

# NEW YORK ARTIST HOPES TO MAKE DAME FASHION BOW TO COMMON SENSE, NOT FADS AND FANCIES

## Frank Alvah Parsons Braves Woman's Domain by Caustic Philippic Against Custom

RED clothes on a woman have the same effect as a brass band in a small room. A jeweled buckle and a wad of cloth applied to the left hip adorn a blank space on the human body that does not cry out for need of decoration.

Hats are for protection, not obstruction! Street, shopping and church clothes should be seen, but they certainly shouldn't be heard.

One of the reasons for clothes is the instinct for privacy. Eve conceived the idea. At different times in history it has been apparent in the concept of clothes. But at present—??—??

Pausing for breath, it is time to say a mere man, and a bachelor at that, has had the courage to gather up all these words and hurl them in a bombshell unafraid at more women.

Just now the bombshell is rolling down Fifth avenue and causing perturbation in many quarters, but Frank Alvah Parsons, artist, writer and art professor, doesn't mind. He isn't afraid. He just leans forward in his Louis XV chair, acquires another good-humored glimmer in his keen gray eyes and fires this off: "And a woman, mind you, would rather take a chance on the hereafter than being called old-fashioned."

Decidedly, he isn't afraid. Prof. Parsons, who has been busier than the President of the United States turning away interviewers since that recent afternoon when he mounted a lecture platform and said what he thought about women's clothes, has the courage of his convictions. He can tell you why, when and how. If he tears down with one hand, he builds up with the other. He has a clothes creed. It isn't piffle. It might be called psycho-analyzing clothes.

Finding the why in them is a plainer way of saying it.

### Has Clothes Creed and Isn't Afraid

If he were that sort of a chap, he might go to the housetops and shout out a message and the message would sound like this:

First. There must be a crying need for decoration before any decoration should be used. It would seem possible to have certain blank spaces on the human body unadorned without any noticeable cry of pain on the part of the spot.

Second. Decoration should never interfere with use. Shoes in which one cannot walk, dresses in which one cannot step, clothes in which one cannot breathe and hats that nobody can see past would seem to come under this law.

Third. Decoration should follow structure. The human figure appears to be bounded by curved lines. Inasmuch as it is possible to follow these lines without overdoing the matter, we shall be within this law. Any fashion that distorts human proportion is anti-artistic.

But in every man's English and in the straightaway style Prof. Parsons likes best to put it, he says in the last essence women's clothes are bound up in three things, simplicity, consistency and common sense.

Who has schooled Prof. Parsons for his courageous calling? No one knows. One suspects a pair of twinkling but keen gray eyes. Suspects them of peering out the windows of a motor by day as it advances slowly through the traffic of Fifth avenue; by night as it whirles more swiftly past the lighted shop windows or pauses for the impouring of fashion herself into the theatres of the "Roaring Forties." He is executive in chief of an art school in Paris. He is president of the New York School of Fine and Applied Art. Ten years ago he wrote a book on the psychology of dress. In the meantime he has had classes innumerable at Columbia University. At present he has a class at New York University, with 197 pupils for only 105 chairs.

Seeking an interview with the much-talked-of Prof. Parsons was an adventure of no mean proportions. At 740 Fifth avenue Mr. Parsons was not at home. William M. Olson, who shares the tantalizing apartment, with its vistas of lovely yellows and soft grays, and who is active head of the school in Paris, was a butler moved back in the well-proportioned shadows.

It was the next day before it was possible to take the next step in the process of seeing a much-sought-after gentleman. It is, if you will, ten-thirty in the morning. The sunshades that filters Broadway streams in and dances about a bit in a waiting room of the art school. One sits on a bench outside a faithful door.

A knob rattles. Memories of the artistic apartment persist. Would the gentleman wear a flowing tie?

### Critic of Woman's Mode Is Sternly Masculine

Frank Alvah Parsons, artist, writer and teacher of note, bowed cavalierly from the threshold of his office, but the sternest feminine eye, reticulating in the name of her sex, could light on nothing to find fault with. The figure that stood in the doorway was tall, broad of build and yet somehow giving an impression of gracefulness. The suit was so dark a brown that it was hard to guess the



Hair ornaments and wads over the ear decrease the width of the forehead, and that's where the brain is supposed to be!



A short, wide person with a broad, flat hat and a skirt stopping at the knees resembles a closed concertina, says the professor

### What Mr. Parsons Says About Some Fashions

**CLOTHES** are for privacy. Eve thought of it. Some people do now.

A pearl expanse of buckle on the left hip could shrink away without being missed.

Red on a woman is like a brass band.

A waist line four inches above the knee, emphasized with a chain, may be fashionable, but it's not artistic.

Decoration should be applied at point of particular interest where attention is to be directed. Thus bright-hued stockings with clucks on 'em.

A four-foot three-inch woman can get away with less vegetables, fruits, plumes, rhinestone buckles, earrings and lace than a six-foot woman, but not with much less.

A woman would rather take a chance on the hereafter than on being out of fashion.

Faces ought to show where the gray matter is stored. Hence hair mattresses at the back of the head and wads over the ears to decrease the size of the forehead.

Color: the shirt and collar to match were blue and white pinstripe. Shoes somberly black. Hair gray and closely trimmed. More than anything else in the world he looked like a banker—a successful banker.

Now, one usually expects interviews on the subject of women's clothes to start, run and finish on those flowing robes the Greek ladies used to wear. The mind roved to laurel in the hair, sandals on the feet and girdles loosely fettered.

Prof. Parsons smashed tradition squarely in the eye in the beginning by saying:

"Of course, they were lovely and graceful, but we're not Greeks. What women want in clothes is fitness, suitability for the age in which they live. Bring it down nearer than that. They want to wear the right thing at the right time each day they do live. Fitness is as much a matter of art as beauty, and in clothes—well, goodness knows we need it. They put evening dresses on the shop girl and plumes on the business girl. We bring the skating rink into the drawing room and the drawing room into the skating rink."

"Short people wear broad things and tall ones wear long things. Where's the fitness or reason in that? Horizontal lines increase width and decrease height at the same time. Conversely, vertical ones should increase height and decrease width."

"Do you know what? A short, wide person wearing a broad, flat hat, with a yoke dress and a colored belt and skirt stopping at the knees, resembles one of nothing less than a closed concertina."

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### Say Women Will Put Rules Into Effect

"As soon as you get this law of the why and wherefore in your hands, you're going to apply it to yourselves. Women are wonderful these days. You know it's only these last few years they've ever had a chance."

"I suppose one reason is that it's an age of psychology and psycho-analysis. Psychology means the working of the mind in regard to anything. And psychoanalysis means finding out where the cause is and treating the cause. Just as soon as some one puts it into the heads of women to apply cause and effect to their clothes they're going to do it."

"Once a woman gets it into her head to do something, no one can get it out again. Once teach her the relationship of art and an evening dress and she'll grasp it."

Mr. Parsons leaned forward a little eagerly in his chair.

"Let's get to the bottom of this thing. Do you realize there never was a time in the history of our Nation where the esthetic sense was roused as it is roused now. Art used to be a fad, a frill, a drawing lesson or a pleasure, as a universal possession in everything. Take the movies, take automobiles, take houses, hotels, clothes. The answer is that art itself is an answer to a time in the history of our Nation. The art of the temple in the high Greek period reached its highest state because temples were what people needed and what they thought about. The art of the salon reached its greatest in the eighteenth century because that's what the people wanted then."

"Now it's our present-day interests that cry out for attention. And I mean that that of all art expressions clothes are the most vital, because they



Leopoldine fruit orchards atop one's head and rope chains dangling from the neck are anathema in Prof. Parson's code

are the most personal and through interest in them the people are more easily reached.

### Applies Basic Art to Rules for Dress

"Now let's get back to the general purposes of art." Prof. Parsons settled himself more comfortably in his chair and drew absent-minded designs on a blotter as he talked. "There are two, fitness and beauty. Fitness is really the foundation of taste and taste is what America is accused of not having."

"He looked up. 'Isn't it true, though? It's taste is fitness, where is the taste of furs worn in the heat or summer, of lace stockings worn in the blast of winter?' He digressed. 'And where is the taste of the young woman who stands on a corner and powder her nose or tongs her lips in public? Or where is the taste of the young woman who holds hands with her 'society' in front of the public library?'"

"But to return to the subject, the second part of art is beauty and we are accused of not knowing this when we see it. What we ought to do is know it. Laws that govern the expression of beauty just as we do those that govern music or arithmetic."

Summing up, Prof. Parsons then briefly but tellingly made this indictment against Fashion.

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Too many clothes are as had as too few, is the verdict here



Prof. Parsons, who has ideas of his own on clothes, and the woman



An oval face with hair neatly but not fussily dressed is a thing of beauty and joy forever



Decorations should be applied at the point of particular interest where the attention is to be directed. "Therefore the buckles?" queries the critic

shoes. The instinct is there, but not active.

"A second reason is found in the instinct for privacy. Eve conceived the idea. At different times in history it has been apparent in the concept of clothes. But at present—??—?? There were no words anywhere around to describe what Prof. Parsons thought of the present."

### Asks 'Why Are Clothes' and Has Own Answer

"Why are clothes? Well, there are three legitimate reasons for clothes only. First the instinct for shelter."

## Dress as You Should to Be Comfortable and Look Well, Not to "Be in Style," He Says

is possible under the circumstances. Any fashion that distorts human proportion is inartistic. When you move the waistline four inches above the knees and emphasize it with a chain so that from the waistline is one and a half times as long as from there to the ground, it may be fashionable, but it certainly isn't artistic.

"Lines, that's the story. That's learning the why of the beauty in clothes. That's getting at the science of them. Horizontal lines for tall people who wish to decrease height and increase width. Vertical lines for short ones who want to work it the other way around."

### Knows Technical Terms of the Dressmaker

One marveled at a mere man who could do what Prof. Parsons did next. But we are a witness. Clearly and seemingly to know exactly what they meant, he sat there and tickled off on his fingers these terms, plait, inscription, heus.

"These are lines," he said, "that can be made valuable in restoring the human proportion. This is decoration, but perhaps there is nothing in art that is less understood than that word decoration."

Then he summed up the laws of decoration as laid down centuries ago by Leonardo da Vinci and said they had never been improved on.

"Hair mattresses back of the head or wads over the ear decrease the width of the forehead in appearance, and that's the part of the head where the gray matter is supposed to be located."

"Color came next in discussion. 'Every tone of color,' Prof. Parsons pointed out, 'has something to say for itself. People do not think of fire, an August sun or an athlete's blood as being baby blue or pink or mauve. We are so constituted that red excites irritates and it should be used to express that idea.'

"Too Much Color Like Too Large a Band"

"A brass band of 100 pieces in a 12x14 room is not essential to the knowledge that music is going on," was this artist's way of putting it. "Neither is a red sweater, a red hat, or a red dress of fullest intensity in the same small room unless there is a color deafness on the part of those present."

In summing up his clothes creed for women, Prof. Parsons dwelt on the



Hips do not cry out for ornamentation, so why decorate them, queries the critic. Hats were made to see by and past, he adds

"The first law is 'There must be a crying need of decoration before a decoration should be used.' It would seem possible to have certain blank spaces on the human body unadorned without any noticeable cry of pain on the part of the spot. For decoration as applied to the left hip in wads of cloth, tin buckles or other materials would seem to be applied to a spot that it is not altogether essential to decorate. The prevailing mode of sticking on jeweled pins, hand-embroidered panels, hair ornaments, materials on hats might be judged by this rule without pain to the subject treated."

"The second law is 'Decoration should never interfere with use.' And the third, 'Decoration should follow structure.' The human figure appears to be bounded by curved lines. Diagonal lines from one shoulder to the other, zig-zag inserted materials like laces or insertions or applied trimmings, whose lines seem to be struggling to find where the lines of the human body are going, are also inharmonious."

Mr. Parsons believes it is true that women dress mostly to attract men. He does not deny the idea, but he better after having discussed the matter with thousands of his own sex, that it is a mistake for women to believe that clothes which exhibit really do attract. Men, he finds, are quite capable of looking out what they want without assistance."

### Decorations Important to Tout Ensemble

He pointed, "There is a fourth law. 'Decoration should be applied at that point of particular interest where the attention is to be directed.' That is presumably the reason why people wear white shoes with black clothes, gray stockings with dark blue dresses, large pendant stopping on the abdomen and such like."

"'Decoration?' he mused almost to himself. 'A four-foot three-inch woman weighing 110 pounds can get away successfully with less vegetables, fruits, plumes, rhinestone buckles, varieties of leaves than a six-foot woman weighing 180, but there is a lamentable chance for either to get away with more than they can.'"

Having done with the proportions of the body, Prof. Parsons turned to those of the face.

"A face ought to be more important," he said, "than the feet and legs. The ideal face is an oval with the

### Here Is Platform Put in Few Words

In his last analysis his platform is this:

"Clothes are the most personal of all individual expressions. There will be no change for better or worse in matters of external expression of clothes unless there is a change in mental attitude. Since the beginning of time, simplicity, consistency and common sense have been good guiding principles in life. Unto these with the present universal democratic intellectual renaissance, and art should appear automatically in women's clothes as it has in men's appeared in other things when not crowded out by idolatry for fashion and show."

Every period can be expressed by simplicity, consistency and restraint. We should try to express good taste and fitness in the epoch in which we live. The laws of good taste and fitness are eternal.