

Skirting the Skirts at the Bathing Beach

LIFE IN WASHINGTON IS WHAT WE MAKE IT

"Mother, may I go out to swim?
Yes, my darling daughter.
Hang your clothes on a hickory limb,
But don't go near the water."

THUS runs a nursery rhyme that shows the hard wear of some two or three centuries at least, still is going strong at the Washington bathing beach in the year of grace 1921 and the one hundred and 45th of the independence of the United States.

The psycho-analysts, those fellows who can tell all your future life from your memory of a dream you had some ten years ago, claim that the mania for discarding every-day garments and appearing in as little as possible is a return to an age in the world's infancy and man's as well when a necklace or an ear ring was considered as an evidence of overdressing.

But Nothing Is Saved.

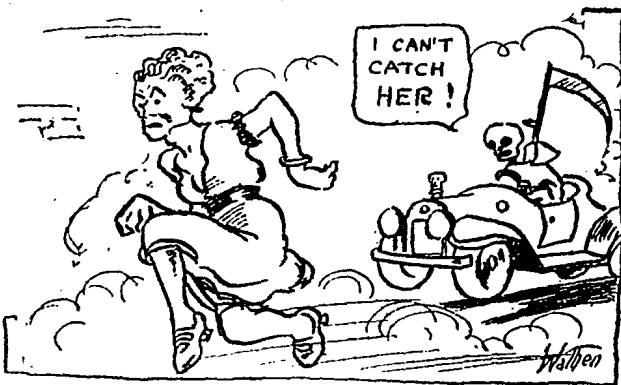
There would be a grain of comfort in the situation for the oldest of old maids in the present situation if only the scarcity of garments meant a lowering of prices. But it doesn't. The less you wear the more you have to pay for it. Why, our great grandmothers could clothe themselves from head to toe in those woolly hand-me-down dresses—the kind that itch like the liveliest of A. E. F. cooties—throw in a seal skin coat, and even indulge in a lace-trimmed pair of pantalettes for what it takes nowadays to buy one of those intimate little garments, silk crepe de chine, &c., &c., &c., that forms one of the steps of the modern clothes pyramid.

In vain the clubs may rage and storm, Sister Sue's skirts mount steadily up and up. Now until you can look in a woman's face as she is coming out of a motion picture palace on Ninth street, you cannot tell whether she is 9, 19 or 90. Really the grandmothers and near grandmothers and the women who should be grandmothers are the worst of the lot. We might as well wave a fond farewell to the grandmother of tradition—the kind you know who sat in the chimney corner and knitted and dressed at 50 as if she was 75 years old. That grandmother is only seen on the screen nowadays. The grandmother of 1921 can smoke her little old twenty Turkish cigarettes a day, wear her debutante granddaughter's short skirts with ease, shimmy, toddle and lose \$100 at bridge with the best of them. Why, she goes so fast that death has to use a 1921 eight-cylinder high-power car to catch up with her and halt her long enough to issue his compulsory invitation for a little ride over the Styx.

Grandma Takes Up Flying.

And grandmothers have taken to flying, to cap the climax. Led on by those two doughty old ladies from the West who left their grandchildren safely at home and started on a cross country flight, grandmother powders her nose, slaps a hair net over her henna hair, unleashes her lip stick and starts out at 6 o'clock in the morning. "Where are you going, mother, dear," you inquire timorously, fearing she will pull that personal liberty stuff on you. The reply comes nonchalantly, "Oh, just for a little spin in my seaplane. I'll bring you some nice fresh fish from Norfolk for breakfast."

Now what can one do with a grandmother? The dear old ladies just must have their own way or they will go out in the garden and eat worms or some other spite performance of that nature to make the grandchild feel cruel and unnatural.



But to return to the question at issue: "Skirting the Skirts at the Bathing Beach," and how it can be done or rather how it cannot be done.

It's a Sad Story, Mates.

Ever since the good old Potomac, way back in the early 1800s, soon after the seat of government was removed from Philadelphia for the sake of quiet, was discovered to be water that not only fish but human beings could swim in, the question of suitable Potomac river bathing costumes has been debatable. The small boy has always managed to solve the problem when he could escape the vigilant eye of the harbor police and other short sports who combine to make a boy's life just as tame as an adult's. He—aforesaid small boy—discards his garments in true old swimmin' hole style, and plunges right in depending on the nonvisibility of water—the muddy, muddier waters of the Potomac—to preserve the proprieties. If legend speaks truly, the small boy has distinguished company in his desire to dispose of the bathing suit

By E. ELLICOTT

ILLUSTRATED BY LES WATHEN

question when he enters the Potomac. For it is said—although not in any of the ponderous history books that deal so much in stupid figures and leave out such vitally important facts as what Pocahontas said to Capt. John Smith when she lifted his head off the block, or what Mary Ball said to George Washington when he returned home and reported that he had thrown a perfectly good dollar across the aforementioned Potomac—that one John Quincy Adams, President of the United States in the early days of the Republic, disported himself at sunrise daily in the yellow waters of the Potomac.

Oh, These Newspaper Comments.

John got up at dawn in order to have the Potomac to himself, not deeming it particularly appropriate for the populace to form a gallery even in those simpler



and less formal days while the Chief Magistrate dove, trod water and floated luxuriously on his back as he planned ways and means of handling Congress—in those days, as in these, occasionally a job and a half for the man in the White House.

Tradition says that a certain woman journalist of the period—one of the earliest of the species—learned of this custom of crusty old John Quincy Adams and resolved to secure an interview from him while he was hors de combat, so to speak, with apology for the mixed metaphors—in the Potomac. Her plan of action was the first sign of yellow in the fourth estate, for she formed the cruel scheme of perching herself on his clothes on the bank and dragging from him reluctant admissions on his high estate as the price of going away and leaving him to dress—in rage.

Not dreaming of the cruel fate ahead, old John arrived one balmy June morning, divested himself of most of the Presidential garments, laid them in a neat pile behind a convenient bush and plunged in. When he came up from his long dive, he could hardly believe his eyes. Seated on his clothes and grinning fendshily was a queer little old woman. "Good morning Mr. President," she shouted, "What make of soap do you use?"

"I Quit," Said Mr. Adams.

He started to sputter and filled his mouth forthwith with the not exactly sweet tasting Potomac water. "There's no sense in your swallowing the whole river," she informed him, "Here I am, and here I sit until you give me the best interview in the world for my paper." And sit she did until the chilled, exasperated, inwardly cussing President snapped out a few banal trivialities as the basis for a "By" story for her paper. The seances at the river side are said to have ceased forthwith for his excellency.

Thus the battle of bathing clothes has raged on the Potomac since it has served as the nation's Capital. Aye, even unto the present day, when the superintendent of the bathing beach early this spring, before even the snow birds had taken to matutinal plunges in the cold, cold waters, issued the ukase that not only women but men must wear skirts this season.

How the sisters of the Bathing Beach Sorority must have laughed in their sleeves, or would have laughed in them, had they possessed this obsolete sartorial article—when they read the announcement. It sounded well, but "I guess no old bathing beach superintendent can make me wear more than I want to. The police cannot do it or won't, and why should he think he can? We'll show him." Then began a terrible conspiracy to make the prescribed skirts of such character that even a kewpie doll would feel undressed in one of them. The Hula Hula sisters of Waikiki with their waist fringe of grass would appear swathed in garments in comparison. It should serve as a warning to mere man not to attempt to dictate to fair woman what she shall or shall not wear. If he does, the last result shall be worse than the first—if that be possible.

A Tip to Young Lovers.

As promised in my last effusion, I told the Sunday editor of The Post that I would make a personal investigation of the skirt condition at the bathing beach. It was not a difficult assignment, because some of the bathing beach nymphs are certainly good to look at though others would never cause any man to sprain his eye giving them the once over.

I am sorry the same thing cannot be said of the manly youth and some not so youthful who disport themselves daily at the Beach. The most impressive of masculines

sometimes fails of being a hero to his valet and romance certainly takes flight temporarily, at least, when Juliet first sees her Romeo in a bathing suit. Few men can stand this acid test of manly beauty.

Well, I felt that perhaps the men of the city, being longer at the business of law making than woman, might wear skirts if the law said "They must."

Where Ex Kings May Park.

But I did not count there on the opposition complex which obtains in most of us. Why, it was on this very complex that America achieved her independence. The founders of the Republic, just because they were told to obey a king, were determined to do away with kings forever. It took a long time to reach the climax, but the death warrant of kings was read when the doughty Yankees threw over the tea in Boston harbor. That was a notice to royalties that their days of divine rights had passed. The sequel to this prologue of Boston harbor is now being written in Switzerland, where former kings are as plentiful as blackberries in the hedges around Washington just now. "Thou shalt not" is a red

flag to a bull in arousing human antagonism except in the case of a German, who adores his "Verboten" and measures the worth of his government by the multiplicity of these signs in his daily life.

Well, I failed to find one self respecting skirt at the bathing beach on either man or woman. There were some camouflage skirts—ruffles that were trying to serve such a turn and long jersey tunics over the Annette Kellerman that reached really half way down to the knee, but not one real skirt was visible. There was a good deal else visible, however, humanly speaking. The modern sculptor or painter should save his model-money in Washington. All he needs to do is to visit the bathing beach.

Skirts? Around the Neck.

Yes, the women wore skirts or what should have been skirts—around their necks. The most convenient way of distinguishing them from the men was by the bright colored caps they wore on their hair, for the costumes were frankly men's bathing suits—99 out of 100 of them. All kinds and conditions of women were there. There was the vamp with the Titian red hair and the Venus de Milo measurements—the perfect 36 who acts as a store model during the working hours of the day.

Like darling daughter of the old jingle, she did not go near the water. But then, she didn't have to. Water was for mermaids and impossibly plain people. What was the sense of her having a nice new Annette purple with yellow facings if she had to spoil it in that muddy old basin water?

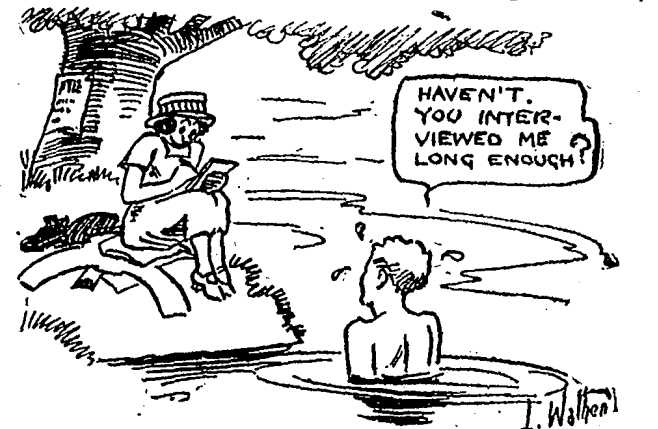
That the hot dog is rapidly becoming the national food was fittingly demonstrated at the beach. Why cramps are not prevalent among the bathers is a problem, because the number of hot dog sandwiches eaten by some of them, interspersed with thick gobs of mustard, should be a great dyspepsia inducer.

The Bather's Diet—Hot Dogs.

An appetite for hot dogs requires cultivation. I remember that during the war a group of society ladies went over ways and means of feeding the fed up soldiers as they passed through Washington. One practical woman, knowing the ways of the soldier and the small boy, suggested, "Let's give them hot dogs, they'll love them."

"What! feed our soldiers dogs!" exclaimed a dowager, "how dreadful!" After a long while he was able to understand that it was ground dog camouflaged, and not actual dog meat, which was the topic of the conversation.

I remember when I was a youngster the awe with which I watched a group of Indians in a circus who were heralded as "dog eaters." It aroused all the barbaric in me, and I could picture the camp fire scene as the braves sat around and chewed the remains of poor old Fido and Spitfire—too old to longer go on their



tribal hunts and now butchered to make an Indian's holiday. How some of the bathers ever escape the dog catchers is a miracle, for they eat so many of the hot dogs that they just can't make their barks behave.

The cake eaters who were much in evidence on the beach, garbed in scanty bathing trunks and jerseys, hung around the hot dog counter hoping that some girl would come along and either buy them a delectable sandwich or lend them the money with which to do for themselves. The same place was also a good place to spot friends who had checked their change and might be induced to part with the price to the hungry cake eater.

Tattooers Must Live.

One of the cake eaters the day I was there had on a gorgeous canary bathing suit and a still more gorgeous aggregation of tattoo marks. He wore on his skin the images of nearly everything in heaven and earth, from a wide spread American eagle to a lady.

—Continued on Page Eleven.

Skirting the Skirts at the Bathing Beach

By E. ELLICOTT.

Continued From Page Five

garbed in little more than a bathing suit a la Annette Kellerman. Tell it not in Gath nor whisper it on F street, but some of the ladies are also tattooed. A tiny little butterfly will cuddle in the dimple of a fair shoulder, or just where the roll tops leave off will be written in the sweetest little bumble bee. Well, it will be good for identification if there is an accident and, after all, the poor tattoo artists have to live.

The real badge of distinction at the beach, however, is the anklet with the locker key attached. Wear one some time and see how hard it is to appear nonchalant with its clammy side striking against your toes.

Once upon a time the clerks went to work with rows and rows of knitting in their bags, hanging jauntily on the arm. Now there is a great change. Busy Worker still carries bag to office but it contains not knitting but bathing suit, so when the 4.30 rush to the bathing beach begins there can be no obstacles or delays in striking the water.

Powder Is Indispensable.

That the vanity of women is eternal was attested the day I was at the beach when a peacherino in a blue and gold Annette Kellerman with a naughty length fringe swam out to the big float. When she got there she reached in and pulled a bag out of her neck—a tiny oil bag—from which she triumphantly extracted a powder puff and gaily powdered her retrousse nose, while the other women looked on in envy and hate at the one nose in the crowd that did not shine after the beauty operation was over.

A sign says "No Malicious Splashing," but it is more honored in the breach than the observance, if sly tricks of the foot that send one sprawling face downward in the water may be counted.

I have seen many blase people in my time—6-year-old children who had exhausted all the pleasures of life and a taxicab driver who could not be thrilled no matter how many people he killed that day—but the bathing beach guard who sits, the monarch of all he surveys, under a big umbrella, has sounded the depths of human emotion. Nothing can arouse him now except the sudden note of real fright in a woman's voice. Play fright, screams and the whole gamut of imaginary fears trouble him not. Yet with an instinct unerring he knows when danger threatens, and in an instant is in action, his bronze body lithe, tense and ready for the long dive that will bring him quickest to the spot.

And still I found no skirts. In despair I turned away and left to the authorities of the beach the job of Skirting the Skirts there.