

They Wore Iron Corsets . . .

By Virginia Rowe

HOW would you like to wear a corset of iron or steel bands which rigidly held your waistline down to about thirteen inches? Or how would you like to be laced into stiff whalebone so tightly that it would make your body black and blue? Barbarous, you exclaim! You can't imagine wearing *any* sort of corset, unless the dainty, lightweight silk or very stretchable elastic foundation garment you occasionally wear could be called one.

But fashionable ladies down through the centuries have felt differently. Primitive South American Indian girls wrapped themselves in yards of rattan cane in order to have as small a body as possible. These were put on when they were still very young and left there until they were married.

The Eastern countries, Java, Crimea, India, Persia, and Egypt were far ahead of Europe in the development of waist belts. These varied from mere decoratively beaded belts to real corsets of morocco and wood.

Homer is the first writer who describes garments which might be taken for corsets. Juno and Venus are both supposed to have worn "cesti" which were of magical power. Roman ladies, of high birth particularly, wore tight waist and hip bands to give the appearance of slimness, which was very desirable in those days, as well as today.

In 1043 a manuscript was published in France with an illustration of "The Fiend of Fashion." This was shown as the body of a woman and the head, arms and feet of a dragon. The body was tightly laced into a corset. Which all goes to show what men thought of these queer contraptions!

In these very early days, however, some men even wore corsets. In 1265 a household register was made out by a French woman, listing corsets as having been made for Richard, King of the Normans, and his son, Edward.

IN THE 14th century the surcoat was introduced. This was probably the first corset as we know it today—plus a complete covering in the form of a dress or coat.

The next reference to corsets that we find is in the early part of the 16th century. At that time the Emperor of Austria issued a law forbidding the use of corsets in nunneries and schools for girls. The penalty for disobeying this law was excommunication from the Church. The only answer to this edict, however, was a still tighter lacing of those privileged to wear them.

Catherine de Medici was one of the heartiest rooters for laced waists. In

fact she insisted that ladies of her court conform to the standard of a waistline of thirteen inches. Her means of obtaining such an extreme was by exceptionally tight lacing. These corsets were then covered by a long steel corset cover, extending from the throat to the hips. These were very popular at about the same time at Queen Elizabeth's court in England.

Little change in the amount of lacing took place in Europe through the 17th century. The rule remained that a smart waist was one which could be spanned with your hands. The word "stays" came into general use sometime in this same century.

IN THE late part of the 18th century there was for a short time a reign of relaxation. During this period the fashion of dress reverted to copying the classic Greek, and of course the very stiff corsets were unnecessary.

This lasted for a very short time, however, for by 1810 the fever for lacing returned worse than before. Instead of the whalebone stays, the women wore bars of iron or steel, three or four inches across and not less than eighteen long.

By the middle of the 19th century doctors had begun a campaign against anything as harmful to health as a corset. There was of course much contro-

versy, with advocates of lacing accusing opponents of ignorance because of lack of experience with stays.

There are many records which relate of young girls, who, in the process of forming their figures, wore corsets day and night, and also dieted strenuously.

By the middle of the 19th century, corsets had fallen to lacing merely around the waist, instead of to the shoulders, as formerly.

During the latter part of this century, however, they again lengthened—now to the arm pits. Many corsets faced both in the front and in the back, and were boned closely. Some inventors made use of elastic webbing or woven india rubber cloth. The resiliency of these garments was greatly exploited. Don't you remember seeing such a corset at your grandmother's or stored away in your attic?

It was shortly after this that the medical profession once more started a crusade against tight lacing. Whether women were becoming tired of discomfort, or whether they realized that their health was being sacrificed, the tightly laced and heavily boned corsets were out!

Even the name has vanished—for our only articles of support are now sold as wrap-arounds, step in girdles, or corsettes. Some of these are lightly boned, but the majority of our modern women cannot be bothered with the discomfort of even a few whalebones. Most of the modern garments are decorative combinations of silk or cotton and elastic. Thus has the corset evolved!

How to Buy an Egg Beater . . .

By Mildred Bennett

WHEN you buy an egg beater do you select one or do you just buy it? Do you want a high, fluffy, large grained angel food or one that isn't quite so high, with a finer texture? The result of your product depends largely on the type of egg beater used.

Egg beaters are used to clump fat, as in whipping cream, to incorporate air, and for general mixing. There are three types of beaters that have been on the market for some time. The turbine consists of two flat discs, usually slotted, turning in a horizontal position. These discs are turned by a gear wheel. This type of beater gives the least volume but gives fine texture. Its use is usually limited to whipping cream and making salad dressing.

The whisk is a flat oval shaped beater with criss-crossed wires. It gives the greatest volume of any but not always the fine texture. The whisk has more surface exposed and incorporates more

air, but also takes more energy to operate than the others.

The wheel beater consists of wheels which pass each other in opposite directions. This beater gives the best texture and does good mixing, but the volume is not as good as with the whisk. It is considered the best all-around beater.

A new egg beater, which was constructed by an Ames woman, has been patented. It is a combination of the whisk and wheel beaters, doing the work of the whisk beater with the ease of operation of the wheel. The whisk part of the beater is constructed of fine wire. It is turned in a vertical plane by a gear wheel. The handle is constructed on a slant so that the operator's arm can be in its natural position for holding the beater.

When choosing an egg beater look for one with fine wire or thin blades, and be sure that the beater fits snugly into the bottom of the bowl so that none of the product will be unbeaten. A comfortable handle is also desirable.