

RAINY DAISIES' TRIUMPH

LONG skirts are coming in again!" It is predicted everywhere. It is the verdict of Paris, where we turn with great deference for fashion opinions, so our home designers are rapidly falling in line, and the long skirt is all but a fact. But in spite of the ultimatums that are wafted to us from all authoritative sources there is one group that is little impressed by the high handed methods of our French sisters in trying to swathe us again in troublesome draperies.

But the Rainy Daisies are wholly unperturbed by the rumors and are proceeding with their plans for their grand jubilee to celebrate their twenty-fifth anniversary as though skirts were the most unlikely of all topics for heated discussion or agitation. It was the Rainy Day Club that started all this agitation. Not for long skirts, mercy, no! Although some of them have got rather nervous as to the turn, decidedly upward, that their reform has taken, it is this band that started the first organized movement for short skirts.

Twenty-five years ago next month a little group of five met to start something, "some kind of society to protest" against the sweeping skirt then proclaimed the fashion and so hated by women of affairs. Mrs. Bertha Welby, a former actress, gathered them together and told of her indignation at seeing the shop girls who were obliged to pass her studio on Twenty-third Street as they traveled between the shops and the ferry, all bedraggled in bad weather, tugging frantically at the pounds and pounds of wet skirts that must be held if they were to navigate. She had been so stirred by the foolish fashion that when one of her friends died from exposure because of damp skirts she decided that she would do something about it. She proposed some kind of dress for women that would not be so unhealthful, something that would not gather dust and germs as well as rain. Certainly, she reasoned, women should at least be interested in a more comfortable costume for rainy days, for hygienic reasons if nothing more. So this was decided upon and the group called themselves the Rainy Day Club.

Public Shocked as Usual.

It was all done quite seriously and simply, but the public did not accept it as such. It was quite as shocked as when the Lucy Stone League recently urged women to keep their own names. Husbands stormed at their wives for considering such a thing. Were they forgetting modesty? Were they forgetting that their place was in the home and that they looked beautiful in the drawing room in the flowing, full skirts? There were not many women in business at that time. With the exception of shop girls, a few stenographers and a handful of newspaper and professional women, the remainder of the weaker sex were numbered among the idle class. The woman of wealth luxuriated in her carriage with the folds of her voluminous skirts gracefully draped about her. She had no interest in skirts for the rainy day, and the less fortunate ones had not the courage to lend a hand to the most sweeping reform that had ever affected the American woman. So the Rainy Daisies—so dubbed by the press—found it pretty hard going. But they were a courageous little group and trudged right along.

Mrs. A. M. Palmer, who became the President the year after the club was organized and has remained in the office since, designed the costume which was endorsed by them. She still has the diminutive model, all complete, which she proudly showed while she told the other day of the vicissitudes of the club. Little Miss Rainy Daisy, she eagerly explained, will be the guest of honor at the jubilee on Nov. 5 at the Hotel Astor when tableaux will be shown depicting the activities of the club during its long service. She will wear the Alpine hat, the chatelaine bag, the Zouave jacket and the full, circular skirt just four inches from the floor.

Just four inches from the floor! But it startled the whole country. Women had participated in the fight for suffrage and the abolition of slavery. True, a few dress reformers had declared that women should wear bloomers, but they were dismissed as fanatics and there the matter dropped, but for a group to come out in positive approval of short skirts—and four inches from the floor—that had never happened before. But these pioneers were undaunted. In spite of the condemnation everywhere, they donned their uniforms to the merriment of many bystanders and the consternation of some.

"You see, some of us were poor and could not afford the costume I had designed," explained the genial Mrs. Palmer, whose personality has done much to lead her sisters through the maze of long skirts into the high road of dress reform. She is the widow of the famous manager of the Union Square Theatre in its palmy days. "There were many who were obliged to shorten

their long skirts, and they were certainly very funny to the uninitiated eye. At that time, you know, the skirts, much lined and padded, measured about four yards or more around the bottom, so when these were shortened they did look much like a raised umbrella.

"It was anything but a pleasant ordeal to appear on the streets during the first two years of our crusade. We were always followed, although after the first few times I did not mind it greatly. I was so cheered by the interest our movement was causing, and because of that was so certain of our success that I did not so much mind being ridiculed."

Here Mrs. Imogene King, another of the pioneers of the club, broke in to tell of one occasion when, upon appearing in her rainy day costume, she was followed by a crowd of men and boys who became so noisy and boisterous that she fled into a shop in fear of violence from them.

"It was the worst experience I ever had," she said, "and when I reached home and told my husband what had happened he only said, 'It serves you right.' It was a long time before I was able to convert him to our side."

Success of the Costume.

"Yes, the men opposed us at every turn then, but it was difficult to say which were our worst enemies, the men or the women," continued Mrs. Palmer. "Just as so many reforms for women are today met by such stout opposition by those whom they are to benefit, we found it hard to persuade women that short skirts were hygienic and pretty. Of course, their greatest argument was that they were immodest. They seemed to forget entirely that whenever they lifted their skirts to board a car or step into a carriage, or, in fact, to get about at all, they were exposing their legs, or at least one of them. We felt that if they must be such sticklers for modesty they might just as well equalize the view of both legs rather than confine it to much of one.

"But finally we made our greatest step when the doctors publicly expressed approval of our costumes and paid us the great compliment of saying it would result in an improvement of health among women. Following this, the manufacturers began to manufacture shorter skirts, copying our costume at first and then deviating from it until there was quite a variety of styles.

"Of course, the New York and Eastern women led in adopting the fashion but it was not so very long before women throughout the country had followed our lead. The papers and magazines had written so much about us that our efforts were pretty well known everywhere and the members of the club, who were active in other organizations did much to further our cause. I traveled with my husband a good deal then and always had my costume with me. Then too, women became more and more interested in athletics, so we had the support of the female tennis and golf enthusiasts at once. After a little more than two years short skirts were an accomplished fact and we turned our attention to other reforms—to better conditions among the poor, better milk and more recently welfare work for the soldiers.

"No, I do not approve of the extremely short skirts," she answered when asked about the present style. "But, thank goodness, a comparatively small number of women are wearing them. I believe in the moderately short skirt—say ten inches from the floor, for they are sanitary, artistic and useful. The shorter skirts were only a fad and never for a moment gave us any alarm. Of course, there are some American women who seem to have forgotten all sense of modesty. When I see a number of them I sometimes begin to fear that the meaning of the word has been entirely forgotten and feel that it might as well be taken out of the dictionary. But then, in spite of these women, I felt that once the fashion in extremely short skirts had gone as far as it did last Winter there would be a reaction, just as there had been during the last few months.

Now, I am asked everywhere if I do not fear that the skirts will again touch the floor. It is an absurd idea, for the return of such a fashion is the most unlikely thing in the world. Women are far too comfortable now and too sensible to allow a few designers and costumers to clothe them again in the clothes we once wore. They are quite impractical, and a rebellion on the part of the business women alone would mean the downfall of any such style. Another year will see much moderation in fashions and a settling down to even more sensible and comfortable clothes. You know any reform has to develop and grow and pass through many phases before the public will have confidence in it. After that there is no fear."

So the Rainy Daisies—three hundred and twenty-five of them now—are serenely planning their silver anniversary, quite oblivious to the reports flying about that their reform, which was only accomplished after a slow, hard struggle, will go for naught, and that soon the American maiden will be a replica of her staid, much-bustled grandmother.