

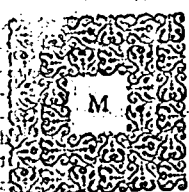
MARYLAND GAZETTE

Containing the freshest Advices, Foreign and Domestic.

TUESDAY, February 17, 1747.

From the American Magazine, Novemb. 1746.

HISTORY OF FEMALE DRESS.



Y Business To day is chiefly with the Ladies, on whose Dress I intend to treat with the same Delicacy and Tenderness, as I should use, in my approach to their pretty Persons.

In remarking on the antient Female Dress, it is difficult to carry the retrospect far back, without setting the Prize Inheritors in a Light that, at this Time of Day, would not be esteemed decent. I own, I am not clear to whom we were first indebted for regular Cloathing; it is most probable to the Romans; but the Dress most in Vogue for some Centuries, was that wore by our Saxon Ancestors: It consisted of a lmp Stay, Jump, or Bouite, a kind of Mantle thrown over the Head and Shoulders, and a light Petticoat, reaching somewhat lower down than the Calf of the Leg; the Furniture of the Feet and Legs compos'd of dress'd Skins, open before, and drawn together with Lacing, perhaps an Imitation of the Roman Buskin, and wore indifferently by both Sexes. In the 6th Century, by the Address of the Great King Alfred, Peace, and regular Government became establish'd; and, in Consequence thereof, Commerce began to extend itself, and Arts and Sciences to flourish. As Men grew rich and ingenious, something new always presented, wherewith to decorate and oblige the Ladies: And they, in return of Gratitude to their generous Benefactors, became studious how to apply their Gifts, so as might at once render themselves more amiable, and express their Regard for the kind Donors. This naturally enough produc'd an Attention to Drefs; and we accordingly find, that between this and the Norman Conquest, the Ladies were very richly ornamented. From the Norman Conquest, down to the Beginning of the 17th Century, the general Manner of the Ladies Drefs was much the same; and, as now, particularly affecting Shape; which was very distinctly shewn at their Waists and Arms, by their Garments being fitted thereto, much in the same Manner as our modern riding Habits; a Linen Ruff about their Necks, that just left expos'd so much of their Bosoms, as might give Opportunity to decorate them with a Kind of Pearl Solitaire. Their Heads were dress'd with a back Coif, the Hair comb'd up full before, and a Steeple Hat finish'd the pretty Pyramid. I am in a good deal of doubt, whether the Drefs essentially alter'd till the Restoration, notwithstanding the Portraits of Rubens and Vandike; who, I am apt to think, from various Circumstances, rather employ'd their fine Imaginations to render our Females perfectly amiable, than to paint them in the Fashion of the Age; since several cotemporary Women of Fashion, painted by meaner Hands, appear in the old Garb. And I guess, that such Painters who wanted Fancy, naturally drew after the Object that presented; and thence concluded, that Vandike, especially, has shewn us how Women ought to be dress'd to the best Advantage; meaner Hands, how they were dress'd. However that be, there is a certain Grace and Propriety in Vandike's Drapery, that in real Drefs merits Imitation; while some Part of the real Drefs is justly enough exploded, as wanting the Advantage both of Grace and Propriety. The Ruff in particular, which was not only awkward, but likewise buried under it a very graceful Part of a fine Lady; and which she might expose without Censure.

At the Restoration this Thought struck the Female Beauties, and they imitated every Thing that was fine in Vandike's Drapery; and had they stopp'd there, would have handed down to us

all that's graceful in Drefs: But thro' a Kind of Libertinism, peculiar to the Times, they degenerated by Degrees into palpable Indecency; which held as long as that Turn of Thinking was admird by the Men, which is never long. One Excess naturally enough produces another; from being too loose and expos'd, they became too stiff and confin'd: Indecency occasion'd their losing Sight of Vandike's Model, and then Shame, of Decency; and having thenceforward no certain Rule to dress by, it was mere Accident for some Time how they dress'd.

At the Revolution a War commenc'd with France; and that happening not much to our Advantage, the French Ladies took it into their Heads to bully the English Ladies in their Drefs; as much as the French Armies did ours in the Field; and in the Pride of their Hearts, elevated themselves to an exalted Magnitude, not only by the Help of high-heeled Shoes, but also by erecting little Castles on the Tops of their Heads; by this Means, raising themselves from, perhaps, 4 Feet 8 Inches, to an Equality with the tallest Grenadier in their Army. Advices hereof coming by the Way of Holland, immediately the British Ladies fondled to Arms, and in little more than a Month's Time became a Match for the Gauls. In this hostile State they continued, till the Peace put an End to the Contest; when, by mutual Consent, they shunk on both Sides into their natural Stature.

On resuming the War under Queen Ann, the sprightly Gauls set their little Wits to Work again, and invented a wonderful Machine, commonly call'd a Hoop Petticoat. In this fine Scheme they had more Views than one; they had compar'd their own Climate and Constitution with that of the British; and finding both warmer, they naturally enough concluded, that would only be pleasingly cool to them, which would perhaps give the British Ladies the Rheumatism; and that if they once got them off their Legs, they should have them at Advantage: Besides, they had been inform'd, tho' falsely, that the British Ladies had not good Legs, and then, at all Events, this Scheme would expose them. With these pernicious Views, they set themselves to work, and form'd a Rotund, of near 7 Yards about, and sent the Pattern over by the Sussex Smugglers, with an Intent that it should be seiz'd, and expos'd to public View; which happen'd accordingly, and made its first Appearance at a great Man's House on that Coast; whose Lady claim'd it as her peculiar Property. In it the first struck at Court, while she Learned in Drefs call, a bold Stroke; and was thereupon constituted General of the British Ladies during the War. Upon the Whole, this Invention did not answer; the Ladies suffer'd little the first Winter; but after that, were so thoroughly harden'd, that they improv'd upon the Contrivers; by adding near two Yards to its Extension; and the Duke of Marlborough having, about the same Time, beat the French, the Gallant Ladies dropt their Pretensions, and left the British Modesties of the Field; the Tokens wherof are wore in Triumph to this Day, having out-last'd the Colours in Westminster-Hall, and almost that great General's Glory. The Peace of Utrecht brought with it a Cessation between the contending Heroines, and a seeming Tranquility ensued, which continued many Years. At length the gay, restless Gauls, began to practice again; and their Scheme now was, to cover their own Shame at the Expence of the innocent British: A wim young Thing had set his Counters none of the best Examples; and of a sudden the Ladies of Quality began to look a little out of Shape. To avoid this Change being readily perceived, they invented a loose Drefs, and call'd it a Robe à la Courtoise; a Suit which was perceived at the same Time, that to give it a modish Name, foreign Courts would prevent its being taken as particular; and