WOMAN AS
DECORATION

CHAPTER I

A FEW HINTS FOR THE NOVICE WHO WOULD
PLAN HER COSTUMES

HERE are a few rules with regard to
the costuming of woman which if
understood put one a long way on the
road toward that desirable goal—decorativeness,
and have economic value as well. They are
simple rules deduced by those who have made
a study of woman’s lines and colouring, and
how to emphasise or modify them by dress.

Temperaments are seriously considered by ex-
erts in this art, for the carriage of a woman
and her manner of wearing her clothes depends
in part upon her temperament. Some women
instinctively feel line and are graceful in con-
sequence, as we have said, but where one is not born with this instinct, it is possible to become so thoroughly schooled in the technique of controlling the physique—poise of the body, carriage of the head, movement of the limbs, use of feet and hands, that a sense of line is acquired. Study portraits by great masters, the movements of those on the stage, the carriage and positions natural to graceful women. A graceful woman is invariably a woman highly sensitised, but remember that "alive to the finger tips"—or toe tips, may be true of the woman with few gestures, a quiet voice and measured words, as well as the intensely active type.

The highly sensitised woman is the one who will wear her clothes with individuality, whether she be rounded or slender. To dress well is an art, and requires concentration as any other art does. You know the old story of the boy, who when asked why his necktie was always more neatly tied than those of his companions, answered: "I put my whole mind on it." There you have it! The woman who puts her whole mind on the costuming of herself is naturally going to look better than the woman who does
not, and having carefully studied her type, she will know her strong points and her weak ones, and by accentuating the former, draw attention from the latter. There is a great difference, however, between concentrating on dress until an effect is achieved, and then turning the mind to other subjects, and that tiresome dawdling, indefinite, fruitless way, to arrive at no convictions. This variety of woman never gets dress off her chest.

The catechism of good dressing might be given in some such form as this: Are you fat? If so, never try to look thin by compressing your figure or confining your clothes in such a way as to clearly outline the figure. Take a chance from your size. Aim at long lines, and what dressmakers call an “easy fit,” and the use of solid colours. Stripes, checks, plaids, spots and figures of any kind draw attention to dimensions; a very fat woman looks larger if her surface is marked off into many spaces. Likewise a very thin woman looks thinner if her body on the imagination of the public subtracting is marked off into spaces absurdly few in number. A beautifully proportioned and rounded
figure is the one to indulge in striped, checked, spotted or flowered materials or any parti-coloured costumes.

Never try to make a thin woman look anything but thin. Often by accentuating her thinness, a woman can make an effect as type, which gives her distinction. If she were foolish enough to try to look fatter, her lines would be lost without attaining the contour of the rounded type. There are of course fashions in types; pale ash blonds, red-haired types (auburn or golden red with shell pink complexions), dark haired types with pale white skin, etc., and fashions in figures are as many and as fleeting.

Artists are sometimes responsible for these vogues. One hears of the Rubens type, or the Sir Joshua Reynolds, Hauptner, Burne-Jones, Greuse, Henner, Zuloaga, and others. The artist selects the type and paints it, the attention of the public is attracted to it and thereafter singles it out. We may prefer soft, round blonds with dimpled smiles, but that does not mean that such indisputable loveliness can challenge the attrac-
tions of a slender serpentine tragedy-queen, if the latter has established the vogue of her type through the medium of the stage or painter's brush.

A woman well known in the world of fashion both sides of the Atlantic, slender and very tall, has at times deliberately increased that height with a small high-crowned hat, surmounted by a still higher feather. She attained distinction without becoming a caricature, by reason of her obvious breeding and reserve. Here is an important point. A woman of quiet and what we call conservative type, can afford to wear conspicuous clothes if she wishes, whereas a conspicuous type must be reserved in her dress. By following this rule the overblown rose often makes herself beautiful. Study all types of woman. Beauty is a wonderful and precious thing, and not so fleeting either as one is told. The point is, to take note, not of beauty's departure, but its gradually changing aspect, and adapt costume, line and colour, to the demands of each year's alterations in the individual. Make the most of grey hair; as you lose your colour, soften your tones.
Always star your points. If you happen to have an unusual amount of hair, make it count, even though the fashion be to wear but little. We recall the beautiful and unique Madame X. of Paris, blessed by the gods with hair like bronze, heavy, long, silken and straight. She wore it wrapped about her head and finally coiled into a French twist on the top, the effect closely resembling an old Roman helmet. This was design, not chance, and her well-modeled features were the sort to stand the severe coiffure. Madame's husband, always at her side that season on Lake Lucerne, was curator of the Louvre. We often wondered whether the idea was his or hers. She invariably wore white, not a note of colour, save her hair; even her well-bred fox terrier was snowy white.

Worth has given distinction to more than one woman by recognising her possibilities, if kept to white, black, greys and mauves. A beautiful Englishwoman dressed by this establishment, always a marked figure at whatever embassy her husband happens to be posted, has never been seen wearing anything in the evening but black,
PLATE II
Woman in ancient Egyptian sculpture-relief about 1000 B.C.
We have here a husband and wife. (Metropolitan Museum.)
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Woman in Ancient Egyptian Sculpture-Relief
or white, with very simple lines, cut low and having a narrow train.

It may take courage on the part of dressmaker, as well as the woman in question, but granted you have a distinct style of your own, and understand it, it is the part of wisdom to establish the habit of those lines and colours which are yours, and then to avoid experiments with outré lines and shades. They are almost sure to prove failures. Taking on a colour and its variants is an economic, as well as an artistic measure. Some women have so systematised their costuming in order to be decorative, at the least possible expenditure of vitality and time (these are the women who dress to live, not live to dress), that they know at a glance, if dress materials, hats, gloves, jewels, colour of stones and style of setting, are for them. It is really a joy to shop with this kind of woman. She has definitely fixed in her mind the colours and lines of her rooms, all her habitual settings, and the clothes and accessories best for her. And with the eye of an artist, she passes swiftly by the most alluring bargains, calculated to undermine firm resolution. In fact one should not
say that this woman shops; she buys. What is more, she never wastes money, though she may spend it lavishly.

Some of the best dressed women (by which we always mean women dressed fittingly for the occasion, and with reference to their own particular types) are those with decidedly limited incomes.

There are women who suggest chiffon and others brocade; women who call for satin, and others for silk; women for sheer muslins, and others for heavy linen weaves; women for straight brims, and others for those that droop; women for leghorns, and those they do not suit; women for white furs, and others for tawny shades. A woman with red in her hair is the one to wear red fox.

If you cannot see for yourself what line and colour do to you, surely you have some friend who can tell you. In any case, there is always the possibility of paying an expert for advice. Allow yourself to be guided in the reaching of some decision about yourself and your limitations, as well as possibilities. You will by this means increase your decorativeness, and what is
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of more serious importance, your economic value.

A marked example of woman decorative was seen on the recent occasion when Miss Isadora Duncan danced at the Metropolitan Opera House, for the benefit of French artists and their families, victims of the present war. Miss Duncan was herself so marvelous that afternoon, as she poured her art, aglow and vibrant with genius, into the mould of one classic pose after another, that most of her audience had little interest in any other personality, or effect. Some of us, however, when scanning the house between the acts, had our attention caught and held by a charmingly decorative woman occupying one of the boxes, a quaint outline in silver-grey taffeta, exactly matching the shade of the woman’s hair, which was cut in Florentine fashion forming an aureole about her small head,—a becoming frame for her fine, highly sensitive face. The deep red curtains and upholstery in the box threw her into relief, a lovely miniature, as seen from a distance. There were no doubt other charming costumes in the boxes and stalls that afternoon, but none so successful
in registering a distinct decorative effect. The one we refer to was suitable, becoming, individual, and reflected personality in a way to indicate an extraordinary sensitiveness to values, that subtle instinct which makes the artist.

With very young women it is easy to be decorative under most conditions. Almost all of them are decorative, as seen in our present fashions, but to produce an effect in an opera box is to understand the carrying power of colour and line. The woman in the opera box has the same problem to solve as the woman on the stage: her costume must be effective at a distance. Such a costume may be white, black and any colour; gold, silver, steel or jet; lace, chiffon—what you will—provided the fact be kept in mind that your outline be striking and the colour an agreeable contrast against the lining of the box. Here, outline is of chief importance, the silhouette must be definite; hair, ornaments, fan, cut of gown, calculated to register against the background. In the stalls, colour and outline of any single costume become a part of the mass of colour and black and white of the audience. It is difficult to be a decorative factor under these
conditions, yet we can all recall women of every age, who so costume themselves as to make an artistic, memorable impression, not only when entering opera, theatre or concert hall, but when seated. These are the women who understand the value of elimination, restraint, colour harmony and that chic which results in part from faultless grooming. To-day it is not enough to possess hair which curls ideally: it must, willy nilly, curl conventionally!

If it is necessary, prudent or wise that your purchases for each season include not more than six new gowns, take the advice of an actress of international reputation, who is famous for her good dressing in private life, and make a point of adding one new gown to each of the six departments of your wardrobe. Then have the cleverness to appear in these costumes whenever on view, making what you have fill in between times.

To be clear, we would say, try always to begin a season with one distinguished evening gown, one smart tailor suit, one charming house gown, one tea gown, one negligée and one sport suit. If you are needing many dancing frocks, which
have hard wear, get a simple, becoming model, which your little dressmaker, seamstress or maid can copy in inexpensive but becoming colours. You can do this in summer and winter alike, and with dancing frocks, tea gowns, negligées and even sport suits. That is, if you have smart, up-to-date models to copy.

One woman we know bought the finest quality jersey cloth by the yard, and had a little dressmaker copy exactly a very expensive skirt and sweater. It seems incredible, but she saved on a ready made suit exactly like it forty dollars, and on one made to measure by an exclusive house, one hundred dollars! Remember, however, that there was an artist back of it all and someone had to pay for that perfect model, to start with. In the case we cite, the woman had herself bought the original sport suit from an importer who is always in advance with Paris models.

If you cannot buy the designs and workmanship of artists, take advantage of all opportunities to see them; hats and gowns shown at openings, or when your richer friends are ordering. In this way you will get ideas to make use of
PLATE III
A Greek vase. Dionysiac scenes about 460 B.C. Interesting costumes. (Metropolitan Museum.)
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Woman on Greek Vase
A FEW HINTS FOR THE NOVICE

and you will avoid looking home-made, than which, no more damning phrase can be applied to any costume. As a matter of fact it implies a hat or gown lacking an artist's touch and describes many a one turned out by long-established and largely patronised firms.

The only satisfactory copy of a Fortuny tea gown we have ever seen accomplished away from the supervision of Fortuny himself, was the exquisite hand-work of a young American woman who lives in New York, and makes her own gowns and hats, because her interest and talent happen to be in that direction. She told a group of friends the other day, to whom she was showing a dainty chiffon gown, posed on a form, that to her, the planning and making of a lovely costume had the same thrilling excitement that the painting of a picture had for the artist in the field of paint and canvas. This same young woman has worked constantly since the European war began, both in London and New York, on the shapeless surgical shirts used by the wounded soldiers. In this, does she out-rank her less accomplished sisters? Yes, for the technique she has achieved by making her own
costumes makes her swift and economical, both in the cutting of her material and in the actual sewing and she is invaluable as a buyer of materials.