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London letter



*A cocktail-dress by Mattli
of black romaine charmeuse from Zurre Silks.*

There is a growing tendency, since the war, for summer dresses and beach clothes to appear earlier and earlier in the shops. Some windows were already full of them in January ; and now all are gay with pale colours, fine fabrics and bright cotton beach suits. Some women take advantage of this preview of summer things to buy their wardrobes early and to be ready for the warm weather when it comes ; but others, whose thoughts do not easily turn to thin dresses until spring has really come, prefer to wait — and when they do go shopping all the best things have gone.

This summer, as in previous years since the war, there are to be no Courts and debutantes will be presented to the King and Queen at a series of garden parties, for which most of them will wear floppy hats and filmy frocks of voile or organza, praying meanwhile that the rain will keep away. As usual, fashion writers are insisting that this year, at last, people will go to Ascot sensibly dressed instead of in trails of chiffon and perishable crinoline hats. But no doubt Ascot week will reveal the usual impractical creations, bedraggled after the first shower of rain.

The favourite fabrics this season are shantung, pleated chiffon, guipure lace and sheers, often in dark colours.

For day dresses and jackets, there is a great deal of black and white check worsted about. Rayon shantung is very popular for suits and the loose dust-coats which are coming into fashion ; while the lighter silk shantung (either natural or in colours) is preferred for dresses. Dorville showed a charming frock of sky-blue shantung trimmed with white, and a good black suit with narrow skirt and a jacket with horse-shoe neckline.

Quite a lot of cocktail suits and dresses are still made of the stiff tie silk which last year was all the rage but which this year has lost some of its popularity. For summer frocks sheers are largely used — nylon, organza, spotted voile, tulle and net. Dark sheers for afternoon have caught on well, and black linen shirtwaist dresses and playsuits continue to be popular. Hardy Amies has an exciting short evening dress of black tulle with satin coin-dots, and a cocktail dress of navy blue organza. At Brenner Sports we saw a black organza jacket worn belted and bloused over a black and yellow print dress. Another good model at this house was a finely pleated black organza frock with double collar and cuffs of crisp white organza.

White or cream broderie anglaise and guipure lace, very simply cut, are favourites for garden parties. One of the loveliest things in Hardy Amies' collection was a white guipure dress, quite straight except for the almost off-the-shoulder cape collar, and Dorville showed a charming dress, just as simple, in creamy broderie.

Evening dresses are predominantly filmy, and there are some delightful organzas and tulles for debutantes who are going to their first big ball this summer. Hartnell has one in blue and white striped organza with a bunch of flowers tucked into the blue velvet belt, and from Victor Stiebel comes a young girl's ball dress of embroidered organza with a deep shawl collar, a sash of blue ribbon and a posy of daisies.

With the revival of this fashion for embroidery and diaphanous fabrics, Swiss textiles have again come into their own, but the fine cottons of Saint-Gall are not the only Swiss contribution to English fashions. For the more sophisticated woman there are also many magnificent ball gowns of satin and cocktail suits of grosgrain, taffeta and poult. There is thus wide scope for the rich silks of Zurich.

Finally, accustomed as we are to lovely but rather expensive imports from Switzerland, we were agreeably surprised to see in one of the leading London stores a selection of remarkably cheap Swiss cotton dresses. The prettiest was a tartan with a full skirt and shawl collar, but there were many others, all practical, pretty and most reasonably priced.

Ann Duveen