

French and American Designers Are at Odds

BY ANNE RITTENHOUSE.

THE battle of skirts promises to be as long drawn out as the battle of nations.

It is a curious war. No one seems to know who are the aggressors and who the defenders. One has no doubt that France is the apostle of the short skirt and America the apostle of the long one, but there is war within war, faction against faction in each country, argument for and against in both languages.

Columns of space are filled with reasons for adopting the long skirt and ignoring the short one, and other columns are filled with answers to these arguments.

It is a battle that seems to mightily interest the world. It has ceased to be a topic for the commercialists alone. The citizens have joined in.

The topic of the skirt is not confined to women. Men talk about it, too. They discuss it with heat and argument, with cynicism and personality. It started as a minor affair; it has grown to be a big fight. The only thing one notices about a new gown is the length of the skirt, and those who feel that all that Paris does is right sneer at the ankle-length skirt, while those who insist that America is independent in her fashions say violent things of the skirt that shows the leg to the knee.

There are extremists on both sides. There are women who go to extremes in developing each fashion. No one seems to realize that there may be a decent and agreeable compromise in a skirt that strikes somewhere between the knee and the instep. The violent ones who argue the question talk of only these two lengths.

One goes to a play and sees costly and alluring frocks that sweep the feet, and comes home saying that long skirts are the fashion for the evening. Then one goes to order a gown from a well-known dressmaker and is told that the skirt must be between eight and ten inches from the floor.

Which is right? Is there any standard? Or, as the Irishman said when he saw two men trying to kill each other in a saloon, "Is this a private fight, or is it free to all?"

Even with Thanksgiving coming up over the horizon, there is no decision as to the proper length of a skirt for the street or for the evening.

The strongest current is toward the short skirt for the street. After that it is every woman's race. She may follow her whim. She may call any type of skirt she wears in fashion. It will be. If she wishes to wear trousers, she has the best names in France behind the fashion. If she wishes to wear a skirt that reaches to the curve of the leg, she has all the apparel people behind her. If she wants to wear a draped skirt that sweeps the toes and carries a train at the back for two yards, she has some of the biggest names in America back of her.

In the evening she may look like a dancer of Delhi or a daguerrotype of the civil war. She may be oriental or Victorian. If she still has sufficient desire to struggle over the subject of her bodice and sleeves after she finishes with the skirt, she is a woman of energy. Most women succumb after the skirt is decided upon and finished. They wave their hands in the air wildly and cry that any kind of upper drapery may be used. They have ceased to think. Their brains have stopped functioning on the subject of style.

Possibly this condition of uncertainty, or rather of personal inclination, will suit the majority of women. There are still some who cry out blindly to be "in the fashion." That is the only phrase they know how to use when they shop. The last thing they see is considered by them the new thing, and therefore, the desirable thing.

It is these women who are non-plussed. They are exhausted over trying to copy each skirt put out by a fashionable house or worn by a well-dressed woman.

No such indecision attends the choosing of a one-piece frock or suit. The long American skirt has vanished for the majority. The French still consider this one of the leading triumphs of their career. They have insisted that if they hold on to the short skirt long enough America will adopt it. America has. Of course, she does not adopt it in French brevity. The American woman still refuses to show her knee caps in public. She permits her street skirt to be cut nine inches from the sole of the foot, but she will not adopt the fifteen-inch skirt that the French sponsor as their maximum length.

America may be tired of her long skirt for the street, or she may have been persuaded by France that it was an ugly fashion. There are those who insist that our returning soldiers have had more to do with our fashions than the layman admits. I could say, with entire assurance, that the American Army, singly and in mass, never hesitated in making the choice, while in France, between the long American skirt and the short French one. They brought their ideas home with them, and they have probably enforced them

After Many Months They Fail to Agree on the Length of the Fashionable Skirt—But American Skirts for the Street Grow Shorter—The Evening Train Again Appears and Sleeves Vanish.



GREEN SATIN HOUSE GOWN WITH COAT OF GEORGETTE IN THE SAME SHADE. IT IS TRIMMED WITH MONKEY FUR. THE LONG TRAIN IS WEIGHTED WITH MONKEY FRINGE.

to a sufficient extent to change our leading and much-vaunted fashion.

Whatever the reason for the change in street skirts, the result is obviously good. The American woman wears gaiters as constantly as does a British man. She prefers them to high shoes. She wears them in all colors. She puts them on over high-heeled patent leather pumps, scarcely disguising the cut steel buckles beneath, and she puts them on over flat-heeled brown Oxford ties. It is her peculiar fashion—one which is associated with the American throughout civilization. She is the only woman who, as a race, is rarely without her gaiters in winter.

If she insists upon wearing them again, there are two things she must do—shorten her skirt and have her gaiters fitted to her legs. She is doing both this winter.

So much for the street. The accepted silhouette is slim at the shoulders, wide at the hips, slim at the hem, with a short skirt and small sleeves.

The choice between a coat suit and a one-piece frock with a top coat must be made by each individual. There is no balance of opinion for or against either choice. A woman must be guided by her necessity, her income and her environment.

When one goes to choose an evening gown one runs full tilt against a battle between the short and the long skirt. The dressmakers say that women should be governed in their decision by dancing. This is a safe guide. On the other hand, the revival of trains is surely not a fashion that has taken dancing into consideration.

The women of the hour wear trains. Some are cut in with the skirt and fall in long Victorian folds on the floor, and others are like a scarf. Some of them have a perilous resemblance to the patched up costumes of young children trying to look like grown-ups, for the train is merely a piece of material—lace, tulle, satin or embroidery—caught

to the waistline and allowed to swing in its own free way.

The stage is making much of these detached trains. One brilliant costume worn by a tall woman in a drawing room scene has a scarf a yard wide, of wonderfully colored chiffon edged with metallic lace, deliberately used as

geous Chinese brocade done in brilliant colors and silver threads.

As a reversal of this fashion, there are brilliantly embroidered gowns which have snake-like trains of plain material. There is one sumptuous gown of the season, which, while it may not be copied in detail by the woman of average income, still suggests ideas to the clever. It is of geranium pink chiffon velvet embroidered in circles of silver, with tiny fringe falling from each circle, also from the hem of the skirt, which curves up in front. The back of the bodice is of plain velvet ending in a long train. It is not lined, but is of the material, doubled.

The strange difference between a tea gown and a formal evening gown is in the absence of a sleeve. Women who are making over clothes are busy ripping voluminous capes of tulle and chiffon from their evening gowns. They realize that the fashion of the hour, seemingly accepted by all classes, is an absence of arm covering.

The medieval gown of last winter,



TEA GOWN OF BLUE VELVET WITH ODD CHINESE JACKET OF GOLD CLOTH WOVEN IN TINY SQUARES. THE EDGES ARE PIPED WITH BLUE.

with its floating shoulder draperies that cover the arm, is denuded of these draperies and left stark and plain. There is no tulle at the edges of the material. There is no attempt to soften the line of velvet or satin against the flesh. There are no sleeves. The bodice is a bit of brilliancy, but it owes its beauty to workmanship and to its direct contact with the skin.

The woman who wears wings of tulle that extend over the arms and drop down the back of the frock, is putting herself into last year's picture. If she has such a gown, she should strip it of anything that covers her neck and arms. Even the most conservative women have been persuaded to adopt the sleeveless gown.

The tea gown, on the contrary, permits itself to have all the drapery that the average woman desires. It is in this one point of difference that the two costumes disagree. A woman who appears with her arms and back covered with swirls of lace and tulle may say to her family and friends that she is not wearing her best evening gown.

It looks as though the distended balloon skirt will fall by the wayside. It is still lingering in the shop windows and on the stage, and it has all the French opinion behind it, but it is not worn in the drawing room or, at a dance, except by a few youthful types

who realize that it is different and picturesque.

Perhaps we have seen too much of it in the last two years in public halls where professionals dance. Perhaps women have found it inconvenient to manage in a crowded floor space or at a dinner table. Whatever the reason, it might be said to be in solitary confinement, even though it occasionally appears.

It may work its way into a leading fashion, as the short skirt for the street has done, although America decried it. Today, however, at the hour when we must choose new evening gowns, the best choice remains with the long, slim frock which may or may not be pulled out on the hips.

One may even be entirely medieval and still in the fashion. If one likes intensive orientalism, there are the loose, trousered skirts that are also in the limelight.

The waistline has not materialized. It was threatened along with the circular hip line. Yet, while we know the defined waistline has been put into the fashions by great masters, we see that the majority of women go along with a straight waistline and a bodice that shows no curve whatever.

Perhaps there are not to be as many changes this season as one thought. This, however, does not mean that women are not buying new clothes, for there is little contradiction of the im-

sistent statement that all dressmakers, good, bad and indifferent, are so overcrowded that they often have to refuse orders for clothes.

Brown for the Bride.

Brides are curious creatures. What one does they all want to do. If Patricia wore a veil of mellow old lace Alicia wants one too, though white tulle would look much better against Alicia's olive skin; if the season starts off with rainbow weddings, then every wedding you go to is a rainbow affair. It is rare, indeed, that you find any real desire to do things differently. When it comes to her wedding day the young girl wants to be conventional to the extreme and so does her mother. And so there is a great sameness to the accounts of the smart weddings and the would-be smart weddings that you glance through in the daily papers.

This autumn all the brides are wearing brown for their traveling toga. There seems to be hardly a single exception. Recall the accounts of recent weddings that you have read—"leaf brown silk," "seal brown peach-bloom," "tobacco brown duvetyne"—so it goes. Most of these brown brides have realized that brown is best when it is used in sympathy—that it is better to wear a brown hat with the brown suit or costume than a hat of contrasting color. With the navy blue suit the hat could be as brilliant as you chose. But most effective is the brown get up when the hat is of the same color, if possible of the same shade, as the costume.