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From the nightcap and long hose to the cocktail dress

There is as much ambiguity in the English word « hosiery » as there is in the French « bonneterie ». Hosiery, originally used exclusively to designate the long knitted hose or stockings of our ancestors, has been extended to include knitted underwear of all kinds. Similarly the French « bonneterie » is a far cry from the original meaning of nightcaps ! The present tendency in French speaking countries is to call this industry « l'industrie de la maille », literally the « stitch or mesh industry » with once again an earlier and subsidiary meaning of chain mail as worn by our Europeans forebears in the wars of the Crusades. However the point we wish to make is that the « hosiery and knitwear » or just plain « knitwear » industry — as we have decided to call it — has made very satisfactory progress in Switzerland during recent years.

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For a long time Switzerland's knitwear industry was considered capable of producing only pullovers, layettes, small children's garments, underwear and other purely utilitarian articles mainly for the home market and occasionally for export. In recent years however, under the influence of certain manufacturers more interested in fashion than purely technical matters, this industry has spread and developed to a remarkable extent. Nowadays no couturier — however great his name and fame — would dream of presenting a collection without including several models of knitted or jersey dresses or suits. This trend has increased so rapidly and to such an extent that even the most exacting buyers of all countries are demanding knitwear and jersey clothing in ever increasing quantities. Curiously enough, in most customs tariffs, including the Swiss, the knitted garment industry, which nowadays includes even the most elegant of cocktail dresses, is still classified under the general heading of « bonneterie » (English equivalent « hosiery ») whereas in actual fact the nightcap and long knitted hose are almost relics of the past.

Is this trend, which tends to put the knitted garment on a par with the most beautiful creations of couture and ready-to-wear production, only a passing phase or will it, on the contrary, last ? The future alone can tell.

* * *

We should like to give here some of the reasons why this industry has been so successful and why it looks as though it will continue to occupy the important position it has won for itself.

The term « knitted fabric » is a contradiction in itself. The word « fabric » — a woven material — presupposes a machine for interlacing warp and weft threads, whereas knitting uses a totally different technique with the traditional warp and weft of weaving replaced by a succession of thousands, or even millions, of stitches varying in fineness and the way in which they are juxtaposed. These materials differ from



the classical woven fabrics in structure and consequently in their aesthetic or decorative effects. Their main features — elasticity, softness and at the same time an extraordinary resistance to wear and loss of shape — explain why active women or those who travel immediately seized upon them with such enthusiasm. In addition to these qualities, the possibility of varying gauge, of using different yarns of all kinds and the host of other possibilities offered by certain ultra-modern machines, which are a credit to Swiss technical ingenuity, enable the designer to give the knitted fabric a brilliance, a variety and an appeal which have contributed greatly to the rapid development of the knitwear industry in this new field — that of couture and ready-to-wear clothing.

The most recent Swiss knitting machines are veritable « thinking automats ». They can interpret and carry out the orders given them by the designer, the man who animates and inspires the whole aesthetic side of the modern knitwear industry. The technical side no longer predominates, it is good taste and the creative spirit that dictate nowadays. Henceforth a feeling for fashion and a certain perennial youthfulness inspire the whole of modern knitwear production.

* * *

The great difference that exists between the couturier and the ready-to-wear manufacturer, on the one hand, and the knitwear manufacturer on the other, must be made clear to prevent misunderstanding. The ready-to-wear manufacturer can afford to buy his materials anywhere in the world, to stock them long months ahead so as to have them available when the time comes to cut them. His colleague in the knitwear industry has to start from the very beginning. He only stocks raw or dyed yarns, has no fabrics made up in advance or at least no fancy fabrics and he must try to beat his competitors in the very short time given him by his clients. He has first of all to produce numerous types of knitted fabric, which change each season ; it is only then that he has caught up with the ready-to-wear manufacturer and can start to think of styles and lines, of cutting and assembling the garments that will make up his collection. He has to carry out a double feat of acrobatics : he must design and manufacture his fabrics, then create and produce the garments in the shortest possible time for fear of being late and finding his work refused by the buyers.

This is the essential difference between these two trades which seem at first sight to be so similar.

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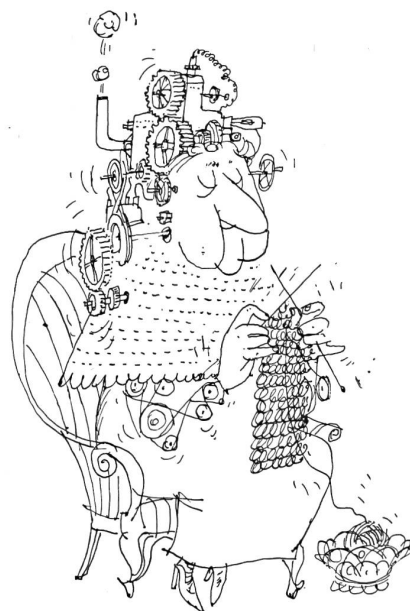
This does not mean of course that just because the knitted fabric is capable of being made into beautiful dresses, smart suits and hardwearing coats, it is also capable of entering into competition with the most sumptuous evening fabrics. The gala evening gown is meant to astonish, dazzle or enchant, but never to be comfortable. This is the borderline that the knitted fabric will never cross, for it is meant to be simple, practical and pleasant to wear even when, decorated with gold or silver yarns, it becomes the little dinner or cocktail dress that every woman is crazy to possess.

* * *

Knitwear is on its way to conquering the world. The day seems near when knitted fabrics, in their turn, will be sold in as large quantities as traditional woven fabrics. Each yard produced will give a new impetus to the knitwear industry. Switzerland has every chance of being among the leaders in this field.

B. Oy.

Compositions de Paul André Perret



Nous reproduisons, sur cette page et la suivante, des modèles récents de l'industrie suisse de la maille qui illustrent bien les tendances actuelles de cette branche telles qu'elles sont définies dans l'article qui précède.

On this and the following page, we are reproducing some recent creations of the Swiss knitwear and hosiery industry, which bear out very clearly what we were saying in the preceeding article about this industry's present trends.

Sobre esta página y la que sigue, reproducimos algunos de los más recientes modelos de la industria suiza de la malla, que ilustran perfectamente las tendencias actuales de este ramo, tales como han quedado definidas en el precedente artículo.

Wir bringen auf dieser und auf der folgenden Seite die neuesten Modelle der Schweizer Maschenindustrie, um die aktuellen Tendenzen dieses Industriezweiges, welche im vorhergehenden Aufsatz erläutert wurden, besser zu veranschaulichen.



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