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DUDES CONSIDERED AS A BOON

By TOM DIBBLE

"He Was a Dandy in Other Days."

THERE is a new King of Dudes in Paris.

What a relief to get so cheerful a bulletin thus soon after the excitement of the holidays.

Particularly so when almost in the same batch of dispatches comes one from London, announcing with becoming British solemnity that an eminent librarian there has prepared an interesting paper upon the subject, "The Passing of the Dude."

Shades of Beau Brummel and Berry Wall!

And three cheers for the new "king" in Paris.

It makes us feel like preparing a paper with a title something like this. "The Dude; What He Has Done for Us."

We will. Here it is.

We hold a brief for the Dude. We deny that he has passed or is passing. We declare that he is at his very prime and at the height of his usefulness; that his history is glorious and worth considering.

The news from Paris requires some little explanation.

The new king apparently has not yet been crowned, for the same reason that other coronations have, at various periods in the course of the world's progress, been postponed from time to time. In short, there is an animated rivalry for the throne.

JUST when Alexandre Duval, who, as everybody who is anybody knows, was the first man to wear a black silk frock coat on Wednesday afternoons, was about ready to place the crown, Napoleon-like, upon his own brow, along came the Chevalier Andre de Fouquieres with the simple announcement that he had obtained control of a personally conducted shirt factory, whose entire product, including nothing but original designs, he purposed to use for his own individual adornment.

The passing of the Dude! Humph!

Two humphs, to say nothing of rot and piffle.

"Clothes," said Carlyle, "have made men of us; they are threatening to make clothes screens of us."

There, now. Do you see? A great brain like Carlyle's has worked upon this subject. Do you appreciate the erudite atmosphere we are furnishing, absolutely free, with this discussion?

Of course we do not think that Carlyle was any arbiter elegantisimo in matters that only a first-class dude can give an opinion upon offhand, but we must admit that Mister Carlyle had some brains and that he used 'em, even if he never did press his trousers more than twice a year between the mattresses.

And clothes have indeed made men.

But has it ever occurred to any one of them to thank the Dude for the clothes?

WE do not intend nor do we desire to be overserious in our defense of our friend, the dandy, but a glance backward furnishes a viewpoint not to that young man's discredit.

Only the other day we were a small boy, eager to poke fun at "the dude that's callin' on sister." How could we ever have had such thoughts? The chap that we then thought a dude would look almost tawdry compared to ourselves even in our every-day office garb to-day.

So let us consider the Dude from another angle.

Is the new King of the Dudes in Paris, or either of the candidates for the place, as eccentric as he seems. Paradoxically we hasten to say that he may be, for, as the Irishman said about his fellow countrymen, "there are dudes—and dudes." And there are extremes in everything.

At any rate, as A. Ward would have said, "he's a amoosin' cuss."

Take the case of M. Duval, who, in spite of Chevalier de Fouquieres' private shirt establishment, is far from discouraged.

M. Duval is a successful business man. He is the proprietor of innumerable restaurants, famous all over Paris. He has millions in cash, the result of their clever management.

But to him money is nothing unless it be of use in enabling him to further his design, which is to improve the sartorial appearance of his fellow men.

M. Alexandre says: "The dress of men! It is very terrible. Their drab, monotonous clothes make them resemble melancholy insects!"

AND yet this advocate of masculine elegancies does not favor the restoration of the colored braveries of the eighteenth century. He will be satisfied if we exchange our broadcloth and vicuna for black velvet, and we may still wear the breeches for semi-dress occasions.

With true French gallantry, the arbiter has ideas that extend and lend themselves to every possible occasion.

For instance, he even suggests a distinctive costuming for calling on one's relatives. If one is about to visit his paternal grandmother he must dress thus; if he is to pay his respects to his wife's mother—it is a painful subject, but the properly garbed one will then dress so.

To give an idea of the great detail to which M. Duval has worked out his scheme, here is his design for clothes to be worn when one is dining with one's aunts: "A long frock coat of black velvet, elegantly caught at the waist and leaving a large opening above, through which a gray silk waistcoat will be advantageously displayed; the trousers should be of fine cloth and fall straight."

Who so bold as to condemn such a considerate dude? No tailor certainly.

And what possibilities are suggested in this country by M. Duval's thoughtfulness of his relatives in this matter of dress. Now there's the Chicago man who is about to pay his first call upon his divorced wife——

"I have not thought of it at all yet," said M. Alexandre, with wide-open eyes. "It is a splendid idea, and I must give it consideration. Much will depend, of course, upon the number of divorces each party has had."

M. DUVAL has designed a dress which he wears when dining with one of the several duchesses who are proud of his acquaintance. He appeared at the chateau of one of the fairest of these not long ago promptly at fifteen minutes before the hour for dinner in the splendor of a dress coat of black silk and very tight trousers of the same stuff. Such courage of conviction naturally tends to the thought that M. Duval, like Sir Willoughby Patterne, "has a leg."

With this costume M. Alexandre wore silk gloves and varnished shoes.

The occasion of M. Duval's appearance in his frock coat of black silk is now as famous as the celebrated meeting of Beau Brummel and the Prince of Wales. It was at a matinee performance of that most Parisian of Parisian pieces, "The Green Coat," at the Theatre des Varietes. The bon vivant strolled to his stall among the fashionables, the bright lights striking and retreating from the sheen of his whimsical garment in such a way as to detract even from the modish gowns of the pretty French girls, outwardly as unconscious of anything unusual in his appearance as though he were about to retire for the night in his own room.

Of course, as would be expected in Paris, the Dude was showered with congratulations between the acts of the play. Very modestly he replied to the compliments that "the elegance of the new coat did not consist in the mere garment itself, but by the way in which it was carried by the wearer."

Right then and there M. Alexandre was proclaimed King of the Dudes and he is so now acclaimed by many; but the Chevalier de Fouquieres is on the job with his factory of shirts and other duds and he has adherents who will not yet acknowledge Duval.

THE Chevalier, by the way, was at the theatre on the occasion of the silk frock coat, and M. Alexandre's friends say he will never entirely recover from the shock and resulting fit of despondency. They say it was the real reason that he immediately began preparations for an ocean voyage.

Meanwhile M. Alexandre is very much on the job in Paris, for he has announced that his street dress for day-time wear during the period of the next Students' Holiday will be a frock coat of Prussian blue velvet with pearl gray trousers.

Take that, Chevalier, and put it in your cigarette holder and smoke it!

Do you wonder that M. Duval, with such clever ideas and designs of dress, compares the rest of us, in the matter of clothes, to "melancholy insects?"

M. Duval was a great friend of King Edward VII, who was himself, as we remember, quite a stickler upon the subject of dress, and for many years a pattern for Englishmen of fashion all over the globe, to say nothing of quite a few Americans.

When Edward visited Paris, it was quite common to hear the King and M. Duval referred to by sentimental Frenchmen as "the very flowers of Parisians." No disrespect was suggested in this coupling of the name of a restaurant owner with that of royalty. Both were men of fastidious taste and perfect tact, and both were popular everywhere.

A writer who was in Paris when the King and Duval were prominent figures there intimated that Duval owed much of his reputation even then to a particular design of hat which he wore. It was "a top hat, ironed and brushed so perfectly that its thousand reflections cast a species of aureole around its wearer's head. It had a peculiar shape, very low, with lines slanting very much."

M. DUVAL was so proud of this hat that he wanted none other to have one like it, and gave strict orders to his hatter not to duplicate it for any one except himself at any price.

A witty Frenchman said that this hat could be seen at sunrise every morning at the central markets, where Duval went to purchase the choicest meats for his restaurants—only nobody ever got up at sunrise to see it.

We smile at what we term the eccentricities of this French "Dude." But is it not possible that the eccentricities of to-day may be regarded as styles de rigueur to-morrow? Is the "Dude" again setting the pace merely, as he has done in the past?

Not so long ago a man who wore a pair of trousers creased would be a subject for merriment or pity. Either his tailor had made a mistake or the breeches were "ready-made" and not pressed out at home—for then we took the creases out just as now we are careful to have them in.

It seems only yesterday that each masculine leg was draped with a circle of cloth the size of a barrel—evidently something along the lines of the trousers that the gay and festive Frenchman prescribes for us now when we "dine with our aunts." A little later came a garment whose narrow legs were apparently designed to stand in, and nothing else, unless at a risk.

To-day we seem to dress sensibly, but, when you think it over, maybe we don't. Is the derby of convention for business wear a proper top-piece for a man's head any more than M. Alexandre's dinky little shining chapeau? It may be. Perhaps not.

"CLOTHES make the man."

They do indeed. George IV. began to blubber when a courtier that wasn't afraid to take a chance—like Steve Brodie—told him that Beau Brummel did not like the cut of his coat.

Brummel probably should have all the medals of his day as a "Dude." He would surely be the "King of Dudes" were he alive now. Yet to-day, in the twentieth century, a brief biography of the Beau in one of our best encyclopedias states that "Brummel was by no means a fop and was never extravagant in his dress."

Comparison of times, the development of ideas, thus change the viewpoint. No doubt when poor Beau Brummel died in the poorhouse—as he did—some chronicler of his day wrote an essay on the "Passing of the Dandy," for the word "Dude" had not yet been coined.

If he did, and he was a faithful raconteur, he must have described a touching incident of the closing hours of the great Beau, which shows that the trappings of the Dude often cover a manly and tender and chivalrous heart whose outpourings receive but scurvy and ungrateful recognition.

In his downfall and poverty, the bankrupt Beau sent to His Majesty, George the Fourth, a snuff box with some of the snuff he used to love, as a piteous token of remembrance and submission. The King took the snuff, and ordered his horses and drove on, and had not the grace to notice his old companion, favorite, rival, enemy, superior.

Coming down to more recent times, between the eras of Beau Brummel and our present day friends, M. Duval and the Chevalier, we have still freshly imprinted upon our minds the careers of such famous bonvivants as Berry Wall, who was once called just what Duval is now in Paris, "The King of the Dudes," "Dicky" Owens and others.

WALL was famed for years as the "best dressed man in New York." About eight years ago, upon his return from a trip abroad, Mr. Wall voluntarily announced that he had abdicated the title forever, age, he said, putting him out of the running. "Styles," he claimed, did not interest him any more. But the very next day Mr. Wall was seen on Broadway, "a symphony in blue." He wore a long overcoat of blue, with checks of dark blue, a blue serge suit, with a scarf of lighter blue. Even his air, it was noticed, was blue.

To-day in New York there are ten thousand Berry Walls. What would have been "a dude" during the earlier days of Mr. Wall's career, is now simply a "well-dressed man," and nowhere under the sun are there more of these than in little old New York, even if you do see fewer top hats than in dear old Lunnon.

Originality in dress is no longer regarded as eccentric, provided there is not an absoluate sacrifice of taste.

The Dude has come to his own. The well-dressed man is not a Dude, but from the Dude has come that which enables him to be what he is. And none of us knows what the so-called completely dressed man will don a year, two years or ten years hence.

We may, like our forefathers, again go in for silks and satins and the colors of the spectrum, and, following the suggestion of Monsieur Alexandre, dress in sombre suit of gray or black when visiting mother-in-law, or in gay, gaudy green or galoptious purple when calling on "the only one."

Who can tell?

It is not the passing of the Dude.

The opposing outside left was a terror. He bundled into an opponent with a savage impulsiveness that spread dismay. At half-time the opposing outside right accosted his captain.

"I want you to change my position," he said.

"But you're doing well enough," remonstrated the captain. "Outside right has always been your position."

"Maybe it has," growled the injured player, "but outside right against that joker means no inside left!"

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Pat was in the museum looking at a copy of the "Winged Victory."

"And what may ye call that?" he asked an attendant.

"That is a statue of Victory, sir," was the answer.

Pat surveyed the headless and armless statue with renewed interest.

"Victory, is it?" he said. "Then, begor, I'd like to see the other fellow."

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