

LADY DUFF GORDON, STYLE EXPERT, DIES

New York Times

Monday 22 April 1935

Pioneer in Bringing Freedom to Women's Fashions Headed Chain of Garment Shops

COINED DRESS TERM 'CHIC'

First Split Skirt and Manikin Show Credited to Her---She Had Stores in Three Countries

Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES

LONDON, April 21-- Lucy Duff Gordon, a pioneer in bringing freedom and grace back to women's dress after the Victorian era, died today after an illness of six months. Her age was 71.

For thirty years Lady Duff Gordon directed the famous dress firm, Lucile, with branches in London, Paris, New York and Chicago.

She was said to have been the first to introduce the split skirt, to hold a manikin show and to use the word "chic" as applied to women's dress.

Sister of Elinor Glyn

Lady Duff Gordon was a Canadian by birth, the daughter of Douglas Sutherland of London, Ont., and she was a sister of Elinor Glyn, the author of "Three Weeks" and other exotic novels. She was the widow of James S. Wallace when she was married to Sir Cosmo Edmund Duff Gordon in March, 1900.

Seven years before that, however, she had gone into the dressmaking business and in 1894 she adopted the trade name of Lucile. In March, 1903, she sold the business to Lucile, Ltd., in consideration of a substantial allotment of shares.

Lucile, Ltd., was established for the first time in New York in January, 1910, and a shop was opened at 17 West Thirty-sixth Street. Lady Duff Gordon had the title of president. Although at first a great financial success, there came a crimp which ultimately led to bankruptcy when, on May 25, 1911, the establishment was raided by customs officials and the manager arrested on charges of conspiracy to defraud the United States of customs duties.

It was not until eleven years later, however, that the firm went into bankruptcy, having failed for an amount of \$100,000. In 1924 Lady Duff Gordon's firm failed in London. Although she was regarded as one of the outstanding creators of women's styles, Lady Duff Gordon exhibited poor business ability in the hearings before the Recorder in Bankruptcy. That official asked her:

"Can you give me some particulars of your shareholdings?"

"It is all Greek to me," she replied. "I don't know what a share is."

Sir Cosmo and Lady Duff Gordon were among those rescued from the ill-fated White Star liner Titanic in

1912. The inquiry brought out the fact that Sir Cosmo had paid a member of the crew \$25 to assist him and his wife.

Through her second marriage, Lady Duff Gordon gained the privilege of presentation at the Court of St. James, but since early in 1910 she had been stricken from the list of those admitted because she engaged in business in England. The exclusion came according to the rule established by Queen Victoria that no person engaged in trade could remain on the list of those admitted to court.

Maxims for Sensible Dressing

Lady Duff Gordon had certain maxims for sensible dressing. She said:

"One never grows tired of a simple gown, and neither do one's friends. Such a gown is always in fashion, and, with a smart hat and neat shoes, one is always becomingly dressed.

"A girl should never dress so that the dress subjects her personality.

"She should never make `sex appeal' on the street.

"She should never wear skirts so short that she shows a bit of leg above her top boots.

"Wear black by all means."

The last advice was for working girls who cannot afford a large wardrobe.

When in court in New York some years ago in connection with bankruptcy litigation, Lady Duff Gordon was asked if she had bought any Liberty Bonds.

"Why should I buy any?" she replied. "This country means nothing to me. I have had nothing but trouble over here. It is an awful country."

Her husband died in 1931.

Courtesy of Mark Baber

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