CHAPTER IX

WOMAN DECORATIVE IN HER BOUDOIR

By the way, do you know that boudoir originally meant pouting room, a place where the ceremonious grande dame of the Louis might relax and express a ruffled mood, if she would? Which only serves to prove that even the definition of words alter with fashion, for we imagine that our supinely relaxed modern beauty, of the country club type, has on the whole more self-control than she of the boudoir age.

Since a boudoir is of all rooms the most personal, we take it for granted that its decoration is eloquent with the individuality and taste of its owner. Walls, floors, woodwork, upholstery, hangings, cushions and objects d'art furnish the colour for my lady's background, and will naturally be a scheme calculated to set off her own particular type. Here we find woman easily made decorative in negligée or tea gown,
and it makes no difference whether fashion is for voluminous, flowing robes, ruffled and covered with ribbons and lace, or the other extreme, those creations of Fortuny, which cling to the form in long crinkled lines and shimmer like the skin of a snake. The Fortuny in question, son of the great Spanish painter, devotes his time to the designing of the most artistic and unique tea gowns offered to modern woman. We first saw his work in 1910 at his Paris atelier. His gowns, then popular with French women, were made in Venice, where M. Fortuny was at that time employing some five hundred women to carry out his ideas as to the dyeing of thin silks, the making and colouring of beads used as garniture, and the stenciling of designs in gold, silver or colour. The lines are Grecian and a woman in her Fortuny tea gown suggests a Tanagra figure, whether she goes in for the finely pleated sort, kept tightly twisted and coiled when not in use, to preserve the distinguishing fine pleats, or one with smooth surface and stenciled designs. These Fortuny tea gowns slip over the head with no opening but the neck, with its silk shirring cord by means of
which it can be made high or low, at will; they come in black, gold and the tones of old Venetian dyes. One could use a dozen of them and be a picture each time, in any setting, though for the epicure they are at their best when chosen with relation to a special background. The black Fortunys are extraordinarily chic and look well when worn with long Oriental earrings and neck chains of links or beads, which reach—at least one strand of them—half-way to the knees.

The distinction which this long line of a chain or string of pearls gives to the figure of any woman is a point to dwell upon. Real pearls are desirable, even if one must begin with a short necklace; but where it can be afforded, woman cannot be urged too strongly to wear a string extending as near to and as much below the waistline as possible. A long string of pearls gives great elegance, whether wearer is standing or seated. You can use your short string of pearls, too, but whatever your figure is, if you are not a young girl it will be improved by the long line, and if you would be decorative above everything, we insist that a long chain or string of less intrinsic value is preferable to one of
meaningless length and priceless worth. Very young girls look best in short necklaces; women whose throats are getting lined should take to jeweled dog-collars, in addition to their strings of pearls or diamond chains. The woman with firm throat and perfect neck was made for pearls. For those less blessed there are lovely things too, jewels to match their eyes, or to tone in with skin or hair; settings to carry out the line of profile, rings to illuminate the swift gesture or nestle into the soft, white, dimpled hand of inertia. Every type has its charm and followers, but we still say, avoid emphasising your lack of certain points by wearing unsuitable costumes and accessories, and by so doing lose the chance of being decorative.

Sibyl Sanderson, the American prima donna, whose career was in Paris, was the most irresistibly lovely vision ever seen in a tea gown. She was past-mistress at the art of making herself decorative, and the writer recalls her as she last saw her in a Doucet model of chiffon, one layer over another of flesh, palest pink and pinkish mauve that melted into the creamy tones of her perfect neck and arms.
Sibyl Sanderson was lovely as nature turned her out, but Paris taught her the value of that other beauty, the beauty which comes of art and attained like all art, only through conscious effort. An artistic appearance once meant letting nature have its way. It has come to mean, nature directed and controlled by Art, and while we do not resort to the artificiality (in this moment) of hoops, crinoline, pyramids of false hair, monstrous head-dresses, laced waists, low neck and short sleeves for all hours and all seasons, paper-soled shoes in snow-drifts, etc., we do insist that woman be bien soigné—hair, complexion, hands, feet, figure, perfection par tout.

Woman's costumes, her jewels and all accessories complete her decorative effect, but even in the age of powder and patches, hair oil and wigs, no more time nor greater care was given to her grooming, and what we say applies to the average woman of affairs and not merely to the parasite type.