

THE DRESS OF WOMAN.

ITS FAILURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF COMMON SENSE AND
AN ADVANCING CIVILIZATION.

GAIL HAMILTON.

JUST go to your window, the next rainy day, and notice the first woman who passes. See how she is forced to concentrate all the energies of mind and body on herself and her casings. One delicate hand clings desperately to the unwieldy umbrella; the other is ceaselessly struggling to keep firm hold of the multitudinous draperies; and if book, basket or bundle claim a share of her attention, her case is pitiable indeed. Down goes one fold upon the wet flagstone, detected only by an ominous flapping against the ankles when the garment has become saturated,—a loosened hold on the umbrella, of which it takes advantage, and immediately sways imminent over the gutter,—a convulsive and random clutch at the petticoats. The umbrella righted, a sudden gust of wind threatens to bear it away, and one hand not being sufficient to detain it, the other involuntarily comes to the rescue,—sweep go the draperies down on the pavement; then another clutch, another adjustment,—forward! march!—and so on to the dreary, dragged end.

Stalk—stalk—stalk—comes up the man behind her. Stalk—stalk,—he has passed. Stalk—stalk—stalk,—he is out of sight before she has passed a single block.

Of course he is. One sinewy hand lightly poising his umbrella, water-proof overcoat "close buttoned to the chin;" tight fitting trousers tucked into enormous India rubber boots. What is the storm to him?

Is this a small matter? Beloved friend, smaller matters than these have swayed the world; and ten thousand such small matters mark the childhood, youth and maturity of twice ten thousand small men and women.

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS WARD

WHEN I see women stay indoors the entire forenoon because their morning dresses trail the ground, and indoors all the afternoon because there comes up a shower, and the walking-dress would soak and drabble; or when I see the "workingwoman" standing at the counter, or at the teacher's desk, from day to dark, in the drenched boots and damp stockings which her muddy skirts, flapping from side to side, have compelled her to endure; when I see her, a few weeks thereafter, going to Dr. Clarke for treatment, as a consequence; when I find, after the most patient experiment, that, in spite of stout rubbers, water-proof gaiters, and dress skirt three or four inches from the ground, an "out-of-door" girl is compelled to a general change of clothing each individual time that she returns from her daily walks in the summer rain; when I see a woman climbing upstairs with her baby in one arm, and its bowl of bread and milk in the other, and see her tripping on her dress at every stair (if, indeed, baby, bowl, bread, milk, and mother do not go down in universal chaos; it is only from the efforts of long skill and experience on the part of the mother in performing that acrobatic feat); when physicians tell me what fearful jars and strains these sudden jerks of the body from stumbling on the dress-hem impose upon a woman's intricate organism, and how much less injurious to her a direct fall would be than this start and rebound of nerve and muscle, and how the strongest man would suffer from such accidents; and when they further assure me of the amount of calculable injury wrought upon our sex by the weight of skirting brought upon the hips, and by thus making the seat of all the vital energies the pivot of motion and center of endurance; when I see women's skirts, the shortest of them, lying (when they sit down) inches deep along the foul floors, which men, in delicate appreciation of our concessions to his fancy in such respects, has inundated with tobacco juice, and from which she sweeps up and carries to her home the germs of stealthy pestilences; when I see a ruddy, romping school-girl, in her first long dress, beginning to avoid coasting on her double-runner, or afraid of the stone walls in the blue-berry fields, or standing aloof from the game of ball, or turning sadly away from the ladder which her brother is climbing to the cherry tree, or begging for him to assist her over the gunwale of a boat; when I read of the sinking of steamers at sea, with "nearly all the women and children on board," and the accompanying comments, "Every effort was made to assist the women up the masts and out of danger till help arrived, but they could not climb, and we were forced to leave them to their fate;" or when I hear the wall with which a million lips take up the light words of the loafer on the Portland wharf, when the survivors of the "Atlantic" filed past him, "not a woman among them all! My God!"—when I consider these things, I feel that I have ceased to deal with blunders in dress and have entered the category of crimes.—"What to Wear." Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

IT is the great misfortune of the civilized world, at the present hour, that the state of morals in France is apparently at the lowest ebb, and consequently the leadership of fashion is entirely in the hands of a class of women who could not be admitted into good society in any country. Women who can never have the name of wife,—who know none of the ties of family,—these are the dictators whose dress and equipage and appointments give the law, first to France, and through France to the civilized world. Such was the confession of Monsieur

Dupin, made in a late speech before the French senate, and acknowledged, with murmurs of assent on all sides, to be the truth. This is the reason why the fashions have such an utter disregard of all those laws of prudence and economy which regulate the expenditures of families. They are made by women whose sole and only hold on life is personal attractiveness, and with whom to keep this up, at any cost, is a desperate necessity. No moral quality, no association of purity, truth, modesty, self-denial, or family love, comes in to hallow the atmosphere about them, and create a sphere of loveliness which brightens as mere physical beauty fades. The ravages of time and dissipation must be made up by an unceasing study of the arts of the toilet. Artists of all sorts, moving in their train, rack all the stores of ancient and modern art for the picturesque, the dazzling, and the grotesque; and so, lest these Circes of society should carry all before them, and enchant every husband, brother and lover, the staid and lawful Penelopes leave the hearth and home to follow in their triumphal march and imitate their arts. Thus it goes in France; and in England, virtuous and domestic princesses and peeresses must take obediently what has been decreed by their rulers in the *demi monde* of France; and we in America have leaders of fashion who make it their pride and glory to turn New York into Paris, and to keep even step with all that is going on there. So the whole world of womankind is really marching under the command of these leaders. The love of dress and glitter and fashion is getting to be a morbid, unhealthy epidemic, which really eats away the nobleness and purity of women.

In France, as Monsieur Dupin, Edmond About and Michelet tell us, the extravagant demands of love of dress lead women to contract debts unknown to their husbands, and sign obligations which are paid by the sacrifice of honor, and thus the purity of the family is continually undermined. In England there is a voice of complaint, sounding from the leading periodicals, that the extravagant demands of female fashion are bringing distress into families, and making marriages impossible and something of the same sort seems to have been begun here. * *

We have just come through a great struggle in which our women have borne an heroic part,—have shown themselves capable of any kind of endurance and self-sacrifice; and we are in that reconstructive state which makes it of the greatest consequence to ourselves and the world that we understand our own institutions and position, and learn that, instead of following the corrupt and worn-out ways of the Old World, we are called on to set the example of a new state of society,—noble, simple, pure and religious; and women can do more towards this even than men, for women are the real architects of society.

Viewed in this light, even the small, frittering cares of women's life—the attention to buttons, trimmings, thread, and sewing silk—may be an expression of their patriotism and their religion. A noble-hearted woman puts a noble meaning into even the commonplace details of life. The women of America can, if they choose, hold back their country from following in the wake of old, corrupt, worn-out, effeminate European society, and make America the leader of the world in all that is good. * *

Where there is a will there is a way. Only resolve that you will put the true beauty first—that, even if you do have to seem unfashionable, you will follow the highest beauty of womanhood,—and the battle is half gained.—"Chimney Corner Papers." Houghton, Mifflin & Co.



Fashion's models for women in the year of the Columbian Exposition, 1893. Pronounced "lovely!" when in fashion, and "horrid!" when out. Preserve this for the women of the next century sec.