

# BLUE STOCKINGS THAT SHOWED REAL CLASS

## Can Our Modern Editions of the Smart Set Compare With Their Sisters of Old?

ARE there any bluestockings left—real bluestockings, with the wit, the learning and the breeding of the original tribe, and with the social standing which they possessed when their glory was at its brightest?

This, indeed, is the learned age, especially for women, and the ambitious America boasts of the most learned women and witty women to be found anywhere.

But is there any coterie, any group of American women whose brilliancy, hospitality and inborn cleverness can afford material for such a distinguished cult of culture as graced England during the eighteenth century?

This modern anecdote is apropos: Consuelo, duchess of Marlborough, and



Mrs. Montague, after the portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds

Mrs. Willie Waldorf Astor, Jr., met this summer at a London tea. The duchess discussed American society with special reference to our aristocracy, so the story runs, and our aristocracy with special reference to the



The Duchess of Marlborough,

grandeur of the Vanderbilts. That left the Astors away back in the woods. Mrs. Waldorf, Jr., who used to be Miss Nannie Langhorne, closed the argument:

"Consuelo," she remarked, calmly, "don't you know the Astors stopped skinning skunks generations before the Vanderbilts began to collect their ferry tolls?"

The story may be apocryphal, but the

wit was genuine, and the great world has accepted it as equally American and old English in its bludgeonlike style.

But one hard kick between friends doesn't make a bluestocking, and the blue-

Nowadays it is not considered or regarded as a mortal sin if a girl does not "sit upright and squarely in a chair, with both feet on the floor, by no means crossing the limbs," as the old folks prescribed. The hands are to be folded in the lap and the most demure expression to be donned in the presence of the gentlemen.

The athletic girl of this immediate period finds it essential to dispense with some of the garments and much of the primness that used to mark a respectable maiden, and, again, their increased self-reliance and the necessity of earning their living has induced women to go to places at hours and under circumstances that would have been little short of damning in the minds of the mothers in the forties and fifties.

To establish fixed rules and regulations, to write text books on propriety, is almost impossible in the light of the constant change in standards. By the time the first lectures on behavior are penned—who knows—the ladies for their greater convenience may be wearing trousers (heretical thought), and the whole series would certainly have to be rewritten to fit new conditions.

Some of the problems which Miss Johnson will have to settle, according to current reports, are whether it is proper to make trysts in the library, whether it is proper to play cards or dance every evening after supper at a boarding house, whether it is proper to stroll after dark, and how late at night a girl may ask a man to stop in for a time.

A girl would have fainted from sheer horror fifty years ago at the thought of receiving a man in her room; but there were no girls coming to the city alone to make their living at that time. There were no lodging houses without parlors where a girl could receive her friends. It may not be proper yet, but there are a great army of girls alone in the cities, living under these circumstances, who do receive callers in this fashion and are not criticized for it.

The laws of morality are absolute, perhaps, but the laws of propriety, of good or bad behavior, are matters of convention, and it is hard to say that the girls of the present age do not know how to behave, that the standards are degenerating, et cetera.

Girls are freer, but they are also stronger, better tutored in the ways of the world and better able to take care of themselves.

Living conditions seem to have made the old propriety impossible, although the old folks would never acknowledge it. They would have the college girl play basketball in hoopskirts, the factory girl keep aloof from her fellow-workers and refuse to walk to and from work with the boys, unless the parents were living aware of it. They would have no woman travel from city to city seeking her fortune like a man unless accompanied by the proper force of antiquated relatives or chaperons.



Miss Burney (Madame D'Arle) as Painted by Edward Burney

stocking wit of the genuine brand must be sought elsewhere than in American society, or English either, for that matter.

MOST of those American women living today who can be accounted learned or clever are saving it up to sell to the newspapers and magazines. Mrs. Van Benschoten Cruger has been, perhaps, the only one who has essayed the establishment of a genuine salon; and she went over to London to try it. She didn't make such a startling success of it when she tried.

Those who are reckoned among the leading lights of letters here, like Mrs. Edith Wharton, Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett and Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, appear to find all their energies exhausted by their literary labors, and make little or no effort to enjoy the pleasures of conversation on the grand scale that characterized their predecessors across the water.

Many attributes and qualifications went to make a true bluestocking then, and foremost among these were social standing and ample wealth.

Yet on occasion any one of the endowments prized by their contemporaries seems to have been dispensed with. If the others were present, quite as the heiress to the millions that began with New York ferry tolls has been received in the most exclusive British circles, and as the doughty defender of the early skunk skinkers has been welcomed in her side.

Ethel Holt Wheeler has completed a labor of much research, and has done it with much grace and charm, in compiling the histories of "Famous Bluestockings," the title under which the John Lane Company has published her work. There one can find the portrait and the life of the brilliant Mrs. Thrale, who ranked the equal of any blue when the cult was at its height, yet was more ashamed of her handsome husband's brewery than either the duchess of Marlborough can be of her ancestral ferryboat or the Samson courage of Mrs. Astor will ever be of the early American skunk.

A MAN OF MUCH DIGNITY Mrs. Thrale came of a good Welsh family and brought her husband a fair fortune of £10,000. Mr. Thrale was a brewer of note in the trade; represented the historic West, Southwark, repeatedly in parliament, kept his pack of hounds at Croydon and maintained his residence, Streatham Place, in splendor. He was a handsome man, of such natural dignity and force of character that he was able at any time to silence the fulminations of the redoubtable Doctor Johnson, which was going some for

any host, to those who have read their Boswell. Yet when, after his death, Mrs. Thrale concluded the sale of the brewery for £18,000—nearly £70,000—she wrote: "I have by this bargain purchased peace and a stable fortune, restoration to my original rank in life and a situation undisturbed by commercial jargon, unpolluted by commercial frauds, undisturbed by commercial connections." Which gives a pretty fair idea of the way baser trade was regarded by people of only good birth and endowed with more than the polite learning of the year 1781. The Thrale ménage, amid the whole round of the bluestocking coteries that dabbled English society between the years 1760 and 1780, seems to have been almost alone in its existence on the plane of the typical British family of the period, with the husband indisputably the head of the house and the wife a proud—perhaps too greatly prized—ornament.

Mr. Thrale, by his wealth, his imposing personality and his assured sense of his position, never relinquished until his death the authority and prestige of head of the house. Mrs. Thrale's intellect he esteemed so highly that he insisted on reserving her vitality for social display; she was not even permitted to manage her own house, because domestic duties or responsibilities of any kind were rated too far beneath her genius.

Nevertheless her cleverness and her learning—she knew French, Italian, Spanish, Latin and Hebrew—were so famous that it was she whose memory survived throughout a hundred years, while her imposing husband's faded practically with his life.

Perhaps Boswell, as Johnson's biographer, did most of all to perpetuate that fame of hers, but any chronicler of the times must have taken her into his reckoning as a woman of exceptional brilliancy and charm. The Thrale home for nearly seventeen years housed the family with



Madame Geoffrin, from a portrait by Charvot

whom Doctor Johnson lived on the terms of closest intimacy, as the husband's most valued adviser and the wife's revered mentor and friend.

A pen picture of the latter half of the eighteenth century which portrays Mrs. Thrale and her contemporaries must present a scene that is surprisingly suggestive of the dominance of American society by the American woman of today, albeit on a scale much less extensive than obtains here now. The husband of the bluestocking seems to have been as self-effacing as the American husband is in the twentieth century.

The woman who ranked as the queen of the blues was Elizabeth Montague, her husband a member of parliament and a mathematician, absorbed in his legislative duties on the one hand and his beloved mathematics on the other, content that his wife should be an elegant, learned and popular as she wished—and quite indifferent to it all.

### AN ABLE ESSAYIST

She, like so many modern women, was a social leader; but her leadership was founded in something more substantial than the mere ability to spend the money her husband furnished and the petty raffishness by which one woman seeks to outshine her rivals. At a time when discussion of Shakespeare's genius raged most acutely she had the daring to take up the gauntlet of Voltaire, and her "Essay on Shakespeare" elicited from Cowper an epigram on his learning, good sense, sound judgment and wit.

She was a satirist as well, and the lash of her pen was felt by none more than by the women of fashion, among whom she was herself shining as brightly as any. At her assemblies there were to be found all who could claim distinction of any kind—authors, critics, artists, orators, lawyers, clerics, tourists and travelers. Ambassadors and all remarkable foreigners were sought out by her or sought her; she was the premier lion tamer in the society of her day. Her most lavish entertainments followed the completion of her splendid residence in Portman square, where the inaugural "breakfast" entertained 700 guests.

The name "bluestocking" remained a distinction until the beginning of the last decade of the eighteenth century. But then it was liable to be a term of reproach, implying dull pedantry and grotesque affectation of learning, instead of the flow of spirit which had previously relieved from that fatal reproach the reputations of the various leaders of the cult.

If the blues as a class hastened to flee from the derision which was attaching to their accomplishments, individually they maintained their supremacy to the end of their days. Mrs. Montague, the most conspicuous as the combination of Minerva and the grande dame, proceeded on her regal way long after it was to laugh when the word "bluestocking" was uttered.

Mrs. Thrale, who was having two or three hundred admirers at her famous breakfast parties, giving several dinners every week, and was the cherished friend of the British royalty, than which British ambition can further go, she had two queen and half a dozen prince breakfasting with her at once.

Fanny Burney, daughter of Doctor Burney, London's fashionable music master, won her fame as a novelist quite in the modern manner. Her first novel, "Evelina," was published when she was 26 years old, and ranging through court life, intimacy with the French emigrants in London, marriage with an old, and the highest-bred woman in the world, she represented art in the bluestocking coterie, while Fitzpatrick, in spite of the fame of learning possessed by the others, shines as the real Minerva of the age.

It was she who translated Epictetus, an achievement which gave her rank in England equal to that of Mrs. Geoffrin in France, where that gracious hostess' exquisite gift of sympathy earned for her a salon of European celebrity.

Some few of those famous bluestockings lacked wealth, and some others lacked "birth" as England regarded it; and one or two of them lacked everything of which one would refrain from exalting the importance of. But all owned that essential quality of tact which draws admirers from out of the void of friendliness which permeates all society in England.

It may be that when wealth, cleverness, learning and hospitality in the United States agree to tolerate and really like one another, this country may bring forth a coterie of blues equal to England's. But one will refrain from exalting the importance of ferry-collected cash, and the other will hesitate to refer to the antiquity of the skinning of skunks.

# Girls, How You DO Behave!

A CERTAIN Miss Johnson, of Missouri University, has bewailed the lack of propriety among the girls of this generation, and has determined to introduce the study of propriety into the college curriculum.

Just what propriety is will doubtless puzzle even Miss Johnson. The proper thing is so much like fashion, changing with the place, the season and the climate, like the shape of a skirt, that even a philosophical pedagogue will find propriety the fustiest thing on the files.

For instance, it may be all right on Broadway for a maiden to assist a gentleman at his lobster up to midnight or later, while the same in Missouri would be more than scandalous.

In New Mexico it is quite fitting to ride astride and make the prairie melodious with kiddish yelps and other things of a wild west tendency that would be so scandalous in Boston's Back Bay drives that the very squirrels would hide their faces.

Fifty years ago, our grandmas tell us, things were so goody-good that the present liberties of the fair sex would have been rewarded with little short of a public switching. And then the bathing suits, the low necks, spooning in the park, gum-chewing and scores of such things will all have to be decided in the propriety department, and will no sooner be settled upon than they will have changed and new standards set.

The old folks declare that the younger generation does not know how to behave, and when they were young they were told the same thing. It is a great problem, and we can be thankful that the pedagogues have taken it up, for now we can rely upon them to decide it, tranquilly awaiting their ultimatum.

IN THE days when the boys were partitioned off from their sweethearts in church and it was the fashionable thing for a maiden to be just as shy, modest and blushing in the presence of masculinity as youthful spirits would permit; the short skirts of the modern Amazon, the bathing togs and similar outfits would have occasioned such a sensation as the female world has never experienced.

And yet we can testify that they were not half so good as we are in the days of Queen Elizabeth. Witness the naughty things they said in polite society and the shocking things that made up their reading.



It would seem that propriety travels in cycles. In one age a woman veils her face and must not be seen with a man except in the presence of a score of male relatives and spinsters. The next decade does away with the veil and so much more that the old folks throw up their hands in horror and the relations between the girls and boys are free and companionable. Fifty years ago the idea of a daughter of the household and her evening caller turning down the lights and spooning in the parlor would have bowled over the entire adult population of the house. In this terrible age the family smiles and winks, and only grandmas think it is so awful.

Long before our grandmothers were born, however, a certain Italian, Barberine by name, set down rules for the conduct of ladies which would have wrung cries of protest from our prim ancestors. Among other remarks he made about the ladies were the following: A girl approaching the marriageable age should not go out to church, and a woman should never go out alone. He avers that a stick is the only reward for women who gad about after fortune tellers. If girls go to balls where men are, it must be in the day, time or "at least in an abundance of light." With regard to the use of cosmetics, he says they make the teeth black, the lips green and the skin prematurely old-looking; all of which is horrible enough to frighten any girl.