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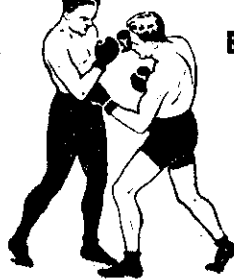
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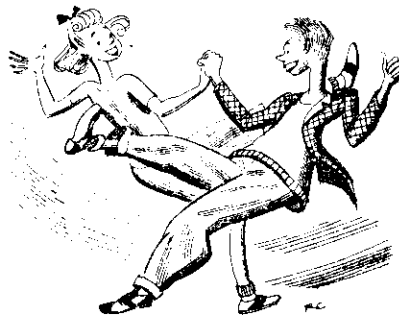
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# The American Way of Life

(Continued from previous page)

a cocky country newspaper editor, when he goes over the circulation figures of these new magazines, which somehow have skipped the old anxiety of the slow coaxing of subscribers and already are bought by an astronomical number of readers. *Mademoiselle*, for instance, for the middle and late 'teens, sells 425,000 copies a month, *Deb* has a guaranteed



"The characteristic strain set on American children"

250,000 and they have only just come out. And the biggest seller of all is a magazine you would say few Americans, even, have ever heard of. It is called *Calling All Girls*; it is aimed at and bought by glamorous tots between the ages of 10 and 17 to the tune of 850,000 a month.

Now I resist my old English instinct to draw heavy morals from light surfaces. Suppose a couple of million young American girls do buy and read fashion magazines put out for them, which in text and advertisement want to have them impeccably groomed from the strands of their hair to the tips of their toenails. Suppose the advertising and the romantic glamour of it all should get them down for a while, for a month, or a year, or more. I can only report to you, after much hot discussion with happy and sensible American mothers and fathers, that the American reaction is "What of it?" What we are up against here is a view of the development of children that unfussy parents the world over probably live by. Unfortunately, the wringing of hands in public is always done by the fussy, that is by the insecure, who see a drunkard in a glass of wine, and a vapid doll in a little girl who likes to play with her mother's lipstick. On the whole, from not too casual observation, I would say Americans are probably more disposed than most nations to put up with phases of child life that would alarm some other parents.

## Is it Serious?

I discussed with my wife the interesting reaction of the British film critics to an admittedly dull film about American 'teen-agers. The British critics were mostly appalled to think that the 15-year-olds in this film honestly reflected the same people in life. They all made up; they were watchful of their hair-do; they mooned and moaned over the youth of the neighbourhood; and they jitter-bugged to the music of Frankie and boogie-woogie. My own reaction was a certain similar alarm to that of the film critics, which I had, however, to admit was a secret fear that a daughter of mine might some day cut up in the same fashion. My wife's reaction was quite different. She read a passage from one

of the English critics saying what would come of young women who made up at 15 and 16 and competed for dates, and went in for similar wickedness. And she said, "But if you're not crazy over boys at 16, when are you?" and pointed out that "the younger you get over that, the better able you are to enjoy your twenties." As for the lipstick, the grooming, the mad concern over dressing, she thought this was a matter of temperament, and that anyway it showed pretty poor faith in your children to think that because at 15 they were greatly taken with these things, they would remain a major interest.

I retail this domestic dialogue to you because one so often reads in English magazines criticism of American life, without being told that Americans do not ignore the same thing that is being criticised. They just don't think it so important. That is to say, they don't overlook these things in themselves, but they do put a different value on them. I think the crux of the matter is that Americans, for good or ill, are not so much concerned (perhaps not enough concerned) over the impression their children will have on other people. Over here the parents seem more disposed to let their children live out their jungle



"In Elizabethan England even soldiers and pirates wore scent"

exuberance. They ask perhaps only that they show signs of being at times king or queen of the jungle. It was well said a few weeks ago, in a BBC talk from Miss Olive Shapley, that American parents tend to set an awfully high social standard, a standard of emotional poise, for their children, which is tough on the hesitant and the timid. But I think it is worth saying too, that if that is the characteristic strain set on American children, they are not submitted to the characteristic European strain of setting an early high intellectual standard on them. The intellectual goal is much more modest over here for many years, and it is interesting that where an American parent who is intellectual is too proud to have his child thought ordinary in the head, you notice exactly the same result as in Europe, of a child almost over-gentle, who is aware of the parent's being the intellectual authority, a child perhaps with many gifts but who already shows the characteristic of adult intellectuals anywhere—the inability to let their hair and their brains down and play without second thoughts, or self-consciousness, or inhibition.

## America's "Elizabethan Age"

In this talk I merely wished to anticipate a lot of strenuous lamentations over the probable fate of American youth, on the basis of the rash of extremely elegant play and fashion magazines, and

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