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HOME DRESSMAKING UP TO DATE.

By DORA DE BLAQUIÈRE.

As I began my recent article on "Home Millinery" by saying that the sphere of it had entirely altered in character, so I must commence the present one on "Dressmaking at Home" by the same statement; and I think that many of the women I see would dress far better, and look more "up to date," if they could fully realise what this means to them and to every woman and girl who reads this paper. For certain gowns—which used to be thought absolutely needful—have almost become obsolete, save and except so far as enter-

tainments or women much advanced in life, are concerned. One of these gowns is what used to be called the visiting, calling, or best walking dress. The dress for these purposes seems to have been dropped out of its position, and its place has been taken by the ubiquitous "Tailor-made" skirt and jacket, with a blouse beneath it, or a waistcoat, as the case demands. The smart gown is only used or needed now by those who have or attend the summer garden-parties, or in the winter afternoon "at-homes" and teas to consider; and for these

something, at once stylish and pretty, is demanded. But even in town, so far as I see, the usual day's round is accomplished by many women entirely habited in the well-cut and smart-looking tailor-made gown of serge, homespun, tweed, or, last winter's favourite, frieze. In which case the only change needed is an evening-gown of some sort suitable to the place where it is to be worn. A good and sensible change seems about to take place, on the initiation of the Princess of Wales and her daughters, and that is the introduction of the



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foreign custom of wearing high-necked, but distinctly smart, gowns, instead of low ones, at concerts, the opera, and other public places. This is a step in advance, although there is no doubt it lessens the brilliancy of the spectacle, which has been in the past at times one of great splendour and magnificence.

The great miracle-worker in the way of dress in our day may be said to have been the blouse, which, in its inception, was a singularly inelegant, rather loose and baggy garment; apt to get separated from the skirt of its temporary adoption, and so to give one the appearance of coming unscrewed at the waist. It had also a tendency to become inflated at the back and make everyone look round-shouldered, and in the struggle to keep it tidy, so many pins had to be used that one became a travelling pin-cushion. The introduction of the gold safety-pin at the back, to ensure the neatness of the belt and skirt, did not mend matters much, besides giving one the feeling that the safety-pin was distinctly out of place.

The addition of the fitted lining was the last stage in the perfecting of this useful article of dress; and just at present, in spite of all prophecies, it holds its own both in morning and evening dress, and it has become a little difficult to say just where the blouse ends and the bodice—either high or low—begins. With the fitted lining there are no more fears of the blouse either becoming baggy or making any needless revelations between the skirt and the band; and even if it did not stay in its place, are we not armed if we like it with the skirt-holders, which can be bought of all drapers for a penny the pair, and which will hold the two together with no trouble, save that of putting one on each, and remembering to hook them together before we put on our bodice.

As a rule, I feel sure that blouses can be made at home; or, aided by that most useful person, a dressmaker who goes out to work by the day, we may certainly accomplish the feat. But I must again maintain what I said in regard to bonnets and hats, i.e., the main thing is to look about you, study the shop windows, and make up your mind as to what is worn, and what will suit you best, and tone in with your general wardrobe, and then proceed to get it made up as well as you can manage. Now if, when the shops are selling off, you are able to purchase some remnants, you will be the possessor of a blouse which has cost less than those exhibited in the shops, and which will look quite as well. I should always advise every girl, or woman, to have some lessons in dressmaking, if only to learn how to make a bodice—for I consider that, however clever you may be, that is a thing which requires learning. The most important part, after the bodice is cut out, is the tacking together, or "basting" it, as the dressmakers most frequently say. This must be performed on a perfectly smooth flat surface—a table or a board made for the purpose. Round the waist of the bodice you must hold the lining loose, and the material tight, that the outside may stretch, and thus avoid the tiny wrinkles that are so vexatious when they come. All seams must be pressed open, no matter where they are. The next most important feature of the bodice is boning it. Indeed, I am not sure whether I do not think this the most serious matter of all. But now that bone-casings can be purchased ready to be put in, it is easier than it was. Do not be stingy about the whalebone, nor about the silk for stitching. In fact, you must remember that, in these things, which constitute the chief part of the finish of your work, the beauty of it will be found.

Some one is sure to put in a purely personal, but most important question here, and that is, "If you knew nothing whatever about dressmaking, where would you begin?" The answer to this is, "I should have some

lessons; or, failing this likewise, I should get a pleasant, civil dressmaker to work in the house, and should learn all I could from her." If you can do none of these things, then I should fall back on the refuge of many an ignorant woman, and pick a half worn dress to pieces, and try to remake it. If it will turn, so much the better for you. Should the dress fit you well, cut a new lining, and save the old one for a pattern. But, whatever you do, take the greatest pains, and never mind if the material be middle-aged, when you are learning your lesson from it you must treat it like new. Dressmaking is not to be learnt at once; but I really think almost all women could learn it, if they really wished to do so, by using one or other of the methods I have suggested, and in default of all of them, you must fall back on a paper pattern from some well-known source. This, however, is the most difficult of all, to my mind, for of course you really do need a certain amount of special knowledge, even to use them. For instance, you must know exactly the right way of the material; and in the case of some stuffs, like velvet, velveteen, and serge, they must be cut in a certain manner to look well. This holds good also in case of trimmings, which must be cut in a correct way. A good deal of special knowledge is also required about the linings of both skirts and bodices, and the various kinds which are most suitable to our varied classes of materials. So that, if the dressmaking lessons be not available, I should strongly advise that a visiting dressmaker should be secured, and that you should give to her and her methods your very best attention.

One of the greatest difficulties about the skirt used to consist in putting in the foot lining at the hem of the gown. Nowadays these have become quite out of date, and the edge of our dresses is simply hemmed up and the braid put on, no lining being considered needful. Certainly, when one looks back on the generations of women who have slaved over, and been made miserable by, these same linings, and the real difficulties of getting them straight and well-fitting, it seems a pity we did not find out their utter uselessness before. They were always perfect dust-traps. They wore out with the least provocation, and they added much to the weight and expense of each gown. Still, the modern method needs extreme care to make it look and set well, and so to manage our stitches that they will not show on the right side, while making them firm and strong on the lining. Much tacking, and patient fixing are needed, and either a large table or a skirt-board, to ensure the absolute success of the attempt. Even the putting-on of the usual skirt frill must be done with care and niceness.

There are two methods of putting in the linings; but the easiest, though not the neatest, is the one most generally chosen. This is done by tacking the lining and the material together very exactly, and then placing the seams together. In doing this, great care must be taken not to pull one against the other, when you come to the bias seams. With thin materials it is best to make the seams to show in the under part of the skirt, even with a silk lining, for by this means you take in the outside material, the lining, and the interlining together at every seam. The neater way is to cut the outer material and the lining exactly alike, and to shape the stiffening, or interlining, to each width separately. Then join up the seams of each separately, and when you have so done, lay them together with their seams facing each other inside. The interlining you have tacked and sewn-in with the seams of the material. This gives an absolutely neat lining, and for thin dresses it is really the best way. The interlining or stiffening used is of tailors' canvas. Lately, however, I have seen a new material called *fibre chamois*, that has been

much recommended here as well as in America. The tops of skirts require fitting, and should lie very snugly, without wrinkling at all.

For the present style of very wide skirts, about thirteen yards of material would be required of about twenty-two inches wide silk, thirty-inch cotton, or five-and-a-half yards of a forty-four-inch woollen material—that is, if it were made with the much-worn *godet* pleats. There need be no waste in cutting the skirt, because if carefully arranged into the right place, one piece fits in with another in a wonderful way when the maker exercises her brains a little. In most of the *godet* skirts, a long length of half-inch wide elastic is sewn upon each of the seams at about fourteen inches from the top, beginning at the second front gore. This holds the pleats in their places, and at the same time gives an elastic yet permanent position.

We will suppose that you have obtained a pattern, purchased your material and lining, and are prepared to begin cutting out your gown. You must begin with the skirt first, for the material required for the bodice will be found in the cuttings left from the skirt. The best lining is, of course, silk; but if you cannot afford that, there is linenette, a material called "marshallete," and also "sillette," the latter with a satin face. These linings are, however, called by different names in different shops, and so you must not be surprised if you have to explain what you want. If you can obtain both the skirt material and the lining of double width, they can be cut in a much more economical manner. The stiffening of the skirt is of tailors' canvas, and this will set much better if you damp it a little, and iron it lightly afterwards. It makes it easier to put the skirt together if you bear in mind that the straight side of the seams goes to the front, and the bias side turns to the back; and when stitching them in the machine, you must be careful to have the selvedge edge underneath. When you do this you avoid the risk of puckering the seam. I have told you that skirts must be very carefully prepared by tacking for the final machine-sewing, and unless this be done, you may expect a disappointment. The interlining of the front and side seams is usually about sixteen inches high, and at the back may rise to twenty-six or thirty inches, and in some gowns to the waist, or nearly so. The top of this interlining is generally rounded off, so as to make a gradually ascending line from the front to the back. This stiffening must be sewn on the lining with the machine, so as to keep it firm. One of the newest methods of making a skirt is to make the material and the lining separately, and then tack them together.

Let us hope that you may find some clever assistant who will turn your skirt up at the edge. But, even though you may do so, you must take very careful measurements of your exact length, so that you may be sure to have something to help you rectify all mistakes. One of the faults in cutting the skirts of to-day seems to me to be in sloping off the gores too sharply at the waist. This makes it look overstrained at the hips, and the painful effect is not altered by the slight fulness which one often sees given at the band. The skirt should fit absolutely well without any fulness at all. Some of the newest tailor-made gowns of cloth have a divided band at the waist, half at the back and half to the front, the fastenings being carried to the back and front respectively. This raises the weight in a measure from the back, and prevents a dragging that is sometimes painful. The under-arm seam in a present-day bodice is brought well forward, and the first dart made as near to the front as possible. There are two side-pieces, and great care is taken to cut the bodice long, so as to come below the waist-line, so that it may be seen above the edge of the bodice.

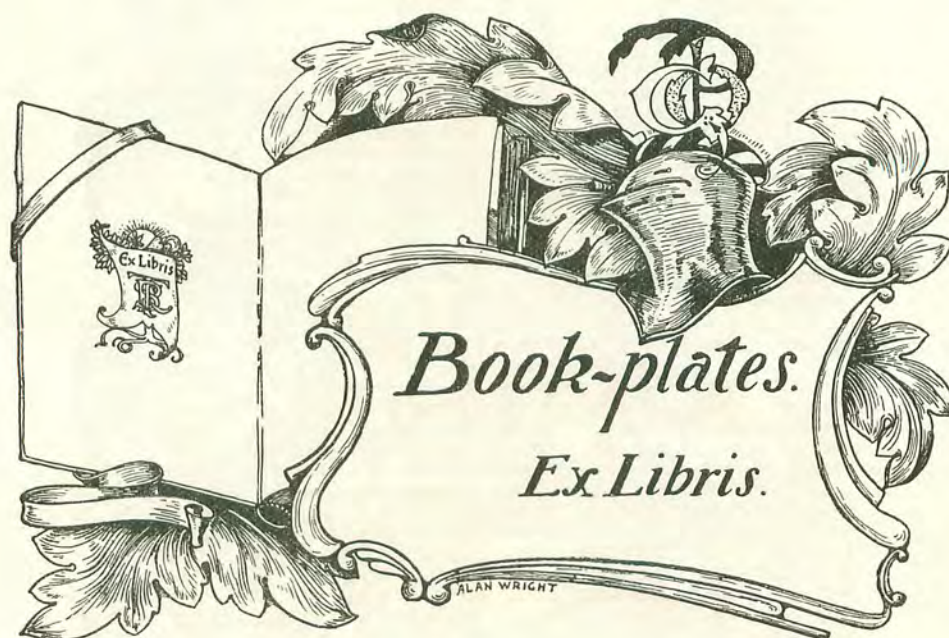
Do not be in the least degree put out if I go on to advise you to have, at all times, as few dresses as possible, and do not envy any of your neighbours who have it in their power to wear half-a-dozen new gowns in as many days. As a well-known writer has recently said—

“Such lavishness cannot, at all events, claim the countenance of one who is not only almost the highest, but by common consent also one of the best-dressed women in the land. The Princess of Wales seldom wears very costly attire in the daytime, and she goes on wearing her dresses as long as they look nice. I have repeatedly seen her at intervals during two successive seasons in the same gown; and at an important ceremony in the

Jubilee year Her Royal Highness appeared in a striking costume of green velvet brocaded with strawberries in their natural colour, which she had worn new in Ireland two years earlier. With regard to her daughters, simplicity has been carried to its utmost limit in their costume. But, in point of fact, dressing beyond what elegance and refinement demand, and dressing for the sake merely of showing how many and how expensive one's new gowns can be, is essentially vulgar; and gross and wasteful extravagance in this respect is no more truly ‘ladylike’ than it is morally justifiable.

“But the more reasonable a woman is about her dress expenditure, the more needful it is that she should pay due attention to having

what she does purchase to suit her, and made in accordance with the mode. Otherwise she soon gets dowdy and conspicuously unfashionable, or tires of her things. It is a penance of no mean description to wear what one feels is either out of style or unbecoming. That is a sensation as trying to the temper as it is distracting to the intellectual and social faculties. By all means, then, let us know what the fashions are and how they are veering, and let us try to discover what suits our faces and figures, and ‘see that we get it.’ This is quite another matter from the reckless ordering of the eternal new clothes, and wearing something fresh on every occasion of display, regardless of the fact that this means throwing aside costly clothes scarcely worn.”



A SHORT article on the origin and development of Book-plates (*Ex Libris*) must of necessity only skim the subject; but in so doing let us be careful to get only the cream, then those who feel themselves more deeply interested in the matter may turn for greater repletion to the wholesome milk—those authorities to whom we are, remember, indebted in a great measure for the cream we intend to condense, if possible, into a few columns.

Book-plates, to quote *Chambers's Encyclopaedia*, is the somewhat awkward name given

to the labels denoting ownership fastened inside volumes. These labels may be anything, from a simple typographical inscription to the ambitious armorial, or the allegorical, symbolical, or pictorial design suggested by the tastes or hobbies of their respective owners; but the prince of all devices is the handsome, richly mantled armorial plate—the plate proper—although to appreciate these thoroughly one must possess some knowledge of that most cunning and fascinating art, heraldry.

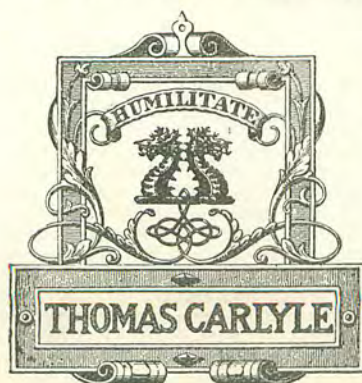
The typographical label is in these days certainly inexcusable; for one may have a design reproduced and quite a quantity of prints made for a few shillings, and even if one cannot design for one's self, our little circles of friends must in this era of Government Art Schools, include at least one artist with sufficient talent to produce the necessary small design.

On the continent, book-plates are invariably termed *Ex Libris*, and in England the Latin phrase also is often used. Our only book-plate society styles itself The Ex Libris Society, and issues monthly an interesting journal devoted entirely to book-plate lore, and freely illustrated after famous old plates or noticeable modern ones.

The phrases *Ex Libris*, *Ex Bibliotheca*, *Ex Catalogo Bibliotheca*, *Ex Musæo*, etc., were not used generally on French book-plates until

about 1700; but the German plates bear the *Ex Libris* on some of the earliest prints.

Book-plates, roughly speaking, may be said to have come into use contemporaneously with printing, of course not generally; but it would be difficult to say how uncommon they were in the early years of the printer's press, since though but very few have survived the four



THE BUXHEIM PLATE.