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Autor: Duveen, Ann
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London Letter

We have just seen the autumn collections in London. Once again the designers, alive to the difficulties of the moment (rising prices and the shortage of wool in particular), have adhered more or less to the existing silhouette; new trends are mostly confined to inventive detail and variety of fabrics.

There is no falling off in the popularity of wool, and jersey is enormously used too: warm wool jersey, light-weight jersey, feather-weight chiffon jersey and, for afternoon dresses or cocktail suits, jersey threaded with tinsel.

Most of the houses show ensembles — greatcoats over suits, topcoats with dresses or very elegant, simple day dresses with their own jackets, either boxy or strictly tailored, so that when the jacket is done up the outfit looks like a suit. Nearly all the coats have contrasting linings of fur, turned back to form lapels, collars and cuffs, or are lined with fabric of another colour to match the suit or dress beneath. Digby Morton shows a dark brown coat over an oatmeal tweed dress; the coat is lined with the same tweed, which is turned back to form deep tuxedo fronts.

Suits are beautifully cut, with tiny waists, slightly stiffened basques and narrow skirts. Lachasse, who showed a most distinguished and inventive collection, uses a deep, double scarf collar on the front of some of his coats and suits. Like Mattli, the Swiss-born member of London's « Big Ten », Lachasse slits many of his jackets at the back in hacking vents, and for some of his town suits he uses a new silk-tweed, a fabric we also saw at Worth's and for which we predict a great future.

Velvet is another material which is tremendously in the news. Every house shows it, for day and evening clothes and for trimmings. There is much « street-velvet », which looks like a very good velveteen and is both rainproof and uncrushable. Hardy Amies has a lovely brown suit in this fabric, the loose, three-quarter length coat lined with nutria. A great many of the suits, whether tweed or smooth wools, have touches of velvet on collar, cuffs and pockets. Cocktail suits, richer and more dressy than last season's, are sometimes made of velvet in unusual weaves — embossed, checked or striped, sometimes of heavy silks with raised stripes, small brocaded patterns or two-colour weaves such as black and emerald green, black and dark red or black and midnight blue. One of the velvets was a small black and white check, another was black and yellow.

There is a new fashion for restaurant dresses, very simply cut, sometimes in the shirtwaist style, in rich metallic fabrics, gold and silver lamé or brocade. Dinner dresses are sleek and covered up, often with long sleeves; but ball gowns for gala occasions are still strapless and very full in the skirt, in rich satins, paper-thin taffetas or in layers of tulle and net.

Trimmings strike a Victorian note — braid, used on everything from suits to dinner dresses, cord and jet. Hartnell's long, clinging dinner dress of white chiffon over white satin is embroidered all over with

gold paillettes and bugles, and bordered with fur. Sherard shows a black velvet dress embroidered with heavy flowers of hand-made braid; a narrow black satin evening dress by Mattli has a raised pattern of feathers.

This present fashion for elegant cocktail suits and dinner dresses gives great scope to the splendid silks of Zurich. Some of the designers for the wholesale market have also been using Swiss silks. Percy Trilnick, for instance, shows a party dress of black shot figured satin with gold spots, and another made of the same fabric, reversible in black with red or blue, and patterned with small coin-dots.

Swiss cottons have had great success during the warm weather. We particularly liked a sun-top dress with matching bolero in one of these cottons, with a charming print in marigold tints, greens and gold, or blues and purples (see sketch).

There has been a great rush in the shops for accessories from Switzerland — « pirate stocking » caps circled in all the colours of the rainbow, and some extremely smart swimsuits in elasticised fabric with gold, blue or black polka dots on a white ground.

The Festival of Britain continues to flourish, but by the time this letter appears in print, many of the main events will be over. However the Festival film « The Magic Box », which tells the life story of Freese-Green, one of the inventors of the cinematograph, will not appear until the autumn. Among the stars of this film is the beautiful young Swiss actress, Maria Schell, who plays the part of Green's first wife. Her reputation increases with each film she makes, and she is fast becoming an important, international star of the cinema.

Ann Duveen.

