

GAY RAIMENT VS. MELANCHOLY



IF MEN WORE BRIGHTER CLOTHES WOULD THE WORLD BE HAPPIER?

"I SHOULD say," observed the distinguished London neurologist, "that you are suffering from Americanitis, complicated with plain clothes. Order a few new, stylish, gay suits—and make a specialty of colors."

"That's a queer prescription. What shall I take?"

"Take—oh, take a walk, take a hundred of them, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, to show off the new suits. You'll feel better the first day; you'll be well in a couple of months."

It was, indeed, a novel prescription, yet it is the prescription to which some London physicians are turning—according to dispatches from that city—for the freshening of the spirits and the increasing of the average man's working energies.

Good clothes, they are saying, make good spirits. The livelier raiment of men this year is as much the outcome of doctors' advices as it is of the tailors' ambitions.

In other words, the newest London theory is that man's temperament is determined largely by the clothes he wears; that gay hues tend to enliven the spirits; that somber apparel is productive of nervous diseases that have played such a part in recent years.

And the history of the peoples of the earth seems to back up this idea. There appears to have been only one great writer who thought otherwise.

Strange enough how creatures of the human-kind shut their eyes to plainest facts; and by the mere inertia of Oblivion and Stupidity, live at ease in midst of Wonders and Terrors. Perhaps not once in a lifetime does it occur to your ordinary biped, of any country or generation, be he gold-mantled Prince or rascal-berked Peasant, that his Vestments and his Feet are not one and indivisible; that he is naked, without Vestments, till he buy or steal such, and with forethought sew and button them.—Sartor Resartus.

A FINE, large, jaw-breaking opinion, this of Carlyle's—and precisely the opinion which prominent London specialists of this day, when the English bagman's strongest card is his clothes, are doing their best to hammer out of existence, as being an idea pitifully obsolete in trade, if not in morals and philosophy.

"Clothes," certain London doctors are declaring, "are a splendid tonic. The mere fact of being smartly dressed is a strong mental stimulant, and the man who is shabby and knows it is often less capable than his well-dressed mental inferior."

"A man in a disgraceful hat, baggy-kneed trousers and a shocking coat, who can appear quite well possessed among a number of smartly dressed people, is either a millionaire or a man of extraordinary brain power."

"Few men can get along successfully in life without the moral support of smart clothing." London tailors, who, sooner or later, contrive to give the stamp of their styles to men's fashions all over the world, have for years struggled to lead to man's habilitment, so tomb-like and so sad, gay lines of form and bright touches of color that would convey the notion of joyousness, whatever the gloom within.

True philanthropists, most excellent Samaritans, wisest of physicians those tailors are, according to London's doctors.

Yet if we will glance through the history of mankind—a subject on which Carlyle is one of the foremost authorities—it would appear that the doctors are right—that the tailors, when given the full sway they finally abdicated when the famous Stoltz, the great tailor who lived early in the last century, went down to oblivion, were humanity's best friends and most health-evoking nurses.

In other words, the periods when men wore gay raiment were the periods during which melancholy was least known.



Young Peasants of 15th Century



Henry II of France, 'The Good King Henry'



'Merrie Gentlemen of the Time of Queen Elizabeth'



Louis XIII of France 'The Grand Monarque'

story of unquailing nerves helped by soul-cheering garments was repeated throughout Italy. The wildest anarchy of internecine strife, with murder ruling supreme and with decimating famine succeeded by disastrous plague in the fourteenth century, was followed by the emergence of some semblance of social order. With the daring and energetic spirit that has been the admiration of subsequent ages, and with the jocund humor of the "Decameron," which had already become a classic, the powerful cities of Italy assumed their grandeur. Venice, seizing upon Verona and Padua, reached out to the shores of the Euxine and showed the world an object lesson in commerce, naval prowess, gay optimism—and fine dressing. There is no more gallant figure in the pic-

giving in marriage and chronically rearing families too numerous for the narrow confines of their native land. Yet in the midst of their foreign conflicts they find ample opportunity for civil and religious war, until no man's life is safe, while the shirt on his back is protected only by the strong arm that guards it. And no more merry gentlemen, in no handsomer clothes, ever laughed at a comedy of Messire Shakespeare than did those gay blades, who enjoyed the prerogative of chairs upon the stage and applauded elegantly a poet's politic compliments to the beauty of an old and red-headed queen, whose temper was only too ready to be vixenish. The reign of Elizabeth was England's most



French Gentlemen of the Gay 18th Century, Messieurs More Serious at the Time of French Revolution, Early in the Last Century



More Somber Dress Beginning the Period of Nerves—1834-1864

passing into the empire of the Caesars, with all the true greatness of that greatest of republics fleeting, like a mirage that had never been real. Ruin was inevitable, and the more sober-minded desecrated it afar. Yet the most sober clinging to the graceful brilliancy of the classic garb, rejoicing in the beauty of their clothes and leading to victorious Rome the high spirits and the martial vim which made an empire so vast that centuries of rotting decay were required to crumble it in ruins. He may have been a very stupid biped, according to the estimate of sour-visaged Carlyle, this feaster of ancient Rome, who, in his gay garments, passed from banquet to banquet and did full justice to the feasts provided by various hosts. He surely had his nerve all with him; and his handsome costumes were undoubtedly the outward and visible sign of his inward and nervous vigor. A thousand years after only her seven hills remained to world-devouring Rome, the

terial history of man than that of any young Venetian of the fifteenth century, as ready for a fight as for a frolic, and as keen in trade as his own sharp sword. And he was conspicuous in sartorial history for his gay raiment. Pass another century beyond, and cross the mountains into France. The nation, lanced and bled again in the Huguenot wars, its sparse grasses still nourished with blood, comes into the reign of Henri IV—of "good" King Henri, that shrewdest of statesmen disguised as a king—and it comes like a man whose veins have been lanced for fever—weak, drained, staggering in its exhaustion. Yet it comes with all the play of rainbow hues and all the jocund variety of cut in costume which hopefulness can contrive and loom supply. Across the channel, in England, a similar brilliant, astonishing scene is being enacted. Here is a people chronically at war with the world about them because they are chronic-

daring and most jovial epoch, and—so far as the attire of mere man could make it—the most picturesque. Another lesson. Who can estimate the importance to France, later, of the high heels with which Louis XIV, the little "Grande Monarque," sought to elevate himself in the eyes of his subjects? Discriminating history, nowadays, does not quite accord to his talents the tribute of "Sun of the Universe," with which contemporary adulators eulogized him. But history can never gainsay his inimitable genius for personal adornment; and not until some defender of duds, as trenchant as Carlyle, shall arise, will oblivious history make account of all that his radiant geggaws meant to France, not only in prestige abroad, but in confidence and practical accomplishment at home. The fripperies and frivolities of dress were never more considered; the unheeding blitheness, that assures a man of success in his environment, was never more high, and the terrors

and spirit had received its death blow. The world was on its self-centered, introspective, melancholy way toward severe, harsh cut of clothes, toward dull, sad hues of fabrics, and toward incessant worry of mind and unceasing depression of soul. Our melancholy and our "nerves," our too earnest and too anxious fashion of living, seem to date back, approximately, to the time when the fashion of our clothes went into mournful black, and left the eye empty of cheerfulness and the spirit of empty cheer. The poor apology for an American exquisite, who puffed the pensive cigar, so bitterly denounced by shocked Tom Moore, is a poor apology still, with his street garb for 1808 an exact replica of his promenading suit for 1834—and with the immortal soul of him fortified in solitary comfort that, when he is too miserable to promenade, he at least can betake himself to a sanitarium. Is there any hope that—some time, somehow—we shall cure ourselves by means of the bright costumes and the high spirits of, say, the gallants who, as Elizabeth's merry gentlemen, let nothing them dismay?