The Occult In Dress

By Kate Masterson

THERE is nothing new under the sun, and the cult that includes the meanings of colors, the significance of lustres or dead surfaces, straight lines or curves, is really older than the pyramids.

The queen of Sheba in all probability had more than an inkling of this when she put on her glorious duds and went to call on King Solomon. Cleopatra, if we are to believe the theatrical representations, donned a very stagy boating dress for her journey down the Cydnus to meet Antony.

Since then even the least of us have learned that white muslin and blue ribbon stand for extreme innocence, black alpaca for misfortune and spangles for a certain degree of racy impropriety—a code that will not balk at any small risks.

Blue is sweet and good and true. Bouguereau said that the color blue was the most beautiful thing in all the world. Nine men out of ten like a woman in a blue gown, although they may not be able to explain just why.

Brown is demure; gray is modest and discreet; all the shades of purple from mauve to deepest violet are disturbing, languorous and luxurious, while the different shades of scarlet, from pink to crimson, go even deeper than purple into the realms of the Ought Not.

It is a fascinating study even in its kindergarten stages, and when you can have jewels to play with as schoolbooks it is like handling the living colors themselves. For the occult in dress and in sheen and lacklustre and tint has its beginning and end in gems and their history.

Think how forms and outlines, the silhouettes of men and women, have changed within the century. From the times of powdered hair and patches, the dandy days when men sported ruffles and brocade coats, high heeled shoes with flashing buckles, silk stockings and garters, to these of the billycock hat and the cutaway—what a stretch there is in times and manners!

Observe how the clothes of the dressy periods expressed the emotional rampantness of the age when every man's hand was either in his snuff box or on the hilt of his sword, when he incessantly made love or fought duels with only slight pauses for meals.

The days were beruffled as well as the over-mannered heroes that go so well with De Koven music and a Hope libretto, but we latter day women who have passed the stage of matinee actor worship are sincerely grateful that our men do not wear feathers in their hats or lingerie ruffles on their shirt bosoms.

Man's Real Place

It is not that we object to feathers, but we know that a modern man who could wear one without feeling several kinds of a fool must be of far different calibre from the men we wot of today, lacking upholstery, lingerie and frills generally, but accomplishing things and signing checks for us with a graceful insouciance that impresses us more deeply than the sweep of a sword. The stub pen is mightier by far, believe us.

Men's dress today has been objected to by artists who love to deck themselves in loose, baggy velvet effects, murderous sombreros and flowing silken ties. But no one would care to have the Latin Quarter fashions transplanted to Broadway.

A little of that sort of thing goes a great way with us, for although we are yet in our primer stage of dress mysticism we could not associate manly American manhood with the lace collar and knee breeches that Edmund Russell and some others have sought to infect our civilization with.

It is because we are beginning to perceive truths in the relations of clothes to the times and the individual that the plainness of the American man's dress pleases us so much. We are quite aware that the moment they began to trim up their hats and wear openwork shirts there would be a corresponding lack of simplicity in personality, manners and morals.

No real man can afford to go in for beauty in his clothes, to pin bunches of violets at his horse'e ears or on his bulldog's collar. Women were built for the purpose of hanging beautiful laces and jewels upon, and when man admires a well dressed woman, as he does almost childishly, he is admiring fineness, delicacy, color, richness—all the gorgeousness that is denied him in everything but his dressing gown and pajamas.

The moment he dares to go in for a frill or two himself he is lost. He can have purple orchids on his mantelpiece, but if he wears one in his coat it argues a desire to be conspicuous or a strain of the feminine desire for frivols and clothes that rustle.

In this automobile age we will not for a moment admit the use of the beauty man. We want the male person who builds bridges and invents flying machines and wireless cables, or, lacking that, then the man who can crawl under the machine and juggle successfully with the cogs and levers.

The modern man's dress in this country expresses this sort of thing, and does so very mysteriously rather by an absence of things, a lack of color and a sparsity of what in a woman's dress we call lines. Even the least little touch of gayety blights a man these days, and only a broker or an actor can afford to wear a boutonnier.

You may have admired a man for some masterful attainment—the discovery of a new star or a smashing game of polo, but if, when you meet him, you find him with a pale blue band on his hat and a diamond horseshoe in his scarf, his mere humanity is at once apparent to you—he is throwing away an invisible aureole for the sake of a little sparkle in his necktie.

American Men Manly

And so loud checks, violently striped shirts that light up well, in the haberdashers' windows, but never on men; stones that shine, pallid spats, cloaks instead of coats, tassels where other men wear studs—all these things impress you vividly and occultly with the unfitness of the wearer, usually an unfitness that is a part of youth and passes with it unless it has been allowed to sink into the bone.

American men set an example to the world in this respect. On the continent you see masculine creatures sporting the most absurd togs for traveling, or cloaked in frigid shawls like bearded ladies on tour. Then the delightful truth dawns distinctly upon you that we are after all a distinctly different breed of humans and that, whatever advantage seniority in art and culture gives to the old world people our fashions in dress for men are saner, finer and more manly.

Of course, our men are not so easy in their wearing of evening clothes as the Englishman, nor so dapper as the Frenchman, but this is a fault of our youth and is again an occult expression of the fact that we are not yet socially developed. The actor who comes on like a lurid sunburst in black and white, holding his shoulders like a motorman, to suit the tailor's pressing, stands with too many of us for the real thing when he is only the really nobby thing.

But it is the dress that is conveying the impression, mark you, and not the man, just as the frayed, carefully brushed, tightly buttoned condition tells its own pathetic tale—a sad little story that we can read so often.

And then there is the comedy that we gather from the young man of ingrowing social ambition, who, in spite of his savior faire and his intense admiration for the good, the beautiful and the true, is wearing evening clothes one or two sizes too large for him, or what is much worse, too small.

In women's dress the occult speaks so strong that we have learned to be subtle. The honest working girl knows in her heart that her proper garb is a neat black ankle length gown, sleekly brushed hair, stout boots, an umbrella and a little formless hat that one might wear to funerals with propriety.

Knowing this she avoids it and goes to the office in a startling pompadour under a stunning hat with six plumes, an open work waist, stockings to match and a vanity bag.

Her employer is vaguely impressed with something he cannot understand, poor man. But it is her manner of dressing that is appealing to certain unused brain lobes. The show girl catches nine out of ten men either on the stage or as a typewriter. And so it is that these girls are marrying all the wealthy men while the industrious little girl in the black gown and stout shoes keeps on slaving to the end of the chapter. Her dress tells the truth, and that is something no woman must ever do if she wishes to charm men.

Symbols and Other Things

It was not until a smart London mediste began to exploit the occult idea seriously, a season or two ago, that women commenced to understand why it was that three feathers in the hair, with a court veil and a bouquet, made even a plain looking woman suggest pomp, royalty, power.

Feathers have always stood for rank, and the plume invariably signifies ceremony and state, whether it is on a hearse or the head of an Indian chief.

The feather is the symbol of pomp, just as white muslin is innocent and black velvet is stately. The reason for this lies not in custom, but in the line and texture and color of the plume itself. So we wear six in our hats this season to emphasize the fact that we are not nuns. And so the cardinal cloak and the soldier's coat speak to us eloquently.

The London dressmaker made something of a furore among the English fashionables when she began to put tears and smiles into lace and taffeta. She seized upon an old motif and built up an idea, delving into undiscovered depths for her themes.

So when she put gold spangles on a sulphur colored satin skirt under five falls of chiffon, through which one only got the dullest and least occasional glints, she was expressing a thought that only a graduate in clothes mysticism could appreciate. She called it the "harp of a thousand strings" and let it go at that.

Then she put forth a creation of peach colored velvet with a little Irish point lace coat, and she hung a few crushed plum colored roses about the bodice and called the thing a "lure to happiness."

Violet embroidered mousseline de soie over a deeper shade of taffeta, with transparent sleeves and a garland of pearls about the shoulders, was "a wave of glory from a distant shore"; surely an inspiration for a youthful widow who had passed the teething stage of her bereavement.

These were only a few of the simple ones in style and treatment and title, but of the many shown on the tall models during long afternoons in those moss green parlors there were dozens purchased by peers, earls and a few dukes and their wives who came to have a cup of tea and pick out something soulfully lovely for the next garden party or wedding in St. George's.

Of course, London is magic mad and is finding the occult in everything, from Japanese crystals to the American cakewalk, but the mystical thought expressed in costumes was one of the greatest things that ever came there since the obelisk was floated down the Thames and set up on the embankment.

Here in America we have unconsciously exploited the idea for many seasons, during which we have been industriously eliminating evil things in the way of dress, street sweeping trains and such.

The American woman needs no Japanese crystal to tell her how to dress. She takes a daily hint from Paris, embellishes it here and cuts it down there and you have, as Worth declared before he died, "the best dressed women in the world."

Our horse show has become one of the greatest dress meets in the world, great even as the Grand Prix at Longchamps or Ascot Cup day in England. Our restaurant dinners Sunday nights are certainly occasions in which one not gifted with second sight can read the story of woman's emergment from her shell and man's effacement of himself that she may shine against a fitting background.

Possibilities Ahead of Street Car Conductors: Some Cases of Note

ALTHOUGH less than twenty years have passed since it was first proved in Richmond, Va., that there were commercial possibilities in the overhead trolley, the profession of electric railroading has already become so well established that all sorts of young men are getting into it.

It is again reported this fall from several districts of the middle west that male school teachers can hardly be secured because the young fellows who formerly taught in the rural schools are now all in service, as conductors or motormen.

A large proportion, certainly, of those who thus join the ranks do so with the expectation of rising from the car platform to the higher paid positions of responsibility. Although the wages paid employes by the electric roads are good for the class of work, the opportunities for advancement are what are especially attracting a superior class of men. Thousands, undoubtedly, of the ambitious have been incited by the example of street railway kings of today, who only a few years ago occupied humble positions at small wages.

The case of Richard T. Laffin, who rose in less than ten years through the various grades of street railway service in Boston to become general manager of the entire electric car system at Manila, Philippine Islands, is one that a few months ago was widely commented on throughout the country, and had its influence on aspiring youth.

Again, more recently, there was the case of young Oren Root, nephew of the present secretary of state, who eight years ago on graduation from college decided to go into street railroading. Taking no advantage of family position, he entered the calling on the same basis as any other well qualified young fellow could, and fought his way upward until he is now general manager of the Metropolitan system in New York city.

Then there was E. C. Foster, who some years ago drove one of the old-fashioned horse cars between the cities of Lynn and Boston, and who, after a remarkably successful career, in which he bore a part in laying out for Boston its present rapid transit system, was chosen president of the street railway company in New Orleans.

Still another instance is that of Hugh J. McGowan, who rose from the ranks to the presidency of the street transportation organizations of Cincinnati and Indianapolis. Another very notable case is that of P. S. Sullivan, president of the Massachusetts electric companies, which operate a very large mileage of trolley lines in the eastern part of the Bay state.

Misfits, of course, occasionally get in still. There is the story that was going the rounds of the press a short time ago of a new conductor on a New York street car whose attention was called by an official of the company to the fact that his register showed only eight passengers while he actually had nine aboard.

"Begorra, sir, you're roight," the man replied; promptly stopped the car, and to the astonishment of the official, addressing the passengers in an authoritative manner, he demanded: "Say, one of youse fellers will have to git off this car-r."

It was another employe of this crude sort who not long ago addressed Vice President Fairbanks in Washington with the words: "Say, youse guys ought to know by this time that this 'ere car don't stop on this side of the street."

The records of such a corporation as the Pacific Electric company prove that there has been a steady improvement in the kind of men applying for examination. The basis, furthermore, is large enough to generalize from.

Remarkable diversity as to former occupations exists among the men whom one notes as polite conductors or motormen in well cut uniforms. Many, of course, report simply that they have all their lives been farming or helping their parents on the farm, but among the hundreds of new ones taken on each year are to be found the names of men who must have been through stirring adventures before they undertook the useful task of collecting nickels. From the United States army and navy there is noticeable a regular drift to the service. Several score of former soldiers or sailors pass their examinations every year and enter the industrial ranks.

Those, too, who have been good servants of Uncle Sam are likely to continue to be good soldiers. They find in their new occupation opportunities for advancement which are impossible in army and navy, for there exists in it no impassable barrier between commissioned and non-commissioned officers. The most efficient men may go right from the bottom to the top, as indeed every division superintendent of the road has.

If men from the government service turn up often at the company's famous training school hardly less frequently do people from callings which would not seem exactly to prepare for street railroading present papers of application and recommendation. School teachers and superintendents, weary of the deadening grind of the school room, have lately been appearing in considerable numbers. They know that in the chosen vocation the same devotion that was shown in teaching will eventually reward them much better. College students, too, enter the service, some for a few months in the summer, and others—these of the type that the company most approves—for permanent work.

It would be hard to say just how many ex-clergymen are taking up nickels instead of presenting contribution boxes on the lines running in and out of the California metropolis. There is, at any rate, a considerable number of them. Some are men who became discouraged in the disheartening task of maintaining a congregation in a town of diminishing population and lessening regard for religious traditions, and they turn to the conductor's calling as one which gives outdoor life, exercise of intelligence and abundant opportunity to practice the Christian virtues. Occasionally a minister takes the examinations because he has some throat trouble which prevents his going on with his preaching.

There perhaps are not so very many historians, novelists, or even romancers in the service—most of these last are too well paid nowadays writing exposures of graft in public and private life—but it is known that at least one poet whose verses have attracted attention wears the company's uniform. He is regarded, furthermore, as one of the best conductors, and he is too wise a man to give up a sure thing for the precarious calling of the free lance writer. Another man was formerly a playwright, but, as he is unable to keep up in productiveness with Clyde Fitch and George Bernard Shaw, he very willingly takes his weekly stipend from the transportation company.

These cases are probably more or less typical of nearly every American city. The ranks of the street railway brigades are being filled by intelligent men from almost every human calling. And their intelligence is called into play every hour in their exacting work.

The American Sphinx

By Auguste Bontempi.

"WHAT do you think of the American girl?" is a question that follows pat on "How do you like America?" which with remarkable originality we ask as regularly as occasion arises of every intelligent foreigner. Our artist answers it in artistic fashion.

The American girl—as he sees her—is beautiful, calm, with a strange poise, an almost matronly self-possession, that is utterly new to the old-time conception of the maiden.

"Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet!"

Flowers of poetry and grace are twined about her and the single rose of passion glows in her hair. The rest is mystery.

So the artist gives her the mythical form of the Sphinx. Not the vast mute monument the Egyptians raised to the setting sun—she resembles that only in that incense is offered to her and a cult—but the fabulous creation of the graceful Greek, the daughter of Typhon and Chimera, the ravager of hearts that could not read her riddle.

The wonderful creature, with lion's body, feet and claws—quite capable of defending herself, if you please!—and the soft breast of a women, sits tranquil in the right her riddle gives her to the life of him that fails to read it.

Let Oedipus appear and this Sphinx will be straightway resolved into a woman

"Nobly planned
To warn, to comfort, and command."

But he must be what Oedipus divined—a MAN.