ABOUT THE HOUSE.

TO A MAIDEN-HAIR FERN.

Where sparkles longest dews of morn
Deep in the shade of rocky vales,
Where purling brooks and fountains run,
Thou wav'st aloft thy plumy sails
To gentle, murmuring summer gales,
Thou modest princess of the dell.
When Frost doth turn thy maiden hair
To gold, thou'rt still divinely fair,
Enchanted by a magic spell.

SIMPLE CONVENIENCES.

Often times housekeepers do without things that are really necessary to make their work lighter, just because money is scarce, and it does not occur to them to substitute simple contrivances for the things they cannot afford to buy.

At any hardware store can be procured a straight, smooth nail keg, such as wire nails come in. Usually these are given away—will not cost over ten cents if bought—and with a candy pail cover to use for lid make an excellent bread box, the cover serving as cutting board as well. If one prefers tin to wood a large lard can may be procured at any grocery for ten cents, that is just as good for keeping bread or cake as a regular box made for the purpose, costing one dollar or more.

Grocers are glad to give away the inner covering of these lard cans, and they are useful for so many things in the kitchen. Being simply a sheet of tin twelve inches in diameter, with a pressed edge, we consider them superior to a meat board on which to pound steak or dress a fish or fowl, as they are more easily kept clean. They are fine to use for kneading bread or pastry, though not large enough to roll it out on, and are just the thing to bake cookies on. When baking a layer cake, we prefer one of them to anything we ever used to build the cake on, as it is large, smooth and level, and the cake will not stick to it.

A pie-box can easily be made from two small boxes obtained at the grocers. In one put small cleats on one side, about three inches apart, and on the other make shelves to put in on the cleats. Each shelf will hold a pie, and the entire box takes but little more room than one pie on the pantry shelf. The box can be fastened to the wall by means of nails or screws, if desired, and thus be entirely out of the way. A curtain of dark, heavy material should be hung across the front to protect the contents from dust.

A coil of heavy wire made to fit inside a flat-bottomed kettle, on which a small tin pail may be set, in boiling water, makes an admirable double boiler.

Tin fruit or tomato cans with the tops melted off make the nicest of moulds in which to steam brown bread, puddings, custards and all such things. If a wire handle is added, a small tin pail that will be convenient for many purposes will be the result.

ABOUT HOUSE PLANTS.

For most flowering plants the windows opening to the south are preferable to those with a western outlook, as during the short days of winter the plants in the latter will have but little sun, and then it will be too low down near the horizon. For a few plants the windows looking to the east may be used and for ferns and similar shade-loving sorts, they are desirable. While the northern windows may be used for some of that class of plants, it is not a desirable exposure.

In case a bay window upon the south side of the living room can be obtained for flowers, very good results can be secured. It should be separated from the room by glass doors that can be thrown open or closed at pleasure, but in case they are not to be had, much of the labor of keeping the plants in good condition can be saved, if curtains are provided, to be used when sweeping. In addition to hooks for hanging baskets and bracket stands for pot plants, it will be well to have a shelf, from one to two feet in width, according to the dimensions of the window, upon which to arrange the smaller plants. This should have side pieces one to two inches high and a zinc lining. The bottom could then be covered with coarse gravel or fine pebbles, and a much better growth could be secured, as the plants in small pots would then be less likely to dry out.

A simple propagating bed can be very easily arranged by supplying the necessary clean sand and a lamp to furnish bottom heat, unless heating pipes run along under the shelf, when they would only need to be boxed in. In case the lamp is used, it will be necessary to provide some sort of shield to prevent it from setting fire to the wooden shelf. A shallow galvanized iron pan filled with plaster suspended above the lamp and close to the bottom of the shelf, will answer the purpose.

If an ordinary window is to be used, it will be well to have a similar shelf at the height of the window sill. If made two or three feet longer than the window is wide, it will hold a considerable number of plants. For the bay window and the common window as well, if the size of the room admits of it, a plant stand with shelves in the form of stairs, or with a flat top, can be used to good advantage to display the larger plants. By having it arranged with casters, if the plants that require a high temperature are kept upon it, upon cold nights it will be an easy matter to roll it back from the window and thus save the tender plants from becoming chilled.

SNOW CREAM.

Did you ever try making snow cream? If not, you should try it, for it makes an excellent dessert and is easily made. Beat to a stiff froth a pint of cream, sweeten and flavor it with half a cup of sugar and a teaspoonful of vanilla. Take a tablespoonful of gelatine and put it in a cup, with two tablespoonfuls of cold water. Let it soak several hours, then set the cup in hot water. In a few moments the gelatine will be thoroughly melted; then strain it into the whipped cream. Add half a teaspoonful of salt. Bring in as much light feathery snow as there is beaten cream, and beat it in the mixture. Pour the mass into a pail or mold, and set it away in a cold closet for about ten or fifteen minutes to form. It will do harm if it stands several hours.

This cream is very nice if flavored with the outer rind of two small oranges, adding their juice and a quarter of a cup, extra of sugar. A cup of strained strawberry or peach preserves, with the juice of a lemon, and a quarter of a cup of sugar, will give another flavor. In this case add also another tablespoonful of gelatine dissolved as before.

If the snow is omitted, this will make an excellent filling for charlotte-russe. Line a tin pail or other mold with slices of plain sponge cake cut about a quarter of an inch thick, and pour in the cream before it has set. Let the charlotte-russe stand for five or six hours in a cold place, and then turn it out on a glass platter; decorate it with a white icing on the outside if you wish, and serve it with a golden wreath of orange jelly around it.

MARKING THE LINEN.

It is quite the fad nowadays to have one's monogram or initials embroidered on all the household linen. And there is an exact spot where these markings must be placed. For instance, the initial must be on the top hem of the sheet, just in the center or middle crease. The bottom of the letter should be toward the edge of the hem, so that it will come right when the hem of the sheet is turned over on the counterpane.

Pillow cases are also marked in the center of the hem. Tablecloths usually have two markings in opposite corners, placed so far in that the design will come on the surface of the table when the cloth is laid. Sometimes the marking is placed on the middle, lengthwise crease of the cloth, a little over ten inches from the center, so that they will not come under the centerpiece when one is used. They, too, must be placed so that the bottom of the letters point towards the edge of the table. Dinner napkins have the marking in the center of the square formed by folding them twice each way.

A NEWLY INVENTED MOON.

Never Visible Except When Crossing the Disk of the Sun.

Dr. Waltemath of Hamburg makes the rather sensational announcement, that he has ascertained the existence of a second moon, revolving around the earth in one hundred and nineteen days at the distance of seven hundred thirty-seven thousand, five hundred miles, and with a diameter of about four hundred and fifty miles; a dark moon, so swarthy of complexion as never to be visible except when crossing the disk of the sun, or on rare occasions when, for some reason not given, she brightens up a little.

If the body reflected sunlight half as well as the "brick moon," which was the subject of one of the Rev. Edward Everett Hale's most fanciful stories, it would be a conspicuous object, it must be about as black as charcoal or it would have been found long ago.

Doctor Waltemath's calculations are based mainly on certain reported instances of dark round spots seen moving eastward on the disk of the sun during the last century, only two of the ten being later than 1800. Most of the observers were persons of no particular astronomical authority, and it is probable that the objects seen were ordinary sun-spots, the reported motion being an easily-made mistake.

Doctor Waltemath, however, gives his results with considerable confidence, stating that the inclination of the orbit is two degrees thirty minutes, and that the body would cross the disk of the sun February third. It was then carefully looked for at several observatories, but not seen.

If it really exists it ought to be easily picked up by photography when crossing the Milky Way in the constellations of Gemini and Sagittarius. It would have an apparent diameter of over eighty seconds, and would mark an obvious trail on the plate by eclipsing the closely crowded stars along its path.

Doctor Waltemath attributes to it the slight acceleration of the moon's motion which is now generally ascribed to the action of the tides, and if there is such a body it may perhaps account for some other still perplexing anomalies in her behavior. But it seems altogether likely that this newly invented moon will turn out a near relative of Lascarbault's imaginary "Vulcan," the supposed planet that has been looked for between Mercury and the sun, but which has never been seen.

A DIFFERENT DIRECTION.

Didn't somebody call you up by the telephone just now?

No; that was my wife; she called me down.

AGRICULTURAL

VALUE OF CLOVER SEEDING.

There is much unjustifiable neglect in seeding with clover, which is the result of a failure to fully appreciate what clover seeding does for the soil. In the first place seeding of any kind, says American Cultivator, prevents most of the waste that on all cultivated soil goes on during the season of frost and snow, when there is nothing to use fertility, as the soil decomposes under these influences. There is no washing away of any soil which is covered with a sod. If surface water from higher land flows over it much of the soil that has been washed or blown into it is caught by the leaves of grass, and is deposited as a covering for their roots. So valuable is this on land that is often liable to overflow that it is usually kept in permanent seeding, and a sufficient growth of grass left every fall to catch all the sediment that flows over it. But it is on upland, where the plowing may be frequent, that seeding, and that too with clover, serves its most important purpose. The growth of clover on the soil, no matter what may be done with the crop, greatly increases the amount of vegetable matter in the soil. Did any of our readers ever take the pains to dig out a clover plant, using preferably one that stood isolated from other clover or grasses, so that its roots can be kept separate? He will be astonished perhaps to find that in most cases much the larger bulk of the clover plant always grows beneath the surface. If he can dig deeply enough he will find clover roots going down two, three, four or more feet. Each root of clover as it penetrates the subsoil carries with it a small proportion of carbonic acid gas. This is one of the most powerful solvents known, and it obliges the subsoil in contact with the root, to yield some of its mineral fertility to be by it carried up to the plant growing on the surface. But it is not alone, nor chiefly in the mineral fertility brought by its roots from the subsoil, that clover is a benefit to land. The roots of clover, as has now for some years been known, have warty nodules on them. These are able to decompose air in the soil, and make a part of the large portion of free nitrogen it contains available for crops. In round numbers, 80 per cent of all the air we breathe is nitrogen. But in its free state, or as it exists in the air, it is not available for plant food. It has been the dream of chemists ever since Dr. Priestley discovered the component parts of common air, that is nitrogen, which in the form of ammonia or nitrates is so important as a fertilizer, might be made available for crops. It was long supposed that the leaves of plants were able to take ammonia from the atmosphere. That they take something that is a necessity for their growth has long been known. But the most careful examination has failed to show that anything except carbonic acid gas is ever thus taken by leaves into the plant circulation. The carbonic acid gas in the air amounts to only from four to six parts in 10,000. Yet from this small proportion comes all the combustible portion of plant trees and vegetation of every kind. Whenever these are burned their nitrogen is speedily mixed with air again, and becomes free nitrogen, not usable by plants, except by the leguminous family, which includes clover, beans and peas. Of all these plants the common red clover, including with this the Mammoth or pea-vine variety, has been proved by practical experiment, much the most valuable as a restorer of fertility. The virtues of clover were, indeed, practically known by farmers long before science demonstrated the methods by which clover benefited the crops. Clover as a renovating part of the rotation has been sown by generations of farmers who did not know why it did any good. Most commonly it was supposed that the broader leaf of the clover shading the surface soil enabled it or the stems of the clover to decompose the air. An old practical farmer whom we knew long ago was satisfied that the benefit was in the clover stems after they became hollow, and that the air inside the stems was decomposed, and its nitrogenous parts made available for use by the plant. This was a step towards the truth, for it is at this period of clover growth that the nodules on the roots, which are now known to be able to decompose air in the soil, are most abundant and active. Nitrogenous fertility in its available form is a much more costly fertilizer than any other which the farmer purchases. As it is made from blood, or from the decomposed excrement of animals, it is worth as manure 17 cents a pound. If the worth of a clover seeding were reckoned only by the amount of nitrogenous fertility that its fully grown roots can furnish to the soil, it would be the cheapest fertilizer that the farmer can use. But with this is to be reckoned the aerating effects of the clover roots in the subsoil, and the supplies of mineral plant food that they bring to the surface, and the benefit to the soil is very greatly increased. It is not possible to fix any sum as the price which a good clover ley is worth per acre, because fertility is worth much more near a market than it is where the market is distant. But it is safe to say that even where land is the dearest, two years devoted to fully growing a clover crop is very often the best use to which valuable land can be put. When a clover crop is plowed under in the second summer of its growth, it mellows and lightens the soil as no method of artificial manuring or cultivation could do. After the clover all the other manures applied are much more effective than they would be if clover had not preceded them. For this reason those who buy the most stable and mineral fertilizers can best of all afford the time and expense required to grow a clover crop, while it is the unfailing and cheap resource of those on land remote from good markets, and who cannot well afford to purchase the more expensive kinds of fertilizers.

LESS PROFITABLE OF LATE.

A correspondent discussing why the farm is less profitable now than it was half a century ago thinks that one cause is due to the introduction of railroads and other modern facilities for transacting business which has led farmers to sell their produce in a small way as fast as it is ready. In old times the stock of butter was salted down and sold at the end of the season; the cattle were disposed of to drovers who visited the farm once or twice a year, and so on. Hence the money than came more in bulk than now. The author of the paragraph in question says that "what trickles in easily trickles out easily," consequently farmers do not get the benefit from frequent small sales that they would from less frequent larger ones. Another reason why, the writer claims, the farm is less profitable now than half a century ago is in the changed conditions that have led farmers to live more expensively than formerly. Income and outgo have changed their relative position.

Whichever way it is, however, we can agree with the writer when he says:—

"There is no call for lament over those departed days. Life is brighter and more gladsome now. The great social uplift which modern development has brought makes life worth more. Improved conditions of life, better-furnished houses, better-provided tables, the decay of the deadly frying-pan, and a generally advanced hygiene, better school system and an advanced culture and refinement are not to be regretted. But they cost more. And so, while there may be other reasons the changed condition of the times is salted down on the farm and more evaporates now than a half-century ago."

A HINT ABOUT PIGS.

It is neither profitable nor always entirely safe to keep great numbers of hogs together. Besides the liability to disease getting among them there is always a certainty that the stronger will crowd the weaker from their feeding-places, so that the inequality in size will increase, instead of decreasing. In every litter there are always one or two weaklings that were born runts, and unless given a better chance than their fellows, they will always remain runts. The best way to manage this is when the pigs are seven or eight weeks old, take out the strongest ones and wean them, giving then plenty of the best food that can be got to make growth. Then the runts, left to suckle the sow alone, will in two or three weeks more take a start that may make them as good as the others, so that in later life all can be fed together. No other feed, without the sow's milk will do this, though such other feed should be given and the pigs be encouraged to eat all they can be made to eat.

HUMOR OF BRITISH ELECTIONS.

The Many Ways in Which Voters Were Kept from the Polls.

Years ago, when elections in England were contests in which bribery and intimidation were winked at, voters who lived at a distance often found it difficult to get to the polls, whether they travelled by land or by water. A vessel carrying voters from London to Ipswich, only seventy miles distant, somehow lost its reckoning and did not discover it until Amsterdam was sighted.

Coaches conveying voters broke down mysteriously. Readers of "Pickwick Papers," will recall Tony Weller, the stout, red-faced coachman who married a "widder" for his "second wentur," and who had what he called "a coincidence," while driving a coach-load of voters from London to a certain town. The coach was upset several miles from its destination, and the passengers reached the polling booth only after the voting had been closed.

Ireland's reputation for practical joking at elections is maintained even in these prosaic days. At the election for the city of Cork in 1895, the contest was between the Parnellites and the anti-Parnellites. A funny incident happened. The wives of four voters held political views which differed from their husbands'. On the day of the elections, these four women rose early and left their homes, carrying off every stitch of male attire from the house, with the keys, after locking in their sleeping husbands.

But fate was against them. Before the poll closed, the clothesless voters were discovered. Friends wrapped them in blankets and conveyed them in carriages to the polling booths, where they arrived just in time to record their votes.

THE EVIDENCE INSUFFICIENT.

Mr. Borem—I am opposed to intoxicating liquors as a beverage, yet I believe that liquor rightly used is a benefit to humanity. I am fully convinced that whisky was once the means of saving my life.

Miss Cutting—Perhaps it did; but I fail to see how that proves it a benefit to humanity.

THE SYMBOL OF MARRIAGE.

The ring, or circle, which is emblematic of eternity, and suggests the probable duration of wedded love of the right kind, has been used in the marriage ceremony from time immemorial. Probably it dates from old Roman and Greek times and customs, or it may go further back to those mythic ages in the far East, where wisdom and civilization dawned on the world of humanity. When public betrothals were no longer the rule, the giving of an engagement ring came in, and, an engagement to marry seems to be looked upon as more serious and binding by every other nation than by those who own English as their mother tongue. The position of the wedding ring is almost a matter of superstition. The third finger of the left hand next to the little finger was longe supposed to have some connection with the heart.

"Sarum usage," decreed that in old English marriages the bridegroom was to receive the wedding ring from the officiating priest with' the three principal fingers of his right hand. Then, holding the bride's left hand with his own, he was to say the words: "With this ring I thee wed," and then, placing the circle on her thumb, he was to add: "In the Name of the Father," and, removing it to her first, second and third fingers respectively, with the words: "And of the Son," "and of the Holy Ghost," was to deposit it finally on the fourth or little finger with the "Amen."

Wearing the wedding ring on the thumb was not infrequent at one time, and may be seen in some old portraits. There is no stipulation about the quality of the ring, and in cases where the gold circlet has been dropped or forgotton very queer substitutes have been used before now. The old Italian betrothal or wedding ring was very often of silver and frequently represented two diminutive hands clasping each other.

An old Icelandic custom provided a circular bracelet or bone or metal, through which the bridegroom put his entire right hand, in which he received the hand of his bride. These rings were previously sanctioned by being laid on the altar and blessed.

A curious old custom in the Orkneys was the "hand-testing" or "hand-fasting" which was a trifle more binding than an engagement, though less so than the sacredotal marriage. The contracting parties clasped hands through an opening in a famous old stone, which had doubtless been connected with the worship of Odin. That stone no longer stands, for the farm on which it was situated was rented by a farmer from the mainland, who was determined to stamp out the foolish practice, and broke up the stone and used it in building a pig-stye. No sooner was this done than all his agricultural impiements were suddenly found to "be awa'," and he himself deemed it the best policy to retreat to where he came from.

In Ireland popular prejudice declares for a gold ring, and there is a tradition that gold rings have been let out to hire to the very poor, while pinchbeck rings did duty for after use. The notion is that marriage with a ring of inferior metal would be illegal.

Modern Greek peasants exchange a gold and silver ring, and then drink wine from the same cup, but the regular ritual of the Greek Church, ordains that a solemn betrothal precedes the actual marriage, in which a gold and a silver ring are blessed by the priest, the former being given to the man and the latter to the woman. The form of espousal is then repeated, and the rings are placed on the right hands and then exchanged, that no inferiority may be betokened by the woman wearing the silver ring, and also to indicate the common ownership of property.

An Armenian mother usually selects her daughter's husband, or, at least, does so nominally. After all business preliminaries are settled between th families, the bridegroom's mother, accompanied by a priest and two matrons, visits the bride, and gives her a ring in token of espousal and with this ring the couple are ultimately married.

Among fishing communities very ancient and elaborate wedding rings are used and descend as heirlooms from generation to generation. Japanese marriages are arranged between quite young children, but the girl always receives a ring in evidence that the union is binding. In Malalar an old native custom seats both bride and bridegroom on a dais, and a relative washes the feet of the latter with milk, and puts a silver ring on the great toe of his right foot. The bridegroom then hands a gold ring to his kinsman, and a necklace and chaplet of flowers are put on the bride's neck and head. Both seem to be rather side ceremonies than binding between the parties who are most concerned. Public opinion probably supplied the lack, and among semi-barbarians no jot or tittle of ceremonial can be omitted.

A CURIOUS APPOINTMENT.

The appointment of ex-King Milan as General-in-Chief of the Servian army is assigned to a curious cause. King Alexander's mother, ex-Queen Natalie it seems, set such a pace in dress and court festivities that the Belgrade husbands could not stand it. They remonstrated with the King, and, as the surest way to keep PNatalie out of the capital, her spendthrift husband was invited back.