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London Letter

The stores and fashion houses in London have had a bad spring and summer season ; in the provinces retailers have been a little more fortunate. During the third week of June summer sales were starting in London at the very period when normal trading in holiday wear should have been at its peak and when the re-orders by retailers of successful styles should have been delivered by the manufacturers. Such unfortunate and unsatisfactory trading naturally produces many post-mortems ; some of these are objective, some obvious, some contradict each other—but they all succeed in placing the

blame elsewhere ! Certainly the financial restrictions imposed by the British Government in September 1957 compelled retailers to cut their orders and the new higher rents authorised by the Rent Act meant that the public had less purchasing power. However, the season in London could still have been reasonably good if, first, the weather had been very much better and, second, the London omnibus strike could have been avoided ; the seven weeks of its duration were vital to London retailers.

But to my mind the blame for a bad season does not all lie elsewhere, the fashion trade itself is responsible for some of the damage and the confusion which has been caused in the public's mind. At one time fashion spoke with one voice (or almost) and its line was clearly established twice a year with a natural progression if one assessed carefully the trends from various quarters. The average woman, wherever she was, could assimilate the developments and enjoy her adventures in fashion. Now the fashions emanating from Paris, Rome, New York and yes, even London—collide and even somewhat conflict each other—some of them with perhaps mis-seasonal additions. Can anyone be surprised if the average woman is confused, hesitates and then goes back home to shorten or lengthen last year's model ? It naturally takes a manufacturer some few months to base his models on a Paris (or Rome) theme, sell and make his deliveries to retailers, but to-day, by the time he does effect his deliveries, his styles are already out of date.

The trapeze line in coats is still part of many British medium priced collections—but so is the much newer high-line rushed in at the last moment ; in dresses the chemise line is also included as well as the harem, bell, and the newly re-entered Empire or high-waist line. To add to the confusion a number of our British newspapers made such a sensation of the longer hem-line reintroduced by the House of Dior that some of the headlines seemed to have reached a near-hysteria. It was, of course, obvious that young Yves St. Laurent



L. ABRAHAM & Co. SILKS Ltd., ZURICH
Gold brocaded Basra.
Model Roter Models Ltd., London.
Photo John French.

HONEGGER FRERES, WALD
London Agent : Frank Loynes.
Wild silk.
Evening dress by B. & R. Sutin, London.



would be the focal point of interest ; but it is equally obvious that no one at the House of Dior could possibly have envisaged the sensational reports that appeared in the popular and even better British press. As all this happened before photographs could be published it would not be surprising if a large number of women here formed a completely wrong and grossly exaggerated mental picture of the new length. They could hardly have thought the hemline to be less than ten inches longer instead of about two for normal day wear !

To look to Paris for a lead in fashion has almost become part of the natural order of life... spiced sometimes with the verve of Italy and dash of the United States.

Paris is not likely to lose its creativeness and delicate sense of the "trade pulse" but I sometimes feel that a lot is demanded by the selective, by the mass producers in the different countries and by an ever increasing number of journals published for the feminine market and requiring a constant feeding of fashion news.

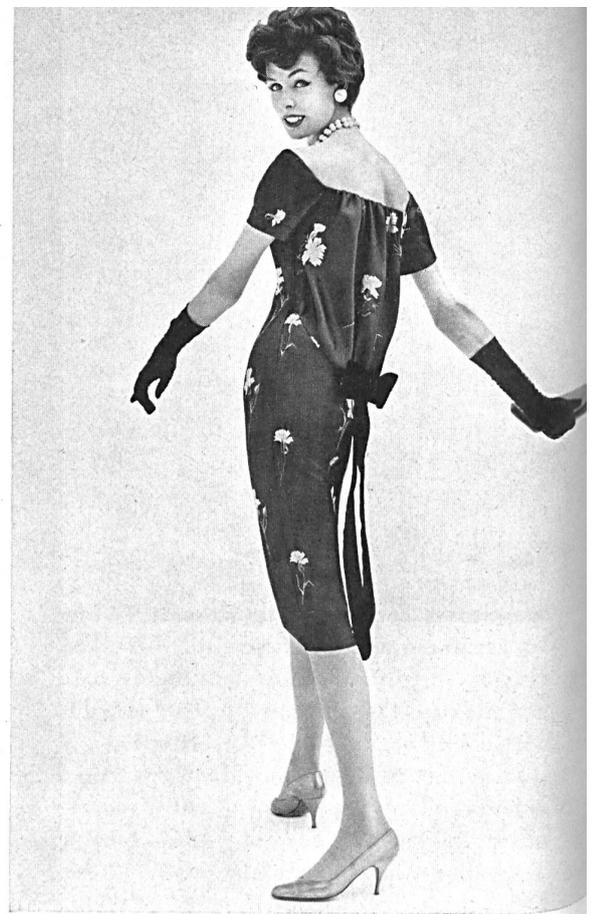
Change for the sake of change would be ruinous to the fashion trade, a change of line which is unkind to the majority of women cannot succeed—still less can it maintain confidence. Fashion must "do" something for a woman ; it must build up her ego and her self-confidence, it must flatter her figure and give her a sense of fashion success ; it is her means of self-expression,

of adventure and pleasure. The recent lines from Paris have certainly been stimulating and attractive on the right figures—but to the average woman going about her mundane way of life, the line has been frankly unkind—particularly when interpreted in mass production, often with indifferent materials.

In the main, Paris houses have progressed logically in a year from the sac to the chemise line and now to the high-waist line. In coats and suits this is achieved with belts, drawstrings, cutting, seams, large collars, etc.; the styles are straightforward, thus giving emphasis to the fabrics. There is no doubt that we shall shortly see quite a number of adaptations worn in London and made by some of the quicker and more flexible ready-made houses. The same simplicity of line runs through the Paris dresses as in the coats and suits and the same quick translation is again being made by some London manufacturers. Competition is running high for a hold and a lead on the mass market!

With the wholesale couture houses catering for the more limited but better end of the ready-to-wear trade where much more thought and care is given to design and material, the appearance is of greater calm and sophistication which quite belies the inner heartaches and headaches of production!

It is, of course, in the more selective market that most Swiss textiles and ready-mades find their sales. Such couture wholesale houses as Frederick Starke, Susan



FORSTER WILLI & Co, SAINT-GALL
Embroidered pure silk organdie.
Model Roter Models Ltd., London.
Photo John French.



SOIERIES STEHLI S.A., ZURICH
Pure silk morocaine.
Model Roter Models Ltd., London.
Photo Michel Molinare.

Small and Frank Usher frequently use Swiss fabrics, while others such as Roter Models normally include a number of models made in Swiss materials.

Of the wholesale firms importing Swiss ready-made clothes, there is no doubt that Buser & Co. Ltd. have established a position of pre-eminence trading exclusively in ladies' knitted outerwear and underwear — from the practical to the glamorous. In men's wear, Beltex shirts have been making a quiet but very steady expansion in a community appreciating a well-tailored shirt (largely sports shirts) in original and quality materials and with a degree of exclusivity.

Swiss organdies and guipures, etc., of course find a regular market among the major manufacturers of blouses—such as London Pride, Werner & Edgar, Janet Colton, etc.; while in knitwear made up in England, Fred Good Ltd.—using the trade mark “Frego”, are carving a very nice niche for themselves with jumpers and sweaters made in Swiss wool lace.

Ruth Fonteyn