

I need to find the articles prior to January, 1861 still. I've included some indirectly related articles as well.

January 5th, 1861

OVER-DRESSING.

"THE over-dressing of American ladies in the streets, at hotels, and in the churches, is a subject of general remark among travelers from abroad, as well as sensible people at home."—RURAL NEW-YORKER.

THERE is a foreign savor about your discourse, Mr. COLEBS. The true sons of "Uncle Sam" do not sit in judgment against the wives and daughters of their own country. Hav'nt you been taking a jaunt in the Queen's dominions, and been accustomed to the sight of those sombre-colored satin dresses that last from one generation to another, and from thence drawn your conclusions? Doubtless you have encased yourself in an armor of impenetrable reserve while the "conflict of" charms is viewed afar off, and while good care is taken that your position is beyond the reach of "Cupid's darts." Who are the sensible people you speak of? Are there any who do not make obeisance to keeping up appearances, especially in dress? A few prodigies of excellence and economy may exist; but the torch of DIOSKURUS would evidently be required to find them. Suppose the American ladies are somewhat in advance of those on the other side of the "big pond," is there any rule by which they can be judged? Is there any judging in matters of dress? Surely nothing is more capricious than taste.

But if fault exists in matters of dress, where does it originate? For what purpose do they array their dear little selves in the most becoming style? Is it for their own gratification alone? On whom do gentlemen lavish their unceasing attention at "the Springs," at Newport, at the ball, and, if you please, at the little private party in your own circle? To whom do gentlemen solicit introductions? Is it the plainly-dressed, unpretentious young lady?—or is it that little butterfly of a coquette, made radiantly beautiful by silks and laces? If I am not mistaken, men seldom value a jewel unless it be handsomely set. Dress, or over-dress, has a semblance of wealth, and husbands are not unfrequently bought with the lustre of money alone, and the conclusion of the matter sometimes is, that they find themselves beautifully "sold."

Personal beauty is worshiped next to mammon, but is rarely appreciated except it be assisted with elegance of dress, and often the chief attraction of the handsome face is dependent on some peculiarity of style, or shade of color in dress, which is made the subject of study by those who know the secret of their power in society. Indeed, the great wonder is that so much attention is paid to mental culture and general intelligence. Goodness and intelligence must receive the homage that is due for their sakes alone, before a reform in dress can be expected. Newspaperdom is not the path to this field of reform. Honestly, Mr. COLEBS, does not an American woman possess more attractions for a better-half with her great fault of over-dressing, or, rather, her fault of trying to please, than any of those English ladies who possess such a keen relish for roast beef and porter? Would you like to be taken captive by any of those German beauties whose liking for lager beer is equal to that exhibited by ARTEMAS WARD'S musician—or would you prefer a French lass to serve up frogs in your dish of fricasee, and keep you spending half your life at a "cafe?"—instead of a neat little American home, where the vine and shrubbery grow undisturbed, and where the sunshine can play hide and seek, and the dear wife, arrayed in the becoming dress you so dearly love to see, is ever ready to welcome you.

LINDA BENNETT.

Hammondsport, N. Y., 1860.

WE wonder if LINDA is not indulging in a sly hit at the occupants of the RURAL sanctum,—administering her castigation over the shoulders of the devoted "COLEBS?" At all events, she comes to the defence of American ladies with true spirit and courage,—genuine feminine grit,—and while we must, with the most profound respect, acknowledge the ardor displayed, we beg leave to enter our protest at being thus summarily read out of either the *Union Federal*, or the *Union Matrimonial*. For the first,—and we include that naughty little sister, Miss S. CAROLINA,—we cherish a devotion that will last while pulse beats or heart throbs, and the latter, bless your dear heart, LINDA, we love with all our powers of body and soul. We speak knowingly, too: for

instead of "keeping beyond the reach of CURUP'S arrows," one of the aforesaid weapons touched us delicious years ago, as those who compose "our own circle" at home,—the little ones who clamber upon our knees and dally with locks where the frosts of winter are somewhat thickly sown,—could testify. In LINDA'S remarks relative to the male race, there is, unfortunately, too much of truth; we think, however, that the cause of this *moral delinquency* is not rightly judged. As to the question of dress, and the modes and styles thereof, we do not consider ourselves competent critics, and will take the advice of the witty writer she mentions:—"Never don't do nothin' which it isn't your Fort." Our correspondent has broached the subject,—the ladies have the matter in charge,—and we will be glad to have them discuss its influence upon their sex, in a philosophical and hygienic point of view, through the columns of the RURAL.

February 2nd 1861

OVER-DRESSING, AGAIN.

It is well that the RURAL has opened its pages to discussion upon this subject, for extravagance in dress has become the national sin of American women, and notwithstanding LINDA'S spirited defence, they are without excuse.

The fact that husbands are often bought by an expensive toilet, is the very reason that over-dressing should be avoided, for what true women would wish to marry a man who wedded only for wealth. However, that class is small which, in seeking a bride, places wealth before personal attractions, and when introductions are solicited to "that little butterfly of a coquette, made radiantly beautiful by silks and laces," in nine cases out of ten it is something in the look, word, manner, or in the taste displayed, that is the chief feature of attraction; and, generally speaking, an elaborate and showy wardrobe does little to assist in gaining admiration. On the contrary, (if we dress to *please* the gentlemen,) they must often be *displeased*, if not disgusted at the low standard by which we judge their taste in our extravagant attire. I am sure they would be better pleased, if the fair ones used a little more common sense, becoming women of America in the nineteenth century.

LINDA says that "personal beauty is rarely appreciated, except it be assisted with the elegance of dress." In good society at present, personal beauty in simple but tasteful array is appreciated more highly than plainer features associated with rich apparel. But few things have a greater bearing upon our success in society than dress, which depends not so much upon its elegance, as its grace and fitness. Expensive attire may usually be dispensed with, but taste and neatness can never be omitted. I know a beautiful lassie who was wooed and won in a corn-colored print, and whose suitor was highly educated and refined, moving in the first circles in our great metropolis. Her beauty was none the less appreciated because of her simple dress. Vulgarity is often clothed in a silken garb, but refinement cannot be mistaken in tasteful though unassuming garments.

"And often the chief attraction of the handsome face is dependent on some peculiarity of style, or shade of color in dress, which is made the subject of study by those who know the secret of their power in society." It is the duty and privilege of woman to make her dress a subject of study, and adopt that which is most becoming. Every delineation of form and feature should be taken into consideration, and from among the great variety of styles in fashion, that one selected which will enable her to appear to the best advantage. Expensive and superfluous dress is not necessary to produce a pleasing effect. It is good judgment and skill in every department of the toilet, however minute. If I were to appear an evening in company with a view to charm an ideal admirer, I should certainly choose the dress which would give the best effect, though it were of plain material, rather than the most elegant, if it were deficient in any particular. Let the clothing be fashionable and faultless, but it need not be superfluous to be admired.

Certainly, American gentlemen do not prefer the stolid English, the phlegmatic German, or the plain features of the French, to our fair and spirited women, with all their sin of dress; but if the dear little wife who presides in the sweet vine-wreathed cottage of our own beautiful land, without adopting the sober colors of the English, would study more perfectly the true science and art of dress, in which the French excel, she could, with less inconvenience, be arrayed becomingly in the style her husband most dearly loves to see, which is oftener the tidy print, or the robe of plain material. Is it not, gentlemen? As we like to please the fastidious of the other sex, let us hear their views upon this important subject.

Piffard, N. Y., Jan., 1861.

JANE E. HIGBY.

February 2nd 1861

FASHIONABLE WOMEN.

FASHION kills more women than toil and sorrow. Obedience to fashion is a greater transgression of the laws of woman's nature, a greater injury to her physical and mental constitution, than the hardships of poverty and neglect. The slave woman at her task will live and grow old, and see two or three generations of her mistresses fade and pass away. The washer woman, with scarce a ray of hope to cheer her in her toils, will live to see her fashionable sisters all die around her. The kitchen maid is hearty and strong, when her lady has to be nursed like a sick baby.

It is a sad truth that fashion pampered women are almost worthless for all the good ends of human life. They have but little force of character; they have still less power of moral will, and unite as little physical energy. They live for no great purpose in life; they accomplish no worthy ends. They are only doll forms in the hands of milliners and servants, to be dressed and fed to order. They dress nobody; they feed nobody; they instruct nobody; they bless nobody; and save nobody. They write no books; they set no rich examples of virtue and womanly life. If they rear children, servants and nurses do all save to conceive and give them birth. And when reared, what are they? What do they ever amount to, but weaker scions of the old stock? Who ever heard of a fashionable woman's child exhibiting any virtue and power of mind for which it became eminent? Read the biographies of our great and good men and women. Not one of them had a fashionable mother. They nearly all sprung from strong minded women, who had as little to do with fashion as with the changing clouds.

February 23rd, 1861

[Written for Moore's Rural New-Yorker.]
EXTRAVAGANCE IN DRESS.

IN the RURAL of Feb. 2d., I noticed continued observations on "over dressing," and as the subject is one in which all women are interested, we presume that those who wish are at liberty to engage in the discussion. Thus far the subject has been ably, yet tenderly treated,—it has been like trimming and pruning a poor tree to make it bear good fruit. These anglers after truth are seemingly satisfied with the superficial, and let the deep stream of substantiality lie unrippled; while if they would sink the line which they have so richly baited, they would draw up many living, sorrowful truths.

There is no greater evil for the philanthropist to oppose than that of *over dressing*. Were the custom destroyed, the human family would not only be benefited socially, but mentally, morally, and physically. How many fathers are mourning on account of debts that they cannot liquidate, while their gay, thoughtless daughters are expending the little he has left in superfluous dress,—dress that is a detriment to themselves,—for the time and thought that they give it, if wisely used, might improve the mind that they are now dwarfing. — Instead of being the mental pigmies that they now are, they might be growing up into the stature of *perfect womanhood*.

With me the effect of *over dressing* has been a lifetime lamentation; I regard it a curse in many ways, but the least important consideration is the idea of "*pleasing gentlemen*." If woman thoroughly studies the law of harmony, it will teach her the art of dressing to correspond with her looks, and that is *perfect taste*. Those are moments ignobly used that woman spends in striving to please the fastidious tastes of man,—but if she would dress plainly, and neatly, and spend the residue of her time in decorating her mind, the *genuine man* would admire her, however scornfully the would-be-gentleman might treat her.

There is a consideration which, with woman, should be pre-eminently above the one of merely pleasing; for there are now hundreds and thousands of women in our land who have been ruined by a love of dress. The wages of an ordinary woman are sufficient to dress her only comfortably; therefore, she cannot honorably procure the fashionable elegances in which almost all ladies of wealth indulge. The poor working girl dislikes to be singled out by her dress as a servant, consequently she dishonors herself that she may appear like other women; and, instead of despising her on account of her immorality, I would pity her because she possesses no more individuality of character, and would condemn that class who set the unworthy example.

Fashion is a tyrant, and sends more women to the haunts of vice than all other causes united; and if the Sisters of Charity are longing for a great work to do, let them, with the chain of example, draw their sister women from the clutches of this monster; then they can truly say, "*I have fought a good fight.*"

Livonia, N. Y., 1861.

A FRIEND OF WOMAN.

March 2nd, 1861

DRESS AND OVERDRESS.

As the columns of this obliging sheet were, not long since, opened to "free speech" on the subject of dress, I suppose it is not too late for me to free my mind on the all-important topic. I flatter myself that my opinions will be well worth having, from the fact that I stand on rather neutral ground, being "a regular blue stocking," so far as raiment is concerned, and not caring a fig what I wear, nor how it's put on. Naturally enough, therefore, I don't please the gentlemen, for they are exceedingly particular about such matters. I comb my hair straight back behind my ears, and, of course, *that* don't suit—for gentlemen adore *curls*. I wear an old and faded wrapper, with a rumpled collar, in the morning, and an elderly and highly soiled silk in the afternoon, and that don't suit the fastidious gentlemen either; no more do my slipshod slippers, and ink-stained finger-ends. But I don't care; I don't *intend* to get married, and so don't trouble myself to inquire about the whims of these lords of creation. But if I did, girls, I should

dress quite differently. If I really *did* want to catch—(that's the proper word, I believe,) if I did think it worth my while to *try* to "catch" a nice, genteel, agreeable, *worth-having* young man, (it's a pity, there are so few of them,) I'll tell you how I should dress. I should have the neatest and daintiest of calicoes, close-fitting, and tastefully trimmed. It should be dark in December, light in June, and with it should be the snowiest of collars, and the smoothest of hair. Above all things don't wear curl-papers. I would as soon wear a false front, or a "scratch," as *curls* made by being twisted up over night. It's a certain sign that a young lady is on the shady side of thirty. You say the gentlemen don't tell you so? They *tell* you so, indeed! These silver-tongued gentlemen don't tell you girls *much* that they think. If you had that pretty, economical morning costume on, which I have just described, they would pronounce it charming, of course; but if you happened to be caught in the other guise, such as I wear, why, these men, don't you know, would assure you that you were bewitching in *anything*. Of course they would. That's their way. Why, if you had fiery red hair, Miss FANNIE, they would tell you it was the loveliest shade of auburn, and if your eyes were the ugliest sort of gray, these dear friends of yours would pronounce them a most charming blue. Yes, and if you are like most girls, you would believe them. Now, I should tell you, right out, that your hair was *red* and your eyes nearer *green* than azure. That's what elderly unwedded ladies are good for—to speak the truth—other people haven't independence and strength of mind enough to do it. But such individuals are usually styled "cross old maids," and, of course, don't love you as the gentlemen do, *by no means*.

What a lengthy digression I have made, and all about the beaux, too. Well, now, I'll drop them if only to convince them that very few are worthy of my notice. *Neatness and economy are the handmaidens of virtue and goodness*. That's a sentiment worthy, so I fancy, of ARISTOTLE or SENECA. That's all I have to say about *dress*,—so I shall proceed to *over-dress*. And writing the word remindeth me of a Southern belle, whose "go to meeting toilette" I once had the felicity of beholding. Ladies like the minutiae of such things, so I'll specify them. Item first of said

wardrobe was an elegant white hat, adorned, inside and out, with a profusion of red buds and their mother roses, in full bloom. Item second, a pink tarletan frock, low in the neck and short at the shoulder. Ditto third, red coral decorations on the alabaster neck and arms. Ditto fourth, an orange-colored sash, depending in long streamers to the ground, no scarf, no cape,—nothing but a parasol, small and sky-colored, to protect her from the sun. And so she went to church. Now that's what I call, emphatically, "over-dressing," though, to be sure, she hadn't over-much on, taking into view the neck and arms.

But if you smile at *her*, it is no more than your cousins over the water do at *you*, when they see you in rich and trailing silks and satins, sweeping the filth from the crossings, while the delicate white hat catches the dust, and the glitter of jewelry, extravagant enough for a court ball, catches the eye of the vulgar crowd. If I were an Empress, and could ride in a coach and six, with graceful pages to uphold the *train* of my rustling silken robes when I alighted, perhaps I should wear one. But living in Democratic America, where an Empress was never seen, and where CINDEBELLA'S fairy god-mother's metamorphoses do not occur, I shouldn't wear a dress with a very long sweep to it, nor thin shoes with no soles, or next to none, nor pink and cerulean silks, with white gloves, to go shopping in. Our London and Parisian friends don't blame us for wearing these elegant toilettes at parties and operas—for they do it just as much as we do, but they never do it, mind you, on the cars or "aboard ship."

But the worst over-dress I know of is that variety which takes all the money one has, and more too, to keep it on. I know a married lady who dresses elegantly,—as one of her young lady friends says, "*perfectly* bewitchingly,"—but her husband hasn't paid his honest debts for a *long* time. People say he lives by *shaving*. I don't understand the term exactly, but he isn't a barber; so I take it that the word is one of the technicalities of the law, referring to the "*modus operandi*" of that profession.

But to sum up all in a few closing "finalies," I would say with some sage who lived long ago, that "a pretty face is worth a dozen letters of recommendation." SYDNEY SMITH once said, or wrote, that "a becoming bonnet had been the making of more than one young girl." I ought not to have tried to quote that—for it is a long time since I read it, but the *substance* is there, and forms a capital argument for extravagant young misses, whose mamas refuse to let them purchase that "love of a hat," just in from Paris. If I am not pretty myself, I like to see people that *are* so. Girls, if becoming bonnets and handsome dresses are any aids in rendering your pretty selves prettier, I say, use them. Only I pray you *don't* be *vain*,—a pretty, *vain* girl, putting on airs, is to me an object of the utmost commiseration and disgust. *Don't* be extravagant, buying jewelry and "fixings" you can't pay for, and *don't* wear your "best dresses" in the streets and on the cars.

Fayetteville, N. Y., 1861.

A. M. P.

March 16th, 1861

THE DRESS QUESTION:

"LINDA" DEFINING HER POSITION.

THE unknown reformer is growing more specific. He says "fashionable women," instead of "American women, which distinction is quite pacifying, since it enables us to define our own position.

As women generally possess a fondness for dress, and nearly all approach as near the latest styles as their means will allow, the term "fashionable" has an extensive application. One would think, to read the newspaper paragraphs, that the mandate had gone forth,— "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve," and that the response had come echoing back from the women of the land,— "The milliners and mantuamakers." We take up a number of the *RURAL* and read as follows in regard to fashionable women: "They have little force of character, they have still less power of moral will, and quite as little physical energy. They are only dolls in the hands of milliners and servants to be dressed and fed to order. They write no books, and [they are worthless for all the good ends of life."

Thus whole magazines of accusations are hurled at you women of fashion, and have you no ammunition for self-defence? If you've anything to confront the enemy with, you'll need a gun that'll "shoot 'round a corner" to make the desired hit. But since conciliation and peace instead of war are more in accordance with our republican notions, we'd advise you to make some concessions; do something to atone for your offences; for, according to the article quoted, you bear about as much resemblance to a true woman in mental and physical stature [as DOLLY DUTTON to Queen ELIZABETH, and a man] might marry half a dozen such as are represented, without being guilty of polygamy.

Now, supposing fashion, in its strictest sense, be laid on the shelf, that your [real] worth be not eclipsed by your plumage. Doff your hoops, diminish your skirts from nine widths to four,—such amplitude is unnecessary,—make your own bonnet, wear that blanket shawl,—just the thing for winter,—toss those light, thin-soled shoes out of your sight, and wear such as your grandmothers wore, eschew dainties and chew surlein, tell them you're going to put down pride, and see if you are not regarded with as much astonishment as "JOAN of Arc," who was "made (Maid) of Orleans" instead of crinoline, and ten to one you will be reckoned a candidate for the Lunatic Asylum in less than a week.

Perhaps our unknown reformer would preach "moderation" unto all "women," but does he not know that the word is obsolete? People don't settle down on medium ground now-a-days. They hurry, and crowd, and jostle along the great highway of life, each one anxious to outstrip his fellow in pursuit of riches, fashion, fame, and power, knowing there is always plenty of room in that far-off region of Eureka, that is only gained by real heroes who lean on their own staff, keeping right before the mental vision what Poor Richard says about Providence helping those who help themselves.

It is said "you write no books." Don't for the world let any one know you ever dreamed your destiny was "undeveloped in an ink-stand," or you'll be dubbed a "Blue Stocking." You are ridiculed for your superficial attainments, yet among the scores of institutions in this republican nation, how many are there where you can compete for as thorough a collegiate course as the opposite sex. Greek roots are not deemed proper food for your mental digestion. Your mind is expected to acquire the requisite strength and discipline for the vicissitudes of life on

music and French, moonshine and flowers. The science of *Homeopathy*, (Homeopathy) however, and the diligent practice of the same, has especially been assigned women ever since PAUL advised a certain portion to be "keepers at home." But think you there was any "down town," in all its present significance, in those days. We are of the opinion charity would have scattered its instructions nearer home if the term had [been familiar to the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

A different education in regard to this home matter may change the organized pursuits of the day somewhat, and home, not as an exception but as a rule, be the grand panacea for the ills of life, when idleness and outward adorning among the rich receive less homage. Woman may be something more than a cup-bearer and mother of her race, and by the assistance of the *RURAL* be able to circumnavigate her *sphere* of duties instead of a *hemisphere*. Useful instructions and cultivated judgment may form a redoubt around the treasures of the heart and mind, such as the flippery of fashion and the volleys of small talk cannot effect, and which will enable her to bring out the good points of form, feature, and complexion by the assistance of dress, without, at the same time, bringing out the weaker points of character. The beauty of an object or performance is dependent on the completion. Does not the same hold true of Education? The Almighty seemed to express this beauty of completion in his works when he made woman the finishing stroke of his great creation. There is much beauty in the fable that represented ADAM as created at sunrise to go forth and labor amid the glories of the day, and EVE as created at sunset, amid the quiet and gentle glories of the night.

It is said the woman was created more for ornament. In that we agree. But the harder the steel the brighter the polish. Thus the more solid and useful the attainments, the more susceptible of refinement and loveliness. May not the arts that are often made the study of a lifetime by the opposite sex be of equal value to her? Does not the witchery of music pervade her being? May she hope to solve the mystery of the canvass? Can she not compete for laurels with the *artist*, whose life is only another name for beauty? Whatever her tastes and pursuits may be, she courts the approbation of her teacher and leader, man. Some particular star is ever guiding her along the pathway of life, variable it may be, yet it remains in her sky of destiny, sometimes threatening to withhold the light of her life, and again shedding a luster that makes earth a paradise of enjoyment.

Hammondsport, N. Y., 1861.

LINDA BENNETT.

March 30th, 1861

[Written for Moore's Rural New-Yorker.]

ARE HOOPS UNCHRISTIAN, INDECENT?

As the discussion of the Dress Question has become quite general in the columns of the RURAL, why may I not claim a small space to defend the moderate use of hoops, as an article of dress.

A short time since, a Western Conference adopted resolutions that, "the wearing of hoops by females is inconsistent with a truly Christian character, — is by some considered indecent, and that therefore, we, as a Quarterly Conference, disapprove of the wearing of hoops by our female members." Through willfulness, or neglect, some of the sisters of the communion failed to obey this edict, and at a recent meeting, held in Montgomery County, Ohio, were consequently cut off from the Church, for it is stated in a Western journal, that the Bishop "forbade any one with hoops on to partake of the sacrament, affirming that they would not be welcome to the table of the Lord." I shall not discuss the propriety of religious societies making the wearing of hoops a bar to membership, for that is nobody's business but theirs. They have a perfect right to decide what shall be the qualifications of their members. They may resolve that "a man's boots shall weigh three pounds avoirdupois," and "his hat hold six quarts dry measure," or that a woman's "dress shall clear the ground four inches," and "sleeves come within six inches of the ends of her fingers," if they choose, and I will not complain. In this matter, at least, I believe in the "principles of non-intervention." But when a body of individuals — it matters not whether secular or religious — proclaims that "wearing hoops is inconsistent with a truly Christian character," and "indecent," thousands claim the right to inquire why? That the use of hoops is abused, is not denied. Tell us a fashion of dress that ever existed that was not abused. There is nothing "indecent" in the use of moderate sized hoops, the resolutions of a religious conference to the contrary notwithstanding. In behalf of a million American women, I deny the truth of the assertion. Nineteenths of the whole civilized world will look upon it as an insult.

When hoops first came into fashion, they were looked upon by some with distrust; but they have advanced steadily, and are now worn almost universally in this country. Their advantages are so numerous, that when once worn they are never discarded. They enable a woman to make her dress assume a comely shape, without such *killing* loads as were formerly worn. They are light, agreeable, and very pleasant to walk in, as there is no fear of stepping on the dress; and, what is more important, *they do not injure the health*, like thin shoes, low-necked dresses, or short sleeves.

But I am drawing out this article too long. In conclusion I will say, that if these modern reformers wish to begin a crusade against dress, it will be better for them to take some more tenable ground. Erie-Co., N. Y., 1861. A. F. H.

We noticed the resolutions, and the edict spoken of by our correspondent, circulating quite freely in the papers of the West, and at the time classed the entire story as the emanation of some knight of the quill whose stock of news was limited, and who found the wherewithal to "fill up" by thus creating a *sensation item*. The paragraphs were furnished with a location, and we looked for a denial, but have not seen it as yet. The whole matter, however, is one which will right itself, for both Conference and Bishop have over-stepped the authority conferred upon them. Neither the Bishop nor a Quarterly Conference has a right to make a new rule of membership of the Church, as this would be. This can only be done by the General Conference, which meets once in four years, and held its last session at Buffalo, in 1860. Neither can we conceive that a minister has any right to refuse the sacrament to a member of the church. Complaint must first be made for violation of discipline, then follows a trial, before a committee appointed for the purpose, and this committee must either condemn or acquit. Either party then has a right to appeal from the decision to the Quarterly Conference. It is best to have Bishops and Ministers, as well as other people, keep the laws.

April 20th, 1861

THE DRESS QUESTION.

Philosophy, Hygiene, Beauty, &c.

IN the RURAL for Jan. 5th, I find an article on "Dress," by LINDA BENNETT, and in closing your remarks you *pass* the subject over to the "ladies," saying, "you will be glad to have them discuss its influence upon their sex, in a philosophical and hygienic point of view. With your permission, I will endeavor to say something upon the subject, and perhaps the "spirit will move" some one more competent to do it justice.

But first, a word in reply to some of LINDA's remarks. She says, "Where are the sensible people you speak of? Are there any who do not make obeisance to keeping up appearances, especially in dress? A few prodigies of excellence and economy may exist," &c. Rather humiliating, is it not, LINDA, this confession of yours; but it's *true, too true*, for the health, life and happiness of mankind, — aye, and womankind also, — that there are but a *few* who follow nature and common sense in the matter of dress. Whether "newspaperdom" is the place to discuss the subject or not, sister LINDA, instead of trying to defend what you evidently acknowledge wrong, would not your powers of mind and heart be better employed in trying to convince your sex that their precious time could be better spent than in adorning the body merely to "keep up appearances," or to please the other sex; — to look this matter of *dress* fair in the face, and let reason and common sense guide, instead of Fashion?

The "American ladies are in advance of those on the other side of the 'big pond,' are they? If *quantity* and going to extremes is to decide, they are; but it's an advance backward, and nothing to be proud of, I opine, and is carrying them far behind the age.

But "newspaperdom" is not the path to this field of reform." Why not in this as well as in other reforms? Is not "newspaperdom" the most powerful engine for good or evil? "Newspaperdom" has done more than any one thing to make woman the slave of fashion and folly. Then why not undo what it

has done in the same way? How long is it since the proprietor of one of our most popular ladies' magazines was lamenting over this state of folly in society, that he, as much if not more than any one else, has been the means of producing; calling on the wealthy and influential to come to the rescue and stop the tide of sin and folly? 'Tis the sanction given to fashion, no matter how unhealthy, unbecoming, or ridiculous, in such magazines, that has bound woman to this Juggernaut of civilization, destroying thousands on thousands of the mothers and children of christendom. And still woman yields to the inhuman and unrighteous demand, sacrificing body and soul to "keep up appearances." If, perchance, a man in the "fullness of his heart" speaks out against this evil, like the editor of the RURAL, for instance, and one of the "dear little creatures" comes to the defence with "true feminine grit," he at once yields the ground, though knowing that he is in the right, and hands the subject over to the ladies. He does not "consider himself competent to judge in this matter," though common sense is only needed to form judgment, and takes for his motto, "Never don't do nothin' which it isn't your fort."

"Nothing is more capricious than taste." What is taste? "That faculty of discerning beauty, order, congruity, proportion, symmetry, or whatever constitutes excellence." (Webster.) Is *Taste* capricious, or is it *Fashion*? Is not true Taste the same in all ages? Is not that which was really tasteful, beautiful, or appropriate, fifty years ago, the same to-day? Are not the works of the ancient artists, their sculpture and painting, as beautiful to-day as when given to the world? Do we not judge then by the same rules, now as then? Let us calmly reflect and see whether Fashion or Taste is at fault in this. "But where does the fault originate?" With man? Not all. Man is much to blame for this folly of dress, and he is not wholly innocent from bowing the knee to the tyrant; but this does not prove that both are not in the wrong. If man solicits the company of that "little butterfly of a coquette" at the "ball," and the "springs," is it there he seeks a life companion? Does the man who wishes his home to be the one spot on earth attractive and beautiful above all others, — where he can have rest and repose from the toils, strifes and tarmoils of life. — a heaven.

where all the highest and holiest affections of the heart may be planted, and nourished, and grow, and blossom, in an atmosphere of purity and love, — raising him higher and higher in the scale of existence, moral, intellectual and social, — does such a man choose the "little butterfly of fashion" made "radiantly beautiful by silks and laces" to share his love, his heart, his home? If he does, he soon finds that he has made a mistake which time will render more and more apparent to the end of life.

But there is a principle, a rule, at the bottom of this subject of dress, by which we can arrive at a true standard of beauty, and to this foundation we must come for a true solution of the problem. For what purpose is dress? For protection, for comfort, for ornament. In a word, for use and beauty. First, *utility*, then *beauty*. We must not sacrifice the useful to the beautiful. Can a thing be beautiful that does not possess adaptation and fitness for what it was designed? Does the dress worn by civilized women answer to these? No. No one will, I am sure, say that a woman "fashionably dressed" is comfortably clad, or that she is sufficiently protected from the cold winds of winter, notwithstanding she may have double the amount around her necessary for that purpose, if properly disposed and fitted; and in summer, they are "roasted alive" in their endeavor to "keep up appearances; thus, unnecessarily expending the vitality of the system in carrying the extra "load." It is not comfortable, for it does not give ease and freedom of motion. She cannot work or walk with ease or comfort.

Is it healthful? Let us see. To the healthful action of the human organism, every organ and muscle must perform its functions with perfect ease and freedom, without obstruction of any kind. The blood must circulate through every part, carrying life and nourishment to every organ, muscle, tissue, and nerve. Do the corsets and whalebones, as now worn, leave every organ free to act in a healthful manner, and the blood to flow unobstructed on its life giving mission? Let the heart and lungs, confined within half the space designed, the viscera crowded from its natural position, weakened muscles, and blood forced in unnatural quantities to particular organs, speak, and echoed by pains in the

side, head, and the untold misery that woman suffers for the sake of "keeping up appearances." Let these all speak with their thousand tongues, and who would heed them? Not they whose "silks and laces" are the price paid to the inventors of these infernal machines of torture, — ever inventing something new and more destructive to health, happiness and life.

Is it beautiful? No. "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." Beauty is something that does not change its shape or color with every new moon. A painting that was beautiful a thousand years ago, would be to-day, and will be a thousand years hence, if canvases and colors are unchanged. How does the huge bonnets of twenty years ago compare with that "little love of a bonnet" worn last year; and the narrow skirts of years ago, with the ample folds expanded with crinoline. Both were "beautiful" in their day, and "just the thing" to "set off" and heighten woman's charms, and gain the admiration of men. If the narrow skirts, "mutton-leg" sleeves, and large bonnets were beautiful *then*, they are still; for beauty is unchangeable.

But I have written more than I intended, and will leave the subject for others more competent, and who may think that "newspaperdom" is one of the paths leading to this much needed reform.

Whitney's Point, Broome Co., N. Y., 1861. CLARA.

May 25th, 1861

WOMAN'S DRESS.

A HEALTHY dress permits every organ in the body to perform its functions untrammelled. The fashionable style does not allow this free action of the vital parts, and hence the present feeble, crippled condition of the women of America. This evil, together with other physiological errors, is doing much to shorten the lives of our women and compromise the health and life of the whole American race. To avert these sad results, and to improve the health of our women generally, it is proposed that the following style of dress be adopted. This dress has been worn by the writer nearly nine years, and she is happy to say that it has saved her from a consumptive's grave, to which she was slowly but surely tending.

The waist should be several inches longer than the body, a little shorter than the present fashion, and full in front, that the chest may enjoy the freest action. The bands of the skirt should be much larger than the body, buttons to be placed on the band of the inside skirt, just as they are on a gentleman's pants for suspenders, and the same elastic suspenders worn, crossing behind. Make button-holes in the bands of the other skirts to correspond with the buttons on the inside skirt, and button on; thus one pair of suspenders will carry three or more skirts. This style of dress is attended by no discomfort to the wearer, and allows full action to every organ of the body. At the same it is sufficiently fashionable to escape observation. Of course corsets should never be worn. And with the skirt supported as above described, there is no apology for wearing them.

Whalebones have no business in a woman's dress. They spoil all the beauty of outline which Powers and other great artists have found in the natural woman. They interfere not less with that peculiar undulating action of the chest and abdomen which results from the normal action of the thoracic and abdominal viscera. And if the waist be short and loose, as advised above, there will be no need of whalebones to keep it down. God knew what he was doing when he made the human body, and made it just right in every way; and we cannot alter its shape without destroying its beautiful symmetry, and causing disease and premature death.—*Lewis' New Gymnastics.*

June 1st, 1861

HOW LADIES SHOULD DRESS.

As you look from your window, in Paris, observe the first fifty women who pass; forty have noses depressed in the middle, a small quantity of dark hair, and a swarthy complexion, but then, what a toilet! Not only suitable for the season, but the age and complexion of the wearer. How neat the feet and hands! How well the clothes are put on, and more than all, how well they suit each other!

Before English women can dress *perfectly*, they must have the taste of the French, especially in color. One reason why we see colors ill-arranged in England is, that the different articles are purchased each for its own imagined virtues and without any thought of what is to be worn with it. Women, while shopping, buy what pleases their eye on the counter, forgetting what they have at home. That parasol is pretty, but it will kill, by its color, one dress in the buyer's wardrobe, and be unsuitable for the others. To be magnificently dressed costs money; but to be dressed with taste is not expensive. It requires good taste, knowledge and refinement. Never buy an article unless it is suitable to your age, habit, style, and rest of your wardrobe. Nothing is more vulgar than to wear costly trimming with a common delaine, or cheap lace with expensive brocades.

What colors, it may be asked, go best together? Green with violet; gold with dark crimson or lilac; pale blue with scarlet; pink with black or white; and gray with scarlet or pink. A cold color generally requires a warm tint to give life to it. Gray and pale blue, for instance, do not combine well, both being cold colors. White and black are safe wear, but the latter is not favorable to dark or pale complexions. Pink is, to some skins, the most becoming; not, however, if there is much color in the cheeks and lips, and if there be even a suspicion of red in either hair or complexion. Peach color, is perhaps, one of the most elegant colors worn. Maize is very becoming, particularly to persons with dark hair and eyes. But whatever the colors or material of the entire dress, the details are all in all; the lace around the bosom and sleeves, the flowers—in fact, all that furnishes the dress. If trimmed with black lace, some of the same should be worn on the head, and flowers which are worn in the hair should decorate the dress.
— *All the Year Round.*

June 22nd, 1861

[Written for Moore's Rural New-Yorker.]

"DRESS AND OVERDRESS."—AGAIN.

SINCE my childhood I have been taught to reverence age, and give particular heed to advice given by people older than myself, especially that pertaining to good morals and manners. I have read the article written by "A. M. P.," of Fayetteville, several times trying in vain to find something that would apply to sensible persons in regard to dress.

In the first place, she says her opinion is well worth having, because she is "a regular blue stocking," not caring a fig what she wears, nor how it is put on." It is something I have yet to learn, if ladies, calling themselves authoresses and writers, deem it necessary to their profession to appear "in an old and faded wrapper," "slip-shod slippers, a rumpled collar," or present inky fingers to visitors. Did "A. M. P." ever hear of the tidiness and taste of HANNAH MORE,—the perfect order existing even upon the writing table of Mrs. HEMANS,—or of CHARLOTTE BRONTE, who could not write even a word until the chairs were properly dusted and in their places? WORDSWORTH says, "it is not *genius* that makes some writers disorderly in their personal and domestic relations, but the *lack* of genius." But then she "don't intend to marry, and so don't trouble" herself "to inquire about the whims of these lords of creation!" A happy idea, indeed, for damsels of an uncertain age to make a "virtue of necessity!"

The name "gentlemen," when applied to those persons that "A. M. P." has been in the habit of associating with, I think a *misnomer*, and that *puppies* would be more expressive of the things themselves. Who ever heard a *gentleman* tell so absurd a falsehood, as to "pronounce your hair the loveliest shade of auburn," when you knew it to be "fiery red"? Or that your eyes were "a most charming blue," when in fact they were the "ugliest sort of gray"? And who ever heard of a lady silly enough to believe it? I am happy to know there are noble, true-minded men, worthy the respect and affection, if needs be, of sensible women. Again, instead of the "highly soiled silk" for afternoon costume, we, farmer's

daughters, modestly attire ourselves in neat-fitting delaines in winter, and plain muslin in summer; not for the unmaidenly purpose of catching a beau, but to please the parents and brothers of the household. Should we, perchance, go a trip on the cars to visit our city or country friends, we *surely* would not adopt the style of a Southern *dowdy*, or the frequenter of the opera; but a plain traveling suit for the purpose.

I do not wish to be unjust to the Fayetteville correspondent, but when people assume the privilege of instructing, they should endeavor to say something worthy of themselves and those whom they try to teach. To my young lady friends, I would say, let us dress economically and with taste as becomes our means, not gaudily or "perfectly bewitchingly," but "with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but as becometh women professing godliness, with good works."

E. K.

Lysander, Onon. Co., N. Y., 1861.

June 29th, 1861

[Written for Moore's Rural New-Yorker.]

DRESS IN THE HOME CIRCLE.

METHINKS I see something very like a frown gathering on your brow, Mr. Editor, after a glance at my caption. You think there has been enough said upon this topic, and you wish you need not be troubled with any more articles referring to it, to be looked over, perhaps rejected; but remember it is an important theme,—one that concerns "us girls,"—one that will bear considerable discussion.

It has struck me, in all the articles I have read on dress in your excellent paper, that something more particular should be written about the apparel adopted by ladies *at home*. Many seem to think it makes but little difference what is worn when they are with their own families, and without a probability of seeing company. "Of course," they say, "I should not think of dressing in this way if there were a possibility of seeing any one except members of our own family, but I do not care for them,—they will not even notice my dress." Very true, perhaps

not, for the reason that they are accustomed to seeing you in such style, and do not expect anything different. But some morning put on a pretty, clean wrapper,—one that you would not be ashamed of before company,—make yourself appear as tidy as possible, and see if you will not attract attention and praise for improved appearance. You will, at least, gain your own self-respect.

Some may remark: "I cannot dress as I would, I have so much dirty work to perform, and I must dress according to my business. Cannot you do something to improve your often untidy and repulsive appearance, and at the same time work just as easily and quickly? Your clothes can at least be whole, and clean,—always strive to have them so. Then put on a neat linen collar, (your work will not affect that unless you are "up to your ears in business,") and never leave your room in the morning without carefully arranging and smoothing your usually disordered hair. Do you think this is taking too much trouble for the sake of looking well at home, where you are seen only by your nearest friends? And why not take the trouble for them; they will surely appreciate it, and should you not do your part to render home pleasant and attractive?

It is sometimes the case that those who are most fastidious about dress when in society, are the most careless when alone. Have you a friend whom you consider faultless in her taste? Call at some unseasonable hour when you will be the least expected, and you may be undeceived, by finding her in a suit not quite so becoming to her form and complexion as you anticipated.

I hope, and doubt not, there are many who can be classed as exceptions to these remarks, but to those to whom they do apply, I would say that they are directed in kindness, and with the hope that they may cause them to reform their careless habits ere they are fixed upon them, and rendered difficult to change.

FRANCES F.

New York, June, 1861.

