

THE VAGARIES OF FASHION.

THE SKIRT: ITS ECCENTRICITIES AND ITS GRACES.

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THE SKIRT OF TO-DAY AT ITS BEST.

ideal of the tight-fitting skirt were absolutely charming—that is to say, when the clinging, long, trailing drapery was gracefully manipulated to accentuate the best lines of a woman's figure and to minimise the worst; but then, alas! the fashion authorities ran riot, more especially in the French markets which cater for the English buyer, who invariably demands a wild exaggeration, and so the straight artistic lines, carried out in soft fabrics, become, in the tailor's hands, dragged in hard tweeds round the too prominent figure of the British matron. Then the provincial dressmaker in her turn brought the eel-like skirt into derision with a parsimonious expenditure of the brightest of coloured cloths and the flimsiest of muslins, cut to show every line of the undeveloped form of the "country miss." It is wonderful what a lack of humour the British dressmaker possesses; nor would deficiencies of her class strike her, if she paid a visit to the Park on a Sunday in May, by the generally disastrous appearance of womankind.

Few observing men or women could help noticing the vulgarity of the stout woman in the tight skirt, and the absurd "sloppiness" of the bread-and-butter miss, when both gowned by the English *couturière*, allowed to run riot on a fashion which is so easily out-fashioned. This is the ludicrous side of the tight skirt. For relief let us turn to its beauties, for at its best, and worn by a beautiful Englishwoman with sufficient length of limb and of good proportions, the serpent-like skirt, when manipulated by a skilled artist and in exquisite materials, was indeed a thing of beauty. But, alas! these cases were only the lovely exceptions. As, unfortunately, fashion is for the million, the skirt of 1899 was one of the most disastrous and ludicrous of the vagaries of *la mode*.

But now, as a chronicler of the "up to date," do I foresee that another danger assails us, and naturally the course of fashion takes us in an opposite direction. The pleated, the goffered, the gathered skirt is with us, and slowly but surely has it made its autocratic sway felt, and voluminous draperies will

SURELY no controversy has ever raged so fiercely in the field of fashion as that anent the skirt—its cut, its exaggerations, and its beauty! Week by week, month by month, since our last Spring Number, up to the present time, has the skirt formed an all-important theme for the chroniclers of fashion.

April is the month *par excellence* in which new fashions from Vienna and Paris are announced in London and the new notes in dress are struck. Again this spring, of all matters relating to dress we still find that the skirt is the most absorbing topic.

This time last year, when we wanted to be especially up to date, with the greatest care we dispensed with every possible fold and gather in our skirts, and to arrive at a serpent-like appearance we often wore tight-fitting satin knickers, in lieu of the petticoat with its beloved frou-frou; so now, in our exaggerated desire for extremes, we consider how many pleats and how much unnecessary goffering and extra weight it is possible to suspend from our waists and hips, thus once more affording food for the caricaturists.

And now to take ourselves back to the April of 1899, when the discussion on skirts perhaps raged its fiercest. The idea and the



WHAT THE "KILTED" SKIRT OF 1900 MAY BECOME.

endeavour to get to the fore. In the hands of the unskilful, the draped skirt of to-day will become as unseemly and as awful as its eel-like predecessor. Yet for our comfort let us recollect that the skirt still remains very long, and so can retain a fair amount of grace.

The skirt, which is kilted or pleated in rather large folds with a wide box-pleat at the back, is most likely to be unbecoming to any but the slightest figures; on broad, short people it will be positively ludicrous. The draped or apron skirt becomes a great danger in untutored hands, for drapery requires an artistic eye, and must be moulded on somewhat classical lines. The petticoat, which should rest on the ground, must be tight to the knee, with becoming frou-frou at the feet; the upper skirt should be cut in folds suited to the individual. Here will the amateur use unyielding materials and produce a clumsy arrangement on the left hip. Nothing could be harder to cut and arrange than a tablier skirt.

Very beautiful is the revived finely accordion-pleated skirt; and from what I have already seen, the goffered skirt will find great popularity. And in this, perhaps, lies our greatest danger. The immense amount of fulness round the waist and on the hips can only be becoming

to the tallest and slightest of our sisters; but being the fashion, the British matron from Suburbia will adopt it with all zeal, and consequently an unpleasing appearance of rotundity will be given to her figure.

When we come to the accordion-pleated skirt in thin and fine material on tall, slim people, it is a different matter—indeed, under such favourable circumstances it becomes a beautiful mode; and as at this time last year the eel-like skirt could be a beautiful one, so now can the kilted example of to-day, provided Nature has endowed the wearer with sufficient length of limb.

Very charming can the tunic-skirt look when the under-petticoat lies in graceful folds on the ground all round and the slight folds of the tunic are arranged on the hip to best suit the individuality of the wearer.

But enough; the vagaries of fashion are amusing, and its exaggerations even more so.

If this article, with its accompanying illustrations, can prevent but a few ultra-fashionable women from rushing from one wild extreme to another, thereby bringing discredit upon the most beautiful of fashions created by artistic geniuses, and carried out with the highest skilled labour, I shall feel that it has not been written in vain.



THE TIGHT SKIRT OF FLIMSY FABRIC WORN BY THE COUNTRY MISS.



WHAT PLEATS AND FRILLS WILL LEAD US TO IN 1900.



THE TIGHT SKIRT OF 1899 WORN BY THE BRITISH MATRON.

