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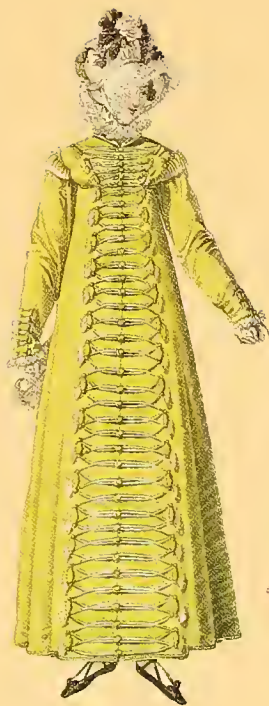
Fashion Plates

in the
Collection of the
Cooper-Hewitt
Museum

1815. *Costumes Parisiens.*



PARIS, MAY, 1799.



Wiener Moden.

1820. *Costume Parisien.*



The Smithsonian
Institution's
National Museum
of Design

Front cover (left to right):

Dress with Spencer jacket

London Magazine, 1799

Woman's and man's clothing "à la anglaise"

Journal des Dames et des Modes, 1815

Walking dress

Wiener Moden, 1817

Day dress

Journal des Dames et des Modes, 1820

Fashion Plates

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in the
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LONDON FULL DRESS. OCT. 1799.

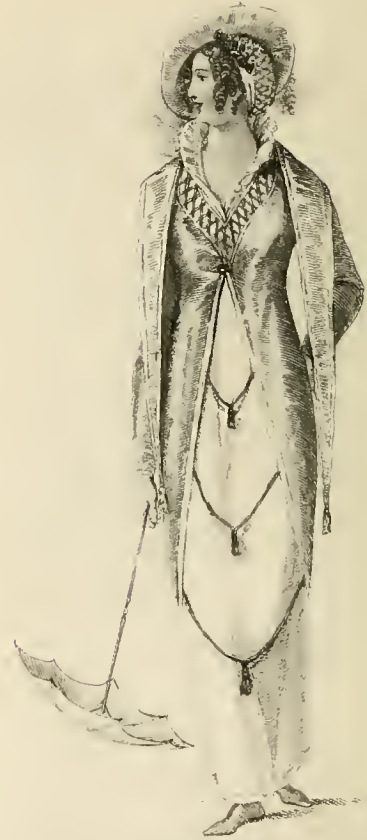
Printed for R. Phillips, 71 St Pauls Church Yard

Foreword

In the late eighteenth century, fashion plates began appearing in periodicals devoted wholly or in part to fashion. A delightful collection of over 9,000 such illustrations, most of which were assembled by Vyvyan Holland, the son of Oscar Wilde, is housed in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. These charming prints illustrate changes in style and taste in clothing for men, women, and children from that period until the first quarter of the twentieth century, when fashion magazines began using photographic illustrations. The prints detail the “proper” attire for every occasion—from carriage rides to concerts, summer frolics to funerals and weddings, bicycling to gala balls—and demonstrate the occurrence and recurrence, as well as the enduring quality of some styles.

The printing of this publication coincides with the showing of the exhibition *Fashion Prints: 125 Years of Style*. Both were made possible through a generous grant from *Harper's Bazaar*, a Hearst Corporation publication which has a long and important history in setting and recording style.

Lisa Taylor
Director





MORNING DRESS.

*Reproduced from *AT&T: New Trends of La Belle Assemblée* by © 2012*

What to wear?

Surely it has been a question under consideration since the fig leaf—and one that has been answered differently by different peoples, according to their time, their geography, their life's work, their society. Nonetheless, for any relatively homogeneous culture, conformity in dress seems to take on the force of an innate human instinct. And that's why a study of any group's sartorial choices yields more than a solipsistic review of clothing styles. History of fashion is quite literally a record of lifestyles, mores, political and philosophical trends.

What's more, an examination of clothing brings one immediately in touch with another time. Just as each of us responds (or not) to the vicissitudes of fashion today, so, too, do we relate to styles that evolved in another decade or century. What woman who has ever even tried on a pair of narrowly pointed or extremely high-heeled pumps cannot imagine the painful price aristocratic Chinese women paid for the "ultra-femininity" of bound feet? What man who has struggled to find matching socks in his rush to the office can't marvel at the leisure required to put on the buttons and bows and studs of an eighteenth-century French courtier's outfit?

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, first in western Europe and then in America, one of the finest contemporary sources for answers about matters

of style was the fashion plate. Technically speaking, fashion plates are engraved or lithographed prints, distributed as the entirety or, more often, as supplements to periodicals concerned with directing their elite readership to good taste and proper discrimination. Often beautifully hand-colored (as are those in the Cooper-Hewitt's 9,000-piece collection), fashion plates occupied the attentions of accomplished, dedicated artists, so that by the end of the eighteenth century, these depictions of fashion had their own standing as a decorative art form, with its own visual signals and stylizations.

In fact, representation of current fashion is as old as art itself, but the earliest examples of work specifically designed to show clothes as opposed to their wearers were usually records of regional costume, as in Albrecht Dürer's early drawings of the styles of Nuremberg and Venice in 1494, or Giacomo Franco's *Habiti delle Donne Veneziane* and Romeyn de Hooghe's *Figures de la Mode* printed in Amsterdam, both in the seventeenth century. But these pictures, and other isolated examples, are doubly distinct from true fashion plates in that they are intended to record the mode of the recent past, and therefore must be deemed the earliest examples of costume, not fashion, plates.

Jacques Esnauts and Michel Rapilly, two Parisian printsellers, are generally credited with conceiving the notion, in 1778, of creating





colored prints showing the prevailing fashion for both men and women. (Some publications, notably *The Lady's Magazine*, published in London, were issuing black-and-white prints at this time.) Under the title *La Galerie des Modes*, Messieurs Esnauts's and Rاپilly's plates appeared at irregular intervals, interspersed with portraits of the fashion arbiters of the day, i.e., members of the French court, and renderings of current theatrical costumes, all richly detailed and carefully captioned.

When *La Galerie des Modes* rather abruptly ceased publication in 1787, there was a hiatus in the production of fine fashion plates until Stuttgart-born, Paris-trained engraver Nicolaus Wilhelm von Heideloff launched the *Gallery of Fashion* in London, in 1794. Exquisitely hand-tinted and even embellished with metallics, the prints in the *Gallery of Fashion* were a wonderful fulfillment of the reportage feature of real fashion plates, failing only as to any prediction about future trends in fashionable dress. It is interesting to note that until its death in 1803, the *Gallery of Fashion*, issued as two multi-figure aquatints per

month, bore a subscription rate of three guineas a year. And records indicate that its total circulation reached a high of 347 copies sold in Great Britain and 67 abroad. However, with the Princesses Royal, Elizabeth and Augusta, the Duke of York, the Empress of Germany and later, Queen Charlotte herself among the subscribers, Heideloff achieved an "audience" any publisher would boast of.

By the turn of the century, several periodicals that included true fashion plates were being published regularly in France, England and Germany, though many, like *The Lady's Magazine*, at first issued uncolored prints. And in the four decades bracketing the change of century, among a raft of short-lived fashion publications, eight are significant for being launched and surviving thirty years or more (if not for the uninterrupted excellence of their plates). The aforementioned *Lady's Magazine* is surely one. *La Belle Assemblée* or *Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine*, addressed particularly to the *Ladies*, published in London from 1806 to 1868, is another. *La Belle Assemblée* suffered many years of dogged if not distinguished publi-

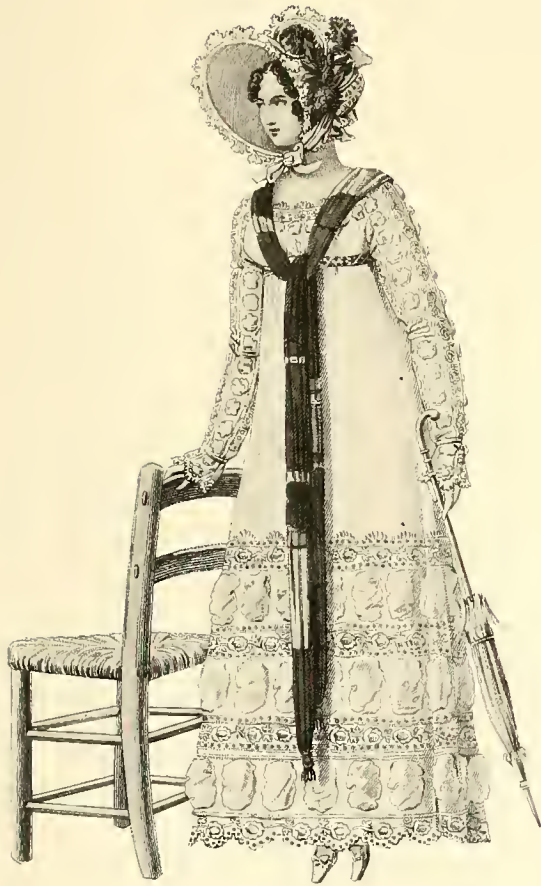
cation—including several where it merely printed out-of-date material from French periodicals—until 1855 when it began to feature prints by Héloïse Leloir (one of three sisters well known for charming fashion plates).

But fashion was only one of its concerns. *La Belle Assemblée* contained text pieces on politics and current exhibitions, articles on cooking and painting, and even poetry. And, not unlike today's fashion magazines, it carried advertising for fabrics, trim, cosmetics and personal care items like false teeth and depilatories.

Die Wiener Moden-Zeitung, which flourished between 1816 and 1844, is significant for issuing some 52 plates a year, thus giving data on the idiosyncracies of the Viennese mode, which was quite distinct from the Parisian, in the early nineteenth century at any rate.

The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashion and Politics (1809–1828), published by Rudolph Ackerman in London, is important for its consistently excellent and pretty, romantic plates, engraved and hand-colored, bearing only one figure each (except when a child was included).

8. Promenade dress
La Belle Assemblée, 1818



9. Wedding dress
Petit Courrier des Dames, 1826



Petit Courrier des Dames
Boulevard des Italiens - N.° 2. près le passage de l'Opéra
Costume de Mariée, Robe de blonde, Coiffure exécutée par M^{lle} Croiset, rue de l'Orléans.

A monthly that comprised pictures of stylish furniture and portraits as well as fashion plates, *Ackerman's Repository*, as it came to be known, also expanded a merchandising concept *La Belle Assemblée* may have originated: in some of its early numbers, actual samples of newly created dress materials were pasted into the book, complete with detailed descriptions of the fabrics and the addresses of their manufacturers.

Artists and filmmakers since have loved the pathos of the scene: tattered, grimy, frightened French aristocrats, wearing the scraps of their excessive costumes as they await the guillotine in some dingy holding room. The theatrical value of a marquis in soiled silk breeches and torn multi-ruffled shirt; the countess in her now-shabby brocade dress with enormous panniers (or side bustles) reflects precisely the human theater of that very serious, critical social upheaval, the French Revolution.

It's not surprising, either, that the post-Revolutionary mode was in direct reaction to the time's sartorial, as well as political, excesses. The accepted style became immediately simpler, with French

men adopting the attitude of dignified ease of English country gentlemen, and women seeking less brightly-colored dresses with simpler lines.

In clear contrast to the preceding period, fashionable ladies of the post-Revolutionary era chose narrow-skirted, relatively unadorned dresses with discreetly covered bodices and upper arms (figure 1), the skirts usually just short enough to reveal silk-stockinged ankles. In a mildly intellectual way, this silhouette—later evolved as the Empire dress we refer to today—represented a trend toward naturalism, since complicated underpinnings were abandoned and the dress conformed much more closely to the actual female body.

Ladies' hair was no longer tortured and ornamented and powdered, but worn curled and up. Hats were small and cheerily feminine.

During the Directoire, this new passion for simplicity reached a zenith in the fashion à la Grecque. The fair Helens of the day wore high-waisted chemises—sometimes with a slight train—in the sheerest imaginable fabrics. In fact, the penchant for naturalism was taken

so far as to dictate that a woman's dress was supposed to weigh no more than a half pound and be able to be drawn through its owner's wedding band! The inescapable reality that such costumes were entirely unsatisfactory for the winter months led to a great interest in—not to say need for—beautifully warm shawls and, less understandably, short-cropped Spencer jackets, as coverings (cover).

From the extraordinary opulence of men's attire in Louis XVI's court, the ensuing style achieved a straightforwardness from which men's clothes have never completely recovered. Their choices in fabrics became duller, less ornate. Knee-length breeches, a fashion so intimately associated with courtiers, were almost instantly, it briefly, given up for longer trousers, symbolizing perhaps, an identification with the French working class who had always worn them. Even men's hair was liberated from the fussy powdering and dressing of the royal heyday.

Around the turn of the century, startling changes, accurately recorded in fashion plates of the period (figure 2), occurred in men's fashions and they were, amusingly,



influenced by two people: the Prince Regent, George IV, a predictable source of trends, who was superseded in the end by his low-born friend, Beau Brummell.

To be sure, the innovative, creative Regent would turn up at a ball wearing a pink satin vest or a new style of shoe buckle, and it was immediately copied. But it was young Brummell, having first gained notice at Eton for his individualized style, who gained entry to the Prince's coterie and soared to the pinnacle of social arbitration.

This "prime minister of taste" favored short-cropped, natural hair and hairless faces. He promoted the clean-lined, careful tailoring for which London's craftsmen are renowned today. He wore little or no jewelry or fussy ruffles, but did set a style for skintight trousers. Brummell's most impressive contribution, however, was probably the expertly fitted, cropped tailcoat that he wore over a short vest and a modestly frilled shirt with a crisp, high collar and a stock tie.

Concurrent with this trend for dandyism (the era's term for the most fastidious attention to the new style for men), was the Romantic movement. Exhausted from wars and drastic changes and fluxes in government, people seemed to yearn for some idealized beauty. And with the Restoration, a pair of old men held political sway in France, but through disinterest, abandoned to the theater the most successful influence on the day's fashion: a sense of fantasy.





Costume de Paris
 Petit Courier des Dames
 Boulevard des Italiens N° 2¹ près le passage de l'Opéra.
 Costume de Mariée
 Coiffure nouvelle de la Saison

Paris, chez M. Fuller, 1^{er} 2^e Rue de la Harpe.



Costume de Paris
 Petit Courier des Dames.
 Boulevard des Italiens N° 2¹ près le passage de l'Opéra.
 Costume d'Homme

M^r Meulin tailleur rue de la Harpe N° 11
 Coiffeur Cheveux pour M^r Meulin, Palais Royal 7
 Rose & Co. 3 Pall Mall, Bullbone Place, London.



*Englische Herren - (Moden)
Extra - Hüpfen.*

Ladies' light, body-revealing vertical silhouettes became softened and blurred with all manner of bows, ribbons, and trim (figure 4). The several years' vogue for white fabrics—which somewhat reduced the inspiration for fashion-plate artists—ended around 1807, while the high-rise Empire waistline survived until about 1824 (figure 6).

In fact, throughout the 1820s, the look became increasingly fanciful, with the advent of puffs, ruffles, frivolous collars and cuffs, and trims (figure 9). Ornamentation regained favor—black-tipped ermine, for example, once the exclusive sartorial privilege of royals, was a very popular choice for edging coats or muffs. Hats



grew bigger while bonnets were first introduced as a millinery alternative (figure 8). Hair was worn in ever more elaborate arrangements of curls and feathers and ribbons (figure 9). The recently-preferred white and delicate pastel shades of silk and cotton were definitely overthrown for more strongly colored fabrics. Perhaps the most telling signal of the shift away from pure, unadorned naturalism is seen in the return of the corset, designed now to raise but not reveal the bosom.

This woman's male counterpart was probably wearing a simple cutaway frockcoat, a waistcoat, and trousers of a lighter shade, sometimes held down by an instep strap. His pants mirror the women's looser skirts in their wider leg. A tall, stovepipe hat would, most likely, complete his look.

As fashion plates of the day so aptly record, the Romantic movement for a time liberated children from lives led as little adults (figure 7). The new philosophy that deemed childhood an innocent period of freedom and growth was reflected in simple frocks of comfortable cotton muslin that allowed little girls to frolic and play—like children. The boys were relieved of their miniature versions of the frockcoat and breeches, and put into short jackets worn over simple shirts with side-button trousers.

The 1820s continued to see the birth of myriad fashion publications, edited to chart the aforementioned vagaries of fashion. Among





the notable European French launches were *Le Petit Courrier des Dames*, which weekly published one or two plates by the best-known and most skilled artists in the field.

And in the 1840s, *Le Courrier* had the good fortune of an association with one such artist, Mme Florensa de Closmenil, who brought great appeal to her figures, took pains to add attractive background settings for them, and represented children as particularly happy little models. Her work can also be found among the portfolios of *Le Bon Ton* (another first-rate and long-lived French entry, which appeared in 1834), and *The World of Fashion. La Mode* (1829–1837) was a weekly best known for the work of another talented engraver, Paul Gavarni, who created the most delightfully feminine creatures accompanied by sweet, lively children.

The World of Fashion, issued out of London from 1824 to 1891, was just one of the magazines of the time experimenting with folio size. Plates tended to be square and to contain up to six figures per engraving. *Le Follet Courrier des Salons*, born in 1829, is significant for its especially stylish plates—marking the beginning of the supremacy of French plates over English—and the fact that it continued to produce its hand-colored plates into the 1890s.

The first American fashion magazine appeared in Philadelphia in 1824, with the imitatively burden-

some title of *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art and Fashion*, and tended to offer copies of French and English plates, engraved locally, but as much as a year out of date.

Its slightly younger sister publication, *Godey's Ladies' Handbook* (published out of Philadelphia from 1830 to 1898) is better known today and was, presumably, the more successful magazine in its time. *Godey's* issued one monthly plate—at first crude copies of plates in French magazines like *Le Petit Courrier*—and later, it imported metal plates from France, with the captions erased and adjusted to account for the many months elapsed in the overseas connection.

Godey's became an American institution: even *Gone With the Wind's* Scarlet O'Hara pouted about the inconvenience of the Civil War since it prevented her receiving her copy of *Godey's*. (It is also one of the first publications outside of Germany to drop hand-colored plates for generally unsuccessful color printing, which it did in 1890.)

Similarly, *The Lady's Magazine* began at about this time (1830) to import French plates whose

captions were doctored and translated into English.

Young Victoria could have provided the model for the late 1830s, since her slim waist; large, liquid-dark eyes; and graceful, gently submissive, slope-shouldered posture reflected the female ideal.

The fashions that clothed this “perfect creature” are perhaps by today's standards silly, but they inspired some of the most enjoyable fashion plates. The exaggerated “champagne-bottle” shoulders were emphasized with dropped sleeve seams and vast collars or bared in off-the-shoulder evening gowns (figure 10). Belled skirts dropped to floor length and were decorated with every sort of lace, ribbon and flora-punctuated draping. Sleeves became exuberantly puffed, narrowing to the wrist (figure 11) or ballooning in leg-of-mutton-in-reverse configurations. The taste for fripperies engendered equally frilly, fussy accessories: hats, aprons, gloves.

Parisian men of the period also presented a rather “feminized” silhouette with a peculiarly unflattering emphasis on the hips. Tailcoats and even the skirted

frockcoats were ever so tightly waist-cinched, then flared out over looser, long trousers (figure 13). The recent trend toward beardlessness was undermined to some extent by a taste for side whiskers, too.

The following decade, however, brought a saner, or at least more conservative approach to being well dressed. The gentleman of the 1840s, were he not a spendthrift dandy, would require a minimal wardrobe consisting of four morning coats, seven pairs of trousers, plus various day and evening waistcoats (figure 14).

The female's raucous ribbons and bows also gradually gave way to neater tucks and ornate but orderly passementerie and other braid trim (figure 15). Women were quite literally subdued by longer corsets, heavier skirts—and bulky, substantial shawls. Their profusions of carefully designed curls were tamed into smoothed-down, parted styles with, usually, two side chignons or rolls. Side-paneled poke-bonnet-shaped hats proffered them limited views of the world, much as if they were peering eternally from club chairs.



When Louis Napoleon returned to power in France in 1848 (later to reign as Napoleon III), he brought along a corseted, mustachioed military-esque appreciation of style, as well as a flamboyant, clothes-mad wife, Eugénie.

The 1840s began a three-decade “golden age” of fashion plates, and in 1843, two of the most significant French offerings made their appearances: *Moniteur de la Mode* consistently bore the work of artist Jules David, who led the era’s new wave of enlivened engravings. Instead of charming but still stiff, portrait-like plates, his were rich with movement and background detail. He made a scene come alive—portraying women and children at the piano so credibly that lovely tunes come to mind, or rendering an outdoor setting so completely that the locale can be envisioned perfectly. His best work exemplifies the fashion plate’s new, literal “atmosphere,” and his detailed renderings of music rooms, conservatories, salons and incidentally, boudoirs, offer a peek into Victorian homelife.

As English periodicals followed *The Lady’s Magazine’s* lead, and gradually gave up producing their

own plates to import French ones, the important new introduction *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* chose to present many of David’s pictures, from 1860 on.

François-Claudins Compté-Calix, chief artist for *Les Modes Parisiennes* (1843–1875), was, like many of his colleagues, a noted watercolorist as well. His poetic, sentimental style made for a sweet, naive attitude in his plates, especially those with women and children (figure 16). And though *Les Modes* started out larger than quarto, it had to reduce to the size of other publications, explaining the change to its readers with an editorial note about the shortcomings of the postal service.

The Queen, born in 1861, was composed largely of articles on social and domestic topics, as well as offerings of literature thought suitable for ladies. Its plates—each containing two adults and one child, or all children’s wear—came primarily from *Le Petit Courrier*. It had a successful life, even beyond 1898 when it ceased running hand-colored plates and substituted color-printed ones. It was the last English hold-out on that aesthetic point.

With all the French and British publications surviving and others that appeared only briefly through these years, one German publication achieved what was probably the largest circulation of the time. It was printed in no fewer than fourteen languages under different titles: its name in New York was *The Season*.

Also in America, there was *Harper’s Bazar*, which debuted in 1867 and enjoyed prominence until 1898 (its current prestige and authority were regained about 1913). *Bazar*, however, offered almost exclusively black-and-white engravings of European fashions that had been “adapted” for the distinctly American lifestyle.

By the mid-Victorian era, fashion plates no longer reflected a style set by the Queen of England, but rather that struck by the new regent in France. Napoleon III, a man interested in looking smart for glittering evenings, and who encouraged ostentation in matters of style, was himself outdone by his wife, the Empress Eugénie. It is said, in fact, that she could talk of nothing but clothes and beauty, and that her nickname could well have been “the queen of crinolines.”





Across the Channel, with Queen Victoria in continual mourning, her son Edward with his beautiful Danish wife Alexandra also presented a royal example of gaiety and a glamorous attitude that was surely noted in fashionable European circles.

The arrogance of hindsight makes the female costume of the 1840s seem ludicrous. Women wore pantalettes under a stiff wool and horsehair petticoat ("crin" means horsehair in French) and up to ten more petticoats, some of which were boned and padded. The desired effect was a floor-sweeping skirt about four yards around.

Heavy corsets contained fuller Victorian figures—ladies of this era being admired for solidity expressed through virtuous and prolific motherhood—sheathed in weighty fabrics available in brand new sharp colors made possible by the discovery of aniline dyes. An open-sided bonnet or floral hat, a muff, reticule and parasol completed the look.

In the 1850s, the sheer poundage of stiffened petticoats was considerably reduced with the invention of steel-spring hoopskirts to support the crinolines. So clearly an upper-class fashion, the hugest crinolined skirts actually required servants to lower the dress over those extraordinary underpinnings and their wearer. And Eugénie, whose morals were apparently a much discussed topic in French society, was at the fore as these

WIENER MODE



jacket and pants (figure 18).

Though the late-Victorian, then the Edwardian period, through to 1914, saw distinct and often drastic modulations in feminine mode, it is this period that marks the decline of the hand-colored fashion plate. As Vyvyan Holland laments in his book *Hand Coloured Fashion Plates*, "...mechanical colour-printing began to get a stranglehold on fashion magazines."

It is true that over one hundred fashion magazines made their debuts in the years between 1840 and 1870, and that comparatively few containing fashion plates appeared between 1870 and the turn of the century. Among the notable exceptions: *Revue de la Mode* (1872–1888), *l'Art et la Mode* (1880–1900), and a new periodical entitled *Wiener Mode* (there had been another) that bowed in 1887.

In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, many of the English, German and American magazines were left in the proverbial lurch. Owing perhaps to its place in the French soul, fashion carried on under siege, and somehow, most of the Parisian publications kept right on publishing.

This period preceding the turn of

the century, of course, saw several older publications flourish, too. *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, for instance, was still going strong, but now with a G. Gonin as principal artist, Jules David having died in 1892.

In his writing about fashion plates, Vyvyan Holland suggests, a bit petulantly, that part of the decline in plates was due to the "ugliness" of the clothes. That opinion is easy to argue.

It was an Englishman working in Paris who, in 1863, changed the fashion world forever. Charles Frederick Worth showed finished dresses on live models to prospective clients, and haute couture as we know it still, was born. Worth had opened his own *maison* on the rue de la Paix and by 1867 had become equally selective about the quality of his materials (eventually, he had fabrics created to his specifications), and about his clientele. He shaped the snobbish aura of haute couture at its infancy.

Whatever his pretensions, Worth did have a refined taste that was effectively brought to bear when he began weeding through the wild ornamentation of women's dresses. He is credited with bringing previously ignored satins and silk

brocades into popular acceptance, and he himself proclaimed exultantly that he'd "dethroned the crinoline" by designing gowns with much less preposterously proportioned skirts (figure 20). He also made life less than perfect for all the ladies' dressmakers—the women to whom fashion plates were ultimately directed—because now every woman of fashion wanted a Worth creation.

In the 1870s, under Worth's influence, the emphasis, the bulk of skirts began, still with the aid of pads, wires and mini-panniers, to recede to the back, with some fullness at the hips, creating the bustled silhouette.

Sub-trends included the reintroduction of the *polonaise* (figure 21) (or Polish national costume), to Paris around 1877, which in turn, seems to have influenced Worth's princess gown. The princess involved a skirt that was tight to the knees and then flounced. And, by 1879, there was a vogue for the princess robe, a silhouette that followed the figure in front and at the sides, but was bunched up in back.

These are all variations on the bustle theme, though, which at its pinnacle included a train, a tiny

elongated and pointed waistline, and bell-shaped crinolines to support all the backward sway and drapery across the hips (figure 23). While bustles reached their maximum popularity—and a slightly absurd, piled-on appearance—around 1885 (figure 24), the favorite wrap was the dolman, now with a fitted, short-cropped back to accommodate the bustle, and long hanging front panels and loose, cape-like sleeves.

Likewise, the mode for chignons or nape-of-the-neck cascades of ringlets required that bonnets be cut out in back. Fancy buttons; single diamond or paste earrings; fans on slipknots attached at the waist; high, tight necklines and high-heeled boots were essentials to the well-dressed woman.

Pity the poor children. It was in 1886 that the Little Lord Fauntleroy suit became the rage for boys. Inspired originally by Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*, the suit was either black or sapphire velvet, a jacket with knickers. It was worn over a white linen blouse with a large lace collar. That the look finally came into ill-repute as a sissy mode may have had something to do with its adoption by grown-up male aesthetes. Oscar Wilde, for one, shocked a nation when he toured the U.S. in 1882 wearing black velvet knickers, a flowing tie and curls.

In any case, boys tended to stay in short trousers, or be graduated into the knickerbockers their fathers wore for golfing and bicy-



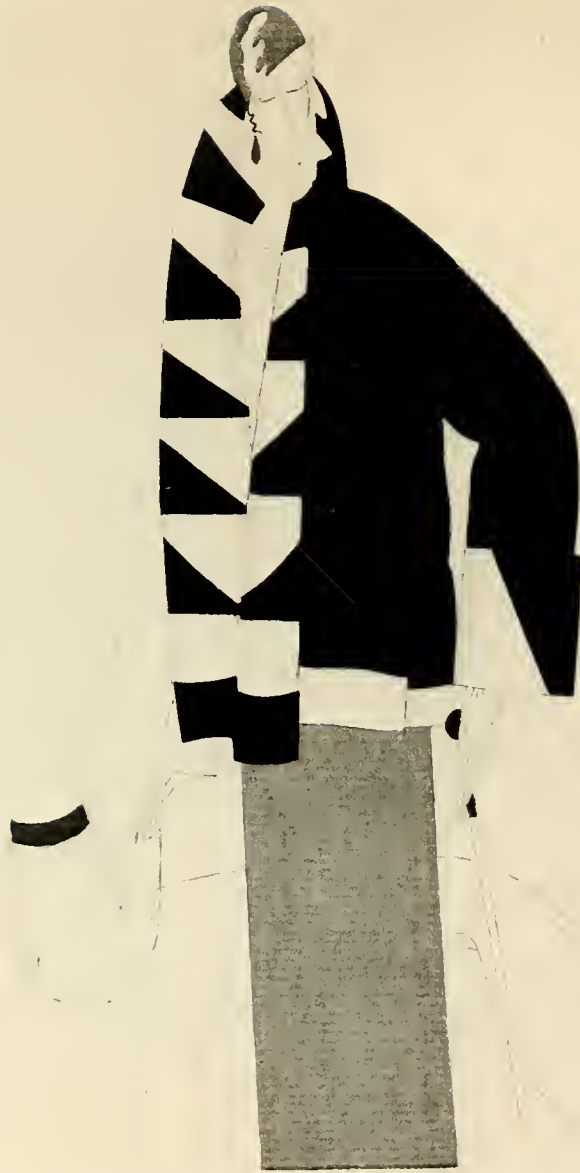
cling. It wasn't until 1920 that long pants were generally available to little boys.

The 1880s saw another mini-revolution in female fashion. With the opening of the Savoy Hotel restaurant in London, women began to have trendy yet respectable places to go to show off their expensive and lavish clothes. At the same time, women became free to participate, however gingerly, in sports like bicycling, boating (figure 26), and skating. The see-and-be-seen compulsion, which ran right through the Belle Epoque, through the Jazz Age, and which still pertains today, was afloat. And the sporting theme opened up entirely new possibilities—requirements, in fact—for a lady's wardrobe.

As separates became more and more entrenched, the tight, fitted tops or basques with leg-of-mutton sleeves gently gave way to unlined shirtwaists and blouses, just as the bustled skirt softened into a circularly-cut bell skirt lined with stiffening to the knee. Also around the turn of the century, man-tailored, long-skirted suits for women made their first appearances (figure 25) and were adapted as skating costumes, with short skirts, by 1906.

Regardless of what clothes they were actually wearing, women during the last of the nineteenth century were measured against a physical type commonly known as the hourglass figure. Thin, short blondes must have, at times, considered suicide as tall, fleshy women with big bosoms and heavy





LA DERNIÈRE LETTRE PERSANE

Extrait de l'Album édité par les Fourrures Max

hips were held up as examples of perfection. They were dark, with the palest skin possible, on the order of Lily Langtry, Jennie Churchill, or the girl Charles Dana Gibson made famous.

To get the look, women strung and fastened themselves into torturous waist-shrinking corsets (the extremists had lower ribs removed) and then used starched lace and padding to fill out the bosom and hips. Puff-sleeved blouses with high collars, trailing skirts, heeled boots and upswept hair rolled over horsehair “rats” topped with huge hats—that was “it!”

But as reaction to the stifling Victorian era built, and social influences—not the least of which was the suffragette movement—developed, something had to give. It did, and it was the corset.

A Parisian designer named Paul Poiret, who had worked for a time with Worth, read the minds of contemporary women and began showing dresses with no waist at all, but rather flowing affairs that resembled ancient Greek tunics. Often gathered under the bosom, Poiret’s dresses fell in a relatively unadorned simplicity to the floor. Of

course, he elaborated on his own concept, creating Orientally-inspired tunics, kimono-wrap tops (figure 27), and turbans to be worn with his gowns. Poiret was also the originator of the loose sack dress and, in a perverse relapse, of the hobble skirt (figure 28). (This contrivance first appeared in 1910, and for several years fashionable women stumbled, teetered and, well, hobbled about in these ridiculously narrow creations.)

For the men, the look became cleaner-lined and narrower, too. Shorter jackets with wider lapels topped longer, creased and cuffed trousers (Edward VII is named as the instigator of creased pants legs). It was the slick and slim Arrow Collar man who projected the male ideal.

The First World War caused a general hiatus in the development of fashion—with the important exception that skirts rose to ankle-height or above (figures 29 and 30)—after which emerged the flapper style. And in the ensuing era of proliferating couturier names, Coco Chanel dominates. She embodied the easy-going style of the time, with her bobbed hair, her little black evening chemises and her sweaters

—with pants!

And so it is that fashion plates, as up-to-the-minute recordings, offer a delightful view of the tastes and tendencies of their times. Seen against the entire spectrum of communications, they hold an important place between the completely costumed miniature dolls Mme Rose Bertin, Marie Antoinette’s dressmaker and confidante, sold to inform women of the current court style, and today’s prime purveyors of fashion information. In fact, the successors to fashion plates are really two-fold: photo-filled, glossy magazines that are produced monthly by the hundreds of thousands, and mass-produced, mass-distributed paper patterns. For fashion plates were meant as much to instruct her dressmaker as to amuse the fashionable lady. Fashion plates are original, idiosyncratic and pleasing proof of the adage: “One picture is worth a thousand words.”

Joan Lancaster Harting



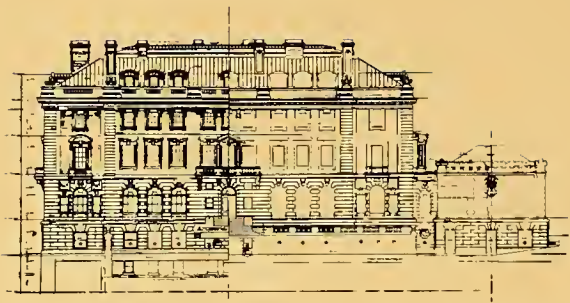
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Back Cover:
Day dress

Journal des Dames et des Modes, 1914



Petit manteau de velours. robe de lunon





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