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 decided 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 manufacturer 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 unthinkingly to the back seats. She will write and rewrite essays and abstracts of every subject that she hears. We attribute the great increase in the class of second year students of the general stirring up of the front lobes of women that has been going on for some time with such vigor. 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 man 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 implausible 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 mind.

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 picture stands there. To the picture as the having the monopoly of all the "odogies" is really such a "nara avis" as to be anything but a true type or even a possible 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 tradition of blue-stockings 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, and when the system was not going on, was of open-work texture, in which flashes of flesh gleam everywhere through the dark strands of the cultured spirit.

Nevertheless, the professional charring as they are, can readily be distinguished from the common herd. Some of their distinguishing characteristics could indeed be dispensed with, as 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 the really learned, and in its place a great quietness of manner and the repose of conscious strength. The Oxford blue-marked indeed is this of 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 manfulness, 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 ladies of good figure, though it is seen in all literati. I have one before me who, by the way, is the head of the wig and stock of our 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-insertion, 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 possession of knowledge, as well as the purity of consecrated womanhood.

Yet, after all, we 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 remove it? Or do we not contain a holier 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 tinct more or less of the professional. But every woman's style of of carrying on examination purposes in most girls'—schools of course hinders this; but there is always time after school-life proper is over for the perfection of her 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 commonly 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.