



Mrs. Stowe's Appeal to Women in 1866.

[With the "cordial consent" of Houghton, Mifflin & Co., we reprint the following from Mrs. Stowe's Chimney Corner Papers, with added emphasis.

It is the great misfortune of the civilized world, at the present hour, that the state of morals in France is apparently at the lowest ebb, and consequently the leadership of fashion is entirely in the hands of a class of women who could not be admitted into good society in any country. Women who can never have the name of wife,—who know none of the ties of family,—these are the dictators whose dress and equipage and appointments give the law, first to France, and through France to the civilized world. Such was the confession of Monsieur Dupin, made in a late speech before the French Senate, and acknowledged, with murmurs of assent on all sides, to be the truth. This is the reason why the fashions have such an utter disregard of all those laws of prudence and economy which regulate the expenditures of families. They are made by women whose sole and only hold on life is personal attractiveness, and with whom to keep this up, at any cost, is a desperate necessity. No moral quality, no association of purity, truth, modesty, self-

Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frances E. Russell

Mrs. Stowe's Appeal to Women in 1866 [with] Note

[Chicago?: National Council of Women of the United States 1893]

\$750

Two leaflets. *Mrs. Stowe's Appeal to Women in 1866*. Printed both sides of a single octavo leaf, reprinted from Stowe's *Chimney Corner Papers* a brief essay on dress apparently meant to accompany the pamphlet *Report of Committee on Dress made to the Executive Board of the National Council of Women, Dec. 14-15, 1892* (not present here). Endorsed at the conclusion by Alice Freeman Palmer and Mary A. Livermore. Faint vertical crease, else fine. [With] *Note*. Printed on recto only of a single octavo leaf, recommending the designs in the above mentioned pamphlet as a template for dress, and discussing some details, apparently also meant to accompany this pamphlet. *Note* is signed in type by "F.E.R.", apparently Frances E. Russell, who headed the Committee on Dress. Faint vertical crease, else fine. OCLC locates two physical copies (over two records) of the pamphlet *Report of Committee on Dress made to the Executive Board of the National Council of Women, Dec. 14-15, 1892*, with one mentioning the presence of *Mrs. Stowe's Appeal to Women in 1866*, neither mentioning whether *Note* is present. Neither of the two leaflets appear to have separate OCLC listings. [\[BTC#424123\]](#)

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In France, as Monsieur Dupin, Edmond About and Michelet tell us, the extravagant demands of love of dress lead women to contract debts unknown to their husbands, and sign obligations which are paid by the sacrifice of honor, and thus the purity of the family is continually undermined. In England there is a voice of complaint, sounding from the leading periodicals, that the extravagant demands of female fashion are bringing distress into families, and making

NOTE.

The designs offered with this report are not intended for exact copying, but are given, *without patterns*, simply as suggestions.

They are variations of two ideas—the short skirted gown, and the skirt divided and closed dually below the knees. A jacket is not an essential part of any one of the styles offered, and in each case any other style of jacket might be substituted. The yoke in one case, the sash in another, and the fitted vest, are matters of taste, easily changed. So, also, of the humps on the shoulders—a passing fashion, which none of us would deliberately “recommend.”

It was by a mistake that the diagram of the partly made Syrian skirt was published (as sent us from England) after the discovery that cutting the gore from the front and back breadths necessitates massing the fullness too much directly in front and behind, in order to conceal the divisions. Butterick's pattern for the gymnasium trousers is better. Only by experimenting can we learn the best length and fullness for this modest and useful style of skirt, and the most satisfactory use of gores and fastenings.

Those who object to the long, close leggings given with the two illustrations of the American costume can substitute shoes made a few inches higher than common high shoes, meeting the bottoms of a scant dual skirt.

We are not objecting to a dress of any length preferred by the wearer—for suitable occasions. But women who wish to be healthy and useful need a convenient dress.

If any one should say that the styles offered would be “too conspicuous,” we must remind her that the great object of this united effort is to secure a dress for the activities of woman's life “which will allow her the free and healthful use of the organs of her body”—her organs for walking and for working, as well as her internal organs.

Such a dress must necessarily be so short—in order to escape contact with stairs—as to be “conspicuous” in solitary cases. Numbers only can overcome this objection.

For this reason we ask those who wish well to this movement not to sit waiting to see what will be done, but to unite with others in your own vicinity and organize some movement to get suits made this spring—for our congress at the World's Fair, if possible, or for summer outings, or walking clubs and picnics.

It has been suggested that entertainments should be given by societies and clubs, where the “first appearance” of the members in handsome and becoming short suits should be one of the attractions. These might help our cause and the finances of the society at the same time.

To the members of women's clubs and other societies of women who have so readily signed our enrollment of those “willing to help,” and to the alumnae and students of women's colleges, other women look for help in this effort to relieve us from oppression.

In the second week in May some of us will meet at Chicago, and at the same time Nature will be calling her friends to the woods and fields, and if every patriotic and humane person will now “lend a hand” to popularize a tasteful short dress for women, a good work for the relief of the burdened may be quickly and quietly accomplished.

marriages impossible; and something of the same sort seems to have begun here. * *

We have just come through a great struggle in which our women have borne an heroic part,—have shown themselves capable of any kind of endurance and self-sacrifice; and now we are in that reconstructive state which makes it of the greatest consequence to ourselves and the world that we understand our own institutions and position, and learn that, instead of following the corrupt and worn-out ways of the Old World, we are called on to set the example of a new state of society,—noble, simple, pure and religious; and women can do more towards this even than men, for women are the real architects of society.

“Viewed in this light, even the small frittering cares of woman’s life—the attention to buttons, trimmings, thread, and sewing silk—may be an expression of their patriotism and their religion. A noble-hearted woman puts a noble meaning into even the commonplace details of life. The women of America can, if they choose, hold back their country from following in the wake of old, corrupt, worn-out, effeminate European society, and make America the leader of the world in all that is good. * *

Where there is a will there is a way. Only resolve that you will put the true beauty first,—that, even if you do have to seem unfashionable, you will follow the highest beauty of womanhood,—and the battle is half gained. * * *It requires only an army of girls animated with this noble purpose* to declare independence in America, and emancipate us from the decrees and tyrannies of French actresses and ballet dancers. GIRLS! YOU YET CAN, IF YOU WILL, SAVE THE REPUBLIC.

In 1890, Mrs. Caroline M. Severance, who was the first president of the New England Woman’s Club, wrote, concerning the subjection of American women to foreign dictation in dress:—

“It is as unworthy them as submission to English tyranny would have been on the part of our fathers. More injurious, also, as it threatens the ruin of all physical vigor for the generations yet to come. But I am comforted in this matter by the growing attention to physical exercise and development,—which *must* necessitate a more healthful style of dress—and which Heaven *and all good women* forbid to be *only a passing fashion!*”

Mrs. Alice Freeman Palmer, says:—“Women need no other one thing so much as freedom of movement in dress.”

Mrs. Mary A. Livermore writes—“I will authorize you to use my name in favor of the strongest dress reform that may be inaugurated.”