

I am writing by a fire in the old blue boudoir, which is so dear to me from its memories of the time when Charlie and I were poor, that when the Court was being done up my dear boy had it renovated and improved for my morning-room. We are fonder of it even now than of any of the grander rooms, and I like best to sit here alone with Charlie and talk of those past days, so hard and yet so dear.

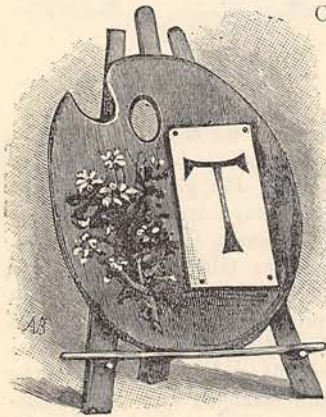
As I look from my window the whole country round as far as I can see is once more Beaucourt estate. Once more the Beaucourts "hold up their heads with the proudest in the land," as Mrs. Susan used

to say when she exasperated me by telling me I was not one of them.

There is Charlie's step on the stairs : he is coming to sit with me till the dressing-bell rings. This is our cosy half-hour together—the happiest half-hour in the day.

"Take Baby to the nursery, Mrs. Susan, please ; and, Charlie dear, let Charles the younger go, and don't smother him beforehand.—No, I didn't say you might look over my shoulder, you rude boy ! I'll come directly ; I have only half a dozen more words to write to finish the true, complete, authentic history of Court Beaucourt's Treasure, and how it was lost and found."

TABLE DECORATIONS.



AN EASEL MENU-STAND.

O make home bright, cheerful, and beautiful, is assuredly one of woman's primary duties ; but to be successful in fulfilling this duty a good deal of time and thought must be given to the subject. There are so many ways in which we can beautify our surroundings, so many opportunities are constantly recurring, that if we take

advantage of them we cannot fail to enliven and improve even the dullest of dull houses. We do not, however, intend to take up our space with remarks of a general kind ; we would rather try if we can help, by a few practical words, those housewives who, acknowledging their obligations in this matter, are yet sometimes at a loss to tell what to find in the way of novelties.

In the present paper we intend to deal exclusively with table decorations, although in doing so we do not mean to confine ourselves merely to the consideration of the filling of silver épergnes and exquisitely engraved flower-vases mounted on golden stands. Those who possess such valuable articles probably possess also the means wherewith to send to the most renowned florists for a supply of the rarest hothouse blossoms, and with such materials, if they have any taste whatever, they can scarcely avoid making a creditable display.

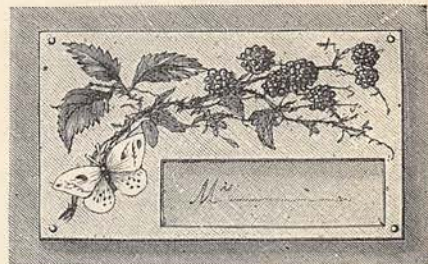
Nothing can take the place of flowers. Their lovely varied tints and graceful foliage make a decoration that cannot be equalled by any substitutes, natural or artificial.

Then, too, no table can look well, however rich may be the appurtenances, unless the linen is pure and

spotless. No "slut's folds" should mar the regularity of the creases. A table-cloth that has seen its best days, and some of its worst as well, if fresh and clean, is preferable to a new one tumbled and soiled. And it must be put on carefully, with the centre crease exactly in the middle of the table ; it is enough to spoil the flavour of the best-cooked viands to sit down in front of a cloth laid all askew, and almost enough to make the most indifferent lose at least some of their appetite for the meal—be it ever so tempting.

A large embroidered monogram is admirable in one corner of the cloth ; the crest may occupy the other, or the crest may be placed above the monogram : whichever plan is adopted, it must be carried out on a large scale if it is to be effective.

The serviettes naturally claim our next attention. These look well when flatly folded on the table if the centre is worked with the monogram—the centre, that is, of the outer square when the serviette is folded. For the breakfast-table we like them simply laid, but for dinner most will agree that they should be



A GUEST-CARD.

more elaborately folded. To our thinking the neat tall pyramid is one of the best forms, and it is more uncommonly used than the mitre or the shoe. The serviettes should be large, and they should be quite square, or it will be found awkward to fold them up in the different styles.

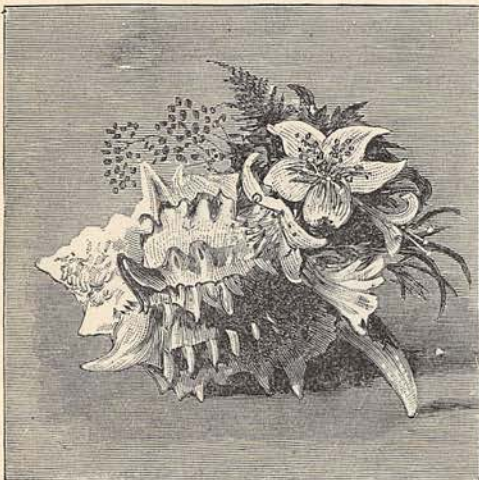
As a last word on table-linen, let us say that it

should be of the very finest quality, then, if well "got up," it looks almost like white satin, so soft and shiny is the surface; and the pattern should be unobtrusive yet well defined. A fashion that now-a-days finds favour is to lay a strip of plush on either side of the table; the colour, it is almost needless to say, should harmonise with the room decorations. To choose a shade simply because it is pretty without any regard to its surroundings would be an act of simple folly, for the appearance of the room would be quite spoilt if the table-strip did not agree with the curtains, &c.

Were a wrong tint used, a casual observer might not be able to tell at once what seemed to him objectionable in the room when he entered it at the appointed dinner-hour; but he would feel the incongruity of the juxtaposed colours; there would be no repose because the eye would not be satisfied.

In choosing the plush we must remember that for a large part of the year many of us dine by artificial light; therefore it will be necessary to consider, when making our purchases, what colours will be least affected by gas or candle-light. Some persons are so fond of blue, they would have it everywhere, on their bonnets and on their chairs; but charming as it is in the day time, it is not a colour that lights up well. At the risk of seeming showy in our taste, we would rather advise that a deep ruby or maroon be selected, as doubtless these will prove on trial to be far more appropriate for the purpose; the red tells well against the green foliage of plants, as no blue would do.

The strip of plush may vary in width according to the width of the table, and also to suit the fancy of the housewife. It may be bordered with cord or gold lace; the latter will produce a good effect on the white damask; or, what is a more elegant style to our



SHELL FLOWER-STAND.

idea, it may be simply bordered with a garland of real leaves; but the latter plan labours under the disadvantage of the work having to be done each time the plush is used, while the corded or lace-edged strip is always

ready for use. Cutflowers may be placed at intervals on the plush band, or little flower-glasses, raised on three feet, filled with light foliage and two or three blooms, can be placed on the plush, one in front of each guest. In preference to the band, or for the sake of a change, some persons would like to have plush mats;

these should form a line down the centre of the table. On the largest middle one would stand a tall glass of flowers, on the two smaller the glasses should be lower, or small china vases may take their place, filled with tiny growing ferns. Shells, filled with flowers, are sometimes used now as table ornaments; and skilful fingers, guided by fertile brains in conjunction with artistic taste, will prove that there is a large field open here for the display of talent. Success will depend on the choice of shells, and still more upon the manner in which they are arranged and filled. Discretion should be exercised as to the number the table will take, so that there should not be an overplus; then there should be variety without the loss of unity. We do not need to match our shells in pairs as we would our vases, still they must to some extent agree either in size or form; to have one very large specimen, and in the corresponding position on the table a wee insignificant one, would be fatal to all ideas of good proportion. They may be placed *au naturel* on the cloth or plush, or they may be mounted on stands. The latter are easy enough for any one to make, although there is, of course, some little trouble attending their manufacture; still there is a lasting satisfaction, if it is successfully accomplished, in seeing our own handiwork on our tables. The stands are to be made in the following way:—Get some firm young branches of trees and cut off pieces of the required length; trim off the smaller shoots informally to within about a quarter of an inch or so of the stem. Now ebonise all the sticks and set them on one side to dry. Then with some wire, or twine, fasten them together, some little distance from the top, after the fashion of the gipsy kettie-stands. The fastening must be placed higher or lower according to the size of the shell the stand is to support. Gild the tips of the off-shoots and also the fastening. Set the shell well into the sticks, and on no account let it look as if it would easily fall off, neither should it appear top-heavy.



SHELL FLOWER-STAND.

Having now made our ornaments, we may enjoy the pleasure of seeing how they look when filled. The larger kinds may be set with lycopodium drooping over the edges, and some tall feathery fern-leaves subduing a few blossoms of brilliant hues; the smaller ones can have a foundation of moss laid in, and shooting up from among the rich green some primroses and snowdrops. Flowers must never be overcrowded. Those who can arrange a few effectively with some delicate fronds of maiden-hair are more certain of a successful result, and deserve higher praise, than others who must needs have a large handful at least to fill a single vase. Colours, too, require to be contrasted well, the brilliantly-tinted flowers being modified in tone with ample greenery, the more delicately toned with light graceful foliage. If one colour is found to detract from, or "kill," another, they must not be placed in juxtaposition. When heavier and lighter kinds of flowers are combined, the latter must be cut with longer stems that they may rise above the rest and fall gracefully over them.

Much of interest might be written on the subject, but we must not linger further than to say that the best way to prove whether the arrangement is satisfactory or not is to finish it off, put it in position, and then to stand back some distance to look at it; the faults can then be noted, and the general effect judged of, as they never could be while the observer is bending over the vase, putting in the flowers. In the same way does the artist judge of his painting; he puts in some touches, then retires a few paces to criticise his work. And the arrangement of flowers is artistic work; to a few it comes as it were naturally, the eye decides at once on combinations of colour and form, and with a few skilful touches they rear a marvel of loveliness in maybe the commonest of vases. Above all, never let an artificial flower, made of muslin or paper, find room on the table, as if any one could be imposed upon by such paltry make-believes, or that such materials, forsooth, could even for an instant lead any one to suppose that they were looking at the delicate petals of a natural flower. If we cannot have cut flowers, and are not satisfied with growing foliage plants alone, thinking that colour is

indispensable to dinner-table decorations, then by all means let us find it, but in some less objectionable way. Let us subdue our candle-light with soft pink shades, lay our table with ruby-tinted glass, let our water-jug and goblets be of topaz-hued glass set with amethyst handles, let us ornament our dishes with clear-cut jellies of varied tints; there are a hundred ways in which we may add colour without descending to the employment of shams.

And what of *menu* cards? Of the making of these it would seem there is no end. Well, we will give our idea of a pretty conceit; if they are not *chic* they are nothing. Have a miniature easel cut by a carpenter, and also a palette. Stain them both dark oak. Now paint a cluster of flowers on the left side of the palette, being sure to leave space enough clear for a card to be fixed on it; on the card the *menu* is to be written. Choose one of the right size, make four holes a little way in, one at each of the corners, lay it in position on the palette, and make four corresponding holes in the latter right through the wood. Now get some tiny gold-headed paper-fasteners, and with these fasten the card in place. Glue the palette on to the easel, and the *menu* stand is complete. When the card has to be changed, remove the fasteners and put on a fresh one. The palette may be tied on through the finger-hole, if preferred, with a fine silken cord and tassels; or it may rest loosely on the easel. Guest-cards can be made very prettily and easily by any one who can paint a design of flowers. Two cards about the size of a gentleman's visiting card, and four of the small fasteners mentioned before, are alone required. On one card paint a spray of blackberries, commencing on the left side, and let it spread climbing along the top. On the lower part of the right-hand side cut out an oblong piece sufficiently large to allow of a slip of paper, on which the name is written, being inserted underneath. Fix the cards together at the four corners with the gold-headed fasteners, and when required for use write the name on paper and run it between the two, so that it shows through the oblong opening. The advantage of this style of card is that it can be used over and over again. The flower designs should be varied as much as possible.

REMUNERATIVE EMPLOYMENTS FOR GENTLEMEN.

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.



HE interest evinced by so many of our readers in the articles on "Remunerative Employments for Gentlewomen," and the attention the latter have constantly and increasingly received on all sides, prove that the subject is one not only of great importance, but one also that affects the well-being and comfort of a considerable number of the gentler sex. These are days in which "high prices" are largely prevalent; when the "march of intellect" has added considerably

to our housekeeping expenses; and when the habits, the conveniences, the very civilisation of the age, in fact, render an outlay inevitable such as would have been held to be the very height of extravagance and folly in our grandfathers' days. To provide for this, and to enable us to perform somehow or other that very delicate operation of making ends meet, every nerve has to be strained, every power of mind and body has to be brought into requisition and utilised. If ladies feel, in so many instances, the pressure of