

would cure her, he put corsets on her, in order to take away her breath, and so prevent her, as he thought, from talking. This cruel punishment was inflicted by other heartless husbands. The punishment became so universal at last, that the ladies in their defence made a fashion of it, and so it has continued to the present day. The fair sex of our own day seem economic in this respect, for however prodigal they may be in other matters, they are for the least possible *waist*. Soemmering enumerates a catalogue of ninety-six diseases resulting from this *stringent habit* among them; many of the most frightful maladies—cancer, asthma, and consumption—are among them. Such unnatural compression, moreover, seems to indicate a very limited scope for the play of the affections, for what room is there for any heart at all? As if to atone for brevity of waist, the ladies indulge then in an amplitude of skirt. The merry dames of Elizabeth's court, in a wild spirit of fun, adopted the fashion of hideously deforming farthingales to ridicule the enormous trunk-hose worn by gentlemen of that period—determined, if not successful in shaming away that absurdity, at least to have a preposterous contrivance of their own. The idea was full of woman's wit. But, alas, they were caught in their own snare. Precious stones were profusely displayed on the bodices and skirts of brocade gowns, and vanity soon discovered that the stiff whalebone framework under the upper skirt formed an excellent showcase for family jewels. The passion thus gratified, the farthingale at once became the darling of court costume, and in its original shape continued in feminine favour till the reign of Queen Anne, when it underwent the modification lately revived for us—the Hoop. In vain did the *Spectator* lash and ridicule by turns the "unnatural disguisement;" in vain did grossest caricatures appear and wits exhaust their invention in lampoons and current epigrams; in vain even the publication of a grave pamphlet, entitled *The Enormous Abomination of the Hoop Petticoat, as the Fashion now is*; the mode, for once immutable, stands on the page of folly an enduring monument of feminine persistency.

Encouraged by the prolonged and undisputed sway of the farthingale, the hoop maintained an absolute supremacy through the three succeeding reigns, though often undergoing

changes which only served to make it more and more ridiculous. The most ludicrous of these alterations were the triangular-shaped hoops, which, according to the *Spectator*, gave a lady all the appearance of being in a go-cart; and the "pocket-hoops," which look like nothing so much as panniers on the side of a donkey—we mean the quadruped. Quite a funny incident is related by Bulwer about the wife of an English ambassador to Constantinople, in the time of James I. The lady, attended by her serving-women, all attired in enormous farthingales, waited upon the sultana, who received them with every show of respect and hospitality. Soon, however, the woman's curiosity got the better of her courtesy, and expressing her great surprise at the monstrous development of their form, she asked if it were possible that such could be the shape peculiar to the women of England. The English lady in reply hastened to assure her that their forms in nowise differed from those of the women of other countries, and carefully demonstrated to her Highness the construction of their dress, which alone bestowed the appearance so puzzling to her. There could scarcely be a more wholesome satire upon the absurd fashion than is conveyed in the simple recital of this well authenticated anecdote.

"It was but a year or two ago that complaints were loud against the amplitude of ladies' dresses. The extent of ground they covered was almost fabulous, and the consequent cost of a gown was a serious item of expenditure, and alarmed young men and old. The young feared an entanglement which might lead to matrimony, when a lady's dress was so costly, and their means were not great; and their elders looked with apprehension upon a state of things which, if it should find its way into their homes, would paralyze all their energies and exhaust their resources. But now the complaint is that, while the dresses are plain in front, they have such immense trains that they actually interfere with the enjoyment of the public. A lady who walks in the Park with a long train trailing behind her in the dust and dirt, occupies so much space that no one dares to follow within three or four yards of her. Imagine, then, what the inconvenience must be in large assemblies within doors, where space is not illimitable, and where the trains are even longer than