

THE TOILET-TABLE, AND WHAT SHOULD LIE THEREON.

By MEDICUS.



WITH the toilet-table, as a table, it is not my province to speak, nor to tell you how it should be draped or bedecked; but neatness, tidiness, and perfect cleanliness should reign supreme in a young girl's dressing-room, however splendid and beautiful the fittings thereof may be, or however humble and poor.

Now, under the title I have chosen for this paper, I mean to give you many little hints, and not a few harmless recipes; and if you attend to the former, and make use of the latter, I have no hesitation in saying that improvement in your personal appearance will be the result. Beauty is your birthright, you ought to try to look as well as you can, both for your own personal comfort and for the sake of those around you. By taking pains to improve your looks by natural and simple means while young, you will retain your beauty even when, with the ever-recurring years, youth is slipping slowly away. But nothing in after years can atone for, what I may call, the want of attention to the simple rules of personal hygiene in your younger days. Does, then, attention to these rules lie in the proper use of the adjuncts of the toilet-table, and dressing-room? Not quite. These are mere accessories, indispensable I willingly admit, but accessories nevertheless; and even their constant use has no more effect without something else, which I shall presently name, in retaining true beauty, than an occasional coat of paint to a rotten boat has in keeping it seaworthy. The something else is health—perfect health. And even granting that you have the strongest of constitutions, and the highest of animal spirits, if you do not cultivate habits of temperance and moderation in all your actions and thoughts, take my word for it you are but frittering those precious possessions away.

"Oh!" I think I hear some of my young readers exclaim, "this isn't a medical paper, this is a sermon 'Medicus' is going to preach."

If "Medicus" does preach, depend upon it he will preach common sense, but not one inch will he budge towards the toilet-table, until he has had his say. "As soon," remarks a great authority, "as we begin to live we begin to die." This is true; and even in youth our bodies are but the strongholds behind which we live, and the stouter the ramparts the more likely are they to ward off the shafts of disease and death. But these very ramparts themselves have a tendency to crumble away, and we must study to strengthen them; we must look upon them as our foes likely at any time to fall and crush us; in other words, we must conquer self, we must study abnegation in everything, for abnegation leads to temperance, indeed, it is the root and soul thereof, temperance leads to health, and health is the foundation of true personal beauty. Be temperate, therefore, in eating, and temperance in this respect will become a habit, although it may cost you much abnegation to acquire it. But look up, never look down, for in this world, though we may sow in tears, we reap rejoicing in the life which is to come.

Be temperate in your hours of pleasure and sleep. Over indulgence in either produces wrinkles and sallowness of complexion. This is easily accounted for in this way, and I will put it as simply as I can. When the heart is

overtired from long hours of wakefulness, or languid and weak from over indulgence in sleep, it is unable to receive the blood back sufficiently quick, the tender tissues around the eyes get puffy and swollen, the skin is thus stretched, and when the puffiness goes away it is inclined to lie in folds or wrinkles. The skin, of course, is very resilient and elastic and will regain its former appearance again and again for a time, but a constant drop will wear a stone away, and at last its elasticity is lost and wrinkles are the result. Be temperate in talking and self-abnegating in argument, you will thus preserve your good temper.

Having heard me patiently, I will now advance to the toilet-table, the largest and most conspicuous object on which is the mirror. However big this may be, or however small, let it be a true glass. A few shillings spent on a good mirror is money well laid out. A proper looking-glass certainly will not flatter you, but, on the contrary, it will point out to you in a friendly way all your defects, and if there be means of remedying them it will give you light to do so; but a bad glass is your worst friend, because it not only hides your faults, but gives an imperfect and very far from flattering reflection of your face and figure, and this would be no comfort to you if you were going out anywhere to spend the evening. The looking-glass should be kept perfectly clear and bright; it should be well polished once a week at least, but this must be carefully done. Thus: dust the mirror first with a soft brush to prevent scratching, then take a damp sponge, and sprinkling a little eau de Cologne on it, rub the surface gently over; then dust over with good whiting, and while it is still damp polish with a silk handkerchief. The sponge itself should be perfectly clean, and sponges, whether used for the bath or simply for face ablation, should be invariably soft and clean and pure. When bought new, before you use them, shake out the dust, and then steep them for some hours in soft water several times renewed. Soap spoils sponges. If soap must be used with a sponge, rinse the latter in warm water before you put it away. Press or squeeze a sponge—do not wring it—and if it gets slimy, which it never ought to, soak it in water and soda for some hours. The bath sponge should be a very large one, if you mean to benefit by the use of the bath. The bath itself should be kept spotlessly clean; when spots of rust begin to appear in it, it is time it was repainted, else it will not wear. Iron rust is rather good in the water than otherwise; indeed, I have known much good come from a course of iron baths. The iron bath is a simple tonic one, and should be used every morning for a fortnight or three weeks at a time. It is composed of water one bucketful, sulphate of iron a quarter of an ounce, placed in the bath over night. While taking a course of such baths, a tepid bath with soap should be used twice a week—to thoroughly cleanse the skin—the last thing before going to bed. For young pale girls with weak nerves and languid circulations the iron bath is likely to be of great use, especially if steel drops—ten in a little water thrice daily after food—are taken at the same time.

Meanwhile, I am turning my back on the toilet-table, so I must face round again. Here are a couple of hair-brushes. How beautifully white and clean you keep them! This delights my eye. Of course you wash them occasionally, by dipping them in cold water in which soda has been dissolved—not soap—with gentle friction on the palm of the hand, holding them in such a position that the backs do not get wetted, and afterwards standing them in the wind, but not in the sun, to dry.

Do you ever use the metallic brushes? They are so cooling to the temples on a warm

summer's day, but must be kept dry, else they are apt to rust. I sometimes think they stimulate the growth of the hair by their pleasant, cool friction. When you wash your hair do not use soap, unless the very mildest transparent kind, the same as you use for hands and face; but yolk of egg is better, well rinsed out with lukewarm water, then with cold soft or rain water, and, when partially dried by means of soft towels, combed and brushed.

Rain water is a great beautifier of the complexion. Collect it, and keep it in jars, after having it run through a filter. This is a hint worth much fine gold, so lay it to heart and you will look well.

Now, I am not your hairdresser, but I know you want me to tell you of something to increase the strength and beauty of the hair. I am good natured, and can't refuse. Here is a good application, a little of which may be rubbed into the roots of the hair, after moderate friction with the brushes every morning:—Tincture of cantharides, a quarter of an ounce; eau de Cologne, one ounce; bay rum, one ounce; rose water, two ounces. You can make your own bay rum simply enough: get two ounces of fresh bay leaves, and steep them for six days in six ounces of best rum. These are valuable receipts, but they must not be used more than once a day, nor longer than a fortnight at a time, and if they produce the slightest irritation or heat of the skin they must be omitted for a time.

Here is a good and very safe pomade for thinness of the hair: Pure lard four ounces, pure white wax half an ounce, melt, then remove from heat, and add half an ounce of balsam of tolu and twenty drops of oil of rosemary. Equal parts of bay rum, eau de Cologne and castor-oil form a good hair cosmetic.

The most innocent of white powders for face or skin are composed either of oxide of zinc, magnesia starch, or levigated starch. Be on your guard against such as are sold under fancy names. Be on your guard, too, against the dangerous compounds that are advertised by taking titles. Here is a recipe for the best bloom for lips or cheeks:—Early rising, morning tubbing, and plenty of out-door exercise. Soap is a necessity of life, but pray get it pure, non-alkaline, and transparent, and not the dangerously dyed masses of unhealthy curd you see so often exposed for sale.

Toilet vinegar should always find a place on the table. A little in the basin of water you lave your face with is delightfully refreshing.

Does your face often flush—I do not mean simple blushing? If it does you cannot be over strong, you need tonics and more fresh air. No applications will do good, but continuous flushing of the face under the least excitement is very apt to spoil the very best complexion.

Cold cream is one of the most harmless of applications to tender lips or skin.

Here is a lotion for freckles. It is a drachm of the muriate of ammonia dissolved in a pint of soft water, and a dessert-spoonful of eau de Cologne added; apply twice a day. The following is a good wash for sunburning:—fifteen grains of borax, an ounce of limejuice, and a dessert-spoonful of eau de Cologne. Butter-milk applied before going to bed, especially if a little sour, is very cooling after a hot day. Milk of roses (the best) is also a good face application; and here is a very simple one. Dissolve a quarter of an ounce of borax in a pint of elder-flower water, and add an ounce of eau de Cologne. By the way many harmless and delightful preparations can be prepared from flowers, as well as many good but simple perfumes, and if my girl-readers care for it, I feel sure the editor will grant me

space for a nice summer article on this subject.

I think, in a former paper, I mentioned tooth-powders. Charcoal is unsightly but very effective, and it can be made more so by rubbing up with an ounce of it as much quinine as will lie on a sixpenny piece; a few drops of otto of roses may be added. Or, make a tooth-powder thus (if you can find a pestle and mortar): Equal parts of burnt crust of bread, white sugar, and Peruvian bark, and a drop or two of otto of roses. If you prefer a paste, add a little honey. Use a soft and a hard tooth-brush, and never omit brushing the teeth inside and out after meals as well as in the morning.

HOW DRESSING-GOWNS ARE MADE.

I SUPPOSE every girl who reads these pages will agree with me that a dressing-gown of some sort is a necessity of her existence. Like the modern bath-room which is now introduced into every recently-fitted house, no one who has once known the comfort and benefit of it would ever again be without it. A dressing-gown is to my mind at once a necessity and a luxury, the greatest comfort and the most indispensable article of a girl's wardrobe.

On one occasion the writer of this paper was going into the country on a visit with her husband, several small children including a baby, and a nurse. In the midst of our preparations, my husband came and requested me to reduce our luggage to two trunks, which, with the addition of the nurse's, he said would look sufficiently formidable to carry into a stranger's house.

We performed marvels in the way of packing, for there were interminable white frocks and pinafores and pelisses for the children, but in the end we had squeezed everything into the prescribed limits but two articles—my one visiting dress of black silk, and my crimson dressing-gown. One of these could by great management be included, but only one, and the difficulty was to make the choice. Nothing could possibly be omitted from the contents of either box. After much deliberation I decided that my dress would be most useful to me, so with many regrets I relegated the dressing-gown to its usual peg in my hanging closet.

On the eve of our departure we received word that fever had broken out in our friend's house, but that they had secured farm-house apartments for us a few miles off.

We accordingly took up our quarters at the farm, and I had not been there two days before I was taken ill. Then how willingly would I have exchanged my silk dress for my dressing-gown. There was not such a thing in the place, and as I became convalescent, after a somewhat sharp illness, I had to see the doctor wrapped up in a blanket, or undergo the fatigue of a complete toilet. Nothing again would ever induce me to leave home for a single night without such an invaluable adjunct.

Nor is there any reason why every girl should not possess so desirable an addition to her comfort when we consider how easily and inexpensively it may be procured. A plain serviceable dressing-gown can be made at home with comparatively small outlay of money, time, or trouble, although for those of my readers who have a fair amount of each of these at their disposal, there are most charming and elaborate *robes de chambre*, about which I shall have a word to say further on.

The simplest and least expensive form of dressing-gown would be one composed of pretty cambric or print, but unfortunately these are only suitable for summer wear, and

necessitate a warmer one for winter nights and mornings; or in case of sudden sickness during a winter night, the sort of occasion which proves to you the real value of a comfortable, handy garment, easily thrown on, and sufficiently warm for the purpose.

On the whole, therefore, where economy must be rigidly studied, I should advise the choice of a flannel dressing-gown in preference to one of any cotton material, probably prettier and costing less, yet I am convinced not likely to prove so really serviceable. I shall therefore speak first of a plain flannel dressing-gown.

I have known people swear by dressing-gowns of ordinary petticoat flannel, either white or scarlet, because of their supposed superiority for washing purposes. It is a mistake. They do not wash better, a red one not as well as many patterned ones; the white soil in a tenth of the time, and are most unbecoming, a matter not without importance. If it is right and commendable to cultivate a high standard of artistic excellence in our household surroundings, let us be consistent and apply the same principle even to our dressing-gowns.

Therefore I advise every girl to choose as pretty a flannel as she can, taking care to select such colours as will not be positively unbecoming. But she must think of something else as well, so she must be satisfied if they are not the tints most decidedly becoming. She wants something that will wash, as it is to last her a long time, and be usable on every possible occasion. Then let me advise her not to buy twilled flannel of one colour, which is to be had at very inexpensive rates of all drapers. I have tried cardinal, violet, blue. Each of these washed execrably. The cardinal, I am assured, will wash if bought in a very good quality, but for this I cannot answer, and am inclined to doubt it. The twilled flannels are as a rule mixed with cotton; hence the difficulty in washing.

We arrive, then, at figured flannels. These are, I believe, quite the best for the purpose, and are to be had in such pretty designs that I do not think any girl would regret giving up the notion of the "splendid cardinal" or "lovely blue" on which she had set her heart. Here, again, another word of advice. Don't choose any pattern in which violet, black, or blue, is predominant. A tone of blue may be had by choosing a flannel in which a thin line of that colour occurs, or, indeed, where it is introduced in any way that will not render the pattern grotesquely incomplete when the blue has retreated, as it most probably will after several washings. Blue is such a favourite shade that I cannot find it in my heart to restrict its use altogether, nor do I think that even those with whom economy is a very special object will find it undesirable wear if chosen with due regard to the hints I have given.

Shirt flannels may sometimes be obtained in designs pretty enough for dressing gowns. These are very good for the purpose, washing well if chosen carefully. The remarks just made apply to these, as well as to the dressing gown flannels. They range from 1s. 6d. per yard. A very charming material is that called velours flannel, which, as its name indicates, has a velvety appearance, and is made in very pretty stripes of pale blue pink, &c., on a ground of some neutral tint. I find that the colours stand washing perfectly well, but that the flannel is inclined to shrink. The prices are from 2s. 11½d. per yard.

Pompadour flannels are very pretty, but here again economy steps in. If your gown is to be made as inexpensively as possible, we must have no pattern to which there is an up and a down, a right and a wrong side. If we do we must have more stuff, as then we could not fit the gores in one with another.

As regards the making, if you have no notion whatever of dressmaking, I feel inclined to give a piece of advice which may read to you something like *Punch's* advice to those about to marry. It is, don't attempt it without a pattern. Very useful patterns can be bought for a shilling in most places, and as an accurate fit is not required, there is no risk to be run. The inexperienced will find the matter greatly simplified by this means. There is at least one firm of pattern cutters who, on receipt of a few simple measurements, will send a pattern of any garment, from which an accurate fit may be relied upon.*

Armed with this our dressing-gown is a very simple matter indeed, requiring no directions that are not given with the paper model.

If a girl has some experience of making dresses, an ordinary jacket-bodice pattern will serve our purpose, if we remember to allow a good margin at all seams, for a dressing-gown must never be a close fit. Having first measured the length back and front that would allow your gown to touch the floor in front and lie about a quarter of a yard upon it at the back, it would be necessary to cut each piece so much longer than the jacket pattern as was indicated by the measurements, allowing quite three inches more for a hem, and taking care that each portion widened proportionately towards the bottom of the skirt. The fronts, which are cut without the two darts usual in ordinary bodices, should measure at the hem about twenty-seven inches in width, including turnings, the side pieces seventeen, and the back gores eighteen inches, and narrow up to the waist by a gradual slope. It would be best to cut the back pieces first of the length required, bringing them up by a somewhat sharp slope to a length five inches more than the front measurement, at the seam which under the arm joins the back and front of the gown together. The fronts must be cut correspondingly, sloping to a length at the sides five inches more than at the front. Thus a dressing-gown for a person of ordinary height might measure *from the waist*, at front, where it fastens, thirty-seven inches, side seam under the arm, from waist, forty-three inches, and middle of back from waist, forty-seven inches.

Many persons give greater fulness to the skirt by the addition of a pleat in the back seam about a quarter of a yard below the waist. This is done by cutting the seam in this fashion (fig. 1), and folding the extra fulness into a flat pleat on the wrong side.



I need hardly add that both the centre back pieces must be perfect duplicates. All dressing-gowns, whether of flannel or cambric, have a lining in the upper part extending some little distance below the waist. Cashmere gowns are generally lined through. A pocket laid on the right side, turn-down collar or pleating round the throat if preferred, simple coat cuff and waist-band, complete the gown, which will require from six to seven yards of flannel, according to width. The accompanying diagram (fig. 2) gives a perfectly plain wrapper such as I have just described, but without the pleated back.

This form of dressing-gown may be embellished by the addition of a kilting round the hem, revers down the front, reaching from the

* Butterick and Co., Regent-street.