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London Letter

The winter season has begun, and the trends for which we predicted a future have definitely crystallised into the fashions of the moment: the continued popularity of short party frocks, the return of the covered-up look in dinner dresses, velvet, fur-trimmed or worn with furs, and a prevalence of rustling silks and rich brocades. Here the Swiss manufacturers have certainly come into their own, for the shops have been full of the beautiful heavy silks of Zurich: brocades of every sort — shot with blending colours, woven with tinsel threads or stamped with delicate floral patterns, in all the colours reflected in the opal — ice-blue, sea green, pearly pinks, nacre and gold. A typical cocktail dress by Nettie Vogues is in shining Swiss brocade striped in green, gold and bronze on a black ground. This is the type of dress that is worn for the more formal sort of cocktail party or for dining in a restaurant: as we forecast in the last London Letter, one of the favourite fashions for theatre and restaurant is the very simply cut dress of sumptuous metallic fabric.

A fin-de-journée suit in Susan Small's latest collection is of black Swiss gros-grain with a sparkle of jet on the velvet collar, cuffs and pockets. We have seen many Swiss silks in the shops — rayon surahs, tie-silks, shot failles, shot peau de soie in bottle green, peacock blue, red and burgundy; heavy crêpe in flaming red and darkest lilac; some crystal cloqués and a cocktail suit of faconné and givrine in silvery grey.

There has been a heartening influx of Swiss fabrics and other articles this

autumn. The only sad thing, from the shoppers' point of view, is that they are so quickly sold out. One frequently hears women asking for something from Switzerland which « was here yesterday », and the answer invariably is that it has all been sold and the shop is waiting for the next consignment.

We have seen some lovely silk scarves, one of them in crêpe-de-Chine printed with scenes from the Bayeux tapestry. There was a window in one of London's largest stores full of exquisite Swiss blouses, in Georgette with lace insets, cream-coloured silk with applied embroidery as well as hand-worked blouses of fine handkerchief linen with pearl buttons.

In spite of the scarcity of wool, the penetrating damp and cold climate of the British Isles will always cause Englishwomen to seek woollen fabrics at any price, and the finer and more elegant the weave, the more it is prized. It has always been taken for granted that we should wear thick greatcoats and warm suits in the daytime, but only in the last fifteen years or so have there been woollen fabrics fine enough to wear in the evening too. And in the cold rooms of English houses, particularly country houses, a warm evening dress is really essential. So a long-sleeved dinner dress in softly draped jersey is the greatest treasure in any woman's wardrobe. Switzerland has been sending us wools too; among them a wonderful fabric in multicoloured checks and overchecks which can be washed without shrinking. And there are some excellent Swiss sweaters still to be found. These are expensive, but they are su-

perly soft, warm and comforting after the paper-thin utility woollens here, for only a small selection of better quality sweaters are to be found — the best British woollens being reserved for export. These Swiss jerseys are original and pretty in shape, colour and design, and they range from sporting checks and stripes to soft pastel shades with dolman sleeves and low necks for late afternoon wear.

We have enjoyed looking too at the Swiss furnishing fabrics which have come into the stores lately: lots of filmy marquisette curtains and enchanting percales for upholstery, patterned with broad stripes of grey, pink or yellow, alternating with 18th century flower patterns. Let us hope that this welcome influx of goods from Switzerland may only mark the beginning of a larger and steadier stream than we have had since the war.

Ann Duveen.

