

HOW TO SET OUT A CHRISTMAS-TREE.



(Drawn by MARY L. GOW.)

DRESSING THE CHRISTMAS-TREE.



A CHRISTMAS-TREE may be made into a most effective and pleasure-giving object, if thought and care be lavished on its preparation. All such projects need careful contemplation beforehand. I hope in this paper to give some practical suggestions, culled from experience, as to how a Christmas-tree may be prepared. And, if many of my readers would exercise their brain-powers, and cultivate the habit of observation at every turn, jotting down notes of utility, who shall say what happy thoughts would come to light? The size of a Christmas-tree, as well as its "set-out,"

must be in unison with its object: a large tree for a school or similar gathering, a somewhat smaller one for a family party. But, remembering that it is customary in many families to annually have "a tree" on Christmas Day, one of comparatively goodly proportions is so handsome, and may, by means of numerous readily-made and pretty ornamentations, have its well-fruited appearance increased, that one need not be afraid of any incongruities if one has but a limited number of presents for its branches. In addition to the gifts exchanged in a family, flags, bannerettes, sweetmeats, nuts, fruit, &c. &c., may be arranged and fastened up with advantage in many

charming ways—ways which any ingenious person will easily devise. There are also the lovely cards of the season which, placed in their respective directed envelopes, make capital additions; and this is a delightful mode of exchanging Christmas love and wishes by members of one family, and spares the unnecessary cost of postage.

If a family "tree" be comparatively large, it may answer admirably for a forthcoming occasion; for instance, young folks now-a-days are so thoughtful for their poorer brethren, that if a large party for such be purposed, the tree in question may be brought forth to receive a second dressing up. It may be first deluged with water from a watering-can, left to drain partly dry, and finished with a good sprinkling of flour from a dredger, and thus made to resemble a snow-covered plant.

In tendering a few practical words on the setting out of a Christmas-tree I shall choose a definite course—that of explaining how the last tree I was a helper in connection with, was brought to be a thorough success. To tell the details of its preparation will be carrying out the object of this article, but I shall attempt to make our plan as capable of being modified as possible, remembering always that circumstances considerably differ. Our party was for a lively band of youngsters, and was to be held in a rather spacious school-room, at one end of which we composed a truly charming bit of scenery. The same plan might be adopted in *any* large room—or where two rooms may be thrown open into one by means of partition doors—by removing the furniture at one end. We worked as follows:—We got two gentlemen friends to undertake the erection of a temporary platform right across the end of the room, and excellently they did it. My readers will have seen the platforms put up for a village entertainment or concert; it was such an one. Of course a platform might be dispensed with, but if so, the tree should be raised on something. Our platform was about six yards by eight. We had the good fortune to have a very large mirror lent us, and this we hung on the wall exactly behind the spot destined for the Christmas-tree. When lighted up the reflection splendidly enhanced the richness and beauty of our scene. Could we have procured them, a similar glass on each side wall would have been even more effective.

I very strongly recommend the use of mirrors in decorative objects, for do they not *double* stationary beauty? We collected together several large pictures of Christmas subjects, and framed them with bright berried holly fastened to laths, which were crossed like Oxford frames. With care this may be done so as to leave the pictures uninjured and useful for another time. Such illustrations as the illustrated weekly papers sometimes give are useful. I need not add that the holly frame needs to be bold in design—not too delicately wrought. Our platform itself was carpeted with a borrowed floorcloth, the pattern of which was in imitation of oak boards, and though its size was barely sufficient to cover the entire board-work, we hit upon the capital expedient of forming an uneven rustic arrangement all round the edge close to

the walls. This we composed of a few large logs, rough tree-roots (as used for rockeries), a flower-stand of "virgin cork," a collection of various evergreens, some bracken ferns, yellowed and beautified by Winter's hand, a couple of little fir-trees in pots, all being dusted over with flour, to resemble a recently-fallen scud of snow. Two rustic garden arm-chairs and a similar companion table were each fitted into a suitable place, and with a few finishing touches of evergreens our scene was all that could be desired. Some seasons (such as last, which was a winter after a glorious summer), those who live in or near the country can find as late as December some wreaths of the Black Bryony covered with their scarlet berries, and these may be used up the sides of logs, and twined round many things with excellent effect. In the centre of our table stood a rustic flower-pot, wherein we placed a lighted lamp, making the lower part of it thus match with its surroundings. A few wax candles were provided with appropriate standing-places round our scenic arrangement.

At the front of the platform we remedied the unsightly appearance by composing a barrier of towel-airers, binding each side and stave with dried moss, and inserting trailing wreaths of ivy and bunches of everlasting flowers here and there, tying all on with green string. Bryony wreaths and berries might be well introduced with the moss. I would also remark, in passing, that moss should be picked in dry weather, when it is at its best, and stored in a hamper in an attic, or any dry place, so as to be in readiness for Yuletide or other decorations in winter. It keeps excellently. About a yard (the width of one towel-airer) from each side wall we left an opening and erected two steps up to the platform, thus having the way of ingress on one side of the tree, and that of egress on the other. When the little recipients of the tree's fruit mounted to the left they each walked round the tree, through our winter scene, and, descending the steps on the right-hand side, joined their happy companions in the lower and more roomy part of the room. In front of our barrier of towel-airers we arranged a row of plants in pots, principally ferns and shrubs, hiding each pot with a rustic cover. Thus all was completed except the decoration of our "centre-piece"—the Christmas-tree itself.

It was a large well-shaped fir, firmly planted in a large flower-pot (or a cement barrel partly sawn off would do) which, in its turn, was set inside a square tea-chest ornamented prettily by being first papered over with white, and then having strips of crimson paper, about two or three inches in width, pasted perpendicularly all round at equal distances. A crimson bordering was also fastened round the top. The inside of the chest was well packed up, and a layer of moss neatly arranged round the trunk of the tree. I need scarcely say that the tree is, of course, set on the platform *before* the front barrier is completed.

To load the tree with its "fruit" came last—a work of less trouble, though needing thought and consideration. We put the candles on first—about four dozen, I think. A great many people now-a-days wisely

possess the capital little candlesticks which are made to clasp the branches of a tree without any trouble of fixing. In our case two or three families "clubbed together" and lent theirs. For candles, nothing can beat the well-known little coloured wax tapers, though I must add that on a large tree several Chinese lanterns do not detract from its beauty—rather the reverse. Next, a collection of tastily-made flags and banners—the work of our brothers—was forthcoming. They had gained many hints in making them from a little sheet of "Flags of all Nations," sold everywhere. Many of the mottoes and designs were modified, and some skilful work achieved solely with coloured paper, twigs, wire, and gum. Flags were fastened to the higher branches of the tree, a huge golden star blazing near the summit, and the bannerettes were hung on the lower boughs with tasty narrow ribbon strings. Similar ribbon we also used for tying up some parcels, though a ball of dainty string, such as chemists use, will do very well.

Besides the above-mentioned articles, a wealth of sweets was forthcoming. *No* Christmas-tree could possibly be successful without "goodies," and much might be said as to the ways of fastening up sweets in their several packages; but so many pretty methods are well known that I need not give directions. With white paper and deft fingers alone, some wonderful little parcels may be turned out. In our case we stitched together little bags of white spotted muslin to hold them; these looked exceedingly nice when filled with white, pink, and other "comfits" and those sweets that have almond and caraway kernels, and are very wholesome. We wrapped Brazil nuts up separately in tinfoil paper, and suspended them on the branches with string or gimp. Some boxes of bon-bons were laid at the root of the tree, on the moss, until wanted. Some people put apples and oranges on a Christmas-tree; but they are almost too heavy. We laid our fruit in two large, shallow, fancy baskets, and placed them near our rustic table. And now to come to the most important articles. Ours were first brought in a large box, un-

packed, and spread upon the table. They had been made quite ready to fix on the tree beforehand. Articles of needlework, books, cards, and anything that might be irretrievably injured by grease or any mishap were neatly wrapped in white paper parcels tied with pink or blue ribbon, and had a Christmas card slipped underneath to brighten up the exterior. Sometimes a tiny spray of mistletoe—just a leaf and a berry or two may be fastened to such parcels to be, perchance, of utility to some one finding it in close proximity to some unconscious damsel. All heavy articles should be fastened to the stoutest branches, on the *lower* part of the tree; on no account put them at the summit or in a frail part.

When the loading of the tree is quite finished, the candles may be lighted *just before* the party enters the room, all "litter" having been cleared away. If any taper should catch a branch of the tree the ignition must be extinguished instantly, therefore some friend should be asked to undertake the pleasant responsibility of keeping an eye on the lights.

I have attempted herein to give my few suggestions, but let it not be thought that all this work mentioned can be done by one person in a short time. "Many hands make light work," and for days beforehand we were busied with all possible preparations. We engaged a collected band of workers, one being at the head as director. Each of us then took a definite responsibility, and all moved pleasantly. There is nothing like *method* in an undertaking of this sort, and without it such an affair is likely to be a failure.

Country residents may find my paper more useful than town dwellers; but it would be pleasant if the latter would utilise their walks and country excursions in seeking and treasuring up Nature's wealth—so valuable to the decorator.

The effect of the scenic work described in this paper might be very considerably heightened, if those who "officiate" at the Christmas-tree were to assume characters, such as Santa Claus, Father Christmas, King Snow, Jack Frost, &c., arranging their costumes accordingly.

E. E. A.



MODEL MENU FOR DECEMBER.

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Menu. | |
| Tomatoes and Sardines. | |
| — | |
| Soup Brunoise. | |
| — | |
| Cutlets of Cod à la Genoise (or with Genoese Sauce). | |
| — | |
| Turkey Poultry. | |
| — | |
| Turnips. | Potato Snow. |
| — | |
| Plum Pudding. | Castle Puddings. |
| — | |
| Cheese. | |
| — | |

At this time of year we are accustomed to think that we ought to have tolerably substantial dinners to fortify us against the cold and dreariness of winter. The spirit of the season

is also somewhat festive. In December friends drop in to dinner almost as a matter of course; and it is particularly desirable that we should give them not only a hearty welcome, but acceptable fare. Let us, then, see what can be done; and while studying our menu, let us remember that, concerning a dinner, we may say of the food what a great vocalist once said of the human voice in singing: "It is a detail. The manner of its presentation is everything."

Tomatoes and Sardines.—A very tasty and acceptable appetiser may be made of the fillets of sardines freed from skin and bone, and arranged upon a slice of tomato laid upon a little piece of toasted crumb of bread about two inches in diameter. This savoury can be served either hot or cold. If it were preferred hot, the rounds would need to be put in a hot

oven for two or three minutes. One sardine would furnish fillets for two *hors d'œuvres*. The tomato would have to be cut with a sharp knife into slices a quarter of an inch thick. Little sprigs of parsley might be employed as a garnish.

Soup Brunoise is simply the name given in these days to clear, pale soup, in which are floating vegetables cut either into dice or into small round balls of the size of peas. It is a very pretty soup, especially when the vegetables employed for making the balls are of different colours. Thus, white balls can be composed of turnip, yellow balls of carrot; and if a spoonful of preserved green peas can be added, they will be a valuable addition, although we can do without them if more convenient. The balls are most readily formed