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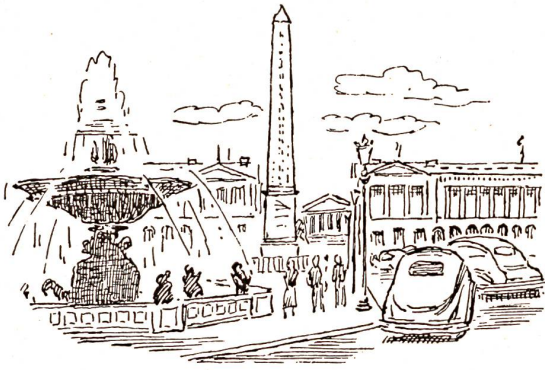
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PARIS

Concerning the presentations

No, I am not going to speak to you of this spring's presentations. All that was different, disconcerting and charming about them has already been admirably commented on in the previous number of "Textiles Suisses". And the accompanying photographs, like those adorning the present number, are more beautiful than description, more eloquent than words. This is because spring fashions are always the apotheosis of vaporous, airy or flowered textiles.

My aim is more simple and yet more ambitious; it is to show the reason behind the permanence of these presentations. How many people are aware that the first one took place almost a hundred years ago? It was in 1856, it is believed, that they were invented by the forefather of the dynasty of the Worths. Love drove him to it. As a matter of fact, he had just married his mannequin or "demoiselle de magasin" as they were called in those days. His wife acted as a model for him and he used her to show the latest creations of his talent. How much we owe to this Charles Frederick Worth! He invented the whole of modern Couture, from the moving into the out-of-the-way district of the Rue de la Paix, to the collaborating with the manufacturers of silks, cottons and wools, not to mention the makers of real and machine-made lace.

He was an apostle as well as a shrewd businessman. His successors after him had but to continue what he had started, but none of them ever equalled the turnover of the mustachioed designer who, about 1868 or 1870, was making as much as 50 million francs a year on his sales, that is to say more than 10,000 million of the present French francs. His château at Mont Valérien is no longer standing; the famous dining room, where all the furniture and all the ornaments bore designs of snails on them, has vanished under the pick-axes of the housebreakers; in its place there is now a huge lunatic asylum. But he has left more than a name, more than a memory — he has left a path gloriously traced.

And for almost a hundred years now, whether the Germans were at the gates of Paris as in 1914, whether they actually entered the city as in 1940, the salons of the fashion houses have continued, day after day, in spite of the political or military upheavals, in spite of the cold, the dog days, strikes, lighting cuts or heating restrictions, to show collections that are striving to be ever more beautiful, ever more original.

And at every change of the season, the textile manufacturers are there. They go to see how their "offspring" have fared since they were submitted to the designers. This ritual visit, two months before the actual presentation, is always exactly the same. On arrival, the carefully arranged fabrics, laces and embroideries are taken out of their trunks. They are placed one by one on the table at which the designer, with a deliberately impassive look on his face, is seated. Without a word he sweeps aside and rejects all that does not meet with his approval. From time to time the anxious parent is unhappy because

one of his favourite offspring failed to please. More often than not he keeps the same impassive face as his adversary while his assistants gather up the rejected patterns.

But, on the day of the collection, all is changed. The proud parent has come to see his offspring make their debut in the world, and often his pride is mixed with a kind of astonishment on discovering new virtues in them that he did not even dream they possessed.

The textile manufacturer has heard, month after month, the grievances of the designers, who lament over present times, complain of the decreased purchasing power of their clientele, groan under the weight of taxes and duties, inveigh against import difficulties and problematic exports, threaten vengeance on the copyists, and declare themselves on the verge of ruin or suicide.

There is a certain amount of truth in all this, but the textile manufacturer knows very well that couture renews itself (like Antaeus, the son of Neptune) each time it comes into contact once again with its soil, the soil of Paris. He therefore becomes philosophical, his efforts as a noble artisan have not been and never will be in vain. The sacrifices he has agreed to in order to gratify that great coquette, Couture, will not go unrewarded. He listens to the complaints, plays the part of the "Comédiant" and that of the "Tragédiant", and goes on with his work.

And the life of Paris goes on. Every day, the salons of the couturiers are crowded for the presentations. Like the theatre, Couture puts on a show every afternoon. The actresses only play silent roles, but they speak with their bodies, their legs and their feet. Sometimes the show crosses the footlights, and we have those Paris nights where it is the audience that provides the show. A dress rehearsal at the Comédie Française, or of a new play by Jean Anouilh or Marcel Achard, a new series of ballets by Roland Petit or the Marquis de Cuevas, a new Opera, and we see the dresses of the presentations dispersed and come together again, worn by the women of Paris.

Very often, the show is on the stage as well as in the stalls, as was the case a few days ago at the new Doelnitz revue "Triple Galop".

Already Paris is preparing for its season. The dresses will be seen then in places as varied as the racecourses, the Bagatelle polo ground, the restaurants of the Bois de Boulogne, or at Monfort l'Amaury, at Carrère's.

But fundamentally they will always be fashion shows, with the same public of fashionable women, rich bourgeois and fashion reporters to the fore. Only instead of dancing in the beams of the spotlights, the organdies will be fluttering in the sunshine against a background of green.

And each afternoon at the same time, the mannequins, impassive and smiling, will continue to display on their tall supple bodies, the most beautiful fabrics in the world, those chosen and shown by Paris.

X.X.X.