

WOMEN AND THEIR WORK.

THE LADY FLORIST.

"In all places then, and in all seasons,
Flowers expand their bright and soul-like wings,
Teaching us by most persuasive reasons,
How akin they are to human things;
And with child-like credulous affection,
We behold their tender buds expand;
Emblem of our own general resurrection,
Emblem of the bright and better land."

So sang the poet Longfellow of those living blossoms, which he called in sweet poetic parlance "the stars of the earth." But this is a mercenary age, so now to regard flowers from a mercenary and not a sentimental point of view. They are the fashion to-day. Strange indeed it could ever have been otherwise, but fifty years ago they were under the bane of being considered "messy," and were often forbidden the sacred drawing-room. But now flowers are considered as much a necessity as music in a ball-room, whilst the dinner table is often transformed into a small garden, where the most gorgeous blossoms vie with each other in beauty and grace, whilst lading the air with sweet perfume. Demand creates supply, and florist shops have quadrupled of late years. "Sweets to the sweet," says the old proverb, and therefore it is that the fragrant flowers seem ever peculiarly the property of "the fair sex." Some of the best known florists' depots are kept by women. To name one or two, there is famous Mrs. Green, of Crawford Street; Mdme. Francoise, of Oxford Street; and Madame Josephine, of Lower Grosvenor Street. Lady assistants are usually engaged when young, generally give a year's time at least, and often also a small premium. The florist is by no means the easy business many imagine, for there is much to learn, and delicate, light fingers are needed, as well as immense taste in arrangement and a true eye in colour. Both the wiring and gumming of flowers is difficult until practice makes perfect. But to those who have a real love of and also the art for arranging the beautiful blossoms which Nature sends "to whisper hope to man," this business will prove profitable as well as eminently pleasant. It has an increasing fascination for the worker, whose sense of beauty is refreshed as she tastefully arranges her fair materials, or wreathes them into wreaths and crosses—wreaths and crosses to be, alas, too soon crushed beneath the falling earth—or else designs lovely "novelties," such as the "Floral Christmas Hamper" which so charmed their recipients a Yule-tide or so ago. The salary for trained assistants varies from fifteen shillings to twenty-five shillings per week; for forewomen, from £2; and the trade is fortunately not, like so

many, as yet overstocked, and forms, therefore, a good opening for artistic young ladies.

PROFESSIONAL florists send out their assistants for the decoration of ball-rooms and dining tables, &c.; but ladies have also started independently in the "floral decoration line" for themselves, and have obtained many engagements. They are usually well paid, besides having, in many cases, the advantage of choosing their own florist depots, where they can often make extremely profitable bargains. Of course it is above all things necessary for the lady decorator to become known, and to become known one must be recommended, and to be recommended one must excel. "I was satisfied" is the best of testimonials. But for those with the talent and deftness necessary to arrange flowers well, this may prove, if a novel, yet also a successful way of "turning an honest penny."

MISS NYSTROM and Miss Chapman have opened a Slöyd school at the Vassall Road Institute, Brixton. So far their work has proved very successful, many of their pupils exhibiting capital specimens at an exhibition lately held. I wish all success to this new school, for I trust the Slöyd system will soon become, not the exception, but the rule, in all schools, and especially Board schools. The training of little fingers is as necessary as the training of little minds, especially for those who must of necessity learn to be independent, and carpentering is not to be despised even by girls. These pleasant lessons will also cause school not to be so dreaded by the youngsters, with many of whom now the inspector takes the place of the once dreaded Boney or the famous "black man" myth with which bad boys and girls used to be threatened in days of yore.

MAYBE it is well, however, that the children should have a real man to fear, for, alas! the Educational Clauses are rapidly driving the charming fairies and awful yet fascinating genii of our youth into "the great company of things that have been." Especially is this the case with the children of the middle class and poor—those mites who become little men and women almost before they can walk. I was once teaching a class of such children—children in the third standard, whose ages varied from five to eight years. "Tell us a story, please," they cry. "If you are very good," I answer. They were very good, at least in their own opinion; so I commenced the promised story with:—"It was the evening hour, and the fairies were abroad. The sun had gone to bed in a mass of rosy clouds and darkness." "Teacher," interrupted a little piping voice, "the sun never goes to bed; at night it is shining in Australia."

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