

London letter

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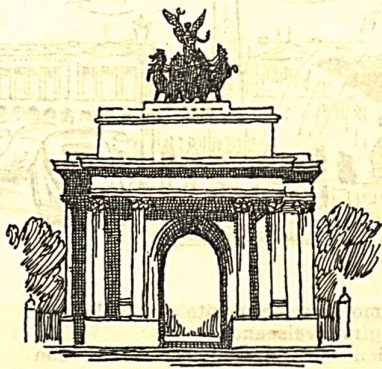
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LONDON LETTER

We have just seen the Spring showing of the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers — collections of eminently wearable clothes, distinguished by a number of new and imaginative details, but following very much the same lines as in previous collections. Apart from the Big Ten of the Incorporated Society, two Haute Couture houses presented excellent collections — Ronald Paterson, a Scotsman who has been established in London for about three years, and John Cavanagh, a completely new designer, who has worked here with Molyneux and in Paris. For his opening, he received telegrams of good will from Christian Dior and other leaders of the fashion world; and his collection was very well received.

Fabrics are going to be charming this summer. It is a great year for silks, especially for shantung and gros-grains; and almost every show has featured the stiff silk coat. This is usually of gros-grain, sometimes of faille or ribbed ottoman (here we predict a great future for the silks of Zurich). Coats are either waisted and full skirted, or else half-tents hanging easily from the shoulder or from a high yoke. The majority are in sombre colours with bright linings, but the most sensational of all were in dazzling white. Cavanagh's big success was a white coat of shower-proof gros-grain, and Hardy Amies showed an equally lovely one of taffeta shantung, widening in his pyramid line from narrow-collared neckline to big hem, and fastened all down the front with shining black buttons. Worth has some straight long coats in pale shantungs, as well as one wonderful topcoat with cape collar and melon sleeves in a new fabric — a sort of silk tweed, dark grey in colour, nobby with white. There are some transparent coats still, for evening and late afternoons — Stiebel shows one in bright cornflower blue — and some short coats and boleros for evening. Cavanagh tops a slim, dove-coloured evening dress with a tiny pumpkin bolero of pink satin, turned under at the hem, while Ronald Paterson makes a feature of what he calls a « supper coat » — stiff black faille, short and boxy in front, dipping to below the hips at the back. This is a coat to wear, with or without a hat, to the theatre and to supper at a restaurant afterwards.

Another fabric which is much to the fore this spring is shantung. We have been seeing a good deal of it for several years, but now it has become softer and more silky, although some of the heavier slub shantung is still used for summer coats and suits. A fabric that we are pleased to see again is the natural raw tussore silk which we wore so much in the summers of our youth. Victor Stiebel showed a great many summer frocks with knife-pleated skirts, all of shantung in greys, beiges or brighter colours — green, tan or copper; and he uses a good deal of gay spotted shantung in accessories for monotone suits — caps, scarves and gloves, all matching, and sometimes an umbrella too.

In colours, black and white lead the field, with beige, dark grey and brown not very far behind. We expected to see sand colours, caramels and pale apricots; what surprised us was the stubborn persistence of grey in all the darker shades — steel, iron and charcoal. There is a good deal of clear yellow, from daffodil to sulphur (at Mattli's, one navy blue coat has a brilliant sulphur yellow lining); and

there is a whole gamut of greens, in every shade from palest almond and watery sea-green to dark leaf green and blue-toned turquoise. One noticed, too, a few reds and vivid flamingo pinks, and at Mattli's, much of the perennial navy blue and white which appears less than usual in the other collections. But Victor Stiebel shows a navy outfit in a beautiful new material — a fine wool crêpe de Chine, exclusive to this house.

Most of the woollen fabrics are fine woven this season — worsteds, Scotch wools, baratheas, silk tweeds; some Bedford cord, and a certain amount of alpaca and, occasionally, gabardine. Fleecier wools are used for topcoats, of course, and some of these are in pastel colours which are not much seen in silks. Suits are mainly softer at the shoulder and very feminine. Michael Sherard shows a pumpkin silhouette — pockets curved and rounded over tubular skirts; Lachasse promotes the capuchon line for sleeves and shoulders cut to give a wider, rounder effect. Perhaps half — or a little more than half — of the skirts are narrow, with slight fullness at the back; the others, full and pleated.

All full skirts, on suits, frocks or evening dresses, swing and rustle over canvas linings or petticoats of buckram or taffeta. Indeed, so much stiff taffeta is used in this way that, at the slightest movement, the sound instead of being the liquid silken ripple which is so romantic becomes positively noisy.

This year, as last, one or two tailored lace suits, perfect for race meetings or for luncheon parties in London, have had great success. And there are some of the surahs and other printed silks without which no summer wardrobe would be complete. Worth teams enchanting lingerie blouses of voile, organdie and broderie with printed suits; some designers accent their suits with white piqué; Lachasse likes silk cravats better than shirts. At one house, we saw a lace blouse with a worsted suit; and Hardy Amies has an excellent convertible outfit in which one could go on from lunch to dinner — a stiff faille coat over a short lace dress with a detachable, long-sleeved bolero bodice. In the evening, this bodice peels off, to reveal a halter-necked décolleté, the very thing for restaurant dining and dancing.

Sheer organza is much in the news too. It is used for filmy afternoon dresses as well as for youthful evening frocks. Sherard shows a brilliant dance dress called « Butterflies in the Rain ». The fabric is Swiss silk organdie made from undyed raw silk, and it is embroidered with sparkling raindrops and pearly sequined butterflies. Another of his dresses is in beautifully draped nylon chiffon, and he uses a new satin chiffon for a pleated dress and jacket.

There are lots of the short evening dresses which fit in so well with the life we lead to-day. But ball dresses are as long and bouffant and grand as ever. Digby Morton and Peter Russell both show beautiful examples in tulle; Hartnell makes great play with the pailletted tulle crinolines for which he is famous, and Stiebel ended his show with a succession of most exquisite young girl crinolines in cream or rose pink silk tulle with sprays of lilac, hyacinths or lilies of the valley on the drifting skirts.

Ann Duveen.