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London

LONDON LETTER

The influence of fabrics on fashion becomes more marked each year. Even though conditions have not reverted to the abundance and freedom of pre-war days, one feels that designers, released from the worst of the frustrations and shortages they experienced immediately after the war, are inspired by the greater variety and richer quality



MATTLI

A black taffeta dress covered in ecru lace.

of the materials now available, for manufacturers both here and abroad seem to be surpassing themselves in their efforts to produce more and lovelier textiles every season.

The rich heavy satins of grandmother's day have returned to fashion, and the clothes which are made from them (mainly evening dresses for gala occasions) often have a very Edwardian air. Lace is another great favourite this season, both for evening and for fin-de-journée dresses, and is used in every texture from the filmiest to coarse cotton lace and guipure. Our drawing shows Mattli's spectacular dress of black taffeta, the skirt many-tiered like a pagoda and covered with ecru lace.

A very different dance dress by Hardy Amies was just as lovely, with black lace cascading over brown net. Black lace is also very popular for cocktail dresses. While last season the fashion was for décolleté frocks with detachable boleros of the same fabric, one now sees tops of transparent lace worn over low necked dresses. «Spectator» adopted this style with tulle over taffeta, or black lace over jersey.

Velvet is undoubtedly the fabric of the season, being used for coats, suits, dresses, hats, bags and trimmings. Many jackets have velvet collars. Dorville designed a scarlet tweed topcoat, taffeta-lined with a velvet collar and a melon-shaped muff in velvet to match.

The other material that is talked about all the time is, of course, wool. As prices are going up and up, and it is expected to disappear from the shops, people (men as well as women) are rushing to buy before it is too late. Even utility clothes are rising considerably in price. Ironically enough, just when this textile is so difficult to buy, fashion designers have been using it more than ever.

Greatcoats are being made in every sort of weave: long, hairy wools for country coats or thick nautical pilot cloth, soft tweeds or smooth velours for town coats. Many of the latter have fur collars, some have collars showing the other side of reversible material, and others are worn with enormous shawl-like wool scarves slung across the shoulder. «Spectator» shows some of these scarf-collared coats. Clinging wool jersey is being used for the warm, beautifully draped dinner dresses which are such a joy in the draughty rooms of English country houses. Dorville have one dress of tinsel-jersey, which looks like fine-meshed chain mail. They also show woollen afternoon dresses with underskirts of pleated net, and they have a fine collection of woollen sweaters from Switzerland, some with Dolman sleeves and diagonal stripes, others in checked patterns.

One sees a great many dance dresses of both chiffon and net, and for young girls there are always frocks of Swiss muslin or fine white tulle, for the beautiful textiles of Saint-Gall are never out of fashion. Brocade also remains in high favour: at the christening of our new Princess Anne, both the Queen and Princess Elizabeth were dressed in brocade, while Queen Mary wore a lace dress with frilled jabot.

As it is still forbidden to have any big structural alterations done in private houses here, many people have been having their homes smartened up with new paint on the front door and fresh covers for the furniture. Among the furnishing fabrics now in the stores, we have seen nothing nicer than the fine glacé chintz imported from Switzerland which is in plain colours such as French grey and lilac. Switzerland has also sent us some pretty flowered cretonnes in gay autumn tints, and delicious frilly lampshades of pink eyelet embroidery with scalloped edges.

Ann Duveen.