

WOMEN DON "PERILOUS" DRESS TO ATTRACT MAN

Short Skirts, Corset Waists and High Heels Dictated by Masculine Approval—Many Fair Wearers Secretly Revolt, but Must Follow the Fashion of the Day.

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Marriage."

London, Feb. 7.—Certain indignant clergymen are preaching and writing upon the moral menace of present-day feminine fashions in dress.

They entirely disregard the fact that women always adopt the form of vesture most attractive to the great majority of men. If masculine taste decided that the corset waist is becoming, women will endure discomfort, and even ill health, to gratify the caprice of their admirers.

When men admire a "generous figure" in their Psyches and Junos, the crinoline and its modification, the bustle, are employed to correct angularity and slimness. There are many men who esteem the tottering gait of women with high heels as charmingly feminine.

Dissentients like myself are obviously in the minority. We may quote eminent medical opinion by the page, and declaim eloquently upon the unhygienic and unesthetic fashion of the elongated heel. But the bulk of manly opinion prevails. Women behave as men wish them to behave.

Man's Taste Decides.

Many women would like to dress rationally and gracefully and to discard cramping and distorting garments. But they are opposed by the very men whom they most wish to please.

Originality and individual preference in dress are only possible for the strongly independent or wealthy woman. Men are wont to judge of women's merit by the style of their clothing and the girl who has to earn a living knows by stern experience

that aberration from the fashion of the hour is regarded with suspicion or prejudice.

Undoubtedly many women submit to the tyranny of custom in clothes for the sake of avoiding an imputation of eccentricity or dowdiness. They are guided by the average man's standard of fitness and charm, even when they are secretly in revolt against unhealthy and ugly clothing.

Women's headgear is more hygienic than man's and occasionally it is artistic. A dispassionate judgment must decide that chimney-pot hats and trousers are as unlovely as the most bizarre of women's wear. But the man who wishes to gratify his womenfolk dons the top hat on appropriate occasions, thus proving that the fundamental principle in custom is a desire to attract the other sex.

We cannot escape this universal rule of allurements. It is biologically imperative as well as socially conventional.

Clerics may apprehend peril in the curtailing of the length of skirts. But the hygienist approves the short skirt. It is dreadful to reflect upon the quantity of microbes gathered from the streets by the long skirt.

Are we to accept the view that the instinct of adornment and the natural law of attraction are innately evil? If so, we ought to apply the theory in the case of both sexes.

Why should men be permitted to "attract" by such devices as lavender colored socks, bright neckties, fancy waistcoats and other masculine adornments? Even the customary sable dress of the curate has been known to "allure" young ladies. Where shall we draw the line?

All uniforms, whether scarlet, gold-laced or sober khaki, possess the fatal quality of allurements. We are confronted with a very serious moral and social problem. This display of finery must be suppressed.

Shall we begin the reform by forbidding the exposure of attractive vesture and personal embellishments in the shop windows? Shall we appoint clerical committees to direct legislation in this matter?

Whom shall we elect as the dress censor? And what of the economic aspect? If only the plainest and most unattractive dress is to become the rule, there is a bad time ahead for several important industries.

Must Follow Fashions.

Many women admit that there is need for educating men in the aesthetics of feminine dress. But a monetary consideration is involved. Original, beautiful and healthy clothing is costly. I know women who have tried to combine these desiderata, and they tell me that the wish cannot be gratified on account of the expense. They have no alternative but conformity to the prevailing fashion.

A rich woman with revolutionary ideas upon dress can have her garments built to any design that she selects. The mass of wage-earning and professional women are compelled to accept the fashion of the fleeting day. It is economically the line of least resistance.

When men in the mass decide what is beautiful, hygienic and useful in woman's dress we may anticipate great changes. But this is Utopian.

Man was ever inconstant in his standards of attractiveness in woman's garb. And here again we are faced with a law of implacable Dame Nature.