

Queer Spring and Summer Styles of Seventy Years Ago



Evening Dress of White Lace over Pink Levantine Dress Striped Changeable Silk



Plaid Silk Dress - Morning Neglige Riding Dress Evening Dress of White Cape

WITH thoughts of Easter hats and the latest styles in gowns, coats and dress accessories filling the minds of the feminine portion of the community, it is interesting to take a peek into the past at the spring and summer fashions of seventy years ago. What did our grandmothers and great-grandmothers wear way back, long before the civil war, when Nebraska wasn't Nebraska at all, but only a prairie with Indians and buffalo in complete possession and with millinery shops, dressmaking establishments and department stores a part of the unborn future?

In the Byron Reed collection in the public library there is a copy of "Godey's Lady's Book" dated 1840—a quaint little old volume, dry and yellow with age—which tells in picture and descriptions what was the very last word in fashions for the women of that day. Very queer in 1912 seem these fashions of the past, with their enormous round skirts, tiny waists, drooping shoulders, puffed sleeves, bonnets and caps and elaborate head-dresses.

In this day of clinging materials and as little as possible of them, it seems as if our feminine progenitors wasted goods most extravagantly with their tuckers, flounces and festoons, their bows and sashes. They even had pockets on the outside of their dresses—not the mannish, tailored kind, but pockets put on with a flounce all round.

And how they loved artificial flowers! Their hats were covered with them and their dresses had elaborate garnitures of roses. These flower accessories do not seem so queer, though, as the black netting mittens, the hair chains and the feronnières which crossed the brow and encircled the head.

In the column in the "Lady's Book" for March of 1840 headed "Chat of Fashions" we read that shawls are an important factor of the spring styles:

"Those of China crape are expected to be the most in favor this summer; they are without dispute the most elegant of all the fancy shawls that have appeared for some years. They are embroidered in superb patterns of quite a novel kind; instead of being figured in the loom, they are embroidered in silk and without any wrong side."

And of the new parasols for carriages the reader was assured that "they are perfectly calculated for that purpose; of a very small size, and with folding sticks, so they may be used to shade the face as a fan; they are composed of pou de sole. Some are trimmed with fringes; others have an embroidered border."

The riding habits described in the fashion magazine seventy-two years ago this month was as follows:

"The corages differ, for though they are always tight, some are made buttoned from top to bottom and others with large lapsels; the jackets are short and not very full; the skirt is of the usual width and length and the sleeves are tight. The cloth that these habits are composed of must be of a very light kind, either black or blue. Habits made with the corage closed down the front have it fastened and buttons placed at regular distances through which the high shirt is seen; it is plaited like that of a man's and trimmed with lace; the sleeve is tight and the jacket very long. These habits may be made in casimire or in double merino. Some also are made with the skirt composed of either of these materials and the corage of velvet.

The April number has a paragraph on that ever-important subject, hair:

"The present fashion of dressing the front hair is either long ringlets in very full tufts, plain bands or bands with the ends braided and turned up again. The back hair is worn so low behind that it touches the back of the neck, being coiled up in braids at the very roots of the hair. Sometimes it forms a figure of eight placed the cross way; at others the braids are twisted over each other, forming one large mass; pearls or a gold chain are frequently twisted into these braids, and the feathers or flowers spring from this mass and droop towards the left ear. Feronnières are still fashionable."

The April number also gives the last word in caps: "The present fashion for caps is very pretty; the cauls are very small and sit almost close to the head. The borders are very full and deep at the sides; they come very low and are intermingled with small bouquets of velvet flowers; those called the bell borders are amongst the most fashionable; the ribbands for caps are of satin."

The May number announces "something new": "From a ring on the little finger of the right hand depends a chain, to which is attached either an eyeglass or smelling bottle, whichever may be the most useful."

This number also brought the tidings that



Evening Costume

"coral ornaments are being revived" and that "in some instances the back hair is encircled with wreaths of coral and is retained by pins of the same kind."

There is further information on hair: "In a front view of the hair, as it is sometimes now dressed, neither curls nor flowers can be seen. The tresses full, loosely put together, a couple of inches on the neck. No comb is used to fasten them, but bodkins ornamented with pearls or jewels."

The women who this season are waiting with subdued excitement the newest developments in headgear can imagine with what keen interest the women of the spring of 1840 read in the "Lady's Book" that "The Caroline or Marine Moss has been introduced as a trimming for bonnets," and further that "black lace hats are now in vogue. They are prettier when trimmed with a wreath of roses or carnation pinks. They are certainly the most beautiful articles of the season."

That June of 1840! What a month for flowers it was. The sweet girl graduates and the June brides must have looked like moving flower gardens. The "Lady's Book" says:

"The most fashionable for hats are two branches of the camelia, pink acacia, two dahlias, roses or a wreath of mixed flowers. For straw bonnets, a branch of lilac, violets, lily of the valley; and for silk hats, all the above, with bachelor's buttons, daisies and fancy drooping flowers, pink or blue consisting of large bells, one inside the other; they are placed quite at the side; wreaths going all round are sometimes worn."

Later in the summer the "Lady's Book" gave forth the dictate that "the hats are getting smaller and a more becoming shape. The front and crown seems all of one piece, and towards the back the form gradually slants, so that the back of the crown is even lower than the bonnet. These little bonnets sit very round and comfortable to the face; they come very long at the sides; the trimming is as simple as possible, or quite the contrary. Some have flowers and lace; others only a trimming of material."

A head dress is pictured in the August number which sounds very attractive to the connoisseur of 1912. It is called a "head dresse"—one of the prettiest caps that has appeared for some time, is composed of rose-colored gauze; the caul is so very small that it does little more than cover the knot of hair behind; the front is formed of three rows of gauze bias, quilled full, and encircling the caul in such a manner as to form a diadem on the summit of the head, descending at the sides and turning up at the back of the caul. A full knot of satin riband, with floating end, adorns one side and a rose with buds and foliage ornaments the other.

The August number also tells that "Caps are more or less ornamented with flowers. There are other pretty coiffures, between a cap and a tur-



Unique Cloak - White Cambric Figured with Sprigs - Walking or Carriage Costume



White Cambric Dress - Apron of Changeable Silk Silk Dress Changeable or Green White Figured Muslin

ban; the crown is that of a cap; but in place of the blonde border there is a roll of gauze exactly such as would be to a turban—it may be with or without a falling end. The flowers adapted to these caps are hop blossoms in every possible color; they are placed as low as where the cap string should come on each side. Indeed, all the trimmings are worn unusually low at the sides."

The trend toward a decrease in size affected sleeves, too. The "Lady's Book" prophesied that "the plain, tight, long sleeves are coming again decidedly, notwithstanding all that has been said against them; it must be admitted that they are sadly disadvantageous to some figures, viz., to those remarkably tall and thin, or to those inclined to embonpoint and low in stature."

One of the woodcuts in the March number of 1840 pictures a cloak—"a perfectly unique cloak, and more particularly adapted for the month of March, which," the designer adds, "although a spring month is apt sometimes to be very bleak. It is a garment holding a position betwixt and between—the remnant of winter and commencement of spring. It is of cream colored cashmere or silk lined with blue satin, bordered with a rouleau of the same." With this cloak goes a hat of open shape "interior trimmed with morning glories and exterior to suit fancy."

Another March fashion plate is a "dress of white cambric, figured with sprigs. Also, waist ribbon

to match black lace. Hat of white satin, trimmed with flowers."

One of the June dresses is of "lilac silk, corage high, made in coat dress style. Bishop sleeves, demi-large, skirt trimmed with two flounces." With this goes a "chip hat, ornamented with roses."

A child's dress of white cambric is ornamented with pink bows and with it the small girl is supposed to wear a "mantilla cape of black satin trimmed with black lace and a straw bonnet ornamented with ribbands and flowers."

White cambric was a very popular fabric that summer of 1840 as was also white muslin. The accompaniments for one of the white cambric dresses were a green silk cape edged with white lace, green sash to correspond, a "casing hat with a bunch of flowers drooping at the side" and a light silk parasol.

The description and picture of an evening dress of white crape are quite attractive. It is made "over satin skirt trimmed with flounces festooned at the side with roses. Grecian corage, confined in front with a single rose. Short, full sleeve, plaited down at top and festooned at the side with a rose to correspond with the general trimming of the dress. Headdress formed of flowers and ribbands."

There is a picture of a riding habit which has no description, but only the mention that it is the

"one worn by Queen Victoria and is copied from the World of Fashion, in which publication the face is said to be a portrait of her majesty."

The soft, clinging, although elaborate, matinees for this season, fashioned on long, straight lines, and the close-fitting boudoir caps of 1912, make the house dress of 1840 seem rather stiff and awkward. Here is the description of a "home dress" in the Godey's book:

"Dress of white muslin; corage half high; the back has a few gathers at the waist; the fronts cross and are in large set folds or plaits. Round the neck is a narrow lace; the sleeves are short and do not even cover the elbows; they are quite tight and have five double tucks (which are cut the cross way), put on as plain as possible and close together, so that the upper tuck covers the putting on of the one below it, and so on. The skirt has rather deep flounce at the very bottom. Apron of broche silk, with a flounce of the same all round and a double one at the bottom. The pockets are on the outside, rather pointed at the bottom; they are put on with a narrow flounce all round, except at top."

Then comes a description of the cap, which was to be worn with this home dress, which will interest the girl who has been making boudoir caps for Easter gifts this season:

"The cap is of the kind denominated 'The Peasant's Cap'; the crown is like a half handkerchief, plaited into form at the back; the lappets in front descend below the ears and are turned up again and fastened amidst the plaits at the back of the cap; they are considerably stiffened and in three or four deep plaits of folds. A colored ribbon, after forming a rosette-bow in front, encircles the cap and finishes in a bow with long ends at the back; a small bouquet of roses is placed at the left side."

The hair was to be arranged "in smooth bands, the ends braided and turned up at each side of the face." A "bow of colored ribbon" fastened the corage in front and the accessories of the dress were a hair chain and "half-long black netting mittens."

Another house dress called a "morning negligee" or "robe de chambre" was "of china foulard silk, a nankeen-colored ground with a showy eastern pattern in bright colors, it is made with a piece put in at the neck, which is covered with a flat collar, the remainder of the dress, which is all in one, is gathered to the neck piece; the sleeves are gathered down in three places at the shoulder, the remainder of the sleeve, which is immensely wide and long, is drawn up by a silk cord at the inner part of the arm. The entire dress is lined with bright blue Florence (sarsnet). It is fastened round the waist by a cord and tassel the color of the lining. Long white gloves are to be seen underneath the others. Bronze shoes of peau Anglaise, embroidered handkerchief."