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Spring Fashions in Straw Millinery

As the snowdrops, first flowers of spring, bloom even while snow still lies on the meadows, so before any others, millinery fashions appear as sure harbingers of spring. Already in January, fashion plates are brightened by illustrations of straw hats, but long before then, leading milliners begin preparing their new collections. Already in autumn they busily begin to create their models and from the wide range of strawbraids at their disposal, choose the materials which best express their ideas. Often the materials themselves inspire their creative joy and lead them on to new themes.

Not all who handle straw hatbraids know their origin. It is mostly from foreign cities that Swiss strawbraids are sent out to conquer the world. For this reason Swiss fashion artists visit wellknown foreign centers in order to present their collections to leading manufacturers, whole-sale dealers and designers, so that they can organize their supply according to the choice of recognized leaders of fashion. The heart of the Swiss hatbraid industry is Wohlen in Aargau, where about 20 factories, employing a few thousand hands, are to be found. The turnover of this industry amounts to some millions of francs. About 5 to 6000 different braid models are brought out each year. Despite the war, a lively, happy industry goes on working, even though present conditions hamper the export trade.

What has the straw hatbraid fashion to offer for the coming spring? A keen interest is shown in the products of this Swiss industry. Today, strong preference is shown for the new and extremely varied designs in relief, which are much appreciated by modistes. There is a rich collection of relief motifs. Many braids have only a shaded relief along the edge, whilst in others the motif is in high relief which gives the material a remarkable artistic charm. Thanks to their pliability, these strawbraids are easily molded by the milliners' creative hands. Many machine-made braids have the appearance of straw which makes them more ornamental, softer and more becoming than finely woven materials. Of course, for a long time past real straw has not been employed for these products. Ramie interwoven with cellophane gives a soft, durable material. Among original and striking braids much in vogue to-day are straw imitations offering a tremendously wide range of designs. Equally appreciated are hand-woven, smooth and mat strawbraids. Although the requirements of both customers and hat designers are so diverse this season, the Wohlen hatbraid industry is still producing very fine, delicate braids, from which charmingly elegant models can be created.

An important point, of course, is the new shades of this season's braids. There is a whole range of warm brown, or ochre, tones, also called « terre brûlée » (burnt earth). Further, to-day's fashions show a predilection for golden maize shades, among which is to be found the new « vieille paille » (old straw). The most fashionable colors are also represented, such as: a hard blue, also termed « bleu toile » (linen blue); flame or fire red; a beautiful pale apple-green shade, « chartreuse »; and the ever fashionable « bordeaux », always welcome to leading dressmakers and the Parisienne, and which returns season after season for shoes, scarves, buttonholes and gloves. Finally this season offers a light grey, a great deal of pure white, and of course the ever-becoming black.

A glance at the first models of the season shows that decorative effects are obtained by the richness of the hatbraid designs, and that although accessories are very elegant, they are also very sober and demure. Hats require little additional trimming which at the most must lie in the coloring, in quaint little feather quills, one or two flowers or ribbon rosettes. Here and there, a straw-edged horsehair veil falls lightly over a coquettish model. But the place of honor is left to the richly varied styles of hatbraids.