

V A N I T Y

F A I R

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The High-Low Controversy

*An Observer Presents Various
Aspects of the Old Question:
To Just What Lengths Should
a Skirt Go?*



By RANDOLPH DINWIDDIE

THE important question of the proper length of dress skirts is again racking the public press and putting a large part of our female population completely off their feed. This particular phase of fashion is the most vital of the many whimsies which are yearly dallied with by the smart modistes and couturières. Pre-eminent in importance among dress questions is the height above sea level of the human hem. It affects the men as does no other vagary. It creates more discussion and philosophical comment than any other problem. Compared with it the current location of the waist line, the cut of the neck or the presence or absence of sleeves are minor issues.

My interest in the matter is purely academic. As one of the sex which merely looks on and admires and wonders at the fickle changes of La Mode I have been tremendously struck by the vehemence with which the most recent edict of Fashion has been received. It was a rather scurvy trick of those mysterious authors of authoritative design, the hidden sources of inspiration in Paris, suddenly to knock the legs out from under the high skirt market. Perhaps it was not a trick at all. I have an idea that fashion is not the wilful arbitrary thing many people suppose it to be, but that it follows definite, immutable laws. We know that Gothic architects built their cathedrals higher and higher until, with Beauvais, came the great collapse. It fell down, and there was an end to it. So it was with skirts. They could go no further. They had nowhere to go but down. Of course, it is unfortunate for the lady who finds herself equipped for a long season with a legacy of shorts. As my friend Willie Aspinwall who is on the Exchange said of his cousin Margaret, "Poor Madge! She bought at the top. Now she is long on shorts and short on longs, and she can't cover." I'm not very well up on Wall Street patter but one look at lanky Margaret seemed to bear out Willie's statement.

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A Few Expert Opinions

READING the various newspaper discussions and looking over a few sample exhibits on the Avenue I resolved to conduct a personal investigation. I decided to get the personal testimony of a varied group of people and compare their angles of observation. My first call brought me to the office of Mrs. Arnold Bemis, President of the Woman's Civic and Social Welfare League.

Mrs. B. is as formidable as her title. She stands, or sits, four-square to all the winds and it is easy to tell exactly what her opinions are on any subject. "This recent attempt of Paris dressmakers to foist their ridiculous standards on American womanhood will never be tolerated for a second," said Mrs. Bemis, angrily tearing a page from *La Gazette du Bon Ton*. "Look at that! Imagine a modern woman trying to cross Fifth Avenue wrapped up in eighteen yards of material like that. A few New York Society dames"—Mrs. Bemis's lip (the one with a slight moustache) curled scornfully—"may stand for it. It is all they can do. They can't walk. But not the sensible women of our League. Thousands of our members live in the suburbs. Tell me, how can a woman catch a train when she is already tangled up in one?"

Mrs. Bemis has a pretty epigrammatic talent if nothing else—admiring which I withdrew and sought my next victim, Dr. Eustace Willis, a young practitioner of my acquaintance.

"I have great hopes for the long skirt," said Dr. Willis. "My practise has picked up amazingly since our sidewalks have been systematically swept by a million or more ladies every day. Many homeless influenza germs have found permanent shelter in well-to-do establishments. This not only keeps our streets much cleaner but also makes possible an intensive study of colds, catarrhal troubles, sneezes and the insidious theater or concert-cough which has long baffled medical science. During the short skirt era people remained so infernally well that I thought I might have to go out of business. Now I am thinking of buying a new car. Put me down unmistakably as a 'long'."

My next visit took me into the marts of trade where I found opinion curiously divided. The silk and fabric importers were unanimous in favor of the new style. An interesting contrary view was rendered by Mr. Isadore Klipsch, Strauss and Bendelmayer. "Where do stockings come off?" asked Mr. Klipsch with some heat. "Here ain't we spent thousands of dollars layin' in a stock of first class goods, y' see, an' what's gonter happen if a feller can't see 'em? Who cares about arms and necks an' waist lines? Such a fuss! Phooey! What the feller in the street wants is legs. Ain't I right, Strauss? An' what becomes of the new fancy colors we make 'em, the apricots, the plum, the peach? Who's gonter eat all them fruits? Believe me, the only hope we got is in these here now side-doors they put in sometimes, these portieres they're wearin' so a feller can once in a while get a look-in, ain't it?"

I felt that there was much in Mr. Klipsch's point of view.

On the Distaff Side

ARATHER pathetic view-point was disclosed by a young lady who must obviously be nameless. Let us call her Louise. Louise is the hat girl in one of our small, smart restaurants. She herself is both small and smart. She is not facially pretty—freckles and a slight cast in one eye prevent her competing in any beauty contests, but in other ways she

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is superb. "Yes, Monsieur," she murmured in her charming Gallic way, "eet is 'ard on some girls, ze long skairt. Eet hide sometime zeer only chances to attrac' ze attention. I myself, you know . . . I have not ze beauté of ze visage, but autrement . . . attendez moi, Monsieur, si vous pouviez voir. . . ."

"Louise," I said, not wishing to prolong the interview, "what time do you leave here?"

"A dix heures," she answered.

Setting my watch, I departed.

Through a card from the manager I was fortunate in having a two minute interview with Vera Gilhooly just as she was leaving her dressing room at the Follies to go on to a supper party. She stood in the doorway dressed in a million dollars worth of ermine and delivered her opinion with terse decision.

"It's all or nothing with me, Boy. In the first number, the fashion review, of course, I wear skirts. But I don't have to. Some people think they look better in the short ones but there's a whole lot oughter be thankful for concealment. Honest, when I walked up Fifth Avenue a year ago I used to wonder where all the barrel hoops came from. But if you seen me in the last number, the Parade of the Perfumes, you'll know that I don't have to worry. And write this down in your little book, No matter what the square-toed high-brows say, they'll all be wearing just exactly what Paree tells 'em to inside of six months. Don't let 'em kid you about being independent. They're all hard-shelled conservatives and if there's anything they hate it's to be different. By-by!"

Vera swept off to her taxi leaving me astounded at her wisdom. She attempted no solution, to be sure, but showed such splendid common sense. After all perhaps it is purely idle speculation to attempt an answer to the question of what the well-dressed woman will wear. It would be simpler to say, what won't she?

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