



BY AN OBSERVANT WOMAN.

CHARACTER may be interpreted by trifles truly light as air. Has it ever struck you how strikingly the feminine disposition delineates itself upon the female back?

You say you have never noticed it. Then let me try to prove the truth of my statement, for I may claim to be, not a prying, but an observant woman, and the backs of my numberless feminine friends, as well as those which I have, so to speak, followed on the way, have convinced me that intellectual qualities, domestic virtues, arrogance, vulgarity, meanness, spitefulness, and kindness can each be denoted as much by the feminine back as by the face.

Intensely typical is the back in evening dress. Let me suppose that I sit behind you one evening in the stalls of a London theatre. Modestly we will take our seats in a fifth row, and study at

leisure the backs before us. Not a yard away, for instance, sits the prosperous but vulgar back—the back which breathes of wealth lately acquired through, perhaps, the channels of the meat market. It

is clad in a gown of richest crimson velvet, with lace adorning it worth a small fortune, and diamonds worth a ship-load of carcasses glitter everywhere.

But alas! here beauty ends. For the velvet is stretched over a breadth unique, and looks more like the work of a Tottenham Court Road upholsterer than a Bond Street dressmaker. The back and shoulders are of fine, mottled pink, falling into many insurmountable creases. The ears, of generous

size, stand out aggressively, and are made still more noticeable by the weighty diamond drops in each. The manner in which the coarse and tow-coloured locks are dressed is wonderfully elaborate, but nevertheless terrible, with its *bandeau* of diamonds, and many stars. We feel quite sure that the owner of this back is ostentatiously proud of the position in which Fortune has been pleased to place her, and that her greatest happiness is realised in making herself a monumental display of her banking account.

Then our eyes wander to a back a few stalls ahead; and this is one that could never be mistaken for anything else than that of utter and dull respectability. The evening gown, of excellent silk, is cut with a peculiar unsmartsness,



RESPECTABILITY.



PROSPEROUS AND VULGAR.

and is of that shade of ginger yellow so beloved by the respectable, and a hue that, in its unbecomingness, would detract even from the peer-



A NAUGHTY BACK.

less beauty of a Helen of Troy. There is a squareness, angularity, and a general uncompromising stiffness about this back which is eloquent of the ready-made corset—nay, we can even define the starting-line of this article of raiment! The neck—what little is shown—is not of lily whiteness,



THE SUBURBAN BACK (EVENING).

but inclines towards that peculiar aspect which has been described as "goose-fleshy." There is a string of broken coral beads round the neck which is in itself an emblem of propriety, and the *coiffure*—of hair that absolutely refuses to be coaxed into a wave or curl—is arranged with infinite care in the meaningless little twists that nowadays take the place of the basket-plaits of yore. Note, too, the finishing touch of adornment in the bow of black ribbon—not velvet—placed mathematically on the top; and perhaps nothing is more characteristic of the respectable back than this bow, which I have found to be ever an

outward and visible sign of the domestic virtues.

In delightful contrast, although perhaps it is rather wrong of me to think so, appears that vision of a naughty back which I would point out to you standing next to a not unknown dramatic critic. Who can fail to admire its grace and *chic*-ness?—and the naughty back always appears more distinctive in evening attire than any other. It is perhaps a *trifle* plump, but beautifully proportioned and moulded. The gown, cut audaciously low, seems to consist of a mass of sunset pink and grey *chiffon* drifted together, but evidently the work of a master hand; it reveals to our eyes a neck and shoulders creamy white, satin smooth, with a distracting dimple playing hide-and-seek on either side.

The soft, golden hair, curling babyishly—so subtle is art—about the neck, is gathered up into a heap of silken fluffiness, upon the summit of which a diamond butterfly perches coquettishly. There is undoubtedly a tinge of wickedness in this back, but to shut our eyes to its fascinations would be impossible.



THE SUBURBAN BACK (MORNING).

There is another type of back which in no case should be passed over, nor, when once pointed out, can it ever be mistaken: this is the suburban back often observed at places of entertainment when free seats are prevalent. From a coign of vantage I have watched and learnt its peculiarities well. The suburban back is nearly always clothed in what the owner fondly terms an evening blouse, in pongee silk, or crepon of an aggressive art shade; and, try to disguise the fact as we will, there is a home-made appearance about it which is unmistakable. It is a hundred to one that this blouse will be cut in a **V**, and trimmed with a frill, either too deep or too narrow, of white lace that breathes of bargains; and I have invariably noticed that



THE SPORTING BACK.

The *coiffure* of the suburban back is wonderfully elaborate, and adorned with numberless paste ornaments of palpable cheapness. It will be found that the evening wrap proper is seldom seen as a covering to the suburban back; some woolly creation in pale blue or pink, which is not removed from the shoulders until the beginning of the second act, is preferred. But it must not be thought by this

that the owner of the suburban back is poor; indeed, I have known such with a substantial balance at their bankers'.

Another back typical of Suburbia may be noticed in all its perfection if a walk be taken up Regent Street during the era of sales. Short, and broad, and high-shouldered, we may note it ambling along in front, clad in a dolman of velvet heavily bebugled. The neck of this back is hardly apparent, but the head-gear.

a *toque*, like Joseph's coat, of many colours, from which the veil-ends artlessly dangle, is an object of interest. It will be noticed also that, wet or dry the weather, a fat, tightly gloved hand will be sure to be clawing up the voluminous skirt, with thrifty intentions, but leaving exposed to vulgar gaze a pair of substantial ankles and comfortable, flat-heeled boots—sixes. Who can deny that this

back is typical of the excellent British matron, whose husband is "something in the City," and who is, without doubt, the mother of the young lady in the pink crepon and pearls?

Now sharpen your memory a little as I bring before you the sporting back, which I am sure you will recognise immediately. Long, firm, and supple, with a rounded waist, and neck well set on the shoulders, clad, if we note it out of doors, in the tailor—not tailor-made—coat and skirt of perfect cut and finish, and more often than not black or dark grey in colour—this back may have a slight stoop at the shoulders, but the carriage is altogether graceful and light, and denotes plainly pluck and decision. The sporting back looks undoubtedly its best in the saddle, but oddly enough, when seen in evening attire at hunt balls, it is far from unsightly, being lissom as a hazel-wand and straight as a dart. The whiteness of the neck may perhaps be disfigured by a weather-beaten line; but we cannot raise serious exception to this, for is it not healthy, athletic, and essentially national?



THE LADYLIKE BACK.



THE HORSEY BACK.



THE NEW-WOMAN BACK.

A poor third cousin to this back is that distinguished by the word "horsey." From personal observation I have noticed this back prevalent in river-side suburbs as much as anywhere; it is always long and narrow, and appears clad in a down-to-the-heels Newmarket coat of mannish, but not first-rate style. The walk will be jaunty and jerky; the head held forward—it sports a bowler hat; and it will be noticed that the ungloved hand will be swinging a stick briskly; and, in fact, to see an umbrella in connection with a sporting back would be a distinct anomaly.

And what about the ladylike back? Ah! that is one which can never be mistaken but for what it is. Graceful and well-proportioned, with a head set prettily upon good shoulders, and with a waist round and neat, the ladylike back may be detected in great frequency if one is taking a stroll up Bond Street on a bright April morning.



Photo, by H. S. Mendelssohn.

Maian E. Pitchard

The well-fitting trim gown of some quiet-hued serge or cloth, the

touch of sable or chinchilla round the neck, the becomingly arranged but not elaborate *coiffure*, topped by the neat but smart head-gear, and lastly, the quiet, even walk, proclaim, without a glimpse of the face, the English-woman of refinement and good breeding.

I had nearly passed over a back representative of the times; and if you would like to note its peculiarities without prejudice, watch for five minutes the door of the feminine club sacred to the great cause of emancipation, when its members are gathering for conference. A positive thrill of terror comes over us as we notice the gentlemanlike fit of the loose coat, the mannish action of the shoulders, the short-cropped hair, and the cruelly hard felt hat. The scanty skirt cannot conceal the defiant stride, nor the universally big foot, clad in shoes that *must* have been stolen from a brother's wardrobe. This *tout ensemble* has but one meaning, it is

the back of the "New Woman," and from her acquaintance may Heaven long preserve us!

### PRIZE COMPETITION.

THE Editor of THE LADY'S REALM has pleasure in announcing another prize competition for a **Fifty-five Guinea Upright Grand Piano** by the firm of Messrs. Chappell & Co.

The prize will be awarded for the most correct list of the twelve most popular contributions which have appeared in THE LADY'S REALM since its publication.

The twelve most popular contributions will be determined by the general vote of the competitors.

In making out a list the competitor should place the contributions in the order in which it is considered they rank.

Each list must be sent in on or before April 2, 1900, marked on the envelope, "Feature," and addressed to The Editor, THE LADY'S REALM, 34, Paternoster Row, London, together with the coupon of p. 18 of advertisements duly filled up. The Editor's decision in every case to be considered final, and no correspondence can be entered into.

The result of the competition will be announced as soon as possible. Competitors may send in as many lists as they like, but each list must be accompanied by a separate coupon.