



Entering the Maison Wallès.

THE + GROWTH
OF + A
PARIS + COSTUME.

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(ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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IT has long been maintained that dress is the one topic of all-absorbing interest of which the fair sex never tires. The sterner sex, while professing to look down with lofty scorn upon dress as a topic, is always the first, nevertheless, to deplore the faintest indication of the wane of its popularity, instantly noting with disapproving eye the absence of those many little touches which betrays a lack of interest in dress.

There is no woman so universally loved and admired as the feminine woman; and although beauty and grace need no adornment, yet they are undoubtedly enhanced by tasteful dress. There is an atmosphere of reposeful harmony about a well-dressed woman of which all must at some time or other have felt the charm. The art of dressing well, however, makes great demands upon both time and thought, which, when the world was younger and woman's mission in life more simple, were ungrudgingly bestowed, with excellent results.

One of the secrets of true excellence in dress is a delicate and unerring sense of the fitness of things—the art, in other words, of providing garments not only elegant and tasteful, but thoroughly suitable to the wearer and to the occasion on which they are destined to be worn. When these principles are violated, and the delicate balance of elegance and fitness is upset by exaggeration of the one at the expense of the other, the result is unsatisfactory alike to wearer and beholder. We should hear less railing against the now well-nigh indispensable tailor-made gown if the

natural simplicity of its contour were not so often parodied and carried to extremes of severity and hardness which are as unbecoming as they are unfeminine.

As the interests and occupations of women multiply, the tyranny of dress makes itself felt, and many are glad to delegate to others some of the responsibilities of choice and selection. It is then that such benefactors as Worth, Wallès, Paquin, Capdeville come to the rescue with creations which are not only marvels of art, but specially chosen to suit the particular style of the wearer. Worth



MONSIEUR WALLÈS.

became in 1858 the pioneer of the modern art of dressmaking, whose characteristic is the intelligent study of individual beauty, its aids and limitations, and many have since followed in his wake.

Paris, being the centre of the universe of Fashion, attracts anxious glances before the opening of a new season; all interested in the question of dress endeavour to obtain a hint of the forthcoming novelties which have emanated from one or other of these great leaders.

Will panne or stiff brocades be the favourite material? Will fur be admitted for evening wear? Will tight sleeves last through another

A carriage rolls along the Boulevard des Capucines towards Rue Louis-le-Grand, and deposits a fair *diente* at the entrance of the house inhabited by her familiar spirit and adviser, whom she wishes to consult on a matter of the greatest importance—nothing less than her new dresses for the season.

Hearing that the *patron* (head of the firm) is engaged, madame asks for her favourite saleswoman, who understands her tastes exactly, and always knows what will suit her requirements.

While waiting till the *patron* is disengaged, they pay a visit to the *lingerie-room*, always a singularly attractive one in these first-class



THE LINGERIE-ROOM.

season? These and similar points become burning questions.

As soon as the new models are ready, there is a rush to the gay capital. Meanwhile, manufacturers who are in the "know" have set their complicated machinery whirling at lightning speed, with never a rest till they are ready to satisfy the clamour for more and yet more material wherewith to copy these great creations.

But who invents the fashions? And where do all the new ideas come from?

The curiosity of our readers shall be satisfied, and the secrets of the growth of one of these costumes shall be laid bare for all to see.

houses, for although they do not keep a very large stock, each garment is an exquisite work of art, in which the finest and softest silks, or batistes, the richest lace and most dainty embroideries, combine to produce wrappers, tea-gowns, undershirts, etc., of such fairy-like delicacy and richness, that none but the most *blasée* of Eve's daughters is proof against their fascinations.

Meanwhile the indefatigable *patron* is eternally seeking to solve the problem of how to be in a dozen places at the same moment. He is supervising the fitting of a costume when the telephone-bell rings: the *modelière* urgently claims his advice. Before he has given it, the



TRYING-ON IN THE DIRECTOR'S PRIVATE ROOM.

bell rings again ; this time the designer of embroideries wants his opinion as to the exact shades to be used in his newest design. On his way back he is stopped : Madame X— has telegraphed for an appointment ; he fixes the time, notes it in his pocket-book, and trips down the stairs to the *salon*, where he interviews a fair one, who pleads to be admitted into his sanctum for him to give the finishing touch himself to a very sensational creation destined to dazzle the eyes of the diplomats at the British Embassy. Having made the promise, he gives the necessary orders, and while the costume is being fetched he climbs the stairs two at a time to the work-room of the chief dress-maker, who requires his sanction for a trifling modification in the original design of a dress.

Some ladies select some of the newest models of the season which they find

displayed in the showrooms, and then have similar costumes made with those modifications in colour and style demanded by their own peculiar characteristics. Others, again, give M. Wallès notice some time beforehand, with *carte blanche*, to produce a creation in which the wearer is to surpass herself and all others : that, of course, is a princely manner of proceeding in which all do not feel at liberty to indulge. Some ladies, again, are very independent, and so sure are they of their own taste and ingenuity that in a lengthy confabulation with the *modelière* and favourite saleswoman they bring forward excellent ideas for a costume ; and after a practical word or two from the head-dressmaker, it is planned down to the smallest details, subject to the sanction of the *patron*, who always pronounces the last word.

By the power of the camera we are privileged to be admitted into the sanctum of the *patron* while he puts the finishing touch to a lovely shimmering silk gown of pale blue and mauve, trimmed with a profusion of silk guipure, gathered chiffon, and *écru* lace. The *première* follows M. Wallès with critical approving glances as he disposes the falls of lace, handing him pins and divining what he requires before he has time to ask for it. Another photograph gives us a view of the finished



SEIZING A NEW IDEA.

costume, complete and ready to be worn at the races.

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The growth of a costume cannot be categorically described; the process is capricious and irregular in the extreme. It rests on the slenderest foundation: a flash, an inspiration, a vision; here one minute and gone the next, leaving an intangible, illusive image upon which fancy sets to work, producing at length a dainty fabric. Fancy knows no restrictions of time or place; therefore, mayhap, it seizes M. Wallès in a railway carriage, at the play, in the Bois. Hastily he draws out his pocket-

into practical lines, the *patron*, to whose inspiration most of the new models are due, passes on his sketches to the *modelière*, who dresses up in white muslin some little jointed dolls about eighteen or twenty inches high, and exactly proportioned according to the prevailing measurements of the house; these several variants she submits to him for selection. As soon as the pattern of the costume has been finally determined, it is cut out in fine tissue paper to try the effects of colouring. Every imaginable shade of paper is at hand, and the delicate harmonies and bold contrasts suggested by priceless orchids and other flowers of which



A LIVING MODEL: THE NEW CREATION.

book and makes a rough sketch of the general outline and of any details that may strike him, for all the world like a musician noting a theme which has been haunting him. This is not all, however; the idea takes a firm hold of him, and it grows little by little. The pageant of the clouds at sunset supplies gorgeous and daring contrasts, or delicate evanescent hues; the curl of a leaf or its veinings, the graceful droop of a flower on its stem, supplies the curves—for it is to Nature, and, above all, to flowers, that these artists go, borrowing from inexhaustible treasures of colour, to form the materials for their creations.

The idea having ripened and been translated

these artists are all passionately fond, are combined until the master is satisfied with the effect.

Every house has an unattached costume designer, who spends his time hunting for new ideas in museums, on the racecourse, at social gatherings; but it is a melancholy fact that he is not always to be trusted, for he often disposes of the same idea to more than one establishment. A designer for embroideries and trimmings is kept on the premises, and his hands are always full. We see in the illustration on page 212 M. Wallès himself roughly sketching out in charcoal on white muslin an idea for the embroidered vest of his newest model; while the



THE STOREROOM.

designer stands by unrolling an artistic poster which has struck his fancy, and from which he means to adapt the tracery for some striking new trimming. After the *patron* has indicated his design on muslin, the designer will draw it out, date and register it, and then prepare it for the embroiderers.

Here we become acquainted with one of the most indispensable features of the establishment—the living lay-figure; there are generally eight or ten of these, whose qualifications consist in possessing a graceful, supple figure of the average measurements adopted by the house. She wears, as we see, a close-fitting plain dress of black silk or satin, over which she is called upon to slip any dresses that a customer may wish to see; besides, she has to try on, over and over again, twenty or thirty costumes during the day.

Next we see how the *patron* is building up his

new creation, which is now nearly finished; he is supervising the last details in conjunction with the *première* and the *modelière*, laying down the coping-stone of the laboriously built edifice, over which he is as enthusiastic and painstaking as the artist whose picture is ready for the *Salon*.

This, then, is practically how a new creation grows. And now we must see something of the organisation of the *Maison Wallès* and similar establishments.

The *personnel* numbers some two hundred and fifty or more, of which only the messengers and boys, and about fifteen living lay-figures and saleswomen, are resident. Work begins at seven for the former, and at nine for the latter, who are always made much of; while the dressmaking hands arrive punctually at eight. They can earn from £9 to £12 a month during the season (from October to May), when they frequently work into the small hours of the morning, receiving double pay after 7 p.m.

The chief dressmaker is absolute mistress in her workroom, and has a very important post; she engages and dismisses her hands at will, supervises them, and keeps order. She is, above all, held responsible for the quality



THE BODICE-HANDS IN THEIR WORKROOM.

of the work done and for waste of material and accessories. Every week the *patron* appears in the workroom to look over the accounts. If he finds that there has been no waste, that much has been produced at a moderate cost, he divides a bonus among the work-girls; but should the contrary be the case, he remonstrates.

The apprentices really learn their business in these large houses; but it is very different in small establishments, where the poor little *trottins*, as their less fortunate sisters are expressively styled, may be seen staggering along under the weight of huge dress-boxes which they are sent to carry home instead of learning their trade. *Trottins* are unknown in houses such as the Maison Wallès, where a proper staff of *garçons* is kept to do this arduous work. If his post is no sinecure, he at least is well remunerated by the firm, and also by the impatient fair ones waiting for their ball- or dinner-dresses.

A very valuable adjunct to the *première* is the *apprêteuse*, whose task is to prepare and rectify the pieces of a costume after each fitting, and to make the corrections and alterations indicated. She is chosen from the most skilful workers, and the success of a dress largely depends upon her accuracy. The *première* prides herself on sending out none but perfect work from her workroom; and she considers it nothing short of a disgrace to receive a complaint or to be obliged to make an alteration in a dress once finished and sent home. Such a calamity is known as a *poignard*; for, as the chief dressmaker explained, "It is like a dagger-thrust aimed at our hearts."

The mantua-maker's room includes many men, who undertake the work which is too heavy for the women, and I have been assured that perfect harmony and good feeling reign in these mixed rooms.

Since the prevalence of English tailor-made costumes, and the increasing interest taken in sport in France, these large establishments find it necessary to engage a certain number of

London tailors; their apprentices are for some reason or other dubbed *baufs*.

Every dressmaking house possesses a *manutention*, or kind of storeroom, where all the materials, linings, trimmings—in a word, everything used in making a dress—are given out. When the *première* receives the order to make a dress, she fills in a form stating exactly what is required and how much of each. In the illustration on page 214 we see the apprentice, who has brought the form down, fingering some material, while the silk and lace she has come to ask for are being measured and cut off, the clerk entering each item in his register. Here, in the *manutention*, the models receive the names by which they are known during the season, and the assistants will exclaim with joyful pride, "Just think!—this is



THE FINISHED ARTICLE.

the twentieth 'Rayon d'Or,' or the fiftieth 'Merveille de Venus'!"

Last of all, we see the secretary of the counting-house and his clerk receiving from a new patroness half the amount of her bill, which, according to the rules of the house, is settled by newcomers on ordering the costume, and the other half on delivery.

Thus we see that a dress may be a real work of art—a composition whose origin lies in

artistic inspiration, and whose various parts are worked out with infinite thought and care down to the smallest detail.

The growth of a Paris costume is, therefore, not a mere matter of a few short hours. As in a symphony, the themes, which must be spontaneous and often float about before the mental consciousness, alluring and yet evanescent as a will-o'-the-wisp, are first noted and then worked out in detail, the artistic effects of tone-colour being afterwards carried out in soothing harmonies or in daring contrasts.

These lines cannot be brought to a conclusion without a passing reference to the wonder of the century, the great Paris Exhibition, which affords numerous opportunities of studying the costumes of the nations and their taste in dress, from that of the peasant to that of the peeress. The models, which we find both in the buildings as part of the show and in the grounds as visitors, are mostly living ones, and as they move about freely within the precincts of the Exhibition they unconsciously form striking examples—some, of the charming grace with which the simplest garb may be worn by the woman who has the gift of adorning herself; others, of how *not* to dress, furnished by women on whom the most artistic gown is wasted, because she invariably spoils the general



THE BILL HAS BEEN MADE OUT.

harmonious effect by a few discordant notes and touches, or by a total absence of grace.

In the *Tour du Monde*, in Vieux Paris; in the Swiss Village, the Breton and Provençal cottages; in the Russian Tzba, the Chinese and Javanese theatres, etc., etc.;—we see the picturesque dress of other climes and other times, among appropriate surroundings which prevent all impression of incongruity.

As these national costumes are worn by living models, we are enabled to judge of their fitness and to wonder at the strange vagaries

of Dame Fashion. Moreover, the costume-pavilion sets forth the history of dress, better than the most complete encyclopædia ever compiled, in a chronological series of picturesque scenes from the fashions of the day in which they were worn. There is a Roman *atrium*, a feudal interior, knights in tourney, Venetian patricians entering a gondola, the Empress Josephine donning the coronation robes, etc. And, finally, as we walk through the textile section of the Palais des Industries, the feminine eyes are dazzled by the wealth of silks, satins, and laces with which fancy builds up half a dozen costumes, each more dainty than the last, with a rapidity and intangibility which would give even M. Wallès the *vertige*.

