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IN VANITY FAIR:
A TALE OF
FROCKS AND
FEMININITY

Eleanor Brainerd
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Eleanor Hoyt Brainerd In Vanity Fair: A Tale of Frocks and Femininity

PREFACE

The Parisienne, in her subtler phases, is a theme for a feminist of genius; and this little book does not venture upon the psychological deep seas.

Grave issues are tangled in the game of fashion-making; but the world through which My Lady of the Chiffons dances lightly to gay music reeks of frivolity, and the story of the fashionable Parisienne and of the haunts in which she obtains and displays her incomparable frocks must needs be a story of folly and extravagance, best told, perhaps, by snap-shots of the inner courts of Vanity Fair.

The Author.

CHAPTER I

FROCKS AND FEMININITY

Clothes and the woman we sing! Given the themes, Paris is obviously the only appropriate setting. Nowhere else do the kindred cults of frocks and femininity kindle such ardent devotion. Nowhere else are women so enthusiastically decorative. There are women more beautiful than the Parisiennes, there are women who spend as much money upon their clothes. Pouf! What is beauty unadorned? What is beauty adorned – provided it is not chic.

That crisp little monosyllable is sadly abused by our Anglo-Saxon saleswomen, but it is a master word for all that, a great word holding in solution the quintessence of things Parisian. It means a subtle something before which mere beauty is humble, and mere luxury is banal. It means coquetry, audacity, charm. It means a thing evanescent, impalpable, unmistakable, absurd, adorable, a thing deliciously feminine, a thing essentially of the world worldly.

That the word should be a French word with no exact equivalent in another tongue is as it should be. The Parisienne is the true "femme chic." She has the secret and she realizes its value, makes a fetich of it, devotes herself to it with a zeal that could flourish nowhere outside of Paris. There are

charming women all over the world, but nowhere is femininity so conscientiously occupied in being charming as it is in Paris.

Your true Parisienne begins her creed with, "I believe in coquetry"; and by coquetry she means not merely embryonic flirtation, but all that goes to make sophisticated charm. She is coquette from her cradle to her grave, from her first communion frock to her last cap and shawl. She does not depend upon her natural advantages, she is not unconscious, not simple. She is deliberately, insistently charming, and to gain that end she shows the infinite capacity for taking trouble which amounts to genius. The ill-natured call the result artificiality, and they are right; but the fine art of the artificiality is a thing to conjure with, and through its aid the Frenchwoman retains her charm long after youth and its bloom are fled. Wit wears better than complexion, and tact outlasts figure. Incidentally, much may be done to patch up complexion and figure if wit and tact are on hand to carry off the counterfeit.

To be sure there is something a trifle depressing about the faded ghosts of Parisian youth, the old ladies of Paris who refuse to admit defeat, and, painted, bejewelled, vivacious, defy the years.

Yes, there's a sadness in the struggle, a gentle melancholy such as serves poets for rondels and villanelles, but they are not sad, themselves, those old ladies of Paris. Bless your heart, no! They are gay, excessively gay. They flutter their fans and toss their curled heads and scatter wrinkled smiles and unwrinkled

bon mots, and succeed, after a fashion, in their aim; for they are delightful, these faded, worldly belles. They keep their youthful hearts, their keen wits, their absorbing interest in men and things. They have not forgotten how to be amusing; and, under their cleverly applied rouge and powder and false hair and general artificiality, they are still sympathetic, still witty, still wise. Not one's ideal of placid old age, not, perhaps, the grandmothers one would choose for the family tree, but delightful companions still; coquettes who have outlived their youth but not their finesse.

Perhaps the cult of coquetry which is the pervasive spirit of French society would be impossible outside the atmosphere in which it flourishes. It is a part of Parisian tradition, it colours Parisian values, determines Parisian standards. Insensibly the woman who lives in Paris surrenders to this spirit though she may have come of Puritan stock or of Roundhead ancestry. It is in the air of Paris. If one cannot breathe the air and assimilate the germs, one departs. That is all. One returns to Boston or Kansas City or Glasgow or Tewkesbury. Doubtless those women who flee from the insidious assault lead lives more estimable than those who succumb, but they do not learn the gentle art of coquetry in its Parisian form. So much the better for the quietude of Boston and Kansas City and Glasgow and Tewkesbury.

It is probable, highly probable, that the foreigner who recklessly remains in Paris and invites the spirit of the place will show her inevitable lapse from Puritanical grace first in her underwear. French lingerie is the sign and symbol of French

femininity. It is the refinement of luxury, the quintessence of coquetry.

To wear a fortune in a gown is something, but to wear a fortune in lace and handwork and cobweb linen hidden away under a frock demurely simple is more, and the Parisienne adores "le dessous." Jewels she may lack – though not for want of conscientious effort to obtain them – but dainty petticoats she will have, and, having them, she will wear them, and wearing them, she will show them. Why not contribute to the sum of humanity's simple joys?

An old lady from a little Missouri town strayed from a Cook's party one day, at the entrance to the Louvre; and, some hours later, a young countrywoman of hers found her occupying one of the Champs Elysées chairs and watching with fearful joy the stream of French womanhood picking its way along walks still wet from an all-night rain.

The old lady clutched the arm of her fellow American and turned a puzzled face away from the passing show.

"My dear, just look at those petticoats and stockings!" she gasped. "The creatures haven't any idea of hiding them. I've been watching for two mortal hours and there hasn't been a let-up yet. Some are finer than others, that's all. But they're all showy, and every single woman has her dress tucked up so you can't miss them. When I saw the first ones I thought I'd struck the French women you read about, – the ones who aren't proper, you know, and I was so interested; but then they kept coming so steadily

that I got all mixed up. Hundreds have gone by, all holding their skirts like that and every one of them swishing silk or lace ruffles and showing silk stockings, – and it isn't humanly possible, even in Paris, that they're all bad, now is it?"

Bad? Not the least in the world. They were merely French. The petticoat of Pleasantville, Missouri, and the petticoat of Paris are two separate and distinct things, and the old lady had vaguely grasped an important fact not down upon the Cook's party schedule of information. The Parisienne is Paris. Incidentally there are picture galleries and museums.

The amount of money spent on the "dessous" by a Parisian woman of fashion is madly extravagant and entirely characteristic. It is but a detail of that religion of luxury whose high priests centre in the Rue de la Paix. The average Frenchwoman has a thrifty and frugal side, but the extravagant Frenchwoman spends her money with a light-hearted gaiety and a maximum of picturesque effect. The most prodigal patrons of the great dressmakers and jewellers in the Rue de la Paix are Americans, but the most brilliant figures in the fashionable Parisian world are French. The born Parisienne is the supreme coquette. She wears her clothes with an incomparable air. There is a touch of the actress in her, and in the matter of feminine fashion art can give points to nature, so the Frenchwoman wears with artfully artless grace and naturalness creations whose audacity would reduce a woman of any other nationality to an awkward self-consciousness that would ruin the effectiveness of

the costume.

Even could one conceive of all the great French dressmakers transplanted to another land, only in Paris could the modes be successfully launched, for only there can monsieur find the women who are ready and able to carry off triumphantly even the most revolutionary of creations, who have the courage and confidence to exploit models strikingly novel – always provided those models have beauty and cachet to commend them. It is the Parisienne, too, who is willing to buy the most extravagantly fragile and perishable of frocks and who will wear them regardless of consequences; who will, moreover, smile most cheerfully when, having fulfilled its mission, the costly frock is crushed, drabbled, ruined.

"It had *un succès fou*, M'sieu!" she says blithely to the maker when she sees him next. That is quite enough. A great success on one occasion justifies any extravagance, and why allow a spoiled frock to obscure an agreeable memory?

King Alfonso attended one of the famous race meetings near Paris one day last summer, and all the smart Parisian world turned out to do him honour. The display of frocks and millinery was a notable one. The pesage was crowded with women in the airiest and most elaborate of summer toilettes and, suddenly, the heavens opened and a torrent of rain poured down. Such a scurrying and twittering; such little moans and shrieks; such laughter and jesting! Bad temper? Not a bit of it. Things were quite bad enough without losing one's temper. So they chatted

and joked and achieved bon mots that almost reconciled them to the facts that their rouge was streaked and their plumes were drabbled and their curls were straggling and their frocks were limp. The sun came out and the demoralized toilettes emerged from under cover, mere wrecks of their former beauty; but the wearers carried the situation off with a good-natured vivacity to which no other women would have been equal. The afternoon was a particularly gay one, and the prevailing philosophy was voiced by one little countess who was heard to say to a friend as they stood waiting for their automobiles:

"The frocks are spoiled, absolutely spoiled. C'est dommage, – but, ma chère, what an opportunity for the petticoats and the feet, n'est-ce pas? Me, – I found much consolation in the real lace in my white stockings and in my new shoe buckles, – Va! One sees, every day, the frocks. To-day, for the first time, I know intimately the ankles of all my friends."

Possibly the countess gave her maid a bad quarter hour after she reached home; but for the benefit of the public she stood there, insouciant, smiling, debonair, with her chiffon frock clinging forlornly to her shapely little figure, with her tulle hat gummed to a disarranged coiffure and its plumes drooping like funeral emblems over her left ear, but with her spirits intact. Not for nothing did she have some of the best blood of France in her veins. It is sporting blood, – that best blood of France.

Concerning the morals of French womankind, the serious may write, – and the less they know about Paris – provided they are

Anglo-Saxon – the more fluently they will write; for intimate acquaintance with Parisian life and sentiment is sadly prejudicial to orthodox Anglo-Saxon standards, and it is difficult to be severe with the Parisienne if one knows her. One disapproves of her, in certain of her phases, perhaps, but one learns the tolerant shoulder shrug of her nation. She is so very amusing, and Paris is, first of all, "le monde où l'on s'amuse."

One may like Paris or not. One may choose to live in Paris or to live elsewhere, but one thing the fair-minded will all admit. This capital city of the kingdom of Vanity Fair is gay. The Parisians have reduced gaiety to a science, luxury to an art. There may be tragedy behind the curtain; but, before the public, life goes to a merry tune. It is quite possible that smart society, the world over, is as rotten as our novelists, dramatists, and preachers would have us believe; but, at least, in Paris it is not dull. Where American smart society is spectacular, French smart society is chic. Even in the half world the distinction holds. The demi-mondaine of New York – or the nearest approach to the demi-mondaine which New York furnishes, for our standards are uncompromising and we recognize no "half world" – is vulgar. The demi-mondaine of Paris is – one can but have recourse once more to that untranslatable comprehensive word "chic."

Immorality, we are solemnly assured, is none the less immoral because it is not banal. Probably it is more deplorable in proportion as it takes on attractiveness; but we are not moralizing, merely stating facts, and the fascination of the great Parisian

demi-mondaine is a well-established fact.

To begin with, she is the best dressed woman in the world. Any of the famous dressmakers of Paris, who are the world's arbiters of fashion, will tell you that. She has the money and the taste, and with her, even more than with the Parisienne of the beau monde, being charming is a metier. She supplements natural attractions with every resource of art. She is, as a rule, clever, tactful, witty. Often she is brilliant, and the nearest approach to the famous salons of old France are to be found to-day in the homes of certain Parisiennes who are frankly demi-mondaine or dwell in that middle world twixt "beau" and "demi" where, sometimes, the name "artiste" casts a broad mantle of charity over irregularity of life. There are countesses and princesses of the blood who play at salon making in Paris, and who would be in the seventh heaven could they once call under their roofs the famous men who flock to certain salons where mesdames of the beau monde may not follow. Great litterateurs, painters, sculptors, musicians, scientists gather at certain informal evenings, certain famous little dinners. And mark you, everything here is comme il faut – yes, indeed. Let the student of morals who associates the phrase demi-mondaine only with Tenderloin orgies revise his vocabulary. Orgies of the familiar kind he can find in Paris. They are easily found; but he will have considerable difficulty in gaining admittance to the salon of the great artiste whose life history has been, to put it mildly, unconventional, or to the salon of the famous demi-

mondaine. Once admitted, he will need wit and worldly wisdom to hold his own. One hears of little dinners where the quantity of liquor drunk falls far below Tenderloin standards, but where the poet of the moment composes sonnets to his hostess's eyebrow; where the famous composer replies to Madame's "A new song, mon chère. I must have a song all my own," by sitting down at the piano and working out a chanson which all Paris will be whistling a few months later; where the petted tenor from the Opera sings street ballads, and the great diplomat chats international scandal, and the successful artist and feminist sketches portraits of his hostess upon the fly-leaf of the autograph copy of the academician's book which the author has just presented to her.

Yes; one hears of those happenings in the little house at Neuilly or in the mansion on the Boulevard Malesherbes, or wherever the rendezvous may be, and one struggles vainly to adjust one's vision to the Parisian perspective to understand the Parisian attitude toward life. It is disturbing to find impropriety so devoid of the lurid light in which melodrama pictures it. One's moral vertebra softens in Paris.

But there are Parisiennes and Parisiennes. There is the aristocrat of the St. Germain – and even aristocratic virtue is not dull in Paris. There is the wife of the millionaire tradesman. There are the women folk of the great banking house. There are the ladies of the diplomatic circle, there are exiled queens and resident grand duchesses. There are the Americans. There are the artistes. There are the demi-mondaines, the cocottes. And there

is Mimi. She is not the worst of the group, this unimportant little Mimi, not the worst, and by no means the least coquette; but she is not a bird of fine feathers and does not belong in our story.

The great lady of Paris is grande dame to her finger-tips, whether she nurses the traditions of the old régime in her exclusive salon in the Faubourg St. Germain or follows after such new gods as "le sport" and broadens her visiting list to include the trades and arts, – provided always that the trade and the art have paid well enough to lift tradesman and artist above their metiers. France loves genius, but for social success, in Paris, genius is not enough.

One must have money, wit, and tact to succeed in smart French society without the prestige of aristocratic birth. If one has the birth in addition, so much the better.

There are salons to which only those to the nobility born are eligible, but they are few, and modern French society is prone to go where it will be most skilfully amused, where it will find the most luxury, the greatest originality, the most volatile gaiety. The receptions of the Duchesse de Rohan are impressive, her invitations are in the nature of patents of nobility, but the Comtesse Pillet-Will's extravagantly original fêtes are more popular, and the average Parisian élégante would rather go ballooning with the exceedingly modern young Duchesse d'Uzes than talk politics in the salon of the Comtesse Jean de Castellane or listen to the excellent music which the Comtesse de Bearn provides for her guests. Not that one objects to politics and music.

Music is "très chic" as furnished in the salons of the Comtesse de Bearn, the Marquise de Castrone, the Vicomtesse de Tredern, and the other society leaders who are noted for this especial variety of entertainment; and, though the great political salon is a thing of yesteryear, the Parisienne always takes an interest in politics. It is a game, and she adores games, especially games in which men are the counters. She is a born intrigante, and here is a field for legitimate intrigue. Moreover, many men are devoted to politics, and is not sympathy the corner-stone of the foundation of that power over men which is the breath of the Frenchwoman's nostrils?

So, many of the fair Parisiennes play at politics, but few play so charmingly as does the Comtesse Jean. Comtesse Boni de Castellane, too, has political pretensions, and shows a devotion to the royalist cause all the more vehement because grafted upon democratic birth and training; but it is when they pay forty thousand dollars for a week-end house party that the Boni de Castellanes loom large upon the Parisian horizon. Their salon is not epoch-making.

Parisian society dabbles in politics, music, art, spiritualism, amateur theatricals, and a host of other things, but it plunges bodily into racing. The Jockey Club of France, which controls the turf in France, is a gentleman's club, and its members are, with the exception of a few rich bourgeois, representatives of the most aristocratic houses of France. The Duc de Noailles, the Duc de Dondeauville, Prince d'Arenberg, Duc de Fezensac, Comte

Pillet-Will, Vicomte d'Harcourt and a host of other men as well known are on the list of membership, and it is natural enough that the great racing events near Paris should bring out the flower of Parisian society as well as the heterogeneous crowds common to race tracks.

"Le sport," too, imported from England and conscientiously fostered for a long time before it showed signs of taking firm root in French soil, is now a conspicuous feature of Parisian social life; and golf clubs, tennis clubs, polo clubs, etc., are the chic rendezvous even for that large percentage of Parisian society which, for all its vivacity, would not, under any suasion, lend itself to active exercise. One does not look well when one exercises too violently, and costumes suitable for golf and tennis are not nearly as fascinating as those that may be worn by lookers-on. Therefore, since looking one's best is a sacred duty, and since attractive frock wearing is the Parisienne's religion, Madame, as a rule, prefers to look on. She has sporting blood, but, as we have already said, she is, before all else, "coquette."

CHAPTER II

THE TYRANTS OF THE RUE DE LA PAIX

If one would write of Vanity Fair, one must write of the Rue de la Paix and the Place Vendôme; for the faithful worshippers of the vanities turn toward that quarter of Paris as devoutly as a Mohammedan toward Mecca. There the high priests of Fashion hold sway, and women the world over acknowledge with reverent salaams of spirit that there is no fashion but Paris fashion, though ideas as to Fashion's true prophets may differ.

Let no one speak lightly of the French frock. It has been a world power, and its story, if adequately written, would be a most absorbing and comprehensive one. Drama of all kinds has clung round its frills and furbelows. Revelations philosophical, historical, sociological, lurk in its shimmering folds. Men have died for it, women have sold youth and honour, husband, child, and lover, for it. It is Fashion's supreme expression, and, on the altar of Fashion all things precious have, first and last, been offered up.

Even the French scarcely realize the vital issues involved in the making of the Fashions, but they, at least, approach the matter with becoming gravity. Americans are said to be, next to the French, the best dressed women in the world; but there is a

certain lamentable levity in the American attitude toward dress, while the French take everything pertaining to clothes seriously. One need only read a page from one of the best French fashion journals to grasp the national point of view.

Here is no mere curt chronicle of the modes. The writer's rhapsodies put our spring poets to shame. Called upon to describe a creation in pink taffeta, he dips his pen in May morning dew and invokes the muses. He soars upon the viewless wings of poesy, and, soaring, sings impassioned chants of praise; he culls his similes from all the realm of beauty, his adjectives glow with fervour, he quotes from the classics, he draws upon history and fable, he winds up with a fervid apostrophe to fair woman, – and not one of his French readers smiles. They see no extravagance in his periods. The pink taffeta was from Paquin. Upon what shrine could flowery tributes more fittingly be laid?

The artists of the French fashion journals approach their work in the same spirit. One uses the word artist advisedly, for they are really artists, those men who picture modish femininity for the Parisian fashion journals of the highest class. On this side of the water, fashion illustrators, with one or two exceptions, attempt nothing more than an accurate reproduction of the details of frock or wrap or hat. There their whole duty ends, and as for producing a clever and charming drawing, – perish the thought! The artist who can do that scorns fashion work; or, if he condescends to it, ranks it with his advertisements for soup or sapolio, and refuses to honour the pot boilers with his signature.

"They do these things better in France." There, a man may have studied seriously, may have seen his pictures given place on salon walls, and yet may take pride in being one of the foremost fashion illustrators in France. For example, there is Fournery. He is, perhaps, the most popular of the French fashion artists, he commands large prices, has more orders than he can fill, is independent to the last degree – and he loves the work, puts into it the best of the skill that he has acquired through earnest study, the skill that has won him a place in the salon, when he has taken time from his serious fashion work for such frivolous side issues.

He is a feminist, this artist. Everything that goes to make up feminine coquetry and charm interests him. He is willing to draw a picture of a fashionable frock, for the joy of drawing the woman who can successfully wear it. The "femme chic" is his chosen theme. If editors pay him large sums for gowning his women in certain costumes, so much the better.

A visit to Fournery and a study of his methods would suggest a new point of view to the American artist who thinks anything will do for a fashion sketch.

One finds a delightful studio, a vivacious and enthusiastic young man, – French to his finger-tips.

"You want to know how I do my work? A la bonheur! It is quite simple, my method. I draw first the nude figure, – from life, bien entendu. One must have the perfect figure before one can display the frock at its best, n'est-ce pas? A wooden woman cannot show off a beautiful gown. The wearer must be

graceful, supple, svelte, chic. When one has the woman one adjusts her lingerie. One corsets her – but why not? The corset is an abomination perhaps, but it is worn, and there are corsets and corsets. Since women must wear corsets, let them wear good ones. The fashionable figure is not that of the Venus de Milo, but what would you? It is the fashionable figure. The fashionable gown is made to go over it. Voilà! My woman must be perfectly corsetted upon the accepted lines, but with as little violence as possible to nature's grace. Then the gown! One fits it to the figure, one makes it cling where it should cling, flare where it should flare, bring the wearer's best points into view, as the wearer exhibits the best points of the frock. One introduces an interesting background. It must be cleverly drawn, that background, a line here, a line there, nothing to distract the eye from the figure but an appropriate setting, – a glimpse of the pesage at Auteuil, the terrace at Monte Carlo, a corner of the Café de Paris, a vista on the Avenue des Acacias. – There you have it, Madame, my fashion picture. Elle est gentille, n'est-ce pas, cette petite femme chic?"

She is most assuredly "gentille." So is the "femme chic" as Drian pictures her, – Drian the youthful, who might stand at the head of our conscientiously monotonous portrayers of pretty women, were he working in New York instead of Paris. Many of those same American exponents of feminine types draw badly enough to shock the clever young Frenchman, but they would marvel at his pride in his fashion work, – for he is proud. He

recognizes the importance of his metier.

It is this popular attitude toward things sartorial that has made Paris the centre of the dressmaking world. The great dressmaker may be born anywhere, but even a sartorial genius, born to dressmaking as the sparks fly upward, will not come into his artistic heritage outside of Paris. Your artistic temperament must have its sympathetic environment, and only in Paris is the artist dressmaker ranked with the immortals, only in Paris is dressmaking classed among the fine arts. Worth, the great, blushed unseen in the dark unfathomed caves of Birmingham; Beer wasted his sweetness on the desert air of Berlin; the Callot Sisters are from Provence and owe to the land of Tartarin their bold originality of invention; the Maison Drecol, famous in Paris and the foundation of Viennese fashion, was established by a Madame Wagner from Amsterdam. Once rooted in Parisian soil, these insignificant ones waxed great and famous, and their history is the history of fully two thirds of the well-known Paris dressmakers.

They are the truly great men of France, those famous dressmakers. Politicians, statesmen, generals, writers, musicians, strut across the public stage and play their rôles; but Paris could do without them. Given a grand cataclysm, and a possibility of saving some one famous man for the Republic, Paris would unhesitatingly rescue Paquin.

There has been a revolution in the type of the illustrious ones, during the last decade. Dressmaking has its Champs de Mars;

but, in its case, the new men have almost driven the old salon to the wall.

Paris to-day has two distinct schools of great dressmakers, the new and the old, but the survivors of the old original type are few and far between. In the old days the phrase "creative genius" was not amiss when applied to the heads of the big French dressmaking establishments. To-day these great men are business men, but the men of the old school were artists, had creative talent – in a fashion sense – and cultivated that talent.

Walles, an Englishman by birth, was an extreme example of this attitude on the part of the dressmaker toward his art, though his name is not so well known to the general public as many others. He was an artist *enragé*, a genius in colour combination and line. He was an avid student of colour, line, values, in the art galleries; he spent day after day in the woods noting the colour combinations of the autumn leaves; he drew upon flower and bird and insect and cloud for inspiration, and he achieved great results; but he had the ill-balanced temperament of genius and his career was brief.

Madame Roderigues, a Portuguese – and an exception to the rule that no great dressmaking talent has come from Spain, Portugal, or Italy – was a phenomenal artist of this same type, but ill health interfered with her spectacular success.

Other dressmakers, not such extremists as these two, ranked with the artist group, but Worth was practically the last of the old masters of dress.

The new men are of a different class. The work turned out from their ateliers is as good as that of their predecessors, but it is produced by different methods. The head of the establishment to-day is, first of all, a business man of extraordinary ability. He is also a man of phenomenally good taste – but he is not a creative genius. He does not lie awake wrestling with embryonic ideas concerning sleeve or flounce or collar, he does not roam woods and fields in search of inspiration. Not he. He buys the brains of lesser folk and launches the product of those brains for the edification of womankind and his own glory. Some little ouvrière in the workroom has a moment of inspiration. She goes to her employer with her idea. If he likes it, he buys it, – and she goes back to her work. Or perhaps some obscure dressmaker with more originality than reputation goes to one of the famous men and shows him models she has designed. If she has anything to offer which, in his judgment, has possibilities, he buys it – and at a generous figure. These men are always willing to pay liberally for ideas; but, once bought, the thing is theirs. The originator must not repeat it nor claim credit for it, though it may make the man who buys it famous, and set the fashionable world agog. Unfair? Not at all. The little dressmaker has not the ability to launch her idea. She makes more out of it by selling it to a well-known house than she could make in any other way. In course of time she may become the head of such an establishment, for the seats of the mighty are filled chiefly from her class; but, in the meantime, she is glad to find a market for her ideas.

The genius of the great dressmaker to-day consists in appreciation of the possibilities in an idea. He may not be able to conceive an original costume, but he knows instinctively what is good, has taste and judgment that are unerring. Out of a hundred models he will unhesitatingly choose the one that has a chance of success; and, having had the taste to select, he has the business ability to exploit and sell.

Then too, the ultimate development of the chosen ideas does rest in his hands. The seller of sketches or of crinoline models has given him suggestions. It is for him to bring forth from those suggestions creations that will dictate to all the fashionable world. Robed in a loose cloak of silk that will protect his ordinary clothing, puffing a cigar that consorts ill with his classic toga, the master sits in his workroom amid a chaos of materials and trimmings. Around him cluster his chief aids, exhibiting to him the experimental models turned out in the workroom. Jove-like, save for the great Havana tucked in a corner of his mouth, Monsieur lays down the law, criticises, suggests, alters, experiments. A fold is changed here, a frill is introduced there, materials are selected and harmonized, trimmings and linings are decided upon, names are given to the models at their birth. If the exact material or trimming needed to produce a desired effect is lacking, Monsieur does not allow that to worry him. He will merely tell the manufacturer to make what he wants – and the manufacturer will do it. The great dressmaker can make or mar a new fabric, and it is wise for the maker of dress materials to

humour the whims of the tyrant.

Under the régime of the old masters of fashion, the head of the establishment was a sacred personality – a being to be spoken of in hushed tones and approached with tremulous awe. He hedged himself about with mystery. He represented creative intellect at its highest; and, when the intellect settled down to its sacred function, nothing short of battle, murder, or sudden death would present a satisfactory excuse for an intrusion upon the privacy of the Master. Only a few privileged ones, elect because of the size of their bills, their superlative appreciation of true art or the worthiness of their faces and figures, were admitted to the Presence, and they accepted the honour in a spirit of true humility. If an ordinary mortal, daring as Icarus, asked to see Monsieur himself, Monsieur's representatives were tolerant, but pitying. See Him! Impossible! So might the priests of old have regarded a Cook's tourist, asking to be personally conducted through the Eleusinian Mysteries.

But Paquin and his followers have changed all that. Ordering gowns is no longer an awesome function. It is a soothing, delightful experience. One loses in religious exaltation but gains in beaming self-content.

Paquin was perhaps the first, as he is the best known, of the new school. Thirteen or fourteen years ago he was a clerk on the Bourse with no more knowledge of costuming than was to be gained by appreciative observation of *les belles Parisiennes*. Madame Paquin, who was not yet Madame Paquin, had a little

dressmaking shop in an insignificant quarter. The two met, married. A rich patron opportunely turned up and furnished capital for an ambitious dressmaking enterprise. The young couple opened a shop on the Rue de la Paix. There was no sounding of trumpets nor beating of drums, but with the opening of that little shop Paris was well on the way toward another revolution.

To-day, Paquin stands at the head of the great dressmakers of Paris. His word is practically law. "Paquinesque" is the word coined to express all that there is of the most chic.

"An ugly costume," says the first Parisienne.

"But no, ma chère, it is of Paquin," protests the second.

"Oh, vraiment? But yes, I see. It has fine points. Ah, mon Dieu, yes, it is charming," gushes the first critic. So much for being the king who can do no wrong.

The success was, first and foremost, a success of personality. Monsieur Paquin is a handsome man. His manner is a thing to conjure with – and he has worked it to its conjuring limit. Madame Paquin is pretty, she is gifted, she is charming. Everyone is fond of Madame. From the first, this clever and ornamental young couple followed a new system. No haughty seclusion, no barred doors, at the Maison Paquin. Madame was probably met at the door by Monsieur Paquin himself, and to be met by Paquin was a treat. The most beautiful of Parisian élégantes and the homeliest old dowager received the same flattering welcome, the same tender interest. There was

no servility in the manner. It was merely the perfection of courtesy. The customer was enveloped in an atmosphere that was soothing, delicious, promotive of deep self-esteem. Madame Paquin continued the treatment. The charming woman, the handsome man, both so deeply interested, both so deferential, both so intelligent! This was a new experience. The Parisienne smiled, purred, under the stroking, bought more than she had intended, – and came again.

Vanity is a lever stronger than awe. Paquin and his pretty wife understood that fact and built upon it. Feminine Paris chanted "The King is dead; long live the King!" The revolution was accomplished.

The sincerest flattery is imitation, and Paquin has been much flattered. A long line of more or less successful Adonises have followed in his footsteps. But Doeuillet and Francis are perhaps the most important on the list.

Francis is young – in the early thirties. He is almost as good-looking as Paquin. His manners are a Parisian proverb and, personally, he is doubtless the most popular man in his class. His customers adore him. What is more surprising, his work people also adore him, and even the touchiest of mannequins, prone to decamp at a moment's notice, swears by Francis and refuses to leave or forsake him. Ten years ago Francis was a poor salesman. To-day he is rich. Tailor-made costumes, or the Parisian modification of the tailor-made, are his specialty, and his coats and cloaks are famous. Doeuillet, too, has won fame

and fortune within a few years. He, too, is young and handsome and ingratiating. Six feet tall, with the shoulders of an athlete and the face of a frank, honest boy, he, too, is a "lion among ladies." Mention Doeuillet to a customer – she tells you of his eyes. "Such soft, honest eyes, ma chère. One would trust him anywhere, anywhere." The soft, honest eyes have been a valuable asset. Doeuillet has the most gorgeous dressmaking establishment of all that cluster around the Place Vendôme. He caters to the ultra-extravagant, who do not care what they pay. His gowns are the elaborate ball gowns, the marvellous confections seen at Maxim's, at the races, at Monte Carlo.

Ernest is another of the men of the new school; but Armand is, figuratively speaking, the baby of the group. On the first of September, four or five years ago, a wealthy patron put an unknown young employee of a silk house into the dressmaking business. The young man was Armand. He had a modest atelier on a side street. On March first he moved into the famous Saye Palace on the Place Vendôme, the palace in which Napoleon and Eugenie met for the first time, and there, among the superb frescoes and splendid carvings, he installed his luxurious establishment. Success, wealth, in seven months! Verily, the dressmaking business has its opportunities for the young man who combines business ability and beaux yeux.

Paquin's income is estimated at from three hundred thousand to four hundred thousand dollars a year. Doeuillet makes as much, and even without the Adonis characteristics, business

talents may carry the Parisian dressmaker to wealth and fame. The list of rich dressmakers aside from "those delightful young men" is a long one. The Callot Soeurs are possibly the most expensive firm in Paris. Doucet needs no introduction to Americans. Neither does Beer, who is considered by many the greatest creative artist in dress of our day. He has one of the historic palaces on the Place Vendôme, and his salons are rich in the eighteenth-century bibelots and furniture of which he is an enthusiastic collector. Flowers are everywhere throughout the rooms, and in the spring all of the many windows of the great palace are abloom with blossoms growing in window-boxes. Beer's mannequins, too, are vastly decorative, and this establishment is typical of the luxury and extravagance amid which the game of fashion-making is played.

La Ferrière has the most exclusive English trade as well as Parisian vogue, and is Paris dressmaker, by royal warrant, to Queen Alexandra. Madame Havet, Blanche Lebouvier, Sara Meyer, Mademoiselle Corné, are famous and wealthy. Rouff belongs near the head of the list and is a lineal descendant of the old school. In his establishment many of the traditions of the great old men survive. M. Rouff is not always in evidence as are the meteoric young men. To have an interview with him is an honour, and he will refuse to see even the most illustrious if his whim prompts him to do so. The ordinary customer meets only his representatives. Perhaps, during the interview, the curtains of the door will part. A thin, dark, rather wild-eyed face will appear

for an instant and vanish. That is Rouff.

Worth has a splendid trade, but it is largely a serious one. The great English and French dowagers go there; and Jean Worth, the present active head of the house, wears, more or less comfortably, the halo of his illustrious grandfather.

The dowager calls him a charming boy and says to him, "M'sieu Jean, when your famous grandpapa was alive, he made for me a light blue brocade that was most becoming. I would like something of that kind" – and M'sieu Jean repeats for age the light blue brocade of youth. He creates an extremely beautiful light blue brocade too, and he charges for it a price that would have surprised his famous grandpapa. He is old school by heredity, but he has modern commercial instincts, this charming boy.

The prices of the average French frock have gone up under the new régime, though extravagant sums were always paid for particularly original creations. There is practically no limit to the expense of dress to-day, and spectacular prices are paid for spectacular costumes; but the price of the great bulk of the gowns sold by the famous makers ranges from one hundred and twenty-five dollars to five hundred dollars, with the greatest sales between one hundred and seventy-five and three hundred. Certain firms refuse to make even the simplest frock for less than one hundred and fifty dollars, and turn out few costing less than five hundred. Small wonder that in Paris the great dressmaker is a personage, belonging to the swell clubs, in evidence everywhere

save in society's exclusive circles, owning a superb country place up the Seine, a seashore home in Normandy, a villa on the Riviera, buying – as did one of the group this year – whole blocks of houses in the most expensive quarter of Paris, spending – as did another of the guild – twenty thousand dollars upon one day's entertainment of a few chosen friends, running handsome automobiles, driving and racing fine horses, and, from his vantage point, watching the flood of fashions which he has set flowing.

Yet the expenses of a big dressmaking firm are large, as well as the profits. Few of the autocrats are themselves practical dressmakers. They must hire work-folk capable of carrying out, in perfection, the ideas they wish to exploit, and expert cutters, fitters, sleeve hands, skirt hands, etc., command high wages. Exclusive material and trimmings are required in such an establishment; nothing is skimped, nothing is omitted that would add to the beauty of the frock and so sustain the reputation of the house. Success, not economy, is the watchword. A small army of employees is required in one of the great houses, and the place is a veritable beehive of systematized industry; but the patrons see only the "front," and of the wheels within wheels even of that smooth-running front, they have small idea.

Each dressmaker has his loyal and devoted clientèle, and it is upon this faithful band that he counts for his greatest profits, although the large floating trade, too, brings in immense returns. Some women famed for their taste and extravagance in dress

refuse to confine themselves to any one artist, claiming that each dressmaker has his specialty and that it is wise to go for each frock to the maker most successful in the creation of frocks of exactly the type desired. The idea seems reasonable, but there is much to be said against it. For the woman with whom Parisian frocks are an incidental and fluctuating supply, the system may work well enough, but the woman who season after season buys lavish outfits from French dressmakers will do well to put herself in the hands of some one of the great men, establish a thorough understanding with him, allow him to study her personality, her needs, her possibilities. It is in such study that the artist dressmaker proves his title clear to the name "artist," and to achieve artistic triumphs in dress it is not enough that one wears a beautiful gown, one must wear a beautiful gown perfectly adapted to one's individuality, a gown in which one is at one's best. There are some women who know instinctively their own requirements, but these women are few, and even they can carry out their ideas only through the sympathetic understanding of a dressmaker who is master of his art. The average woman must trust to the dressmaker for the desired results, and to do this confidently and with a surety of obtaining his best efforts, his most serious consideration, his most masterly comprehension, she must be among his tried and valued customers, must have given him opportunity to know her well, to understand perfectly her needs.

All are fish who come to the dressmaker's net, and the woman

who will pay the price may have the clothes; but the woman who can pay the price and display the clothes to the best advantage is the beloved of the Parisian artist in dress. "One does one's best, of course, even with the woman of no figure and of homely face," says Monsieur, with a shrug of resignation, "but when a customer is slender, graceful, beautiful, and knows the art of wearing a frock – then it is a joy to clothe her, then one puts one's heart into the work, then one is inspired to flights. Ah, mon Dieu, yes, there are women for whom one would make clothes without pay, were it not necessary to divorce sentiment and business."

Many American women are upon this list of ideal customers. In fact les Americaines divide the honours with the famous demi-mondaines of Paris. Do not shudder, Madame of the impeccable reputation. The comparison extends only to the province of clothes, and as we have said before, the great demi-mondaine of Paris is the best dressed woman in the world. One of the tyrants of the Place Vendôme put the matter clearly in a recent interview:

"Our best customers – best because they spend most freely and because they show our creations to the best advantage, are the famous demi-mondaines of Paris. You must not confuse the demi-mondaine with the grande cocotte. La grande cocotte is another thing. She dresses gorgeously, she spends money like water, when she has it, but she is seldom well dressed. She is merely spectacular. The perfection of extravagant simplicity, the apotheosis of artistic taste, – that is for the great demi-mondaine. She makes no mistake. Her costumes do not jump at the eyes.

They are perfection. C'est tout. There are French society leaders who dress as well, but they are few, and for that matter, the demi-mondaines belonging to the class of which I have been speaking are also few. One can count them on the fingers of the hands, those demi-mondaines who really influence the fashions."

"And the Americans?" queried the interviewer.

"Oh, they are charming, les Americaines. We depend upon them. They cut more figure with us than any other dames et demoiselles convenables – respectable matrons and maids – on our books. Some are bizarre. Yes, of course. There are parvenues in America as elsewhere, more there, perhaps, because there are more quickly made fortunes in America. But many of the Americans have a genius for dress, and the money to indulge their tastes. They appreciate good clothes and wear them well. Me, I adore les Americaines."

His ardour was heartfelt, as it might well be, for millions of dollars had been poured into his coffers by American customers. One of these women, whose fortune is American, though its possessor elects to live in Europe, orders, on an average, from one hundred to one hundred and fifty gowns a year, the prices running from one hundred and twenty-five dollars to two thousand dollars. Even the great man lowered his voice when he mentioned these figures. "Voilà une cliente précieuse. Voilà, certes, une cliente précieuse," he murmured reverently.

From all over Europe, and from farther afield, women flock to the dressmakers of Paris. The Hungarian and Polish and

Viennese women of fashion have a reputation for dress, and some of the Russians spend fabulous sums upon the Rue de la Paix. Many English women of fashion buy almost all of their frocks in Paris, and within the last few years the German trade has assumed unprecedented importance in the dressmaking establishments of Paris, but neither the English nor the Germans as a class have a talent for dress, and the English or German woman who attains the effect to which the French apply the comprehensive term "chic" is the exception rather than the rule.

CHAPTER III

THE FAMOUS ATELIERS

The dressmaker of Paris is an artist. Granted that, it is quite natural that his workroom should be an atelier. Your true artist works in a studio, not in a shop; and when one speaks of the famous ateliers of the Parisian dressmaking world, one but gives the work done in these establishments its due recognition.

But they are "magasins" as well as ateliers, those establishments in which fashions are made, and business plays quite as important a part in them as does art, though even the business in some of its phases approximates the dignity of a fine art.

The saleswoman of the great dressmaking establishment is certainly an artist in her line, and perhaps it would not be speaking extravagantly to call her the shrewdest business woman in the world. She is the chief figure in that department of the establishment which meets the public eye and which is designated as the front. Upon her depends the successful disposal of the creations which are tediously evolved behind the closed doors, and her work calls for no ordinary ability. Her knowledge of things Parisian is equalled only by her knowledge of human nature, her suavity is equalled only by her diplomacy. Her siren song would make the mermaid's melodies sound like a hurdy-

gurdy. She could sell a ten-thousand-dollar sable coat to the savage owner of a hut on the equator – provided she knew that the savage would be good for the ten thousand dollars. And she *would* know. That's the amazing thing about her. She always does know, or if she doesn't, she finds out by some lightning quick process painless to the customer. She makes no mistakes, this soft-voiced, smiling, carefully groomed, persuasive woman, and yet there is such opportunity for mistake in Paris. It is not only a question of knowing the financial rating of the husband of Madame A, or of the Countess B. The credit system of a Parisian dressmaking house is a more complicated thing than that. When Mademoiselle Blanche of the Scala, at fifty francs a week, drives up in a luxurious carriage, with coachman, footman, maid, and poodle all in attendance, sweeps into the show rooms and begins talking of five-thousand-franc gowns, the saleswoman shows no surprise. She only wonders and then adroitly institutes a search for the explanation. The chances are that she can get the story from Blanche herself, by dint of diplomatic wheedling and flattery. If not – well, there are other ways of finding out before the material is cut.

And when everyone knows that the Grand Duke has loved and ridden away from Antoinette of the Folies Bergère, yet Antoinette turns up smiling and places extravagant orders, one must not be too hasty. A grand duke may be succeeded by a rich banker. Even if there is no visible guarantee of the bills, the little woman should not be angered. The future may hold other grand

dukes.

Not highly moral, these calculations, but supremely Parisian. Business is business, and Parisian business is adapted to Parisian conditions. The dressmaker does not concern himself about the source from which the money floods his tills, so long as the money is forthcoming, and tainted money scruples would sadly demoralize the business prosperity of the Rue de la Paix.

There are black books in the great dressmaking establishments and queer things are entered in them, items of information that would furnish spicy running commentary upon Parisian life. The incomes of Monsieur's customers are so often fluctuating things. Even in the beau monde there may be circumstances not generally understood, and, where no touch of scandal enters into the calculations, still there is room for mistake. Fortunes may rest on tottering foundations, appearances are often misleading. Yes, there is much to confide to the black book, and the dressmakers interchange statistics in right comradelike fashion. There are men employed whose business it is to investigate all matters having a bearing upon the financial condition of the women who make up the clientèles of the famous dressmakers, and it might surprise some of the gay butterflies that flutter into the luxurious salons of the dressmaking establishments to know how thoroughly informed concerning their private affairs are the saleswomen who wait upon them and the "master" who caters to their whims.

The saleswoman is as clever in dealing with Miss Millions

from Chicago as with the irrepressible Toinette. She flatters so subtly, influences so insensibly, makes herself so indispensable. Madame must never be made to feel that her own taste is bad, but she must, if possible, be guided to wise selection, persuaded to believe that she herself has decided upon the frock she finally chooses. It is to the interest of the house that every woman who buys her frocks there should look her best. Moreover, the woman whose friends praise her clothes will hold fast to her dressmaker, so the saleswoman does her best, and unless the customer is very obstinate, that best is surprisingly good. If necessary, with an old and valued customer the diplomat can be firm, suavely, politely firm.

"Why have I no black gown on the list?" asks Madame, after studying the plan of her season's outfit as made out by Mademoiselle Therèse.

Mademoiselle smiles, a deprecatory little smile, but her reply is prompt.

"We find that this year Madame is not of an age to wear black," she says simply, sweetly, but with a finality in her tones.

Madame colours, looks resentful, Mademoiselle busies herself with orders to a mannequin. The pause is ended by a sigh of resignation.

"Oui, c'est vrai," admits Madame. "There is an age, and there is again an age, but in between – eh, bien, it is true. We must now be careful, Therèse."

The successful saleswoman gains the confidence of her

customers, holds them, brings millions of francs' worth of business to her employer, and receives a commission on all sales. One saleswoman, among the best in her class, makes as much as fifteen thousand dollars a year out of her commissions, and, though this is exceptional, all earn good incomes.

The mannequins or models are the secondary features of the "front"; but they are of little importance compared with the saleswomen; and while it is a difficult thing to replace a good saleswoman, satisfactory mannequins may be had for the asking.

They are usually recruited from the ranks of the errand girls who swarm in all of the large dressmaking establishments, and are a sharp-witted, precocious set of gamins wise in the gossip of the atelier which is the gossip of all Paris. One of these girls grows up into a good-looking young woman with an admirable figure, a forty-four-inch skirt length, a twenty-one-inch waist, and a soaring ambition. She attracts the attention of the powers that be and is transplanted from her inconspicuous place behind the scenes to the full glare of the front. No more trotting about in pursuit of elusive colours and materials, no more delivering messages and frocks at all hours and in all weathers, no more being a shabby little atom of humanity at everyone's beck and call. Henceforward it is her sole duty to be chic, to wear with an air that will lend cachet to the creations any frocks or wraps which the saleswoman wishes to show.

Much of the talk concerning the transcendent charms of the Paris mannequins is great nonsense, and the sensational

tales of these humble beauties and their spectacular marriages – or "arrangements," are, as a rule, pure fabrication. There are handsome girls among them, and one and all they have the French talent for wearing smart clothes; but their good looks are largely a matter of make-up and of those same smart clothes. A more ordinary looking group of girls than the mannequins of a house, when they arrive in the morning, it would be hard to find, but a half hour in a toilet room works a transformation, and when Mademoiselle, perfectly corsetted, skilfully made up as to complexion, eyes, and brows, with her hair dressed in the latest fashion, her hands and nails beautifully cared for, her feet clad in dainty high-heeled slippers, sweeps across the show room wearing a frock that is a dream of beauty – then one understands how the traditions concerning her have arisen. She is not beautiful perhaps, but one forgets it, for she is excessively chic, and being that she fulfils the French law and gospel.

A few mannequins have developed into saleswomen, a few have married well, a few have become notorious cocottes; one became a favourite attendant of Queen Victoria, and finally drifted over to New York to end her days there. A number have found unimportant places upon the French stage, but, in the main, the mannequins are very ordinary young women whose history is but the history of the average Parisian working girl. Perhaps it is demoralizing, this constant masquerading in costly finery meant for others. One cultivates a taste for luxury under such conditions, and when six o'clock comes the rôle of grub

must seem hard to the girl who has been the most gorgeous of butterflies all through the day. One works hard and lives shabbily and is virtuous – but among the customers for whom one trails silken draperies up and down, up and down, there are so many who have the fine clothes for their own, who live luxuriously, gaily, and who do not trouble about that tiresome virtue. Bernard Shaw is right. It is ill paid in a worldly sense, the virtue, and if the mannequin has that fact forced upon her by the show that passes before her – well, it is but one of the lessons of Vanity Fair. As we have said before, French frocks will have much to answer for when accounts are summed up.

The mannequins' ball gives to the mannequin at least one opportunity during the year for playing her rôle of *élégante* outside the establishment in which she is employed. For the truly great houses there is little object in furnishing costumes for this ball, save only the giving of pleasure to favourite employees, but gorgeous confections are provided for the occasion, and the spirit of rivalry twixt the different ateliers runs high.

Sometimes, too, pretty mannequins are commissioned to wear model frocks at the great racing events or on other occasions when all the fashionable Parisian world turns out to see and be seen; but as a general thing, Mademoiselle's sphere of usefulness is limited to the salons of the firm that employs her. The days are not so dull even there. All sorts and conditions of women, save only the women without money, pass in and out. One sees the famous beauties, the most notorious demi-mondaines, the

most celebrated artistes, the princesses and grand duchesses and queens, the wives of the rich bankers and manufacturers, the heroine of the latest scandal, the newest love of a crown prince, the American of fabulous millions, – the mannequin knows them all, so does the saleswoman, so does the page who opens the door, and the procession is an amusing one for onlookers who have the key to its humours. Ah, the very walls are saturated with gossip in the salons where Fashion makes her headquarters, and when an old customer disappears, when a new luminary arises, even the curtains flutter with interest and conjecture.

Stars of a certain type rise and set swiftly in Paris. Of a sudden, there is a new sensation. Some woman by force of beauty, wit, diablerie, sheer audacity, has caught the public eye. All Paris talks of her, men pour fortunes into her grasping little hands. She eats and drinks and is exceedingly merry. Her jewels are a proverb, her costumes beggar description, her sables would do credit to an empress. She has her handsome house, her horses, her carriages, her servants. Wherever she goes she is the cynosure of all eyes, and then – Pouf! she is with the snows of yesteryear. Paris has a new sensation. La belle Margot? Oh, yes; she had *un succès fou*, but that was yesterday.

"Where is Felise?" asked an American who had not been in Paris since the season two years earlier, when Felise was the lionne of the day. The Frenchman to whom he spoke shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, mon ami, how can one tell? – picking rags for aught I

know, – but have you seen Suzanne? Ravissante, mon chère! Paris is at her feet."

They are good customers of the dressmaker when they are on the crest of the wave – these creatures of a day, whom the French misname "filles de joie." When their day is over and their credit is gone there is an entry in the black book. The familiar carriage appears no more at the door – but there are other carriages, other customers to take the vacant place. The performance is a continuous one in Vanity Fair.

There are fine distinctions made in regard to the customers who flock to the famous dressmaking establishments. Not for everyone are the choicest models brought to light. These are for the delectation of the elect, for known and cherished customers, for others whose custom is a thing greatly to be desired.

Not until she is sure that the visitor is worthy of the lure does the saleswoman order the mannequin to show these exclusive models. She is eternally vigilant and can recognize a dressmaker in search of ideas rather than of frocks, or a woman moved by curiosity rather than by a desire to buy, as far as she can see her. There are many such visitors and they are treated civilly, but they see little for their pains and they are not encouraged to linger.

Then there is the woman of one frock, the casual tourist who is seeing the sights of Paris and feels that she will not have completed her programme satisfactorily unless she takes at least one French frock home with her. She is not received with effusion, rather with a good-natured tolerance, yet

the saleswoman's manner toward her is far warmer than that accorded to the visitor with no intention of buying. In the course of the year, these small orders, a vast majority of which are placed by Americans, foot up to an imposing sum total, and the saleswoman is too shrewd a business woman to underestimate the importance of small things.

What does Madame want? An evening gown, a dinner gown, a visiting gown, a street frock? Madame, somewhat embarrassed, thinks she would like a nice all-around dress, something dressy, but not too dressy, a dress to wear to luncheon or afternoon tea or theatre or —

"Parfaitement, — a gown utile. Marie, the grey crêpe; Elise, put on the black and white silk."

"Too youthful? But no, Madame. It is of a sobriety that grey crêpe. Madame is even too young for so serious a costume, but — since she does not wish anything conspicuous — The grey suits Madame's complexion and figure to perfection. It will serve for occasions of all kinds, and it is chic, très chic. The friends of Madame will recognize at once that it is of Paris. The sleeve is all that there is of the latest, and the skirt — Madame will observe how the skirt hangs. It is our newest skirt. Madame will be satisfied — oh, of a surety."

And Madame buys the frock or orders one made like the model. She has been shown little else, but then the saleswoman is clever enough to have brought out at the start something that would actually be suitable and becoming, so, though overawed

and robbed of self-assertion, the unimportant customer probably fares better than if she had been shown many models and left to her own devices.

Then, of a sudden, there is a stir in the entry, the door opens, a woman elegantly gowned, aristocratic of air, sweeps into the salon. The saleswoman's face is wreathed in smiles of welcome, her air is eager, deferential. Madame la Princesse wishes to see Monsieur? But, certainly. He shall be called. In the meantime, if there is anything one can show?

Mannequins are sent flying for the best models and a long file of the young women promenades through the room wearing frocks in which the illustrious customer may be interested. Monsieur comes out from the inner fastnesses and declares himself enchanted, honoured; materials are brought out and displayed, trimmings are suggested. The interview is a very serious one. No smallest word of the Princess is treated lightly. A beggarly dozen of frocks, all extravagant in price, are planned. A few costly furs are thrown in for good measure. The Princess rises languidly. Monsieur himself accompanies her to the door, and in the hall she passes La Petite Fleurette, who has danced herself into notoriety and into the heart of the Prince whose name and title Madame la Princesse bears. Evidently this is to be an expensive day for his Royal Highness.

Fleurette, too, is received with smiles, with effusive greetings. The credit of his Royal Highness is excellent. Monsieur stops on his way to his private rooms and returns to greet the danseuse. His

manner to her is not what it was to the Princess. Quite as cordial, yes; but more familiar. The grave deference has disappeared. The saleswoman, too, is familiar. She calls the customer "ma chère" and "ma petite," flatters her openly, jests with her. The best in the cases is brought out for Fleurette as for the Princess, but it is a best of a more striking type, and the master artist's suggestions are not those he made to the Princess. One is always an artist, but one caters to the individual. Where Madame la Princesse has ordered a dozen gowns, la petite Fleurette orders a score, and when she goes Monsieur accompanies her also to the door, but as he turns he shrugs his shoulders.

"Oh la, la!" says the saleswoman, vulgarly, expressively, as she meets his eyes, and a buzz of conversation sounds from the corner where the mannequins are gathered.

The popular danseuse, chanteuse, diseuse, of the Fleurette type is usually a more profitable customer in her private capacity than is the great actress. She is the fad, the sensation of the moment, and her money comes easily and plentifully. No ambitious productions, no expensive theatrical experiments, eat up her income. Her art is not of the kind that absorbs her thoughts and hopes and dreams. It is a means to an end, and that end is gay and luxurious living. So la petite Fleurette spends her money prodigally in self-indulgence, and much of it goes to swell the profits of those alluring establishments on the Rue de la Paix and the Place Vendôme. Other chanteuses and diseuses there are in Paris who take their art as seriously as Bernhardt takes

hers, and who make it, in its own way, as truly an art; but here again one finds women too deeply interested in their work to take an absorbing interest in chiffons. They may dress well, but not extravagantly well; and beside the splendours of Fleurette their mild sartorial radiance will seem dim indeed.

Of the actresses who stand at the head of their profession in Paris, Réjane is probably the best dressed, spends the most money for her personal and unofficial adornment. She loves pretty frocks and she wears them well, off the stage as on it; but even she does not rival in her toilettes certain lesser lights of the stage, for whom, in her capacity as artiste, she may well feel a good-natured contempt.

It is when the famous actress appears in a new play that she becomes important in the dressmaking world. Then, if you please, she is extravagant, exacting, full of whims. Then she and her chosen dressmaker have long and strenuous conferences, at which the most able assistants of the master artist are present with suggestion and advice. The play must be gravely, exhaustively considered. If it deals with some historic period, the fashions of that period must be studied down to their merest detail and adapted to present needs. The physical characteristics of the actress must have due attention. She must be made to look her best, – but the psychological subtleties of her rôle must also be taken into account in the planning of her costumes. Oh they are grave, very grave, the preliminary consultations concerning the costumes for a new and important rôle. Day after day, Réjane

drives up to the door, behind her white mules, and is closeted with the master and his chosen aids. There are sketches, crinoline models, materials to be viewed and discussed, high converse to be held concerning points upon which artiste and artist are not at one. Then come fittings by the dozen, with Monsieur looking on, and the heads of the departments called in to receive orders or suggest improvements. The skirt drapery does not fall as it should. Madame shakes her head. Monsieur knits his brows.

"Ask Renoir to come here." The chief skirt hand appears.

"Tu vois, Renoir, ça ne va pas. It is a horror, that drapery. I have the air of a femme des Halles, n'est-ce pas?"

Renoir goes down upon her knees, rips a stitch here and there, gathers the material up in her quick fingers. A touch, a fold, a lifting here, a dropping there, while everyone watches anxiously.

The skirt takes on new lines, Madame looks over her shoulder at her reflection in the mirror, and her frown melts into a smile.

"Mais oui, c'est ça."

Monsieur smooths his furrowed brow, and the skirtmaker endeavours to look modest as she hurries back to the workroom, but she is proud, extremely proud. It is something to surmount serious difficulties under the eye of the master.

There is perhaps a miniature stage in one of the fitting-rooms, – a tiny stage, but large enough for a solitary figure in sweeping draperies, and lighted by footlights as is a real stage. So much depends upon those footlights. They may ruin totally the effect of a frock lovely under ordinary light, just as they will

make the most perfect natural complexion look cadaverous, and the stage costume must be planned with reference to this problem of lighting.

Many dressmakers care little for the theatrical custom and seldom make stage costumes save when a modern society play is in question, but other houses cater largely to the stage trade. Doucet makes more of the costumes worn on the Parisian stage than any other one maker, but Redfern has had great success in that line, and Drecol, too, has costumed some famous rôles, while, when it comes to the modern society play, actresses turn to any one of the autocrats who finds most favour with them.

The première of an important production always brings out, if not the great dressmakers themselves, at least their official representatives, whose task it is to garner fashion ideas wherever they are to be found. Even a period play may furnish some idea in colour, line, or detail that may be adapted to modern dress and inspire a new mode, and the elaborately costumed modern play is always interesting to students of the modes. Sometimes an actress wears a new and original frock that catches the fancy of Parisiennes and launches a mode, but, in general, the stage frock's influence is limited to the inspiring of ideas for modes rather than to the setting of fashions, and the stage trade is not of great importance in the great game of fashion-making.

Professional buyers fill the salons at certain seasons of the year, and are to be reckoned with seriously in the business calculations of Monsieur.

In early spring and late summer dressmakers and buyers from all parts of the world set their faces toward Paris, but by far the largest element of the pilgrimage is American. Every dressmaker of pretensions to-day makes her trips to Paris at least twice a year, views the advance season models, buys as many of them as she can, lays in a supply of exclusive materials and trimmings, and fills her note-book with ideas to be used for the benefit of her home customers. Often during her summer trip she takes a run to Trouville and to other Normandy resorts where the tide of fashion is at its highest as the summer draws to a close; and, in the late winter or early spring, the Riviera is a famous hunting-ground for fashions.

Before March brings the Auteuil races, Paris is, in the eyes of the ultra-chic, a wilderness. Women charmingly gowned may be there. The uninitiated may believe that the latest creations of the French dressmakers' art are on view. The elect know better. They understand that the gowns being worn in Paris before March are the gowns of yesteryear. They understand, too, that, all through the Paris winter, spring modes are having their trial, but that this trial is going on in far-away summer lands. The women who launch the modes, the exclusive few who set the fashion, are already wearing toilettes that will serve as models to the general public when spring comes, but they are wearing them at the winter resorts, each of which has its distinct season for the European smart set, and it is not until Auteuil calls fashionable folk back to Paris that the stay-at-homes know what is upon

Fashion's spring programme.

CHAPTER IV

FIFI AND THE DUCHESS ON THE TURF

For fashionable Paris, the season begins with Auteuil. The first of the races calls all of the wanderers back to the heart of Vanity Fair. It is the famous rally, the great spring opening, the first important toilette display of the season. The meeting is held as soon as winter shows the smallest sign of relenting, and is never later than March, sometimes as early as February; but whenever it comes it marks the *début* of spring upon the Parisian calendar.

The weather may be bitterly cold, but that makes no difference to the Parisienne. She has prepared a costume for Auteuil and she wears it.

"Elise, what is the weather?"

"But of a coldness, Madame. It is to freeze!"

"Eh bien, bring me my fur coat."

Change the frock? The idea doesn't even occur to her. That is her Auteuil frock.

And so Auteuil usually offers a spectacle as picturesque as it is incongruous. The day is bright and cold, or – more probable supposition – the sky is lowering, and there is a flurry of snow in the air. The grand stand and *pesage* are not yet gay with blossoming plants. Tall braziers are set at intervals along the front

of the stand, and near them hover swarms of women drawing sable coats together over frocks of chiffon and lace, showing faces a trifle blue with cold beneath flower-laden hats. They hold their chilled hands out to the flames, these forced blossoms of spring, and they shiver daintily and jest at their own discomfort and are altogether gay and inconsequent and absurd. Here and there the furs are thrown back to afford a deserving public glimpses of a toilette well worth seeing; and it is around the braziers that all Paris first gains an idea of the fashions that are to dominate spring and summer.

Feminine Paris appreciates and improves the opportunity. Nowhere in the world do races draw so large, so mixed, and so enthusiastic a crowd of women as do the races in "Parisi" – which, slangily speaking, implies the district round about Paris, and takes in all of the famous courses upon which the spring races are run, – Auteuil, Longchamps, St. Cloud, St. Ouen, Massons, Lafitte, and Chantilly.

It is a queer mixture, that feminine crowd. The Royalist Duchess, Fifi of the Variétés, the rich banker's wife, the stable boy's sweetheart, the famous actress, the little milliner, the tourist, the great manufacturers' women folk, – all are there, dressed in their best, gay, excited, conferring with jockeys and touts and illustrious members of the Jockey Club, quite impartially, in their quest for tips, betting eagerly, coquetting still more eagerly, showing their own frocks and studying those of their neighbours.

Verily, on the turf and under the turf all women as well as all men are equal, but nowhere is the mélange more amazing than at the Paris race courses. "A feminine *pousse café* melting into a cocktail," commented one irreverent and thirsty American as he watched the throng at the Grand Prix last year, and the description was apt if inelegant. Fifi and the Duchess come nearer meeting on equal terms in the *pesage* than they do in any other one place. They are beautiful women in beautiful gowns, vying with each other for the approbation of the crowd. The Duchess would not admit that, but the fact remains, and it is a fact, too, that the honours frequently rest with Fifi.

During the last few years there has been a tentative effort in the smart Parisian set toward simplicity of dress for the races. The *demi-mondaines* having chosen these occasions for reckless extravagance in dress, the social elect said, "Let us mark a distinction by disdaining rivalry in chiffons. Let us be chic, but with a difference, with a severity."

The movement has perhaps had some slight effect; but, on the whole, the cause is a lost one. It demands abnegation of too strenuous a type. Madame may sacrifice much to a principle, but not an opportunity of displaying her most charming costumes where their merits will find wide and enthusiastic recognition; and the racing events are the ideal opportunities for such display.

The setting is in itself a delectable one, for all of the courses near Paris are attractive. The grand-stands are all ablaze with flowers. Women trail their gowns over velvety turf and under

shadowing boughs, or stroll along wide promenades between high banks of blossoming shrubs. Given sunshine and warm weather, a great day at any one of the courses is a surpassingly gay sight, all colour and motion and sparkle.

The grande Militaire, a steeplechase with gentlemen riders up, is one of the most popular of the Auteuil events, for the horses are ridden by officers from the neighbouring garrisons, and both Fifi and the Duchess "aiment le Militaire." The Day of the Drags, or coaching parade, is another chic event, and the occasion for a phenomenal toilette exhibit. One is so delightfully in evidence upon the box seat of a coach that one's most charming frock and hat will not be wasted there. Moreover, the competition in dress is more limited than it is in the pesage or the Tribune, and, naturally, is all the keener for the concentration. Seats upon the coaches, which are tooled out to the race track by their famous owners and greeted with traditional and impressive ceremony, are eagerly coveted, and many a mode has been launched from the top of a coach, many a new belle has entered into her kingdom behind four curvetting horses on the Day of the Drags.

But the day of days for the Parisienne who follows the races – and what true Parisienne does not? – is the day of the Grand Prix. The Grand Prix is the dramatic conclusion of the season to which Auteuil was the triumphal introduction. It is the climax to which St. Cloud and St. Ouen and Chantilly and the rest have led.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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