

REFORM IN WOMEN'S DRESS.

We are too different from the French to adapt with any success the style which best suits them. The English character and mind being as compared with the French, simple, vague, and slow; imaginative rather than fanciful; constant and stable in feeling rather than quickly sympathetic; proud rather than vain; and though proud are apt to surrender our national taste not because the taste we adopt is superior, but because the weak side of our simplicity is deluded into believing theoretically in the taste which thinks so much of itself. That we are not discriminating in the manner in which we follow French fashions is shown by the fact that we do not copy what is really admirable in their work, and that we exaggerate almost to distortion the most fantastic inventions in French dress. Many a Paris milliner will keep an *outré* form of the fashions for her English and American customers, and we in England often imitate the frills and furbelows of French trimmings, but we do not make a point of imitating the neatness and perfection of the work, nor are we clever in fitting the wearing of the garment appropriately to the occasion, so that often we see an idea which starts from the Paris milliner in the form of an elaborate and artful piece of needle-work, swept about dirty London streets in a slovenly, untidy form. In desiring a reform in dress we do not mean that individual taste should not be most fully exercised for the good reason that, as those houses are the most interesting which suggest the character and occupations of their inhabitants, so also the dress which in a measure translates the individuality of its wearer must always have the most charm for those who care for the individual. In all matters surely the worst reason for doing anything is because everybody else does it. But still in dress as in all other matters for individual liberty of taste to work successfully such liberty must be based on intelligent laws. At present these laws are those of a fashion which we contend is anything but intelligent and which leads many English woman to adopt a style of costume that misrepresents the nicest part of their character, and which sits but ill on any but the fast cosmopolitan set who sacrifice distinction and all character in appearance, it would seem, to the desire of looking to belong to no country in particular. It would be well were our Dress in harmony with such national culture, as accentuates the better side of our English character—the modesty, dignity, and imagination which we English at our best possess. Surely human beings, being the most interesting elements in life, ought to study the art of dress, which affects their appearance so materially, sufficiently to keep pace with the taste of their houses and furniture, if any good results attend beauty in external matters at all. We cannot here enter into the minutiae of any scheme for re-dressing the English public; we can only suggest that such a re-dressing is advisable which would put an end to the unhealthy, distorting, and ugly forms which are, through all changes of fashion, steadily adhered to, and that the good side of our English characteristics should be woven into such a re-dressing. For instance, could not garments be invented at once convenient, modest, and beautiful, which should give an arrangement of folds (folds being in themselves lovely as means of giving varied light and shade, and graceful intricacies of line), instead of the light, foldless dress, expanded and stretched over the form, falsified by a depraved idea of the human figure which is much less modest than nature left to herself without any garments at all would be.

It would simplify the difficulties much, were it possible to gratify the love of change by varying the ornamentation, and not the form of the garments. Perhaps there is no line in which ornamentation could be carried out with more variety and beauty, and in so doing more scope would be given for our imagination, and with (what is of so much importance) more interest to the worker, than the art of embroidery by hand. How much more wholesome for mind, and therefore for body, would be such an employment as embroidering, carrying out beautiful designs in lovely-coloured silks and crewels on the stuffs which are now neither rare nor expensive, but yet beautiful, compared to the occupation of the many milliner's girls who sit hour after hour, day after day, week after week, working the sewing-machine, in order to produce thousands and thousands of yards of monotonous frills and furbelows, made to be worn out as quickly, and in the process to collect as much dust as possible, the highest aim of such manufacture being to produce the effect of smartness and elaboration? Were the workwomen employed the same number of hours in embroidering beautiful designs, in delightful colours and delicate tones, we should not only have much of the world dressed in really beautiful garments, which would, moreover, remain beautiful as long as the threads held together, but we should have found a means of encouraging good design and a field of industry for the many art students who fail to support themselves as artists, but might, by making appropriate designs for embroidering dresses, do Art a better turn than by producing sixth-rate pictures. We have never adopted generally a French fashion of dress for our English children, feeling instinctively that the grace of childhood is too imperative in its simplicity for us to shackle it with the artificialities of French inventions, however daintily carried out. To the ordinary English mind, a French child dressed in the fashion is a comical little object. It has, to our minds, also something of the pathos of a young foal put cruelly early into harness. But it is when our young girls are growing up, developing from children into women, that fashion necessitates their being put into harness, it is

then the operation of "fining down" the figure by stays begins; that the free action and natural balance are restricted and destroyed; that, instead of giving every function a chance of free development, the incessant, gradual pressure is used of whale-bone and steel where Nature has not even allowed the hardness of any bony structure to press. Of course, Nature's form can only be materially altered where there are no bones to resist, but the want of sense shown in the desire to alter her form cannot be too urgently denounced. Happily, *Punch* has lately taken up the case of beauty and good-taste in this matter, in a most practical and convincing form; and in Mr. Du Maurier's and Mr. Sambourne's inimitable drawings we have the absurdities of fashion saliently shown, though hardly caricatured; and find hints at improvements in dress perfectly moderate in taste and artistic in treatment.—*Spectator*.

UNITARIANISM.*

At the American Unitarian Conference, held in Saratoga, the Conference sermon was preached by the Rev. P. W. Clayden, and is worthy of attention and study. He thus describes the Unitarians whom he is addressing, flatly contradicting the pre-conceived ideas of many "orthodox" people:—

"You are animated by the missionary rather than the speculative or critical spirit,—that you are not mere creedless seekers of an unknown truth, but teachers and witnesses of a word of life you have seen and felt and handled,—and that you do not ask to-day for novelties of thought or of expression, but for sympathy, encouragement, and stimulus in doing your duty to the truths you know."

The italics are mine, and the italicised statement is, perhaps more than any other, a direct challenge to outsiders. Unitarians are usually thought to hold no creeds; this is a mistake. Unitarians, in common with all Christians, have creeds; but Unitarians are allowed, in the fullest sense and to the utmost extent, the liberty of private judgment. Unitarians do not bind themselves to "iron-clad" or "damnation" creeds, and they hold that the same tests that are applied in criticising profane history must be applied in criticising sacred history, and that if the latter cannot stand these tests, it must necessarily be classed under the category of profane history. (In Mosheim's works will be found some curious instances of this, which completely upset the demands of certain creeds and churches; that is, if Mosheim would apply the same tests of criticism in both instances. One creed has been altered several times and *very materially*, so that infallibility is in some cases fallibility, and orthodoxy becomes heterodoxy; "my doxy is orthodoxy, another man's doxy is heterodoxy," is in many cases the only meaning to be given to these terms.)

As to the place which Unitarianism occupies in the life of the age; as to the spirit of the movement; as to the "function it is called upon to discharge in the religious unsettlement and re-settlement which are going on in the world around us,"—it stands in a grand and noble position, forming a view of intellectual beauty, endeavouring in pure and rational simplicity to raise the curtain which shields in many cases the Deity from our view—it stands with its feet on the rocks of Time and History, "its uplifted face looking toward the Dawn of Future Day," and claiming with joy to exercise God's beauteous gift to man—Reason—to the fullest extent. For Unitarians the Day is beautifully dawning; other churches have had their rising, and are now watching the falling hands on the dial; their beliefs are being disproved, and to this state of feeling Keble's despondent hymn may be applied:

"Is this a time to plant and build,
Add house to house and field to field,
When round our walls the battle lowers,
When mines are hid beneath our towers,
And watchful foes are stealing round
To search and spoil the holy ground?"

"No, rather steel thy melting heart
To act the martyr's sternest part,
To watch with firm, unshrinking eye
The darling visions as they die,
Till all bright hopes and hues of day
Have faded into twilight gray!"

Religious systems perform their work and last their day and their year—they are born, they pass into manhood and pass away into higher forms. The Mosaic code has had its influence; what does it exert now upon life in this world? Many laugh at it indeed, while but few believe in it; and on good authority it is stated never to have been written by Moses at all—as it records his own death. Whether it be true or not, its influence as a religious power has passed away. So with Roman Catholic Christianity; so with the Calvinism of the Puritans. But on the other hand, nothing that was pure and holy and vital in the Prophets has passed away. Their teachings of justice, of charity, of Divine peace and rest, are cleared and brightened for us by the Saviour, and form the burden of our religious discourses in these times. Of this spirit the Rev. W. P. Clayden beautifully says:

"In just the same way, the spirit and life of Roman Catholic piety have been reproduced in Protestantism. We can appreciate the heroic devotion of a St. Francis, while we criticise the exaggerations by which it passed over into fanaticism. And, in our own Channing, we seem to see the devotion of Fénelon and Pascal in its modern dress, while Thomas à Kempis's "Imitation of Christ" is the most inspired book of devotion which has been written since prophetic times. The Reformation was not the destruction of Catholic piety; it was only the fulfilment which made the same trust, the same devotion, and the same zeal possible to other men in other times. The doctrines of our Puritan forefathers have undergone the same development. The old stern Calvinism has passed. The town in New England where the witches were burned has now more Unitarians in proportion to its population than