WOMEN WRITERS' FROCKS

The Gowns Affected by Ladies of the Genus Lovely Women Literary.

Blue Stockings, Short Hair and Spectacles are Things of Imagination.

The Simple Draperies and Quiet Colors of Many Wielders of the Pen—Women's Doings.

[Special Correspondence of THE INDEPENDENT.]

NEW YORK, June 18.—German women have a reputation for thinking good clothes incompatible with virtue. Americans often hold them inconsistent with brains. We hear much of the learned ladies, shabbily dressed and untidily coiffed, who wear spectacles and home made clothes, who pull up their petticoats in the streets and show clumsy boots and worsted stockings. In good truth I have seen few women for whose mental calibre I have much respect who tousle their hair with much crimping of hot irons, who spend a life's ransom on tight fitting bodices and abnormally small waists and big feather fans, and who flirt abominably in the conservatory under the shelter of the flabby leaves of a big begonia. But in spite of these acknowledged shortcomings of those whom somebody calls the "developed women," I confess to a certain weakness for the inconspicuous dress, simple draperies and quiet colors often characteristic of them.

I wouldn't have altered, for instance, the frocks of Miss Edwards, who lectured to us on Egyptology all winter in plain silks, exquisite of texture and unmistakably refined, but costing evidently in the putting on or taking off very little attention. Despite the pronunciamento of those who hold that the chief function of one sex is to adorn itself, they appeared to me to be quite the ideal gowns for a busy woman.

Neither would I alter the toilets of Miss Frances Willard, who recognizes the policy of becoming dress and buys handsome costumes, when she gets any, but who grows frequently so absorbed in her work that she forgets her bonnet has been rained on and her dress acquired a wrinkle or two from much traveling. We women have dress preached at us in season and out of season. If we forget it, that means we are in earnest, and earnestness in almost any cause is refreshing.

I like the simple, dark, well-shaped frocks of Miss Grace H. Dodge, costing little more than the often showier gowns of the working girls wite whom she spends so many pleasant evenings. When the pretty club parlors in Thirty-eighth street are full to overflowing, and "there's plenty of room, girls, on the floor and the tables," how could the smiling president take herself the lowliest position if her skirts shuddered when the touched a carpet that might possibly be dusty?

The great majority of women writers differ very little in their outward appearance from the average, intelligent, rather quiet woman who goes into quiet society. Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, the editor of St. Nicholas, for example, wears close fitting, matronly gowns of solid colored silks with refined little bonnets. You would never spot her for a celebrity, but simply remark that she was pleasant and attractive looking. So with Mrs. Margaret E. Sangster, of Harper's Bazar, whose winning face would probably leave you altogether oblivious of her gracefully fashioned black dress in contrast with her fresh complexion and prematurely whitened hair. So with Olive Thorne Miller, the bird lover, of whom you would note that she was a splendidly vigorous specimen of mature womanhood, straightforward and sincere, long before it would occur to you to pay particular attention to her unobtrusive but elegant gown—if one may use with its proper meaning a word so much abused—a little open at the throat and decked with fine laces. So with Mrs. Martha J. Lamb, the editor of the Magazine of American History; so with Miss Mary F. Seymour, of the Business Woman's Journal, whose frank, alert countenance with its bright eyes and rosy cheeks catches the attention much sooner than her trim little bonnet with its tie sprays of white lilac or anything about her clothes; so with Mrs. Braeunlich, of the Engineering and Mining Journal; so with Mrs. Grannis, of the Church Union; so with Mrs. Betts, of the Christian Union, who will lean back in a chair and chat with you, and fifteen minutes later you will catch a glimpse of a brown turban in the middle distance, and when it turns about you will be surprised to find that it adorns the very woman with whom you have been speaking. I know not what others may think, but as for me give me the clothes that convey such an impression of "suitableness" that when they are out of your sight you are unable to call to mind having seen their details.

Jenny June has worn black since Mr. Croly's death, and I don't know that anybody could find a costume in which he would rather see her than the soft draping lace falling close about the figure with a ribbon knotting it here and there.

Grace Greenwood commonly wears black also. Her figure is a little bowed and she combs her dark hair down over her ears in the fashion of a generation ago. She is fond of lace and often covers her shoulders with a handsome lace shawl or mantilla.

Mrs. M. Louise Thomas, who dropped her mantle as president of Sorosis upon the shoulders of Ella Dietz Clymer (sister of Secretary Bayard's wife) is stately and benevolent in black velvet. She has a strong, kind face framed in smooth coils of hair.

Mrs. Clymer dresses with a certain individuality and grace. The last time I saw her she wore a combination of old rose and black with picturesque sleeves open from the elbows and filled in with deep lace ruffles. Her hat—it was one of those inconclusive things that you hesitate to define as hat or bonnet—was black lace with a wreath of old rose flowers.

Kate Sanborn dresses handsomely, and is, with her rather tall, finely developed figure and blonde coloring, an impressive personage. I have a mental picture of her entering Mrs. Croly's drawing-rooms with a witty sentence on her lips and in a trailing black silk with square-cut neck, lace garniture and here and there a touch of what one would judge to be her favorite color, yellow.

Laura Holloway Langford—her new name does not yet come easily—is a small person, slender, quick and alive in her movements. Sometimes she wears black with a touch of blue in her bonnet or a plaided silk in which there are grayish tints mixed with blue.

Mrs. Lee C. Harby, the southern poet who has recently made New York home, is chestnut-haired, and wears warm browns with Vandyke lace and embroideries. When one is as pretty as Miss Bisland there is reason why she should deck herself with the soft black lace, draping the bust, and exposing the round arms, in which Mr. Champney painted the young writer.

Mrs. Frank Leslie, who combines business and social cares, gives much attention to her toilet, and in black silk at her office desk or ashes of roses and shaded grays at a reception, with bonnets and gloves of faultless match, is always richly attired. Robert Collyer was speaking of having met her one evening "loaded with ropes of pearls." For the taste of an old-fashioned person like myself she, with most women who have money to buy them, wears too many jewels. I have given over expecting anybody to agree with me, but I do not care to see a hand covered with rings. It is prettier without ornaments or with not more than one. However, since Mrs. Leslie pluckily made her own money, it is her own business what she does with it, and a good deal goes warm-heartedly and intelligently into charities. At least she wears jewels only with evening dress, when such magnificence is allowed.

Mrs. Ballington Booth of the Salvation Army is a woman of whom it may be said as truly as of Mrs. Leslie that she attends to her gowns. It would not seem that the army costume offered much chance for elaboration, but her uniform of dark blue skirt and plaited waist is perfectly fitting and of fine rich material, finished at throat and sleeves wite a white silk cord and embroidered on the belt with a sacred motto. Her large poke bonnet is of fine black straw, trimmed with folds of navy blue satin, the scarlet ribbon badge interwoven about the crown. It is tied at the chin with a big soft bow of broad ribbons. An American flag of fine silk forms a regalia sash and a plain wedding ring gleams on one small hand. "Myrtle," as Marshal Booth calls his wife, has a sweet, smooth face with fine hazel eyes.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox dresses picturesquely, often in Empire gowns. A creamy white silk with waist as short as Mme. Recamier's, low neck and short sleeves, with garniture of gold embroidery, is for her a becoming style. Her brown hair is worn in a Greek knot, with such a costume.

Not among the literary women pure and simple would one class the Marquise Lanza. She is a writer of no mean gifts, but she is at the same time a beautiful and accomplished woman of the world and dresses to suit this latter role.

The same dictum applies to "Bab," the much quoted correspondent, who is the Mrs. Mallon who has lately taken the fashion department of the Ladies' Home Journal and who achieves the somewhat unusual distinction of being at once quietly refined and "chic" in her dressing. A good many pens have been dipped in ink to describe the little black jacket faced with red in which this spring she appears on the promenade.

Kate Field, who is everything, lecturer, journalist, book-writer, never had it said of her, I imagine, that she didn't know how to compose a toilet as well as a leading article. Her gowns are as characteristic of her as is her Washington. What I admire about Miss Field is her exquisite pronunciation. I know of no one who makes the English language so musical.

If you come to the women who lead in the musical world, Mrs. Alice Freeman Palmer, ex-president of Wellesley, suits her warm brown tints excellently with browns touched with red. Mrs. Helen Hiscock Backus, the president of the Collegiate Alumnæ, dresses always simply, but tastefully. I remember her at a reception in yellow crepe cut in Greek lines.

Mrs. Lizzie W. Champney enters into the life of the literary world and through her husband that of the studios. She is a tall, rather dark, cameo-faced woman, and I remember her most vividly in black relieved by one glowing, crimson flower. A picturesque woman—she's not literary—is the wife of Chase, the painter, especially when she wears her Japanese tea gown.

Mrs. Jenness Miller has written novels as well as designed "improved" frocks. Her color sense is acute and she is beyond question a dress artist, but I have seen her on occasion when her gown didn't hang as well as that of the unregenerate woman. Even great Homer nods sometimes.

American Art Students in Paris.

Apropos of the recent ebullition over the introduction of nude models before a mixed class, people just returned from abroad are telling tales that outdo Zola. These revelations, they maintain, are mere Sunday school stories compared with what might be uncovered if the undraped truth were not too disgusting. A woman who attended the convention of painters in Edinburgh last autumn relates that a famous artist seriously maintained that it would be well if women students could not find instruction in Paris, because the atelier life demoralized their characters; whereupon Miss Burton, the only woman artist in the Scotch city, inquired if the atmosphere said to poison the women was especially stimulating to the moral fibre of the men. American women students were attacked with especial virulence, which led the American auditor to look into the matter with some closeness when she crossed the channel. She was fortunate in having friends in the Quartier Latin, and she now declares that she found it enough to destroy one's love of art altogether to know what foulness one must face in order to get instruction. If her informants are credible, some of the Paris ateliers witness orgies that are worse than those of a house of prostitution. The condition of things abroad has no especial bearing on the question here, because there are no mixed classes in Paris, although models of opposite sexes pose at the same time on the same platform; but what especially disturbed my informant was the confirmation she believed she obtained of the rumors derogatory to the women students, the tone of their classrooms being reported in general quite the reverse of elevating. Half a dozen American women students known to be of respectable families were found living amid such associations, taking their meals at a restaurant frequented by such notorious characters, and walking in and out in such close proximity to so much pitch that defilement seemed inevitable. Things had gone so far that the restaurant, not too squeamish, probably, had "objected to their loud voices."

So many American girls have made honorable records in Paris that the black sheep, if there are any, must stand out very conspicuously in a flock of white ones.

A Child of 21.

The young girl who is "kept back" because her older sisters are yet lingering in the sluggish matrimonial market is a familiar figure in the story books, especially in those of English origin, but it was never my fortune to see a pronounced specimen of the type until quite recently. I must say the job had been done with neat thoroughness. I was prepared for the meeting by an irrefutable authority, who informed me that the girl was of the right age, though the wrong sex, to vote. I wouldn't have believed it possible. She was just home from school. Her hair hung down her back in glossy waves, her figure was undeveloped and girlish in the extreme. Her dress ended not far above her knees, showing several inches of scantily filled stockings above the tops of her shoes. She was chewing candy as she bounced in. I waited with awe and apprehension for the phenomenon to speak.

"Mamma," said she in a high-keyed voice, flinging down her schoolbag, "Nellie and Mame are going to the park; can I go with them?"

"Yes, my dear," said mamma, ever indulgent to her youngest, and out dashed the phenomenon with the hop, skip and jump of a 13-year-old girl. "That child is so impetuous," murmured the mother, languidly, "quite a hoyden." As playing in the park is much better fun than playing on the piano, the child of 21 is probably having a pretty healthy and happy time of it, unless her doting mother has to starve her to keep her lean.

Cosmetics in Hot Weather.

To make up one's face is at any time of year unwise, but between May and October it has peculiar dangers. The other day, on an East River ferry boat, a trim and jaunty girl stepped out of the ladies' cabin to the forward deck. The clear white of her skin, set off by the roses blooming in her cheeks, showed effectively through her "beauty spot" veil. She raised her parasol and stood under its shelter enjoying the breeze. A frolicsome zephyr had no more pressing occupation than to turn it inside out, nearly wrenching it from her hand. It was a hot day. It cost her a long struggle to repair damages. In course of the fight her veil became disarranged. When the parasol was finally righted, she might have been going on the warpath, for her pink and white tints were rearranged in vertical stripes, with little rills of perspiration trickling through. By her side stood a girl in drab who whipped out a handkerchief and began a whispered consultation. Some judicious dabs with the cambric followed, and a few well-considered tugs at the veil. Was there a precipitate retreat to the shadow of the cabin? No; the made-up girl has got to the point where she expects to be made-up, as she expects to be washed and combed. It's a little disagreeable to perform either sort of toilet in public, but neither seems to claim over the other the palm of respectability.

The Finger Bible.

Have you a finger Bible? It's the latest thing to hang with the rest of the danglers and janglers on one's chatelaine. The theory that the fashionable girl does not consult the good book outside of Lent is thus conclusively disproved. The finger Bible is only an inch wide and three and a half inches long. It is published by the Oxford University press and printed on very thin India paper. It doesn't weigh an ounce. One that I saw yesterday had a jeweled clasp and was bound in perfumed leather. Its nearest neighbors were a tiny crystal bottle, holding some sort of cordial, that swung on one side and a small bottle holding a smaller powder puff that swung on the other. Good company?

Woman and Her Needle.

A neighbor of mine tumbled off of his house the other day while he was acting as amateur painter. A professional painter who stopped to inquire for him said he hoped he would not die of it, although he was taking the bread out of the mouth of an honest man. Our dressmakers have not begun to talk to us in this way; on the contrary everybody praises the woman who has her daughter taught "the complete art of cutting and fitting." And yet dressmaking is a trade, as is shoemaking and millinery. The woman who gets her bread and butter by it should know all the ins and outs of its many details. For other women to learn some smattering of it may often be convenient, even necessary, but it is not in the line of social progress. A fine state of affairs it would be if every man when he wanted a mutton chop went out and killed and dressed his own sheep, and every man when he wanted a pair of boots made them. The world is too busy nowadays for the individual to stand by himself and supply his own needs. For the housewife to spare her husband's income by patient stitchery is sweet labor we shall be long in abolishing; but for the army of women who work at bread winning occupations all day to sit up half the night to make their clothes is ruinous economy. The man who earns $5 a week has more common sense. He doesn't put his evenings into the sewing of pantaloon seams. The woman's business is to sleep and get strength to make the especial work she has chosen more valuable. It will cost her more than money to burn the candle at both ends. We need to get rid of the sewing fetich, the idea that there is an inherent, peculiar virtue in a woman's setting stitches. In point of fact it's all a matter of convenience, and civilization will not have done the fair thing by one whole sex until it is as easy for a woman to walk into a dry goods store and buy at a reasonable price a tasteful dress as it is now for a man to supply himself with a good business suit ready made. ELIZA PUTNAM HEATON.

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THE IRON BOOT.

Its History in the Past and the Storm That it Has Weathered.

We republish the following history of the Old Iron Boot, from THE INDEPENDENT of July 17, 1882, as a sketch worthy to be preserved, not only on account of Mr. Millen, who over 20 years ago had it constructed and swung aloft over his noted shoe store on upper Main street, but also because of Mr. John R. Drew, his successor, who has recently removed his vast stock of boots and shoes to a new and easily accessible store opposite the Grand Central hotel on Main street, where he has raised the old iron boot high overhead, from whence it can be seen by all from either end of Main street. It is the same familiar sign, renewed with gilding and paint, and is known like an old friend to all the present generation of Helena. But to the story:

HELENA, June 21.—To the Editor of THE INDEPENDENT:—Sir:—I noticed an item in your local columns the other morning that caused, me, as an "old-timer," more grief than you can imagine. It was simply that a suit had been begun against my old friend, Nick Millen, to compel him to take down his sign of the Iron Boot, that has so long waved to the force of the free winds of the mountains, in front of his business place in the metropolis of Montana. I read also that hearing of the case was postponed until next Thursday, because of the illness of the defendant and his counsel, save one who came to the rescue and had the case postponed. I did not wonder at this, for as I realized the fact that the vandal idea of improvement, as moved by our august city council, had decreed that this ancient landmark, which is coeval with the foundation of our town, should be lowered to the earth, I almost turned sick myself.

A thousand recollections rushed through my mind, as I sat down to think such a sacrilege could be committed. "Great heavens!" I said, "will Helena be Helena, when that grand old monument of early days is gone forever?" As well might the city council order the Bear Tooth, Powel's Peak, the Falls of the Missouri, the grand geysers, and the whole Rocky range to disappear, and then expect people to call this land Montana, as to remove Millen's Iron Boot, and then call this city Helena.

No, Mr. INDEPENDENT, it cannot be done. Not an old-time miner, ranchman, cowboy, bullwhacker, or stage driver, but will rush to the rescue of this venerable sign of all signs. Why, sir, for seventeen years they have gazed on this oriflamme of St. Crispin, when on a pilgrimage to Helena to buy equipments for their feet. It is the first object to arrest their gaze when they come up Main street, and its clear cut and graceful shape is outlined against the southern sky as it sways and gently creaks from its lofty swing. Not to see it, they would at once become bewildered, and swear there was no more a Helena.

All other landmarks are gone from Main street. The unsightly woden awnings are gone, the low wooden signs that so completely obstructed the views are gone, the wooden gutters that so frequently conducted water from the roofs on to the passer-by below are gone, the rickety wooden steps in the sidewalks, that were so dangerous to all, are gone. Not a landmark but the old Iron Boot is left of all that for years were so familiar. It is iron and can't burn, then why remove it?

Almost the entire population of Montana, the bold pioneers, with their wives, sweethearts, and little ones, have shuffled into Mr. Mullen's store in well worn shoes, and again walked out proud and glad, with new understandings.

By long association, inanimate things become to us as familiar and loving friends. Poets have immortalized them in song. Can such songs as "The Old Oaken Bucket," "Woodman, Spare That Tree," or "Old Arm Chair" ever be forgotten?

If some one among us would just now write in glowing words a song to "The Old Iron Boot, that swings in the air," he would immortalize himself and save the boot. Cannot Eddy or some of the poets of Helena come to the rescue. Pray heaven they may.

Sir, that glorious old boot must still wave. When, in 1874, the fire fiend in his terrible wrath rode down Last Chance gulch in a whirlwind of fire, carrying desolation before him and leaving but cinders and sorrow in his path, where was the flame stayed? Go look at the scorched side of Nick Miller's store and the warped figure of the old iron boot, and they will tell you. The fire fiend had respect for his grim highness and stopped just under his heel. I, for one, who was a witness to this grand spectacle, say, "forever let it wane."

W. F. WHEELER."

It is a singular fact, that has been remarked by almost every one who has ever bought foot-wear from John R. Drew, that he feels that he has a new sole and solid understanding, and that he has the whole world under his feet.

The American Book Company.

The consolidation of the leading school book house of the country into the American Book company will prove of great advantage to the Northwest in that the St. Paul Book and Stationery company, of St. Paul, has been appointed northwestern agent, thus enabling dealers and school officers to purchase all their books from one house, near home, instead of having to divide their orders among half a dozen eastern publishers and pay heavy transportation charges on each order as heretofore. We understand that the St. Paul company will make as advantageous terms as the New York house. Surely this is an acceptable change.

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SITUATION WANTED—A SOBER YOUNG man, not afraid to work, would like a position in any respectable business. Address J. A. H. Independent.

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