

London letter

Autor(en): **Duveen, Ann**

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FRANK USHER

This summer the filmy fabrics of Saint-Gall are to be seen everywhere, as though London were expressing the Festival spirit in foaming frills and flounces of muslin, organza and lace. Shop windows and the pages of magazines are filled with bouffant tulle evening dresses, afternoon frocks of organdie and broderie anglaise, and crisp blouses of dotted Swiss voile. Indeed, these daisy-fresh blouses of pure white organdie, eyelet embroidery or transparent voile are all the rage. The fashion for « separates » — different coloured blouses and skirts instead of one-piece dresses, even in sheer fabrics — is greater than ever ; and these blouses, demurely collared or ruffled and off the shoulder, are being worn with thin, bright skirts as well as with tailored suits.

« It's Lovely, It's Swiss » was, for a week or so, the slogan in one department of a famous London store, where two large display sets were devoted entirely to Swiss textiles. One was covered with a sea of printed lawns and organdies (some appliqued with sprays of flowers and true lovers' knots) ; the other was draped with the rich silks of Zurich, shimmering and gleaming in an infinite variety of colours and weaves. In every good fabric department we have also noticed the vast amount of voile displayed, crisp, almost uncrushable, patterned with stripes, checks or the tiny coloured knots traditionally associated with Switzerland. These voiles are lovely for summer lingerie and nightgowns as well as for blouses and, now as always, voile is one of the best-loved materials for children's summer dresses.

We have been doing our usual round of shops and dress shows, and some of the prettiest dresses we saw were made of these sheer fabrics. Frank Usher's summer evening frock (see illustr.) in white organdie with broderie anglaise bordering the high ruffled

LONDON LETTER

sleeves and the great flounces of the skirt ; Roecliff and Chapman's white net evening dress, its swirling skirt and decollete bodice embroidered with scattered flowers of white lace ; Mandell's short, low-necked dinner dress of navy blue tulle, converted into an ensemble for theatre or garden party by a redingote of white guipure lace ; Frederick Starke's grey and white organza afternoon dress with crisp white collar and cuffs, and at Fortnum & Mason's, an elegant dress of black guipure with coat to match. This craze for girlish muslin sometimes makes elder women sad, for it is so nostalgically pretty to wear, but far too youthful for them. Yet, though daisy-patterned white broderie and blue ribbons are no longer for them, there are many charming dresses in black, grey or navy blue guipure, or organza over taffeta, which look right on women of any age.

Another welcome sight in the shops this season is the great variety of Bally shoes, in newer and more varied styles than ever. The high-heeled pumps, either classic or made of narrow strips of leather, are lovely but we particularly liked the very elegant, narrow, low-heeled walking shoes they have introduced lately.

This spring the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers put on a special dress show for the Queen and the Princesses. This was held at Warwick House, in St. James' Palace, the beautiful home of Lady Rothermere who is the President of the Society. Each designer contributed six models, and sitting next to Queen Elizabeth had the opportunity of talking to her while his clothes were being shown. Norman Hartnell, who dresses the Royal Family, showed two wonderful evening dresses : in one, the full tulle skirt was a harlequin pattern of diamond-shaped pieces — pink, yellow, blue and sea-green each diamond outlined with pearl embroidery ; the other, a courtly dress of white tulle frosted with rhinestones, was narrow as a wand with panels floating out behind and forming a train. Another beautiful ball gown by Hartnell was in aquamarine tulle with a tiny jacket encrusted with sequins, for the Hon. Mrs. Denys Lawson, London's beautiful and elegant Lady Mayoress, who will have a particularly busy term of office, taking part in all the Festival occasions which are adding gaiety to the city this summer. The finest setting for English beauties is said to be the formality and splendour of full dress occasions, and at the new Royal Festival Concert Hall, the Royal Opera House and all the balls and parties of the London Season, visitors will have an excellent opportunity of seeing Englishwomen at their best.

Ann Duveen.