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LONDON LETTER

Watching the spring showing of the London Model House Group and the other wholesale houses which supply the stores with clothes for the vast majority of Englishwomen who do not buy their clothes from Haute Couture, one was struck by the way in which fashion remains international in spite of ever-increasing tariffs and restrictions. The lines laid down in Paris at the end of January have already been adopted here and can now be seen in the shop-windows — scooped-out necklines, low-flaring skirts, boleros and judo belts, and the middy line revived from the 1920's. And the fabrics come from all over Europe; most of them, naturally, manufactured in this country, but always enough from Switzerland, France and elsewhere to create that diversity without which fashion — and life — would be dull indeed; and to remind us of the common interests and common culture that unite our countries.

As we expected after the big conference last autumn, pure silk has made a great come-back. Prices, inevitably, are high, but it is delightful to feel the soft organzas, foulards and shantungs between one's fingers again, and to save up for at least one dress made from these loveliest of all fabrics. Rembrandt, for instance, showed a really delectable dress in pure silk organza from Switzerland; deceptively simple shirt top with a plunging neckline, and swirling pleated skirt over a shadowed taffeta petticoat. This house also did clever things with blended silk bourette, which they used for a grey and white striped jumper suit, iced with white piqué, and for another suit in glowing red.

Dorville clothes have an unmistakable style of their own — young, casual yet very chic. The designer here uses a lot of linen in pastel colours this season, supple silk jersey and a new material called "Sheer", which is summer

and easy to launder. One of the prettiest things in the collection was an eyelet embroidery dress (embroidered in Switzerland on an English fabric) with an insertion round the deep horseshoe neck, and a wide belt of emerald grosgrain to match the circular shawl bolero. (Little boleros of every kind are having a *succès fou*). Spectator, one of the most elegant of the Model Houses, uses Swiss fabrics (shantung and uncrushable dupion) for beautifully tailored dresses; Nettie Vogues loves organzas for wedding dresses, for evening dresses and for filmy coats to go over garden-party frocks.

Horrockses have been spectacularly successful with summer cottons in the past few years. Now they have one of Molyneux's designers with them, and they are going



REMBRANDT

A dress of "Toile Spahir" a pure silk organza shantung from *L. Abraham & Co. Silks Ltd., Zurich*.

Photo Peter Clark Ltd.

from strength to strength (they designed the clothes for one of the leading ladies in Noel Coward's latest play). A great virtue is that their clothes are not very expensive. In the present collection they used a good deal of piqué (black as well as white) and poplin, much jersey for housecoats and clinging evening dresses, lots of young-looking checked or flowered cottons and, of course, the transparent muslins which provide the high-spot of every summer show. One quite enchanting dress for a debutante was in ice cream-pink Swiss voile interwoven with a small white check, the camisole-topped bodice thickly encrusted with daisies.

As I write, the English textile industry is as everybody knows in a state of crisis. The House of Commons sits late into the night trying to decide what is to be done, and the people of Lancashire fear a return of unemployment and the bad old days. One of the causes of the situation is lack of money and the refusal of the customer to buy at present prices. Utility clothes, which until lately were restricted in price and very moderate, are now no more. There is official talk of bridging the pricegap between these cheap articles and the much more expensive ready-made

clothes in the range above. But it looks as though the bridging will be in one direction only, and that the wrong one for the poorer shopper since the promised drop in price for the dearer clothes amounts to only a few shillings in £ 25 or £ 30. At the moment, prices of goods already in the shops show signs of falling (because shopkeepers are voluntarily risking a loss) but not yet far enough to tempt the customers.

Recent restrictions on imports, imposed for these and other reasons connected with high finance, fall at present most heavily on lengths of cloth, not made up, and on hand-kerchiefs. The special quota for embroidery and lace has not yet been revised, and we are still allowed to bring into the country 50 % of the ready-made clothes we bought in a given quarter last year.

There is no sign yet of any shortage of Swiss clothes and fabrics in the shops — indeed, when I made a tour of some of the big London stores the other day, I was struck by the quantity as well as the quality of all the Swiss products I saw there. I suppose that once these stocks have been exhausted, we shall see them no more. When, one wonders, will governments grasp the simple fact that if everybody



REMBRANDT

Grey and white suit of "Tailleur rayé" a blended silk bourette fabric from *Rudolf Brauchbar & Co., Zurich.*

Photo Peter Clark Ltd.



Photo Millar & Harris

Some Swiss furnishing fabrics as they are sold in London. From left to right: "Graphis", "Harroc Trill" (net), "Tropic" and "Altamira".

tries to export everything and to import nothing, international trade will soon come to a standstill?

One of the most distinguished and oldest of the big Oxford Street stores, Marshall & Snelgrove, has just put on a seductive window display of Swiss blouses, practical nylon shirts with short sleeves and necks which button high or can be worn open over the revers of a jacket, in black or delicate pastel colours, and fastened with gold or jewelled studs; and for more dressed-up occasions, crisp broderie anglaise blouses with round pearl buttons. Inside the shop were shining lengths of Zurich silks: I particularly liked a black taffeta with a scroll motif lit up with scrolls of translucent colour, a plissé taffeta with a check of metal thread, and a pure silk dupion in every possible colour, again in a scroll design.

At another Oxford Street store, John Lewis's, I saw spun rayons and shot taffetas. And I noticed everywhere how popular Swiss lace and embroidery are, this as every other summer. At the moment, women seem to want batiste and embroidered organdie with open designs, heavier guipures, and needlerun lace. And over at Harrods, the famous store in Knightsbridge, I saw a profusion of enchanting things from Switzerland. In one department, which specialises in fashions for the smart, younger set,

there were some beautiful evening dresses in rainbow-printed silk organza, ivory slipper-satin embroidered with pearls and gold, ombré in melting shades of yellow, printed with brown full-blown roses — and all had beautifully fitting boned bodices. Here and in the neighbouring department for sub-debutantes and very small sizes, I saw attractive jersey dresses in pretty colours, good designs, and lined and finished in a way they do not, I am afraid, finish ready-made clothes in England now. A young-looking grey flannel suit for junior misses was bound with black braid, and was, again, a shining example of good workmanship, meant to last for years. Buyers in English stores are particularly impressed with the quality of Swiss woollen clothes: among the knitted wear at Harrods I noticed some of the patterned jackets made for Dior and photographed in *Textiles Suisses* No. 4/1951. Marshall & Snelgrove also had a fine selection of jersey dresses and jumper suits — some of the prettiest in edelweiss and pale green colours.

Prints have never been more interesting than they are this summer. One is relieved to see that there are not so many of the perennial, undistinguished floral patterns. Paisley patterns, much loved in Paris, are to be seen everywhere, in voiles, fine cottons and crêpes as well as silks;



HARTNELL

Lace dress for wear in Ascot. Swiss material by Playle.

Photo Central Press Photos Ltd.