

# WHAT IT COSTS A YOUNG GIRL TO BE WELL DRESSED

By Inis H. Weed.

A LITTLE shop girl once said to me with a sigh: "I've never really envied rich girls, except at one point, and that is their ability to appear always immaculate, always daintily-exquisitely groomed in every respect." Just how much does it cost to be in the mode and have enough shirtwaists and all the other accessories to be quite beyond reproach?

Few of us know, for we are too busy to keep separate accounts. Budgets to show how much the different grades of workingmen's families spend for clothing have been painstakingly compiled by students of sociology, but no one has studied the leisure class in such a way as to secure definite information as to their standards of expenditure in matters of dress.

The position of teacher in one of the old conservative girls' schools in New York has given me the opportunity to collect from the girls in the senior class budgets on dress.

By way of introduction it might be well to say that these girls represent families of English-Teutonic stock, most of whom have lived in New York, New England, and New Jersey for three generations.

The girls are from 18 to 20 years of age, and completing their senior year in a private school which most of them have attended for ten years or more. Most of the girls who intend to go to college leave at the conclusion of the preparatory work. This leaves in the last two years a larger percentage than otherwise who are unlikely to be factors in the professional world, who will stay at home to add comfort to their family and "grace" to society, as most of their parents are convinced that all well-brought-up girls of this class should.

## Standards of Dress.

The impression gained on entering the senior room is of a group of girls whose dressing is relatively simple and quiet and whose manners correspond.

I say relatively, because, while one sees fewer extremes in dress than at Barnard College, for example, one more than suspects some of the hats and waists would be elaborate beside those of girls in French and English schools, where the dressing is delightfully simple and unpretentious.

Nevertheless, an American teacher entering the room would be conscious that these girls came from homes that must, in America, be counted quiet in matters of taste. She might get the gratifying impression, too, so unobtrusive in most instances is the dress, that they represent families who spend little for clothes.

Is this pleasingly quiet dress, however, attained at a relatively small cost?

It may be premised for the benefit of the masculine reader who has had no experience in finding the wherewithal to meet bills for feminine apparel that, with the exception of a few articles, the simple hats and gowns desired by women of refinement are costly and the elaborate, over-trimmed things are more easily within reach of her purse.

I have endeavored to estimate what these young women spend for this dressing, the result of which is such a pleasing simplicity.

They were asked to state the prices paid for certain articles of wearing apparel and the number bought per year. Those articles were chosen which usually are made outside the home and which normally constitute about two-thirds of the amount spent for dress.

At the same time they were asked to state the prices they would pay and the

number they would buy if they did not have to practice what they would consider economy.

A study of the following table is of interest. The numbers given are the median, and coincide closely with the modes: SOCIAL STANDARD, EFFECTIVE STANDARD. Based on "If I had all the money I wished."

Price each.	No.	Price each.	No.
Hats, street... 4 \$13.00	Hats, street... 3 \$8.50	Hats, dress... 2 13.75	Hats, dress... 2 13.75
Hats, dress... 4 27.50	Hose, pair... 8 4.75	Hose, pair... 8 4.75	Hose, pair... 8 4.75
Boots... 12 6.50	Hose, pair... 8 4.75	Hose, pair... 8 4.75	Hose, pair... 8 4.75
Boots, pair... 24 6.50	Tailor-made suits... 3 45.00	Tailor-made suits... 3 45.00	Tailor-made suits... 3 45.00
Hose, pair... 12 2.00	Undergarments, sets... 8 4.00	Undergarments, sets... 8 4.00	Undergarments, sets... 8 4.00
Tailor-made suits... 4 75.00	Shirtwaists... 13-14 4.00	Shirtwaists... 13-14 4.00	Shirtwaists... 13-14 4.00
Undergarments, sets... 12			

Total, plus 1/2, \$2,076 Total, plus 1/2, \$350.00

The attempt to tabulate the number and cost of various undergarments was not successful because these young women, as a rule, do not seem to know very much about the subject, beyond the style of garments preferred.

I did learn that eight sets are the effective standard and twelve sets the number desired, and that in the matter of shirt waists thirteen or fourteen are the actual need, and for those shirt waists bought ready made or made outside the home the cost tends to hover around \$3.

Summing up the amounts paid for hats, boots, hose, tailor-made suits, and evening gowns, and adding one-third for separate coats, furs, gloves, neckwear, wash dresses, shirt waists, and underwear, we get an annual expenditure of \$556, which gives some idea of what this quiet dressing costs the head of the house.

Summing up the amount they would like to spend per year if they did not have to practice what they consider economy, we get \$2,076, nearly four times the amount actually spent.

This standard to which they are trying to conform gives us some idea of the social pressure which is being brought to bear on these girls.

It is even more interesting to estimate the amount paid by two different groups of girls in the class, the one a very simply dressed group with rather definite intellectual interests, the other a group of rather more definite social interests.

Social Standard, Group II.	Social Standard, Group I.	Effective Standard, Group II.	Effective Standard, Group I.
Hats— 4 at \$15.00	3 at \$15.00	3 at \$8.75	4 at \$5.00
4 at 25.00	2 at 23.75	4 at 15.00	2 at 8.00
Hose— 14 at 7.00	8 at 5.00	8 at 4.75	6 at 4.12
Hose— 24 at .50	22 at .50	30 at .34	11 at .35
18 at 2.00	9 at 2.00	12 at 2.00	3 at 1.50
Tailors— 4 1/2 at 95.00	3 at 71.25	4 at 50.00	2 at 30.00
Evening dresses— 15 at 100.00	5 at 71.25	5 at 45.00	3 at 27.00
Undergarments— 12 at 18.00	9 at 13.50	7 at 10.50	5 at 7.50
Total 1-1-3, \$3,000	1-3, \$900	1-3, \$900	1-3, \$300

The first spends slightly over \$300 per year for clothes, the second nearly \$900. Each group would, if it could, spend three and one-half times as much, nearly \$900 in the one case and \$3,500 in the other.

Some one seeing the item, fifteen evening gowns at \$100 each, will think the gowns so large an item that the total of the column represents more than two-thirds of the expense, but the costly evening coats, furs, and the hand-embroidered undergarments in the remaining third must not be overlooked, nor the large number of wash dresses used in Summer.

The sums quoted do give, I am certain, a relative measure of the social pressure brought to bear by unreasonable and false standard of dress.

So far as one may judge by figures from this limited number of cases the standards of cost in dressing tend to increase in proportion with the income.

This was once true for both men and

## Actual Facts Given by a Student of Sociology Which Were Obtained from a Class of Young Women in a Private School.

women, but it does not hold for modern masculine apparel after a certain point is reached. A commercial age has required the adaptation of costume to the purposes of business. The same age has seen a relative simplification in the dress of women.

Why, then, does the expenditure continue to increase? Divers men will give you diverse answers. One says in the richest age the world has ever seen women have lost their heads. One sociologist, Dr. F. H. Giddings, considers that the principle of sexual selection plays the most important part in the problem, showing that it has worked out negatively by resulting in a decrease of the number of marriages proportionately.

### Theories of the Increase.

Doubtless this is a factor, but there are other fundamental reasons. I found it interesting to examine Mr. Veblen's theory of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous waste and compare it with the tendencies found in these budgets.

He points out in his "Theory of the Leisure Classes" that men's force came to be measured by the degree of their pecuniary success, and that in turn by the amount of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous waste they were able to compass.

This brave display on the part of powerful men in ancient times was greatly enhanced by the conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption of servants and wives; thus the head of the house came to enjoy a vicarious consumption of leisure and goods.

An industrial age has necessitated a decrease for men in the amount of conspicuous personal leisure and conspicuous personal waste formerly indicated in matters of dress, but the vicarious enjoyment has gone on through the wife, the imitation of this standard extending down the scale even into families of the lower class.

The theory seems reasonable as one sits in the balcony on opera night and watches stream down the aisle a procession of black, beetlelike creatures, in plain, inconspicuous coats, accompanying exquisitely gowned matrons wearing jewels that would put a poor man's family on the pleasant side of want.

Mr. Veblen says, too, that the standard of conspicuous waste is as high as the earning capacity of each class will permit—with a tendency to go higher. In the matter of clothes, he points out, that waste has grown less conspicuous because so great a mass of wealth has been accumulated by such numbers of people that "any aspersion on the score of enforced manual employment would be idle and blameless calumny." The result is that the emulation is within the group.

"Loud" dress becomes offensive to people of taste, as evincing an undue desire to reach and impress the untrained sensibilities of the vulgar. The result of all this is a refinement of methods, a resort to subtler contrivances.

Also, as the upper leisure class sets the pace in matters of decency, the result for the rest of society is a gradual amelioration of the scheme of dress. In analyzing the causes of con-

spicuous waste, he emphasizes not only the emulation involved and its modern refinement, but also the effect of custom and its reaction. In the first place certain standards of dress have been established, and no one can measure the sway of established usage, so great is its power.

It is a commonplace that we would rather stay at home than attend a function at which all our neighbors will wear tall, cylindrical hats if ours be a different shape. We cannot endure the mortification.

A secondary effect of accepted standards is, as Mr. Veblen says, that the "requirement of expensiveness is so ingrained into our habits of thought in matters of dress that any other than expensive apparel is instinctively odious to us." Without reflection or analysis we feel that what is inexpensive is unworthy. "A cheap coat makes a cheap man." An inexpensive imitation of a costly hand-wrought article, even though one cannot detect the difference, if detected by the microscope of the expert immediately seems less beautiful and its cost declines accordingly. The article is odious to us.

His analysis of conspicuous leisure in relation to dress is equally suggestive. Wearing apparel must not only demonstrate our pecuniary success, but it must also suggest our leisure. It must bear no mark of wear or of productive labor.

To this same end of suggesting leisure it has been made inconvenient, witness the long skirt, the high French heel, and the frill of lace falling over the hand.

These three suggestions of leisure, newness, spotlessness, and inconvenience, were reinforced by mutilation, a barbarity which still exists in a mild form.

It was obvious that the woman whose feet were bound could not work, nor could her Western sister who gloried in an eighteen-inch waist be a very useful factor in industry. So subservient is our aesthetic sense to the insignia of leisure that, though the bound foot of the Chinese woman was ugly to the Western man of leisure, his daughter's fragile waist, delicate hands and high-heeled slipper—lo, they were lovely in the eyes of all his countrymen. We have only to recall some of the women of Dickens and Thackeray by way of illustration.

I cannot forbear quoting at this point bits from Walter Besant's description of the woman of 1837 who "has been to a fashionable school; she has learned accomplishments, deportment, and dress. She is full of sentiment; there was an amazing amount of sentiment in the air at that time; she loved to read about gallant knights, crusaders, and troubadours; she gently touches the guitar; her sentiment, or her little affectation, has touched her with a graceful melancholy, a becoming stoop, a sweet pensiveness. She loves the aristocracy even though her home is in Bloomsbury, whether the belted earl cometh not. \* \* \* As for doing serious work a girl of that period shrank back appalled at the very thought. To earn one's living was to be disgraced; \* \* \* a woman was not allowed to teach dancing, for a most praiseworthy reason—you cannot teach dancing without show-

ing more than the tips of the toes—half the foot perhaps. Where, then, is feminine modesty?

"Nor must we forget her little affectations. She could not help them; they were a part of her education. For instance, it was a very common affectation with girls that they could not eat anything at all, such was their extraordinary delicacy and elevation above the common mortal. So they sat at dinner with a morsel upon their plate which they left untouched; some girls made up for this in private by a valient lunch; some habitually lived low and practiced, though in no religious spirit, abstemious austerities. I think, however, that the girl who wished to be thought consumptive, cultivated, a hectic bloom and coughed and fainted, carried affectation perhaps too far."

### Return to Vitality Standard.

"In modern communities which have reached the higher levels of industrial development," writes Mr. Veblen, "the upper leisure class, has accumulated so great a mass of wealth as to place its women above all imputation of vulgarly protective labor," so we find the ephemeral standard for women which succeeded the age when women were valued for their service and were accordingly vigorous, like Homer's Nausicaa standing by the river like a young palm tree, gradually changes back to something more nearly Greek.

To return to the question asked, why the cost of women's dress continues to increase beyond the maximum for men, the answer would be, according to this theory, that in an industrial age the demonstration of pecuniary success by conspicuous consumption of leisure and goods has been delegated to women.

Let us review our facts and discover in how far they support Mr. Veblen's analysis.

In the first place, the increasing expenditure for the different groups correlated with the desire to spend far more, would seem to bear out the argument that the conspicuous waste is "commonly as high as the earning capacity with a tendency to go higher."

The unusually quiet dressing of these senior girls and the subtleties of expense, the differentiation that would be obvious only to people of their own class, the exquisitely dainty undergarments, the expensive gowns worn to private affairs, as compared with street clothes, the hand-embroidery, the hand-wrought articles of jewelry, illustrate the statement that the emulation of people of wealth is coming to be within the class and accordingly subtle.

The pressure brought to bear through custom and ingrained expensive tastes is too obvious to need discussion.

Let us examine next the evidences of dress on the part of the seniors as expressions of conspicuous leisure. As to spotlessness, a fresh shirtwaist each day is the standard. The necessity of newness is fully borne out by the budgets on dress.

All the girls avow themselves against tight corsets, with the exception of one girl, who cautiously observes, "Not too

tight," and another who says "Tight around the hips but not around the waist." The best proof of their sincerity is their own standard as to a proper waist measure, which runs from 21 to 26 1/2 inches, with 77 per cent. from 24 to 26 inches.

The modern corset has lost its injurious curve in front and has acquired a relatively straight line, thanks to the firmness of a popular grand opera singer who insisted that Worth adapt her gowns to her vocal powers. The exaggerated curve at the side of the waist line, though still abnormal, is being somewhat modified.

While such waists are not yet Greek in their proportions, they are a distinct advance over the standards of our grandmothers.

Fancy those women not having an idea of what constituted a proper waist measure, like some of the girls in this class who really had no opinion on the subject except that the waist should be natural! Indeed, few girls of refinement to-day regard tight lacing as other than cheap and common. These girls, too, fail to understand the old code of etiquette by which a hearty appetite was taboo for a gently bred woman.

Besides a decrease in the matter of mutilation, there has been a very great decrease in point of inconvenience.

The train is seldom seen on streets, and the multitude of underskirts which our grandmothers thought were required by certain exigencies of the weather have been replaced by tights and a single underskirt in keeping with the tailored skirt, which change, together with the popularity of short walking skirts, has made walking more of a joy than it could possibly have been to our grandmothers.

Witness, too, the stout, sensible boots, the dogskin gloves, and the decrease in French heels for street wear. Though in the matter of shoes our opportunity for congratulation is rather limited. These girls were asked to state the highest heel they would wear on street shoes, and on dress shoes. The mode for the first proved to be an elevation of 1 1/2 inches, for the second an elevation of 2 inches.

This modern girl, especially the American girl, with her expensive tastes and love of extremes, has still many follies, especially in the matter of hats, but viewed in perspective the adoption of modes which do not cripple the body and impede its ease of locomotion is a distinct gain in the right direction.

To return to another explanation of the increased cost, the principle of sexual selection, it does undoubtedly play too important a rôle. I have not studied it enough to justify my discussing it. But that it does not play the most important rôle I feel sure—e. g., the dressing suffers no abatement in girl's schools and colleges where the girls are cut off from the society of men for weeks and months at a time. Nor does it explain the expensive dressing of married women.

There is one phase of American women's dressing for American men that I should like to comment on. Women, whose aesthetic sense is formed by the canons of art, and who strive to dress simply and inconspicuously, soon discover that this manner of attire does not elicit so much admiration from men as more pronounced styles.

It is a truism that in New York a man would rather take to the theatre or a fashionable tea room a homely woman smartly gowned than a beautiful one whose clothes are of uncertain style. His admiration helps to maintain the extrava-

gant standard which is decreasing the marriage rate.

To my mind, conspicuous consumption of leisure and goods furnishes the most fundamental explanation. The best proof of this is the sharp disapproval among men of the upper and middle class at the idea of their daughters' or sisters' engaging in paid work, and the decrease in the cost of dress for the women who have a serious work.

It is eminently proper to be an amateur and paint pictures distressingly out of drawing, and play masterly compositions in a conventional fashion, but it is eminently improper to be a professional and receive pay.

A man feels that if any of the women of his family enters the world of work it casts a reflection on him.

He is quite unconscious of any inconsistency, too, when in an hour of pecuniary retrenchment, he condemns the women of his family for this extravagance. But the figures in our budget reveal the inconsistency. The big items of expense are for garments that are distinctly leisure garments, e. g., fifteen evening gowns at \$100 each, four dress hats at \$25, &c.

It is obvious that if women are seriously occupied with a day's work, they are not going to go about so much to bridge parties, fashionable teas, receptions, and various other functions which occasion expensive dressing. They not only do not have so much leisure during the day, but the people who do their work well can not dissipate their energy very often in late evening hours.

### Extravagance an Obligation.

In the next place women's entrance into the world of work awakens their consciousness to truer social obligations than those involved in conventional social life, for then they have a larger sympathy with the toiling thousands and with helpless childhood, which tends to create a distaste for personal extravagance.

Most men would unhesitatingly condemn those girls whose social standard of dress is \$3,500 per year. But it is no more fair to condemn these girls for their extravagance than it is to blame the messenger boys for getting into the juvenile court. The standards of both reflect the stimuli to which they are being subjected.

It must be remembered that 75 per cent. of these parents are training their daughters for lives of leisure, to make a business of leisure, as it were, to lead a life of organized up-to-date play. So long as men are in the grip of this standard of vicarious leisure I see no prospect that their financial problems relative to women's dress will be materially simplified.

These vigorous and modern girls, whose play is more athletic than that of their grandmothers who sail and play golf and tennis with no fear of reproach, are leaving their play little by little and going to work.

Women who have a serious profession, whether they are paid or not, inevitably tend toward simpler standards of dress, in cost as well as in design, but the problem of doing so for a small sum is very great, due to the seasonal changes, the difficulty of finding simple garments in the less expensive makes, and the high cost of living.

It is becoming relatively easier to find plain garments of good material and make for a modest sum, but it takes hours of weary searching in the shops compared with the ease with which one may buy conspicuous and over-trimmed things.