

Our Paris and London correspondents give their impressions of the fashion week-end at the Burgenstock

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FASHION WEEK-END at the Burgenstock:

There is nothing strange in the fact that I appreciate beauty and good quality. That is why I buy Swiss watches. Under the armour of the case lies, so I have been told, a complicated mechanism of springs, gear wheels and other ingenious devices, all ticking away with methodical precision. At least that is what I am led to believe; for my part, I could not say, never having seen inside, these watches possessing all the modesty of people in perfect health who never need to take off their clothes to reveal their ills and with whom I am always on terms of mutual respect.

On the whole, the same applies to all Swiss mechanisms. There is no point in trying to take them to pieces. It is far better and much simpler to accept them as they are, without trying to understand the whys and wherefores of their perfection. Don't tell me, for example, that the trams in Zurich are always so impeccable because the cleaning squads know their job so well or the passengers have an instinct for cleanliness. Maybe it is so, but I prefer to think that the trams themselves have a propensity for remaining spotlessly clean, that it is sufficient for them to give a shudder from time to time to shake off all the dirt, like a dog shaking itself dry on coming out of the water. Everything is miraculous in Switzerland: the flowers that grow everywhere so artistically and with such taste, the scenery looking as if it had been composed by some old master, the inns spotless and shining like a bright new penny, the attractive houses, the delicious fruits of the soil, the excellent industrial products.

And yet, I have looked into one Swiss mechanism; I have seen for myself the wheels within wheels and tried to understand. Now my admiration is based on reason. This reminds me of an old racing driver I used to know. Whenever he lifted up the bonnet of a car and peered inside at the engine, as clean as a new pin and full of mystery, he would say, «When all is said and done, progress is beauty dressed up».

I was reminded of what he had said, during the fashion week-end at the Burgenstock. Seen from the outside, there was beauty dressed up. Seen from within, it was a triumph of planning and organisation. All those who, like myself, had the privilege of attending this series of events were literally lost for words — and I mean «literally».

The spectators had come from the four corners of Europe — by plane, train and car. Each of them had been given a special time-

table. Wherever they arrived, they were met, everything was taken care of and arranged for them. Buses, cars and boats whisked them towards their destination, the top of the Burgenstock. There, in a flash, they were shown to their rooms, where they found their luggage waiting, flowers on the table, a neat pile of interesting and relevant literature, and the necessary invitations. Downstairs, welcoming the guests, was Madame Braeker, the organiser, smiling and unruffled as she answered a barrage of questions. To anyone who knows the difficulties involved in such organisation, the preparations to be made, the attention to detail, the last minute changes and the perfect timing, this was a convincing demonstration of the famous Swiss organisation. But now let us speak about the dresses. There was much to see and the guests were greatly impressed. The first evening a fashion parade was held and the lovely mannequins strutted up and down the runway showing a great variety of clothes from coats to evening dresses. They were all ready-to-wear models, but one would never have believed it if one had not been told, they were all so beautifully cut and fitted. The fabrics were of fine quality and the colours in good taste. I heard around me the journalists' murmurs of admiration. The styles were quiet, free from all exaggeration but keeping the little touch of originality that gave them their charm. Some of the models have already appeared in this periodical, but it is a general impression I want to give.

After the parade, the night seemed all too short, the guests only getting back to their rooms at dawn, and they had to be in the magical setting of the swimming pool by eleven o'clock. To begin with the sky was overcast, but at the appointed hour the sun appeared — Swiss organisation again, I presume! — and lit up the blue waters of the pool. This swimming pool on the very top of the mountain is something quite out of this world. The mannequins of the evening before paraded around it in light, brightly coloured models which stood out in vivid splashes of colour, in the manner of the impressionists. One would have thought oneself watching cinémascope, or in California, Florida or on the Riviera. It was both delightful and charming.

An hour later, the rain began to fall. However the guests left on their excursions to meet again in the evening for dinner. And then it was all over. The next morning they all left the Burgenstock, reluctantly but taking with them the memory of a lovely week-end.

The Swiss clothing industry has every reason to be proud of its initiative. It has firmly established itself on the European market where competition is growing keener and keener every day. Ready-to-wear clothing is worn today by women in all classes of society, who are becoming more and more exacting in their demands. Between the haute couture and ready-to-wear collections there is no longer the wide gap there used to be, and the number of women who are well dressed is increasing all the time. A charming week-end like this one above the Lake of the Four Cantons has set an example... and we hope it is but the first of a long series of similar events.

J. G.-L., Paris.



If any of you who may glance through this Letter are men you will no doubt appreciate the distinctive experience that came to me early on the morning of June 4th — that of setting off on a journey in the company of thirteen charming, attractive and capable fashion editresses and being seen « off » by my wife and earnestly being admonished to « have a good time ». Such episodes linger in the memory like good wine !

As soon as we left the London Air Terminal the sun gradually rose and as we boarded the aircraft it shone brilliantly — almost as a good omen for a very special « Week-End ». Over France it became cloudy and settled into a superb all-concealing shroud as we approached Switzerland — and as we descended so also did the rain. Such a situation is, of course, excellent for the British morale as far as meteorological matters are concerned. As the remainder of the entire proceedings were so highly organised, I felt, on further reflection that this dull and wet reception was perhaps part of a master plan to make us British feel quite at home. As I had brought my sunglasses I was naturally touched by such consideration... and lest any of you suspect me of trying to be a shade facetious please try to read on.

It has frequently fallen to my lot to arrange fashion shows in well-known hotels, in famous London houses and in manufacturers' own showrooms, so that the background work undertaken for the « Week-End Suisse de l'Elegance » did not pass unnoticed. The very first impression, namely the presentation of the invitation itself, created the right mood, the forwarding of the tickets and distinctive luggage labels to facilitate passage through the Swiss Customs showed the attention to little details which can be so easily overlooked. The appointing of Chefs de Groupes to look after each different national contingent gave the major operation intimacy and an almost personal relationship. In short, the gathering of the journalists, the care of their personal comforts from the moment of setting out to that of their departure was excellent and never fussy.

To attend the first fashion parade at the magic hour of midnight each guest walked under a human chain holding up umbrellas. The presentation was truly admirable, well timed and fortunately sufficiently flexible to allow an easy and unstrained parade. The two most striking features — apart from the creations — were firstly the absence of a commentator and secondly the absence of manufacturers' names on the programmes. I have on previous occasions found my mental stability uncomfortably strained by commentators who insist on saying the obvious and who feel it to be their mission — to the point of martyrdom — to maintain a ceaseless barrage of words, not only when models are being shown but even more so when a lapse occurs through the unavoidable delay of a mannequin in changing. « For this relief, much thanks ». On the second point, congratulations to a group or association who can present creations anonymously and thereby obtain an impartial judgment — where the abilities of the designer and manufacturer can be appreciated without the bias of a well-known brand name. A policy of this nature rises well above the common shoddiness of self-interest and its application reinspires one with the knowledge that people can act intelligently for a common benefit and ideal.

If at times the sequence of the parade did not seem quite right this was more than compensated for by the fact that each model was shown with excellent accessories — the shoes in particular. Quite rightly the day and evening wear shown at the Midnight Parade followed logically on what is now being worn and although I did not have the opportunity of handling any of the garments afterwards they certainly gave the impression of being very well made and finished. The materials were often extremely beautiful but I did sometimes feel that the lighting did not do justice to the fabrics or their colour — particularly in the daywear ranges. But the incident which I shall never be able to resolve, and which at first I regarded as a mere bagatelle which later rendered me weak with bewilderment but which I now regard



with the greatest respect and deepest awe, was the remark passed on the Saturday night at dinner by one of our hosts : « You will see, it will stop raining and the sun will come out tomorrow morning at 10.30 for the parade at the piscine ». Now I believe I am a perfectly ordinary human-being, moderately rational, not too intelligent and not too stupid and above all I am kind to animals but I still cannot understand why the rain did stop and why the sun came out brilliantly at 10.30 precisely — the appointed time !! Maybe, of course, that this mass illusion is as simple as producing rabbits out of a hat but I admit I still cannot get the hang of it ! However, the magnificent scenic background of wooded slopes and snow covered peaks, the crystal clear air to accentuate the true colours of the fabrics and the festive appearance of the parasols around the piscine — all combined to make this second fashion parade a thing of unforgettable beauty. The playsuits and beachwear were obviously shown in their own natural — but perfected — surroundings and how excellently their designers had captured a happy fun-loving mood.

The St. Gall garden party dresses were the obvious fitting close to the parade — so picturesque, so very Swiss. Should I have expressed my opinion of the styles shown in greater detail ? I, personally, think not ; that has already been done to far greater advantage and far more ably by my charming companions. If, however, I may summarise my impressions I would say if there was little high fashion shown in the parade there was a great deal of good taste. Women of high fashion pass and hold the eye for a moment but the women who appreciate the subtle beauty of each major phase of fashion know how to use it with good taste — and that is remembered because it is timeless.

A British writer and dramatist once acidly wrote « A woman who is not in fashion is either too poor to afford it, too stupid to understand it, or has « thrown in the sponge ».

S. F., London.