Nothing to Wear.
NOTHING TO WEAR:

An Episode of City Life.

(From Harper's Weekly.)

Illustrated by Hoplin.

NEW YORK:
RUDD & CARLETON. 310 BROADWAY.

MDCCCLVII.
NOTHING TO WEAR.

AN EPISODE OF CITY LIFE.

MISS FLORA M'FLIMSEY, of Madison Square,
Has made three separate journeys to Paris,
And her father assures me, each time she was there,
That she and her friend Mrs. Harris
Nothing to Wear.

(Not the lady whose name is so famous in history,
But plain Mrs. H., without romance or mystery)
Spent six consecutive weeks without stopping,
In one continuous round of shopping;
Shopping alone, and shopping together,
At all hours of the day, and in all sorts of weather;
For all manner of things that a woman can put
On the crown of her head or the sole of her foot,
Nothing to Wear.

Or wrap round her shoulders, or fit round her waist,
Or that can be sewed on, or pinned on, or laced,
Or tied on with a string, or stitched on with a bow,
In front or behind, above or below:
For bonnets, mantillas, capes, collars, and shawls;
Dresses for breakfasts, and dinners, and balls;
Dresses to sit in, and stand in, and walk in;
Dresses to dance in, and flirt in, and talk in;
Nothing to Wear.

Dresses in which to do nothing at all;
Dresses for winter, spring, summer, and fall;
All of them different in color and pattern,
Silk, muslin, and lace, crape, velvet, and satin,
Brocade, and broadcloth, and other material,
Quite as expensive and much more ethereal;
In short, for all things that could ever be thought of,
Or milliner, modiste, or tradesman be bought of,
Nothing to Wear.

From ten-thousand-francs robes to twenty-sous frills;
In all quarters of Paris, and to every store,
While M'Flimsey in vain stormed, scolded, and swore,
They footed the streets, and he footed the bills.

The last trip, their goods shipped by the steamer Arago
Formed, M'Flimsey declares, the bulk of her cargo,
Not to mention a quantity kept from the rest,
Sufficient to fill the largest sized chest,
Which did not appear on the ship's manifest,
But for which the ladies themselves manifested
Such particular interest, that they invested
Their own proper persons in layers and rows
Of muslins, embroideries, worked underclothes,
Gloves, handkerchiefs, scarfs, and such trifles as those;
Then, wrapped in great shawls, like Circassian beauties,
Gave good-by to the ship, and go-by to the duties.

Her relations at home all marvelled no doubt,
Miss Flora had grown so enormously stout
For an actual belle and a possible bride;
But the miracle ceased when she turned inside out,
And the truth came to light, and the dry goods beside,
Which, in spite of Collector and Custom-house sentry,
Nothing to Wear.

Had entered the port without any entry.

And yet, though scarce three months have passed since the day this merchandise went, on twelve carts, up Broadway, this same Miss M'Flimsey, of Madison Square, the last time we met, was in utter despair, because she had nothing whatever to wear!
Nothing to Wear! Now, as this is a true ditty,
I do not assert—this, you know, is between us—
That she's in a state of absolute nudity,
Like Powers' Greek Slave, or the Medici Venus;
But I do mean to say, I have heard her declare,
When, at the same moment, she had on a dress
Which cost five hundred dollars, and not a cent less,
And jewelry worth ten times more, I should guess,
That she had not a thing in the wide world to wear!

I should mention just here, that out of Miss Flora's
Two hundred and fifty or sixty adorers,
I had just been selected as he who should throw all
The rest in the shade, by the gracious bestowal
On myself, after twenty or thirty rejections,
Of those fossil remains which she called "her affections,"
And that rather decayed, but well-known work of art,
Which Miss Flora persisted in styling "her heart."
So we were engaged. Our troth had been plighted,
Not by moonbeam or starbeam, by fountain or grove,
But in a front parlor, most brilliantly lighted,
Beneath the gas-fixtures we whispered our love.
Without any romance, or raptures, or sighs,
Without any tears in Miss Flora's blue eyes,
Or blushes, or transports, or such silly actions,
It was one of the quietest business transactions,
With a very small sprinkling of sentiment, if any,
And a very large diamond imported by Tiffany.
On her virginal lips while I printed a kiss,
She exclaimed, as a sort of parenthesis,
And by way of putting me quite at my ease,
"You know, I'm to polka as much as I please,
And flirt when I like—now stop, don't you speak—
And you must not come here more than twice in the week,
Or talk to me either at party or ball,
But always be ready to come when I call;
So don't prose to me about duty and stuff,
If we don't break this off, there will be time enough
For that sort of thing; but the bargain must be
That, as long as I choose, I am perfectly free,
For this is a sort of engagement, you see,
Which is binding on you but not binding on me."
Nothing to Wear.

Well, having thus wooed Miss M'Flimsey and gained her,
With the silks, crinolines, and hoops that contained her,
I had, as I thought, a contingent remainder
At least in the property, and the best right
To appear as its escort by day and by night:
And it being the week of the Stuckups' grand ball—
Their cards had been out a fortnight or so,
And set all the Avenue on the tip-toe—
I considered it only my duty to call,
And see if Miss Flora intended to go.
I found her—as ladies are apt to be found,
When the time intervening between the first sound
Of the bell and the visitor's entry is shorter
Than usual—I found; I won't say—I caught her—
Intent on the pier-glass, undoubtedly meaning
To see if perhaps it didn't need cleaning.

She turned as I entered—"Why, Harry, you sinner,
I thought that you went to the Flashers' to dinner!"

"So I did," I replied, "but the dinner is swallowed,
And digested, I trust, for 'tis now nine and more,
So being relieved from that duty, I followed
Inclination, which led me, you see, to your door."
Nothing to Wear.

And now will your ladyship so condescend
As just to inform me if you intend
Your beauty, and graces, and presence to lend
(All which, when I own, I hope no one will borrow),
To the Stuckups', whose party, you know, is to-morrow?"

The fair Flora looked up with a pitiful air,
And answered quite promptly, "Why
Harry, mon cher,
I should like above all things to go
with you there;
But really and truly—I've nothing to
wear."

"Nothing to wear! go just as you
are;
Wear the dress you have on, and you'll
be by far,
I engage, the most bright and particular
star
On the Stuckup horizon"—I stopped, for her eye,
Notwithstanding this delicate onset of flat-
tery,
Opened on me at once a most terrible battery
Of scorn and amazement. She made no reply,
But gave a slight turn to the end of her nose
(That pure Grecian feature), as much as to say,
“How absurd that any sane man should suppose
Nothing to Wear.

That a lady would go to a ball in the clothes,
No matter how fine, that she wears every day!"

So I ventured again—"Wear your crimson brocade,"
(Second turn up of nose)—"That's too dark by a shade."
"Your blue silk"—"That's too heavy;"
"Your pink"—That's too light."
"Wear tulle over satin"—"I can't endure white."
“Your rose-colored, then, the best of the batch”—
“I haven’t a thread of point lace to match.”
“Your brown moire antique”—“Yes, and look like a Quaker;”
“The pearl-colored”—“I would, but that plaguey dress-maker
Has had it a week”—“Then that exquisite lilac,
In which you would melt the heart of a Shylock.”
(Here the nose took again the same elevation)
"I wouldn't wear that for the whole of creation."

"Why not? It's my fancy, there's nothing could strike it
As more comme il faut—" "Yes, but, dear me, that lean
Sophronia Stuckup has got one just like it,
And I won't appear dressed like a chit of sixteen."

"Then that splendid purple, that sweet Mazarine;
That superb point d'aiguille, that imperial green,
36 Nothing to Wear.

That zephyr-like tarleton, that rich grenadine"—
"Not one of all which is fit to be seen,"
Said the lady, becoming excited and flushed.
"Then wear," I exclaimed, in a tone which quite crushed Opposition, "that gorgeous toilette which you sported In Paris last spring, at the grand presentation,
When you quite turned the head of the head of the nation;
And by all the grand court were so very much courted."
The end of the nose was portentously tipped up,
And both the bright eyes shot forth in dignation,
As she burst upon me with the fierce exclamation,
"I have worn it three times at the least calculation,
And that and the most of my dresses are ripped up!"
Here I ripped out something, perhaps rather rash,
Quite innocent, though; but, to use an expression

More striking than classic, it "settled my hash,"

And proved very soon the last act of our session.

"Fiddlesticks, is it, Sir? I wonder the ceiling

Doesn't fall down and crush you—oh, you men have no feeling,

You selfish, unnatural, illiberal creatures,

Who set yourselves up as patterns and preachers."
Your silly pretence—why what a mere guess it is!
Pray, what do you know of a woman's necessities?
I have told you and shown you I've nothing to wear,
And it's perfectly plain you not only don't care,
But you do not believe me" (here the nose went still higher).
"I suppose if you dared you would call me a liar.
Our engagement is ended, Sir—yes, on the spot;
You're a brute, and a monster, and—I don't know what."

I mildly suggested the words—Hotten-tot,
Pickpocket, and cannibal, Tartar, and thief,
As gentle expletives which might give relief;
But this only proved as spark to the powder,
And the storm I had raised came faster and louder,
It blew and it rained, thundered, lightened, and hailed
Interjections, verbs, pronouns, till language quite failed
To express the abusive, and then its arrears
Were brought up all at once by a torrent of tears,
And my last faint, despairing attempt at an obs-
Ervation was lost in a tempest of sobs.

Well, I felt for the lady, and felt for my hat, too,
Nothing to Wear.

Improvised on the crown of the latter a tattoo,
In lieu of expressing the feelings which lay
Quite too deep for words, as Wordsworth would say;
Then, without going through the form of a bow,
Found myself in the entry—I hardly knew how—
On door-step and sidewalk, past lamp-post and square,
At home and up stairs, in my own easy chair;
Poked my feet into slippers, my fire into blaze,
And said to myself, as I lit my cigar,
Supposing a man had the wealth of the Czar
Of the Russias to boot, for the rest of his days,
On the whole, do you think he would have much to spare
If he married a woman with nothing to wear?
Since that night, taking pains that it should not be bruited Abroad in society, I've instituted A course of inquiry, extensive and thorough, On this vital subject, and find, to my horror, That the fair Flora's case is by no means surprising, But that there exists the greatest distress In our female community, solely arising From this unsupplied destitution of dress,
Nothing to Wear.

Whose unfortunate victims are filling the air
With the pitiful wail of "Nothing to wear."

Researches in some of the "Upper Ten" districts
Reveal the most painful and startling statistics,
Of which let me mention only a few:

In one single house, on the Fifth Avenue,
Three young ladies were found, all below twenty-two,
Nothing to Wear.

Who have been three whole weeks without any thing new
In the way of flounced silks, and thus left in the lurch
Are unable to go to ball, concert, or church.
In another large mansion near the same place,
Was found a deplorable, heart-rending case
Of entire destitution of Brussels point lace.
In a neighboring block there was found, in three calls,
Nothing to Wear.

Total want, long continued, of camels' hair shawls;
And a suffering family, whose case exhibits
The most pressing need of real ermine tippets;
One deserving young lady almost unable
To survive for the want of a new Russian sable;
Another confined to the house, when it's windier
Than usual, because her shawl isn't India.
Still another, whose tortures have been most terrific
Ever since the sad loss of the steamer Pacific,
In which were ingulfed, not friend or relation
(For whose fate she perhaps might have found consolation,
Or borne it, at least, with serene resignation),
But the choicest assortment of French sleeves and collars
Ever sent out from Paris, worth thousands of dollars,
And all as to style most recherché and rare,
The want of which leaves her with nothing to wear,
And renders her life so drear and dyspeptic
That she's quite a recluse, and almost a sceptic,
For she touchingly says that this sort of grief
Can not find in Religion the slightest relief,
And Philosophy has not a maxim to spare
Nothing to Wear.

For the victims of such overwhelming despair.

But the saddest by far of all these sad features

Is the cruelty practised upon the poor creatures

By husbands and fathers, real Bluebeards and Timons,

Who resist the most touching appeals made for diamonds

By their wives and their daughters, and leave them for days

Unsupplied with new jewelry, fans, or bouquets,
Nothing to Wear.

Even laugh at their miseries whenever they have a chance,
And deride their demands as useless extravagance;
One case of a bride was brought to my view,
Too sad for belief, but alas! 'twas too true,
Whose husband refused, as savage as Charon,
To permit her to take more than ten trunks to Sharon.
The consequence was, that when she got there,
At the end of three weeks she had nothing to wear,
And when she proposed to finish the season
At Newport, the monster refused out and out,
For his infamous conduct alleging no reason.
Except that the waters were good for his gout;
Such treatment as this was too shocking of course,
And proceedings are now going on for divorce.
But why harrow the feelings by lifting the curtain
From these scenes of woe? Enough, it is certain,
Has here been disclosed to stir up the pity
Of every benevolent heart in the city,
And spur up humanity into a canter
To rush and relieve these sad cases instanter.
Won't somebody, moved by this touching description,
Come forward to-morrow and head a subscription?
Won't some kind philanthropist, seeing that aid is so needed at once by these indigent ladies, take charge of the matter? or won't Peter Cooper's corner-stone lay of some splendid super-structure, like that which to-day links his name in the Union unending of honor and fame; and found a new charity just for the care...
Nothing to Wear.

Of these unhappy women with nothing to wear,
Which, in view of the cash which would daily be claimed,
The Laying-out Hospital well might be named?
Won't Stewart, or some of our dry-goods importers,
Take a contract for clothing our wives and our daughters?
Or, to furnish the cash to supply these distresses,
And life's pathway strew with shawls, collars, and dresses,
Ere the want of them makes it much rougher and thornier,
Won't some one discover a new California?

Oh ladies, dear ladies, the next sunny day
Please trundle your hoops just out of Broadway,
From its whirl and its bustle, its fashion and pride,
And the temples of Trade which tower on each side,
Nothing to Wear. 65

To the alleys and lanes, where Misfortune and Guilt
Their children have gathered, their city have built;
Where Hunger and Vice, like twin beasts of prey,
Have hunted their victims to gloom and despair;
Raise the rich, dainty dress, and the fine broidered skirt,
Pick your delicate way through the dampness and dirt,
Grope through the dark dens, climb the rickety stair.
To the garret, where wretches, the young and the old,
Half-starved, and half-naked, lie crouched from the cold.
See those skeleton limbs, those frost-bitten feet,
All bleeding and bruised by the stones of the street;
Hear the sharp cry of childhood, the deep groans that swell
From the poor dying creature who writhes on the floor,
Hear the curses that sound like the echoes of Hell.
Nothing to Wear.  67

As you sicken and shudder and fly from the door;
Then home to your wardrobes, and say, if you dare—
Spoiled children of Fashion—you've nothing to wear!

And oh, if perchance there should be a sphere,
Where all is made right which so puzzles us here,
Where the glare, and the glitter, and tinsel of Time
Nothing to Wear.

Fade and die in the light of that region sublime,
Where the soul, disenchanted of flesh and of sense,
Unscreened by its trappings, and shows, and pretence,
Must be clothed for the life and the service above,
With purity, truth, faith, meekness, and love;
Oh, daughters of Earth! foolish virgins, beware!
Lest in that upper realm you have nothing to wear!
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