FASHIONABLE FANCY WORK.

Fancy work! At the very words, so elastic in their meaning, innumerable thoughts come in one’s mind. What can be done in all the fancy work that has been done in a single year? “Why, we use some of it in our houses, and give some to our friends,” say the indefatigable girls and matrons who ply the needle and thread almost as diligently as those who work for a living. Others, who have but little time, think that all the houses in Christendom could hardly contain the never-ending supply that is always forthcoming. If a cloth table cover is embroidered handsomely, why, it lasts in perfect condition for a few seasons, and even then is put away, and who would vote it old-fashioned after a month’s wear. Then the army of chair-backs, which is being recruited every day and all the days, not only by amateur workers, but by manufacturers’ hands, where can they all go to? Do the dustmen’s wives decorate their boards behind the door with the faded glories which at one time veiled the silken brocades in a duchess’ drawing-room? And the cushion covers and the mantel borders, I can understand how the levelling process of time acts in their case. The lady tosses them aside as faded, the domestic lays hands by, and passes them on as presents to a married sister, who keeps a small greengrocer’s shop near by; then when the little home is broken up they are hung into the broken cart with the rubbish of the sale, and quickly get turned into shoddy. But it seems hardly possible to account for all the fancy work that is done in that way. Visions come, too, of the indispensable class of workers, the designers of patterns, those who commence the embroidery, and others too numerous to mention; and we feel that even those ladies who spend over much time on fancy work are, unconscious ly it may be, but surely accomplishing some sort of a mission by giving employment to men and women whose livelihood depends largely on the ephemeral nature of fashions.

In a search after news for fancy-work lovers, I saw some lovely strips for curtains of Flemish linen, worked in exquisite shades of colored cotton. They were set patterns closely worked in satin stitch, but could be quickly accomplished since the stitches were long; and each one was self-colored, either a soft green or a delicate carnation tint. The cushion covers were just the thing to suit the Oriental style of decoration that is so much in vogue; the colors of the saris would tone splendidly with Eastern rugs and carpets and Benares ware ornaments. The seamen might almost be taken for silk handkerchief-chefs that have been laid by for years, so time-worn in their coloring they look; and the Moravian cottons for working out the patterns are of charming tints. Red and blue are used on a dark red ground for the Turkish stitch, which is, in fact, the old English herring-bone.

Decoration in Hambro wool are handsome and can be finished off very rapidly, as the thickness of the wool does not allow of fine stitches. A delightfully simple chair-back was of white satin; one end was ornamented with lace-work, over which trailed leaves in shaded shades of brown and green Hambro, thrown up with filoselle; a light border edging the other three sides. It would make a very pretty present, and could be executed in no time, comparatively speaking. Cloth table covers are picked out at three edge now, for ladies, it is said, do not like them any other way. This laudable economic idea is certainly an improvement, as it is much lighter, and does not detract from the work, as many of the fringes do, by the coloring being too bright. One table cover was of dark greenish grey, all handstitching, and shades of apricot, and had plush medallions at the corners. Another, of terra-cotta diagonal-cloth, was beautifully worked with French knots, basket and satin stitches, and couching, all done in shades of greenish yellow, with a cellular and honeycomb cloth makes a pleasing ground the squares, which are of canvas pattern, but not open threads, are worked in cross-stitch, and the alternate honeycomb squares are darned. It is suitable for five o’clock tea and sideboard cloths.

One table cover was done with a needle, with wool chenille on canvas; it is very soft and pretty. On coarse wool canvas wool is drawn through, then knotted and the ends left to fall loosely in resemblance of tassels. It answers well for beakets and mantel-borders, but not so well for cushions. The rough felt used for table covers had an appliqué of tapes try cretonne, which was worked over with tinsel and silks. A table top was composed of golden-brown plush enriched with a pattern in shades of gold. An Empress cover was also lately exhibited in this department. The maçramé was laid on, as it were, upside down, the heading of the border being at the bottom of the cozy, and the vandyked edge standing up like a crown with the fringe ends caught to the top and knotted.

One advantage of the Russian work is that it can be done in strips, which is always convenient; another, that the materials are stamped, so that no counting of stitches is requisite for carrying out the patterns. Furniture upholstered in dark golden brown, and the same close-stitch, looks extremely well. Ladies might more often furnish a bedroom in this style; it would be to many a novelty, and it makes an agreeable change from cretonnes.

Some people, the writer amongst them, delight in placing large vine leaves, violets, laces and ribbons, into stylish hatbands, plain caps, fichus, neckties, and such-like. Fancy work proper is rather too slow a process to please them. Now with a piece of old French brocade, or some squares of Eastern embroidery, with a length of soft corded silk or plush, and a few yards of ribbon and beautiful old lace, what charming confections can be made in an hour or two. The very writing of the words calls up memories of delicious bits of coloring, coquettish articles fit for a princess to don, and quaint knickknacks bewitching enough to satisfy a squawkish lover’s taste as offerings to “the dearest girl in the world.” There is as much art in such “tossing up” as there is in draping; and a good deal more, and made up of minute pieces of fancy work that are already commenced, and, in some cases, almost completed before the ladies put their needles into the materials. “Tossing up” must be done lightly, gracefully, and with spirit. The harmonious, whilst form must be fairly considered. Indeed, the best confections are pictures in stuffs, and “tossing up” is nearer akin to artist’s work than some of us think for. Here is a charming little bag for ladies to carry their needlework or snuff and cherub and scent bottle in. A piece of brocade, in which coral pink and golden tints predominate on a white ground, forms the front and back, with a frilling of golden-brown satin standing up at the top. At the sides are inserted pullings of white and red, the whole being almost entirely hidden with loops upon loops of golden-brown ribbon, by which it is also slung on the arm. It hangs by three or four ribbons, which are tied in a bow that rests on the arm when the bag is carried. It never does to stint oneself when it comes to making the bag. A globe-shaped small bag of silk gauze, with an almost spherical shape, and covered with a variety of flowers, leaves, &c., and the whole covered with a fine silk thread, which is worked in minutest stitches. The bag is finished off by twisting the ends into round medallions, which are firmly fixed to the bag. Other satchets are made in the shape of night-dress bags, but more oblong, and the flap is ornamented with a band of Eastern embroidery, or gold painted canvas. Gentlemen’s satchets look best when treated as plainly as possible; navy-blue silk with white laces or horseshoe is suitable; it is simply edged with cord.

As for the pretty frivolities that can be “tossed up” out of silk and Eastern mate rials, there are a great many. The following fan is now used as a wall bracket. It is opened, and across one end is arranged a soft silk pocket. A rather fussy chair back that lately came out is worth noticing. Over the stubbed back of an occasional chair is thrown a slip of velvet, embroidery in one corner with a group of flowers; a silk scarf falls down on one side, whilst another scarf is knotted up and jauntily placed on the top above the flowers. Baskets are with a few stitches by the help of the silk squares, made into a framework, the coloring in unison with the wall decorations. Boxes of all shapes and sizes, when covered with Eastern embroidery, are fit for any drawing-room or table top.

Those ladies who prefer using a brush to a needle will find it easy to imitate the style of varnish painting. All the colors are mixed with varnish, and the method of laying them is rather different to that employed in ordinary oil painting. When finished the colors are very smooth and brilliant, and the decorative effect is as good as wood or lacquer, the former needing sizing. There is some knack required for getting the coats of paints perfectly level, and a few lessons might possibly be found necessary.