

# MRS. HENDERSON CRUSADES FOR MODESTY

By ELLERY RAND. WASHINGTON.

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WASHINGTON.

YOUNG women who walk abroad with their knees exposed and their fingers stained with nicotine have once more received a warning. This time it comes from Mrs. John B. Henderson, one of the few permanent figures in Washington's shifting official society. Her challenge has echoed from newspaper to newspaper all the way across the continent. It is hoped by a wide circle of people that her words will swing the pendulum of styles and manners back toward an age of purity, piety and the elusive ankle. Meanwhile, the Charleston continues, the cropped heads in the night clubs are wreathed by haloes of blue smoke, and skirts are measured by the inch instead of the foot. The words of the prophet have yet borne little fruit.

When Mrs. Henderson meets the Senate ladies at lunch, heads nod in vociferous approval of her new campaign. Teachers and clergymen, despairing mothers and irate swains write bales of letters to her and to the newspapers, professing their gratification at the stand she has taken. But the streets and the shop windows look the same. Young girls and old still flaunt fifteen inches of chiffon stocking, and the fashion magazines report that Paris has not lowered the flag by the width of a hairpin.

Undaunted is the gallant little lady of Henderson Castle. She makes frequent long pilgrimages through the boulevards of Washington, and as she walks she stores in her mind pictures of the sort of skirt atrocities that must disappear. Or she sits in her great house high on Sixteenth Street hill, and speculates on the golden age

that is to come when the misguided women let their hems out and put their inhibitions back in the basket.

All of official Washington has long been familiar with her firm and virtuous stand, for Mrs. Henderson is an institution in the city. As hostess and art collector, as author and realtor, she has been a conspicuous figure for several decades. She has built some of the most beautiful embassies in Washington, and then helped to welcome the new mistresses into them. She has been an ardent supporter of almost every reform movement that has swept the country in her day. But this is the first time she has inaugurated a special campaign of her own.

## Her Contagious Vitality.

She is a straight-backed, gracious little lady of seventy-odd years, keen-eyed and full of a contagious vitality and very much in earnest about this matter of hem lines. She talks freely of the existing evils and of her plans for changing them.

"I'll tell you what started me," said Mrs. Henderson. "I never went downtown that I wasn't annoyed by the leg shows that I saw on every side of me. It wasn't only that the skirts were above the knees, but the sheer, flesh-tinted stockings made the girls look as if their legs were absolutely naked.

"I watched and watched, until I felt that something had to be done about it immediately, if our girls were to retain any sense of decency. I talked over the situation with a great many of my friends and they all seemed to feel just as I did—except that they were not eager to take any active steps to remedy conditions. I soon saw that, if anything was to be accomplished I should have to start moving on my



Mrs. John B. Henderson.

From Keystone Photo.

own initiative. So I wrote a series of resolutions expressing my views on present-day styles and they were taken up by the newspapers."

Those resolutions have been broad-

cast too thoroughly to need repeating here. They speak of the prevailing fashions as "dictated by the underworld of Paris," and despair of the cigarette habit as leading to "physical

bankruptcy and race degeneracy." They "call upon society women of America everywhere to band together to condemn such vulgar fashions of women's apparel as do not tend to cultivate innate modesty, good taste, or good morals."

Although her resolutions repeat cries that recur from season to season, world without end, they have caught the public ear, supplied table-talk for thousands of households, and evoked endless editorial comment.

"It really is amazing," said Mrs. Henderson, "how much agitation the campaign has aroused. Letters deluge me every day, from all sorts of people and all parts of the country. Most of them come from men. I wish I could show some of them to the girls who are losing their sense of propriety in their efforts to attract husbands for themselves. They would soon realize that they are using the wrong methods.

## Boldness as a Lure.

"It is only natural that girls should want to make themselves attractive to men. But since the war they have lost all restraint in their attempts to captivate. They do not realize that boldness as a lure is not so effective as the old-fashioned womanliness and grace.

"Things are almost as bad today as they were after the Napoleonic wars, which was one of the most corrupt periods in history. So many of the young men had been killed, it was so important that children should be born and the next generation well begun, that morals were forgotten and discretion flung to the winds.

"We thought we had learned certain lessons in civilization since then, but

apparently we have not. The World War left us with our sense of values gone and our moral stamina weakened. The girls are shameless in dress and conduct alike. We don't know what is going to happen next. It is like the days before the fall of Rome."

As for what is to be done to alleviate the scandalous state of affairs, Mrs. Henderson is perhaps a little uncertain. Her main idea at the moment seems to be to direct a general boycott against those Parisian couturiers who delight in uncovering the body.

"American women have gone mad over the tailors to the Parisian demimonde," she said. "The really fine French people do not subscribe to the fashions that the ultra Americans rush to adopt. At any of the resorts abroad American women are out-Parisian Paris.

"It is sad that our countrywomen are helping to burlesque the fashions created by so artistic a race as the French, whose clothes have been models for the world for so many years. No one cares more for Parisian dresses than I do. I have a collection of them that stretches back over many seasons. Before the war, I went abroad every few years, and I always stocked my wardrobe completely in Paris on each trip.

"But the Americans who go abroad today come back with clothing that no decent woman has a right to wear. This is the type of garment that the importers bring over from France and the domestic manufacturers copy. If we are to effect any reform in America, this sort of thing must stop. Our women will have to

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# MRS. HENDERSON LEADS A CRUSADE

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look to other sources for their fashions.

"They can't get them at home. Our country may lead the world in a great variety of ways, but it cannot become a fashion centre—in the near future, at any rate. We are not artistic enough. Our Government does nothing to encourage an understanding or an appreciation of art, as the French Government does. Why, we haven't even a national art museum."

At the mention of a national art museum, Mrs. Henderson forgot skirt lengths. For years she has been fighting for the establishing of such an institution in Washington. She has an extensive art collection of her own, part of which she would hand over to the country if a proper gallery were created to house it.

"There is one logical solution of the clothes problem," she said at last. "We can't draw our styles from Paris because they are too vulgar, nor from America because we are not esthetically developed. Very well, we must turn to London. The English fashions combine an old world artistic sense with the refinement that is a necessary part of our good taste.

"There is a definite reason why the English fashions are so restrained. The royal family are the English style arbiters, and since they are very conservative the English styles are correspondingly quiet.

"The Princess Mary is the model of most English gentlewomen. She is regal in appearance, her clothes are elegant, but they never violate the fundamental standards. She illustrates the truth that it is possible to

be well groomed without being vulgar.

"The ladies of the foreign embassies here in Washington follow the same high standards. When we go to their homes we do not see the outlandish costumes that our own ladies delight in. If American women will look to such examples as the Princess Mary and the ladies of the embassies, they can't go wrong."

That is, they can't go wrong in their dressing. There are other evils which must be wiped out, and most urgent among these, according to Mrs. Henderson, is the ubiquitous cigarette, which she accuses of undermining not only the morals but also the health of male and female alike.

Cigarette reform is no passing whim with Mrs. Henderson. "My interest in the harmful effects of tobacco started years ago," she explained, "when my only son was at Harvard. Almost everybody smoked there, and the boys were taught nothing of physiology to help them withstand the poisonous nicotine which they inhaled. The rooms of the wealthy boys were for the most part like drug shops, with smoking and drinking going on all the time.

"When my son's health became affected by smoking I determined to go into the matter carefully, and I started studying at the medical library in Washington. There were hundreds of books available, but the more I worked the more I felt the need of a popular treatise on tobacco that the public would understand. And I determined to write one myself.

"It took me five years. I called the book 'The Aristocracy of Health,' and published it myself under the name of the Colton Publishing Company. I distributed over 1,000 copies where I

thought they would do the most good. Some of them I sent to China, and the book was translated into Chinese and read to the Empress. There is a great deal in it about opium as well as tobacco.

"Now I have decided to give the book to the public through the newspapers. I want to publish it gratis, for it is a message which I feel I owe to the people. I have interviewed a few syndicate managers about it, but have come to no decision as yet. I should prefer to place it in the hands of a man who does not smoke.

"I am quite sure that a wide reading of the book will help a great many smokers, just as I am confident that the campaign we are waging will improve the standards and lower the skirts of our young women."

But though Mrs. Henderson speaks valiantly of the campaign which "we" are waging, most of her supporters are letting her work single-handed. The officials of those organizations which she is counting on to back her, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, announce that they have "nothing to say."

Still, prophets have never received much encouragement in their home towns. And what may be a light matter to a Senator's wife is perhaps a serious business to the mother of a willful daughter in the less sophisticated walks of life. Some people must be taking Mrs. Henderson seriously, as her correspondence and the newspapers show.

It is not beyond the realm of possibility that her resolutions may start a real wave of reform. Such waves do come from time to time. It may be that the challenge to indecency issued from Henderson Castle marks the start of a new era in our modes and manners.

## BEEES AT SCHOOL

Beekeeping is a part of the curriculum of rural schools in Ontario. In sixteen schools in Wentworth County bees are kept in observation hives in the schoolroom.