

## OUR CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS.

THE style of decoration to be followed depends on a good many different circumstances. The size and nature of the room or hall, the locality, whether town or country, and the time which can be expended on the work, have all to be taken into account. The subject is so familiar to everyone, that there is no need for a detailed description of any style of decoration, and it is only necessary to give a few suggestions, to be adapted according to circumstances.

When holly and mistletoe are scarce, very pretty and effective varieties are made by introducing bulrushes, teazle heads, pampas grass, or any of the tall brown grasses to be found growing near water in the country. These should be gathered in the autumn, and



well dried. If the bulrush heads are too ripe, and shed their seeds, they should be dipped in gum water. Mountain ash berries, and hips and haws should be gathered in the autumn too, and preserved for Christmas use by soaking in strong brine. Lichens are very useful as a background for red lettering, or to form the letters themselves on a coloured background edged with leaves. The grey lichen can frequently be torn off in large pieces from the trunks of trees, and this variety is the most useful for lettering; but twigs and branches covered with moss and lichen should be preserved just

as they grow, as very quaint and effective decorations can be made by grouping these in masses, with trails of ivy hanging from them.

If artificial frost is wished for, crushed glass, sold under the name of "frost," answers the best, or it can be made at home by crushing white glass (old white bottles, or pieces of broken window panes) with a garden roller. It is more effective than Epsom salts, the coarse kind of which, however, such as is sold at oil shops, is often used when glass cannot be procured. In either case it is sprinkled over the surface of the leaves, or cotton-wool snow, which have previously been coated with strong colourless gum.

In small rooms it is not advisable to use artificial frost or snow of any kind, as it will not bear close scrutiny, and distance is necessary to give it a proper effect. A judicious use of grey lichen amongst glossy green leaves gives a very wintry appearance, and will not only bear close inspection, but does not look tawdry in the glaring light of day, which cannot be said for anything artificial.

Japanese fans, as well as those of ordinary shape made of paper, are very useful for brightening up sombre rooms. They are very cheap, and are made in all varieties of brilliant colours. They look particularly well over pictures, not only as a temporary, but a permanent decoration, as they break the monotonous straight lines of a number of picture frames, and add a touch of colour to the walls, where it is often very much wanted.

If it is absolutely necessary to employ imitation berries and flowers, the easiest plan is to buy bunches of artificial red berries, which are very inexpensive, and save a good deal of trouble in making them at home; but if there are plenty of helpers, they can easily be made either by dyeing peas or pellets of putty with Judson's dye, or by dissolving red sealing wax in spirits of wine, and dipping the peas into it so as to coat them with wax. Artificial Christmas flowers are not so easily purchased, as they are either expensive or very tawdry-looking; Christmas roses are not at all difficult to make at home. Have ready some white satin, or sateen, dark green paper, fine wire, greenish grey paint, and green crewels. Get a real flower to copy from, if possible, or, if not, good patterns of Christmas roses can often be obtained from old Christmas cards. Cut out the petals in satin; they are something of a pear shape, but flattened at the top, and wider in proportion at the upper part; leave half an inch of stalk at the base. A short length of fine wire is gummed up the back of each petal, to stiffen it. The stamens and pistil are of wire covered with crewels, and with a knot at the top; and these, with the stalks of the petals, are united by means of a fine wire twisted round them. This united stalk is then passed through a calyx, or little cup, of the green paper, and the flower is complete, except for the touches of greyish green shading on the petals, which are added with a paint brush. These look very delicate and pretty arranged amongst moss and dried ferns.

Be careful to avoid an air of heaviness in small rooms. It is better to use too little material than to let it appear overdone. Trails of ivy look light and graceful hanging at the sides of a picture or mirror, springing from a light bunch at the top. If the sprays are refractory, they should be wired. Laurel has a disagreeable smell, and should be used sparingly in small rooms.

A light trellis work of leaves looks very well to cover a blank space, or hide an ugly door. It is made by sewing single leaves on tape, or wiring them on thin laths of wood, with a cluster of leaves or berries where the bands cross each other.

In decorating schoolrooms, or any large hall with bare walls, one has to work on a different principle. Here quantity is of more importance than quality, as the general effect only is noticed while details are overlooked.

Flags are very useful. They are not used to the extent they well might be in such cases. The proper material for them is bunting, which hangs well and is durable, but it is expensive, and Turkey twill answers the purpose very well. The red and dark blue should be used. The small flags may be plain, but the larger ones should be elaborated by devices of contrasting colour, red or white upon blue, and *vice versa*. Stars of gold and silver paper can be gummed on, and some of the flags edged with the tinsel paper, cut into a fringe and folded to a good thickness. The larger devices in twill and calico are more durable if stitched into place. Shields, anchors, and other emblems can be cut out in millboard, and covered with red twill, and are useful as centre pieces for masses of green, or, as connecting links for festoons.

Wreaths and garlands are easier to make, and show up better if arranged in a flat form, instead of round like a rope. They should be fastened on to a strip of any bright red material, which shows on either side; this not only enhances the effect of the garland, but preserves the wall from being scratched or discoloured by the stalks.

For a large bare room, on which little time can be expended, an effective centre-piece for the end wall can be obtained by making a very large circle of thin wood or strong cardboard, covered with some bright colour, with a spreading bunch of green upon it, and a star of tinsel or straw in the middle, and four or six garlands springing from behind it, carried to the side-walls of the room, where each ends in a short hanging bunch of green—a sort of tassel.

Mission rooms and wards which have a wooden or painted dado can be brightened by making a heading to the dado of a long strip of red lining, about a quarter of a yard wide, and edged with a band of gold-paper pasted on, or else overlapping leaves stitched on. At intervals, say a yard apart, stitch or paste on one of the Japanese paper pictures, sold at a halfpenny each. In addition to the pictures, a motto, the letters cut out in white, may be applied, a word, or two if short, between each picture. If texts of Scripture are preferred, the pictures should be omitted or less curious ones substituted, as the two are hardly suitable together. An easy way of applying letters is by stencilling. Take a piece of stiff card, large enough to contain a single letter besides a margin of two inches or more all round. Draw and cut out the letter, taking care to have it in the middle of the card, and of a plain clear shape. In letters such as B, where there are fragments which would fall out if the whole letter were cut, little strips of cardboard must be left here and there to connect them. Place the frame of cardboard from which the letter has been cut in position on the red strip, and paint over with paint or whitewash. On removing the frame, the letter will, of course, remain clear and white, and the marks left by the connecting strips of card must be filled in afterwards. The cardboard shapes are easily made and can be used over and over again.

Mirrors, and even windows, are sometimes pressed into the service of decoration by having mottoes and devices painted on them in whitening. A branch of a tree or spray of flowers is usually painted coming down from the left-hand top corner of the glass, and partially encircling the motto which is near the bottom of the mirror, where it can be easily read. The whitening is easily wiped off, and rather improves the glass than otherwise, and if a tasteful design is selected, the effect is exceedingly pretty.



## A BUNCH OF CROCUSES.

SOME thirty years ago, after wandering through the Lowther Arcade in search of some small article which I thought I might be able to buy there, I turned into the side room known as the "Adelaide Gallery." I was looking at some small plaster of Paris figures, when my eye was arrested by the hue of some golden-coloured crocuses, in a tiny flower-pot, which on closer examination I found to be made of wax.

The owner of the stall, an elderly lady, came forward, and I admired and bought them. She then said her daughter made them, and that if I would call at No. so-and-so in a street not far off, she was sure her daughter would be pleased to show me her collection. I went, and was much interested in the groups of wax flowers, but much more so in the daughter herself, who seemed not more than thirty years of age; very tall, with the manners and carriage of one who had been in much better circumstances.

After some conversation it was arranged that a relative of mine should take lessons from her at my house, and thus I afterwards heard what I am going to relate. In her youth Miss K— lived in the country; their house and grounds being filled with everything which adds to the comfort and refinements of life, and her great love of flowers led her to try and imitate them in paper and wax; gathering them from the conservatory in all stages of development, and taking two as near alike as possible, one to be dissected leaf by leaf and petal by petal, the other flower being kept in water as a pattern. After a time dark days came, the father was found dead in his garden, and through a flaw in partnership deeds, or for lack of deeds, there remained but about £100 a year for the mother, three daughters, and a young son.

They had their good furniture and plate, which they removed to London, taking a house, which they let in the Parliamentary season, themselves living in lodgings. Sometimes the house did not let; then Miss K— generally managed to go to some fashionable seaside resort, where she sold her groups of flowers to private families, in which she gave the daughters lessons. Her elder sister was a daily governess, the other sister was somewhat of an invalid, but could see to letting and preparing the house, and they all bravely worked at anything their hands found to do. Before I knew them Miss K— had been engaged to be married to a gentleman who was faithful to her after all her fortune had fled. The wedding breakfast was laid, the bride in her wedding-dress, and a few guests assembled, when on the "best man" going to the hotel for the bridegroom, it was found that he had died during the night from heart disease.

Dr. Cumming was waiting in Crown Court Chapel to perform the ceremony. On hearing of the sad event he hastened to the house, aiding the desolate lady by his sympathy, and leading her to the One true Comforter. From that time Miss K— looked upon Dr. Cumming as her best earthly friend.

Her sisters had both long illnesses, and died within a short time of each other. The mother also died; and Miss K—'s sight having long been failing, friends helped, and a small annuity was got for her from a beneficent society.

Let us gather from this history connected with a bunch of crocuses, that even accomplishments and the recreations of *leisure hours* may be turned to good account when thoroughness is the motto.