

## HOW ABOUT THE LOW NECKS AND THE HIGH SKIRTS OF FASHION?

Every so often the need of dress reform in America penetrates to the press from whispers in women's club circles, and for a little while the bell of doom seems about to ring on the slimy skirt and the peek-a-boo waist, the whalebone torture and the high heels. When the agitation has simmered down we discover that the reform consists in women wearing high collars to protect their throats and cutting off six inches of their skirts, so that the cold winds blow on silken hose, and when needy reform stops at the top it is needed at the bottom, or vice versa.

In Europe the feminist movement has quietly gone about reform in women's dress on a systematic basis that is slowly but surely emancipating the sex from its slavery to fashion.

German feminists have organized the German Union for the New Clothing for Women and Women's Culture, with branches in 26 European cities and a journal edited by Clara Sanders and Elise Wirminghaus. The society holds a congress every two years; it sends out literature; it gives lectures and it spreads abroad constantly the propaganda of dress reform.

The executive committee of 1912 sent out a statement to women in every woman's journal. The statement explained to the women of Germany that in the midst of a troubled period when many were uncertain of their daily bread the tendency to luxury had increased, especially in women's clothes, and it concluded:

"The fashion industry, with its allies of the press, its cleverly planned exhibits and seductive fashion plates, speculates upon the intellectual immaturity of women and exploits their lack of the understanding of sound economics."

Reform in women's dress had to start hygienically with the abolition of

the whalebone torture, and when women consented to put aside corsets it was found that their back and abdominal muscles were so weakened by the long usage of a whalebone support that it seemed the slavery of the corset could never be done away with.

The feminists used strategy to solve the problem. They began to reconstruct women. They introduced and encouraged Swedish gymnastics, a series of exercises to develop the muscles; they backed physical culture clubs; they encouraged skating as a sport in winter and mountain climbing in summer and they were ardent supporters of the classic dances of Isadora Duncan in her Grecian costumes.

Though it seems a radical departure to have emancipated women from the slavery of the whalebone, it is as radical, from the viewpoint of the cartoonist, to have emancipated woman from the slavery of the dress that she could not fasten herself, but, even this has been accomplished.

One of the modern dress forms was devised by Hedwig Buschmann in Berlin. She takes a piece of goods, cuts a square or round hole for the neck, puts a girdle around the waist and the costume is finished. There is also the shift form which opens in the front and the one-piece dress that does away with the separate skirt that had to fit tightly around the waist.

Beauty has not been sacrificed in the dress reform. Great latitude is allowed for individual tastes, but it is agreed that the rational dress must allow breathing space and free limb movement, consequently the tape-measure is no longer drawn tight about the flexible parts of the body, but the dressmaker loosely measures after milady had inflated her lungs and she winds the tape about the ribs.