

The watch

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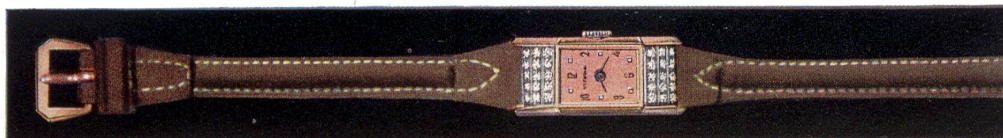
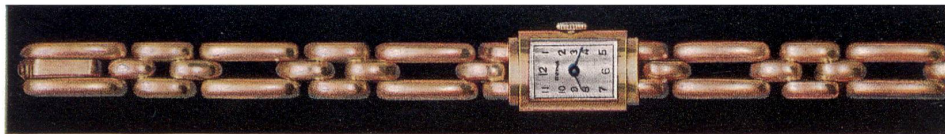
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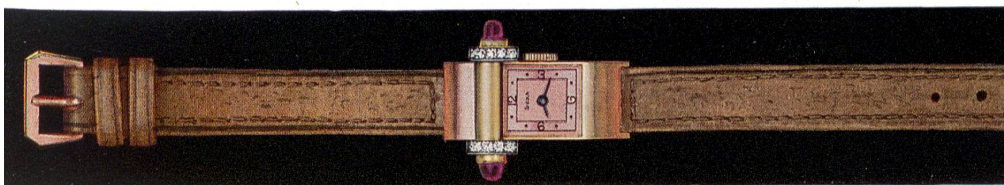
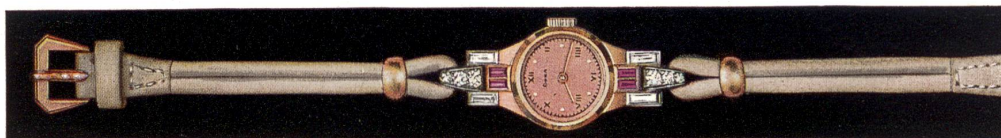
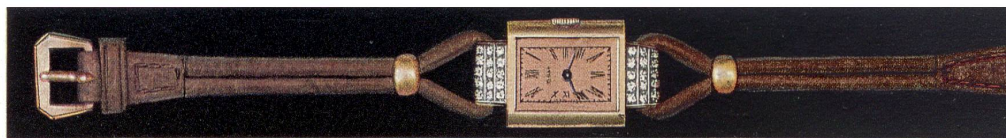


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A Tremendous Trifle:

The Watch

About a century ago, an important watch-manufacturer of Fleurier — a village in the Neuchâtel Jura — seeing his son's prodigal ways, feared that the youth would become a never-do-well if he remained in his native village. So he sent him off, with his pockets well lined, to distant climes. The young man finally landed in China where, suddenly reverting to type, he quickly persuaded the rich mandarins he knew, that watches should always be worn in pairs, in order — so he said — that one could be controlled by the other. Chinese dressmakers soon adapted themselves to this new custom by making two fobs instead of one in their clients' richly decorated belts. And the watchmakers of Neuchâtel also rapidly found means to exploit this custom to the benefit of their art and technique. They began creating the quaintest watch-cases ornamented with elephants gracefully beckoning to each other with waving trunks ; with Cupids aiming their arrows at ladies' hearts. A whole series of delightful two-act tableaux were thus born of the fertile imagination of the Jura artisans. In Fleurier factories swiftly prospered as a result of this new impetus, and the old gentleman could not but think with emotion of his prodigal son whom he had sent away for fear of his reputation, but who had nevertheless brought his native village wealth and fame. This is not a fairy story. It is merely one episode of the great epic of the Swiss watch industry. For the watch has had its heroes, just as art has had its martyrs, but this is not the place to trace their history. Suffice it to say that, besides the wild Swiss valleys and the banks of the Yellow River, the climate of Paris and London also proved conducive to the development of that „ little, cold-blooded animal which lives coiled up in a shell, feeding on time ” — as Sacha Guitry, the famous French playwright, wittily describes the watch. The evolution of the watch is continuous, and it is constantly being adapted to follow the caprice of fashion, while obeying the strict technical laws which rule its life. During the first century of its existence — when hours were really hours — the watch was considered more as an ornament than as an object of practical utility. It was a jewel worthy of the pomp of the extravagant wardrobes sported by gentlemen of the Court. On its round cheeks, gold and precious stones alternated with Genevan enamels.



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Then, after being a luxury, the watch became a family heirloom, a fit present for a bride. Did not Mr. Pickwick present Emily Wardle with a „ rich gold watch and chain ” on her wedding day ?

More sturdily built than Breguet's dainty jewels, the watch became man's faithful companion through good days and bad. Presented to worthy citizens on festive occasions, it became an object of consideration and respect. Men of those days valued material and spiritual things more highly than they do today, and they considered their watch as a precious and costly object, which however confirmed its worth each day : precision, regularity, the silent obedience of the hands and wheels to the flying minutes — all these qualities were worth their weight in gold. And these timepieces survived the destruction of time. Stamped with the seal of bye-gone days, they bore witness before each successive generation to the continuance of life.

But the late XIXth century brought a swifter rhythm of living, unquiet days and bitter memories. Longfellow's haunting refrain

For ever — never
 Never — for ever

renders the stately, unceasing flow of the hours.

The XXth century ! The vast field of undiscovered things, sand in which footsteps fade away as man marches on, sand in which old shapes vanish and die only to reappear, but changed and ever new.

The watch reflects the many aspects of our modern life : the sturdy sportsman's watch with its metallic or leather strap ; the fob-watch as thin as a sheet of steel ; the feminine wristlet watch, infinitely varied as to shape and size ; the ring-watch ; the clip-watch, and the watch buried under petals of strass or precious stones.

The rivalry between science and good taste has produced many beautiful things, and it is still true that

„ A thing of beauty is a joy for ever. ”

E. N.