XV

SERVANTS’ DRESS


In taking up the question of special costumes, we may perhaps begin with those which we see most commonly, and for that reason we may turn our attention, in the first place, to the liveries and dress of servants.

We have laid down a sort of rule that the costume of servants is that of the master of an earlier generation, and we will now bring forward some evidence in support of it.

Modern coachmen and outdoor footmen wear the tall hat, the bright buttons, doeskin breeches and the top boots characteristic of the outdoor and riding dress of the gentlemen at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The groom, it will be noticed (see Figure 110), wears in addition a leather belt, and the reason for this will not perhaps strike the inquirer straight away. Our grandmothers and great-grandmothers did not always drive in carriages, and it was customary for them, when riding on horseback, to sit
on a pillion behind a gentleman or a servant. The belt which we now see round the waist of a groom afforded a hold to which they had to cling, in order to prevent themselves from falling off the horse.

![Fig. 110. — The modern groom, showing the belt to which ladies clung when riding on a pillion.](image)

Such a livery as we have described is also adopted by the general run of well-to-do people. The aristocracy, however, are more inclined to stand upon ceremony, and through it to make more show. Their footmen, who go by the generic name of "Jeames," wear plush breeches, silk stockings, and powdered hair. (See Figure 111.)
A little inquiry will soon show that these peculiarities of dress were those which it pleased the gentlemen of George III's time to adopt. Some flunkeys belonging to the nobility have their breasts ornamented with cords known as aiguillette, and these give them somewhat of a military appearance, besides reminding us of the old retainers. The coats that go with the plush breeches and are cut away so as to recall the wings of a pigeon—hence the name "pouter" coat—
are a special feature of George III’s reign. The coachman’s coat is usually a little fuller in the skirt, and carries us back to the time of George II. In another way this costume is a little older in its style than that

![Fig. 112.—A sheriff’s coachman with the full-skirted coat of the time of George II. (By the courtesy of Messrs. F. T. Prewett and Co.)](image)

of the footman who powders his own hair instead of wearing a wig like his colleague. (See Figure 112.)

In connection with the Lord Mayor more ceremony still is maintained. His coachmen and footmen appear in all the glory of three-cornered hats,
which are decorated with feathers, and their coats are highly ornamented. They are representatives of the very fine gentlemen of George III's time.

On the back of the collar of the Lord Mayor's coachman, we find an arrangement that looks like an elaborately made rosette of black ribbon (see Figure 113). This is a survival of the bag-wig, of which we shall have occasion to speak again when dealing with Court and military dress, so that we need not go into further details here with regard to this curious vestige. (See page 229, Figure 143.)

This is a progressive age, in spite of the many survivals which still flourish, and when we come to consider the costume of the modern manservant who
attends at table, or the waiter in the restaurant, we find that he has come out of his generation, as it were, and has adopted the dress of his masters before they have themselves discarded it. Confusion has arisen through this before now, and it has been suggested that if ornamental buttons were worn by the man who serves, the difficulty would be overcome.

The writer well remembers being amused when standing in a room at a well-known restaurant, where a private dinner was to be given, to notice the change which suddenly came over the dress of the waiters. When the latter first arrived they had black cloth buttons on their coats, while in a few minutes' time, these same garments were adorned with brass buttons bearing the initials of the firm that provided the dinner. Inquiry soon elicited the fact that the men carried with them small brass cases which were sprung on to their ordinary buttons, and at once gave them the appearance of being on the staff, and showed that they were waiters.

The almost overwhelming number of buttons which are worn by page-boys must have been a source of wonder to many. They run from neck to waist of a tight-fitting jacket in such a crowded line that the pages usually go by the name of "Buttons." Occasionally we see the livery ornamented by two other rows of buttons which are useless, and run from the shoulder towards the waist (see Figure 114) in a
way similar to that described as being the case on the coats of His Majesty’s postilions. On looking at an old book of fashions we find that a costume called the “Dutch Skeleton Dress” was very fashionable for young boys in 1826 (see Figure 115). In this we

Fig. 114.—A modern page-boy’s livery.  
Fig. 115.—The Dutch skeleton dress, fashionable for boys in 1826.

find that there were brass buttons arranged in three rows, similar to those we have just described. It is difficult even in the modern page-boy’s dress to see the lower edge of his coat, but in the case of the small boy of 1826 it was impossible, because his trousers were buttoned on to the outside of it.

The name of the skeleton dress is interesting, because it points to the buttons marking out the
position of the breast bone, and it recalls the story that
the lacing on the breast of Hussars, which we have
interpreted as representing enlarged buttonholes, was
intended to give the appearance of ribs. This would
be in keeping with the figure of a skull that was worn
by some of them on their head-dress. We may im-
agine that in the page-boys, with the superabundance
of buttons in one row, that the other two series have
migrated and joined with those which originally
fastened the coat.

On special occasions such as weddings and corona-
tions, the nobility and members of old families dress
their servants in state liveries, and some very interest-
ing costumes appear for the time. For instance, at
the wedding of the Duke of Norfolk in 1877, some
of the coachmen and footmen appeared wearing on the
shoulder of their livery a "manche" or large hanging
sleeve, which is familiar to students of heraldry and
may be the origin of the sign usually called the
"Crooked Billet."

An interesting little survival is sometimes seen on
livery collars. It is a little patch of lace, and is an
imitation of the knotched buttonhole or laced hole
which was commonly made on elaborate dresses.

We get a survival of a livery cap, which was worn
by servants generally in the middle of the eighteenth
century, in the black cap worn by the drum-major
of the Foot Guards and the bands of the Household
Cavalry. We find that it is also adopted by hunts-
men and postilions (see Figure 89), while jockey caps are of a similar shape.

The costume of jockeys is an instance of parti-coloured dress which, apart from the Stage, is now chiefly worn in connection with sports such as football and racing. Some parti-coloured garments made their appearance early in English history, as we shall see when dealing with the subject of patterns.

The cockade is now a particular feature of the liveried servant, and as the story of its evolution is of a particularly striking nature, we will consider it in a special chapter.

Here and there we find survivals of the old beadle, with his three-cornered hat and his long gown with its curious capes and its bright edging. To find the original wearer of such garments we shall have to look about at the end of the seventeenth century. The watch then wore very large coats with many capes, and from these was developed that of the beadle. No doubt colours and other ornamentation were produced so as to bring the dress of the beadle more into the line with liveries and to give him a more ornamental and imposing appearance.

We might also mention that the beadle, to whom we shall once more allude, still makes his appearance and plays his part in the Punch and Judy show.

When we recall the many and varied liveries which
the porters belonging to the various places of amusement and business establishments now wear, we cannot help drawing attention to the magnitude of the problem which would confront any one who desired to trace the origin of their clothes. In one detail or another we see the remains of an old livery, while turning from these we find a gaily coloured plastron borrowed from a Hussar uniform, and besides the cap there are a host of other features which have been taken from military and civilian dress.

Railway porters if not menials are the servants of the companies which employ them, and there is one feature of their dress which is worthy of note. It will be seen that their waistcoats, although generally built on the same plan as that of the ordinary individual and having a linen back, are provided with sleeves. It is truly a coat which comes to the waist, such as we shall speak of when dealing with the dress of the Guards and other regiments, and it is usually the outermost garment of the porter.

If we now turn to the costume of the gentleman, we shall find a very good instance of what Mr. Paley Baildon claims to be done whenever a new garment is adopted. He says that it is always put on over all the others. In the case of the ordinary civilian we have the waistcoat, which was originally an outer garment. Then comes the frock-coat or surtout, which at the beginning of the nineteenth century was
an overcoat, and over this again in cold weather the modern ulster or top-coat is put.

No consideration of servants' dress would be complete without an allusion to the cap and apron of the house- or parlour-maid. To begin with, we see in these a survival of the special dresses which were once adopted by particular trades. The fact that the cap is white points to a connection with the early head-dresses of women which we see now perpetuated by the nuns, and which are relics of the time when it was customary to have linen caps and hoods. Perhaps there is some connection between the cap of the servant and the custom which condemns women to wear their hats in church and makes them feel desirous of keeping them on their heads at all kinds of public entertainments. On this question, however, we shall have a word to say later.

Sometimes servants' caps have strings which, like those that are customarily found on bonnets and on mitres (see page 54), are the survival of the ends of a head fillet. The latest development in this direction is a scarf which is allowed to hang down from the backs of ladies' hats, and which may be of so substantial a nature that it looks very much like a fringed towel.

The apron can claim a long history, and just as the plush and powder of the footman were once worn by his master, so we may easily discover that the apron was not always the special attribute of those who
work or serve. Towards the end of the seventeenth century aprons were considered an almost essential part of a fine lady's costume. A little later on, Queen Anne made and wore them herself, and very gaily ornamented garments they were.

In the case of the lower classes, aprons were—as they still often are—provided with bibs. The old name for them was barme-cloth, and under this title Chaucer refers to the apron of Carpenter's wife as being as white as the morning milk. Unless the article of dress which we are discussing was of considerable age, we should hardly have the proverbial expression which defines a man who is always at home as being tied to his wife's apron-strings.

Another name for an apron with a bib which was pinned to the front of the dress was "pinner," which gives us the word pinafore, which refers now to a kind of overall rather than to an apron.

In the costumes of the barge-women and milk-women, where we get a slight survival of characteristic country dress, we have seen that in both cases the apron is always adopted as part of the outfit. (See Plate VIII.)

The uniform of the hospital nurse partakes somewhat of that of the nun, but at the same time the apron is often one of its most important features. We mention this uniform here because it has become customary of recent years for the nurses who look after the children of well-to-do families to assume
A barge girl with the characteristic bonnet and apron. She is not wearing her small plaid shawl.

(From a photograph by Wakefield, Brentford.)

Plate VIII.
the bonnet and veil and severely cut collars and cuffs of the hospital nurse.

Here again we get a case on all fours with the adoption of evening dress by waiters, and the gradual assumption by the lower classes of the dress of their social superiors.