

## HOME CONTRIVANCES.



NO one who has not tried can form any idea of how many useful "contrivances" there are in the world;—of how many apparent impossibilities may be conquered, how many ends widely asunder may be drawn together;—of

how many difficulties may be surmounted, and dangers averted, by the practical application of a little of the floating ingenuity to be found in every family.

Every one knows that necessity is the mother of invention, and a careful, energetic, prudent mother she is, fostering her offspring in youth that she may be fostered by them in age; but it is something short of actual necessity which calls for contrivances, and something short of invention which supplies them.

When the drawing-room furniture becomes actually shabby, instead of packing off the chairs and couches to the furniture shop to be re-covered, or exchanging them at a great sacrifice for new ones—which will necessitate new carpet, rug, and curtains, or at least make the old ones look very guilty and downcast—they should be tastefully and carefully covered at home; they will look just as pretty, frequently prettier, than if they had been sent to the upholsterer, without putting their surroundings to the blush. Even when their shape is old-fashioned, a little contrivance does wonders; the shabbiest and most ungainly couch can be made to look not only passably, but positively pretty, by a well-made cover of some soft, self-coloured washing material with a floral border, or a delicate-patterned chintz or cretonne: a cover contrived to conceal defects, tone down angularities, supply deficiencies, and present a grateful outline to the eye. If the back is stiff and awkward, try what a few *soft square* cushions carelessly placed will do. If the ends are straight and prim, pad them well with cheap wadding, see that the covers do not drag, and avoid attracting attention to them by ornamenting them with showy antimacassars. The fragments of lace and satin, so fashionable and popular, and we may say plentiful in the modern drawing-room, look well on handsome chairs, which they are meant to ornament, not protect from either dust or friction, but a pretty

antimacassar on a shabby chair or lounge only makes the shabbiness more painfully apparent.

Is there a vacant or bare-looking corner in your back drawing-room, or breakfast-room? Think what a nice ottoman can be easily contrived to fill it up—one of those empty square trunks in the box-room, a few yards of grey wadding, which costs about 1½d. a yard, and a few yards of chintz or cretonne. Have a small, neat pattern with a clear ground. Contrive your cover to fit well—that is the main point; don't let it be too short, or too long, or too wide, or too narrow, nor have one side full and the other skimpy. Above all, have the corners exact, and get the sides to hang evenly and gracefully; place it cornerways; place all furniture—couches, easy-chairs, tables—at some angle—a correct one to the eye, if you can—and the result will be surprising. We have seen pretty, tasteful, modern furniture look stiff and old-fashioned from being arranged in lines, and a well-worn old suite look effective and charming from artistic arrangement, and a few cleverly contrived aids in the way of cushions, covers, and padding.

Having transformed an unsightly box into a pretty and useful article of furniture, we may, in houses where such contrivances are not needed or permitted in the drawing-room, with great advantage transfer it to the bed-room, where a pretty seat in a window, or by the fire, is not only a great comfort, but a box in the disguise of an ottoman relieves overcrowded drawers and wardrobes, so adding to comfort and orderliness; and here we may say that without orderliness there can be no real comfort; without comfort, hardly can we hope to maintain perfect health; and without health there is no happiness.

All covers should be made to wash, and come off easily, therefore tacks should be religiously avoided; the cushion, which must be made separately, ought to come over the edge of the box a little, and be firmly tied on with tape; the covers, if you can contrive to make them fit properly, require no fastening. Not only may empty boxes be utilised, but dressing-tables too shabby for respectability, too old-fashioned for pleasant contemplation—for the eye delights in novelty—useless to the furniture dealer, yet too good to be broken up for firewood, can by the judicious use of coloured roll muslin, and old lace or leno window curtains, or even worn-out grenadine evening dresses, be transformed into tasteful, graceful toilet-tables. We have seen a pretty and most convenient dressing-table contrived, on a pinch, from two villainous-looking deal packing-cases placed on their ends, and the discarded leaf of a table placed on top; each box was covered all round with pink glazed calico, tacked on tightly, and that draped with the best portions of a pair of old lace hangings that had lain in a drawer for years, discarded as utterly useless. There was a frill about eight inches deep tacked to the table-leaf, and the whole finished by a white dimity toilet-cover trimmed with fringe. The

contrivance was not only pretty to look at, but it was a most comfortable table to sit at, the space between the packing-cases being most convenient for the feet.

Book-shelves for the bed-room may be easily contrived from the boards of old boxes, which in some mysterious way accumulate about a house. Three pieces should be selected, of three sizes; carefully paper them, and when thoroughly dry, have a hole bored in each corner about half an inch from the edge; get a few yards of green or red window-cord, pass it through the holes of the largest shelf, then place four firm knots on the four ends at equal distances, then draw the ends through the holes of the second-sized shelf, and so with the third; then fasten all four ends firmly together, leaving the two front ones a little longer than those meant to be next the wall. When the shelves are firmly and evenly hung up, get a few yards of ornamental leather, and tack it round the ends and front of the shelves. It hides the edges of the board and the knots on the cord, and most important of all, keeps the dust from the books.

Calling on an acquaintance, not very long ago, I observed a hearth-rug of a very original design in the breakfast-room; it was entirely composed of shreds of cloth, blue, black, scarlet, and grey, about three inches in length and half an inch wide, arranged in a systematic and pretty pattern, the grey forming the walls of Troy as a border on a black ground, the centre an intricate design of stars and squares, the whole stitched firmly and neatly on a piece of coarse canvas. It was large, comfortable, pretty-looking, and would doubtless last a long time; and, I was informed, had been made by the servant during the leisure hours of two winters.

"But where," I asked, "did she get all the pieces of cloth?"

"Collected them patiently and carefully," was the reply: "saved scraps left from the children's clothes. I fancy she must have a particular friend a tailor, for she has manufactured a sort of winter rug for her bed entirely from cloth selvages, and one for mine, very pretty and beautifully warm, from fragments of scarlet flannel collected with patience, and put together with a great deal of ingenuity." Apropos of rugs I would give a hint for the making of one, which I tried and found to answer very well. Get a dozen yards of wadding and eight of cretonne, four of one pattern and four of another; cut each piece into two widths and join them together, then arrange the wadding between, and bind the edges neatly with coloured braid; a narrow fringe all round is an improvement. Sew a few dozen cheap shirt-buttons on it at regular intervals, to keep the wadding in its place, and you have a warm, useful, pretty rug, equally serviceable for the couch or the bed, at a very small outlay. Of course it comes cheaper still if you have any old curtains, dressing-gowns, or any other soft materials that can be used instead of cretonne.

One pretty addition to the bed or dressing room which, though not exactly a contrivance, may be worth mentioning and describing—this is a shoe-bag. A yard of holland will make one to hold four

pairs of boots or shoes. The holland should be folded into three parts—two of equal size, the third smaller—and shaped to fold over like the adhesive part of an envelope. The two equal parts should be stitched together, then divided lengthways into eight compartments—each large enough to hold a boot or shoe—by rows of feather-stitch, herring-bone, or rows of narrow braid neatly put on. The whole bag, flap and all, should be bound with braid or finished off with fringe, or it might be made of piqué or dimity, to match the toilet mats, and trimmed accordingly. Two tapes should be fastened at the back to tie it to the foot of the bedstead, or to hooks put up in any convenient place. The envelope-shaped flap may be either tied, hooked, or buttoned over, and then the boots and shoes are out of the way in a careful, orderly manner, secured alike from dust and damage.

Windows, especially in large towns, are a continual tax on the patience and pocket of the house-keeper. It is needless to say how soon clean muslin or leno short curtains become grimy, or how badly they look then, and how troublesome it is to put them up quite straight and keep them so. On back windows a useful substitute for short curtains is tissue paper; white or pale yellow looks best, cut into pretty patterns and pasted neatly on the panes, with sweet oil or the white of an egg. It gives plenty of light, excludes observation, and only requires dusting with a feather-brush, while the cost is scarcely worth mentioning. In many instances it will be found to answer all the purposes of ground glass.

Seeing a lady fringing the ends of a pink bow, one day, I asked her why she did not save the ravelings.

"What for?" she asked, "what earthly use are they?"

"If you save a great many," I replied, "of different colours, and mix them *softly* together, they make a pretty sort of filling for the grate." And sure enough some months after, when I visited her, I found a soft, fluffy, flossy ball of all the colours of the rainbow in the drawing-room stove, and very pretty and original it looked. Indeed, silk ravelings are useful and well worth saving for many reasons; they stuff cushions very well, and where there is a baby they do beautifully to wad a couvrette for the cradle, being light, soft, and warm.

These are but a few of the contrivances, useful as well as ornamental, that are to a certain extent within everybody's reach. If a good housekeeper did not contrive things innumerable—if her dresses when altered, re-trimmed, and turned, did not cut up into frocks for Minnie—if Minnie's did not descend by easy stages to Florrie, and if Florrie's pinafores did not cut into bibs for baby—if she was not always altering, planning, and contriving, where would she be at the end of the year? Clever contrivances cover at least a third of the expenses of a prudent housekeeper. She brings them to bear on everything, from reversing the dining-room curtains when they begin to look faded, or placing a table over the weakest spot of the drawing-room carpet, to ingeniously concocting two new window curtains out of three old ones, or making the two best ends of a counterpane meet without exciting observation.