



The Hon. Mrs. John Fortescue.

FRANCE is extraordinary, and therefore attractive in its contrasts. One passes through Paris, astounded by the same mad traffic, the uncontrolled noise of the squeaking hooters, the rush, the beauty, the charm of it all. But fashions have become international—alas! that it should be so!—and there is nothing to be seen in Paris that may not be admired in London, New York, or any other great capital.

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Some new craze in necklaces ; the alteration of a waistline, or some novelty in trimming or material may make its first appearance in Paris, but will soon be imitated in England and in Europe generally. All individuality is lost in the senseless folly of fashion, all nationality submerged in the Sway of Paris modes and creations. There lies the pity; France has ceased to be unique, and all the cities of Europe have forgotten their own special designs and traditions, their own distinctiveness, in the effort to imitate. They imitate well—even too well.

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There remains the joy of the provinces, of unsophisticated folk, who wear their peasant dress with their own grace and dignity, careless of the tyranny of modes and manners. Here in Brittany what could be more charming than the dainty *Coiffe*, differing in the various villages; the fluttering streamers of Pont-Aven ; the demurely-tight bonnet of Concarneau; the lovely *coiffe* of Trejung, with its two pointed pinions framing each side of the face like the folded wings of an angel. In every district something lovely and distinctive : the old-time costumes in velvet and silk, with the wonderful Eastern embroidery ; the vests and ruffles of antique Breton lace ; the dainty little gauged aprons of satin, with their triangular bibs, and, above all, the beautiful collars, starched and fluted, and worn like a ruff around the shoulders. One enthusiastic Englishwoman desired to introduce these lovely collars into England. She took infinite pains to seek out the only *blanchisseuse* of the district, who would undertake them, in order to learn from her the mystery of how these collars were shaped like curving ruffs, and how the tiny fluting was accomplished. She came away discouraged. What English laundress would spend four hours in arranging fine straws alternately above and beneath a wet-starched collar to gain the tiny pleated effect, and another hour in removing the straws next day and ironing the collar into its characteristic curves for the sum of eight francs (about 2s. in English money to-day)? And what English peasant would spend two shillings on the doing up of any article of clothing that might be spoilt by a fitful shower, even were it to preserve an old tradition?

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Alas ! with the advance of education these lovely old customs will inevitably be lost. One buys the delicious Breton biscuits from madame, dignified and demure in her black Bretonne dress and apron and her spotless *ceiffe* and collar. And mademoiselle, her daughter, clad in a yellow knitted jumper, a row of imitation pearls round her neck, her hair waved and oiled in the latest Parisienne manner, will add up one's expenditure in a trice. She has been to a good

school in Nantes; she is now too grand to wear the costume; and *coiffe* her mother and all her forebears have worn so proudly.

One dreads to think that a time may come when the musical clonk-clonk of the sabots will be heard no more ; when the eye will be no longer delighted on a feast day by the sight of Breton men clad in their old velvet waistcoats and wide silk-beaver hats, En all the unspoilt grace of line and form.

The contrast between the monotony of internationalised fashion and the simple grace of provincial tradition was shown very abruptly at La Fete des Ajoncs d'Or in Pont-Aven. Then the prettiest maiden of the district is chosen by ballot of her sister Bretonnes to be the queen of the revels, and two maids of honour to bear her company. Throned on a bullock-wain, garlanded with ferns, feathery branches of pine, and spikes of *ajoncs* (gorse), they passed in procession, after the high mass, through the whole gaily-decorated town, with Breton cavaliers on cart-horses as outriders. Rustic bands played Breton music, and squeaky *binions* (a kind of native bagpipe) was heard high above all the rounds of revelry, as the procession wound its way through the narrow streets to the Market Square, where the ceremony of the crowning of the queen was to take place.

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As the little queen dismounted from her chariot, and crossed the square with her attendant maids of honour, and ascended the dais, followed by a train of tiny pages and maids clad in the ancient Breton costumes, the whole scene was dainty, picturesque, and significant. One of the oldest and finest peoples of France were proud of what they were. Suddenly there came the inevitable discord. Into the centre of the enclosure round about the dais there surged a number of English-speaking women with Kodaks of all sizes. In their anxiety to see and to snap the pretty scene at its best, some jumped up on the reserved benches, thereby entirely blocking the view of the Breton peasant behind them, while others rushed incontinently amongst the instruments of the Breton band. One lady in particular made herself conspicuous near the steps of the throne. She was clad in a chemise-dress of printed crepe de chine, with a design of a Chinese land and seascape delicately mixed. At the back, from the shoulders to the waist, trees, ferns, and mountains luxuriated. From the waist to the back of the knees blue waves and Chinese junks chased each other merrily from the northern to the southern hemisphere. She, with some of her sisters similarly attired, was sufficient to break the spell.

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It all comes to this in the end : the latest fashions may often lack beauty of line and shape, of harmony and colour. They may sometimes have all these things for one individual and not for another. In any case, they are often singularly out of place. The simple peasant dresses with the tiny delicate *coiffes* are never incongruous; they are redolent of an earlier time with its finer standards of dignity, grace, and beauty.