CHAPTER XXIV

THE ARTIST AND HIS COSTUME

The world has the habit of deriding that which it does not understand. It is the most primitive way of bolstering one's limitations. How often the woman or man with a God-given sense of the beautiful, the fitting, harmony between costume and setting, is described as poseur or poseuse by those who lack the same instinct. In a sense, of course, everything man does, beyond obeying the rudimentary instincts of the savage, is an affectation, and it is not possible to claim that even our contemporary costuming of man or woman always has raison d'être.

We accept as the natural, unaffected raiment for woman and man that which custom has taught us to recognise as appropriate, with or without reason for being. For example, the tall, shiny, inflexible silk hat of man, and the tortuous high French heels of woman are in themselves neither beautiful, fitting, nor made
to meet the special demands of any setting or circumstance. Both hat and heels are fashions, unbeautiful and uncomfortable, but to the eye of man to-day serve as insignia of formal dress, decreed by society.

The artist nature has always assumed poetic license in the matter of dress, and as a rule defied custom, to follow an inborn feeling for beauty. That much-maligned short velvet coat and soft loose tie of the painter or writer, happen to have a most decided raison d'être; they represent comfort, convenience, and in the case of the velvet coat, satisfy a sensitiveness to texture, incomprehensible to other natures. As for the long hair of some artists, it can be a pose, but it has in many cases been absorption in work, or poverty—the actual lack of money for the conventional haircut. In cities we consider long hair on a man as effeminate, an indication of physical weakness, but the Russian peasant, most sturdy of individuals, wears his hair long, and so do many others among extremely primitive masculine types, who live their lives beyond the reach of Fashion and barbers.
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The short hair of the sincere woman artist is to save time at the toilette.

There is always a limited number of men and women who, in ordinary acts of life, respond to texture, colour or line, as others do to music or scenery, and to be at their best in life, must dress their parts as they feel them.

Japanese actors who play the parts of women, dress like women off the stage, and live the lives of women as nearly as possible, in order to acquire the feeling for women's garments; they train their bodies to the proper feminine carriage, counting upon this to perfect their interpretations.

The woman who rides, hunts, shoots, fishes, sails her own boat, paddles, golfs and plays tennis, is very apt to look more at home in habit, tweeds and flannels, than she does in strictly feminine attire; the muscles she has acquired in legs and arms, from violent exercise, give an actual, not an assumed, stride and a swing to the upper body. In sports clothes, or severely tailored costume, this woman is at her best. Most trying for her will be demi-toilette (house gowns). She is beautiful at
night because a certain balance, dignity and grace are lent her by the décolletage and train of a dinner or ball gown. English women who are devotees of sport, demonstrate the above fact over and over again.

While on the subject of responsiveness to texture and colour we would remind the reader that Richard Wagner hung the room in which he worked at his operas with bright silks, for the art stimulus he got from colour, and it is a well-known fact that he derived great pleasure from wearing dressing gowns and other garments made from rich materials.

Clyde Fitch, our American playwright, when in his home, often wore velvet or brocaded silks. They were more sympathetic to his artist nature, more in accord with his fondness for wearing jewelled studs, buttons, scarf-pins. In his town and country houses the main scheme, leading features and every smallest detail were the result of Clyde Fitch’s personal taste and effort, and he, more than most men and women, appreciated what a blot an inartistic human being can be on a room which of itself is a work of art.
PLATE XXX
Souvenirs of an artist designer’s unique establishment, 
in spirit and accomplishment vrai Parisienne. Notice the 
long cape in the style of 1825.

Tappé himself will tell you that all periods have had 
their beautiful lines and colours; their interesting details; 
that to find beauty one must first have the feeling for it; 
that if one is not born with this subtle instinct, there are 
manifold opportunities for cultivating it.

His claim is the same as that made in our Art of Interior 
Decoration; the connoisseur is one who has passed through 
the schooling to be acquired only by contact with master-
pieces,—those treasures sifted by time and preserved for 
our education, in great art collections.

Tappé emphasises the necessity of knowing the back-
ground for a costume before planning it; the value of line 
in the physique beneath the materials; the interest to be 
woven into a woman’s costume when her type is recog-
nised, and the modern insistence on appropriateness—that 
is, the simple gown and close hat for the car, vivid colours 
for field sports or beach; a large fan for the woman who 
is mistress of sweeping lines, etc., etc.

Tappé is absolutely French in his insistence upon the 
possible eloquence of line; a single flower well poised 
and the chic which is dependent upon how a hat or gown 
is put on. We have heard him say: “No, I will not claim 
the hat in that photograph, though I made it, because it is 
mal posé.”
Sketched for "Woman as Decoration" by Thelma Cudlipp

Tappe's Creations
In England, and far more so in America, men are put down as effeminate who wear jewelry to any marked extent. But no less a person than King Edward VII always wore a chain bangle on his arm, and one might cite countless men of the Continent as thoroughly masculine—Spaniards in particular—who wear as many jewelled rings as women. Apropos of this, a famous topaz, worn as a ring for years by a distinguished Spaniard was recently inherited by a relation in America—a woman. The stone was of such importance as a gem, that a record was kept of its passing from France into America. As a man’s ring it was impressive and the setting such as to do it honour, but being a man’s ring, it was too heavy for a woman’s use. A pendant was made of the stone and a setting given it which turned out to be too trifling in character. The consequence was, the stone lost in value as a Rubens’ canvas would, if placed in an art nouveau frame.

Whether it is a precious stone, a valued painting or a woman’s costume—the effect produced depends upon the character of its setting.