CHAPTER XXIII

MARK TWAIN’S LOVE OF COLOUR IN ALL COSTUMING

The public thinks of Mark Twain as being the apostle of white during the last years of his life, but those who knew him well recall his delightfully original way of expressing an intense love for bright colours. This brings to mind a week-end at Mark Twain’s beautiful Italian villa in Reading, Connecticut, when, one night during dinner, he held forth on the compelling fascination of colours and the American Indian’s superior judgment in wearing them. After a lengthy elaboration—not to say exaggeration—of his theme, he ended by declaring in uncompromising terms, that colour, and plenty of it, crimson and yellow and blue, wrapped around man, as well as woman, was an obligation shirked by humanity. It was all put as only Mark Twain could have put it, with that serious vein showing through broad humour. This quality
PLATE XXIX
One of the 1917 silhouettes.

Naturally, since woman to-day dresses for her occupation—work or play—the characteristic silhouettes are many.

This one is reproduced to illustrate our point that outline can be affected by the smallest detail.

The sketch is by Elisabeth Searcy.
Drawn from Life by Elisabeth Searcy

A Modern Silhouette—
1917 Tailor-made
combined with an unmatched originality, made every moment passed in his company a memory to treasure. It was not alone his theme, but how he dealt with it, that fascinated one.

Mark Twain was elemental and at the same time a great artist,—the embodiment of extreme contradictions, and his flair for gay colour was one proof of his elemental strain. We laughed that night as he made word pictures of how men and women should dress. Next morning, toward noon, on looking out of a window, we saw standing in the middle of the driveway a figure wrapped in crimson silk, his white hair flying in the wind, while smoke from a pipe encircled his head. Yes, it was Mark Twain, who in the midst of his writing, had been suddenly struck with the thought that the road needed mending, and had gone out to have another look at it! It was a blustering day in Spring, and cold, so one of the household was sent to persuade him to come in. We can see him now, returning reluctantly, wind-blown and vehement, gesticulating, and stopping every few steps to express his opinion of the men who had made
that road! The flaming red silk robe he wore was one his daughter had brought him from Liberty's, in London, and he adored it. Still wrapped in it, and seemingly unconscious of his unusual appearance, he joined us on the balcony, to resume a conversation of the night before.

The red-robed figure seated itself in a wicker chair and berated the idea that mortal man ever could be generous,—act without selfish motives. With the greatest reverence in his tone, sitting there in his whimsical costume of bright red silk, at high noon,—an immaculate French butler waiting at the door to announce lunch, Mark Twain concluded an analysis of modern religion with "—why the God I believe in is too busy spinning spheres to have time to listen to human prayers."

How often his words have been in our mind since war has shaken our planet.