

INTRODUCTION

IT IS TRUE to say that unless a woman is prepared to pay a high price for a model she has to face the fact that every time she sallies forth she will probably pass half a dozen or more women who all appear to be wearing her hat. She is also, I regret to say, likely to pass a good many more who are wearing no hat at all.

Do not construe this as meaning that I think that women should never appear bare-headed, or that we should revert to the day when ladies disported themselves on the hockey field or tennis court complete with long voluminous skirt covering a number of petticoats, high-necked long-sleeved blouse and, to cap the ensemble, a large straw boater firmly anchored, with a couple of long hat-pins, atop hair arranged bird's-nest style. I think it right that for taking exercise one should be dressed (or should I say undressed?) for the occasion.

There is, nevertheless, a medium course in all this, and the post-war change-over from the mannish, padded-shoulder style of clothing to the softer outlines of the modified New Look is a happy indication that women are attempting to remain themselves, and are refraining from trying to vie with men in severity of style.

I am personally all in favour of the feminine sex remaining feminine; therefore, as a milliner, I hope I may be forgiven for claiming that no other article of apparel stamps the feminine hall-mark on its wearer more surely than does her hat, particularly if it is one that has just that something that the others have not—a pleasing line at the head, a well moulded

upsweep brim, a nicely placed feather or an attractive bow.

Coincident with the post-war change of fashion it is pleasing to note that home arts and crafts are no longer struggling for survival. This, indeed, is welcome in this age of mass production, with its lack of variety in design. In these days, any woman who wants something out of the ordinary is compelled to make it for herself; therefore, if she can make her own dresses, knitwear, handbags, etc., why should she not become her own milliner?

If you have never tackled the job of making a hat, take my advice, try it now. Not only will you save expense; you will, if you have any idea of needlework, colour and line at all, gain immense satisfaction from what can become a lucrative, fascinating hobby and you will be better dressed into the bargain. I suppose I have made literally hundreds of hats, the majority of them, admittedly, for other people to wear, yet I can honestly say that I still enjoy making a hat to wear for myself, and get just as much pleasure in wearing it as I did from my first effort as an apprentice.

In the sense that headwear, like all other clothing, was first made for protection, millinery is primarily a craft. With the development of skill headwear also became decorative, ornamental even, so if you do not believe that it is an art too, then I invite you to take a peep at the one, or perhaps two, hats, which may adorn the shop window of any high-class milliner. If you are still unconvinced, try designing a hat of your own, and I am sure this will finally break your resistance on the point.

Do not be too apprehensive if your efforts with the needle are hardly of the highest order, as competent, rather than exquisite, needlework is required. Apart from slip-stitching

and button-hole (or lock-) stitching, which you may have learned in dressmaking, grafting is probably the only stitch with which the average woman is not familiar. Of course, if you have had a fair amount of practice at over-sewing, back-stitching and hemming, so much the better. The secret of good needlework in millinery is to make stitches invisible; in fact, finished hats should appear to have been untouched by hand.

The working instructions do not cover the entire field of millinery technique and are therefore mostly only of an elementary order. They do, however, deal with all basic millinery principles, which, if followed, will set both the student at an Art School or Technical Institute and the woman at home on the right lines. The amateur seeking a means of self-expression or economy should not be deterred by the fact that the student, who has access to an equipped workroom, appears to have an immediate advantage over her. Most of the tools used in millinery are to be found in the average household and all of the work described in the book can be done on a corner of the kitchen table.

The emphasis of the book is, admittedly, technical. Do not, however, interpret this as implying that design may be ignored—far from it. Craftsmanship and design go hand in hand; all the careful handiwork lavished on a badly designed hat will be just as surely wasted as good design on a badly made hat.

Both skill by hand and ability to design depend to a very large extent on a person's flair. Blocking, moulding, pressing and needlework, all these you can learn from the book and, with practice, become proficient in, but so far as the power to create is concerned I have done all I can by warning you against the more obvious pitfalls; the rest is up to you.

