



THE CLOTHES CRAZE

By ESTELLE M. KERR

DID you know that the latest thing in skirts was the barrel shape? You must discard all your old frocks and buy new ones which will give to the lower part of your figure the graceful form of the barrel, bulging around the knees! A philosopher might have predicted this innovation, for since the outbreak of war found us tightly encased in sheath skirts, fashion has indulged in every kind of change—the overskirt, the crinoline, the panier, the bustle, have all been revived with dazzling rapidity, but for the last few months a saner note has appeared and the loose, one-piece serge dress, neither too short nor too long, neither too full nor too scant, has had a decided popularity. Can we not seize this style and hold it, at least for the duration of the war?

Fashions change so fast that we no longer have time to wear out our clothes. And therefore we do not want good material, nor good workmanship. We positively demand poor material and poor workmanship and reject what is not flimsy and shoddy, for we want to wear out our clothes as rapidly as possible and so keep in the style.

It is true that the women of past days were fond of dress, but this craving for change is essentially modern. The women of the Court of Queen Elizabeth were regal dressers and their styles appear to have been extremely uncomfortable and inconvenient, but their costumes were never discarded until they were worn out, for the fashions did not change. The desire for costly and showy shoddy is something wholly new.

MANY innovations deemed advisable in war-time will have a doubtful value when peace is declared, but there are other lessons which it seems only a war can teach us, and if the women of Canada can learn the meaning of thrift they will not have suffered in vain. In the Thrift Campaign in England it was the people who could most afford to be extravagant who were the first to practise economy. This is not surprising, because the rich are naturally thrifty. It is one reason why they become—and stay—rich. Among the pioneer organizations was the Women's War Economy League, founded and developed by a group of titled women who got thousands of their sisters to pledge themselves to give up unnecessary entertaining, not to employ men-servants unless ineligible for military service; to buy no new motor cars, and use their old ones for public or charitable work; to buy as few expensive articles of clothing as possible; to reduce in every way their expenditures on imported goods; and to limit the buying of everything that came under the category of luxuries. Champagne was banned from the dinner table; décolleté gowns disappeared; men substituted black for white waistcoats in the evening.

The abolishing of evening dress will have a marked effect on the national dress bill of Great Britain, which was said to be four hundred million pounds a year, or more than the total amount annually spent on intoxicating drinks. Special costumes for occasions that do not need special costumes fill the wardrobe of a woman of fashion. We would not have her—as in Elizabethan days—ride horseback in a satin gown, but besides the variety of clothes that sports and the changing seasons demand, there remain the dressing-gown, the negligee, the morning gown, the street costume for morning, another for afternoon, the afternoon gown, suitable for playing bridge, the tea-gown for afternoon wear in her own home, the dinner-gown, and the ball-gown, not to mention the multiplicity of hats, cloaks and coats necessary to supplement these costumes. There is

also the burning desire not to be seen twice in any one gown. The really fashionable woman must have boots to go with every costume, though the prices range from six to fifteen dollars a pair. At the beginning of the winter season one shoe merchant in Toronto claims to have sold 5,000 pairs of the kind of high-priced boots that go with the abbreviated skirt. White kids, bronze kids, grey kids, putty kids, even red and blue kids, the price was high, but the girls felt that they must have them!

THERE are some connections between war and fashions that are natural; there are others which are rather gruesome. That our clothes should be more practical is obvious, that we should economize in wool is necessary, the famine in broadcloth

all costumes is that of the hospital nurse or the munition worker.

MR. W. L. GEORGE has recently written a short book on "The Intelligence of Women," in which he says that national bankruptcy must be faced unless women can be coerced into uniforms. Women, he says, by the insanity of their dress fashions, have already corrupted the drama into a show-room and invaded even the most dignified of our newspapers with their infamous fashion pages. This obsession for clothes affects the whole social system, for it is not confined to the women who can afford these debauches. A recent inquest on a girl showed that she had starved herself in order to buy clothes. It is not beauty that inspires these excesses. Very few women know what beauty is. It is the desire to be more expensively dressed than her companions, to insult and humiliate them.

It is not complimentary to our sex—but perhaps we deserve some of it. It has been said that French women dress to please the men, American women to outshine each other. Personally we confess to a great love of clothes, of rich materials and beautiful colours, and though we heartily approve of trousers for women whose work makes it advisable, we should be sorry to see women's clothing become as stiff and ungraceful as that worn by men. The nearest approach to a uniform is the tailor-made suit, which can be most attractive, but the light blouse and dark skirt is not beautiful. If we might presume to suggest a national costume, it would be one with a wide girdle and shoulder-straps attached to the skirt, or, better still, a low-cut waistcoat, worn with an underblouse with loose sleeves that can be easily turned up and a collar which can be worn high or low. The dress could be made of serge with the blouse of washing material, and think how lovely it would be made of velvet with a chiffon underblouse! If fashions never altered, women would take pride in having good, durable materials, they would also embroider them and so give an impetus to the handicrafts of the country. The rapidly-changing styles discourage such ornamentation. The waistcoat could be very loose for stout or pregnant women, or adjusted to the figures of slender ones. Some of the hats worn at the present day are very sensible. We remember the time when it was impossible to get a hat large enough to fit our heads. The soft felt hat with a rolling brim for winter—possibly a velvet one of similar design with a feather when our love of decoration cannot be held in check—and for the summer a well-made straw with a wider brim and a ribbon to match our gown—or our eyes. Believe me, our beauty would not suffer.

WE had the doubtful pleasure of sitting through a high-priced theatrical show the other night which resolved itself largely into a display of clothes, legs and shoulder-blades. A chorus of pretty girls reappeared every ten minutes in a new set of clothes that exhibited every eccentricity. Their skirts—when they wore skirts—were made of three-inch checks of black velvet and silver, or they were of multi-coloured taffeta wired up in the back to touch their shoulders, or they were made of leather, or covered with fur and decorated with a long tail, and when they finally appeared—imagination having reached its limit—in daintily modest muslin gowns and hats of quaint simplicity, the effect by contrast was startlingly beautiful.

So why follow the latest craze of fashion? Why not let our ideal be beauty, comfort and durability, rather than style.

BAD FORM IN DRESS

"THE National Organizing Committee for War Savings appeals against extravagance in women's dress.

"Many women have already recognized that elaboration and variety in dress are bad form in the present crisis; but there is still a large section of the community, both among the rich and among the less well-to-do, who appear to make little or no difference in their habits.

"New clothes should only be bought when absolutely necessary, and these should be durable and suitable for all occasions. Luxurious forms, for example, of hats, boots, shoes, stockings, gloves and veils should be avoided.

"It is essential not only that money should be saved, but that labour employed in the clothing trades should be set free."

AN ENGLISH ECONOMY POSTER.

and the high price of leather are directly traceable to the war, but there are other connections to which the fashion writers draw our attention that are quite unnecessary, and they call them "Paris Fashions."

"This frock and hat are an example of the effect produced by a few innovations along military lines. The hat is suggestive of a hussar's, carried to an extreme. The long lines of the coat, which is of light-toned biscuit-coloured broadcloth, can not be anything if not soldier-like."

"For the street, khaki is in great favour and the more military the frock in appearance, the smarter it is."

"The extent to which the European war is telling on winter millinery is strikingly marked in this diminutive turban of sphinx metallic braid, shaped for all the world like a helmet, christened 'The Kaiser,' and surmounted by a most charming little tower of black velvet."

And these descriptions appear in a column flanking the very letters that describe an army in its agony!

There is something peculiarly unpleasant in the search for Paris fashions just at the present time. The fashion in Paris is to be unfashionable. The same is true in London, where smart dresses are assumed to indicate either a feeble brain or feeble morals, and usually both. The most fashionable of