

That the 'bluestocking' is preferable to the society-girl.

Propose

I will begin my paper with a brief sketch of the society woman and will then proceed to show how much superior the bluestocking is to her in every respect. The society woman is generally fond of admiration, spends large sums on dresses and amusement, and uses her talents for the entertainment of society and for her own aggrandement. Her duty to her family, is in the mad pursuit of pleasure often forgotten and neglected. Her truth, if she ever had any, gives way to insincerity of speech and action. Not satisfied with the hair, complexion and figure nature has bestowed on her, she tries to improve all by artificial means, and as nature objects to be interfered with the result is far from beautiful. The bluestocking despises the varieties and frivolities of life. She studies seriously to improve her mind, and a woman who has solid aims and ambitions, cannot fail to be a better woman than one who has none, and cares more for looking as much like a fashion-plate as possible, than she does say for the condition of her country. Many a blue literary woman has and does, by method of the judicious management of her home, give proper attention to domestic and social duties, and is a sympathetic companion to husband, father and brother, taking as she does an intelligent interest in national affairs and encouraging that public spirit which is the main spring and salvation of the country's prosperity. The name 'bluestocking', once an unflattering title has passed out of use now that everyone can obtain a good education, and so many women are scholarly in their tastes! In conclusion, I will state what all of you may not know – that the name 'bluestocking' is derived from a literary society formed in London about 1780, which included both men and women, a lady of the name of Stillingfleet who was in the habit of wearing bluestockings was a member of the society, hence the name.

S. Simon

Oppose

When I declare my preference for the 'society-girl' to the 'bluestocking', I hope none of you will for one moment consider that I disapprove of higher education for girls, or even that I think girls should learn no more than the average 'society-girl' knows. I have made my choice on the principal that of two evils it is better to choose the lesser, and by no means because I think the 'society-girl' a very desirable person. I merely consider her as not quite as bad as a bluestocking.

It is a matter for sincere congratulations that, in these days of higher education, so few bluestockings are to be met with; for it is seldom that one comes across a really good, or rather bad specimen. I cannot, for my own part, call to mind a single person who really merited the title of bluestocking. Yet we read of such people, and I suppose most of us have a clear idea of what she is like – a terrible bore, at any rate. How the society-girl is, it should fancy, better known, or rather more frequently seen in real life. She is the girl who is the exact opposite of the bluestocking, she would never dream of talking education, though no doubt she would give you a clear account of all the seasons balls, the latest engagements, and the newest tit-bit of gossip and scandal. A pitiful creature you will say. Well, I suppose I must admit that; but surely she is better than that other one, the bluestocking, who does not take sufficient interest in her fellow-creatures even to gossip about them. Surely the society girl is more womanly than the bluestocking; though her gossip may not always be perfectly harmless, the injury is done quite thoughtlessly, for she really hardly has brain enough to do it maliciously. She would have, I think, sympathy for others if once she were aroused. But the bluestocking would be too much wrapped up in her own affairs – her own struggle for knowledge, when love for her particular science, to take into account the feelings of others.

What would she care whether a starving family gained relief, when she was intent on watching her eye glued to a telescope, for some new comet or other or when she was making some marvellous calculations for some equally marvellous plan of sending messages to Mars? I think the starving family would be more likely to get relief from the society-girl, though the relief might be given carelessly, not because of any real charitable feeling, but as the given would probably languidly explain, half in apology, "it must be dreadful to be poor, you know, and have no dramas or fun or anything". To return to the other individual, I dare say nearly all of you have read Edna Lyall's Novel, "Won by Waiting", and no doubt most of you will remember a certain character in that book – Cornelia Collinson. Esperence de Mabilion, Cornelia's cousin loses her father in the terrible Franko Prussian War and was forced to accept the hospitality of Cornelia's father. She arrived at her new home in a state of weariness, worn out by the long anxiety and the horrors of the war, and in grief on account of her father's death, and the separation from her brother. She might naturally expect, at any rate at first nothing but tender solicitude and care from her cousins. Yet on the first day of her arrival, Cornelia puts her through a strict examination on her education, and wounds poor Esperance deeply by pronouncing her badly taught, for her teacher had been her father. This seems to me an excellent illustration of a bluestocking's way of acting, she does not consider other people's feelings in the least; if ever she does feel compassion for them, it is merely on account of their stupendous ignorance, and if she attempts to help them, it is by teaching them. She lives for learning. This is an unnatural state of existence, for any human being, but more particularly so for a woman, who should be gentleness itself. In short, the bluestocking is thoroughly unwomanly.

Now the society-girl's faults are all exaggerations of average feminine failings. Her love of gossip, of flirting, of dress, of flattery, her ambition for admiration, are possessed in a lesser degree by nearly every girl. Usually, her weakness of character is the result of her training and the mother of a society-girl is usually a frivolous woman.

Generally, the society-girl has a heart and though she may have been taught to hide it, it can easily be found. It seems to me such a pity for a girl to be blamed for what is not altogether her own fault. Suppose a child is a very clever dancer, her parents will encourage her, she is continuously being asked to show off her skill, and naturally learns to love flattery and admiration; while balls, fine dresses, excitement, and gaiety seem to her a matter of course. She is not really responsible for her love of these things, without which life would seem empty to her. This is the natural result of her training. Now the bluestocking has more choice. We will suppose she is a clever child; her parents will naturally encourage her; and certainly with more sense than in the former case. She will probably succeed well at school, gain scholarships, and go to college. This is the natural result of her training. But the unnatural result of becoming a bluestocking is by no means a necessity. She need not let all her affections be stifled, she can keep young, and fresh and girlish in spite of all her knowledge, if she wishes to. Therefore I contend that there is less excuse for her than the society girl. Now I must draw my papers to a close, or you will vote me as big a bore as either of those I am describing; to summarise, I can only repeat that while the society girl has merely an excess of feelings and good spirits, all the emotions and affections of the bluestocking have absolutely evaporated and surely it is better to have too much of a good thing, than to have none whatsoever.

D.Hall