Worldly Woman

France should never have been a Republic. She owes it to us to provide a brilliant example of the fashions she enforces—an example, by the way, we are not likely to get in the estimable wives of her Presidents. Since she has taken it on herself to foist her ideas on an obedience world, the least she could do was to give us a leader we could copy without misgivings. True, we have any amount of leaders—too many, and in their multitude there is little wisdom. Instead of a queen to guide us, we have a levy of actresses, and a few notorious beauties belonging to a world which, by no stretch of charity, we could call the great one. The haem done by these models of Fashion, for whom nothing is too exaggerated, or too expensive, is greater than one imagines. All the world flocks to Longchamp in the spring and autumn, there to seek inspiration, and it derives it, alas! from the things that “jump to the eyes.” Naturally, it copies the clothes that are too chic to be “comme il faut,” rather than those “comme il faut” to be altogether chic. Quiet distinction on the person of a mere aristocrat cannot compete with the screaming novelties flaunted by the others. Those who are “in the know” are careful; but even Bond Street has been known to make mistakes.

Now, if there were a queen in France, those fine ladies, with their forty guinea hats and their live-hundred-guinea coats, would come to leading lights. Even were some more grand dame than chic, her ways would still impose themselves. In France one adores Royalty. The cut of our King’s waistcoats, for instance, is law in that Paris trés snob that orders its coats in Piccadilly. Once, I remember, how implicit faith in the good taste of Royalty led to unfortunate results. There was a picture on the walls of a certain year’s Academy which represented the King in a frock-coat and patent leather boots. Unfortunately, the artist had seen fit to paint the latter with distinctly brown reflections; there is no dictating to the eye of the painter. No allowance, however, was made for artistic license, and the news went round Parisian circles that the “first gentleman in Europe” were brown boots with a frock-coat. Accordingly, nothing else appeared on the Boulevards for many a day, and in the depths of some obscure coin de praier, no doubt, they are wearing them still.

I wish I had some convenient Royalty, or some cavard, to blame for the cut of the newest skirt. Evidence points to a famous couturier of the Rue de la Paix, for the skirt is mere or less on First Empire lines, to which period he has been faithful for more than two years. This autumn he has gone back to the Greek idea that originally inspired the Premier Empire. Instead of a skirt, he is giving us an effet de statue; a cloth as supple as a kid glove is dragged round the hips, moulding as tightly as possible the limbs of the unlucky wearer, whose proportions, too often, are far from classical. Besides, a statue is allowed to remain comfortably on its pedestal, while we are obliged to drag our skin-tight draperies over unsympathetic pavements. If only Monsieur X., in all the glorious freedom of his incomparable trousseurs, would have the kindness to remember this, and abandon his studies from the statue; I have small hopes of such benevolence; the new skirt has come to stay, at least all the winter. It is skin-tight, rather high at the waist, without the accustomed dip in front, and without a wrinkle to give it ease over the hips. There are to be no petticoats; of course, none are possible; besides they would leave too much to the imagination, and that would be altogether unfashionable. Instead there are satin knickers, either in black or in pique, all fluffy with lace, and bows, and shining with diamond buckles. But one must not imagine that the absence of elaborate silken from-on is an economy; I have heard that those satin trifles cost a mere nothing of ten or eleven guineas. But these are Paris prices.

Luckily, the classical sheath is not universal, and there are tunics, double skirts and draperies for the timid and the stout. These are the dernier cri; and, as things go nowadays, it is a cr that is likely to last. Silk fringes for day, and pearl and gold ones for evening dresses play an important part in all these arrangements. If we want novelty this season we must look for it in the skirt. Bodices have hardly changed at all, only they are so laden with embroidery and lace that they contrast too much with the skirts they accompany. It is an effect to be aimed at, all the same, by those who aspire to the latest. The sleeves, of which great things were expected, remain practically unaffecter. They are still rather Japanese, and very often still short, only a tribe longer than they were last summer. The lace mitten has not had the success that was promised. It goes admittance with Princess gowns of heavy brocade, but all those arrangements are apt to have a Mélusine look, rather trying in a prosaic age.

Hats are growing more picturesquely daily. Almost all of them are in satin, generally purple, and lined with white, or the lightest heliastre. They are really very pretty, and the only objection that might be raised is that they are almost too beautiful to go with the severity of the present-day tailor-made. To correct this, or perhaps only for a change, we are promised small hats of soft felt and absolute simplicity. Underneath them the hair must be more elaborate than ever. This means a Pompadour pad, a plait, and a great many curls, as well as the hair one happens to have. To be successful one must be able to convince the beholder that all this improbable quaint is one’s own very—not the least difficult of tasks nowadays.

I notice that no woman with any claim to a temperament ever dresses her hair, as we understand hair-dressing to-day. Fashionable clothes, it seems, do not prevent emotions, but a carefully waved head was never yet known to cover a soul, that is if a soul may be covered. Sarah Bernhardt, in her modern plays, undulates through her scenes in gowns that are poetically fashionable, but her hair remains the same tasseled mop we have always known, and would forgive in no one but in Sarah. Nor is she the only one; it seems as if the Ondulation Marcel were incomparable with gowns, and a well-brushed head a certain bar to immortality.

L. S. R.

It is a pleasure to be able to recommend woolen underclothes that are soft, elastic, and really do not shrink. Doctor Rasved has invented a kind, made of pure Australian wool and pash, particularly useful for rheumatic people; but they are equally delightful for everyone, and the only things that make an English winter bearable. His new depot is at 112, Shaftesbury Avenue.

A black cloth skirt edged with a Greek key pattern, and a long coat in chiffon velvet embroidered all over in raised motto of grey and silver, make up a gown that is elegant and distinctive. Model by Martial and Armand. Photograph by Henri Manuel.

Toilette de Cérémonie.

A skirt of pastel blue chiffon has insertions of flat lace edged with evidence of stich in the same shade; the hoistings below open over a chartreuse of Malines. Keeps in black satin and Irish lace. Model by La Rue. Photograph by Henri Manuel.

The Charm of Simplicity.

Breadfruit in the far of the season, and for softness and suppleness it cannot be surpassed. This charming fruit is a good example of its own. Model by Grünwaldt. Photograph by Henri Manuel.

A Broadtail Coat.