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POETICAL.

For the Memphis Appeal.

TO "ANNA P." ON HER MARRIAGE.

[illegible]

FASHION AND FIRE.

From the London Examiner.]

What a puzzling, teasing, mischievous, capricious and fugitive thing is fashion! How are we to catch or fix this Cynthia of the minute? By what chains can we bind, by what regulations control this ever-changing she Proteus, deceiving, misleading, annoying, and yet enslaving everybody? In the earliest of his public writings, the late Samuel Rogers, who remained one of her most servile worshipers at ninety, thus speaks of her:

"Whether she hightened with a pencil the vermillion of her cheeks, or clothed her limbs with a tight or flowing vest; whether she plaited her singlets in a knot, or suffered them to hang negligently on her shoulders—she was imitated by her votaries, who vied with each other in obsequiousness and reverence. All insisted on presenting their offerings—either their health, their fortunes or their integrity. Though numbers were disappointed, the assembly, receiving from supplies, preserved its grandeur and its brilliancy. At the entrance I observed Vanity, fantastically crowned with flowers and feathers, to whom the fickle deity committed the initiation of her votaries. All who rejected the solicitations of Vanity were finally pelted to scorn by Ridicule, whose darts never universally decade."

So far as their own but weak argument concerned, the male sex has shamed the weaker, if not altogether repudiate her authority. The times are gone when a [illegible] back shabbed, and repaired to [illegible] tailor in despair, on Saturday morning, [illegible] the lapped of his upper garment and [illegible] "Do you call this thing a coat?—or [illegible] when the Regent, having originated the [illegible] was for tight pantaloons, was caricatured [illegible] ring on a pair, with the explanation, [illegible] never wear [illegible] time when the fair sex were more inflexible [illegible] fashion, or horrified into [illegible] absurdities by her influence. The bonnets serving as magnificent purposes of an out-of-door covering for the head, and their hideous fake petticoats, endangering their lives, while simultaneously disarranging the neat and comfort of society. If this reign of crinoline is declined [illegible] the whole [illegible] for domestic and [illegible] and static arrangements must undergo a corresponding expansion. Our ordinary rooms and passages were never intended for such a dress. Carriage bulkers and railway stations, also, must look about them, and consider how this new order of female requirement must be met. Our very boats must come down to give female attendants proportional to the orbs of our women, and churches and chapels must vastly enlarge our churches, or resort to the parks and commons to find sphere for a moderate female congregation.

When Canning was asked why some poets were put up at one of the Park entrances, he replied, "Such very fat people want it." He would now say, such very full-blown ladies and there is a clever sketch in the shop window of a lady stopped by this impediment, and addressing her little dog with, "It's no use, Tiny, we must go round by the gate."

Things must be getting serious when country members allude to them at agricultural meetings. We see that Mr. Kerr Seymour observed with well-founded alarm the other day, in Dorsetshire, that a maid servant had actually appeared before the justice in petty sessions in crinoline, and claimed to be "[illegible]." Roland, the Great, "with ribbons in his shoes, could hardly have created a more lively sensation among the French courtiers, than was diffused by this steel-clad damsel among the squires.

One would have thought that the cost of so much superfluous drapery, pressing so large a surface to sweep the dusty mat, would have operated as a check. It may be true, as Rochefoucault suggests, that people commonly manage to find both time and money for their caprices, but when the caprice of fashion and the diseases take the form of enduring and very expensive habits, we wonder that husbands and fathers have allowed so completely ascendant to the commonplace argument: "My dear, you know we must dress like other people. You would not wish to see Emma or Fanny looking like frights or dowdies."

But all other considerations sink into insignificance before the awful domestic tragedies to which this preposterous costume has recently given rise. Only the other day the public were horror-stricken by the fate of two young women, the pride and hope of their circle, dying deaths of prolonged agony, and seriously endangering the lives of beloved relatives, because the foolish world will persevere in stretching a style of drapery which would seem expressly devised for the facility of taking fire. Hero, in sober and most melancholy seriousness, was the very description of catastrophe which a different self-sacrificing age would have ventured to bring about any sudden reform, however needed, in English habits or manners. The sufferers belonged to the highest rank, a circumstance which lended most universal attention to the terrible details of their fate. Is this warning not enough? Or must we wait till an English hall-room shall exhibit a scene similar to what occurred at the Tuileries in the time of the unhappy Charles the Sixth, who was driven mad by it, when all the dancers of the royal party were set on fire at once, and one managed to save himself by remembering that there was a tub of water in the vestibule, into which he jumped. At any events, this, while crinoline reigns, let there be tubs of water in the vestibules, or shower-bath and fire engines within easy reach.

It is curious to mark how insensible this fashion has grown upon us, and how soon the eye of taste becomes familiar with what, a short time previously, it would have revolted from and condemned without mercy. The author of the art of dress, (forming a part of Murray's railway reading,) obviously a highly accomplished gentleman, writes in 1822:

"We are inclined to think the female attire at the present day is, upon the whole, as favorable a state as the most rebounded advocate for what is called nature and simplicity could desire. It is a custom in which they can draw quickly, and nimbly, and plentifully, stoop easily, fall gracefully, and in short, perform all the duties of life without let or hindrance."

Will she repeat this judgment now? We feel quite sure that instead of inclining to, she will cordially unite with us in calling on all the rational portion of her sex to co-operate in abating what is rapidly becoming an intolerable nuisance. The extraordinary extent of the attired female has increased, is increasing, and must be diminished. Here is a resolution as sound as reason and as important in its consequences as the famous resolution of Dumbiedikes. We say that this is not a subject for journalists to revive the exploded nonsense about the dignity of history. We relate to marriage jurisdiction over everything that touches the morals, manners and feelings, or comes home to the pockets of mankind and of womankind. At the same time we frankly confess that we do not see our way to a sure and prompt remedy.

Peter the Great would have cut the matter short by ordering a tax so total by which he ordered the beards of every one who passed the gates of St. Petersburg to be trimmed to stated dimensions. A Peter might send commissioners into the squares and byways, beginning with Belgravia, Tyburnia and Mayfair, with instructions to pass every large looking lady they met, as a regulation hoop, or Marchioness over-dresses directed to pass the sticks broken off in roads through a ring. But even Napoleon the Third could not venture on such a stretch of power; consequently there are out of the question; and we are left to speculate on the chance of another whim of Queen Fashion, or fresh edict of the Empress of the French.

It was rumored about a year ago that the Empress tried the experiment by commending some of the handsomest women of her set to leave off their stiffest clothes for an evening, and that a cry of quelles horreurs saluted the boys as they entered. This, if true, proves merely the force of habit.

Madame Tallien would have been saluted with the same cry if she had entered with her neck and shoulders decently veiled, or her ankles hidden by a dress reaching to the floor; but she bore in mind that the present is to all intents and purposes a leveling system, by which the revived possession of the full form not rounded and graceful is ascribed to the angular, and the scraggy and the lean.

The female pen already quoted regularly remarks, that "though Mary Queen of Scots sticks to the story that the counters of Salisbury put on a negligent attire in order to avert the attentions of Edward the Third, yet, if the truth were known, we should be shocked at the liberties of the court." That, with ribbons in her shoes, could hardly have created a more lively sensation among the French courtiers, than was diffused by this steel-clad damsel among the squires.

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