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Swiss Textiles in the tropics



Beach dress from Saint-Gall embroidery with scarf.

The end of year festivities which, it should be mentioned, take place with the greatest of simplicity, definitely mark the close of the season in all the great centres of this country. The glorious holiday period is beginning and with it the flight towards summer dwellings and the search for a more agreeable climate such as is afforded by the well-known heights of Petropolis and Teresopolis. Brazilians are on the point of leaving the receptions and gay social gatherings of the large towns behind them for a few weeks, to steep themselves for a little while in the invigorating life of the country. The « haciendas », or large country estates, which for the most part are scattered in the interior but are also to be found along the coast, assume much of the life which has so noticeably withdrawn from the great centres. Everyone lives as he pleases, leaving behind for a moment all the cares and obligations of town life.

As this « hacienda » existence is the privilege of the somewhat well-to-do, fashion is both set and followed here; and large parties are also given from time to time. In the field that interests us most, we may well call this period the great « cotton » season.

During these holidays people seek relaxation and rest above all; dresses are therefore at their simplest. Colours remain light, for everything is pure under this sky and Nature herself provides all the contrasts. It is the period which marks the heaviest run on the meagre stocks of Swiss textiles still in the country. There is no point in repeating the undisputed advantages of all these products at a time of the year when the warm climate of the country places such demands on quality. Whether for the practical little day dress or for the evening gown which for certain smart gatherings may reach the heights of elegance, the raw materials in greatest demand are those imported from Switzerland.

For the little dress, it sometimes takes a great deal of ingenuity to track down sufficient of the desired material. For the more important dress, the evening gown in particular, we are more privileged. Embroidery from Saint-Gall and organdies of all types are fortunately still numerous enough to give a wide and varied choice, offering the necessary coolness for tropical nights.

In spite of the importance of « hacienda » life at this time, the two capitals, Rio and Sao Paulo, still detain many less fortunate people who have to bear with the rigours of summer without being able to get away. At Copacabana on the warmest days and on Sundays at the noon hour, those forced to remain behind present the most amazing spectacle imaginable. In this grandiose setting, bounded by imposing sky-scrapers, the crowd gathers, displaying a careless abandon with gay effect. Luxurious cars drive slowly through the throng of beautiful women, in their brilliant and exquisitely moulded costumes, who invade the roadway which runs along this beach for almost two miles. Dresses never reach the shoulders and are almost always unencumbered by shoulder straps, vying with the swimsuits, shorts and other light summer wear which give Copacabana its atmosphere, its colour and its charm which are unforgettable once their influence has been felt. It seems to us that this season in particular takes on an extraordinary importance which might almost be attributed to a sort of reaction against the so-called « League of Decency » which is tending to take from this « Town within a town » its universally recognized individuality.

On that day, so eagerly awaited but whose dawn is not yet in sight, when Swiss textiles will again be permitted to satisfy the demands of an extensive clientele, dresses, special wear, colours and lines will take on still more value, enhanced by the brightness of Swiss colourings and by the superb quality which assure their undisputed freshness.

Fred Schlatter.