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The Proved Remedy

WELLINGTON ROUNDAABOUT

By "Thid"

"It is necessary," she told me, "at this time of the year, to drag together a few things." There was the matter of a frock, a coat, shoes, stockings, a hat, and what they call accessories.

"Not," she explained, "that I am one of those people who go mad about what they wear. But one must wear something."

Followed some discussion of various problems, and my fuller appreciation of the words of Boadicea: "Oh, for a pair of pants," or was it "Would that I were a man!"?

Four times a year, at the very least, women must have this orgy of buying, and trying on, and changing—unreasonable, even for the flimsier sex.

Things We Laugh At

The comic papers rank Women and her frivolities alongside the plumber and his forgetfulness of tools as a fit subject for humour. In other matters I have found they err. The Scots are not Scotch, although an American witness of the recent Forth Bridge bombing said that they stayed on one train while the bombs were dropping in case by getting off and waiting for another train they might have to pay an extra fare. The number of people who hit their fingers while driving nails is actually infinitesimal compared with the total which jovial romance would have us accept. There is nothing in the theory that quarrelsome wives strike their husbands with crockery, especially since imports were restricted. I have not yet seen domesticity fall to the level of using custard pies as projectiles, perhaps because I have not often seen a custard pie; and it is only once in a thousand times that a ladder collapses while walls are papered, roofs painted, or pictures hung, although last month in Wellington a man fell while painting in his wash-house and scalded himself in the copper. These jokes, and their like, are certainly overdone. They mean nothing but that we enjoy the discomfort of others and must invent it if it does not happen of itself.

Memories of Plumbers

But with plumbers I have had experience. They have poor memories. Perhaps one who has only just received payment of my account will notice that the delay of months in settlement tallied with the delay in weeks while he made up his mind to bring the kitchen sink back into commission—and perhaps he has profited by the knowledge.

No such summary lesson can be given a woman. On the matter of dress, women are impregnable in their frailty. Useless it is to remind them that cloth is woven only out of cotton, silk, wool, or the

deeper mysteries of wood pulp and cellulose. For women, cloth is woven out of dreams, and is made to be worshipped as well as worn. Useless to dogmatise about its simple purpose as a covering. They regard it as such, to a limited extent. But to say that they use it to cover themselves would be to reflect upon their art in using it to leave themselves uncovered, with that annoying contradiction that makes modesty an invitation, and the invitation a cause célèbre threat for modesty if it is accepted.

Women's Hats

Equally useless to say that a hat must be worn to keep off the weather. This would make it seem that a hat (or any other garment worn by women) is subordinate to its wearer. Any woman would rise at such a suggestion. For is it not well known that the big problem about hats is how to keep them on, and not how they will keep the weather off? So far is this theory taken, that no woman would ever permit herself to be discovered in a hat which served any practical purpose. If the sun should shine the hat must be so artfully created, built with such cunning tucks and folds and twirls and twiddles, with this omitted at the last moment, and that pinned on extra, that the wearer must run straight for shade, as much for the sake of the hat as for her complexion. If rain should come, so fine a science has the hatter made of the craft, every woman with a hat must run for a verandah. And so with stockings, which do nothing but ladder, at 10/- an ounce; and shoes, which lose their heels between paving stones (have you noticed that about Wellington?) and give corns, bunions, and carbuncles in exchange for a false sensation of elegance.

Other Mysteries

The less said about the dress itself, the better. In many respects it is amazing, but to my mind it is most amazing for its changeling demands upon the form of the person inside it. Waists rise and fall like the Plimsoll Line of a coastal tramp. Hips expand and contract to astonish Nature, which has long lost all control. Shoulders ape the bottle or the guardsman as required. Chests puff out and flatten without reference to known facts of anatomy. And various other interesting alterations are made within the scope of the sex's unplumbed potentialities. As I said, the less said, the better said.

All this does not mean that men are without their problems. Women and their dress may both be silly. They are expected to be, for the same reason as men are expected sooner or later to be silly

enough to marry them, although tact and a natural deference to weaker things most often calls their peculiarities frivolity, and makes pretty phrases out of such sugared words as gay, demure, sweet, chic, smart, attractive, and daring.

Man Is Silly, Too

An yet, while Man might rise superior to these minor insanities, he remains more than a little foolish himself. There is the collar-and-tie fetish, another blot upon civilisation's smudgy record; the starch fetish, the hard hat fetish, the dark suit fetish, and The Love Of Being Drab. If Woman kneels abject before the sacrificial altar of Fashion, Man is almost as humble in his devotions to the cross-legged Buddha of Convention, who sits in the dark corners of mercers' and drapers' and tailors' premises staring at his middle and refusing to be ruffled.

A man may not spend more than two minutes buying a shirt, compared with two weeks necessary for a woman to make up her mind to buy even a shift; but once he has it, he allows it to cling forever after to him as by a vice fixed around his neck. A little deliberation and a moment's converse with a tailor, and he has a suit, fixed upon him, it would seem, for life. Hot or cold, he wears it, freezes in it, or sweats in it, a poor thing.

He keeps on saying how wrong it is. I have no doubt there are, too, even a few sensible women able to find fault with Woman's "fashionability." Yet they do nothing about it.

Following Up the Argument

Obviously, it is as wasteful for one man's conservatism to keep another in discomfort as it is for one man to drop mines for another's ships to run against. There is nothing secret about such opinions. Everyone has them, and gives them out. Everyone likes a good fight, and everyone hates a war. Everyone would rather see Harvey matched against Schmeling than Britain and France matched against Germany. But no one really does anything about it, except to theorise about evolution, and miss the point that it lies within men's power to do things by design without waiting for chance to bring them about by accident.

At the moment I, personally, hold it within my hand and my hip pocket to make a stroke in the cause of progress.

The laundry has lost my shirts, and with them, my collars. My studs could quite easily lose themselves. They often try. One moment of resolution would be enough. I could stop nagging the laundry. I could leave the studs under the bed. I could inform the world that my salary will not cover clothing expenses with Christmas so close and green peas fourpence a pound.

But you know as well as I do that the laundry is going to get it in the neckband, that my studs will be found at the cost of crawling after them, that this week I must visit the tailor, that I shall not submit to the urge to go about Wellington striking the silly headgear off the silly heads of all the silly women, that it is all BUNK, and that I do not intend either to attend the office in a toga or make love in a cave.

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