

PAULE DE GIRONDE
 FASHION
 ILLUSTRATION
 IN FRANCE
 II. HENRI MERCIER

IN a former article I spoke of one of the pioneers of French fashion illustration, as it appears to us to-day, that is to say, not only as a concrete image, but as a work of art in itself.

To-day I should like to call attention to a young scion of this now so well-developed branch of art, to a still very young artist who, nevertheless, has been able in the course of a few years to win for himself a great and well-deserved reputation.

Henri Mercier belongs, first of all, to those artists who have absolutely grown out of themselves. Even at the age of seven, the pencil was for him what ball and top were for other children. Stubbornly he refused to bow his neck to the yoke of a school or even a single teacher. He worked alone, developed himself out of his own inner resources, and when he was fifteen he drew almost as well as he does to-day — with the same devotion, the same fineness, the same assurance. The last ten years have sufficed to give ripeness to his talent and to win recognition for him.

As Mercier has never clung to a single, rigidly prescribed way it is easy to understand that he has been able to preserve his freedom and his elegance and to follow the many and diverse ways of his phantasy. He follows the *outré* nature of the strictly modern or of extreme snobbery, just as he satisfies the demands of the most exacting realists — just according to his inclination and the degree of his personal development. Sometimes the women he draws with their unutterably slender bodies and their unutterably small and dainty heads, reveal the yearning, languishing charm of the new primitives, then again the proportions of their silhouettes are almost realistic, almost anatomically clear and true. And when we regard these drawings of Mercier intently, we find that in each everything is different — every face, every attitude, every gesture, every landscape.

Eclectic by nature and by education, he is also eclectic as a draughtsman. And what is there that is really more fluent, more mobile than fashion? And what is more natural than that a draughtsman of fashions should adapt himself to fashion again and again, changing it and renewing it? — according to the length of skirts, the width of sleeves, the height of hats?



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