

SLAVES OF FASHION SHOWS

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Illustrated by W. E. HILL



NOT that I am in the least interested in fashion shows. I don't care what the women wear so long as it is dark blue with something white up high around the neck. But one doesn't have to be interested in fashion shows to attend one of them. You may be interested in some one

who is interested in fashion shows, or you may simply be interested in slumming.

I had, in a moment of domestic prodigality, signed up for a shopping sortie to help select my winter underwear. "If you won't come with me," I had been told, "so that the clerk can get the exact size, you mustn't complain if they are so large around the waist that they have to be taken in at the back. I should think that you could show enough interest simply to come to that one department. It wouldn't take you ten minutes."

This sounded fair enough. After all, a department store isn't a detention camp. They can't make you stay after your legs get tired or your share of the oxygen in the air has been used. And I was fair minded enough to see that I probably should get more satisfaction out of the winter months if I went and let them take my measurements.

I ought to have remembered the last time, exactly three years and seven months ago, when I was lured into a department store under practically the same pretext. Then it was to pick out my own shirts if I didn't like those that had been picked out for me. At that time I had ended up, walking on my ankles, after covering every unexposed spot of flooring in the store. On being interviewed at the time, I had said, in part: "I'd rather wear the shirts you buy me than set foot in a department store again."

Yet here I was in exactly the same box—caught on the tenth floor with a disagreeable little man tickling my ribs with a measuring tape and no prospect of regaining my liberty, unless by the risk of falling on the floor and screaming until carried out by attendants. I knew what was coming.

"You don't have to get back before 2, do you? I see that there is a fashion show going on upstairs. Let's run up, just for fun. There'll be lots of men there, buyers and everything, and we won't stay more than a minute."

There is no need of going into detail over the short, ugly words that were passed. I was beaten from the start, and I knew it, but, thank heaven, no one can say of me that I gave in without a struggle. We were both breathing hard when we reached the eighteenth floor, where the show was scheduled to take place.

Guided by ornate signs, we progressed down aisles lined with countless chiffoniers, through what was obviously the Chiffonier Department, to one end of the building, then turned to the right and struck off 'cross-country through miles and miles of dining room tables, the sight of which made me feel niggardly in having provided only one for my own home. Here the path took a sharp turn and we could see it straight ahead, leading through a vista of umbrella stands and green plush-seated rockers to the fashion show entrance, a quarter of a mile off our starboard bow.

It was in a long, low-studded room hung with mock-Japanese lanterns and lined with seats like a dancing school. In the centre was an elevated runway, all doctored up with palms, across which the show was evidently scheduled to show. Glad of a chance to sit down after our endurance run from the elevator, we took seats near the foot of the runway, skillfully concealed behind a



"SWEENEY"

bush of linen hydrangeas. Here we could see all that happened on the stage, and yet I would not be conspicuous if it should chance that I was the only registered voter in the audience, for we could not be seen by the other spectators, and, better yet, could not see them.

"I think that I shall get medium weight stockings for Baby this winter," said my Wife. "When he is in the warm house he certainly doesn't need anything heavier, and when he is out of doors he is all wrapped up anyway."

"That's right," I said. That's all I was expected to say.

"The man came to fix the furnace just before I left this morning. He said that it needed a new pipe or something, and I told him to go ahead and put it on."

"That's good." I looked at my watch, but didn't see what time it was.

"Mrs. Gunn sent Harold over with a big basket of grapes from their vines. I told Hilda to make some grape jelly if she had time. You like grape jelly, don't you?"

"Sure."

And so it went. One household detail after another was brought up, and, after giving each one careful and deliberate thought, I voiced my decision, usually by the phrase "That's right." Once or twice the music struck up and we turned to see the start of the fashion parade, but evidently it was only an overture, for the stage was as empty as Ebbets- priced seats at a ball game.

After about twenty minutes I peered up over the top of the horticultural exhibit behind which we were hidden, to see what sort of people were in the audience. I couldn't see any sort of people at all. The seats were empty.

"Can you tell me when the fashion show begins?" I said to a clerk.

"At 10 to-morrow morning," he said. "But what is the music for?" I asked, thinking that he probably didn't know what he was talking about.

And, as if the humiliation of the thing were not enough, I was told, on the way down in the elevator, that if I had only had spunk enough to ask in

see one of them or die in the attempt. And I would see a good one, too; none of your department store shows, where they don't know enough to tell you the hours, but a real exclusive fashion show, in a Fifth Avenue shop, where you have to have an engraved invitation to get in. I have a quiet exterior, but, once thwarted, I stop at nothing.

Getting from a reliable source the name of an exclusive modiste who was holding a salon that afternoon for million-dollar buyers, I stepped to the telephone and called her shop.

"This is 'The Woollen Age and Guimpe Makers' Trade Journal,'" I said, in a voice like the editor of a trade paper, "representing a circulation of sixty thousand Middle Western buyers. We are sending a couple of our staff over to write up your show."

"Certainly, certainly," was the reply. "Ask for Mr. Schmutz."

Mr. Schmutz was asked for, and we were led to the white and mauve apartment where the esoteric performance was being staged, just as if we were friends of the family. It was a dishonest method of obtaining what we wanted, but think of all that goes on down on Wall Street, and by members of the church, too!

Here the thing was on a much more elaborate scale. In the first place, there were people sitting in the chairs, where at the other show we had been the only ones. This fact alone gave us a feeling of being present at something real, which we could never have had at the department store unless we had waited until 10 the next morning.

The audience was composed entirely of buyers from the big stores of the country. At least, we were told that they were buyers. I didn't see them



BUYERS FROM THE MIDDLE WEST. Pantomime Meaning "Too Extreme for Our Trade."

"That's just the demonstrator over in the piano department," he said, and disappeared behind a pile of rugs which were stacked up like wheateakes in a corner.

the first place, the whole thing would never have happened.

My fighting blood was up by now. Having started with a red hatred of fashion shows, I was now resolved to

buying anything, neither did I see why they should have been chosen to buy anything. I am not a particular person about my clothes, but I certainly would never have elected any one present at that gathering, judging from what they wore themselves, to do my shopping for me. Perhaps they considered that their good taste belonged to their employers, to be used only in company's business, and that it would be a breach of contract to display any of it in fitting themselves out. Business ethics of to-day are pretty rigid. You never can tell to what lengths a man will go to give you your money's worth.

But, be that as it may, there they were, and there we were, under the solicitous care of Mr. Schmutz. I tried to give the impression that I was the one who was going to write the story for the trade paper and that my wife was going to do the drawings. I gave her a pencil to hold in order to heighten this effect.

"If you will step this way," said Mr. Schmutz, "I will have some of our manikins show for you."

This gave me a little shock, as my remembrance of a manikin was something we used to have in physiology in school to illustrate the ground plan of the human body. It was a little figure with the outer, or storn, epidermis removed, so that it wore its nervous system, as you might say, on its sleeve. Then there were little doors all over it which you opened when you wanted to look in on a ventricle's home life or surprise a thorax by saying "Peek" at it. I didn't just see how a manikin would fit into this sort of a show.

But it wasn't long before I learned. A manikin came across the exhibition room, dressed in one of the exhibition gowns. There could be no better term for it than "exhibition gown." Neither could there have been anything better than that manikin. She was tall and dark—no, I guess she was light—and walked from her shoulders, with her hands held out at the side as if she had water on them and was looking for a towel.

I suddenly became aware that my wife was looking at me and not at the manikin, which meant considerable sacrifice on her part. So I looked away from the manikin and at my hat, also considerable sacrifice.

"Sweeney," called Mr. Schmutz to the vision as she glided past. "Over here, please."

He called her "Sweeney," just as if she had been a porter, or President of the United States!

With delicately raised eyebrows and drooping lids, "Sweeney" pivoted divinely, balancing herself by just the right elevation of her little fingers, and swept toward us, stopping dead in front of me and drawing back suddenly, as if she had discovered in me the man who stole her away from Vermont when she was a little girl.

I was on the point of hiding behind a palm until she should have recovered her composure, when I saw that her gesture was merely to display the staying qualities of the gown; that is, when the wearer stopped, the gown stopped also, and when the wearer went ahead, the gown followed.

As she thus performed in front of us, and withal to the call of "Sweeney," I felt like a dissolute Roman emperor sitting on a couch and drinking wine out of a gravy-boat while Egyptian slave girls danced at my command. And when I got through feeling like a Roman emperor I felt like Simon Legree. Altogether, I was relieved when she had gone.

I was also relieved when we reached the street. A joke is a joke.

Before closing, I must add that I have given a somewhat false impression in this account. Instead of my being dragged to all of these places by my wife, it was I who induced her to go with me to help me get the technical terms of dressmaking correctly. She really hates shopping.

AYIKAMA OF JAPAN

internal. I happened to see the rear admiral's face just then. It was the "you-too-Brutus" look in his patient eyes.

"It's silly, of course," I admitted, lamely. "But you can and you do find it often all over the front pages of newspapers here. You can ignore it. But it's like infantile paralysis; the more you ignore such gossip, the worse it gets. There is nothing like facing facts."

"Well," and the admiral's patience would have made a stone Buddha look like a nervous wreck. "Well, I might point out a rather simple fact—the navy of a country is useful only when it is equal or superior to that of her prospective foe. Take the example now presented by England and Germany. If equal in strength, it is useful just as a gambling chance

is useful. If superior in a moderate degree, then it is useful in a moderate degree. A country does not wish to take a wild chance in matters of life and death. The margin of superiority of the British navy over the German navy when the war broke out was—well, you said, 40 per cent in the number of capital ships, didn't you?"

"If a country's navy is inferior to her enemy that she is to attack, then her navy is not merely useless—it is worse than useless. It is foolish. A useless thing is not always expensive. Nothing is quite as expensive as a worthless navy; it drains the treasures of a country at a fearful rate.

"Well, then, by 1920 the Japanese navy will have twelve capital ships built and building. The American navy will have by 1919, built and building, thirty-three capital ships. A race of demi-gods straight from Olympus may be able to defeat a fleet of thirty-three ships with that of twelve. That sort of achievement is common enough in the convincingly illustrated Sunday editions of some of the American newspapers. But not on a real sea in an actual fight—not very well. American imagination is generous. It overrates nothing quite as much as the fighting ability of Japan. It is pleasant to be flattered. There is this trouble, though. A real battle is about the poorest

flatterer there is. If Japan were thinking of attacking the United States, then she is spending a good deal of money—accepting a tremendous sacrifice—for an end worse than useless.

"We have our share of fools and lunatics at home, as you know—perhaps more than our fair share, as I sometimes think—but even in Japan there is hardly a fool big enough to send our fleet of twelve capital ships all the way across the six thousand miles of ocean to fight a fleet of thirty-three ships in their own home waters, near their bases and expect to beat them. But"—the rear admiral's voice was even and quiet now; there was nothing fiery about his gestures, yet there was about him and about what he said something as strong and determined as the saint's faith in God—"but if America or any other power were to

come over to the Far Eastern waters and threaten the national existence of Japan, her inherent rights or legitimate aspirations, then, that's quite another story. Japan will fight. The Japanese navy, with its twelve ships, will fight thirty-three or ten times thirty-three of the most modern and powerful ships imaginable. Japan would fight, even if she had nothing but one old wooden tub; she would continue to battle, even if she were beaten one, fifty, a hundred times. And she would fight to the finish with a profound conviction that she would come out victorious in the end—no matter if it took a dozen centuries. History knows not a single instance that a virile, homeland loving race of any magnitude was completely wiped off the map by an outside power, however strong. A great nation falls from within—not from without."

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I always appreciate a high compliment whether I deserve it or not. When I think of your question, it is just as well you did. The result is the same. You will not get the explanation from me, because I can't give it to you. The General Board can, but hardly would."

That settled it. I could not possibly fall lower in the rear admiral's estimation if I harried myself out of the window then and there. Therefore, in a fit of fine frenzy, I cut loose.

"There is a good deal of fashionable talk in this country about Japan's getting ready to fight the United States."

I stopped abruptly. It was not a sudden and acute attack of colic. The trouble was not