

**MODES & MANNERS OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY AS
REPRESENTED IN THE PICTURES
AND ENGRAVINGS BY THE TIME;
VOL. 1**

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Modes & manners of the nineteenth century as represented in the pictures and engravings by the time; Vol. 1 by Max von Boehn & Oskar Fischel

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MAX VON BOEHN & OSKAR FISCHER

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Gallery of fashion, London, 1797

MODES & MANNERS

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NINETEENTH CENTURY

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BY

DR. OSKAR FISCHER AND

MAX VON BOEHN

TRANSLATED BY M. EDWARDES

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY GRACE RHYS

1790



1817

IN

THREE VOLS.

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INTRODUCTION

THE North American Indian is perhaps the person who has most thoroughly realised the possible significance of dress. To him dress was not so much a covering worn for the sake of convenience and fashion as a symbol of his state of mind. I have been told that a Red Indian prepared for the war-path, shaven, feathered, and chalked, is the most hideous emblem of the horrors of war that the artifice of man has ever produced. To test its success one need only glance at the mass of literature that has grown up round the subject.

It is to the passions of the primitive man and their translation into dress and ornament that we owe a considerable amount of our local colour in costume; but there is another source from which much charm is still derived—the reflection of natural conditions in dress, hardened into custom. How wonderfully do the garish colours of the gipsy's clothes still suggest the oriental suns; how do the thirty embroidered petticoats of the Bulgarian young woman suggest the accumulated weight of custom, the lonely valleys, the wide coffer, and the still house; how empty of pleasure would our children's books be without the reindeer-skins of the Esquimaux, the Japanese umbrella, the turban of Arabia!

It is of no use to grieve over the inevitable, over the sweep of universal law as it comes rapidly into action; but what a lament might be raised over the imminent disappearance of local art in dress. In the British Isles the destruction is all but complete; within the last ten years, the last native Welsh costume has mouldered away in the farmhouse chest; the Irish maiden has discarded the head-shawl from beneath

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which she used to smile so sweetly ; and the Highland girl has learned to import the fashions by post from Manchester. And this process is going on all the world over ; so rapid is it and so sudden that it is as yet all but unobserved.

To European dress and its changes, we must look not for the charm and interest of primitive custom and feeling, but for the large expression of a social history common to all men. Fashion in dress follows behind the human catastrophes and triumphs, as Harlequin and Columbine follow with their tricks the serious actors on the stage.

No trait can better illustrate the frenzy of luxury that possessed the wealthy and powerful classes of Europe than a study of eighteenth-century dress. At a time when black bread and wild herbs were the food of the people, national property was wasted in the riot of personal splendour. How clear a prophecy this seems to us now of the French Revolution and the shaken thrones of Europe. Take for instance such a description as this of the wedding-dress of Frederick the Great's daughter in the early years of the century.

"The jewels worn by the bride were valued at four millions of dollars. She had a coronet, set with diamonds and pear-shaped pearls, which alone was estimated at one million ; her train was borne by six maids of honour, who, on account of the great weight of the precious stones with which it was garnished, had two pages to assist them. The total weight of the bridal attire is said to have been nearly a hundred pounds."

So much suffices for the princess ; the great gentleman of Paris was not far behind her in expense. Madame de Sévigné gives a charming account of the wedding toilet of the Prince de Condé. "Let me tell you the finest, the most extraordinary piece of news in the world," says she, in her delightful way. "Here it is ; yesterday the prince was shaved ! This is no illusion, neither is it a bit of gossip ; it is the solemn truth ; the whole court was witness of the ceremony, and Madame de Langeron, seizing the moment when he had his paws crossed like a lion, slipped upon him a waistcoat with

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Gainsborough

Mrs. Siddons

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diamond buttons. A *valet de chambre*, abusing his patience, frizzed him, powdered him, and at last reduced him to the condition of the handsomest courtier imaginable, with a head of hair that easily extinguished all the wigs. These are the prodigies of the wedding. His suit was inestimably lovely; it was embroidered in very large diamonds, following the lines of a black pattern, on a straw-coloured velvet ground. They say that the straw colour was not effective, and that Madame de Langeron, who is the soul of all the splendours of the Hôtel de Condé, was quite upset: and truly, such misfortunes are the most grievous in life. . . . But, indeed, I was forgetting the best of all, which is that the Prince's sword had a handle of diamonds. The lining of his mantle was of black satin sewn with diamonds." So did the great gallants "carry a manor on their backs"; and the great ladies a farm or two tied to their fan-strings, or a whole village round their necks.

Up to the very year of the Revolution, 1789, gentlemen's clothes were exceedingly smart. From Hogarth an excellent idea of English dress of the day may be had; always remembering that his day was the earlier eighteenth century, and that dress became more absurd afterwards. Although Hogarth was first and foremost a prophet, as daring and savage in his denunciations of wickedness as any character in the Old Testament, yet such is his delicacy and perfection as an artist that his creations are still as vivid as any living creature of to-day. Take, for example, the singer in the drawing-room scene of "Marriage à la Mode"; what a consummate picture of able-bodied foppery! Then we have the knee-breeches, the long-flapped waistcoat, the gold-laced coat with the huge and gorgeously embroidered cuffs, the absurd bows, brooches, and earrings, so cleverly matched to an inimitable folly of countenance.

It was the Revolution that sounded the knell of masculine gaiety of dress. The follies of women's costuming were not at all affected; the fashions for women merely altered, and in fact became to the full as absurd and extravagant in