

HIGH HAT

The luxury group . . . five super-slicks with 500,000 readers . . . The battle between Nast's Vogue and Hearst's Harper's Bazaar . . . Spur's \$7500 wardrobe for men

HENRY F. PRINGLE

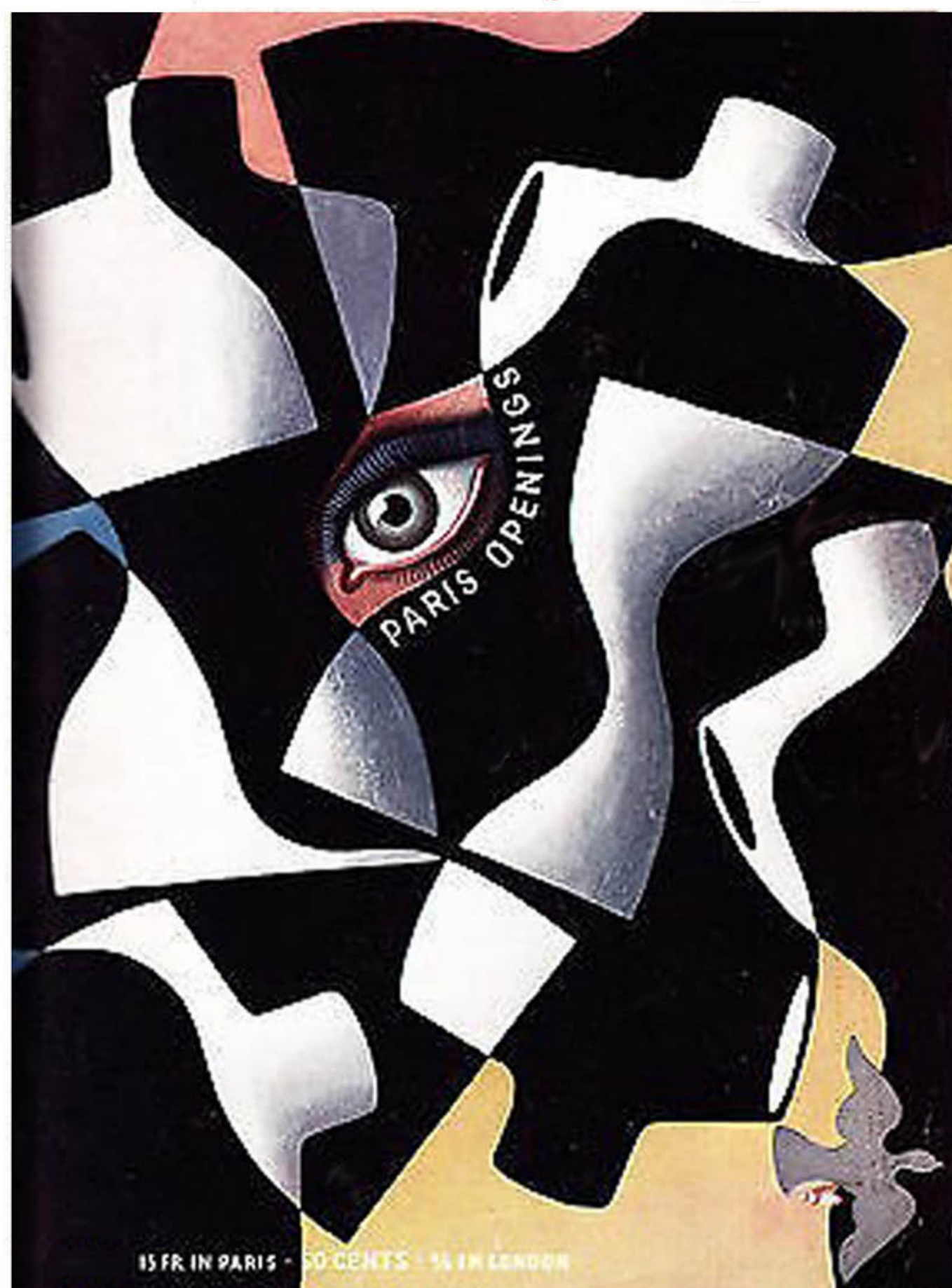


THE merger of *Vanity Fair* with *Vogue* in March, 1936, caused a minor crisis in at least one of New York's more elegant clubs. An elderly member, unacquainted with magazine births, deaths, and marriages, bumped into the club library one day and began searching testily for the current *Vanity Fair*. Finally, in a great rage, he summoned a servant and ordered the copy brought to him at once. The retainer, a Negro accustomed to strange requests, was scandalized.

"Why that's—that's a female magazine now, sir!" he said. "We just throw it away as soon as it comes in."

He was right. "Incorporating *Vanity Fair*" was printed in small type on *Vogue's* cover, but the combination of the two periodicals wasn't really a merger. It was an assimilation of the male by the female. Nearly all of *Vanity Fair* had vanished. It had been a bright, amusing magazine with a definite appeal to men. Guided by the graceful hand of Frank Crowninshield, it had held a mirror to the best in belles lettres, art, satire, and the finer points of contract bridge. That was all gone. The new magazine is merely *Vogue*, and its advertising pages are replete with lovely models in scanties, girdles, lingerie, silk stockings, and less. No self-respecting club—certainly no Manhattan club where the mere appearance of a woman at the door starts a near panic—could permit such hussies to cavort, though merely on the printed page, within its solemnly masculine precincts.

The Class Magazines



The loss of America's club circulation did not grieve Mr. Condé Nast, who had been losing \$100,000 a year on *Vanity Fair*. *Vogue*, always a money-maker, continued to gain circulation and held its position as the leading publication in the class field. Still, *Harper's Bazaar*, owned by Mr. Hearst, had been gradually gaining on it in advertising revenue. In 1925 the *Bazaar* received only 36.3 per cent of the combined lineage of the two magazines. In 1935 its percentage had climbed to 44.

Today, *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* dominate the "class field," which does not mean at all that they, with the other class magazines, have a monopoly of readers with intelligence, culture, or manners. It means that advertisers and advertising agencies are convinced that the people who buy them have, on the average, more money. "Class is money"—that is an axiom in the mind of every space-buyer. It is true even today, despite income taxes and surplus taxes and all the machinations of the New Deal. The class magazines exude an aura of wealth, and their circulations, therefore, are limited. They cater to the fit though few and they do this with slick paper, excellent illustrations, and a sycophantic reverence for Society—at thirty-five to fifty cents a copy.

In addition to *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, three other publications are in this high-toned group: *Town and Country*, which also belongs to Hearst; *Country Life & The Sportsman*, another merger; and *The Spur*. Their appeal is to people of wealth and to persons who wish they were people of wealth, with country homes, horses, dogs, and yachts. *Country Life* states with the most force, perhaps, the purpose of the three class magazines which are not merely fashion portfolios. It is "to portray with dignity, charm and seriousness the real life of the American landed gentry." But apparently the landed patricians in the United States are greatly outnumbered by the ladies thirsting for information about hats, dresses, and shoes. *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* have 395,000 readers (*Vogue* slightly in the lead) while the three others have a total of but 109,122.

A typical number of *Vogue* will contain:

Fashion predictions, lavishly illustrated, here and there, with great solid masses of red and green.

An article titled "Get into Gray" or "Be Blue."

More photographs, illustrating an article beginning something like: "The spring's spotlight has shone tenderly on the astonishing talents of these astonishing people."

A four-color photograph (of a ballet, probably) by Anton Bruehl.



Advice on cosmetics—pages of it.

Reports from Paris—all about ensembles, evening flowers magnified three times, a beret made of grape-purple felt, and a bolero blouse of Yangtze-yellow foulard.

Interiors of a smart house.

Photographs of Joan Crawford, Constance Bennett, Katherine Hepburn.

Interior of a smart garage.

Harper's Bazaar differs, mainly, in offering a wider appeal. Some good fiction is published and additional emphasis is placed on Society (particularly the titled members) and the theater. In general, it is a more youthful magazine with a little more sex in text and illustrations.

Town and Country begins with a detailed "Social Calendar" which lists engagements and marriages. This is followed by "Social and Travel Notes" (the antics of the smart set in various parts of the world), feature articles about horses, head waiters, or columnists are often published, and a travel piece or two. *Town and Country* is fairly catholic in its editorial policy. Its variety is greater than in the case of the other magazines. It has a more specific appeal to women. In contrast, *The Spur* is very, very masculine. Its pages are littered with photographs of expensive ladies and gentlemen in riding clothes, articles on polo, tennis, golf, and yachting. *Country Life* is the swankiest of the three—mainly because its dissertations on sport and rural life are the most technical. You really believe that its readers have baronial estates and thoroughbreds.

II

IN December, 1892, a new little magazine called *Vogue* bowed to a limited group of New York's socially elect. It was financed by such leaders as Cornelius Vanderbilt, Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, Percy R. Pyne, and William Jay. It was to be devoted to society, fashion, and sport, and was to be published weekly. The first issue (dated December 17) was not impressive. Featured were a number of laborious jokes of which the following was typical:

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The SPUR



A Rebuff

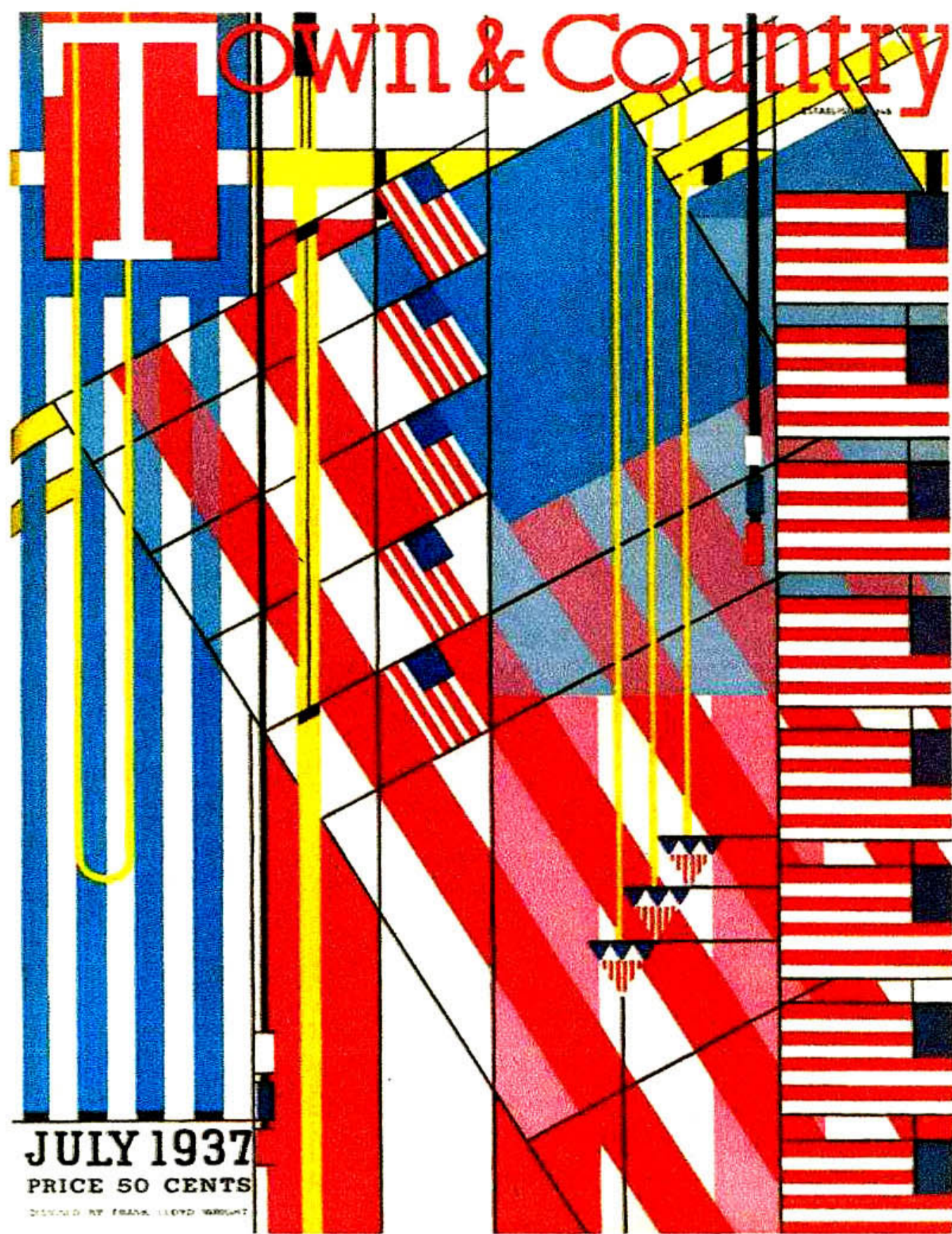
CHOLLY: I should like to have lived in the olden days and been your page.

SHE: Thank you—but a blank page is so dull.

Vogue limped along for seventeen years. In 1909 its advertising revenue was about \$100,000 a year and it was probably running a slight deficit. It was a "class" magazine (although the term had not yet been invented) in the days when a young advertising man, Condé Nast, was making a name for himself in the mass field. He became advertising manager of *Collier's Weekly* in 1900 and business manager five years later. Nast's specialty then was promotion, and he was an acknowledged master in it. In 1905 Nast was thirty-one. He had a salary which rumors put at \$25,000 a year and he had other irons in the fire, too; among them was a pattern company which he had organized the previous year.

Advertising was relatively crude in those dark ages. It was far from the blend of science and art that it is today. Among Condé Nast's innumerable ideas on the subject was the notion that there was a lot of waste to existing media. He decided that it would be smart to have a magazine in which high-class shops and manufacturers could offer their wares chiefly to the people with enough money to buy them. So he cast about and finally decided on *Vogue*, which, by 1909, had branched out from society and whist to reports on feminine fashions. The owners were a little weary of it and were glad to sell, for stock, not cash, to the young man from *Collier's*.

Vogue, selling for ten cents, was pretty dull. Its art was as bad as the stock on which it was printed. It had articles on New York society, written in a haughty vein, and occasionally an editorial attacking such moral evils as the increasing divorce rate. But *Vogue* gave well-informed reports on fashion, for men as well as women. Retail merchants in New York considered it a good medium, and most of the big stores advertised.



Young Nast was patient about making changes. For two years he did very little. He has since insisted, in fact, that the *Vogue* of today is basically the same as the magazine of 1909. "Our proportion of fashion to society material hasn't changed very much," he has told friends. "What I did, if anything, was to get better artists and better writers."

In Nast's hands, success was a foregone conclusion. Someday America's social historians may turn to the January 8, 1910, issue of the magazine and discover an advertisement inserted by a Dr. Jeanne Walter, manufacturer of reducing garments, who is still a client. They may note, too, a product called "Fatoff," which was described as "The Easiest Way to Keep Your Shape." In any case, *Vogue* was certain to make money because it was being published as the women of the United States began to dedicate themselves and their purses to self-beautification. Until 1910 or thereabouts beauty had been exclusively for the young. Dr. Walter and her competitors now told them they could be slim after thirty. Before very long the cosmetics manufacturers would be convincing them that powder and rouge were not exclusively for the fancy ladies. And during the next quarter of a century, fabulous sums would be spent by America's women for beauty in all its phases. Nast prospered enormously from this universal demand for loveliness; *Vogue* was an ideal medium for the people who had, or claimed to have, beauty to sell. By 1929, on the eve of the crash which he considered impossible and in which he very nearly lost everything, Nast is reliably reported to have been worth, on paper, \$16,000,000.

In 1909, when Nast assumed the ownership of *Vogue*, an industrious and intelligent young woman named Edna Woolman Chase was a subordinate editor. She has married again and is now Mrs. Newton in private life. But she is still Mrs. Chase professionally, editor-in-chief of *Vogue's* three editions—the American, the French, and the British—an extremely smart and clever lady who boldly lists 1877 in *Who's Who* as the date of her birth. Beyond doubt, she is the most eminent fashion authority in the United States. Her arrival at some couturière's showing of new dresses, whether in New York or Paris, is a moment of vast importance. She is invariably accompanied by at least two aides, usually Emmy Ives and Martha Stout of her fashion staff. And during the entire showing no words, save of praise, come from her lips.

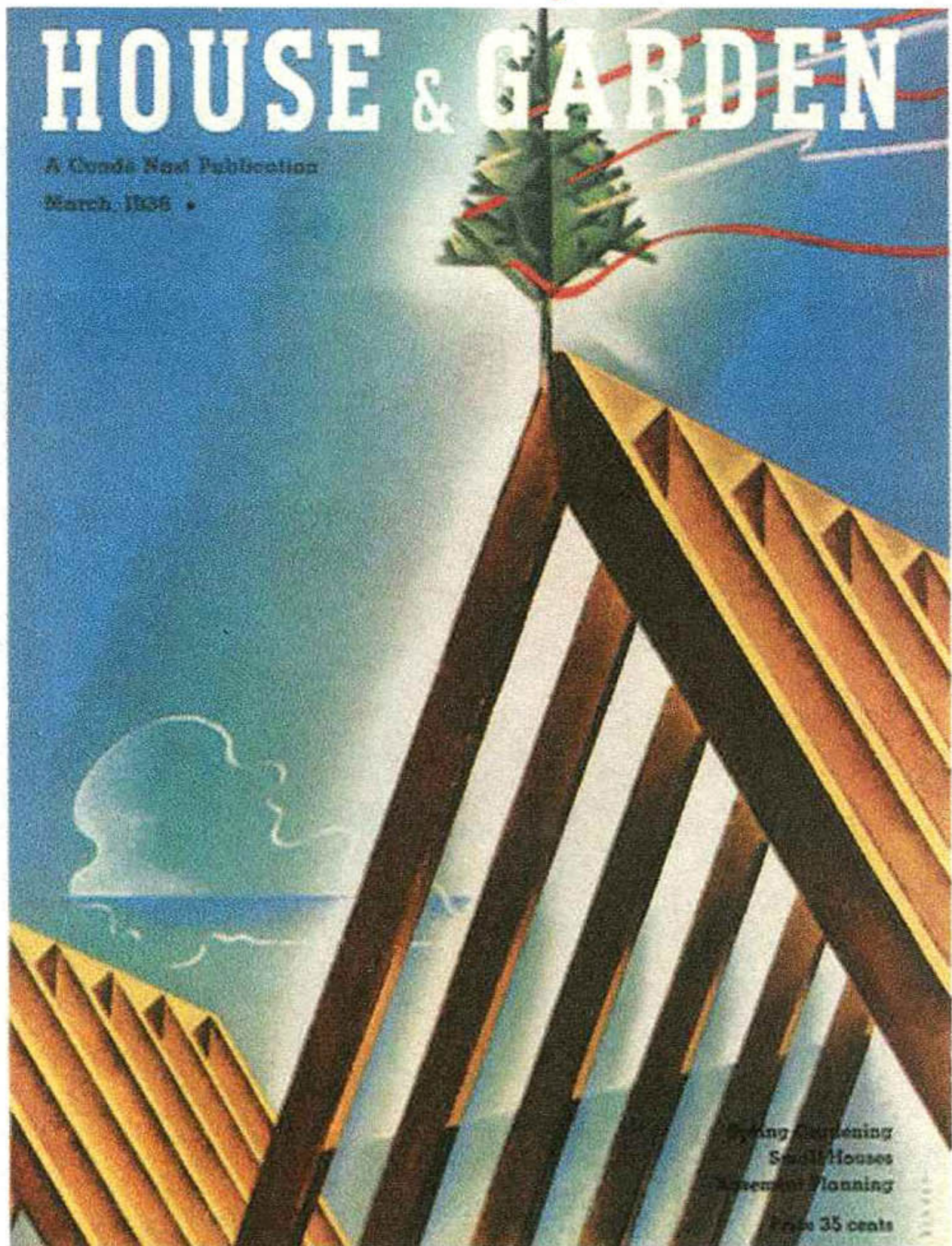
VANITY FAIR

is a moment of vast importance. She is invariably accompanied by at least two aides, usually Emmy Ives and Martha Stout of her fashion staff. And during the entire showing no words, save of praise, come from her lips. "Charming," she will murmur in that slightly throaty, very expensive voice which all the lady editors of *Vogue* somehow acquire. "Delightful," "quaint," "lovely" are other favorite expressions. All this is faintly annoying, sometimes, to the dressmakers who wish that Mrs. Chase would occasionally indicate whether a particular little number is likely to sell. "She always gets information out of me instead of telling me anything," once protested Hattie Carnegie of New York.

III

WELL, who reads *Vogue*? What type of subscriber buys *Harper's Bazaar*? The five extremely slick magazines have, in all, roughly half a million readers, but no generalization about them is really accurate. I suppose it is true that these readers are relatively prosperous, for the books sell at from thirty-five to fifty cents and regularly carry the advertising of Cadillac, Packard, Lincoln, and the big Chrysler and other de luxe cars. The people who buy *Town and Country*, *Country Life*, and *The Spur* have at least a yearning for manor life. They may not ride with the hounds or shoot, but they would like to do so. A definite taint of chi-chi is prevalent in the pages of these three magazines and it reached a high point in a recent issue of *The Spur*. Therein, with sublime gravity, it is set forth that "the proper wardrobe for a well-dressed man" should cost \$7500—and this without such plebeian accessories as underwear, shoes, or hose. Even the wealthiest *Spur* subscriber must hold his breath as he surveys the wonders and extent of this costly wardrobe. As described by "a master American tailor," who is not identified, the layout includes: twelve business suits, two full-dress suits, three dinner suits, twelve white waistcoats, six dinner waistcoats, one black sack suit and waistcoat, four pairs of striped trousers, two golf suits, four odd sporting coats, ten pairs of flannel trousers, two riding suits, four pairs of odd breeches, one

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brocade silk house coat. In addition, for spring, winter, and fall, this fabulous Beau Brummell needs ten overcoats.

“At first glance,” remarked *The Spur*, “the number of items may seem to reach an imperially extravagant total; but the authority who established it supports it with very sound reasons. . . .”

The class magazines frequently flatter their readers with the implication that all of them are persons of affluence. For instance, *Harper's Bazaar* recently inquired, “Why don't you consider building on the roof of your country home an outdoor room or terrace and go up there at night as you would in Tunis to enjoy the night breezes?” And “Dressing on \$1000 a Year” was the mildly helpful message offered by Margaret Case Harrimann in *Vogue* last fall.

It is possible to be somewhat more specific in identifying the readers of *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. The magazines are widely read, for example, by what the clothing-fashion people call “the trade.” “The trade” consists of the innumerable manufacturers, wholesalers, jobbers, and retailers who produce or sell dresses, hats, shoes, stockings, underwear, corsets, and all the other articles with which women clothe themselves. “The trade” reads *Vogue* and advertises in it because Condé Nast has built, through the years, a very remarkable following among the department-store buyers of this country. It is a safe assumption that nine out of ten buyers in the United States read the magazine. At Macy's in New York, for example, one hundred copies are bought every month.

Let us picture an imaginary scene in the garment district of New York. Moe and Alec, senior partners of a dress house, are conferring. A model wearing a smart, new silk dress has been undulating before the partners. But they have not been interested in her allure. Their eyes have been on the dress alone.

“Very well, Miss Fontaine,” Moe remarks at last. “You can go now.”

So she switches her hips out of the room. “It's okay,” Moe then remarks. “A good number. It's sure to go over big if we play it right. We'll start off with a page in *Vogue*—full color.”

Alec looks a little shocked. He can't see paying out \$2900 for just a little more than 200,000 circulation.

But Moe insists that the \$2900 will be very well invested. The name of their firm, he points

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out, need not be mentioned in the advertisement. Arrangements will be made so that a smart Fifth Avenue shop will appear as the sponsor of the dress. Other shops in such key cities as Chicago, St. Louis, Dallas, and Los Angeles will then stock it. Reprints of the advertisement will be sent to every dress buyer by the Condé Nast Company. It is even possible that *Vogue* will make editorial mention of the new dress. It will, perhaps, be described in the "retail trade" edition of the magazine which goes out four or five days ahead of the regular issue.

No taint of venality is attached to the policy of *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar* in giving their advertisers editorial recognition. It is an established custom, and there is nothing secret about it. The shoe manufacturer knows that his shoes will be mentioned, from time to time, in shoe layouts. So do the corset and the stocking manufacturer, etc. "*Vogue* puts goods on his shelves," explained one agency executive. "Then we recommend *The New Yorker* or the daily newspaper to get them off."

The fabric manufacturers, a very lucrative source of revenue for both publications, advertise to still another group—the town and city dressmakers. It is important for a woolen concern to have these able seamstresses familiar with the goods they sell; large numbers of American women do not live near smart shops or are still prejudiced against ready-to-wear clothes. The recommendation of "the little jewel" who sews for them counts a lot. But the dressmakers read *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* for the advertisements almost as much as for the fashion guidance. "Woolens are smart this year," one of them may hint to a client in Kansas City. "Epicure Woolens come in splendid variety and quality," she may add, recalling the announcement, in the current issue, of Epicure Woolens, Inc. But the facts show that by no means all the advertising in the fashion books is aimed at dressmakers and dealers. For instance, of the 1808 pages carried by *Vogue* last year sixteen per cent were accessories (corsets, hosiery, etc.), fifteen per cent toilet goods, thirteen per cent ready-to-wear, and eight per cent fabrics. But retail stores took thirteen per cent; travel and automotive, ten; home equipment, eight; and miscellaneous (including food, tobacco, beverages, and classified), twenty-five per cent.

While *Vogue* and the *Bazaar* have larger circulation, *Town and Country*, *Country Life*, and *The Spur* are more directly consumer magazines. The classifications of advertising in their pages do not vary greatly. Travel is a staple. So are the announcements of kennels, horse breeders, liquor manufacturers, and real-estate brokers handling country properties.

The "class market" is well worth the attention of the advertisers if the rates maintained by these magazines mean anything. *Harper's Bazaar*, with 190,000 circulation, gets the most; its basic charge for a page is \$1900. *Vogue*, with 205,000, gets \$1880. *Town and Country*, with 36,000, has a basic rate of \$650. *Country Life* & *The Sportsman* has a circulation of 45,000 which sells for \$550 a page—low because the merger took place only last fall and it is still impossible to say how many readers of both magazines will be retained. *The Spur*, with 27,000 circulation, receives \$500 a page. These figures, of course, are for single insertions in the "general advertising" classification and they are, without exception, fairly high rates when the circulation averages are considered. *Good Housekeeping*, with 2,210,835 circulation, has a base rate of \$6300 a page. The *Ladies' Home Journal*, with 2,981,000, gets \$8500. If *Good Housekeeping* were paid in pro-

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portion to *Harper's Bazaar*, reader for reader, it would charge about \$20,000 a page.

The advertiser seeking the class market gets more readers for his dollar in *Vogue* than in the four others. An advertising dollar spent on a full page will buy: in *Vogue*, 109 readers; in the *Bazaar*, 100; in *Country Life*, 82; *The Spur*, 55; and *Town and Country*, 55. The same dollar will buy 327 readers of the *Woman's Home Companion*.

Despite this high cost, *Vogue's* record as a medium is impressive. For twenty-nine years, it has carried more advertising space than any other magazine in the women's field. For the last ten years its closest competitor, in lineage, has been *Harper's Bazaar*. In February of this year only *The Saturday Evening Post*, among all magazines published, was ahead of it—and then by only a slim margin. The recession has not yet touched *Vogue*. It carried more advertising in April, 1938, than in April, 1937.

IV

THUS, while Mr. Hearst's publication empire is thrashing around in the dark, Mr. Nast is apparently beginning to see daylight again. He will never again see the lush days of 1929, but he is probably in a much sounder position than he was when that hysterical boom broke. There is a touch of irony in Nast's apparent ability to weather the Roosevelt recession. For the only violent prejudice held by this friendly, affable gentleman is his conviction that President Roosevelt is going to wreck the nation. At sixty-three, an age which his appearance denies, Nast looks precisely as the publisher of a luxury magazine should look. He leads exactly the life such a publisher should lead. His penthouse at 1040 Park Avenue is a penthouse of which little waitresses in Iowa railroad stations dream as the transcontinental limited flashes eastward in the night. His parties, never too frequent, but always excellent, constitute a gathering of the stage, the screen, the arts, and good substantial New York cash. It is undoubtedly a canard that Mr. Nast usually also invites three or four Seventh Avenue cloak-and-suit wholesalers who are potential advertisers and who might be impressed by a personal encounter with Miss Ina Claire.

A Condé Nast penthouse party—usually staged after an important Broadway opening—attracts such luminaries as Mrs. Harrison Williams, Elsa Maxwell, Miriam Hopkins, Mary Taylor, Gwili Andre, Cole Porter, Mrs. Harold Talbot, Mrs. Thomas Markoe Robertson, William Rhinelanders Stewart, Beverly Bogert, Lord and Lady Cavendish, and Cecil Beaton. No, not Mr. Beaton any longer. He doesn't live there any more. For *Vogue's* photographer and sketcher of lovely ladies is now, to put it mildly, in the doghouse. One of the unhappiest days of Condé Nast's life was January 26, 1938. A very splendid issue of *Vogue* reached the stalls that day. Among other features, momentarily reminiscent of *Vanity Fair*, was a piece by Frank Crowninshield called "The New Left Wing in New York Society." Young

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Beaton had drawn an artistic pictorial border for the article. It had been passed by all of *Vogue's* editors. But it was not until the issue was out that anyone discovered, hidden in the pictures, some violent aspersions against prominent Jews. Nast was deeply shocked. His publications, he said publicly, "must remain free from such attacks whether committed wittingly or unwittingly. . . ."

Young Beaton resigned from the *Vogue* staff—a not inconsiderable loss to the magazine, inasmuch as his personal following provided photographs of many an important lady as a clothes model. The Duchess of Windsor, the one-time Mrs. Simpson, had permitted Beaton unprecedented privileges in photographing her, for instance, and *Vogue* beat the world with a layout of the Duke and Duchess after their wedding. But apprehensions that the Seventh Avenue trade might black-list *Vogue* for the Beaton attack proved unfounded. No advertisements were cancelled. It was universally agreed that Nast had known nothing about Beaton's little trick. Nor has he, in his long history as a publisher, shown the faintest anti-Semitic traits.

V

THE battle in the class field today is between *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Condé Nast's misfortune, to an extent, is that he develops many excellent young men and women in his organization and often loses them to Hearst. Paul MacNamara, the advertising manager of the *Bazaar*, is one of these. A shrewd and aggressive young Irishman, MacNamara was trained in the Nast method. Now, with the versatility of the advertising fraternity, he refutes, for the *Bazaar*, all of the arguments he once advanced for *Vogue*. Nast is unusually loyal to his subordinates, but he will sometimes decline to compete with Hearst when a raid occurs.

The most serious loss he has sustained thus far was when Carmel Snow (néé Carmel White), first lieutenant to Mrs. Chase, was lured from *Vogue* to become editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. This was in 1932, and he has undoubtedly regretted, ever since, that he allowed her to slip away. Slender, gray-haired, and blue-eyed, Mrs. Snow is to no small degree responsible for the stiff competition which the *Bazaar* is now offering. She had a decade or so of experience with *Vogue*. She knows her business thoroughly. *Vogue* may still have a slight edge as the more authentic fashion publication. But the *Bazaar* is coming along at a fast clip. From a publishing viewpoint, the Hearst magazine benefits from the fact that only fourteen issues, as compared with twenty-four a year for *Vogue*, are published. The two additional issues are for fall and spring openings. *Vogue* unquestionably loses heavily on its twice-a-month issues during the summer when business is light.

Both magazines, as a matter of fact, are authentic fashion journals. But both, I suspect, are a degree dated insofar as their value to the average well-to-do American woman, trying to be as smart as possible at the lowest cost, is con-

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cerned. There are indications that American women are getting independent, that they will no longer bow an obedient neck to all of the edicts of fashion. They are interested in being attractive and stylish, and if they must choose between style and charm, there is a chance, at least, that they will vote for charm. *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* are, on the whole, non-critical of fashion.

Short skirts are right. So are long, medium, full, narrow, or balloon skirts. "Short skirts spell youth," chirped *Vogue* when skirts were short. "The mode is growing up," it declared with throaty graciousness when skirts came down. "She has become a young woman of infinite grace and charm."

But this, no doubt, is what the women of America want to hear. The poor dears are, after all, more or less helpless. They have to buy what is in the stores—or the majority of them do. *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* have a very marked influence on what is in the stores. This is particularly true outside of New York. Their power increases in direct proportion to the distance from that metropolis. Our debt to them is profound. You can no longer tell a Kansas City girl from a San Francisco girl. For both have listened, often without knowing it, to the dicta of Mesdames Chase and Snow.

[This is the fifth article in our series on magazines that sell. The sixth will appear next month.]

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