The Extraordinary New Rivalry in Legs

How a Pair Called the "Most Beautiful in the World" Now Challenges the Merits of the Pair Just Insured for $15,000—A Modern Problem for Beauty Contests.

Fabienne Semi French Actress Posing For A "Leg Study."

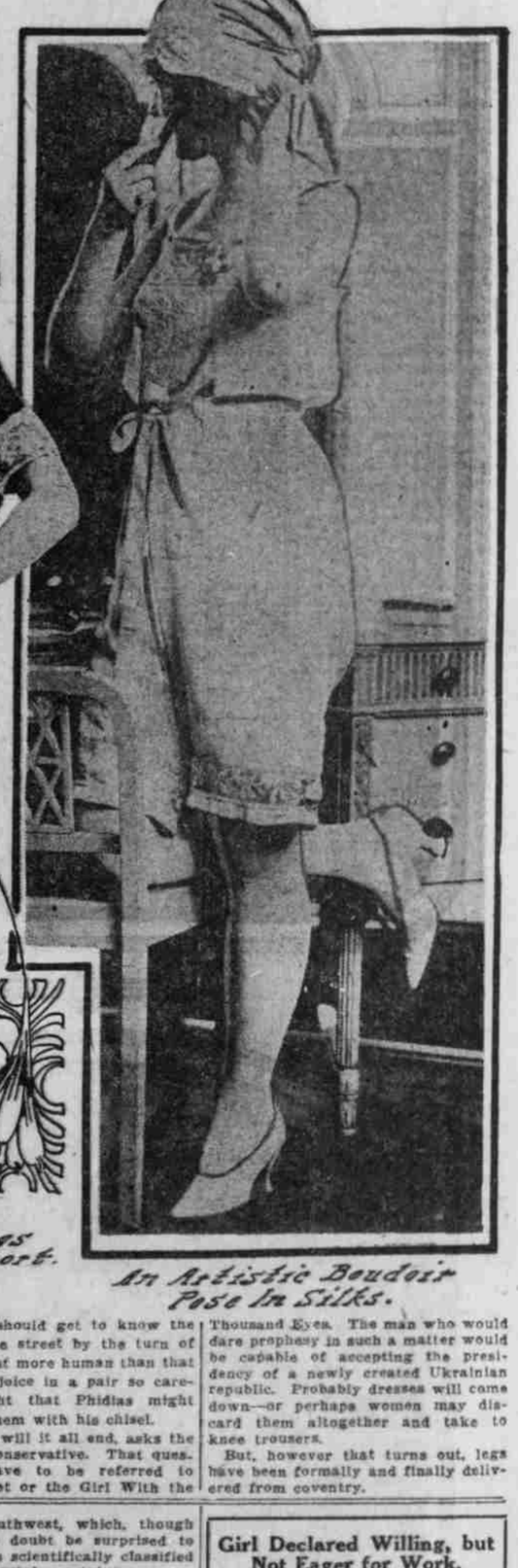
The Latest Fad In Paris Is Painted Designs On The Legs.

Miss Marie Curtis, Who Won First Prize In A Mermaid Contest Which Judged Both Form And Costume.

French Experts Say These Legs Are the "Most Beautiful In The World."

How The Painted Leg Designs Look.

Helen Shea And $15,000 Legs Which Are Her Chief Support.



An Artistic Boudoir Pose In Silks.

Photos by Kadel & Herbert.

BY ETHEL THURSTON.

A COMMITTEE of serious minded gentlemen got together the other day and voted the legs of a certain Mlle. Mistinguett the most beautiful things of their kind in the whole French republic. It was a sad day for numerous other aspiring demoiselles, but a distinguished occasion for two important members of the human anatomy.

While this action only meant that the attitude of the world was being made vocal, it was important because it officially marked the escape of the word "legs" from the stifling limbo of indelicacy and by that token, sanctioned the extraordinary new rivalry in legs which seems to have reached a crescendo of excitement at this hour.

The French, of course, being a realistic and plain-spoken people, never felt quite the same horror of admitting the possession of female underpinnings as did their English-speaking neighbors. They used the word without exhibiting the fact. But, the skirts of women having long since threatened the sanctity of the agitated and fluctuant knee-cap, there was no use publicly blinking the fact any longer that legs could be quite as aesthetically respectable as a dimpled chin or a swan-like neck. Hence the solemn conclave and the gravely rendered decision; hence the shattered hopes of thousands of demoiselles and the eminence of Mlle. Mistinguett. Hence the loud crash of a puritan tradition in these states, and hence the prolific blooming of a wondrous crop of what once were limbs but now are good old Saxon legs.

Athletics Lifted the Skirt.

And that the lid is off once and for all—that legs are legs from this time forth, is amply manifest on every side in America. Miss Helen Shea, a Broadway show girl, knows the value of hers so well that she has had them insured for the sum of $15,000. She might conceivably suffer a fracture of the clavicle or a collapse of the vocal cords and bear up under it, but if anything happened to her shapely props, literally and figuratively her support would be gone.

Miss Shea, of course, is not the first show girl to realize the commercial value of her legs. The old wheeze about the merit of a musical comedy being determined before the curtain has risen two feet is at least ten years old. But ten years ago the public taste would not have allowed her to proclaim the fact with such unblushing frankness.

Why the modest young woman of a few years back could talk about her liver all day but was nevertheless barred from mentioning that part of her anatomy immediately north of her ankle is a matter for Dr. Freud and his psycho-analytical brethren. But such was the fact whatever its explanation. She would admit to a limb or a foot and under pressure would sometimes confess to an ankle—but a leg, never!

In those days, however, she was aided in her concealment of her underpinnings by a skirt so long that it hid even the knobs of her ankles. For all that the luckless male could see under formal circumstances, she might have been upheld by limbs made of wood fiber or papier-mache.

When women began to go in for athletics, though, a skirt that allowed greater freedom of movement was necessary, and what was a dress used only for sport occasions shortly became the commonly accepted garment for street wear. From that time on there was a steady upward revision.

The modish skirt finally reached to the full part of the calf and philippics were being hurled from the seats of the reformers at the brazen creatures who wore them. Even the adventurous-minded were inclined to think it had gone far enough.

The war came and the world generally was shaken loose from some of its old conceptions. The purists felt the concussion from the hollows of their feet to the tops of their haircuts. The Parisian dressmakers, pleading a scarcity of materials, but realizing all the time that they were inspired entirely by a desire for an even franker, fuller and more daring effect, sent the skirt to the knees—and there it is seen at this good hour.

Why a Man Turns to Look.

On rainy and windy days of yore, groups of callow and curious young men would foregather on the prominent corners and giggle with delight when an inch or two of sheer silk, above the normal allowance, was exposed to their gaze. Those groups don't assemble any more, because rainy days and windy corners bring no greater revelations than one can behold with the day at a dead calm.

Has the male lost his interest in limbs since they became public and since they became legs? Hardly. He has lost his curiosity, perhaps, but his interest remains and for good, sound reasons. The crowds that throng the auditorium to hear Beethoven's fifth symphony are not moved by curiosity. Most of them have heard it many times before; some of them are familiar with every bar, every phrase, every change of tempo and expression. They are inspired by an aesthetic motive; and, so is the young man who revels so frankly in the plump and comely calf when it is appropriately bound in silk—and often when it isn't.

The callow juveniles who gathered on the street corners to watch the girls get into their carriages or the street cars were hauled up, every now and then, as fit objects of public scorn. Even in this sophisticated era one occasionally hears a young woman complain that some of her male friends constantly pass her on the street without speaking for the reason that their eyes never reach her face.

But a great majority of the girls realize that occurrences of this sort are nothing more than should be expected. The time was when a girl would say of an extravagant friend: "She puts all her money on her back." The turn of events has made that expression obsolete. She now puts as little on her back as possible—but that's another story.

If one would know where the girls put their money these days let them appraise her wardrobe item for item. They used to dress from the head down—but now they dress from the feet up.

A recently produced motion picture turned on a man's identification of his sweetheart by the stockings she wore. This is a fair index of the times because stockings are getting to be the real center of interest of the female costume. More and more do they reflect the personality of their wearers. Already, where the girl who wants to be modish has only a limited amount of money to put on her clothes, she sacrifices everything else to smart shoes and stockings.

What more natural, then, that the young man should get to know the girl down the street by the turn of her legs; what more human than that he should rejoice in a pair so carefully wrought that Phidias might have hewn them with his chisel.

But where will it all end, asks the bewildered conservative. That question will have to be referred to Friend Kismet or the Girl With the Thousand Eyes. The man who would dare prophesy in such a matter would be capable of accepting the presidency of a newly created Ukrainian republic. Probably dresses will come down—or perhaps women may discard them altogether and take to knee trousers.

But, however that turns out, legs have been formally and finally delivered from coventry.

GOGGLE-EYED MOTORISTS SEE WOMAN FESTOONED BY SNAKE

Novel Sight Stunt of Reptile Study Club Hunting Fields of Jersey and Seeking to Teach Regard for Creatures.

"DO YOU see what I see?" said one chauffeur to his companion as he halted his truck at a bare ledge of rock on the Great Notch-Montclair road, writes Raymond T. Torrey in the New York Post.

"Great suffering Aunt Maria!" said the head of a family party in a touring car as he halted, too.

More motorists pulled up and stared, goggle-eyed. Two small boys going fishing turned and their jaws dropped as they gazed.

A huge snake, yellow and white and bronze, seven feet long and three inches thick, was festooned in somewhat torpid folds about the shoulders of a young woman, who was facing a battery of photographers. With them were several members of what might be termed, for the moment, the reptile press, besides a dozen others.

It was the annual spring hunt of the Reptile Study club. It was a rainy day, and any native Jersey snakes had sense enough to keep in their holes. The only reptiles aboriginal to the locality which the members had been able to find in the wet thickets along the road were a few tiny black and red striped salamanders, dragged squirming and indignant from the shelter of rocks overturned by the searchers.

But the director of the society, Allen S. Williams, who has held these hunts for the last five years to bring before the public the aim of the society, to protect and prevent unreasoning slaughter of harmless and beneficial snakes, did not want the reporters and photographers disappointed. So he brought along, snugly wrapped in cotton bags and packed in a suitcase, four snakes from his private stock.

Two of the four were serpents such as might be found in New Jersey, and might have been seen on this day but for the bad weather. They were the hog-nosed snake or puff adder, known in exclusive snake circles as heterodon platyrhinus, and the mountain black snake, otherwise coluber obsoletus. They were comparatively small, and, to give the reporters an idea of what the reptile tribe can do when encouraged, Mr. Williams brought along the big fellow, a bull snake, from the neighborhood of Brownsville, Tex., which carries the formidable title of pituophis sayi bellona, and the slightly smaller king snake, also from the southwest, which, though he would no doubt be surprised to learn of it, is scientifically classified as ophibulus getulus getulus.

These two were large and imposing. The reporters, hardened to strange assignments, gasped a little and stood at first somewhat offishly in the offing when Mr. Williams took old Mr. Pituophis out of his bag. But after he posed about the shoulders of Mrs. Williams, who is a writer herself under the name of Elizabeth Remington, and behaved very nicely for the photographers, they consented to festoon his snakeship about their slightly shrinking forms and were snapped for the news pictures.

The two boy fishermen stood on the outside of the circle of spectators during this scene. "What do you do when you see a snake?" asked one of the members, seeking to impart a lesson in kindness to such creatures.

"We kill 'em," said one boy.

"Why?"

"Cause they eat the fish. Oh, yes, they do. Why once when I was up at Bear Mountain park I saw a water adder with a catfish as long as that in his mouth."

"Wouldn't you like to hold this one and see how gentle he is?" inquired Mr. Williams, offering the huge bull snake.

"Gosh—NO," replied the boy, as he receded in the middle distance.

Johnny's Price Is Raised.

Awgwan.

Mother—Johnny, will you be a quiet for a bit?

Johnny—I'll do it for two-bits.

Girl Declared Willing, but Not Eager for Work.

Backyard Discussion Deals With Problem of Raising Daughter.

NOW that the washing was hung on the line, Mrs. Botts was leaning over the back fence and discussing with sympathetic Mrs. Johnson the problem of bringing up a daughter. Privately Mrs. Johnson considered that Lily Botts was born lazy, but Lily's mother held that Lily's case was not so simple.

"It ain't dat Lily ain't willin'," said Mrs. Botts. "Willin' she is, an' active an' all dat. She is always ready to run on erranda fo' yo'. But she ain't one dat heahs work callin' or see it a-lookin' at her."

"Heap mo' easy to do a thing yo'se'f dan be tellin' other folkses," said Mrs. Johnson, understandingly.

"An' dat's de truth," agreed Mrs. Botts. "But Lily ain't to blame; but maybe she gits discouraged a little too easy. I's seen her tryin'. Last winter I says to her, 'Lily,' I says, 'every time yo' find somethin' to do to help yo' mother round de house I'll gib yo' a cent.' Dat started her hard at it. Mrs. Johnson, it was two weeks befo' she done git discouraged an' give it up."

"An' how much did she make?" asked Mrs. Johnson.

"Nine cents," said Mrs. Botts, "but I called it a dime."