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DRESS AND ITS VICTIMS.

By Miss Harriet Martineau.

There are a good many people who cannot possibly believe that dress can have any share in the deaths of the 100,000 persons who go needlessly to the grave every year in our happy England, where there are more means of comfort for every body than in any other country in Europe.

How can people be killed by dress, now-a-days? they ask. We must be thinking of the old times when the ladies laced so tight that "salts and strong waters seem to have been called for to some fainting fair one, as often as numbers were collected together, whether at church, or at Ranelagh, or the theatres. Or perhaps we are thinking of the accidents that have happened during particular fashions of dress, as the burning of the Marchioness of Salisbury, from her high cap nodding over the candle; or the deaths of the Ladies Bridgman last year, from the skirts of one of them catching fire at the grate; or the number of inquests held during the fashion of gigot sleeves, when a lady could scarcely dine in company, or play the piano at home, without peril of death by fire.

Grace and beauty are flowers from the root of utility. The worst taste in dress is where things are put on for no purpose or use, as in the earrings, nose-rings, bangles and necklaces of savage (or civilized) wearers, the feathers on the head, and flaunting strips of gay colour, whether of wampum or ribbon, and the rings and turbans that one sees—now in Nubia, and now by Lake Huron, and now in New York or London. The best taste is where the genuine uses of dress are not lost sight of, and the gratification of the eye grows out of them.

At present, too, no woman who adopts the fashion of the hoop in any form is properly guarded against the climate. Any medical man in good

practice can tell of the spread of rheumatism since women ceased to wear their clothing about their limbs, and stuck it off with frames and hoops, admitting damp and draught, with as little rationality as if they tried to make an umbrella serve the purpose of a bonnet.

Then, observe the head and the feet. The eyes are unsheltered from sun and wind, and the most important region of the head is exposed by the bonnets which Englishwomen are so weak as to wear in imitation of the French. Again, the doctors have their painful tale to tell of neuralgic pains in the face and head, which abound beyond all prior experience, of complaints in the eyes, and all the consequences that might be anticipated from the practice of lodging the bonnet on the nape of the neck, and leaving all the fore part of the skull exposed. Why the bonnet is worn at all is the mystery. A veil, white or black, would be considered an absurdity as a substitute for the bonnet in a climate like ours; but it would be actually more serviceable than the handful of flimsy decorations now usurping the place of the useful, cheap, and pretty straw bonnet, which suits all ages in its large variety.

If we consider the female dress of 1859, what can we say of it? Does the costume, as a whole, follow the outline of the form? Does it fit accurately and easily? Is the weight made to hang from the shoulders? Are the garments of to-day convenient and agreeable in use? Is the mode modest and graceful? So far from it, that all these conditions are conspicuously violated by those who think they dress well. Here and there we may meet a sensible woman, or a girl who has no money to spend in new clothes, whose appearance is pleasing—in a straw bonnet that covers the head, in a neat gown which hangs gracefully and easily from the natural waist, and which does not sweep up the dirt: but the spectacle is now rare; for bad taste in the higher classes spreads very rapidly downwards, corrupting the morals as it goes.

It is painful to see what is endured by some young women in shops and factories, as elsewhere. They cannot stoop for two minutes over their work without gasping and being blue, or red, or white in the face. They cannot go up stairs without stopping to take breath every few steps. Their arms are half numb, and their hands red or chilled; and they must walk as if they were all-of-a-piece, without the benefit and grace of joints in the spine and limbs. A lady had the curiosity to feel what made a girl whom she knew so like a wooden figure, and found a complete parade extending round the body. On her remonstrating, the girl pleaded that she had "only six and twenty whalebones!"

Do the petticoats of our time serve as any thing but a mask to the human form—a perversion of human proportions? A girl in the dance looks like the Dutch tumbler that was a favourite toy in my infancy. The fit is so the reverse of accurate, as to be like a silly box—a masquerade without wit. While at the same time, it is not an easy fit. The prodigious weight of the modern petticoat, and the difficulty of getting it all into

the waistband, creates a necessity for compressing and loading the waist in a way most injurious to health. Under a rational method of dress the waist should suffer neither weight or pressure—nothing more than the girdle which brings the garment into form and folds. As to the convenience of the hooped skirts, only ask the women themselves, who are always in danger from fire, or wind, or water, or carriage wheels, or rails, or pails, or nails, or, in short, every thing they encounter. Ask the husbands, fathers, or brothers, and hear how they like being cut with the steel frame when they enter a gate with a lady, or being driven into a corner of the pew at church, or to the outside of the coach, for want of room. As for the children—how many have been swept off pathways, or foot-bridges, or steamboat decks by the pitiless crinoline, or hoops of some unconscious walking balloon! * * * From the duchess to the maid-servant, the slaves of French taste have lost position; and it will require a permanent establishment of some leading points of the sense and morality of dress to restore their full dignity to the matronage and maidenhood of England.—Once a Week.

CAMPHENE AND BURNING FLUID.

The too common use of this fluid is the cause of the loss of more life and property than people are aware of. It is exceedingly dangerous, and is the cause of many accidental fires; it is also used daily by designing persons throughout the country to set their property on fire. I am of opinion that if the State had the same right to regulate the sale of this article, as of any thing else that is dangerous to life and property, the right should be exercised. I have in a former report called your attention to this subject. Either a law should be passed to regulate the sale of burning fluid, or its use should be entirely prohibited.

I am positive that at this time there are in the city of Brooklyn more than two hundred places where camphene and burning fluid are sold, and that the profits of each store would not average 37 cents per week. I have never seen a suspicious fire in a store where it was sold, but the fire originated near the fluid cans, and in seven cases out of ten, if the building is not entirely destroyed, the camphene or burning fluid can be traced. I have known cases, and many who read this are aware of the fact, that in several cases parties have obtained privilege to keep camphene and burning fluid for sale on their premises, and that fires have occurred on said premises through the agency of camphene in less than ten days thereafter. I have frequently heard it stated that people do not read their policies, but I am inclined to think some do, for they get the required permission to keep these dangerous fluids before an accident occurs. However, I do not believe that every person who keeps camphene, does so with the intention of setting fire to their premises; but the knowledge of the fact that it will burn, and that it evaporates very quick, and therefore not easily detected