

By
Constance Jacob

FLOWER DECORATIONS

ARTISTIC
&
INEXPENSIVE

PERHAPS none of the minor domestic arts has more rapidly developed within the last decade or so than that of floral decoration.

In our mothers' days a posy of flowers indiscriminately mingled with little regard to colour or form, crushed into any vase which might chance to be too valueless to grace the mantelpiece or chiffonier, was quite a holiday ornament for a middle-class dinner-table; and indeed, not so very long ago I have seen cabbage roses, yellow calceolarias, and scarlet geraniums murdering each other's beauty in the same specimen glass, and that in a house whose ladies aspired to great taste.

How different is it now when one sees the floral decorations of smart dinner-tables even more minutely chronicled than the ladies' gowns. We read of wonderful combinations of dark leaves and green orchids, purple orchids and white, Shirley poppies and grasses, roses of all colours, almander and hothouse ferns, poinsettias and arums; and many of us can recall from our own experience London rooms in which neither time nor expense has been spared to make beautiful floral backgrounds of the walls and shelves.

In point of fact this, like other fashions, is pushed to a ridiculous extreme, and in many houses as much thought and money are bestowed on the table decorations as on the food to which they should be only accessory, while the room necessary for the comfortable disposal of plates, knives, forks, and glasses is most mercilessly encroached upon.

In any case these brilliant triumphs are but for festive occasions, and for every ten ladies who can afford the professional assistance indispensable to such display there are hundreds who wish to, and many who do, make their dinner-tables and sitting-rooms continuously beautiful with fresh flowers at the cost of a few shillings a week. It is to these that I hope the ideas and suggestions gained from a long personal experience may prove of some service.

I do not think any girl can be a successful "artist in real flowers," whose love of nature does not make her observe their growth and native surroundings, because it is only by placing flowers in the receptacles best suited to their form and colour, and in combination with leaves and other blossoms which would probably be found in their natural neighbourhood, that a really pleasing group can be obtained. For instance, a daffodil is a charming picture if stood in a blue and white narrow and long-necked vase, while it at once loses its peculiar beauty if allowed to flop about in a wide, shallow bowl. The shape and colour of vases

is a very important part of my subject, and I intend to give it due consideration; not, indeed, in the interests of economy, wishing any of my readers to buy new glass and china in order to carry out my fancies in detail, but that in dealing with a particular plant I shall always picture which of the probable contents of the average china closet will show off its characteristic beauties to best advantage, presupposing that girls who take a pride in this branch of the domestic arts will themselves always wash and dust the necessary receptacles; because this practice allows of the use of those odd pieces of old china, glass, and silver, which nearly every house possesses, and which association renders too precious to be trusted to the housemaid's mercies. It may be as well to mention in this place a few articles which I have found most convenient for general use, viz. :—

Half-a-dozen blue and white vases of different shapes, from four to six inches in height. These are invaluable when flowers are scarce, as one good-sized blossom or spray, such as a chrysanthemum, single dahlia, or narcissus is sufficient for each;

Some tall slender champagne glasses, such as were in use half a century ago, which carry with admirable effect any delicate flowers with slender stalks, light foliage, or grasses, although weighty blossoms render them top-heavy. For the same purpose ordinary specimen glasses answer nearly as well;

Two celadon green and white Worcester china vases of a triangular shape, which keep well in position heavy flower-heads like peonies, carnations, or lilac, and in which nearly everything looks right;

Some little iridescent globes with necks, which hold small flowers like primroses, violets, snowdrops, or aconites, and whose flashes of colour show brighter against green leaves and stalks;

Plain, white-ribbed glass globes for similar use;

Imari vases, with fairly wide necks; Some glass dishes about five inches in diameter, and some straight and semi-circular troughs with which, on a dinner-table, something like carpet bedding effects can be obtained;



Four punch bowls of varying sizes, some old china soup plates, a large blue and white jar, and various old jugs, all of which are effective in a drawing-room where masses of foliage, berries, or blossoms serve to lighten up dull corners.

In all the articles on table decorations which have appeared lately, much has been said about silver decanter-stands; and as I have, by good fortune, six of these at my disposal, I have had them fitted with some cheap finger-bowls, for the better holding of damp moss or water, and know by happy experience what a beautiful harmony the silver makes with bright-coloured flowers like tulips, azaleas, and, beyond everything else, with roses; but for those people who do not count these articles among their treasures, I do not consider such shams as strawberry baskets silvered over with Judson's mixture at all a happy substitute, as I once saw recommended for a silver-wedding party.

Far better use plain white or iridescent glass finger-bowls, or some of the disused pieces of silver which most houses possess, in the shape of cake-baskets, snuffer-trays, or sugar-basins.

Plain white china ornaments are very serviceable, although the usual forms are rarely artistic.

Coloured glass is, on the whole, not very satisfactory unless one can afford Venetian; but a few pleasing jars in peacock-blue, olive-green, or brown-gold are sometimes to be seen, while some pieces of "clutha" glass are both cheap and good.

Cheap so-called "opal" or "ruby" vases with crinkled or turned-over edges are unmitigated abominations, and would vulgarise the most dainty blossoms.

On the other hand, charming little rustic nose-gays of wild flowers can be arranged in the brown jugs cream is sold in.

The table centre is too important a feature of the modern dinner-table to be forgotten, although we are sometimes told that its reign is nearly over. When it first appeared as a piece of bright-coloured plush, it made an effective background to the delicate sprays often strewn with apparent carelessness upon it; but after the novelty of the idea had worn off it seemed to many of us as an infringement of the time-honoured law that everything on a dinner-table should be fresh, clean, and washable. However, this objection does not apply to strips of linen embroidery, of which ladies of artistic taste may provide themselves with a variety to suit different arrangement in colour, care being taken that the tones of the embroidery do not overpower the more delicate tints of the flowers, which they ought rather to emphasize and throw forward. A handsome piece of white damask, with a good pattern outlined in blue flax, is a suitable accompaniment to the blue and white pots I mentioned above, or a strip of butcher-blue linen bordered with a free design in white answers the same purpose, and takes much less time to work.

White or sepia on lemon colour; burnt sienna on buff; salmon pink, olive green, and brown on cream—are useful combinations; while cross-stitch borders, worked in ingrain cotton on crash stripes or squares, have a very fair effect. Of course if one possesses a very brilliant piece of old or eastern embroidery, it is a treasure to display on the most festive occasions; but it should be in conjunction with white flowers generally; and the same may be said of dragon's blood linen stripes, which I have seen beautifully embroidered in light colours of flax.

But all these, although charming ornaments to the dinner-table, should after all be considered as second to the flowers themselves, and are by no means as necessary as some writers on fashion would lead us to suppose. Here I may as well mention the fancy which came in vogue a year or so back of crumpling up and draping lengths of bright-coloured silks round the centre ornament, and laying on them loose sprays of flowers and leaves. When artistically done, this arrangement is no doubt highly pleasing, but it really requires a born artist or a skilled professional to keep the apparent carelessness on the safe side of absurdity; and as it needs rearrangement every time the cloth is laid, is only fitted for a party, and therefore hardly comes within the scope of this article, which is intended to deal particularly with every-day decoration.

An important consideration always is the foliage suitable and available, and here the country girl has a tremendous advantage over her town sister, since, in a short walk in her own garden or the nearest lane, she can obtain graceful forms of green appropriate to any flowers (except exotics), while the other can never buy the same variety or choice.

Of latter years, however, the London florists have greatly improved in this respect, and now one can generally get something else than the

once inevitable maidenhair fern. In the autumn there is to be obtained, even in the streets, a glorious show of coloured foliage, such as hedge-maple, oak, beech, barberry, and brown ivy—all in the tints they put on in the fall, and yet by some unknown means as firm on their twigs as in the early summer. The barberry and ivy are an unfailling resource throughout the winter in support of flowers whose hardy nature renders them uncongenial companions for delicate ferns. In the summer many kinds of grasses can now be bought in cheap bunches, and combine naturally with wild or cottage flowers. A new departure is the *Asparagus plumosus*, which, from its vivid green and graceful growth, takes the place of maidenhair in an economical way, for although a little costly at first (sufficient for four specimen glasses is worth about sixpence), it lasts fresh so long that it is really cheap in the end.

Having enumerated what may be called the properties of the art, we may as well consider a few rules which the beginner will find necessary to bear in mind if she wishes for happy results.

All flowers should be arranged with a due regard to their natural habits of growth, as I said above, and as a matter of fact all other rules hang on this.

Summer and autumn flowers should always be accompanied by at least as much foliage as bloom. Spring flowers and most bulbous plants do not require this profusion.

Rarely have more than one bright colour in the same group. Although in nature many brilliant tints may be observed in close proximity, they are always brought into harmony by their gray-green or brown-purple surroundings in a way which cannot be achieved in a room.

Never overcrowd; it is better to err on the other side, as each beautiful outline should be kept perfectly distinct, and a few sprays lightly and freely arranged will have a far happier effect than double the number in the same space, not to mention that they will last much longer; and few people can afford either time or money for entirely fresh flower decorations every day.

On the other hand, see that the water is changed frequently, and never retain any vegetation which has begun to decay. A small piece of salt in the water will keep it fresh much longer than without.

In summer, flowers need looking to oftener than in winter, and they should be even fresher on the dinner-table than elsewhere.

Better no flowers at all than stale ones, and therefore it is well to buy those which are cheapest (they are at their best when most plentiful), and have a constant change, rather than spend one's weekly allowance in more costly wares which one cannot afford to renew.

In winter, use lukewarm water instead of cold, and still warmer if the flowers are cut while in bud.

Of very succulent plants, cutting off a small piece of stalk every day will often preserve the blossom a long while.

The foregoing remarks are for general use; in the ensuing pages I propose giving for every month a list of the most popular seasonable flowers, with hints how they may be made into tasteful decorations at small expense; occasionally suggesting or describing more elaborate schemes suitable for parties, and necessarily costing more time and money. These suggestions may be likened to elementary cooking recipes; but if they assist any of my readers towards concocting other varied and more delightful dainties, I shall have gained the object for which I write.

Many people may think that such a trivial matter as arranging prettily a few cut flowers is hardly worth so much care and thought; but surely this is a mistake. What is worth doing at all is worth doing well, and the same

principles are involved in the lowest as in the highest branch of art; the differences lie in detail and degree. Loyalty to natural law, harmony of tone, sense of fitness and proportion, must all be properly understood before success in any line is possible, and can all be learnt to some extent by studying the habits and surroundings of our most familiar flowers; moreover, such a study must imperceptibly but surely bring us nearer to a comprehension of that generous universal wisdom, which has made the generation and preservation of plant life the means of spreading beauty, like a garment, over the earth.

The chrysanthemum is characteristic of this month, and in colour and size offers more variety than any other one flower. Many flowers last on from October, and the autumn-blooming violets now get plentiful; tinted foliage is still to be had, and the invaluable brown ivy and red barberry begin to take the prominent place among our materials which they retain throughout the winter, so that, on the whole, the month is not so barren as might be supposed. Monthly roses too may sometimes be gathered now, and are very lovely if surrounded by sufficient of their own foliage and placed in specimen glasses, or, better still, in a china basket, or silver stands, with ivy and mignonne, either for dinner-table or drawing-room decoration.

Perhaps no flower is so easy to arrange artistically as the chrysanthemum, especially the large Japanese variety, of which the specimens look best in china vases with narrow necks, one or two blossoms in each, their own foliage being all the necessary supplement; and for success in this matter one cannot do better than make a study of any Japanese and Chinese designs, of which this flower in a suitable jar makes a prominent and graceful feature. But if only ordinary specimen glasses are available, a few tinted leaves or some feathery greenery may be added with advantage. The chrysanthemum foliage is not sufficiently appreciated by flower decorators; in shape and colour it is one of the most beautiful of leaves, and nothing else can suitably take its place with the blossoms; yet it is almost impossible to obtain at any but the very best florists; and even at a fashionable watering-place, when buying copper-coloured flowers for button-holes, I have been quite unable to get any of the leaves, and have been offered maidenhair as a superior substitute. If one has ever so little garden in a town it is worth while to grow a few chrysanthemum plants, as, even if the flowers should be worthless, the leaves will prove invaluable to mix with bought specimens.

Although large blossoms will cost twopence or threepence each, I think, in view of the effect attained, it is really economy to use them in preference to the smaller kinds, as these are seldom of good enough form to use singly, and treating them successfully in the mass comes more expensive; nevertheless one may have them ready to hand in the garden, and in that case the prettiest way is to put as many as possible, without crowding, into a picturesque jar or china bowl with plenty of their own leaves, and perhaps some carrot-tops. There should be very little difficulty about colour, as nearly all the shades will agree, and the flowers look almost as well in a mixture as in monochrome.

For the dinner-table, however, the latter is in better taste, and as no flowers last longer fresh, it is easy to have arrangements of them all through the month.

I have put five yellow dragon chrysanthemums each into a tall champagne glass, with a little brown ivy and bright green *Asparagus plumosus*, grounding the arrangement with a table centre of linen embroidery worked in dull greens and browns on white.

On another occasion six pink flowers and

some red barberry filled two good-sized white vases placed on the same mat, a lamp occupying the centre.

I have also used half pink and half white, with a little green ivy in glasses, this time using a table-centre of Langdale linen worked in white, and pale shades of green and blue.

Copper and yellow chrysanthemums went well together in blue and white vases on a white table-centre embroidered in blue.

The same vases and mat supported, another day, some extra fine specimens of the yellow dragons with brown ivy.

A large punch bowl may be filled with green ivy, studded with about six red and white blossoms of the incurved species, with a spray or two of asparagus, and placed on a Langdale linen mat in whose embroidery the principal shades are pale pink, green, and white.

White chrysanthemums look well alone with the same bowl and mat, and may be effectively mixed with red and yellow carrot leaves.

These arrangements, which all included some of the chrysanthemum foliage, were for everyday dinners of about six people, and cost from a shilling to eighteenpence each; but I found that with care they would last fresh a week, and even then some of the flowers were good enough to mix with others in groups for the drawing-room. Each scheme might be extended for a large party by using more materials, and the table filled up with long trails of ivy laid on the cloth outside of the table-centre, by which means the additional flowers needed would not be so many in proportion to the number of the guests.

For a side table in a sitting-room, three or four white blooms in an old blue and white china jar were backed with red oak and some sprays of green ivy hanging down from the neck of the jar.

Those violets which bloom in autumn ought to be now at their best, although by one means or another Londoners can really obtain this flower nine months out of the year. However, delightful as they are for button-holes, violets are not exactly suited for decorative purposes; their colour is too subdued, and by gaslight vanishes altogether; nevertheless a few will fill a drawing-room with a welcome fragrance, and should be arranged loosely with their own and some small ivy leaves in tiny pieces of nice glass or china, in positions where they are readily seen. I always put such tiny bouquets on a small round table which supports a lamp, taking care that the china or glass does not clash with the colour of the body of the lamp, nor the flowers with that of its shade.

I often wonder why the single sweet-scented white violets, which I used to gather in big bunches in copses and old country orchards, so seldom find their way into the London market; they are more decorative than the purple ones, and the two sorts blend delightfully together.

By this time most people are settled at home for the winter, and as in town and country ladies are resuming those weekly or fortnightly "At home" days, when the drawing-room needs special attention for the reception of visitors, this seems a fitting opportunity for a few words on the best methods of arranging flowers for such occasions.

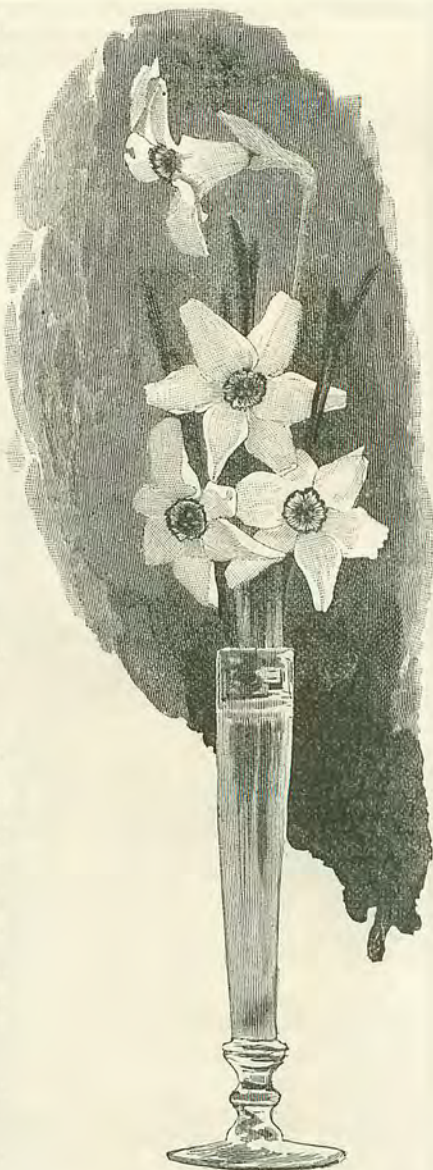
Much, of course, depends on the size of the room, and on the colour of walls and furniture; but in any case it is well to remember that flowers, after all, are an ornament, not a necessity, and certainly ought not to become, as they sometimes do, a nuisance. We all know the uninhabited look of some rooms which never have any flowers, and we all have been struck, probably, by the overdressed appearance of some others where flowers are everywhere, crowding out books and other comforts, and where a nervous

visitor may suffer agonies of mind before discovering any vacant space large enough to hold a tea-cup and saucer. Good taste lies somewhere between these two extremes; and exactly where, each hostess must judge for herself; but as a rule some suitable place should first of all be selected, rather back from the middle of the room, where a principal group may be arranged, and give the motive, so to speak, to all others, if indeed any others are required, which in small drawing-rooms might not be the case. For instance, a room with a yellow wall-paper, and having, as so many have, a largish table across one corner, could have two or three palms of varying heights stood upon it, in dark red or blue and white pots, and a nice old jug or a ginger jar containing a few large chrysanthemums of copper-brown or red colouring. A growing plant of the same flowers on either side of the fireplace might go with this, and if any cut blooms were required, they should be small yellow ones in blue and white vases on brackets and occasional tables, but never, in my opinion, on the piano, nor, in winter, on the mantelshelf. With a blue paper the dark green plants would be better on the ground or on low stands rather out in the room, and a good bunch of yellow flowers should stand on a table near the wall. With terra-cotta or green walls, white and pale pink are the best shades, and if the paper is very dark, white flowers will effectually light up the corners. Perhaps oak panelling is the most pleasant background for any and every kind of flower, and the smallest blossoms gain an added value by being placed in front of it; but their receptacles should be light, by preference blue and white china or very good glass. Of course most rooms allow of some variety in the weekly decorations, and, in these days of coloured meals, the embroidered tea and tray cloths, iced cakes, and paper d'oyleys might very well repeat the tones suggested by the principal flowers, if the tea-service colours allowed it.

The great drawback to chrysanthemums is their lack of scent, and this is rather an important matter in the room of a woman of refinement; but it may be compensated for by some mignonette, a pot of which, to be bought for about eighteenpence will scent a room delicately for a week or two; or the little bouquets of violets I mentioned above would be less expensive, but also less lasting.

If tea-roses are to be had—and the *Gloire de Dijon* is sometimes quite plentiful as late as this—one or two buds in a nice piece of china will fill a room with perfume, and they look very well in the neighbourhood, although certainly not in the same group, as chrysanthemums.

A basket of nicely-arranged flowers is a very pretty ornament for a small occasional table which is intended to stand near the middle of the room; and although it is a thing generally bought at some expense professionally filled, a little practice will enable the patient amateur to make a sufficiently good effect if she is not too ambitious. First, choose a basket of good shape, fairly low at each end, and not too high in the handle; then carefully line the well with waterproof paper, cutting this off round the upper edge, and fill it pretty firmly with moss which has been plunged into a basin of water and only shaken out. The waterproof paper will, provided it is not cracked anywhere, effectually prevent the water dripping through, but round the edges of the basket, where the paper of course does not reach, moss should be placed out of which the moisture has been thoroughly squeezed. Into the moss stick the flowers, taking care that the best blossom has the most conspicuous place, and that no two on the same side of the basket are of the same height; when you have put in all the flowers—which,



for an example, we will say are yellow chrysanthemums—put some close foliage, like ivy, between them and round the edges only just above the level of the moss, and then insert two or three fine pieces of some feathery green, such as asparagus, or some delicate flower-sprays as the tiny Michaelmas daisy, and let these wave above the larger flowers and hang over the ends of the basket, all the stalks, however, springing from the well. Do not put flowers on the handle, which, even if professionally done, is, I think, false art; but place a piece of ivy up one side and tie it on with a bow of ribbon of some harmoniously contrasting colour, and let the ends hang down so as not to crush or hide any of the blossoms. This arrangement may be kept fresh for some time by lightly syringing daily with lukewarm water, giving it rather more copiously to the centre bed of moss, first removing, of course, the ribbon, and wiping the handle dry before replacing it.

Personally I never wire flowers except for dress trimmings, but for baskets or posies always select those with long stalks, and, if possible, a little foliage growing to them, cutting them of varying lengths, so that the heads come on different levels, and thus any appearance of formality is avoided.



chrysanthemum is still the most plentiful flower in gardens, greenhouses, and shops; but towards the end of the month the beautiful white hellebore, or Christmas rose, lifts its buds almost from the bare ground.

Some shrubs, as the laurestinus and strawberry arbutus, are coming into bloom; while the latter and others, as the holly and mistletoe, are ripening their berries.

From the Riviera and the Scilly Isles comes also a supply of rosebuds, Roman hyacinths, paper narcissi, freesias, tulips, and the graceful yellow acacia, or mimosa; while our own market gardeners force for Christmas quantities of arums, poinsettias, geraniums, and double white primula. But all these are, as a matter of course, expensive.

It is now perhaps, and for a month or two, more difficult than at any other time to make a little money go a long way; but although

flowers are scarce, they have the merit of lasting very much longer than in the summer, so that one outlay will often suffice for the week.

On the whole, it is more economical to have a large single group of flowers on the dinner-table than several small vases, and in the drawing-room the same; while a good quantity of ivy or barberry will last for a week or two, and by force of contrast will give a few bright blossoms much greater prominence.

For a plain dinner, ivy makes a very good decoration by itself; and I have seen about a dozen well-berried sprays in little globes look quite enough for rather a long table, and the glossy well-washed leaves shone cheerfully in the lamp-light. Barberry leaves would be pretty arranged in the same way, or either of them might be placed in a circular trough round each lamp; three large chrysanthemums in specimen glasses would then make quite a festive ornamentation. Now is the time for pretty table centres, and with schemes founded on dark leaves, the brighter the colours of the embroidery the better. A long piece of Cretan embroidery, such as may be often bought for a few shillings if slightly damaged, repaired and mounted in bright red silk, will make a beautiful ground for ivy to stand upon; while with red barberry, bright yellow and orange threads should predominate.

The leaves may also be arranged in a punch bowl; but then I think a few flowers are necessary for a dinner table, although not for a drawing-room or hall. The larger kinds of ivy, especially that variegated with white, are quite handsome enough by themselves; but the small-leaved creeping sort should always be considered as an accessory to something else, and best displays its distinctive beauty by being laid simply on the tablecloth, the trails winding in and out among the vases and dessert dishes, or by hanging lightly down from the necks of tall vases.

The mimosa, with its varying foliage, but always bright yellow, fluffy little ball-like flowers, is comparatively a new visitor to English shops, but is already so plentiful and cheap, that one may rely on it for a good deal of decoration throughout the winter. A fair-sized piece, when it first comes in, will cost about a shilling, and should break into sufficient small sprigs to fill four or five specimen glasses for the dinner table, or will make a handsome focus for the drawing-room decorations, particularly in a large blue and white jar.

Little pieces of it look picturesque in almost any of the small coloured pots with bulbous bases and narrow necks. If we are extravagant enough to afford other flowers at the same time, the mimosa should be looked upon as a secondary blossom, and may fitly accompany such flowers as Roman hyacinths, single tulips, and yellow rosebuds, which all come with it from the south; or chrysanthemums, brown, yellow, and white. A pretty ornament is made by filling a china basket or soup plate with moss, studding it with violets, two or three in a knot, and their leaves, and then sticking in some sprays of mimosa to wave over their heads, some grey mimosa foliage and brown ivy trails hanging over the edge of the plate.

The Christmas rose ought to be in its full beauty, although a very bad winter like that of 1890 will spoil the buds and make them very expensive to buy; perhaps in London as much as threepence each. However, those who have plants in their own gardens will find it quite worth while to protect the buds with glass before the snow comes. Their own foliage is very seldom cut, from a prevalent idea (whether true or false I do not know), that to do so impairs the blooming power of the plant; but ivy goes almost equally well with them. And no more beautiful object can well be imagined than a dish or basket filled with dark glossy ivy leaves mingled with the pure white stars.

I have dressed a table for a Christmas party of thirty people very successfully with these flowers, placing them in glass troughs of straight and semi-circular forms, with which I described three circles round the silver-branched candlesticks, connected by two long, straight troughs, with a shorter one projecting at either end. Alternately with the flowers in the troughs were small pieces of dark ivy just to emphasise their form, which was particularly fine; then, on the cloth, on either side of the troughs, and entirely concealing the glass, were trails of green and white variegated ivy, among the outer pieces of which were put some little silver plates of sweets, olives, etc. These and the candlesticks were choice possessions, but nice lamps and plain white china plates would not greatly alter the effect. I used about fifty Christmas roses, which, bought at a shop, would have cost at least four shillings, and would have been probably very inferior specimens, but they were sent to me by a country friend as buds a week before, and I had kept them meanwhile in dishes of lukewarm water

in an airy cupboard, by which means I ensured their opening clean and perfect. I would advise my readers to adopt the same plan, if they can obtain outdoor-grown buds, which are always the finest, but likely to prove a bad colour if left to develop in the frosty air. The ivy was also a gift; and as I have never bought any of the variegated kind, I am unable to reckon what the quantity used was worth—but probably about one shilling and sixpence. No table centre was required, and the candle-shades were yellow.

Another pretty decoration for a Christmas party was contrived with the same design in troughs holding box sprigs thickly interspersed with well-berried sprays of mistletoe, the ivy trails being green. The box grew on the premises, and mistletoe being cheap that year, the whole arrangement cost about one and sixpence. On this occasion the table centre and lamp-shades were pink.

Another Christmas Day, when the party was much smaller, I had the dessert on the table in four old low Spode china dishes alternated in a row down the middle with the silver candlesticks, and put at equal distances down both sides six silver decanter stands, each well but loosely filled with *caladium*, *coleus*, begonia, and other fancy leaves, which a neighbourly florist cut for me out of his greenhouse for a shilling, and three pink tulips costing two-pence each, while to every guest was a specimen glass holding a piece of pink begonia in bloom, and some *Asparagus plumosus*. This arrangement had pink candle-shades, and the table centre was a piece of Kells embroidery worked in brown, green, and salmon colour.

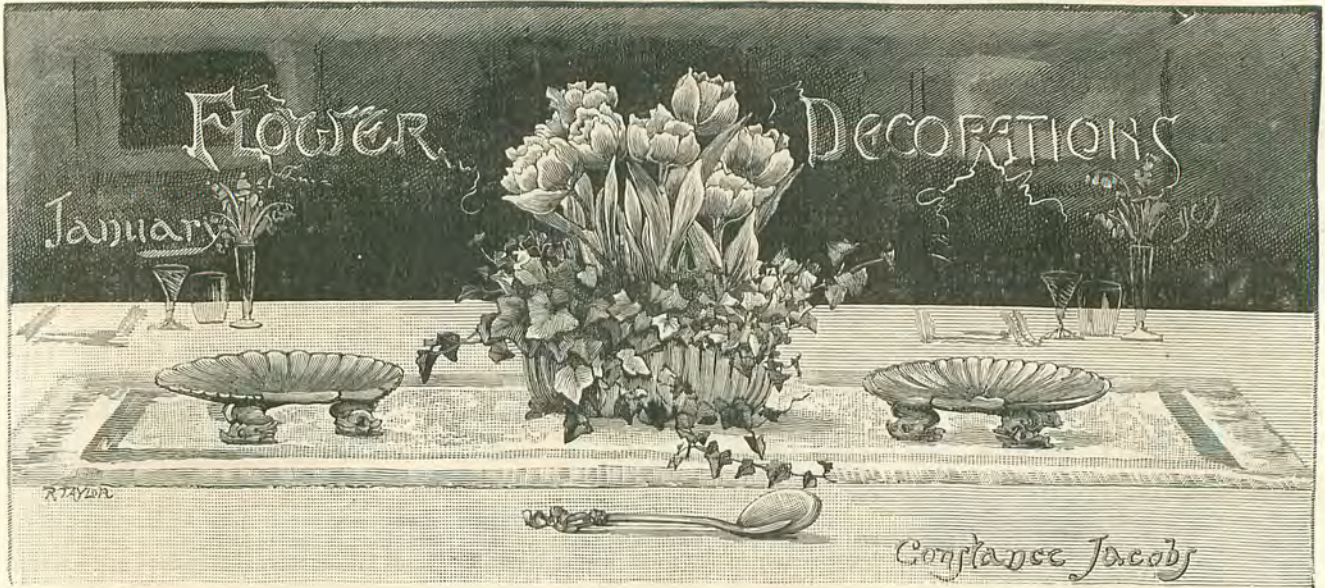
Christmas decorations are still popular in most large families, and give scope for much ingenuity in design, even where very elaborate trophies are not attempted. Much must depend on the height of the rooms, and what kinds of shrubs are used; but I suppose the most usual method is to tie together miscellaneous bunches of laurel, ivy, box, and holly, stick them above pictures and mirrors, and hang boughs of mistletoe under the hall lamp and in the doorways. The plan has some disadvantages; for instance, the mistletoe, if hung too low, may strike against the heads of tall, unwary visitors with rather too strong a reminder of its popular significance, while the bunches of evergreens are very difficult to place gracefully over pictures, and have a tendency to rattle down at awkward moments, to the ruin of something breakable. These last objections do not apply to festoons made of trail ivy tied together with bows of ribbon of a similar or congenial shade to the wallpaper, and suspended to the picture rail or between the pictures themselves, when they are easily fastened to the cords. Where they are tied together should be inserted small sprigs of the other evergreens; but the larger masses of these should be reserved for grouping in large jars for the floor, tables, or shelves in sitting-rooms. If the walls are somewhat bare, wreaths of laurel, box, and holly, separately woven in classic fashion with narrow ribbon, may succeed each other at intervals, and be connected by the ivy festoons; and where the pictures are too close to allow of any festoons, such wreaths may very appropriately be hung between the cords of family portraits.

A drawing-room decorated in this manner would require few flowers, if any; but to harmonise with shrubs of this description, the poinsettia is particularly valuable. The blossoms, or clusters of red leaves, will cost from sixpence to a shilling each; but as a good one in a nice jar is quite enough ornament for a room if placed conspicuously, and will last fresh for two or three weeks, they are really rather economical purchases at this time of year. I have also mixed some mimosa with one of the scarlet flowers for a dull-looking room, with brilliant and yet not gaudy effect. The ivory kind are rarer, and not so handsome; but the two go very prettily together, and but for the expense I might recommend a plan which is novel and striking enough for a very smart dinner, and consists of equal numbers of white and red poinsettias separately in tall Venetian glasses of a greenish white about eight inches high, each head having two or three green leaves left on its stalk. Between the glasses were low, bushy maidenhair ferns planted in silver decanter stands. No stretch of imagination can, however, consider this an economical decoration, nor is a similar arrangement which would substitute arums for the ivory poinsettias.

Arums are expensive always, and although one bloom with two or three leaves is a very handsome ornament, it would so soon fade in a warm room that I think it could not fail to be an extravagant purchase: and if the plants are grown on the premises, it is a pity to spoil their beauty by cutting.

CONSTANCE JACOB.





THE flowers of January are not difficult to enumerate, even in these days when florists merge the floral seasons into one another.

In the garden a few chrysanthemums may have survived the frosts; but they are mostly imperfect specimens, fit only for large bunches in the corners of rooms, where their colouring is of value, and where they will not be closely examined. Those in shops are better, but all alike are past their prime. Laurestinus and arbutus are better than last month, and are a great resource where they are to be had for the cutting, but are not often to be bought. Christmas roses ought to be plentiful. In shops, tulips, hyacinths, freesias (all forced), and mimosa are the cheapest; but roses, lilies-of-the-valley, and azaleas can also be had.

Perhaps in this barren month the cheapest flowers in the end are the tulips. They are forced and sent into the market in large quantities, the entire plants, bulbs and all, in the boxes in which they are grown. And this is much the best way to buy them, provided that the stalks are not too long, as, placed bodily in a bowl of water, or in very damp moss, they will sometimes with care last for a fortnight, opening wide in the lamp or gas-light, and partly closing again during the day. Of course with good china the mould which adheres to the bulbs might scratch and other-

wise injure the inside of the bowl, so that it is best to use an inner basin of common earthenware or glass, placing a mat or paper between the two, and hiding the device with plenty of ivy, box, or barberry foliage. This is a much prettier and a less heavy arrangement than merely re-planting three or four bulbs into an ordinary flower-pot, as it can be varied by the admixture of other cut flowers or foliage. At West-end shops the bulbs cost from three halfpence to twopence-halfpenny each, and three, with ivy, in a punch-bowl on a pretty table-mat, are quite sufficient to dress out an ordinary-sized table, or to form the principal ornament for a drawing-room.

The following are some of the variations which I have made on the above lines with the aid of these flowers, and so gained some little commendation.

Five large pink blooms in a Lowestoft china bowl with brown ivy, whose colour made a delightful harmony with the delicate tints of the tulip leaves and petals. Two of the flowers fading after some time, I put the remaining bulbs and ivy into a low Austrian china basket, and added about half a dozen sprays of freesia, which cost fourpence.

The same basket held, another time, five scarlet tulips and four sprays of lily-of-the-valley, with sprigs of myrtle foliage in between. But this came to one shilling and ninepence, the lilies costing three halfpence each; and the effect was neither so good nor so lasting as another, in which two scarlet and three pink were mixed with box in a dark green bowl.

Three scarlet flowers, with no other leaves than their own, in a cream-coloured terracotta pot of classic shape with high handles, made a quaint group for an occasional table.

Yellow tulips look well with barberry, brown ivy or mimosa in an old blue-and-white bowl, or a white china basket.

The freesia, which has only become common during the last two or three years, is very sweet-scented, and a congenial companion to almost any other bulbous flower; or is pretty in small olive-green glasses, with its own grass and some dark leaves, particularly box or myrtle. Such an arrangement would show to most advantage on a light green and brown table-mat. Sufficiently large bunches of freesia cost from sixpence to eightpence.

The strawberry arbutus, bearing its little pendant ivory blossoms at the same time as

the red fruit—which, by-the-by, are more the shape and size of cherries than strawberries—is a very decorative shrub, and sprays of it in celadon or blue-and-white china or dark green glass, are pretty for the dinner-table by themselves, or in conjunction with lower vases holding Christmas roses. A large bunch of it is also effective for a drawing-room corner.

Laurestinus looks best in masses, and may be prettily arranged in a bank down the centre of the table, or to fill glass troughs in the way I suggested for ivy last month.

I have made extensive use of this shrub when in full bloom for the adornment of a room turned out for a party, banking it up on the mantelpiece, the top of the piano, and other shelves, from which all ornaments had been removed.

I formed the bank first of all with damp, not wet, moss, laid on waterproof paper, sticking the laurestinus and a few sprays of arbutus lightly in. The room being small for the number of guests, there were no available corners for groups of pot plants, but a few palms, some early tulips, and Roman hyacinths, were made into a very picturesque group on a landing where there was still space for a couple of chairs. Trails of ivy hung down from the mantelshelf over the sheet of glass which, in this instance, concealed the fire-place, and over the back of the piano. From a hook just under the shelf I suspended by yellow ribbons a basketful of yellow tulips, Roman hyacinths, begonia leaves, and mimosa. On the same occasion the centre of the long supper table was decorated alternately with sprays of mimosa in tall specimen glasses and low banks of ivy. These latter were studded with yellow, red, and white tulips; and whereas some had all the colours mixed, others had only one, all having a little mimosa intermingled. Another time the banks were composed entirely of laurestinus in full bloom; and old champagne glasses, taking the place of the specimen glasses, held yellow or red tulips as well as mimosa. The tulips might have been pink and white, and in that case the mimosa would have been discarded in favour of asparagus plumosus.

The banks were arranged with a contrivance which has lately been introduced by a London firm of nurserymen, and consists of concave pieces of wire netting, which are placed on the table, fitting tightly over a heap of damp moss,



A FIREPLACE.

waterproof paper being laid under all to protect the cloth from injury. Some of these wire frames are of a triangular shape, and look extremely pretty for the ends or corners of tables. The flower stalks put into the moss are held firmly in position by the wire, which it is easy to hide by foliage, or by pulling some of the moss through the interstices; and it is always desirable to start with a fringe of fern fronds, ivy, or something as light, of irregular lengths, to droop on to the tablecloth, and so avoid a straight, formal edge.

I have no doubt that the holders advertised by Carter in his seed lists would answer the same purpose; but I have never tried them, and should imagine that the effect in amateur hands would be more stiff. Christmas roses and the tiny yellow winter aconites would look extremely well in these banks, with ivy as the only foliage.

Greenhouses are gay now, and a favourite flower in many is the camellia, which per-

sonally I consider quite unfit for cutting for decorations. If, however, it is desired to use them for such a purpose, the blossoms should be laid with some of their shiny leaves in plates of moss, together, if possible, with some exotics of a light feathery growth, such as deutzia and some delicate ferns, to lend a little grace to these essentially artificial-looking flowers.

For a large dinner an excellent plan is to dress the table entirely with little ferns and other foliage plants growing in small celadon china or copper pots. Down the centre should be a row of the taller ferns such as pteris (or spider), or miniature specimens of dracæna and aralia sieboldii, while on each side should be a lower row of maidenhair. The table-centre most suitable to use would be a very bright piece of embroidery; and with copper pots, silver should be prominent in its design, with the celadon red and gold. If embroidery cannot be had, a strip of red silk

fringed at each end and side will serve for the one arrangement, and two or three yards of crumpled-up pale green muslin stamped with silver devices, to be bought cheaply at most oriental shops, for the other.

I have carried out a similar scheme with a silver basket for the centre, and my favourite decanter-stands for the sides, and used them with a table-centre of heliotrope silk richly embroidered in cream, lemon, and orange tones, the lamp shades being yellow. The centre mat might equally well have been yellow, or salmon colour, with lamp shades to match.

None of these arrangements are so expensive as they sound, as small ferns and other plants can be bought for a few pence each, and are really permanent properties. The celadon pots are also cheap, the copper ones more costly; but both will be found constantly useful.

A few years ago everybody tried to grow

small ferns in so-called Liberty pots of blue-and-white china with pierced sides; but I do not know anyone who succeeded very well. Probably there was too much ventilation, and the roots could not be kept sufficiently moist.

Now, however, one can buy little blue-and-white or other artistically coloured pots which have only one hole, and that at the bottom, and otherwise resemble in form the common garden flower-pots, but are quite pretty enough for any purpose; and I believe

that, with care, most small plants thrive in them very well.

Many people also plant ferns for the table in white china receptacles of more or less artistic design, and all these plans are useful at a season when flowers are scarce and very dear.

GRANNIE'S GINGHAM;

OR,

MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

BY MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS, Author of "God's Providence House," "The Manchester Man," "Miss Pringle's Pearls," etc.

CHAPTER III.



THE one great change was productive of many.

Though grandfather Colbeck had been twelve years older than his wife, and ripe for the sickle, his sudden removal was not the less a blow to her. Coming, as it did, at the top of her own fatigue, there was no wonder she was prostrated for a time.

She, however, soon rallied sufficiently to take up her knitting-pins, if not to pursue her outdoor avocations.

This was of the more importance as spring was setting in.

About two years had gone by since Catherine and the children had found a refuge with her. Little Susie had grown into a bright, intelligent child of five and a-half years, always alert and proud to make herself useful, and her good grandmother was careful her energies should neither be misdirected nor overtaxed as she grew older.

Katie, two years her junior, was an imitative little elf, and it was well for her Susie had taken to tidy and industrious ways so early. They both looked as if simple diet and moorland breezes suited them, for they were bonny and blooming.

But now Martin's heart began to throb and ache for them, as his crippled condition disabled him from cultivating the ground, on which so much depended, or from seeking custom in his own trade.

He could but pray, and trust in God for the answer.

It came first from Catherine's unsought preparation for Moorcross market.

"Some one is bound to go," she said. "I only wish I had gone—" but there she stopped. She did not care to confess too much. She soon got over the strangeness of "standing the market," and the change from the monotony of the moor was delightful. Very soon she began to know people, and to look forward to market day as a pleasurable

excitement, apart from the money or household stores she brought back. Then she was strong and healthy, so that the walk to and fro was merely good exercise.

The children, left to the wiser guardianship of Martin and his mother, were none the worse for her frequent absence.

It so happened that Michael Toft, whose master's shop was in the market-place, spied Mrs. Martin Colbeck coming week by week, and profited by it to mature a project of his own.

The March winds blew an unexpected visitor across the moor one Thursday afternoon in Catherine's absence—a young man about seventeen, somewhat dubious of his reception, who carried a parcel under his arm, and saluted wondering Susie with the question, "Why, Susie, love, don't you remember Mike?"

Yes; after a brief effort of memory Susie remembered Mike, and put a shy brown hand into his, while a voice from within cried heartily, the past gone to the past, "Come in, Mike; I'm glad to see you. Why have you not been here before?"

Michael could have told, but hesitated. "I was not sure I should be welcome. And I've come now to bring you this, and hope it may help you to get about a bit better."

He opened his parcel as he spoke, and revealed a boot made with a graduated high heel. "I think it's your size, master, and I hope it will fit. If not it will do for the hospital, and I'll measure you for another. I've been a long while trying my hand at making these things in my overtime, taking hints from the doctors. You see I've put a felt sock inside, to be soft for your tender foot."

He could scarcely have taken Martin a gift more acceptable, and both he and grandmother Colbeck told him so, to his great gratification.

What was more, the boot fitted admirably, and both children clapped their hands in high glee to see their father walk about with only one stick, which, he said, he should soon be able to discard.

"You've learned a good deal since you left me, Mike, or you could not make a boot like this," observed he, over the homely tea-table.

"Well," replied Michael, "our foreman's a clever chap, and knows a lot, and when I told him all the mischief I'd done, and how it hurt me to see you shuffling along between two sticks, he put me up to making high boots, so as I might do something to show how sorry I am. And it's like to be a good thing for me, master, for I work in overtime when I'm not at the Institute. And I'm a Sunday-school teacher now," he added proudly, as if to show how he filled his time.

"Are you?" said Martin, with a smile. "That's rather odd, for I've begun to be a teacher too. No, not Susie; I've been teaching her a long while. But just as I was down-hearted, because I could neither dig nor plant, and the garden was going to ruin, Hirst, the man who took father's vegetables to sell along

with his own, came and proposed that his big lads should keep the ground in order for us if I would teach them at night to read, write, and account. And since then I've had some other lads come, who pay, so I have quite a class round me. And things don't look so black as they did."

"Ah, master!" exclaimed Michael, as he rose to depart, lest he should encounter his old mistress on the way, "you were always for making the best of things. And I've kept your saying in mind."

It would be difficult to analyse the feelings of Catherine when she heard the beat of the high boot, and saw her husband coming to meet her at the gate with only one stick, and learned whence the boot came. Amazement and satisfaction died out in bitterness and vexation.

"What!" she jerked out; "accept a favour from that scamp?" and marched into the house in marked displeasure, taking no heed of Martin's rebelling commentary—

"Then you would rather see me go limping painfully along between two sticks for the rest of my life, than receive a benefit from a remorseful lad anxious to make atonement? I thought better of you, Catherine."

She set down her basket on the table without a word, and was loosening her bonnet-strings, when Susie struck another jarring note with the gleeful exclamation—

"Mike's measured me for new boots."

"And me too," echoed Katie, in like tone. Then she turned on her husband sharply. "I thought you would have had better spirit than to suffer it."

"I had a better spirit than to wound a sensitive lad anxious to make what reparation lies in his power."

"Hmph! But after all it's little enough, considering the mischief he has done," she retorted, with a sudden change of tone.

And there the altercation ended. Grandmother Colbeck, undressing the children, wisely held her peace, and Martin let the matter drop.

Experience had told him that his wife said things in her haste she repented in her leisure; and he generally left her time for reflection.

Prejudice could not blind her to the advantage of the high boot to her husband. She was pleased to see him walk about with comparative ease; nay, even to handle a rake or a hoe to improve on the rough gardening of the Hirsts, finally contriving to sow seeds, or to transplant young shoots.

Her satisfaction rubbed off the sharp edges of her resentment. She could not resist the delight of the youngsters over their well-made "Sunday boots." And when, a few weeks later, Hirst brought in from Moorcross a neatly wrapped up pair of boots for herself (which, Martin observed critically, were the best of material and workmanship), she read the modest note, in which Michael Toft offered them humbly, conscious how little he could do to show his regret for the injury he had done—



A
triple
contrast
of

Form

Colour

&
Texture

Begonia
Gladiolus
& Spirea

FLOWER DECORATIONS

FEBRUARY

IN February comes a little stirring of the sap, and a distinct promise of blossom, even when the fulfilment is cruelly deferred.

Out of doors snowdrops, aconites, and scillas start up out of the snow; crocuses follow quickly, camellia japonica and the yellow jasmine nudiflora adorn sunny walls, while in mild seasons the first primroses and violets give us a foretaste of spring.

Indoors there are now in bloom thousands of hyacinths, narcissi, tulips, and other bulbs easily reared by amateur gardeners, while the flowers from the south are more plentiful than ever.

Down in the heart of the Midlands there is an old orchard whose oddly-shaped appletrees, giving such a delightful shade in summer, now let all the sunshine through their boughs on to a perfect carpet of snowdrops and aconites, which grow and bloom in all but one corner, where a tree trunk has fallen years ago into a depression which is a shallow pond in damp weather, and where it still lies, its form clothed and almost hidden by forget-me-nots and ground ivy.

The former have neither flowers nor leaves now, but the ivy is luxuriant, and not only creeps on the ground, even where the flowers do not allow it to show, but climbs the older trees, and hangs from the weirdly twisted branches in fantastic garlands. It is a shockingly neglected and wasted piece of ground from the economist's point of view, but to the artist, beautiful as Nature always is when left to herself; and when I have a good quantity of snowdrops to arrange, it is always this orchard which comes into my mind, with its many suggestions of harmonious grouping.

In all arrangements of snowdrops it is desirable that the graceful natural curve, where the flower-stalk emerges from its sheath, should be preserved, and the flower itself allowed to hang free; and to do this it must be assisted to stand up as straight as possible. They look best of all in troughs or baskets full of moss, but long-stalked extra large blossoms may be loosely placed in specimen glasses with a little fine ivy trailing downwards.



The graceful natural curve should be preserved



Begonia
& White
Narcissus



Down in
the heart of the
Midlands there is
an Old Orchard

I have filled four semi-circular troughs with moss and water, stuck closely with snowdrops double and single, and at intervals yellow aconites; small ivy, drooping down on to the green table-centre, concealed the glass, as these troughs are generally rather common and clumsy. Two surrounded the base of each of the lamps with which the table was lighted, and an old champagne glass, containing some very fine double snowdrops and graceful sprays of ivy, stood in the centre and at each end of the arrangement.

I have also used similarly-filled troughs to surround a drawing-room lamp having a yellow shade.

Another pretty way is to put the snowdrops and ivy into a china basket filled with moss; or the contrivances of wire, moss, and waterproof paper, which I mentioned last month, would be very convenient for them.

A flower that mixes very agreeably with snowdrops is the blue scilla, and the two may be used with advantage in small vases either for dinner-table or drawing-room decoration.

Snowdrops and crocuses are an obvious association of ideas, but in practice the two flowers do not go well together. Still, I am often astonished that crocuses are so seldom used in room decoration, for few flowers make a more brilliant display, especially if the three colours, purple, white, and gold, are mixed. They require very little arrangement, and should be put into small glass vases, accompanied only by some of their own grass and ivy, or by what looks very pretty—a few budding twigs of some tree like lilac, when the fresh green shoots are just about to open out into definite leaves. I have filled six or eight little green and iridescent glasses (I wished they had been Venetian) with crocus blooms, three or four in each, and some budding lilac twigs, placing them on a dark green table-centre with excellent effect. These twigs are



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



By CONSTANCE JACOB.

THE daffodil is especially typical of this month, and the name includes so many varieties that it would be possible to decorate a house differently every day throughout the month and yet use no other flower.

Almost equally numerous are their relatives the narcissi, although many of these are hardly in full bloom until later in the spring. In gardens, besides, are to be found hepaticas,

auriculas, ranunculuses; and in the lanes and woods, violets and early primroses, overhung by several green-flowering trees such as the hazel and willow.

Greenhouses are particularly gay now; and, in addition to such plants as cyclamen and primula, not exactly suited for cutting, azaleas, genistas, and dielytras are at their best. Some tulips are still to be had, but as a rule

the forced ones are over, and the garden-grown bulbs are hardly in bud.

Hyacinths in pots and glasses form an important feature in room decoration, but are unsuitable for cutting.

Of all the daffodil family *none is really more beautiful than the wild single member, the genuine Lent lily, and Asphodel of poets*; and no flower is easier to use decoratively. Nothing else is needed in a table arrangement than the flowers and leaves together, although ivy is a very pretty accompaniment. They are often used for dinner parties, stuck in banks of moss—an arrangement in excellent taste, but much more difficult to manage, and therefore generally less effective, than putting them into slender vases of varying heights, and best of all, in blue and white china. I never use my blue and white set so frequently and with so much satisfaction as in daffodil time; and seven of these on a table centre to match, holding amongst them a fourpenny bunch of flowers, is as artistic and popular a decoration as anyone could desire, always supposing that the blossoms are placed lightly and with discrimination as to their grouping. A blue and white punch bowl may also hold them for the centre of a small dinner-table, or as a drawing-room ornament; but in this case it is essential that the bowl should be packed with moss before the flowers and leaves are put in, and thus prevent their tumbling about anyhow, as is so often the case; and then perhaps a little ivy round the edges is an improvement. In buying the cultivated daffodils, it is often quite impossible to get any spikes with them, for the reason that cutting the leaves prevents the conveyance of nutriment to the bulb, and hence hinders the formation of next year's flower; but in bunches of wild ones there is usually a little bundle of spikes tied up in the middle, probably because where no one has the trouble of cultivating them, the gatherers do not think about the future. I wonder growers do not think it worth their while to cultivate some hardy plants for their leaves only, as most people of taste would willingly pay for these extra. Daffodils in specimen glasses should have their delicate tints thrown up by a dark table-centre, or by ivy laid on the white cloth; but on no account should the flowers themselves be laid on the table in a sort of fringe,



Primulas
Hyacinthus Candicans
& Ferns
in tubular holder.



as I have seen done in some houses, and even recommended in some journals—their beauty is entirely suppressed by such treatment.

The large double yellow flowers are almost as plentiful as the wild single, but I do not personally consider them nearly as decorative, and like best to see them growing up from among their leaves in the borders of old-fashioned gardens, or at the foot of an orchard tree. Nevertheless, they are very handsome and strongly fragrant, therefore well suited to form large conspicuous groups in halls and sitting-rooms.

Blue and white or brown earthenware jars and jugs are their best receptacles, and they may be tastefully backed with pieces of hazel or willow in bloom.

Besides these common kinds, there are numerous varieties of the daffodil and narcissus, which, as a rule, mingle very kindly together, provided that the yellows are sufficiently distinct, and I have even made an artistic table decoration with as many as six different sorts; but the species which is perhaps of all the most difficult to manage is the crude yellow sickly-scented campnelli, with which ivy is, I think, the only satisfactory mixture. As a matter of fact, nearly all the sorts look best without any rivals, the most prominent exception being the paper-white narcissus, which is rather uninteresting alone. It is, however, the first of the race to become plentiful and cheap, and therefore of some value in the early spring, and for a few weeks more often seen than any other flower in London drawing-rooms. As a rule, it is simply treated in a close mass, but looks much better if a few sprays are placed lightly among some very brown ivy. Scarlet anemones are

sometimes mixed with it, and look well if enough foliage is added to soften the crudity of the contrast, and here French fern comes in very well. With large, light-coloured blooms, such as tulips, pink anemones, or big trumpet daffodils, the pure white sprays of narcissus are very useful accessories; but the prettiest result of all is obtained by mixing them with the other bunch-flowered or polyanthus narcissi, white and yellow, with richer toned cups, adding plenty of spikes, and a lower line of ivy. With such an arrangement care should be taken to bring the flower heads on varying levels, only a few in each vase, and that should be generally tall in proportion to its bulk, but may be either of white, blue and white, celadon, or very pale yellow china, olive green, or plain white glass.

In rooms where daffodils occupy a prominent place, some posies of violets or primroses may be placed in close proximity to them, but never in the same vases as the larger flowers; and the same idea may be carried out in greater detail on the dinner-table.

On the other hand, a basket of moss thickly studded with purple violets may very appropriately have a number of daffodils stuck among them, their heads at least four inches above the violet level; and for this purpose no sort looks prettier than the small hoop petticoat variety.

A pretty arrangement for violets is to use an old china tea-cup and saucer, filling the former with wet moss, the latter with water, and putting the flowers and leaves very lightly in both. In the saucer the violets should only droop over the edge, and allow the china to show through the water.

A simple but very pretty decoration is made of white arabis mixed with blue and white hepaticas, and plenty of the latter's glossy leaves in small white china baskets. The arabis must be put in very lightly, so as not to overwhelm the other flowers, which should

stand up just above the leaves. Pink hepaticas are of an unmanageable colour for decorative purposes, but the others mix well with almost any yellow or white garden flowers.

The polyanthus, auricula, ranunculus, and hardy primula, of which so many varieties come into bloom this month if the season is mild, are hardly decided enough in colour for table decoration; but they are all quaintly charming if placed in low dishes of moss for the drawing-room. They may all be mingled as long as the colours do not clash; and I have even seen a dinner-table successfully adorned by lilac and double-white primroses, mixed with dark brown auriculas and plenty of the fresh green primrose leaves, standing freely in glass troughs, from which a fringe of young wild carrot foliage drooped on to the tablecloth; but the good effect required a greater profusion of flowers than most people would care to afford.

The greenhouse varieties of primulas are, as a rule, unavailable for cutting, and are most suitably used, like cyclamen, as pot plants; but a small double-white variety, which is plentifully grown and cut for the market, is a useful accessory to bright-coloured greenhouse flowers like geraniums, or may be used for small vases with plenty of maidenhair fern only.

Genista is not often cut either, but it is a bright and sweetly-scented little blossom, which in small specimen glasses will decorate a table very prettily, or goes well in a basket of white azalea, and, indeed, with any white or mauve exotics.

Ordinary azaleas—not the Morris or American kinds—are at their cheapest now, and are very beautiful, either as pot plants or for cutting. A basket filled with three colours, white, scarlet, and very pale pink, with asparagus plumosus and white spiræa added for lightness, is a lovely adornment for a drawing-room or dinner-table, and would cost

about eighteenpence; or for a long table the same mixture might be put into finger-glasses or decanter stands, and cost about sixpence each bouquet. For this last scheme the red and pink should be alternated, a piece of white with each; and maidenhair fern would look as well as asparagus.

A good-sized celadon and white china vase held effectively a head of white azalea and some sprays of the graceful pink dielytra, made to stand as erect as possible; and another time pink azalea was placed in it together with spiræa and begonia leaves.

Large double tulips, which can generally be bought now at about twopence each, are very effective combined with brown ivy and some full sprays of flowering willow, sufficient of the three to fill a good-sized china basket costing about a shilling.

The flowering currant bushes ought to be in good bloom by the end of this month; and although not very æsthetic shrubs, bunches of them in good-sized vases look very cheerful in sitting-rooms where there is plenty of light; for dull corners they are not sufficiently conspicuous.

There is a great variety of plants forced into bloom now, and two or three of them, such as primulas in harmonious shades, with a spiræa, will make a pretty group on a side table, and ought to last two or three weeks if well supplied with water, and, where gas is burnt, occasionally syringed; but they must not be looked upon as permanent possessions even for a greenhouse, as plants forced up for sale have generally had their constitutions ruined. If home-grown, they are altogether different—more robust, and probably less full of bloom. Cinerarias should be contrasted with genistas, while cyclamens and azaleas look best surrounded by fresh green ferns; indeed, all such groups are improved by the admixture of some small foliage plants, and by a background of taller palms or aspidistras.

THE MYSTERY OF KEVAN CAREW.

CHAPTER I.

MY BOY DICK.



HERE I sit, Charlotte Shaw, spinster, aged fifty-four, at my desk in my own private sitting-room at Grayswood, about to try my hand for the first time at writing a little romance which I have just seen the end of—or beginning of, perhaps Dick would say, for it was only yesterday we were throwing rice and slippers after

the carriage as he and Rosamund drove away. My window is deep and wide, with diamond panes, with Dick's coat-of-arms in coloured glass above my head; and from this window I can see right across the wooded park—Dick's park—to where a far-distant silver streak tells me that the sea lies between my boy and me. That makes me feel dreary, so I will turn my back on the window, dip my pen in the ink, and start afresh.

Until quite recently no firmer disbeliever in things bordering on the supernatural could be found than myself; and whether or no I am justified in my change of opinion, I leave you, after reading the following account of Dick's

wooing, and of how nearly it affected the clearing up of the mystery of Grayswood Hatch, to decide.

Let me begin then with the briefest possible account of how it was that Dick came to be lord and master here, and of how his fortunes and mine have been bound together ever since he was a tiny mite not twelve months old.

Thirty years ago I came to Grayswood Hatch as "a thoroughly capable finishing governess"—so my friends described me in the advertising columns of the newspapers—to Sir Kevan Carew's only daughter Jennie. The baronet was a cold, haughty, gloomy sort of man, whom I disliked and feared almost as much as I did his son; but his wife and daughter I idolised, and for six years the life I led at Grayswood Hatch was one of uninterrupted happiness. Then came the breaking of the dream. Jennie, whose confidence I had flattered myself was entirely mine, made a runaway marriage with a young gentleman—six foot two—in a cavalry regiment, and nothing but his pay.

It was a great shock to me at the time, although I have since learnt that in these matters you can never be sure what any girl, or boy either, will be after; but to Lady Carew it was a greater shock, for it broke her heart, and she died two years after. The doctors made out a certificate that it was *angina pectoris*. Pshaw! I knew better, and

have never believed in any doctor since, as my little medicine chest over there will testify.

So I left Grayswood, and came to live in ease and comfort on the generosity of my late employer, and to look for Jennie. I found her—how, it does not matter here—dying, with a little son ten months old, and her boy-husband—poor Dick St. Leger, with whom she had lived such a little while ago—dead and buried in the Crimea.

After willing away to me all her property, real and personal—her little son Dick—Jennie passed away into the shadow-land to find the mother whose heart she had broken, and the husband whose death had broken hers; and I took away my baby to a little cottage in the country, and he has been all-in-all to me ever since.

Twice I wrote to Grayswood Hatch on his behalf—the first time to his grandfather, who ignored my letter; the second time to his uncle, who had succeeded to the baronetcy, and who answered that he had a child of his own to see after, and Jennie's boy must reap the fruits of Jennie's folly. A year after this cruel answer, the tables were turned indeed.

I had managed, by judicious scraping, to give Dick a good grammar-school education—one of the big public schools and either of the universities being, of course, out of the question; and, to my secret chagrin, though Dick



FLOWER DECORATIONS

APRIL

IN April the wealth of flowers in country gardens and town shops makes the only difficulty that of selection; while in the lanes a girl of taste will find, within a few hundred yards, materials to her hand for the most charming scheme of decoration.

Among English wild flowers there are—Primroses, violets, wood anemones, forget-me-nots, orchids, kingcups, ladysmocks, arums, cowslips, bluebells or wild hyacinths, water crowfoot, daffodils, thorn blossom.

In the garden—Daffodils, narcissi, anemones, hepaticas, wallflowers, star of Bethlehem, peri-

winkles, pansies, hyacinths, tulips, almond blossom, lilac, laburnum.

At florists may be bought also—Roses, mignonette, geraniums, acacia (or mimosa), spiræa, azaleas, orchids, white arums.

Perhaps the flower most intimately associated with the month, for natural and political reasons, is the primrose; and none is more lavishly used, or more distressingly illused. In most primrose decorations we come across, the principal idea that strikes us is the shocking waste of blossoms; and, following an inevitable law, this superfluity of material

causes a corresponding poverty of effect. Only look at the bunches of primroses everywhere now to be bought—all crushed together more into the resemblance of a cauliflower than anything else, their delicate pentagonal outline lost, the dainty spot of warm colour hidden; and then think of what were their native surroundings. As I write I recall the Devonshire lanes, where surely more primroses grow than anywhere else; where the eye, looking first at the blue sky, travels downwards by red uplying fields, to hedges of that shiny purplish-brown which budding twigs take on in spring, to the banks beneath, where the brown ivy and brambles, bearing still some red leaves of last year's growth, form a rich background for the brilliant bits of yellow, purple, and white, supplied by primroses, violets, anemones, and other flowers which mimic them closely; while on hedges and banks alike the fresh green shoots complete the full chord of colour. The primroses grow in thousands, but yet there are more leaves than flowers; each blossom can be seen distinctly by itself, and the groups of three or four on a root have their forms thrown out by the intervening and surrounding green and brown. Remembrances like these are invaluable for suggesting naturalistic arrangements, and anyone may easily originate ideas in this way.

For instance, if you are gathering primroses, get at least as many leaves as flowers, and supplement the light green with the darker tints of ivy or bramble; while, if you must buy, remember that a penny bunch, if judiciously mingled with foliage, will decorate a room with better effect than three times the quantity alone. Leaves are not always easy to obtain in town, but ivy can generally be bought; and wild anemones, while mixing well with primroses, supply sufficient green for both kinds of blossoms. Hepaticas too, and trails of periwinkle, look well with primroses in low dishes, and their glossy leaves are sufficient accompaniment; but the wild anemones do go agreeably with any strictly garden flowers. Palm Sunday falls in primrose time, and a charming arrangement for that day is as follows: In each of four tall specimen glasses sprays of the hedgerow-flowering willow tree, called "palm" at this season, a few white anemones, some long-stalked primroses and leaves, and a spray of brown ivy; a dish of moss stuck with primroses, anemones, and violets, mixed with ivy and their own leaves; and four small globes with the same flowers and foliage. This was for rather a large dinner-table, and the centre dish and specimen



HAWTHORN BLOSSOM AND COWSLIPS.

glasses were stood on a table-mat of cream linen, embroidered in brown and green, and edged with a plain border of green linen, the small globes being at the corners of the table. The cost would be about 1s.—Primroses 1d., violets 4d., palm 2d., moss 2d., ivy 2d., anemones 1d. But of course the moss and ivy may be regarded as permanent materials, and will last for many weeks.

In the country this may be varied by substituting wild arums for palm; but I have never met with any of these in shops.

Palm and daffodils are a very happy combination in blue-and-white jars, and the latter look very well filled with the handsome golden kingcups which appear about the middle of the month, and a very dark species of flowering grass.

The scarlet and pink anemones, which mostly come from the Riviera, are valuable as a change of colour at this time of year; but here again we have to complain of the lack of green sold with them. Their own feathery foliage is very difficult to supply the place of; but with the pink kind, asparagus is very nearly as good; and with the ever-useful brown ivy, make delightful contrasts, shown to most advantage in white, or celadon-and-white china vases.

The scarlet look well mixed with pheasant's-eye narcissi and their grey-green leaves, and French fern in tall white glasses.

The white narcissi remind me of an old country garden where they grow in profusion on a bank which slopes down to a miniature brook, whose brink is fringed with forget-me-nots; and this suggests a very lovely arrangement of the two flowers.

The narcissi must stand in tall, narrow-necked vases, while forget-me-nots look best in open bowls or dishes; therefore a compromise should be effected by standing two or three specimen glasses in the middle of a dish, and surrounding their bases and stems with the lowlier flower, a few sprays of which may be placed in the glasses with the narcissi, keeping their blossoms on a lower level. Another and even prettier way is to fill a basket with moss, stuck closely with the myosotis, so that the narcissi will stand upright out of it. But this is somewhat difficult to manage, and unless the basket be of china, the moss must be constantly damped to keep the flowers fresh.

The almond is a very early forerunner of the various fruit-blossoms which begin in April to deck the orchard and hedgerow, and if branches can be cut, give striking effects in a drawing-room.

On the whole, these require less arranging than judicious placing. They should be put alone in well-shaped vases with narrow necks and wide bases, which will stand firmly, and allow the branches to spread out above without overbalancing; and great taste is demanded to obtain the most pleasing angle of the main stem with the perpendicular part of the vase. To understand exactly what I mean it is only necessary to examine any Chinese or Japanese drawing of a pot of flowers, these people having a peculiarly fine perception in the matter. Large branches of "palm" will repay similar treatment.

I do not think, as a rule, that fruit blossoms are suitable for dinner-table decorations; but a jar filled with the flowering thorn will make an effective centre to a low-lying arrangement of wild flowers, such as orchids and primroses, or bluebells and cowslips.

One of the most conspicuous of spring garden flowers, the wallflower, is decidedly unsociable, and looks best alone, or rather in a mixture of the brown and golden species, in any old china or modern white bowls. Very few sprays should be placed together, and great care taken to leave no foliage on the stalks below the water-line; and in any case the water must be changed every day, as no flowers sooner become unpleasant.

Although no other flowers go well in the same vase, a centre group of wallflowers can be effectively supplemented on a dinner-table by low troughs or old china teacups and saucers filled with pansies, which are fully out in gardens by the end of the month.

The cultivated hyacinths of all colours are plentiful now, and delightful both to sight and smell; but I cannot help thinking them unsuited for cutting. Growing out of the bulb the thick head looks very handsome, but when deprived of its natural base, few vases can support it with dignity, and any suspicion of floppiness in such a flower is lamentable.

The small Roman variety, however, is more graceful, and looks very pretty in finger-bowls



ALMOND BLOSSOM.

with some brilliant anemones and a sufficiency of its own delicate green leaves.

The colour chord of the month for English flowers is undoubtedly purple and gold, beginning with primroses and violets, passing on through cowslips and bluebells, kingcups and delicate ladysmacks or cuckoo-flowers, and finally finding expression in the lilacs and laburnums of the garden. And endless variations can be obtained from these harmonies by the admixture of appropriate background greens and such neutrals as white blossoms (anemones, water crowfoot, or lilac), or the black-flowered grass mentioned above.

CONSTANCE JACOB.



VARIETIES.

THE EFFECTS OF FLATTERY.

An unsuccessful lover was asked by what means he had lost the object of his affections. "Alas!" he said, "I flattered her till she got too proud to speak to me."

GOOD MANNERS.—Nothing sits so gracefully upon young people, and nothing makes them so lovely, as habitual respect and dutiful deportment towards their parents and superiors.

SWEET MUSIC.

The following, in praise of music, is from a manuscript in the Cotton Library:—

"Where griping griefs the heart would wound,

And doleful dumps the mynde oppresse,
There music, with her silver sound,

With speed is wont to send redresse.

Of troubled myndes, in every sore,
Sweet music hath a salve in store."

THE IRISH LOVER.

"I know there's a cross about Norah's blue eye,

But that fact my love cannot smother;
But her eyes are so pretty—no wonder they thry

To be gazin' 'round into each other."

LOOKING ROUND.—To the mean eye all things are trivial, as certainly as to the jaundiced eye they are all yellow.

Flower Decorations

May

IN this month the principal English wild flowers are cowslips, wild hyacinths, kingcups, buttercups, daisies, hawthorn (white and pink), moon-daisies, grasses, white broom, dead nettle, gorse, lychnis.

In gardens: Tulips, iris, American azaleas, peonies, lilies of the valley, rhododendrons, syringa, chestnut.

In the greenhouse: Roses, plumbago.

Most of the remarks I made last month on the primrose would equally apply to the cowslip; the latter are not so utterly ruined by being pressed into a compact bunch, because the soft green calyxes surround the tiny flowers so closely, and protect them from crushing. Still, now as always, the less crowding the better effect. A very usual and pretty arrangement of cowslips is to mix them lightly with wild hyacinths in a basket, and to these may well be added a few kingcups, letting them, with their handsome leaves, droop over the edge of the basket. For a small dinner-table I have made a very easy success by dividing about a penny bunch of cowslips between five little olive-green Clutha glasses (these shade into blue, or tawny yellow at the edges), and placing them on a table-centre made of pale sage-green linen. An equally simple decoration is made by filling about six small glass dishes, or old china saucers, with the common buttercups and daisies, a little fine flowering grass in each, and down the centre of the table three tall specimen or champagne glasses, containing kingcups and a larger variety of grass; or for a change, a small branch of white hawthorn in a blue-and-white vase; if a table-centre is used, it should be—for the kingcups, green; for the hawthorn, blue and white.

To girls living in the country I may offer the suggestion that the white dead nettle is a handsome flower too little used for decorative purposes; it can be joined happily either to the wild blue hyacinths in celadon, yellow, or white china vases, or to the pink or white lychnis, campion, or bachelor's button, as it is variously called, in glasses.

The wild white hyacinth is less common than the blue; but the two can be very prettily mixed, together with young fern fronds.

Lilies of the valley are plentiful this month; indeed, the Germans call them maybells: and very lovely they are. I have put them with forget-me-nots in white china vases, with pink tulips or American azalea in iridescent finger-glasses or silver decanter stands; or by themselves in specimen glasses, alternated with small dishes full of purple pansies, always taking care to add plenty of light green, either their own leaves, or fresh shoots of fern, and other low-growing plants.

All kinds of tulips look well in silver decanter stands or finger bowls; and as they are plentiful now, three or four blossoms should be used for each bowl. They are much improved by the addition of some ivy besides their own grey-green foliage, and some lighter flowers like narcissus, or small pieces of white lilac kept on a slightly higher level. Five large parrot tulips, placed in my little Clutha glasses on the green table-centre, opened wide in the heat of the lamps, and, with their own leaves, formed quite enough ornament for a small dinner. They were all placed in the middle of the table; but four more at the corners

would make quite a brilliant display, and the whole ought not to cost more than ninepence.

Rhododendrons and American azaleas belong principally to this month, and are very effective ornaments for any occasion. For the centre of a table I have filled a punch-bowl with pale rhododendrons mixed with their own fresh green shoots, some sprays of the copper beech, and a few large fern leaves. The materials for this arrangement cost about one shilling and twopence; but they are ready to hand in most country and many London shrubberies. If the syringa is out before the rhododendrons are over, a few sprays of it may well take the place of the fern leaves.

Peonies, especially the pink and white varieties, are so handsome alone, that their own dark foliage is sufficient accompaniment; but a congenial addition is a little ribbon grass, or branches of syringa. Like most flowers of their size, they require substantial full-bodied bowls, jars, or jugs. I have seen them combined with iris, with what I consider atrocious taste, as, although often grown close together in gardens, the two flowers have absolutely no affinity, either in form, colour, or natural habits.

Fortunately, one can now buy large bunches of the sword-like iris leaves; and lightness can be given to groups of these flowers by the plentiful addition of flowering grasses and moon-daisies, or of sprays of spiræa, wild or cultivated.

Although June is their proper month, roses can now be found in some gardens, and can be bought, at some expense, at the florist's; but those ladies who have greenhouses ought now to be plucking rich harvests of the exquisite Maréchal Niel, which, with its glossy green leaves, forms so perfect an ornament in itself



WHITE TULIPS AND LILAC.



that little can be added with advantage. If possible, pick the flowers with a good length of stalk; if this is unadvisable, for the sake of future buds, cut off plenty of leaves from parts of the tree where their loss does not greatly matter, and put them into tall vases, old blue-and-white by preference.

I have an old-fashioned jug of clear turquoise and white china which forms an ideal holder for this flower; and I have also put a fine specimen of the *Maréchal Niel* with a piece of plumbago into a dull yellow Liberty vase. This mixture of colour is much pleasanter than the favourite arrangement of buttonhole makers, of this rose with forget-me-nots, where the blue is too crude to harmonise with such a very tender yellow and bright green.

Before the lilacs and laburnums are over come the pink and white chestnuts and hawthorns, which all look best in large jars or jugs; but the May blossom grows naturally in such evident little bouquets, that one is justified in plucking them off the twigs and using them in small vases or troughs for table decoration. I did not admire, however, an arrangement I saw a spring or two back, of roses, pansies, and knots of may in ruby-glass globes.

In this month we generally leave off fires in our sitting-rooms; and as our delightful climate never allows us to feel sure that we may not require to light them one day, even in summer, at a moment's notice, it is well for the stove ornament to be one which can be quickly removed. To this end I personally always use a large fan or paper screen to hide the ready-laid coals and wood, and stand on the hearth before it my much-valued large blue-and-white jar, or a brown earthenware jug filled with flowers or leaves according to the season; preferring this arrangement to pots of growing ferns and palms, which are invariably injured by the draught down the chimney;

and having a wholesome hatred for a room in which the register is always closed. Large bunches of almond blossom, lilac, laburnum, chestnut, hawthorn, and wistaria may succeed each other for this purpose; but the

purple lilac and wistaria must not go into blue-and-white china. Then a bunch of yellow or white iris mingled with moon-daisies and grass, backed with a piece of copper beech, is effective; and so is gorse or white broom, which is, in some places, to be obtained this month. This latter flower is very pretty mixed with peonies in a good-sized bowl; and, I might mention here, that heavy flowers keep in better position if the brim of the bowl turns inwards, and for this reason I have had the globular parts of some broken wine decanters cut round smoothly at a suitable height, and use them to line, so to speak, my punch bowls, which thus escape much risk of breakage, by not requiring to be often washed.

For a dinner party this month make a bank of ivy down the middle of the table, using thick bushy pieces to raise it in the centre, and trails of the smaller kind to fringe the edge, these coming nearly to the line of wine-glasses, and at the corners right to the edge of the table, winding round any small dishes of olives or sweets which may be needed. Down the centre put five or six white china vases, or specimen glasses, standing about six inches high, and so just showing above the ridge of ivy, containing each a well-grown head of lemon-colour or terra-cotta azalea, with some light sprays of very vivid green asparagus or young fern. If lamps or candles are used, they must also be placed in the same line. Then hide among the rest of the ivy as many small glass globes as you can afford flowers for, with a lily of the valley and two or three leaves in each, and at the corners a small spray, or two or three single flowers of the azalea in addition; stick in also at intervals a few small pieces of asparagus, to veil, if possible, all the vases. In all dinner-party arrangements the colour of the dessert service is a very great consideration, and sometimes absolutely prohibits the use of any flowers but white; but the above scheme would go with any china except the brilliant rose-pink which apparently was so popular about twenty years ago.

As both lilies and azaleas are at their cheapest in May, the whole design ought to be well carried out for a party of fourteen people, at a cost of about three shillings and

sixpence, viz., azaleas eighteenpence, lilies a shilling, asparagus and ivy a shilling. For a luncheon earlier in the year I have mixed Neapolitan violets with the lilies; but I find that artificial light takes the colour out of all kinds of violets.

Another good arrangement of azaleas is to keep them on the lower level and let sprays of spiraea wave above them; using the ivy as before, and the foliage of the spiraea in place of asparagus or fern. But, indeed, ways of successfully treating these flowers are endless if the important points are remembered—that they require plenty of bright green surroundings, that any accompanying blossoms must be light in structure and neutral in tint, and the general background dark green or brown.

CONSTANCE JACOB.





By CONSTANCE JACOB.

NOT even the poorest City "artist in flowers" can complain this month of scarcity of material; the variety is only too confusing, and in our purchases the danger lies in buying too much rather than too little.

In gardens there are roses, pinks, peonies, iris, sweet peas, lupins, syringa, honeysuckle, larkspurs, snapdragons, Canterbury bells, sweet-williams, alpine poppies, gladioli, geraniums, many varieties of annuals, marigolds, pansies, mignonette, columbines, ixias, and a few late species of narcissus. On the hedges and in the fields are dog-roses, honeysuckle, elder-flower, iris, meadow-sweet, clover, campions, moon-daisies, sorrel, poppies, cornflowers, bryony, woodruff, buttercups; while many trees are now in bloom, such as the lime and sycamore.

The name of June brings before us a vision of roses—roses everywhere, in lanes, in gardens, in streets, and in shops; and few flowers are so easy to deal with, and need so little accompaniment. With the garden varieties, the great point is to avoid doubtful harmonies in colour; the innumerable shades of pink and crimson including many which refuse to blend with certain others. The old-fashioned cabbage rose, for instance, is quite vulgarised by the neighbourhood of La France or Baroness Rothschild, while with some shades of dark red and pale yellow it makes a delightful contrast. Other flowers which are particularly suited for rose decorations are—mignonette, sweet peas, syringa, honeysuckle, and white pinks, mainly because they sink naturally into the secondary place, and heighten the dignity of their queen by their own lightness.

In gardens where many roses are grown, it is always good for the trees to have every blossom cut off before it is quite full-blown, leaving the buds to mature; and as this means contenting oneself with very short stalks, flat arrangements of the flowers are almost a necessity. Here old china plates and dishes and silver decanter-stands are invaluable. For longer stalks, specimen-glasses, small jugs or vases, and bowls may be used. No foliage goes quite so well with garden-grown roses as those rich, brown young shoots which are a peculiarity of some of the tea-scented kinds; and one of my friends keeps a large bush in

his garden on purpose for a supply of these shoots, the cutting of which, of course, prevents the tree from blooming.

The Japanese single roses, which are now coming into fashion, should be cut each with a large bud and leaf, and placed by themselves in vases of Oriental china, if possible; but as the fruit is the most characteristic part of the plant, it is not often that the flowers are cut at all.

The wild dog-rose requires much more discrimination in placing, but well repays it if small sprays are chosen with the buds just about to open, as the full-blown flowers fall in an hour or two. They look best in upright glasses or small bowls, and may be mixed very lightly with meadow-sweet, or trails of woodbine, bryony, woodruff, or the three last all together, provided that the roses predominate. This last arrangement was very much admired at a country dinner-party, the roses and honeysuckle being in five tall specimen-glasses down the centre of the table, and in a row of small globes about six inches on either side of them, while the trails of bryony and cloudy woodruff fell from the globes and wound in and out upon the tablecloth. In each folded napkin was placed a spray of rose or honeysuckle alternately, and when dessert came on, a tiny piece of woodruff floated in each finger-glass. This cost nothing but the trouble of gathering the flowers from a hedge-row near the house, and was pleasing to more senses than one, for the combined odours made a sort of *pot-pourri* fragrance too delicate to interfere with the guests' enjoyment of the wine and sweets, as I have known heavily-scented flowers sometimes do.

Another rustic table decoration of which the beauty must be seen to be thoroughly appreciated, is composed entirely of that white clover the tiny florets of whose heads are tipped with pink. They should fill a glass or white china bowl rather closely in the centre, but plentifully mixed with foliage, with some long sprays hanging over the edges, on to a table-mat, if possible, of pale greenish-blue; at the edge of that should be put more flowers and plenty of foliage in glass troughs, or small globes, or white china vases, and to each guest place a specially fine spray in a specimen-glass. If only large, tenderly-tinted flower-heads be selected, and the foliage sprays of as bright a green as possible, I am sure the effect will be both original and graceful.

The red sorrel of the fields is now out in full splendour, and looks very beautiful com-

bined with moon-daisies, buttercups, and grass in large jars for the corners of the drawing-room, or in small glasses for the table.

Wild flowers are nearly always spoilt by travelling, so that these suggestions will be of little use to town dwellers.

In London at this season I have bought for 6d. a large bunch of Iceland poppies, which, mingled with flowering grass in old champagne glasses on a dark green table-mat, or in blue-and-white china on a square of white damask embroidered in blue, made a brilliant centre-piece for a small dinner-table.

Sweet peas are very effective scattered over a table in slender glasses, and we can either keep to one colour—pale rose-pink, for example, or mix the pink, purple, and white together. The so-called "scarlet" is not a very pleasant shade, and blends well only with white.

It is generally difficult to obtain sufficient green for these flowers, and, for my part, having a plant of the everlasting kind, whose blossoms are not particularly pretty, I use the young green shoots of that to accompany the flowers of the beautiful annual varieties now to be bought everywhere.

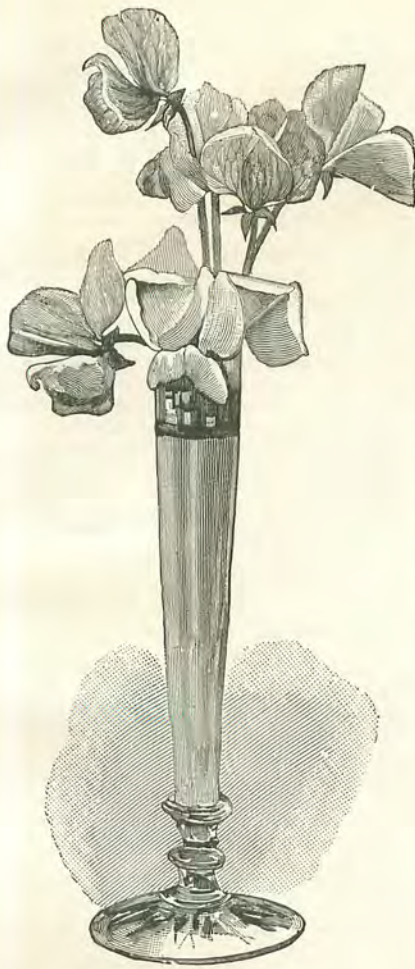
The foliage of the white jasmin will also answer the same purpose.

Two or three tall glasses full of white sweet peas look very well surrounded by trails of mauvish-grey ivy geranium, in low vessels, or the pink shades of both flowers may be combined in this way.

In a nicely-shaped vase of neutral colouring two or three sprays of purple sweet peas contrast agreeably with a Gloire de Dijon rose. White and pink peas will also give lightness to a bowl of peonies. Small posies for sitting-rooms may be made of columbines, which are now to be obtained in so many exquisite tints, and for the dinner-table these may be treated in the same way as sweet peas.

Ixias, and their relations—sparaxis, tritonias, and Watsonias—are generally plentiful this month, and look very well in specimen-glasses mixed with fine grass. The green flowers of *Ixia Viridiflora* need no foliage, and can be arranged in light bunches with the handsome double white narcissus, as long as these are to be had.

Such annuals as nemophila, candytuft, Virginia stock, scabious, and flax, which bloom this month, are chiefly valuable as light accessories to more important-looking flowers; but if used alone, should be in large masses, in order to obtain the full effect of their colouring.



Lupins and Canterbury bells—blue, pink, and white—larkspurs and snapdragons, are all handsome flowers, less suited for table decorations than for putting in tall vases on fairly high shelves or cabinets, where their colours should be carefully adapted to that of the wall-paper or other background. There is no reason why all these different species should not be mixed together in large bunches, provided that the colours do not jangle; and some ribbon-grass looks as well with them as anything besides their own green leaves, those of the larkspur, by the way, being particularly decorative.

For large groups to ornament the fireplace or to stand on the floor, branches of the elder in flower are very effective; but many people object to the sickliness of the perfume. The early-flowering gladioli answer the same purpose in tall jars, and, like the iris, may be mixed with some good-sized fern leaves. A large bunch of syringa, or a small branch of lime in bloom, will fill a room with sweet scent, and give a cool bowery effect without interfering with flowers of brighter colouring. Other trees, such as the larch, when it is bearing its purple raspberry-like flowers, and the sycamore, in bloom or seed, may be laid

under contribution for decorating the grate, and I am not sure but what the effect is better in hot weather than when flowers are used. However, if branches are put on the hearth, small posies of woodland flowers may appear, with a happy suggestiveness, on the mantelshelf.

For entirely covering the opening of the fireplace, the bamboo frames now made are useful; they require a great many flowers to fill them, but are particularly suitable for rustic mixtures. Several long trails of dog-roses, in a large jug of water, can be supported by one of these frames, and thus form a natural screen of great beauty, which may be completed by some sprays of honeysuckle placed in the little clefts of the bamboos, which are purposely cut out to hold water.

A frequent source of embarrassment at this time of the year is that multicoloured posy which good-natured country friends bestow on their town guests at parting, and which from its very variety is almost impossible as a decoration in a tasteful London room. How is one to disperse and rearrange successfully a medley of cabbage roses, geraniums, marigolds, sweet-williams, iris, larkspurs, lupins, pinks, and pansies, set in a ring of fern leaves, laurel, and

southernwood? How often have I mingled with my gratitude for such a sweet-smelling gift the wish that the donor had exercised more discrimination in her generosity! However, one must try one's best, and something like beauty may result from isolating the different kinds of flowers as much as possible, and putting the roses in a bowl along with the pinks, if these should happen fortunately to be all white; the iris and ferns in tall vases set round with the marigolds on a slightly lower level, and softened, if possible, by feathery grasses; while the prim heads of the sweet-williams, placed in flat glasses, may make an effective base for the larkspurs and lupins in taller vases, accompanied by the neutral-tinted southernwood. Geraniums generally refuse to agree with any cottage garden flowers, and look best alone with their brilliant tints thrown up by dark glossy leaves like those of the laurel; but it is hardly necessary to say that bright scarlet, salmon, and rose-pink wrangle horribly if they are too near neighbours. In this month of vague forms and brilliant colouring, many flowers like some of the last-mentioned are not in themselves decorative, but they may be made so by judicious treatment and by carefully contrasting them with others.





By CONSTANCE JACOB.

JULY has nearly all the same flowers as June, with some additions, generally of more florid colouring and robust growth, while the spring survivals have quite disappeared.

Gardens now show lilies, carnations, jasmin, nasturtiums, poppies, stocks, marigolds, geraniums, calceolarias, cornflowers, the rose of Sharon, nicotiana, fuchsias, and some early dahlias.

In the greenhouse, oleanders, gloxinias, almanders, and cacti are plentiful.

Wild flowers include poppies, cornflowers, marigolds, clematis, honeysuckle, woody night-

shade, flowering rushes and grasses, yellow iris, water lilies, teasles, forget-me-nots, meadow-sweet (spiraea).

Lilies are the most conspicuous flowers at the beginning of the month; indeed, in an early season they may be ascribed to June; and from the old-fashioned white or St. Joseph's lily to the gorgeous auratum species now sent to us from Japan, they are all decorative in a high degree. Unless a tall centre epergne is used they are not suitable for dinner-tables, as their full beauty is only enjoyed when the blossoms and buds are allowed to remain on the parent stem, not when single flowers are picked for small vases. This is one reason why only people with gardens can use them satisfactorily; another is, that in most florists' shops the flowers which are open have been robbed of all their golden pollen before travelling; probably from a mistaken idea of tidiness, but to the utter ruin of their appearance. I have often wondered why cotton-wool could not be wrapped round the stamen and pistils to prevent the pollen soiling the purity of the petals, but I suppose the majority of buyers do not notice or care for the difference. But if one can gather from a garden at one's pleasure, no more beautiful ornament for a room can be imagined than a fine head of any kind of lily in a tall jar, whose neck is narrow enough to keep the stalk in upright position. Foliage is not at all requisite, but if any is used it should be of a large kind of leaf or small branches of some shrub, only just appearing above the neck of the jar.

For the quaint Turk's cap variety, a vase with a long, narrow neck and wide base is necessary, to preserve a good semblance of balance.

The old-fashioned flowers, Solomon's seal and crown imperial, require the same treatment.

Carnations are growing every year more popular, and in variety of tint resemble and almost rival roses; with which they have, indeed, much in common, when we consider them decoratively. They are mostly cut with very short stems, and then must be placed in low dishes, or globes, being too top-heavy for tall vases. Their own grey-green leafage is the best surrounding for all shades, although gardeners generally object to much of it being cut; and fitting company to all varieties, and especially to the clove, the king of the race, is found in the small white clematis, white jasmin, mignonette, and sweet peas of contrasting shades. They can also be mixed with roses, but must be quite opposed to them in tone;

for instance, cloves with tea-roses, malmaison pink, or yellow carnations with dark red roses, red and white cloves with pale pink roses.

I have dressed many dinner-tables and refreshment-counters for suppers with some of these mixtures, using silver decanter-stands, silver, china, or wicker baskets, soup plates or china saucers, with the two latter alternating tall specimen glasses holding two or three long-stalked flowers of either kind, and sprays of clematis and jasmin, which also drooped on to the table, and trailed in and out among the lower dishes. I have also put red and white cloves and jasmin into the lower parts of one of those terrible silver epergnes which were so fashionable some years ago, and which their possessors still like to use, and filled the upper vase with a light bouquet of pink Canterbury bells, jasmin, and clematis, the latter falling down like a cloud over the ugly silver and glass stem.

On another occasion purple clematis jackmanni took the place of the Canterbury bells, and the carnations were all white and yellow; and then I put six little globes containing each a carnation or jackmanni and a spray of jasmin down the sides of the table. These last schemes demand a good number of flowers, but they are generally cheap now in shops and plentiful in gardens; while if smaller receptacles are used, an equally pretty effect can be obtained at much less cost. I need hardly here allude to the hideous dyed carnations which we have heard so much about lately, as by no stretch of imagination can they be considered artistic or economical.

Garden poppies are quite a modern fashion, and very beautiful most of the species are, both in form and colour; the smaller kinds, such as the Shirley, mikado, and Victoria Cross, may be arranged in loose posies, and, with advantage, mixed with the flowers of the Marguerite daisies, the white cornflower, or white sweet sultan, whose sturdy growth and opaque purity contrast with and enhance the bright fragility of the poppy.

To such groups grass is a most suitable addition. Of the larger kinds, such as the oriental, the perennials, the tree poppies, and a very fine white, called the Bride, one flower is enough for an ordinary-sized vase, and should be accompanied only by one of its own large and handsome leaves, and, if possible, a seed-vessel. Any vases for these flowers should be at least six inches high, and of fairly substantial form; in colour whatever best exhibits the brilliancy of the poppy.



Blue cornflowers are great favourites with many people, but somewhat difficult to treat artistically. A popular way, of course, is to mix them with red poppies, with, I think, a certain crudity of effect; and another, no more successful, is to put them with margolds. All these flowers are so intimately associated with cornfields, that probably people naturally think of them as suitable companions, but, as a matter of fact, they are very seldom found growing in close proximity; and the very pronounced colours require a great deal of atmosphere and natural environment to bring them into harmony. After many experiments, I have found the happiest results gained by mixing blue and white cornflowers with a good quantity of green oats, in white or in celadon and white china vases. A very graceful arrangement I have seen too on a country house table, consisting of blue cornflowers, yellow and white Marguerites, large blossoms of the white malope, deep orange coreopsis, and plenty of asparagus tops in white glasses.

Carpet bedding has made calceolarias plentiful in most gardens, but they are difficult to manage as room ornaments, the easiest way being to mix the brown and yellow sorts together, with plenty of dark and light green foliage, such as box and southernwood, or copper and silver beech.

I have never seen the handsome Aaron's beard, or rose of Sharon, for sale in shops; but ladies who have plants in their gardens may make an original table decoration with sprays of these golden flowers and dark glossy leaves in low vessels, while a few interspersed specimen glasses hold some loose sprays of calceolaria. These suggestions are given because, when one has a small garden to cut from, it is often a case of Hobson's choice; but, for my own part, I consider most bedding-out plants to be unsuitable altogether for providing cut flowers. The only exception is the tuberous begonia, which has lately been so popular in the London parks, and which really does look decorative in specimen glasses with its own leaves only, and no other flowers in its neighbourhood; the white and yellow can be mixed; scarlet and pink look best alone.

Geraniums can be used in loose bunches of fine heads in corners where bright colouring is desirable; and the scarlet repay putting into white china with some large leaves of the deeply serrated scented, or oak-leaf, variety. Of course if people like to transfer the carpet



*Jasminum
gracillimum*

bedding on to their dinner-tables, they can use heads of this class of flower in low troughs following geometrical designs, and interlace them with other lines and curves of coloured leaves such as are used in the beds; but, for all artistic result, the flowers might as well be left in the garden, and a piece of bright embroidery placed on the table. I have seen yellow and white Marguerites sacrificed to this fashion, to the entire destruction of their grace, for that can only be displayed by retaining a good part of the stalks and foliage; either sort alone or both mixed however makes a charming arrangement in blue-and-white narrow-necked vases, and flowering grass is a pretty accessory. Most stocks of good colours—and these become better every year—mixed with spikes of *Nicotiana affinis* (or white tobacco plant) look well and smell sweetly as groups for high places.

The last-named flower, although in the garden it is closed most of the day, will continue open in rooms where the sun does not shine directly on it, and hence is particularly useful for corners where other flowers would languish.

Aquatic flowers are very beautiful this month, and picturesque effects may be got by water-lilies and their leaves floating in soup-plates or shallow dishes full of water, and sprays of forget-me-not and water crowfoot round. Any common plate will do if the edges are well concealed by drooping fern leaves. As these

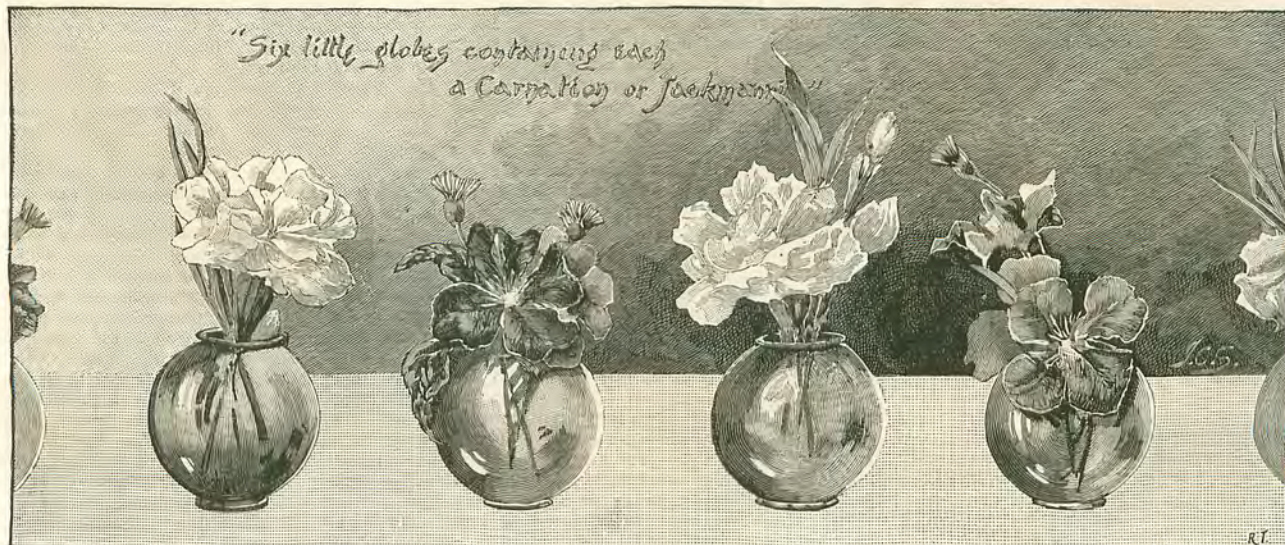
arrangements require to be looked down upon, they are especially suited for placing on open tiled hearths, and may be backed by tall jars or jugs holding bunches of flowering rushes, spiraea, flags, and other tall aquatic flowers.

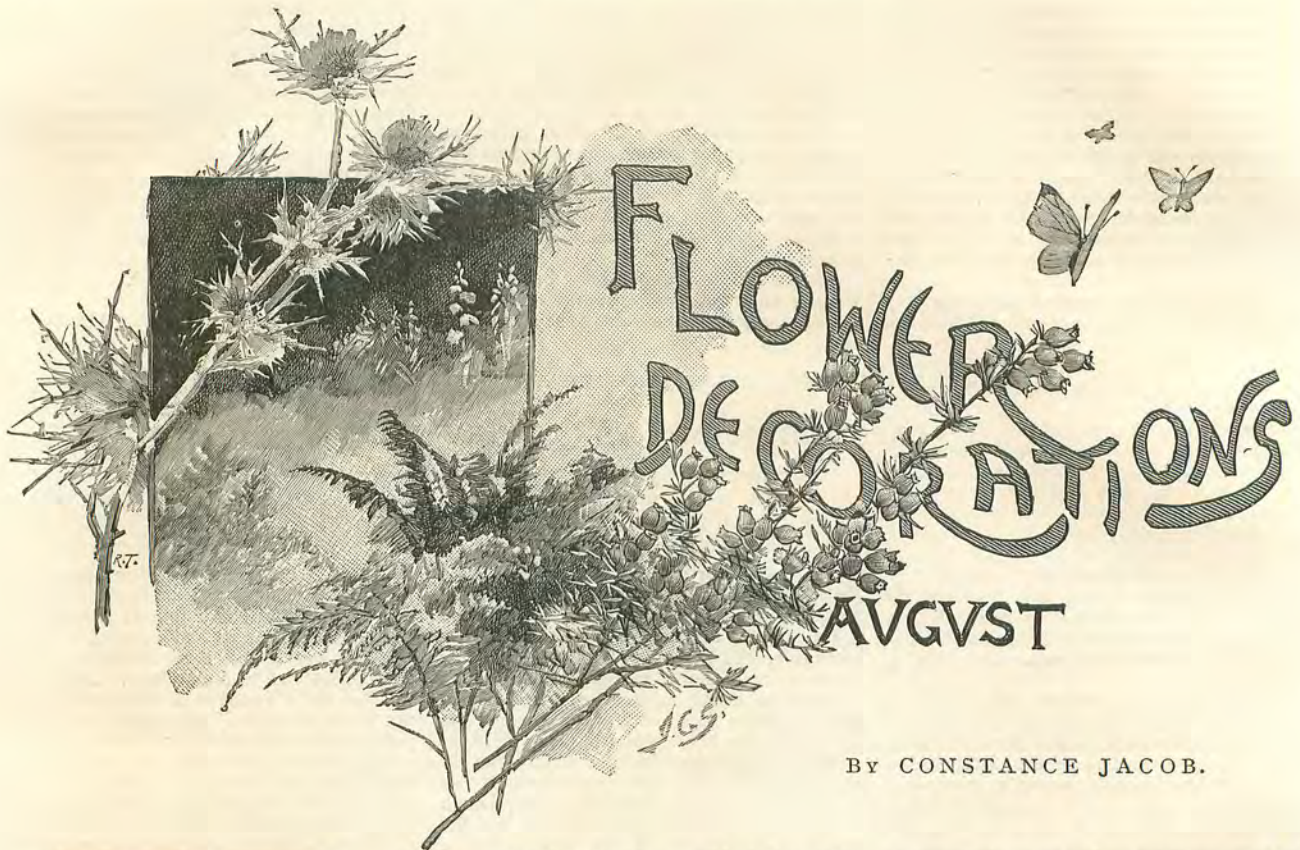
A somewhat elaborate scheme of decoration for a dinner, but by no means difficult to those who can obtain the flowers, can be carried out by making a bank down the centre of the table of silvery and brown foliage, such as tradescantia and coleus, starred with the large yellow blossoms of the almander, and fringed with sprays of smilax, almander, and purple jackmanni, single flowers of both kinds being placed in specimen glasses down the sides of the table.

Oleanders are among the most decorative of exotics, and the pink or white flowers and willow-like leaves may be prettily mixed with pale tea roses, clove carnations, jasmin, or myrtle.

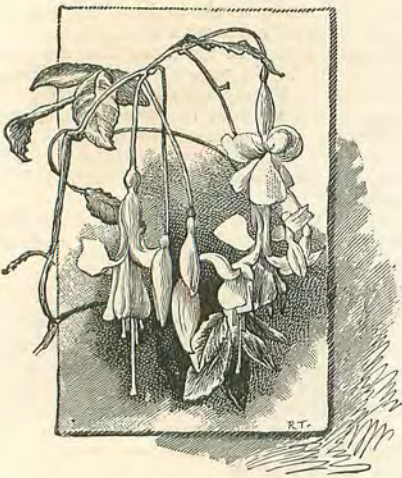
Gloxinias, another very favourite flower with greenhouse gardeners, like cacti, are much more to be admired on their own roots than anywhere else; but if cut at all, their velvety richness is best shown up by sprays of maiden-hair, or other delicate ferns, which is equally true of the gorgeous fancy pelargoniums, less fashionable now than some years ago.

An old-fashioned flower rapidly returning to favour, with improvements, is the fuchsia; but like many which begin to bloom this month, it is in its greatest profusion in August, and will be best treated of then.





By CONSTANCE JACOB.



ALTHOUGH, strictly speaking, a summer month, August foreshadows in its characteristics the near approach of autumn. There is still a profusion of bloom; but berries and fruits gradually take its place, while the dark green leaves of the preceding month slowly change into the first tints of their dying splendour.

Most of the July flowers last on in gardens; but the earlier lilies give place to those of the lancifolium species. Roses—especially those grown on bushes—enjoy now a second season of bloom; clematis, jasmine, nasturtiums, marigolds, stocks, fuchsias, geraniums, are at their best; while among the newer arrivals come hollyhocks, asters, the later kinds of gladioli, dahlias, and sunflowers.

In the fields, poppies, lychnis, cornflowers, fool's parsley, and marigolds are plentifully mingled with the ripening corn. The water plants remain much the same as in July. On the hedgerows the roses have mostly dis-

appeared, while the honeysuckle is less often found than clematis and bryony, both of which, however, are approaching the seed-bearing stage. On the moors and commons, heather, bluebells, succory, and the brilliantly-tinted leaves and tiny pink flowers of the crane's-bill, or herb Robert, mix with large fronds of bracken, now changing into gold, or the smaller hard and parsley ferns. In the woods the crimson and white spikes of fox-gloves, and large shrub-like plants of hemlock, stand up conspicuously from an undergrowth of many kinds of fern. Everywhere crimson, gold, and purple are the colours naturally predominant.

Comparatively so few people remain in towns during this holiday month that I may as well leave the florists out of the question for awhile, and assume that most ladies will find the materials of decoration for themselves in the gardens of their country quarters, on the Scotch or Yorkshire moors, on the Welsh and Cumbrian mountains, or, what is much more difficult, on the cliffs, or in the lanes near seaside resorts.

The more fashionable of these possess, of course, shops where flowers, particularly those suited for buttonholes, can be bought, more or less expensively; but as the stock of foliage consists chiefly of the ever-popular maiden-hair, people with sharp eyes and ready wit will do much better to trust to them in country walks for beautifying their apartments. My own latest experience of the shops of a healthy but unfashionable watering-place on the south coast was so discouraging that I preferred to glean from the cliff path, which, although wind-swept and barren at a first glance, ultimately yielded sufficient small red poppies and lace-like fool's parsley to keep filled the five small blue-and-white jars which always accompany me to furnished apartments, and which I have so often mentioned. Another day I found a few roots of dandelion and yellow hawk's-weed, which, mingled with the fool's parsley, made groups of such beauty

as to surprise some of my visitors, who had hitherto passed these flowers over as vulgar weeds of no decorative value. Yet again I received æsthetic pleasure from the white flowers of the hornbeam, backed by brown shoots of hedge maple. On less frequented coasts one may gather bunches of the sea holly, which can only be placed by itself in glass vases; and wherever the salt air blows over it, the tamarisk, with its light green foliage and coral-red stems, will afford handsome pieces of ornamentation. If one is within reach of a moor, there need never lack variety or brilliancy in one's table decorations. Delicate posies of harebells, oak, beech, lady or parsley ferns, and the pale straw-tinted late woodbine, are thrown into relief by fronds of golden bracken, either laid on the tablecloth or put into larger vases in the centre. The same leaves should always be mixed with heather, although this is less suited for the table than for larger groups, as for the fireplace, hall, etc. However, a glass bowl filled with heather and bracken may well find an occasional place on the dinner-table.

White champions, or bachelors' buttons, look charming standing up from a low carpet of crane's-bill, which can easily be arranged by means of dishes full of moss. The little brown jugs in which some of the most important dairy companies sell their cream, hold such rustic nosegays with peculiar fitness, and contrast well with the white table-linen in farmhouse or cottage rooms—that is to say, they would be quite out of place in a mansion. Usually wild-flower arrangements are spoiled by a want of selection, and an enthusiast in one ramble will often gather enough for two or three days—far too many sorts of flowers, and not sufficient of one. On these occasions it is wiser to note the prettiest flower which grows in abundance; gather enough, and no more, of that; and then to select others which will best agree with it and with each other. Where a medley of a dozen different sorts will be quite meaningless and unpleasing, a

careful choice of two or three will produce a suggestive and poetic picture.

I have dressed a bamboo hanging in the hall of a country house very effectively, beginning at the bottom with harebells, oak ferns, and grass; higher up, harebells, rock rose, and woodbine; still higher, woodbine and brambles; and at the top of the cane a spray of very pale belated wild roses and some long trails of down-hanging clematis, backing each little tier with some pieces of bracken just turning golden, which brought the whole into harmony. But I should never have ventured on putting all these flowers into one or more vases on the same level.

There are numerous hedgerow timbers whose flowers, being small, and of neutral colouring, make them particularly suited to accompany others of more decided appearance; but as these differ in almost every county, it is useless to mention them in detail.

Foxgloves look well with large fern leaves in tall jugs or in jars (especially old ginger jars), and backed by some small branches of trees, by preference fir or larch, letting some of their own velvety leaves hang over the brim.

The blue succory is a quaint-looking flower, which looks well in the little brown jugs in company with moon-daisies, coarse grass, sprigs of woody nightshade, or any bright yellow flowers of light form, such as hawk's-weed.

It is hardly necessary to say that all such arrangements require changing every day, as summer wild-flowers fade more quickly than any.

Lancifolium lilies, like others, look best on their own stems; but the rose-pink ones admit of single blossoms being picked for specimen glasses, with one of their own leaves for each, and a spray of jasmine or white clematis. These two climbers are particularly valuable at this time of year for softening the often crude tones of larger flowers, and few arrangements should be without them. For the centre of a drawing-room table I have laid large elm leaves, just turning yellow, round the edge of a plate, filling up the centre with white jasmine, and the result was excellent.

The large pale clematis of the jackmanni species, single and double, are handsome and graceful flowers for dressing a dinner-table, but they require dark leaves of warm colouring in the background to atone for their somewhat cold greys. For this purpose also a bright piece of embroidery or dark red linen is useful as a table centre, or the flowers are well suited for surrounding plates of plums and other rich-coloured fruit.

Among fuchsias, few are so decorative as the old-fashioned hardy shrub, with its red and purple pendants; but there is a long range of brilliant hues among the species more recently introduced; and all alike may be used in bunches with plenty of stalk and foliage in tall vases, placed where they will be looked at from below; they also make graceful fringes to groups of larger flowers, such as stocks or dahlias, provided that their colours are harmonious.

Sunflowers have apparently quite gone out of fashion, yet they are really beautiful, and one of the large blossoms with two or three fine leaves in a good substantial-looking receptacle (here again the old ginger jar is useful) lights up a dull and uninteresting corner as nothing else can do so well.

The small-flowering kinds are better for mixed groups, and I have seen a few of them



in a nicely-shaped celery glass, with a bunch of yellow broom in the centre, form a very pleasing arrangement in yellow. Single dahlias might take the place of the sunflowers with an equally good effect.

Marigolds, which overrun some gardens to the extent of becoming weeds, look very cheerful in a massive bunch, and, like sunflowers, give light in dark places; but they do not mix well with anything else.

Nasturtiums are profuse bloomers, whose rich colouring and graceful growth make them valuable for table decoration, and yet they are very seldom used for this purpose. They need plenty of their own foliage, but nothing else, except, perhaps, some jasmine; and the velvety dark red are easily mingled with the yellow and pale terra-cotta shades; the scarlet are best only with their own leaves, which are of a peculiarly bluish-green. Placed in a white china basket, which will allow the younger shoots to droop over, they form a very pretty centre ornament.

Single and cactus dahlias have quite superseded the old formal quilled favourites of the florists, and are valuable treasures when other flowers begin to fail. They must be very carefully selected in regard to colour for mixed bunches; but if the artist keeps to one shade, or to two shades of one colour, the chief consideration is the choice of appropriate foliage, which, to my thinking, lies between sprigs of small-leaved trees, such as oak, beech, or hedge maple, and sprays of asparagus, either

of the plumosus variety or that of the vegetable garden, by this time going to seed. The leaves of the dahlia are rather unwieldy, so we may be excused for making them an exception to the rule of using flower and foliage from the same plant. As accessories to such large flowers, the small clematis, jasmine, and hardy fuchsia are particularly adapted.

Hollyhock blossoms are rather formal when cut—something like silk rosettes; but many people admire them, and they look quaint in flat dishes on some of their smaller leaves, and veiled by sprays of clematis. For fireplaces the heads are suitable when they are fully in bloom up to the top; so are sunflowers, dahlias, hemlock, teasles, or large dock leaves. These remind me of an artistic arrangement once made by a friend of mine, consisting of a large silvery-blue fan spread before the drawing-room grate, and in front an old "Toby" jug holding about half a dozen large graceful leaves, which, on enquiry, proved to be those of the common horseradish overrunning her back garden. The same lady, having friends arrive unexpectedly to supper one night, decked the table with a strip of crumpled-up pale-blue silk, and strewed on it the flowers and buds of the white cluster rose, and bunches of red and white cherries. The effect was charming, but resembled one of those rapid sketches only produced by artists of experience, and is by no means an example to be easily followed.

I adopted an easier plan in laying long trails

of an out-door vine on the table, winding in and out among five glass dishes of fruit, while two tall vases held each a few blossoms of Gloire de Dijon rose.

These roses are the most continuous bloomers of any, and were a conspicuous feature on the refreshment counter and small tables of a wedding reception which took place in August; and as this is rather a favourite time of year for marriages, I may as well describe it here.

The cake, plainly iced, stood on a large silver tray, which had a fringe of very pale roses and sprigs of myrtle in bloom round the edge, kept fresh by a little damp moss in waterproof paper, the latter protecting the cake from any moisture, and of course carefully hidden by the myrtle. Round the upper edge of the cake was a wreath of full-blown roses, white cloves,

white jackmanni, and white cactus dahlias, thickly mixed with jasmine and small clematis, the latter hanging downwards, the whole skilfully mounted in moss and waterproof paper, and where the cake was to be cut, tied together with white satin ribbon. Within this stood a glass dish, quite hidden under roses, myrtle, and white sweet peas, while in the centre was a glass vase (silver would have been better), holding two or three white lilies in the midst of a bunch of orange blossoms. A row of specimen glasses at the back of the counter, and one on each of the small tables, contained sprays of one or two of the same flowers carefully suited to each other, and a line of glass troughs of semi-circular form contained roses, carnations, myrtle, and jasmine only. All the flowers on the counter were as nearly white as possible, but on the tables the

roses and carnations were pale pinks or yellows, sometimes as deep as the William Allen Richardson. Leaving out the cake, a similar arrangement would be pretty for a garden-party, "at home," or ball supper; and while all but the orange blossoms would be found in many country gardens, they are none of them very expensive to buy at this time of the year, although of course the ultimate cost must depend entirely on the number of tables, and the length of counter to be provided for. A dinner-table for about twelve people could be lavishly dressed with specimen glasses and troughs in the manner suggested for three or four shillings, and if the flowers were all white, a red table-centre would be desirable; but I would rather leave out the jackmanni, let the roses be pink and yellow, and make the foliage droop straight on to the table-cloth.

A BATTLE WITH DESTINY.

By JOHN SAUNDERS, Author of "The Lion in the Path," "Abel Drake's Wife," etc.

CHAPTER XX. "RINGED TREES."



WILL you come too, Miss Capella?" cried Beth, as Sybil hastily crossed the hall in search of the girls. "Jean and I are going to have a stroll round the park."

"Just what I should like of all things," answered Sybil.

They went toward the stables, where they found Jeanie loosing the dog, and endeavouring to curb his wild exuberance of spirits, which, when she

had set him free, threatened the overthrow of Beth as he sprang upon her, resting his great paws on her shoulders as if to embrace her.

For awhile they meandered through the rose walk, where the flowers, untended and unpicked, hung in heavy clusters, dying, or spoiled by recent rain.

"Is it not sad," exclaimed Jeanie, "that those rose trees can't have a little attention! You have no idea, Sybil, what this walk is like when properly kept as I used to see it. It was simply lovely."

"I can quite understand that it would be so. To me it is beautiful even now," she answered. "I will tell you what I have been thinking. Could not we three—you, Beth, and myself—each undertake to do a little gardening daily. I see that you keep a boy—perhaps he would be allowed to help us. For instance, we might cut off dead flowers, syringe where there is blight, and do a little weeding. What do you say?"

"It is a capital thought!" exclaimed Jeanie. "We will begin at once."

"I'll fetch some scissors!" cried Beth.

"You dear, impulsive children!" retorted Sybil, who had other wishes for the moment than gardening. "Not now—don't begin now. I am longing to go over the grounds. You know we have had such wet days lately that I have seen scarcely anything out of doors. As we walk let us arrange the parts we will each undertake."

"Very well," said Jeanie. "It is your plan, so choose first."

"I am not at all particular," Sybil answered, having already made up her mind; "but if I must name some part, I will undertake the beds on the left side of the garden door, that I may be near should Mrs. Calvert need me."

"All right!" cried Beth; "you mean those in front of father's den. I'll have the other side, then—in front of the little drawing-room; and Jean, will you take the centre beds?"

Jean agreed, and thus the matter was settled. It may be well to observe that, though the others occasionally neglected their gardening, no fine morning passed without the colonel observing a picturesque and diligent worker employing the hour before breakfast in tidying and beautifying the flower-beds facing his window.

After Sybil and the girls had walked through the orchard and shrubbery, they turned into an avenue of fine lime trees leading to the park. As the morning was unusually cool for August, Jeanie joined Beth in running races with Wolf, who, in the highest state of glee, barked and tore along by their side, while the previously silent grounds echoed with the noise of his deep bay, and the ringing laugh of the girls.

The elder sister was the first to own herself tired for the moment; and, leaving the child and dog to continue their gambols, she walked along more sedately with Sybil. Occasionally they came across trees which were marked in a way she did not understand, but

as to the nature of which Sybil made a shrewd guess, while some few were cut down, and lay, stripped and forlorn, across her path.

The sight grieved Jeanie. They were fine old trees, the growth of nearly a hundred years, and appeared to have been felled in their full strength.

"I can't think why grandfather cut down these noble trees. I am sure father would not have done so," she said sadly.

"The timber is worth a great deal," replied Sybil. "Gentlemen often cut down trees when they require money. Oh, what a perfect view!" she suddenly exclaimed, as, after entering the park and ascending for some few moments, they reached the brow of a slight hill.

She linked her arm in her companion's as they sat together on a seat beneath an aged oak-tree, admiring the broad stretch of undulating landscape. Beth quickly joined them, carrying a book under her arm.

"I shall sit here too," she said. "I want you to read one of the fairy tales out of my book."

"What is the book?" asked Jeanie.

"The one Madame Marchant gave me," answered the child. "But oh, Jeanie!" she cried, jumping up from the seat, "I have such an idea! That would be delightful! Don't read at all, but tell me yourself a story from your own head—you know you can."

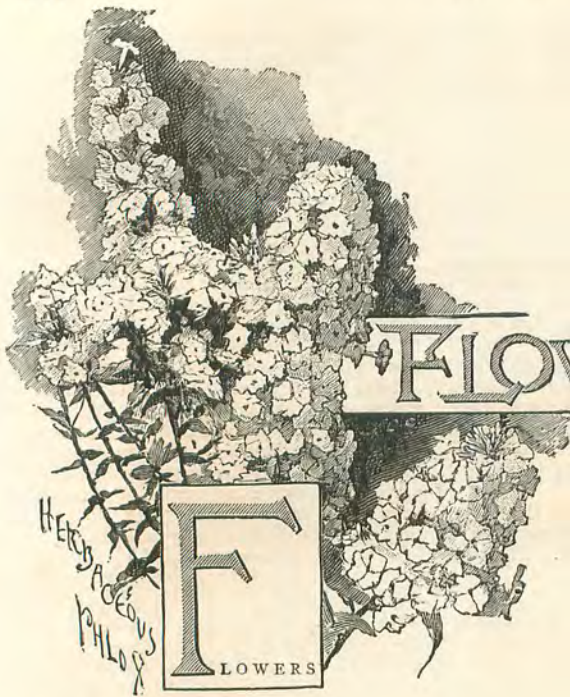
Jeanie smiled as she said, "I am afraid you rate my abilities much too highly." She opened the story-book to see if she could get inspiration from its pictures. Fortune favoured her.

"Look! What's that insect doing?" queried Beth, pointing to one of the pictures. "It looks as if it had boots on."

"Yes," said Jeanie, laughing merrily, "so it has. See!" she said to Sybil—"see the hero of my story"—showing her the book.

"Go on! go on!" demanded Beth.

"Well, that insect," Jeanie began, "walks and walks night and day, all over the world, seeking something he has never found."



FLOWER DECORATIONS

SEPTEMBER

BY CONSTANCE JACOB.

are getting fewer this month; but those which first appeared in August continue in bloom, with the addition chiefly, in gardens, of asters, phlox, Michaelmas daisies, Japanese anemones, and the early chrysanthemums. Dahlias are at their best.

On the moors the heather and gorse are more brilliant than ever. In the fields, poppies and their neighbours continue only less plentiful than in August. A little woodbine lingers on in sheltered places. The clematis and bryony are seeding; but the most striking natural features of the month are the ripening berries and the changing tints of leaves. Among the latter, the most brilliant are the bracken, lime, maple, oak, virginia creeper, birch, beech, and brambles; and the berries most commonly to be found are mountain ash, bryony, hips and haws, wild rose, white beam, woody nightshade, elder, and other edible native fruits.

Asters are not favourite flowers of mine. Their forms are too prim, and their colours somewhat vulgar, if such a term can rightly be applied to any natural object; and yet in some houses just now they are more frequently seen than any other flowers. The three shades of white, violet, and magenta-pink are usually put together, and, perhaps, that is where the vulgarity really comes in, as no amount of arrangement can ever make the two last harmonise. White may, of course, accompany either of the others, and with purple ones, yellow flowers like calceolarias, grey ivy geraniums, or Michaelmas daisies, do not look bad; but no other colour goes pleasantly with the pink. They should all be put into plates, or white china vases, with plenty of dark green—not fern—and some neutral, like mignonette, or sprays of fine white efflorescence, such as tiny Michaelmas daisies, or clematis. The white may be mixed with any flowers of one colour which are not wild, and look very well with pink ivy geraniums,



richly-coloured snap-dragons, or simply red and yellow virginia creeper leaves.

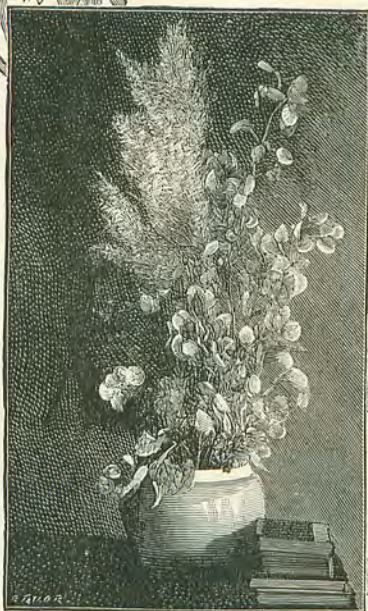
After struggling to help these stiff, artificial-looking flowers express whatever latent beauty they may possess, it is a great relief to turn to the beautiful single and cactus dahlias, whose heads are poised so gracefully on their slender stalks, and whose tints are generally good, often exquisite. They are grown so plentifully now that a big bunch can be bought almost anywhere for sixpence; but, alas! those mixed bunches are usually much too mixed, and often contain colours which refuse to agree on any terms whatever. It is better, therefore, to choose for ourselves, even if we lose somewhat in quantity. To the suggestions for their arrangement which I gave last month, I may now add some advice as to the choice of colours. If you are buying scarlet, get as well the very darkest shade of crimson, and keep the foliage as light as possible. If yellow is to predominate, the dark red again forms a pleasant contrast. Pink, light crimson, or terra-cotta shades, only harmonise with white; while the latter goes with all others, but looks rather crude with scarlet.

If the heavy, quilled kind of dahlia is alone obtainable, the specimens, being very carefully contrasted in tone, and the stalks cut short, should be placed on their own leaves in flat dishes, with sprays of some light foliage or small flowers to soften the otherwise formal effect.

The *Phlox Drummondii* is a very useful flower for table decoration, either in troughs, baskets, or specimen glasses; while the large heads of the perennial kind make handsome groups in taller receptacles, and with some brilliant-tinted leaves and long pieces of ribbon grass, are particularly well suited for stove ornaments. The colours of phlox are confined to purple, red, and white; but these comprise such an immense variety of shades that in any selection it is a little difficult to avoid discord. Perhaps the safest way is to choose a very dark and a very light shade of the same colour, and then add white; or put a bright middle tint with white only. Their own foliage is all that is needed to go with the drummondii. The pure white variety makes a graceful companion to the robust-looking nasturtiums, and so do a few shades of pale lilac.



HAREBELL AND FERN.



HONESTY AND PAMPAS GRASS.

The daphne, or spurge laurel, is an old friend whom I seldom meet now; but, like the myrtle, it should be in bloom in many sheltered gardens this month, and nothing is prettier than sprays of it mixed with late-blooming roses.

I have dressed a small dinner-table very successfully with white Japanese anemones, Gloire de Dijon roses, plenty of the foliage of both, and the red berries of a large single briar, in a blue-and-white china bowl; but pink or green-flowered daphne might take the place of the berries, and either arrangement might be transferred to a drawing-room.

A somewhat uncommon way of decorating a dinner is to put the dessert on the table, and, instead of having flowers in separate vases, to wreath each dish with some blossoms whose pale or bright colours throw up the contrasting shades of the fruit. Round the grapes—purple and white—which formed a centre-piece, I have put Michaelmas daisies of the largest white kind, while one of these and a spray of the very tiny white was placed in an interstice at the apex of the group. Round the pears, apricots, greengages, and apples were small lilac blossoms of the same flower, while two low dishes of mulberries were lightly veiled with sprays of the lace-like white daisy, which is, I believe, called by florists *Asteracæ alba*, the whole arrangement being surrounded by lines of the small (*Ampelopsis Veitchii*) virginia creeper laid on the cloth. The dessert dishes, by good fortune, were of a pale lemon-yellow; but the same decoration would have suited red, white, green, or old Spode china. If the service had been blue or pink, or the fruit had included peaches, I should have kept the flowers all white. The wreaths were made by wiring the head of one flower on to the stalk of another until a circle was formed the size of the dish; but a quicker way would be to lay the flowers on the dish, all the stalks towards the centre, the blossoms at the edge, and laying the fruit atop of the stalks.



For fruit of neutral tint, such as pears, nuts, and greengages, on white china dishes, wreaths of nasturtiums make very pretty ornaments, in which case I would like a dark-green centre mat, and no foliage on the table. For a bright-coloured dessert, hops are a pretty decoration, some large bunches and graceful sprays being placed in tall vases in the centre of the table, others laid on the cloth outside the dishes of fruit. Brambles answer the same purpose, and seeding clematis can be twined round the dishes; but it is a fancy of mine, probably not shared with everyone else, that poisonous berries, such as those of the bryony and nightshade, should never be found on the same table as fruits intended to be eaten.

September brings in a much richer natural scale of colour than even the summer months, and possibly at no time are striking effects so easily obtained as now, with the help of fading leaves.

The glorious colouring of the virginia creeper, common alike in town and country, blends well with almost any tint of flowers, and particularly with white or pale dahlias, phlox, Japanese anemones, or lilies; or it is sufficiently effective for a dinner-table if used alone, or with white clematis, trails of it in low glasses winding in and out round the bases of taller vases, in each of which are two or three of the larger and brighter leaves. As a centre-piece, or a sitting-room ornament, a bunch, loosely arranged in any large piece of old china, particularly blue-and-white, never fails to please the eye.

With deeper-toned flowers paler leaves make a better contrast; such as those of the lime-tree, which now turn golden.

The feathery wild clematis, seeding now, and called by country people old man's beard, or traveller's joy, combines softly with the dark red leaves of its neighbour the hedge maple, or the brighter berries of the hawthorn and of the wild rose, or, in a quieter key, harmonises with purple elderberries.

The leaves of the white beam turn at this season a deep purple, and with its red berries I have made a charming arrangement of old man's beard and pale lilac scabious, all gathered within a few yards of each other on the South Downs.

Trails of bryony with changing leaves and berries might take the place of the white beam with more brilliant effect.

Berries do not easily combine with flowers unless all are taken together direct from the hedgerow or common.

Gorse is in some places at its full splendour, and to country people supplies brilliant groups for the fireplace (when the weather still allows flowers to take the place of fuel), the hall, or other parts of the house where bright colouring is welcome, and where one is not likely to come unduly near the thorns. Bracken is of course its most congenial companion; but where the local background is light, a branch of fir will throw it into relief; and should the vase or jar holding it be high, a few brambles may pleasingly hang down from the brim. Harebells are too fragile-looking to find a place in such a group; but in a room where a large piece of gorse forms a prominent object, small bunches of harebells, with fine grass, delicate ferns, and sprays of little moorland weeds, numbers of which are now turning red or yellow, may be fitly placed on mantelshelf, tables, and brackets. Heather, bracken, and gorse are of course natural neighbours; but skillful cutting and handling, with some risk of torn fingers, are necessary to make all rest gracefully together in one vessel. When achieved, however, the result is always popular, and has also the merit of lasting fresh a long time.

The bamboo screens which I mentioned in June may be charmingly dressed with small pieces of gorse, heather, and bracken, with the addition in the topmost holes of mountain ash—otherwise rowan—berries. Large bunches of the latter also make good single groups, and small sprays of them and their pretty leaves may be introduced into a table decoration in the following manner:—Put for the centre a growing fern of vivid green—such as the oak, the beech, or the mountain fern—into a pot of dark green, brown, or very dull red pottery; round that have four glasses about eight inches high, holding each a well-grown cluster of the berries, and one or two leaves just changing into scarlet; then between place small glass globes, or, still better, tiny pots of Devonshire or Vallauris ware, holding

harebells and small fern leaves. To a long table this may be adapted by having six groups of berries in all, and a bunch of harebells opposite each cluster of wineglasses. The cow parsnip, hemlock, and other umbelliferous plants, are useful for large decorative masses, and as they are never sold in shops, and therefore must be gathered by the artist, the latter will have an opportunity of noticing what other plants are plentiful in their vicinity, and will, therefore, probably assist to bring out their beauty in rooms. I mentioned last month how prettily fool's parsley weat with poppies and dandelions, and this is only an instance of how these pale greenish-white heads of tiny flowers refine others of stronger form and colouring. The foliage, too, of this class of plant is marvellously complex and beautiful, and is often useful in wild arrangements where the flowers are hardly wanted.

Striking effects can be made this month with aquatics, combining, say, a few tall bulrushes, some scarlet-seeded iris pods, sedges, and large flowering grass. But I must here enter a protest against the prevalent idea that such groups will last all through the winter; they will last indeed, but as poor dead mummies, not as living beings; and nothing in this way is sadder to see than some once beautiful bulrushes standing neglected in a corner months after all their life has departed, their sword-like leaves hanging down limp and yellow, the rich, warm, brown pollen shed off in patches on to the carpet, and being slowly replaced by the dirty, unwholesome dust of the room. Field grasses look just as miserable; and the only things used in this way which do not are heather, the seed-pods of honesty, and Cape gooseberry, and the large pampas grass, all of which can be easily washed; but even they contradict the essential reason of our having flower decorations at all; which is, the need of bringing some of the living beauty of outdoor nature into our homes.

There is a meaning in the tint and form of the least conspicuous vegetable, and even if we cannot discover what this is, we can at least be careful not to utterly falsify and destroy it.

A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE G. P. O.;

WITH SOME THOUGHTS ON LETTER-WRITING.



THIS age of pens, ink, and paper, when letter-writing is no longer the privilege of the few, but the property of the many, what a small proportion of those that scribble off letters "in haste" think

of the wonderful machinery at work which takes anxious and unwearied care of all the multitudinous correspondence that pours hour by hour into the G. P. O. Let us see what becomes of all these letters, when, as we carelessly drop our portion of them into the letter-boxes, they become "the property of the Postmaster-General."

It was after five o'clock on a spring evening that we made our way through St. Paul's Churchyard, on a visit to the G. P. O. of London. We had got an order to see the Telegraph Department and the great sorting

rooms. It was a pity we could only afford a cursory visit to the former—that vast and wonderful place, with its hundreds of clerks busy night and day—for the offices are never closed. Ceaseless was the hum of the machinery as the ciphered paper poured out in long lines, and was as readily translated to us by our guide—scraps of news from all parts of the world, the latest electioneering triumphs, and the last rise or fall on the Stock Exchange—hopelessly intricate to the uninitiated it all seemed. But our anxiety to get a peep behind the scenes over the way interfered with our desire for further information from the telegraph clerk.

We took our stand close behind the great receivers; through the slit one could see into the street outside, thronged with passengers eagerly pushing their way to deposit in safety the letters, cards, and papers, which fell in one unceasing stream into the receivers, and were as quickly carried away by busy hands to the sorting room. A comical story was told us, illustrating the nervous haste which sometimes befalls late comers. One evening the clock

was on the stroke of six, when an errand-boy was seen running breathlessly up the steps to reach the box before it closed; in one hand he had a pair of fowls, while in the other he held a document for post. The excitement was too much; in went the poultry with a thud; at the same moment the lid closed, and the poor youth was left staring disconsolately at his master's letter still in his hand!

The first process with our letters, after taking them from the receivers, is called *facing*. Thousands are thrown on the tables, and with great rapidity "faced," *i.e.*, the letters are put in large bundles, each postage-stamp being at the right-hand corner of the letter. Those letters which have the Queen's head in any other position on the envelope are thrown aside as *blind*, and must be sorted in a separate packet. One always looks upon a badly-stamped letter as a vulgarity; but it would be well if people remembered all the additional trouble given to the Post-Office officials when they put on stamps in irregular ways.

The "facing" complete, the next thing is to *deface* the stamps. This is done very quickly.



OCTOBER

By CONSTANCE JACOB.

tunities for taste and originality of arrangement than flowers do. In every ramble, on moors or hills, in lanes or in meadows, quick eyes and fingers can gather an infinite variety of these beautiful dying forms—red, purple, silver, and gold; in gardens it is the same; while even in the kitchen garden the carrot tops and seeding asparagus are brilliant and graceful accessories to hardy flowers.

The virginia creeper has mostly fallen before the month is well in, and other leaves in smoky towns have a way of turning nothing but a dingy unpleasant-looking brown. Still, there is always plenty of bright foliage to be bought.

Japanese anemones look fragile, but really they defy the gathering cold and slight frosts of early autumn with a hardihood which makes them most valuable when other flowers are failing. I have used them, selecting by preference the white kind, in many different ways, and with almost any kind of garden foliage, green or red; always taking care to place them in vases which allow them to stand well up, and show a fair amount of stalk.

In blue-and-white china red leaves go better with them than green. It is hardly necessary to say that for small vases two or three blooms are quite enough for each, and as a rule they are most ornamental without other flowers; but, if something else is desired, fuchsias, late-blooming roses, and—best of all—berries are suitable. The Japanese single rose yields berries (for which it is cultivated more than for its flowers) of a quaint, decided shape, which contrasts in a marked manner with the irregular circle of the anemones.

A plant which puts off changing its leaves until later, and now comes out in bloom, is the tree ivy; and tiny though the flowers are, their greenish-yellow miniature wreaths have considerable decorative value. I have used it with Japanese anemones for a charming table decoration, formed with the aid of a basket of Austrian white and coloured china, letting the anemones rise some inches above their bed of ivy.

Michaelmas daisies—of which there are about seventy different species, all white or purple, but varying considerably in size—are both common and hardy, therefore a great resource just now. They mix agreeably among themselves, and the smallest of all, growing in fine lace-like sprays, is a softening companion to many other bolder blossoms. Faded leaves, as well as their own, are the best accompaniment for all the various kinds, and with the purple-yellow foliage makes a pleasant contrast.

For a dinner-party this month I have used six silver decanter-stands, each holding a fine spray of red rhododendron foliage and some mignonette. These were placed on each side of the middle of the table; while in the squares thus formed, and at each end of the plan, were tall glasses containing large yellow and white cactus dahlias and some sprays of brown beech. Between the two middle decanter-stands was a silver cake-basket, holding for the occasion a group of grapes, bananas, and pears, laid on red vine leaves; between the others two large lamps with yellow shades. To each guest was placed a very small glass, containing a white or yellow (alternately) single dahlia, one or two beech leaves, and a spray of mignonette. This cost about five shillings (everything being bought in London), but might be carried out less expensively by substituting marguerites for the dahlias; or, if these flowers were over, chrysanthemums could take their place, one large one being sufficient for each centre glass. The decanter-stands could of course be replaced by finger-bowls, or celadon pots about their size, to be bought at Liberty's and similar shops at ninepence each, and very useful generally for holding flowers, and an ordinary fruit-dish can take the place of the basket.

On another occasion, when the party was small, and only one lamp used, that having a body of celadon-coloured china, I had two Worcester vases of the same colour and white, filled with red oak and yellow and white marguerites, one towards each end of the table; while nearer the lamp, opposite its four corners, were the little Liberty pots I mentioned above, containing mignonette and fine sprays of the oak. That cost a shilling altogether, and looked very pretty. White phlox, or *Nicotiana affinis* (sweetly-scented tobacco plant) might have taken the place of the marguerites.

In many gardens, blue as well as yellow and white marguerites are grown plentifully, and the three flowers are very pretty, together with some light grass in slender glasses.

White asters look very well in low bowls or baskets with red barberry leaves and mignonette, while the hardy shrub fuchsia may droop over the edges.

I may explain here that I much prefer mignonette or asparagus, with English garden flowers, to the more fragile maidenhair fern, which not only fades quickly in the heat of a room, but seems to me a congenial companion only to delicate orchids or other exotics.

The tuberous begonias, with their bright red, white, and yellow flowers, are pretty for the table in low saucers or troughs, and need no accompaniment but their own quaintly-

MAY be either very rich or very poor in varieties of flowers, according to the weather. If this has continued warm, all the late summer flowers—geraniums, fuchsias, lancifolium lilies, tobacco plants, begonias, asters, sunflowers, dahlias, phlox, hollyhocks, and everlasting peas—will be still in good bloom; but if night frosts have set in, we must rely for cut flowers chiefly on chrysanthemums, Japanese anemones, Michaelmas daisies, and gladioli, all of which are coming in rather than going out. Wild flowers, save for heather and gorse, are scarce; but their place is well supplied by the rich and varied colours of the leaves just about to fall, and the berries, now nearly all ripe. In fact, for country girls these form, for a few weeks, an inexhaustible mine of colour, which gives even more oppor-



shaped leaves. Care must be taken, however, not to mix the shades of red and pink, which do not harmonise.

Geraniums, fuchsias, sunflowers, lilies, and gladioli are less suited for table decoration than for making large groups with the aid of dark foliage, preferably green, in halls or sitting-rooms.

On a low stool or table in the drawing-room an old ginger jar of good colour generally looks well, and is useful for holding the bright foliage and tall graceful flower-heads of which such effective ornaments can be made. Among other mixtures, I would suggest *Nicotiana affinis*, or gladioli, with beech foliage; hemlock, copper-beech, and silver birch, which now turns golden on one side of its leaves; silver birch and pine; bracken and mountain ash; fern leaves and heather.

Every modern drawing-room contains some growing plants in pots, and as long as they are well attended to they are most beautiful ornaments, especially palms, dracænas, aspidistras, and aralias, which seem able to resist the evil influence of gas. Ferns are less long-suffering, and for anyone who has no greenhouse to act as infirmary for delicate plants they are not profitable purchases; nor are plants in bloom, which being generally highly forced before sale, require very careful treatment if they are to live after the bloom is over. Such foliage plants as palms, however, require very little care; only a moderate amount of watering, the leaves lightly dusting every day, and sponging with lukewarm water every week, or oftener if much gas is burnt in the room. In the winter the water given them should be slightly warm, and at no time icy cold,

while in the summer they are grateful for being stood for an hour or so on a balcony or window-sill in a soft rain. They like sunshine, but will do with very little; hence are useful for corners or northern windows, but should on no account stand continually in a draught.

Flower-pots of artistic colours can be now bought in such cheap ware that there is no need to use those terrible and expensive vessels which were fashionable years ago, and still survive in some houses, usually of white or rose-pink china, with gaudy flowers or landscapes painted on them. When buying flower-pots, a good deal of thought should be given to the general colouring of the room, and especially to the wall-paper. If this be dark, our pots should be bright, and foliage plants should be placed out in the room and detached from the shade of the wall by light coloured fans and screens. If it be light, the reverse, of course, holds good.

Besides Doulton and cheaper pots, I have for my palms a large copper water-pail, such as Italian peasants use, which will take a very large pot. Then for very small ferns punch-bowls and old china milk-jugs and sugar-basins are pretty. Many people would object, perhaps, to use their old china in this way, and many have none to use; and for my own part, I see nothing offensive in an ordinary red flower-pot standing on a nicely coloured plate or saucer, provided that it is thoroughly scoured, and *not* painted. A good way of protecting the china from injury by the rougher ware is to put between them a round piece of thin oilcloth or linoleum.

The bright crêpe papers which are now sold for covering ordinary flower-pots are useful, but like the past fashion of silk scarves, may be easily overdone. One is generally enough in a room, and should be of such a colour that it will draw attention to, and not overpower, the more delicate tints of the plant. The most successful of these that I have seen was an orange one, decorating the pot containing a grape-hyacinth, with whose purple and pale-green tints it made a very delightful harmony. I may add that all the bright tones in the room were yellow, and the cut flowers used in its decoration were marguerites and Michaelmas daisies.

Silk bags seem to me to be altogether in bad taste, if they are used for this purpose, the same rule should be studied with regard to them. On the whole, plants in pots are not suitable for table decoration, their bulk interrupting people's views of one another. Besides, their use involves more monotony than cut flowers; but the first objection does not apply to low-growing plants, like some ferns, and indeed these often make a beautiful centre for small posies of wild flowers; but when I dine at a table whose floral decorations consist mainly of heavy china pots, containing heaths or other shrubby plants, I suspect that the hostess either intends her guests on opposite sides to remain strangers, or thinks such matters altogether beneath her notice.

For the quietest home dinner, or the smartest party, one rule should always be observed—to let the mass of the flowers be either below or above the level of the diners' heads, so that general conversation may be carried on without that uncomfortable dodging about otherwise necessary.

