

FASHION LETTER.

THE ARISTOCRATIC FIGURE AND HOW IT IS CLOTHED THIS AUTUMN.

The flat back is fashion's latest flat. When nature tries to make one the result is generally an Albert Durer type of figure. The fashionable flat back stops being flat at the waist line, where the naturally flat back becomes stubbornly persistent, and there curves adorably. The fashionable flat back is piquant. It is a trifle exaggerated—all smart fashions are—but it adds something indefinable to the figure and carriage. Carriage is so vastly important in style. The woman who does not carry herself after the fashion that this season, in more ways than one, is "good form" cannot acquire the fetching slant of the military back. Without it the frocks of the day are powerless to make their wearer quite fit.

The aristocratic type of figure now in vogue is not produced by much practice in the gymnasium. It did not take women long to note that the consolation prizes for lack of beauty belong to women who pass much of their time manoeuvring with rings and poles and rope ladders et al. Such women become agile; they are almost never graceful; they never have beautiful figures. The fashionable back that so completely eliminates the awful corset line with which the "lobster backed" women send makers of distingue gowns to an untimely grave is acquired by the svelter figure simply through learning to stand and sit and walk well. When advancing years and indolence have deposited their burden of flesh so hopelessly at variance with elegance, this must be annihilated. Apropos of which, it is worth noting that the physicians in extraordinary to the Court end of the town have, as one man, added to their favorite prescriptions for matrons the latest antidote for embonpoint—Vichy and Kissinzen on alternate days.

The fashionable walk is akin to the glide beloved of the novelists when the century was young. It is not learned where caddies congregate. The trailing, clinging, mermaid, silhouette robes of the reigning mode are absurdly out of harmony with any other than a leisurely serpentine movement; a Jane Hading method of moving. I had almost written a Mrs. James Brown Potter manner; but Mrs. Potter has never reached the perfection of art that enables her to hide that she is "mumming," whether on or off the stage. It is an art that is not common in good society. In American society, so far as the North is concerned it is practically unknown. In the South? Well, yes, here and there. Baltimore? Hardly. In New Orleans, more likely. Empress Josephine, I imagine, had it to perfection.

Out of the fog of uncertainty that encompasses the new fashions of any season for the first few weeks some conclusions have begun to emerge. They are not gratifying to those silly birds of passage who annually comfort the popularly known establishment in Paris, London, and Vienna by buying all their turkish-up leftovers and uninspired concoctions of the dead season. The high priests and priestesses of the most exclusively patronized temples of fashion are not infallible. They do not even claim to be oracles for longer than the immediate present. They refuse to prophesy in August what will be the best style in October. The key-note of fashion today is originality. Popularity is the death knell of a style, so far as the well dressed woman is concerned. She no longer has her wardrobe made up at the beginning of the season. She orders at the beginning of that season merely what she then needs. After the herd has selected its wardrobe the women

who may be correctly called fashion leaders place their orders for something quite unlike the styles to be met at every turn.

How utterly dowdy the street dresses of drawing-room length, made several weeks ago, look beside the latest word in walking dresses! These escape the ground all around and, with the specially designed coat and toque, have no end of chic. The majority of women do not discriminate between the street dress for carriage use and the street dress for walking. A goddess cannot look well groomed in a skirt that is soiled about the bottom. A walking skirt must be soiled if it touches the ground. A trailing skirt that is held up to prevent it being soiled becomes crumpled and frumpy. The skirt designed to sweep must sweep. Hence the new walking skirts that are neither storm frocks nor golf frocks, but made after designs expressly planned for the city streets are not for the freedom of the real dows or the artificial links.

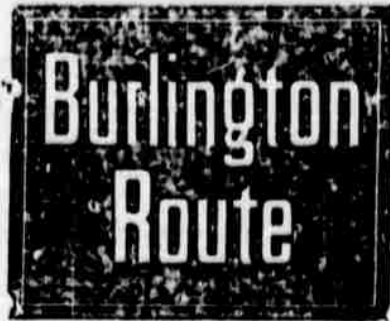
Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand Paris models of gowns made for Americans show the sheath back and the train that is little else but a tail. The exclusive designers in Paris, however, are beginning to depart from these outlines, introducing something of fulness at the center of the back of skirts, and making on gowns for formal occasions trains spread out generously instead of collapsing like a wet flag on a windless day.

If one sees it in Paris it is not necessarily so. Paris exhibits some weirdly dressed women who are expensively clothed. No city on earth, either, marks so radically in its dress the bottomless abyss between its women of the upper class and the women who are unclassified. But, none the less, Paris is the birthplace of every new style. London has never launched a style unaided, New York's best dressmakers and tailors make their gowns better than the French do, and cleverly adapt Parisian ideas as well as adopt them. But New York has never introduced a really new style yet. The first departure from a reigning mode is made in Paris, and so, when Paris says enough of a given style that is the beginning of the end of it.

New evening bodices are very low (very, very low), without a vestige of sleeves, and kept in place merely by shoulder straps of jewels. This is a charmingly handsome style on a Diana, when the jewels suit her. A wisp of lace worth as much as several stones, worn over one shoulder, relieves somewhat the tension of the beholder, especially one who recalls that shocking Drawing-Room when Mrs. —'s right shoulder strap of pearls broke during her curtsy, and when, in her involuntary effort to catch the pearls, the left one broke. Her Majesty, it will be recalled, covered the outcome with her own lace shawl and gave orders that never again should anyone be presented to her with so little besides confusion to shield her in the event of a jeweler's bad workmanship precipitating a situation.

Low-necked dresses are going to be worn more than ever before in this country. Nobody has ever devised any thing so becoming to the face and head as a lovely neck and shoulders. A high-necked gown simply makes a hat imperative to cast the becoming shadow, which a dress that swathes the wearer to the ears makes necessary.

It would be hard to understand why such a very small minority of the women in New York who dress expensively take advantage of the unequalled charm of low-necked gowns, if there were not the depressing facts of the comparatively small number of private stables, the climate so intemperate that horse owners dislike to take fine animals out much of the time, and the unparal-



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