



NOW AND THEN; OR, 'TIS NEARLY A CENTURY SINCE.

DEAR HERRARD,

I am an old man; and as I sit by my parlour fire, between the day and the night, watching the flickering in the grate, my mind looks back, through the long telescope of time, for nearly one hundred years, and I experience the oft repeated aphorism, that things that passed "long, long ago," are more firmly fixed in the memory, than those of yesterday. In particular, one train of thought often comes up before me—a comparison of the costume of the times of my boyhood, with the dress of the present day. In those distant days, parasols were unknown; and umbrellas had only arrived and been in use but a few years. These were of bright scarlet colour. The ladies wore scarlet riding habits; and dandies—for them, as now, there existed these creatures—were also dressed in scarlet. The squire of our village was one of these. For you must know, I was, as the Americans say, "raised" in the county. I now see his worship, as clearly as if it were but yesterday. A tall handsome man, a noble personage, he was, and well became his summer's evening dress. I see him, on such an evening, as he walked up the village, dressed in scarlet swallow-tailed coat, with white vest, nankeen breeches, and silk stockings, with broad frills to his shirt, protruding from the half opened vest. Laced frills decorated his wrists, and small buckles were at his knee, studded with polished pebbles, while large silver buckles covered the entire front of his shoes. His hair was white with powder, and fell in a long queue behind, like that of a Chinaman; the queue bound round from top to bottom, with a black ribbon, terminating with a bow at the one end, and a tuft of hair at the other. Such was the squire; and something similar, but far below in splendour, was the general costume of the day. Braces to support the garter garments, were unknown, and hence, the display of fine linen that protruded from the waist, that of old men being extravagantly exuberant. The face wigs, close shaven; but the hair was carefully cultivated behind, and formed into various patterns, chiefly long pig-tails, as they were called, like the squire's, sometimes a plaited club, and often collected into a modest tuft that hid itself within the coat collar. Old men's wigs were preposterous affairs, consisting of three or four stories of massive curls, encircling the back of the head. Hair powder was generally used. Where abundant, the hair was simply dusted; but men with bald heads wore the powder formed into a peak down the centre of the forehead, a circular place being uncovered over each eye. Leather breeches were much worn by rich and poor; down to mere boys. Those worn by men of rank were of buckskin, made ample above, and tight at the knee. Top boots were also the fashion, and when riding they were supported by leather straps, passing from behind and fixed over the knee. On these were ornamented buckles. Village boys wore tunics made of cloth, over which they wore red leather aprons, extending from chin to foot. On an Easter Sunday, when these were new, the streets had quite a scarlet hue. Cigars were unknown, but long clay pipes were in daily use. The usual tipple was rum, ale or gin: whisky was unknown. Rum was the favourite beverage at funerals.

The dress of the ladies of the present day forms a strange contrast with that of their sisters at that time. They, like the men, also used hair-powder. Many women in the middle ranks of life smoked their long clay pipes, and some of them snuffed. They all wore large ear-drops. Their waists were ludicrously short, and their head dress ludicrously high. The waist nearly joined the armpits, and the skirts were so straight that nearly half-a-dozen such might be made out of one crinoline of the present day, and greatly interfered with the free movement of the limbs. They wore high-heeled shoes and buckles, and old ladies carried a walking stick of unusual length, which they grasped by the middle,

ONWARD, THE LIGHT'S.

Let me mark the difference in costume that has thus taken place within the life-recollection of one man. At present, instead of cultivating their hair behind, our men encourage as much as nature has given them—and in some cases that is but little—in the growth of beard, moustache, and cheek tufts. Beards, no doubt, are the legitimate covering for the chin, and in the good old Saxon times were universally worn. Our Norman conquerors were shaven men; and in times immediately succeeding the conquest, Saxons and Normans, and their adherents, were known as Beards or No-Beards, until the No-Beards came off victors. Frenchmen, since the Norman times, have returned to beards; and it is a curious fact that Frenchmen of the present day, whose predecessors were the cause of our casting off our beards, have led to our re-placing them! The hosts of unshorn men who visited the great Crystal Palace exhibition gave the impulse towards beards, which are now claiming their legitimate rights. At present we have no shirt frills, excepting a small appendage scarcely deserving the name—in fact, almost hidden, and only adopted in out of the way places, as Ulverston and other old-fashioned Lancashire towns, where, curious enough, a powdered head, veritable breeches, and white stockings, may yet be met with. The long swallow-tailed coats have given way to the comfortable suit-out. An amusing appendage has of late been adopted by those who ape the gentleman—that of a bamboo twig, with a crooked head. Boys even, only one remove from petticoats, sport their bit sticks. They are not, however, carried by men of ton—only by those who fancy that, by their use, they will be mistaken for gentlemen. It is but an aping of gentility, as shop-lads worship cigars in the street. Both have made a mistake. Neither habit obtains favour with gentlemen of high breeding.

In my mind's eye, I can fancy a lady, dressed as in the olden time, now passing up Lower-street, in her tightly fitted skirts, closely fitting her figure, with a waist to her shoulders; a hat beyond my power to describe, fixed to her powdered hair by a long pin with an ornamented head; wearing high heeled shoes, the bottoms of the heels not broader than a shilling, their height formed of wood, and fronts decorated with large buckles; and grasping a long cane with a golden head. Thus attired, fancy her marching stately up the street! In those days they all walked stately. How attractive the exhibition—how great the popular commotion—would be!

I observe that the habits of the olden time are again, as "coming events," casting their shadows before. We have already assumed the red petticoat and red stockings. The short dresses exhibit the well turned ankle, of which the ladies are not now ashamed. Hoops are converted into crinoline. I acknowledge I admire crinoline, when kept in moderate bounds. It gives roundness to the female figure, a shape approved of by all men. But when sticks and steel are resorted to, the thing becomes an absurdity and an annoyance. The jobber failed bunnets, hanging to the back of the head, are not in good taste; but the jaunty wide-a-wakes with their feathers are very becoming to youthful faces.

Ladies in mourning now hide their faces behind a double veil. This is a decided mistake. It is a mask for age and for unbecomingness, and leaves an impression upon us men highly unfavourable to the wearers. Gay colours and many ribbands are now much worn. When the colours are properly adjusted, and not too much of them, the effect is good. But we often see a mass of red, blue, and yellow ill assorted, that do not harmonize, either with themselves or with the complexion of the wearers. Elegance and a grand display of gay colours are incompatible. Depend upon it, ladies prone to such gaudery are not generally successful in obtaining husbands.—I am, dear Herrard, yours, &c.,

A VERY OLD CODGER.

Whitehaven, 24th May, 1859.