



LADY OF FASHION A.D. 1560.



FASHION OF 1800.



THE MODERN HOOP.

THE RED PETTICOAT AND ITS PEDIGREE.

"It is our painful duty to announce the death, this week, at her lodgings, from fever, produced by over-anxiety, of the celebrated mantua-maker, Mrs. Selby, the inventor of the hooped petticoat."

Thus the *London Weekly Journal* for the first week in January, 1717, near a century and a half ago. And hence the acute reader may learn how old is every thing under the sun; for not only doth this long-forgotten Mrs. Selby strip our modern milliners of every claim to originality, but, if the truth were known, she herself, in her day, was regarded by the erudite as an ignoble plagiarist from some long-buried female Snip of foreign extraction. Let us be content with whispering that there is in that bloody city of Delhi a female idol—say a Vishnu—which was made so long ago that the creation is an affair of yesterday in consequence, and which wears a full-boned hoop.

Every body knows that if Madame de Montespan had never added to the pretty large family of her lord and master the king, hooped petticoats would never have become fashionable. At least, the chances would have been against them. But Madame de Montespan loved her lord, and was shamefaced. "I see that Madame de M— has put on her *robe battante*, therefore she must," etc., says the babbling old Duchess of Orleans. So the fashion spread across the Channel, and was even brought across the Atlantic, to Virginia, in some of the fortunate ships which were freighted with persons of the better condition.

The idea of expanded skirts—with a view, seemingly, of giving an appearance of solidity to the female figure by enlarging its base—was familiar to the fashionable world as early as the days of Raleigh. But the expansion was not circular; the skirt hung from two or more projections proceeding from a belt round the waist; and the belt and projections were known by the inelegant but intelligible name of "pairs of hips."

"I' faith, Maria," says the young lady in the shocking old play, "some varlet has run off with my new hips."

Our artist has sketched for us a figure in the expanded skirt of Elizabeth's time, and another in the long, graceful, flowing train, which was worn at court for so many years, and which, so far as appearance goes, strikes us as by far the most artistic and beautiful costume ever worn by a lady.

If people will go to the Astor Library and examine old books of costume, and especially caricatures, they will perceive that the hoop of the eighteenth century was not only similar in appearance to that of the nineteenth, but that it gave rise to precisely the same jokes and just as many witticisms as have been freshly recoined about it in our day. Nearly all the jests about hoops are to be found in the *Spectator*, the *Tattler*, the *Examiner*; one of the very best *facetiæ* of the *Tattler*—the trial of a young lady for obstructing the highway with her hoops—was the other day modernized and adapted into a Boston paper, whence it has gone the rounds of the press of the Union.

Between the hoop of Madame de Montespan's day and that of our own the female skirt has fluctuated prodigiously. It ebbed back at one time, until, under the French Empire, the waist was under the arm-pits, and a lady duly provided with skirts needed, for the fashion of the time, little or no other clothing. Then the ebb proceeded from the other extremity, and gradually fair ankles were suffered to be seen and the extremity of a tapering leg. Against this enormity moralists long protested in vain. They might indeed have preached till doomsday—so incurably obstinate is the female sex—but for one accident: how shall we describe it? Nature, jealous of her gifts, has not been so prodigal of graceful ankles as the fashion of thirty years ago would have required. First one fine lady, then another, blushing for undue solidity where grace requires tapering form, let fall her dress to within an inch or two of the ground. They say that Queen Victoria, whose example has been so recently followed in another novelty, was one of the first to adopt the fashion of long dresses. But who shall dare to criticise a monarch's ankle? Whether that gracious potentate was or was not led by vulgar considerations of what her courtiers might think of her foot and the adjacent premises, it is undoubted that, with the courage of her character, she took an early lead in adopting the long skirt; whereupon all good Englishwomen followed suit; and the rest of the female world, brought to consider first the grace of the long skirt, and next its convenience for the bulk of Eve's daughters, frankly adopted it too.

Hoops succeeded at an interval of nearly twenty-five years, as a substitute for the load of heavy skirts which fashionable ladies felt bound to wear in order to produce the requisite expansion in the skirt. And last of all came the latest novelty, the Scarlet Petticoat.

Every body has read how Queen Victoria, sojourning at Balmoral, and grievously impeded in her mountain walks over the dewy heath and grass by the flapping of a bundle of wet skirts at her heels, was struck by the advantage which the short petticoat of the Highland girls gave them over the fashionables of the court; how she instantly resolved to borrow the convenient article of raiment; how Prince Albert, who, in the intervals of the severe labors which are known to engross his time, had once or twice, not oftener, noticed the petticoats of the aforesaid Highland girls, declared that the attire was good, not only in shape but in color; how the Queen ordered half a dozen red petticoats with stripes; how every body in England flew into red skirts directly; how the French took it up with the ardor and vivacity of their character; and finally, how Lady Gore Ouseley, as the lawful representative of Her Majesty in the United States, formally introduced the garment at Washington, and our ladies straightway pronounced the verdict that it would do. Every body knows all this. People may not know, however, that within the past few weeks over ten thousand of these scarlet petticoats have



COURT DRESS A.D. 1630.



PARIS FASHION, 1825.



THE SCARLET PETTICOAT.

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been made here and elsewhere. The finest are of an all-wool material, considerably thicker than flannel; the color is generally dark crimson, with black, green, or purple stripes; they are usually embroidered at the bottom. Others again are of cheaper material, with bayadere stripes, and sometimes stamped with a border of palm-leaves round the lower edge. The price varies from three to twelve dollars.

Every one who has watched the miseries of our New York ladies on a muddy day will wish well to the scarlet petticoat. It seems to be the only contrivance by which dirt and decency can both be regulated.