

## FASHION HIGH COMMAND BY RUTH CARSON

**T**HE scene is the ballroom of the Biltmore Hotel in New York, at luncheon time. The audience is some 500 businesswomen and their guests. The lights are dimmed, spotlights pick out a runway down the middle of the room, and a show of summer fashions is on.

The businesswomen are not playing hooky from their jobs. They are members of The Fashion Group and they turn coldly calculating eyes on the twenty-one costumes, from barn-dancing red calico to exquisite sheer linen and lace, parading down the runway. They want to know the answer to some strictly business questions: Is it new? Does it represent a fashion trend? Will it sell?

They want to know, too, whether you—the American woman—will rush in to buy when such costumes, and hundreds of others of which these are typical, hit your local stores. Although the clothes may be pretty they're not important if you don't buy. What you want is what matters. Figuring that out ahead, and getting it to you in good season, at your own price, has grown, in the past twenty years, into big business. It is one of the largest and best-paid fields of work for women.

You didn't always get such flattering attention. Fashion magazines, for example, used to publish pictures of glamorous costumes, products of New



Dorothy Nash, Fashion Group member and millinery buyer for Marshall Field and Frederick & Nelson, prepares model for Fashion Group millinery show. Hat by Emme

York and Paris. Whether you could get these anywhere in the country was a matter of airy concern.

Customers began to clamor and out-of-town buyers and department-store executives made demands around New York. Where could they find out ahead of time what fashion magazines would be showing so they could stock the same fashions?

Complaints reached the sympathetic ears of Marcia Connor, then of Vogue's promotion department, and Helen Cornelius, then of Harper's Bazaar. The result was a meeting of top-flight fashion women like Dorothy Shaver, now president of Lord & Taylor; Carmel Snow, now editor of Harper's Bazaar; Aimee Larkin, then distaff editor of Collier's; Edna Woolman Chase, editor in chief of

## The Fashion Group

Vogue; and Mary Lewis, now head of her own retail store. The Fashion Group was formed. It would enter no commercial ventures itself, but, financed by dues and an occasional fashion show, would serve as a common meeting ground for members and an information center for the fashion world.

Today its membership is 1,800, with headquarters in New York and groups in Dallas, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, San Francisco, Columbus, Kansas City, St. Louis, Minneapolis and St. Paul, Baltimore, Pittsburgh,

Founder-member Aimee Larkin, who was distaff editor of Collier's until her retirement early in January of this year, enjoys lunch at The Fashion Group's post-Easter millinery show. Helen C. Reid (at right) is the merchandise editor of Harper's, Junior Bazaar



Atlanta, Washington and New Orleans. The 1,800 include heads of important cosmetic firms; designers of fabrics, hats and clothes; store executives and buyers; editors and writers; and specialists in display, decorating, radio, advertising and publicity. Last year they had their fingers in \$13,500,000,000 worth of retail business. They are powerful enough in their individual jobs to be a deciding factor in what all American women wear.

They go about their job of influencing our looks in two ways: by finding out what we want and helping to see we are provided with it pronto, and by seeing to it that we are constantly wanting something new. Both ways are good for business.

They judge trends by watching sales figures, which indicate which fashions are on the wane and which are gaining favor. They travel around to see what we do, and, therefore, what we need. They talk with sales clerks.

A woman who is interested can go just about anywhere in the fashion business today. Good examples of this are Dorothy Shaver, first chairman of the group's board of governors and president of Lord & Taylor, who started out being a comparison shopper; Elizabeth Madeira, fashion editor of the Woman's Home Companion, who at one time stumped the country reporting to stores on shoe-leather colors; Helen Valentine, president of The Fashion Group, who, as editor in chief of Seventeen, made it the magazine it is today; and Mary Brooks Picken, one of the first presidents of the group, who is vice-president of the G. Lynn Sumner advertising agency.

The Fashion Group helps its members in several ways. It played a large part in putting the fashion business on the map. In 1935, it staged a fashion show called Fashion Futures, which did so well that it was repeated the following three years. These were moneymakers and forerunners of the countless fashion shows of today.

The group runs an informal job bureau in New York, conducts fashion training courses and holds frequent luncheon meetings at which members and guest speakers discuss what's new. At the job bureau Ethel M. Kremer, executive director, gets four or five hundred calls a year from girls wanting work, or employers wishing to fill jobs. Prominent fashion people like Alicia van Wesep, vice-president of Lord & Taylor in New York, and Jessica Daves, editor of Vogue, lecture at the training course, which has been taken by a thousand women.

But all the while it is the consumer—with a capital C—who counts. She is Very Important. That's where The Fashion Group came in. ★★★

(continued)



At the summer fashion show's speakers' table are, left to right, Tina Leser, Jane Derby, Mildred Orrick, designers, and Ruth Waltz, Milgrim's advertising manager. All except Miss Orrick are members



Fashion Group members who are responsible for the famous Nelly Don dresses. Director of design, Beulah G. Spilsbury is seated to the left of Mrs. James A. Reed, president and owner of the



On hand to observe the summer fashion show are, left to right, Ruth H. Fay, free-lance writer; Kay Sullivan, who runs a fashion counseling service, and Alison Bisgood, hostess editor of Vogue. Miss Sullivan is former fashion editor of Town & Country and was 1947 group head