RELATION OF CLOTHES TO THE BODY

CLOTHING should serve to protect the body from cold and heat and criticism, to enhance the value of the wearer's personality in connection with his work and life, and to please—or at least not to offend the eyes of sweet-minded honest beholders.

Therefore the laws of ethics and the laws of aesthetics meet and have common cause in questions of dress. That which is really practical, comfortable, beautiful, cannot be immoral. That which is not practical, comfortable, beautiful, falls short, somehow, of the fulfillment of the moral law, even though the wearer be not altogether to blame.

Clothing that does not sufficiently protect the body from heat or cold or other inclemencies is unhealthy and for that reason immoral. To wear it is physical anarchy.

Clothing which hinders us in the accomplishment of our work—high heels for the shop girl, lace frills on the sleeves of the stenographer—a gown of woolen goods or silk on the cook or houseworker is at once immoral and unlovely, because it is unsuitable and denotes a mind and heart in rebellion against the task. In like manner the most luxurious garments of fashionable women are immoral oftentimes just because they declare values not actually present in the personality. Our clothing should never be allowed to hinder the expansion of our spirits in the life and opportunity that is theirs.

Clothing which offends the eye of the honest and sweet-minded beholder—the hat too large, or too rakish, the skirt too tight, the stocking or the lingerie too transparent, the silk too cheap or worse still—soiled—these things, seen daily on our streets, cheapen life by sickening the senses. The aim of the girls who wear such things is more obvious in its pathos than the hats—the desire to attract attention: the ideal is more transparently seen than the young, unprotected shoulders and ankles through their mockery of covering—it is to copy the rich at all costs—the rich "who are always right!"

Here is the terrible tragedy of the weak, the ignorant, the woman baffled and thwarted in her normal craving for love and beauty, driven to this abnormal imitation of the foibles of the rich.

Clothes should be appropriate to the lives we live—to the work we do. Our clothes should belong to us. We should be able to move freely and comfortably and gracefully in them, to do our work well in them, without hindrance or annoyance, to enjoy recreations in them—in those we have chosen for that purpose only—and at all times, to be ourselves, at our best in them.

In our present period of development women's clothing does not express the personality of the individual woman, despite all that the modistes say to the contrary. Women are still a prey to absurdities in fashion largely because their lives are lived in obedience to conventions and dress has been a conventional matter, to a large extent, since the beginning of time.

But when women have freedom in childhood and youth to seek out an individual work and develop themselves for it—when they no longer feel justified in making unlimited demands on the purse of husband or father just because he, in his pride, so strictly limits their activities—then this abnormal passion for dress will be done away, and it will be the desire of each woman to be comfortable and beautiful in her clothes and to choose those that are appropriate to her life and interests. Give a woman her own life, her own work, her own interests, her own burdens and responsibilities and she will gradually find her own proper clothing, to go with them—that which is essentially suitable.

It is not merely sentimentality and tender associations that lend beauty to the blue gingham of the trained nurse, that render most bewitching of all head dresses for a pretty girl, her spotless cap, or that make her ample immaculate apron attractive. Nor is it the costliness of them. It is the wholesome appropriateness of them—their suitability to the uses for which they were made—their essential simplicity and sincerity. Only a very pretty woman very well dressed can go into a hospital ward and court comparisons with the average nurse.

And many a man, seeing that blue gingham in its austerity and its comfort flitting about the ward has wondered why his wife at home does not "tug herself out" in the same way to do her housework.

To shelter our bodies and to express our personalities, to make bright the lives of those who must look upon us—to sweeten and cleanse their ideals of womankind—for these ends, let us make clothes.

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