

ON SHADES IN BLUE-STOCKINGS.

A STUDY IN MIXED METAPHORS.

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THE fashionable colour for this season in ladies' dress (1895) undoubtedly has been blue, except in stockings, which have been black with a sprinkling of brown, blue being a decidedly off colour for hose. Blue-stockings, however, in certain circles of increasing circumference have been, and always will be, fashionable. They are being turned out in surprising numbers just now, in all shades, and makes, and sizes. The manufacture of them is on a scale never before contemplated; the supply being so great, there surely must be a brisk demand for them somewhere.

The various shades may conveniently be arranged in two well-defined groups. The lighter shades may be classed as amateur, or Cambridge blue-stockings; while the darker, from royal to navy, as the professional, or Oxford blue. By the amateur blue-stocking, I understand those who have a thirst for knowledge rather for its own sake than as a key to unlock the door of some learned profession or calling. The distinction is an important one and is very marked. The amateur blue-stocking is deservedly more or less a general favourite. Her earnest, intelligent face always betrays her thirst for knowledge—it does not matter much what, so long as it is something she does not already know. Indeed, her desire to increase her stock of ideas is so strong that no difficulties are too great for her to surmount. This attitude is an attractive one to men, in that it pays a tacit tribute to their superior learning, a toll never received by men from her professional sisters.

Although our amateur is not contemplating turning her knowledge into money, she displays an enthusiasm in its acquirement, which often causes undue wonder and astonishment in the irreverent sex. She will attend classes and courses of lectures with an assiduity which excites a pained surprise and puts to shame the lounging undergraduate, who retires

uneasily to the back seats. She will write and re-write essays and abstracts of every subject that she hears. We attribute the great increase in this class of late years to the general stirring up of the frontal lobes of women that has been going on for some time with such vigour.

It is all very good and healthy; but we doubt not that the keenness which we have described will wear off in time, as knowledge of all sorts becomes, as it long since ought to have been, the equal heritage of men and women.

But women will always be superior in one point. Their habit of thinking in the concrete, rather than in the abstract, has this good result, that they always yearn to turn what they know to practical account. Far from being content with imbibing theories, you will find them in twenty-four hours trying to turn some of them into practice, with a quickness, and often a success, that opens the eyes of the more sluggish male.

When we turn to the professional blue-stockings of the darker shades, we are at once struck with the difference in the classical ideal which we had evolved out of the depths of our inner consciousness, from the reality, as she presents herself before our admiring eyes. The angular, spectacled, hatchet-faced and faded but loquacious spinster, whom we picture as having the monopoly of all the "ologies" is really such a *rara avis* as to be anything but a true type or even a passable caricature. The professional blue-stocking of the period is generally in the form of a sweet girl-graduate, wholesome, fresh, bright and winning, and anything but a fossil. The fact is, the whole texture of the stocking is different from what we had conceived. The blue-stocking of our imagination was a very closely woven hose, that entirely concealed the flesh and blood beneath it; the blue-stocking, as she is now turned out, is of open-work texture, in which flashes of flesh gleam everywhere through the dark strands of the cultured spirit.

Nevertheless, these professionals, charming as they are, can readily be distinguished from the common herd. Some of their distinguishing characteristics could indeed be dispensed with, as for instance when they think the only really important part of their dress is a pair of blue stockings. This distressing idea leads, we are told, to some considerable inattention, and not unfrequently, shall we say, slovenliness, in other parts of their attire. We take no pleasure in these strictures, but it may not be, perhaps, entirely needless to suggest that this distinction at any rate should be conspicuous by its absence. Indeed the professional Oxford blue should be even more careful than their illiterate sisters to be dressed (physically) up to date at all times with conspicuous neatness and care.

But there are some distinctions that are more pleasing. One cannot but be struck with the entire absence of "side" of the really learned, and in its place a great quietness of manner and the repose of conscious strength. So marked indeed is this in these ladies, who have often more letters after their names than in them, that it gives them not unfrequently an almost masculine bearing, not in any coarseness or mannishness, but in the absence of outward emotion, in the want of interest in the sound of their own voices, or in the having

the last word, which is not always found amongst women.

I have noticed this quality particularly amongst young lady-doctors, though it is seen in all literati. I have one before my mind now, who has been very successful in repeating four times, with no skilled aid, perhaps the most difficult operation known to surgery. She is a heroine in her way, and an undoubted professional blue-stocking of the dark hue, but of the open-work texture. Those who cannot see beneath the surface, do not suspect the fund of knowledge and of practical surgical skill that lies beneath that quiet and calm exterior. While on the one hand there is no self-assertion, on the other there is no *mauvaise honte*: the clear grey eyes can look anyone in the face, and not be ashamed, for there is power in them—the power of possessed knowledge, as well as the purity of consecrated womanhood.

Yet, after all, we men have still a slight and ill-defined feeling that this professional blue-stocking, charming and skilled as she is, does not after all, perhaps, fill out the complete ideal of womanhood. Is this a stubborn relic of bygone prejudice, and shall we seek to overcome it? Or does it contain a hoary truth as old as the sex, and handed down to us by heredity, which it is foolish to fight against?

The time has perhaps hardly come to decide this question. One thing is certain, that we want more amateur blue-stockings. The classical definition of culture is to "know something of everything, and everything of something." The first clause is fairly-well carried out by women in general, but the second undoubtedly involves a tint more or less blue. But even at the risk of having one's hose of a slightly cerulean hue, it is well to be cultured; and for this, every woman ought to know some subject thoroughly well. The wide-spread smattering that is carried on for examination purposes in most girls'-schools of course hinders this; but there is always time after school-life proper is over for the perfecting of one's knowledge in any chosen direction. What we desire to see is not a race of women senior wranglers and classics, but a general deepening of the culture of women in the way we have indicated.

As for the noble army of professionals, we wish them God-speed in their work, for we are sure the whole world is ennobled in the education of women. We must remember, however, that in each year that passes, more and more women will compete for whatever posts are offered, and as the scale of pay is already unfairly low for women's work, we fear for some time to come the remuneration for their labours must be insufficient. During the first rush of women into professional posts, it is vain to hope that any Trades Unions or artificial restrictions will keep prices up under the fierce competition that must ensue; but a better time is coming, and when the position of women in professional life has at length been settled, and university women are as common as university men, we confidently expect that the value of their services will be more thoroughly recognised pecuniarily; and last, but not least, that the odious term which forms the heading of this paper will be for ever banished from English nomenclature.