

COSTUME IN ALL AGES.

COSTUME and fashion are not synonymous terms. Fashion is often regulated by caprice, and its changes are so frequent that we keep a monthly record of them. The laws that regulate costume are less mutable; they depend on the progress of the arts and on the climate and policy of countries.

The subject of costume is associated with the well-being of mankind, and, on a nearer consideration, we shall find it also connected with very important questions, particularly with those that relate to social improvement and to national liberty.

When, in the eighth century, Charlemagne passed a law restricting the working classes to a certain style of dress, he became the author of a decree that, while it tended to render the classes of society stationary, checked many noble aspirations. The mind is influenced by everything that affects the body, and the garb of servitude produces a corresponding depression of spirit. In China, the most remarkable things in the costume of the women are the shoes, that would only fit the infants of other nations. But why do they fit the Chinese women? Because a barbarous policy has decreed that the feet of female babes should be crushed and dwarfed, so that in after life they may easily be detained prisoners, and never enjoy freedom of action.

We need say no more, in order to prove the relation our subject bears to the policy of governments.

We perceive that, very shortly after the fall, the skins of beasts furnished clothing for mankind. Very different clothing is, however, mentioned before the end of the Book of Genesis; but then we must recollect that this Book records the events of two thousand years. In the 37th chapter, we read of the "coat of many colors" given by Jacob to Joseph. This leads us to suppose that the Hebrews had then become acquainted with that art so all-important to everything that relates to costume, the art of weaving. In the Book of Exodus, in the 39th chapter, we read of a degree of magnificence in costume that could hardly be surpassed by the potentates of the present day. It was in the sacerdotal robes that this splendor was displayed. We may form some idea of the magnificence of the dress of Aaron, the high priest, merely from the following record of the

number of stones with which the breast-plate was enriched: "And they set in it four rows of stones. The first row was a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle; and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond; and the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst." In the same chapter, we are made aware of the fact that embroidery existed at this early period, for we find it stated—"And they made upon the hems of the robe pomegranates of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and twined linen. A bell and a pomegranate round about the hem of the robe, and a girdle of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, of needle-work, as the Lord commanded Moses."

The Hebrews had probably acquired many of the arts connected with splendor in apparel from the Egyptians, during their sojourn with them; and, turning from sacred to profane history, we find it was from the same wonder-working people that the Greeks, and consequently the Romans, derived a knowledge of the arts that civilize the world. Of course they imitated their masters in costume as in other particulars. Classical costume, like that of some eastern nations of the present day, consists principally of drapery—formed of the material as it comes from the loom—thrown gracefully about the person.

In the beginning of this century, classical costume was introduced with slight modification into England, France, and other European nations. Tired of the stiffness that characterized the dress of preceding reigns, the belles welcomed a reaction, and the freedom of classical attire was adopted. But the change that took place in the costume of the ladies was slight to the revolution in that of the lords of the creation.

The Quaker Franklin, fresh from the new republic of the United States, arrived in Paris, towards the end of the last century, clad in the well-known sombre garb. This garb an imaginative people associated with the idea of liberty, and soon from admiring they proceeded in some degree to imitate. No more full-dress swords or cocked hats—no more rosettes at the knees, shoe-bows, or bright buckles. *Justaucorps* and flapped waistcoats were laid aside, with cravats and ruffles of Mechlin lace, with wigs and periwigs of every description.

The ladies no longer endeavored to captivate

in jewelled stomachers, and brocade, and high-heeled shoes. Simplicity was the order of the day. In a picture of a belle of fifty years ago—of the beautiful Madame Récamier, for instance—the costume nearly resembles that of a Grecian statue. But this style, though well suited to the people and the age in which it was adopted, was by no means appropriate to modern times. It was attended with more serious inconveniences than the high heads and large sleeves that followed, or than the tiny bonnets and ample skirts that are adopted by modern belles, who think, of course,

“That, from the hoop's enchanting round,
The very shoe has power to wound.”

But the classic style of dressing the hair may be adopted with perfect propriety in the present day. It is quite in harmony with our tastes and fashions, and seems as well suited to the ladies of 1860 as to the Sapphos and Cornelias of ancient times.

In the remarks we purpose making from time to time on the costumes of different periods, it will appear that the costumes of the classical ages, in which human taste was most pure, and the perception of what was proper and becoming most correct, have constantly been the models for imitation. Even at the present day, we see in the picturesque dress of the Highland clans a striking resemblance to the military costumes of those Roman warriors who not only subdued by their courage and discipline all the nations with whom they contended, but carried into the remotest regions of the world then known to them their manners, habits, costumes, and arts of civilization.
