CHAPTER XIII

FINISHING. POLISHING. TRIMMING. LINING

The straw hat having now arrived at the stage where its actual manufacture ceases, has still further to undergo the process of embellishment necessary for its proper appearance on the counters of the merchant, or in the showroom of the milliner. A great many hats of the "Leghorn" variety leave the factories without any finish of trimming or lining, but after they leave the blocking room they have to undergo a process of polishing. This is done in one or two ways. The "dry" way is for the hat to be put through a severe brushing, done by rapidly revolving brushes carrying powdered sulphur, in an air shaft which takes away the residue of the powder. This gives to the Leghorn hat a velvety smoothness and incidentally imparts a richer colour, owing to the sulphur that finds its way into the crevices of the straw fibres; although the brushing is intended to leave the hat free from the powder, in actual working that is found to be nearly impossible. The other way is the "wet," and in this case the hat is covered all over with a thin paste, of which sulphur is the principal ingredient. When dry the blocking process is gone through, and the hat subsequently receives a brushing similar to the "dry" method, but in this case the object of the brushing is to remove every available particle of the dried paste. The advantage of this method is great where the colour of the Leghorn is none too fine. The wet sulphur mixture has a bleaching effect on the straw, and naturally tends to penetrate better into the fibres and crevices than the powder alone. The result is
that the tone of the hat is immeasurably beautified and with a longer lasting colour than is obtained by simply polishing with dry powder. When properly brushed and ticketed Leghorns are then completely ready for the market.

Some few other kinds of hats go out without any trimming or lining, but the processes they undergo will be set out in one or the other of the following descriptions. Every kind of straw needs some variety of treatment before the actual "Finishing," but generally speaking these treatments are confined to the darker coloured plaits. Thus for chip plaits black receives a coating of some oil such as olive or nut, etc. This levels up the colour of the plait and intensifies the black; all other colours are simply cleared by steam, and receive no further treatment. For plaits of actual straw various things have been used during the course of time. The first method, when only black, navy blue and brown colours were available, was to smartly brush the dry finished hat with stiff hand-brushes. This imparted a fairly good shiny surface to the straw, but it had two drawbacks, one was that the brushing did not in any way improve the colour of the sometimes faultily-dyed plaits, and the other was a tendency during the brushing of roughing up the fibres of the straw. In those early days when lowness of price was not the main consideration, many hats have been glossed by brushing over with white of egg, but the expense of that rendered it useless for the bulk of the goods. The "Japan Black," that in the time of our fathers was utilized every spring on the household grates, was also tried on black straw hats, but its viscous nature was quite unsuitable for the proper polishing of straw. It was not until about 1870 that a polish made of some resinous gums and methylated spirit was put on the straw hat market.
For black this "polish" was tinted with a suitable colouring matter, and at first the finding of the proper ingredient that would remain in solution without precipitation was a long and tedious job; however, this was eventually effected, and now for some years the various best brands of straw hat spirit polish leave nothing to be desired. A German firm, Messrs. Conrad Schmidt & Co., was about the first to market in Great Britain a satisfactory spirit polish, and with recurring improvements this brand of polish, now made by the London Varnish Co., still obtains a large share of straw hat makers' demands. Brown and blue spirit polishes were produced by dyeing the gum and spirit mixture with an aniline dye. White spirit polish was of two varieties, one nearly opaque white, and the other a clear fluid with just a slight yellow tint. These can be used on all coloured straws other than black, brown and navy, but many manufacturers omit to polish the very light tones such as champagne, silver grey, sky blue, etc. White, of course, is never polished. When spirit polish was first introduced it was very costly, and on the advent of the China plait to these markets, it was found to be rather out of proportion expensive to the very cheap Canton hats. A polish made of ordinary glue mixed with lamp black or charcoal was current in Luton about 1870, and lasted in use for the lowest price goods until spirit polish became a reasonable price. The glue polish often smelt very nasty, and was always badly affected by a humid warm atmosphere. During the past few years when so many varieties of fibre have been utilized for making plaits, all kinds of polishing media have been experimented with, even the household bees' wax and turpentine has not been left out in the cold, but those that have made any lasting mark on the making of a straw hat are all of them in
some way combinations of gums and spirit. The rapid evaporation of any liquid put on a blocked hat is an absolute necessity, it must also not be able in any way to soften the gelatine or other stiffening material, and it must leave a desired gloss on the hat without being glassy or "fatty" looking. Further, it must not materially harden the fibres. Some plaits are required quite bright; for these ordinary straw hat polish is correct; others are wanted with an "egg shell" shine, these are provided for in one or the other of the "Lustres" and "Silk Finishes" that are to be obtained. In fact, to-day there is no material of which hats are made that cannot be properly polished. The last advantage of the spirit polish is that it gives a slight water proofing to the ladies' hat, and the mention of that brings up the question of the waterproofing of men's boaters. A boater is generally made of rustic plait of which the saw-like edges lapping over each other form a surface similar to a tiled roof, and if it were possible to sew the plait with the serrations as regular as tiling, the result would be showerproof, but such regularity is impossible, and in order to make this most useful hat still more serviceable, one or two patents have been taken out in the direction of making it absolutely waterproof. As far as one can gather in the trade, the only method of rendering straw hats rainproof now extensively used is that known as the "Cravenette." After the "shell" of the boater is sewn and stiffened, a special powder is applied carefully over the entire surface of the hat, after which a spray of the patent liquid is made to evenly and thinly cover the powder causing it to dissolve and form the waterproofing medium. After drying the hat is blocked in the usual manner, and when done, only an expert can tell from sight that the hat has been treated, as the colour is in no way
deteriorated, nor are the fibres of the straw changed in any manner.

The straw hat, whether boater for masculine wear or the ladies' fashionable hat, is, when the polish or finish is quite dry, ready for the attentions of the "Finisher" or "Trimmer." In the early days of the British trade, that is about a century ago, the work of the finisher was very limited. Practically all that was done was to insert some kind of temporary lining to the head fit, and affix a small tab or ticket for reference purposes. Gradually as more intricate shapes began to be in public favour, it was found necessary to add to the above operations, by inserting at the edge of the brim a metal wire covered with either cotton or silk. This had in view two purposes, the first that by skilful bending and shaping the desired outline of the brim could be produced, and the other was that when the proper form was achieved, the support of the wire assisted in its retention. As plaits of lace-like appearance came on the market (those of crinoline and fancy adornments, for example) the temporary linings were made from various colours of tissue paper. These not only permitted a possible purchaser to see at a glance all the beauties of the plait, but afforded means by which the bonnet could be tried on the head, with the least chance of damage, either to the shape or the wearer's hair. And mentioning bonnets, up to 1860 so much predominant in public request, and even to the present time, the wholesale manufacturer of them has always used paper for the temporary lining for all made of chip or fancy plaits, while for straws with their hard sharp heads, likely to tear the tissue paper, the probably equally short lived lining was made of fine white muslin. A common reason for these temporary linings (for they were always removed by the milliner when trimming) was that as
bonnets were kept on the show counter or dispatched to their destination, in sausage-like rows where one bonnet nested in another, the lining prevented any protuberance of the plaits used from catching, and thus any part of the row could be taken from the other with the greatest facility. But by 1850 hats began to assume a considerable volume, and for these in addition to paper, which, of course, was intended to be temporary, head-linings of saten silk, sarsenet, and other similar materials, gradually began to be used. They were made with a draw cord at the edge intended to fall into the top of the crown, where a "tip" of the same material was already in place. The lining having been sewn, as it were, upside-down to the head entry inside the crown, was turned over the stitches until the drawn cord edge met the tip; this edge was then sewn to the circumference of the crown, the draw-cord was tightened to make the lining sit exact to the oval, and this operation was complete. But at that time and until about 1900 every hat was wired at its edge with a silk or cotton mixture covered wire. This was made especially for the millinery trade, and consisted of a fine iron wire, of which it was necessary to have the "temper" even and ductile, so that when once bent there would be no resilience, or "springing," as it was known to straw workers. Parallel to and all round the wire, which thus formed a core, were varying numbers, according to the thickness ultimately required, of strands of cotton. Around this was twisted the silk fibres, which at the same time kept all in position, and made a glossy exterior to the wire. In some qualities the silk laid so thickly as to show no break, while others according to value, showed varying spaces between the silk spirals; others of the cheapest qualities were entirely of cotton inside and outside. The advantage of this cushion-like
pad around the wire was that stitches could be taken through it, and if affixed to the hat or bonnet with a "slip-stitch," no trace of the stitching could be seen. The ladies’ hat trade also uses another variety of wire known as "miniature." This is wire of similar gauge to the "silk," but it has no padding, and consists solely of the metal and a silk or cotton yarn covering. In putting this into or on any hat, it is, of course, necessary to sew over and over as the closeness of the cover does not permit of any needle penetration. In some kinds of hats of which the brims are required hard and straight edged, steel wires of watch spring-like temper are used, and in others strengthening and shaping are assisted by strands of cane, cut into round strips, of different gauges for various kinds of work. When the wiring of hats for female wear became universal, machinery was introduced to put the wires at the edges of the brims, but this was done only to hats of the lower grades, because the stitch was very visible. Mention has been made of the tab or ticket attached to the hat by the "finisher." This is primarily, in fact absolutely, for purposes of reference; the shape number, according to the manufacturer’s registry, is written on it before dispatch, together with any other special markings required by the purchaser, but almost every wholesale distributing house in Paris, London, New York, etc., etc., has some distinctive ticket. This generally bears a trade mark, crest, or other sign peculiar to the house in question, and may be of any colour; even black, with gold or silver printing, has been used, and as they vary in marks and colours, so they vary in size, from, say, $\frac{3}{4}$ in. wide and 2 in. long, to even 2 in. wide to 4 in. long. Their shapes are very numerous, rhomboids, ellipses, circles, pentagons, conic sections, parallelograms, half-moons, stars, and all other geometric-like
forms may be found in ticket shapes, but the major part of those used partake of a "sweep" that has some conformity with the outline of the hat or bonnet.

Generally speaking, trimming a lady’s hat is the special province of the milliner, and in this case, of course, hats are not confined to those made of straw or plait, and, in fact, this is an industry of its own, and is, therefore outside the scope of the making of a straw hat. But for many years both ladies and gentlemen have worn what have been at different epochs called “sailors” or “boaters.” The making of these hats for men has nearly always been accompanied by the trimming; and when, about 1880, women commenced to wear “sailors,” many of them were dispatched from the St. Albans factories with some trimming. About 1890 the makers of ladies’ shaped hats of simple form began to add some little adornment to them, and these were designated as “semi-trimmed.” It is, therefore, quite inside the history of the straw hat to include some account of men’s boaters, ladies’ sailors, and “semi-trimmed” or ready-to-wear hats. The first straw hats to be trimmed by the manufacturer were men’s boaters. Their trimming has not very materially altered from the first output up to the present time. There was a ribbon band and bow at left hand side on the outside of the crown, and there was also some head lining. Anyone conversant with the boater of to-day will recognize that these salient features are still maintained, the only differences from time to time being in their nature and detail.

For the head linings, leather, flannel, cotton, imitation leather, satin, and various other articles suitable for comfort to the head and moisture absorption have been and are still used. The most material change has been effected in the imitation leathers, which have now been
brought up to such a high standard of excellence from what one might almost term "the lowest depths," that they are very formidable competitors of the real article. At the same time they do not quite compare with good class leathers, which are still always used for the best hats. Where boaters are lined with flannel, cotton or satin, they are generally made in the form of a thin pad, and for certain markets are much esteemed. The other part of the interior of a boater is sometimes left without any other adornment, but generally the sides are decorated with a lining of white open work net, and the top is covered by a tip of silk, satin, sateen, or cotton, which generally has the centre printed with the retailer's name and address. For other markets the side crowns inside are covered with materials similar to the tips, in all kinds of colours, and arranged in both plain and fanciful manners. The exact fitting of these head linings, or "sweatbands," as some term them, is an operation needing skill, and the work has been rendered more easy by the invention of Mr. Bracher, of Stockport. This, now known throughout the world as "Brachering" (pronounced Brashering) consists of a small strip of material around a fine strand of cane or other material, which is sewn by a special stitch machine to the lining or leather, making at the same time a neat, untearable edge and a convenient means for attachment to the hat.

From time to time various inventions have been made for the ventilation of boaters, these generally consisting of some open work straw being used at the base of the crown instead of the nearly impermeable rustic. This, when covered with a thin band of ribbon, is not visible from the outside, and affords some fair degree of air passage. Other methods have been adopted by having a punctured edge to the sweat band, which
permitted air to freely circulate close to and all around the head of the wearer. To increase the resiliency of the leather or imitation leather lining, patents have been taken out for pneumatic surrounds, forming an air cushion all round the hat, which incidentally allows in the easiest manner for any discrepancies, and they are very common, in the contour of the wearer's skull. The various devices for increased comfort and utility in boater linings are very numerous, and display great ingenuity. The "Autoform" The "Bon-Ton-Ivy" and the "Ecsola" pads, each of them specialities of various makers of boater sweatbands, present differing features creating resiliency around the head of the wearer. These are produced by means of soft material insertions under the leather or other lining, or of cellular impressions made in the leather, or of a continuous roll all around the head fitting part, or even of the insertion of a pneumatic tube, all creating a cushion like addition to the flatness of the lining material. Each has its peculiar merits, and for certain purposes are perfect in their utility. Some are very little more costly than the plain leather, but others from the extra material and work involved are naturally more expensive, but the efforts of their manufacturers to raise the standards of quality and of efficient comfort are such as to deserve special commendation.

The most recent development for ensuring the comfortable wear of the hardest boater is that of an American inventor. Although the making of straw hats from plait has been an established industry in the United States for at least half a century, and the amazing increase of the trade has been phenomenal, yet up to the present the name of an American has not been written very prominently on the pages of straw trade industry. It is true that the first machine to sew plait
was the product of an American firm, but, it was not really successful until it had been altered and adapted by a Luton engineer; it is also true that Mr. Bodsworth, an American, introduced a straw sewing machine, but as previously stated, this was not a striking success, and although at the present time the principal machine in the trade is made by an American firm, it is the result of a Briton's invention. And, therefore, it is with pleasure that in this record of the trade a real invention, which promises to be of the highest value to the boater trade, can be laid to the credit of a citizen of the United States. Mr. Herbert L. Moses, of Baltimore, has patented a device for attachment just inside the head entry of a boater which consists of a floating, flexible band, held in position about ⅛ of an inch from the hat by a series of stitches at about half an inch intervals all round the crown. The principle is that the stitches of cotton take the place of the spokes of a wheel running inside another wheel, where a thrust in one part is compensated for by a relaxation of the other parts. Over this is sewn the leather sweat-band, or head lining of any other nature, attached to the hat in the usual manner. The necessary machinery for the insertion of this flexible conformateur, for that is actually what it amounts to, is provided by means of mechanical attachments to any suitable sewing machine. These attachments form the subject of another patent by the same inventor, who has assigned his rights to Messrs. M. S. Levy & Sons, of Baltimore, U.S.A. The peculiar features of this patent are, first, the ease of fit conveyed to the wearer of the hat, and, second, the great yield given by the device obviates to the utmost extent the need for small intermediate sizes of the hats, for fitting the many-shaped heads of customers.

Co-eval with the boater, and perhaps even a little
earlier, was the "Galatea" or "Jack Tar" for boys. This hat was founded on the shape of the "Sinnett" rustic hat worn by sailors in the Navy for so many years. The model was in use at the end of the eighteenth century (as pictures of Lord Nelson's sea fights clearly demonstrate) made both in straw and in tarpaulin. It was quickly adopted for boy's wear, and for many years formed their summer hat. No boy could go to the seaside without one.

A painting, executed about 1850, illustrative of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, with the then Prince of Wales, afterward King Edward VII, shows the Prince wearing a straw Galatea, and any observer of the pictures of that time in the various periodicals such as The Illustrated London News and Punch, cannot fail to notice how popular this "Jack Tar" style was among the youthful males.

The other department of trimming in the straw trade, that of the "semi-trimmed" hats for ladies, is of comparatively recent origin compared with the boater, for at most it can claim an existence of only thirty to thirty-five years, but the trade has now grown to such large dimensions that any account of the straw hat would be incomplete without it. It commenced, as most things do, in the trade that was done for some years in sailors for ladies. Those in the main were on the same lines as those for men, that is they started with square edge crowns, upright sides at right angle to a perfectly flat brim. Developments of a fanciful nature in the brim formation in the direction of what is known as a "Breton" sailor, of which the characteristic is a slightly turned up edge, were the first to be made, and subsequently crowns of softer outline with overhanging tops attained for some time a great share of fashionable favour. But to-day, with the exception
of straw sailors for girls and young ladies at school, there is very little demand for hats of this description. But the trimming, which was nearly a necessity of these hats, had established, in many factories, departments which on the decline of their sale, required fresh openings, and attempts were made on "Alpine" models, then in great vogue for ladies, which proved very successful. This whetted the appetite of manufacturers, and all kinds of "ready to wear" hats for sports were speedily on the market, one thing led to another, and now all manner of shapes, toques, medium size, and picture hats are being trimmed in a manner that from its departure from the early extreme simplicity, seems to trench considerably upon what has always been considered the proper domain of the milliner.
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