

FINE FEATHERS

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ART OF COSTUME
INAUGURAL LECTURE DELIVERED AT RHODES UNIVERSITY

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

GRAHAMSTOWN
RHODES UNIVERSITY

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Before me, this evening I observe a spectacle at once uncommon, and I might add, aesthetically pleasing. A scene which contains sobriety and dignity of form contrasted with a gay element of colour.

It was the anticipation of this scene, which suggested that the theme of my lecture should be the art of costume, and that its title should be Fine Feathers.

Earlier this evening I asked myself with some exasperation why I had to wear these fine feathers. It is a question we may all ask ourselves, and the query is, I think, an appropriate point of departure for an incursion into the art of costume.

Why do we wear clothes?

It would seem that a single and watertight theory is insufficient to explain the origins of costume, and before costume as an art can be discussed, some consideration of the various theories of costume origins might well be examined.

In primitive costume, perhaps the first theory to be advanced would be that of Economics, that man adopted clothing as a protection against the elements. This, at first examination, would seem to be at least practical and a matter of common sense. However, we shall find that common sense has often little in common with costume. This economic theory has been upheld by commentators through history, and is an idea favoured by those who see the development of man as a progression from a hairy near-animal who, after deciding to walk upright, had the misfortune to lose his pelt, and finding the chill air of the early world a discomfort in his new-found pink nudity, first removed and then took unto himself the fur coat of his four-footed friend. Against this theory, it must be observed that the earliest indications of costume came from warm and semi-tropical countries, where there was hardly need for protection from the weather.

Charles Darwin related that he had seen Fuegians standing naked whilst driving sleet froze upon their bodies, causing them no discomfort. Also we can assume that the female of to-day with her underclothing reduced to a minimum in weight and area, is either hardier or more stoical than her Victorian grandmother, whose voluminous petticoats she has discarded without increasing the bulk of her superficial clothing.

“And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.” This quotation from scripture indicates that clothing was adopted because of a deep-rooted instinct of modesty or decency, leading man to seek covering through a sense of shame. This theory has found favour from Early Christian times to the present day, but it must be borne in mind that conceptions of modesty vary in different parts of the world, and many savage peoples have no conception of its existence as we may understand it. It must be observed, too, that the quantity of clothing worn seems often to be in inverse ratio to modesty and morals.

Westermarck, in his “History of Human Marriage”, states that ornament preceded clothing, and that decoration developed into dress. This development, as far as one is able to discover from primitive remains, is well proved. The supposition is that personal decoration is employed by virtue of the desire of men and women to make themselves mutually attractive. The decoration of the body, and its later change to dress could not only express the emotions of the wearer, but induce emotion in the spectator, such as fear, admiration, and of course sexual interest. With the advance of civilisation, man’s costume has become increasingly part of himself. It has assumed the properties of an outer skin, and is almost an artificial organ of expression. In many cases we can learn more from the decoration than the nakedness, the dress speaks before the face.

Ellis, with Westermarck, proceeds further, and indicates that clothing was not intended to conceal or protect the body, but to render it sexually attractive. The fact that ornamentation is practised particularly in youth and that natural ornamentation is a potent factor in animal courtship, tends also to support the theory of origin based on sexual attractiveness. This theory, however, cannot be absolute, for we find that all things which primitive peoples attach to their bodies are not necessarily for decoration, though they may seem to be. Trophies of war, or of the chase, symbols of wealth, or substitutes for such trophies, are often seen—without doubt intended to display the wearer’s courage, strength or skill. It can be argued of course, that such decoration can be sexually attractive too or can at least increase sexual attraction.

The young man waiting at the gate in a Rolls Royce has an advantage over the young man with the bicycle; the mink stole is more attractive than the coney tippet. Such types of decoration or clothing show the beginnings of the symbolical clothing of caste, rank or occupation.

It is possible that the aesthetic, as distinct from the sexual instinct, may exist in some animals and birds, and it may be that some similar urge to collect the brightly-coloured or attractive object, a predilection for the gay and the glittering, may have prompted the primitive human to place the feather in his hair, hang the shining sea-shell round his neck, or have urged the Ancient Briton to paint himself with woad, despite the protestations of Britannicus that navy blue has an air of respectability and was employed in the fair name of decency. I cannot think that any theory that has been suggested is a complete statement or origin in itself. The theory of sexual attractiveness is perhaps the best single explanation, but at all times the modifying effect of the others should be borne in mind, for I think it unquestionable that such motives have exerted their influence upon the art of costume.

The decoration of the human body is, together with music, dancing, ceremonial and poetry, amongst the oldest of man’s aesthetic achievements. Costume is an attempt to enhance by an aesthetic architecture the appearance of the human body.

There is obviously a direct relationship between the human form and its costume—an aesthetic bond. Man should be considered not in contour, nor in mass as a visible image, but as a solid form which reacts to the forces of gravity, growth and voluntary movement. The force of weight or gravity acting vertically from top to bottom is in

opposition to the force of growth also acting vertically from bottom to top. These two vertical forces are at variance with the third, that of movement. It is the harmonising of these diverse forces which produces a superior unity capable of expression and manifestation of beauty. The three interacting forces should be in a state of equilibrium. If man developed only vertically as a tree, the equilibrium would be symmetrical in the direction of growth; or if the axis of movement coincided with the axis of growth as in a fish, an exact distribution of mass round the directional axis would be necessary.

Man participates simultaneously in these two directions, he is independent of a rigorous law of equilibrium. It is only from left to right, or right to left that symmetry as a static condition must be observed. Thus we have three forces whose axes correspond to the three dimensions of space. These three centres of action are represented in a manner perceptible to the eye in three main types of bodily ornament: the Pendicle, the Annular and the Directional.

The Pendicle (Fig. 1.) is related to the first force of weight or gravity and is essentially symmetrical and stable, also likely to be expressed in vertical movements. Such a condition makes difficult the conception of two hanging ornaments of unequal length, prohibits the use of a single ear-ring and makes half a moustache ludicrous. The aesthetic effect is augmented by the moral effect on the wearer which inclines towards a dignity of bearing and moderation in movement. The decorative verticals on the Chancellor's robe discourage unseemly behaviour. One cannot jive in a cassock and mitre, in such garments square dancing is impossible; the prohibition is not necessarily one of mobility but rather of aesthetics.

The Annular (Fig. 2) form of ornament, resultant of the two opposing verticles, serves to accentuate proportion; it divides and defines transitions, proportions and forms. The belt divides the torso from the lower limbs, the collar marks the transition from shoulders to head, bracelet defines the upper arm distinct from the lower, the bangle accentuates the proportion of the hand, the ring points to the proportion of the fingers. It is well known that where natural proportion varies greatly from the ideal, annular ornament should be used with care.

Liberty and spontaneity of movement attach themselves to the ornaments of direction (Fig. 3). Neither rhythmic nor symmetric, they are based on the contrast from front to rear. The head ornament of the Egyptian God King, the floating plumes of the helmeted warrior and the flowing train, express movement and direction. They may be fixed or floating, according to position and weight of material, and can serve as indications of sobriety and dignity of movement, or degree of mobility.

The Art of Costume is a fascinating blend of the obvious and the subtle—it presents a picture and a puzzle. It is a visible expression of the overwhelming power of the herd instinct which overrides the claims of the individual. We should find it impossible to reach any conclusions relating to the Art of Costume by sole reference to "The Costume of the Hermit through the Ages". It would then speedily resolve itself into a study of utility as opposed to an expression of ideas. Cut of the supply of cast-off clothing for the hermit and we are left with nothing more than shreds and patches.

Costume is an art which cannot survive in solitude. Like all arts, costume concerns itself with the expression and communication of ideas, by recognising the presence of other human beings to whom its significance is directed. Costume, from the simple expression of perhaps a single idea in its primitive origins, has grown to be an art of complex expression. The innumerable modes that costume has assumed at different times have been inspired by innumerable motives, the imperative need to express an idea checked only by the technical limitations of the art, practical possibilities, and what perhaps can only be defined as a sense of beauty peculiar to the epoch.

The reformer of costume is doomed in advance, whether he teaches comfort, morality, or aesthetics, for the gospel that he preaches will be at variance with the prevailing idea; to put it plainly—the reformer is out of fashion.

It is my intention to examine a few of the ideas that are, in my opinion, significant in the way they have directed and inspired this art.

An art communicates its ideas through a style and it may well be asked how costume can be classified, simply, in styles. Rejecting fine definitions relative to particular periods, style of costume may be divided into two groups, which I shall call Classic and Baroque. Classic Art (Fig. 5), with classic costume, takes the path of Idealism. The keynote is the ideal human figure, its proportion and its architecture are the foundations upon which is based the structure of Classic Costume. Having the human figure as an ideal we can expect to find lines, forms and masses which echo and reinforce the idealised shape of the figure, or which tend to display the human form. We can almost define Baroque (Fig. 4) as being a complete reversal of this role, and say that it is a style where the body is used to display the costume.

The word Baroque implies the odd, the whimsical or the extraordinary. In Baroque Architecture we have various members such as columns, windows, entablatures, pediments and the like not fulfilling a structural purpose, but used solely for aesthetic effect. We find a recess or a projection provided for the purpose of throwing a shadow, breaking a mass, throwing a feature into relief or using contrasted surfaces of masonry to supply texture. It aims at a pleasing of the sensibilities and promotes emotion. In the Baroque art of costume, the human figure serves only as a structural scaffolding or foundation, round which a sartorial composition has grown. It is costume for costume's sake, its effect is the reason for its existence.

The baroque style has, with the interruptions of a few minor classical interludes, been the dominant style in Europe since the middle of the 14th century. Naturally at some periods we have the desire to reconcile these two styles, or to move over completely to the opposing style.

When the baroque style has reached a point when the distortion of shape is extreme, when the whimsical or extraordinary element has passed that purely arbitrary limit of eccentricity, voices are raised in protest, and a chorus is heard in praise of the superior beauty and nobility of the human form. "Away with gaudy toys and foppish conceits", cry the purists. Then, on the return swing of the sartorial pendulum, when the body has become increasingly evident, an ever louder cry of disapproval is heard. The fulminations of the reformers of both parties provide some of the most entertaining literature of the History of Costume. Geoffrey Chaucer treads a middle course with great delicacy when he says, "I saw that honesty in clothing of man or woman is unconvenable, but certes, the superfluity or disordinate scarcity of clothing is reproveable".

Broadly speaking, from antique times through the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, both male and female costume retained much of the simplicity and dignity of the classic model. During the latter three centuries there is a curious reluctance to divide the body into its components, and male and female costume closely resemble each other. In the 14th Century, a significant period in many of the arts, there is the realisation of the artistic possibilities of dress. The waist was discovered, (a geographical discovery of the human form of major importance), division was made, and from that time the costume of the sexes parted ways, never again to join.

The legs of man emerged distinct from his trunk, and woman found her waist. With the creation of two distinctive shapes, one male, the other female, the way was open for the exploitation of a new range of ideas. The change was not a passing fashion and by the end of the 15th century the position was stabilised.

On occasion, there has been interchange of form between male and female, resulting inevitably in effeminacy of character in male costume, and corresponding condition in the female dress. Such obvious borrowing of male styles in Victorian days would have been stigmatised as 'fast, indelicate, and even immoral', or at the best, a serious lapse of good taste.

In our 20th century, when so many of the sex barriers, psychological and occupational, have fallen, we should not be surprised to find that the sexes have borrowed each other's forms in sartorial matters. From the 14th century to the present time, there has been a tendency to overload the upper half of the male body, with the intention of suggesting that quality so familiar to the followers of Superman, the Rugged Male, whilst in female costume the lower half has been overloaded, to imply the sedentary, the immobile, and the tranquil character of the female.

It will be seen that the male form in costume has tended to resemble the letter H (Fig. 6), whilst the female can be likened to the letter X (Fig. 7), with the crossing point at the waist. Such shapes are by no means absolutely rigid, the straight lines of the X may be replaced by curves, the crossing point can be higher or lower, the crossed lines may close together till they become almost parallel, or may spread to enclose very obtuse angles.

In an aesthetically pleasing costume, the dominant theme must be stated with confidence, and must be able to sustain its major role, curved and straight elements cannot equally be mixed,—they are conflicting in character.

The principal theme may be angular, straight or curved, and we may lay it down as a necessary rule that this leading role must also be accompanied by its opposite or complementary.

The maximum value of the major role is then achieved, for example, Vertical—Horizontal; Acute—Obtuse; Elliptical—Circular; in exactly the same way that a colour achieves its maximum effect when confronted with its complementary. The vertical, the acute, the elliptical give height; the horizontal, the obtuse, and the circular suggest breadth. It is obvious that the subtle balancing of these formal elements is essential in costume. An over-statement of the dominant is boring, the understatement irritating, the art lies in stating the design in a manner that compels attention so that interest may be subtly rewarded.

So far, I have assembled a mere skeleton, the scaffolding of the art,—this art which I said was capable of the expression of ideas. Before me this evening I see costumes that provoke me to discuss an interesting factor in the art of costume, that of Symbolism.

A symbol is a sign associated with an idea. Obvious examples of the display of simple symbols in dress crowd to the mind, a Crown, a Cross, the Broad Arrow, are at once significant and are readily understood, but it is the implied idea rather than the plain statement which fascinates. A mink coat and a necklace of pearls have an aesthetic appeal that is denied to a skirt of banknotes. The ceremonial costumes of the learned professions are, I think, worthy of attention. Let us imagine a University procession, viewed by Alice proceeding through the Wonderland of a University Town. The column is headed by the Chancellor, who balances on his head the 15 volumes of the Encyclopaedia Britannica; he is followed by the Vice-Chancellor, crowned by 10 volumes. The learned Doctors support 5 volumes, the Masters and the Bachelors still fewer, and the procession terminates with the Undergraduate, crowned with a grubby note-book and the current issue of the Rhodeo. A fantastic sight, you will agree, and a performance requiring great poise. In our prosaic world these symbols are replaced by fitting sartorial symbols.

The Chancellor's cap is trimmed with gold, the Vice-Chancellor's with silver, the Doctor wears a Tudor cap, the Bachelor a mortarboard. The learned Judge wears a full-length wig, the barrister a mere wig. Thus we see ceremonial headgear, with symbolic significance, its style and decoration arranged, it is hoped, in strict ratio to mental capacity. From the 14th to the 16th centuries, a distinction was made in the sleeve.

The mechanic wore a simple and functional type of sleeve, the member of the learned profession, the civic and the state dignitary, wore sleeves of increasing size, bulk and inconvenience, with each step above the manual level. Thus the sleeve of the gown of the Doctor is larger than that of the graduate, which is in turn larger than that of the undergraduate. Considering both head and hand we can infer that as the capacity of the head becomes greater, we have less need of the use of our hands. The practical qualities of certain types of clothing for particular occupations produced costume that became an occupational symbol.

Although at the beginning of the last century there were about fifty different costumes of occupation listed in Yorkshire, this diversity has now almost entirely disappeared, owing to the mass-production of standardised types of clothing, Jack's desire to be as good as his master, and the shifting of class barriers. Indeed, in the working-class districts of England, it would be almost impossible to guess the occupation of a manual labourer by the appearance of his clothes, unless, like Sherlock Holmes, we could detect traces of sawdust, coal dust or similar substances which would betray the occupation.

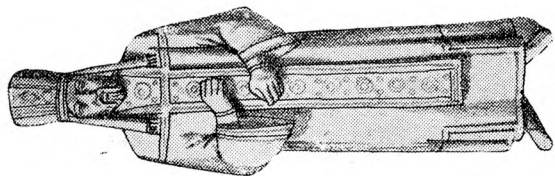
There have been of recent years some curious reversals of symbolism in this connection. Corduroy, once almost the exclusive property of the coal-heaver and dustman, has now become the casual wear of a higher stratum of society. Nowadays if a corduroy jacket were worn by a dustman, he would probably be accused by his associates of getting above himself.

A faint eccentricity of form, a super-smartness was a desirable distinction that marked the costume of a gentleman, but this characteristic has become—or is in danger of becoming—a symbol of a completely different character. The deeply-pointed collar, dangerous in its pendant angles, the lapel too acutely and smartly pointed, the double-breasted waistcoat and all such elegant appointments, have now become the symbol of the "spiv". The gentleman now dresses himself with an art that conceals art.

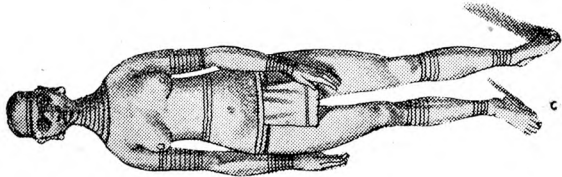
All the conventions which go to make up sartorial etiquette are arbitrary symbols used to distinguish various social occasions. There is no real reason why one cannot appear in the stalls at Covent Garden Opera House in shorts, sandals and a tennis shirt, nor why a woman's dress may be more décolleté in the evening than in the day. In the 1880's the bathing dress for women consisted of a voluminous tunic and knickerbockers of an apallingly stout material, but we could see the same woman appear in the evening with a décolletage astoundingly low for that prudish period. Utility and modesty could both be ignored, but the appropriate symbol for the social occasion must be preserved at all costs. Comfort, too, on these occasions is thown to the winds, the physical discomfort of any costume is mild compared with the mental agony occasioned by the abandonment of the symbol that custom demands.

Women have from time immemorial clothed their personalities with symbolism. The allure of female personality can be heightened by symbolic attractions or by symbolic seclusion—the promise of favours and the desire of the unattainable. The huge skirts with the use of hoops in the 16th, 18th and 19th centuries, focussed attention on her feminine aloofness — she was isolated in splendour like a goddess, to be worshipped only at a distance. It was only by willing surrender, the gracious extension of her hand, that contact could be made without trampling down the barrier of her skirts. The spreading skirt was the symbol of her feminine seclusion. Indeed, her entry was that of a goddess, double doors had to be flung open on her approach, an entry to music was almost called for.

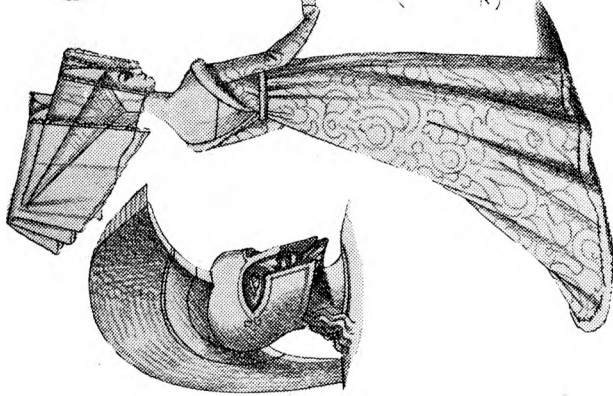
In the 1920's, when the equality of the sexes was loudly acclaimed, and many sex barriers were overthrown, women renounced this symbol, and no barrier of skirt was observed, and the feminine character of costume was reduced to a negligible minimum,



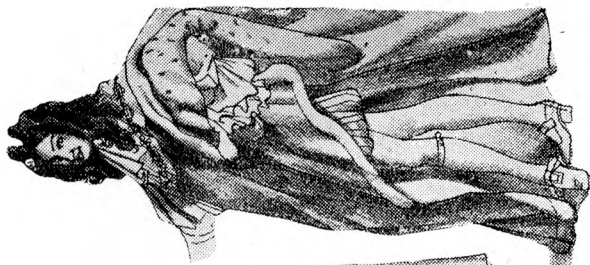
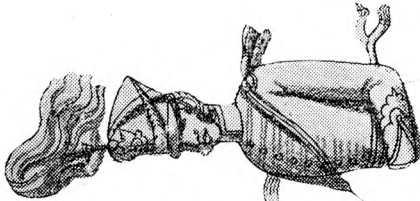
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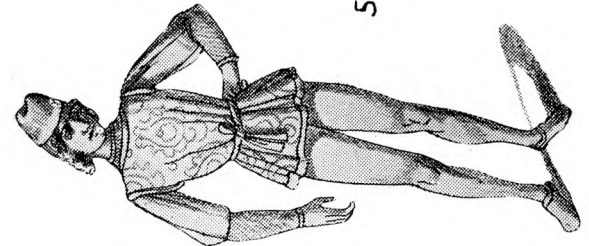
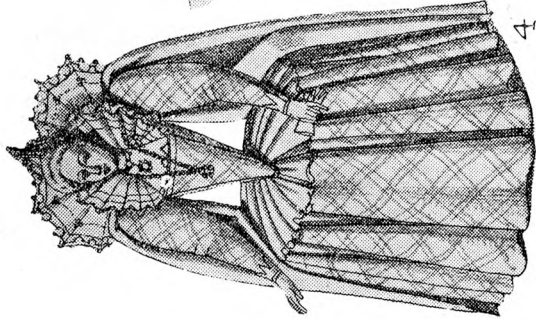
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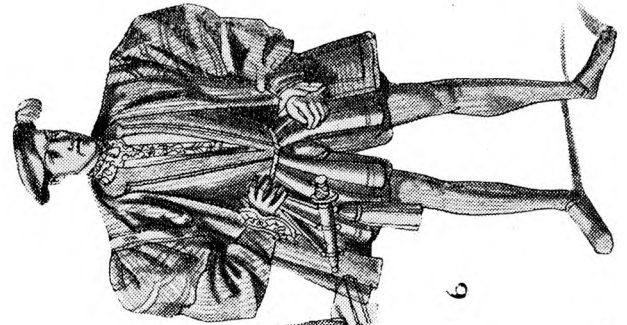
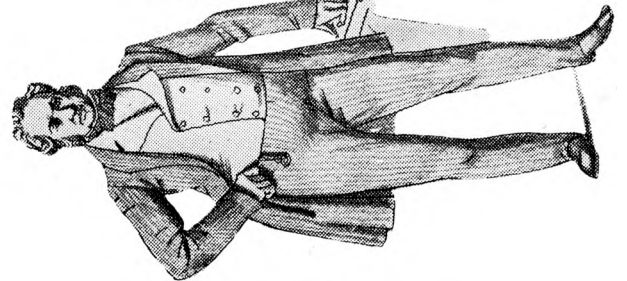
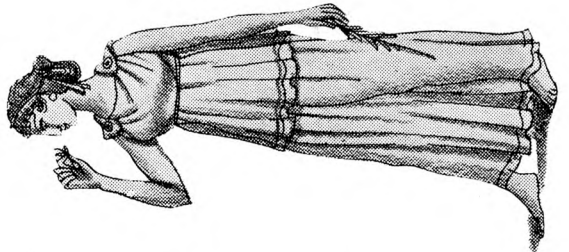
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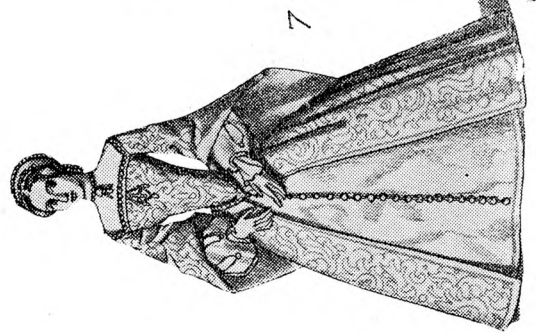
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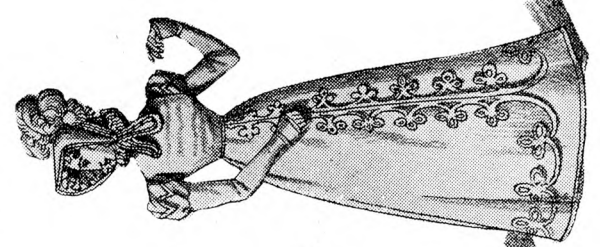
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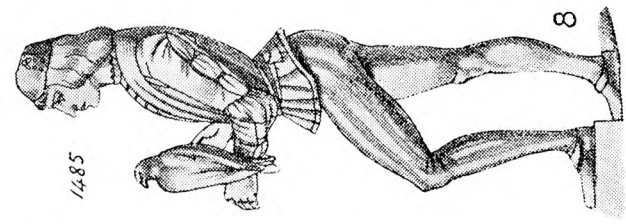


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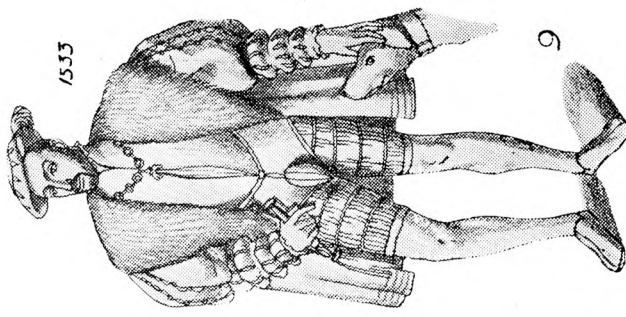
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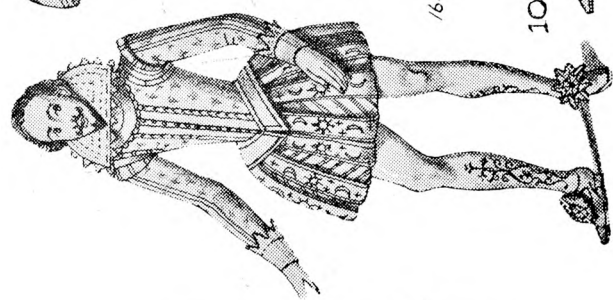
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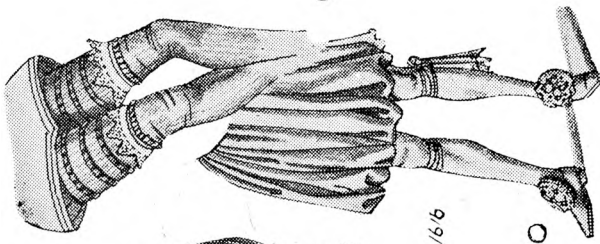
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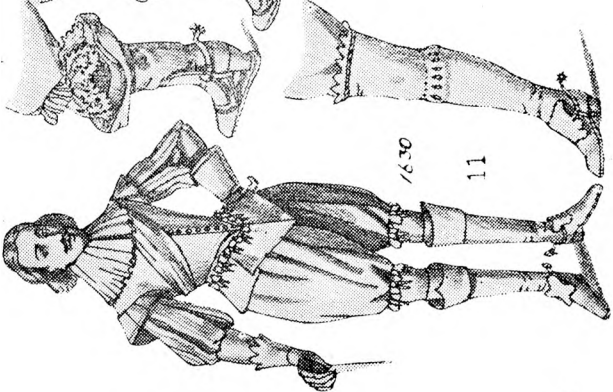
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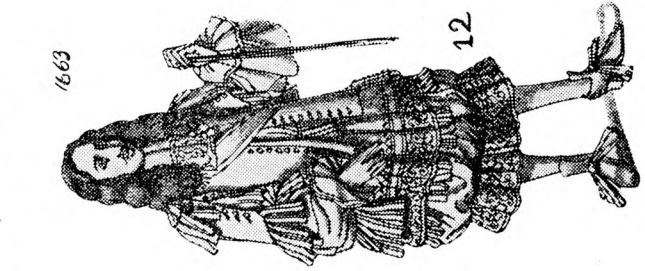
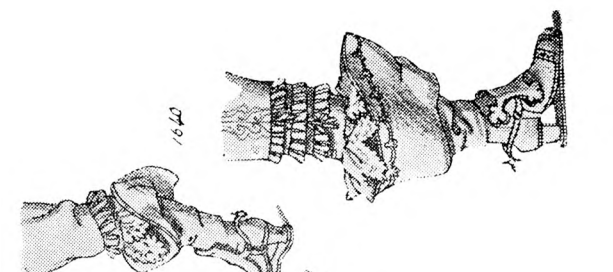


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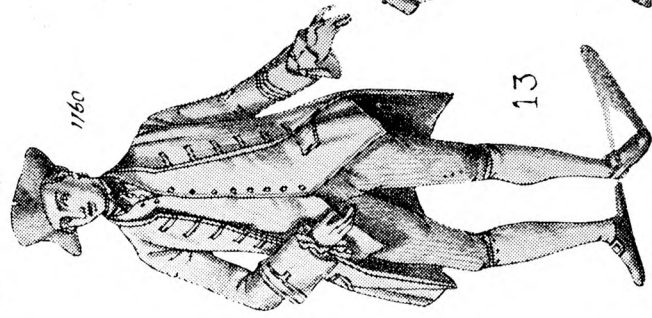


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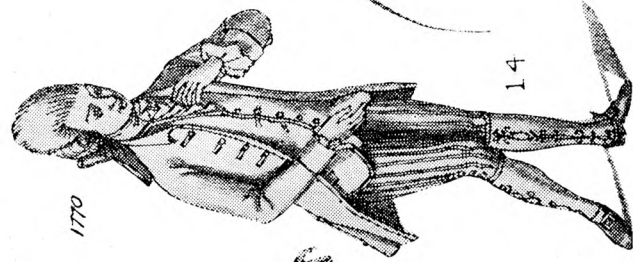
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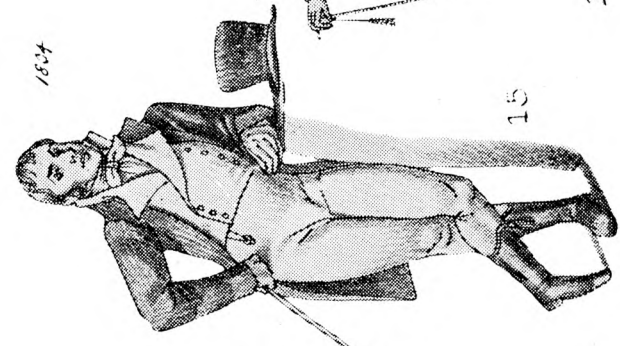
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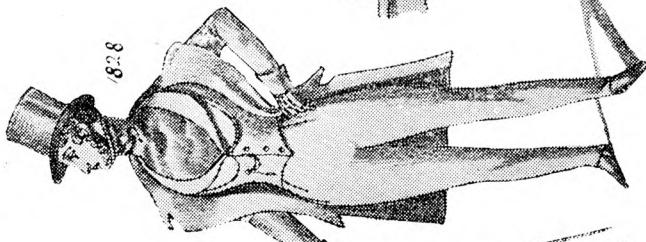
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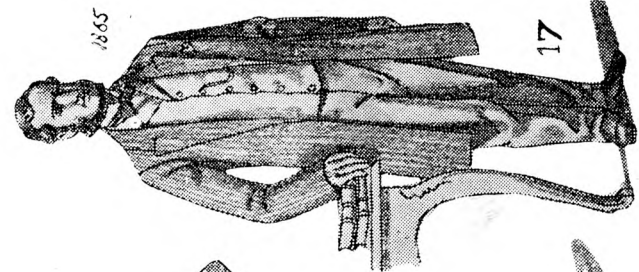
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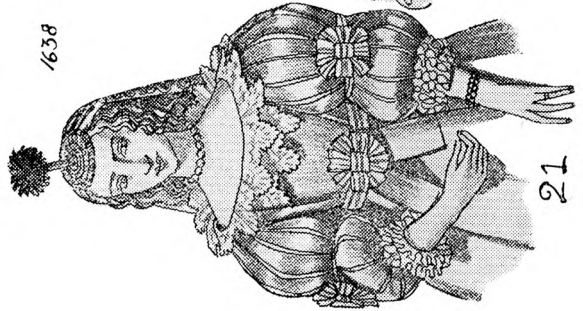
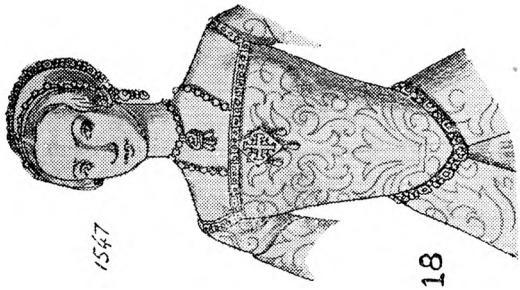
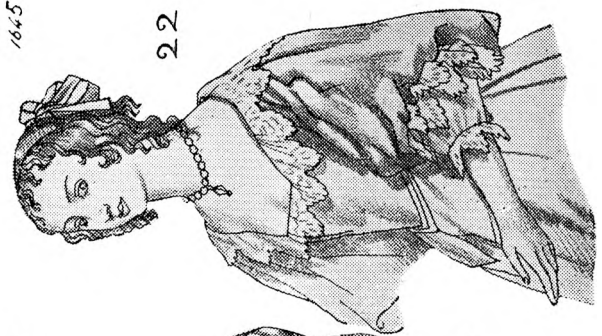
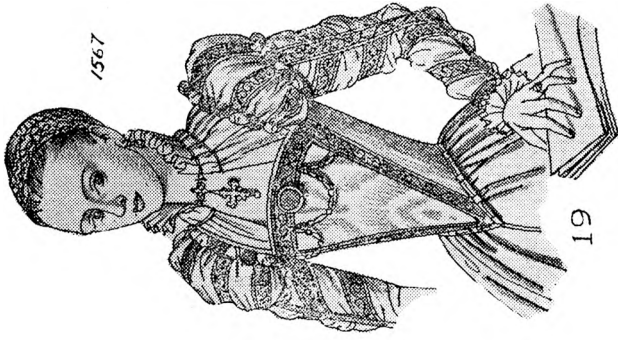
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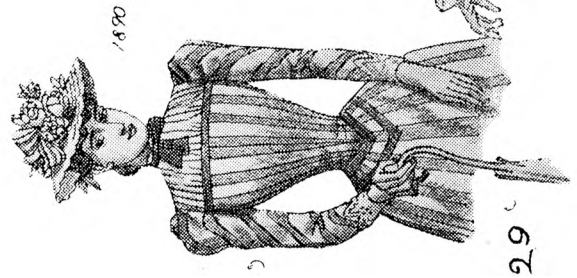
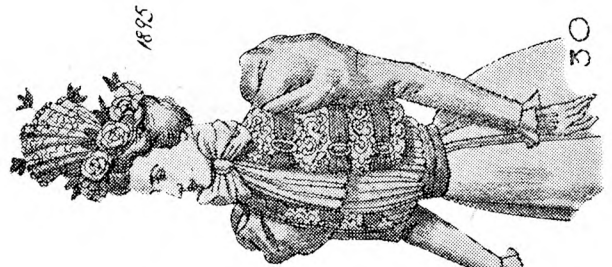
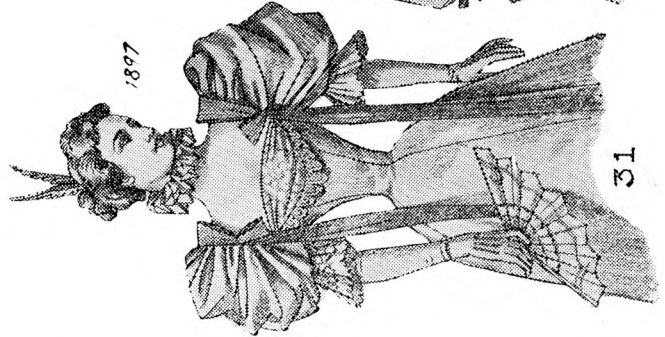
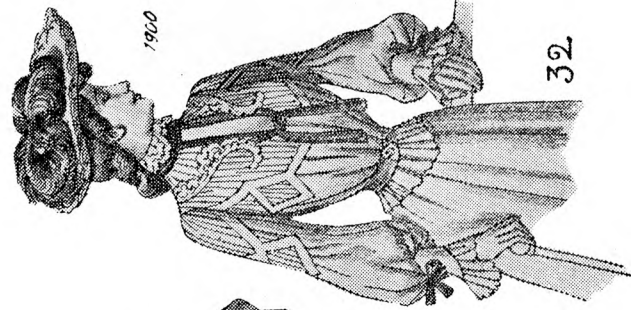
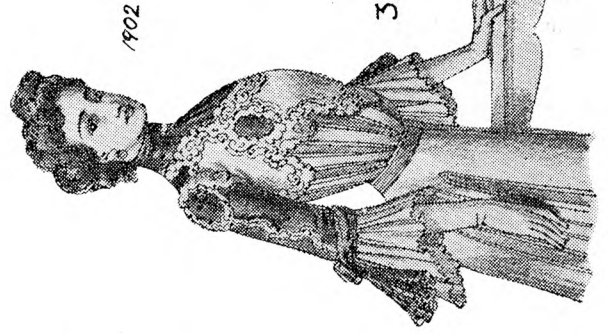
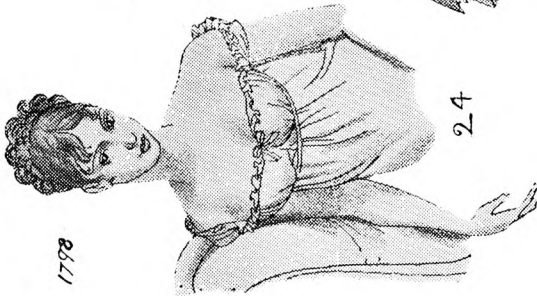
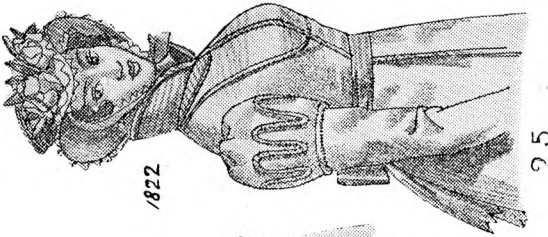
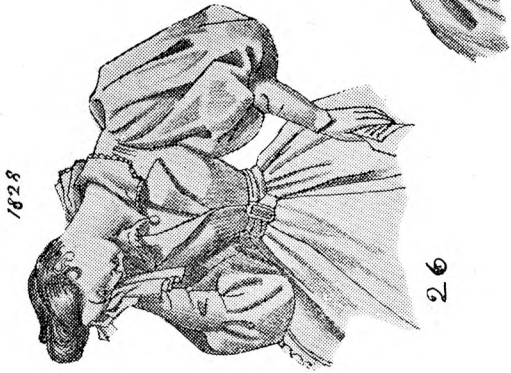
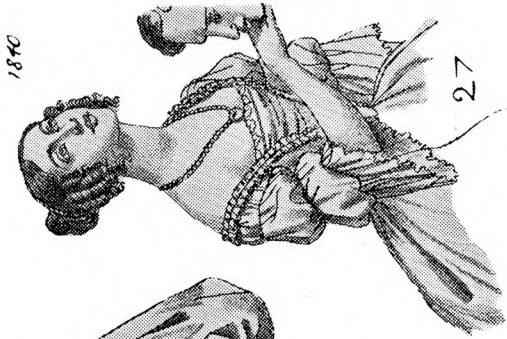
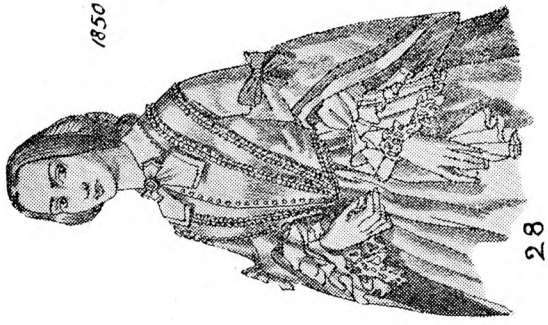
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so that approach was open, and intimacy invited. Indeed, it would have been difficult to step on the hem of the lady's skirt of 1926 without the assistance of a step-ladder. Mystery and its charm had vanished. The emotional tone of symbols is in a constant state of flux. The female glove, that symbol of feminine surrender, once the reward of the faithful lover; that delicate trifle, to be worn on the helmet, that trophy over which poets sang and sighed, and lovers wept, has now no significance at all, its emotional tone has become inert.

The reverse of this picture, when the emotional tone has far outstripped the idea it represents, is seen in the relationship of underclothing to the state of nudity. The prettiness and charm, and the deliberate seductiveness of female underclothing, is a direct appeal to imagination. Such garments may be necessary for the considerations of hygiene, climatic comfort, or structural engineering, but the decorative character is an ingenious idea. The chocolate has its wrapping of glittering tinfoil, and the box is tied with ribbon. Significantly, men's underclothing has never possessed a similar degree of charm.

This last observation may lead us to speculate as to whether male costume has ever possessed any degree of sex attraction. Let us not delude ourselves into thinking that man has never attempted or ever abandoned such an appeal in his dress. Even to-day, by perusal of the advertisements, we may learn that a shoe is 'ruggedly styled', or that a jacket may be 'essentially masculine'. Essentially masculine in the torso, and ruggedly shod, perhaps modern man can see a faint shadow of his primitive ancestor barging and tramping his way into the sunshine of the approval of the opposite sex.

In the examination of sex appeal in clothing, it is important to remember that the intention of costume has always been to be attractive. In its desire to be attractive, it may have failed to be beautiful, and what is considered attractive in one generation, may be considered repellent in another. The standards of good taste and beauty of the past are often seen as inappropriate when estimated by different occasions and circumstances. The direct forms of sex attraction are, of course, connected with the physical aspects of the body, those aspects generally known as secondary sexual characteristics. In the male, it will be height, breadth of shoulder, shape of leg; in the female, shape of figure—i.e. the shape of hips, waist and bust, the distinct characters of each sex.

In this problem of sex appeal, man has never attained the subtlety and ingenuity displayed by the woman. His approach commenced by what can only be described as a blinding glimpse of the obvious, which has declined during the passage of time to a state where we are only dimly aware of its presence. I hope to show that this direct sex appeal has now perhaps turned into an appeal far more subtle.

We have seen that male costume developed its distinctive character some six centuries ago, and almost at once it exhibited a definite sex appeal. With the horizontal breaking of the long rectangle, a division of leg and trunk was created. This horizontal line has had a degree of instability over the centuries and seems only to have reached a fairly consistent level in the 18th Century. The shifting of this level has been due to a variety of reasons—moral, aesthetic and utilitarian. But there has never been since the division a time when the lower section became completely absorbed into the upper portion again. Generally the upper section has remained bulky, rectangular and massive, top-heavy in appearance. The more square and massive the upper section, the more aggressively masculine and virile does the appearance of the costume become. By lowering the level of the transverse line, dignity and gravity are increased, but the sense of mobility is reduced.

A comparison of the bronze-frock-coated gentry in Parliament Square at Westminster with a portrait of a Tudor gentleman, will confirm this impression. The degree of sex attraction in male costume has been greatly dependent on the proportioning of the

area below the horizontal division, and its decoration. The appeal of the upper section is too obvious to merit examination from the point of view of sex attraction. A study of the pictures of an American footballer, a gorilla and a Tudor gentleman will make this evident.

In the middle of the 15th Century (Fig. 8), the horizontal line was at its highest, about the level of an Eton jacket. The legs with the buttocks were revealed in one continuous form. That this was considered to be attractive cannot be doubted, for much was done to increase attractiveness. Sometimes each leg was in a different contrasting colour, or the leg was decorated with vertical stripes, serving to focus attention on the leg. On a youthful figure, as still seen in the male dancer of classical ballet, this costume is at once graceful, virile and aesthetically pleasing. The rotundities or the shrunkeness of older years, one must admit, would appear gross or inelegant in this costume, a fact which no doubt gave rise to the strictures of contemporary commentators. Although some objected to this extreme degree of exposure on moral grounds, it is interesting to observe that the Sumptuary Laws of Edward IV in England pronounced:—

“No knight under the rank of Lord, Esquire or Gentleman, nor any other person shall wear any gown, jacket or cloak that is not long enough when he stand^s upright to cover his buttocks under the penalty of 20/-”.

The conclusion which can be drawn here is that as the very highest ranks of society could hardly be suspected of indecency, the costume survived as being the symbol of true gentility and high elegance. Even when the major portion of the thigh was later concealed, it is noticed that the codpiece survived, which seems to prove that such a device was not considered an indecency.

During the 16th and 17th centuries (Figs. 9 and 10) a much lower level for the main horizontal line was employed, when the doublet was skirted, or the trunk expanded and lowered, so that the shape of the thigh was disguised and concealed. This lowering of the transverse line, threw the appeal down to the lower leg, and well that lower leg was exploited. There came the great age of leather and lace (Fig. 11), when the lower leg even on formal occasions was enclosed in an exotic mixture of leather and lace, a curious mixture of the iron heel and feminine frippery. It was in turn elegant and close-fitting, moulded to the leg, or high heeled and spurred with fantastic turned-over tops, frothing with lace. The leg cannot resist the urge to pose, there is always the hound to be kicked out of the way, or a footstool convenient for posture.

Leather goes out (Fig. 12), and lace and ribbons go up, the lace and ribbons are now suspended from the bottom of the petticoat breeches. The whole thigh is disguised, but we are invited to concentrate on the lower leg which emerges from the pendant lace and ribbon, and now is observed a shoe elegant in shape, with ribbon so long that it reaches the ground, and we see the flash of a scarlet heel. There is such a fantastic air about this costume, that it seems that a point has arrived where a change of idea and shape must come, and there is a certain conflict of idea, a hesitancy of decision, which seems to presage a coming change. For we find the hand presented in a fashion that leads to competition with the leg, for the hand emerges from its lace and ribbon in a similar way, and holds the fashionable select cane—the eye is fascinated by its movement.

The face also attracts the eye, for at this period it is framed with a heavy wig descending to the shoulders, which concentrates attention on the features. The Elizabethans presented us with the whole head on a charger, the severed head on a wide dish of a circular ruffle, but now the consideration is detail in a massive and ornate frame. Perhaps the frame is too overbearing, and the times are ripe for a readjustment of values.

The male costume of the next period (Fig. 13) is one of perfect adjustment, and is, I think, the most elegant and aesthetically pleasing of all costumes. Such balance and poise, such well-mannered art, is a characteristic of the 18th Century, and its costume in the male reaches the same high level of sensibility. The whole costume expresses a refined masculinity, sex-appeal was implied rather than proclaimed, no feature emphasised itself at the expense of its neighbour. So pleasing is it, that it repays a detailed examination. The illustration is taken from a painting of 1760. We find that the horizontal line is now represented only in minor details, such as the line of the coat pockets, the tops of the stockings and the transverse lines of braid on the coat. So it becomes obvious at once, that ruggedness and breadth are not to be the main theme. The division between the trunk and the lower limbs is indicated by an angle formed where the bottom button of the waistcoat is fastened. Angles have become a main feature in this costume, as is seen in the slope of the coat from the neck downwards, the waistcoat opening at top and bottom and the natural fork of the breeches, whilst the motif is subtly echoed in the tricorne hat.

The flaring skirts of the coat commence at the waist line by a stiffening of the lining. This break in the perpendicular gives a lightness and a sense of mobility as the line moves out at a tangent. A complete contrast to the deadly gravity of the Victorian frock coat. The waistcoat opening below is at an obtuse angle, giving a feeling of stability and base to the composition, whilst at the tops the open angle is acute, giving height and grace.

Obtuse angles below, acute angles at the top, give the effect of strength and grace in ascending importance. The hand, the head and the leg are discreetly and effectively indicated with restrained emphasis, the lower leg relying only on its natural shape, a contrast of colour and a buckled shoe. Such perfection, however, is short-lived.

The extravagance of the Maccaroni (Fig. 14) soon followed, featuring effeminate glamour, the wig being dressed in quite fantastic shapes, but there is a returning emphasis on the leg, for stockings of clouded and shot silk are seen, and we read of shoes being cut like a butter boat to show the clock of the stockings, which often went in fantastic designs up to the knee, and artificial calves became fashionable, to make the leg as beautiful as possible. It is sufficiently described in Sheridan's version, brought up to date, of Vanbrugh's comedy 'The Relapse' and re-named 'A Trip to Scarborough' (1777):—

LORD FOPPINGTON.—The calves of these stockings are thickened a little too much; they make my legs look like a porter's.

MR. MENDLEGS. My lord, methinks they look mighty well.

LORD FOPPINGTON. Ay, but you are not so good a judge of these things as I am. I have studied them all my life. Pray therefore let the next be the thickness of a crown-piece less.

MR. MENDLEGS. Indeed, my lord, they are the same kind I had the honour to furnish your lordship with in town.

LORD FOPPINGTON. Very possibly, Mr. Mendlegs; but that was in the beginning of the winter; and you should always remember, Mr. Hosier, that if you make a nobleman's spring legs as robust as his autumn calves, you commit a monstrous impropriety, and make no allowance for the fatigues of the winter.

In the next era, the whole leg as a direct appeal returns to its own again. The waistcoat is cut in a horizontal line at a height which had not been used since the 15th century. The Regency buck (Fig. 15) wore the tightest of breeches, reaching to the midriff, with the coat cut away to reveal as completely as possible the shape of the leg and thigh. It was the age of Classic Revivalism, and the resemblance of the nether

portion of the male to the Elgin Marbles is only spoiled by the presence of the fig leaf on the one and the Hessian boots on the other, and it is the Hessian boot, elegant, close-fitting, tasselled, and lacquered to a dazzling brilliance, which completes the obvious appeal of the leg.

The age of the Dandies (Fig 16) followed, the hessian boot was discarded, but the trousers remained tight at the ankle, emphasizing a feminine tinness of foot. Going upwards, the trousers expanded at the hip, produced a curve reminiscent of the opposite sex. The dandy, aided by corsets, developed the elliptical curve and went into a feminine decline. The last of the dandies, the last of the leg, and from thenceforward man clothed his lower limbs in unmentionables and 'inexpressibles'. Glamour was gone, the frock coat clamped down the horizontal line to the knees and the leg became a broadcloth cylinder (Fig. 17).

Little candles of leg appeal have been lit since, but have flickered for a moment and gone out. Oscar Wilde appeared in knee breeches and silk stockings, but with a lily in the hand: this was the wrong stage property to accompany such a costume—there is only one reason for leg appeal and the lily is miscast. In any case, he was an aesthetic reformer, and reformers are small fish in large pools and stir no more than a ripple.

The shy spat, with its charms, has passed away, the knickerbocker trousers and plus fours, originally sports costumes, had a brief popularity as non-sports wear. The plus four gave the male a fleeting glimpse of a possibility. Indeed, it was whispered that some men even used to wear two pairs of thick woollen stockings to bolster up their calves, artificial calves having gone off the market when the footman went out of employment. And now the plus four finds itself back on the golf links.

The final renunciation of the cult of the leg came in the 20's of this century, when man wrapped his legs in the voluminous draperies of the Oxford bags, and handed over to the woman the right to show a leg. She took over this privilege with zest and dropped her waistline to the level of her partner, flattened her chest and cropped her hair, and appeared closer to man in costume than she had ever done since the days of the Amazons. In passing, one might note that the maximum popularity of the plus four coincided with the dropping of the skirt line in the early 30's.

We occasionally see a type of shoe which I think can only be described as intriguing—a confection of lizard or snake skin and patent leather. This creation, too obvious in its appeal to be considered by the gentleman, has, like the too natty suit, become the symbol of the spiv.

Are we to draw from this history of decline and fall the moral that sex appeal is no longer an idea worthy of expression in costume, or can we see the exploitation of the obvious giving way to a more subtle form of appeal? This may be so. Let us consider some other factors.

Imagine a series of shop windows, each under a fascia board entitled "Gent's Tailors and Outfitters". Instead of being numbered for the convenience of the postman, they are dated for the convenience of the historian, and extend down the corridor of time. Each garment displayed is wearing its price ticket. In shop 1952 we see garments all very similar in appearance and style, that differ only in price, according to the quality of material and the degree of mass production. In outward appearance there is little difference between the clothes purchased by a duke and a dustman, and the difference in price is only affected by the factors that I have just mentioned.

If we go window-gazing into the past, we shall find as we go down the street that there is a growing gulf between the prices of such garments. We should not have to go very far into the past, to find that our friend the dustman would not find a suitable garment at all, but across the street he might find a little shop that would make him a dress suitable for his occupation at a price he could afford. This side of the street would be quite definitely unfashionable, and the Duke would certainly never shop there.

Examining goods we retrace our steps to 1952, and are forced to the conclusion that costumes of social rank and occupation have not only disappeared, but also that what sartorial appeal exists is now common property. Social and occupational barriers have largely vanished. We are no longer impressed by rank, but perhaps we are willing to be impressed by proficiency.

In the 20th century proficiency is a greater asset than glamour. Can masculine competency be characterised by clothes? Surely it can, and it is an idea worthy of expression. The harmonious combination of detail, quality of material, choice of colour, perfection of form, all these factors agreeably assembled indicate proficiency. We may not be able to tell a duke from a dustman, but we can certainly tell a dud. This idea of the expression of proficiency is in its infancy, it has yet to develop, so let us beware of calling modern man's clothing dull, it may well prove that it is becoming really interesting, for we may be expressing a new idea.

I have indicated previously that the appeal of female costume has attained a degree of subtlety and art never approached by the male.

Woman has usually tended to conceal the shape of the body whilst emphasising its sexual characteristics. We cannot but be impressed by the pains taken to draw attention to their physical allurements. To heighten the effect of one region, others will be skilfully hidden or their attractions veiled, ingenious exaggerations are practised and the laws of aesthetics broken with impunity. It is but natural that woman's costume should draw attention to her distinctive characteristic, the curve. The bosom, the waist and the hips have all, with the exception of the 1920's, been emphasised repeatedly during the last six centuries.

Secondary curved features, such as the neck, the head and the arm, have been exploited independently, or more commonly employed to reinforce a major theme. The curve is used in the design of the costume both to frame the natural curves, to supplement the natural curve, or to supply artificial ones. One can readily see that this technique used on the principle of the more the merrier, will soon become too obviously blatant and therefore uninteresting.

The accepted technique of female clothing may be regarded as threefold:—

1. Concealment to provoke curiosity.
2. Allusion to provoke associated ideas.
3. Exposure to provoke surprise.

The first two have been habitually employed, and will continue to be used whilst women wear clothes, and the third intermittently and for short periods.

There is little need to refer at any length to the technique of the exposure of those areas obviously characteristic of sex. The décolletage practised from the 15th century to the present day has varied both in degree and type; the interesting factor is the way in which it is displayed, and the extent of it in a particular period. Décolletage was a pronounced feature of evening wear in the Victorian period, in spite of the prudery that distinguished day costume, and demonstrates that the feature displayed in appropriate circumstances is compatible with the strictest conventions, and illustrates that singular power we have of being able to exercise an instinct whilst disapproving of its existence.

Allied to the art of décolletage, is the use of material moulded over the bosom, a device practised at intervals since the 14th century, and having a great revival in modern times, a fashion symbolised by the sweater girl. An American writer recently described this modern fashion as the art of pulling the eyes over the wool, and at least it has the virtues of appealing to the home knitter and also to the virtues of economy, as one requires about sixteen stitches fewer to be cast on the needles than prescribed by the pattern.

Perhaps the best commentary on the principal techniques is made by Thomas Jeffreys (a map engraver and geographer to the Prince of Wales) in 1757 in this extract from "A Collection of Dresses of Different Nations, Ancient and Modern, particularly English Dresses after the Design of Holbein, Vandyke and Hollar": "The Europeans are so much at liberty to follow their own fancy in the figures and materials of their dress, that the habit has become a kind of index to the mind, and the character is in some particulars as easily discovered by a man's dress as by his conversation. As to the dresses of women, they have never been military, and therefore have never been short; for besides the alterations that convenience and caprice have introduced into the female habit, there are several which have a more latent and less innocent cause. The dress of woman has long been considered a decoration of beauty and an incitement to desire, ingenuity and solicitude; but it does not always appear that those who intend to multiply or secure their conquest by dress, always know best how to exert that power which the choice of that dress puts into their hands. When the British lady thinks fit so as to discover the whole breast, the British gentleman soon looks upon it with as much indifference as the naked Indian looks upon all the rest, but if she covers it with her handkerchief and contrives this covering so that it will accidentally discover what it appears intended to hide, the glimpse that is thus casually given immediately and forcibly seizes the imagination and every motion is watched in hopes that it will be repeated so if by any accident a lady discovers half her leg the fancy is instantly alarmed, though when the actress appears in breeches and discovers the whole she is the object of indifference if not of disgust. For the same reason the figure of a naked Venus produces less effect than that of a dressed figure with a petticoat raised so as to discover the garter. It follows that if she dresses most immodestly to excite licentious desire, she does not dress most immodestly who uncovers most of her person, but she who covers it so that it may be accidentally seen." Thus Master Jeffreys.

The concealment of a particular part, the part in itself not necessarily attractive, but the fact of its concealment with its so rare appearance makes the occasional exposure of that part delightfully attractive, the delight lies in the privilege of being allowed to see. Suckling's line:—

"Her little feet beneath her petticoat
Like little mice stole in and out
As if they feared the light."

Not a squeak of dismay at the sight of these little mice is heard, but rather a cry of delight.

Mystery excites the imagination. The fair one's ungloved hand and her semi-concealed ankle once possessed a high degree of attraction. Nowadays when concealment has lapsed, the interest is dead.

"Fain would I kiss my Julia's dainty leg
Which is as white and hairless as an egg."

That is all very well for Herrick in the 17th century, but can you imagine a poet of 1926 writing those lines? No comment on the leg in 1926—it was commonplace.

The method of allusion is usually one of great artistry. The aim is to catch the eye, skilfully direct and lead it to some particular region. The example that I have selected for demonstration shows how either the waist or the hand, both centres of attraction and interest, can be emphasised and rendered more appealing by the manipulations of the form of the sleeve. The consideration of this item will illustrate one of the peculiarities affecting the art of the costume, namely that once a fashion has gained a certain momentum, in any particular direction, it seems compelled to go to the utmost end. Fashion demands not merely satisfaction, but over-satisfaction, the wave of desire going beyond logical limits before it comes to a halt.

I must ask you to imagine for a moment a state of fashion where the bodice and waist, shoulder and sleeve, have the dimensions and proportions of the normal female figure. I cannot readily imagine such a fashion, but the wave must start somewhere. We start with the first movement of the wave forwards and a costume of about 1540 (Fig. 18) will serve us as the example. An enlargement of the shoulder takes place. There is no bulk at the top of the sleeve or arm, the effect is obtained by the severe horizontal line at the top of the bodice. The emphasis of the top line by contrast makes the angle of the bodice at the waist appear more acute. In 1560 (Fig. 19) this shoulder width is further emphasised by puffing the sleeve at the top. The previous fashion indicated the direction, and now we have a sleeve which is separate and enlarged at the top. The momentum increases and at the height of Elizabethan fashion (Fig. 20) we find the huge bulk of the leg-of-mutton sleeve. The greater expansion of the upper arm seems always to coincide with tight lacing to assist the contrast of shoulder width with slenderness of waist.

The next move is down the arm, in the balloon sleeve of 1640 (Fig. 21), which expands above and below the elbow. Some sort of indecision is detected here, for the waist has moved up slightly and is about equal in bulk and height to the elbow. There is, however, a pointer to the next, for we notice that the lower sleeve is terminated in a cuff, and a section of the forearm exposed, indicating a coming emphasis of the hands. Next we have the elbow sleeve with elegant negligence of the turned-back cuff, exposing the whole forearm (Fig. 22). The waist is no longer laced, the width of the upper arm has gone, and we are invited to admire the whiteness of the hand.

By 1740 (Fig. 23), the sleeve is still elbow length, width at the opening is increased, we see the deep ruffles rather increasing the width, and the hand and wrist is enchantingly presented. We are no longer conscious of the waist, and the sleeve has achieved a complete inversion of shape. It is of interest to note that this cycle appears again (Fig. 24). Commencing with a discreet puffed sleeve in the late Regency (Fig. 25); In 1928, huge sleeves and tight corsetting (Fig. 26); elbow sleeve in 1840 (Fig. 27), and the bell opening in the later 40's and 50's (Fig. 28). Again we observe the shoulder expansion of 1889/90 (Fig. 29), which is followed by the leg-of-mutton sleeves of the 90's (Fig. 30). In 1896 (Fig. 31)—the balloon sleeve, then a phase of close sleeve frilled at the wrist (Fig. 32), terminating in the bell opening of 1901/2 (Fig. 33). In each turn of the wheel through the medium of the sleeve, the waist and the hand have been the zone of interest.

Art has been described as "exaggeration à propos", and the artist is he who knows how, when and where to exaggerate. The artist in costume must have an exact and instinctive vision of what are the essential lines. The art of costume is essentially exaggeration à propos, and its successful practice is instinctive in its operation and magical in its effect.

Any work of art created between the days of ancient Egypt and 1925 commands both our appreciation and our understanding. We have knowledge of the artist's intention and understanding of his techniques. How would we fare in an exhibition of work by leading contemporary artists, pictures only a week, a month or a year old? The distance and the middle distance of a landscape are seen in perspective, the details assemble in forms, but our foreground and the ground on which we stand is rubble and stones, bits and pieces, we cannot see the wood for the trees. Can we by looking at the current number of Vogue discover the direction of costume at the present time? I think not. We see fragments, but no single pattern, and it would be a rash person indeed who dared to look into the future and predict a path that fashion is likely to follow.

We can perhaps say with a reasonable degree of certainty what it will not do. It is doubtful whether, physiologically or aesthetically, costume will follow the pattern

that followed the first World War or the Napoleonic Wars. 1920-28 is not at the requisite distance for enchantment, but just at that peculiar distance in fashion, hovering between the hideous and the quaint.

Just before the outbreak of the last war, feminine fashions were riding to a new Victorianism. In 1939 Vogue reported from Paris "hoop-flared day skirts, pegtop hobble skirts, Velazquez panniers, tight-wrapped mummy skirts, bustle-backed skirts, plastered-to-the-figure bodices, super-light-weight boned corsets." There was not a figure in Paris that did not curve in at the waist. There must be frou-frou and femininity, for woman was re-discovering herself, her personality and her sex. So said Vogue, and it is certain that after the 1920's the pendulum was about to swing to the extreme opposite direction.

Europe did not see this come fully into flower, the chill wind of war nipped the fruit in the bud. But even the interruption of war did not cause this movement completely to die out; it was something that fashion had waited for, for a long time. We kept it at the back of our minds.

Woman emerged from the war with her waist intact and at the right level, the battle dress blouse helped to keep it there. And where there is a will, there is a waist. Another certainty—students of costume in the future will see our present fashions as another of the inevitable results of another great war, whatever forms they may take. The creative arts are never static; like life they are never at rest, and the art of costume is a special and significant manifestation of life.

