



HOW TO GET UP LACE AND CHIFFON.



CAN almost imagine I hear some reader saying, "It is a very easy matter to read directions for getting up delicate fabrics like those named in the title, but quite another thing to make them wearable, much less to look like new." All I can say is that, if the following instructions are explicitly followed, the result will far surpass my readers' expectations. I speak from experience, as I know what can be accomplished by willing and quick fingers in laundry-work. Just the very things that the ordinary laundress fails in are those which can be most easily and successfully done at home, viz., lace, silk, fancy work, and flannels.

Indeed, the former can be managed in the dining- or breakfast-room without having to invade the kitchen at all, except, perhaps, for irons. I am sure this consideration carries great weight in these days, when one must be careful (and rightly so, I think) to give no cause for complaint in the servants' quarters.

We will suppose that there are white and coloured laces, chiffon, net veils, and a Maltese handkerchief to be washed and got up.

The first thing is to sort out the white things and put the coloured on one side. All, coloured and white, will need shaking. This is to get out as much of the dust as possible, and all, except coloured materials, are improved by being steeped or soaked for a time (over-night if time permit) to loosen the dirt. A teaspoonful of powdered borax dissolved in boiling water to each pint of water will further aid the process.

But supposing it is silk lace, and that it is more discoloured than actually soiled, the better plan will be to pour over enough hot milk to cover, and let it steep several hours before washing it.

The preliminary soaking makes the task of cleansing much easier.

Squeeze the lace out of the steeping water, taking care not to break the delicate threads. Next make a warm lather by melting some shreds of yellow or cured soap in a perfectly clean pan or jar with enough water to cover. Boil until dissolved, and then add it to warm water, stirring with the hand until a lather of soap-suds be obtained. It will depend entirely upon the hardness of the water as to how much melted soap will be required. If soft rain-water be employed, a very little will be sufficient to raise the lather. On the contrary, should the water be hard as the proverbial "nails," five or six times the amount may be requisite. This hardness *must* be overcome before it is of much service for cleansing purposes. Borax has softening properties without the deleterious effects of soda on the material.

The lace must now be most carefully kneaded, and squeezed in the soapy water with the hands (exactly as though it were a sponge) until it is fresh and clean. It may require two or three soapy waters if it is very much soiled. Rinse in warm water and again in cold until every trace of soap be removed. If pure white lace, slightly blue the last rinsing water.

I think most lace is improved by being stiffened. I am afraid visions of a stiff papery fabric will rise up before the mental gaze of my readers as they scan the word "stiffen." I will hasten at once to allay the natural alarm by saying the stiffness should be just enough to give body to the texture, and yet not enough to prevent it falling in soft folds. Very thick lace, such as furniture lace, etc., will require more starch naturally than that which is used for trimming and wearing. The very best way of stiffening the latter, and indeed for all ordinary lace, is as follows:—Take two tablespoonfuls of rice, a pint and a half of water (cold). Wash the rice well. Boil in the water three or four minutes. Strain and use by soaking the fabric in it for a few seconds, then squeeze it out with the hands. Water which has been used for boiling rice for a curry makes a capital starch for muslin curtains and aprons.

Rice starch is far superior to any other kind, and the best makers manufacture their preparations almost exclusively from it. Wheat starch, though stiffer, is much coarser.

Having squeezed the lace out of the rice water, pull it into shape with the fingers and spread upon a clean cloth; fold over and place under a heavy weight for a time. Books will do admirably for pressure.

Now take a perfectly clean but only a moderately hot iron. It is difficult to judge accurately the right heat unless one has had some experience in the use of irons. The best plan, after rubbing the iron on a greasy rag to clean it, will be to try it on a piece of damp rag. If it scorches ever so slightly, it is too hot; if it sticks ever so little, it is too cool. It should pass over a damp surface quite smoothly.

Lay the lace on a piece of flannel, if possible, or some soft material with the wrong side uppermost, the reason being that, instead of the pattern being flattened by the weight of the iron, it is raised by being pressed into a soft bed. Endeavour to keep the lace straight. The points will need careful attention, and the fingers must be used almost as much as the iron in doing dainty work of this sort. Press with the iron until it is absolutely dry if you wish to avoid the tumbled appearance it invariably gets if put away the *least* damp. It is really safer to leave it in front of the fire even after it *feels* quite dry.

Coloured Lace and Chiffon.—These must be washed in exactly the same way as the white, but add to the rinsing water one tablespoonful of vinegar and one of salt. These ingredients are used to preserve the colour. The vinegar revives and the salt helps to fix it. All coloured things must be ironed at once after pulling into shape and pressing in cloths for a few minutes only. Let the rice water get cold before using it, and if the colour be inclined to run much, add vinegar and salt to that.

Chiffon must be ironed while very damp, and should it be a large piece do not expose more than necessary to the air while ironing, as it dries very quickly. After ironing, if it is too stiff, rub between the thumb and finger to remove some of the starch, and then iron again. This brings us to the

Maltese Handkerchief, which again is washed as before, but, instead of passing it through rice water, gum water will answer our purpose better. To make it allow one ounce of gum

arabic (best white) to half a pint of water. Stir over gentle heat until melted, strain through *very* fine muslin, and bottle for further use. From half to one tablespoonful to half a pint of water will be found enough for most purposes.

I must not forget to mention that, in cases of emergency, one ounce of lump sugar dissolved in half a pint of water is a useful way of making a stiffening agent quickly. The disadvantage of using sugar is that, unless extreme care be taken, the material has a brown appearance owing to the heat of the iron carbonising the sugar. The Maltese handkerchief is finished off a little differently from a length of lace.

The best way is either to take a pillow or cushion and cover it with a clean handkerchief. Then pin the fancy handkerchief with the wrong side uppermost again: begin with the corners to ensure its being a good shape. Then pin out each loop without unduly stretching the threads and material. It will take a little time and patience to do it nicely, but it is worth the trouble. Leave it until quite dry; finally press it with a cool iron after removing the pins. This method of finishing off is suitable for collarets and cuffs as well as for fancy lace handkerchiefs.

Honiton Lace is really better not ironed, but merely placed between folds of clean white paper, blotting preferably, and pressed under heavy weights until dry.

Coffee-coloured and Deep Cream Lace, after washing in the usual way, must be rinsed in weak coffee or tea. Coffee gives a brighter shade than tea, and the strength of both must depend upon the colour of the lace. For very yellow lace, yellow ochre may be used for tinging the rinsing water. The ochre should be tied in a piece of flannel and used in the same way as the blue-bag.

Very Old and Valuable Lace is often of so delicate a nature that it will be found better to wash it in a bottle. For this purpose choose one that is rather wide-mouthed, and fill it two-thirds with warm soapy lather in which half a teaspoonful of borax has been dissolved; put in the lace, shake well until clean, change the water if necessary. Rinse till free from soap (in the bottle), and to each rinsing water allow the above quantity of dissolved borax. This ingredient not only helps to bleach the lace, but also imparts a slight glossiness and stiffness to it which by many people is considered enough. Pull out and wrap in a cloth as before. Press with a warm iron if not suitable for pinning out.

I have already mentioned one method for restoring the colour of lace which has become yellow with age, but this paper would be incomplete without a few words on boiling it. After shaking and steeping, put it in a jam jar with soapy water to well cover. Place the jar in a saucepan which contains enough cold water to come half-way up the jar. Put on the lid and boil for an hour or two. Then wash, rinse, and iron as before. If after boiling it is still discoloured, let it hang in the sun to dry.

I will close with a few rules for the washing of fine things:—

1. Shake out all the dust.
2. Steep to loosen dirt (except in cases of coloured articles).
3. *Never* rub, but squeeze lace.
4. Wrap in cloth for a time under pressure.
5. Iron on *wrong* side.