

## HOW THE CHRISTMAS CARDS ARE MADE.



**A** PLEASANT sound of many voices, that rises and falls as a door is opened and shut, like the effect produced by raising the louvres, or shutters, in the swell of an organ; then a merry laugh or outcry, and then, as we enter, a complete silence, save for the scratching of busy fingers over paper. To a certain extent it is like entering a school-room with Madame the principal; but this is no school, only a light, well-ventilated work-room, in which some fifty or sixty girls are as busy as the bees in some hive—the bees whose hum seemed to issue from this hive of industry.

Those who take an interest in seeing girls and women furnished with the means of gaining a respectable livelihood in some clean, light business, would be delighted here. For there is not a sallow, unwholesome face to be seen; no girl seems drooping over too much work in a close room, but all look bright, cheerful, and happy, their eyes directing their busy fingers, while a staid middle-aged female sits at a kind of desk in a stall, as if

playing at selling the brightly coloured pictures about her to the various girls who come and go. But this seeming play is all in earnest, and every movement here is relative to the great commercial power, business; for though it is a bright, sunshiny, autumn day, these are preparations for Christmas; in fact, this is one of those factories of Christmas Cards, visited to obtain the materials for a description of the little artistic works with which our homes are flooded at the festive time.

It is of very modern growth, this sending of Christmas tokens; and in spite of the very severe letters that have appeared in the daily press, it is a plant of healthy and ever-increasing dimensions. In fact, it seems that this year there will be a great advance in quantity and quality, for the various makers have been enlisting the services of artists of no mean position, with the result that some of the cards, small as they are, display pictures of such refinement and delicacy of treatment that they will be well worthy of preservation. Let us see how these cards are prepared.

Accompanying a guide to a lower room, where men and boys only are employed, we see a number of great, heavy, creamy-coloured stones, like the flags used for paving, but much thicker, and with one side exquisitely smooth. These are German lithographic stones, and on a closer inspection we find them covered with designs. In fact, an artist has painted on paper some charming little scrap, perhaps a bullfinch on a spray of holly, and this has been copied by the lithographic artists, and, to use their term, placed upon the stone. Let us watch the work, and see what that means.

Here is what has been done. Ten stones will be required to print this pretty design, and on examining them we see that something resembling a badly defined or shadowed resemblance of the pretty card is on these stones; not once, but sixty-four times repeated—eight rows and eight columns of birds placed



there by printing or transferring on the stones. It seems a great number, and a great amount of preparation, but we soon learn that it is needful, and that the repetitions of what seem trifles result in the per-

the screw-press descends on the printed roses, and when the card is removed, the petals and buds stand out above the paper with admirable effect.

This embossing is carried to a great pitch of perfection—faces, figures, and various designs being treated in this way; but a vast amount of the work is done abroad, cut out by steel dies, and sent over here to supply manufacturers at a far lower cost than they can get the labour done at here: It is this same principle of stamping with steel dies, each of which is laboriously cut in some intricate design, at great expense, that supplies us with the delicate paper-lace work that so charmingly ornaments many of the so-called cards, while much of the work is cut out on the same principle—that is, the driving down of a steel die by means of a fly-wheel, or a couple of heavy flying balls,



LET • TREASURES • FILL • YE • CHRISTMAS • STOCKING.

fection we see. The object is, of course, to produce the one brightly-coloured drawing of the water-colour artist in endless quantities, and so at the different presses this is done.

At one the smooth, pure white sheets of card are brought in contact with the stone, and they come up with a bordering of gold. At another press an outline blue pattern is printed on the ground of gold. At the next, a dark shading to the blue pattern, and in the middle of each card a dull dark patch, and a faint trace of a spray. Next follow the shape of the bird, the dark head and back, the delicate roseate hue of its breast, the bright green and dark green of the holly, the scarlet of the berries, and so on and on, each stone supplying some one touch of colour, till lying before us is, in all its original beauty, the reproduction of the artist's water-colour painting, repeated here sixty-four times, and being produced by this combination of labour, after the long preparation, in thousands upon thousands.

Here, though, lies a heap of sheets of cards of a very charming but simple design. It is merely a full-blown rose. Its shadows are delicate in tint, and the whole is very beautiful; but its beauties are yet to be heightened by bringing them out in low relief. In fact, these cards are to be embossed, and to do this a steel die has been cut of the shape of the rose with all its petals. This die is attached to a die-press of tremendous power, a couple of heavy balls fly round,

which are attached to the die-armed screw, and twist it down.

The printing in colours of all the cards is executed on the same principle. The more colours in a card, the more tints even and shades of the same colour, the more stones it has taken, and consequently the more printings it has received. But these sheets of twenty-fours or forty-eights or sixty-fours, according to the size of the designs, are broad and large. They have been rolled and pressed, and look the very perfection of beauty as they are passed over to a man ready to do execution upon them, for he presides over a guillotine. This is a machine set to the exact gauge of the length of the cards to be, and taking forty or fifty, or maybe a hundred sheets, the workman lays them flat on the machine table, passes them under till they are stopped by the gauge, runs round a couple of balls



LET • VS • SHARE • YE • FRUIT • OF • YE • XMAS • TREE.

which turn a screw to hold them tight, and then a wheel revolves, the guillotine knife comes down with a steady, lateral descent, and cuts through the hard mass of pressed-together cards as easily as if they were so much cheese. By this process the card of sixty-four designs is cut up into equal rows of eight, and these in turn are cut into the single cards so familiar at Christmas time, and with edges so regular and smooth that no knife or scissors will produce the same effect. A man so employed cuts up countless thousands in a day, a few turns of a wheel regulating his machine to suit cards of any size; and these now cut up are passed to an upper room, where busy-fingered girls packet them in assorted dozens—fastening each packet with a pretty ornamental band of paper, whose ends are rapidly secured with a touch of molten sealing-wax.

Passing up-stairs once more, we are led into the room where so many girls are busy, some making the packets, but the greater portion at much more elaborate work; and we learn that they far excel boys in these tasks, from their deft cleverness of finger, cleanliness, and closer application to the duty in hand. One girl here has before her a number of cards with so many pretty borders, but blank in the centre. Over this blank place she fits a pretty design in lace-paper, which is made to stand away from the base by four paper springs, formed by doubled strips of the width of narrow tape. Another has a box full of stamped flowers, which she rapidly gums on her cards. Another has birds, the robin being the favourite, and it is wonderful to see how the red-breasted bird, stamped out and embossed, is placed in position with a rapid touch of a gum-brush, and laid in a heap with others to dry. And so card after card is built up with embossed ornaments according to its price, some being quite elaborate pieces of workmanship, all lace, gilding, silvering, and brilliant colours, like one of the better-class valentines meant for a later season.

As a matter of course, the emblems of Christmas time form the majority of the designs for cards; holly is abundant, with its dark glistening leaves and scarlet berries; and so is mistletoe, all delicate grey-green and luminous pearl. The Christmas rose too is plentiful, and every floral design is in exquisite taste, and marvellous in its fidelity to nature. But wassail-bowls and ruddy Father Christmases are not wanting, with fir-trees out of number. Wondrous plum-puddings, each with a knife and fork in it, lie heaped in a box, ready for gumming on some of the cards; in another box are comical turkeys and stately pigs, but the serious and pretty have the greatest sway, while nothing is seen that would offend the most fastidious taste.

Here are some quaint cards, evidently intended for a novelty for the children. They consist of figures which are at first represented by faces, hands, and legs, but which a nimble-fingered damsel dresses up with little stamped velvet suits of clothes, taking them rapidly from a box, and gumming them in their places with a delicacy of touch and accuracy of eye that are in truth surprising. Next to her a quiet-looking girl is

fitting together card-fans, each leaf of the fan bearing a calendar printed ready for the New Year, 1879. They are pretty designs, these, and combine the useful with the ornamental, though from their fragile structure the latter must prevail.

There is a pleasant odour here, though, as if the mimic flowers that flash in myriad dyes had assumed the real at the touch of some enchanter's wand. Rose, lily, musk, and verbena, what a sweet blending! It is only, however, the girl who makes up the sachets or scent-packets distributing perfume, Flora-like, as she hastens on her work. Her scent-packets are, so to speak, so many glazed or enamelled envelopes, with a Christmas card where the direction should be. Into each of these, the Christmas card Flora places a little cotton-wool or wadding, just dusted over with the scent-powder, fastens securely the lappet, and there is a pretty Christmas present, odorous and sweet, ready to remind its recipient of the giver with a strange and subtle power of its own. It is for this reason probably that the forget-me-not, with its tiny eyes of blue, is so often a portion of the design outside, even though a kindly wish for the coming season leaves the gentle flower in the shade.

One firm has excelled itself in the beauty of some of its productions. No built-up pictures are here, all embossing and separate designs, but charming artistic designs, many being gems of the most exquisite tinting and effect. For instance, they have prepared a series of studies of girl-life, simple and classic as if from the pencil of Alma Tadema. Another series is of Japanese birds, leaves, and flowers, delicately quaint, and though perhaps bordering on the grotesque, yet so beautiful in conception that the eye does not weary, as it is never offended by a garish hue.

Perhaps the most perfect of these real gems of colour-printing are the birds, which are so true to nature, so harmonious in tint, that none but an artist who is a naturalist as well could have produced the effect. The aim seems to have been more to obtain a pleasing picture than to produce anything related to the festive season. Hence we have sea-anemones, orchids, and cacti horrent with spines, and quaint in shape; flowers of tints such as nature might have dyed; and mingled with these a series of wild dreams of fairy and elf land, with wondrously formed birds and quadrupeds, such as must have come from the brain of Ernest Griset, though they are unsigned.

Seen in their perfection of blended colours, the cards are very beautiful; in their earlier stages of production, however, they are so many puzzles, and a half-blank sheet with a few colours apparently daubed here and there is anything but a pleasing object to the eye. It is not until lithographic stone after stone has added its blending touches that we realise the patience, care, and wonderful exactitude that have to be exercised to produce these trifles of the season, many of which are really high-class works of art.

But the hum of voices has suddenly increased as we are deeply studying one of a heap of pictures being formed into packets, the scene being a sailors' mess,

with the Jack at the head cutting the Christmas pudding, and this brings us back to the fact that it is one o'clock, and dinner-time, the girls hurrying away to their midday meal, evidently light-hearted and happy at the coming of this respite from their daily task, one that gives pleasure to old and young throughout the land.

The silhouette studies we have given with this paper are original designs supplied by our own artist for the delectation of the readers of this Magazine. Some of our younger readers may find a pleasurable employment in taking tracings or pen-and-ink copies of them, and sending them to their friends.



## FRANK ROSS AT OXFORD.

BY A RESIDENT M.A.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.  
GONE TO OXFORD.

HERE was a long discussion between the Vicar of Porchester and Mr. Ross, the lawyer, as they walked together after evening service to the vicarage. Frank Ross was just eighteen, the eldest of six brothers. He was still at school, but it was time for him to go to the University. Oxford had been chosen—not from any notion of superiority to Cambridge, but simply

because of school and home associations. The difficulty was the choice of a college. The vicar—a well-to-do bachelor—an old Eton and Christ-Church man, advised his own college. But Mr. Ross was frightened. "Christ-Church" to him had ever been a terror, and meant waste of time and money, in the shape of cards, drink, and horse-flesh; and all the vicar's eloquence could not shake his unfounded prejudice. The result of the discussion was that Mr. Ross decided to write to a friend at Oxford, settled there as a "coach"; and also to Mr. Rickards, a country doctor, with a family larger even than his own. The doctor's answer was as follows:—

"DEAR ROSS,—My boy is going to Brasenose: at least, he goes up in May to try for a close scholarship. I can give you no advice, as I know nothing about the place. I sent him to the Hereford Cathedral School by a fluke some years ago; and as there are scholarships and exhibitions from the school to Brasenose, I am saved the difficulty of choosing a college.

"Yours truly,

"W. RICKARDS."

The vicar explained that a "close" scholarship was, like other scholarships, a sum of money paid annually for four or five years as a prize, but differed from them in being confined to competition among boys from certain schools; and that the value of them varied from £45 to £80 per annum, part being paid in money, and part made up in allowances in the way of

diminished fees. The letter from the "coach" was more valuable:—

"DEAR MR. ROSS,—So much depends on your son's abilities, your own means and wishes, that I cannot answer your question as to the best college off-hand. I think I may assume you do not want him to spend more money than is absolutely necessary; and possibly that you would wish him to 'go in for honours' instead of taking a Pass Degree, that is, offering the smallest possible number of subjects for examination. I need hardly say that a high degree in honours opens the way to a Fellowship, or at any rate to good masterships in schools; and is, in fact, a distinct help, directly and indirectly, not only in educational, but in all professions.

"It is far better for a lad to go to a good college, even though he is unable to obtain a scholarship or any other college endowment, than to go to an inferior college, where he may succeed in getting pecuniary assistance. To illustrate what I mean: I believe, in the long run, it would be wiser to send your son as a commoner to New College, Balliol, Corpus, Paul's, University, and perhaps a few others, than as a scholar to Wadham, Pembroke, or Lincoln. If, from a pecuniary point of view, you do not care for him to get a scholarship, nor want him to read for honours, and are not particular as to whether he spends £300 or £500 a year (or even more), I should send him to Christ-Church, Brasenose, Exeter, or St. John's. The first two especially were in my day emphatically popular colleges, and I believe are so still. But I would not send him to either unless you are fully prepared for the amount of expenditure which I have named. Possibly you might like our only denominational college—Keble. He would be most carefully looked after in every way, and his expenses kept within a fixed limit. The Warden and Tutors devote their whole energies to their men, and the men themselves speak in the most affectionate terms of them—a most exceptional fact, I assure you. But I must warn you that the religious tone of the college is distinctly pronounced, and inclines to ritualistic rather than evangelical doctrines.

"If your son's college life will be a pinch to you (you will allow me to speak thus plainly on such a question), send him as an Unattached Student. But here, again, you and he should clearly understand that the life of an unattached student is isolated,\* and quite unlike the life of the college undergraduate. I should fancy your choice will lie between New College, Corpus, Paul's, Balliol, and University. A scholarship at either means that the scholar is capable, with industry, of gaining the highest honours in his future University examinations. If there are any objections to either, I should say they would be these—and possibly even these may be fanciful: Balliol has a great many men who—not to say anything unkind—are rough. New College has beautiful gardens and a magnificent college service, and I fear these attractions induce 'loafing.' On the whole, I think, I incline to Paul's. Unfortunately, you have just missed the examination for scholarships. There is, however, an ordinary matriculation examination for commoners in about three weeks' time. If your son holds a good position in his school, he ought to have no difficulty in passing even at this short notice, for the subjects are those which are read in forms lower than the highest at all schools. I shall be happy to do anything further in the matter for you that I can. He should come prepared for residence, in the event of his passing. The examination begins on the Wednesday after Easter, and will be over in time for successful candidates to 'come

\* The only exception to this statement is when an undergraduate migrates, as for various reasons sometimes he is obliged, from college to the body of the unattached. His society, being already formed, remains unbroken.