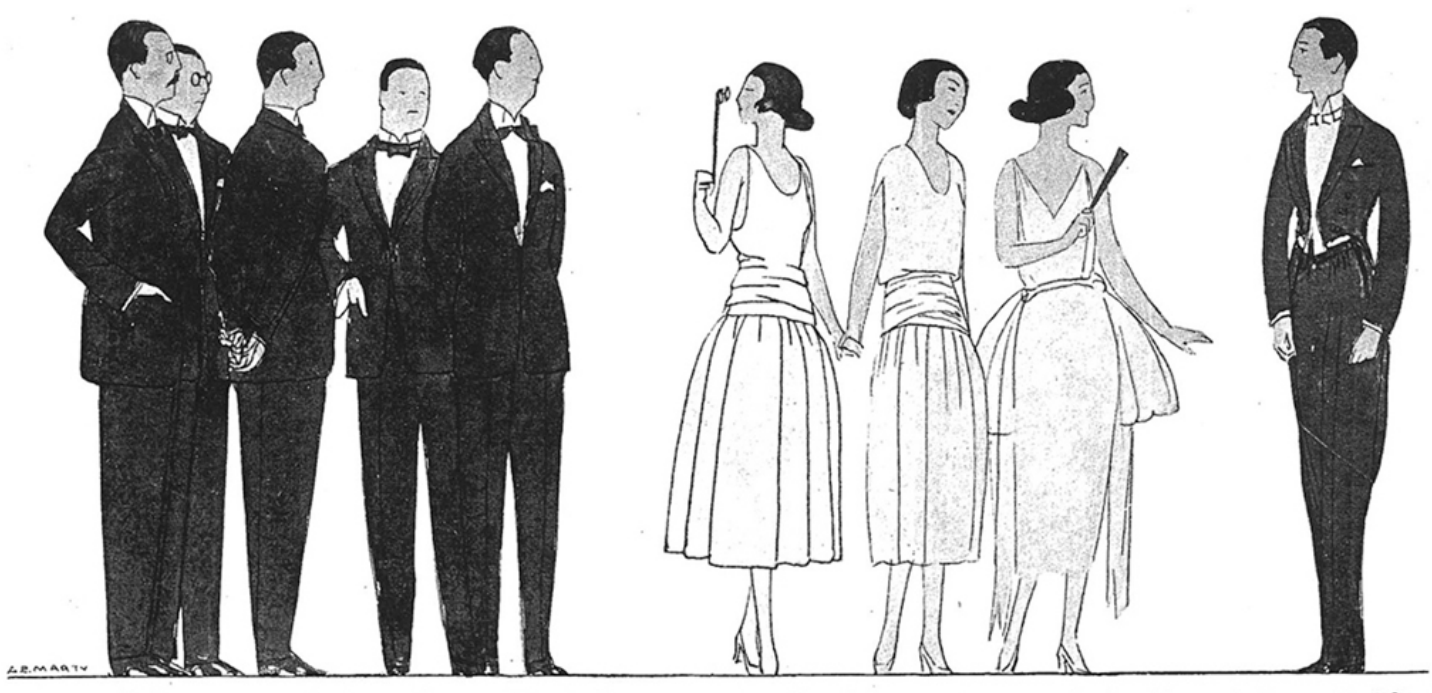
VOGUE
JULY 15, 1922: p. 62

The CASE AGAINST *the* DECLINE *of* MASCULINE ELEGANCE



Many men there are, no doubt, who would gladly return to the dress coat, yet refrain through fear of ridicule. Would they but don the garment of distinction a bare dozen times in defiance of the voice of the majority, they would find that the ridicule would fall, not upon them, but upon those of their fellow men still lazy in dinner coats

A Parisienne Enters Protest against the Negligence Which Substitutes a Mere Dinner Coat for the Correct Dress Coat, to an Extent Displeasing to the Feminine World and Inimical to French Prestige

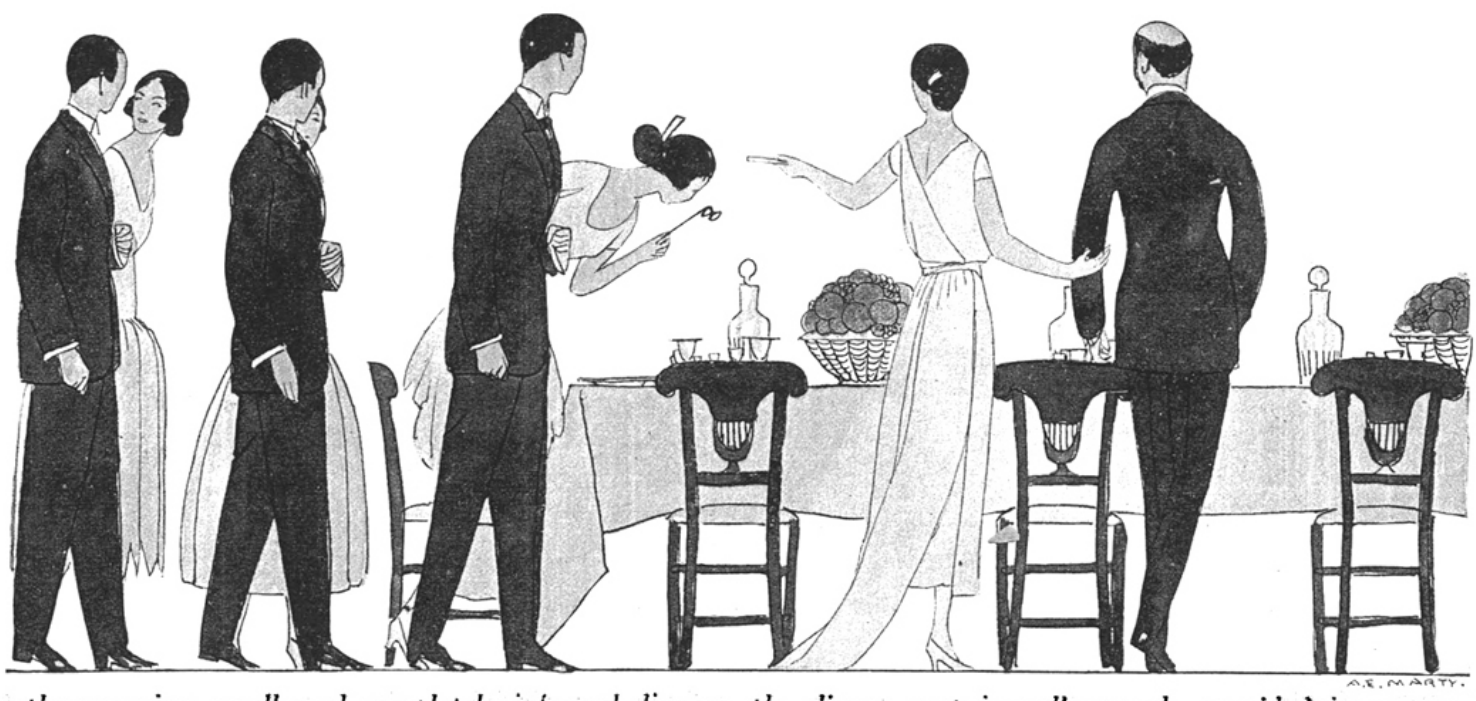
By FRANCIS de MIOMANDRE

INDEED, yes, my dear friend, now that I think of it, that was something of a criticism that you made me the other evening of the ways and manners of women. It was not of the usual order, of course, for you are very well bred, but it was terrible, none the less. You have a way all your own of saying everything without seeming to say anything, so that at the moment one finds no reply to make to you. That, *parbleu*, is because one does not at the moment feel the wound. Later, however, there is time for reflection, and one realizes that you have said things which are very hard, even cruel.

Nothing that we do, we poor women. finds favour in your eyes, neither our attire, our bearing. nor our dances. Shall I confess to you very softly, *cher ami*, that I am rather of your opinion? They say that it is the privilege of mature years to find fault. The real privilege is that of seeing clearly. Being no longer blinded by any snobbishness, I see clearly, as you do. The young women of to-day astound me; I realize that they will return the compliment—to those who shall to-morrow succeed them. But, all the same, they astound me. They also scandalize me a little, for they seem to me always at the extreme edge of danger, of disaster, of bad taste. It is a miracle that they do not break their necks. Indeed, that miracle may prove to be their distinction. Then they would be right. What am I saying? They are right. They must be right, for they are young. With a little reaction, all that will take form.

However that may be, they are at present, I agree with you, disconcerting. But—are you entirely sure that you men are without reproach in the matter? Are you sure that you really deserve that perfection, those delicate attentions, all those fine shades of feeling of which you dream? Do you really do everything possible to find in us that which you desire? Take simply the question of attire. Do you really think that you are all that could be desired?

You are entirely wrong in imagining that we pay no attention to the way men dress. Some of your most illustrious writers, I know, have not feared to write that we know nothing of the matter, that



For the engaging, small, and completely informal dinners, the dinner coat is well enough, provided its wearer is possessed of the wisdom to know that it must be accompanied always by a black vest and an equally black tie; but when it seeks to usurp the place of the dress coat at formal affairs, it should meet with the just fate of usurpers

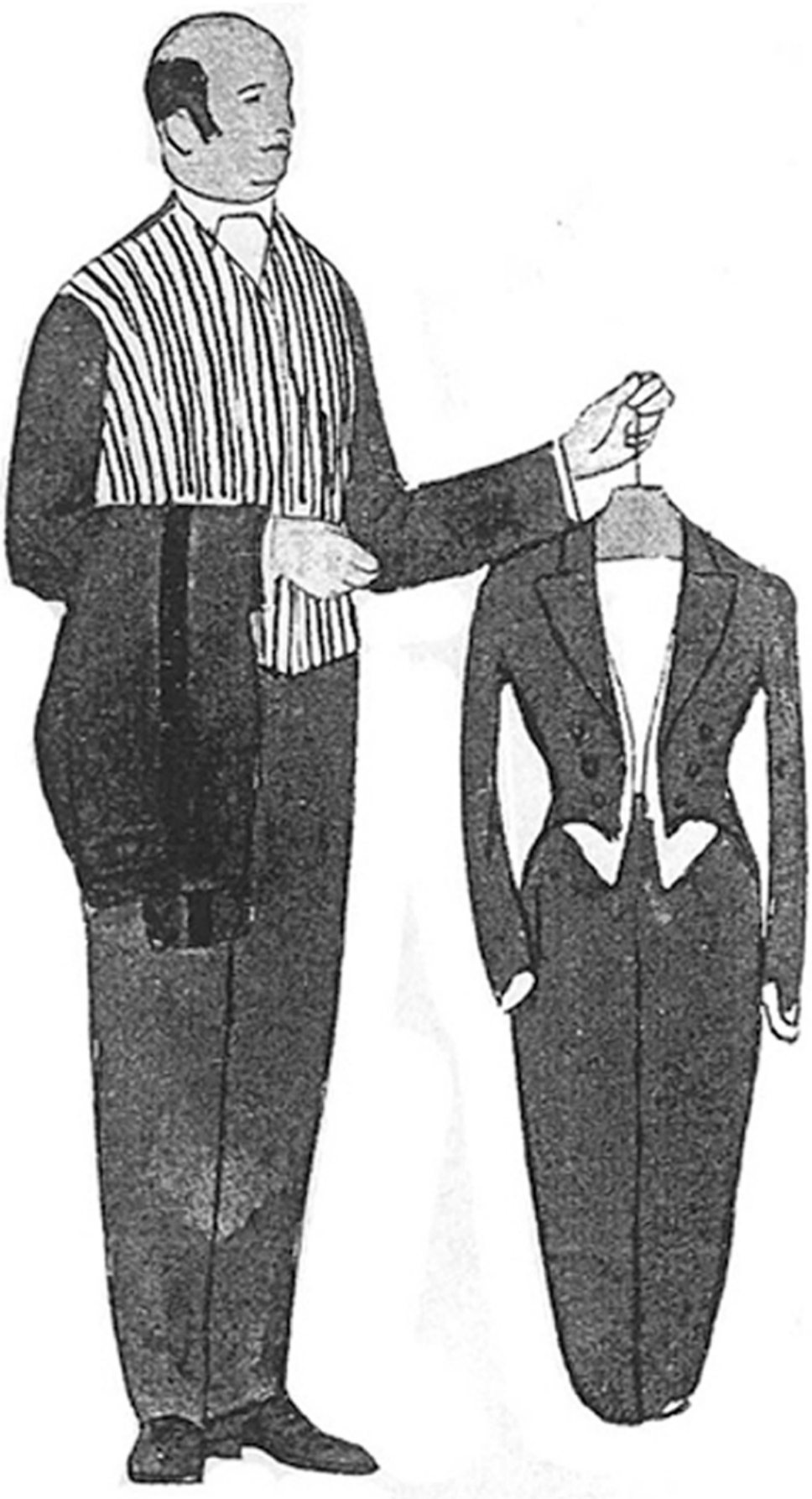
OldMagazineArticles.com

MASCULINE ELEGANCE

Can it be that there is really perceptibly greater difficulty in the knotting of a white tie than of a black one, that the masculine world so shuns the impeccable dress coat?

there are no worse advisers than women on the fine points of masculine attire, and that a man dressed in accord with our ideals would look like a coiffeur's assistant or a painter's boy.

It is true, of course, that we may make mistakes in details, may even fail to appreciate some type of cuff which will, in any case, be out of date to-morrow. But we are, on the contrary, very sensitive to the subtle distinctions of masculine dress, and we do not at all like that a man should present himself before us carelessly arrayed. That which we might pardon in a great man—feeling that he offered us the far more precious gift of his time and his intellect—we are little inclined to overlook in a man of lesser importance, whose impeccable costume might be his one real merit.



Once all the smart world of men wore it of an evening to all but the most informal of affairs. It was, as it were, a last vestige of that chivalry which they once lavished on woman

OldMagazineArticles.com

MASCULINE ELEGANCE

DOWN WITH THE DINNER COAT

It is, without doubt, very much easier to believe that we know nothing about it and to take our silence for consent. The truth is that while we may say nothing, we do not in the least consent, and we find, messieurs, that for some time now you have been very much changed—and for the worse. To take but a single detail—yet a very characteristic one—do you not find that the aspect of our evening functions is entirely different since the war?

The reason for that change is that men no longer wear the dress coat—or wear it so seldom that it is hardly worth mentioning.

In the old days, the dress coat was the accepted thing for all evening receptions or for dinners followed by receptions. The dinner coat was a very special garment, reserved for gatherings of men or for very informal small dinners. To indicate clearly the limits set to its use, it was called the dinner jacket, and it was worn only with a black cravat and black vest.

It is true that some people—those who always yield to the slightest pressure—seized, at the cost of questionable taste, every occasion for substituting the dinner coat for the full evening dress. Still their efforts had little influence, and one recognized a man of the world by the very fact that he never made a mistake in his evening attire. He never wore a dinner coat unless he were sure that no reception was to follow the dinner.

During the war, because it seemed unfitting to dress formally for the evening, many men substituted in those years the dinner coat for the dress coat. And the majority of them, alas, have continued to do so. To so great an extreme has this been carried that the newly rich—whom it would have been so easy to guide by their vanity—believe in all good faith that this is the accepted evening dress of the smart world.

I spare you the fantasies which they have developed from this mistaken theme. They are terrible. One sees men in dinner coats with white vests and white cravats, while others do not even know that there is a special type of hat, soft and black, to accompany such a costume, and wear the derby or a soft hat in colour—a truly horrible ensemble. And everywhere one sees this dinner coat, which gives all the men such a monotonous

Put on your dress coats, messieurs. All that is rare, gracious, or distinguished has its element of uselessness, and they, absurd as a working costume, are perfect in a salon

OldMagazineArticles.com

MASCULINE ELEGANCE

More than all, it is a matter of the prestige of France. All the world comes to Paris, not for the practical—of which it has enough—but for the smart, the distinguished, the elegant

and tiresome aspect, as if they were clerks who had simply changed their coats. I assure you, it is disheartening.

What is the reason for this negligence among men who, after all, are not all *nouveaux riches*, who used to know, who must still know what the correct usage is, and who, therefore, can not be ignorant of the fact that they thus commit a daily heresy, a sort of scandal?

Some of them, of course, feel more or less keenly that the dress coat does not become them—for it is not becoming to every one. Thus they keep to the dinner coat as an equalizing and impersonal sort of uniform, like the military uniform, which often creates the illusion of equalizing gentlemen and commoner. Others imagine that full evening dress would give them a solemn or affected air and that the present time demands simplicity. Yet others like to dance and fear the absurdity of the silhouette of a man who dances the modern dances with two long coat tails flapping behind him.

For most men, however, it is nothing more than laziness. A vague feeling of "what is the use" is over the land. People do not care to give themselves more than a minimum of trouble to be agreeable to their neighbours Now the act of putting on a dress coat seems to be to most men a real effort, and wearing it for three hours appears to be considered an insupportable bother, and I wonder why in the world it is so. In any case, a man must take the trouble to go home and change for dinner, and whether he puts on a dress coat or a dinner coat would seem to amount to much the same effort. Why is it that you are all so much more comfortable

OldMagazineArticles.com

in one than in the other of these two costumes, both of black cloth? Is a white cravat perceptibly harder to tie than a black one?

It is mere prejudice, all that. I know that many of you are dying to go back to the correct evening dress, but do not dare for fear of seeming ridiculous alone in a crowd of men in dinner coats. Yet if each one of you would take the risk, it would be the men in dinner coats who would be embarrassed.

We women feel very badly, I assure you, about such negligences. For it seems to us that they are so many wrongs against the cult of chivalry which you once rendered us and of which this gala costume which you wore to pay homage to us was one of the last traces. After all, it is to please you that we wear all these toilettes, the absurdity of which you are quick to see, while overlooking the inconvenience to us. Is all this trouble which we take for you to meet always with indifference, never with reciprocity?

There is yet another matter involved in all this, our national prestige. Foreigners, who have, it appears, a monopoly on practicality, do not come here to see practical men. They come to find admirable bearing, chic, and a distinguished social life. It is, in a word, *le panache* that they seek, every sort of fragile exquisiteness, things which seem to them precious and which they consider our specialty. The dress coat is a sort of symbol of all that—illogical, of course. But is there anything more illogical than going under fire in white gloves, as our heroic men of Saint-Cyr did in the first days of the war? Never mind, it is only in France that such gestures are every-day affairs.

Everything that is rare, gracious, or distinctive has a certain element of uselessness. Put on your dress coats, Messieurs. If you are thinking of sitting at your desks, it is an absurd costume; but in a salon, when you pay your court to us, there is, I give you my word, nothing better to be found.

Your old friend,

CHRISTINE

OldMagazineArticles.com