DRESS REFORM

CLOTHES TO BE AVOIDED—NEED FOR WARMER GARMENTS
—"RATIONAL" DRESS FOR WOMEN

It is evident from what we have said about the effect of clothes upon the body, that there is ample opportunity for improvement in our costume as regards its shape and the methods in which it is worn. We have already said also, when speaking of colour, that, in the case of men at any rate, it might often be more picturesque and brighter. There are several societies whose aim it is to bring about improvements. The Rational Dress League has general objects in view, and it also keeps in mind the special one of introducing bifurcated garments for women. There is also the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union which seems to have general objects.

Education is needed in order that knowledge of the evil results of wrongly shaped shoes and tight stays may be known, and what is more, such training as will enable that strength of mind to be acquired which will prevent the coming generation from being swayed by foolish fashions. The origin of these it is difficult to trace, but the pioneers of them, whether
self-centred costumiers or willing victims, ought to be punished in some way. There are points to be borne in mind in connection with garments which have not yet been considered, and they cause otherwise unoffending clothes to do harm. There is no doubt but that the weight of one’s dress should be suspended from the shoulders, though the great majority of women hang much of their clothes from their waists. A good deal of the weight could easily be taken off this part of the body by the fastening of skirts and under garments to bodices, or by the use of shoulderstraps and the introduction of tunics.

Dr. Cantlie has very graphically shown the common features of a modern family, and he has given a picture (see Figure 169) of a group consisting of the average-sized mother, the taller and larger-framed daughter, and the insufficiently clad boy of poor physique. This author says that the sailor suit worn at the age of two and a half or three years is a recent innovation, and the rather puny young boy of to-day came in with the change. Dr. Cantlie has estimated that, except in very hot weather, children should have a pound of clothing for every stone they weigh, for the one great secret of rendering children healthy is to keep them warm. As a matter of fact, a girl that weighs three stone really wears clothes that weigh three pounds; but one of the small boys of the same weight, in a sailor suit, wears clothes that only weigh about half as much as his sister’s.
Dr. Cantlie also objects to short jackets which do not cover the loins, and says that the public school that will introduce the Norfolk jacket in the place of the Eton will thrive at the expense of its neighbours.

High collars worn by youths keep the head at the wrong angle, and also perpetuate the deformity of the jaw which is caused by breathing through the mouth. They also prevent the shoulders from being squared in the attempt to get rid of round shoulders. Dr. Cantlie urges a return to the brace worn by our fathers, and still occasionally seen, in which the straps are not united. It is impossible for any one wearing joined braces to stand erect with the shoulders squared, for they press on the neck and cause the wearer to poke his head forward. Dr. Cantlie, however, hopes that the difficulties in the way of obtaining separate braces will not lead to the adoption of the elastic belt, for the only place where this could be worn without bad effects is below the haunch bones, and in ordinary dress this would bring it below the waistcoat. It will be found also that the use of belts by labourers brings evils in its train which were not mentioned by Mr. Heather Bigg, when speaking of the advantages of girding up the loins. (See page 329.)

No account of dress and its developments would be complete without a reference to Mrs. Bloomer and the garments which now bear her name, and are
emblematical of rational costume. That women have no absolute claim to petticoats as their own special dress has been made quite clear, and it is equally evident that in many places they wear trousers as a matter of course. Still, in this country there seems to be a rooted objection on the part of the majority to doffing skirts, though this seems, however, to be growing less day by day, in spite of the many reasons which cause the fair sex to cling to petticoats. As we have found before, garments which fall to the ground give dignity, and women sacrifice their dignity
with difficulty. Yet, as need hardly be pointed out, men do not wear dressing-gowns when they are jumping, nor fur-trimmed mantles when they go to business. Dresses with trains could be kept for ceremonial occasions, or when there is nothing much to be done, or again, we might add, when there is little dust to be raised.

Bacteriology has shown us that the long skirt disseminates germs as it trails along the ground; in fact, it stirs them up for other people to breathe, and the culprit herself carries off as her fair share a large quantity which settles on her dress. In this way the germs of disease are carried home to the dwelling-house.

In these days also, when women even jump on and off motor omnibuses before they are at a standstill, it is evident that long frocks are objectionable and dangerous.

When lady gardeners were first employed at Kew Gardens, it was found that their skirts got in the way, and were liable to damage the plants. The Director ordered that the girls should wear a suitable costume, and they adopted divided garments, though it must be said that they covered them to some extent with an apron. In riding-dress of course ladies wear trousers under their habits when they use a side saddle, although it has been considered right of recent years for them to ride astride, and from time to time we hear that it is being done. In the time of
Stephen and of Edward III women rode astride, and the ladies in Mexico and other parts of America regularly do so at the present time.

Chaucer described "The Wife of Bath" as wearing "on her feet a paire of spurries sharpe." From this we may judge that she also adopted a cross saddle, and as a matter of fact in the Elesmere MSS. we find a picture of her, showing that she rode astride, and was dressed in a curious garment like a divided bag. On the Continent, ladies who go shooting very often dress like their husbands, and a year or two ago the American newspapers were full of accounts of a lady who imitated the riding costume of a hunting man to the smallest detail. Apropos of this, The Field\textsuperscript{61} told an amusing story of an English lady who in a measure unintentionally forestalled our American cousins, for after she had had the best part of her habit carried away by some aggressive brambles, she was seen scudding after her horse in a pair of real top boots.

Divided garments only appear unfeminine because we are unaccustomed to see them on ladies, and it is no secret that they are worn to a very great extent under skirts. Doubtless there may be some to whom the very idea of such a thing is abhorrent, and possibly there are still wardrobes like those of a good lady mentioned by Miss Alice Morse Earle\textsuperscript{62} in her book on the "Costume of Colonial Times." She was the wife of a respectable and well-to-do Dutch
settler in the New Netherlands, and her name was Vrouentje Ides Stoffelsen, and she left behind her in 1641, "a gold hoop ring, a silver medal and chain, and a silver undergirdle to hang keys on; a damask furred jacket, two black camlet jackets, two doublets, one iron gray, the other black; a blue, a steel-gray lined petticoat, and a black coarse camlet-lined petti-coat; two black skirts, a new bodice, two white waistcoats, one of Harlem stuff; a little black vest with two sleeves, a pair of damask sleeves, a reddish mourning gown, not linen; four pair pattens, one of Spanish leather; a purple apron and four blue aprons, nineteen cambric caps and four linen ones; a fur cap trimmed with beaver; nine linen handkerchiefs trimmed with lace, two pair of old stockings, and three shifts. One disposed to be critical might note the somewhat scanty proportion of underclothing in this wardrobe, and as Ides's husband swore 'by his manly troth' that the list of her possessions was a true and complete one, we are forced to believe that it was indeed all the underclothing she possessed."

It seems, however, as we have said before, that the actual ugliness of many of the so-called bloomer costumes which were in vogue a few years ago, did much to keep back progress in the direction of their adoption. It seems as if women were frightened, as it were, to go the whole hog, and instead of wearing neat knickerbockers they had them exceedingly
baggy and inelegant, or adopted a kind of hybrid costume, half bloomers and half skirt.

Let us see what the tendency now is with regard to a rational dress for women. Mrs. Bloomer had a skirt just below the knees, and trousers gathered in at the ankles. The modern bloomers come only to the knee, but really, as Dr. Bernard O’Connor says when writing in the Gazette published by the Rational Dress League,63 “they are made too full.” Dr. O’Connor recommends for active exercise, such as cycling, something like a sailor’s jacket and sailor’s trousers, but the latter should end and be gathered in at the knees. In addition there should be long tight stockings, and Dr. O’Connor adds that tights throughout would be preferable to the ordinary bloomers.

It would seem, however, that this dress for general use might be improved as regards both form and elegance, and that a long coat or tunic, reaching nearly to the knees, with fairly tight knickerbockers, is the rational dress that is most to be commended for women.