

The Low Neck Gown, From Cleopatra Down



The Egyptian Woman Wore Lower Necks than Are in Vogue Today



The Grecian Woman Didn't Affix High Collars.



A Roman Woman's Neckless Gown

Can It Be Suppressed, This Gibraltar of Fashion, This Displayer of Feminine Charm?

IT ISN'T any question of whether women ought to wear low-neck gowns. It might be, of course, if it weren't for the women. But they have always had the knack of upsetting the nicest decisions of the moralists; and they have taken this question, like all the others, out of the realm of ethics, to keep it flourishing in the field of practice.

So the real problem is: Will women wear the low-neck gown? Will they just go right along, clinging to that Gibraltar of fashion, holding to their bosoms the arch displayer of their charms; or will they hide modestly under a bushel of clothes for dear propriety's sake?

A few years ago, when firm old Queen Victoria was alive and making sure that every British court function was graced by exhibitions of whatever plump shoulders and scrawny collarbones her nobility and gentry classes could provide, there was such unanimity of naked candor that it seemed the poor, skimped corsage would never have a chance to rise a single inch.

But the history of the corsage has shown

so many changes that only few years have sufficed to veer the sails of fashion from the most prim propriety to the most flagrant immodesty, and back again to primness. There are influences affecting décolleté now which may soon convert the fashionable dinner table into the likeness of an afternoon tea, so far as appearances go; and even the rosy flush of the ballroom may be compelled to lose itself in laces a little below the ear instead of wandering along down past the shoulder blades until it reaches those lower articulations of the spine, where a blush really ought to be, if it isn't.

IF GOOD Queen Victoria was insistent on décolleté to an extent that left some of her early friends partly attired in gooseflesh, she was also particular enough to frown on every attempt to exceed the limit when some fair British beauty happened to own an especially fine specimen of breastbone. Thus far, ruled Victoria, and not the fraction of an inch further. But when she died her sorrowful subjects had her rules of dress to go by; and they hastened to go by them about as far as the law against exposure allowed. Their alluring torsos became so many beautiful monuments to the fidelity with which they revered the memory of their virtuous queen; and the more monument they showed the more credit they took to themselves. By the time King Edward's reign was over there were monuments waiting around whose pedestals didn't reach much higher than the floating ribs.

Queen Mary—who hasn't any too much flesh on her bones, by the way—waited until she was universally known as a queen who was sure to have her own way. Then she exclaimed, kindly, but with all her familiar pointedness, that the old order had now changed. Ladies who hoped to be welcomed with a cheery smile would kindly omit those portions of themselves which had previously aroused so much enthusiastic admiration on the part of attendant courtiers. Full dress up to about the middle of the neck, front and back, with nice, long sleeves to somewhere around the wrist—that would do for the present.

A POWERFUL COMBINE

No more powerful influence could have been invoked against décolleté, which had become a scandal not very far removed from open immorality. The enormously increased intimacy between British and American social leaders, and the alliance with France, where fashion can be influenced by politics, have given the one woman's dictum a weight which promises to exceed even Victoria's. It was a time when some other powerful ally of decorum in dress might definitely turn the scale the other way.

The ally has declared himself. From Rome comes the word that Pope Pius X has decreed that the cardinals of the church shall refrain from lending the sanction of their presence to any gathering where the women wear low-neck gowns. It is no new ruling; in Rome it has long been the custom that no woman can visit the pontiff unless her dress be black, closed to the throat, with full-length sleeves to wrist, and a veil. At receptions given cardinals in this country, a black veil around the shoulders was a rule for ladies who were décolleté. The general practice of the church condemned low-cut gowns for women on any and all occasions.

The 'decree' was an emphasis of a time-honored rule rather than the formulation of a new one. But it came just when it could have the greatest force. The effect was immediate. Cardinal Bourne, in London, added to the queen's direct commands the indorsement of the Roman Catholic clergy in relation to any assembly he might attend. In Washington, Mrs. William F. Draper, as hostess at a dinner to Cardinal Gibbons, intimated to her other guests that his eminence could be invited to meet only those wearing afternoon gowns. Far and wide it was known that the Catholic Church disapproved of any woman displaying her shoulders, back or bosom, and disapproved on the plain, old-fashioned ground that such displays were indecent.

Will women yield to these two allied influences, and undoubtedly the most powerful, except one, that could have arrayed themselves against vanity abetted by conceit? That one, Fashion herself, as enshrined in Paris, is as amenable now to British influence as are women in American society; and her own domestic hearth is kept most elegantly by the aristocracy, who have made it a point of honor to show reverence for the decrees of the ancient, if dispossessed, church of their forbears.

Both patriotic and religious independence could make a winning fight on any other issue. But the quality of patriotism socially, in both this country

survey, a sort of calasiris, or long shirt, was worn around the lower limbs and the body up to the ribs. It gave the effect of the sheath skirt reaching up to a point below the bust. Over the shoulders came a couple of strips of linen, best comparable to a pair of wide suspenders, which were fastened to the edge of the swathing garment. The style, which had the indorsement of no exalted a wearer as the goddess Isis, differed from the extreme of 1870's décolleté only in that it revealed the lower half of the bosom as well as the upper; otherwise, it would have passed muster at almost any truly fashionable reception in London or New York.

Cleopatra, when she visited Julius Caesar to induce him to call the dogs of war off Egypt, is reported to have omitted the calasiris and the suspenders, substituting for them a large rug, in which she was rolled from head to foot, and so carried by slaves into his presence.

The incident shows how readily a famous beauty can adapt herself to circumstances. When she got inside, she had her slaves unroll the rug. That she was now suddenly fashions can change.

In ancient Greece, when race suicide began to threaten Sparta with too few soldiers to keep it in the lead of local politics—the marriageable age having receded beyond the time when big families were the rule—coeducation in athletics, on the basis of a truly Trilby décolleté, was resorted to, and the business of the marriage license clerks fairly hummed. The other Grecians declared these direct and efficient Spartans were crude savages, and the women made their tunics and chlamys longer and more voluminous. But it remained very noticeable that they never fastened them too high around the neck, and invariably used such soft, sheer material that, when the weather permitted, a Grecian beauty's display of her figure would have shocked the peek-a-boo waist girl into a deep pink blush.

ROMANS WERE NOT FINICKY

Nor were the women of Rome much more careful to avoid a cold on the chest, their fair city being famous for its supply of geese, and goosegrass being known as a sovereign remedy for coughs and colds and also good for the complexion anywhere below the collarbones.

It was when Christianity secured its full hold on the remains of Roman civilization, and the stern barbarians from the north of Europe had clinched their power, that woman's clothes crept shamefacedly upward toward her chin. For some hundreds of years, with minor variations, she went around wearing gowns that fitted her uncrowned figure like the paper on the wall, but stopped well above the outline of her bosom, with a cape to shield her shoulders and a cap or hat that came down over her ears. When she didn't hide her neck that way, she was liable to wear a white neckcloth right up to her chin and along the sides of her face until it met her hair. And mighty tempting she could look at that.

Fashion worried along in this feudal style up until about the time of Charles V, in France, and women became rather tired of it. So, when Charles VI went into business as a king on his own account, he found the ladies of his court cutting their bodies in front to a V shape just about as wide and just about as deep in front as our ultra-fashionables, more than five centuries afterward, have been cutting them in back. The displays in 1380 were even more admired than they have been in 1912; and with much more reason, if the old portraits and descriptions are reliable.

But it didn't last. Another century or two and the ladies of the court of Henri II were fairly choking themselves with ruffled collars and high-necked dresses, as severe as those of the most precise Puritan who had a mother on the Mayflower. Under Henri III, they couldn't cover themselves up any more, so they extended the ruffling like the head of a barrel, puffed the sleeves over the shoulders and wore the barrel—they looked that way, any way—around their hips. Very, very prudish the French ladies were, in their attire, at the close of the sixteenth century.

BROKE LOOSE AGAIN

They broke loose at the beginning of the seventeenth century, like bulbs that had been buried to bloom. Down came the collars and out came the necks, with whatever area of bosom they thought would look well and be popular. By the time Louis XVI ascended the throne of France, beauty was betting it would soon have the Charles VI style backed off the map. As soon as the revolution came, beauty won its bet; for when it found it couldn't cut down its dress any more at the top, it cut a V in the skirt below.

The empire restored a little propriety to woman's clothes; but it wasn't needlessly crude. Any debutante could shorten her skirt well above her ankle, if she had a nice ankle, and let her bodice down to her bosom, if she was plump enough. Most of them were, by the way.

Louis Philippe, who had as fine a taste in hands some women as could be found anywhere in Europe—he never made a mistake in selecting the balls of the ball—approved highly of the clever innovation by which the apology for the sleeve, in décolleté, descended to the arms, instead of doing its honest duty as a shoulder strap. It left the upper area duty fenced along its boundaries, yet didn't present any five-bar hedges for the eye to jump when prone to tender contemplation. Modern progress has showed its superiority by losing the shoulder straps altogether.

And then, around the time of the Centennial, mode



Decollete of 1380 or Thereabouts



An Empire Gown of 1804



A Louis Philippe Low Neck of the 1840s

and France, has been sadly weakened by the domination of British prestige; and as for religion, the clergy, who might most earnestly inveigh against Roman interference with conduct and manners, are the very ones whose convictions have, again and again, been voiced in favor of the reform.

So woman, in her half-naked beauty, her marble-white flesh revealed in its seductive expanse, her bosom's curves heaving at the thought of the attack on the privilege that has been handed down from the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, must stand defiantly alone and demand:

"When did I ever yield to authority or force?" Many a time, ladies—many a time; and so utterly that your best bib and tucker amounted to something like a collapsed tent, with peep-holes for your pretty faces. But don't despair. Many a time, too, before your husbands paid the bill, you have managed to pop right out again, more candid than ever in your revelation of your charms. Religion and morality, kings and queens, have taken turns in condemning you until you just had to quail before their awful wrath. But the minute they turned their backs, or turned up their toes, there you were again, looking lovelier than ever, with more evidence to show for it.

In those very early years of fashion, when ancient Egypt was monarch of all she surveyed, and didn't

A Florida View of Winter



A Florida Lettuce Field in January

By Wallace Chadman

BELIEVE me, I have not become an ad writer nor a Florida land boomer, and it is not my purpose to put over on any unsuspecting reader a beautiful and bearing orange grove, a pineapple or banana field or an ideal home set in the midst of the palm, the ever-blooming lemon, our own common rose, the year round, magnolias, acacias and a thousand other flowering and sweet-scented shrubs, and canopied with the perpetual serenity of the lovely southern skies, while the gentle lap of the opalescent sea laves the glittering shores and the balmy zephyrs lull to sleep the happy occupant in an ecstasy of multitudinous joys.

Truly, I came down here to interest myself only in what Alex Thompson, the well-known fish sleuthhound of the Allegheny river, would designate as the "natural investigation of nature," and, in order to insure that full credit will be given my text, I have sent along a few pictures in corroboration thereof.

AND now to work. Before beginning this morning to thump the keys of this single keyboard pianola I took the time to glance at some papers from the north, and I read about the invigorating and bracing atmosphere which seems to be blowing through the facial palmetto and fanning the brows of the humans up there at a temperature somewhere below zero. I take another glance, and this time I see out into the garden of my landlady and observe that estimable woman, sun-bonneted and white-dressed, filling a sixteen-ounce dishpan with an ample assortment of peas, beans, radishes, bright red tomatoes, celery and a few strawberries, and I know what vegetables will surround the piece de resistance at dinner. Later in the day she will make a friendly call at her henhouse and rob the hens of their entire output. Hens have a hard



Landing an Eighteen-pound Sea Trout on the Punta Gorda Pier

time of it here; they are required to lay an egg a day without a hope of ever having a layoff because of winter.

I read again in the paper, and I note particularly that much space is given to such things as ice carnivals, hockey tournaments, curling contests, iceboats, sleighs, bobbeds, ice skates, snowshoes and skis. And I cast my impressionable eye out upon our streets and playgrounds and see lawn tennis and croquet and baseball being indulged in by the young people, while others are making their perspiring way to the soda fountains, the ice cream parlors and hurrying off the blazing streets in the fear of possible sunstrokes.

Yesterday I saw something which will leave a lasting impression on my mind. It was a genuine old state-colored cutworm at work in a garden. Instead of being in his cozy bed many inches below the surface of the ground and wound up in his silken cocoon, he was busily engaged at work on the 26th of January whacking off the finest tomato plants in the garden.

I touched that January cutworm, and he immediately curled up in a circle, with his head and tail together. I tickled him again, and he immediately reversed. I kept this process up for a few minutes and I noticed that each time his cutwormship turned his mandibles, or incisors, or pruning knife, or scythe, or whatever the instrument is he does his cutting with came in contact with the end of his tail. I continued the process, and within a few minutes he had cut his tail off and bled to death. I am sending an account of



Alligator Creek, Jan. 13, When the Thermometers in the North were 40 Below

this remarkable discovery to the American Agriculturist.

I have found the robins. I counted thirty-eight on one cabbage palm tree. They flock into these trees to get the bluish berries which they bear. I have also found the bluebirds, the wrens and the orioles. Wild ducks in the bay and harbor are too numerous to mention, as they say, in the sale bills.

I have also caught some fish, vide photos herewith. But of fish later—except that I cannot resist telling about a shark I attempted in my innocence to land last night. They say we have land sharks in the northern part of Florida, but no land shark ever equalled this water shark in speed, pitch, force, rate and quality of voice.

NEEDED A CLOTHESLINE

I was trolling along the pier with an eight-inch yellowtail on my ordinary trout line, when suddenly there was all kinds of streaks and dashes in the water. I believed it to be a good sized robalo, or snook, as they call that fish here; but at the third or fourth lunge I vividly saw my mistake, and it didn't need to be on the calcium spot, either. That shark simply came up to the top of the water, showed me his teeth, gave me the shark haw, haw, which is not unlike that of the mule, fastened tighter onto the bait and hook, and out he goes toward No. 2 light like a government submarine. He took all my line, part of the pole, and was careful to get the hook. I am told that sharks like hooks as an edible. I was also told to take the clothesline when I went out again for that shark.

A man from Illinois tells me that Florida is 95 per cent climate and 5 per cent sand. I agree with him as far as he goes, but I point out that 100 per cent doesn't come any way near including all there is in Florida. If we take the time to figure it all up it comes to 186 per cent, which, as I remember, is the amount of the curative ingredients in the mineral springs of Ohio, Pennsylvania and Mt. Clemens.