

Where Is The Present Spirit Of Undress Leading To?

The Rev. Father Lucien Johnston Calling Attention to the Pope's Earnest Appeal for Decency in Dress, Points Out the Sound Truth of Elinor Glyn's Statement That "Five Women Out of Ten Are Ugly, Misshapen Creatures," And Therefore Ought Not

Go About Half-Uncovered

ON October 22, 1919, His Holiness the Pope, in dismay at the trend toward indecency of women's fashions, called upon Catholic women to repudiate "those exaggerations of fashion which show the corruption of those who designed them and who bring an evil contribution to the general corruption of manners—fashions contrary to that modesty which should be the fairest ornament of the Christian woman."

On November 2, noting the further spread of such fashions, His Holiness made an even stronger protest, likening the indecent dresses to poison and calling upon Christian women to follow the example of the Italian Women's Union in its campaign upon immodest clothes, and urging a boycott upon all who refuse to modify the outrageously short skirts, bare arms and extremely low necks.

Curiously enough, Elinor Glyn, the very well-known English novelist, recently pointed out in this magazine that she "was startled at the nakedness of everyone." Mrs. Glyn then, after remarking that the indecent fashions "force the eye to realize that five out of ten women are ugly, misshapen creatures, often with coarse skins," took her sisters to task, not so much for immodesty as for exposing their ugliness.

To-day Father Lucien Johnston, of St. Thomas's Catholic Church, Baltimore, and an editor of the Baltimore Catholic Review, takes up the matter in a remarkably sane and vigorous manner and attacks the problem somewhat along the lines suggested by Mrs. Glyn.

By Rev. Lucien Johnston
(In the Baltimore Catholic Review.)

I HAVE my doubts whether denunciations from us clerics will have much effect in restraining the present worldwide indecency in female dress. Perhaps the opposite. For it is notorious that many good women will read a naughty book precisely because we tell them it is on the Index.

The good Cardinal himself might, apropos of this, recall how the fine ladies of the Court of Versailles in the days of his predecessors secretly read the irreligious writings of Voltaire and the Encyclopedists simply because forbidden to do so.

Therefore, in discussing this matter of women's dress, I prefer to do so not as a cleric but as a mere man and student of history. This will doubtless explain my frankness to the too-easily shocked.

Now, in my discussion of dress, the first question to arise is why man dresses at all. An answer to this will help in clearing up the secondary question of how he ought to dress. But, strange as it may seem, the answer to this elementary question is not as easy as most presume. Expert students of costume are engaged in quite a lively debate thereupon.

Of course, all admit that climate is one cause—a cold one requiring more clothing than a hot one.

However, theologians and philosophers of history radically differ as to whether or not man is naturally ashamed of his nakedness or whether clothes cause that sense of modesty and shame. I will not enter into a discussion of this, but will confine myself to a discussion of the influence of the aesthetic sense upon dress, which, all grant, is largely responsible for clothes.

That is, man clothes his body largely because he realizes the need of beautifying it.

Because, as a matter of fact, is it true that the human body is as beautiful as is commonly assumed and as poets sing?

Candidly, I think not.

I think it can be maintained with considerable reason that man is less beautiful as a physical specimen than most other members of the animal world. Most animals are graceful—practically all birds are so—while some insects, like the caterpillar, and some species of beetles attain an exquisite beauty. Of course, there are some ugly exceptions, like the hog, and some grotesque ones, like the parrot. But, all in all, their physique seems superior to man's in sheer grace and symmetry.

This will, of course, shock you. But just sit down and reflect and ask yourself honestly how many of your friends and acquaintances are physically as well formed or graceful or symmetrical as an ordinary, well-cared-for horse, pigeon,



The Apollo Belvedere, One of the Statues at Which the Rev. Father Johnston Points to Support the Assertion That the Male Figure Is More Beautiful Than the Female.

cover his ugliness—the natural ugliness of the naked body.

A horse or a pigeon needs no such covering. They are more comely without clothes. But man is undoubtedly more comely when clothed.

So the conclusion I first draw is that the naked human body is not as beautiful as the clothed human body.

How far this applies to the female of the species, I must confess my very modest and limited experience in such matters rather handicaps my ability to judge. So that I must go for more exhaustive information to the artistic experts and to women themselves.

Now, it is actually true that some grave authorities have the hardihood to maintain that woman physically is not as beautiful as man! They argue thus with apparent plausi-

The Roman Artist Gilli's Remarkable Painting, "Surge, Comede Carnes Flurimas"—Arise, Devour Much Flesh, Daniel vii., 5—Which So Well Illustrates the Rev. Father Johnston's Remarks Upon the Temptation of St. Anthony As Applied to Modern Indecent Dress, and His Further Remark That "The Devil Has More Intelligence Than to Tempt a Really Good and Fine Man with the Display of Mere Meat."

bility. In the beginning, they say, you must eliminate the element of mere sex attraction, which as such really has nothing to do with the question of comparative beauty of the male and female forms. That being eliminated—and I think justly so—these brave critics will ask you to go into a first-class sculpture gallery, usually containing the most renowned and perfect nude statues of both sexes and make a candid judgment.

For instance, compare such male figures as the Discus Thrower and Canova's Theseus, with such equally famous female figures as the various Venuses of Milo, De Medici and Borghese.

As human bodies, as sheer physical specimens of humanity, they maintain that the former are more graceful. If such a judgment be true, then do you not see that a woman's beauty is largely a matter of clothes—more than is commonly believed?

And that the average woman is quite likely to render herself ugly by exposing so much of her body as she does now?

Here also women unconsciously admit the truth of at least some of this unfattering and untraditional opinion of their charms. Because, ever since Eve was the first modiste, women have devoted an astonishing amount of their ingenuity and time to the fashioning of clothes. Does not this ancient and universal practice clearly prove that woman realizes, perhaps more than man, that the nude human body is not beautiful—that it needs clothes to cover its rude repulsiveness?

After all, Madame Paquin in Paris to-day is doing, in only a much more elaborate manner, precisely what Eve did with those fig leaves—that is, covering nudity, simply because both were or are ashamed, as Genesis puts it.

Allowing for diversity of opinion as to details, I think that the foregoing historical premises logically lead to this one great conclusion, namely, that the nude human body is not beautiful, whether it be male or female. As above stated, I am considering sex appeal eliminated, because I am arguing for decent people, not savages.

So then—and here is what I have been leading up to all the time—I maintain that the present indecent feminine dressing, which exposes so much of the body, is not beautiful.

In a word, I maintain that most women nowadays would be more beautiful if they exposed less.

And, if I can trust a recent newspaper account, this same opinion is held by no less an authority than Elinor Glyn, the popular authoress of "Three Weeks," which account encourages my obstinacy; because if Elinor does not know every-

thing in such matters from three weeks to three seconds then nobody does. After all, when you look at such matters squarely in the face, really there is a whole lot of bluff about them, and I think that it would clear up matters a good deal by calling the bluff.

For instance, take that famous picture representing the "Temptation of St. Anthony." The story is that the good man fled to a desert somewhere in the region of Cairo to escape the allurements of a sinful world, but that memories of the same continued to harass him. The artist seized upon this story as an excuse to exhibit on canvas the nude figures of more or less beefy individuals who are supposed to have plagued the saint at his prayers.

Well, in a way, that painting always rather amused me! Because I imagine that the devil has more intelligence than to tempt a really good and fine man with a display of mere meat. And if there be any gentleman now who finds himself in the same moral predicament as Anthony, then I would advise him not to go to a desert but to a modern ball or opera. I feel confident that the "butcher" effect of bare flesh will prove a ready cure.

Yes, it is largely a bluff, and the sooner "called" by looking at it straight the better.

That was a wise even though blasé Broadway "first-nighter" who recently remarked that "a fortune was awaiting the theatrical manager who would restore the mystery of the female form."

That's the point—the mystery. For the secret of woman's beauty lies quite largely in its mystery, and—needless to remark—mystery is always veiled. Somewhat in line with this thought was the philosophical expression of the ancient Greeks, the most aesthetic of all races. They said, with Plato, that "the good is beautiful." A Christian would mean the same thing, in the last analysis, by saying that beauty is modest and indecency is ugly.

And may I ask someone to explain why some really pretty girls will ruin a naturally good complexion by laying on paint and powder so that their faces often look like those of embalmed corpses, and at the same time do not wash their necks—especially behind the ears—with good soap and water? I give up this puzzle as one that is beyond the comprehension of a mere man's brain and go my uneventful way, softly musing over the expression of one Will Shakespeare to the effect that—

the chariest maid were prodigal enough
If she but unmask her beauty to the moon.

What Elinor Glyn Said.

MRS. GLYN'S article, to which the Rev. Father Johnston refers, was as follows:

"A friend insisted upon my going to a ball last week, and after my quiet months at Versailles I was startled at the nakedness of everyone.

"I do want to discuss this strange spirit of the time.

"What is causing this almost universal desire to expose the person to view?

"The standard of decency in such matters has always been only geographical, but in all countries where the later Christianity held sway morality had caused a set of instincts to be evolved which experienced horror at any undue exposure of any part of the body but the face, hands and neck.

"The result of all this was that a woman's figure was a thing of mystery and fascination, because it was hidden, and imagination had to be called in to picture it.

"How hardly anything is left for this faculty to work upon; almost everything can be stared at baldly, and the eye is forced to realize that five women out of ten are ugly, misshapen creatures, often with coarse skins. Have you ever remarked how much finer and whiter men's skins are than women's, as a rule? In the hospital where I worked the first year of the war this came upon me as a revelation.

"Among a hundred women in a modern ballroom not more than two or three would be found who were beautiful as far down as one could see—women who did not expose some scragginess or overdeveloped flesh or blemished skin or the suggestion of some uncomeliness.

"First one woman passed whom I am accustomed to admire in day clothes—a fascinating thing. Her dark purple pany dress was cut down to just below the waist in the back, coming into a narrow square. It gave no indication that she had any 'undies' on beneath it, not even

the flimsiest gossamer chemise. One's imagination could not but picture the fact that the lining of the dress came against the bare, hot skin each time she wore the garment—not an appetizing thought. She had the graceful modern stoop, so alluring in outdoor clothes, but which, when naked like this, pushed out two bony 'wing joints' and made salt-cellars of her neck.

"A line of diamonds held her garment up over one shoulder, and the other was left to chance, and except that she was so slight, an accident would have happened at every instant! Her skin was very dark and a little downy and greasy looking and not enticing.

"Now, for what earthly reason had she exposed all these undesirable particles of herself? To stimulate the admiration of her male friends?

"And yet it could not be for that purpose, because what they saw must have put them off. If she had desired that end veils of tulle might have given them some illusions that she would be beautiful if further examined.

"No, she was just 'in the fashion': that is all. She had 'the look.' And I wonder what the men whom she danced with felt like when their bare hands clutched her bare (not smooth) back, with its bones! All the 'smart' women in the room were equally unclothed, and only two suggested, by what they showed, that further investigations might not be painful.

"Why is all this? Public opinion is quite with the undressers, and you see in every up-to-date American paper advertisements for little safety-razors or depilatory powders.

"On one woman's bare back—she was plump—I noticed two weals of red, where her partner's sharp nails had evidently scratched her, somewhere near the waist-line!

"It is all very cheap and vulgar when one comes to examine it, and I do not wonder that the men are wearied and bored and difficult, or that respectful manners have gone by the board."

An Unusual Pictorial Version by a Distinguished Italian Artist of the Legend of St. Anthony's Temptation Referred to by Father Johnston.