

## DRESS REFORM FOR MEN.



UNTIL the last few months a movement has been proposed, in earnestness, for the reform of the ordinary apparel of Englishmen, with a view to bring it into better conformity with taste. The readers of this Magazine are aware, most likely, of a similar movement in regard to the dress of women—a movement which, in my opinion, deserves respect, and cautious discriminating support. The attempt to improve men's dress, not yet so well known, I am inclined to think also deserves attention, though it is hardly of so much importance in the family economy. It will be a long time, probably, before much is done by either sex in the way of improvement; meanwhile, a few words directed to show what is the principle upon which reform in dress should rest, and a few of the points in which the principle might be applied, will not be out of season.

No one need laugh at this matter. There is as much reason why we should dress with good taste as there is for the exercise of good taste in our furnishing, our wall-papers, and our domestic textiles. Mr. William Morris, the poet, and leader of the reform in furnishing, speaking in public the other day, declared that the minor arts of furnishing and house-fitting were in one sense of even greater importance to the nation generally than the fine arts, in that they had so intimate a bearing upon our every-day life. The question of reform in dress is one which "runs on all fours" with that of taste in furnishing and fitting our dwellings, and the one ought no more to be treated with a jaunty contempt than ought the other.

So far as the question of reform in the dress of men may be said to have been taken up at all, it has been taken up chiefly by an architect, and mooted at an architectural association. Mr. Gotch, an architect at Kettering, read a paper on the subject last season at the Architectural Association in London. He has since published his views in a pamphlet, consisting in the main of a reprint of his paper. Little as there may seem to be in common between building a house and what is sometimes, in playful phrase, called building a coat, there is, in reality, a discernible and good reason why it should occur to an architect to propound a dress reform. A thinking architect, of all other men—except, perhaps, a painter—would be the most likely to find his taste offended by the every-day dress of Englishmen, because he has been imbued with the one great canon of taste which stands undisputed, and was first distinctly formulated in modern times by Owen Jones, namely, that "Construction may be ornamented, but ornament should not be constructed." In another guise, this principle might be expressed in the maxim that "Utility is at the base of all true beauty." The more one observes in the domain of taste, the more one finds that a construction of which the main and first motive is to please the eye results

uniformly in weakness, and not seldom in the contemptible. No good architect builds a house or a public building for exterior effect as a primary intention. If he does so, he is pretty sure not to attain more than a transitory and superficial success. The rule of the thinking men in the profession is first to make the plan—by which is meant, in architectural phrase, the ground-plan—and afterwards to design the "elevations," or exterior. Study first the use which the thing is to serve, adapt your construction to that use with the best economy of material, then ornament your construction.

I have dwelt upon this principle because to master it, and become persuaded of it, and apply it, is the one thing needful to the formation of a correct taste in the branches of art which are concerned with construction: that is to say, in architecture, in cabinet-making, and in all kinds of furnishing: it is also a guide in any advances we may make in dress. There is firm ground here—and only here, so far as I could ever ascertain—for establishing a standard of criticism in matters of taste relating to the branches of art which I have named. In judging of a piece of architecture, the first—and I should almost say the last—question to ask is: Does this building well and without waste serve its purpose? If it does, it cannot, to the informed eye, be in bad taste; the unlearned observer may not like it, but his opinion is of no value. It is the same with a chair or table; no such article, if it is well adapted to its use in shape and strength, can be in bad taste. On the other hand, no such article of which a substantial portion serves only for ornament can be in good taste; the ornament must be added after the main lines of the article have been determined upon considerations of utility. There is always room, under this method, for plenty of ornament; and the ornament which follows construction upon a motive of utility is sure not to be irrelevant.

The application of this principle of constructing for utility, and adding ornament with relevancy to construction, is the problem before us in any reform of dress, male or female. The first thing to be studied is utility, including in this the question whether the dress adopted fulfils the useful end of making the wearer appear to good advantage. Mere display of material, however beautiful in itself, is very secondary, if admissible as a motive at all.

Mr. Gotch and others have lately been testing some of the features of men's dress by the principle of utility, sometimes too narrowly construed. One of the first things they have condemned is the cylinder hat. It would surely be hard to prove any basis of utility for that; it seems equally out of the question to claim for it that it is in itself ornamental. The best thing to be said for it is that many men's faces look well under the black cylinder, however absurd it may be in itself. There are several good substitutes.

The black felt "deer-stalker" fulfils the requirement of utility, and is in itself of graceful lines; a man's face looks as well under it as under a cylinder hat. The "Tam O'Shanter," again, is a *ne plus ultra* of convenience, has no objectionable lines in its contour, and suits most faces. The clerical round soft black felt is as conducive to "respectability" of appearance as any possible head-covering; otherwise it would hardly have become clerical.

Next after the cylinder hat comes, in the condemned list, the article we call trousers. These, it is said, sin against utility in that they ignore the knee, whereas men bend their limbs at this point hundreds of times a day. There can be no question, with any one who has tried them, of the superior convenience of the knickerbocker, which does not ignore the knee, but terminates at it. So, seeing further that the trousers is a garment with no claims to grace, the dress reformers propose to relinquish trousers for the knee-breeches of our grandfathers.

Our present coats have not been assailed with any great effect. The dress coat is usually laughed at; but I question if it could be fairly ruled inconvenient, or on the whole ungraceful, when cut without curtness. Probably it could be improved by rounding off its sharper angles, and making it fuller. Against the usual coat of morning wear in the present day little has been alleged as yet, nor do I think there is much to be said to its detriment. It is not inconvenient, and it has little of foolish ornament, unless we reckon in that category the slit at the wrist and the two never-used buttons and button-holes. The two buttons put on the waist behind have been condemned as useless, and explained as survivals of the time when all gentlemen wore a sword, and required these buttons to keep the sword-belt in place; but it is a question whether the buttons might not fairly pass muster as ornamental detail, and in all probability they have been retained, in spite of the disuse of the sword-belt, because they satisfy a desire of the eye for some breaking-point at the waist. They may pass, then, as ornaments having relation to the lines of construction.

Neckties are another article which dress reformers

would like to see regulated. To construct a paste-board and silk article in sham folds of an unnatural smoothness, and fix it under the chin as if it were really doing honest duty as a tie, is manifestly bad taste; these constructions should be eschewed by him who aspires to dress well. A kerchief which can be and is tied, or passed through a ring, or folded flat, passed round the neck, crossed in front, and fixed with a gold or jewelled pin, is the eligible substitute. Some men manage this quite faultlessly already.

Sticking-up collars must be condemned. In so far as they stick up they are inconvenient, and necessitate some fastening at the back of the neck to keep the tie in place, whereas the turned-down collar keeps the tie in place, and does not present a stiff edge to the cheek or throat.

Men who care to dress with any regard to principle—in other words, with taste—will easily think out other details, or see modifications in the views expressed above, which I should be sorry to put as dogmas, though they may serve to set us thinking and discussing.

Some of the reformers call for more colour in men's apparel. This is a thing to be desired, but also to be adopted with caution. To run into colours because a black coat does not look well in a picture—an objection frequently made to black—would be rash. The reason given against black is insufficient if black looks well in actual life, as on the whole it may be said to do. Still, it is probable that with careful artistic guidance, such as will not come all at once, men might use more colour than they do. In this we want a guide, such as Morris has been to us in carpets and wall-papers. But it is not often that a poet will turn his thoughts seriously to such matters.

Texture is another matter which will have to be carefully considered. There are subtle difficulties connected with this, as all ladies know, and subtle successes to be won. Between velvet and silk of the same shade there may be sufficient difference in effect to make or mar a costume. But here I am on the threshold of the milliner and dressmaker: I must excuse myself from going in.

JOHN CROWDY.

## MISS SAXELBY'S WORK OF ART.

### A SHORT STORY.



RUE," remarked my aunt, "I really do not see what else you *can* do;" and she rubbed her nose meditatively with her spectacles, and looked in a pitying fashion at me.

"You don't seem to consider my prospects very bright, aunt," said I, somewhat nettled.

"Well, no, I certainly do not," rejoined Miss Saxelby. "It is all very well, Tom," she continued, "to dawdle about a studio in a velvet coat, and make pretty little fanciful pictures, but when it comes to

selling one before you get a dinner, why——" and Miss Saxelby paused in a highly significant manner.

"You mean you think the chance of the dinner will be a small one? Very likely; but affairs are not quite so bad as that," returned I. "After everything has been paid, I have still the little fortune my mother left me: it will keep me from starvation, perhaps even give me butter on my bread. If I work hard I don't see why I should not be able to earn something as well as other folks. At all events, I mean to try."

The state of the case was this: I was trustee for