OUR FASHION LETTER.

SOME OF THE INTERESTING TRICKS OF THE DRESSMAKERS.

Elaborately Worked Seperate Skirts—The Expanding Effect of the New Plaited Skirts—Simple and Elegant Gowns for Lent.

The array of airy, dainty summer dress goods is most inviting, and never before were such fine sheer qualities and beautiful color effects among every-day materials offered at such reasonable prices. Single, double, and triple box-plaits appear at the backs

of various walking-dress skirts, also fine knife plaits closely massed, deft French gathers, and on the latest models a slight drapery which gives a jabot effect or in-and-out curve of the dress fabric at each side of the centre-back fulness.

The length of the stitchings on kilted or side-plaited skirts varies from a few inches below the hips to within a quarter of a yard of the bottom of the skirt; and on some of the imported cloth costumes the kilts or side-plaits, reaching the entire length of the skirt, are stitched from belt to hem.

En suite with a skirt of side-plaited black peau de soie is a new bolero jacket of black silk velvet stitched both back and front in straight narrow plaits. White satin covered with guipure—the design picked out with tiny jet beads—forms the wide collar which broadens out over the bolero, and has a scarf of white silk with fringed ends knotted loosely beneath it. The vest and its high collar are of very finely tucked white satin.

Among the separate skirts shown at the importing houses are some of silk or satin elaborately worked with silk net and taffeta applique designs. These are further enriched with scroll-work in tambour stitching. These skirts are particularly handsome in black, and also in gray cloth with the applique patterns at the edge of the overdress and flounce of the underskirt.

Crepe fabrics have undergone many changes of late. The kind most used by fashionable modistes and tailors, although coarse in weave, wears much better than the finer sorts of other seasons. It is lighter, however, in effect, more transparent, and clings to the figure after the manner of all fashionable materials. Crepeline, which is all wool, is much used for handsome demi-dress mourning gowns, as is crepe cloth, which is one of the most useful of all the goods used on mourning attire.

Robe dresses, or separate skirts of last season made of black lace, net, or fancy grenadine, are offered at the importing houses and fancy dry goods stores at less than half their original price. These are in designs somewhat less fashionable than the latest weaves in black or white laces, but they are of equal value as regards quality and durability, being jet-black and all-silk in weave. The fancy grenadines have applique decorations in taffeta silk, and chenille or jet-spangled, arabesques in satin or peau de soie, outlined with silk or jetted cords. A black silk or satin bodice and skirt, or better still, a princesse dress, which has had a season's wear, answers all the purpose of a foundation slip upon which to drape the robe dresses of lace or net just mentioned. A new kind of French silk is called peau de gant. It is claimed to have valuable wearing qualities, and makes up especially well with velvet trimmings. Eolienne is a fabric showing an equal mixture of silk and finest wool, with a woven rep in the fabric which gives it additional strength.

The expanding effect of some of the new plaited skirts, flowing out into much fulness at the feet, is still further increased by a gathered flounce set upon the foundation skirt, or by a narrow shirred ruche placed at the extreme edge of the skirt proper before it is plaited. Rows of ribbon and scallops or stitched bands are likewise used as borderings to kilted skirts and to plain skirts with overdresses trimmed to match. Khaki is a color just now much affected. A Paris costume in this cloth has bands of a darker sand shade stitched in perpendicular rows of different lengths on the front and sides of the skirt. The jacket-bodice opens with lengthened revers over a vest of guipure and brown silk, and is trimmed with graduated bands of Khaki cloth in the same way as the skirt. The hat en suite is in red, brown, and Khaki colors, and though somewhat voyante is chic-looking and unmistakably French.

For house-wear during Lent have been prepared many simple elegant white gowns of serge, Henrietta cloth, drap d'ete, etc. Some are white, others have pretty color relief in the way of vests, collars, and girdle of old rose satin, cherry red, Persian mauve, or watermelon pink silk, which is a favorite. The addition of rows of black baby velvet ribbon on the pink revers, belt, and collar-band is often seen. Women of wealth with luxurious surroundings have ordered these gowns for exclusive wear during the entire season—the list including trained princesse dresses and tea gowns with classic draperies formed of white crepe de chine, white crêpon, silk poplin, and India cashmere. All color is omitted in the trimmings, the dresses being decorated with white lace and choux, strappings and long scarf ends of satin ribbon. Next to these in delicacy are gowns in opal or nun's gray, with guimpes and vests of shirred and plaited white chiffon, the edges of the bolero, low-cut round waist, or open redingote fronts, bordered with rows of white silk braid or white satin pipings.

The beautiful invoice of nun's veilings, either in black or delicate tints, are a great attraction to every woman who loves sheer, delicate fabrics. Not only are these materials wonderfully soft and artistic, but they are a more durable investment than any silk or cotton textile of corresponding dainty effect and coloring. Either in plain or embroidered veilings, in silk-dotted effects or in costly robe patterns, wrought partly with silk or chenille and partly with lace, these clinging, semi-transparent materials make up into gowns that are fit for any possible dress function. The toilet in its rich simplicity rivals in attraction the elaborately decorated gown of satin or brocade.

Neckwear has come to hold as important a place in woman's wardrobe as her hats. Formerly she counted upon variety in the letter for ready variation in her costume. She is able to gain it now less expensively by frequent changes in the things she wears about her throat. I have taken much notice of these engaging accessories, and can speak on the subject. True, the summer sorts are not fully on exhibition, but this is the season of strong tendencies, and one may learn from inference. Perhaps the first point which strikes one minded to be critical is that tawdry varieties in neckwear are not seen much in the better shops. The first influx of decorative neckties brought in a meaner grade. Such things usually have found their way to the bargain table, and even the least expensive of the new ones shown has some character. A tidy fresh example of the inexpensive kind is a butterfly knot of cherry taffeta, made up with a high, white taffeta stock. Taffeta continues in favor for neck decoration, and it is likely to do so. Nothing takes its place. It is used for small ties and big. Of the latter sort there are certain novelties two and a half yards long, done from

white polkadotted pink and blue taffeta. The ends are long and wedge-shaped. They narrow to collar widths, for the neck-band.

This tie, when worn, makes you think that the wearer has borrowed her little sister's big blue or pink sash. But it is effective when worn by one who knows how to bear herself up under it. The wisest of us have learned that no neckwear is becoming which wholly obscures the line of the neck. Consequently one searches this season and finds neck arrangements which give the bow under the chin high on the chest, rather than on the collar line. Sometimes we clasp our two or three yard ties simply with a pin at the throat front, and knot the long ends either at the corsage, or so low as the belt. The longest ties yet shown are three yards, from fine white mull to wear with filmy summer gowns, or at any season with house dresses. They are embroidered and exquisitely painted. It is intended that they shall tie two or three times after being drawn closely around the throat twice. One example of this long tie is knotted in true love fashion at the throat, four-in-hand at the corsage, and again at the belt with two loops and ends.

A GIGANTIC WORK.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN NEW YORK.

A Part of a Greater System of Tunnels—This is the Main Artery—Enormous Obstacles to be Overcome in Its Construction.

The work of constructing the great underground railroad for New York city will soon be well under way. The contract has been let for $35,000,000, and sub-contracts will soon be awarded. Work will be commenced at many points along the line, and 10,000 men will be employed for three years.

Great as the undertaking is, in reality it marks only the beginning of a gigantic system of improved transit which New York city is bound to attain. It will be the main artery of the system, but its branches will reach out in all directions, binding together closer than ever the several boroughs of the city and making quick interchange of traffic possible.

A Subway.

While tunneling will enter largely into the construction of the Rapid Transit Railroad, it is not correct to term the entire enterprise a tunnel. It will be a subway, not a tunnel. Throughout the greater part of the right of way the excavations will be made from the surface down, what is called technically "cut and cover work." In other words, the contractors will have to rip up the streets, incidental to more than one-half of their undertaking. Generally speaking, the roof of the subway will be as near the surface as possible, the road beds following closely to street grade to avoid

Excavating for Subway.

cutting deeper than would be required otherwise. It will be cut and cover work from the lower terminus of the line at the post office loop to Thirty-second street. There the line dips under Murray Hill through solid rock, involving tunneling for eight blocks to Fortieth street. From Fortieth street to Broadway and 103d street it will be cut and cover, and from the last named point to 121st street, under Broadway, the tunnelers will make the route. There are a few other short stretches in the West Side line where some tunnel work will be required, notably at Fort George.

East Side Line.

The East Side line turns from the main line at 103d street, its tracks running down a gradual depression to 104th street, where they turn east under the tracks of the West Side line. Thence their course will be under Central Park, all tunnel work, to Lenox avenue and 110th street. From there to the Harlem river at 145d street the contractors will work in the open. The tunnel under the Harlem will be cut in accordance with the provisions of the law covering that point, which require that the roof of the tunnel shall be twenty-one feet below low-water mark. The cut and cover process continues on the other side of the river to 149th street, past Third avenue and into Westchester avenue, where the line emerges and runs over elevated structures to Bronx Park. Viaducts, or elevated structures, will also be used at several points of the West Side line. The most prominent of these will span the steep grades of Broadway, converging at 125th street.

The general idea for the subway is to prepare it with a concrete floor with steel columns at the sides and centre every five feet, the roof girders resting on them and the spaces between and behind them in the walls filled with concrete and brick. The roof is to be built of concrete, with arches between and in varying thickness, according to the conditions above the beams. In all cases the roof and sides will be water-proofed, and wherever water is found in the ground the concrete floor will have a waterproof layer to insure a perfectly dry structure. Many difficulties will have to be overcome to attain that result, but all have been taken into consideration and have been provided for by Chief Engineer Parsons.

Subletting the Work.

It will be impossible for Mr. McDonald to sublet the work on a basis of bare money values, contracted for in advance. In a tremendous undertaking of this kind changes of plans are certain as unexpected obstacles arise. On a cold basis of dollars and cents such obstacles would lead to frequent friction and delay. Therefore, the great contractor will deal only with engineers who have not only the experience needed, but the capital to carry out their contracts as well, come what will.

In some places the constructors of the underground line will have to work in water. At Canal street, for instance, the depth of the water in the proposed ditch would be ten feet. Other obstacles will be encountered when the great hole is dug for the double-decked terminal loop in front of the post office. The lower floor will be forty feet below the street surface, and it is probable that extensive piling will be needed to provide the proper support there.

[illegible]

John F. O'[illegible] best [illegible] engineers and contractors [illegible] easiest part of the work [illegible] tunneling through the rock [illegible] several sections specially [illegible] employed in that work and so [illegible] ing interests to obstruct their progress. It is practically all [illegible]

In cutting the tunnels for the subway, the engineers in charge will start the work in two ways. One is from portals cut into hillsides at the desired levels, and the other is from shafts sunk from the surface of the higher grades. In both cases the method of blasting will be the same. Having determined the dimensions of the hole to be cut, which in this case will be thirty feet wide and twenty feet high, a gallery or heading at the top is prepared by the blasters from which to operate with drills on the greater mass. The headings will be about seven feet high and eight to ten feet wide, and will be carried along about 100 feet of where the excavation is being made the full size of the tunnel.

"To start a heading a V-shaped cut is first made by drilling six holes with two sets of drills about three feet apart, and placed at such angles that the holes cut meet at a triangle point. They are charged with high explosives and discharged simultaneously, forcing out the shattered rock and leaving the V-shaped cut, three to four feet deep, in the rock. Then two rows of holes, four each, are drilled straight into the rock at either side of the heading. These are charged and exploded, the blast squaring off the entire cut to the depth of the V-shaped cut first made. The whole operation is repeated until that particular section of tunnel is completed.

Blasts and Headings.

"Once the heading has reached the proper length, another gang, larger in numbers than the first, occupies the cleared floor space of the heading. They drill downward at all angles to the limits of the prescribed measurements. In the meantime the workers at the heading are cutting it further into the mass, so that the work on the bench, as the full clearing is called technically, and the work on the heading proceeds continuously and simultaneously. Thus the progress is rapid, an advance of 125 lineal feet a month being the average. The shattered fragments are removed by cars promptly after each blast to the portal or shaft, as the case may be, and carted away for other uses. It is a singular thing that in blasting the inner end of the charge never shattered the rock to the full depth. It is like powder in a gun in that respect. For that reason the cuts are always about two feet short of the length of charged holes. Blasters have given this [illegible] exploded hit the technical name [illegible] because of the similarity.

The Greatest Difficulty.

"The greatest difficulties to be [illegible] come in carrying out the [illegible] be found in the open cut [illegible] work in places where surfaces [illegible] congested and where large [illegible] are close by, if the ground happens to be bad. In such cases provisions have to be made for the [illegible] tion of the traffic and the protection of the buildings. This will be true particularly in Park row, Forty-second street, Broadway and several other points. There are two ways by which these troubles may be alleviated. One is to work only one-half the width of any such thoroughfare at a time, leaving the other half for the use of traffic. In upper Broadway the contractors may brace the trolley structure up on supports while cutting out their fifty-foot subway beneath, or they may move the tracks and all their be-

Subway Arched Over.

longings to the extreme sides of the roadway. The latter plan is undoubtedly the better, because it would leave the work clear, and working directly under the powerful electric cars used for propelling the cars would subject the men to constant danger. All these considerations are weighed thoroughly by the men at the helm, and the work will go on with the least possible friction. There is more good ground to work in than bad.

"In digging up the streets, the pavement, soil and refuse will have to be removed immediately by carts or cars for final disposition. In almost every instance the workmen will encounter sewers, water and gas pipes, [illegible] wire conduits of many kinds and tubular ducts that have been placed under the street surface from time to time. All these will be in the way of the workmen.

Interfered Conduits.

"The pipes and conduits [illegible] ferent conditions. They are [illegible] surface, as a rule, and [illegible] ribed. They will have to be [illegible] up or suspended [illegible] beams by chains while [illegible] silt men are at work. It has happened often before when [illegible] have been torn up [illegible] causes demanded in a great city like this. Wherever the [illegible] pipes are found within the lines of the subway they will have to be [illegible] ed until new ones are [illegible] they may be shifted out [illegible] limits of the structure.

"The pipes and conduits [illegible] all owned [illegible] and the [illegible]