

A Dangerous Way to Win A Husband

Dr. Edith Hall Smith, of Wellesley College, Explains How Too Short Skirts, Too Thin Waists, Too Bare Backs and Other Suggestive Fashions Attract Only the Worst Kind of Mates—and Describes Her Experiments That Prove It

By Dr. Edith Hale Swift,
Medical Examiner of Wellesley College.

IT is time to adopt new and better modes of dress because the old ones have failed of their purpose.

The girl who sets forth wearing transparent chiffons, bare backs and knee-length skirts on her mission of husband-hunting finds that her ammunition is faulty. Thus equipped for hunting she bags the lesser man.

She may land a husband, but he is at best a poor imitation of the kind of mate she wants. She can attract a worth-while man by the candid parade of her physical charms, but only on the lesser side. She cannot hold him.

She can lead him by a chiffon scarf to the altar—but no further.

Every girl more or less consciously dresses with one object. That is to get a husband. When she finds that the kind of clothes she is buying secures for her only a second or third or fourth class companion on the jog of life, I hope she will abandon the indecent forms of dress.

Recently at the International Conference of Women Physicians, held at the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association headquarters in New York, I occasioned controversy by these statements.

Mrs. Beatrice Forbes Robertson Hale dissented from my views.

She said women dressed for class. Her view was that cooks sartorially try to imitate queens.

I am willing to grant that the desire to rise in the social scale is a factor in the dress of mature women. But the big, controlling factor in the dress of most women, particularly of the younger members of the sex, is to win the male of the species.

I uttered my warning at the conference of doctors because I have learned in my confidential practice and my observation of life that young women are failing in their primary and worthy purpose. They must find another means of gaining that purpose.

They must stalk their prey from another side.

I have had occasion to do a great deal of talking to girls of many classes. In Boston I have addressed college girls and the wards of the charitable organizations. The intermediate grades of business and professional women have been in my audiences. From all I have drawn the admission that expensive and, in the matter of weight and covering, inconsiderable clothing is chosen because men like it.

Girls whom I have persuaded to be frank have said:

"We would rather wear sensible, durable clothes. But when we do the men don't notice us. When we wear silly, thin-as-paper blouses the men sit up and take notice. It never fails."

I asked some of the girls for whom I am friend and counselor to make the experiment.

"Try another point of attack," I said. "The sex interest is ephemeral. He has many other deeper and more enduring interests. Learn to play a good game of tennis and talk to him about tennis. Read the newspapers and talk about the news."

The girls followed the plan faithfully. Of that there can be no doubt. They applied themselves diligently to the solution of the problem. If they could attract the male and hook a husband without undue outlay of their earnings or allowances and more display of person than modesty permitted they preferred to do so.

But after due trial they reported failure.

"The girls who wore the flesh-colored blouses so like the skin that you couldn't tell where one ended and the other began got all the attention," they told me.

"The girls who wore their skirts up to their knees grabbed all the partners at the dances. There was a girl who had painted her mouth until it looked like a cherry that was ready to drop to the ground. She had three proposals of marriage at one week-end visit."

Discouraging, but not hopeless.

I asked the girls to describe the men who were thus easily hooked. They were youths who lived on remittances or who earned small salaries. Those whose names signified anything hadn't made them significant. They had inherited the significance. They weren't even strong, physically fit men. They had not distinguished themselves even at athletics.

Then I said:



Two Extreme Fashions, Types of Those Against Which the Pope Is Thundering and Which Are, Says Dr. Swift Just the Right Kind of Dresses to Attract the Worst Kind of Husbands

"Well, girls, granted the vulgar type of dressing does attract all men, and that it is bait upon the matrimonial hook for some of them, would you like to have such husbands?"

Most of them agreed they wouldn't. A few said: "But a girl is expected to marry. And most girls do. If there aren't enough men of the right kind, we'll have to take the rest."

"That," I replied, "promises badly for the future of our race."

I acknowledged frankly in my talks to the girls of many strata of society that there is an appeal to every man in the too thin, too low at the neck, too short at the hem, too tight at the hip-line attire.

Every woman who knows the truth about her husband knows this. It is true of good husbands as of bad ones.

But I maintained and maintain that the lure is only for their lesser side. It does not last.

To use the phrase of the late David Graham Phillips: "The legs of a man's desire are not long, and they do not carry him far. Women don't know that."

I urged them to adopt substantial methods to win substantial men.

The substantial method is proof of permanent companionableness.

Amiability, intelligence, vivacity, sympathy are better than Georgeanne waists, knee-length skirts, constricted hips, bare backs and insufficiently brassiered fronts.

The woman who dresses with the primary purpose of sex appeal must pursue that art or business to the exclusion or neglect of all others. She is the bondswoman of the manufacturer. It is not enough that she wear diaphanous garments that leave little to the exercise of the imagination.

She must also make frequent changes. The husband hunt is an expensive pursuit.

"Clothes may be ever so pretty, ever so becoming, but their charm is dulled by accustomedness. They are as a beautiful face that seen across the table three times a day becomes less interesting to the gazer the new and plainer faces."

So in the attire that is for sex appeal there must be change, change, change. That is the root of feminine extravagance. To attract a man one costume, if daring enough, will suffice. But to prolong that attraction boxes must come from the couturiere's with amazing frequency.

It was a professional beauty who knew well her art who required a new hat every week of the year.

Girls who wish to utilize their brief charm of youth to catch a husband well know that to draw a man's eyes from the charms of other girls she must please his eye. She seeks to do this by the brightest colors, the thinnest fabrics and the most daring designs she can find. That the origin of the imported fashions is the cocotte of Paris, for whom Parisian fashions are designed, does not dismay her. She is intent upon her aim—the securing of a husband.

I do not decry these man hunts, if their object be matrimony. Instinctively, and sometimes unconsciously, a girl is seeking a mate. Acquaintanceship comes more easily, and a kind of feverish friendship follows more quickly, when she wears the latest in fashion, inappropriate thought it may be to her life and character.

But in the end she defeats her purpose. I differentiate between proper and improper attire by saying that right attire



A Type of Walking Gowns Whose Lines Are Modest Yet Entirely Attractive

emphasizes the personality, wrong attire the person.

The best example of dress that avoids any emphasis of the person is the garb of the nun. Full, straight dresses, the weight and fullness of which hang from the shoulders



The Devices by Which the Courtesan Ensnarers Her Prey Are Not the Kind of Appeal Which Wins the Respect of the Right Kind of a Man or Make Durable Bonds of Matrimony, Points Out Dr. Swift, Calling Attention to Exactly the Same Situation Which the Hon. John Collier Has Symbolized in This Famous Painting—"The Man Hunters."

ders are theirs. Even the hair, which to some has a lure and coquetry, is hidden. You look at, you think only, of their faces. It should be so with the secular attire of women. The costume should

be as the stem and the calyx of the rose, merely a background for the flower. A woman's clothes should serve the two main objects. It should be a sufficient covering and should throw the face into relief.

That the manufacturers have wandered far from the aims of health and propriety in dress I can prove to you in a sentence. Our committee that had in charge the matter of providing for an exhibition of proper clothing had to spend two days in going through one of the leading stores to select a few suitable costumes. The work should have lasted but half an hour. But we spent two days. And we had the hearty co-operation of every one in the store.

Models were shown at our demonstration, of which we approved in the main. The requisites seemed to be few. We asked that hygiene be served by an easily removable lining. And we insisted that a woman should be clad so that there should be no constriction. Personally I believe in and wear the corset. But it is not a tight one.

A model that pleased us consisted of a foundation that was composed of a union of shirt and bloomers. This easily could be removed, easily could be cleaned. Over this was worn a sleeveless one-piece gown of dark serge. The lines were nearly straight, yet curved gracefully at the waist line. It was slipped on easily and snapped at the shoulders. Over this slip a long, graceful cape could be worn and fastened by a clasp at the neck or breast and by straps crossing beneath the cape at the back.

The Nun's Modest Garb Which Dr. Swift Believes the Ideal Dress for Women.



More elaborate was a second garment. The dress had no lining, for each one was made with a washable blouse. This, too, was a straight garment hanging from the shoulders. It could be trimmed with lengthwise or horizontal rows of buttons, or more elaborately with ruffles. A slip of dark serge or gabardine could be worn in the morning for the street. The wearer on returning to her home could wear over it a dainty coat of crepe or chiffon in any desired color. A short coat or longer tunic could be embroidered or painted at the will and purse of the wearer.

An objection was heard from the audience that a gown that had been worn on the street should not be worn indoors. The germ theory was raised and the protection of the household from bacillic invaders argued.

I should negative that objection myself. For since skirts are short, they will not carry home the germs gathered from the streets. If dust has settled upon the garment a brushing will remove it. At all events, the bacillus is maleficent only in its moist form. Dry, it is innocuous.

I believe that these basic ideas brought out by the clothes demonstration were good. Personally I do not favor a uniform. I would preserve a woman's individuality. But I heartily approve a plan for a basic hygienic style into which a woman may introduce variants according to her taste.

When all women dress modestly and hygienically the husband hunt will proceed upon higher lines and the huntresses will not bag the lesser game.