

WELL-DRESSED WOMEN.

Powerful forces are in clash when the Catholic Church and the orthodox synagogue unite against present styles in women's clothes. Essentially it is not a quarrel between the ecclesiastical authorities on the one hand and the daughters of the Church and the daughters of Zion on the other. The women themselves are in the clutch of the mighty circumstance that goes by the name of Fashion. Since the very nature of Fashion is change, victory promises to rest ultimately, though not permanently, with the churches. What their direct efforts might not accomplish may be achieved through the vicissitudes of the mode. It cannot be taken for granted that the short skirt and the boyish form are definitely incorporated into Western civilization. The male of the species in 1925, with his colored shirtings and grenadier ulsters, is back where he was about the time of the Spanish-American War. It may yet happen with the other 50 per cent. of the race.

Presumably, the chief characteristic of immodesty is that it deviates from the norm, it stands out, it shocks. The blaring thing on Broadway today would be precisely the "modest" fashions of twenty years ago. With the spread of democracy and the growth of well-being for the masses, the decrees, or ravages, of Fashion become well-nigh universal. For the modest woman of ISAIAH and the Psalmist the surest way to escape conspicuousness is to subscribe to the mode. This leaves out of account the pressure of economic evolution in behalf of the new styles. Comfort and convenience have lined up with le sport in behalf of the short skirt and the general thrift in the use of dress material. Before this the masses have imitated the classes even when it hurt. Now the masses find it useful as well as spiritually satisfying to follow the classes. The short skirt of the tennis court is the convenient garment for the business woman. The nonchalance of the British aristocrat happens fortunately to coincide with the ease of the American woman gainfully employed.

The circumstances point to woman's definite emancipation from the garments that trail, envelop and clog. If the women of Turkey have abandoned the veil, and the women of India are abandoning purdah, the women of the West will be argued with in vain to retrace their steps; and particularly because here in the West the new fashions embody no such break with tradition. Our modesty standards in dress have largely been artificial. Satirists have long wanted to know why something that was modest in the ballroom is immodest on the street curb, and why the proper thing on the bathing beach is the improper thing on the subway. It is largely habit. No one has ever considered the short kirtle of the peasant woman in her national costume to be immodest. That short skirt should be no less proper behind the shop counter and in the business office.

Why, then, in the face of all these forces working logically for the modern dress, is it assumed that victory may yet rest with the churches? For the reason that when Fashion speaks, economic forces, social forces, psychological forces, emancipations, progress and all the rest mean nothing. The dressmaker breathes upon them and they are not.