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London Letter

Switzerland never seems to be hidden very far, or for any length of time, from the minds of the average Englishman or Englishwoman. Indeed, from January or February onwards many are looking forward with anticipated pleasure to their forthcoming Summer holidays in the Bernese Oberland or whatever other area they may choose; and before the last Summer visitor has returned home, others will have been planning their Winter Sports holiday — and possibly shopping for it.

There is no doubt that the vast majority of English people enjoy being in Switzerland; it is not merely the rich and vivid contrasts of gentle and majestic scenery nor the pleasures of Winter Sports but rather the courtesy, quiet friendly service which they receive everywhere. But in addition, the Englishman of to-day feels that the Swiss he meets have a parallel sense of values and a similar appreciation of some of the finer aspects of life.

To the average Englishwoman, the wonderful and helpful assistance which she finds in all the shops is something she can revel in, so now that our Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Butler, is raising the normal travel allow-

ance to £100. per annum the Swiss shops and stores can look forward to an interesting and profitable 1955, especially as, for us, there is the added thrill of shopping abroad.

Only a few weeks ago a Press Reception was held in one of London's most famous houses — a centre, in grandmother's days, of royalty and high society — and there in the ballroom under the distinguished noses (in oils) of milords and ladies, a bevy of mannequins demonstrated garments made from Helanca yarn. They spent part of their time stretching, pulling and apparently trying to tear these garments to shreds; they even invited blasé journalists to tug at them. There were swimsuits by Balnea, underwear by Yala and foundation belts by Carina, stockings and ski-trousers, and the first English garments made from Helanca yarn produced in this country (under license by Messrs. John Heathcoat & Co. Ltd.). When I saw some of these same garments only a few days ago they hardly looked any the worse for maltreatment and wear — in fact, I think I could have sold them as brand new! Helanca certainly opens up a new



Reichenbach & Co., Saint-Gall

A « Reco flock » display at
Dickins & Jones Ltd.,
London

Photo Evelyn Lee

Irène Gilbert Ltd., Dublin
 Full black « Recoflock »
 evening dress.
 Fabric by
 Reichenbach & Co., Saint-
 Gall

Photo Hans Wild



and exciting range of fashion possibilities besides stockings that will not run at important moments and an end to unsightly darns on husbands' socks !

The London shops and stores are at present exceptionally gay and brightly decorated for the Christmas Season — and for the more fortunate of us who can think of « ski-days » ahead.

Full advantage has certainly been taken of the easing of import restrictions so that a far greater range of textiles, fashion goods etc. from abroad are now available for selection — but in the quality ranges Swiss goods find few competitors. There is, of course, an accepted relationship between better quality goods and higher prices but

unfortunately the economic factors differ in the various countries so the communities enjoying higher standards of living and exporting to areas living on a somewhat lower economic level must lose some possible sales. Although this does not seem to apply on the more general items such as knitwear, I have noticed its effect on the more occasional and specialised products such as ski-wear.

Lillywhites of Piccadilly, who enjoy a wide reputation for their sports accessories and fashions, had a small but excellent range of Swiss-made ski-jackets. Two delightful Swiss ski-jackets caught my eye ; the first of these by Respolco and sold under the brand name of « Croydon »

was in elegant proofed poplin with attached hood and a most effective saddle stitching across a low yoke ; the second jacket, again by Respolco, was in proofed poplin with thick fleecy fur fabric, cut on straight lines but with an attached hood. For the really Junior Miss — between

the ages of six to twelve — I found another excellent ski-jacket, again by Respolco, made in reversible proofed poplin with an attached peak-cap hood but set-off in an effective contrasting colour. There is no doubt that each of these garments was designed and produced for real



Roter Models Ltd., London
Embroidered pure silk shantung by
Rudolf Brauchbar & Co., Zurich
Photo John French

action, fun and pleasure and not merely for lounging on a terrace or sun-patio ; each was both attractive and practical.

Since I firmly believe in keeping warm from tip to tip — or top to toe — I wandered round some of the accessories departments of Lillywhites. A pair of mitt-gloves

by Solfix made me wish I could wear these for every cold winter day ! The mitt can be worn fitting over the gloved fingers or turned back and used as a pocket for a small handkerchief. Although the idea of mitt-gloves seems so natural, particularly for ski-ing, I do not remember having seen any before.

From Lillywhites I decided to go to Swan & Edgar — in other words from a specialist store to the more popular and general. As some of you may know Swan & Edgar faces — on one side — Piccadilly Circus and is one of the best known « meeting places » in the world, in fact hun-

dreds of people arrange to meet there every day of the year ! In their Winter Sports department I saw very fine sports jackets — again by Respolco ! Both these jackets were, I understand, specially designed and produced for Swan & Edgar and their prices were wonderfully kind.



Roter Models Ltd., London
Pure silk printed fabric by
Rudolf Brauchbar & Co., Zurich

Photo John French

Both were in proofed poplin with peak-cap hoods and while one had a draw-string waist and full Magyar arm-holes, the other had its draw-strings on the hips and a large zipped pocket across the bodice.

From all I have seen I've been able to make my own

selection — all I need do now is to make up my mind just when and where I'll be going for my own Winter holiday.

RUTH FONTEYN