CHAPTER XV.

I. THE STORY OF PERIOD COSTUMES

_À Résumé_

"Our present modes of dress (aside from the variations imposed by fashion) are the resultant of all the fashions of the last 2000 years."

W. G. SUMNER in _Folkways._

The earliest Egyptian frescoes, invaluable pre-historic data, show us woman as she was costumed, housed and occupied when the painting was done. On those age-old walls she appears as man's companion, his teacher, plaything, slave, and ruler;—in whatever rôle the fates decreed. The same frescoed walls have pictured records of how Egypt tilled the soil, built houses, worked in metals, pottery and sculpture. Woman is seen beside her man, who slays the beasts, at times from boats propelled through
reeded jungles; and hers is always that rigid outline, those long, quiet eyes depicted in profile, with massive head-dress, and strange upstanding ornaments, abnormally curled wig, and close, straight garments to the feet (or none at all), heavy collar, wristbands and anklets of precious metals with gems inset, or chased in strange designs. About her, the calm mysterious poise and childlike acquiescence of those who know themselves to be the puppets of the gods. In this naïveté lies one of the great charms of Egyptian art.

As sculptured caryatide, we see woman of Egypt clad in transparent sheath-like skirt, nude above the waist, with the usual extinguishing head-dress and heavy collar, bracelets and anklets. We see her as woman, mute, law-abiding, supporting the edifice; woman with steady gaze and silent lips; one wonders what was in the mind of that lotus eater of the Nile who carved his dream in stone.

Those would reproduce Egyptian colour schemes for costumes, house or stage settings, would do well to consult the book of Egyptian designs, brought out in 1878 by the Ecole des
Beaux Arts, Paris, and available in the large libraries.

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Among the earliest portraits of an Egyptian woman completely clothed, is that of Queen Taia, wife of Amenophis, Eighteenth Dynasty, who wears a striped gown with sleeves of the kimono type and a ribbon tied around her waist, the usual ornamental collar and bracelets of gold, and an elaborate head-dress with deep blue curtain, extending to the waist, behind.

Full of illuminating suggestions is an example of Woman in Egyptian decoration, to be seen as a fresco in the Necropolis of Thebes. It shows the governess of a young prince (Eighteenth Dynasty) holding the child on her lap. The feet of the little prince rest on a stool, supported by nine crouching human beings—men; each has a collar about his neck, to which a leash
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is no dodging the issue, woman's story recorded in art, shows that she has always responded to Fate's call; followed, led, ruled, been ruled, amused, instructed, sent her men into battle as Spartan mothers did to return with honour or on their shields, and when Fate so decreed, led them to battle, like Joan of Arc.

II. EGYPT AND ASSYRIA

In Egypt and Assyria the lines of the torso were kept straight, with no contracting of body at waist line. Woman was clad in a straight sheet-like garment, extending from waist to feet with only metal ornaments above; necklace, bracelets and armlets; or a straight dress from neck to meet the heavy anklets. Sandals were worn on the feet. The head was encased in an abnormally curled wig, with pendent ringlets, and the whole clasped by a massive head-dress, following the contour of head and having as part of it, a curtain or veil, reaching down behind, across shoulders and approaching waist line. The Sphinx wears a characteristic Egyptian head-dress.
PLATE XIX
Mrs. Condé Nast, artist and patron of the arts, noted for her understanding of her own type and the successful costuming of it.

Mrs. Nast was Miss Clarisse Coudert. Her French blood accounts, in part, for her innate feeling for line and colour. It is largely due to the keen interest and active services of Mrs. Nast that *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* have become the popular mirrors and prophetic crystal balls of fashion for the American woman.

Mrs. Nast is here shown in street costume. The photograph is by Baron de Meyer, who has made a distinguished art of photography.

It shows the value of a carefully considered outline which is sharply registered on the background by posing figure against the light, a method for suppressing all details not effecting the outline.
Photograph by Baron de Meyer

Mrs. Conde Nast in Street Dress
III. EGYPT, BYZANTIUM, GREECE AND ROME

During the periods antedating Christ, when the Roman empire was all-powerful, the women of Egypt, Byzantium, Greece and Rome, wore gilded wigs (see Plate I, Frontispiece), arranged in Psyche knots, and banded; sandals on their feet, and a one-piece garment, confined at the waist by a girdle, which fell in close folds to the feet, a style to develop later into the classic Greek.

The Greek garment consisted of a great square of white linen, draped in the deft manner of the East, to adapt it to the human form, at once concealing and disclosing the body to a degree of perfection never since attained. There were undraped Greek garments left to hang in close, clinging folds, even in the classic period. It is this undraped and finely-pleated robe (see Plate XXI) hanging close to the figure, and the two-piece garment (see Plate IV) with its short tunic of the same material, extending just below the waist line in front, and drooping in a cascade of ripples at the sides, as low as the
knees, that Fortuny (Paris) has reproduced in his tea gowns.

An Englishwoman told us recently that her great-great-grandmother used to describe how she and others of her time (Empire Period) wet their clothes to make them cling to their forms, à la Grecque!

The classic Greek costume was often a sleeveless garment, falling in folds, and when confined at waist line with cord the upper part bloused over it; the material was draped so as to leave the arms free, the folds being held in place by ornamental clasps upon the shoulders. The fitting was practically unaided by cutting; squares or straight lengths of linen being adjusted to the human form by clever manipulation. The adjusting of these folds, as we have said, developed into an art.

The use of large squares or shawls of brilliantly dyed linen, wool and later silk, is conspicuous in all the examples showing woman as decoration.

The long Gothic cape succeeds it, that enveloping circular garment, with and without the hood, and clasped at the throat, in which the
Mother of God is invariably depicted. Her cape is the celestial royal blue.

The stained silk gauzes, popular with Greek dancers, were made into garments following the same classic lines, and so were the gymnasium costumes of the young girls of Greece. Isadora Duncan reproduces the latter in many of her dances.

In the chapter entitled "The Story of Textiles" in *The Art of Interior Decoration*, we have given a résumé of this branch of our subject.

The type of costume worn by woman throughout the entire Roman Empire during its most glorious period, was classic Greek, not only in general outline, but in detail. Note that the collarless neck was cut round and a trifle low; the lines of gown were long and followed each other; the trimming followed the hem of neck and sleeves and skirt; the hair, while artificially curled and sometimes intertwined with pearls and other gems, after being gilded, was so arranged as to show the contour of the head, then gathered into a Psyche knot. Gold bands, plain or jewelled, clasped and held the hair in place.
In the Gold Room of the Metropolitan Museum; in noted collections in Europe; in portraits and costume plates, one sees that the earrings worn at that period were great heavy discs, or half discs, of gold; large gold flowers, in the Etruscan style; large rings with groups of pendants,—usually three on each ring, and the drop earrings so much in vogue to-day.

Necklaces were broad, like collars, round and made of hand-wrought links and beads, with pendants. These filled in the neck of the dress and were evidently regarded as a necessary part of the costume.

The simple cord which confined the Greek woman's draperies at the waist, in Egypt and Byzantium, became a sash; a broad strip of material which was passed across the front of body at the waist, crossed behind and then brought tight over the hips to tie in front, low down, the ends hanging square to knees or below.

In Egypt a shoulder cape, with kerchief effect in front, broadened behind to a square, and reached to the waist line.

We would call attention to the fact that when the classic type of furniture and costume were
revived by Napoleon I and the Empress Josephine, it was the Egyptian version, as well as the Greek. One sees Egyptian and Etruscan styles in the straight, narrow garment of the First Empire reaching to ankles, with parallel rows of trimming at the bottom of skirt.

The Empire style of parted hair, with cascade of curls each side, riotous curling locks outlining face, with one or two ringlets brought in front of ears, and the Psyche knot (which later in Victorian days lent itself to caricature, in a feather-duster effect at crown of head), were inspired by those curled and gilded creations such as Thaïs wore.

Hats, as we use the term to-day, were worn by the ancients. Some will remember the Greek hat Sibyl Sanderson wore with her classic robes when she sang Massenet's "Phédre," in Paris. It was Chinese in type. One sees this type of hat on Tanagra Statuettes in our museums.

Apropos of hats, designers to-day are constantly resurrecting models found in museums, and some of us recognise the lines and details of ancient head-dresses in hats turned out by our most up-to-date milliners.
Parasols and umbrellas were also used by Assyrians and Greeks. Sandals which only covered the soles of the feet were the usual foot-wear, but Greeks and Etruscans are shown in art as wearing also moccasin-like boots and shoes laced up the front.

Of course, the strapped slippers of the Empire were a version of classic sandals.

As we have said, the Greek gown and toga are found wherever the Roman Empire reached. The women of what are now France and England clothed themselves at that time in the same manner as the cultured class of Rome. Naturally the Germanic branch which broke from the parent stem, and drifted northward to strike root in unbroken forests, bordering on untried seas, wore skins and crudely woven garments, few and strongly made, but often picturesque.

Though but slightly reminiscent of the traditional costume, we know that the women of the third and fourth centuries wore a short, one-piece garment, with large earrings, heavy metal armlets above the elbow and at wrists. The chain about the waist, from which hung a
Mrs. Condé Nast in an evening gown. Here again is a costume the beauty of which evades the dictum of fashion in the narrow sense of the term.

This picture has the distinction of a well-posed and finely executed old master and because possessing beauty of a traditional sort will continue to give pleasure long after the costume has perished.
Mrs. Condé Nast in Evening Dress
knife, for protection and domestic purposes, is
descendent from the savage's cord and ancestor
to that lovely bauble, the chatelaine of later
days, with its attached fan, snuff-box and jew-
elled watch.