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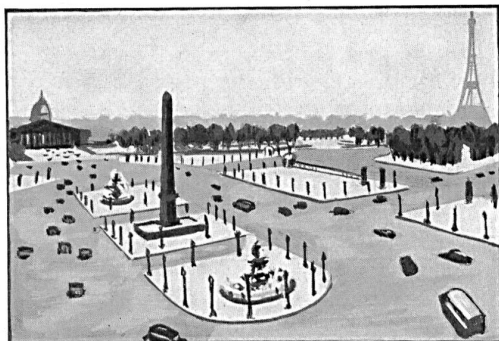
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CONTENTS

Paris: Fashion report, p. 33; The fall and winter collections 1955/56, p. 35. — London letter, p. 68. — Letter from Germany, p. 71. — Letter from Vienna, p. 75. — Here, there and everywhere, p. 77. — New York letter, p. 78. — Los Angeles letter, p. 81. — Publications of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade, p. 84. — Handkerchiefs, Squares, Scarves . . . , p. 85. — The clothing industries: Footwear, p. 96; Millinery, p. 97; Recollections of the «Week-end de l'élégance», p. 98; 27th Swiss Export Week, Zurich, p. 100. — St. Gall in festive mood, p. 164. — Notes and News, p. 179. — Manufacturers' own contributions, p. 182.

Index of advertisers, p. 183.



Paris report

FAIRYLAND

Pay no attention to those who moan and groan and grumble, renouncing this day and age. They will tell you that we have all become out and out materialists, that we no longer have any feeling for fiction, that we have lost the love of poetry that graced the lives of our fathers and — final and most monstrous calumny of all — that we no longer believe in fairies. Pay no attention to them; they are talking mere nonsense, like all false prophets.

The truth is quite different. Never has society felt such a need for complete escape, never has it tried so hard to rise above its lamentable lot, to get away from the hard facts of life. At one time, fairy tales, those delightful stories that transported us into a world where even animals had the gift of speech, were reserved for children, and when adults did read them, they only very rarely admitted taking any delight in them.

Whereas nowadays the cinemas are crowded with people who have flocked to see the latest coloured fantasies of Walt Disney. We are living in an age of unbounded discovery, of interplanetary travel, the wild imaginings of Jules Verne have become the facts of today and science fiction forms part of

every well-read man's bookshelves. Is this not what fairyland is made of? And even those books where the champions of law and order are beaten up, gagged and shot at on every page to emerge finally unscathed from all their adventures and end up on the last pages by unmasking and handing over to the law their adversaries, those arch-criminals, are they reality or fiction?

Thoughts such as these were passing through my mind recently during a fashion opening in Paris. There were a good three hundred people there, come either for professional reasons or out of curiosity. To keep out the fierce August sun, the shutters were closed and the big salon was but faintly lit by the feeble shafts of sunlight filtering through. Suddenly the projectors pierced the blue spirals of smoke from the innumerable cigarettes. A mannequin entered, and was immediately caught in the golden beams of light. She wore a coat of wild mink, soft, silky and dazzling. She took a few steps, turned and, with a careless gesture, undid her coat, flinging it open to reveal a lining of snowy white mink. A murmur of admiration arose.

We had stepped into a fairy-tale world. Everything took on an air of unreality: the atmosphere, the light, the hieratic aspect of the young model, her disdainful way of wearing a garment fit for a queen.

Gazing at this dreamlike creature, we realized that the couturiers are among the poets of our age, that they are the providers of the fiction that we all need, as Verlaine needed music.

You may not believe me perhaps, but I can assure you that even the journalists, whose enthusiasm one might expect to be dampened and even extinguished by a surfeit of fashion parades, by too close a familiarity with the hot-house world of luxury, were in the same state of excitement. One saw them suddenly put down their pencils to applaud. In their eyes they had that light that showed that they too were caught up in the spell.

And I believe in all sincerity that we ought to thank the couturiers who, by creating beauty and making dreams come true, enable even the most hardened cases among us to escape on the wings of illusion. Thanks to them, Cinderella has become an everyday reality. Suddenly the little starlet bursts out of her cocoon, wraps herself in fine fabrics and furs and passes from one day to the next into a world of fantasy. Don't tell me I am exaggerating, that the couturiers are first and foremost hardheaded businessmen like the rest, that they are merely selling their products. Or if you must, then apply the same criticism to theatrical producers, creators of ballets and all those whose lives are dedicated to keeping us supplied with illusions. When at the ballet the young man with the rose takes off and flies through the window in defiance of all laws of gravity, he too is only doing his job, selling his talent, but in addition he has that vital little thing, the power of invoking dreams.

*

Of necessity the works of a poet are unequal; he composes mediocre lines alongside immortal verse. The work of the couturier too is unequal. When he creates a less successful collection, he realises at the back of his mind that the result is not perfect, but still, like the poet, he lives in the world he has created. By definition, he loves what he has created. Like every artist, he is eager for praise, he believes the compliments he hears, he needs to believe them. No one around him is unkind enough to disillusion him. Even the most sceptical of journalists – those who would ruin the reputation of ten people for the sake of a clever pun or a witty remark – cannot help playing the game. You have to see it to believe it – this mad rush at the end of the showing, you have to hear the shower of extravagant compliments poured in his ear by the guests in a desperate attempt to outdo each other. Whether they are sincere or not, these compliments are the nectar and ambrosia on which the couturier thrives. He is perhaps not responsible for the forces he unleashes; he has selected a fabric and made use of the labour of hundreds of assistants, but it is nevertheless he who has given birth to the dream, and of that he is fully aware.

Some will shrug their shoulders. Stuff and nonsense, they will say. Trying to pin poetry onto a piece of satin – it is a sign of mental decadence. What a lot of fuss for a few dresses! Doubtless, but if one did away with all pretexts for escape, if one eliminated all that beautified our existence, how dull our lives would be!

*

Should I speak to you now about the dresses that we shall be admiring this winter on the fair sex? I feel that the photographs accompanying these notes are far more eloquent than any words could be. As always, the top few have scattered at random the seeds of new ideas, some of which will flower and blossom this winter. The fashion press will be speaking of fluid lines, of suppleness, of femininity, all in a technical jargon with no other purpose than to create an illusion. But it will not be able to tell you of the dream, that is not its job.

And yet believe me, the world of fairies has not disappeared; we can always escape into our fairyland; all we need are a few fashion designers to open up the doors for us.

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