

Insignia, Not Black Gowns, as War Mourning

Women of America Asked to Forego Gloomy Evidences of Grief—Black Band on Sleeve to be a Badge of Honor for the Bereaved

MOURNING BLACK, for some member of the family who has fallen in war, has in the past been worn more persistently by women than in memory for a death from any other cause. In the larger communities of the country there are now women who have been in black ever since the civil war, and for years after that war the widows of soldiers, starkly marked out by their sable garb, were seen in every village in the more thickly populated sections. They wore their mourning with a noble pride and devotion to the memory of him who had given all man can give for his country.

A newer heroism is abroad in this war, more uncomplaining, and one of its reflections is a realization by women of the effect of mourning black on the spirit and energy of soldiers, their families, and the public. It first came to notice in England. First a few women, then others, in larger and larger numbers, decided not to put on black when the news arrived that the husband or brother had been killed in battle.

The new practice spread slowly, however, because there was no organization behind it to direct and advance its adoption. In this country that lack is to be supplied from the start; the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense, with an organization which reaches every city and town in the country, has just completed plans at Washington which it is expected will obtain a practically universal rejection of the wearing of black in memory of a soldier's death.

Instead of mourning an insignia is recommended by the committee. In a letter to Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, Chairman of the committee, President Wilson has approved the insignia. He said:

"I do entirely approve of the action taken by the woman's committee, namely, that a three-inch black band be worn upon which a gilt star may be placed for each member of the family whose life is lost in the service, and that the band shall be worn on the left arm. I hope and believe that thoughtful people everywhere will approve of this action, and I hope that you will be kind enough to make the suggestion to the committee public with the statement that it has my cordial indorsement."

Regarding the plans for obtaining the widespread adoption of the insignia Dr. Shaw said in Washington the other day:

"We are calling on our State Chairmen today, and by them through the district organizations the appeal will be laid directly before the women of the country. Our organization reaches everywhere; in Chicago, for instance, we are represented by a committee in every ward. We have, of course, no authority to do more than to call on the women to adopt the insignia in the place of mourning, but we think the grounds of the ap-

peal are strong enough to result in extensive use of the badge.

"These grounds, in the main, are, first, the moral or spiritual; second, the economic. With regard to the first there is the depressing effect of mourning on

the soldiers themselves, their families, and the public at large. Its depressing influence on a young soldier just going into service is readily seen. What we women should do is to encourage and cheer, to see to it that we do nothing to lessen the courage and endurance of the men who go to the front.

"The men are going over in the spirit of battling for the freedom of the world, cheerfully, with defiance of the enemy in their hearts. Once 'over there,' they do not murmur or repine, even in the face of death itself. We women should lift our lives to the same plane, in appreciation of the exaltation of the service rendered by the men for the protection of ourselves and our homes. Instead of giving away to depression, it is our duty to display the same courage and spirit that they do. If they can

die nobly, we must show that we can live nobly.

"We should look on the insignia, therefore, not as a badge of mourning, but as a mark of recognition of exalted service, as a sign of what it has been their privilege to give to their country—a badge of honor. The wearing of the insignia will express far better than mourning the sacrifice that has been made, that the loss is a matter of glory rather than one of prostrating grief and depression.

"On the economic side there is the expense of putting on mourning, and at this time, when so much money is needed to carry on the war, we have to think of the expense as an important element.

"Then there are the dressmakers. Dressmakers are scarce, and they are becoming scarcer. They are needed in other work than that of making mourning dresses. Women are being called for, too, in new kinds of work, and it would not be for the best interests of the country to train women as dressmakers' helpers when they are being sought to take the places of those who are entering the army.

"There is one other thing in favor of the insignia. We decided to select something that could not be commercialized; that is, a design over which no patent right or other right could have any control. The band can be made at home. We did not specify the cloth, so that any black cloth can be used.

"There is only one restriction—that is to the width of the band. Later we may decide to have these bands made in quantity. I may say that we had many suggestions submitted to us, and that this design was selected after much consideration by the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense."



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Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, Head of Committee Behind Movement for Mourning Insignia.