CHAPTER XVI

DEVELOPMENT OF GOTHIC COSTUME

TO the Romans, all who were not of Rome and her Empire, were foreigners,—outsiders, people with a strange viewpoint, so they were given a name to indicate this; they were called "barbarians."

Conspicuous among those tribes of barbarians, moved by human lust for gain to descend upon the Roman Empire and eventually bring about its fall, was the tribe of Goths, and in the course of centuries "Gothic" has become a generic term, implying that which is not Roman. We speak of Gothic architecture, Gothic art, Gothic costumes, when we mean, strictly speaking, the characteristic architecture, art and costuming of the late Middle Ages (twelfth to fifteenth centuries).

But we find the so-called Gothic outline in costume as early as the fourth century. Over the undraped, one-piece robe of classic type, a

second garment is now worn, cut with straight lines. It usually fastens behind, and the uncorseted figure is outlined. The neck is still collarless and cut round, the space filled in with a necklace. The sleeves of the tunic appear to be the logical evolution of the folds of the toga, which fall over the arms when bent. They cling to the outline of the shoulder, broadening at the hand into what is called " angel " sleeves; in art, the traditional angel wears them.

Roman-Christian women wore their hair parted, no Psyche knot, and interesting, large earrings. The gowns were not draped, but were in one piece and with no fulness. A tunic, following lines of the form, reached below the knees and was *belted*. This garment was trimmed with bands from shoulders to hem of tunic and kept the same width throughout, if narrow; but if wide, the bands broadened to the hem. The neck continued to be cut round, and filled in with a necklace.

The cape, fastening on shoulders or chest, remnant of the Greek toga, was worn, and veils of various materials were the usual head coverings.

Between the fifth and tenth centuries there are examples of the overgarment or tunic having a broad stomacher of some contrasting material, held in place with a cord, which is tied behind, brought around to the front, knotted and allowed to hang to bottom of skirt.

Byzantine art between 800 and 1000 A. D. still shows women wearing tunics, but hanging straight from neck to hem of skirt, fastened on shoulders and opened at sides to show gown beneath; close sleeves with trimming at the wrists, often large, roughly cut jewels forming a border on tunic, and the hair worn in long braids on each side of the face; the coil of hair, which was wrapped with pearls or other beads, was parted and used to frame the face.

This fashion was carried to excess by the Franks. We see some of their women between 400 and 600 A. D. wearing these heavy, rope-like braids to the hem of the skirt in front.

In the fourteenth century the Gothic costume was perhaps at its most beautiful stage. The long robe, the upper part following the lines of the figure, with long close sleeves half covering hands, or flowing sleeves, that touched

the floor. About the waist was worn a silk cord or jewelled girdle, finely wrought and swung low on hips; from the end of which was suspended the money bag, fan and keys.

The girdle begins now to play an important part as decoration. This theme, the evolution of the girdle, may be indefinitely enlarged upon but we must not dwell upon it here.

In some cases we see that the tunic opened in the front and that the large, square, shawl-like outer garment of Greece now became the long circular cape, clasped on the chest (one or two clasps), made so familiar by the art of the Gothic and Renaissance periods. Turn to the illuminated manuscrips of those periods, to paintings, on wood, frescoes, stained glass, stucco, carved wood, and stone, and you will find the Mother of God invariably costumed in the simple one-piece robe and circular clasped cape.

In most of the sacred art of the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Virgin and other saints are depicted in the current costume of woman. The Virgin was the most frequent subject of

artists in every medium, during the ages when the Church dominated the State in Europe.

The refurnishing of the Virgin's wardrobe has long been and still is, a pious task and one clamoured for by adherents to the churches in which the Virgin's image is displayed to worshippers. We regret to say, for æsthetic reasons, that there is no effort made on the part of modern devotees to perpetuate the beautiful mediæval type of costume.

In some old paintings which come under the head of Folk Art, the Holy Family appears in national costume. The writer recalls a bit of eighteenth century painting, showing St. Anne holding the Virgin as child. St. Anne wears the bizarre fête attire of a Spanish peasant; a gigantic head-dress and veil, large earrings, wide stiff skirts, showing gay flowers on a background of gold. The skirt is rather short, to display wide trousers below it. Her sleeves have filmy frills of deep white lace executed with skill.

To return to the girdle, as we have said, it slipped from its position at the waist line, where it confined the classic folds, and was allowed to

PLATE XXI

Mrs. Condé Nast in a garden costume. She wears a sun-hat and carries a flower-basket, which are decorative as well as useful.

This costume gives distinction and interest to the least pretentious of gardens.

Mrs. Condé Nast in Garden Costume

hang loosely about the hips, clasped low in front. From this clasp a chain extended, to which were attached the housewife's keys or purse and the dame of fashion's fan. In fact one can tell, to a certain extent, the woman's class and period by carefully inspecting her chatelaine.

The absence of waist line, and the long, straight effect produced in the body of gown by wearing the girdle swung about the hips, gives it the so-called Moyen Age silhouette, revived by the fashion of to-day.

In the thirteenth century the round collarless neck, low enough to admit a necklace of links or beads, persists. A new note is the outer sleeve laced across an inner sleeve of white.

Let us remember that the costume of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was distinguished by a quality of beautiful, sweeping line, massed colour, detail with *raison d'être,* which produced dignity with graceful movement, found nowhere to-day, unless it be on the Wagnerian stage or in the boudoir of a woman who still takes time, in our age of hurry, to wear her negligée beautifully.

In the fourteenth century the round neck continued, but one sees low necks too, which left the shoulders exposed (our 1830 style).

Another new note is the tunic grown into a garment reaching to the feet, a one-piece "princess" gown, with belt or girdle. Sometimes a Juliet cap was worn to merely cover the crown of head, with hair parted and flowing, while on matrons we see head coverings with sides turned up, like ecclesiastical caps, and floating veils falling to the waist.

Notice that through all the peiods that we have named, which means until the fourteenth century, the line of shoulder remains normal and beautiful, sloping and melting into folds of robe or line of sleeve. We see now for the first time an inclination to tamper with the shoulder line. An inoffensive scallop appears,—or some other decoration, as cap to sleeve. No harm done yet!

The fifteenth century shows another style, a long sleeveless over-garment, reaching to the floor, fastened on shoulders and swinging loose, to show at sides the undergown. It suggests a priest's robe. Here we discover

one more of the Moyen Age styles revived to-day.

The fourteenth century gowns, with necks cut out round, to admit a necklace with pendants, are still popular. The gowns are long on the ground, and the most beautiful of the characteristic head-dresses—the long, pointed one, with veil covering it, and floating down from point of cap to hem of flowing skirt behind, continues the movement of costume—the long lines which follow one another.

When correctly posed, this pointed head-dress is a delight to the eye. We recently saw a photograph of some fair young women in this type of Mediæval or Gothic costume worn by them at a costume ball. Failing to realise that the *pose* of any head-dress (this means hats as well) is all-important, they had placed the quaint, long, pointed caps on the very tops of their heads, like fools' caps!

The angle at which this head-dress is worn is half the battle.

The importance of every woman's cultivating an eye for line cannot be overstated.

In the fifteenth century we first see puffs at

the elbow, otherwise the outlines of gown are the same. The garment in one piece, the body of it outlining the form, its skirts sweeping the ground; a girdle about the hips, and long, close or flowing sleeves, wide at the hem.

Despite the fourteenth century innovation of necks cut low and off the shoulders (berated by the Church), most necks in the fifteenth century are still cut round at the throat, and the necklace worn instead of collar. Some of the gowns cut low off the shoulders are filled in with a puffed tucker of muslin. The pointed cap with a floating veil is still seen.

Notice that the restraint in line, colour and detail, gradually disappears, with the abnormal circulation of wealth, in those departments of Church and State to which the current of material things was diverted. We now see humanity tricked out in rich attire and staggering to its doom through general debaucheries.

Rich brocades, once from Damascus, are now made in Venice; and so are wonderful satins, velvets and silks, with jewels many and massive.

Sometimes a broad jewelled band crossed the

breast from shoulder diagonally to under arm, at waist.

The development of the petticoat begins now. At first we get only a glimpse of it, when our lady of the pointed cap lifts her long skirts, lined with another shade. It is of a rich contrasting colour and is gradually elaborated.

The waist -line, when indicated, is high.

A new note is the hair, with throat and neck completely concealed by a white veil, a style we associate with nuns and certain folk costumes. As fashion it had a passing vogue.

Originally, the habit of covering woman's hair indicated modesty (an idea held among the Folk), and the gradual shrinking of the dimensions of her coif, records the progress of the peasant woman's emancipation, in certain countries. This is especially conspicuous in Brittany, as M. Anatol Le Braz, the eminent Breton scholar, remarked recently to the writer.

Note the silk bag, quite modern, on the arm; also the jewelled line of chain hanging from girdle down the middle of front, to hem of skirt,—both for use and ornament.

To us of a practical era, a mysterious charm

attaches to the long-pointed shoes worn at this period.

In the fifteenth century, the marked division of costume into waist and skirt begins, the waist line more and more pinched in, the skirt more and more full, the sleeves and neck more elaborately trimmed, the head-dresses multiplied in size, elaborateness and variety. Textiles developed with wealth and ostentation.

In the sixteenth century the neck was usually cut out and worn low on the shoulders, sometimes filled in, but we see also high necks; necks with small ruffs and necks with large ruffs; ruffs turned down, forming stiff linen-cape collars, trimmed with lace, close to the throat or flaring from neck to show the throat.

The hair is parted and worn low in a snood, or by young women, flowing. The ears are covered with the hair.

The Virgin in Art

When writing of the Gothic period in *The Art of Interior Decoration,* we have said ". . . Gothic art proceeds from the Christian Church

PLATE XXII

Mrs. Condé Nast wearing one of the famous Fortuny tea gowns.

This one has no tunic but is finely pleated, in the Fortuny manner, and falls in long lines, closely following the figure, to the floor.

Observe the decorative value of the long string of beads.

Mrs. Condé Nast in a Fortuny Tea Gown

and stretches like a canopy over western Europe during the late Middle Ages. It was in the churches and monasteries that Christian Art, driven from pillar to post by wars, was obliged to take refuge, and there produced that marvellous development known as the Gothic style, of the Church, for the Church and by the Church, perfected in countless Gothic cathedrals, crystallised glorias, lifting their manifold spires to heaven; ethereal monuments of an intrepid Faith which gave material form to its adoration, its fasting and prayer, in an unrivalled art. . . ."

"Crystallised glorias" (hymns to the Virgin) is as concise a defining of the nature and spirit of this highest type of mediæval art—perfected in France—as we can find. Here we have deified woman inspiring an art miraculously decorative.

Chartres Cathedral and Rheims (before the German invasion in 1914) with Mont Saint Michel, are distinguished examples.

If the readers would put to the test our claim that woman as decoration is a beguiling theme worthy of days passed in the broad highways of

art, and many an hour in cross-roads and unbeaten paths, we would recommend to them the fascinations of a marvellous story-teller, one who, knowing all there is to know of his subject, has had the genius to weave the innumerable and perplexing threads into a tapestry of words, where the main ideas take their places in the foreground, standing out clearly defined against the deftly woven, intelligible but unobtruding background. The author is Henry Adams, the book, *The Cathedrals of Mont St. Michel and Chartres.* He tells you in striking language, how woman was translated into pure decoration in the Middle Ages, woman as the Virgin Mother of God, the manifestation of Deity which took precedence over all others during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; and if you will follow him to the Chartres Cathedral (particularly if you have been there already), and will stand facing the great East Window, where in stained glass of the ancient jewelled sort, woman, as Mother of God, is enthroned above all, he will tell you how, out of the chaos of warring religious orders, the priestly schools of Abelard, St. Francis of

Assisi and others, there emerged the form of the Virgin.

To woman, as mother of God and man, the instrument of reproduction, of tender care, of motherhood, the disputatious, groping mind of man agreed to bow, silenced and awed by the mystery of her calling.

In view of the recent enrolling of womanhood in the stupendous business of the war now waging in Europe, and the demands upon her to help in arming her men or nursing back to life the shattered remains of fair youth, which so bravely went forth, the thought comes that woman will play a large part in the art to arise from the ashes of to-day. Woman as woman ready to supplement man, pouring into life's caldron the best of herself, unstinted, unmeasured; woman capable of serving beyond her strength, rising to her greatest height, bending, but not breaking to the end, if only assured she is *needed*.