Hints for Christmas Decorations

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

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

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

Amongst the many methods adopted, the following will be found the easiest: Ivy berries or dried peas dyed red (a sixpenny bottle of dye will be sufficient for a very large quantity); or putty, rolled into little balls and coloured...
either in the same way or in a solution of sealing-wax mixed with spirits of wine; or red wax, to be bought at an oil shop, and shaped into berries, after slightly softening before the fire. There are many different worm salted berries to be had in the autumn, which, by soaking in strong salt and water, will keep till Christmas time, and may well pass for holly. And, lastly, evergreen artificial holly is sold in bunches very cheaply at all toy shops.

With all this choice at our disposal and a little judicious management a great deal can be done with a few of the commonest evergreens; a room may be made to look very pretty every day. For instance, little holly, ivy, and holly; but any other wires that may be available will be useful in giving a variety of effect; amongst them may be mentioned the box, arbor vitae, bay, variegated holly, ivy, and laurustinus.

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

The decorator must not fail to provide herself with the necessary implements—string, wire, and strong glue.

The effect of snow is easily obtained, and gives a very reasonable air to the decorations.

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

Trees sparkling with hoar frost are always a lovely sight in winter, and this effect of frost or rime can easily be procured by artificial means. A mixture of gum and gum water, warm, frosted glass, ready crushed, is sold; but a much less expensive contrivance is to pound roughly, or crush with a garden roller, any piece of glass, such as old bottles, which have been saved up during the summer for this purpose. Cardboard letters, for mottoes, can be crystallised in the same way, and look well on a background of leaves or coloured flannel.

Another method of crystallising, which is more used for some purposes, is to dip the objects in a mixture of gum water. On one side of a leaf of alburn, pour a quart of boiling water. Whilst still warm, suspend the leaves in it by a string tied to an angle, and leave them there in for twenty-four hours, and then hang them up till dry. Large and beautiful crystals are formed, but the effect is less like real frost and snow than the other means. If a wreath or festoon is to be frozen, it must be made up first, and then immersed in the alburn, as it is impossible to handle it much afterwards, without, breaking off the crystals.

Everlasting flowers are very useful indeed in adding colour to our devices. If a suitable natural colour cannot be obtained, they should be may be easily dyed; red, violet, or yellow being the most useful colours. Mixed with the green in wreaths and garlands, or sewn thickly on cardboards for letters, these are very effective. Grasses dyed in the same way will also be useful, particularly those splendid heads of Pampas grass. These latter, dyed crimson, are most beautiful objects.

If one has time and patience to make a number of ornaments, letters which were used so much for little picture frames a year or two ago, are very pretty and useful, and abundant that they will serve for years, with care. Artificial berries and variegated holly are much used in church decorations as at a little distance they look exactly like carved oak.

Large ones, made of red paper, are very handsome. They are painted with either of yew, or dark green leaves, while small ones, creamy white, may well pass for ivory, and their use is almost endless, and they will quite repay one's trouble. The way to make them is too well known to need description here, but the various colours, especially red, are very seen, though most effective.

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

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

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

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

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

Red is the favourite colour for the background of mottoes and scrolls; Turkey twill, muslin, or any other material painted as garnished lining, being generally employed for the purpose. When the position is too high up for close inspection, coloured paper does equally well.

Cheese cloth as an anchor, shield, or swags may be used for further ornamentation. Let it be stitched on in tucks, and afterwards arranged till the surface looks uniformly covered. Letters of bright everlastings or small red rossettes on a background of moss are very pretty. The Cape silver leaves, too, are very handsome. The walls of the Prince Imperial's tomb at Chantilly, look charming laid on bright green moss, but, as they are rather expensive, they should be reserved for small wreaths or mottoes in a conspicuous position.

Before beginning to decorate it is well to have a plan in one's mind, more or less natural, for the general arrangement. In forming this design, be careful not to over do it, or the result will be a heavy and crowded effect, which is anything but beautiful. A little more of this kind of work means much more pleasure than an excessive amount.

Wreaths and garlands in a room should not be too thick, but a light, graceful effect must be aimed at. In making of these, it should always be two persons at work together.

Having cut the rope to the required length, one person can hold it and bind on the twigs which the other arranges and hands to her if there is only one person, she has constantly to lay down the rope while she seeks out suitable pieces, which not only hinders her very much, but probably ruins the symmetry of the wreath. For churches and public rooms a number of large, rough wreaths and garlands are usually required for adorning pillars and windows; these are of the last, as the divits from the small wreaths and more delicate devices will do for them. They should be made on stout rope, and the bunches of green tied round it with string.

If it is wished to ornament a pier glass or other article of furniture likely to be injured by water, a sheet of wood should be obtained to fit the top or back, to which all the decorations are fixed, thus preventing their contact with the gilt frame or glass. If they are for Epson frosted glass, nothing is better suited, as these pretty could then be laid on to this bath, as their reflection in the mirror is exceedingly pretty; these should be quite separate, as they are getting longer towards each side, till the outside ones should be long enough to reach to the bottom of the frame.

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

In decorating a chandelier, only light materials should be chosen, and few of those having a weight is important. The work should be cast, besides casting an unpleasant shadow. A graceful effect may be obtained by twisting threads of wax round the stem of the chandelier a very slight wreath of ivy, made of wire, and having a few of the leaves frosted.

If there is a large space of bare walls, these may be made, light enough to be affixed with strong paste, and hang it down, besides casting an unpleasant shadow. A graceful effect may be obtained by twisting threads of wax round the stem of the chandelier a very slight wreath of ivy, made of wire, and having a few of the leaves frosted.
THAT AGGRAVATING SCHOOL GIRL.

By the Author of "Wild Kathleens."

CHAPTER XII.

AN HOUR IN JOSEPHINE'S STUDY.

"Hi! Rosie, Rosie, I can't understand it. It is no good; my head won't take it in at all."

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

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

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

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

"Do you dislike my being here?"

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

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

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

"I don't think it is a dull little room," was the answer, "with you and your books in it. And, Josie, I am going to ask you a favour. I want to know if you will let me try to—" and the colour deepened in fearless Helen's cheeks, as she spoke, with something before poor, stupid, Josephine, who gazed at the phenomenon in speechless amazement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh! you don't know how comfortable it is," was the heartfelt answer. "I was only thinking, the other day, that perhaps I never should be able to cry any more. I seemed to have grown too dull and heavy; Josephine is just it," exclaimed Helen Edison, suddenly recovering her spirits and animation when she found that her offer had, after all, been balm rather than a wound. "That is just it, Josephine. You are not really dull and heavy; but you have been growing dull and heavy, yes—that is the very thing I have been expecting."

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

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

"Don't believe it," was the short contraction, accompanied by a shake of the curvy head, and a smile. "You came to school after a life in India and a lot of illnesses, with no education: and you and the folks here set to work at once to put into your brain babies' learning, and children's learning, and girls' learning, and a lot of finishing elegancies," as my nurse calls them, all at once. And I think you have all been just as wise as if you had put a freezing person into a doubly-heated hothouse, and kept on raising the temperature. First of all, the freezing creature would have suffered a horrible pain, as you did when you suddenly found how ignorant you were. He would have gradually got suffocated past all feeling, and ended by dying, as your wish to learn will end by dying, if you go on trying to do impossibilities, and will, to your disappointment, that they won't be mastered. And there now! There's a long speech for you; but I mean it every bit, and I've been thinking it out to say to you ever so many days past."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"None," answered Josephine, her wan face again overspreading with an expression of despair, which was started away before it could grow very definite by Helen's quick, clear voice retorsing coldly.

"No, I should just think not indeed. Nine months ago, you have told me yourself, you had forgotten even a little of the new German you had never looked at. Arithmetic the doctors had never let you touch, and if they could see you now I am certain they would continue saying, by the by, was it the Rule of Three rules?

(See page 174.)