



HOUSEHOLD LINEN: ITS PURCHASE, CARE AND PRESERVATION.

The manufacture of linen dates from a very early period, and the comforts of the fabric were recognized then as fully as they are now. Dainty linen is to-day as much sought as it was in remote times, and the linen closet in the fully equipped house is a feast to the eye. January has long been recognized as the month for replenishing the linen supply. Shop-keepers at this time take their inventory for the year, and all stock that shows short lengths, shop-worn towels or soiled table-cloths is marked down to a bargain price. Shoppers have learned to wait for these January sales. It would almost seem that the supply grows in quantity and elaborateness each year. Formerly the dining-room linen did not demand so formidable an equipment; but now that at least one meal a day is served without a cloth doilies without number are used instead, thus adding appreciably to the articles required.

TABLE LINEN.—Table linen comes in many grades of fineness, but there is false economy in choosing a quality that is part linen and part cotton. These weaves look finer for the cost per yard than does all-linen, but the latter will outwear two cloths of the former. The finest linens are the Irish and French, although the German make has its admirers. The last is a coarse material possessing wonderful wearing qualities, while beautiful designs are not hard to find. The unbleached German linen cloths are much liked for use at luncheon or for breakfast, where napkins to match are also used. The creamy tint of these cloths is retained as long as possible, and to retain their natural color they are long kept from boiling. When boiling is necessary, however, the cloths are usually further bleached to whiten them thoroughly. Half-bleached damask promises a long life of wear, and the fortunate possessor of a bleaching spot may whiten her own cloths, thus assuring much durability. The most elegant cloths are those to be used at dinner, and there is a wide range in quality and price: there is the cheap, loosely woven linen that it is such poor economy to buy, and at the other extreme is the double damask so beautiful that it is said the threads are not visible even through a magnifying glass. Between these extremes lie many grades from which to choose—the best the purse can afford being the wisest choice—always remembering that the cloth should be purchased with a view to its use. A dinner cloth should be long enough to reach within eighteen inches of the floor at the ends, but for other meals eighteen inches below the edge of the table will suffice. The width of table linen varies from thirty-six to ninety-two inches. With a cloth too narrow any attempt at a beautiful table is futile, the linen should reach well down on the sides of the table, fully covering the table felt that should be always used.

In choosing patterns it is well to be governed by the length of cloth required. For a table set for two persons a large pattern is out of taste, while a cloth four yards long is more elegant if the pattern is not too small. When the material is purchased by the yard, the cloth is not as satisfactory as when a pattern cloth is procured; the latter costs little more and yields a degree of elegance not possible with the cut material. Table linen is always finished with a narrow hem made by hand, an even edge being attained by pulling the threads and then cutting straight. In these days it is not uncommon for the ladies of the family to hemstitch their own linen with needlework, to this end a large initial or a monogram of slender letters three inches long may be worked in the handsomest cloths, the embroidery being placed at the center of the length between the edge and the table. Fringed cloths are no longer used for luncheon or breakfast, their wretched condition after laundering and the early disappearance of the fringe furnishing the reason.

The laundering of table linen is most exacting work. Hand-some linen may be made to look very commonplace by an ignorant hand, while a cheaper quality will shine and be very

beautiful when done by a maid who understands her work. Linen should receive a very thin starching, for with a little stiffening the cloth keeps fresh longer and the pattern is more pronounced. Very heavy linen, however, should be ironed while very damp and does not require stiffening. Linen should be ironed until perfectly dry; table-cloths are folded down the center only, while napkins are left square. Table-cloths, when perfectly dry and folded once, are rolled over a smooth stick. When they hump in the center and will not lie smooth, too much starch has been used; they should be done up two or three times without any stiffening to restore the linen to shape.

NAPKINS.—Napkins come in varied widths; but those for dinner use unless of good size are worse than useless. The dinner napkins reserved for special occasions are veritable table-cloths, so large are they; and they are made very elegant by embroidery either in a single initial or in a long slender monogram, the embroidery showing at the center of the square when folded. A smaller napkin is used for breakfast and for luncheon than for dinner when laundering need not be taken into account, but in the average home it is not possible to have frequent changes, and the napkin ring encloses the napkin used at all meals. Fringed napkins are never seen except for tea, when they match the cloth. A solution for the use of these fringed napkins is found when the table is set without a cloth, a napkin being laid at each corner upon which to set the plate. Napkins when so used are ironed flat.

DOILIES.—Doilies made of small squares or rounds of linen are put to many uses in the modern home, and the supply should be well maintained. The word doily is a most elastic one and covers all sizes and shapes of protectors for the table, for use with finger-bowls or under cake. At least two sets of doilies are requisite if the table is laid without a cloth—a set that is used every day and of sufficient number to allow of necessary changes, and a set for special occasions when more elaborate service is desired.

Doilies may be simply hemstitched squares of linen or may be embroidered and made very handsome. The tendency, however, is to white effects on the table. The doilies for the bread or cake plate and those on which the carafes are set may be round and either fringed or finished with a scallop of embroidery. For the hot dishes of the meal the doily takes the shape and size of the platter used and may be simply hemstitched all round with a rather deep hem, a pad first being laid to protect the table from the heat. These pads are very soft and effective if made of many thicknesses of old table linen, quilting the pad on the sewing machine into diamond-shaped squares. Finger-bowl doilies are indispensable in the refined home of to-day, and their degree of elegance is commensurate with the purse of their owner—simple ones for every-day use consisting of squares of linen and finished with fringing a half inch all round.

TEA, CARVING AND TRAY CLOTHS.—When a tray is used for the tea paraphernalia the cloth should cover it completely. Carving cloths are made of butcher's linen twenty to twenty-four inches long and sixteen or eighteen inches wide, and are simply hemstitched all round, embroidery being considered out of taste. The carving cloth is removed with the meat course at dinner. Squares of linen either fringed or hemstitched are necessities for keeping biscuits, muffins or toast sufficiently hot. The corn napkin is usually ornamented with some distinguishing embroidery or outlining. These useful cloths are large enough to unfold the food.

TABLE CENTERS.—Table centers are requisite to the modern table and are used at all meals. They may be square, rectangular, oval or round; but the size and shape of the center-piece should accord with the size of the table upon which it is used, a long table set with many covers demanding a rectangular piece for the center. These pieces admit of more elaboration than any other accessory used in the dining-room. The coloring, however, should be quiet and never obtrusive, else any elegance is impossible. Simple center-pieces are not without their admirers, and the hemstitched pieces finished with a ruffling of Valenciennes or a scroll design outlined with feather-stitching in heavy Roman floss make most attractive table pieces. When the table is laid without a cloth the center-piece is always used.

SIDEBOARD COVERS.—Sideboard covers should be of sufficient length to hang well over the ends of the board; they are of linen or momic cloth, hemstitched and with a border of drawn-work inside the stitching. The scarfs may be purchased at this season for a small sum already hemstitched and drawn-worked and