

# High Style a 'Weighty' Matter in 1856

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Special Writer

In June, 1856, the then-current issue of Harper's monthly magazine published an article warning prospective husbands that matrimony might be merely an incident in their lives.

The warning was grim: a man of 49 marrying a woman of 20 would probably survive her one year.

Harper's blamed many things for this state of affairs. Women avoided the sun like a plague, failed to exercise, shirked household labors, and even enjoyed central heating.

But Harper's also blamed Dame Fashion.

PERHAPS MILADY, 100 years ago, did not overdo but even Harper's admitted that it "cost more labor for her to disrobe than to unwrap a mummy."

Over her hoop skirt, the lady of fashion might have worn a robe of moire antique. Underneath—oh, horrors—she was probably smothered in a laced petticoat, whalebone ditto, crinolines petticoat, moreen skirt, cotton ditto, two corded ditto and flannel petticoat.

Under all this were other gar-

ments, which naturally could not be described—not in that day and age.

And the sewing machine was too new an invention to be a common household item.

A walking dress, described in this 1856 issue of Harper's, was described as having three founces, bands of cheeks and fringe and sleeves with slashed fore-arm portions, confined by fancy tassels or drops. Above the elbow were two large puffs.

A little girl pictured here, was confined in a taffeta frock with pantalettes of English embroidery and embroidered jupe, all this topped by a lace jacket with transparent or azure ribbon passing through revers. Basquine ribbed and banded the sleeves.

Milady donned (at great length) her walking dress after her husband had departed to his man's world. Her morning robe, in which she bid him goodbye, consisted of white mousseline de laine, joined by a series of loops in front. The back was gathered in four reversed plaits; the skirt, folded back upon itself was elaborately embroidered or over-wrought in braid.

Divers cords were also part of the design and passed through large eyelet holes to loop the

revers. Full short sleeves, richly ornamented, covered under-sleeves of lace caught up in festoons upon the upper arm. All this hid the lace bouillonne chemisette underneath.

ONE WONDERS how many of these short-lived ladies expired from infections after pricking their fingers with needle after needle as they stitched their wardrobes. Dressmakers must have had a high mortality rate.

Night robes certainly eliminated any need for electric blankets and, as a matter of fact, it would have been a shame to hide the bands, cords, tassels and embroidery of these ornamental tents.

Today's woman might also wonder whether her earliest counterpart rode on a work horse for the animal would have carried a great deal of weight.

Take a riding habit. Under-sleeves and over-sleeves, riding gloves, hats of straw trimmed with velvet and plumes, were lightweight accents to a hooped skirt and heavy cloak.

THE LATTER garment might have been made in moire and velvet, elegantly embroidered, and finished in buttons of the same materials. Flowing sleeves and attached capes ended in tabs, cut pointed at the bottom.

Bonnet choice might have been one of rep with black velvet tabs, trimmed with blonde and fern leaves. Another style included chainworked velvet, straw buttons, puff and curtain, trailing evergreen and—for the trim—plenty of lace.

If she took her baby with her on her outing, he would probably have worn a marino dress with ruffles and bows of taffeta adorning his lengthy skirt.

If a daughter were with her, she could have been dressed in black silk with high bodice and bretelles ornamented with black velvet.

AFTER A WEIGHTY day, nother might attend the opera in

white glace silk with deep décolletée, rounded waist and short infant sleeves. Chantilly lace would have swept over the bust in 10 inch-wide bretelles, meeting at a cluster of orange flowers, foliage and moss-rose buds.

A frill at the waist of this Harper's gown, topped a skirt softened by a second skirt of tulle, garnished with narrow plated ribbon. The skirt was further divided into lozenge-shaped compartments, serving to retain tulle in festoons at the bottom of skirt. Underneath this was a long trailing silk under-skirt.

And of course, underneath this was a laced petticoat, whalebone ditto, crinolines, cotton and flannel petticoats and garments best not mentioned.

THE FASHION PLATES in Harper's were furnished by a Mr. G. Brodie of New York and drawn by Voigt.

The artist must have been a man. No woman, dressed in the style of the day, could have lifted a pen or brush to sketch the latest in fashion.

Not with all those clothes on.



## All-Around Stole

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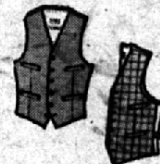
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