THE LITERARY DIGEST

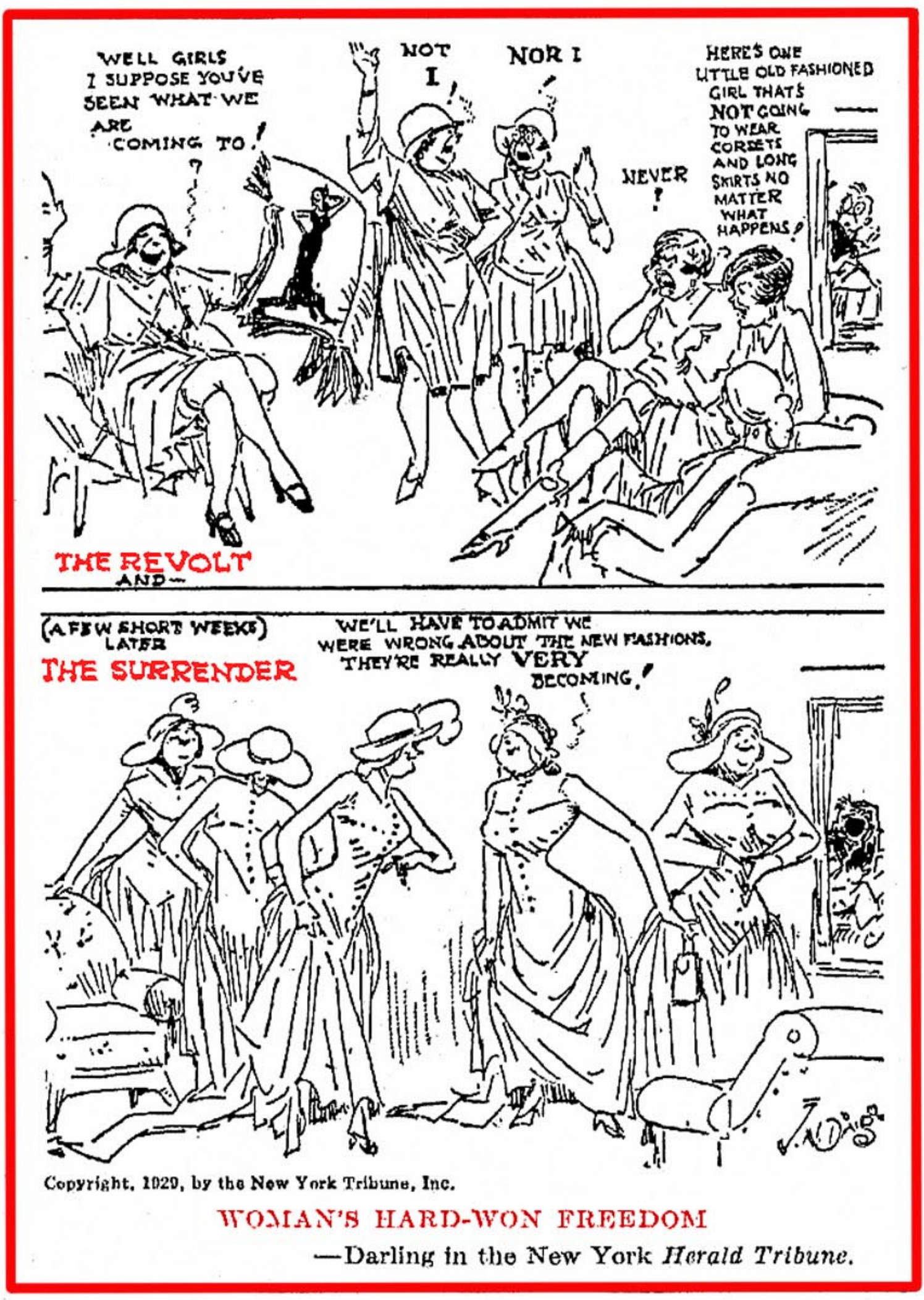
November 16, 1929: p. 39

MUST WOMEN GO BACK TO TRIPPING OVER THEIR TRAINS?

"NOT ON YOUR LIFE!"—or words to that effect—cry the fair ringleaders of what looks like a fairly promising revolt against the Parisian moguls of fashion who have decreed the return of long skirts. Even the Young Women's Christian Association, which fought tooth and nail against the flapper kilt when it first came in, is now, we are told, just as vehemently resisting the revival of the shin-swaddling flounces of the 'nineties. And the menace is not a remote one. Every woman who has tackled her fall shopping knows that the new season's frocks have taken a jump of several inches toward the ground, while the more extreme evening gowns are majestically sweeping the dust. Nor is that the worst of it. With consternation one hears a rumor—nay, a matter-of-fact report—of bustles. Also muffs—presumably to balance the bustles. In fact, altho "Peacock Alley is no more," as Flora Merrill reminds us in the New York *World*, "styles such as were displayed along the Waldorf's famous corridor in its heyday now fill shop windows like ghosts of bygone days. When the cabbies on lower Fifth Avenue see the latest things in bustles, trains, and muffs, they will think the day of the taxi is over, and polish up the lamps on the old victorias." And this is the gloomy outlook Miss Merrill dangles before us:

Long, voluminous skirts are once again to wipe up the sidewalks of New York, and the modern, athletic figure is to be corseted for the princess line. That is, if the startling innovations decreed by the fall fashions really materialize.

But will the working woman submit to fluttering draperies that will catch in the subway door; will our advanced hygienic standards tolerate bedraggled petticoats? Who is staging this



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WOMAN'S HARD-WON FREEDOM

—Darling in the New York *Herald Tribune*.

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An Echo of the Gay "Nineties"

come-back in styles and accessories long relegated to the attic, and why?

Those two questions are echoed by other writers, mostly feminine and indignant. Some of them bitterly accuse the textile manufacturers of a plot to imprison modern woman in the sartorial shackles of her mother and grandmother. A clarion call to rebellion is sounded by Miss Fannie Hurst, the vivacious author of magazine fiction. Writing in *The New Republic*, under the title, "Let's Not Wear Them!" she exclaims:

1929 Fashion

Are the fashion-mongers going to succeed in reviving the obsolete and ridiculous spectacle of a woman tripping over her train?

The incredible fact seems to be that women are hard at the clownish spectacle of pulling in waistlines and let-

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ting down hemlines. Otherwise one would say that this time the fashion dictators have grossly overstept the line in trying to cram our emancipated bodies back into yardage.

Yet they ought to be careful. If they are not, the "tyranny of fashion," ceasing to be a half-affectionate phrase, will stand suddenly revealed in its true light as an impudent and intolerable obligation.

It has been embarrassingly and consistently true of the female of the human species, that you can lead her from one form to another of personal adornment, but you can not make her cerebrate about it. Witness the hoop-skirt, the big sleeve, the corset, the bustle. Without so much as questioning the voice of the unseen dictator, in times past she has lent herself to the outlandish, the impractical, the cumbersome, the absurd, the fantastic, and the risible, for so long, that it seems only natural that the Master Mind behind the dictatorship should be prompted to enormous self-confidence.

The bleating, or more aptly speaking, the braying acquiescence of women to fashion, is the most dependable and constant factor with which the international industry of dressing them has to deal. Crops may fail, silk-worms suffer blight, weavers may strike, tariffs may hamper, but the mass-gesture of the feminine neck bending to the yoke of each new season's fashion goes on.

At least, has been, and is, going on.

It is only natural that during the last ten years, in the ferment after the war, should have occurred what are perhaps the most radical changes in woman's dress since fashions began. Not that radical and sudden change in woman's dress is unusual. It has been pretty conscientiously seen to that last year's wardrobe shall annually be made as obsolete as possible. But certainly not in the history of American fashions have such radical and important changes asserted themselves in styles for women. The reasons, in the light of the world cataclysm and the resultant social changes, are significant. They reflect, in a manner too intricate to be treated here, certain traits that strike deeply into feminine psychology.

The fashions of the last ten years not only establish the most radical departure in the history of woman's clothing since woman first donned clothing, declares Miss Hurst, but they eloquently

AT THE MERCY OF HER ANCIENT TYRANT
Modern woman's relation to the Parisian man-milliner, as viewed by an artist, who evidently sympathizes with the fair victim.

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represent her new psychological, sociological, economic, and political status. Thus:

> A peep into the clothes-closet of Queen Victoria might have proved, by negation, that she did not golf, drive a car, go to business, let her waistline alone, or wear two-ounce underthings. The clothes chronicle of the woman of 1920-1929 tells a different story, and tells it eloquently. Woman's new and varied activities came to create a demand for more utilitarian clothes. Short hair seemed to synchronize with the close-fitting hat, or vice versa. The hip-flask probably inspired some designing mind with the cute idea of the boyish form. Woman's emergency jobs, during the war, made the short skirt a prettified novelty. Corsets rode low on the Ferris wheel of fashion. The female limb became a leg and the silk-stocking business an industry.
>
> But slowly, surely, subtly, over a period of three years, forces have been at work to pry from woman's clutch, without causing too loud an outcry, those fashions of the she has found so sane and comfortable. Never have changes in style come more gradually than recently. No crude methods which might, perchance, awaken women to the impending calamity, have been employed. Slyly, for the last few springs and falls, Paris has been dropping that hemline, inch by inch. Subtly, woman's eye has been trained toward that skirt of more yardage and increased length. Slowly, the poppycock propaganda of the "natural waistline" has gone on.

And then, overnight, as it were, fashion, emboldened by signs of success, suddenly trumpets her triumph. Long skirts. Trains. Corsets. Larger hats. Eleven yards to the gown instead of four or five. Long gloves. Long hair.

The woman shopping has not much choice in the matter. Not only are the simple, brief fashions of yesteryear not on view, but if they were, it would be rank impracticability to buy them. It not only takes crusader's strength of purpose to be "special," but there are two other fundamental deterrents. It is expensive to be special. It is conspicuous to be special. One swallow does not make a summer, and one revolt or two revolts or two hundred revolts, in so mammoth an issue, do not make a revolution.

At the moment, the ridiculous spectacle is seen of millions of women about to climb back into corsets, trains, long gloves, and coiffures. True, we are not the only sheep following the bell. Fräuleins, mademoiselles, signorinas are also being led to slaughter, but that does not lessen our plight. Here is one of the most important emancipations of woman in the past twelve years about to go for naught.

Organization against the oligarchy of industries is all that can save her from the predicament that is about to send her backsliding. "Down with the corset and up with the hemline!" should be the slogan of every woman who doesn't want to be bullied into doing something as undesirable as it is unwelcome.

Miss Elsie McCormick protests, in her triweekly column in *The World*, that this winter she won't be able to accept invitations to anything except fancy-dress balls. In recounting her troubles at the style studios, she explains ruefully:

> Waists, it seems, have come back again. They have been missing for a long time, and a number have changed during their absence so that their owners hardly recognize them. I used to have one that could be spanned with two hands, provided they were bridge hands and the cards weren't held too closely together.
>
> No, that doesn't give quite the right impression. For several years my waist really was small, even tho a wasp might not necessarily mistake me for his sister-in-law. During most of the time, however, a small waist was no more of an asset than a beautiful palate. Being concealed by gowns that mistook the hips for the diaphragm, the proportions were a secret between one's self and one's gymnasium instructor.
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> Life simply isn't good to me. Just as waists returned I had my tonsils out, and promptly gained fifteen pounds. After seeing myself in some of the new frocks, I have started negotiations to get the tonsils back again. My only fear is that, hav-

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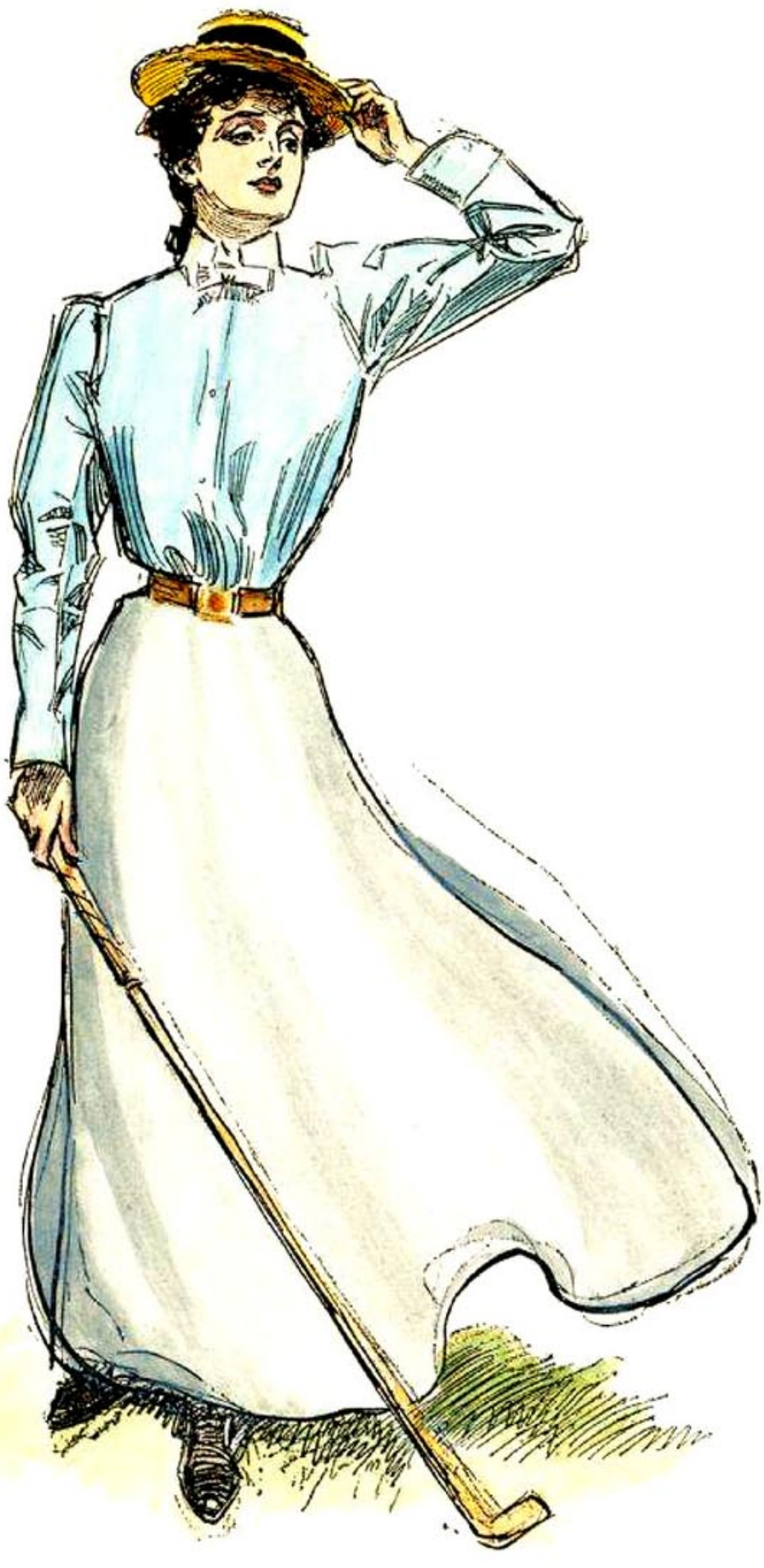
ing lived in alcohol so long, they may prove a rowdy and deleterious addition to my personality.



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