

MODERN DINNER-TABLES.

posal, and to whom the appeal to the President has been referred.

A system of office brokerage has sprung up in Washington, whereby the broker, for a commission or percentage on the salary of the office for which his client applies, engages to use his influence, whatever that may be, and however exerted, in order to obtain the office.

Thirdly, it will be observed again that General M— went back to Ohio. In other words, he went home, a disappointed office-seeker without the office. He is thereby representative of at least nine-tenths of the office-seeking class.

The figures mount up to strange proportions when we consider that for every office in the gift of the President there are, on an average, ten applicants; and as there are one hundred thousand Federal office-holders in the United States, it almost takes one's breath away to learn that there are in round numbers one million of the office-seeking class, of which nine hundred thousand must needs be disappointed.

It is not necessary in this place to compare the Civil Service of America with that of England, further than to say that at the change of the National Administration from one party to another, every office within the gift of the Executive becomes, in the eyes of the members of his party, a sort of legitimate prize for their avaricious self-seeking.

Happily the current of public opinion is strongly setting against the system embodied in the words of Andrew Jackson, "To the victors belong the spoils;"

and we have good reason for hope that the time is not far distant when the Civil Service of this country will be put upon such a basis that rotation in office will not mean the displacement of every Civil servant, from a Cabinet Minister to a letter-carrier.

Suffice it to say that under the pernicious system so long prevalent in this country, and which is, at present, altogether too firmly established in the political workings of the Federal Government, there has naturally been bred this multitudinous horde of place-seekers, who, if they do not sink to the degrading infamy of a Guiteau, are certainly a menace to the well-being of the body politic, and a reproach to the good name of the Republic.

Many think that an Independent party, which is now springing up (and whose adherents did good work in the last election), will, in the end, stamp out this evil. Others say—and perhaps wisely—that the Presidential term should be extended two or four years, thereby making less frequent the wild scramble for office; to say nothing of the paralysing effect on all business caused by the general excitement of a Presidential election.

Whatever the particular remedy may be that is to prove successful in this case, it is evident that time and education will do most of all; and when the memory of the late war sinks deeper into the past, and the word "General" loses its tender historic interest, let us trust that the trade of office-hunting, thus shorn of half its dignity, will attract smaller crowds to Washington, and that the good men of Ohio will remain quietly at home.

A. Z. S.

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SUPPOSE that never were decorative articles of every description to be had in such variety, and at so small a cost. Certainly this is the case with those suitable for dinner-table adornment.

It must be taken for granted that many are unsuitable for middle-class families, at the same time they are subject to modifications, and all who are anxious to improve the appearance of their dinner-tables may gain many ideas from those of a more elaborate kind.

Just now there is a rage for plush of every colour, and it is, unquestionably, one of the most lovely fabrics for the table. Rich shades of crimson, claret, old gold, myrtle and moss greens are all in good taste, and generally chosen, though it is easy to substitute others when these would clash with the dinner service or general surroundings.

In combination with plush, plate-glass plays an important part, and, if bought judiciously, is not so expensive as many would suppose. Very good quality

may be had from a glass merchant (not at a retail shop) in any large town for about half-a-crown per square foot; thus a piece six feet long and eighteen inches wide would cost but twenty-two shillings and sixpence, and—it is almost needless to remark—could be converted to other uses eventually.

At a recent dinner for ten, the table was arranged as follows:—A sheet of plate-glass, seven feet by eighteen inches, occupied the centre of the table, the latter being sufficiently large to leave a good margin for the dinners. On the glass the dessert was placed in such a way as to give every guest an uninterrupted view of the rest of the company.

The centre-piece—very little higher than the others—was an exquisite little fountain, which discharged sweet-scented water; round the base, moss, ferns, and various grasses, with pieces of ice, were artistically grouped.

The dessert service consisted of shallow glass dishes of varied sizes and shapes, of shell-like, ever-changing hues. The time of the year being late autumn, an exquisite garnish for the fruits was obtained from ferns, ivy, marguerites (both white and yellow), and gracefully arranged sprays of the leaves of the black-berry briar, elderberry, and wild geranium; their vivid

orange, scarlet, and dark crimson tints contrasting charmingly with the pale star-like flowers and the varied greens of the other foliage. Nothing artificial, it will be noted, found place here! To proceed: down the sides and at the ends of the sheet of glass, strips of plush, about six inches wide, were laid. The colour was a rich ruby, and all round the outer edge what may be termed glass troughs were set to form an entire border. These were two inches high and about the same width, and in them more of the flowers and leaves before mentioned found place, in addition to scarlet and white fuchsias, which were placed among the dark leaves, and hung carelessly over the edges of the troughs.

On the margin of plush, viz., between this outer arrangement of flowers and the fruits in the centre, were ferns of various kinds, alternating with maiden-hair, growing in natural shells, the supports for which consisted of three sticks silvered over.

The finger-bowls were novel in shape—rather as if a square piece of glass had been gathered in the hand by the four corners, so that the middle formed an irregular half-sphere, the flat parts resting on the table; and, the opening being small, the four corners standing out from it in irregular curves and peaks. They were of ruby glass, the salt-cellars, water-jugs, &c., being all of the same rich hue.

The dinner service, of the shade of cream known as "Queen's ware," just relieved by a band of ruby and gold, and a monogram and crest of the same colours, was harmonious and unobtrusive.

The room was entirely lighted by wax candles, a tiny ruby shade over each shedding a softened glow, and adding to the general effect.

We may mention another dinner, where the guests numbered thirty. Here the prevailing tone was a rich golden-brown. The middle of the table was covered with plush of this shade, edged with a heavy gold lace. All round, close to the plush, were narrow sheets of plate-glass, at each edge of which, on the glass, was a moss border, out of which, as if growing, peeped waxen bells of stephanotis and superb Christmas roses alternately, sprays of golden jessamine fringing the edge of the moss on each side. The time of year was Christmas, but, of course, other flowers could be substituted to suit the various seasons; we may mention that white jessamine and plumbago would make a very effective border if dark claret plush were used; wild strawberries and white field roses would look equally charming placed in proximity to myrtle or olive-green plush. The flowers mentioned may be varied indefinitely, but care must be taken in selection, only such as will lie tolerably flat on the moss being suitable for the purpose.

The same floral specimens, which we have named as used on this particular occasion, reappeared in tiny pots, each encased in gold wicker-work, and were placed plentifully about the table. Nothing was set upon the plush; the dessert, in rare old china of gold and white, being put on the glass, between the borders of moss and flowers.

Perhaps it may seem superfluous to remark that

in each case the damask cloth and serviettes were faultlessly placed, and of exquisite quality.

If any of our readers care to adopt this style of decoration, but do *not* care to go to the expense of the plush and plate-glass, they may yet make their table "a thing of beauty" without these adjuncts by careful arrangement of the moss and flowers alone, or by using strips of cloth of rich colours (in the place of the strips of glass), bordering them on each side with the moss (on which the flowers must be arranged as before directed), and placing the pots of flowers at regular intervals down the centre of each strip.

In table-linen, like all else, fashion has wrought many changes. It is often embroidered somewhat largely with the monogram or crest of the owner; sometimes both are seen. The colours are generally gold or crimson, or a combination.

Dinner-mats—used by those who cling to the old custom of carving on the table—of "Lincrusta Walton" are a good deal used. This material is produced in plain colours, as well as in richly embossed designs, and is both durable and inexpensive.

Dessert d'oyleys of plush, edged with lace, find favour, while hand-painted satin ones are equally popular. We saw lately a set of a delicate shrimp-pink, edged with a deep coffee lace. In the centre of each a spray of white flowers was painted, there being twelve varieties in all, as follows:—Hawthorn, blackthorn, pear-blossom, snowdrop, convolvulus, jessamine, stephanotis, spiræa, field rose, anemone, crocus, and ox-eyed daisy. White plush, edged with lace, looked suitable and rich at a wedding *déjeuner*; they were a present from, and made by, the bride's sister.

Equally pretty decorations for the table may be made from the thick gold paper which is now so much used for artistic purposes; it may be cut to any shape, but must be mounted on stout cardboard, or something equally strong, before being painted upon; gold American cloth is used for similar purposes, and both look well if placed down the table in long strips, bordered with natural flowers, and plenty of foliage.

Of *menu* and guest cards there is an endless variety, hand-painted on china, porcelain, or card, being equally popular according to position and requirements.

For ordinary home dinners, the tinted cards, with gilt or silvered edges (such as are used for birthday or Christmas cards), are sufficiently elaborate, and there are few homes where, in this artistic age, there is not at least one member capable of giving the required embellishment. Simple sprays of flowers may be painted on these, either in oils or water-colours, or small landscapes etched in one corner in Indian ink or sepia. Even caricatures, if well drawn and in good taste, make a pleasing variety. We would suggest, however, that it is well to adopt the same style of decoration for *menu* cards and dessert d'oyleys; not, for instance, to have flowers painted on one set and landscapes etched on another.

Many comparative novelties might be enumerated if space permitted; one is a dish in shape similar to a vine-leaf, divided into three sections, for cheese,

butter, and bread or biscuits. The cheese should be cut into small pieces, and the butter moulded in tiny shapes, as varied as possible. Antique glass and silver, and when these are unobtainable, imitations of the antique are becoming general.

Most delicate in design and workmanship are the small lamps so much used for dinner-tables, and, although very pretty shades may be bought, many ladies find pleasant occupation in making some tiny original ones. Perforated cardboard, gold, silver, or white, is a good foundation; it may be lined with a contrasting colour, and worked with a monogram to match. Some of the Japanese designs, too, are striking, and may be worked very quickly with crewel wools. Many satteens and muslins (Oriental) would make novel and pretty shades. Or here, again, the gold paper referred to would be useful; it should, to be effective, be lined with some bright colour, and may be turned to account by artistic fingers in any

way which is suitable, at a nominal cost. Tiny stew-pans of silver, in which to serve *ramakins* and *soufflés*, are another innovation; their price, necessarily, restricts their adoption, but ere long we shall probably see the same shape in a cheaper material.

We hope that these slight suggestions may prove of such use to our readers that they will, at least, be able to adapt them to suit their own needs, as there are so many little ways by which a dinner-table may be lifted from the commonplace, and made fit to rank among really artistic objects.

At the moment of going to press we saw a plush centre-piece, made to order, as much in design and colouring like a Turkey carpet as it well could be; and although more uncommon and expensive than the self-colours we have referred to, we liked it far less; the general appearance, as it was fringed at the ends, being suggestive of a hearth-rug.

BEAUTY IN UNLIKELY PLACES.

PRETTY RAILWAY-STATIONS.



SIGNAL-BOX, LANSDOWN STATION, NEAR CHELTENHAM.

“THERE never was more flagrant nor impertinent folly than the smallest portion of ornament in anything concerned with railways or near them.” Such is the explicit conviction of that arch-enemy of steam, Mr. John Ruskin.

whole system of railway travelling is addressed to people who, being in a hurry, are therefore, for the time being, miserable. . . . The railroad is in all its relations a matter of earnest business, to be got through as soon as possible. It transmutes a man from a traveller into a living parcel. For the time he has parted with the nobler characteristics of humanity for the sake of a planetary power of locomotion.”

After these vehement remarks it would, perhaps, be idle to reason with Professor Ruskin. He can find no romance on the railroad. The carriage-windows of the train that conveys him from London to Coniston frame no pictures that come and go with ever-changing flight, relieved from monotony by comparison and kaleidoscopic contrast. Even the gigantic engineering works that excite the average mind by their sublime domination over the forces of nature; the lofty bridges where the traveller is

The Brantwood philosopher, in his

“Borne, like Loretto’s chapel, through the air;

fervently illuminated “Seven Lamps of Architecture,” decries the decoration of railway-stations as one of the most strange and evil tendencies of the present day. He conscientiously contends that if there be any place in the world in which people are deprived of the disposition necessary to the contemplation of beauty, it is there. Mr. Ruskin says that he would as soon “put rings on the fingers of a smith at his anvil,” as make a railway-station pleasing to the eye. The railway-station, by the way, may be compared to the home of the smith—would he deny him Longfellow’s “spreading chestnut-tree”? “It is,” he continues, “the very temple of discomfort, and the only charity that the builder can extend to us is to show us, plainly as may be, how soonest to escape from it. . . . The

the romance of river and rock made more ravishing by engineering realism; the graceful viaducts whose curving arches span rainbow-like deep and devious valleys, with wood and water far away below, and which are quite as engaging as the ruined Italian viaducts that Turner idealised, convey no more intelligent expression than that of grovelling commercial greed to the supersensitive soul of the author of “Modern Painters.” I quite agree with my friend Mr. M. J. Baddeley in his protest in this connection. He says: “Railways, in regard to their effect on natural scenery, have been abused wholesale. Poets have led the way, and everybody with a ‘soul for the beautiful’ has followed. They are straight and square, and altogether out of harmony with the flowing lines of nature; yet Turner’s pictures abound in