CHAPTER V

ESTABLISH HABITS OF CARRIAGE WHICH CREATE GOOD LINE

WOMAN'S line is the result of her costume, in part only. Far more is woman's costume affected by her line. By this we mean the line she habitually falls into, the pose of torso, the line of her legs in action, and when seated, her arms and hands in repose and gesture, the poise of her head. It is woman's line resulting from her habit of mind and the control which her mind has over her body, a thing quite apart from the way God made her, and the expression her body would have had if left to itself, ungoverned by a mind stocked with observations, conventions, experience and attitudes. We call this the physical expression of woman's personality; this personality moulds her bodily lines and if properly directed determines the character of the clothes she wears; determines also whether she be a decorative object which
Queen Elizabeth in the absurdly elaborate costume of the late Renaissance. Then crinoline, gaudy materials, and ornamentations without meaning reached their high-water mark in the costuming of women.
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Tudor England Portrait of Queen Elizabeth
ESTABLISH HABITS OF CARRIAGE

says something in line and colour, or an undecorative object which says nothing.

Woman to be decorative, should train the carriage of her body from childhood, by wearing appropriate clothing for various daily rôles. There is more in this than at first appears. The criticism by foreigners that Americans, both men and women, never appear really at home in evening clothes, that they look as if they felt dressed, is true of the average man and woman of our country and results from the lax standards of a new and composite social structure. America as a whole, lacks traditions and still embodies the pioneer spirit, equally characteristic of Australia and other offshoots from the old world.

The little American girl who is brought up from babyhood to change for the evening, even though she have a nursery tea, and be allowed only a brief good-night visit to the grown-ups, is still the exception rather than the rule. A wee English maiden we know, created a good deal of amused comment because, on several occasions, when passing rainy afternoons indoors, with some affluent little New York friends, whose luxurious nurseries and marvellous me-
chanical toys were a delight, always insisted upon returning home,—a block distant,—to change into white before partaking of milk toast and jam, at the nursery table, the American children keeping on their pink and blue linens of the afternoon. The fact of white or pink is unimportant, but our point is made when we have said that the mother of the American children constantly remarked on the unconscious grace of the English tot, whether in her white muslin and pink ribbons, her riding clothes, or accordion-plaited dancing frock. The English woman-child was acquiring decorative lines by wearing the correct costume for each occasion, as naturally as a bird wears its feathers. This is one way of obviating self-consciousness.

The Eton boy masters his stick and topper in the same way, when young, and so more easily passes through the formless stage conspicuous in the American youth.

Call it technique, or call it efficiency, the object of our modern life is to excel, to be the best of our kind, and appropriate dress is a means to that end, for it helps to liberate the spirit. We
of to-day make no claim to consistency or logic. Some of us wear too high heels, even with strictly tailored suits, which demand in the name of consistency a sensible shoe. Also our sensible skirt may be far too narrow for comfort. But on the whole, women have made great strides in the matter of costuming with a view to appropriateness and efficiency.