FRENCH EXPERT BRINGS THE PARIS ART OF DRESS HERE

Straight lines of the MIDDLE AGES.

M. de Giafferri giving the hat the French accent.

Spotlight favorites.

And to Hear M. de Giafferri Lecture Is to Admit Dress at Once to Its Rightful Place Among the Important as Well as the Beautiful Things of Life

ONE is constantly in this world of war and politics, traction troubles, submarines and Zeppelins, six cent bread and Wall Street and the Panama Canal and the Mexican question and munition factories and woman's fight for the vote encountering the feeling that dress is one of the slighter things of life. Necessary, of course—women have to have fripperies, it's the way the dear creatures are made, and Friend Husband likes well enough to see the wife looking pretty.

But that dress is a matter for real brains to spend themselves upon—oh, behaw! Tush! Nonsense! What are you giving us? says Man, looking up from his ticker, or his spade, or his analysis of the vote in Umphty-umph county. Dress is the diversion of the women folks.

Brought face to face with the level brows, the grave dark eyes and the serious and highly interesting conversation of M. de Giafferri, expert and authority on the garb of women, this feeling hides its head and slinks away. Listening to him, watching him, dress assumes its rightful and dignified part in history, in economics, in æsthetics and other "ics" that spectacled persons expound before college classes.

Behold, then, M. de Giafferri, native of Corsica, son of Normandy, citizen of Paris and of the world, conducting a dress rehearsal on the stage of the auditorium at Wanamaker's. It is the dress rehearsal of the dress show—no pun intended—that will take place later in the day before an audience of eager women. Now the huge hall is almost empty, except for a fatherly looking elderly man in the gallery who seems a good deal like one of Dickens's Cheeryble brothers.

"That's John Wanamaker," say the store people who are rushing around arguing and criticising and interfering with and helping along "the Frenchman" who has come across the Atlantic to put on the biggest fashion show ever. "Mr. Wanamaker comes over from Philadelphia twice a week or so. Sure, he wants to see how this show is going. He keeps an eye on everything."

Sitting with Mr. Wanamaker, when she isn't everywhere about the auditorium and stage putting tangles straight with a word, is a woman whose air of competence and calm authority surrounds her like an aura—impalpable, but right on the job. You understand it, the air, when you hear that she is the Lady of the Decoration, otherwise Miss Mary J. Walls, one of the highest salaried buyers in the world, the woman who snaked a lot of Paris gowns, concealed in wicker cases, past the officials of France and on shipboard for New York just after the outbreak of the war, and was decorated by Mr. Wanamaker with a splendid diamond pin in recognition of the deed.

But to return to M. de Giafferri who, with his gowns, is, after all, the main thing in this show.

The gowns and the coats and the hats are behind the scenes, in great steamer trunks, heaped on tables, hanging from the wall, being hustled on pretty models who have been hired in haste for this show. Haste or not, they are some good lookers, those models. When they are all grouped in the finale, a ballroom scene designed to show off a baker's dozen of the peachiest evening gowns in M. de Giafferri's collection—but let us not anticipate. Street costumes and coats come before party dresses, as meat comes before the ice cream at dinner.

The gowns and hats and coats, it should be explained, come from some of the younger firms of Paris—Joseph Paquin, Rondeau Legrand & Co., Tollman, Camille Roger, the Maison Carlier and others that have formed themselves into the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, and are represented by Paul Louis de Giafferri. (He is a marquis, too, in his own country, but it fusses him terribly if you mention it before him. "In France," he explains, "you are considered to have gone down if having a title you enter into business. Yes, even though France is a republic that feeling exists. I wish to forget that 'marquis.'")

The Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, it seems, is a growing institution, taking in constantly more firms. It is the aim of its representative, while not ignoring the great value of the few large dressmaking firms of Paris that are well known and patronized in this country, to remind America that Paris has other artists in the matter of clothes. These other firms, M. de Giafferri explains to you, with his grave eyes kindling and his flexible hands interpreting his meaning when he can't think of the English word, employ a great many girls, and it is their welfare that he has most deeply at heart.

"Then your interest in woman's dress has really an economic basis, M. de Giafferri," you say, beginning to realize that this tall, well knit man who looks like a bit of a soldier and a bit of a poet and a bit of a philosopher rolled in one, is not just making trivialities to please women for money.

"But yes, of a surety," he says. "There are these thousands of these midinettes in Paris who must work to eat. What would they do if not work with the needle?

"They cannot go into the mines. They have not strength to dig, to drag, to toil in factories. Is it not good to design beautiful things for women to spend their money upon, that a little of the money may go to these girls?

"The rich women would spend their money in some other way if not upon clothes. They would spend it upon automobiles, in gambling, in making foolishness, and the poor midinettes would get none.

"They are paid little enough, the sewing girls of Paris," M. de Giafferri goes on, his eyes clouding. "I spent much time last year trying to get the sum made larger. Fifty francs a month—how can a girl live on that? They are paid more now, but still it is not enough."

A cascade of giggles from the American girls on the stage who are crowding behind the doors in the rear scenery peeking through and giving distracting glimpses of the fascinating Paris things they are wearing for an hour calls M. de Giafferri to his duty. He leaps upon the stage and informs Mr. Wanamaker in the gallery and the Lady of the Decoration and the distracted store people who are experimenting to find the best setting for the show and the handful of reporter persons in the orchestra circle that they are now to see some gowns "inspired by the costumes of the moyen age and the Directoire period in France."

A golden haired girl glides upon the stage, wearing a mouse colored velvet gown that brings to your mind Laura's little evening dress in May Sinclair's "The Creators"—the one Owen bought for her with the fifty pounds he got for his poem. Only this is an afternoon gown.

Well, that's my idea of a sensible dress for a woman—sort o' comfy," says a man who has sneaked in from the musical instruments in the rear of the auditorium.

"And yet it is beautiful," says a woman in tones of extreme bewilderment.

M. de Giafferri gives the soft folds a deft touch here and there and turns what was merely a gown into a creation. "You see it is of a looseness," he says. "The influence of the moyen age."

He unfastens a girdle and the velvet falls yet more loosely. It is gathered across the back at the waist line; in front it falls straight from the throat, apparently the most simple thing imaginable, and yet, as a woman down in front says with a sigh:

"I feel that my dressmaker ought to be able to copy that, but in the background of my mind I know that I'd give the result to the cook and she wouldn't wear it."

More moyen age gowns come tripping, beg pardon, gliding—upon the stage, supported and filled out by pretty girls. M. de Giafferri meets each one, and gives it that little indescribable touch here and there that turns it into a creation. A reporter girl says to a male artist who is wildly trying to sketch a mandarin mantle and a Rejane hat and a Lafayette tea gown all at once, together with the three ravishing models who wear those articles, with a few other things:

"If that man would start a school for ladies' maids and teach them himself what jewels he could turn out!"

The artist's pencil gallops wildly through a 5 o'clock blue taffeta and he grunts. It's some speed test to sketch creations at one of M. de Giafferri's shows. Beautiful creation succeeds beautiful creation till you wonder where they all come from, and yet they keep coming.

Tailored coats and skirts take their turn upon the stage, topped by ravishing hats that spell Paris. They are all simple, or rather they have that deceptive appearance of simplicity. Most of the skirts are a bit full, but not excessively so. Nothing is excessive about these creations.

The jackets are neither very long nor very short, and those funny little bobs and quips and quirks that some jackets sported last season are not to be seen here. Perhaps the most striking novelty is a skirt with what appears to be pockets around the bottom—a broad band of trimming not sewed at the top, only caught at intervals of five inches or so.

The colors, likewise, are quiet in these street dresses. There is a prune colored gown sober enough for a dowager, but a bride couldn't help coveting it if she saw it. There is a dull green that would be cast in the shadow by most of the suits worn on Fifth avenue, and yet every woman would turn to look at it. There is a lovely pale gray suit that ought to be named "Winter," with a hat that a snow princess might wear. Almost the only bright tinted street suit in the collection is a strawberry, and that isn't very vivid.

Skirts, M. de Giafferri explains to his audience, are becoming longer. They are dropping, he says, gradually down through the Directoire period to the First Empire. Next summer will see the First Empire with the ankles of the ladies in its grip.

The girl reporter persons remonstrate with M. de Giafferri when next they get his ear. Are business women, after having tasted the delightful emancipation of the short skirt, to be shackled again? M. de Giafferri reassures them. Skirts of a surety have been, yes, a trifle extreme in their shortness, and that is not to continue, but skirts dragging in the mud, mon Dieu, that will never be; the American woman is of an independence that would not submit to that.

The rehearsal goes on. The models are having the time of their lives palpably, and the certainty of having to take off these lovely things after their little hour is over doesn't cloud their spirits in the least. They are on the best of terms with M. de Giafferri, and you can see little jests tossed between them.

Maybe they are pleased by the story of how he got the midinettes' wages raised in Paris, but probably his skill in giving their hats a French accent with the least little touch inspires their interest and respect. If these girls thought they knew how to put on a hat they find out their mistake when his eye falls on that hat and with one little motion he changes the whole appearance of the wearer.

The grand finale, as before said, is a tableau of ball gowns. There is a Watteau of black taffeta all sprinkled with gold knots, the skirt looped up at the hips with little pink rosebuds, and rosebuds peeping from under the hem. There are—oh, well, what's the use? These things have to be seen to be understood.

There are, to be brief, thirteen lovely girls in thirteen evening gowns of white and pink and other lovely tints, and M. de Giafferri moves gravely about in this garden of beauties, snipping off a bit of thread here and tucking a loop of ribbon there, vociferously advised meanwhile by a phalanx of coated persons from the Wanamaker department of decoration, every one of whom seems to have a different idea of the way the thirteen beauties should stand to make the effective finale.

Pink beauties and blue beauties and white beauties are shuffled back and forth to make the right color combination till M. de Giafferri begins to lose his wonderful serenity and look worried, and then just as it begins to look as if the picture was giving satisfaction and the clamoring voices quiet down the Lost Pleiad appears.

She's a little yellow haired girl in a Greek gown of white gauze and other things, and she gasps out that she's late because there was no one to fasten her gown, and where is she to stand, please? This breaks up the whole arrangement, and the tableau is in a worse tangle than ever till the Lady of the Decoration, with that calm air of authority, takes hold, shuffles the pinks and blues and whites around a bit, and lo, a lovely picture greets the eyes of the little audience, the colors perfectly blended.

This result achieved, the visions melt into the wings to become workaday girls again, and M. de Giafferri comes down from the stage to have information drawn out of him by the reporter persons.

One is naturally curious to know how this man with the form of a soldier and the face of a philosopher and poet mixed came to choose clothes as a life work.

"It seems when I was a child," he says, "My people had a castle in Normandy. I was born in Corsica, but our home was in Normandy, and there my people gathered many old and beautiful and curious things.

"The garrets were full of them, old costumes, old furniture, and when the house was full of guests we played comedies to amuse ourselves and them, and the old costumes were worn with great delight. But sometimes they were too small and sometimes too large for the actor who would wear them, and always it fell to me to alter them. So I learned to love them and to study them, and I read books about them, till I learned to see that clothes have a philosophy and a history and a relation to everything in life.

"When I became a young man I travelled much in Italy, in the Orient, studying always costumes and beautiful vestments in churches, and so when it was required that I should earn my bread it was natural that I should take this for my work."

M. de Giafferri has written many books on the evolution of feminine costume and the allied arts, and he is a member of the firm of Worth. But he appears to have the true artistic indifference to money making. It is because Americans care so much for money, he says, that they can never produce beautiful clothes.

"No, American couturiers will never equal those of France," he says with an air of calm finality. "They have not the hand. They are always in the hurry, they make things with the machines, and what is made with machines can never have the beauty of that produced with the hand, with slow patience.

"Why do we love old costumes, old furniture, old tapestries? It is because those artisans of old were willing to spend days, years on one small object. And we in France are willing to take our time. Seven, eight days will go to the making of one gown. Would an American dressmaker spend so much time? Of a certainty, no.

"But the French do not care for money. We work a certain number of years, enough to gain a comfortable competence, then we retire. What you call the millionaires, we have not many, nor do we desire millions.

"I know," M. de Giafferri breaks off to say with an apologetic smile, "that many of the Americans are indifferent to money and love art, but the desire of money is what rules your manufacturers. Is it not so?"

Also M. de Giafferri politely intimates that Americans can't combine colors, that they throw tints together that swear at each other.

"The American dressmaker can make a blue serge costume very well," he says in a calm, crushing way. "The fit, the set of the coat is good, the skirt hangs well, but that is one color. To put two or three colors together in a dress so that one does not cry aloud against the others requires the eye, the genius that is French."

Then this gifted Frenchman turns to inspect a marvellous pink ball gown that is borne toward him on a tall blonde model, considers it a moment, decides that the back needs something, picks up a few of purple tulle with long ends and pins it on. The effect is enchanting. His audience glances back in memory over pink and purple monstrosities seen, well, never mind, but of American make, and decides that M. de Giafferri is right about that woman of France's statement.

"But, M. de Giafferri, tell us one thing," implores the audience as it retires. "Those queer little pointed trains on the short skirted evening gowns, trains that seem to have no relation to the gown—do you consider them beautiful?"

"They are a novelty," says he, smiling. "The ladies must have novelties."

"One may question," says some one. "Has the war made a great difference in the work of the French couturiers? Are the houses employing as many midinettes as before?"

It is the first question of the day in the whole afternoon. M. de Giafferri, glancing at the black bordered handkerchief in his breast pocket which suggests that war has taken its toll from his family, answers that as far as the making of clothes goes there is no end—the French houses are producing quite as many as in the days before August, 1914.

Found: the little white one.

THE SECRETS OF A GREAT AUTHOR AS TOLD BY HIS WIFE

IF you want to delve into a man's life don't waste time ploughing through verbosity with the man: seek out his wife, and lo! you have but to turn the pages.

I had planned to interview Irvin S. Cobb and I set forth with a lot of pertinent questions, carefully veneered with tact and apologies, all lined up in my mental storehouse and ready to shoot out at him should I corner him. The negro who showed me up to the writer's apartment grinned a toothful smile all the way as though one of the smile provoking stories of the man for whom I had asked was tickling its way through the brain in the egg shaped skull. Arrived at the door, a trim maid informed me that Mr. Cobb was out of the city.

I was disappointed of course. How was I to know that the gods were smiling upon me? I sent the maid to her mistress with the request that she allow me to interview her in her husband's stead.

It was a compromise, but it aroused little enthusiasm in me when the maid returned and said Mrs. Cobb would see me. I did not expect to get proper answers to my queries, because wives know so little about the business in life of their husbands, and I felt that interviewing by proxy would not prove very successful. That was because I did not know Mrs. Irvin S. Cobb!

I entered a long room delicately fragrant with cut flowers that craned their heads above innumerable vases and seemed to lift their faces to the oil painting of the author that hung on the far end wall and that smiled back genially. Came a rustle of petticoats behind me, a low admonishing voice, a terrifying bark of a dog and the scurrying of feet. Then two small dogs, a Boston terrier and a skein of tangled black silk, came flying into the room with a slim, dark girl in white pussy willow bringing up the rear.

"I am Mrs. Cobb," she said as she extended her hand cordially, "and there's not a thing in the world I'd rather talk about than my husband. I'm awfully glad to have this chance. You see, it's never occurred to any one to interview Mr. Cobb's wife, and there's so much she knows about him that he doesn't know about himself."

And then she curled up in a great chair that almost swallowed her and the dogs sprawled out on a silk rug at her feet. I would have liked to whisper to that oil painting just what I thought at that moment. She made such a picture curled up in that chair, petite, dark eyed and sparkling! I felt much like asking her please to stop masquerading and run away like a good little girl and fetch her mamma. She did not look a day beyond the basketball age, yet she spoke of her daughter in a matter of fact way, as if she were quite used to making people gasp.

She would love to talk about her husband, she said, and she did! She shook out the folds of his greatness and showed me the husband and father. Then she wrapped him up in his greatness again and told me about his work. Thus it was that I dug deeper into the life of this writer through his charming wife than ever I could have done through Mr. Cobb himself. That modesty which he is known to possess—that rare virtue in authors—would have kept from me the intimate little facts that a proud wife delighted in telling.

First of all I learned that one haunting regret of Mr. Cobb's life is that he did not have a college training. He went to work on a newspaper in Paducah, Ky., at the age of 16, and it was through his experiences as a Paducah reporter that he stored up a fund of knowledge about such characters as Old Judge Priest.

When first he came to New York city he went to work on The Sun. Next he became affiliated with the *Evening World*. And all the time he was piling up germs for future writing. He was then, as he is now, an indefatigable worker.

"He always talks over his story plots here at home," said Mrs. Cobb with a great deal of tenderness, "and usually the day before he begins to write a story he tells it to me from beginning to end. In this way he learns how the story will sound if read aloud."

He keeps no notes save a word scrawled now and then in a tiny red book which he carries in a waistcoat pocket. Mrs. Cobb has never seen him write a connected sentence in it. When it is full the little book contains nothing but random words which would convey no coherent meaning to any one but Mr. Cobb.

"Why," enthused the little lady in the big chair, "I've gone tramping through the woods with him where there was nothing particularly unusual, and I've seen him take out his little red book and jot down a word dreamily, as though he expected it to recall volumes some future day when he should refer to it."

Mr. Cobb works twenty-four hours a day, according to his wife, who says he is forever living a story or dreaming it. He can be in a crowd without being of it. And because his mind is always developing germs, Mrs. Cobb walks with him or rides with him sometimes for hours in absolute silence.

"I never break in on his thoughts. When he wishes to be silent I know he is working, and I wait for him to speak first." As my hostess said this I wondered how much credit the publishers and the reading public gave to this little helpmeet.

Mr. Cobb is not a playfellow. He does not care for golf, tennis or any of the sports particularly, but he is a boy in his unspoiled modesty and lack of self-assurance. He always acts as if each story were his first, and sends it out with the expectation of getting it back, and is always equally surprised when the check arrives. He seems to be unable to believe that his success is assured, a thing to depend on.

Mr. Cobb does not write out his plot, as the beginner is so often advised to do. He works it up mentally until it is a finished story, with its corners nicely rounded, its climax sufficiently tense and its dénouement consistent. Then he sits down at his typewriter and there is not a pause in the clicking of the keys until the story is written or the hour arrives for the closing of his desk.

He has a study in his home. Here he works every day from 9 in the morning till noon. Nothing is ever allowed to interfere with this work. Mrs. Cobb assured me that her vigilance outside her husband's study never relaxed. She permitted no interruptions in the clicking of those typewriter keys.

She has never known him to write a story until he has worked it over in his mind for a couple of months or more. He tells her that he has always a hundred germs developing at a time, and that he will not live long enough to write all his stories.

A year before he wrote "The Belled Buzzard" he was visiting with Mrs. Cobb at her old home in Georgia. They were sitting on a front porch one morning and a huge buzzard flew past. Mr. Cobb recalled a Southern story about a belled buzzard, and remarked that he guessed he would weave a plot round it. Just one year later he finished the developing and wrote the story.

He is a keen observer. When he is out with his wife he sees ten times more than she does, yet she thinks she is seeing all there is to see. When he was writing "The County Trot" Mrs. Cobb marvelled at his lifelike pictures of the Kentucky characters, all of whom he had really known. She asked him how it was possible for him to remember their faces and mannerisms after the lapse of so many years. He said:

"Why, I can close my eyes and see the knotholes that were in the fence around that fairground."

Mr. Cobb does not believe that any man is a genius. He declares that all success must come through hard work. He believes that a writer must handle only subjects with which he is well acquainted. He says the public cannot be fooled.

"You know," Mrs. Cobb confided, "our daughter, aged 13, is fond of writing. But he destroys her little stories and admonishes her for trying to write about things not of her world. He tells her to write about her dog or canary or the trees in the park."

"How about inspiration?" I asked.

"That," said my little hostess with a shrug of her shoulders and a toss of her dark head, "belongs to geniuses, and they do not exist."

Mr. Cobb treats writing as a business and works at it as steadily and regularly as if he were a merchant.

When writing a story his object is to draw sharp pictures that will never leave the reader. To do this he thinks out the minutest details of that picture, not that he will use those details, but that he himself may really see the picture as he writes.

I came away from that interview wondering how many women are so closely allied to their husband's work as is the wife of Irvin S. Cobb.