


CHAPTER XVII

THE RENAISSANCE

Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

HE marked departure is necks cut square, if low, and elaborate jewelled chains draped from shoulders, outlining neck of gown and describing a festoon on front of waist, which is soon to become independent of skirt to develop on its own account.

As in the fifteenth century, when necks were cut low off the shoulders, they were on occasions filled in with tuckers.

The skirt now registers a new characteristic; it parts at the waist line over a petticoat, and the opening is decorated by the ornamental, heavy chain which hangs from girdle to hem of gown.

One sees the hair still worn coiled low in the neck, concealing the ears and held in a snood or in Italy cut "Florentine" fashion with fringe on brow.

Observe how the wealth of the Roman Empire, through its new trade channels opening up with the East (the result of the crusades) led to the importation of rich and many-coloured Oriental stuffs; the same wealth ultimately established looms in Italy for making silks and velvets, to decorate man and his home. There was no longer simplicity in line and colour scheme; gorgeous apparel fills the frames of the Renaissance and makes amusing reading for those who consult old documents. The clothes of man, like his over-ornate furniture, show a debauched and vulgar taste. Instead of the lines which follow one another, solid colours, and trimmings kept to hem of neck and sleeve and skirt, great designs, in satins and velvet brocades, distort the lines and proportions of man and woman.

The good Gothic lines lived on in the costumes of priests and nuns.

Jewelry ceased to be decoration with meaning; lace and fringe, tassels and embroidery, with colour combinations to rival the African parrots, disfigured man and woman alike.

During November of 1916, New York was

so fortunate as to see, at the American Art Galleries, the great collection of late Gothic and early Renaissance furniture and other art treasures, brought together in the restored Davanzati Palace of Florence, Italy. The collection was sold at auction, and is now scattered. Of course those who saw it in its natural setting in Florence, were most fortunate of all. But with some knowledge and imagination, at the sight of those wonderful things,—hand-made all of them,—the most casual among those who crowded the galleries for days, must have gleaned a vivid impression of how woman of the Early Renaissance lived,—in her kitchen, dining-room, bedroom and reception-rooms. They displayed her cooking utensils, her chairs and tables, her silver, glass and earthenware, her bed, linen, satin damask, lace and drawn work; the cushions she rested against; portraits in their gorgeous Florentine frames, showing us how those early Italians dressed; the colored terra cottas, unspeakably beautiful presentments of the Virgin and Child, moulded and painted by great artists under that same exaltation of Faith which brought into being the sister arts of the time,

PLATE XXIII

Mrs. Vernon Castle who set to-day's fashion in outline of costume and short hair for the young woman of America. For this reason and because Mrs. Castle has form to a superlative degree (correct carriage of the body) and the clothes sense (knowledge of what she can wear and how to wear it) we have selected her to illustrate several types of costumes, characteristic of 1916 and 1917.

Another reason for asking Mrs. Castle to illustrate our text is, that what Mrs. Castle's professional dancing has done to develop and perfect her natural instinct for line, the normal exercise of going about one's tasks and diversions can do for any young woman, provided she keep in mind correct carriage of body when in action or repose. Here we see Mrs. Castle in ball costume.



*Mrs. Vernon Castle in Ball
Costume*

imbuing them with something truly divine. There is no disputing that quality which radiates from the face of both the Mother and the Child. One all but kneels before it. Their expression is not of this world.

That is woman as the Mother of God in art. Woman as the mother of man, who looked on these inspired works of art, lived for the most part in small houses built of wood with thatched roofs, unpaved streets, dirty interiors, which were cleaned but once a week—on Saturdays! The men of the aristocracy hunted and engaged in commerce, and the general rank and file gave themselves over to the gaining of money to increase their power. It sounds not unlike New York to-day.

Gradually the cities grew large and rich. People changed from simple sober living to elaborate and less temperate ways, and the great families, with their proportionately increased wealth gained through trade, built beautiful palaces and built them well. The gorgeous colouring of the frescoed walls shows Byzantine influence. In *The Art of Interior Decoration* we have described at length the house furnishing

of that time. Against this background moved woman, man's mate; note her colour scheme and then her rôle. (We quote from Jahn Rusconi in *Les Arts*, Paris, August, 1911.)

"Donna Francesca dei Albizzi's cloak of black cloth ornamented on a yellow background with birds, parrots, butterflies, pink and red roses, and a few other red and green figures; dragons, letters and trees in yellow and black, and again other figures made of white cloth with red and black stripes."

Extravagance ran high not only in dress, but in everything, laws were made to regulate the amount spent on all forms of entertainment, even on funerals, and the cook who was to prepare a wedding feast had to submit his menu for approval to the city authorities. More than this, only two hundred guests could be asked to a wedding, and the number of presents which the bride was allowed to receive was limited by law. But wealth and fashion ran away with laws; the same old story.

As the tide of the Renaissance rose and swept over Europe (the awakening began in Italy), the woman of the gorgeous cloak and

her contemporaries, according to the vivid description of the last quoted author, were "subject to their husbands' tyranny, not even knowing how to read in many cases, occupied with their household duties, in which they were assisted by rough and uncouth slaves, with no other mission in life than to give birth to a numerous posterity. . . . This life ruined them, and their beauty quickly faded away; no wonder, then, that they summoned art to the aid of nature. The custom was so common and the art so perfect that even a painter like Taddeo Gaddi acknowledged that the Florentine women were the best painters in the world! . . . Considering the mental status of the women, it is easy to imagine to what excesses they were given in the matter of dress." The above assertions relate to the average woman, not the great exceptions.

The marriage coffers of woman of the Renaissance in themselves give an idea of her luxurious tastes. They were about six feet long, three feet high, and two and a half feet deep. Some had domed covers opening on hinges—the whole was carved, gilded and

painted, the background of reds and blues throwing the gold into relief. Scenes taken from mythology were done in what was known as "pastille," composition work raised and painted on a gold background. On one fifteenth century marriage coffer, Bacchus and Ariadne were shown in their triumphal car drawn by winged griffins, a young Bacchante driving them on. Another coffer decorated in the same manner had as decoration "The Rape of Proserpine."

Women rocked their infants in sumptuous carved and emblazoned walnut cradles, and crimson satin damask covered their beds and cushions. This blaze of gold and silver, crimson and blue we find as the wake of Byzantine trade, via Constantinople, Venice, Rome, Florence on to France, Spain, Germany, Holland, Flanders and England. Carved wood, crimson, green and blue velvets, satin damask, tapestries, gold and silver fringe and lace. Against all this moved woman, costumed sumptuously.

Gradually the line of woman's (and man's) neck is lost in a ruff, her sweeping locks, instead of parted on her brow, entwined with

pearls or other gems to frame her face and make long lines down the length of her robe, are huddled under grotesque head-dresses, monstrous creations, rising and spreading until they become caricatures, defying art.

In some sixteenth century Italian portraits we see the ruff flaring from a neck cut out square and low in front, then rising behind to form a head covering.

The last half of the sixteenth century is marked by gowns cut high in the neck with a close collar, and the appearance of a small ruff encircling the throat. This ruff almost at once increased to absurd dimensions.

The tightly laced long-pointed bodice now appears, with and without padded hips. (The superlative degree of this type is to be seen in portraits by Velasquez (see Plate IX).

Long pointed toes to the shoes give way to broad, square ones.

Another sixteenth century departure is the absurdly small hat, placed as if by the wind, at a careless angle on the hair, which is curled and piled high.

Also we see hats of normal size with many plumes, on both men and women.

Notice the sleeves: some are still flowing, with tight undersleeves, others slashed to show full white sleeve beneath. But most important of all is that the general license, moral and artistic, lays its ruthless hand on woman's beautiful, sweeping shoulder line and distorts it. Anne of Cleves, or the progressive artist who painted her, shows in a portrait the Queen's flowing sleeves with mediæval lines, clasped by a broad band between elbow and shoulder, and then *pushed up* until the sleeve forms an ugly puff. A monstrous fashion, this, and one soon to appear in a thousand mad forms. Its first vicious departure is that small puffy, senselessly insinuated line between arm-hole and top of sleeve in garments for men as well as women.

Skirts button from point of basque to feet just before we see them, in the seventeenth century, parting down the front and separating to show a petticoat. In Queen Elizabeth's time the acme of this style was reached by Spanish women as we see in Velasquez's portraits. Gradually the overskirt is looped back,

PLATE XXIV

Mrs. Vernon Castle in Winter afternoon costume, one which is so suited to her type and at the same time conservative as to outline and detail, that it would have charm whether in style or not.



Victor Georg—Chicago
*Mrs. Vernon Castle in Af-
ternoon Costume—Winter*

(at first only a few inches), and tied with narrow ribbons.

The second quarter of the seventeenth century shows the waist line drawn in and bodice with skirts a few inches in depth. These skirts are the hall-mark of a *basque*.

Very short, full coats flaring from under arms now appear.

After the skirt has been pushed back and held with ribbons, we find gradually all fullness of upper skirt pushed to hips to form *paniers*, and across the back to form a bustle effect, until we have the Marie Antoinette type, late eighteenth century. Far more graceful and *séduisant* than the costume of Queen Elizabeth's time.

The figures presented by Marie Antoinette and her court, powdered wigs and patches, *paniers* and enormous hats, surmounting the horsehair erections, heavy with powder and grease, lace, ribbon flowers and jewels, are quaint, delightful and diverting, but not to be compared with the Greek or mediæval lines in woman's costume.

Extremely extended skirts gave way to an

interlude of full skirts, but flowing lines in the eighteenth century English portraits.

The Directoire reaction towards simplicity was influenced by English fashion.

Empire formality under classic influence came next. Then Victorian hoops which were succeeded by the Victorian bustles, pantalets, black velvet at throat and wrists, and lockets.