



“THE DRAWING-ROOM FLOOR.”—HOW I FOUND IT, AND HOW I LEFT IT.

It was eighteen feet by fifteen feet—not the whole floor but the drawing-room—the ceiling had been whitewashed once, but now it was black. The chimney had had the redecoration of the ceiling. In the centre a typical lodging-house rosette, moulded in bad plaster; projecting from it the stump of an amputated gas-pipe; an ornamental border—bordering on anything but the ornamental—ran round the room. The paper might have been worse. Subject—syringas and sunflowers, drawn by a cramped hand with a stiff elbow; “splodges” for leaves; colour neutral, inclined to bilious. Carpet—cream ground with large crimson flowers and grey leaves, their tints mercifully assuaged by that thoroughly domestic trinity, wear, dust, and sun; pattern neither conventional nor natural—but especially not the latter—bordered by a dirty crimson felt. The curtains were crimson damask, with a narrow edging of gold and crimson, keeping a faded watch over lace Nottinghams of the largest, coarsest, and boldest design, rigid and straight as buckram, not *much* darned.

Furniture:—The monarch of these ancient timbers, and giant amid pigmies, was a large and portly sideboard, a broad-shouldered, straight-backed old gentleman on gouty pedestals, one of which contained a nest of movable drawers, the other, as usual, a *garde vin*. Between these two supports a cavern, an “antre vast and drear.” Next came a ricketty circular table, standing precariously on a polished three-clawed foot, which creaked and groaned a loud remonstrance if leant upon; covering this a very old-fashioned damask, some distant relation in colour and dinginess to the carpet. *The* regulation couch, with bandy legs and castors warranted to trip up all who pass, and so constructed that you might sit but could not recline; ditto easy chair, a prize piece of irony. Both these clothed in chintz sobered by immersion in the wash-tub—brown sprigs on a dubious ground. Six chairs “*ong sweet*,” brass fender, with “set” of fire-irons of same metal. No other would have had impudence to pretend to be a set, and yet consist of half a poker and a dislocated shovel! Dotting vacant spaces; two occasional tables home-upholstered, a dumb waiter, and a writing-table. Between this last and the ink-stand—large splashes from which it had intercepted—a crimson cloth, unhemmed, unbound, un-everything but stained. A gilt-framed mirror crowned with befitting mock splendour the marble mantelpiece. The door (scarred with old screw marks of banished brackets) and windows (French, opening on a balcony) were warped and shrunk, and the privilege of inhabiting this incongruous abode was 40s. a week!

To the carpet and the paper I resigned myself. I consented to be prisoned in a gloomy cage of syringas and sunflowers, and to tread upon crimson emblems of an unheard-of horticulture; but I made a clean ceiling and a swept chimney conditions of tenancy. These fulfilled, I bundled in, and the first bundle I undid was my draperies. The curtains were first attacked. Butter-muslin, at 1½d. a yard,

was purchased, and replaced with soft creamy folds the rigid, frigid Nottinghams. Three di-jims, one between and two flanking the windows, supplanted the crimson damask. Of the two pairs of these brought in my bundle, the single one remaining concealed the nakedness and wounds of the door. Art serge, at 1s. 3d. a yard, ousted the table-covers, and clad the ample shoulders of stout Sir Sideboard. An odd scrap of art-muslin, tucked into a crack; which ran the whole length of his central drawer, hid the “dead vast and middle” between those gouty pedestals. A dark indigo blue phoolcarrie was draped, with the aid of a few pins (and fingers), over the “quarry” which framed the fireplace, and great was the horror of my “land-woman”—why, *why* should they be called *landladies*?—at this veiling of the marble altar of the hearth. I had to explain that I veiled it because I held it so sacred. A complete set of fire-irons cost 5s. 6d.—I “ran to” that—and this partially atoned for the desecration of the mantelpiece. What should I do with that couch? Ah, happy thought! arras cloth at 9d. a yard. “Oh, what a horrid stiff material!” you’ll say; but you wouldn’t if you saw it draped on that poor old “little ease” in my sitting-room.

At any rate, a big authority on art decoration, who did me the honour to call to-day, was struck by the satisfied, comfortable way in which it folded and fell. Try for yourselves and see. I made a frill of it, ravelled at one edge, to follow the outline of the couch and hide those bandy legs! The rest simply draped, and three silk cushions, blue, Naples yellow, and terra-cotta, with broad frills, to eke out its repose.

The arm—I won’t say easy-chair any more—submitted with a good grace to the same material, and was put in the background; while for real ease and use I introduced two wicker lounges, with pretty soft silk cushions, which I made at a cost of 7s. or 8s.—real eiderdown! The occasional tables were put on the “retired” list in corners, and covered with Liberty cotton crêpe, embroidered in odd moments. The central table and its complaints were banished to the limbo of “downstairs,” and a kitchen brother promoted to its place after his plain but neat understandings had been coloured a nice walnut with Jackson’s water-stain. I hired a piano—a small cottage by Bord, with brass panels, brackets, and ornamental hinges. To break the oblong of the walls, I placed my arras-hung couch and the piano on one side in this position:—



the couch across the angle of the wall and smuggling up to one side of the fireplace, the piano reaching almost to the door. Behind the couch a little pedestal, supporting a big brown-red wavy-tipped bowl, the home of a bracken fern, or some branch of that distinguished highland family; replying to the bowl, a dull golden-brown phoolcarrie, with

broad gold hem over the back of the couch. Behind the piano, in the space left by the angle at which it stood from the wall, and near the door, a celadon jar (which the fabled stork might have dined from), full of teasels (good for decoration, if not dinner). At the end of the piano, just between it and the door, a little wicker table, mounting a blue bowl and *Aspidistra*. The effect of this between the broad rich colours of the di-jim on the door and on the burnished ebony of the piano was delightful. A big fluted yellow bowl—a rich deep yellow, mind, nothing shamefaced—as diadem to the dull-blue serge on the sideboard; another and ampler *Aspidistra* spreading and waving out of it; a brass Benares, holding a white hyacinth, on one of the occasionals; a tub of plaited reed, concealing the pot of a dwarf palm, on the other; a Silenus-shaped bowl of Devonshire-ware sheltered under one of the broad leaves; smaller bowls, shrining little ribbon-ferns, in all available nooks. For the walls, two cheap but handsome kakemonos; and to distract attention from the pictures (two of which, however, were pretty mezzotints), the kingly kus-kus, with its suggestion of Eastern monarchs and fanning slaves. To relieve and contrast with these, ragged-edged palm-fans, and here and there a Japanese lady in tinselled paper bas-relief. A couple of Burmantoft plaques, in soft deep-brown plush, on each side of the overmantel. An iron candle-bracket over the head of the couch, and climbing up the walls a few celadon and Japanese plates excavated from a warehouse in the city. On the mantelpiece a mimic grandfather’s clock-case, showing the face of a little American “ticker;” an old ginger-pot, full of heather pulled on the slopes of Bracelet Bay, the Mumbles; a pair—yet not a pair—of Devonshire-ware double-handled mugs; white ware chalices for little ferns, held by boy and girl figures; an unframed oil sketch; a kus-kus; two easellets, bearers respectively of a bright little French painting on wood, and a photo of Marie Roze. Backing the chrome bowl on the sideboard, two ragged palm-fans. On the writing-table, brass candlesticks with orange shades; a broad blotting-pad of art serge worked with sunflowers; paper-knife of tortoiseshell and silver; snuffer-dish, used as a pen-tray; a little fern, and cut flower (carnation, if possible), in a water-green antique-shaped wine-glass; a pretty leather string-box, date-card, penwiper, odds-and-ends tray, etc. Books on the dumb waiter—the right kind of waiter for mental food!—above them; on the top shelf, a larger easel, moonlit and water splashed; and yet another fern bowl. A bright little group of ships, recalling the Norfolk Broads, similarly presented on the piano; and at the other end, against the background of teasels, a slim vase, shaped like a saddle-flask, an effective shaft of pale yellow on the piano. What else? Photographs, a little diamond-shaped white chair, an iron and copper standard kettle, striking a ruddy flash of good cheer into a distant corner—and that is how I left it.

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