

HABITS OF THE ROMAN LADIES.

It has been remarked that "a fondness for adorning the person for the sake of obtaining admiration from men is natural to all women." Now allowing this to be true, surely no one can condemn so laudable a desire of pleasing on the part of the fair sex, whatever may be its ulterior object. The female mind, for the most part, has so few important considerations wherewith to occupy itself, and so few opportunities of *publicly* displaying its judgment and taste, except in matters of dress, that we cannot wonder at seeing so much attention paid to it by women of every class; besides, when it is remembered that the amount expended by ladies in articles of dress and *bijouterie* by far exceeds that spent by the "lords of the creation" for the same purpose, a female fondness for fashion must always be considered as a national blessing, and one of the many advantages derived from a splendid court. We would, however, by no means be understood as advocating that excessive love of dress which is indulged in by some, reckless of all consequences, and which would almost induce them, Tarpeia-like, to sacrifice their country for a bracelet. The opening remark was made on the Roman ladies some two thousand years ago, and it is of their different dresses that we now propose to treat; these, in splendour, richness, and gracefulness, were not surpassed even by those of the present

day, if we may judge from the little insight afforded us by old Latin writers into the mysteries of a Roman lady's toilet.

The ladies of ancient Rome rose early, and immediately enjoyed the luxury of the bath, which was sometimes of perfumed water; they then underwent a process of polishing with pumice-stone for the purpose of smoothing the skin, and after being anointed with rich perfumes they threw around them a loose robe and retired to their dressing-rooms, where they received morning visits from their friends, and discussed the merits of the last eloquent speech delivered in the senate, or the probable conqueror in the next gladiatorial combat. After the departure of their visitors commenced the business of the toilet, which occupied a considerable portion of time; the maids were summoned, to each of whom a different duty was assigned: some formed a kind of council, and only looked on to direct and assist the others by their advice and experience; one held the mirror before her mistress; while others there were to whom it was a

“———, constant care

The bodkin, comb, and essence to prepare.”

With the exception of the looking-glass, the articles of the toilet were much the same as those in use at present. The glass, or more properly speaking, mirror, was composed of a highly polished plate of metal*, generally silver, richly chased around the edges, and adorned with precious stones; this was not fixed in a frame like the modern glass, but held by a slave. The combs were formed of ivory and rose-wood. Curling tongs, bodkins,

* Looking-glasses were known to the Romans, and obtained from the Phœnicians, but they were not in general use.

and hair pins were also known; the former was a simple bar of iron heated in the fire, around which the hair was turned in order to produce a curl; the two latter were made of gold and silver, and ornamented with pearls; it was probably with one of these bodkins that Cleopatra gave herself a death-wound, and not, as is commonly supposed, with an adder.

The use of perfumes, cosmetics, and depilatories, prevailed to a great extent amongst the Romans; the first were obtained at a considerable expense from India, Greece, and Persia; there are still in existence a few recipes for making the cosmetics used two thousand years ago, and which will be found to have many ingredients in common with similar preparations of our own time. Ovid gives the following, and adds that those who use it will possess a complexion smoother than the surface of their polished mirrors:—"Take two pounds of Lybian barley, free from straw and chaff, and an equal quantity of the pea of the wild vetch, mix these with ten eggs, let it harden and pound it, add two ounces of hartshorn, and a dozen roots of the narcissus bruised in a mortar, two ounces of gum, and two ounces of meal; reduce the whole to a powder, sift it, and add nine times the quantity of honey." Some used poppy juice and water, and others a pap or poultice of bread and milk, with which they completely covered the face, and kept on in their own houses; this when removed left the skin smooth and fair. Depilatories were used to form and adorn the eyebrows, which it was considered elegant to have joined across the nose.

On one part of a Roman lady's dressing table might be seen her small silver tooth brush, which, with the assistance of a little pure water and occasionally a pow-

der of mastic wood, formed her only dentifrice ; near it stood a paper containing a black powder, which when ignited sent up a volume of thick smoke, and had the valuable property of restoring the eyes to their former brilliancy if weakened by the gaiety of the preceding evening, or by a sleepless night occasioned by the constant serenades of her lover beneath her window. Here was a bottle of the perfume of Pæstum, and there a box of rouge, and another of hair dye ; on another part lay a large coil or braid of false hair, made up by a male hair-dresser, and near it were the bodkins, the chains, the rings, and hard by the richly-studded bands of white and purple which adorned the head ; this braid was worn on the crown of the head, the hair from the nape of the neck being all pulled out by the roots. Continual changes were taking place in the fashion of wearing the hair ; at first it was cut off as a votive offering to the gods, but the Roman ladies soon discovered that "a luxuriant head of hair was a powerful auxiliary of female beauty," and allowed it to grow ; at one time it was worn high in bows with a range of curls in front ; at another *à-la-grecque* ; then allowed to float in the air in a dishevelled state, and again *à-la-militaire* in the form of a helmet. Light hair was sometimes worn over that of a naturally dark shade, auburn being the colour most esteemed and admired by both sexes ; those who had white or dark hair used saffron as a dye to give it an auburn tinge. Some ladies used gold dust as a hair powder, "which shed such a ray of glory around them as dazzled all beholders, and gave their heads an appearance of being on fire." When the ladies did not "wear their hair," they wore a kind of veil and a turban or bonnet, called *mitra* ; this was like a bishop's mitre in shape but not so high, and with a lap-

pet hanging over each cheek, something, in short, like a modern mob cap, which elegant head-dress owes its origin, no doubt, to the classical mitra; thus has the Roman female head-dress descended to our times, not only as one of the insignia of the members of the Right Reverend Bench, but also in the shape of a covering for our domestic matrons.

After having performed their ablutions, and gone through all the little delicate offices of making the complexion, perfuming the person, and endeavouring by art to excel nature, the Roman ladies were prepared to put on their costly garments, which were duly produced by the slave who had the honourable post of "mistress of the robes." In the earlier ages the under garment—which in other respects differed little from the modern—was worn as high as the chin and down to the feet, so as to leave no part of the person visible except the face, in time, however, it was cut lower and shortened; over this was worn the *tunica*, a dress composed of many folds, open at the sides and with sleeves; these sleeves were left open from the shoulder to the wrist, and fastened with clasps of gold and silver; one end of the *tunica* was fixed to the left shoulder, while the other was carried across the breast and fell negligently over the right shoulder till it touched the ground; this train was generally carried over the arm when walking, so as to show the right ankle; but it was considered *négligé* and graceful to allow it to drag on the ground instead of holding it up, and consequently was a custom much in vogue amongst the *distinguées* of ancient Rome. This was the dress worn during the republic, but it is difficult to obtain a correct description of it from the very vague accounts handed down to us; probably, as in most re-

publics, little attention was paid to dress, at all events it was plain and simple. It was not until the time of the emperors that the goddess of Fashion reared her head in the capital of the world, when though considerable alterations took place in dress, yet a few traits of the former style were retained. The number of garments worn varied according to the *temperature* of the wearer; they were generally three: the first was the simple vest; the second a kind of petticoat richly worked in front and surrounded at the waist by a belt, which answered the purpose of a corset, and was formed in front like a stomacher, richly studded with jewels; then came the third garment, the *stola*, which entirely superseded the use of the ancient *tunica*; this was a robe with a small train trimmed at the bottom with a deep border of purple and gold; it was confined at the waist by a belt, and the upper part thrown back so as to discover the embroidered front of the second garment or petticoat; on this front was worn the *laticlave*, an order or decoration of the empire granted to distinguished men, and sometimes assumed by females in right of their husbands*. Over all these was worn the *palla* or cloak, with a train of some yards in length, which fell from the shoulders, where it was fastened by two richly ornamented *fibule* or clasps; this train was trimmed with gold and silver, and sometimes with precious stones, and was usually carried over the left shoulder in the manner of the ample *roquelaure* worn by gentlemen. It will be seen from the above description that there is a considerable resemblance between the ancient Roman dress and the modern

* Orders were sometimes conferred on ladies. The senate granted a riband of a peculiar pattern to the wife and mother of Coriolanus, to be worn by them in consideration of valuable services performed to the state.

court dress, the former perhaps exceeding the latter in gracefulness and elegance of appearance, from its numerous folds and flowing outline. The materials of which these dresses were composed were silk, cashmere, and linen. Embroidery was procured from the Phœnicians and Assyrians; the former was most esteemed as it was raised, while the latter was smooth with the surface of the cloth. The only colour used for robes was white trimmed with purple, coloured clothes not being considered "*comme il faut*" amongst the higher orders at Rome.

The Roman stocking was of silk, generally pink or flesh-coloured, over which was worn a shoe or rather boot reaching above the ankle, turned up at the point like a Chinese shoe, and laced up from the instep tight to the leg. This boot was made of white leather or the papyrus bark, ornamented with gold, silver, and jewels. Sandals were also in use; they consisted of a simple sole with riband attached to it, and was laced up like a modern sandal, at the same time supplying the place of a garter by keeping the stocking up. We are informed that coquettes used cork soles and false insteps of cork, but never disfigured their persons by the barbarian ornaments of necklace, ring, or ear-ring.

After the Roman lady had completed her toilet she sallied out, followed by a slave, for a promenade beneath the porticoes of the Forum, where she could not only cheapen goods, but also hear what was going on in the law courts; after continuing her walk up the gentle ascent of the gay and crowded Suburra Street, she returned to her own house, the threshold of which (if she happened to be unmarried) was adorned with garlands of flowers, placed there by her young patrician admirers;

some of these flowers her attendants collected to fill the splendid vase which stood in her chamber, and preceded her to draw aside the curtain which supplied the place of a door into the tapestried and perfumed apartment; here she enters, and sinking softly down into an ivory and gold adorned chair, she is welcomed by the chirping notes of her favourite bird which hangs near in a gilded cage. By her side stands a beautiful page, who gently wafts a plume of peacocks' feathers around her head, while a slave presents a small stick wrapped around with, apparently, a roll of straw-coloured riband, but in reality it is a letter from the young Emilius, who adopts this mode of writing in preference to the usual waxen tablet, not only because it is a fashion introduced from Greece, but because it preserves most inviolably those secrets which are only meant to meet the eye of his lovely mistress; far be it from us to pry into these secrets, so let us now bid adieu to the fair Lucretia, who already begins anxiously to unrol the folds of her papyrian epistle.

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