

"Futurist Fashions" and Other Absurdities

A Little Sermon
on Good Taste
in Dressing
By
Lady Duff-Gordon.



A "Futurist" Development of the Slit Skirt, Turned into a Grotesque, and Accentuated in its Ugliness by the Shock of the Cigarette.

By Lady Duff-Gordon.

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YOU have asked me what I think of the "Futurist Fashions," and by that I infer that you mean the weird ideas in dress that have been promulgated from time to time recently as the kind of clothes women will wear in the future.

There will never be any "Futurist" fashions in this sense. There are certain fixed and eternal principles of harmony to which such conceptions run directly counter. And these principles of harmony in dress have been perceived by the eternal woman, and have been used by her in all stages of the world's culture.

To my mind harmonious dressing is a most important factor in the harmonious adjustment of ourselves to our world. It is a part, and a very great part, of that effort toward perfect equilibrium that should mark the striving of every human atom in this thing we call society.

What we call good taste is only a perception and an application of these principles of harmony—whether it be good taste in dress, in manners, in furnishing the house or what not. Our minds, unless they are morbid or perverted, turn as naturally toward happiness, joy, peace and progress as flowers turn toward the sun. And this only means that we, with all created things, strive to be harmonious.

A woman who is gracious, understanding, charming and delightful and a man who carries with him the masculine equivalents of these attributes



"Pierrot"

are those to whom everything is possible because they carry with them harmony. Dress is a symbol of one's personality, the "outward banner" of the mind.

Anything that is ugly, that excites in persons a sense of absurdity, anything that shocks the aesthetic sensibilities, cannot be helpful, and anything that is not working for lasting good cannot endure. That vast engine which is the sum total of all human minds clings fast to and runs along the lines of eternal beauty and goodness. The ugly things, the wicked things cannot live. They die or they are transmuted into good.

And so it is of dress. There have



"L'Impertinence"

been ugly fashions, and there have been times of decadence and wickedness which was reflected in ugly and wicked fashions. But these pass. There is an eternal rhythm and harmony and a dominant line from which woman's dress can never for long stray. Its secret is simplicity.

In the best of our modern dresses there is nothing better or more beautiful than was in the dress of the ancient women of Greece. The fashions of the women of the Orient have been fixed for centuries, and in our loveliest modern creations we can go no further than they.

And the reason for this is that the Greeks and the women of the Orient discovered those simple laws of harmony, and, having discovered them, had faith in them and clung to them. "There is nothing new under the sun," said Solomon. The laws of harmony and of good taste in dress were fixed before womanhood was born. They are a part of the law that rules the rolling of the suns in the heavens and the coloring of the tiniest flowers on earth. There are no doubt monster suns borne



"Toilette d'Apres-Midi"

Three "Futurist" costumes suggested by Paul Poiret, of Paris, but which even their inventor does not take seriously, it is said.

in the universe and ugly growths among flowers, but these do not last. Nature herself kills them. Life is upward—toward beauty, harmony and joy.

Let your dress, then, as a rule, be simple. There is an infinite variety that can be obtained in the changing of colors, in fabrics, of the adjustment and selection of embroidery and laces. The simple line can be varied harmoniously so that there will never be an effect of tedium or of sameness. It is really not necessary to shatter every standard of good taste in order to be "different." I know of at least a hundred ways in which the girlish and flowing robe of the ancient Greek maiden can be varied, and yet in not one of them will its principles of clean harmony be violated.

I do not mean by this that there is not a use for what is sometimes called the bizarre. It has its values just as dissonance has its value in music, but it must be sparingly used. Its purpose should be to emphasize harmony or to gather up the chord of the dress into a climax. And every woman should have at least one or two perfectly gorgeous dresses to fit what I call the "Imperial mood." It is well for women to have



A Charming Fashion Which is Taken Out of its "Harmonies" by the Pipe-Shaped Cigarette Holder and Mannish Attitude of its Wearer.

this mood now and then—to feel the full power and beauty of dominant womanhood. It is a soul strengthener, and when she feels it her dress ought to vibrate in unison with her thoughts.

But the mood which would find its interpretation in some of these costumes which are called "Futurist" could only be madhouse moods, and as such cannot live, and should not live, in a world whose constant trend is toward a finer sanity.

If thoughts are things, as I believe they are, a true dress is thought's substance. Words form one way of clothing our thoughts—a great picture is the clothing of another vision.

Dress is, in its spiritual essence, the clothing of what psychologists would call "our complex."

Why it is ugly to have a dress of full length on one side and of quarter length on the other and nothing else, or why some lines are attractive and others offensive one cannot prove by mathematics. Yet we know it is so.

Certain colors blend and certain others do not. And the reason for this lies in the vibrations we call color. The vibrations do not harmonize. Lines, no doubt, are only vibrations also, and this, I think, is the true secret of right composition or form. Things are ugly because they are unharmonious. They are beautiful because they harmonize.

If I have dwelt too much on harmonies, it is because I believe that in this

world harmony is the most important of things. What we call success is only being in harmony with the dominant principle of nature, which constantly strives for achievement. What we call luck is only harmonies which we attain, without recognizing them. In proportion as one is in harmony with the forces that control life, in just that proportion is he or she successful. I do not mean only successful in a money sense, but also in the sense of being able to command the love and trust of our fellows and of being a truly helpful influence.

Unless our dress is harmonious we are like discords. The good forces which can help us and desire to help us are held away—there is a barrier between our minds and them.

All of us recognize this, even though we do not put that recognition into the shape of thought or words. It is the law that we cannot alter, and, like all eternal laws, it is a good law.

And for this reason as the years go by we will not find womanhood clothing herself in the absurdities called "Futurist." Here and there perhaps one will, or a group will, but these are only little back eddies in the main stream.

Woman will be faithful to the laws that the Greeks knew, and before the Greeks many other civilizations. There is such a thing as ugliness, and there is such a thing as beauty, and in the great Purpose, as I humbly dare to define it, there is no intention that beauty shall be slain by ugliness.

The Real Tragedy of the Blond Eskimos.

THE London Lancet in an unusual editorial raises some picturesque questions concerning the now famous blond Eskimos discovered by Stefansson in the far Arctic. It is believed that these blond Eskimos are the last remnants of the vigorous Icelandic colony of Norsemen who disappeared in the sixteenth century. The writer in the Lancet says:

To medical men the death or decay of white races in hot or distant climates is not less interesting than the degeneration of a family or of individuals. The "Poor Whites" of the West Indies, who are the decadent descendants of Cavaliers sent into slavery by Oliver Cromwell, survive lugubriously, pathetic representatives of a once high-hearted class; but other white races have completely disappeared, leaving behind them only a ruin or two, a few graves, a tradition vaguely repeated by savages, an occasional racial cast-back among yellow or dark-skinned supplanters.

We are thinking more particularly of the Norsemen of southernmost Greenland, who flourished for some 300 years, then fell into decadence, and utterly disappeared toward the close of the fifteenth century. History records that in about the year 985 A. D. Eric Raudi, the Red or Ruddy, an Icelandic outlaw, founded two colonies, Wester and Oestre Bygd, to the west of the southern cape of Greenland, a name of hopeful sound adopted by him to attract colonists.

Eric the Red was a pioneer among European explorers. Though a pagan, he seemed to have been a singularly good man, and he was a careful explorer. It was his son Lief who is credited to have discovered "Vine-land the Good," or America, with which his people afterward traded. They constituted, in fact, a flourishing trading republic, keeping

up their connection with Bergen and with Iceland for centuries.

In 1448 a fleet of "heathens," supposed to be English, attacked them. Then in successive waves they were invaded from the north by the Eskimos, at that time ferocious, and by the Black Death from overseas. Their connection with Europe ceased, and though in 1492 an effort was made to reopen communications with them nothing came of it. In 1498 a bishop, appointed to the Greenland see, sailed, but could not reach it. The last of their bishops died in Europe in 1540. He had never visited them. Their civilization probably flickered out after 1450.

"Darkness falls," says Mr. William H. Babcock, their latest historian, "but the uncertainty and the marked paths of this chapter of old history makes any item (of information) very welcome." One such item is a mysterious story of voices, for the colonists were perhaps heard, though not seen, by an Icelandic bishop, Amund of Skalpolit, in the sixteenth century, who was driven by stress of weather so close in shore that his ears caught, or he believed so, from the deck of his ship voices of cattle and sheep. This was at Herjolfsness, now an Eskimo settlement, with an Eskimo name. The voices from the shadow were the last sign of life given by perhaps the earliest European colonists, forerunners of Columbus.

In 1855 John Davis, the explorer, found their settlements in the hands of the Eskimos, who retained a few dim traditions of why welcome. They had left behind them a fourteenth century church—the Cathedral of Gardar—some seventeen ancient houses, one of which, from its decorations, has been identified as that of Eric the Red, and a few coffins containing European corpses, with faces wrapped in coarse an-

tique cloth. In 1721 the "Apostle of Greenland," Hans Egede, made determined efforts to find "the lost people" along certain green inland fjords beyond the ice wall of the coast. Southern Greenland, it should be remembered, has the climate of Iceland or of northern Norway. He found nothing, nor did a subsequent explorer, Lieutenant Holm, in the last century.

Recently, however, Herr V. Stefansson has reported the existence of white Eskimos on Coronation Gulf, far to the north of the original Icelandic settlements. It is said that some of these tribesmen have light hair and that their language contains Norse words.

Romantic as this may seem, it is not impossible, nor yet improbable. Disease, the mediaeval Black Death, may very well have decimated the ancestors of these people, and their weakened remnant may have been absorbed by invading savagery and carried northward. Many instances are recorded of similar absorptions. An Indian town in Chili, to take one case, is known to be mainly descended from Spaniards, who there held a fortress, erected by a viceroy for the purpose of overawing the natives.

The Norse Greenlanders in their day produced the "Lay of Aill," and perhaps contributed to the verse Edda. They thus formed part of the grand literary movement, which in Iceland produced the "Prose Edda," that sublime and little-known poem. To the scientific psychologist the mental changes taking place in a vanishing race are as interesting as physical decay to the pathologist.

When did these white Eskimos, supposing them to be descendants of Norsemen, begin to forget their traditions and their origin? And who among them was the last to remember that he was of a white race?