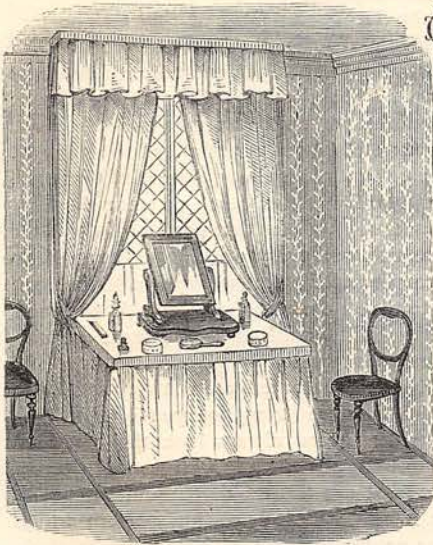


"HOW SHALL I FURNISH MY BED-ROOM?"



OF late years doctors have had much to say upon the subject of bedrooms and their contents; amongst other matters, it appears their unanimous opinion that the old four-post bed-

stead, with its many vallances and attendant curtains, ought to be discarded. Indeed, I know several physicians who go so far as to disapprove of bed-hangings of any description whatever, their approbation resting only on the simple bedstead which has a board at the head similar to that at the foot.

Custom, habit, and association have such strong hold upon us all, that those of us who have spent the nights of our youth under the canopy of a four-poster will most probably cling to it, and steadfastly uphold its superiority in the matter of cosiness, warmth, and seclusion, over Tudor, French, or Arabian bedsteads.

It can readily be imagined, however, that the exclusion of fresh air must be as injurious to health when we are asleep as when we are awake; and this being conceded, what can be said in favour of the four-post? On the other hand, it must be allowed that a bedstead does look bare and comfortless when quite denuded of all drapery.

We must therefore make a compromise, and buy those which require only a vallance and a couple of curtains. Even this small allowance of drapery will give an air of comfortable repose; and then, if the hangings are made of a washing material, I think we shall surely escape any censure from those high in authority.

The next point of discussion is whether the bedstead shall be of iron or wood. What sets off a bed-room so much as a handsome wooden bedstead, with twisted pillars and brightly polished, beautifully grained foot-board? Ornament an iron one as you will, illuminate it gaily, decorate it with shining brass, and at the best it will never equal the beauty of the wooden one, although it may exceed it in price. With these sentiments I quite agree; but what say the doctors? Why, their idea is that infectious fevers are more likely to linger and lurk about a wooden bedstead than about an iron one. There is a further reason in favour

of the latter, adduced more especially by the dwellers in towns. (Let me whisper it in private.) Unwelcome visitors cannot secrete themselves in iron. I am aware that old housekeepers are dreadfully shocked at the bare mention of these intruders, and condemn the management of the households in which they appear; but really, in these modern days, trunks and boxes which make frequent journeys in railway vans or holds of ships, and people who continually travel to and fro by steamer, rail, or omnibus, are apt to introduce into the very cleanest of our bed-rooms these nocturnal disturbers of peace; then woe to the housekeeper if they once find a hiding-place in a wooden bedstead!

Having thrown out these hints, I will leave the final decision. To my mind a wooden bedstead looks much more comfortable than an iron one. The question arises, is it wise to allow the eye to decide the matter?

Father bed or mattress? Once more the medical faculty step forward and declare that a "downy couch" is an unhealthy one, and that a horse-hair mattress is the proper substitute.

We have not time to discuss the question, nor indeed does it lie within our province; suffice it to say that mattresses are much more generally used than feather beds.

The most luxurious arrangement is to have a horse-hair mattress on the top of a spring mattress. The latter is costly in comparison to a palliasse, and more expensive than a wool mattress. The purchase of good mattresses involves a considerable outlay; but it is clearly false economy to buy poor ones. The tufts come out, the wool forms itself in lumps (have I not felt them?), the ticking cover—which should be of linen, but of course in cheap ones is of cotton—quickly soils, and our beds soon look untidy, and feel wretched. It should be remembered that they are in constant use, and yet should last a lifetime.

Well, we have talked much about the bed, and yet have not finished it. The question of sheets I shall leave for a future discussion on "Household Linen," in which blankets will be included. With regard to the bolster and pillows, again let me advise good ones being bought. Good feathers are not to be bought for a trifle; and if they have not been well stoved, the odour which will nightly greet your nose will be neither sweet nor pleasant.

The next great comfort, apart from a good bed, is a well-made chest of drawers, or wardrobe. Have you ever been aggravated by badly-made furniture? I have; and I know of nothing more vexatious and tormenting (in a small way) than to pull at drawers which will not open, or which come out all askew—to push at those which will not shut—whose handles come off—chests which creak, and shriek, and totter on three legs because the fourth is rather too short. Don't buy chests of drawers which are badly put together, even though they have a tempting appearance

—may be inlaid or with superior handles, but are in reality manufactured simply with a view to catch the eye, and afterwards displease the owner in a dozen respects.

And now about the wash-hand-stand. Gentlemen like an immense basin and jug, and for that reason prefer those round stands one sees, which possess those qualifications. Ladies require a little more space for display of pretty earthenware. A narrow shelf at the back is most useful, as tooth-powder and other requisites are apt to get wet or overturned if they are on the stand itself. Tiles or marble seem to be the most suitable for the top of the stand. Paint soon wears off, and looks shabby; a white cover quickly soils, and looks untidy; veneer cracks and splits with the heat of hot-water cans; but marble and tiles are durable, and can be washed and dried every morning. The only objection to a marble top is that one is apt to make a clatter, and perhaps to crack delicate earthenware, when putting jug or basin hastily down on it. The basin rests more steadily, and is more quickly emptied, when there is no hole in the top of the stand made for it.

The dressing-table is one of the prettiest objects in a bed-room, if it and its appointments are nice and natty. If you do not wish to expend money upon this piece of furniture, order a white wooden table or a large box, in which you can stow away evening dresses and the like. This can be made at the cost of a few shillings, and then you can cover it with coloured calico and white muslin.

Some people object to these clothed and skirted tables. Well, then, there are plenty of other kinds. One of the most useful has drawers down each side, and a cupboard in the centre. Please have a toilet-cover on the top. I know that marble, or handsomely polished wood, is supposed to look well, partly because it betokens costliness, and also saves the trouble of covers; but to my mind such a dressing-table looks desolate, even if it has a number of small mats—tiresome little things, on which you are expected to place anything you may lay down.

All the pieces of furniture in a bed-room—including the looking-glass, chairs, and towel-rail—should be made of the same kind of wood. Light-coloured woods, such as maple and birch, are more in favour than mahogany. These are sometimes inlaid with darker woods. Painted furniture always looks suitable provided all the pieces match in colour. Plain white, with a narrow gold border, or a relief of pale pink,

blue, or green, according to the prevailing colour of the room, has a very good effect, and its freshness can at any time be renewed.

To quote the doctors for the last time:—The less carpet the better about a bed-room. We English people think much of our carpet, and take it into every nook and corner. The gloom and damp of our climate oblige us to clothe our rooms warmly, as well as our bodies. If it can be so contrived, a bed-room carpet should not be put under any heavy pieces of furniture, and then it can be the oftener taken up; nor should it go entirely under the bed, for that portion of the floor should be washed over every week. With regard to the kind of carpet and its pattern, here at last we are entirely free to please ourselves. A Brussels will wear the longest, but Kidderminster is the most general. Dutch is cheap and pretty; tapestry is not to be despised. The Scotch carpets are not very refined in appearance, but they are strong, inexpensive, and very durable. Small patterns always look the best in a bed-room, even when the room is a large one. Correct taste chooses what are termed diaper and “minglety per”—either a stiff, set design, or a pattern which seems to have no design at all. These remarks apply also to the wall-paper.

The window-curtains should match those of the bed. Again I speak in favour of chintz, and of a small pattern on a white ground. Cretonne is also used; and, for a simply furnished room, what drapery can look better than plain white dimity, or French dimity which has stripes of colour on the white at broad intervals? Some people use the Japanese paper curtains for their bed-room windows. They can be bought for five shillings per pair; and, therefore, if there happen to be several windows in the room, these serve the purpose at a much less cost; for the curtains are not often drawn in a bed-room, so that this kind of curtain can be introduced, as appearance, and not use, is all that is wanted.

In placing the furniture, contrive if possible that the bedstead should not be placed opposite a window, for the light falling upon the eyes, especially in the early summer mornings, is often injurious to sight. If this cannot be avoided, and also when the room is exposed to a hot sun at any time of day, a most excellent device, because it is at the same time effectual and inexpensive, is to pin green glazed calico over the white blinds. This does not show at all outside the house, neither does it look untidy inside the room; and it softens the glare in a delightful manner.

E.C.

THROUGH THE JUNGLE BY TORCH-LIGHT.

THE sun has set upon the valley of the Taptee, in Western India, and the ridges of the Satpoora Mountains are fast fading into deepening shadow; but the light that streams through the open door of the officers' mess, shows that something unusual is going on in the barrack-square of the little fort of Guwalgirh. Soldiers are clustered in groups in front of

their quarters, swelled momentarily by others who come hurrying out of the low thatched stable at the far end of the yard; officers of every rank and age, in undress uniform and cigar in mouth, muster round the gate; and lean, weedy native servants, in long white robes and voluminous turbans, look on and whisper at a respectful distance.