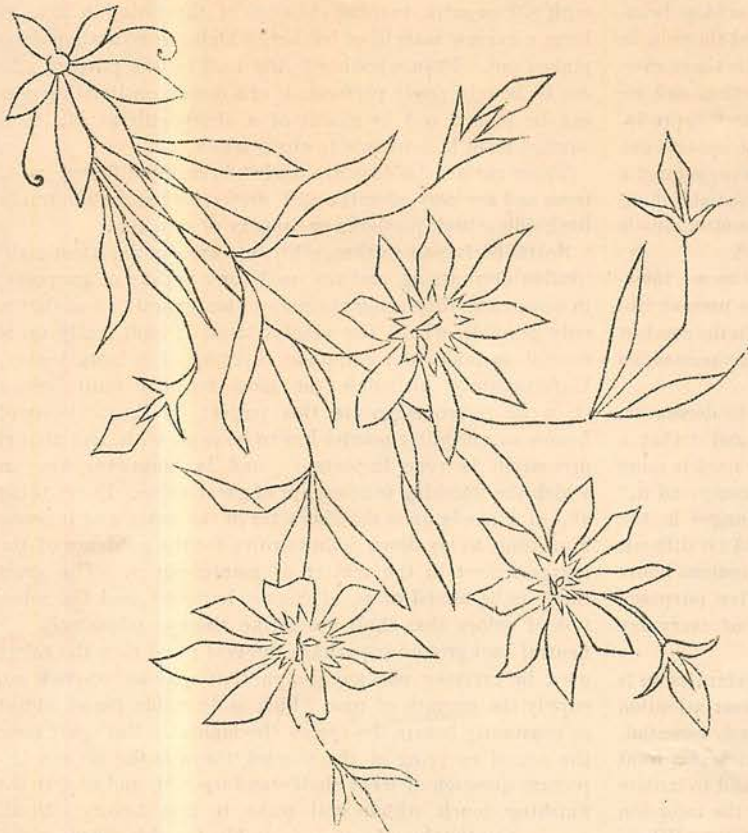


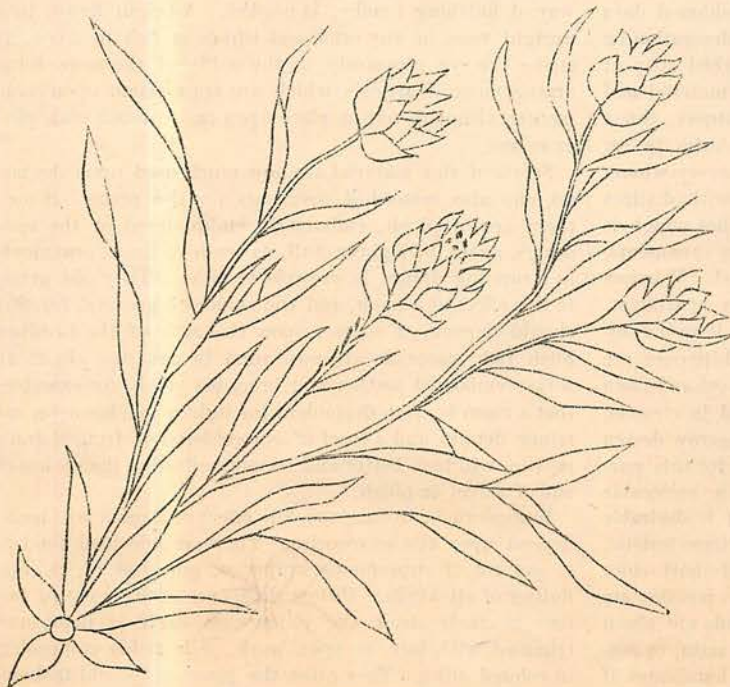
Finishing Touches.



SABATIA.

yellow near the calix. The stems are very delicate, and the leaves a soft yellow-green. In all these doyley designs, the conventional leaf forms at the bottom, should be of a heavier color than the leaves of the design above, if the design is worked in more than two colors.

HETTA L. H. WARD.



POLYGALA.

EVERY one who has carried out an elaborate design by the needle or brush, knows the value of those magical touches which seem to convert it all at once from a mere piece of work into a thing of beauty. What wonderful effects are produced in the pupils' drawings by a few touches from the master's pencil; yet how difficult it often is to recognize exactly where they have been put. All at once the amateur performance becomes an object worthy of admiration, and only those who are in the secret realize how the metamorphose has been brought about.

And the same thing is true in a great measure in more important matters, and notably so in all that regards home decoration. In arranging the furniture of a room, for example, how much the general effect depends upon those scarcely noticeable details which are carried out only when all the principal arrangements are completed. Some persons seem to have a natural gift for finishing; they will take possession of some cold, bare room, and apparently without an effort impart to it beauty and warmth. How often a lady is said to possess the "happy knack" of making things look pretty. Stiff and formal objects under her management suddenly develop graceful curves and outlines, and seem to take on a mysterious something that they lacked before. And certainly pos-

session of this "happy knack" is to be desired, for, like the prismatic ray, it has the power of converting the very stones into beauty. If we ask in what it consists and how far it can be cultivated, we should say that to define it is impossible, but to reach it is within the power of all who, having an educated taste, can appreciate the touches whose subtlety works such marvels. How many pleasant rooms are there that seem to smile at one, and yet which are at best indifferently furnished, and upon analysis prove to contain absolutely nothing in itself beautiful, yet by the judicious arrangement of such materials as are at hand, have been made to appear not only agreeable but beautiful. And, on the other hand, how often in the midst of splendor this subtle element is wanting. How cold and "lifeless" the house, fresh from the hands of a professional decorator frequently appears, until those finishing touches have been given which seem to bring out every hidden beauty and enhance each graceful intention.

Is it fanciful to call this subtle element the "soul" of beauty? that which the perfume is to the flower, and the aroma to the grape, without which all is cold and harsh and lifeless? "Beauty," said Emerson, "is its own excuse for being," and beauty in home life is that indefinable something which can be felt and not described. Yet, ethereal as it is, it is in reality essentially dependent upon material



things, even (so much has training to do with it) upon passing fashion. That which is strikingly out of date is seldom beautiful in the midst of modern surroundings, and there is, in fact, something in the desire to keep up with the times even in furnishing which is well worthy of admiration and respect. It springs in no small measure from that "appreciation of the fitting" without which harmonious results can never be obtained. And, however *outré* and exaggerated a fashion may become in vulgar hands, we invariably find, that among cultivated and refined people, a due attention is paid to it and its influence is felt and recognized.

It is the recognition of this truth which gives us an interest in the minor details of home decoration at the present moment, for the great advance that has been made in the comfort and beauty of modern houses, has influenced the accessories as well as the necessary details of furnishing.

It is becoming recognized as a principle that in decoration the useful should underlie the ornamental, and "that a beautiful thing that has grown out of a definite need is more beautiful than one that has only its beauty to recommend it," and this principle has led to considerable changes in the minor details of household ornament. It would be difficult nowadays to find the sample upon which many tedious hours had been spent, framed and turned to a decorative purpose; industry will rather seek some essential article of every-day use and decorate and embellish that.

Certainly one of the noticeable things in a modern room is the absence of all irrelevant objects, and the great attention bestowed upon the decoration of those that are essential. Take, for example, the old-fashioned tidy which was wont to depress the masculine mind by its tenacity, and to irritate all lovers of order by its persistent disregard of the intention for which it was made. What has become of it? Where shall we find to-day the marvel of intricate crochet or knitting and the heavy fringe which completed it? In its stead, we have, as the latest substitute for it, a small square of fine linen or muslin, which fits into the chair back, and answers a definite purpose; it is decorated, of course, and is furnished with a design which can be elaborated either by the needle or the brush. The prevailing style certainly has much to recommend it, not least the fact that in rising from a chair a visitor is not likely to displace or inadvertently carry it off. The amount of labor bestowed in the old-fashioned days upon large tidies can now be devoted to the decoration by embroidery of the chair itself, and a well worked strip of some handsome design will lighten up a dark material and turn a dingy-looking chair into a thing of brightness. Home decoration fifty years ago meant monotony, chairs in set places against the wall, formality and rigidity every-where. To-day it means brightness and variety, yet with distinct attention to that which is essential first, and that which is merely extraneous afterward. We have fewer ornaments, but much more decoration which is ornamental. Window shades, as necessary accompaniments of every apartment, are susceptible of a good deal of beauty, and, if well managed, add greatly to the effect of a room. White ones are never to be admired, but those of gray or cream-colored linen should be substituted, and can be embroidered in crewels, either in a broad design at the bottom or in a narrow design down the sides. Bright colors are admissible for this purpose, because the window should always be a noticeable point in a room, and when closed and shaded it is desirable to retain the brightness which should be its characteristic. So, too, in the matter of curtains, both long and short, color is indispensable, and bands for holding them in position are among the latest finishing touches. Such bands are about four inches in width, and can be made of silk, satin, or perforated leather; the latter being especially handsome if worked in coarse purple silk of bright colors. The bands can

be readily made up at home, by simply lining the leather with silk or satin, turning the edge of the lining in so as to leave a narrow margin of leather, which can be scalloped or pinked out. Bronze leather is the best for the purpose. It can be bought ready perforated, or a design outlined upon it can be pinked out by means of a sharp stiletto, and then worked from hole to hole in chain stitch.

These curtain holders are useful in many different positions and are very effective and pretty, and serve admirably for holding back portières or drapery of any kind.

Scarfs of Indian workmanship are among the latest fashionable decorations, and are used for a variety of purposes, in some cases displacing the mantel lambrequin; but that is only possible where the mantel itself is sufficiently ornamental to make the complete covering of it unnecessary. Unfortunately, although the most recently built houses show an improvement in this respect, in the majority of homes an unsightly mantel has to be dealt with, and mantel decoration is very important; and is, moreover, one in which the finishing touches are of great value. Every-thing almost depends upon the character of the room, and it seems impossible to lay down definite rules for the guidance of the inexperienced in the matter of mantel-pieces. The great thing to be aimed at is, of course, harmony, and the selection of colors that shall not strike the eye offensively. A neutral background is perhaps the best; and then the colors used in carrying out any design that may be selected can supply the warmth of tone which is desirable for an object so constantly before the eye as the mantel. But apart from the actual covering of the mantel, there is the no less important question of what shall stand upon it, and supply the finishing touch which will wake it into beauty. Small panels painted in oils are admirable for this purpose, because each is complete in itself, a distinct thing of beauty; "pairs" of any thing are no longer judicious—even vases and jars are more effective if they are odd. Plaques, if placed over the mantel, ought to be of suggestive rather than formal design; for instance, flowers or foliage are more appropriate than figures or portraits, which are suitable for brackets to set against the wall. For those who are fortunate enough to possess one of the most modern wooden mantels, with its beautiful carving and polish, little in the way of finishing touches is needed. A bright flower in an upright vase, or any ornament which is rich in color, will strike the eye pleasantly, in the midst of the more formal arrangement of articles which are appropriate upon such a mantel, although out of place upon one covered with plush or velvet.

Scarfs of rich material are now much used upon the mantel, and also instead of coverings for the piano. Some of them are of plush, elaborately embroidered at the ends; others, again, of lighter stuff, as crash or linen, ornamented in a running design in crewels or silks. They add greatly to the effect of a room, and the choice of material for them should depend, of course, upon the style of the furniture. Such rich materials are now used in covering chairs and sofas—embossed leather and brocaded plush, for example—that a room is often dependent for lighter touches upon such minor details, and a scarf of embroidered or fringed Indian muslin, will look better and be more effective than a heavier one of velvet or plush.

In modern bedrooms, too, the effect of a room will largely depend upon the accessories. There is a decided tendency to get rid of superfluous draperies, and, indeed, of superfluities of all kinds. Pillow shams are entirely out of fashion; in their stead, the pillow-case itself is handsomely trimmed with lace, or open work, or is richly embroidered in colored silks. Very often the place of the old-fashioned pillow sham is supplied by a quilted covering of satin, which



conceals the bolster and pillows, and is spread over a quilt of the some material in another color. At no time has so much attention been bestowed upon the quilt itself, it is now the basis of a great deal of decoration. Pure white piqué and Marseilles spreads are out of date; in their stead, in smaller homes, we have the lace covering over a colored lining, or the cream-colored piqué with a design in the center, and where expense is no particular consideration, they are of every variety. We have seen them in blue satin trimmed with lace, the bolster cover being quilted and ornamented with tiny rosettes, and finished off with heavy tassels, and an elaborate quilt is made of a center of quilted satin, with a deep border of plush, embroidered in silks. Momie cloth or coarse damask quilts are often embroidered in silk or crewel, or divided into squares, each square bearing a different design; or, again, unbleached linen is used for the purpose, an outline design being worked in blue or red thread, expressly sold for embroidery. The old patchwork quilts, which usurped so large a portion of our grandmother's time, are replaced by others made in more elaborate style, which, if well done, are quite Eastern in effect. Squares of muslin are cut all of one size, and upon them odds and ends of ribbon, satin, or plush are arranged, and securely fastened with long stitches; when all are in place and the entire surface of the square is covered, each little piece is joined to the rest by feather or some other fancy stitch in gold-colored silk, and, finally, all the large muslin squares are joined in the same way. These quilts are quite bewildering in their combination of colors and stuffs. Now that scarfs are looked on with increasing favor, it is not unusual to see one laid across the counterpane at the head or foot of the bed, heavy fringe upon the ends hanging down at the sides.

Cloths for occasional tables are made in the same style of combination patchwork, and so are cover-lids for baby carriages.

Household linen also comes in for many finishing touches to-day. Towels are embroidered in colored silks, or a design is traced as a border near the ends and worked in overcast stitch, and then the intermediate spaces are cut away, leaving an insertion in open work. Others are elaborately ornamented in raised work and completed with knotted fringes, and bureau covers are universally decorated in open work. What is known as "Holbein" stitch is specially well adapted to the decoration of towels and napkins, because it is the same on both sides, and it is usually worked in blue and red cotton, which wash better than crewels or silks.

Perhaps nothing gives a finishing touch to a room more effectively than the decorated mirrors which are now so much the fashion. A beveled mirror, cut square, and placed diagonally upon the wall, is one of the prettiest ornaments imaginable, and an infinite variety is possible in the choice of a frame for it. Dark wooden frames are decorated with designs, in oil paint, of flowers or foliage, birds or butterflies, or they are covered with handsome material—plush, satin, or velvet—which is elaborately decorated in embroidery or by the brush. Often the mirror itself receives decoration, or a design commenced upon the frame is completed upon the surface of the glass with the happiest effects. It would, indeed, be impossible, within the limits of a short article, to enumerate the many ways in which the effect of a home can be heightened by attention to minor details; but enough has, we hope, been said, to encourage all who feel the value of bright and pleasant surroundings, to pay increasing regard to the finishing touches, by which they are so largely assisted, and without which the most handsome room looks cold and bare.

JANETT RUEZ RETS.

## Adam Gordon's Two Wives.

BY FLORENCE B. HALLOWELL.

SELINA GORDON was dead. In the darkened parlor which her hands had kept so scrupulously clean for twelve long years, and where no intrusive fly ever dared set his foot for fear of the impending duster, she lay in her coffin, the thin, work-worn hands at rest at last over the silent heart. The tired anxious look which her face had worn for so many years was on it still. Even Death, that great magician, had not been able to smooth it away. There had been so much of toil, pain, and care in her life, that it was not strange that in her countenance there was more appearance of the sorrow of the past than of the rest and peace of the future into which she had entered.

Adam Gordon stood alone by the coffin, looking down at the white, still face and folded hands. He was tall and well-made, with broad shoulders, a deep chest, brown, wavy hair, and dark eyes. A heavy brown mustache shaded a mouth as sensitive as a woman's. His face was bronzed from constant exposure to the sun, and his hands were large, brown, and sinewy—the hands of a farmer who never shirked his plow.

At twenty-one Adam had married a girl selected for him by his mother, and brought her to the home left him by an uncle who had recently died. It was an old, straggling farm-house, built at different periods and in different styles, overgrown with a dark mass of trees, underneath which the grass grew long and rank amid a tangled mass of roses and vines of various sorts, which blossomed luxuriantly in the spring, and made the place a bower of beauty. Selina had been a girl after the elder Mrs. Gordon's own heart. Adam had heard her praises so persistently chanted by his mother and sisters, that he fell very naturally into the belief that she was the only wife possible for him if he would make sure of prosperity and happiness.

Well, he *had* been prosperous, even though his happiness had been rather of the negative kind. Industrious, energetic, neat, and economical, Selina soon taught Adam that life with her was to be no play-day. She considered recreation of any sort sinful, and discouraged even the reading of books and papers as liable to lead to a neglect of some duty. Up by daylight in the morning, she worked unceasingly until late at night, looking, apparently, on hours spent in bed as so much time wasted. She did not relax her energy even after there was no longer a necessity for it. She was proud of Adam's well-filled barns and well-tilled fields, but she worked as industriously as when he had to turn over every penny before he spent it. Lines of care came on her yet young face; her shoulders grew round from stooping over the wash-tub and bending over the sink, but she heeded it not. Two children were born to her—fragile little creatures that faded and died before the touch of their waxen fingers had softened the lines of their mother's face.

Adam grieved bitterly over the death of his babes; but if Selina shared his sorrows she gave no expression to it. She had no time to indulge her feelings. There was the milk of the cows to be attended to every morning and night, three meals a day to prepare, the washing, ironing, baking, scrubbing, sweeping, dusting, and sewing to be done, and only her two hands to do it all. She was noted in the neighborhood for her thrift and economy, and old Mrs. Gordon, who lived across the road from her son, frequently congratulated herself on having such a model daughter-in-law.

But now Selina was dead. The delicate machinery of mind and body had worn out at last under the continued strain put upon them, and the toil-worn woman laid in her coffin with