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Women's Fashion Today

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“Women’s Fashion Today”

Maria, Queen of Romania

Translated by Cindy Evans

From time immemorial, women's fashion has played an important role in the world. Even since the days of Eve being cast out of the Garden of Eden. As Mark Twain wrote in his *Adam's Diary*, the first man remarked in a protesting tone, "Ever since we ate the apple our clothes have been uncomfortable, but Eve says they're 'stylish' and that's what's important!"

I suspect that Eve was right, but I must also agree with Adam that "stylish" and comfortable are not always the same thing. As with all women, clothing has played its part in my life; I have even been counted among the most stylish women in my day, although I don't always strictly follow the fashion of the time and even sometimes go against its tyranny if I don't find something becoming or comfortable.

Like every other girl, I became very excited upon getting my first ball gown; for my wedding (I married at 17) I tried to look as good as possible; later, as I was crowned, I even wanted my crown to be flattering. Because it was being made for me out of the gold from my country, I specified the shape that I desired. And one time I was accused by a woman from the older generation that while in deepest mourning I wanted to look too pretty!

Ever since the *Tournüre*¹, which I wore as a young girl with ridiculous pride, I have followed every type of fashion. I have worn *Glockenröcke*² and *Schinkenärmel*³, tripped over senselessly long dresses that surged like waves across the floor, protested against skirts that only reach my knees, had my waistline moved up to where it was almost under my arms, just as I have had to become accustomed to the waistlines of today, of which a gentleman once said, "I don't understand the desire of modern women to sit on their waistline." I have also stretched and contracted my waistline according to the mood of the fashion at the moment. Thank Heavens, today we don't have to lace ourselves up until we can't breathe. That, at least, is an improvement!

One thing is certain: people become accustomed surprisingly quickly to the fashion that is at the moment "in vogue." I cannot, however, claim to be excessively thrilled with this year's fashions.

¹ A type of bustle popular in 19th century women's fashion, used to create fullness in the back of the skirt.

² A type of skirt which has the shape of a bell.

³ A voluminous type of sleeve worn by women, popular in the latter part of the 19th century.

Very few look very good in them. Nevertheless we still simply shrug our shoulders at fashions from yesterday.

Personally I have passed the age in which I feel myself “fully dressed” in a shapeless smock that reaches my knees and is so tight that I can neither get into it or out of it, nor am I able to go through a room unencumbered. I have always abhorred the *Entrave*⁴ skirt. It is of utmost importance for a queen or princess to not be hindered in her movement. A person must be able to step out of a carriage with dignity; it is also important to be able to pass through a room when every person is looking and is making room. One is not allowed to scurry or hop like Japanese women in a *Festkleid*⁵. They typically don’t have to go through large rooms. As an athletic lady I also would like to be fully able to jump over trenches or to climb a hill or to make large steps as I please without risking my health on account of the cut of my skirt.

It seems to me that the trend today is as much as possible to cancel out the difference between genders. I find that this has its pros and cons, but it would take me too far from the subject if I were to spend more time on this topic; although I confess freely that I do have my own views on this subject.

Women’s clothing today follows this tendency. I could almost say that women sometimes want to have an unjustifiably large part of everything. They demand the benefits of being a woman, the pleasure that they draw from the accidental fact that they are a woman, while they adopt the methods of men, their posture, their athletic activities, and as much as possible, their attire.

They cut their hair even though this once was deemed their most valuable possession, and I cannot help but think that one day they will regret having sacrificed their “crowning glory,” which they cannot win back overnight, for a temporary fashion.

When my youngest daughter was little, she sported truncated hair which suited her delightfully, and because curling was out of the question, it also proved to be quite a comfortable style. As she realized that she was growing up, she asked permission let her hair likewise grow out. At first I wanted to protest, as mothers are inclined to do in relation to anything which touches on the

⁴ A type of pleated underskirt which caused the skirt to be smaller in volume, in contrast with the fuller skirts of earlier fashion trends.

⁵ A celebratory dress or costume.

childlike character of their loved ones, but she made an argument that I had to accept, “But Mama, I can cut my hair at any time in five minutes, but it takes a year or longer to grow out; and what if “he” came along and didn’t like short hair!”

One must acknowledge that this objection was reasonable.

Girls today, however, have gone beyond this simple cut; many only feel content with so-called “Shingling” (short hair), a hairstyle that comes a step closer to being a masculine haircut, but I would like to know how many men actually like this style. Where is the “playing with her soft, golden locks?” Is that forever gone? I lean towards the opinion that this is not the case.

I am not one of those who disapprove of the super-skinny boyish-girls popular today (one always admires what one does not have). Since I myself am of more affluent proportions, I can only imagine that it must be wonderful not to carry any weight at all. But I believe it was less the men, than the women themselves who brought about the exaggerated admiration for this board-like figure that has no traces of those curved lines— as handed down from the Greeks, or is it handed up? —which we have learned to view as the element of true feminine beauty.

Sports have without a doubt contributed greatly to this, and certainly a skinny, lithe girl has the advantage over her rounder sister when it comes to polo, hockey, tennis, and ultra-modern dance. Certainly our ladies of former times, who had a bit too much of everything, would not have looked good in a man’s saddle⁶.

Certainly a *juste milieu*⁷ would be the ideal in everything, but rarely is this achieved! I believe that we have gone a step too far in this direction, and that health and, I may add, children, must not be sacrificed to this exaggerated idea of “curvelessness” —if this expression can be permitted.

Automobiles instigated the first revolution in modern clothing. We were forced to give up our picturesque garb for practical clothing. We now must wear smaller hats, dust-colored coats, shorter skirts etc.

⁶ Women and men used different saddles. As a general rule, women rode side-saddle, which was considered to be more modest and was appropriate to a long dress. The reference here is to a woman who rides with one leg on each side of the horse.

⁷ A happy medium or golden mean

With the disappearance of the carriage, the world has lost a large part of its elegance. The notion of distance has been overcome, even our remote neighbors are now accessible to us, but the younger generation will never know the majestic sight which Hyde Park presented, when in the late afternoon the beautiful Queen Alexandra, smiling and greeting, drove through the long rows of wonderfully equipped barouches⁸ and victorias, drawn by splendid horses with harnesses polished to a high shine, only as the English can do it. All the women resembled flowers; they had been reared to be more beautiful than any other women in the world, and they were only there to give the day splendor. These things belong to the past; now we race away, shroud ourselves in veils, and even wear sunglasses. We certainly see more of the world, we can accomplish more in 24 hours than ever before, but we and our vehicles are certainly a lot less attractive to the eye.

Therefore we must not waste our energies crying over the past. I myself am a passionate automobilist and have been able to get to know my country as previous Queens were not able to. But because I love all things of beauty I do allow myself to sigh when I think of the things that have delighted our eyes, and which we will never see again.

Although in comparison to the very young, among the older generation I nevertheless belong to the group that follows the trends of the times; I am no “protester.” I admire the great inventions of our times. In many things, particularly in the furnishings of our rooms, gardens and homes, we apply far better taste than our grandmothers, and yet I fear, with our all-too-practical inventions we have in nowise made the world prettier.

With the automobile and all the innovations of this type, there arose a practice with which I cannot agree in any way. This is the way that today every woman, old or young, stout or thin, tall or short, wears the exact same thing. In my modest opinion, a woman should only wear what is becoming to her. Of course I do not demand her to wear crinoline when her sisters wear a tight skirt. But I demand of her that she look in the mirror with the eyes of a neighbor and not feel obligated to wear something that does not at all fit her size, figure and style. I suspect that it has in part to do with the democracy of our time, in which every garment is made by the hundreds and thousands, and fashions change every two months, so that the people who follow the rushed

⁸ Barouches and victorias were fashionable horse carriages in the 19th century.

tempo of fashion assume a sort of uniform, which every woman adopts because “that’s what they are wearing.”

For many years, evening dresses have become very unflattering, according to my taste. The passion for short skirts is responsible for the grotesque fashion of the scanty little evening dresses that barely cover the knees, and from which a fringe of every imaginable type hangs from unexpected corners, as a sort of substitute for a train, but which only serves to entangle one’s feet or be torn off by the first gentleman who bids one a good evening.

To my artistic eye, this fashion was never pretty, not even when it was the creation of the greatest and most famous houses. It remains a sin against line; furthermore women can only move with great difficulty in these dresses, and since it is never easy to make graceful movements, the dress should offer help with this, not a hindrance. The evening dress should be distinctly different from a day dress, and why should flowing lines and graceful folds only be reserved for a tea dress?

Perhaps the passion for dance is to blame for this never-ending fashion of dresses which are too short. But even then, a wide short skirt that sways with the dancer like a flower, is endlessly more becoming than these tasteless tight skirts that hinder all free movement. I have always wondered why for years people have inexorably clung to this dreadfully tight fashion in clothing. I would have thought that our athletic, sports-loving women of today would prefer to wear something that allows their limbs to move freely.

As far as the passion is concerned of wearing almost nothing, and of leaving absolutely nothing to the imagination – does this really symbolize much artistic progress, in comparison with the hooped skirts and crinolines, in which women looked like flowers and moved with a grace that might seem too feminine for our taste today, but which at least gives a more dignified appearance than the posture of sitting with crossed legs in our modern restaurant lifestyle, which, to put it mildly, lacks much from our former culture? I would like to observe that I only wanted to express this in the form question, because I am not in the least inclined to criticize or offer advice. *Je constate seulement*⁹, as the French say.

And with that I say Adieu.

⁹ *Je constate seulement*: I’m just saying this, I’m only saying.