

DRESS

BY the design of Divine Providence vanity has been from the beginning the virtue of male creatures. That he should take a pride in his physical condition and appearance is a necessity of the male, and vanity is designed for his advancement. This fact is sufficiently obvious throughout the whole of the animal creation, and the peacock, though a flagrant exemplar of the principle, is by no means an exceptionally fine bird. On the other hand, we are not aware of the existence of any female creature which so much as vies with her male, and certainly of none that rivals him. And this fact is as remarkable as it is obvious. There is more in it than meets the eye! Surely it is of Divine origin, and surely a female peacock would be a monstrosity.

But however it may be among the animals, among human beings the case is to-day reversed. Drab clothing is so generally the apparel of the male that the vision of the peacock in his finery suggests to us a female thing and, were it not for his name, we should actually suppose him to be a she.

This is a remarkable state of affairs and it has even been stated as a law: "Finery is for the male in all creatures except the human." It is suggested that this vanity of the human female is but another proof of the difference and superiority of humanity as compared with animals.

We believe the time has come to make a stand against this inversion of the natural order. We believe that vanity and personal conceit are as much the right and proper accompaniment of the male among human beings as among animals. Among women, we shall maintain, vanity is *ipso facto* vicious—a sign of degradation, a proof of departure from the Divine plan, the fruit of irreligion and sexual abnormality and abandon.

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And by vanity we do not mean merely an excess of regard for personal appearance or physical condition. We are not thinking only of those who use powder and paint upon their persons or of those who wear high heels or tight corsets. We are thinking of all those who take the least pride in their looks, all those who give so much as half a thought to the question of what other people will think about them. Excessive vanity is not the only kind of vanity—and, for the matter of that, what is excessive? It is a purely relative term, and without principles to guide us we shall be quite unable to judge the particular degree of tightness in a corset or highness in a heel which constitutes excess.

Now the guiding principle is the one with which we head this scripture. Vanity is virtue in the male and, *per contra*, vice in the female. Such is the will of God. Any practice or custom which is based upon an inversion of this principle is impious. And, from this point of view, both men and women are in these times at fault. If woman is to blame for decorating herself like a strumpet, man also is to blame for neglecting and eschewing his birthright. Again, if it be wrong for women to wear frills and feathers, lace-edged undergarments and bright silk garters, it is equally wrong for men to encourage them and to make money out of their depravity. The newspapers and periodicals of to-day are filled from end to end with the most barefaced flatteries of woman's perverted taste, and modesty and self-effacement, which are the proper virtues of the female, have, in the course of the last four hundred years, become the attributes of the male. Man is to-day the modest sex—woman the immodest.

It is the fashion for men to wear coats and trousers so that when you see such garments you may generally suppose their wearer to be a male. But it is not the

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fashion of her clothes by which you know a woman. Fashions change too rapidly to have any such useful quality. No, in the case of women you know them by the sexual attributes which many are at such pains to display. So that vanity, which leads to no harmful but only beneficent results in man, leads in woman to every depravity, and of which mere exhibitionism is the least. Vanity in men does not lead to sexual exhibitions, because women are not inflammable in that way and are more frightened than pleased by it. Vanity in women, on the other hand, leads directly to physical display, because man is the most inflammable creature on earth and has no physical fear of contact with woman.

That woman should be the immodest sex is in fact the most astonishing anomaly. Such a state of affairs is always the accompaniment of decadence and that thing of which decadence is the result—irreligion. It cannot be too plainly stated. The dress of modern women is the dress of the prostitute. The fashions of Park Lane and South Kensington and Upper or even Lower Tooting are based upon the fashions of Piccadilly. Do the women know it? No, even nuns do not, and they are shocked at the mention of such a thing. For woman still retains a certain innocence and all her ancient irrationality. Should a boy wear coloured socks they call him effeminate, whereas he is simply boyish. Does he do so that women may admire his ankles? Such an idea does not occur to him, and naturally it does not because, though girls are quite capable of admiration of a boy's limbs, their admiration is normally quite dispassionate. This is obvious when you consider how nearly naked men can be in games or races without any serious notice being taken by women, whereas it is impossible to imagine a boxing match between two women, naked but for short drawers, without dangerous results.

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But consider the case of the girl with short skirts and coloured stockings. If she denies that she wears such things to attract men, she is either a liar or an idiot. In this matter girls are brought up to be idiots nowadays. Their grandmothers wore paddings round their hips to make themselves look bulgily attractive. The modern girl plays another game and wears as little as possible—in all innocence very often. But it is time the thing were unmasked. It is no use saying things have gone too far, women should be more careful, girls should be more modest, and so on. That is not the line to take in this business. The truth of the matter is that vanity in dress is not a female concern. Nuns, nurses, and servant-maids are the only decently dressed women. Women should dress in uniforms and be thoroughly covered up. All mirrors should be taken away from them, and they should learn to wear their hats upon their heads instead of upon their faces. It is quite easily done, with a little practice. And above all, the world should be spared the horrid sight of elderly women, parsons' wives, and the wives of Cabinet Ministers, dressed to look attractive. Being good is more important than fashionable appearance, and no one will be able to stop them from learning the penny catechism and the rules of modesty.

Man is, on the whole, a more reasonable creature than woman, and vanity, his proper accomplishment, may safely be left in his care without fear of its running away with him. He has not time for unprofitable strutting in the streets or gaping in shop windows. Certainly the display in shops of feminine garments, whether of hats or frocks or underclothes, should be punishable at common law as an unwarrantable indecency and an insult to common sense.

Vanity in women is mere personal display, and women should not display their persons. Vanity in

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men is simply "good form," so that a man looking into a mirror does not see himself but the world. In a woman, clothes are a means to the enhancement of her own beauty—in a man they are an enhancement of the beauty of things in general. So it is that when, as too frequently happens, a woman plays the piano she is only interested in her own performance, whereas a man goes even so far as to take a passing interest in the music. Everything is for women a means of personal display; for man everything is a means to creation.

But let it not be supposed that men and women, pure and simple, are anywhere to be found. We are all mixtures of one another, in our minds as in our bodies, and every male is more or less female, every female more or less male. In most persons, however, the male or the female is predominant, and the vast majority of men are only slightly female and of women only slightly male. It is therefore possible to distinguish between the sexes and to say what properly belongs to each. Fundamentally, it is child-bearing that makes the difference. A woman knows her own child, but it is a wise man that knows his own father, and the great act of life is for woman a personal achievement, while for man it is a mystery.

Women are by the grace of God our mothers. They have everything to gain and nothing to lose by modesty. By display and vanity they have gained nothing and have come near to losing man's respect.* Vanity in man is respectable for it does neither him nor woman any harm, and, being naturally more creative and artistic than woman, he makes it the means of beauty instead of mere loveliness. The loveableness of women does not need the enhancement of indelicate frippery, and the problem of the million "odd

* This is an exhibition of male but rational vanity.

“ As Little Children ”

women ” can be better dealt with than by making prostitutes of them all.

Listen ! In the Isles of Arran they give and are given in marriage. Yet their women are entirely covered by their shawls, and they have crucifixes instead of mirrors in their bedrooms.

ERIC GILL.



“ AS LITTLE CHILDREN ”

SHE kneels, her innocent, quiet eyes
Know Wisdom deeper than the wise.
Her baby hands are lifted up ;
Praying, she holds as in a cup
The whole wide world ; for “ great ” and “ small ”
Man made—God knows them not at all
And things we deem as nought may be
Nearest His dread infinity.

DOROTHY FRANCES GURNEY.

