

Woman and Her Work

As long as dame rumor continues to turn out imperfect work in the shape of female figures, and insists on giving one woman all the glorious curves, and soft cushions of dainty flesh, while she reserves the sharp corners and unsightly angles for another; corsets will hold their own and remain woman's sheet anchor, a sort of harbor of refuge from the storms of ridicule which are so often the portion of her whose bones and sinews occupy a more prominent place than is consistent with the rules of beauty, while her flesh is invisible except to the eye of faith. Shall such an one merely bow to the decree of the dress reformer and throw off her only armor against the prying eyes of a cruel world, just because that oracle says it is unhealthy, and shortens her life? No, a thousand times no! What odds if one's liver does get mixed up with her lungs and her heart dances a perpetual can-can on her spleen, those organs must look out for themselves and learn to accommodate their requirements to the exigencies of space as the people who live in New York flats do, and are none the worse in consequence, once they have grown accustomed to their surroundings. And as to the threat of shortening one's life, that is the least terrifying prospect of all! Tell a woman that corsets make her nose red and ruin her complexion, if you want to disgust her with them but don't think to frighten her with any such trifle as a shortening of her days. What is life without attractiveness? "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay." Better forty years of tailor made trimness and glove fitting garments, even if one's interior organs do get rather mixed up in consequence, than three score years and ten of baggy comfort and dowdiness, accompanied by perfect health and the undisguised display of all one's worst points. What woman of meagre figure will refuse to say Amen with all her heart to that sentiment?

In fact the corset is the best friend that woman has; if she is too stout, a properly made and properly worn corset will disguise the too redundant flesh and keep it in bounds, while the painfully thin woman is simply dependent on her corset for every charm of figure she can hope to possess. Without it every ungraceful angle is painfully apparent and she is apt to look the same size from under her arms down to her hips. But with a skillfully made corset in which all the defects of the figure are remedied the thin woman can be given a charming figure, and hold up her head amongst the most perfectly shaped of her sisters. I am afraid the really perfect figure is almost as rare as the buffalo or the black swan, now-a-days, if one may judge by the numerous contrivances, for disguising defects and beautifying imperfect figures.

I read a very interesting article not long ago on the latest achievements of the corset maker's art in reshaping woman's form and supplying what was needed to bring it up to the requisite standard of beauty; and I confess that I was astonished to find what a paying business artistic corset making, as it is called, has become. The very best corset makers are men, and they have offices to receive their customers just as a lawyer, or physician might, only there are sundry boxes of corsets visible on the shelves which surround the room.

The following conversation between a New York corset maker and one of his customers is full of interest and instruction for women who are in doubt whether corsets are injurious or not, and uncertain how to remedy the defects of figure which have so long been her despair:

A young woman walked into the office of a well-known corset maker and said:

"My figure is so downright ugly that I'm a dismal failure in society. Would it be possible for you to build me up?"

The corset maker looked at her and smiled. He half shut one eye and with the other seemed to penetrate her very ribs. Finally he said:

"Oh, yes, you are possible, very possible, ma'm'selle." He is a Frenchman, and he went on with all the enthusiasm of his race: "You might be worse. You have no hips or bust or symmetrical lines, but that can all be remedied."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed the girl. "You can give me a figure that will defy my big brother's comments! That can't be possible."

"Perhaps I oughtn't to wear a corset at all," she went on confidentially. "Do you know they tell me that there is absolutely no physiological argument for the corset, and if we women could see our interiors, by means of the Roentgen rays, we would never put corsets on again."

"Bosh!" ejaculated the Frenchman. "Every

woman should wear a corset. There are places where a corset should and should not press on the figure. The danger from wearing corsets lies in improperly made stays worn too tight. A corset that fits the form perfectly keeps it straight and holds it as it should be held. When a woman wears a ready-made gown she has alterations made in it. She does not expect it to fit her. Then why should she expect a ready-made corset to fit her? Most women think that if a corset fits the waist alone, it is a well-fitting garment. All wrong! All wrong! The waist is the least important. If a woman is short-waisted she should never wear a long-waisted corset, for it throws her bust up under her chin and accentuates every fault of her figure. On the contrary, if a woman is long-waisted she cannot with any degree of comfort wear a short waisted corset."

"How should a corset fit?" asked the young woman, eagerly. "I always feel like pulling my corset down. It is the most disagreeable sensation, and loads of girls and women tell me that they have the same tendency. When I was in college we counted 93 girls out of 110 one day who said they were never free from that feeling of wanting to pull their corsets down."

"There, now! There now! broke out the authority. "You make my point for me. The corset should curve in well at the waist, and gradually slope upward, to conform to the natural swell of the figure; if not, it gives the wearer that uncomfortable feeling, as if her corset always needed pulling down. The gradual curving of the hip, by continually pushing the ill-fitting stay up, causes this feeling."

"It seems to me," said the young woman, surveying her full length in a mirror critically, "that my figure swells in where it ought to swell out and vice versa. Of course, I have padding put in all my gowns but still nobody would take me for a Venus."

"There's where you make a great mistake," said the Frenchman; "I do not mean about Venus, but about padding. Padding that presses down on the body prevents developments. It not only arrests growth, but reduces it. Oh, if you women who have that padding put in your gowns, only knew the disastrous effect it has on your figures. I turned from a man's tailor into a dressmaker and from a dressmaker into a corset maker. I know woman's figure."

From which it would appear that it is not the corset itself which is so injurious but the improper wearing of it, and the ill fit of the readymade article, all of which is reasonable enough, only so few of us can afford to have our corsets made to order by an artistic male corset manufacturer.

In answer to a query from his customer as to what women who have neither busts, nor hips are to do, if they must not wear padding, the great man shows her a corset of his own invention, the result of years of study; and is indeed a masterpiece. It has springs where the bust and hips should be, arranged to make the corset itself stand out from the body in such a way as to give the wearer a most symmetrical figure, and at the same time prevent any pressure on the body itself, thus giving an appearance of perfect development without the use of any cumbersome and unhealthy padding. These springs are unbreakable and never get out of order, so the wearer need not fear a sudden collapse.

For stout women there are other specially made corsets fitted with a belt which greatly aids in reducing both their actual, as well as their apparent size, and which gives them an appearance of trimness most soothing to their feelings. Great is the inventive genius of man, and great is the corset as an aid to beauty, especially when it is made to order by a high priced artist. No wonder we are reluctant to give it up!

By the way—one of this corset artist's stout customers had thirteen pairs of specially constructed corsets made for her in one year, and thereby succeeded in reducing her waist measurement by ten inches in that time, without injuring her health in any way. Could there be a greater triumph of art over nature than that?

In spite of the many fearful and wonderful combinations of color that are now so fashionable, and the variety of trimming

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seen on the majority of dresses, the best dressed woman is still the one in the plain tailor made gown. But the tailor gown of this season is just a little different from its predecessors of other seasons. It is of French, instead of English design, and the Frenchwoman's tailor gown differs very materially from that of her English cousin, and is indeed a thing of beauty. A striking example is of green cloth with a vest of brocade yellow and green silk, a cloth bolero braided all over with narrow silk braid, a high battlement collar also braided, and a jabot of fine creamy lace falling over the vest. The skirt and sleeves are braided, and frills of lace fall over the hands. It does not sound very plain, but it is a fair example of a Parisian tailor gown. Wide collars and revers of white satin covered with lace, and velvet belts embroidered with gold, are seen on many of these dresses. The tailor coats show several different styles of collars. One is a sort of Medici, cut out in squares on the edge and trimmed around with braid, while others have a plain high collar flaring slightly and rolled over at the top, very much in the fashion of last year. Amongst the very dressy tailor gowns is one of heliotrope cloth with a cuirass bodice of white cloth elaborately braided in black and gold and fastened at the left side near the armhole, where it is finished with a pleated frill of black chiffon. The tiny small V shaped piece let in at the neck is of turquoise blue velvet, and the collar and the belt are of the same. The sleeves are of the heliotrope cloth trimmed from the waist to the beginning of the shoulder puff with bands of braid encircling the arm. The skirt is trimmed in panel fashion with the same braid, put on in clusters of horizontal bands. The cuirass bodice is quite new, and promises to be very popular. Amongst trimmings for cloth gowns plaited panels set in at each side of the front breast are in favor, and form a pleasing variety after the numbers of horizontal decorations one sees on every side.

Pique and linen suits turned out by the tailor have plain skirts, and jaunty coats, and will be very much worn a little later on. Braiding is used in these dresses almost as lavishly as on cloth suits, but yet many of the best style are perfectly plain, the revers being faced with some contrasting color in pique such as dull blue, or red on a white gown. Blouses of washing silk are worn with these, and many of the apparent blouses are really only soft vests or false fronts of silk which are light and cool and can be easily kept in place by being attached to the corset cover. A narrow belt with a pretty buckle finishes the waist.

Every imaginable variety of eton coat is worn this season, but the very newest cut has points in front that come a little below the belt, and opens enough to display the vest or blouse under. An excellent way to vary a cloth costume is to have a number of different vests to wear with it. They may be made in any and every style, and need not cost much. White, colored, or spotted pique, made in close masculine style either single or double breasted, is most serviceable, but for dressy occasions there is no limit to the choice velvet and silk vests embroidered with jet, jewels, silk braid, and applique lace, are worn with tailor gowns, but the lighter materials are preferred. Cream lace net over white satin, with a jabot frill of accordion plaited net down the front, make an especially dainty vest, and tucked linen lawn trimmed with maltese lace, is almost as pretty. Oriental silks, flowered satins, and linen covered with Oriental embroidery are all striking and pretty while cream white satin tucked in groups makes a charming vest for a tailor gown of black cloth; while colored batistes especially in violet, and heliotrope shades are very effective, especially when tucked, and the tucks edged with narrow Valenciennes lace. White chiffon gathered very full and striped across with colored baby ribbon and lace insertion makes a perishable but charming vest.

ASTRA.

THE SHEEP OF LEBANON.

They Are Fattened Like Famous Geese of Strassburg.

Harry Fenn, the artist, has written for St. Nicholas an account of his visit to the famous celars of Lebanon, which place, is noted for its silk. Mr. Fenn says: Where ever a handful of earth can be made to rest upon a ledge, there a mulberry plants grows. It is a picturesque and thrilling sight to see a boy lowered by a rope over the precipice, carrying a big basket of earth and cuttings of mulberry twigs to plant in his hanging garden. The crop of leaves, fodder for the worms, is gathered in the same way. By such patient and dangerous industry have these hardy mountaineers been able to make their wilderness of rock blossom into brightly colored silks. Not a single leaf is left on the trees by the time the voracious worms get ready to spin their cocoons, but a second crop comes on later, and a curious use is made of that.

The tree owner purchases one of those queer big tailed Syrian sheep, the tail of which weighs 20 pounds when at a full maturity of its fatness, and then a strange stuffing process begins, not unlike the fattening of the Strassburg geese. When the sheep can eat no more, the women of the house feed it, and it is no uncommon sight to see a woman going out to make an afternoon call leading her sheep by a string and carrying a basket of mulberry leaves on her arm. Having arrived at her friend's house, she squats on the ground, rolls a ball of mulberry leaves in her right hand and slips it into the sheep's mouth, then works the sheep's jaw up and down with the other hand till she thinks the mouthful has been chewed enough, when she thrusts it down the throat of the unfortunate animal. The funny part of the business is that probably half a dozen gossips of the village are seated around the yard, all engaged at the same operation. Of course the sheep get immensely fat, and that is the object; for at the killing time the fat is tried out and put into jars as meat for the winter.

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Miss Neere—"No. I looked at one other day, but there was something about it I didn't like, and the man wouldn't alter it, so I didn't get it."

Browner—"They generally make any alterations required. What was it you wanted altered?"

Miss Neere—"The price."—Judy.

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