

Letters from Artists on Ladies' Dress.



QUESTIONS of Fashion are, perhaps, more open to debate and difference of opinion than any others. But those who ridicule the commands of Fashion, as well as those who worship them, must find an equal interest in the views of the best judges of what is beautiful and what is ugly—that is to say, of artists. In this belief, we have asked a number of our leading painters to state their views upon the subject, in the form of a reply to the succeeding questions:—

“What is your opinion of the present style of ladies' dress? What are its chief defects, and what its merits, from an artist's point of view? What is your ideal of a beautiful woman, beautifully dressed?”

Our invitation has been most cordially responded to, and we are now in a position to publish the replies received.

SIR FREDERIC LEIGHTON.

Ladies, who are, of course, the keenest votaries of fashion, will be delighted, and we think surprised, to find Sir Frederick Leighton on their side.

Hôtel Royal, Rome.

DEAR SIR,—Whatever may be the criticisms to which the dress of a lady in our day is open, there is a vast amount of nonsense talked about it. Titian and Velasquez would probably have been very happy to paint it.—Believe me, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

FREDERIC LEIGHTON.

MR. G. F. WATTS, R.A.

Little Holland House,
Kensington, W.

DEAR SIR,—I don't know that the present style of “ladies' dress,” when not pushed to extremes and exaggerations, can be very much objected to. Mr. du Maurier, in *Punch*, is able, without violating truth, to make it look very graceful and charming. Such portions as are easily put on and taken off need not be soberly, much less severely, criticised. It is natural, and even right, that considerable elasticity should be claimed by fashion—fancy and trade are encouraged. All, however, that is calculated to effect permanent injury to health must be very severely condemned. Tight lacing, pointed shoes, and high heels—these, unless the fashion changes (which, being very ugly, it probably

will not), leave permanent disastrous results. No lady can be really well and beautifully dressed if what she wears outrages Nature's intentions in the structure of the human frame. Such outrages are: a waist like a stove pipe, shoes that compress the toes into a crumpled mass of deformity, and, it might even be added, gloves that confine the hand till it looks little better than a fin—but as this inflicts no permanent injury, it does not matter—but the foot is irredeemably ruined, to the destruction of spring and grace in movement, and to no inconsiderable injury to health. It is a very common thing to hear a lady say, “The foot is an ugly thing!” Her shapeless shoe has told her this; but it will be seen how untrue it is if one looks at a cast from the foot of an Indian woman, or the drawing of a foot by Sir Frederic Leighton. No doubt the crumpled clump of deformity common from wearing modern abominations, is a thing an ancient Greek would have shuddered at; and this is to be the more lamented as the modern young lady is often of splendid growth and form, such as probably the ancient Greek never saw.

Perhaps, the real test of the highest taste in dress would be, whether it could be put into sculpture; but that would be too rigid a rule. One may say, however, that no lady can be well dressed who, for the sake of tasteless vanity, decks herself in the spoils of the most beautiful of created creatures, cruelly indifferent to such destruction; or sticks reptiles and repulsive insects about her.

To your question, “What is your ideal of a beautiful woman?” I would answer, That form which, tall or short, or of light or dark colour, most emphasises human characteristics furthest removed from suggestions of the inferior creatures—a principle so well understood and acted upon by the great Greek artists. How beautiful when, in the words of Ruskin, “Fairest, because purest and thoughtfulest, trained in all high knowledge, as in all courteous art—in dance, in song, in sweet wit, in lofty learning, in loftier courage, in loftiest love—able alike to cheer, to enchant, or save the souls of men.”

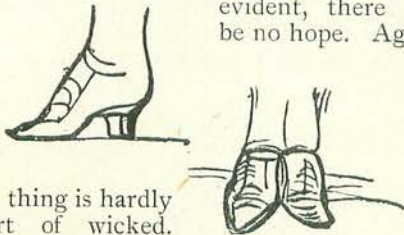
This would, I think, do for an ideal.—Very truly yours,

G. F. WATTS.

In a second letter Mr. Watts adds:—

"It is impossible that we should be unaffected by the impressions the mind receives through the medium of dress; we ought not to be so. The indifference in modern times to grace and harmony in dress is a strong reason for concluding that pleasure in what is beautiful—or, which may sometimes be accepted as an equivalent, interesting—a sense so strong in former ages, is extinct.

"I think I said that it was more easy to say what should not be, than what should be. Good taste must be outraged when deformity is suggested, but even that may be passed over when such things are perfectly extraneous. When they tend to produce permanent deformity, it is a pity they cannot be suppressed by law, as unquestionably the race suffers. No healthy, well-made young girl ought to be allowed to wear stays compressing the ribs; after thirty, there may be reasons; and by that time nature would have asserted herself, and no great harm would be done. But as long as men have the degraded taste to prefer a pipe to the beautiful flexible line, which might always, with the greatest delicacy, be evident, there can be no hope. Again,



this thing is hardly short of wicked.

Put together, you have this—uncommonly like a cloven hoof. I wish the ladies joy of it!"

MR. G. D. LESLIE, R.A.

Riverside, Wallingford.

DEAR SIR,—I alluded to the subject of ladies' dress in an address I delivered at Southampton on Art. It is a short allusion, but if you care to publish it I have no objection, and could send you a copy.—I am, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

G. D. LESLIE.

The passage runs as follows:—

"The results of female art education are not quite satisfactory in the matter of dress, as here woman is so apt, by nature, to become the slave of fashion; but still I think much can be done by right-minded girls, by careful selection and wholesome reform in such things as tight-lacing and

high heels. I care not for the so-called high art school of millinery. Dresses that look like bed-gowns of green serge, and little girls smothered in Kate Greenaway flopperty hats, seem to me, however picturesque intrinsically, in bad taste from their eccentricity. A young lady of real taste can always find amidst the prevailing fashions some that suit her individuality; and those that have this taste invariably seem to do so."

HON. JOHN COLLIER.

4, Marlborough Place, N.W.

SIR,—I should hardly venture to express an opinion on the delicate subject of modern female dress, were it not that in my double capacity of husband and portrait-painter I have been obliged to devote a great deal of attention to it.

I think the outlook is, on the whole, encouraging. To begin with, there is much greater variety of style and freedom of choice than has obtained for a very long time. Indeed, it is probable that in no country or period since dress was invented has there



FIG. 1.

been such a wide scope for individual taste as in England at the present day.

This is an enormous advantage, for women vary so much that a hard and fast style,



FIG. 2.

however good in itself, is certain to be unsuitable to at least half the sex. It is true that this freedom of choice is not always wisely exercised, but it is a subject to which women devote so much time and thought that they are mostly good judges in the matter.

Then, again, there is at present a happy absence of those monstrosities that have first offended, and then corrupted, our ideal of feminine form; the crinoline has long disappeared, and at length the bustle—perhaps the most odious of all these misshapements—has followed suit. Of course they may both re-appear, and probably will do so; but freedom of choice is now so firmly established, that no one will be considered eccentric or unwomanly for refusing to adopt them.

We may take it once for all that the extreme tyranny of fashion is broken down—a glorious triumph that we mainly owe to the much-abused æsthetic movement.

But although much has been achieved, much still remains to be done. There are two deadly sins in modern female dress which seem to defy all considerations of beauty and convenience. Tight waists and high heels are still so common that the courageous protests of the emancipated pass almost unnoticed,

My own opinion is that female dress will never be thoroughly satisfactory until women have realised that they have no waists. Nature has not endowed them with waists, which are artificial forms produced by compressing the body.

This seeming paradox is easily proved by considering that the waist of woman has been placed by fashion in every conceivable position, from under the armpits to half-way down the hips. Obviously it cannot correspond to any natural formation, or it could not wander about in this extraordinary manner.

Of course, the Greek lady never supposed she had a waist. She often, for the sake of convenience, tied a string round her body, but only just tightly enough to keep her clothes in place, and then nearly always let some folds of the drapery fall over and hide the unsightly line (Fig. 1). If there must be a waist, I distinctly prefer the one placed under the armpits, in the fashion of the beginning of this century, for it is physically impossible to tie it so tightly as to much alter the form, and having the division high up tends to minimise the most common defect of the English female figure, a want of length in the leg (Fig 2).

Of course, it is this very want of length



FIG. 3.

that has led to the high heels, but the remedy is worse than the disease. It does not really give the impression of long-leggedness, and it does alter and spoil the whole carriage of the body.

The high heels also help to deform the feet by pressing the toes forward into the pointed ends of those terrible boots that are another disgrace to our civilisation. Painters and sculptors have good cause to know that the modern female foot is a hideous object—our vitiated taste has become accustomed to it when clothed, but when seen in its naked deformity it is a thing to shudder at.

It occurs to me that there are two fundamental rules of dress.

First, wherever the dress is tight it should show the true natural form of the body beneath, and should not suggest, and still less produce, some entirely unnatural and artificial form. (This rule, of course, only applies to tolerably good figures.)

Secondly, where the dress is loose it should be allowed to fall in its own natural folds, and should not be gathered up into the horrible convolutions miscalled drapery by the milliners.



FIG. 4.

The old Greek dress fulfilled these conditions in the highest degree, and, I have no doubt, was the noblest form of clothing

ever invented. All other forms of dress have abounded in monstrosities of one kind or another, but in looking over the history of costume one now and then comes across



FIG. 5.

some simple and artistic form which seems to have sprung up by chance, as it were, or as a transition between two opposite exaggerations. Here is a fine example from the early middle ages (Fig. 3). And here, again, is a good design from a much later period (Fig. 4).

Just before the introduction of the enormous hoops in the early part of the eighteenth century, which, perhaps, are the high-wafer mark of monstrosity in dress, there was a brief period of comparative simplicity, to which has been given a perhaps factitious charm by the genius of Watteau (Fig. 5).

And then, again, we come to the costume of 1800 and the neighbouring years, to which I have already alluded, and which was, perhaps, the simplest and most graceful dress that European women have worn since the classical period (Fig. 6), but which soon, alas! gave way to the succession of nightmares from which, at last, we seem to have awakened.

But from many styles besides these there are hints to be gathered for the benefit of modern dress, and, fortunately, the tolerance

of the age enables us to pick and choose from any source we like. I have great hopes of the future of female costume (male costume seems, from the artistic side, to be past praying for), but a great deal depends upon the artists. The average man is as bad as the average woman; he likes pretty little waists and neat little feet quite as much as the recipient of his misplaced admiration. Indeed, as I think it is incontestable that women dress more to please men than to please themselves, we men are probably more to blame than the women for the vagaries of female costume. But the artists have, or ought to have, a better taste in these matters than the outside public. They all affect to admire the masterpieces of classical art, and they are, few of them, entirely ignorant of what the human form ought to be. It is to them that we must look for protests against its disfigurement.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

JOHN COLLIER.

MR. G. H. BOUGHTON, A.R.A.

West House,
Campden Hill-road, W.

DEAR SIR,—The questions you send me regarding my opinion of the present style of ladies' dress cover too large and varied a field to be disposed of in a moment—that

is, if one *could* dispose of them even after many and many a month, let alone moments. The one virtue of the women's dress of to-day is its variety and individuality. Those who are really *dressed* and not merely clothed, have their dresses "created" for them, and they belong to each other. The fair and the dark, the lean and the reverse, do not now bedeck themselves with the same all pervading tint or cut, whether it suits them well or ill, just because it is "all the go." Even the almost universal cut of to-day is most usually graceful and of quiet tone. And somehow girls seem to be of taller growth, and of better health and colour, and to walk better than ever before. The adoption of *bits* of bygone fashions is now and then deplorable. One sees queer jumbles of Marie Stuart ruffs and "Empire" bonnets, or of any other period except of the Marie Stuart head-gear. Suppose a poor simple masher of



FIG. 6.

the male kind should try some historical head-gear—say a cocked hat or a Charles II. with a wreath of feathers and lace—and mount a jewelled sword, as a new incident to his usual Piccadilly attire? It would be in no worse taste than the various mixture of "periods" that some of the dear creatures of to-day startle the student of costume

with now and then. My ideal of "a beautiful woman, beautifully dressed," is not yet defined. I am not very narrow-minded with regard to either point. From the Princess in gold and white samite, to the nut-brown maid with her gown of hoddan gray and her bare feet, there are thousands that are good enough for *me*. The only bad ones are the pretentious and vulgar (dirt and fine feathers). I saw a little "æsthetic" creature the other day, with a sad, woe-begone costume in flabby colours, a mop of tousled hair, a painted mask of a face, all in keeping, except the boots—"side-spring," if you please (if anything so squashy could have a spring). She was only a passing vision—but enough. I could but repeat with Madame Roland under the guillotine (*was* it Roland?) "O Liberty (and Co.), what crimes are committed in thy name!"

The subject is a fascinating one; but there are limits.—Yours faithfully,

GEO. H. BOUGHTON, A.R.A.

MR. G. A. STOREY, A.R.A.

39, Broadhurst Gardens, N.W.

SIR,—It is difficult to pass an opinion upon "ladies' dress," because its chief characteristic seems to be that it is ever changing. We no sooner see a really pretty fashion than we hear ominous rumours—from Paris (?)—that some abomination such as the crinoline is coming in again, or the Gainsborough hat is to give place to the Pork-pie, or a small copy of the Toriodero's head-gear. We are told that costume indicates the phase or current of thought of the period and of the country in which it is worn; that it becomes sumptuous in rich communities and in prosperous times, but is sad and impoverished in times of war and depression; that it marks the degree of civilisation, of culture, of taste, and of wealth; and, like the other fine arts, has its glorious periods as well as its decadence and restoration. Perhaps it reached its lowest stage of ugliness, in this country, some thirty or forty years ago, when corkscrew ringlets, high foreheads, flat bandeaus plastered down the cheeks, evening dresses cut straight across the collar bones, flounces and crinolines, and all the other horrors that John Leech has so cleverly depicted in the early volumes of *Punch* were the fashions that set off our types of beauty. May we then conclude that taste has improved since those days, and not only taste, but common sense? At the present moment we see

nothing outrageous to find fault with, and much that is pretty to admire. It would take up too much space to go into detail: to discourse on hats alone would require a separate letter of some pages. I should have to show how some set off the face and others do not, and how it often happens that the success of a hat depends very much upon the face that looks out from under it. And so with the way the hair is dressed, &c.; and I need scarcely say that a pretty, graceful woman will make almost any costume look well if she puts it on with taste, whereas there are certain other figures that require special treatment.

There are some, whom I would not offend, but who nevertheless are deficient in those graceful curves that Nature bestows upon her best art, who require farthingales, hoops, improvers, and even flounces to disguise the angularity of their structure, whilst others go the other extreme of rotundity, such as a lady I knew, who was taller when she sat down than when she stood up, and must baffle the most ingenious contrivers of European costume, and whom nothing but a Chinese or loose Japanese gown could make at all presentable.

I think female dress may be either very gorgeous, or very simple—gorgeous as a Venetian lady when Titian and Paul Veronese delighted to depict her in rich brocades and a wealth of pearls and jewellery, or simple as in England a hundred years ago, when our great-grandmothers wore muslin gowns with short waists and silk sashes, the beauty and refinement of their faces making their chief attraction, and the simplicity of the dress leaving full scope for the gracefulness of the figure to display itself, as we see in the pictures of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Gainsborough, George Morland, Romney, and others.

But the great artists seldom adhere to the passing fashions; they arrange the dress or reconstruct it so that it shall be most becoming to their sitters and at the same time make a good composition of colour and form for their pictures. This is also done by ladies of taste, who will often turn some freak of fashion into a thing of beauty, and, regardless of their milliner and dressmaker, will adopt some modification of the passing style if it seems to them more suitable and becoming.

The sense of fitness in dress as in everything else, should, I think, guide the fair sex of whatever degree—and I must say that there are fewer costumes more suitable and,

at the same time, much prettier than those of some of our domestic servants, who, with their white caps, bibs and aprons and black dresses make quite dainty little pictures, often reminding us of that well-known print of "La Belle Chocolatière."

Whether this idea of fitness could be carried out in the cases of lady Town Councillors, female clerks, &c., &c., I do not know. I must leave that and many other matters connected with this subject to more competent judges,—and remain, Yours obediently,

G. A. STOREY.

MR. WYKE BAYLISS, P.R.B.A.

SIR,—You ask me to give you, in the form of a letter, my ideas on the subject of ladies' dress.

It is not without considerable hesitation that I venture to approach so sacred a mystery. I should indeed be disposed to decline your courteous invitation to be "drawn" upon the question, on the ground that I am not a figure painter, but for the consideration that although unhappily an artist is obliged in his work to limit the range of his vision, yet the beauty that exists in the world is the common heritage of us all, and every artist is, or should be, equally appreciative of the loveliness of our companions in life, and jealous of the safety and honour of the shrine at which we all worship.

Replying to your letter, therefore, not as a specialist, but simply as an artist, I would say:

The first essential in a woman's dress should be that *the beauty of it must be a beauty that shall always be beautiful*. I do not deprecate fashion—on the contrary, change is in itself pleasant to the eyes. But it must be a change from one loveliness to another. To see a rose is always an exquisite delight; so it is to see a lily. But we are not called upon to decide once for all which we prefer, and if we choose the rose to kill all the lilies. Thus it should be with dress: change is desirable, but it must be on the understanding that no ugly thing shall be tolerated for the sake of fashion.

That is, I think, the first great principle; and attention to it would rid us for ever of the danger of the recurrence of those monstrosities that have brought the very name of "fashion" into contempt. There have been vagaries in dress to which our countrywomen have submitted, not because they had an imperfect perception of what is

really beautiful and took the false for true, but because, in obedience to the inexorable laws of fashion, they accepted regretfully what they knew to be ugly. I hope the time will never come again when we may be tempted to lay a finger on her ladyship's hoops, and ask, as the little maid did, "Pray, madam, is that all yourself?" The leaders of fashion in Europe see clearly enough that to mutilate a woman's foot, as the Chinese do, is a barbarous custom; but they do not perceive that to make European ladies walk painfully on stilts and tiptoe is barbarism of the same kind. But the truth is that every attempt to modify the human form is an act of savagery, and any form of dress that simulates a modification, whether worn in Pekin or in Paris, or in London, is a savage dress, and carries with it the additional shame of being a sham. Let us be content with women as God made them. Let them be dressed, not altered. In a word, *no dress can be really beautiful that suggests a personal deformity*.

Secondarily to this reverence for the human form should be fair treatment of the fabric of which the dress is made. Velvet, silk, linen,—each has its own natural way of falling into folds; and the shape that a dress should take should be the natural result of the folding of the material, and not the result of an artificial construction. This principle may also be expressed in the simple form of a negative. *No dress can be really beautiful that suggests the carrying about of a machine*.

Then as to colour. I think the present taste for soft, tertiary colours is altogether favourable. Strong colours, in a mass, are destructive to the delicacy of colour and expression in a woman's face. The vermilion of her lips should not have to fight the red that is suitable enough for pillar-posts. The blue of her eyes should not have to compete with that of Reckitt. The missing colour, yellow, should not be flaunted against her carnations and azure and pearly white. A woman is worth more than to be subordinated to an aniline dye. *The primary or secondary colours should be used (like brass instruments in a fine orchestra) very sparingly*.

These are, of course, very general principles. But I am not an expert in millinery, and can only speak generally.

I think, however, that there is a tolerably safe test that might be applied in carrying them out, viz., What will the dress look like in a picture? Artists are every day

finding their inspirations more and more in the living men and women of their own time. Women are every day making more history for men to paint. Let them dress so as to be paintable. Dress how they will, they are always admired, and revered, and loved. But I cannot say the same of their dress. The time has been when, in order to paint a woman, the first necessity for the artist was to get possession of her great-grandmother's gown. Under such circumstances the painting of contemporary life must be limited to portraiture; and everything that limits the range of art, limits its splendour and the hold it should have on our affections.

There are only a few words that I care to add.

I think we lose something as a nation in not having a distinctive dress for our peasantry and the *bourgeoises* of our provincial towns—nothing, I mean, to correspond with the square of linen folded on the head, of which the Roman woman is so justly proud, or the white caps of Normandy and Holland, varying in shape according to the township. The picturesque way in which the shawl is used by our Lancashire lasses is, indeed, some approach to it. But I recognise the impossibility of the Continental system being established amongst us.

Would it, however, be too much to hope that the ladies of England may see fit to adopt the beautiful custom of wearing a special garment for church services? It would be in itself so seemly; it would add so much to the grace and dignity of our worship; it would be so agreeable a contrast to the *parterre* of bonnets in the lecture-room, and the pretty grouping of black and brown and golden hair—yes, and of silver, too—in the opera-house, that I believe the suggestion has only to be fairly considered to be accepted.

I ask, "Will the ladies see fit to do this?" because, after all, it is a woman's question. Men have a right to be considered, but *a woman's dress, to be beautiful, must be the expression of a woman's mind, and the work of a woman's hand.*—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
WYKE BAYLISS.

MR. JOHN ABSOLON, R.I.

52, Chetwynd-road, N.W.

DEAR SIR,—*All padding, unless to hide a positive deformity, is a mistake.* Fashion must be constantly changing, or how would dressmakers live? I remember taking my wife to a friend's in the country. Next

morning the young ladies were invisible, but appeared in the afternoon *without* crinolines. I never submitted to that abomination, and my wife, to please me, never put one on. The young ladies thought Mrs. Absolon brought the last London change!—Truly yours,
JOHN ABSOLON, R.I.

Lastly, let us hear the opinion of a lady artist. Madame Starr Canziani—for years one of the best known lady exhibitors at the Royal Academy, to whom we owe the following designs—writes as follows:—

MADAME STARR CANZIANI.

3, Palace-green, W.

SIR,—I have been asked to give my opinion of modern dress, its merits and demerits, from an artist's point of view. It seems to me that while much at the present time is picturesque and quaint in the extreme, the highest laws of beauty demand fitness as well, and while we have no fixed



DESIGN FOR A TENNIS DRESS.

principles to guide our fashions, however beautiful and sensible they may happen to be at any given moment, there must always

be the danger that at the next moment they may relapse into the inconvenient and ridiculous.

Considering how much has been done of late years to encourage all other forms of art, I cannot help wondering why in the Art Schools now existing all over the country, no classes have been instituted in which the principles of hygiene and fitness, harmony of colour, proportion, and beauty are taught. Architecture and decorative design are taught in the schools, but dress, which has existed since the world began, has no guiding laws, and sways from the severely ugly and matter-of-fact to the wildest extravagance of form and colour in a manner truly grotesque, were it not so sad to those who love ideal beauty, and whose eyes are daily outraged by flagrant sins against the laws of beauty and common sense.

There never was a time in which there was a greater abundance and variety of materials, rich and simple, exquisite embroideries, and lovely combinations of colour; but of what avail are all these beautiful materials if they are erroneously employed? At the present moment—alas! that we only dare speak for the absolute moment—some of the forms of dress are, on the whole, simple and practical, and express the natural figure fairly well; but who can say what wild vagaries the next caprice of the fashion-giver may bring forth?

If the laws of health and beauty were more generally understood, would it be possible that such enormities could exist as tight lacing, and high heels, and pointed toes? I am far from holding in abhorrence all corsets whatever. There are few figures which can do entirely without some stay; but tidiness and a neat, well-fitting gown are very different things from the walking

hour-glass that seems as if it would snap in two at a touch.

But though the stay, when properly used, may be upheld, there is nothing that can be said in excuse of the wicked fashion—wicked, because the cause of much deformity and disease—of the high heel and pointed toe. We all know the mischief done by the very high heel, and from an artistic point of view it is to be condemned, making, as it does, the prettiest foot look like a hoof and destroying all freedom and dignity of gait. The pointed toe distorts the foot from its

natural shape and gives the idea of the front claw of a vulture protruding from the gown, and while it miserably fails in making the foot look small, succeeds only too well in making it hideous. If one sees the whole foot, its width appears very much greater than it really is, by contrast with the point, and the joint of the big toe is brought into most aggressive prominence. If one sees only the end of the shoe peeping from under the dress, in many cases the point with its rapidly diverging lines suggests that the foot hidden by the gown *may* continue to any width, however enormous.

With the square-toed shoe, on the contrary, one has a fair idea of the whole width of the foot at once. It cannot go much beyond that,

and the ideas of discomfort and pain are not constantly forced into one's mind.

Characteristic dresses of the period are the riding habit and tailor-made gown. I humbly confess that I dislike them both, for while they are simple, practical, plain, neat, warm, and on a slender unexaggerated figure, modest—they fail in the quality of womanliness, and therefore cannot be beautiful.

They are not womanly in sentiment. First because (a reason which has little to



DESIGN FOR A BALL DRESS.

do with the scope of this letter) a woman's clothes should be made by a woman only, and all who are loyal to their own sex would employ each other in an occupation so feminine.

Then they are unwomanly because they imitate men's dress, and I don't know that I should make a sin of this, were it not that at the present time men's dress is too truly hideous to be imitated even by a savage of darkest Africa!

It is for this reason that I find the riding habit so ugly and inartistic. Practical it is, but it apes the coat and the hat (!) of the man, and now that his cardboard shirt and collar are often added, I have no words strong enough that I may use to express the depths of my dislike.

I do not agree with the general opinion that a good-looking woman never looks so well as on her horse. If she do look well, I believe it to be in spite of her habit and not because of it, and that all the charm which a well-cut, appropriate, and simple garment can give to a graceful figure could perfectly well be retained, and yet that slightly more liberty might be allowed as to texture of material and colour (though the colour should always be quiet and mellow) and appropriate ornamentation by braiding the body and sleeves of the habit. By these means its hard severity would be somewhat softened, and without destroying the simple lines it would be rendered more feminine, and the fitness of the garment for its purpose would by no means be interfered with.

My objection to tailor-made gowns is that they give no scope for graceful, natural movement. In these the figure is made to fit the dress, and not the dress the figure, and if the wearer lift her arm above her head she must burst—or one feels that, having originally begun as a human being, well, she *ought* to burst if she doesn't. I am not fond of inventing sins, and think we already have enough for all our needs, and I cannot see—to save my life I cannot see—the harm of moving if one wants to do so. The whole costume is a failure so far as beauty and picturesqueness are concerned, but it claims to be practical, and if there were only a little more room in it for all the purposes of life I should say it succeeded well.

It also succeeds in something else. It paints truly the character of the women of the age. Matter-of-fact, sharp, full of common sense, with an eye to the main chance they are, and their tailor-made

gowns express this most clearly. Not much room seemingly is there for romantic or motherly love, for devotion and self-sacrifice, in those tightly-fitting cases.

How different are the women of Sir Joshua Reynolds' time! Delicate, ethereal creatures, with swaying, soft movements, not fit for this hard every-day world. These exquisite beings went out in thinnest of evening shoes into the wet grass. They never wore anything more practical than soft white satin, even in a thunderstorm, and they *never* saw the thunderstorm coming. They knew not of homespun nor of heavy boots, and when their true loves went to the wars, they did not wait until they came back, but went into consumption and died. At least many of them did, though some lived to be our great-grand-mothers.

At any rate it was the proper thing to do in those days, and it is not the proper thing now. No—our maidens no longer faint, and pine, and die, nor do they wait either—they marry someone else!

I confess to a feeling of wonder when I look at Sir Joshua Reynolds and Romney's beautiful women. I wonder how they are going to get away from the pedestal or tree against which they are leaning without distressing very much their soft draperies when they move. But—how tender, how graceful, how refined, how fascinating, how pure and faithful and womanly these gentle beings are! Their dresses were the outcome of the character and customs of the period, but although very feminine and beautiful were not practical, and would not be adapted to our present needs.

And this brings me to what I want to ask. What constitutes fitness and womanliness in dress? Do the dresses of the period possess these qualities? I certainly think not always, and without fitness and womanliness no dress can be artistically beautiful.

To be beautiful, it should be the expression of a beautiful mind, a beautiful body, and of perfect health and ease, and of natural delight in movement.

Also, it should have no association with pain.

No dress can be beautiful that is disfigured by an innocent animal wantonly sacrificed to the vanity and egotism of the wearer.

What womanly woman would wear real astracan on her jacket (if she knows *what* real astracan is), or the corpses of gulls,

doves, humming-birds, swallows, &c., in her hair? No one with a heart could do it, or, having a heart, the brain must be wanting which would enable her to think of the unjustifiable cruelty to which she gives her sanction.

If I were a man, nothing would induce me to marry a girl who would wear a bird in her hat. I should think: "Either she is selfish and cold, and through life would sacrifice everything to her own vanity or interests, or else she has so little mind and judgment that she would be ill able to conduct the affairs of life with discretion."

I should say that never was a pretty face rendered one whit the prettier by the body of a dead animal above it, but that on the contrary the attention is distracted from the living beauty beneath, and the mind is saddened and disgusted by the association of cruelty, and death, and decay, with the tender and beautiful womanhood which should rightly only call forth deepest feelings of admiration and respect.

From these examples it would appear that unless restrained by more general knowledge of guiding principles, dress, as hitherto, will always err by the want of some one necessary quality or another, be it that of beauty or of utility, or by indulgence in the vulgar, masculine, or grotesque.

How lately have we been subjected to the most illogical treatment of fine materials. Magnificent velvets and brocades cut up into "panels" of all sizes and all shapes, expressing nothing unless deformity. Tapering "gores" put wide end up on the skirt, or crossways, or any way except one in which they might help to express the shape—if the human form could be expressed by patches! Add

to these the folds gathered into the aforesaid panels across, sideways, upside down, and the hump behind in the wrong place, and the hats like a huge dish stuck on in front with nothing behind, so that the wearer looks as if she must topple forward for want of balance, and we wonder what the good of civilisation and education can be if they only bring us to this. Truly, that savage in Africa can have little to learn from us in the way of adornment.

Still, we must thankfully acknowledge that at the present moment, amongst the better classes, there is much that is ideal in dress. How simple and how lovely are some of the afternoon gowns, how picturesque the hats and cloaks, and what romances of colour and form may one not find among tea and evening gowns? The tea gown especially lends itself to grace of line and beauty of colour and material.

I should like, before concluding, to say a few words about the most beautiful dress of all times and countries—the Greek. I cannot see why it should not be adopted in England for evening dress, or at any time when the wearer is not exposed to wind and weather. Then, I am fain to confess, the clinging, voluminous draperies and the long skirts would be sadly in the way, and be no longer practical nor beautiful. But I do think that the *principles* governing classical Greek dress should be our guide in all costume. Our garments should be garments with a meaning and a purpose. We should never contradict Nature's simple lines by false protuberances or exaggerations. To be beautiful, clothes should, by their shape, express the figure un-



DESIGN FOR A TEA GOWN.

derneath; any cutting about of material in such a manner as to contradict the natural lines of the shape must be wrong.

If the figure be ungainly, the lines of the dress should be so discreetly managed as to apparently lessen its defects and suggest better proportions to the eye.

The gown should also be in harmony with the character of the mind and form of the wearer, and while quaintness of cut and even frippery (in a sense) may be appropriate to a merely pretty woman, and, discreetly used, may give interest to a plain one, only the very simplest and most flowing forms are worthy of the noblest type of beauty. No one could imagine the Venus of Milo in ribbons or frills, but wrap her in a sheet and her beauty will still dominate the world.

Dress need not be Greek in form to be Greek in spirit. I think we only need look,

and we shall find the following noble qualities in Greek dress:—Fitness and honesty, simplicity, modesty, and dignity. —I am, Sir, your truly,

LOUISA STARR CANZIANI.

It will be seen that, on the whole, the verdict of the artists on the present style of ladies' dress is considerably more favourable than might have been anticipated from the adverse criticism to which it is so commonly exposed. Indeed, the consensus of opinion is one which cannot fail to gratify our lady readers, since, in reality, it affirms not only that they are themselves, as ever, the delight of painters, but that—tomfooleries of tight-lacing and high heels apart—their everyday attire may be so also.
