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London Letter



In the Spring Collections of the Incorporated Society of Fashion Designers the basic silhouette remains more or less unaltered. No doubt couturiers realise that in the present situation, women cannot afford any more of those revolutionary changes which would force them to discard perfectly good outfits. Therefore the main interest lies in fabrics and workmanship, both of which are particularly outstanding. Some houses are showing the best suits they have had for years.

There is plenty of fabric news. For daytime, worsted is used a great deal, as are gabardines and soft tweeds, often in small check patterns. Colours are more neutral: black and white, navy blue, all the greys in every shade from pale silver to dark thunder-cloud grey, some lichen green and a good deal of yellow in melon tones or subdued tangerine. Shantung is back again in every weave, from pure silk to woollen mixtures. Grosgrain is gaining in popularity, both for fitted afternoon redingotes and for big, beautiful evening coats, often in glowing colours. For

afternoon dresses, shantungs, surahs and tie silks predominate — either plain or in small discreet patterns. And for the evenings we shall see a great deal of lace — fine Chantilly or heavy guipure; paper thin taffeta and lots of net and tulle. The lace dresses usually have underskirts of rustling taffeta. Coats, whether loose or fitted, are straight in line and sober fabrics are often enlivened by bright linings — zinnia red, mimosa yellow or emerald green. Suits are narrow, nipped in at the waist and may have pronounced basques flaring out over pencil slim skirts. Pleats are still used a good deal, particularly to give extra fullness at the back of straight skirts. At Hardy Amies they are in the form of little fishtails or fins. Many of the jackets button low; lapels have become important — some rolled, some double, some big and pointed, with facings of white piqué or a darker colour. Evening dresses are either very slender with draped fullness at the side or in the trumpet line, flaring out below the knee; or else they are big and bouffant, with huge tulle skirts. There are delicate colours — pale wisteria, muted pink — and a few brilliant colours. We still see short evening dresses, usually with strapless tops covered by matching fitted jackets. Hardy Amies uses black guipure for one of these. Worth shows a beautiful organza ball dress, checked in stained glass colours.

One noticeable feature this spring is the predominance of ensembles. Details are gay: lots of crisp white piqué, flowers, apples, even carrots set in buttonholes, and flowers filling in the décolletage of a dress — mimosa is the favourite. We also see coloured waistcoats under dark suits — Creed uses these a great deal, and at Hartnell's, a checked gingham waistcoat has shoes and bag to match. There is also a lot of jewelled embroidery.

In spite of the predominance of lace, the muslins of Saint-Gall will certainly not be neglected this summer. One famous London store has been displaying seductive Swiss voiles, checked or spotted in blue and green, as well as lovely organdies printed with floral motifs.

We have also noticed Swiss materials at some of the houses which design for the wholesale market. At Horrockses, a summer evening dress of coin-dotted organdie, a dinner dress of black cotton broderie and a frock of navy blue piqué with a broderie anglaise motif. Horrockses are also featuring poplin — plain, iridescent, Paisley printed or combined with piqué.

Marcus showed a rose-coloured jumper suit of Swiss shantung, and Frank Usher has a lovely white organdie evening dress printed with a grey lace pattern.

Ann Duveen.

FRANK USHER

White organdie evening dress with grey lace pattern.

