

FERNS AND FLOWERS FOR THE HOUSE IN SUMMER.



All the revivals which have come upon us in these latter days, none has been more delightful, and none has imparted more pleasure to our lives, than the increased taste for the decoration of our homes. Experience alone can reveal to us the infinite

“possibilities” for beauty which reside in each house, needing only artistic feeling and some little skill to call it forth, and we shall find a delight and pleasure in our own simple contrivances which no bought decorations could afford. It must be confessed, however, that the usual attempts at plant-culture are eminently disappointing, and the results vexation and annoyance to the novice in the art. Everything appears to die so soon: the blossoms fall, and the plant fades, without either “rhyme or reason.” Our poor little endeavours to decorate our empty grates, too, are such sorrowful failures, the limits of plant-life in that position being apparently reached in little more than a week. Several reasons may be given for the disappointments. We do not know how or when to water our fragile friends; we forget to guard them from draughts; they lack light and air, or we have not the necessary knowledge and experience to choose the proper plants for in-door culture.

Our grand stand-bys must always be palms and ferns; the last-named are sometimes the best resource of the dwellers in town. “They will grow,” says a recent authority, “where flowering plants will perish.” They only require moisture and shade, and—perhaps better than all to some people, with but a small share of this world’s wealth—they may be gathered freely by all: in the woodlands, in the common hedgerows, indeed in almost every locality where Dame Nature spreads her carpet of greenery. The secret of successful fern-culture, of taking up ferns in the open air for home decoration, seems to consist in securing a good ball of earth round the roots, and carefully noticing all the smaller circumstances of their position—soil, water, and shade—that you may give your best endeavours to imitate them at home. Fern soil is composed of loam, peat, and leaf-mould; in case this cannot be procured, the ordinary soil from the garden can be mixed with sandy loam, and some chemical fertilizer added instead of the leaf-mould.

The commonest ferns are the most suitable for our purpose, for they are the most hardy, and will flourish best in the atmosphere in which we shall place them. They will require no heating apparatus to keep them healthy in a cold place, and they will not mind either hot rooms or gas, provided they be given sufficient

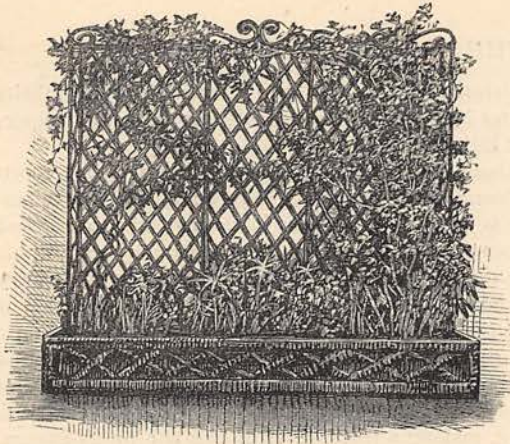
moisture and kept free from insects. They will thrive better in pots than when planted in beds, and require but little attention.

One of our most charming auxiliaries in our efforts at home decoration is virgin cork; its soft grey colouring is delightful, especially in close vicinity to the fresh green of ferns, and its moderate price brings it within the reach of every one’s purse. On paying a visit to a friend, we found her busy with hammer and nails in her library, turning an ugly window, looking out on a back yard, into a perfect bower of beauty. The window had been taken out, and a roughly constructed frame placed on the outside, which was being covered with cork, making a pleasant vista like our pretty illustration, the small fountain only excepted. The ferns used were the common British ones, which grow wild, and had in most cases been collected with her own hands. The very large ones are, perhaps, of too robust habit, except during their youthful days, for a small window; but the amateur fern-grower will have the best success with them, so had better try them first. They are the male fern, lady fern, triangular buckler fern, and mountain buckler fern. The other common varieties are the hard fern, the black maiden-hair spleenwort, the common maiden-hair spleenwort, the mountain parsley fern, the brittle bladder fern, and the common polypody; these are all dwarf-growing varieties. A selection of both large and small will be needed to make a window or an alcove look well. Into the question of greenhouse ferns we need not to enter, as I do not consider that they come within the scope of our cheap decorations.

Amongst the hardy flowers and plants which it will



be easy to cultivate for our home purposes, I may mention the ivies, jasmine, Virginian creeper, hops, ivy geraniums, maurandia, periwinkle, wallflowers, violets, primroses, mignonette, geraniums, heliotrope.



Amongst shrubs there are plenty to be selected, which will be permanent ornaments to the house. It will be seen that I have only selected the best known and the simplest to manage, as well as the most moderate in price, for it is no part of my desire to recommend extravagance in their selection. If it can be afforded, nothing is so beautiful as a few palms or expensive ferns, but they need much care and some knowledge. It should be remembered, with reference to flowering plants, that those with smooth shining leaves last longer than others in the house, as the dust which settles on them can be removed without injuring the leaves. This washing should be done in the cool of the evening with a damp sponge. No plants in hot rooms should be sponged, and they should be watered so that the water will not touch the leaves. Pot-plants thrive best when they are rather pot-bound.

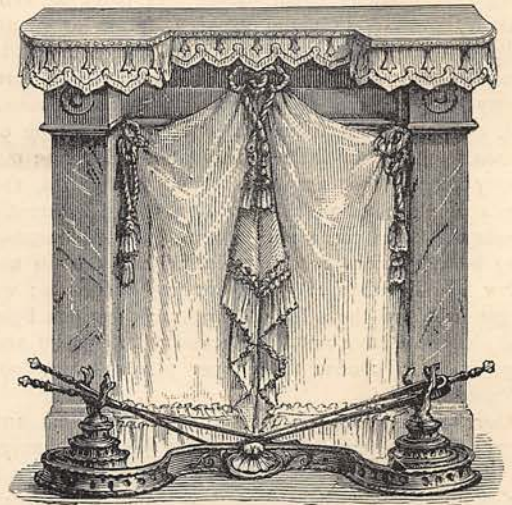
The fireplace is one of our summer anxieties, and after much experience I have come to the conclusion that curtains are the most suitable, many bed-rooms especially having such draughty chimneys that they prove a very considerable addition to their comfort. Where there is no more air than is needed for health,



the curtains should be drawn back at night. If the furniture of the bed-room be chintz, the curtains may be of the same material, and lined. They are sometimes made to match the toilet-table cover, of white sprigged muslin and coloured calico.

We give an example of an ordinary window-blind screen made of wicker; in front of it is a long box in which flowering plants may be grown, such as tropaeolums, sweet-pea, or canariensis, and trained over the screen. Artificial ivy-wreaths are also used for this purpose, as natural ivy does not flourish without much air and light. Hardy ferns and some of the foliage-plants, such as *Euonymus japonicus*, *Dracæna magnifica*, or *Grevillea robusta*, will answer in a cool and empty fireplace, and the curtains can then be festooned into graceful hangings, which will add much to the general effect.

When fireplaces are decorated with ferns and flowers, it will be found an excellent plan to dismiss the steel fender, and supply its place with a square-shaped,



velvet-covered fender, which may even match the curtains of the fireplace. The mode of its manufacture is very simple. First, a flat frame of wood is made of the required shape, and over it are placed small arches of wood, with a lath from end to end supporting them; over this is stretched canvas, which is slightly padded; over this is put the velvet, very smoothly placed, with the oblique join at the two front corners, very neatly folded in; round the lower edge a row of handsome gilt-headed nails is placed. Within this fender the ferns and plants are arranged with much additional effect.

The decoration of flower-pots is just now attracting much attention. Of course, a china painter will be able to do it for herself, but there are several simpler methods which may be described. The common clay flower-pots have great capabilities in them, and may be painted with little trouble or expense. Two or three coats of oil-paint are required, of any colour selected: light red or black, if Greek or Egyptian subjects were selected for the decoration. The design

is then outlined by means of black tracing-paper, which may be filled-in in ivory-black with a fine camel's-hair brush. The colours for this should be those sold in tubes by the artists' colourman. These common pots can also be decorated, without the preliminary coats of paint, on the light-red clay foundation of the pot, which must be well rubbed with sand-paper, and then brushed clean from dust, and all roughness removed. The designs most suitable are trailing sprays of ivy, Virginian creepers, or branches and fronds of fern. They may be drawn as described, and then filled up with green, or shaded in white and black. If these pots are to be very hardy used, they should be varnished, and the last-named can be permanently fixed by baking at a pottery.

The water bouquet is an old fashion of drawing-room decoration just revived. It consists of flowers, leaves, and buds immersed in water beneath a glass

shade, which owes its peculiar beauty to the sparkling appearance which the vegetable forms assume, and the lovely effects of the refraction of light. In addition to the glass shade, a plate must be provided to fit the bottom of the glass shade exactly. In the centre of this the bouquet is arranged, tied to a stone to give the needful weight and prevent its rising to the top of the glass. A tub of water is procured, in which the plate with the bouquet is placed, and the glass shade is introduced into the water sidewise, so as to leave no air within it, and placed in position over the flowers. The whole is then lifted from the tub, when, as there is no atmospheric pressure from within, the shade will remain full of water, which will not flow out, although a little water should be left round the edge of the glass to keep it thoroughly air-tight. This bouquet remains beautiful for about a week in summer and for ten days in the winter.

DORA DE BLAQUIÈRE.



ENTERING THE DRAPERY TRADE.



In these latter days, when every avenue of existence is densely crowded, in the midst of the "trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels which," as John Stuart Mill wrote, "form the existing type of social life," it is difficult for Paterfamilias to find openings in business

for his sons and daughters as they attain to years of discretion. The selection of a calling is restricted, too, by the aspirations of his fledglings. Without doubt there is a feeling of repugnance to the drapery as a trade, but why there should be this feeling in the minds of so many passeth knowledge. Drapers are a wealthy and very influential body of tradesmen. The work demands some education, and more intelligence, but it is not nearly so laborious or exacting as many other pursuits; nor are the duties so destructive of finer feelings as in many other stations of life to which young ladies are called.

However, it is not our purpose here to combat prejudices or conjecture causes, but to offer for the consideration of Paterfamilias some facts concerning the drapery as an advantageous opening offering facilities for either his son or daughter, and to give him some hints as to the best manner of placing them in it.

Primarily, we say, do not be led away by the repute of a large establishment to the detriment of a smaller one. The fact is, each has its own peculiar advantages. Large houses must necessarily be under a rigid system to secure order amongst the little army of assistants, and the sphere of the apprentice is very limited. Even when he advances in knowledge he will be attached to some single department, instead of gaining groundwork in all, as he would where the size of the concern allowed him to *serve through*, as it is called—that is, where each assistant serves a customer with all she requires, instead of supplying her with goods of one department only, and passing her on to another if she needs other articles.

Another point in apprenticeship may be treated as a question of profit and loss. Short periods of service are much in vogue; instead of the arbitrary term of seven years once imposed, only one of two or three years is now entered on. With a short apprenticeship the employer generally requires a premium, as he soon loses the advantage of the training he has had to impart; with a longer period the premium will not only be dispensed with, but a small salary frequently given for the concluding term of service. With the longer period there is undoubtedly a fuller opportunity of being thoroughly grounded in trade knowledge, instead of having only a superficial smattering sufficient to tide the apprentice over into a situation as assistant. Strictly speaking, indentures are not necessary at all.