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## IS THE AMERICAN WOMAN OVERDRESSED?

BY HELEN CAMPBELL.

Whoever dares reply to such a question sails between Scylla and Charybdis, and even if immediate shipwreck is escaped, comes to shore under bare poles with storm-swept decks, thankful for any shelter.

The woman of society demonstrates with fury that, as a rule, she has nothing to wear, and that if, at the moment of speaking, a few rags not quite unworthy of consideration may be found in her wardrobe, it is a mere accident, life as a whole resolving itself into a hand-to-hand conflict with dressmakers, who always provide the wrong thing. The reformer, armed with her divided skirt and its accompanying necessities, waves them wildly in the face of society, affirming that till women have accepted these garments as the only solution of the dress problem, the only road to the higher moralities, there can be no salvation. Between these two extremes marches the great army of the middle class, an army made up of the "average woman," whose title has become the synonym for the worst abused class in America. The fashionable woman finds absolution because she has money and forms part of the spectacular life daily more and more dear to the rich American. The ardent reformer is forgiven a little over-impetuosity, because it is at least amusing, and we must make the most of such amusement as is left for a weary generation.

The average woman comes under neither head. She is simply the embodiment of original sin, responsible directly or indirectly for

all evils in church or State; preached at, and to and for, till if she followed one hundredth part of the precepts laid down for her guidance not one short life, nor ten, would suffice for the undertaking. Yet even now she cannot be spared, and it is in the house of her own familiar friend that the new blow is struck, and her defender and advocate asks and must answer, "Is the average woman overdressed?" It is to this form that the question comes at last. For it is impossible to deny that the fashionable woman sins beyond redemption on this score; as impossible as it is to affirm that the energetic reformer can ever be counted as one of the offenders, and thus once more the burden rests on shoulders well accustomed to such load, and it is the patient, long-suffering, most teachable, most enduring, average woman who must serve as illustration and afford such reply as can be drawn from the facts before one's eyes.

What are the essentials of dress? The question began with time, yet the answer, from the old Greeks down, remains the same—beauty, comfort, suitability. No dress that fails to unite these three can be counted as fulfilling the mission of dress, and no woman who has not studied in minutest detail each one, her mission as a woman. Beauty leads by divine right, and will lead, no matter what batteries are brought against it; but one must first learn what constitutes beauty. In these borderlands one restricted to reply in fixed lines cannot wander. But when one seeks to un-

## SALMAGUNDI.

*In this pudding is not commonly put one thing alone, but one thing with other things put together.*—Littleton.

### TO A METEOR.

BY GEORGE E. DAY.

I saw thee take thine awful flight  
Across the darkened western blue ;  
Like some majestic bird of light  
Thy fiery trail of splendor flew.

With beauty bright thy single star  
Made sombre darkness light as day.

I watched thy beauty from afar  
Through space unbounded speed away.

I saw thy trail of feathered fire—  
Bright as the lightning's tangled skein—  
Fade into space, like some desire  
That wings across a dreaming brain.

O fleeting visitor of night—  
Majestic in thy swift career !  
Tell me whence comes thy fiery flight,  
And what portends thy presence here ?

Art thou some exile doomed to roam  
From star to star through boundless space,  
O'er mountain heights and ocean's foam,  
And never find a resting-place ?

Or hast thou some diviner fate—  
Some prophecy of good or ill ?  
Alas ! no mortal can translate  
The message that thy glories thrill.

### MY FIRST CIGAR.

BY T. DE WITT TALMAGE.

The time had come in my boyhood which I thought demanded of me a capacity to smoke. The old people of the household could abide neither the sight nor the smell of the Virginia weed. When ministers came there, not by positive injunction, but by a sort of instinct as to what would be safest, they whiffed their pipe on the back steps. If the house could not stand sanctified smoke, it may be imagined how little chance there was for adolescent cigar-puffing.

By some rare good fortune which put in my hands three cents, I found access to a tobacco store. As the lid of the long, narrow, fragrant box opened, and for the first time I owned a cigar, my feelings of elation, manliness, superiority, and anticipation can scarcely be imagined, save by those who have had the

same sensation. When I put the cigar to my lips, and stuck the lucifer-match to the end of the weed, and commenced to pull with an energy that brought every facial muscle to its utmost tension, my satisfaction with this world was so great my temptation was never to want to leave it.

The cigar did not burn well. It required an amount of suction that tasked my determination to the utmost. You see that my worldly means had limited me to a quality that cost only three cents. But I had been taught that nothing great was accomplished without effort, and so I pulled away. Indeed, I had heard my older brothers in their Latin lessons say, *omnia vincit labor* ; which translated means, if you want to make anything go, you must scratch for it.

With these sentiments, I passed down the village street, and out toward my country home. My head did not feel exactly right, and the street began to rock from side to side, so that it became rather uncertain to me which side of the street I was on. So I crossed over, but found myself on the same side that I was on before I crossed over. Indeed, I imagined that I was on both sides at the same time, and several fast teams were driving between. I met another boy, who asked me why I looked so pale, and I told him that I did not look pale, but that he was pale himself. After some further walking, I sat down under the bridge near my house and began to reflect on the prospect of early decease, and on the uncertainty of all earthly expectations. I had determined to smoke the cigar all up, and thus get the full worth of my money, but was finally obliged to throw three fourths of it away. I knew, however, exactly where I threw it, in case I should feel better the next day.

Getting home, the old people were frightened, and demanded of me an explanation as to my absence and the rather whitish color of my complexion. Not feeling that I was called to go into particulars, and not wishing to increase my parents' apprehension that I

was going to turn out badly, I summed up the case with the statement that I felt miserable at the pit of the stomach. Mustard plasters were immediately administered, and I received careful watching for some hours. Finally, I fell asleep, and forgot my disappointment and humiliation in being obliged to throw away three fourths of my first cigar.

#### NATURE IN A FOREST.

When you wander through a forest you feel what the ancients called "the sacred horror of the woods;" you understand that a mystery surrounds you, and in the undefined shades spectres float whose outline you dare not fix. It seems as if you were intruding upon and disturbing solitude, and that at your approach some one had retired. The trees, plants, and flowers appear to change the subject of their conversation, as is done in a drawing-room when an intimate chit-chat is interrupted by some unwelcome visitor. Perhaps you were on the point of detecting Nature's secret, which man seeks to unravel; but were your tread as light as that of a red Indian in his moccasins, your foot has moved a stone, made some grass rustle and dew-drops fall from a wild flower. All at once a little bird darts away and goes to inform the old oaks of the approach of the enemy—that is, man. Then the forest is circumspect, and says only insignificant things; the flowers fold up their corollas and the singers are hushed. For awhile life seems to be arrested. After a little time, when you are found to be a harmless dreamer, a poet incapable of those useless murders so remorselessly committed by sportsmen, all that timid world is reassured. The trees talk with the wind; the birds, resuming their prattlings, hop through the branches; the gnats recommence their waltzes in the luminous streaks of light wherein their balls are given, and Nature attends to her little affairs exactly as if you were not there. Sit down, like Tityus, the Virgilian shepherd, under the canopy of a spreading beech-tree, and look at that delightful chaos of vegetation, the thousand details of which are brought out by the sun. Here the

holly exhibits its indented prickly leaves; there, in the bright sunbeams, the fern spreads its flexible stalk, furnished with little leaves dotted with stigmas which in the spring become the flowers; you might think they were palms; indeed, in the tropics the fern has the appearance and size of the palm-tree. They rise to a height of more than forty feet.

Between the ferns and the hollies, herbs, grasses, and little flowers are crowded together, and at their feet the mosses spread softly in green or brown patches. From all these plants, warmed by the sun, perfumes arise and spread in the air as from a sachet. Intoxicated with these odors, the insects hum and fly about with unusual activity. The *tipula*, or 'daddy-long-legs, flutters round the oaks; the *cantharis*, a brilliant emerald, glitters like a point of green gold on the silvery bark of the birch; the ant, nimbly plying its delicate feelers, makes its way through the grass; the *cicindela*, that messenger with the green livery, hovers in front of the lounge, while the stag-beetle—the rhinoceros of insects—caparisoned with its heavy black armor, runs over the warm sand in quest of its prey. To him who comes from a noisy town where human clamor never ceases, the silence at first appears deep. Little by little, the ear becomes accustomed to it and discerns a thousand little noises which at first were unnoticed, and these are the voices of solitude.

The restless leaf is always shivering and rustling, like a silk dress; invisible water is rippling over the grass; a branch, tired of being so long in the same attitude, rises abruptly, and makes its joints crack, as if stretching itself. A stone, losing its equilibrium or moved by an insect, rolls down a slope, and this miniature avalanche carries away with it a few grains of sand; a sudden quivering of the wings of an insect or of a bird rapidly lashes the air; an acorn breaks from its stem, bounds from leaf to leaf, and falls upon the turf with a dull sound; something goes by, producing a grating noise among the grass; a bird jabbars, a squirrel squeaks while climbing a tree, and the woodpecker, with a beat regular as that of a pendulum, strikes the bark of the elms