

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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A BOOK FOR TO-DAY.

By L. M. S.

THE WELL-DRESSED WOMAN.

(A Study in the Practical Application to Dress of the Laws of Health, Art, and Morals.)

By HELEN GILBERT ECOB.

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty."—Keats.

LET a child develop in an atmosphere of perfection and instinctively will he abhor the inferior, the defective, the distorted, though he may not be able to define precisely the cause of offence. But a waif whose mental and material surroundings from birth have been of a degraded type will not fully recognise nor appreciate the beautiful when brought into contact with it. Years of instruction and education will be needed before he is able to discern between "good and evil." And are not the majority of women but dimly conscious of the fact that their conception of the artistic in dress differs widely from the ideals of the great masters in art. Such slaves are we to custom and conventionality that only a daring spirit here and there ventures to probe the subject, and then act in accord with her thought and knowledge.

In the preface to the work before me the author notes that the present interest in dress reform is many sided. "To overcome physical frailty through obedience to the laws of our being; to return to true standards of beauty in the female form; to cultivate artistic

taste and feeling in the structure of dress, and to free women from the degrading influence of a social environment which binds them to self-adornment, are the aims which animate this movement." Expression is also given to the truism that "a well-dressed woman must observe the laws of dress. These laws relate to hygiene, art, and morals. They form a trinity mutually dependent upon each other." The subject of rational dress is not to be taken up as a fad, but "as women appreciate the noble purpose of life, and the possibilities which are opening to them, they will scorn a dress which cripples the body and exhausts its powers of endurance." The book is not issued as a final treatise on healthful and becoming dress. It rather indicates the general principles upon which reform must proceed. It acknowledges that present efforts to reconstruct woman's dress "are largely experimental. We are patiently groping our way towards better things."

Normal Woman is first described, and ample evidence is adduced to show that, among uncivilized races, woman has an infinitely superior physique to that of her paler sister, and cannot be denominated the "weaker sex." So degenerate are we of civilization born that we actually glory in our weakness. Powerful physique in a man is admired, but the small, insignificant physique of a woman is described as "piquant, petite, dainty, etc." According to

scientists environment is responsible for variation in living organisms; environment, therefore, is largely responsible for the fragile form of the average Anglo-Saxon woman. And this physical weakness is responsible for many of the vices characterised as peculiar to women. "A man, conscious that he has not strength enough for self-defence might be a coward. A man of weak body might be emotional. A man dependent on others for the means of existence might be artful and dissembling. A man not educated to regular employment might be capricious. A man confined to petty details without the exhilaration of out-door life might become fretful." "Women must learn that a life of intellectual and moral equality demands physical equality."

Among the causes of this degeneracy in civilized women, that of improprieties of dress looms large. And the lack of fresh air, sunshine, and exercise and the excessive nervous development which further handicap women, are largely due to these improprieties of dress. As one might expect, the corset comes in for a large share of condemnation, pushing, as it does, the organs downwards, and exerting a pressure (even when loose), of 35 pounds and upwards. Small wonder is it that one doctor declares that "woman by her injurious style of dress is doing as much to destroy the race as is man by alcoholism;" and another, "The practice of tight lacing has done more within the last century toward