

“Long lappets, the horse-shoe cap, the Brussels head, and the prudish mob pinned under the chin, have all had their day,” says the “Connoisseur,” in 1754. Now we have first mention of lace cardinals; trollopies or slammerkins¹⁶ come in at the same period, with treble ruffles to the cuffs; writers talk, too, of a “gentle dame in blonde lace,” blonde being as yet a newly introduced manufacture.

Though history may only be all false,¹⁷ as Sir Robert Walpole said to that “cynic in lace ruffles,” his son Horace, yet the newspapers are to be depended upon for the fashion of the day, or, as Lady Mary would say, “for what new whim adorns the ruffle.”¹⁸

The lace apron,¹⁹ worn since the days of Queen Elizabeth, continued to hold its own till the end of the eighteenth century, though some considered it an appendage scarcely consistent with the dignity of polite society. The anecdote of Beau Nash, who held these articles in the strongest aversion, has been often related. “He absolutely excluded,” says his biographer, “all who ventured to appear at the Assembly Room, at Bath, so attired. I have known him at a ball night strip the Duchess of Queensberry, and throw her apron on one of the hinder benches among the ladies’ women, observing that none but Abigails appeared in white aprons; though that apron was of the costliest point, and cost two hundred guineas.”²⁰

George II. did his best to promote the fabrics of his country, but at this period smuggling increased with fearful rapidity. It was a war to the knife between the revenue officer and society at large: all classes combined, town ladies of high degree, with waiting-maids and the common sailor, to avoid the obnoxious duties and cheat the government. To this subject we devote the following chapter.

¹⁶ Slammerkin, a sort of loose dress. This ugly word, in course of time, was used as an adjective, to signify untidy. The author recollects to have heard it so applied in her youth. Fortunately it is now obsolete.

¹⁷ “Don’t read history to me, for that I know to be false,” said Sir R. Walpole to his son Horace, when he offered to read to him in his last illness.

¹⁸ Lady M. W. Montagu, “Letter to Lord Harvey on the King’s Birthday.”

¹⁹ “The working apron, too, from France,
With all its trim appurtenance.”
Mundus Muliebris.

²⁰ Goldsmith, “Life of Richard Nash, of Bath,” London, 1762.