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Flowered tissues

The summer collections, shop windows in Fifth Avenue, receptions and smart dinners, all display the most graceful, truly feminine frocks that have been seen for many years. Fabrics are fresher and daintier than ever.

Thousands of flowered dresses are sent off daily from all the workshops and dressmaking establishments. They go from town to town, from State to State, from East to West, from North to South. Fascinating flowers looking as though they had come straight from a greenhouse and not from a workshop, long evening dresses with petals of organdie, embroidery or silk. Sometimes transparent like a morning mist, velvety and silky like the texture of an orchid or a sumptuous gloxinia.

How stimulating and yet restful they are for tired eyes and minds in our restless days. Our thanks are due to manufacturers, designers, dressmakers and fashionmakers, who have sufficient imagination, and optimism to make us forget the worries of the present day, and to help to spread abroad beauty of shape and colour in a dismal world! Long may they live, — these workers in severe-looking offices who give our threatened civilisation the gift of graceful flowers and spring-like beauty with their embroidered fabrics, their printed, silky materials, organdies and satins, tulle and linen, fancy stockinette, and straw laces.

It is they who are responsible for all the many parcels which are sent off every day and which contain so many exquisite creations, carefully wrapped up in tissue paper, — frocks made of the daintiest materials, the latest achievements of the textile industry. Their work resembles that of Nature: at the time when trees and flowers are in bud, spring reigns in the workshops of the textile industry.

Just as there are different flowers at different times of year, so there are different materials for every latitude. Switzerland sends her fabrics to Paris for

the Riviera, to New York for Florida and California. America herself manufactures a vast variety of materials for that vast continent, but when the finest of fabrics are required to satisfy the tastes of women who long for something really perfect, it is generally Switzerland who furnishes the very thing that is wanted.

And just as the loveliest alpine flowers can only be gathered by those who take the trouble to climb up to sunny mountain pastures, so the products of the Swiss textile industry demand persevering efforts and most careful work in order to attain a unique degree of perfection in the various materials, — fine, delicately tinted silks, beautifully embroidered organdies, soft, light cotton materials, the purest linen, gossamer stockinette, intricately plaited straw.

In order to understand the influence of Nature on all Switzerland produces in this line, it is necessary to visit Swiss textile works in spring or in summer. Zurich, St. Gall, Basle, Appenzell, and the Bernese valleys are the centres of the fashion industry. There are no gloomy-looking factories in miserable suburbs: from the windows of the buildings in which they work, workers see the nearer or more distant mountains, orchards with fruit blossom, or trees sprinkled with snow, according to the season. Those who have seen the sunny fields of St. Gall or the Aargau in spring can understand how fine the embroideries are, how dainty the lace made of straw. The Lake of Zurich, on the other hand, extending far away into the distance like a long scarf of silk with varying hues, gives the beholder some comprehension of the art of making Zurich silk.

But in spite of the inspiration given by Nature, Switzerland is a country that has few natural resources and, in parts, an inclement climate. Good crops in fields and orchards, as well as industrial products, demand ceaseless patience and perseverance in order to be able to overcome the changes of temperature and the crises by which Europe is devastated periodically. That is why garden flowers, the fruits of the orchard, and the various industrial products are more valuable than elsewhere. Nothing is wasted. Every metre of silk, every piece of embroidery, every article of clothing, is made with the greatest care, not only to make it durable, but also to satisfy the longing for beauty and perfection resulting from the continuous fight with elements and with more or less favourable times and events.

In big countries, with mass production, the accelerated rhythm of life gives no time for the minute work done in Switzerland. Textiles imported from Switzerland are therefore always much appreciated by American customers who wish for something more refined than what is worn by the general public. It is for this reason that the leading dressmaking establishments of New York, and smart Fifth Avenue shops give a place of honour to the products of the Swiss textile industry which all possess qualities rarely met with elsewhere.

Thérèse de Chambrier.