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Round The Exhibition. II. - A Palace Of Dress. By Frederic Lees.

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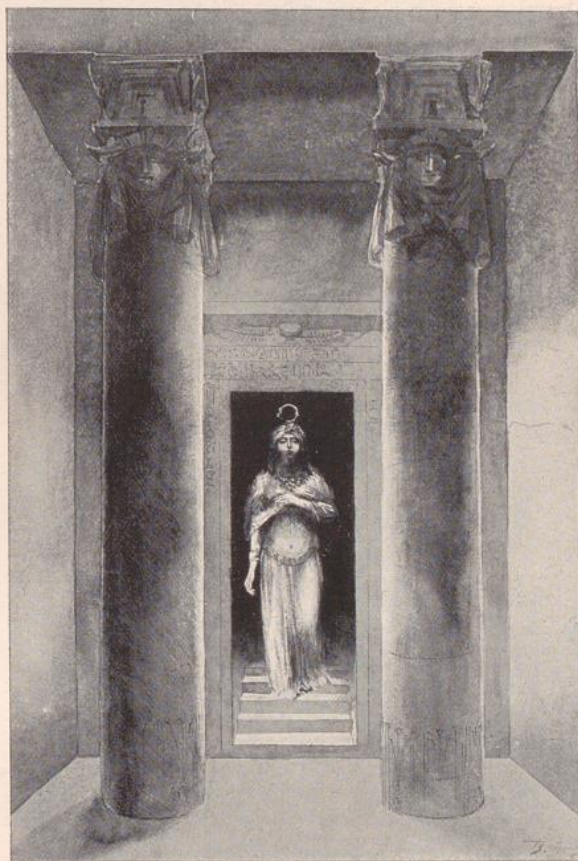
## A Palace of Dress

### ROUND THE EXHIBITION. II. —A PALACE OF DRESS. BY FREDERIC LEES.

WRITTEN sometimes in the exquisite poetry of a golden age of dress, sometimes in the plain, honest prose of a more matter-of-fact period, the book of Fashion is one of the most intensely human we can read. It is a book in which has been written, mostly in a feminine hand, many strange and wonderful things, and the whole forms the most entertaining narrative extant of the characteristics of all peoples and all ages. Now long since closed, the word *finis* written on the last page, it forms a complete story, to which probably little or nothing new will be added in the future. The female form has been clothed in every conceivable manner; all that can be done nowadays, authorities on dress tell us, is to ring the changes on fashions of former ages. In short, we must go back to the past—as we do in so many things nowadays—for inspiration. And yet, turning over the wonderful pages, we are not as a rule wisely inspired.

Whoever are chiefly responsible for the inelegancies of modern dress—and it must be understood that I here refer to woman's not to man's dress, in which the question of utility rules the day—the fault does not rest with them alone. Lack of taste in the public must also be taken into account. And in an age when the majority pay so little attention to aesthetics, is it surprising that the power of distinguishing what is really beautiful is not a common gift? No attempt has ever been made in this country, as far as I am aware, to educate the public in matters of dress; and even in France, where the standard of public taste is much higher than in England, the experiment is only just being made. What the result of this experiment is to be it will be of the greatest interest to note. M. Félix's admirable Palais du Costume at the Paris Exhibition must be looked upon as much more serious than an ordinary

attraction for money-making purposes, and the fact that the French Government has considered the advisability of purchasing it, with the intention of forming a permanent museum, is striking testimony alike to the manner in which it has been formed and to its possibilities as an educational institution. Class 85 of the Palais des Fils, Tissus, et Vêtements will be found to contain an exhibit of women's costumes, including a large number of historical examples of the Empire period, of the greatest value and interest to students of dress. But no systematic attempt has been made to give an historical survey of dress, not even of those comparatively recent years which have handed down to us genuine old examples. Only by a more extensive programme, embracing the copying of dresses from pictures and other sources,



"QUEEN CLEOPATRA"

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS

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would it have been possible to cover the ground in a manner at all adequate to the subject. But as this was somewhat outside the scope of the Exhibition, M. Félix, whose position as the leading *costumier* of Paris and as an authority on dress enabled him to command a large working capital, decided to undertake this stupendous task of forming an exhibition of dress from the earliest to the latest times. Each period, he determined, ought to be typified by a group or groups of wax figures (*à la* Madame Tussaud's, but oh! how superior from an artistic point of view—let me say it without disparagement—to that marvel of our childhood), representing woman in her true *milieu*, reproducing with scrupulous fidelity not only her dress and accessories, but the architecture and the furniture

of her time. The composition of the subjects and the designing of the costumes he entrusted to the well-known artist, M. T. Thomas; while M. Charles Risler, the architect, was given the work of reconstituting the architecture. No easy task had they before them, and the five years between the time they commenced and the date for opening the Exhibition were none too long. M. Félix, M. Thomas, and M. Marcel Hallé, an *érudit* and an artist in one, visited innumerable museums, deciphered innumerable manuscripts, copied innumerable illuminations. In many cases the greatest difficulty was encountered in obtaining reliable information about particular forms of dress: ordinary sources failed them, and recourse had to be had to savants, archæologists, searchers in the most out-of-the-way corners.

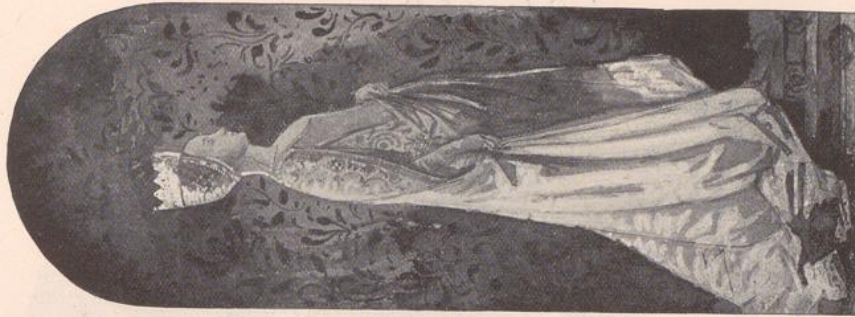
With what success the efforts of M. Félix and his collaborators have been crowned can be judged by a visit—and let it be a lengthy one—to the Palais du Costume. The art with which these thirty odd tableaux have been composed will be apparent at a glance, even to one with no special knowledge of the laws of composition. No ordinary wax-work show this, but one in which the figures, perfectly natural in pose and in expression, come as near to the living human form as is possible with dead material. How admirable the lighting, too, and how varied! To the artist these are true pictures.

The earliest examples of dress thus shown by means of figures draped in such a manner as to tell some story or other are Roman. M. Albert Gayet, in making explorations at Antinoopolis, in Egypt, in 1896 and 1897, discovered examples of costumes worn by Patrician ladies of the Roman colony of that place. These, now belonging to the Lyons Chamber of Commerce, were in a sufficiently good state of preservation to allow of exact copies being made without any very great difficulty for use in the first scene. "At Antinoopolis" represents a visit of Patrician ladies to the dwelling of a snake-charmer. The man is in a crouching position, holding his rod poised above the raised head of the reptile, the movements of which are

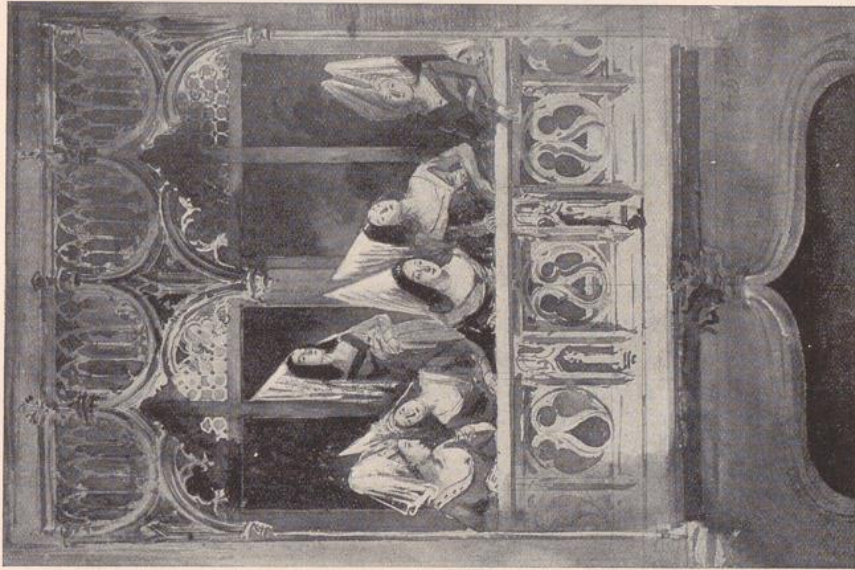


"THE ROMAN ATRIUM"

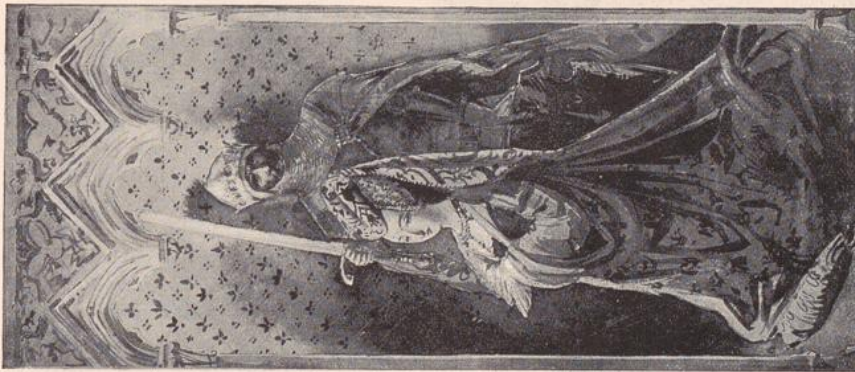
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY THÉODORE THOMAS



"MARIE OF BOURGOGNE"  
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS



"THE HENNINS"  
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS



"ISABELLE OF BAVARIA"  
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS

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followed with amusement and eager interest by the onlookers. The rude furniture and the utensils upon the rough walls—so strikingly in contrast to the elegance of the visitors—are the same nowadays as they were far back in history, so this portion of the tableau was prepared with less difficulty than the dresses. More purely Roman is the second picture, representing the Roman atrium at the time of Trajan; but I much prefer the Egyptian interior, on account as much as anything of its rich colouring. There is little to choose, however, between any of the tableaux representing the early history of dress, all being worthy of mention, nay, more than that, lengthy analysis if space only



“THE VISION OF JOAN OF ARC”

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS

permitted it. How dramatic, for instance, is that representation of Gallic women of the first century peering from the mouth of their cave at the approaching enemy—it is easy to imagine that one can see the glint in the sun of the helmets of the Roman soldiers as they march across the hills. M. Amédée Thierry's work *l'Histoire des Gaulois* was of great value in supplying details for this episode in the life of the Gauls. As for the jewels worn by the women, the spear, net and other articles, these were copied from specimens in the St. Germain Museum, so rich in documents relating to the early years of France. Again, could anything be more impressive, more magnificently cruel than the figure of that Byzantine Empress of the next tableau before whom her subjects, proceeding, almost crawling, up the steps towards the throne, are prostrating themselves to rise only after they have kissed her feet in adoration? Full of a deep power is this richly coloured marble audience chamber, hung with the jewelled lamps of a mysterious century, the magnificence of which has faded like a passing rainbow. To an earlier period, the fourth century, belongs the next scene, familiar to all



“GABRIELLE D'ESTRÉE”

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS

"GALLIC WOMEN AT THE TIME OF THE  
ROMAN INVASION"

FROM A SKETCH MADE BY

MRS. FREDERIC LEES

AT THE PALACE OF DRESS, PARIS EXHIBITION, 1900



## A Palace of Dress

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"THE LION OF THAT OF AEG"

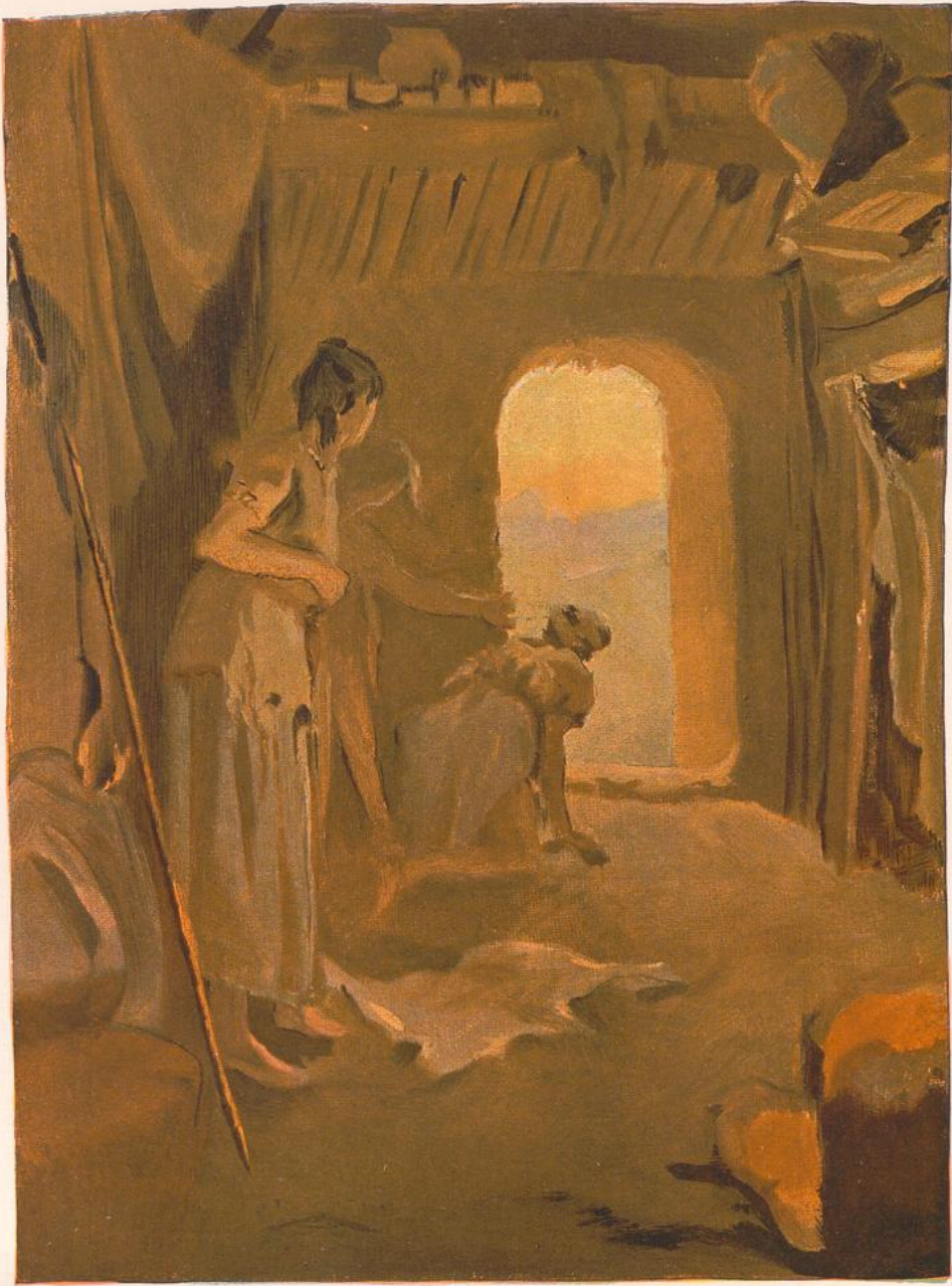
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS



"GABRIELLE D'ESTÈS"

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS

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1875  
LONDON



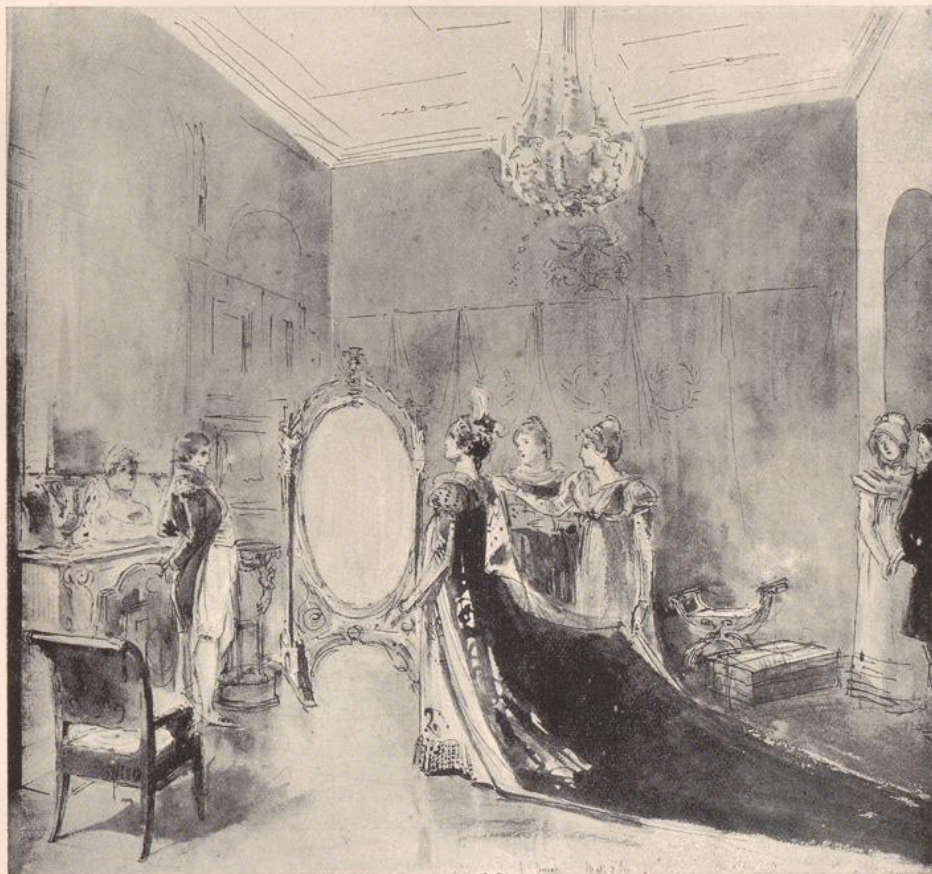


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who have visited the Cluny Museum: it is a representation of the Frigidarium of the Emperor Julian, the ruins of which still exist on the Boulevard Saint Germain.

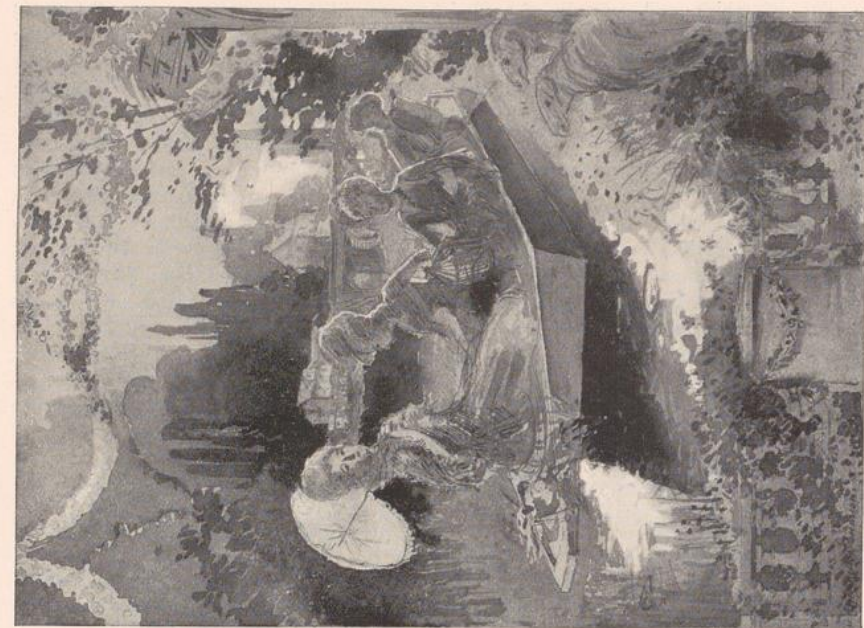
And so we proceed down the centuries. Here a masterly attempt to give us an idea of Ste. Clotilde, of whom no authentic portrait exists; there a feudal interior and a group composed of Blanche of Castille, Louis IX. and Marguerite of Provence. A little farther on look down upon us from a balcony of the time of Charles VII. a number of gentle dames wearing that curiosity of fashion the "steep" headdress, which, strange to say, lasted half-a-century—fifty years of torture to the elderly ladies who adopted it, for the "Hennins," as Viollet-le-Duc tells us, used to draw up the skin under the headdress in order to hide their wrinkles. Again, we are present at the end of the Fourteenth

Century at a visit of some noble ladies and seignors to an exhibition of the shields and helmets of the knights entered for the tournament—*Before the Tournament* it is called,—and at another scene when the prizes are distributed. It is one long procession of courtly ladies is this admirable Palace of Dress. Marie of Bourgogne, daughter of Charles the Timid, richest heiress of her time, and famed in history for her modesty; Patrician ladies of Venice in fine silks and jewels descending the steps of their palace towards the gondola in waiting, one of the best pictures in the building; English dames dressed in rich French stuffs heavily decorated with jewels and gold, as was the fashion in the time of Henry VIII., looking out on to the "Field of the Cloth of Gold"; Catherine of Medicis consulting the Italian astrologer Ruggieri, whom she brought from Italy

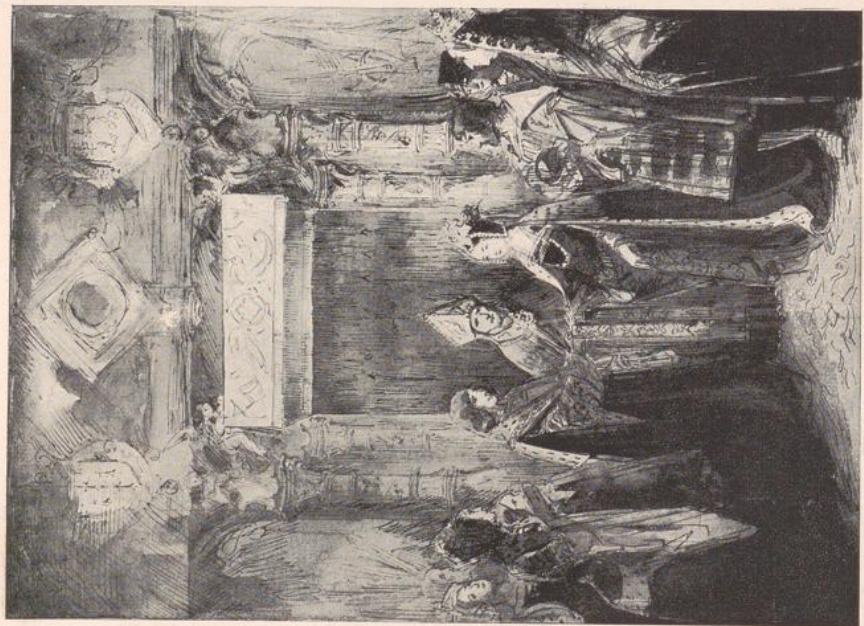


"THE EVE OF THE CORONATION"

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY T. THOMAS



“MARIE ANTOINETTE AT THE TRIANON”  
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY T. THOMAS



“MARRIAGE OF LOUIS XII. AND ANNE OF BRITTANY”  
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY T. THOMAS

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and installed in the rue de Soissons; the beautiful Gabrielle d'Estrées who inspired the King of Navarre, then at war in the neighbourhood of Rouen, with a noble passion; Marie of Medicis, second wife of Henry IV. as she appears in her portrait painted by Porbus in 1612; and Marion de l'Orme, "capricious as a devil," as the Chevalier de Gramont tells us in his Memoirs,—and this admirer (one of a score or so) had probably good reasons to know. Marion de l'Orme, who was born in 1612, died in 1749, at the age of 137. She is here represented as being escorted by one of her lovers through the courtyard of her house towards a door, held open by an attendant, leading into the street, from which two women and a man are watching her with curious eyes.

Sweet Marion de l'Orme brings us to an age when feminine dress entered upon a period which exercises a great fascination over us moderns.

The elegance of the time of Louis XV. stretches in an unbroken chain down to 1830, when the secret is apparently lost. In a series of tableaux, which are masterpieces almost without an exception, the charm of this elegance is made apparent for us. At the danger of making this notice a mere catalogue, I cannot refrain from again describing several of these reconstitutions. One in particular took my fancy, namely, that entitled *Les Visites*. St. Simon says in his Memoirs that on the eve of the marriage of the Duc de Maine, the duke's fiancée received the court of Louis XV. in her bedchamber. This fashion of receiving in bed solved the difficulty of having to advance towards visitors whose rank was unequal to that of the hostess; it also did away with the necessity of conducting them to the door. This bedchamber scene inspired the tableau in question. But there is little to choose between it and either of the two copied from the well-known engravings

*La Petite Loge à l'Opéra* and *Les Deux Baisers*, the former belonging to that collection of twenty-six plates drawn and engraved by Moreau le Jeune in 1776, the latter by Debucourt, a celebrated painter and engraver of the end of the eighteenth century. Some may prefer the Directory period, as shown by the interior of a *modiste's* shop, reproduced in all its charming details as recorded for us in the paradoxical Louis Sebastien Mercier's invaluable "Tableau de Paris." A lady, accompanied by her husband, is standing before a mirror, trying on hats and bonnets which the *modistes*, or, as they were called in those days, *marchandes des modes*, are bringing forward one by one from cases, receptacles of so many hidden feminine treasures. It is all so natural—just like a scene in a modern Parisian shop. How much more successful this charming



"AT FONTAINEBLEAU"

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY T. THOMAS

## Bench-ends



"LE THÉÂTRE DU MARAIS IN 1636"

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING  
BY T. THOMAS

piece than the *Veille du Sacre* side by side with it; yet its cost must have been much less than half if it is correct, as I am given to understand, that the gold embroidery on Josephine's train alone cost more than £600. The figure of Napoleon standing with his elbow on the mantelpiece watching the fitting on of the Empress's robe is not altogether successful to my mind. "Le Petit Caporal" cuts a much better figure in M. Thomas' preliminary sketch. Finally, let me mention the two domestic scenes entitled *Le Fiancé* and *Un Baptême*, the former an interior of 1820, the latter a scene of 1830 outside a church at the conclusion of a christening.

Whilst mentioning M. Thomas it would be well to take the opportunity of drawing attention to the work of this excellent black-and-white artist, whose drawings for the Palais du Costume are here reproduced for the first time. They include several designs which are of special interest, since it was decided for various reasons not to carry them out.

It is to this master in the art of *mise en scène* that we owe some of the finest dramatic creations of the modern French stage, that is, from the point of view of dress. The marvellous dress

worn by Mme. Sarah Bernhardt in *Théodora* was his, as also the principal costumes worn in *La Tosca*, *Les Danicheff*, *Michel Strogoff*, *Les Mille et une Nuit*, *Patrie!* and *La Haine*—all masterpieces of their kind.

The Palace of Dress may or may not—opinions differ—be calculated to have the effect of improving public taste in matters of dress. Personally I am inclined to believe that it will, that the millions who visit it will—unconsciously perhaps—be influenced for good by what is best, deterred from copying those fashions which when they were invented seemed so becoming, but upon which now we look with horror. There is a tendency at present, especially in America, to go back to the Empire for

our inspiration. Certainly no better period could have been chosen. It is to be hoped that in these days, when so much improvement is possible, that this tendency will not be found to be one of those vagaries of which the history of fashion can show so many examples.

FREDERIC LEES.

## A FEW NOTES ON BENCH-ENDS. WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY J. HENWOOD BLAMEY.

THE object of these few notes and drawings is to call attention to the artistic excellence of the bench-ends in many of the country churches in West Somerset.

In spite of the ravages of fire, and destruction by fanatical zealots and the modern "restorer," few have any idea of the amount of fine old carvings hidden away in our country churches, which are deserving of far greater attention from the student than they receive. The Somerset churches have been justly famed for the beauty of their carved