

London letter

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London Letter

Some three hundred and fifty years ago a well-known English poet and dramatist made one of his characters say « Frailty, thy name is woman ». It is true, however, that being a woman, the full significance of these words may be lost on me.

Could it be that men, our lords and masters, once felt so protective towards us poor helpless women — or can it be that these words are an admission of weakness by our menfolk who now leave us frail women to cope as best we can with one of their own sex who suddenly drops an H-bomb (or H-line). His name is Christian Dior. Sometime ago he brought back to us women our femininity, and if you will, something symbolic of our frailty, and how we loved it ! Now without warning we are suddenly told by the Master that we are not as nature made us. It seems to have been all a ghastly mistake ! Hundreds, maybe millions, of women must have rushed to their mirrors in bewilderment and for some pitiful lonely private consolation during the past few weeks... could it be that other men, including the world's greatest poets,

sculptors and painters, have been wrong so far? Are to-day's Lollobrigidas' and Marilyn Monroes' « mere figments » of mens' imaginations and not of nature's own rich making?

To reassure myself I went round some of the London shops choosing none in particular, just simply to look around, watch and listen to any interesting opinions or comments. I had, however, decided to try and find the names of some Swiss manufacturers who might be newer to the English market. My very first « discovery » came in a most unexpected way — as a bouffant petticoat. Although made in the workrooms of a famous London store, the stiffened nylon net was imported from Switzerland. The wonderful feature about these bouffant petticoats is, of course, that they are so light and so easily washed. They should provide very easy sales for the Autumn and Winter — they look so utterly feminine even as they hang on rails ; when worn they slim the waist and hipline and bell out to a frothy fullness of net or tulle — so right with the shorter evening dress, cocktail gown or party skirt.

In Marshall & Snelgrove yet another surprise awaited me — in the underwear department and in the shape of really dainty woollen underwear but in vivid tones of red, green, acid yellow, lilac and even black — made by Hanro. At first glance these vests and panties are certainly startling and then on second glance one begins to think — well, why not? I suspect the Swiss woollen underwear manufacturers to have taken a deliberate step to make women aware and fully conscious of woollen underwear by giving it a far younger and more cheerful look. Earliest reactions however, are more likely to come from the more open counties and not so quickly from the larger cities and towns where women have cut their underwear ward-



Frank Usher Ltd., London

Evening dress in sari-design pure silk organza.

Fabric from :

Weisbrod-Zurrer Fils, Hausen s. A.

Photo Baron Studios

robe to the bare necessities, spending as they do a great deal of their time in centrally heated buildings or flats so that nylon underwear scored an immediate success.

In Dickins and Jones of Regent Street — a sister store to Harrods, I found a particularly attractive negligée, in nylon and lace trimmed, influenced in style by « Grand-mama ». Produced by Hufenus & Co. of St. Gall, it was unfitting with a straight effect from the rounded yoke provided by gathers which fell loosely to the hem.

Swiss handkerchiefs have, of course, been finding steady sales for some time in several stores throughout Great Britain but as far as the London stores are concerned — Dickins and Jones have made a feature of hankies embroidered with the owner's name, while Bourne & Hollingsworth have contented themselves (and obviously their customers) with just the owner's initials. For the Summer holiday season this last mentioned store laid emphasis on brightly coloured silk squares or kerchiefs — and as is the policy of this House — offered them at very moderate prices.

In the jersey dress department of Bourne & Hollingsworth I found Swiss classic jumper suit styles strongly represented by Sawaco and Swissnit, while in the knitted jumper section I saw a truly delightful long cardigan in a close-coarse-knit with a small sailor collar and raglan sleeves. This was produced by Tanner; plainer styles, but also with a strong emphasis on quality for money, came from Roboro. It was good to see that a major store such as Bourne & Hollingsworth should find it possible to offer their customers Swiss made garments at popular prices, it was even better to learn of the growing section of this public who immediately react to Swiss products and assume high quality and finish as natural and inherent national features.

From the crowded streets and stores in Oxford Street and Regent Street I went down to the gentler but no less active streets of Knightsbridge and their somewhat more sophisticated stores.

At Harrods, my first stop, there was a morning dress by Yala which has aroused considerable interest. This again was styled with a strong reminiscence of « Grandmother's days » and was in effect partially a negligée and partially a dressing gown. Made in flame coloured brushed nylon it had unpressed pleats falling from a rounded yoke and beautiful full sleeves finishing in tight cuffs at the wrists.

Reference to men's wear, seems to be carefully avoided in the various Letters, so out of interest — and partially out of devilment — I thought I'd try to browse through the departments and stores which are known to be « men's sanctuaries ». While still at Harrods, I was shown pants and vests in fine lisle and a companion pair in pure silk — both from Yala. On my way back, I stopped at Simpsons of Piccadilly — a store which has an international reputation for men's wear. Almost immediately I spotted socks made from Helanca yarn by Rime. These are indeed socks that every wife can appreciate! Across the road at Swan and Edgar's I found men's shirts by Beltex. With attached collars they were in cream coloured with fine white pin stripes and made from Orlon.

In conclusion three main points stand out in sharp relief:

that Swiss garments — chiefly knitwear and underwear — are established and regular lines in all major retailers;

medium price stores are now able to offer lines at suitable prices, their success seems assured partially because of the greater opportunities of travelling and noting quality products and partially because Swiss goods are associated with quality;



Kates C.L., London

Evening blouse in pure silk crystalised Swiss organza.
Fabric from: Reiser & Cie, Zurich.

Photo Ken Ross Mackenzie/Max Rayner



Kates C.L., London

Elegant blouse featuring Swiss washable diamante studded embroidery.

Embroidery from Alfred Metzger & Cie, Saint-Gall.

that men's wear is no longer being completely overlooked — maybe my husband will not have to go to Switzerland especially to buy his ties!

Ruth Fonteyn