

Paris Dressmakers.

BY M. GRIFFITH.

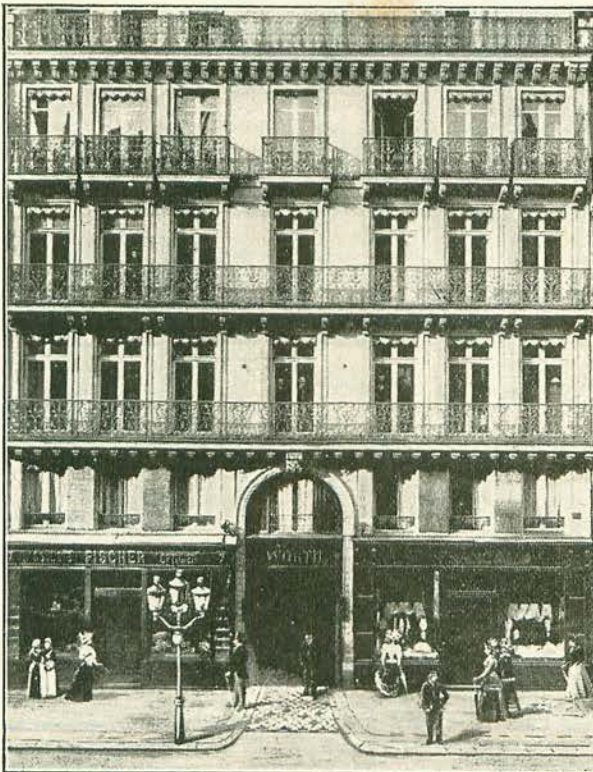
HAVING determined to call upon the Oracles of Paris Fashions, and question them as to their reminiscences of the beautiful women that their creative genius has rendered irresistible, I began with the establishment of M. Worth.

The dear, picturesque old veteran was deep in consultation when I entered. It must have been on a question of trousseau that he was laying down the law; for the group surrounding him consisted of an elderly lady, a pretty young one, and a very bored-looking young man. M. Worth was dressed in a dark, loose dressing-gown, relieved with touches of blue, and the right-hand side bottom corner was lifted up and drawn through a button-hole a little above the waist; on his head he wore a mitre-shaped cap of black velvet. Sometimes his gown is richly trimmed with fur. The rooms where clients are received are many in number, but plainly furnished, with counters for measuring material, and the floor is covered with carpet in imitation of tiger skin, in grey and black, with scarlet bordering. Several young ladies are dressed in the latest style of morning, visiting, dinner, and reception toilettes, and are paraded in turn, this way and that, before clients, to enable them to judge of the effect of the garments when worn.

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M. Worth was born at Bourne, Lincolnshire, in 1825; his father was a solicitor, with a good private fortune, which he lost in speculation. At the age of thirteen, young Worth went to Swan and Edgar's, in London, and remained there for seven years, during which time he did all the work of an ordinary apprentice. Having heard much of French fashions, he determined to go to Paris, but on his arrival there was for some time out of a situation; ultimately, however, he succeeded in getting into Gagelin's, where he remained twelve years. This firm was noted for silks, which were woven by workwomen in their own homes. There was at this time no house in Paris which sold material and made it up as well, and this combining of the two branches struck M. Worth as a good idea, and he obtained permission from his principals to try it. This he did, beginning with cloaks;

and a train that he designed gained a medal in 1855. The firm refused to take him into partnership, although he had been the means of introducing a profitable and novel feature into the business, so he determined to start for himself. This he did at his present premises, 7, Rue de la Paix, in 1858. He began by employing fifty hands, and he now employs about twelve hundred, and turns out between six and seven thousand dresses and between three and four thousand



From a

M. WORTH'S ESTABLISHMENT.—PARIS.

[Photograph.]



from a

M. GASTON WORTH.

[Photograph.

cloaks a year. M. Worth is assisted by his sons; M. Gaston Worth taking sole charge of the counting-house, and M. Jean Worth the technical part of the business, in which he bids fair to be a worthy successor of his clever father.

"Who," I asked, "are your best customers?"

"Well," was the reply, "we send model dresses to all parts of the world, but I think Americans are the best clients."

"Have you many Royalties on your books?"

"Yes, we have supplied every Royal lady in the world, I think, except Queen Victoria."

"What is really the origin of a fashion, M. Worth?"

"Well, it is difficult to enter into all the details which influence changes of style; but briefly I may say that, when a manufacturer invents any special fabric or design, he sends me a pattern, asking if I can make use of it. That fabric may require a severe style of dress, or if light and soft, is adapted for draperies, puffings, etc. If the material pleases me, I order a large quantity, to be specially made for me, and design my dresses accordingly.

A purchase by a large firm of a great quantity of material influences other firms, and that material, and the style it is best suited to, becomes the fashion. Then, again, the stage has great influence over fashion."

"How do you arrange your designs?"

"All my models are first of all made in black and white muslin, and then copied in the material and colouring which I select. Our silks are specially woven for us, and our jet fringes cannot be got elsewhere."

"And your favourite figure to design for?"

"Ah, that's telling; but one of my ideals is Mrs. Brown-Potter's. I consider her one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen." Here M. Worth presented me with a large photograph of Mrs. Potter as *Cleopatra*, which costume he designed for her.

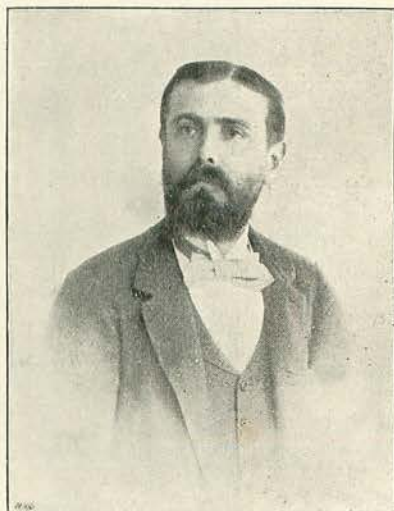
"Are your materials very expensive, M. Worth?"

"Not for the quality. We have them up to £12 a yard; but, then, they are of the finest quality, such as no other firm supplies."

"Have you made many stage dresses?"

"There is hardly an actress of note in the world we have not supplied; but we do not make a speciality of theatrical costumes."

I was surprised to find that ladies of fairly



M. JEAN WORTH.
From a Photograph.



From a] DRESS DESIGNED BY WORTH FOR MRS. BROWN-POTTER AS "CLEOPATRA."

[Photograph.

moderate incomes can visit the Worth house and order simple costumes, but of good material and perfect style, for the same price as they would pay any other first-class firm; but you can also order a gown that, trimmed with fur, or exquisite lace, is a veritable work of art and an heirloom.

Among the costumes in course of execution were some for the Empress of Russia, the Queen of Spain, the Queen of Portugal, and many great ladies also, whom they have never seen or measured.

A stranger would be specially struck with the constant, attentive supervision over all departments by M. Worth and his two sons; the unpretentious appearance of the reception and fitting rooms; the beautiful finish and refined daintiness of all the work, and the daring originality which every model exhibits, which only a creative, artistic mind could possibly think of. Above all, all the work-rooms that I was freely permitted to visit, as well as the kitchen, where the food is cooked for the many employés, show the care and forethought of the master for those who work for him.

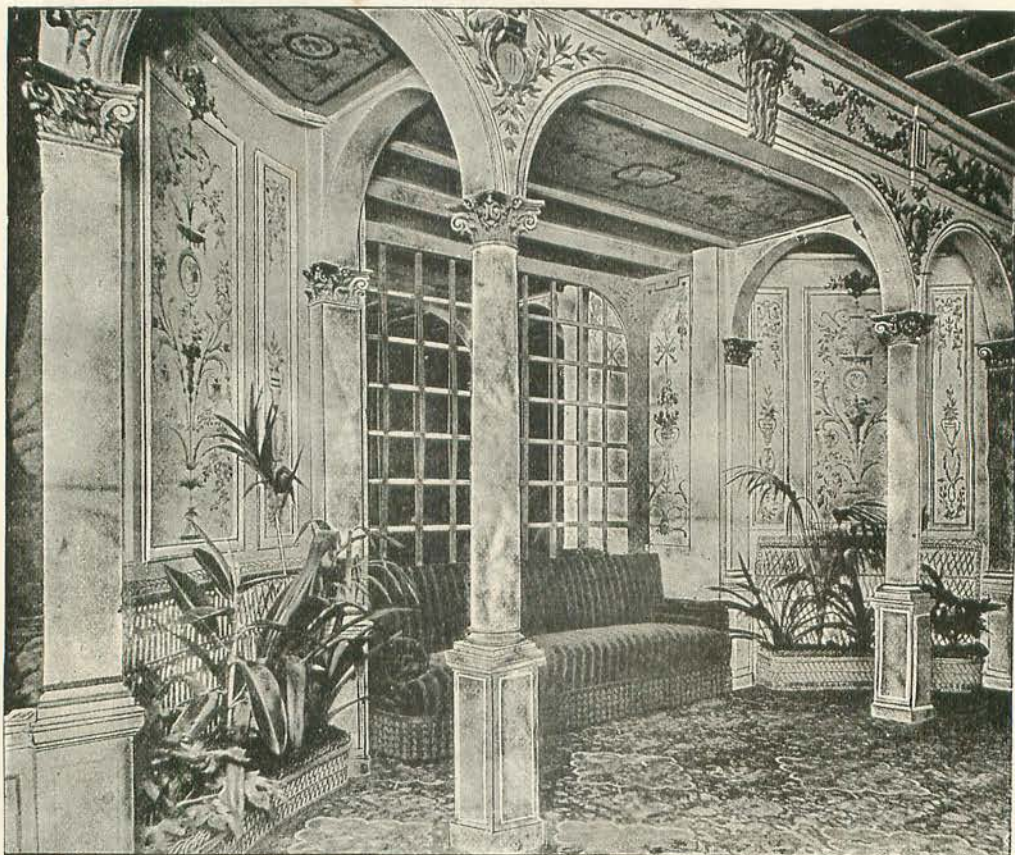
At the top of the house is a



From a]

SAME DRESS—BACK VIEW.

[Photograph.



From a]

A CORNER OF THE YOUNG LADIES' ROOM—M. FELIX'S ESTABLISHMENT.

[Photograph.

studio, where all the models are photographed; and looking over the albums of costumes, extending back for many years, I had the pleasure of examining the most interesting ones, those especially typical of the most eccentric phases of female dress.

M. Worth's beautiful country seat is at Suresnes.

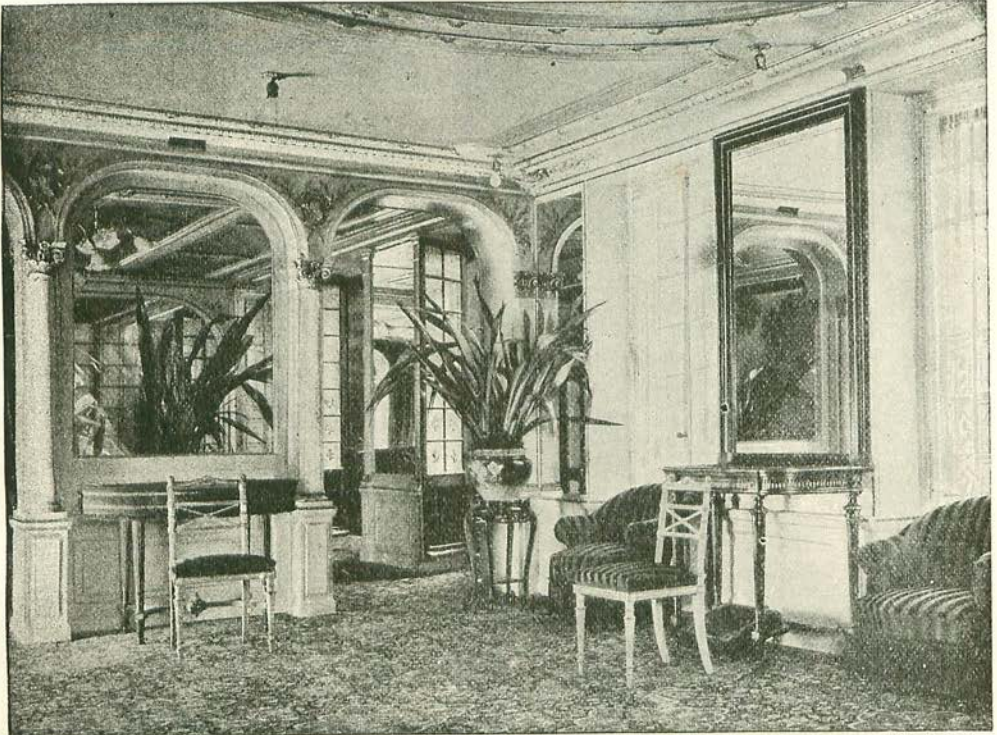
My second oracle was M. Felix, in the Faubourg St. Honoré. He very cordially welcomed me, and allowed me to wander about his beautiful salons at will.

One salon is in the style of Louis XVI., with panels of green brocaded velvet, alternating with console tables, surmounted by long mirrors, made on the models of those in Trianon: the decoration is white and gold; the couches and chairs are covered with green striped velvet and satin, and huge pots filled with ferns and palms stand on pedestals. A gallery leading from the first salon to a second has four large panels, painted by Louise Abbéma, representing Sarah Bernhardt in "Ruy Blas," Croizette in the "Caprices of Mari-

anne," Ada Rehan in the "School for Scandal," and a fancy costume of the period of Louis XV. These panels are exquisitely painted, and illustrate some of M. Felix's choicest designs in fancy dress. The Grand Salon has panels of old tapestry, coloured glass ceiling, draperies of plush, and long mirrors framed in mahogany. Every room is lighted with electric light, and the groups of palms, screens, and harmonious colouring of carpets, furniture, and walls make delightful surroundings for trying the effect of beautiful gowns and fabrics. M. Felix is a charming man, of polished manners, who personally superintends his vast business, and is bringing up his children in the most sensible way.

"I have apprenticed my son," he said, "to a large business house, where he has to begin at the very bottom of the ladder and work his way up, as I had to do."

I learned a little more about him a few days later when I was present at a charitable fête given by him in aid of a Home he has founded for the children of those employed in business in Paris as cutters and dress-

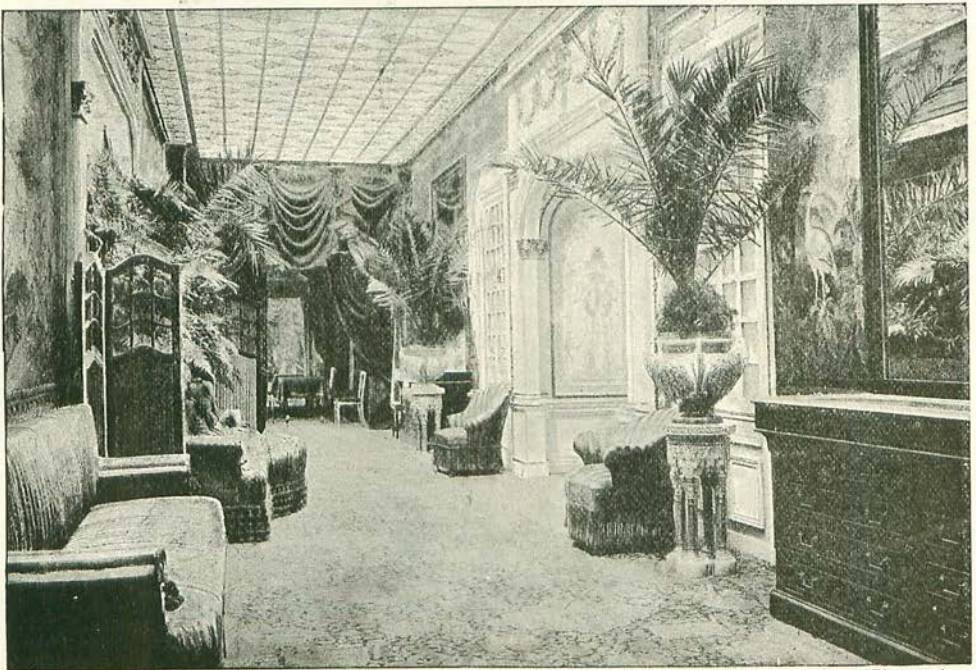


From a]

THE FASHION HALL—M. FELIX'S ESTABLISHMENT.

[Photograph.

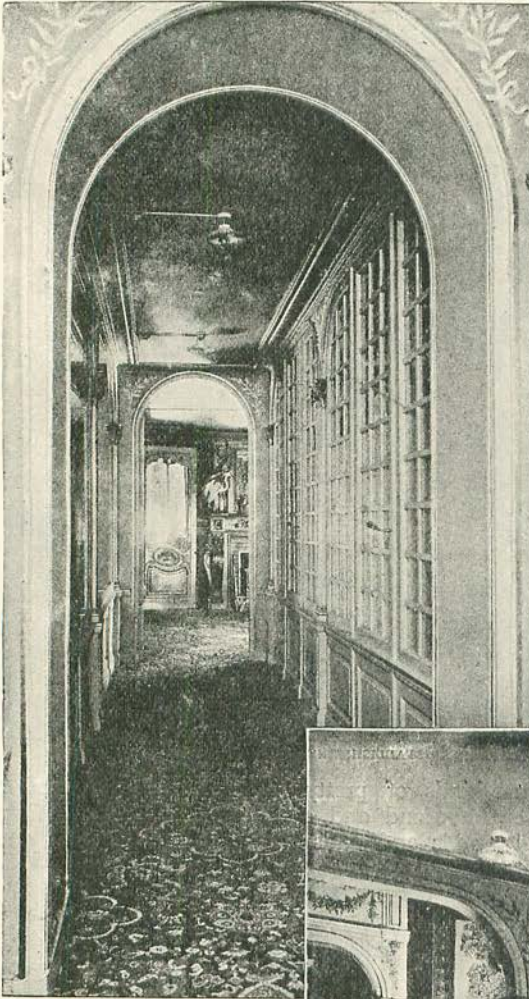
makers. Mme. Carnot, who took a great interest in this charity, was present, and the fine show-rooms looked lovely, filled with all kinds of pretty satchels, cushions, and a thousand and one dainty trifles made from odds and ends, and looking so fresh and



From a]

THE GRAND SALON—M. FELIX'S ESTABLISHMENT.

[Photograph.



ENTRANCE TO THE TRYING-ON ROOMS.

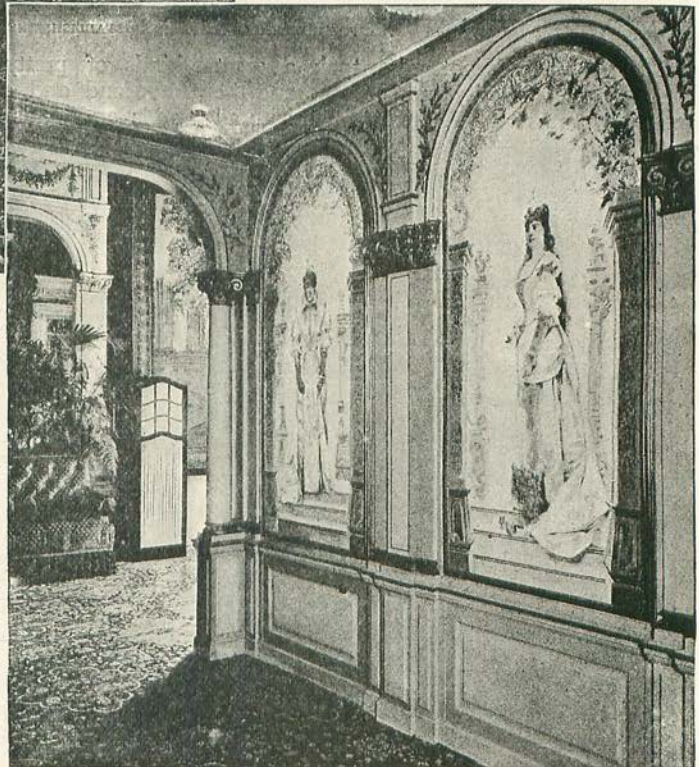
From a Photograph.

fairly-like that it seemed that human hands could never have touched them. These things were to be sold for the benefit of the Home, and Mme. Carnot, her kindly face beaming with sympathetic benevolence, was a purchaser to the extent of a hundred and fifty pounds.

I wandered slowly from room to room, and was struck by the beauty of the girls presiding over each department, as well as by their dresses, which were the latest models. One

blonde, tall and slender, with masses of red gold hair, into which were twisted strings of pearls, wore a gown of apple-green velvet and chiffon, with a scarf-like trimming of shrimp pink. This firm is noted for quiet elegance of style and novel combinations of colours, and they number among their clients many of the best-dressed women in Paris, as well as a large foreign *clientèle*.

My last visit was to Morin and Blossier, in the Rue Daunon, the list of whose patrons reads like a volume of Debrett. This firm was for ten years in Venice, and only started in Paris in the spring of 1883. The business premises are five stories high; the first and second floors are used for show and fitting rooms, and the other three floors for offices and work-rooms. There is nothing special to be said about the decoration or furniture, the latter, in one room, being covered with yellow velvet, and the windows of stained glass. The head of the firm is a man of about forty years of age, a thorough artist, but very modest withal. It is from this house



ENTRANCE TO THE GRAND SALON—M. FELIX'S ESTABLISHMENT.

From a Photograph.

that the Princess of Wales and her two daughters get their gowns, also the Queen Isabella of Spain, the Queens of Naples, Denmark, and Greece, and the Empress of Austria, besides innumerable Grand Duchesses, foreign princesses, countesses, and the leaders of London society. They recently supplied Mrs. Vanderbilt with a ball-dress of yellow satin, with garniture of real lace, which cost the modest sum of four thousand pounds. The Duchess of Sutherland, Lady Dudley, Lady Granville Gordon, the Duchess of Devonshire, and many, many others are dressed by this noted firm.

Although we do not now indulge in, or permit, unseemly scantiness in a woman's dress, there is still room for improvement. A story is told about a gentleman going out to dinner, and, being asked by his wife on his return what the ladies wore, he replied: "I don't know, my dear; I did not look under the table." This is still true in some cases, but, on the whole, our taste is improving, and some of our fashions are nothing but copies of beautiful old pictures; and, whatever may be said about the extravagance of the modern woman, there is a reverse to this medal, as to all others.

For the last ten years has brought a revival of almost forgotten industries; whole villages are employed in copying old patterns and stuffs, in lace-making and beading, that otherwise would be reduced to pauperism. The whole world is laid under a tax in order that woman may have a fitting setting for her beauty of face and person. Great artists think it no degradation to design her dresses, or to furnish patterns for materials, that, by their artistic excellence, will enhance her charms. However the silly few may rave about adopting male costume, on account of its greater comfort and convenience, the majority will never forswear the robes and chiffons which so well become them.

We are living in a happy age, a time when we can wear anything becoming and befitting the season and place. At the same "At Home" may be seen Empire gowns, Spanish jackets, Greek robes, tailor-made dresses, and tea-gowns belonging to no particular period, and all charming and delightful in their variety; and Fashion's oracles, in the shape of Worth, Felix, Laferrière, and Morin and Blossier, are public benefactors as long as they keep in view the aim of a perfect dress, which is "the most fitting attainable applicability."



DRESS DESIGNED BY MORIN AND BLOSSIER FOR SARAH BERNHARDT AS "THE DORA."