were given to carry pin-cushions at their side, and one of them that I find among these old treasures appears to me far more sensible than the small round *châtelaine* appendages we have now. It is made of a morsel of red satin, with a brocaded design of green and cream flowers; and a double loop of ribbon twelve inches long is sewn to it; the pin-marks

show it has been used. The cushion is oblong, three inches long and two broad, and so stuffed that the corners stand out well and the sides are drawn in. Such little cushions made in velvet, with a monogram in silver cord, and silver cord round, would, I feel sure, be acceptable little gifts for Christmas time, or indeed any time.

A great deal, as I have said, was done in bygone days with cardboard and gold paper, and I came across a large collection of needle-books, some covered with rich brocaded silk and velvet, but the majority are cardboard, with painted flowers, or a tiny print cut out and bordered with gold. Among these treasures there is a sticking-plaster case made of cartridge-paper, two inches and a half square, cut with four rounded flaps turned down and made to lap one over and under the other; and then, when thus folded, a pattern has been painted on them.

There is a stock of materials for the then fashionable hand-screens with gold handles; the cardboard as bought of the proper shape, the centre to be painted or covered with butterflies, drawn and coloured on rice-paper.

The yard-measures represent cottages with thatched roofs, the tape coming out at the doorway; and funny little ivory eggs contain others, or thimbles. The scissors are enclosed in silver sheaths. Beside them is a steel button-hole cutter, not unlike a fire-shovel, set in a rosewood handle; and with these are corking-pins, used for the hair when it was worn of a towering height in puffs and loops. So toilsome a process was hair-dressing then, that at the coronation of our present Sovereign many women of fashion had theirs dressed over-night.

Of course there is wax for thread; no work-box

of that kind would be complete without. It is ornamented with a piece of coloured paper at each end, vandyked round, and secured by a pin hidden by gold paper.

There are some old-fashioned reticules in one of my grandmother's boxes, most of them ugly and inartistic to our thinking. The pattern of one, however, might be adapted to work-baskets, and to the bags for holding newspapers sometimes suspended in libraries; the foundation is canary-coloured velvet, piped with black, and worked all over with black bugles, forming irregular squares, with the longer beads set diagonally between.

The patterns for embroidery and lace are uncommon now. There are appliqués of muslin or net in bold designs, with a coarse thread laid round the outline and sewn over; the heart of the flowers represented by darning, and a heavy cord-like braid sewn on net and muslin, forms a thick floweret, with but little trouble. The old tambour-work is plentifully represented, the different kinds of fine embroidery used for the centre of each flower being exquisite specimens of needle-work.

My researches into the depths of my grandmother's work-box have convinced me that, with all our revivals of ancient handiworks, there is much more to resuscitate, and moreover that there is a great deal to be learnt from the patient industry of those bygone days, when home-life played a more important part in existence than it does now: an existence so hum-drum, that people made their wills before they undertook a journey, and sociable tea-parties were looked upon as great dissipation. They had time and patience to bestow, while we can bring to bear the improved adjuncts due to machinery and the strides of modern improvement.

### LAURA'S DOCTOR.



AND I said, if there's peace in this world to be found, the heart that is humble might welcome it here."

I sang that snatch of the sweet old-fashioned ditty as I paused for a moment or two by the side of a copse, with my tied-up fly-rod in my hand, acting as walking-stick, my creel hanging from my shoulder, and a book of choice trout-flies in my pocket.

For I was thoroughly enjoying myself on one of nature's best early summer mornings; the trees were just in their early green, the meadows were golden with buttercups, the ditches hidden by the lush growth of moisture-loving wild flowers, amongst which showed the glistening green arrow-heads of

the arum, the delicate pink of the wild geranium, and the pretty blue eyes of the speedwell. From every verdant tree rang out nature's sweet hymns of joy, and I stood drinking in the delicious sounds, thanking God for my very existence as I inhaled the bright pure air, and gazed and listened. From one side came at intervals the soft, mellow cry of the cuckoo, low down egg-hunting in the dense green hedges; from the other, the copse side, trilled the sweet melody of that most charming of our spring songsters, the little black-cap; from the nettles in the ditch came the jerky, fidgety song of the white-throat, all effort and no music.

An old friend had told me of this place, with its pretty village, its rustic rectory, and glorious trout-stream; telling me, too, how the gentlemanly, kind old rector would, if asked, give me leave to make casts from his meadows across to the high bank under which the fat speckled trout lay waiting for the pretty dancing May-flies, which flitted up and down in wondrous flight, sailing aloft, and floating slowly down to the glistening water.