

### **Introduction**

Elizabeth Cady Stanton did not equate wearing the reform dress to advocacy of women's rights. Rather, in the following article, she argued that the shorter skirt and "Turkish trowsers" offered women a greater freedom of movement. She urged women to ignore the comments of the "men and boys [who] laugh at us." Stanton and other women's rights activists eventually abandoned the freedom costume precisely because of the negative reactions of the general public.

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### **OUR COSTUME.**

Let the silk worm stay in its cocoon until its own wants compel it to throw it aside. Let every woman stay in her long petticoats, until she feels the necessity of a change; then no opposition, or trivial objections, will deter her; then she will not doubt or hesitate as to what she shall do; she will not heed the remarks of rude men and boys, and unmannerly women. Though I do not wish to convince any woman against her will, of the reasonableness of this change, yet I would answer some of the objections I have heard. Some say the Turkish costume is not graceful. Grant it. For parlor dolls, who loll on crimson velvet couches and study attitudes before tall mirrors -- for those who have no part to perform in the great drama of life, for whose heads, hearts and hands, there is no work to do, the drapery is all well; let them hang it on thick and heavy as they please; though, to the highest artistic taste the human form is most beautiful, most graceful, wholly undraped and unadorned. Are not the Graces themselves, thus represented? I have seen galleries of beautiful paintings and statuary, in the old world, but no where is the ideal female form to be found in a huge whaleboned bodice and bedraggled skirt. If the graceful is what you aim at, study the old painters and sculptors, and not Godey's Book of Fashion. But for us, commonplace, everyday, working characters, who wash and iron, bake and brew, carry water and fat babies upstairs and down, bring potatoes, apples, and pans of milk from the cellar, run our own errands, through mud or snow; shovel paths, and work in the garden; why "the drapery" is quite too much -- one might as well work with a ball and chain. Is being born a woman so criminal an offense, that we must be doomed to this everlasting bondage? "But," say some, "it is not the fashion!" Neither is it the fashion to be honest and virtuous, to lead simple, pure, and holy lives. The true, the earnest soul is always odd. Again, "some women of doubtful character, are proposing to wear the short dress." Well, have they not also worn the long one? "But the men and boys laugh at us." That is a strong reason in its favor. It is good to be laughed at; the more ridicule you encounter the better. It strengthens and develops the character to stand alone. "What will the people say?" has been a powerful weapon, in crushing many generous impulses, high resolves, and noble deeds. Women are said to have excessive love of approbation; therefore must we cultivate indifference to the opinions of others, but be ever alive to their sufferings. Let the weal and the woe of humanity be everything to us, but their praise and their blame of no account. E.C.S.

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