

WOMAN'S figure, says a famous poet—in fact, say most poets—is divine. That woman herself is divine no one would deny, for since the time Mother Eve gave to Adam the delicious apple of knowledge men have endowed the fair one with all the attributes of goodness and loveliness combined. In myth and fable she figures as the incomparable, perfect and flawless creature of all creation.

But to say that woman's figure is divine—well, it has not been so at various periods during the last century, at least.

Woman's beauty depends largely upon her modiste. This was as true in 1807, when her figure was marred by the dress of the period, as it is in 1908, when all the art of the dressmaker is invoked to emphasize its wonderful charm. The figure of woman has been made to suffer from many changes—there have been many embellishments and not a few disfigurements. And, perhaps, it has never, in all the history of the sex, passed through so many diversities wrought by fashion as during the last 100 years.

Gowns, corsets, skirts, hats and all the paraphernalia of feminine attire have undergone marvelous and astounding changes, so that one would think at times that the Eternal Woman herself had changed.

Within recent years it has seemed the aim of modistes to accept more literally the designs of nature, and so pleasing if not exact adaptations of the old Grecian style of draperies—by far the most artistic ever conceived, in the opinion of most persons—have become popular. Many persons predict that, within a comparatively few years, woman's figure will reveal to full advan-

Fashion's Pranks

With the

Feminine Form

Draperies of a Century that the World Got from Paris.



aped by all contemporary nations inspired but a poor opinion of human intelligence."

In 1870 the styles suddenly changed, and woman's figure shrank nearer to normal proportions.

Modesty of attire was affected by all the women of fashion, and Mlle. Mars, the Parisian idol, no longer made an extravagant skirt or mantle the style for her sisters throughout the civilized world.

The leg-of-mutton sleeves, popular in the time of Charles X, became plain and tight; skirts shrank to less than one-half the former volume, and all the crinolines of the Second Empire faded.

Instead of wearing a full, round skirt, women adopted a skirt fuller in the back than in the front, with a modest train. They were straight out in front, and decorated about the waist with draperies, often trimmed with ruffles.

Bodices were made quite plain. The materials mostly worn were velvet or satin in winter, and alpaca and mohair in summer. Small, graceful hats and plain capes or coats were worn.

These styles made the figure effect extremely simple, compared with the bulging figure of fifteen years before. Skirts underwent various modifications, diminishing in fulness and growing more elegant. Woman's figure was nearer natural. The waist and arms melted into soft curves. The aim was to make the whole effect harmonious.

Bodices were tight fitting, the sleeves flat, the skirts comparatively plain—it was the modest, homely figure of the woman we can still remember. Then followed a gradual modification—a fulness of sleeves, more elaborate trimmings, fuller waists, larger hats.

And we have now the woman of 1895, with the graceful figure—a figure of round curves above and straight lines below the waist.

Full sleeves are now in favor; the waist is slightly narrower than before; the skirts rather full, yet falling in a straight line. Knots of ribbon and long plumes are worn, augmenting the fancifulness of the style.

Waists are slightly full, barely giving a suggestion of the natural curves. Capes are now being worn over the shoulders, and the full-sleeved bloomer dress of the female cyclist is having an influence on the figure of woman in street costume.

But the evolution continues. The figure evolves and improves. And now we have revealed to us, in all its glory, the figure of the woman of 1908!

Artistry of line is the keynote of the figure of the

tage the flowing curves that nature gave; that they will be wonderfully and artistically draped, as in the days of Helen of Troy.

TO COMPARE the figure of the lady in the plain, short-waisted gown of the style in vogue in 1807 with that of the dainty, charming and elegant woman in the dress of 1908 is to realize the sweeping changes of fashion that have been so busy with woman's figure during the intervening period.

First, one sees a lady in the dress of her period, singularly plain, the pleasing curves of the natural form concealed by the long, plain skirt and the short bodice, while her lovely arms are cramped in glove-like sleeves.

That there were to be no uneven lines in the dress was the dictum of fashion then, and the ladies of that period imagined the plain, near-"Mother Hubbard" effect showed off the beauty of form. Compare that form with the one of the lady you see in the style of the present winter—a winsome creature gowned for the admiration of all humanity.

In 1807, or about that time, women of fashion would meet in the salons of Paris and discuss the bad taste of vanity. While a low cut was made in the neck of the dress, slightly revealing the swelling throat, scarfs were worn to obviate a décolleté effect.

The women themselves, during this period, according to a writer of the time, "affected a melancholy and tired air, feigning to be weary of all enjoyment and thoroughly worn-out."

It was a weary age, and we may even suspect, having a perspective of the time, that the dress of the women was probably a reflection of the lull in social hilarity.

During the period of the early Restoration court dress was quite simple, the figure being slightly more revealed in fuller grace than in the ordinary costume. The court dresses were made in low décolleté, with a fulness and long train in the back of the skirt.

Everyday costumes also underwent a transition. Ruffles were adopted, the sleeves grew fuller; rather slowly the skirts became wider, until about 1830 or 1833 one could see the astounding figure of the lady in the "hoop" skirt. As the pendulum of dress had swung to one extreme, it now went bounding the other way.

Woman's figure then resembled a twin balloon. Great, full-blown skirts were worn, decorated with bows of ribbon; ladies wore wadded gowns of velvet and the thickest satin, with lace tuckers and great cashmere shawls.

Sleeves swelled to immense sizes, while great bonnets, shaped something like coal scuttles, completed the amazing attire. As she walked along the street a woman must have resembled a great moving mass of jelly, simply wobbling and trembling in her exaggerated fulness of costume.

This period of dress was called "romantic."

Large lace shawls were affected; on the bonnets were immense flufferies of lace and veiling, and the colors of the dresses were varied and warm hued. Immense, grotesque, the figure of woman had lost all trace of its original natural charm.

But, fortunately, the taste became more temperate in the decade that followed, and in 1847 one could see a really graceful style—a style of harmonious curves. Perhaps the figure at this period was the most artistically displayed of any of the counterfeit forms which woman from time immemorial has conceived at various periods to disguise the natural shape.

This figure of 1847 was but a pretty intervention between two extremes and exaggerated eras. While the modified hoopskirts were worn, the colors of dress were bright but harmonious. Skirts were worn full; the sleeves had grown much narrower, and were trimmed with dainty tuckings.

Bodices were worn rather tight, with low-cut necks, trimmed with fur, ermine or rare lace. Long, flowing shawls of variegated colors were favored, and, from her small, graceful bonnet to her feet, a woman presented an attractive appearance—for that day.

But the god of fashion—the most whimsi-

cal and eccentric of all gods—took a fit, and, seven years later, evolved the outlandish style of the great balloon skirt, done in a series of ruffles, with remarkably tight-fitting bodices—a curious contrast.

Grand dames who dictated fashion during this period, we are told, patronized dressmakers who drew their inspiration from tragic, dramatic and melodramatic literature. They combined in their garments Greek bodices, Polish vests, Chinese tunics, Hungarian dolmans, Russian riding habits, and from these styles evolved amazing costumes, yet with delicate combinations of colors.

Picture to yourself the figure of the lady of 1853, when the style reached its extreme. Skirts were worn full, and were adorned with immense puffings of tulle or lace and ruffles and flounces.

Square-cut, open bodices were in general favor, with tulle puffing around the décolleté. The fashion journals of 1850 give more than 1800 different patterns for ball dresses of this kind. At this period women were simply overwhelmed with flouncings.

"As far as the fair sex was concerned," writes a historian of the time, "it adopted between 1851 and 1870, roughly speaking, a tone, a general style, of manners and of dress that nobody, we may be sure, will care to revive; and the fact that these were obediently copied and

day—long, sweeping lines, an elegant contour, a slinness and delicacy of form resembling the classic lines of the Greeks. In this figure the art of the modiste seems to reach its loftiest ambition—at least, so far as one may judge from a long glance backward.

Simplicity of outline, soft curves enhanced by charming drapery; a waist delightfully slender, yet natural, and an accentuation of the curve of the neck—these are the dominant features of the figure of woman of today.

Gone are the grotesque caricatures of the fifties—the swollen skirts, the outlandish sleeves or the straight, prim lines and awkward, tight-fitting waists.

One hundred years ago, perhaps, woman's figure had become as unlike the natural shape as at any period in modern history. In 1908 the figure is resuming the charm and grace and naturalness which characterized the woman of Athens when she was in her glory.

"With the woman who is shapely," says a famous modiste, "there is little need for an artificial figure. But the woman who is not shapely can be made shapely."

"In this age the corset maker gives hope to all—short women, tall women, fat women, tubby women, women without shapes. The corset maker really gives to deformed women the natural figure. For the proper figure is the natural one. The corset is merely a means of emphasizing the natural figure. This is what we strive to attain today—a realization of the grace given Mother Eve."