"Almost a Miracle" WAR AND FASHION

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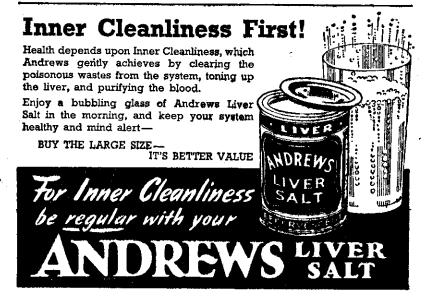


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When Men March To Battle, Women Change Their Clothes

HE study of female fashion is very far from being the trivial pursuit it is sometimes considered," says James Laver. "The common view" (we presume he means the man's eyeview) "is that the cut of a dress, the shape of a hat, a waistline high or low, the angle of a feather, are things quite arbitrary, decided by a small group of designers sitting in London, Paris or New York, and imposed willy-nilly on an unsuspecting and herd-like public. The history of costume confutes this view completely. There is a rhythm in dress, there is a meaning in fashion."

Fashion, Mr. Laver goes on to say, is always the epitome of an epoch, and in it can be seen reflected in miniature the whole of an age. If this is so, we can expect to see the history of a nation reflected in the costume of its women. But not all the more important social, economic, or political changes are commemorated in woman's costume. In fact fashion often seeks its inspiration from more personal, romantic quarters. Rather than an expression of great historical changes, women's clothes often seem to be merely an expression of the mood of the passing

When War Is Picturesque

If this is so in what way does war affect fashion? If we look back over the nineteenth century it appears as though the minor wars have had far more immediate effect upon woman's clothes than the major ones. To be really satisfactory as a subject worthy of fashionable record a war should be quaint and colourful. The further removed it is from woman's daily life the larger will be its yield of exotic and picturesque ideas for her adornment. And the 19th century was particularly rich in little wars. The Bolivar hat of 1825, the burnouse in 1856, the cuirasse bodice and dolman of the 'seventies may all be traced back to the successful little wars of the last century.

But all wars are not picturesque. If we consider the more important wars of the last century and a half we see that their direct effect on fashion has been considerably less than their direct effect on history. In her dress woman is an escapist. She tends to ignore the unpleasant, and thus her costume seldom commemorates events, however topical, which have unpleasant associations for her. Thus, although khaki was the colour for women's dresses in the first year of the Boer War, it did not outlast our first few months of victory.

Indirect Effects

But if the two big wars of the last century and a half had little direct effect on fashion they have made up for it by their indirect effect. A major war (on which gravely disturbs the domestic life of the average woman) always produces at first psychological and later economic results which are reflected in her fashions. And this is



shown in the effect upon feminine attire of the Napoleonic Wars and of the First Great War.

The first effect of a major war on fashion is an increased elaboration and an increased femininity in dress. Man overnight becomes a hero. The creature who was formerly a prosaic fellow-inhabitant of the globe is now endowed with the glamour of a uniform-symbol that he is about to give up all for woman's protection. She is increasingly conscious of him.

She redoubles her efforts to attract. If appealing for his protection her costume becomes more wistfully feminine, if claiming his attention it may become more audacious. But it does not remain indifferent.

Daring Styles

The Napoleonic Wars affected the English domestic circles only gradually, but by the turn of the century warmindedness was infecting the rising generation and feminine modes became as daring as possible. Military and naval designs were adapted for feminine use. Presently the economic factor began to rear its ugly head, and we find cotton in the form of muslin replacing the silk that could be smuggled only at great cost from France. With the opening of the Peninsular campaign in 1808 all sorts of Spanish effects were introduced, though the gayer note permitted by the approach of final victory did not seriously threaten the note of classical simplicity characteristic of female fashion.

As The War Went On

In Great War No. 1 women for almost the first time in history found themselves active participants. The effect on fashion was naturally profound.

For the first year or two costumes remained piquant and attractive -there were flounces and feminine furbelows. Striking hats with a military or naval flavour made themselves noticed. Then as the war dragged on there was both an economic and a psychological reaction. Materials became dearer and the cheap dressmaker replace the modiste. Less material could be used and elaboration in the form of frills and embroidery was no longer possible. And hand in hand with this economic change went the psychological. In the first year or so of the war woman was standing on the sidelines cheering on her man, and her costume was designed to attract and

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