

unbecoming*—which diminishes your personal charms, and is quite unsuited to your station and circumstances."

"It is the fashion," said Sophia, hanging down her head, and vainly wishing the broad flat brim of her large hat would shade her face from her companion's searching gaze.

"The fashion!" he repeated, in a grave tone, "what have you to do with the fashion? George Linhope's daughter should have higher aims."

Sophia remembered the manner in which she had obtained her finery, and the reproof was doubly severe.

"Alice said well," she murmured to herself, when she assured me that I should repent the purchase of this hat, as long as I lived. What trouble and mortification has it already cost me. If Captain Ogilvie did not admire it, I would never wear it again." This last conviction operated more powerfully on her mind than Stephen's reproof, and her own self-condemnation; and she returned for answer: "That she thought the best way of avoiding affectation of singularity was to dress as other young people dressed, and adopt the reigning fashions of the day."

"I suppose Mary Martin, the pretty country girl who used to call milk about the town, when I last visited B——, thought the same," returned her provoking companion; "for I passed her today dressed in a blue silk gown, and a hat exactly the shape of yours."

"But, Mr. Norton! consider the difference between her rank and mine," said Sophia, not a little mortified by this piece of information; "surely a girl like her adopting this style of dress is perfectly ridiculous?"

"It only shows that the girl is vain of her pretty face, and that the milk trade has flourished," said Stephen. "The love of display, which induced her to lay out her hard earned wages in such unbecoming finery is not a bit more absurd or criminal, than that which actuates her richer neighbors. This wish to outshine her companions in the costliness of her dress is not confined to the breast of Mary Martin, though, from the lowliness of her station, it appears more conspicuous. It is a weakness common to her age and sex. At the present day, when all ranks are struggling for precedence, and all in turn are outstepping their original bounds, the rage for dress has spread like a pestilence through the land. Do not imagine, Sophia, that merely telling the lower orders of the folly and presumption of awkwardly imitating the manners and costume of their superiors will be able to remedy the evil. The middle class, who are their world, and whose fashions they eagerly adopt, must first set them a better example

by assuming a plainer, and more appropriate style. When we see the daughters of farmers and tradesmen rivalling women of rank and fortune in the richness of their attire, ought it to be a matter of surprise that the same infection spreads to the poor?"

"It is an evil for which there exists no remedy," said Sophia, eager to vindicate her passion for fine clothes.

"The stream must first be cleansed at the fountain head," said Norton; "persons in moderate circumstances must set a better example to their dependents, by living within their incomes, and dressing in proportion to their means, and not according to the figure they wish to make in the world. To this inordinate love of dress may be attributed half the vices and miseries which make this beautiful earth a moral desert, and destroy the domestic peace of so many families. One of the reigning follies of the day is for the middle ranks to assume an appearance, and affect a consequence, which they do not really possess. One half of the well dressed puppets we meet parading the streets are composed of these pretenders to gentility; their property and credit are alike exhausted, they must sink back into insignificance and contempt, yet, sacrifice for a few years of heartless pleasure, and mere outside show, the comfort and respectability of a whole life. The artisan and tradesman, at a humble distance, imitate their example, and endeavour to sport a fine exterior, while their smart clothes only partially conceal the poverty and wretchedness they cover."

Sophia felt perfectly miserable during Mr. Norton's speech. She was fearful that Alice had begged him to talk to her upon the subject, and finding no argument to advance in extenuation of her leading vice, she abandoned the attempt, and Stephen, hoping that what he had said might make an impression upon her volatile mind, dismissed the unpleasant topic, and quickened his pace, until they reached the avenue of old oaks that led to the Abbey farm, where they were joined by the rest of the party.

The house they were approaching was a fine specimen of the style of architecture common two centuries ago. Its high turreted chimnies and indented roofs, rose proudly from among the old elms which surrounded the building, whose massy trunks, excavated by time, still seemed to bid defiance to the storm. The mansion conveyed, even in this age of luxury, the idea of a good substantial residence, for the yeoman or farmer, and in real elegance of structure far surpassed the heavy square buildings of the present era.

The harvest had just commenced, and the banks that skirted the high road, in front of the Abbey farm, were occupied by a large party of gleaners, who were eagerly watching the loading of the last wagon of corn in a neighbouring field. Our party

*The great flat hats, worn by the ladies of fashion in the years 1827-8.