

Designer's Dilemma

"Shocking Life," by Elsa Schiaparelli (E. P. Dutton, 255 pp. \$4), is the autobiography of one of the most celebrated Paris dress designers. Elizabeth Hawes, who reviews it below, is a noted American designer who some years ago expressed her sentiments in a book entitled *"Fashion Is Spinach."*

By Elizabeth Hawes

LIFE has held a lot of serious shocks for a serious and hard-working woman named Elsa Schiaparelli. Don't let the title of her autobiography, *"Shocking Life,"* or the shocking pink of the dustjacket mislead you into thinking there's anything "wild" in the book.

It's a shame that a certain reticence always arises when one is writing an autobiography. Schiap, as she calls herself, tells enough about herself to make one anxious to know all. And much of it is very well told, although there is a section in the middle where names and places are flashing by so fast the reader may get a little dizzy.

Schiap is, as every garment worker and wearer knows, one of the few really star-studded names in the world of fashion creation. She was born in Rome (though she does not say when), educated at various convent schools, and married. Then she and her husband came to America and she to hard times when her husband proved a wanderer.

Madame Schiaparelli got into the fashion business almost by accident. She simply had to earn money for her daughter and herself and, happening to see a handsomely knitted sweater, made by an Armenian peasant in Paris, Schiap drew up some modernistic designs and had the peasant knit them up. The book makes it appear that one day she got into the sweater business and the next she was Internationally Famous. She should have told us more about what must have been some very rough years while she was getting under-way.

Reading her story makes it seem almost too bad that Elsa Schiaparelli ever stumbled into the fashion business. Clearly she could have been a painter or sculptor or something that would have given her more personal satisfaction. This reviewer would be the last to wish to diminish the importance of dress-designing. However, I could not agree more with Schiap when she says she regards dress-designing as an art, not a pro-

More About Spinach

To **ELIZABETH HAWES**, the highly articulate dress designer, fashion is not only an unsavory vegetable but a cause célèbre. Since she invented the catchphrase *"Fashion Is Spinach,"* which served as the title of her first book, she has consistently slung acid-tipped barbs at the vagaries and inanities of *Dame Fashion*. Her new book, *"It's Still Spinach"* (Little, Brown, \$3.95), takes up the battle with renewed, free-swinging zest. Some samples:

• • "American men have always mentally undressed women and, although less frank about it, women have done the same to men. But the objectives in this kind of stripping of the female by the male, and vice versa, haven't been of much help in solving the individual American's problems of how to dress."

• • "To dress beautifully and attractively means making one harmonious whole of soul, body, and whatever is used to decorate or conceal the body. It is, of course, perfectly possible to use dressing as a sort of mask behind which you seek to hide what you don't care to have revealed or suspected about your shape or personality. But to succeed in hiding *all* your defects, physical and spiritual, from *all* beholders, is impossible."

• • "Dr. Kinsey, in his book on women, says half of the American women he interviewed sleep raw. Unfortunately, he hasn't correlated this statistic with the sexual satisfaction the naked ones have been enjoying nor does he disclose the sleeping dress of their mates. If we had such statistics about private night dress the night-clothes busi-

ness might either vanish tomorrow or be doubled overnight."

• • "In all American suburban communities men and women dress quite alike part of the time. Both have adapted ambi-sextrous costumes composed of what were once male garments but done now in female material and color. As the work of the world gets more evenly divided between the sexes and the men have therefore less responsibility and more time for what are considered leisure pursuits, they will gradually cease being 'manly' in the traditional American sense."

• • "How can you distinguish, with any accuracy, between a well-designed and a badly-designed female garment? To begin with, if the naked silhouette of the female in the garment is very much blurred and distorted by a great number of drapes, bows, flounces, the garment can't possibly fuse with the wearer but simply lives a life of its own."

• • "The American male when he has ceased to be a boy (which often never happens) seems to like silver-haired women. Insofar as any American woman has the courage to openly cease being a girl, one sign of which is to permit her silver hair to show, she will be attractive to grown-up males who naturally prefer grown-up females."



fession, and then goes on as follows: "I found it was a most difficult and unsatisfying art because as soon as a dress is born, it has already become a thing of the past." Also, as she says, if a designer does make a dress that satisfies her entirely the dress immediately goes off on the back of a customer and the designer must start all over. Paintings, sculpture, books last. Clothes don't. Evi-

dently this fact seems important to some designers, not to others. It was frustrating to Schiap.

It will not be surprising if Schiap turns out another book—in which case perhaps she'll see to it that the seriousness of its content is matched by its title and appearance. Not that *"Shocking Life"* is any weighty tome. Serious fun, perhaps. And pretty shocking in spots.

Self-Portrait of a Sufferable Snob



"The Memoirs of Aga Khan—World Enough and Time," by His Highness the Aga Khan (Simon & Schuster. 367 pp. \$6), is the autobiography of the international figure who is the spiritual leader of millions throughout the Islamic world. Cleveland Amory, our reviewer, is the author of *"The Last Resorts."*

By Cleveland Amory

"NEVER in my long life," says the Aga Khan, "have I for an instant been bored." One has an irresistible urge to say that one wishes that the reader, in reading this long life, could say as much. Such a comment, however, would be unwarranted. The fact is, with the help of two ghosts (one of whom gave it up), an editor, and a preface by Somerset Maugham, the Aga has produced in *"The Memoirs of Aga Khan—World Enough and Time,"* not only an interesting book but one which is both meaty and surprisingly unghostlike.

Already, booksellers have noted, the average reader turns almost immediately to the index under Hayworth, Rita. Here they are rewarded by being led to three pages which tells them that the marriage of Rita and Aly was a "perfectly happy" one at the beginning but that in the end they were "not a well-assorted couple." The Aga is even cheerful about the conclusion of the affair: "A system of dowries and of marriage settlements is, I understand, developing in the United States."

Although the Aga hasn't been to this country since 1907 and it is not quite clear whether he means a general system for everybody or an individual system for Khans only (he himself began the Begum No. 4 in 1945) the fact remains that he is equally cheerful and charitable with his comments on a whole host of international figures. Indeed, he praises, more or less indiscriminately, even such controversial ones as Kaiser Wilhelm, Mussolini, Neville Chamberlain, King Farouk, Charlie Chaplin, the Duchess of Windsor, and Elsa Maxwell. Whether His Highness really likes everybody or whether he wants everybody to like him, the result is (perhaps in deference to the book be-

ing simultaneously published in eight countries) perhaps the most internationally complete job of name, place, country, and title-dropping since the last Olympic Games. (About the only omission is the late Czar of Russia. "He lived," says the Aga crisply, "a strangely secluded existence.")

To read this book for such gossip-column reasons alone, however, would be a severe disappointment. The Aga's anecdotes and portraits of personalities are curiously unsatisfying and have a strange "ex" or "has-been" quality which somehow seems to fit so much of international Café Society. As for the stories of his own life, they are so carefully tailored to fit his idea of himself rather than himself that they are at times oddly didactic. ("You can either sleep slow or sleep fast," he says. "I am a firm believer in brisk sleeping.")

Even the stories of his weighings are told rather heavily (he was weighed against gold in 1935, against diamonds in 1945, and will be weighed against platinum in 1955) and seem to prove that if the Aga never gets bored, neither does he ever get excited. He is very definitely a snob (when nominated by the Prince of Wales for the Marlborough Club he obviously feels it is no more than his due) and finally, like most rich men, he talks poor (the only dif-

ference being that since he is perhaps the very richest, he talks almost the very poorest):

About my own personal wealth a great deal of nonsense has been written. There must be hundreds of people in the United States with a larger capital wealth than mine; and the same is true of Europe. Perhaps not many people, in view of the incidence of taxation, even in the United States, have the control over an income that I exercise; but this control carries with it—as an unwritten law—the upkeep of all the various communal, social, and religious institutions of my Ismaili following, and in the end only a small fraction of it—if any—is left for members of my family and myself.

WITH all this, however, there is much to praise in this book. If the Aga is a snob, he is not an insufferable one. ("In public life I have always been, in a sense, an amateur.") The Aga has given a complete and excellent account of just who he is and how he got there (including a concise history of Islam) and he has told the story of his early years in a fascinating way. We learn how he goes about the job of being Imam of the Ismaili branch of the Shia sect of Muslims (a man, incidentally, without a country) and what, in his seventy-seven years, he has accomplished, including being publicly inoculated to promote Pasteur's vaccine, founding a college, being elected President of the League of Nations, and converting some 30,000 professional-class Hindus to Islam. He sat next to Queen Victoria at dinner and he had tea with Queen Elizabeth II and he has at least tried to be the spiritual leader of a community spread across the globe from the Great Wall of China to South Africa.

It was a big job in a big time and, generally speaking, the Aga seems to have done his best. Even today he is carrying on boldly although, as he says, in the old days he was a guest ninety-nine times out of a hundred, and now, nine times out of ten, he is the host.

There is a pretty sad thought in this and perhaps, in 1965, when the Ismailis get around to weighing the old Aga against uranium (or the



Aga Khan weighed in diamonds.