

Historic Fashion Plates That Illustrate Manners as Well as Dress



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THE FASHION-PLATE GIVES THE CORRECTNESS AND GRACES.

NEW YORK, May 11.—"Know your fashion plates! It will save you from being cheated in more ways than one if you have an intimate acquaintance with fashion plates, past and present."

So said an authority, and to point the warning she showed some recent reproductions of prints of early New York.

"Here is a print labeled such and such a street about 1780," she said. "The 'about' is the only saving grace in this dating, which is about forty years out of the way, as any student of fashion plates would know. The people walking on the street, the men in full-bottomed wigs, the women and the little girl in lace-trimmed sleeves and other unmistakable signs, mark the period as somewhere near 1830."

"The mistake in dating another print 1800 should be plain to anyone, as it is pretty well known that women at that time had waists as short as to come just below the armpits, while the woman walking by a famous old New York building in the picture has the long, slim, trimly belted waist, which was not in vogue until at least twenty-five years later. The dating of the third print is a curious attempt to turn time backward in its flight."

"The picture purports to show how a well known business street looked in 1862 when it was the center of the shopping district. At this date women sported stupendous hoops, but the women in the print are garbed like those of the other two, in the demure fashions of 1880 or a little earlier, while the men wear the very long swallowtail coat of that period."

"Of course, this is of no real moment except as an exposure of some one's ignorance, but if you were collecting historical prints you would find that the study of fashion plates and a general knowledge of costume was well worth having to make sure that your treasures were dated correctly. Then, too, there is a bit of malicious fond to be got from your acquaintance with fashion plates."

"Family albums still exist and you have only to study the bygone photographs of the person who hates like poison to have her age known in order to arrive at the fatal number within two or three years."

These are generally unappreciated uses for the fashion plate. It has still other merits in its own peculiar province which are not usually appreciated in an ungrateful world.

It has other functions besides its obvious one of teaching the newest fashion in dress. Permeating this is the more subtle, but not less important, lesson on the latest fashion in airs and graces.

The good fashion plate invariably gives just the correct air, neither more nor less. The pose of the figure, the turn of the head, the manner of sitting or walking, of holding up the gown, of disposing the hands are so important in creating a fashionable appearance that one is tempted to think that style radiates from the mien rather than the costume.

The great portrait painters, who were usually fashion artists, illustrate this point perfectly. They recorded the smallest detail of the costume of their day and of its company manners.

The early portrait painters were taught to disregard the body. Anatomy was anathema, and they drew attenuated, poor creatures with woe-begone faces, while their skill was expended on the most minute representations of the costume of the period. Every little fancy in head-dress or embroidery, every fold of drapery, was painstakingly recorded, and the women were all posed in what must have been the fashionable attitude of the time, a sort of reversed Grecian bend so peculiar that its like has never been seen.

It would have been impossible for Holbein or one of his school to be other than absolutely truthful, but the homely dignity and power of the faces in Holbein's pictures decidedly overshadow the costume. These great women and men with gravely folded hands appear as though they had sat to the painter in their everyday clothes.

The portraits of the next hundred years, during which the queen of three thousand dresses ran her race, seem to be nothing more than highly wrought fashion plates, so deeply buried was the individual in the monotonous and excessive ornamentation of costume. Van Dyke, whose sitters always came to him in gala array, was the happy recorder of costumes at once stately and picturesque.

He tells us that there were restrictions in the use of jewelry in his time for the long taper fingers with which he delighted to endow his sitters are guiltless of rings. From this time on it was often the fashion to dispense with formal costume.

The Lely school painted the languid beauties of the restoration in a more or less indiscreet undress, but how fashionable was its indiscretion! Only to be matched by the extreme modestness of the wearer's languishing mien and elaborately careless coiffure.

The eighteenth century was the golden age of portrait painting. It was at the same time the age of masquerades and, above all, the age of sentiment.

Ladies were painted in formal costume, the height of the mode, and still were prodigiously fashionable when they chose to be painted in classical draperies, in peasant dress or in charming print morning gowns and in the act of feeding the chickens. But it must be remembered that portrait painters were merely faithful copies of fashions that were already current and had first been spread broadcast by some other agency.

Just what form the first fashion plates took is not recorded, but we do know that as early as the fourteenth century France sent puppets dressed in the newest modes to other countries and it is likely that this effective means of disseminating the fashions was of very ancient origin, perhaps as old as dolls themselves. In England

these quaint fashion plates were called little ladies or babies, made of papier-mâché instead of dolls until the middle of the eighteenth century.

Henri IV of France writes to Marie de Medicis in 1600: "Frontenac tells me that you desire patterns of our fashions in dress. I send you, therefore, some model dolls." No. 27 of the Spectator, for January 17, 1711, is devoted to a description of a jointed wooden baby which "came regularly over once a month habited after the manner of the most eminent toasts in Paris."

This mademoiselle was complete in every particular of her costume even to the way the garters were tied and also as to the coiffure, the complexion and the very newest place to put a patch. The coming of this "dear moppet" had been somewhat delayed at this time owing to the war with France, though no matter how tightly closed English ports might be during war-times there was always a loophole left for the fashion dolls to creep in.

This privilege was taken away during the Napoleonic wars, however, and then, said Mrs. Bury Palliser, "English women, deprived of French aid for a whole generation, began to dress badly. Pitt has much to answer for."

Mrs. Earle finds many allusions in old letters to fashion dolls and gives a chapter to them in her book on American costume, for, of course, they were of the first importance to ladies on this side of the water. The poor souls seem to have got them second hand by way of London and then to have sent copies of them to still more benighted beings in remote inland districts.

It is fancied that the little dolls were somewhat rare also, for Mrs. Hannah Teatt, a mantuamaker at the head of Summer street, Boston, advertises "a baby dress after the newest fashion lately arrived from London. Any ladies that desire to see many either come or send, she will be ready to wait on 'em, if they come to the house it is Two Shillings & if she waits on 'em it is Seven Shillings." This was in 1723.

The genuine fashion plate came into being with the woman's magazine. As was natural these fashion plates came earlier and were better in France than in England. In the latter country, though there had been an effort made as early as 1600, the woman's magazine was not launched on a successful career until 1770.

These quaint periodicals contained some general news, tales which, according to the fashion of the day, were impartially composed of sentiment and vulgarity, some tedious essays, much mawkish poetry, some acrostics and cookery recipes. The embellishments consisted of a few poor woodcuts and copperplate engravings, with patterns for needlework.

It was some years even then before there were added to these attractions descriptions of London and Paris modes, accompanied by colored plates. Paris was of

course the fountainhead in this matter and the only good prints were those drawn from French plates, which were delightful little works of art, beautifully drawn and colored.

Indeed, there are few modern fashion plates which can approach in excellence the French plates of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. But would the Anglo-Saxon adopt anything from Paris without a fling? Not if he could help it, and here in a woman's magazine of this period we have plates side by side, one showing the Paris fashion, the other the fashion in London.

The London design is fondly supposed to be a modification, a toning down, of the frivolities of French dress more acceptable to the modest good sense of Englishwomen. It was the same with our own Godey of blessed memory. After procuring at immense pains and expense, as he was careful to assure us, some beautiful French fashion

plates, he had them redrawn and carefully modified or Americanized, as he put it, which means that the waists were enlarged, the low bodices made higher and the general air made more demure.

There is still a curious display of national sentiment to be noted in fashion plates. Though the latest modes from France may be followed in England, Germany and the United States, there is as much difference in the general air of their respective fashion women as there is in the racial characteristics of their women.

The French fashion dame is always suave and graceful, though much corrected, the German rather square and stiff, the English a willow, hollow thing; the American—shades of the departed Godey, what style! Here is to be found a slight degree of exaggeration, probably to be accounted for by the national self-confidence and nervous energy of pose and action.

Life and Nature of Sahara

(Continued from Page Three.)

man stands at the hole where it flows out with an hour glass, and when the sand has run through shuts off the supply.

A Dreary Life.

I cannot describe the dreariness of common everyday life in these Saharan oases. About the only green thing one sees in the streets is the palm leaves overhead. Inside a garden there may be patches of vegetables and grass with trees bearing various kinds of fruit; but in the villages themselves everything is as bare as the middle of the road, and that in a land which might be a tropical paradise. The houses have no gardens in or about them. They are joined close together, and are more like a catcomb than a place where people live, move and have their being. There are few signs of life during much of the day. There are no windows facing the streets, and the only means of ventilation on that side of the house are little holes about the size of a paving brick up near the roof.

In villages like these the people look squalid and dirty, but the dirtiest of them are loaded with jewelry. I photographed one middle aged dame of a swarthy complexion who had ear-rings as big as an after dinner coffee cup saucer, and as she turned round I noticed that she wore anklets of white metal as wide as a tin cup is high. Indeed, they looked like tin cups without bottoms or handles. Even the children were loaded with jewelry. Some of them were not averse to being photographed, although both women and children held out their hands for money as soon as their pictures were taken.

As I walked through the town I passed several Moorish coffee houses in which were Arabs sitting on the floor, smoking themselves everlastingly, or playing dominoes. The coffee houses look not unlike an American stable. Their only light comes in through the door and the people sit on the mud floor.

Chateau Landon.

In "The Garden of Allah," the novel to which I referred at the beginning of this letter, some vivid descriptions are made of the Chateau Landon, a wonderful date plantation belonging to a wealthy French nobleman. If one would know just how much water means in the desert he may learn by visiting this place. It is a wonderful about fifteen acres and is a wonderful botanical garden right here on the edge

of the desert. It is a date forest interspersed with all sorts of tropical and temperate fruit trees and shrubs. There are green hedges fifteen feet high, as carefully trimmed as those in the botanical gardens of Algiers, or in that of Buitenzorg, Java. About twenty Arab gardeners are always busy keeping the plantation in order and the leaves are not allowed to lie on the paths or walks. Here and there through the garden are houses of Arab architecture, the homes of the owner, and in one place there is a great circle cut out under the trees where dances may be held in the open.

Sidi Okba and His Oasis.

Have you ever heard of Sidi Okba? He was a famous Arab general who conquered the whole of north Africa from the Nile to the Atlantic about 1,500-odd years ago. All whom he conquered he converted by telling them that they must die if they did not espouse the Mohammedan religion; and it is said that when he reached the western ocean he rode into it exclaiming that if it were not for this barrier he would make every people of the lands beyond worship Allah or die.

This man was one of the great Mohammedan heroes. The people look upon him as a saint and they have named towns, oases and other places after him. One of the most important of these is Sidi Okba, which lies twelve miles from here in the heart of the desert. In it is the shrine of

the saint and the mosque containing it is said to be the oldest Mohammedan building in Africa. The town is the religious capital of this part of the world, so holy that the people make pilgrimages to it as they do to Kairouan, in Tunisia, and to Mecca and Medina, in Arabia. I rode across the desert this afternoon and visited it. The way is over a country covered with a scanty vegetation of thorny scrub, through sandy and stony wastes, and by the oases of Fillich and Chetna. Sidi Okba itself has 8,000 palm trees and the town has several thousand people. The plantations are surrounded by mud walls like those of Biskra, but the houses are better and some of the streets are so wide that one can drive through them. On our way there we passed some caravans of camels and donkeys. We saw many tents and great flocks of black goats watched by shepherds.

Business of an Oasis.

Entering the gate we rode between the mud walls to the public square, which is surrounded by petty stores or bazars. Every store is a box-like room no wider than the door which leads into it and so low that the merchants can hardly stand upright within it. The stores are lighted from the front and the customers stand in the street as they bargain.

There was considerable industry going on. Here men were weaving, here they

were making plows and farther on saddles. In the street of the tailors I saw several men using American sewing machines, but nowhere did I see any American goods. On the sides of the streets were mud ledges built out from the mud walls. These ledges were filled with white-gowned men chatting or sleeping. Some were rolling cotton and some sewing. At night the ledges are filled with sleepers.

Many of these poorer Arabs have no homes. They eat at the cafes and sleep in the streets. This is especially so in the cities. The men always sleep with their heads covered and, in fact, with every bit of bare skin hidden. One reason for this is on account of the flies. They fairly swarm in all the oases, making one pray for the Caliph Adhemel, the father of flies, to breathe upon them and drive them away. This old caliph had a breath so fatal to flies that every one dropped dead that flew over his mouth.

During my stay I visited the famous mosque. It is an ordinary building with perhaps half a dozen rooms, including the place of worship. It was filled with Mohammedans when I entered it this afternoon and I heard the Mohammedan youths singing out verses from the Koran in the school rooms on each side. I spent a while watching the men at their prayers and although I was known to be a Christian I was not molested.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

New Mexico's New Governor

THAT'S a characteristic Roosevelt "trick," remarked a veteran of the Philippines, "is to get the best of the appointment of Captain George Curry, governor of Samar province, to be governor of the territory of New Mexico. The announcement of Curry's elevation to the governorship of a territory came without any warning, and it was at the White House that probably no one would be more surprised than Captain Curry, to whom news of his appointment was cabled last week.

"There's an adjective in Greek," continued this Philippine veteran, "which aptly describes Curry: it has slipped my mind for the moment, but freely translated it means 'walk up to anything.' That's the sort of man the new governor of New Mexico is; he will walk up to anything; he does not know the meaning of the word fear and things that would frighten even a brave man out of his boots merely make Curry's little blue eyes twinkle the faster. Some people wear their years well; some badly. Curry does not wear his at all. You never think how old he is; you often wonder how young he may be. I have known him a long time, but I never thought of his age until you asked; he is probably 45 years young, not old. Curry was at one time sheriff of a county in Arizona. He is western born and brought up, and there is no better type of that section of country. He was a captain in the Rough Riders, but he had the hard luck to belong to that battalion which was left behind and did not get to the front. He did not get to Cuba, and it was about the saddest lick Curry ever had. When in the Rough Riders he had the promise of his colonel's assistance and was thereby enabled to get a second lieutenantcy in the Eleventh cavalry. He wanted a captaincy, but that was not to be had, so Curry took the job at hand. He went to the Philippines with that regiment, expecting to see some fun. He received another disappointment when he was placed in charge of the regimental pack train, but it was always Curry's way to do the day's work, whether the work was to his liking or not. The Eleventh cavalry was attached to General Bates' division, which was at that time engaged in the occupation of Cavite and Batangas provinces. 'Jack' Hayes was lieutenant colonel of the Fourth cavalry. The volunteers and the regulars set out from two points about five miles apart to like it across the island and stretch a line into which General Winton was to drive the enemy. Curry was in charge of one pack train and the other was made up of regulars. The line of march taken by the volunteers was as rough a bit of hiking as ever fell to a soldier's lot in the islands; it took them over six streams and through mud bogs for 20 to 30 feet high. The volunteers got ahead; every evening the head of the column halted for supper, after a little brush with the Filipinos, and before the march was taken up again the tinkle of the bell mare of Curry's pack train was heard in the distance and he was right with us ready for the start the next day.

"The race was kept up with the volunteers in the lead until in crossing the last gorge one of the mules of Curry's pack train slipped and broke its neck. Instead of abandoning that pack Captain Curry unpacked the mule and men handed the pack out to the top of the gorge, but he could not overtake the regiment for night had come. He ordered his mules unpacked and made a breastwork of the packs outside the mules, and Curry and his men, armed only with six-shooters—there was not a carbine in the bunch—sat there the night through before a big, blazing fire, shouting and yelling themselves hoarse, hourly expecting to be rushed by the natives any moment, but endeavoring to frighten them away by making enough noise for a regiment. The pack train overtook the regiment in the town the next day. Hayes got in with his men about 9 o'clock, but the pack train in charge of the regulars did not arrive for two days.

"It was a remarkable performance, the promptness with which Curry got that pack out to the top of the gorge. It is told in the islands today to all newcomers.

"Characteristic of the man was his comment to his commanding officer when he arrived: 'I would be obliged, sir, if you would issue some carbines to me and my men the next time we start on a hike; we might have a little trouble in handling the situation if we were attacked and had only six-shooters.'

Since then Curry has been in the thick of many a fight, and when peace times came he was in the customs service in Manila for a time and later was appointed governor of Samar. He was lost for a while last year when he went out with some school teachers to conduct negotiations with the natives and the party was attacked by insurgents. When the party returned Governor Curry was missing. He turned up some time later. When the attack came he had jumped into the river and ducked out of sight on the other side and set about reconnoitering for himself to find out who the trouble makers were. Later he turned up and went down with the troops to restore order.

The president has never forgotten Curry and has kept in touch with him through men who have served in the Philippines and have seen the kind of work he has been doing and that there is no reward has come—Boston Transcript.

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