

# V A N I T Y F A I R

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## A Reconnaissance of New York

By JEAN MURAT

**A**FTER flying for four years, I have acquired the habit of drawing my conclusions from a bird's-eye view and for that reason these observer's notes of New York may be subject to change upon closer inspection. Often in flying one looks down and sees the camouflage vegetation which hides stores of dynamite, or finds a field, which seemed perfectly safe from a great height, unfit for landing, while another field close by, which had appeared dangerous, may prove a friendly port. These observations were made, as it were, from the clouds.

Of course, it is only natural for a Frenchman in a new country to find American women the first subject of importance. Is there a typical American woman? I thought there must be before I came to America, having seen only those blank faces on the covers of your magazines, and the uniformed ladies of the war relief associations. There is so much monotony in America that one is afraid it may hold true of the women. The long streets of houses all alike from number one to number *n* run in a terrifyingly straight line, and the men have clothes cut from the same goods and after the same pattern, but—thank Heaven!—the women of America offer the widest variety of individuality. And so refreshing because of the speculation each type offers!

### *Points Which American Women Miss*

**U**NFORTUNATELY, American women wear very bad hats. Fifth Avenue in the afternoon looks like an English flower garden. In her ardor to be attractive without any effort the American woman clutches hurriedly at bright and often garish combinations of color. And at the same time she may forget to powder her nose—or she may powder it too much. Such careless tactics! Surely she should be more deliberate in choosing a color to match her eyes or an individual perfume. American girls tell me that they do not even know the names of the perfume they wear, and in most cases they do not wear it at all. Yet it is so nice, so harmonious, for a pretty girl to be connected in one's mind with a delicate perfume. For example, I could classify my *marraines de guerre* thus: Yvonne—blond hair, blue eyes, *Tous Les Fleurs*; or Odette—black hair, red lips, *Violette*.

I cannot know so soon, of course, whether American women are less feminine than French women, but it appears absolutely to be a fact. Just stroll any day on the Avenue. How differently from the French girl the American girl walks, answers your eyes. The American is almost offensively sure of herself and does not at all mind mannish fashions. She parades in uniform—even after the war! French girls like very much the uniform for men but dislike it intensely for themselves. And with good reason. A uniform must give one a masculine appearance, must give one the manner of a conqueror. The French woman flatters the man by making him feel he is strong—a protector. This makes the man preen himself, *bomber la poitrine!* An American girl often gives one a look which says, "Never mind, I'll take care of you."

There is also lacking in the American woman's dress a completeness. The American woman is so independent that she refuses to make sacrifices to her

## JEAN MURAT

beauty. You can often see a lovely girl with charming costume—all spoiled by an enormous pair of horn rimmed glasses. It shocks one in the same manner that it would to see a fastidious man without his tie.

After studying the personage I naturally turn to his habitat. I find that I like Fifth Avenue so much better than Broadway. I feel sure that the Avenue must give the correct *couleur locale*. Broadway has the glare and cheapness of wealth quickly gained and quickly lost, while Fifth Avenue has the solid background of Americanism. Broadway looks, whether true or not I do not venture to assume, like a great circus where one pays five dollars instead of five cents. To me that is the only visual difference between Broadway and Coney Island.

*An Exchange of Courtesies*

ONE of the amusing things one observes in New York is the quite apparent desire of all sorts of people to be *si Française*. Now the tendency on the part of most of the French people at this moment is to be *si Americaine*. While everybody in Paris is drinking American drinks, you over here are eating, during these melting days, French pastry and French ice cream which was never originated in France. My friends generously spent much time taking me from one French restaurant to another during the first week. I would give anything to know what mysterious French-named dishes I ate! Even the waiters were not French. I remember one who brought me ice in a glass of water as soon as I sat down. I remonstrated and he replied in Italian that he could not understand me.

*That Washington Square!*

THEN, happily, I came also to know that small district which surrounds Washington Square—a more comparatively interesting *quartier* than our own. You have imitated our Latin Quarter of fifty years ago, about the time of Murger. You still possess much that we now lack. Certainly on first glance Greenwich Village is entirely charming. And yet all America laughs at it with undisguised cruelty! That is too bad. In France our Latin Quarter has always been regarded with respect as the home of those who create intellectually.

Generous America does well to remember that artists must have some place to play. And this is especially true of New York. Your uncomprehending attitude makes me understand for the first time why, before the war, so many of your artists felt a need for Paris. All your institutions seem to be built up with a careful eye for the development of business, and there appears an alarming indifference to American art.

*A Word of Advice*

IF I am permitted to offer you well meaning advice I would say only this: be good to your artists, tolerant to Greenwich Village. Never mind if there are too many smocks and an over amount of bobbed hair, or even if sometimes you find individuals who are absolutely weird in their attire and their ideas. Be indulgent even if the Village is naughty, even if it is *debauché*. One knows instinctively that it will repay you. A great city has all the needs of a beautiful woman, and Greenwich Village is the necessary speck of rouge—the finishing touch!