

From the Woman's Point of View

By ALICE DUNBAR NELSON

Far be it for women to gloat over the way the sister-hood is attaching to itself the formerly exclusive masculine prerogatives. Not to mention women governors who are in danger of impeachment, there are bandits, bank robbers, embezzlers, female Ponzis, high flyers in finance, and what not. Is it votes for women, sun spots, post-war hysteria, the restless age, or the adolescence of the sex? Short skirts and cigarettes, fancy garters or sheik bobs, and all the rest of the feminine adornment or exposure, whichever happens to be the fad; Turkish women doffing the veil, Chinese women demanding the vote, the Orient donning the habiliments of the occident, Japanese women rolling their own, and college girls demanding smoking rooms, Fur coats and chiffon hose; German women demanding the right of their own method of self expression, the youth movement, and the barefoot cult, artists and models dressed in a scant bunch of grapes, modistes threatening Victorian bustles, upheaval, unrest. Whatever is the blatant sex coming to?

So spake Isaiah twenty-six hundred years ago. Listen to his tirade: "stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet; the chains and the bracelets and the mufflers; the bonnets and the ornaments of the legs, the headbands and the ear-rings; the rings and the nose jewels; the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles and the wimples and the crisping pins, the glasses and the fine linens and the hoods and the veils. . . ."

Sic semper the female of the species.

She had not had time to bob her hair; the babies came too fast. She did not know much about international affairs, and the latest agony story in the howling tabloid was unread by her. Her gingham frocks were comfortable looking and she was able to hold a cooing bit of soft ovalness in the hollow of her arm, while she cut bread and butter for two others clinging to her skirts. Like Werter's Charlotte, when the artists begged to be allowed to sketch her she "went on cutting bread and butter." Nothing marred the serenity of her broad brow, and when the Man came home, it was to a well ordered house and steaming dinner and the understanding smile—all the domesticities that you read about in the old-fashioned novels and see in the hokum movies, and wish that they could exist again as of yore.

Where can you find her? Or is this a picture of two generations ago?

Her name is Legion. She is all over this jazz-mad, radio-crazed hysteric nation. Black and brown and yellow and white, she is to be found in villages and hamlets, in small towns, on farms, on Main street, in New York and Chicago and Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. North, where she puts galoshes on the children and sends them forth to school; South, where she gives them a stick of sugar cane to appease the hunger of their sweet tooth; West, where they tramp miles across the prairie to the country school house, and in the effete land of the Cod and Bean, where she helps them to scan their Emerson before they pray to the God of the Pilgrim Fathers. She exists by the million, and realizing this, we can lean back and sigh with relief that the country is not going to the dogs any more than it was in the days when the first dauntless maiden had the temerity to leave off her bustle and hoop-skirt, or than England was when the fair maids at the court of Henry the Matrimonialist essayed the awful waltz, as they stood shamelessly and allowed courtiers to place a timid hand about their tiny waists.

No, she's a pretty stable article, woman. But she is not news, because she does nothing spectacular. It is only the abnormal things that get into print—like the old wheeze about the dog and the man and the biting episode, reversed. Comforting thought that. Plenty of mother-crazed babies and bread and butter and little noses carefully wiped, and placid ignorance of abnormal psychology. Those women, in the first paragraph, who persist in breaking into print—little iridescent bubbles on the surface, forced up by ephemeral disturbance in the depths. But the depths remain, cool, placid, unmoved, eternal. Basic womanhood. The backbone of the world.

Inhibition. Wonderful thing. When the dog was a puppy, he could not climb over a chair, that was laid length-wise across the dining room door to prevent his coming into the room. But he grew into a great dog. And still the chair was laid across the door, and he would come and stand on the other side of the chair, and whine and howl most piteously to come in. He had only to lift his huge paws and step over the chair, but because he had been trained as a puppy to believe that he could not cross that chair, he stayed out in the hall and howled because he could not cross the barrier and enter the enchanted land of food and warmth and tempting smells.

So the man of color. He was told some generations ago, "Thus far shalt thou go," and he still believes it. He has only to lift his huge racial might and brush aside the frail barriers separating him from the outside of things where he has been relegated, and step into the promised land—but he does not know that the barrier that seems so huge and real is after all—nothing but a few frail lies laid on end, and he looms above them, and can step over them.

That ancient standard of beauty, for instance. How hard it died. How many battles had to be fought before that lie was brushed aside, and the true beauty of color came into its own.

The French cabinet is changed again. One needs to be a mental gymnast to keep up with the politics of Paris. If Liberia or Haiti changed governments one-fifth as often, we should have learned professors rushing into print to point out the inherent inability of the Negro to govern himself, due to his highly hysterical, volatile and unstable temperament. And so forth.

This poor race of ours is always getting the worst of it. Now after the stench of the Rhinelander case has died down, we will have to carry the burden of owning the Artful Alice with her oared romance and still more bared back, who married a man so dumb that he thought a girl with a brown skin father, a black brother-in-law, and a golden body was a white woman. Though she repudiated her race, it must bear her on its aching shoulders. Thank Heaven by this time next year, the whole unsavory mess will be swept away with the cross word puzzle books, and the mah jong sets that we wasted our good money upon.

If the custom of selecting fair maidens to represent localities and clubs at the annual football classic continues, we may expect a beauty pageant before or after the game, comparable on a small scale to the famous Atlantic City pageant of moneyed fame. Why not? Think of a huge hall with all the golden browns from all the burgs competing for a Lincoln-Howard golden cup? When this beauty pageant is a reality, and the winner of them all bows over her golden trophy—a year or two or three years hence, what fun it will be to tabulate the long list of names of those who "first thought of the idea and passed it on, you know."