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London letter

Last Christmas was the gayest we have seen since the war. London shone and glittered with neon signs and the great star-topped Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square. One famous shop in Regent Street had filled a window with a sedan chair supporting a canopy of blue and white Swiss organdy, from which hung drifts of snowy broderie anglaise. Inside the chair were wax models of rosy-face children wearing crisp party dresses of the same Swiss fabrics. And at the many childrens' parties which were held during the Christmas holidays, we noticed that organdie and broderie anglaise were favourites for the little girls' dresses, as well as some nylon.

A number of pretty things imported from Switzerland were much in demand for Christmas gifts: delicate muslin handkerchiefs in flowery colours and, for more costly gifts, Fairisle jerseys from Switzerland and — Swiss watches. These are now to be seen in many London shops. A novelty in England is the watch which not only tells the time, but also serves as a calendar, recording the date and the phases of the moon.

The most important innovation this winter has been the two-in-one model: the décolleté short evening frock with a close-fitting jacket to turn it into a cocktail suit; the narrow day dress which becomes full and flowing when you add a detachable overskirt; the plain top-coat which is transformed by a fur cape and muff. In spite of the new short-skirted fashion, many party dresses are still long; floating tulle and lace are beloved as ever; and there is a definitive renaissance, both for evening and for tailored afternoon frocks, of the chiffon which was the favourite of the 1920's.

One wholesale designer who makes good use of Swiss fabrics is Julian Rose. Our sketch shows one of his prettiest evening dresses, in white eyelet embroidery; he plans to repeat it in pink, pale blue and navy blue. The other illustration is a gray flannel tailored day-dress with a high detachable collar of snow-white piqué and black bow tie.

Swiss shoes, which are tremendously popular here, have been plentiful lately.

Since the war, Englishwomen have become increasingly conscious of the value of two or more sets of good accessories to dress up a basic outfit; and now most of the London High Fashion houses are adopting the French idea of having a « boutique » for accessories and less expensive clothes, attached to the original salon. Here they sell costume jewellery, big silk handkerchiefs to tuck into your belt, scarves in lovely colours, and glowing artificial flowers. One couturier who has a new « boutique » is Mattli. He is a Swiss from Locarno, with a very pretty wife who shows his clothes for him, and he has, in a short time, built up a great reputation in London.

The London Couture Collections echo the general trend for an easier, more natural silhouette — the waistline neat but not pinched, shoulders not sloping so sharply, hips smoothed down. Skirts are shorter (15 inches from the ground), but short evening dresses are still in the minority; when they are en grande tenue, Englishwomen definitely prefer long skirts. Colours are muted.

No summer collection would be complete without the delicate fabrics of St. Gall, and at nearly every house we have seen drifting organzas, crisp organdies and guipures, as well as tulle and chiffons. Hartnell blends white and cherry tulle in a romantic dress called « Rambling Rosie », and he uses tulle in cyclamen and orchid shades for a magnificent crinolined ball-dress, which the Empress Eugenie might have worn. Mattli shows a charming dress for a young girl in fresh white organdie with black spots. This has a deep collar and huge cuffs of filmy organza, recalling the fashion of the 1830's. Another of Mattli's evening dresses is made of black guipure with a deep, full décolletage and a grosgrain skirt edged with guipure.

Ann Duveen.



White eyelet dress trimmed with white roses of same material, by Julian Rose.



A smart flannel dress by Marcus. The neat white piqué collar with black bow tie is detachable.