



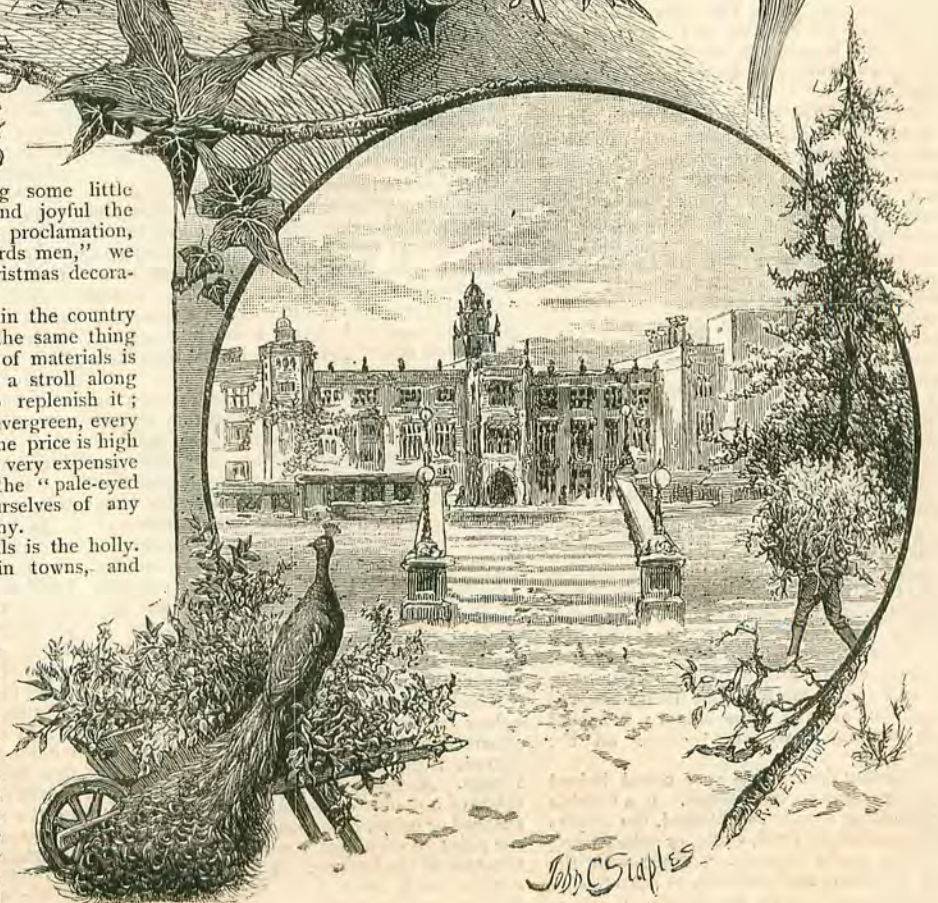
HINTS FOR CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

IN the pleasing hope of rendering some little assistance towards making bright and joyful the Christian's great anniversary of the proclamation, "Peace on earth, good will towards men," we venture to offer a few hints for Christmas decorations.

The pleasant work of decorating in the country is comparatively easy compared to the same thing in town. There, when one's stock of materials is exhausted, a run into the garden or a stroll along the lane is all that is required to replenish it; while in the town every branch of evergreen, every trail of ivy has to be paid for, and the price is high enough to make a large purchase a very expensive matter. Therefore it behoves us, the "pale-eyed denizens of the city," to avail ourselves of any and every means of practising economy.

Pre-eminent amongst our materials is the holly. Unfortunately, it is always dear in towns, and sometimes this time-honoured friend of decorators fails altogether as far as its chief attraction—its berries—is concerned. It is quite unnecessary to pay more than a trifling sum for the berries, as imitations can be made which answer all the purposes of the real ones, and at a very small cost.

Amongst the many methods adopted the following will be found the easiest: ivy berries or dried peas dyed red (a sixpenny bottle of dye will be sufficient for a very large quantity); or putty, rolled into little balls and coloured



either in the same way or in a solution of sealing-wax mixed with spirits of wine; or red wax, to be bought at an oil shop, and shaped into berries, after slightly softening before the fire. There are many different sorts of red berries to be had in the autumn, which, by soaking in strong salt and water, will keep till Christmas time, and may well pass for holly. And, lastly, easiest of all, artificial berries are sold in bunches very cheaply at most toy shops.

With all this choice at our disposal and a little judicious management a great deal can be done with a few of the commonest evergreens; a room may be made to look very pretty with only a little laurel, ivy, and holly; but any others which may be obtainable will be useful in giving a variety of effect; amongst them may be mentioned the box, arbor vitæ, bay, variegated holly, ivy, and laurestinus.

Some artificial berries are too hard to admit of stalks being added, and will only be available for gumming on to a flat surface. Where stalks are required the soft berries must be chosen, and a little fine wire inserted.

The decorator must not fail to provide herself with some of the bunches of dry moss which is sold at all florists'; also with the necessary implements—string, wire, and strong glue.

The effect of snow is easily obtained, and gives a very seasonable air to the decorations. For a flat background white wadding, bought at sixpence a yard, answers very well, but for an object standing out, such as a statuette, the fine soft wool called jeweller's cotton is required. The wool should be first tied on with thread all over the top edges and wherever snow would be likely to lodge. It must then be pulled out, and made to look as light and natural as possible, hanging down in irregular points and masses over any projecting parts. The effect of snow may be obtained on branches and leaves of evergreens with less trouble by coating the upper surface with gum, and then sprinkling thickly with flour.

Trees sparkling with hoar frost are always a lovely sight in winter, and this effect of frost or rime can easily be procured by artificial means. Drop gum upon the wool, wherever frost would naturally form, and sprinkle coarse Epsom salts over it. The surfaces of leaves and twigs may be coated in the same way, and, as an alternative for Epsom salts, frosted glass, ready crushed, is sold; but a much less expensive contrivance is to pound roughly, or crush with a garden roller, any pieces of glass, such as old bottles, which have been saved up during the summer for this purpose. Cardboard letters, for mottoes, can be crystallised in the same way, and look well on a background of leaves or coloured flannel.

Another method of crystallising, which is more useful for some purposes, is to dip the objects in a solution of alum. On one pound of alum, pour a quart of boiling water. Whilst still warm, suspend the leaves in it by a string tied round the stalks; leave them in for twenty-four hours and then hang them up till dry. Large and beautiful crystals are formed, but the effect is less like real frost than by employing the other means. If a wreath or festoon is to be thus crystallised, it must be made up first, and then immersed in the alum, as it is impossible to handle it much afterwards, without breaking off the crystals.

Everlasting flowers are very useful indeed in adding colour to our devices. If a suitable natural colour cannot be obtained, the flowers may be easily dyed; red, violet, or yellow being the most useful colours. Mixed with the green in wreaths and garlands, or sewn thickly over cardboard shapes for letters, these are

very effective. Grasses dyed in the same way will also be useful, particularly the splendid heads of Pampas grass. These latter, dyed crimson, are most beautiful objects.

If one has time and patience to make a number of them, the paper rosettes, which were used so much for little picture-frames a year or two ago, are very pretty and useful, and are so durable that they will serve for years, with care. Those made of brown paper and varnished are much used in church decoration, as at a little distance they look exactly like carved oak. Large ones, made of red paper, are very handsome on devices made of yew, or dark green leaves, while small ones, in creamy white, may well pass for ivory. Their uses are almost endless, and they will quite repay one's trouble. The way to make them is too well known to need description here, but the various colours, especially red, are rarely seen, though most effective.

Letters and borderings should be first cut out in strong cardboard, and then ornamented in various ways. A novel method is to coat the letter thickly over with gum, and then sprinkle it with pieces of broken walnut shells, or to fasten them on whole in rows. A similar effect is produced by cutting up old corks, and sprinkling their fragments on a gummed surface.

The methods of making ornamental letters for mottoes or monograms are innumerable, and the choice will depend upon the position they are to occupy. If near the eye they must be carefully and neatly done. Cardboard letters, with small leaves sewn thickly all over them, look well, but it is a long task; the background should be first covered with green or red paper or cloth, to show through between the letters. Silvery letters, too, are pretty, made of tinfoil. Cut a piece of the tinfoil to something like the shape of the letter, but larger, and crumple it up in the hand; then straighten it out slightly, but so as still to preserve the crinkled appearance, and lay it lightly over the card letter, fastening it at the back. Others are covered with everlasting flowers, sewn firmly on to a foundation of cardboard; or if they are required strong enough to last for future occasions, of perforated zinc.

Very pretty letters, in imitation of coral, are made by coating the shapes with gum, as above, and sprinkling them with rice or, better still, tapioca; they will generally require two coats to give them the proper rough look. Sometimes the rice is first dyed red, which looks very pretty; for a monogram it is a good plan to have each letter a different colour, which will make them more legible than they usually are.

A word as to cutting out the letters may be useful. It is most important that they should all be the same size; this is not so much a matter of course as would appear to the uninitiated, but is easily managed. Decide first how many inches in height and width each letter is to occupy, then cut out a number of pieces of paper or cardboard of these dimensions, and all of exactly the same size, and by taking one of these for each letter they are sure to be correct. The smaller they are the simpler they should be in design, as if elaborately-formed letters are used for small mottoes they will not be legible, and their chief charm will be lost.

The border of mottoes will depend on the colour and texture of the background and letters; but it must not be so obtrusive as to detract from the effect of the sentiment it frames. A simple and pretty border is easily made of a double or treble row of holly leaves stitched or nailed on according to the material; the point of each leaf must overlap and hide the stalk of the last one. A more durable one can be made with cork or nut shells, as described for the letters.

Red is the favourite colour for the background of mottoes and scrolls; Turkey twill, cheap flannel, or glazed lining being generally employed for the purpose; but where the position is too high up for close inspection coloured paper does equally well.

For devices such as an anchor, shield, or Maltese cross, moss makes a capital foundation for further ornamentation. It must be stitched on in tufts, and afterwards arranged with the fingers till the surface looks uniformly covered. Letters of bright everlasting flowers or small red rosettes on a background of moss are very pretty. The Cape silver leaves, too, of which there are such beautiful wreaths on the Prince Imperial's tomb at Chislehurst, look charming laid on bright green moss, but, as they are rather expensive, they should be reserved for small wreaths or mottoes in a conspicuous position.

Before beginning to decorate it is well to have a plan in one's mind, more or less matured, for the general arrangement. In forming this design, be careful not to overdo it, or the result will be a heavy and crowded effect, which is anything but beautiful. A little tasteful decoration is much more pleasing than an excessive amount.

Wreaths and garlands in a room should not be too thick, but a light, graceful effect must be aimed at. In making them, there should always be two persons at work together. Having cut the rope to the required length, one should hold it and bind on the twigs which the other arranges and hands to her; if there is only one worker, she has constantly to lay down the rope while she seeks out suitable pieces, which not only hinders her very much, but probably mars the symmetry of the wreath. For churches and public rooms a number of large, rough wreaths and ropes of green are usually required for adorning pillars and windows. These should be left to the last, as the *débris* from the small wreaths and more delicate devices will do for them. They should be made on stout rope, and the bunches of green tied round it with string.

If it is wished to ornament a pier glass or other article of furniture likely to be injured by the green, a thin lath of wood should be obtained to fit the top of the glass, to which all the decorations are fixed, thus preventing their contact with the gilt frame or glass. If possible some long trailing pieces of ground ivy or other creepers should be fastened on to this lath, as their reflection in the mirror is exceedingly pretty; these should be quite short in the middle, getting longer towards each side, till the outside ones should be long enough to reach to the bottom of the frame.

A lath may be arranged in the same way over doors, but in this case, of course, there must be trailing pieces at the sides only. This is a suitable place too, for a motto, as it can rest on the ledge over the door, and so avoid injuring the wall with nails.

In decorating a chandelier, only light materials should be chosen, and few of them, or their weight is likely to drag it down, besides casting an unpleasant shadow. A graceful effect may be obtained by twisting round the stem of the chandelier a very slight wreath of ivy, made on thin wire, and having a few of the leaves frosted.

If there is a large space of bare walls, wreaths can be made, light enough to be affixed with strong pins instead of nails, by stitching laurel, other large leaves, or dried fern leaves on a length of tape. The leaves should be sewn on two at a time, one pointing to the right and the other to the left, and they must slightly overlap each other where the stalks meet, or, better still, let the juncture be hidden by a good-sized red rosette.

We venture to urge the desirability of not leaving decorations up too long, but of

removing them before either the occasion has passed by, or the least symptom appears suggesting the perishable nature of the materials; for, in every circumstance in life, there is nothing much more objectionable than faded finery.

THAT AGGRAVATING SCHOOL GIRL.

By the Author of "Wild Kathleen."

CHAPTER XII.

AN HOUR IN JOSEPHINE'S STUDY.



H! Rosie, Rosie, I cannot understand it. It is no good; my head won't take it in."

And with a low cry of mingled weariness and despair, Josephine dropped her

head on to two hands that for the past ten minutes had been resting on her knee, and turned her eyes to their owner's face. As she did so a second cry escaped her, but with a very different accent in it from the last.

"Why, Helen Edison, is it you—is it you who have been kneeling by me so patiently for the past ten minutes?"

"And why not?" asked Helen, laughing. "Do you think, as Miss Rowe does, that it is utterly impossible for me to be quiet or sensible?"

"I don't think anything about you that Miss Rowe does," was the quick answer. And then, still more quickly, "I mean, I think I know you better than Miss Rowe does. She does not feel the kindness in you as I do. But go now, please, dear. You know no one is allowed to be here with me during recreation hours except Rosie, and I could not bear you to get into another trouble on my account. Please go."

"Do you dislike my being here?"

"Dislike!" echoed Josephine, wonderingly. "Don't laugh at me, but, do you know, I feel sometimes as if looking at you was like looking at courage itself put into a real form. I shall feel brave enough now to try once more to conquer that lesson when you are gone."

"But I am not going," said Helen, with a mischievous toss of her head, which gave way, however, at sight of her schoolfellow's distress, to a quiet smile, as she added, "No, Josie, I am not going, if you like me to stay. Miss Crofton has given me leave to sit with you for half an hour four times a week."

Josephine stared. "Given you leave? Do you mean that you have asked to spend your playtime in this dull little room?"

"I don't think it is a dull little room," was the answer, "with you and your

books in it. And, Josie, I am going to ask you a favour. I want to know if you will let me try to—to——" and the colour deepened in fearless Helen's cheeks, and she stammered before poor stupid Josephine, who gazed at the phenomenon in speechless amazement.

"To ask me a favour?" she said at last. "That sounds too good to be true. Why, even Rosie scarcely ever thinks of asking me anything. What can you want that I can—at least that you think I can do for you?"

Helen got up from her knees, and going behind her companion's chair made a necklace of her two arms round her companion's neck as she replied in a low rather hurried voice, so unlike her usual independent utterances—

"Please don't be vexed with me, Josephine. I know I am ever so much younger than you, and idle, and not at all clever, but perhaps—if—do you think you would let me try to help you in your work a little sometimes?"

For some moments there was no answer. All was silence in that dingy little lesson room. Then Helen stooped her head lower, laying her cheek gently on her companion's head, as she whispered—

"Try to forget what I have said, Josie, dear, and please to know, now and always, that I did not say it to hurt you. I will run away now."

And then, with one kiss on the pale cheek she was turning hastily away, feeling painfully that she had added another sting to her schoolfellow's dreary lot. She was soon undeceived. She had not set a second step before she was caught back, and held tightly, while Josephine's weary, patient, hot eyes were cooled, for the first time for many months, with a refreshing flood of tears.

"Please don't cry," whispered Helen, with fresh remorse.

"Oh! you don't know how comfortable it is," was the heartfelt answer. "I was only thinking, the other day, that perhaps I never should be able to cry any more. I seemed to have grown too dull and heavy."

"Ah! that is just it," exclaimed Helen Edison, suddenly recovering her spirits and animation when she found that her offer had, after all, been balm rather than a wound. "That is just it, Josephine, I am sure. You are not really dull and heavy; but you have been growing dull and heavy. Yes—that is the very thing I have been expecting."

Josephine sat up, and left off crying to stare at her companion.

"Oh, but Helen, I really am dull and stupid."

"Don't believe it," was the short contradiction, accompanied by a shake of the curly head, and a smile. "You came to school after a life in India and a lot of illnesses, with no education; and you and the folks here set to work at once to pump into your brain babies' learning, and children's learning, and girls' learning, and a lot of 'finishing elegancies,' as my nurse calls them, all at once. And I think you have all been just as wise as if you had put a freezing person into a doubly-heated hothouse,

and kept on raising the temperature. First of all, the freezing creature would have suffered a horrible pain, as you did when you suddenly found how ignorant you were; and then he would have gradually got suffocated past all feeling, and ended by dying, as your wish to learn will end by dying, if you go on trying to do impossibilities, and finding, to your perpetual discouragement, that they won't be mastered. And there now! There's a long speech for you; but I mean it every bit, and I've been thinking it out to say to you for ever so many days past."

"Have you?" said Josephine, looking up with a flickering smile. "Had you thought of the freezing man, and all?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" was the laughing answer. "But I thought of half a dozen similes besides that. The frog, beginning modestly as a tadpole, and the butterfly as a grub, and heaps of others, only, as my half-hour is beginning to run short, perhaps I had better not waste time to tell you any more to-day. What work are you preparing for to-morrow?"

"Trying to prepare, you mean," corrected Josephine, sighing, but with something of a glimmer of hope struggling into her face, as she turned to the table at which she had been studying, and pulled a heap of books forward towards her schoolfellow. "For to-morrow I have a French exercise, with the rules to learn by heart; a German exercise, with the rules—oh, those dreadful rules—to learn by heart; a chapter of Roman History to be questioned on; a couple of pages of geography to learn by heart; these three dreadful Rule of Three sums to do, and I do not understand the rule one bit better now than when Miss Rowe explained it——"

"I don't suppose you do, and much she cares," muttered Helen, in interruption. Then she said, "But go on, please. Anything more?"

"Yes; a chapter of Morris's Heathen Mythology, and—and," in a very low voice, "a page of spelling."

"Ah!" said Helen, calmly, as if she had not noticed the lowered tone nor the tinge of shame in poor Josephine's cheeks. "Ah, what a clever idea of yours to learn that! Papa says that he has scarcely ever known a woman who spelt really correctly, and that it is a disgrace to our sex that it should be so. We won't cut off that one of your lessons, at any rate, and I will learn it with you. But how many of the others do you expect to know properly?"

"None," answered Josephine, her wan face again overspreading with an expression of despair, which was startled away before it could grow very definite by Helen's quick, clear voice retorting, coolly—

"No, I should just think not indeed. Nine months ago, you have told me yourself, you had forgotten every little bit of French you ever knew. German you had never looked at. Arithmetic the doctors had never let you touch, and if they could see you now I am certain they would continue the same veto. By-the-by, was it the Rule of Three rules