

strangling the Nemæan lion cured colic in the true believer; and others bearing the names of the three Kings of Cologne were supposed to possess innumerable virtues. Even now a sty on the eyelid is supposed to be cured by rubbing with a wedding ring. The toadstone rings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were silver, with a jewel supposed to be taken from the head of a very old toad. Their owners could detect poison by its means, for it changed colour. Shakespeare alludes to this in *As You Like It*, act ii., scene 1:—

“Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like a toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.”

In Sweden, maidens anxious to foretell the future place a ring, a coin, and a piece of black ribbon each under a separate cup. If the ring is first exposed, they marry within the year; the coin secures a rich husband; but the ribbon denotes an old maid. The Russian girls conceal their finger-rings amid the corn in the barn, and then bring in a hen to peck the grain. She whose property is first unearthed is supposed to be the first to marry. In England, a ring, a button, and a coin are often placed in the wedding cake. She who secures the ring is to be the next bride; the

button, the old maid; the coin secures a wealthy suitor. A ring put in posset “infuses magic power,” and “will tell the fair if haply she will wed.”

Rings did not always encircle the finger. In the fifteenth century and later they were frequently hung by a ribbon round the neck; and a ring in the bandstring in the seventeenth century was mentioned as an essential of good dressing. The dandies of an earlier period cut holes in their gloves that the gems on their fingers might be seen.



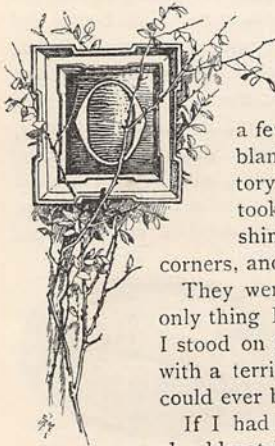
KINGS OF COLOGNE RING.  
(South Kensington Museum.)

There is a comic side to the history of rings. Addison, in the *Spectator*, alludes to “a gold ring to be grinned for by men,” which the writer considers should bear the posy, “The frightful grinner be the winner.”

John Heywood, in the sixteenth century, alludes to “Him that hoppeth best, at last to have the ring”; and in an old church at Bury St. Edmund’s a record is kept of a certain bride who, having no arms, had the ring placed on the fourth toe of her left foot, and signed the register with her right foot.

## THE BRIGHTENING OF THREE DREARY BACK ROOMS.

### FIRST PAPER.



IF the dull cold dreariness of their aspect, there could be no question. Outside, a few yards from the windows, the blank walls of a great manufactory shut out light and air, and took away all chance of the sun shining into those dark bogie-like corners, and chasing the spiders away.

They were large rooms: that was the only thing I could say in their praise as I stood on the threshold, and wondered, with a terrible sinking of the heart, if I could ever bring myself to live in them.

If I had had one particle of choice I should not have gone there, but as it was, circumstances had ordained that it was to be my home, and I had to give myself up to making the best of it.

Now, had I possessed plenty of money, this “making the best” would not have been so very difficult; beautiful painted glass and Morris papers would have wrought wonders, and I should soon have had a pretty room; but money was not very plentiful with me just then, and I was obliged to count the cost of everything that I ordered.

The first room was papered with an old-fashioned flock paper, dreadfully dark, in colours of brown and purple; it was very ugly, but, like many ugly things, was

in wonderful preservation. I hardly liked to tear it down and have the walls scraped and another put up; I ought not to begin with an unnecessary expense. Then I remembered that I could paint it—the expense



MY POLISHED PINE MANTEL-PIECE.



MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

would be much less than a new paper, and the effect gained by painting on flock is exceedingly good: the pattern shows up under the paint in bold relief. Before we began to paint I bought some yards of Japanese gold paper at eighteenpence the yard, and some of the Lincustra bordering. This bordering was nailed round the top of the room, just below the ceiling. The gold paper was cut into panels and was pasted upon the wall, great care having been first taken to tear off the flock paper beneath it; had this not been removed, the surface of the wall would have been unequal. When the paper was thoroughly dry the painting began, the great question of the colour having first been settled.

The colour depended more upon the character of the room than upon individual taste and inclination. Had the room been less cold and sunless, white walls and gold panels would have been beautiful, but under present circumstances I felt warmth must be the first consideration, so we fixed on a red, or rather a crimson lake, and when finished, the choice was quite justified. The first coat was of white paint; it is always well in painting flock papers to use white for the first coat, as it prevents the colours of

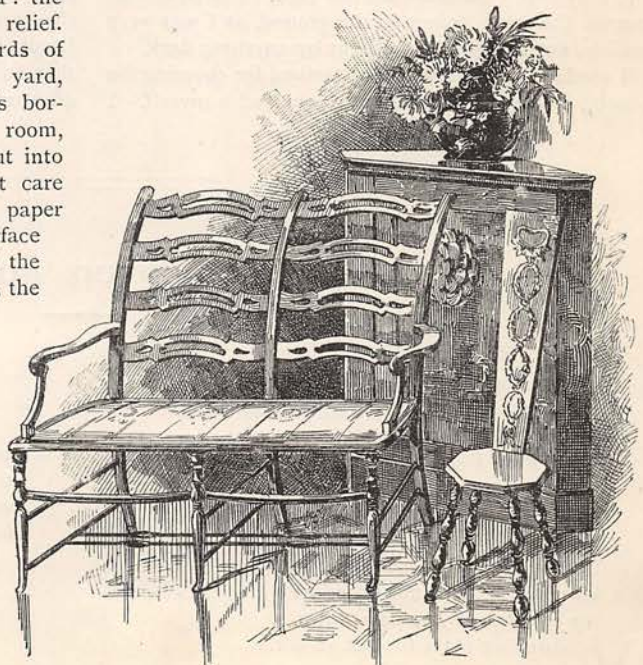
the flock taking away the brightness of the paint, and it gives substance also to the Lincustra border. Two coats of the crimson lake completed the work, and when some etchings in black and white frames were hung, the walls looked wonderfully well. The mantel-piece was a dreadful wooden one, painted to represent marble. I could have had it scraped and re-painted, but I was extravagant enough to take it down and to put up one of polished pine, which I illustrate here. The mantel-piece and overmantel are all made in one, a little mirror of bevelled glass is let into the centre, while a motto is carved over the brass fireplace.

I bought a pierced brass fender for this room, costing nineteen and sixpence. The walls being finished, the carpet had to be considered, and this was an anxious question. A carpet to cover the floor was a difficult thing, and yet the boards were too old and worm-eaten for polish and staining, and even could they be stained the colour would not look well with my polished pine.

After a great deal of thought, I ended by having no carpet at all. I had the floor covered with parquet flooring. This was laid upon the old boards and fitted tightly over the floor; it made a great difference to the warmth of the room, as it kept out the draughts which used to rush up between the cracks.

The parquet we had was of the thin kind and in light polished wood. A large Turkey rug, costing thirty-one and sixpence, was put down in front of the fireplace, and looked very well.

But though all this was an improvement, the black walls of the manufactory still stared in at the



THE OAK SPINNING-CHAIR.

windows in hopeless ugliness. What could be done? Fine silk inner curtains would have been pretty, but on trying a piece of silk against the pane I found that it darkened the already dark room too much to be a possibility. At last I remembered a device that I had once seen in a friend's house.

I hunted the shops through till I found some very fine muslin with a very large pattern. I succeeded in getting exactly what I wanted—a pale cream ground with a faded-looking pattern of crimson flowers and leaves, edged, as in coloured glass, with olive green: it was fifty inches wide, at tenpence-halfpenny the yard. This I pasted on all the lower part of the window; I had to exercise great care in keeping it quite straight. I used fish glue, as I found it whiter and much stronger than gum.

The effect of muslin used in this way is wonderful. As it is pasted tightly on the glass, there are no folds, as in curtains, to obstruct the light; it does not soil for a very long time, and then it can easily be washed off with very hot water and a hard nail-brush, and the glass can be re-covered. Over the top panes of these windows I pasted some dried fronds of ferns: the Royal and Bracken. I made them come from each side, and did not let them quite meet in the middle. They must be fastened on very carefully; each leaf should be lightly gummed down to the glass.

My windows looked very well when they were finished; but I have always found the top panes very difficult to keep clean, as it is so hard not to rub the dried ferns off.

For curtains I chose a very pretty "Art Tapestry." The ground was something the same colour as my floor, and it was worked in stripes of gold, with flowers in crimson and pale pink: it was a very nice material and exceedingly cheap, as it was fifty-two inches wide, and only cost eighteenpence the yard. I lined it with canvas the same colour as the ground, as I was very anxious not to obstruct the light by anything dark.

I used the tapestry I have described for covering the couch; it was an old one, and I covered it myself. I

found it easier first of all to take the pattern in paper, which I did by pinning newspapers all over it. When these fitted well, and were all right as to their seams, I laid them upon the material and cut out my pattern; after this, the rest was easy work. I made a deep frill all round the bottom, but I find with tapestry it is best to pleat instead of gathering it.

I will give some description of my new furniture; it was not expensive, but wonderfully strong and artistic. My oak spinning-chair only cost fifteen-and-six, and is made from an old model two hundred years old. The Shakespeare oak chair is also a copy, while the settee and smaller chairs are quite modern, though very well designed. I am very proud of their seats, for I modelled them myself in the raised leather-work, and I am told they will never wear out.

I have a comfortable Indian rattan-cane rocking-chair, for which I paid nineteen-and-sixpence. As the room is used for a dining-room, I had of course to buy a table. I ordered a deal one with polished pine legs, and had to have it made. It has a round top, and cost about four pounds. I use for a table-cloth one of the lovely Indian quilts, the colours of which look very well in my room. I could not pay the price required for a good sideboard, and would not have a common cheap one, so I had to go without one at all, and bought instead an oak table with two drawers, and beautifully carved, which I thought would serve the same purpose; it cost three guineas. Of course this did not give a cupboard, but I found I could get a very pretty oak corner cupboard for two guineas. So I had my sideboard accommodation for five guineas; and the corner cupboard, having three large roomy shelves, was useful for many things. The walls being so bright, the dark oak furniture in no sense served to make the room look gloomy. The light polished boards and the brass fireplace all gave colour; and though I could hardly believe the evidence of my own eyes, it was true that, in spite of its dreary surroundings, the whole effect of the room when finished was one of brightness.

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### AN OLD TIME WOOING.

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DEAREST, I have no courtly grace  
 To sing the beauties of thy face,  
 To praise thy hair, thy matchless eyes,  
 And all thy gentle witcheries.  
 But all I am, and fain would be,  
 Dearest, my dearest,  
 Is for thee!

Dearest, I have no gold or gem  
 To make for thee meet diadem;  
 No costly dress, no palace rare,  
 Fit dwelling-place for one so fair.

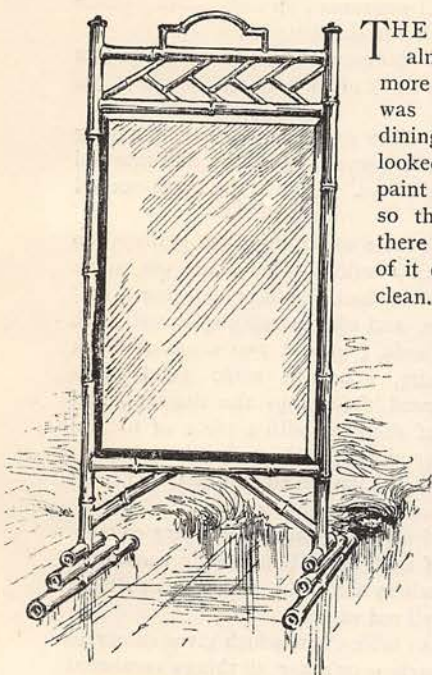
But what I have, and all that's mine,  
 Dearest, my dearest,  
 All is thine!

Good-night! the stars are in the skies,  
 But all my light is in thine eyes;  
 And every rose in this sweet land  
 Is nought compared to thy dear hand;  
 Because I know, because I see,  
 Dearest, my dearest,  
 Thou lovest me!

FRED. E. WEATHERLY.

## THE BRIGHTENING OF THREE DREARY BACK ROOMS.

## SECOND PAPER.



A BAMBOO-FRAMED LOOKING-GLASS.

THE drawing-room was almost, if possible, a more difficult task. It was smaller than the dining-room, but it looked so dark, and the paint was so worn and so thick in dirt, that there seemed no hope of it ever even looking clean. It was easy enough to call in scrubbers and whitewashers; the hard part began after they had departed.

Now, when everything is done, and is so fairly successful, I wonder at the anxiety it cost me, though I know that if I had to do it all over again

I should give just the same amount of serious thought to the subject.

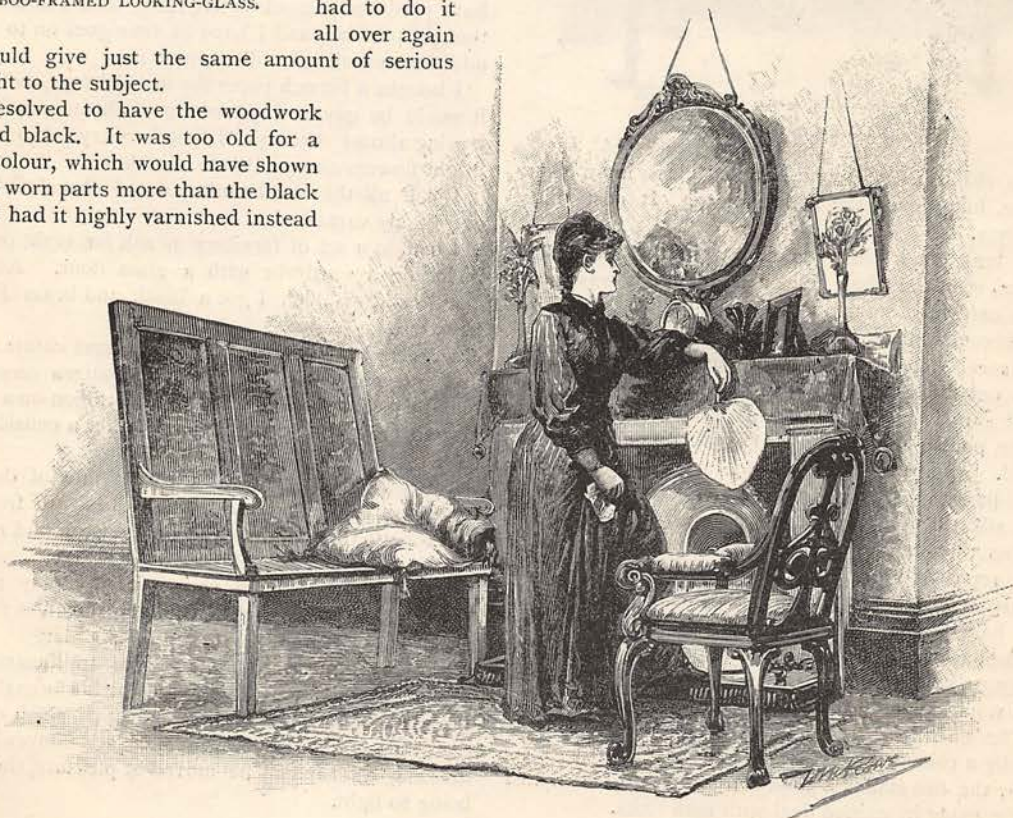
I resolved to have the woodwork painted black. It was too old for a light colour, which would have shown up the worn parts more than the black did. I had it highly varnished instead

of flatted, because I knew that the polish would give brightness to the walls.

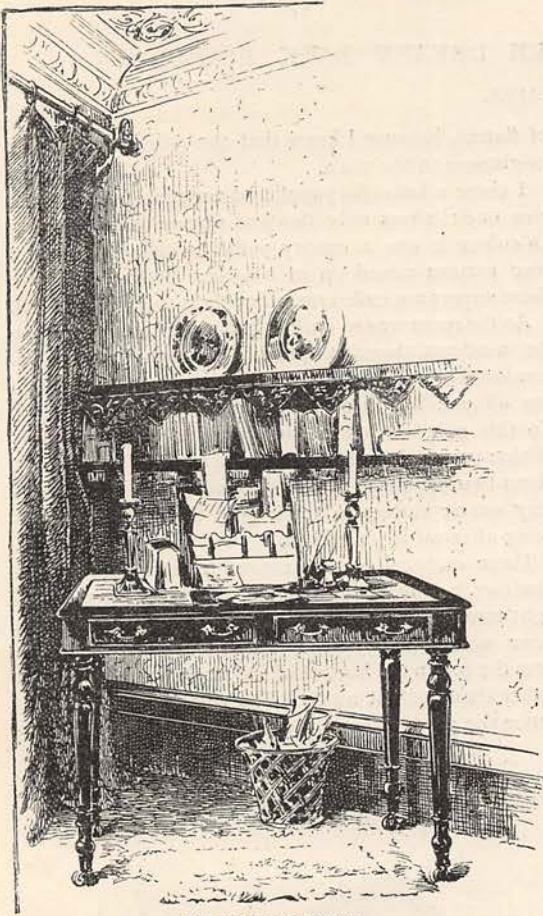
I chose a beautiful paper, and a moderately inexpensive one: it was only two and threepence the piece. In colour it was a canary yellow, with a well-drawn rose pattern raised up in a darker shade: I believe these papers are called metallic; their surface is ribbed.

As the room was so dark, I had no curtains to darken the windows, though to prevent the room looking uncomfortable at night I put up a long brass pole, which ran all one length of the room, at the window end. To this pole we hung two very wide curtains, made of blue imperial plush, with a wide band of cross-stitch about two feet wide: this was worked along the edge on very coarse canvas in thick gold thread, the canvas being afterwards pulled out.

These curtains were arranged to hang not at the windows, but in each corner, and at night were drawn right across that end of the room. Over the windows came white silk curtains, which were only fastened from the top to the bottom of the sash: these gave light rather than took it away. The silk cost one and sixpence the yard.



MY DRAWING-ROOM FIREPLACE.



MY WRITING-TABLE.

An old-fashioned round bevelled glass, in an ebony frame, hung over the mantel-piece. It cost thirty shillings.

A long black shelf (as shown in the illustration above) went the whole side of the room; it was made by a carpenter, stained and French-polished, and cost me fifteen shillings.

I saved pounds by learning how to French-polish; it is not difficult when you know how to do it; but great care is wanted in the operation. Buy a bottle of the polish, and pour a very small quantity on the wood. After you have worked it very smooth with sand-paper, you rub round and round with a piece of soft silk till you feel the surface getting sticky; that means that more polish is required; you put it on, and repeat the rubbing. This continues till the transparent effect of polishing is gained.

I have two beautiful inlaid arm-chairs: they are a revived art, and are made in the village of Beaconsfield. They are exquisite in design and of good workmanship, and would make beautiful presents.

The carpet is a dull faded blue-green, which is hardly a colour, it is so indistinct.

By the fire stands a good copy of the old-fashioned settle, made in stained deal with rush seats.

The couch is covered with a real Indian covering of a most lovely shade of dull red, embroidered all over in groups of white and pale yellow flowers. It was made with a frill, which covered the legs of the couch. The edge of this frill was turned up with a lovely shade of green silk worked into the material.

It cost only forty shillings, and I got it from people who have always a stock of such things to sell in aid of Indian missions.

Almost my only other expense was having a long panel of looking-glass framed in bamboo, and inserted between the two windows. It gave the much-needed light to the room.

My most useful article of furniture was perhaps too simple to mention: a writing-table made out of an old dressing-table. I had the legs shortened, and screwed in castors, and after scrubbing it well with boiling water and soda, I gave it two coats of black enamel. When dry, I bought some good brass handles and screwed them into the drawers, and covered the top of the table with a piece of natural coloured leather, or pigskin rather. I did not put it quite over the table, but left an edge of six inches all round, which was coloured with the black.

The cushions of my chairs are of different colours. Some are made of dark blue Roman satin worked in gold cross-stitch, others are of the gold printed Bolton sheeting, and of dull red velvet.

I have one Indian table-cloth, which gives colour to the room, and somehow or other all things combined have produced a much better effect than I could have thought possible, and I hope as time goes on to make additions which will still improve it.

I bought a French paper for my bedroom, as I knew it would be gay, and yet not too light to require re-newing almost directly. I found a very pretty one of bright flowers and gay knots of ribbon.

I had all the wood-work painted chocolate-brown and highly varnished.

I bought a set of furniture in ash for eight pounds, including a wardrobe with a glass door. And for one pound eighteen I got a black and brass French bedstead.

I covered two arm-chairs with a glazed chintz at one and ninepence the yard. It had a pattern very much like the paper of roses tied with blue ribbon on a cream ground. Being glazed, it kept clean for a considerable time.

I put down instead of a carpet one of the new linoleums, in plain terra-cotta. These are from two and nine to three and six the square yard, and make a soft clean covering for the floor.

The room had good shutters, so I only put up Venetian blinds, and used a folding screen in front of the windows at night.

At the head of this chapter I give an illustration of a bamboo-framed looking-glass which I brought from Paris, where they are very common, and much cheaper than they are in England. They are convenient for dressing, as they can be moved at pleasure, the frame being so light.