


CHAPTER XIX

WOMAN IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD

HE first seventy years of the nineteenth century seem to us of 1917 absolutely incredible in regard to dress. How our great-great-grandmothers ever got about on foot, in a carriage or stage-coach, moved in a crowd or even sat in any measure of serenity at home, is a mystery to us of an age when comfort, convenience, fitness and chic have at last come to terms. For a vivid picture of how our American society looked between 1800 and 1870, read Miss Elizabeth McClellan's *Historic Dress in America*, published in 1910 by George W. Jacobs & Co., of Philadelphia. The book is fascinating and it not only amuses and informs, but increases one's self-respect, if a woman, for *modern* woman dressed in accordance with her rôle.

We can see extravagant wives point out with glee to tyrant mates how, in the span of years

between 1800 and 1870 our maternal forebears made money fly, even in the Quaker City. Fancy paying in Philadelphia at that time, \$1500 for a lace scarf, \$400 for a shawl, \$100 for the average gown of silk, and \$50 for a French bonnet! Miss McClellan, quoting from *Mrs. Roger Pryor's Memoirs*, tells how she, Mrs. Pryor, as a young girl in Washington, was awakened at midnight by a note from the daughter of her French milliner to say that a box of bonnets had arrived from Paris. Mamma had not yet unpacked them and if she would come at once, she might have her pick of the treasures, and Mamma not know until too late to interfere. And this was only back in the 50's, we should say.

Then think of the hoops, and wigs and absurdly furbished head-dresses; paper-soled shoes, some intended only to *sit* in; bonnets enormous; laces of cobweb; shawls from India by camel and sailing craft; rouge, too, and hair grease, patches and powder; laced waists and cramped feet; low necks and short sleeves for children in school-rooms.

Man was then still decorative here and in

western Europe. To-day he is not decorative, unless in sports clothes or military uniform; woman's garments furnish all the colour. Whistler circumvented this fact when painting Theodore Duret (Metropolitan Museum) in sombre black broadcloth,—modern evening attire, by flinging over the arm of Duret, the delicate pink taffeta and chiffon cloak of a woman, and in M. Duret's hand he places a closed fan of pomegranate red.