BE consoled, Nadine. The situation is trying, I grant, and what is worrying you, far from growing less, is going to be more of a problem from year to year. The new vibrant spirit that animates the mode is taking possession of it. A catastrophe? Or a blessing?

Certain years in the history of fashion, notable for the grace and originality of the clothes they have produced, have defied oblivion. Certain dates—1830, 1880, 1890—evoke images, awaken poignant memories: we recognize in them a style, a personality, something almost human. The mode is so close to woman, woman so close to destiny!

And now, 1929—or, more certainly, 1930—is determined not to die. These revolutionary years that aspire to glory try to make us deny our old customs. Without a scruple, they sweep away the standards to which we were conforming. First, they destroy the outward form, then the spirit that gave it shape. Farewell the straight lines, square or rectangular, the easy give-and-take, our dearly won freedom. Farewell frankness, farewell comradeship free from jealousy—something that could exist between women who could not be distinguished one from the other; between men and women undisturbed by the complications that arise from coquetry.

Already, we are beginning to question those beliefs that a year ago we still held dear. Our old silhouettes, stalking through the mists of the past, seem to have lost something of their former harmony, seem positively funny. We almost laugh at the long, straight line of the bodices, the skirts cut short and straight, just below the knees; above all, at the boarding-school aspect of simplicity and uniformity. And, yet, we thought ourselves charming.

“What? Change?” said the Parisian (and you, Nadine, said the same). “But, why? Why, if we have found the utterly blissful state of existence, if we have learned to acquire grace without effort; if our clothes and our coiffures are young, becoming, and discreet; practical and adequate to our lives? The perfect expression of our modern souls?”

The average woman adored this mode, because, as she explained, she was always sure of herself—there was not much of a margin for error. You followed certain set rules, and you couldn’t go far wrong. Or, if you were wrong, the world was wrong with you. There was never the danger of being ridiculous, and it didn’t much matter whether you were seventeen or fifty; ages were practically interchangeable. Real beauty, of course, could not be concealed, but it was never enhanced; mediocrity was nearly as much of an asset as good looks.

“All these new fashions are pretentious, inconvenient,” Nadine complains. “I go to dine with some friends. It rains, and I am cold, for my short coat doesn’t begin to cover me. My skirt is too long, I don’t even know how to walk any more, and it is impossible to step out of a car without getting splashed. And how should one go up a staircase? My husband sighs and grumbles, ‘This hair that must be curled up on the ends, these dresses that must be fastened. A few more excuses for arriving late!’ My partners complain of panels that trail in all directions, and there is an awful moment when I think I am going to lose my balance. Besides, I can’t go into a drawing-room or a restaurant without feeling terribly conspicuous, conscious of stares and criticisms.

“The other night, I went to dinner in a new dress, feeling just a little excited and pleased, and my friends, who have not yet had the courage to abandon the old proportions, made fun of me. ‘Are you trying to launch the new fashion, Nadine?’ they said. And, ‘You were so much nicer with your short little skirts,’ the men complained. ‘Are you trying to create a type of your own?’ asked one woman. ‘Whom are you trying to please in this new garb?’ said another.

“Ah, who indeed is one trying to please? One tries to find a dress in the collection that looks new, yet one that will seem familiar enough in the drawing-room. A dress so perfect that at first it will pass unnoticed, its merits gradually appreciated, bit by bit. There was, of course, that one man at dinner the other night, a rather distinguished-looking old fellow, on whom my new dress seemed not utterly lost.

“One can not wear last year’s dresses—there is nothing to be done with them. One feels at first that the new dresses were created only for the very slim. One wonders how Aunt X., who was such a beauty in 1900, would look in them, or how they would (Continued on page 86)