

a very favourite material with me for any arrangements of outdoor spring flowers, and no one who has not tried them can imagine the quaint suggestiveness of the glossy brown sticks and their vivid green excrescences (they are little more as yet) in conjunction with delicate-looking flowers like the crocus, snow-drop, and hellebore, which are yet so much more hardy than they. I mention lilac because these shrubs are plentiful and luxuriant in London gardens, but in the country many hedgerow plants are available and equally effective for the purpose.

A dull room can be made bright by dressing it with a few dozen crocuses, two or three together in a nice glass or china receptacle wherever they may be needed, either in all parts of the room, or closely encircling some large object, such as a palm or lamp. I have never seen the cut blossoms for sale, although no doubt they can be obtained if asked for; so this suggestion will be chiefly useful to those who grow a good quantity in their own gardens. But it is always possible, and I think worth while, to buy boxes of the bulbs, which can be kept quite easily in bloom for some time by transferring them to vases filled with water or very damp moss. For a dinner-table they would be charming in glass-lined decanter stands with plenty of ivy or sprouting twigs.

Primroses and violets, if they are to be had at all, make very pretty posies, together with a few snowdrops and their own leaves, especially in small pieces of china (not blue and white).

A little bunch of large purple violets may be distributed among a good quantity of snowdrops, and look as sweet as they smell; but equal numbers of each flower always suggest funeral wreaths. The same objection does not apply to a mixture of violets and lilies-of-the-valley, because the vivid green leaves of the latter count as a third colour; and such a posy will give grace and fragrance to a bright sitting-room; but both flowers are too expensive at this season to use in any quantity if economy is a consideration.

Roman hyacinths are good now, and a sixpenny bunch, placed lightly, will fill a good-sized china basket of moss. They are very sweet, but rather uninteresting alone, so I generally combine them with some bright larger flowers and dark foliage. Bunches of a very dark-leaved begonia with tiny pink blossoms are sold for about fourpence at many florists, and with white Roman hyacinths and

pink anemones will make a very pretty group at a cost of about one and threepence.

Troughs filled with begonia stuck in moss might on a dinner-table surround a tall vase filled with white paper narcissus, or the begonia could be in specimen glasses shorter than others holding narcissus.

For "At Home" days following a wedding white hyacinths mixed with sprays of myrtle or box might appropriately dress a drawing-room, or a basket holding two pieces of white azalea or rhododendron, some hyacinths and myrtle sprays, the handle tied with light green ribbon, could occupy a conspicuous position in the room.

The winter yellow jasmine and scarlet japonica are very beautiful, and so Japanese-looking that they demand Oriental vases; but they are more suitable for shelves and brackets than for table decoration. I have often seen the little knots of the japonica flowers and buds plucked and laid in saucers of water, but cannot help thinking this a mistake, as a great part of their beauty lies in the way in which the brilliant blossoms open out on the dark leafless wood. Small sprays of them are most attractive when placed in narrow necked jars of dull cool colouring.

A few sorts of iris and gladioli are in bloom now, and are quite as quaint and beautiful as orchids, which they greatly resemble in everything but their costliness. For a dinner-party it would be difficult to make a prettier arrangement than a bank of moss fringed with maidenhair, studded in the raised centre with specimens of iris persica and reticulata, and filled up with spiraea or deutzia, some handsome flag leaves and maidenhair; or a centre row of tall glasses holding the iris and spiraea might be flanked by small pots of maidenhair. Gladioli could be treated in the same way, but are hardly so effective as iris. To make the latter last well, they should be cut in the opening bud the day before they are required.

I have not as yet mentioned orchids in any scheme of table decoration, fashionable as they have been of late years, because the cost even of the cheapest has seemed to me almost prohibitive; and for the price of two or three of their blooms a whole table can be decorated with iris, gladioli, or even forced ixiis and narcissi. If, however, orchids are used, they should always be placed in banks of moss amidst a mass of fern leaves or other ornamental foliage lightly placed.

A similar bank may be studded only with

freesia, white and yellow, at a cost of about half a crown for a dinner of eight people; and blue and white scilla and chionodoxa would give an original effect at even less expense if the flowers were bought direct from the nurseryman. In this arrangement the foliage should include silver and yellow leaves; asparagus would be better than ferns, and the lamp or candle shades should be yellow.

I have used six small but bushy ferns planted in decanter stands as the only accompaniment to three heads of salmon-coloured imatophyllum and a few of their leaves in tall white glasses, the table being lighted by two silver-branched candlesticks with very pale salmon-coloured shades. The whole cost me five shillings, but it will be understood that the occasion was a special one, and I do not think so really splendid an effect could have been obtained for less; while the ferns, carefully repotted next day, lived and grew, serving me in like manner on many future occasions. These suggestions are offered to those who have greenhouse plants in bloom now, from which they do not mind cutting sparingly; and experience will show that even though familiar blossoms like snowdrops and crocuses need treating in good quantities, rarer flowers may be more isolated, and will often make quite as rich an effect if the foliage surroundings be sufficient and appropriate. For the latter I go to a large nursery instead of to a shop, and find usually that the proprietors are willing to cut from their less perfect plants enough leaves for a good sized table for a shilling or so.

Begonia, caladium, canna, rheum, and saxifrage leaves are specially suitable for such arrangements.

Hyacinths, grown in rooms by most people, make beautiful ornaments for sitting-rooms, if not for the dinner-table.

Other bulbs, such as narcissi, freesias, tulips, crocuses, snowdrops, and scillas, are best grown on in boxes until the bud is well formed, then a number in the same stage of development can be planted in a nice bowl. If several are grown together in the same pot from the first, the buds will seldom open out at the same time.

When the bloom is over, all bulbs, whether grown in water or earth, should be planted out into good mould, and only taken up when their leaves are quite withered; then they will be worth growing again next year, although probably the flowers will not be quite so fine.

CONSTANCE JACOB.

A LUNCHEON IN BRITTANY.



WITH keen curiosity I sprang lightly out of bed and ran to the window. It was my first real glimpse of France, for the night before, when we had arrived, it had been too dark to see anything. Thrown back in a pretty, gaily-

flowered garden, our house, where we were staying with some Breton friends, did not stand quite on the main road, but through the branches of the trees in the garden I could see the tall houses of our street, with their cream and white fronts and pretty green shutters, and the narrow blue river which gives its name to the town, flashing in the early sunlight. As I stood at the open window and felt the crisp warm air kissing my cheeks with a truly French welcome, the town clock struck eight, and already the ladies of the neighbour-

hood, nearly all dark and stout, and dressed with a plainness almost amounting to dowdiness, were passing home from their marketing, followed by white-capped brown-handed maids carrying the baskets. Early as it was, the good people must have been up a good two hours before to have completed their purchases; and I blushed for my laziness as I glanced down at my dressing-gown and slippers, and compared myself with the thrifty people passing home among the trees.

However, this sense of inferiority wore off when the maid, knocking at the door, brought me some coffee and bread and butter wafers, with the information that *déjeuner* would be served at half-past ten; and glancing through the window I saw Madame, my friend, and her sister walking up and down the terrace in an undress similar to my own. There were some French people who did not go in for early rising after all, I said to myself, as I poured out my first cup of coffee. How I enjoyed that breakfast! Never did liquid taste as refreshing

as that coffee; never had bread been so delicious or butter so sweet! The sunshine came warmly in little crinkled lines through the crimped muslin blind, and the shrill merry voices of the children of the house floated up to the open window with pleasant strangeness. Yes, at last I was in France! At last I should know something of the land of immortal fame! And with a sigh of ecstatic rapture I sank back in my chair and gave myself up to dreams.

"Are you not coming down to *déjeuner*?" asked Madame two hours afterwards, peeping into my room on her way down, and I sprang up in dismay. So late and not dressed yet! With hasty fingers I piled up my hair, drew on an easy wide-sleeved gown, and in five minutes rushed down just as *déjeuner* was served.

All the family were assembled. There were Madame and her husband, a tall, white-haired, fresh-complexioned foreigner, and Madame's sister, a slight brown thorough French girl, and two little boys, cousins to the three. A

merry-faced English girl, who was stopping in M—— to learn the language, and Ruth and I, fresh from our trip across the Channel, made up the party, whose voices, as we arranged ourselves round the long daintily set-out table, cheerily airing a mixture of broken French and English, made a babel of indescribable noise.

The day was Friday, therefore no meat appeared on the table, but such a delicate vegetarian *menu* was served that I cannot resist jotting it down for you.

- Eggs à la Bretagne.
- Baked Cauliflower. Celery Rissoles.
- Gâteau de Pomme de Terre.
- Boule de Neige Biscuits. Puff-puffs.
- Ice Wafers. Fruit.
- Cheese.

There was black coffee for the gentlemen, boiled milk and chocolate for the ladies, and a dear little pot of tea for us three English girls.

I afterwards learnt the method of preparing the above dishes, which is as follows:—

Eggs à la Bretagne.—Break six new-laid eggs into separate cups. Poach each lightly, drain, and trim carefully, leaving but a narrow frill of white round the yellow centre. Have ready some square pieces of note-paper, place an egg in the middle of each, sprinkle over pepper, salt, mace, and nutmeg, and a little minced parsley, and wrap up, taking care that the edges of the paper are well turned over.

If you have some fresh tomatoes so much the better, but if not, tinned ones will do. Choose six large ones, skin, and cut them into rings. Place in a stew-pan with half a pint of cream, half a teaspoonful of cayenne, a teaspoonful of salt, and the same quantity of brown vinegar. Simmer until the tomatoes are quite soft, and keep hot.

Have some fresh butter—about six ounces—ready melted in an omelette pan, put in the wrapped-up eggs, and fry. When the paper is a fine brown, remove from the pan, drain, and uncover. Pour the tomato into an entrée dish, place the eggs on top, and serve.

Baked Cauliflower.—(White broccoli, when young, may be used, if desired, instead of

cauliflowers.) Break up the flower of two fresh cauliflowers, and boil gently for fifteen minutes in new milk. When tender, take out, drain, weigh, pour into a bowl, and add the same quantity of fresh white crumb, the yolks of four eggs, half a pint of cream, and four ounces of good butter. Beat these up well, and season with a teaspoonful of salt, half one of cayenne, half of mace, and a tablespoonful of vinegar. Butter a basin and fill with the mixture. Bake in a slow oven for an hour, and serve in the mould.

Celery Rissoles.—(I find asparagus or sea-kale make a good substitute when celery is not in season.) Cut a head of celery into equal lengths, first, of course, removing the green tops and scraping and washing quite white; tie into bundles and boil gently. When tender, take out and drain. Stir together the yolks of four hard-boiled eggs, one tablespoonful of minced parsley, two tablespoonfuls of cream, half a teaspoonful of salt, and a pinch of cayenne, and coat the celery with the mixture. Roll out some good puff paste, cut into strips a little longer than the celery—about six or seven inches—and case the vegetable. Have ready some butter or good beef suet melted in a pan, fry to a nice golden brown, and serve decorated with the green tops of the celery.

Gâteau de Pomme de Terre.—Boil six large potatoes in their skins. When done, peel and crush quite smooth. Put into a basin and add the yolks of six new-laid eggs, six ounces of fresh butter, one ounce of castor sugar, and half a pint of good milk. Beat to a thick cream, whisk up the whites of the eggs, and mix. Pour into a buttered tin, beat up the whites of three more eggs, place on the top, and bake in a hot oven for one hour. The cake, when done, should resemble a preserve sandwich, and be quite brown on top. Sift with castor sugar before sending to table.

Boule de Neige Biscuits.—Separate the whites of six eggs and beat to a stiff froth. Add two ounces of sifted sugar, half a teaspoonful of vanilla flavouring, and whisk for five minutes longer. Butter a baking-sheet and drop on the egg—a tablespoonful will be sufficient for each biscuit. Bake in a quick oven. When done they should be a light

crisp brown, and quite solid in appearance. Send to table heaped in a dish, and decorated with preserved cherries and angelica.

Puff-Puffs.—Weigh one pound of fine flour on to your board. Take one teaspoonful of salt, half one of carbonate of soda, and half one of cream of tartar. Mix together and rub well into the flour. Add a little cold water, and work to a stiff paste. Put twelve ounces of fresh butter into a muslin, and press with the hands to the consistency of the paste. Roll out the paste into an oblong shape, and spread with the butter. Wrap into three folds, taking care that the butter does not come out at the ends, and roll again gently. Always roll puff paste in the same direction—that is, away from you. Fold in three and place on one side. In ten minutes turn the paste half way round and roll as before. This must be repeated five times, turning the paste half-way round each time, and leaving ten minutes between each roll. Smooth out the sixth time, cut a lemon in two, remove the pips, and squeeze over the paste; fold, roll out and sprinkle with lemon once more, and then put on one side until required. Cover over carefully from the air, and keep in a cool place.

Beat up four ounces of fresh butter to a cream, and add four ounces of castor sugar, three eggs, and two ounces of cornflour, whisking well between the addition of each article. When quite smooth pour in half a pint of cream and a teaspoonful of almond essence, and stir. Pour into a saucepan and simmer gently for ten minutes, keeping well stirred. When done, stand in a cool place to set.

Take half the paste and roll out very thin. Puncture it slightly with a knife, brush with raw egg, place on a baking-sheet, and bake to a light brown. Roll out the remainder of the paste about a quarter of an inch in thickness, cut into strips about five by two inches, brush over with egg, sift with sugar, and bake. When done, spread the thin paste with the cream, cover with the thicker layer, and cut to the size of the upper sippets. Spread the rest of the cream on the top, whip up the whites of three more eggs, lay smoothly over the cream, and serve. LOUIE CAREW.

VARIETIES.

IRISH BULLS.

The churchwardens' quarterly meeting will be held every six weeks instead of half-yearly, as usual.

Next Tuesday being Ash Wednesday, an open air meeting of the congregation will be held in the vestry to determine what colour the church shall be whitewashed.

IN ARGUMENT.—We are never so well pleased with an antagonist as when he makes an objection to which we are provided with a good answer.

A SAD DISAPPOINTMENT.—Sterne's maid-servant once asked permission to go to a public execution near York. She soon came back in tears. On her master enquiring the cause of her grief, she answered, "I have lost all my trouble; for before I reached the gallows the man was relieved."

DOING ONE'S DUTY.—Life is the most frivolous of things unless it is regarded as one great and constant duty. Life is only of value by devotion to what is true and good. The aim of a life worth living should be ideal and unselfish.

THE KING AND THE QUAKER.

When Penn stood before Charles II. with his hat on, the King put off his.

"Friend Charles," said Penn, "why dost thou not put on thy hat?"

"'Tis the custom of this place," replied the monarch, "that only one person should be covered at a time."

THE NEW MAMMA.

A widower married a second time, and his choice was a wealthy lady about fifty years of age.

When the bride and bridegroom returned home from the wedding, the husband, introducing the wife to his children, said, "My dear children, kiss this lady. She is the new mamma I promised to bring you."

After taking a steady look at the "new mamma," little Charlie exclaimed, "Papa, you have been cheated! She isn't new at all!"

RATHER MONOTONOUS.

Oh, don't the days seem lank and long,
When all goes right and nothing goes wrong?
And isn't one's life extremely flat,
With nothing whatever to grumble at?

DISINTERESTEDNESS.

"Friend Tom," says Ned, "I've viewed the world around;

Disinterestedness I ne'er have found."

"I must," quoth Tom, "from your opinion vary,

For I have found it in—the Dictionary."

THE ART OF LIFE.

"The art of life is easily attained—

Trust in yourself, and you the whole have gained."

HOME, SWEET HOME.—To Adam, Paradise was home; to the good among his descendants, home is Paradise.

THE HOUSEMAID'S ANSWER.

"Mary, how is it that the chairs are all covered with dust?"

"Why, ma'am, no one has been sitting on them to-day."

ANSWER TO RIDDLE (p. 26).

Lot's wife.