



LAST Christmas we made our decorations on a much more elaborate scale than formerly. All the members of our family were to be united, including our sailor-boy; two uncles, an aunt, and some cousins were also to make an addition. We therefore determined that we would spare no pains to make their visit enjoyable, and made arrangements—subject to circumstances—for the season to be one of consecutive “felicities.” Hence, our home decorations were to be superfine. In the hope that my account will prove practically helpful and suggestive to others, I will explain how we very successfully transformed the appearance of the interior of our “modest mansion.”

First, however, I must own that during the autumn time our eyes and hands had industriously exerted themselves in fields, lanes, and woods, for materials. I commend this plan to those who love to see their homes wear a Christmas-like aspect; and, besides, it is very pleasant to be ever on the look-out for nature’s wealth.

Having collected a goodly store of material, one person—the elder sister—was in our case elected superintendent, and by her directions we pursued our work orderly and well, no incongruities ensuing. Many leaders spoil effect. I advise that when any decorative project is intended, the leader be elected a reasonable time in advance, so that she may make her plans and allow them to mature. It is advisable for a leader to write out a list of purposed schemes beforehand; having a programme for reference, all may glide smoothly. Five of us, besides Enid, our superintendent, helped to decorate last year. A special

task (say a motto, or bordering) was assigned to the responsibility of each; and then, with concentrated thoughts, we strove to emulate each other. Our work was apportioned out more than a week before Christmas, a spare room was devoted to our accumulated paraphernalia, and there in leisure moments we pursued our “labour of love.” On difficulties arising, we always referred to Enid. We had dining-room and sitting-room—both comparatively large places—to specially decorate. We expended the more care on the latter.

Round the top of the room, close under the ceiling, ran the words—

“Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles to-day,
To-morrow will be dying.”

The first line occupied the wall over the window; the second was over the fireplace, and so on, the final line being over the door. We used crimson paper—twelve inches deep—for the background, and white jeweller’s cotton for the letters, which were first cut out in stout paper, then covered with the cotton. Our letters were plainly and clearly designed, and were not “fancy” ones. This is a first essential in mottoes. In cutting out letters, a rule and measure should be well used, for it quite ruins effect if they are not uniform in height. For bordering, we made on broad black tape long wreaths of mixed material—box, bay, tiny bits of holly, oats, grasses, everlasting flowers, cotton grass, &c. These were comparatively slight wreaths, as thick and heavy ones might have hidden our beautiful words in some degree not desired. Our work, being light, was fastened on the walls at each edge of the crimson paper, with pins—which are less injurious to paper than tacks. A few tacks only as mainstays were used. Enid the tasty undertook the mantel-piece. She made a charming hanging for it, of stiff calico, covered luxuriously on the outer side with white wadding. The sentence it bore was “A HUNDRED THOUSAND WELCOMES.” The letters were sweetly pretty, being made on cardboard by layers of tapioca, dyed red (using Judson’s dye) to resemble coral. The letters needed three layers, and were each

time left till the gum had quite dried. The border was carefully made with mixed mosses and lichens, arranged somewhat unevenly. Along the lower border, a few fern-fronds, dried grasses and flowers, and silver leaves—from Table Mountain—were arranged as though growing up from behind the lichen boundary. All had previously been pressed and dried, after the manner of preserving for a herbarium, and were kept upright by means of a few stitches. As our mantel-piece was rather high, the heat of the fire was quite harmless. A scattering of cotton grass was finally distributed about the afore-mentioned edging. Above the mantel-piece hung a pier-glass, at either side of which some long sprays of trailing ivy were placed. Some truant pieces reflected in the mirror enhanced the beauty. From the summit of the glass a fox's head (stuffed) snarled down, and the expedient of sticking a spray of holly and mistletoe with a few suspicious barn-yard feathers in Reynard's mouth was hit upon. At the top of the glass, bulrushes, teasel-heads, oats, thorn-apple capsules, and pampas grass were also arranged, together with a little holly. The mantel-piece held some busts and statuettes, upon which we tied jeweller's cotton where snow might be supposed to rest. The entire shelf was treated in this way, and we pulled our artificial snow into natural likeness, some pieces drooping over our lambrequin. The cotton grass in the valence-border was a very good imitation of snow-flakes, and looked well in conjunction with the work above it.

For several large pictures we made wreaths from our autumn gatherings, using wire (which, owing to its bending properties, is so useful for pictures and such-like articles) to work upon. Our wreathing rested on the top ledges of pictures without further adjustment. We bordered two pictures with bright-berried holly, after frosting it with Epsom salts (fearing crushed glass, on account of children's feet); we intermingled cotton grass with the holly. The crystallisation was lovely, and the snow-flakes—cotton grass—against the dark holly perfect in effect. We composed six little bannerettes to hang in the too neglected places. One bearing our father's monogram was placed on the wall on one side of the pier-glass, and another bearing mother's on the other side. They quite matched. In making them, we cut cardboard the desired shape and size (some good hints may be gained by procuring a printed sheet of the banners and flags extant), and covered it with crimson cloth. All our bannerettes were covered alike. The monograms were fastened in the centre, after we had made the letters separately in different colours, gold and white. We gleaned some good straws from a stack-yard for the frame, lengthy ones to edge the entire sides first, and then made little straw stars on the top of these, at equal distances apart. The two remaining bannerettes bore unique Christmas cards, which were framed prettily with cotton grass before fixing. These banners were edged with frosted holly.

We inlaid our window-ledge—an old-fashioned thing—with moss, and afterwards partially embedded

a few tiny pots of cut flowers with pleasing effect. Our Christmas roses were much admired.

We decorated the dining-room but slightly. "A HAPPY CHRISTMAS" was the motto we made for the mantel-piece, using tiny pink everlasting flowers for the letters, white wadding for the background, and mixed evergreens for the border. On the mantel-piece we arranged berried holly, &c., in lustres and vases. For the picture-framing we wove on wire some slight greenery of mixed evergreens crystallised with crushed glass. The wreathing was arranged to only border each picture at the top, and part way down each side, but we made some to wind round the hanging cards. In each corner of the room, about half-way up, we fixed a picture, each being completely environed with holly and cotton grass. The subjects were entitled, "The Mistletoe Bough," from Sir Roger de Coverley; "Arrival of Santa Claus;" "Christmas in the Fifteenth Century," boar's head predominating; and "Christmas in the Nineteenth Century," chief fare, plum-pudding. Over the room-door rested a scroll, on which one of us had illuminated, "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN." This was enclosed within a border of holly-leaves, one leaf-point laid over the base of another, and two rows of leaves placed side by side, as a single row looks too scanty. (*Three* rows of leaves even might be an improvement.) The scroll and bordering were tacked on laths, the corners crossing like an Oxford frame.

We did little more; all the cut flowers we could muster were fitted into suitable places, as well as pot plants, as we needed them. Enid made a motto to surmount the sitting-room door in the hall; it was another Shakspearian scrap, "PRAY YOU, WALK IN," made of tinfoil letters on a dark fawn-coloured paper ground, and edged with dried green moss, in which at equal distances a small sprig of berried holly was secured. Enid's thoughts were ever capital ones, and a more appropriate prelude to her "Hundred thousand welcomes" than the hall invitation, "Pray you, walk in," it would be difficult to suggest. Around the socket inside our hall-lamp, lichens and holly-berries were placed, making it pretty when lighted.

Nothing further remains for me to tell, except that when *we* had folded our arms, judging our work to be completed, Enid was exercising a piquette in the kitchenery regions, distributing evergreens in likely places; "for," said she, "such an important part of the house shall *not* be slighted." Let it not be thought that our work was executed in a day. We commenced many little things fully a fortnight before Christmas, leaving, of necessity, the more perishable materials until last. I strongly advocate "taking Time by the forelock" in decorations for Yuletide, for nothing is so annoying as to have the prospect of much work at the last moment, say on Christmas Eve, when a hundred and one little duties are sure to require attention. If our tasks master us, do we not feel provoked? Then let us order our affairs well, so that we may wear smooth and happy faces when ushering in that glad festival, our Christmas Day.