

TO WEAR IT or NOT to WEAR IT?



The Real Directoire Gown of 1798.



Ancient Greek Dress, the Classic Original of the Directoire Gown.



The Gown that Presents the Present Problem.



Model Wearing New Directoire Gown at a Paris Race Track.



Transparent Gown of the Directoire Period.



An American Gown of the Directoire Period.

The New Directoire Gown a Problem for Womankind

Was ever woman by such a problem faced? Was she ever so tantalizingly driven between the Scylla of fashion and the Charybdis of modesty and doubt?

To wear it, or not to wear it? Such is the season's most pressing question that follows in the wake of the new Directoire gown—the garment of the aggravating problem.

A few weeks ago it lay buried under the gray tombs of the Paris cemeteries, a winding sheet for the vanished forms whose loveliness it clothed so revealingly more than a hundred years ago.

Today, like a beautiful butterfly sprung from its forgotten chrysalis, it hovers over the women of America, fascinating their gaze and startling their souls with the thrilling question: Are we all to wear it?

SOME have already taken this bull of fashion boldly by the horns; they have adopted the Directoire, or, at least, a somewhat modified form of the daring new garment. A number of others, perhaps, are casting more favorable eyes upon it than they did at first.

But among the great majority of women of this country the question is still buzzing its perplexing rounds: Shall we wear it, or not? Upon them the answer still waits.

And still above her it hovers, charming her astonished eyes, frightening her anxious spirit. A glance at this disconcerting Directoire gown, with all its allurements and all its drawbacks—and the drawback of a skirt weighted above the knees and of a tape that ties the front to the rear, so that every step becomes a flashing outline of contour, is one of its most noticeable features—reveals traces of the most slender, and most beautiful, apologies for garments that have appeared since Eve was satisfied with her fig leaf.

Yet, again, it reveals the quaintest idiosyncrasies that have ever delivered lithe and graceful women over to the doubtful mercies of the tailor's shears. If it be made with that Grecian effect, of drapery exquisitely clinging, it does not promise a union suit of silk fleasings and nothing more, as one economical report explained it.

The normal linen undergarments are there, but made so close in their fit that they afford no "bungling" creases to mar the smooth undulations of the figure they clothe. And the stockings are there, in any color your gown may choose and in any shade the occult law of fashion allows; but whether the admiring world shall know them as silk or modest cotton depends wholly on your purse—and your discretion. The gown itself, fitting truly from the neck to the hips, carries its own underskirt, divided into pantalettes and reaching a little below the knee. In the middle of the skirt, just below mid-thigh, an ounce weight hangs and a tape is fastened which passes between the limbs from front to rear of the skirt. They work the

miracle; for, as its wearer walks, her skirt draping the foot, the weight and the tape draw down and backward the yielding skirt and reveal the outlines of the limbs.

In the daytime, the new Directoire girl can be as "proper" as she ever was, if she chooses to don the erratic coat of the "incroyable" to conceal any indiscreet display of her throat and chest which may attend the distinctive Directoire garb, and to hold the divided part of the skirt together.

But in the evening, with her form encased in materials that cling as closely as the summer beau's arm clings to the summer girl's waist, and with the bodice cut generously square or more generously V, the whole, original question of "full dress," which was never more than part dress, looms up to plague her conscience or her figure. And then the skirt—ah, that's a question, too!

If ever woman found herself compelled to quote Shakespeare, if ever Sarah Bernhardt had millions of imitators among her own sex in the declamation of Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be,"—that is, indeed, the question for which the answer must be found this year.

Never did butterfly of fashion undertake a greater enterprise than this of the Directoire gown. It is not one detail alone of dress. The enormous hat tackled woman's head with the blithe impudence of the stage, and settled there with the merry assurance of a front-row chorus girl. But the Directoire gown attacks a modern woman all over, from head to foot, from under-ear to flaring coat lapel, morning and evening, in front and in back.

Her great-grandmothers were the scandal of Europe and the admiration of America.

Before their day, in the time of handsome Marie Antoinette, the mothers of those great-grandmothers wore such enormously discreet dresses that their panniers and their hoopskirts were all that was required, with the help of a little modesty, to keep the longest armed lover at a more than respectful distance; she was a sort of central paradise, entirely surrounded by barbed wit and woven wire.

But after France cut off the heads of all those dignified, vast-skirted, rose-embroidered beauties, after the bloody frenzy of the Terror abated to the license of the Directory, after the restoration to the children of the properties of the slaughtered parents, Paris felt convinced that morality had perished with religion.

To those who remember the crinoline of the past, the Directoire of the present is near nudity; but there are not many who remember—or want to.

To those who recall the saddle skirt—last year's photographs will show some still desperately clinging—it is propriety's personification.

To those who recall the winter's translucent skirts, it is one extreme of prudery; to those who observe the present limit of the peekaboo shirtwaist, it is the other.

And to those who emerge from the waters in the mermaid outlines of their bathing garb, it suggests the muffings of the jealous harem.

Ah, but it has such a bad name; surely there must be something to these outcries of pained morality.

Let us admit it. This beautiful, appealing, insistently clinging Directoire girl, so fascinating to our modern, fault-finding eyes, so suddenly dear to our modern, beauty-loving hearts, comes of a very wicked family—the little sinner.

The capital of victorious France, whose

legions were the dismay of Europe, was as superciliously, as impertinently indifferent to the achievements of its heroes as if it was abjectly abased to the distaff of its Omphalots at home. Virtuous Republicans, critical Juvenals, beheld decadent France ruled by its rapacious contractors; and their strictures were true enough.

But classic customs worked out almost as thoroughly as the classic costumes; that Grecian ruler who proved his baby ruled his country, because his baby ruled his wife and his wife ruled him, was paralleled by the French contractor, who was ruled by his wife. But there the likeness stopped, as the costumes stopped, short of the classic excellence, for babies were then, as now, the fault of accident or the whim of fashion.

The suddenly enriched heirs of those who had been decapitated by the guillotine organ-

ized the ultra-fashionable Bal des Victimes, at the Hotel Richelieu, where they set the styles for the children of their parents' murderers, yet reserved to themselves the prerogatives of the how a la victime, in imitation of the convulsive twitch of the falling bodies of their forbears; the coiffure a la victime, which cut their hair as if in readiness for the grisly, slanting knife; the very shawl of red that commemorated the executioner's mercy to the modesty of Charlotte Corday and Mesdames de St. Amaranthe before they mounted the dreadful scaffold.

They danced there, those rejoicing nymphs, in Laconian tunics, in chlamys with waving lines of color, chemises of finest cambric, gowns of gauze and lawn, alluring buskins with dainty ribbons ascending from instep to calf.

Lavalette, aide-de-camp to the brilliant Junot, wrote to a friend of the public receptions:

"I have seen, with Mons. de Talleyrand in wine-colored silk pantaloons at Barras' feet while General Bonaparte ate up his master's dinner, fifty singers and musicians from the opera on a raised platform to the right, and on another to the left a couple of hundred ladies, in all the glory of their youth and freshness—and nakedness. All these ladies were habited in white muslin tunics over tight-fitting silk nether garments, such as are worn by opera dancers, and most of them sported rings on their toes."

"The Nymph and the Merveilleuse," observes Uzanne, in his review of the fashions of Paris, "those types of a period of deep corruption and open libertinage, were the accepted deities, worshiped on every holiday and at every Pagan festival of the republic."

"Mere plastic beauty theirs, these priestesses of nudity and of the God of Pleasure, so in love with their own bodies that their souls had forsaken them, their wits gone all astray in the wilds of a sham mythology, aping Greece for the sake of its antique beauty, so as to liken themselves to the sculptor's Venus or the fabled heroines of ancient history."

The woman of the Directory, in her morning walk, cast off all superfluous draperies. Not only must the dress show the lines, but the fabric must be transparent. The doctors wasted overworked lungs in cautioning their patients that the climate of France was not the climate of classic Greece. In vain. A famous authority stated that more young girls perished of exposure during that reign of nakedness veiled in gauze than had died during the two preceding generations.

"Parisian women are enchantingly dressed, my dear sister," wrote Faviere, the dramatic author, in 1798, to the Citoyenne Basin. "Sleeves reach only to within five or six inches of the elbow. The short waists are extraordinarily to the height even of the shortest women."

"Almost everybody goes on foot; many, decked out like nymphs, lift their petticoats and gowns at one side, the gathered folds hanging gracefully over the arm, the leg uncovered to the knee in front, showing rather more than the calf behind. Shoes are worn low, and stockings are white silk, with embroidered colored satin clocks, pink or lilac. I assure you that any one who desires to look like them must see their attire and copy it."

The short-waisted, soft, clinging gowns that remain in all the simplicity of their form, if not in the pristine sheen of their color, bear witness to fashion's imperious sway in republican America.

A shameless and very shameful ancestry, this of the wicked Directoire gown.