

# How Low? A Question of Woman's Gowns

## What Physicians, Modistes and Social Leaders Say of Decollete



A Style of Some Years Ago.



Fashionable Decollete of 1905.



What Appealed to Fashion Followers in 1906.



A French Christmas Style.

WHEN it was gravely stated a little while ago—during the pro-grip period of the winter—that a leading society woman of the ultra New York-Newport set was suffering from illness, and that this misfortune was attributed to her predilection for extreme decollete gowns, that old but ever new and interesting question, "How low?" had a recrudescence.

Should women wear low-necked gowns at all? If so, how low? And, after all, is the decollete of fashion a question to be dealt with by the doctors, as one of health; by modistes, as belonging entirely to the realm of style, or by women themselves, as one of ethics?

Says a physician: "Extreme decollete is rarely harmful to health." A society leader asserts: "It is a question of taste—and the figure"; and a modiste declares that there is a tendency toward wearing evening gowns cut as low as possible.

So there you are.

G fair undress, best dress, it checks no vein, but every flowing limb in pleasure drains, and heightens ease with grace.—Thomson.

"R EALLY, she ought to show better taste. It's quite disgraceful." So the tall, lean lady whispered to the corpulent grand dame who sat just by.

"Look, look," she murmured behind her fan, her eyes fastened on a lovely creature who stood in the middle of the ballroom, surrounded by numbers of the male species.

Happily ignorant of criticism, the object of their remarks simply radiated glittering smiles, talked in a voice that tripped like music and set the hearts of her devotees fluttering. About the wall stood the wallflowers.

"I wouldn't wear such extreme decollete for the world," muttered a maiden lady, done up respectably to the top of her neck in brown. "Nor would I, if I were you," responded the corpulent grand dame graciously.

Can't you picture the scene? Haven't you heard the discussions over this old but ever new subject, now revived because of published accounts of the illness of a New York leader of fashion—discussions not so much as to whether or not a low-necked gown should be worn as to how low the gown may properly be made.

It's an absorbing question. Ask a doctor, and he'll discuss it from a medical standpoint; a clergyman will view the matter, perhaps, from another; modistes have their own views, and so have the women who wear evening gowns.

When the question was first asked no one knows definitely. It was some time after the adoption of fig leaves in Eden and Eve began to tire of natural attire. Nevertheless, it has doubtless traced its way down through the ages, as feminine raiment has shown a greater or less tendency to the decollete since the fig-leaf period.

### VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW

Of late years the steady trend in the downward course of evening dress has provoked protesting cries. In the pulpit clergymen have taken up the subject and cautioned the ladies to remember the first fall; physicians have told them of dangers to health, of the possibility of catching cold as they drifted from the warm ballroom into the cold night; of pneumonia, hoarseness of the voice and other more or less dangerous maladies.

Expounders of etiquette, in women's magazines, have told of the bad taste of the garments or parts of garments that are never made; while persons with a taste for gossip have made the decollete dress a personal matter, and have thrown mental vitriol on the fair necks of the ladies in full undress.

Some ladies, hearing of grave danger to health, have been perturbed seriously by the medical issues aroused. It was with tears and lamentations, undoubtedly, that ladies with Mile. Nazimova necks covered up the swan-like fairness, nearly breaking their hearts. For them the verdict of a leading physician regarding the evening dress will come as glad tidings.

"Is there any danger in the low-necked dress?" was the question put to him.

"There is little danger to the wearer's health, if she take proper precautions outside the ballroom," he responded.

Then this question was put to several society leaders: "Is it bad taste to wear decollete—extreme decollete?" And the consensus of their replies—they were all lovely women—reduced, meant just this: "It is bad taste—for the woman without a figure. It all depends on the figure."

Modistes assert that the decollete garment is not only increasing in popularity, but is steadily getting lower and lower, so low, in fact, that white tulle is used to give a suggestion at least of some kind of clothing.

making headway among the women of the United States—that is, the women with figures. Of course, it may be mentioned that various eccentricities of dress have become popular lately, one being modeled on the ancient Egyptian costume, and the other an adaptation of the Grecian tunic. Whether the future will see evening dress resolve itself into a combination of the low neck and the Grecian tunic, after the fashion of the dainty thing Miss Psyche wears in paintings, is a question.

Several months ago a professor at a seminary for young women in New Jersey was so grieved and embarrassed by the appearance of a clergyman's daughter at dinner table in a low-necked dress that he asked her to leave the room.

The young lady is 18, pretty, graceful, charming and modest. She had worn the dress before, and no one had taken offense. But the professor is said to be a very

modest man, and when he first saw the young woman his cheeks actually flamed, he dropped his eyes, and is said to have muttered that he wished the floor had opened and swallowed him. So painful was the situation that he asked the young woman to retire.

Of course, there was considerable comment; her dress, the young ladies said, was not so low at that. Be that as it may, his action raised a discussion of the question in many seminaries for girls.

But as the question is one which needed an expert's opinion an interview was sought with Dr. J. Madison Taylor, an eminent practitioner.

"From a hygienic standpoint there is no danger to health whatever in the decollete dress," declared Dr. Taylor. "I have never come across a case where a woman contracted an illness by wearing a low-necked dress."

### QUESTION OF MORALS

"In fact, from a hygienic standpoint, it is better to wear too little clothing than too much. The question is not one of hygiene—it is a moral question."

"Then, from a hygienic standpoint, you mean there is no limit to the lowness of women's dress."

This was making a pun. But Dr. Taylor was serious. "Decidedly," he said. "For one reason, a woman can stand more exposure than a man. Her circulatory system is more elastic and capable of modification than a man's. Besides, the upper part of the body is the least susceptible. It is rather dangerous to expose the abdomen and lower part of the back; in tropical countries even the savages cover these parts. The Turk and Arab

always have something about the waist. "So far as the decollete dress is concerned, unless a woman is ill or there is a lowered resistance, there is no danger to her health. From the standpoint of health she may wear the waist as low as decency permits. I should say the proper depth would be to the fourth or fifth dorsal vertebra in the back and to the curve of the breast in front."

This seems to be the general opinion of physicians. Of course, it's quite safe to ask this question of a doctor. But it's awkward to ask a lady "how low" she would wear her evening dress.

"Well, this is a delicate matter," murmured a society leader who was approached on the subject. "But, from my standpoint, the question is one of taste. A woman whose skin is ugly and shriveled would certainly show bad taste to wear a low-necked gown. But a woman with a pretty figure and beautiful skin, I should say, could wear the dress as low as she wishes."

"How low might a woman wear her evening dress? It's entirely a personal question," declared another society leader. "Any suggestion of impropriety is absurd. Be this spiteful or not, it represents the opinion of a woman who realizes that the human figure is beautiful and who displays her charms artistically is to be admired—there are comparatively few who do. I look with delight to the time when a beautiful woman will not have to hesitate about the cut of her dresses for fear of unpleasant remarks. The minds of the people who comment are debased. They are vulgar."

Another well-known woman, unmarried and not beautiful, said tersely: "A woman can wear her dresses low in accordance with the lowness of her morals."

The whole nation shuddered when the horrible tale came to light, and the whole nation demanded: "What demon inspired the Parliament?"

Now comes Dr. James H. Hyslop, expert on psychic phenomena and head of the American Society for Psychical Research, who avers that persons accused of various crimes should be turned over to the experts of the society for examination as to their condition. In order to determine whether the real criminal is the normal self, or some other self who converts the individual into a demon and then vanishes, to let the normal person pay the fearful penalty. He declares:

"Many persons are punished unjustly for crimes committed by another personality which gets control of their bodies and makes them irresponsible for their acts.

"Dual personality has been known to science for years, and people afflicted with it have been known to do all manner of queer things. Some of them have committed murder; others have become thieves, and it has affected still others in different ways.

### HYPNOSIS IN COURT?

"The government ought to let our society take hold of cases where there is the slightest suspicion that a crime has been committed by a man while under the influence of a second self. We would go into the courts, and by hypnosis induce the subject to tell of his acts at the time the crime was committed.

"That such results can be secured by hypnosis is evident from the case of Ansel Bourne, a Connecticut preacher, who lost his identity and lived for months as another individual.

"He could remember nothing of his life as Bourne, and when his normal self returned he did not know anything about the period in which he was possessed by another personality which made him do all manner of strange things.

"When his normal self was restored, Professor William James, of Harvard, and I hypnotized him, and he told freely of everything he did while under the control of his second personality.

"Now, I contend that there are many similar instances in everyday life. Normal, sane men become afflicted with dual personality and are changed to demons. When in this state the demon that controls them commits some terrible crime and then sinks into oblivion to let the real personality reassert itself and reap the reward of punishment.

"Dual personality may be caused by many things. A blow on the head or a sunstroke may set free a devil inside a man that may do all manner of damage before it loses control of the motor centers."

Shall we, because of the demons that are likely to possess us, revise our courts of law and be careful to let an expert in psychic science sit in judgment upon all crimes?

decollete dresses as low as they can be worn," said a modiste, an authority. "Of late the French fashions are becoming popular, and the extreme style in vogue in England is becoming apparent. You can see this in any production of grand opera. The new style is a V-shape in the back and square in front. When the cut is extreme, white tulle or veiling is worn to protect the skin.

"There is absolutely no falling off in the demand for decollete dresses; my experience, and that of other modistes, proves that more women are wearing them, and the cut has become lower."

And, hygienically, physicians say, women can go as far as they like; in fact, from the point of health, it is true that the less clothing worn the healthier one becomes. If it is a question of taste, to be determined by the beauty of the lady—as many ladies aver—"How Low" becomes a personal question. The poet says:

Loveless Needs not the foreign aid of ornament, But is, when unadorned, adorned the most.

### Filipino Women Are Very "Advanced"

THE only strong-minded woman in Manila," said a recent visitor to the Philippines, "are the upper class Filipino women. They have clubs and talk of women's rights as glibly as the women of this country. They are strong advocates of women's suffrage, and to listen to the speeches of some of the Filipino women one could almost imagine herself at a woman's suffrage meeting in New York.

"The American women, however, do not bother with the political and economical problems of the day. They have no time for serious things. There is not a single club of American women in Manila, although there are bridge whist parties plenty. The American women are so busy having a good time that they cannot bother with politics.

"Bridge whist is the favorite pastime among the older women, while the younger set prefers dancing. Manila is a paradise for young women. The town is gay and giddy. Every one there soon becomes possessed of the native spirit of irresponsibility, and there is nothing to live for except enjoyment. Those who think that going to Manila is going into exile make a great mistake. Manila is a pleasure ground, pure and simple.

"Dances and other lively parties are the order almost every night. They have an army set, a navy set, an official set and various other sets composed of foreign government representatives and persons whose business brings them to Manila.

"There are representatives of almost every nation there, and consequently the cliques are many. But no lines are drawn. Every one knows every one else and all absorb the spirit of gaiety. There is no reason why any girl who goes to Manila should not have a glorious time.

"The upper class Filipinos mix with the foreigners to some extent. But those Filipinos are dreadfully formal. They never give nor do they attend informal affairs. In fact, they would not know what to do at them. The upper class Filipino is in custom and tradition a Spaniard, and a Spaniard is the most formal person in the world.

"The women in Manila dress exceedingly well. If anything, their costumes are more gay than those of the women in New York or other large American cities. They wear a great deal of the native stuffs in their gowns, although most of the time the women are dressed in white because of the intense heat. The clothes, however, are of fashionable cut, for the latest fashions spread to Manila after their adoption in American cities.

"I believe that one of the reasons Manila has no women's clubs is that there is no servant problem, out there. The Chinese make excellent servants, and one can get as many of them as he or she wants. There is never any need to worry about servants, but, then, worry is not in the atmosphere out there. Tomorrow in Manila always is better than today."

### Scrap Books of Royalty

THE emperor of Austria saves his valuable time by having a book of cuttings prepared for him every morning by his secretary. These cuttings represent all the principal news of the day, and the emperor is thus able to acquaint himself with all the most important news without wading through page after page of the newspapers.

It is the duty of his majesty's secretary to slip the columns of the cuttings into a daintily-bound leather case, and the emperor peruses this little volume at his breakfast table.

In the event of any of the articles being very long, however, the secretary has to condense them and present them to his majesty in typewritten form.

The Princess of Wales possesses a unique scrap album, in which all sorts of cuttings from the society papers relating to herself and her royal relatives are preserved. The title of this book is suggestive, for her witty royal highness has labeled it: "Words We Never Spoke; Things We Never Did."

The majority of European rulers subscribe to press-cutting agencies, and so great is their desire for information that they insist on reading everything which is written about them, whether favorable or otherwise.

# WHAT DEVIL POSSESSES YOU?

"GENTLEMEN of the jury, the evidence having made it clear that the defendant was under the control of the demon Belial when he killed the lady with the icpick, you will return a verdict of involuntary manslaughter."

There is a possible form of the future ruling of a criminal court judge in an ordinary murder case, if the demands of the most advanced American investigators of psychic phenomena should ever be complied with.

For belief in demons, universal at the beginning of the Christian era, laughed at in the century past, is again winning adherents.

EVERY little while some fresh evidence is presented that demons have not altogether been driven from the world. While one great and living church still insists upon the possession of the terrestrial activity of a wide variety of devils, many other churches join with it in averring the existence and the unflagging energy of the devil—that ancient and once universally recognized enemy of God and man—Satan.

Between the two orders of faith, and at an equal distance from those calm, assured souls who are sure the devil is dead, and that, if there is to be any hereafter, it's bound to be a happy one, modern science stands still very dubious.

It doesn't believe in demons, yet it is far from feeling certain that "dual personality" is untrue. It rather inclines to believe now that dual personality is most uncomfortably true.

### SCIENCE AT SEA

Then, who shall say that another personality is merely a fragment of the original personality, split up? Science, which has also learned its fractions, likes to think that; but science cannot say, with any assurance whatever, that the other personality is anything less than something demoniacal, or anything more than something divine, which has taken possession of the subject who shows evidence of having two separate natures.

It is not worth while, since so many churches yet hold to the faith in the existence of demons, which was set forth plainly in the writings of the New Testament, and since scoffing science dare not wear its habitual, cynical sneer, to ask one's self, at times, which demon possesses him?

Is it Belial, the demon, who turns away love's glances and makes sin of the passion which is the foundation of the loftiest virtue? Or is it Lucifer, or Beelzebub, or Apollyon, or some other one of the hierarchy of hell who rage, each with his especial incitement to sin, from gluttony to overreaching ambition?



Whether it is yourself, or a part of yourself, or a part of the legion of fiends that originally attached themselves to the generations of the sons of men, depends largely on the way we look at it.

But that some demons, or some other personalities, demoniacal or human, take possession of the helpless brain and body and will is being averred, as a defense, with greater and greater frequency by offenders against the recognized law, from the Pittsburg tramp arrested some weeks ago, who alleged he was trying to escape a demon of gluttony, that manifested its devilishness by compelling him to drink liquor, to the latest woman who has killed her babies because some devil prompted her to do it.

The most notorious case of belief in demons occurred in the fall, when, in Illinois, a group of Parliamentarians, offshoots of Dow's Zion, believed that aged Letitia Greenhaugh, twisted and bent with thirty years of rheumatism, was in the cruel clutches of a devil.

Her own children some of them, while others were bound to her by marriage ties, they obeyed the behest