

Dressing to Type

DESIGNING WOMEN. The Art, Technique and Cost of Being Beautiful. By Margaretta Byers with Consuelo Kamholz. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1938. \$1.96.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH HAWES

CERTAINLY "every woman in the world wants to know how to make the most of her appearance," as Messrs. Simon and Schuster point out. I am equally certain that no one is ever going to be able to tell specifically in writing just how the individual can accomplish this desirable end. It requires much individual thought. To get the good ideas out of "Designing Women" and dis-



"The best of the book is the . . . part devoted to the 'plump' woman and the woman with wide hips." The figure to the left is wrongly attired, the one to the right correctly. (Pictures from "Designing Women")

regard the inapplicable or useless will also necessitate a good, keen mind on the part of the reader.

The best of the book is the small part devoted to the "plump" woman and the woman with wide hips. Since these are the worst problem children to the dress-maker and to themselves, Margaretta Byers deserves plenty of praise. She puts it to you straight. First, for heaven's sake, find out what you look like and then deal with it. If you're plump in whole or in part, don't imagine that wearing tight clothes will make you thinner.

Miss Byers does not feel as some of us do that there may be advantages to looking plump, having wide hips, a square jaw, a bony neck, or thin arms. She describes an ideal type, thinnish and oval faced, and writes her whole book to help you conform. This may suit a majority of the public as an idea, but I doubt their

ability to pour themselves into the mold successfully. There are a good many women who prefer to take advantage of their own individual characteristics however much they may vary from Hollywood's standards.

A great part of the advice given is excessively contradictory and some of it will be very disheartening to those who can't afford custom-made clothes. For instance, the author is glad that color promises to come back into women's clothes in a bigger way. Several chapters later she warns that colors are for the rich! She says that if your neck is short you'd better avoid collars, and certainly you better had. But you with the short neck may be surprised to hear, later, that if your dress has no collar, your coat must have one, or vice versa. What to do? Margaretta Byers has never seen a play outfit with shorts and skirt to wear over them that fitted. They must be made to order, she says. She warns vigorously that pants are apt to be very unbecoming to the female form. Later she recommends that the housewife who looks so very messy in her cotton housedress may wear overalls or dungarees. Luckily she reflects that most housewives consider the world well lost for love, and personally I think that the simplest way out of the problem of keeping neat and attractive while washing the baby between cooking three meals a day.

The book is laden with such contradictions, but you can make up your own mind how to follow the advice given—that is if you have a mind. The most fascinating thing about the book to me is that no mention is made of the mind, and only in the postscript is any mention made of the possibility of dealing with one's body per se with a view to changing it. Eagerly I waited for that chapter on posture, health, exercise, that primary factor in a woman's looks. Two hundred and sixty odd pages went by before one appeared where "carriage" was mentioned. Here you will find some simple rules for posture which are excellent. You will also be advised to practise deportment before a mirror. I am terrified. I have seen ladies who had practised their deportment before a mirror with only their own opinion to guide them. I consider it a very dangerous procedure.

The author considers Elizabeth Hawes "a stickler for the importance of dressing to your type." I am. But in my experience there are vast differences between the physical type of a woman which is obvious to the naked eye and her psychological type. I believe that the psychological factors are more important than the physical. I shake at the thought of describing the characteristics of the types as Margaretta Byers does. "The Coquette . . . petite figure, retroussé features,

curled coiffures." Look here, the great problem of dressing is that your soul may be a coquette and your body what Byers would call "the angular type."

It is my belief that if the majority of women tried to follow Byers's advice they might do an adequate job by their physical, external characteristics but they would at the same time violate their inner feelings. It is useless to dress from that point of view. It never works. It is such advice which turns out all our American women looking more or less alike, lacking in individuality.

A tall, angular type who very definitely feels coquettish has a far bigger chance of being a social success if she dresses to match her feelings, her talk, her actions. So I say no one can write a book on how to dress and leave out the mind and feeling of the women for whom she writes. This book is written about what is seen of a woman by her mirror. No mirror has ever solved the clothing problem. We are still lacking that book which will advise a woman on how to dress from the standpoint of her own inner consciousness. When that information has been planted, the mirror comes in handy.

The other clothing advice that women crave is how to spend their money wisely. Twenty pages of this book are devoted to "The Cost of Clothes"—budget your wardrobe, plan a year in advance, don't be fooled by passing fads, buy things that will change your costume, get to know about the quality of clothes. Byers's general budgeting and planning advice is good. The advice on making one costume into three or four proves the fallacy of trying to be specific on these matters. I



The Square Face
Wrong Right

note that you may change your black crepe dress or velvet evening gown by means of "a Juliet cap," "green sequin bolero," "roman gold collar," "lei of green and white flowers," "white chiffon scarf." Who are you that you can wear those items? Are you tall, short, fat, thin, romantic, gamine, or what? There should be a law against making loose statements of that kind.

The chapter on how to get your money's worth is 75% useless. No person not trained for years in judging furs can ever hope to know what she is buying

except by the reputation of her furrier. The same is true of precious stones and of lace. Most of the chapter deals with these items, so vital a problem to the mass of the American population. As to the words on fabrics, I am a notorious hater of artificial silk because it may or may not be durable according to who makes it and how. It is possible to ruin any artificial fabric rather easily by pressing it with an iron that isn't just luke warm. Byers says: "Because rayon is essentially a firm fabric, it needs no weighting" (that is, literal addition of tin or mineral salts) "at all, which means it wears better than silk. And as silk is the strongest of the natural fabrics, rayon is obviously the best wearing fabric in existence." MARGARETTA BYERS! Even if I am a maniac on the subject, what kind of reasoning is that to hand the public?

As to the author's statements on workmanship, sure, some of what she says is okay, but I began to doubt the whole story when I read that French seams are best. I doubt if there's been a good dress made with French seams since before the French Revolution. Oh, well, why quibble?

I suppose that many thousand women will read this book in their frantic search



The Long Face
Wrong Right

for sound advice on the clothing problem. Some of them will pick up valuable hints. Most of them will emerge just where they started or maybe a little more balled up. Fashion is superficial and perhaps all of us who write about it must bask in the reflected light. I think the book the public is looking for should be written by Lois Long using material gathered by a trained psychologist, and statistical information furnished by the Consumers Union.

I congratulate Margarett Byers for doing even a fair job on this absolutely terrifying subject. The book is easy to read even if it doesn't solve your problems. It will probably make you think about them harder, and in all modern education the subject is supposed to figure out the final answer for himself!

Elizabeth Hawes, one of the most prominent dress designers in this country, is the author of "Fashion Is Spinach."

The New Dispensation

THE NAZI PRIMER. With a Commentary by William E. Dodd. New York: Harper & Bros. 1938. \$1.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

THIS is a rather cold-blooded book, highly objective. In it one finds translated from the German the basic new German philosophy. Here are carefully set down in the official German handbook for schooling the Hitler youth, the fundamentals of the new creed. In something less than fifty thousand words one may read here what the Germans think about man as a biological product, what they think about the German races as the ultimate result of biological evolution, what they think about possible racial improvement under directed heredity and controlled environment, what they think about man and the earth—which is the translation of the slogan "blood and soil"—what they think about the future of German culture as it affects Europe and the world, and what they think of the peculiar economy and the destiny of the German people.

It is a terrible book, or perhaps one should say it is an illuminating book, a book illuminating a terrible philosophy. No indictment of Germany by her worst enemy could be more damning than the naive revelations of this book. It is not shocking in its exposition of Germanic political ambitions for expansion. That is old stuff; it is not disturbing in its amusing biological theory that the gods having created the German Nordics, ceased to function further in the improvement of man, being satisfied with the perfection of their handiwork. The German biology is merely quaint. The amazing thing, the thing that will spiritually nauseate modern readers of America, is the philosophy of the Third Reich. It is curiously at base not unlike the philosophy of the Russians or of the Italians or of the Balkan tyrants. The despotism of the state is no new thing of the world. The divine right of kings is an old more or less outmoded philosophy. Under that philosophy men came up out of the woods and jungle and built an orderly civilization. But men living under the theory of the divine right of kings felt instinctively that it was wrong. For two thousand years and more the idea of liberty has been an expanding ideal in the human heart. Its dynamic power not even the educational philosophy of divinely anointed kings could suppress. But this philosophy of the Third Reich, this Nazi credo carefully, deliberately, thoroughly, ignores, where it does not scorn, the dignity of the human spirit which is the basis of the evolutionary spiritual processes of free men.

We all know that the creed of the tyrants is based upon the domination of the state. We have read in the newspapers that man is the servant of the tyrant's state in opposition to the theory that the state is the servant of the man, which is the democratic belief. But to have it set down in cold type, this creed of the tyrant gives one the shivers. We read:

1. The Leader is always right
2. Never violate discipline
3. Never waste time in idle chatter, nor in self-gratifying criticism, but take hold and help
4. Be proud but not arrogant
5. The program is your dogma; it demands your complete surrender to the cause
6. You are a representative of the party; govern your appearance and behavior accordingly
7. Loyalty and unselfishness are the first commandments
8. As a true socialist you must be a real comrade
9. Do to your comrades as you would have them do to you
10. In battle be steadfast and discreet
11. Courage is not recklessness
12. Whatever serves the interest of the movement, and through it Germany and the German people, is right

There it is set down in cold blood, the twelve commandments of the new dispensation.

Closing this book, one asks whether or not this struggle for human freedom which has been engaging man for so long a time in his journey through the wilderness of this world rises really out of his instincts or out of his environment. Has the presence of unploughed fields over the hill, beyond the hill, given man his idea of freedom? Has the eternal forest primeval beckoned humanity toward liberty? Or was the liberty implanted in man's own spirit an embryo that has been enfolding through the ages to its present democratic stage in spiritual environment? One is puzzled when one thinks that nearly two hundred million Europeans in Russia, in the Balkans, in Italy, in the Third Reich, have rejected the theory that the spiritual evolution of man comes through man's unfettered spirit, his right to his dignity as an individual. Was the "pearl of great price" individual self-respect or was it the capacity for merging one's self in the social unit? Was it in man's blood to "surrender to the cause"? Is indeed "whatever serves the interest of the movement" the ultimate and unquestionable right? These questions haunt the mind like restless, phantom dragons glowering at humanity from another age as one lays down "The Nazi Primer"—a terrible book.