

Poisonous Petticoats, Strangling Scarves: Uncovering the Dark Side of Victorian Fashion



In the opulent world of Victorian fashion, where elegance and sophistication reigned supreme, there lurked a hidden danger: poisonous garments.



Killer Fashion: Poisonous Petticoats, Strangling Scarves, and Other Deadly Garments Throughout

History by Jennifer Wright

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From arsenic-laced petticoats to strychnine-infused scarves, the Victorian era was rife with garments that could cause serious harm or even death.

The Deadly Petticoat

One of the most notorious garments was the poisoned petticoat. Made from silk or cotton, these petticoats were often treated with arsenic or other toxic chemicals to give them a beautiful green hue.

However, this artificial coloring came at a deadly price. The chemicals would leach out of the fabric and cause skin irritation, respiratory problems, and even organ failure.

In 1858, a young woman named Maria Ashford died after wearing an arsenic-laced petticoat to a dance. Her death shocked the nation and led to a public outcry against the use of poisonous dyes.

The Strangling Scarf

Another dangerous garment was the strangulating scarf. These scarves were made from a lightweight fabric, such as gauze or lace, and were often tightly wrapped around the neck.

The pressure from the scarf could constrict the wearer's windpipe, causing shortness of breath and even death. In some cases, the scarf could also

cause the wearer to choke on their own vomit.

In 1863, a woman named Eliza Armstrong was found dead in her home, strangled by her own scarf. The coroner's report concluded that she had accidentally strangled herself while adjusting the scarf.

Other Deadly Garments

Petticoats and scarves were not the only garments that could be deadly in the Victorian era. Other hazardous accessories included:

- **Hats with mercury-filled feathers:** The feathers in these hats were treated with mercury to give them a iridescent sheen. However, the mercury could vaporize and be inhaled by the wearer, causing neurological problems and even death.
- **Gloves with lead-based dyes:** The lead in these dyes could be absorbed through the skin, causing lead poisoning.
- **Shoes with antimony-laced leather:** Antimony is a toxic metal that could cause skin rashes, hair loss, and even death.

The Dangers of Victorian Fashion

The use of poisonous chemicals in Victorian fashion was a reflection of the era's fascination with science and technology. Victorians believed that science could solve all of their problems, including the need for beautiful and fashionable clothing.

However, they were unaware of the deadly consequences of using these chemicals in clothing. As a result, thousands of people were injured or killed by poisonous garments.

Today, we are aware of the dangers of poisonous chemicals and they are no longer used in clothing. However, the legacy of Victorian fashion remains a reminder of the dangers of sacrificing health for beauty.

The Victorian era was a time of great fashion innovation. However, it was also a time of great danger, as many garments were made from poisonous materials.

The stories of women who were killed or injured by their clothing are a cautionary tale about the importance of consumer safety. They also remind us that beauty should never come at the expense of health.



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