



A Country Parlor.

BY MARGARET B. HARVEY.

NOW-A-DAYS we hear a great deal about the "art craze." People talk glibly of "Eastlake," and "effect," and "tone," and so forth, even if they are not always sure just what they mean, because they want to do as other folks do, and think as other folks think. This is well—there is no objection really to following a crowd, provided the crowd happens to be going in the right direction. And certainly it is a very good sign that in our day men and women are seeking after beauty instead of conventionality, truth instead of fashion, exalting, indeed, the artist above the upholsterer. We rejoice to see a painted plaque excite within a girl-soul far deeper emotion than does a gold locket—a rare piece of bronze move her brother more than does a fine dog.

But it is not so generally known that a love of art and a successful pursuit of it do not necessarily involve a great outlay of money. With a cultivated taste, there is no reason why the homes of the poorest should not be fully as beautiful as those of the most affluent, even though not nearly so costly. To prove this, we would like to tell what a lady friend of ours did.

Not a great while ago it was her fortune to find herself an inmate of a very secluded, primitive farm-house, in which there was absolutely nothing in the way of a parlor except a great room, dreary in its bare walls, its uncurtained windows, its carpetless floor, and its echoing emptiness. No refuge from the toils and cares of life; no place for pleasant friendly greeting, other than the dingy dining-room, the crowded chamber, or the rough, forlorn yard. So our bright friend concluded that she would see what she could do with her own taste and her slender pocket-book.

So, first of all, she mixed some common whitewash—nothing on earth but lime and water, with a handful of salt thrown in—and whitewashed the walls and ceiling until they were as smooth and pure as marble. Then with a knife and her fingers, she used some of the thick paste out of the bottom of her whitewash-bucket to fill up all the cracks—and oh! didn't she do it nicely?

Next the paint all had to be scrubbed—it was in a tolerably good condition, of a grayish white hue, and she didn't feel able to go to the expense of having it renewed. Over the inevitable smoky stove-pipe hole, she stretched a square of new white muslin, and then hid the round part showing through by tacking over it a blue Minton tile, upon which she had previously painted a spray of daisies.

Of course, with less than twenty dollars at her command, she couldn't expect to have anything very handsome; nevertheless, it would never do to have her pretty parlor look poverty-stricken. If she couldn't have the "old masters," and so forth, she would have art, and real art, anyhow.

So she wended her way to the barn and the hay-mow, in which were piled tons upon tons of beautiful Hungarian grass. It was a tedious task, but a worthy one, to pull out the rich heads and tie them up into a long garland, but she accomplished it all perfectly. Then, with a liberal supply of lath-nails, she fastened it all around the top of the wall for a frieze. In the center of the ceiling she run out half a dozen sprays of the same, about a foot in length, like spokes in a wheel, from the middle point, suspending a large gayly-

colored Japanese umbrella, turned downward, and having the greater part of the handle sawn off.

Next, all around the sides of the wall, she tacked some white matting, thus forming a dado a yard high corresponding to the frieze and center. The floor she simply covered with the same matting. In the middle of each of the three vacant spaces in the room—the back wall, the side one, and the part opposite to this last between the two windows, she placed two Japanese fans, their handles crossed and tied together with pale blue ribbon. We shall observe right here that the fourth side of the room was mainly occupied by a window.

Already the room looked elegant, even though the materials were so simple. But in fact she had scarce begun. Our friend next turned her attention to the three windows. For each she made a lambrequin of coffee-bag, only a plain plaited flounce, deeply fringed and worked along the lower border with double coral-stitch in pale blue, along the upper in single. The curtains were of unbleached muslin, caught loosely back on each side by broad bands of the coffee-bag, worked like the lambrequins in blue.

Each of the four corners of the room contained a little bracket made of pine wood, tacked up on supporting slats as our artistic upholsterer was best able. But they were completely covered over with cunning little lambrequins of the coffee-bag, also fringed out and bordered with blue. What she put on them we will tell by-and-by.

It was an easy task for her to cover an old lounge frame with some of the sweetest chintz you ever saw, a lovely French fabric with a delicate blue ground, over which, in white and soft gray, roses and doves, and daisies and butterflies, and arches and arabesques, and Apollos and Cupids fairly ran riot. The place for this was against the back wall, and to place in front of it on the floor she worked a long mat, or sofa-strip out of the coffee-bag in shaded blue zephyr and large cross-stitch. By the way, in making coffee-bag mats, ladies, turn in the edges (don't fringe them), and *line* them heavily with the same, and then they won't kick up. And next our friend began to look about her to see what she had available in the way of furniture, for we can often make a good many things *do* if we try.

First, there was a very pretty camp-chair, with a blue carpet back and seat, hidden away up stairs. That must come down. Then out in the kitchen there was another camp-chair, but this was old and dingy; she saw in a minute, however, that a new seat would freshen it up wonderfully, and this she proceeded to make. Having measured off a suitable piece of coffee-bag, she hemmed the edges, and then worked along each a broad border in shaded blue, composed of a succession of perpendicular and horizontal diamonds. By a daisy-tidy she transformed an old cane rocker into "a thing of beauty," and this is how she did it.

To make a daisy, she merely rolled some white zephyr over three fingers until she had a tolerably thick ball, then she tied it tightly in the middle, cut the ends, and pulled these last all out, giving her ball a flat round form. Next she made a little ball of yellow zephyr, just as we used to make ball-trimming, and sewed it in the middle. It was of course easy to make a plain rosette, of blue zephyr, omitting the buff center. The tidy itself was formed by threading together the five rows of rosettes (including a plain rosette and a daisy alternately), each containing five, the whole forming of course a perfect square. This was sewn diagonally upon the cane chair-back.

Thus she found herself possessed of three chairs, but she wanted three more. The foundation for these she got in purchasing two light oiled-wood rockers without backs and seats, and a very pretty camp-chair of still a different style. The never-

failing coffee-bag again came into requisition, to be astonishingly transformed. To the first two chairs, of course, she supplied the omission with the stout fabric; for one she worked borders in plain blue, large cross-stitch, the other we will describe anon. The carpet-bottom of the camp-chair was covered with a most elaborate investiture. Down the middle of the bagging she basted a broad band of garnet silk poplin, then upon this foundation she embroidered two rows of pale-blue (conventional) asters, inclosing each with two rows of fancy stitches in yellow silk. Outside the garnet band, upon the fabric itself, she next worked on each side a broad stripe of buff and blue in cross-stitch, finishing the front of the chair-seat with deep knotted fringe in the same buff and blue zephyr.

The present rage for old furniture put into her hands two tables—one a very plain, dark wooden affair, but of a convenient size, and able to hide well under an ample cover. And this cover she made, as you might suppose, of the precious coffee-bag, fringed and bordered with the pale-blue double coral-stitch, like the lambrequins. And this is the place to describe the sixth chair, for now she had no coffee-bag left but scraps. Well, these she cut into strips about two inches wide, and pieced them up in the most ingenious manner, and then she wove them together, one over and under the other, until she formed a most substantial seat and back. Lastly, in each alternate one of the squares so formed, she worked a lovely star in shaded blue.

The other table was a beautiful antique pier-table—or rather, it was higher, more like a buffet—with a marble top, and inlaid with wreaths and harps of satin-wood. A good polishing was all this needed. Of two dainty mats which our lady made, one went on the under part of this, while the other set directly on top of its dissimilar companion. The last was intended as a receptacle for a lamp, and was as large as a crow's nest, and as soft as the moss which it imitated—you girls know how to make moss-mats. This was in three shades of blue. Maybe you know how to make daisy-mats, too; the other was such a one, bordered with blue fringe, and, like the tidy, an alternate row of blue rosettes and white-and-yellow daisies.

Now for the high art, the finishing-touches. We have said that on the shelf part of the table was a daisy-mat. Well, upon this stood a decorated pot, filled with a bouquet made of heads of the Hungarian grass. By a decorated pot, however, we do not mean a ginger jar, stuck full of bugs and beetles—oh! no. It was an earthen-ware flower-pot, of a pretty tapering shape, and our smart young woman painted it herself. The bottom edge was pure white, shading *down* as the paint went upward, through soft grays into greenish blacks, finally ending in a broad, black band around the top, relieved by a fire-line of scarlet. Then all around the solid, darkish part, went a wreath of gay Japanese fans—round, semi-circular, crossed, and half-open—each one a marvel of exquisite coloring and execution. Oh, you should have just seen it!

Well, on the marble slab were arranged a few books, and a delicate vase to hold a spray of flowers. Besides, there was upon it a silver easel, attached to which by loops of blue and garnet ribbon was a painted horseshoe—a *real* luck-bringing horseshoe—rendered gorgeous by displaying against a black ground a spray of "dear little buttercups."

Now, don't you want to know what were on the four brackets in the corners? Oh, something on each, as the pretty robin said, "sweet, sweet, sweet!" Well, upon one was a little wooden plate, adorned with a bunch of beautiful apple-blossoms; and on the one opposite, another wooden plate, with a gay dandelion shining in its

center. And on the two others were shells decorated with landscapes—one showing forth a crooked apple-tree adrift with blossoms, against a background of trees and fleecy clouds and blue sky; the other, a tiny patch of woods in spring-time, in which in one glance you might see more shades of green than you had previously imagined you could in a lifetime, the brilliant emerald of the beech mingling with the deep malachite of the cedar, both heightened by the exquisite red-and-silver of the budding oak.

It was the most exquisitely beautiful parlor any one could imagine, filled to a wondrous degree with sweet, satisfying grace. And it really did cost less than twenty dollars; so who need be without a beautiful home, a home sending beyond it a gladdening, elevating, purifying influence? To be sure, our girl could paint, and paint skillfully, as well as contrive and embroider as few women can. But no one need be discouraged—there are ways and ways. And as to decorations, there are shells, and corals, and ferns, and autumn leaves, and Japanese articles, and Florida moss, and butterflies, and bird's-wings, and ivy,—and, oh sisters, you are rich!

Something about Coal.

SOME one says, "There are two words, each containing only four letters, but expressive of the two most valuable minerals in the world—coal and gold." And it is to the first we owe much of our comfort and happiness, and much of the world's progress in science and civilization.

Coal was known to the early Britons and their Roman masters, but it was rarely used, for timber and peat were very abundant and accessible. As late as the reign of Edward II. many objections were urged against its use, such as the contamination of the atmosphere by smoke and the spoiling of the ladies' complexion, and indeed a law was passed forbidding its use.

During the reign too of Henry VIII. fires were not allowed in the University of Oxford, and the students after their eight o'clock supper and subsequent hours' study, were permitted to take a run to warm themselves up before going to bed.

However, when wood became so scarce as to be sold by the pound, coal came into general use, spite restrictions and prejudice. And what is coal?

To the naked eye, only a black substance, neither comely in shape or color—but take a microscope and then we begin to discern its true nature and real characteristics. Like many human beings, years of external pressure have so changed it, that the beauty of early youth is visible only after long and patient search.

Geologists tell us coal is the remains of forests and floating islands chiefly made up of tree-ferns, calamites, or tree-rushes, *Sigillaria*, which grew from thirty to sixty feet high, their stiff, clumsy trunks covered with long, slender, rush-like leaves, some fungi or mushrooms and *Lepidodendra*—the progenitors of our beautiful *Lycopodiums*—varying only in that in those far-away days the earth brought forth giants where are but pigmies now.

Besides the coal we use for fuel, there is a variety known under the name of Jet, found on the coast of Whitby, in Yorkshire, and known to Pliny, centuries before, by the name of Gagates, derived from the river Gagates, in Syria, near whose mouth it was found.

Cannel coal, which closely resembles jet, has a dark grayish black, or brownish black color, receives a high polish, takes fire readily, and burns

without melting as other bituminous coal does, with a clear yellow flame. Like jet it is used for ornamental purposes, the writer seeing in the London Exposition, a garden seat well designed and executed, from coal taken from mines at Newcastle, and also a set of chess-men made of coal from China.

Although Providence has scattered this valuable mineral over nearly every part of the world, yet our own country is unquestionably most favored in this regard, it being estimated that the amount of workable coal in the United States is thirty-two times greater in quantity than the mines of Great Britain.

But should the mines of England ever give out, the stock of coal hidden in the heart of Belgium can be drawn upon. The coal industry of that tiny kingdom is pretty equally divided between the three provinces of Hainault, Liege, and Namur.

Happening to reside in Belgium several years ago, we had an opportunity to see for ourselves the interior of one of the most famous mines in the first-named province.

As we approached the mines, one foggy, uncomfortable morning, the roads, the houses, and even the inhabitants, became black. Between Manage and Mons, a road constantly traversed by heavily-laden wagons led us to the village and castle of Mariemont. This castle of princely magnificence stands directly upon a coal mine, as indeed does the fortune of its owner.

Our descent into the mine was preceded by a toilet, which consisted in putting on a bloomer costume of blue linen and a round leathern hat like those worn by the miners. This done, we took our lamp and were swiftly let down to the lower level of about 1,700 feet. There was nothing to frighten or fatigue us in our descent, but we must confess to a certain degree of nervous inquietude when daylight vanished and we were swallowed up in the intense darkness, a degree of darkness which we had never experienced but once before, and then in the Mammoth Cave, where our guide hid for a moment all our lamps that we might, as he said, "taste the dark."

At first sight, the interior of a coal mine has something almost infernal in it. The pictures from the sixth book of the *Æneid* flitted before our eyes as realities. We saw the wheel of Ixion, the rock of Sisyphus, and the Danaïdes in form of young girls pouring out, not water, but coal into tubs which were being continually filled and just as continually emptied. There were human forms crouching, lying on their backs, their outlines lengthened and sharpened by the sinister lamp-light, struggling with the black ceiling which threatened every instant to crush them into nothingness, or tossing away with burning arms the debris ready to bury them. All the attitudes of suffering and expiation were combined in this picture to which night lent its weird coloring.

But after a while these classical recollections vanished, and the realities of the present took their place. Between the damned whom mythology placed in the bowels of the earth and these miners, there is the infinite distance there is between retributive service and the dignity of honest labor. Ancient poets had too much good sense and justice to make a chastisement of labor alone. It was labor without result, the very irony of strength, which mythology portrayed in its retributive, unproductive toil.

I never conceived the grandeur of man or of his works until I visited these mines. Then the realization that these immense galleries have all been opened by human strength, directed by human intelligence, made silence and darkness alike forgotten. Yet these solemn depths where the eternal silence is broken only by the roar of the coal as it falls from its bed, or the distant thunder of the iron-plated wheelbarrows upon the freight

ways; galleries which lead we do not know where, intersected by other galleries; dripping springs, oily and dusky ponds,—these leave the mind balancing between the poetry of fancy and the poetry of deeds. We cannot in these modern days surpass the ancients in beauty of form or grace of expression, but we are superior to them in works of utility. The ancients sung of the marvelous—we make the marvelous real.

To the miner, however, the mine is only a workshop like any other, except a trifle more gloomy. All he finds fault with is the length of the ladder by which he reaches it. Yet there was one circumstance we noticed and our guide confirmed, which was that although the workmen reached the mouth of the pit noisy and talkative, their songs ceased and their faces reflected the gloom of the place as they penetrated into its depths.

The mines of Belgium are remarkable for their number rather than their richness. At Mariemont the deepest vein is only from four to six feet thick, while in England and America there are veins from thirty to forty feet in depth. These banks of coal are embedded in masses of schist, flint, and other rock. The coal after being detached from the vein is sent to the weighing gallery. There it is placed in small, iron-plated wagons resting on iron roads. And we should not forget that it is to the working of coal mines that we are indirectly indebted for our railways. The first railroads ever made were for use in mines; they were, it is true, constructed of wood instead of iron, nevertheless it was the feeble commencement of a great idea.

This transportation of coal is accomplished by human and brute power. The first is represented by boys and girls from twelve to fourteen years of age, who push the loaded cars over the road. At Mariemont, women are not allowed in the mines, but at Charleroi, near by, they are employed in the proportion of 200 to 1,000 workmen. It was inexpressibly painful to meet these poor creatures, as we did on another occasion, silent and grave, in their grotesque garb, harnessed like beasts of burden to their dingy carts.

Brute force is chiefly represented by donkeys and Scotch ponies. The latter are especially fitted for such service, as they do not seem to suffer in the slightest degree from the deprivation of light. Some, on the contrary, who were brought there thin and scraggy, soon grew fat and flourishing. Their intelligence is remarkable too. Occasionally they grow blind, but that is no hindrance to their usefulness. Once in the mine, there they remain, except in cases of extreme illness or great age. The stables are spacious and carefully fitted up. Still we could not repress a feeling of pity for these poor creatures to whom there is neither sun nor green meadow, nor rivulet hidden under the tall grass, nor free out-of-door life where the summer breeze can play at "hide and seek" in their bushy manes.

The coal is finally carried to the upper world by steam-engines of about 150-horse power. Standing on the lower edge of the pit's mouth, a workman dexterously seizes the huge tubs called *cuffets*, as they descend, into which the contents of the small wagons maneuvered by the children are emptied. These *cuffets* rise quickly to the top of the pit, where the coal is as quickly discharged to be borne away in wheelbarrows by men, women, and children.

We had been in the mine five hours, when our guide held out his watch as a reminder that our time for staying had expired. In a place where there is no sunlight the passage of time is readily forgotten. As we ascended the shaft, little by little the pale light of day filtered through the darkness, until we emerged into the full glare of day.