

Chapter 7. Miscellaneous-Historical.

Happier is our Professor, and more purely scientific and historic, when he reaches the Middle Ages in Europe, and down to the end of the Seventeenth Century; the true era of extravagance in Costume. It is here that the Antiquary and Student of Modes comes upon his richest harvest. Fantastic garbs, begging all fancy of a Teniers or a Callot, succeed each other, like monster devouring monster in a Dream. The whole too in brief authentic strokes, and touched not seldom with that breath of genius which makes even old raiment live. Indeed, so learned, precise, graphical, and every way interesting have we found these Chapters, that it may be thrown out as a pertinent question for parties concerned, Whether or not a good English Translation thereof might henceforth be profitably incorporated with Mr. Merrick's valuable Work *On Ancient Armor*? Take, by way of example, the following sketch; as authority for which Paulinus's *Zeitkurzende Lust* (ii. 678) is, with seeming confidence, referred to:

"Did we behold the German fashionable dress of the Fifteenth Century, we might smile; as perhaps those bygone Germans, were they to rise again, and see our haberdashery, would cross themselves, and invoke the Virgin. But happily no bygone German, or man, rises again; thus the Present is not needlessly trammelled with the Past; and only grows out of it, like a Tree, whose roots are not intertangled with its branches, but lie peaceably underground. Nay it is very mournful, yet not useless, to see and know, how the Greatest and Dearest, in a short while, would find his place quite filled up here, and no room for him; the very Napoleon, the very Byron, in some seven years, has become obsolete, and were now a foreigner to his Europe. Thus is the Law of Progress secured; and in Clothes, as in all other external things whatsoever, no fashion will continue.

"Of the military classes in those old times, whose buff-belts, complicated chains and gorgets, huge churn-boots, and other riding and fighting gear have been bepainted in modern Romance, till the whole has acquired somewhat of a sign-post character,—I shall here say nothing: the civil and pacific classes, less touched upon, are wonderful enough for us.

"Rich men, I find, have *Teusinke* [a perhaps untranslatable article]; also a silver girdle, whereat hang little bells; so that when a man walks, it is with continual jingling. Some few, of musical turn, have a whole chime of bells (*Glockenspiel*) fastened there; which, especially in sudden whirls, and the other accidents of walking, has a grateful effect. Observe too how fond they are of peaks, and Gothic-arch intersections. The male world wears peaked caps, an ell long, which hang bobbing over the side (*schief*): their shoes are peaked in front, also to the length of an ell, and laced on the side with tags; even the wooden shoes have their ell-long noses: some also clap bells on the peak. Further, according to my authority, the men have breeches without seat (*ohne Gesass*): these they fasten peakwise to their shirts; and the long round doublet must overlap them.

"Rich maidens, again, flit abroad in gowns scolloped out behind and before, so that back and breast are almost bare. Wives of quality, on the other hand, have train-gowns four or five ells in length; which trains there are boys to carry. Brave Cleopatras, sailing in their silk-cloth Galley, with a Cupid for steersman! Consider their welts, a handbreadth thick, which waver round them by way of hem; the long flood of silver buttons, or rather silver shells, from throat to shoe, wherewith these same welt-gowns are buttoned. The maidens have bound silver snoods about their hair, with gold spangles, and pendent flames (*Flammen*), that is, sparkling hair-drops: but of their mother's head-gear who shall speak? Neither in love of grace is comfort forgotten. In winter weather you behold the whole fair

creation (that can afford it) in long mantles, with skirts wide below, and, for hem, not one but two sufficient hand-broad welts; all ending atop in a thick well-starched Ruff, some twenty inches broad: these are their Ruff-mantles (*Kragenmantel*).

"As yet among the womankind hoop-petticoats are not; but the men have doublets of fustian, under which lie multiple ruffs of cloth, pasted together with batter (*mit Teig zusammengekleistert*), which create protuberance enough. Thus do the two sexes vie with each other in the art of Decoration; and as usual the stronger carries it."

Our Professor, whether he have humor himself or not, manifests a certain feeling of the Ludicrous, a sly observance of it which, could emotion of any kind be confidently predicated of so still a man, we might call a real love. None of those bell-girdles, bushel-breeches, counted shoes, or other the like phenomena, of which the History of Dress offers so many, escape him: more especially the mischances, or striking adventures, incident to the wearers of such, are noticed with due fidelity. Sir Walter Raleigh's fine mantle, which he spread in the mud under Queen Elizabeth's feet, appears to provoke little enthusiasm in him; he merely asks, Whether at that period the Maiden Queen "was red-painted on the nose, and white-painted on the cheeks, as her tire-women, when from spleen and wrinkles she would no longer look in any glass, were wont to serve her"? We can answer that Sir Walter knew well what he was doing, and had the Maiden Queen been stuffed parchment dyed in verdigris, would have done the same.

Thus too, treating of those enormous habiliments, that were not only slashed and gallooned, but artificially swollen out on the broader parts of the body, by introduction of Bran,—our Professor fails not to comment on that luckless Courtier, who having seated himself on a chair with some projecting nail on it, and therefrom rising, to pay his *devoir* on the entrance of Majesty, instantaneously emitted several pecks of dry wheat-dust: and stood there diminished to a spindle, his galloons and slashes dangling sorrowful and flabby round him. Whereupon the Professor publishes this reflection:—

"By what strange chances do we live in History? Erostratus by a torch; Milo by a bullock; Henry Darnley, an unfledged booby and bustard, by his limbs; most Kings and Queens by being born under such and such a bed-tester; Boileau Despreaux (according to Helvetius) by the peck of a turkey; and this ill-starred individual by a rent in his breeches,—for no Memoirist of Kaiser Otto's Court omits him. Vain was the prayer of Themistocles for a talent of Forgetting: my Friends, yield cheerfully to Destiny, and read since it is written."—Has Teufelsdröckh, to be put in mind that, nearly related to the impossible talent of Forgetting, stands that talent of Silence, which even travelling Englishmen manifest?

"The simplest costume," observes our Professor, "which I anywhere find alluded to in History, is that used as regimental, by Bolivar's Cavalry, in the late Colombian wars. A square Blanket, twelve feet in diagonal, is provided (some were wont to cut off the corners, and make it circular): in the centre a slit is effected eighteen inches long; through this the mother-naked Trooper introduces his head and neck; and so rides shielded from all weather, and in battle from many strokes (for he rolls it about his left arm); and not only dressed, but harnessed and draped."

With which picture of a State of Nature, affecting by its singularity, and Old-Roman contempt of the superfluous, we shall quit this part of our subject.

