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The manufacturers' point of view

“ Spontaneousness is the fruit of conquest... ”

These words of Paul Valéry sprang to one's mind, as one admired the Special Collection of summer fabrics presented under the patronage of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade. How gracefully natural appeared the art here displayed ! It seemed as though seashells and seaweed had of themselves left their imprint on these fabrics, as though the mermaids frolicking here had, like Aphrodite, emerged painlessly from the waves.

It is true enough that “ spontaneousness is the fruit of conquest ”, but conquest implies a victory. Here then is one more victory of mind over matter, of faith over doubt, of the spirit of enterprise and the *creative idea* over inertia and the unyielding rigidity of materials and machines.

The dilemma to be overcome is immediately apparent. On the one hand lies the domain of pure art, on the other, that of technics. Art must contribute the idea, the creative impulse ; technics, the transposition of the idea into form, the material realization. Therein lies the conquest : in the uniting of these two extremes. To entrust a bold, original conception, artistic designs conceived by men unhampered by the limitations of tradition and the restrictions imposed by technical details — to entrust such designs to manufacturers that they might reproduce them on textiles as vividly as on paper, this was indeed an innovation smacking strongly of pioneer work.

And, willy-nilly, manufacturers became explorers of unknown territory. Nowadays, of course, one adapts oneself to any kind of work, but exploration involves certain risks and one must often pay the price. The present experiment cost many nights of work, considerable expenditure and laborious trials ; it raised innumerable problems, to all appearance insoluble. It meant that all concerned had to forget their acquired habits of thought, to renew themselves, to enlarge their field of action and vision. But the result obtained was this perfection so absolute, that it is all seeming simplicity and natural grace.

Let us study the matter more closely. An experiment always holds a lesson worth retaining. Let us glance through our “ explorers' ” log-book ; we shall find there many interesting and valuable details.

Generalities

“ It is evident that if, when choosing their colours and forms, the artists had realized all the technical possibilities and impossibilities and, consequently, had carefully weighed each stroke of pen or brush, their inspiration would have been wrecked on the reefs of all these obstacles, and nothing outstanding would have been achieved. ” Such was the general impression of manufacturers (weavers, textile printers and embroiderers) when shown the drafts of designs presented by the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade for the Special Collection. But, on comparing these designs conceived by artists who knew nothing of the trade with those usually proposed by professional textile designers, and on measuring the difficulties involved, several manufacturers added :

“ ...but, because the ideas were new and difficult to realize, they tempted us ! They acted as a stimulant, offering us the opportunity of surpassing ourselves, of taking count of our own creative powers. ”

It is, of course, necessary that the artist and the technician should understand each other, before the great effort of realization is made, not because the one or the other must abdicate his views, but because it is often easy for designers to spare manufacturers certain difficulties — sometimes almost insoluble and involving useless loss of time and money — by merely modifying a few details of their drafts without thereby diminishing the artistic value of their work.

Weavers and Printers

A group of sea gods frolicking in the waves, dark figures whirling wildly in clear waters... such was the design presented by one artist for reproduction on a fabric (Tritons' Frolic, pages 38 and 39).

The first problem technicians and manufacturers had to face was whether the design in itself was suitable for a dress fabric. Then the details of the pattern had to be examined. Once this matter was settled, the question was : Should the pattern be reproduced as an isolated motif, or should it be repeated in an all-over design, entirely covering the fabric ? Both solutions were acceptable, but the first possibility was chosen in preference to the second, because it seemed to correspond more nearly to the artist's original idea... Then the type of fabric had to be decided upon. The choice fell on a heavy crêpe de chine. Pure silk alone can capture and reflect light with almost all its primitive brilliancy, and this quality was indispensable for the design in question, as the 14 different colours painted by the artist had, at all costs, to be reproduced faultlessly and with all their pristine clarity.

While the fabric was being specially treated, the printer prepared the 14 stencils required for the frame-printing. The first difficulty to be met in this case resided in the actual making of the stencils owing to the extremely small lines separating the juxtaposed surfaces of colour. Another and more serious problem was presented by the printing itself ; it seemed at first technically impossible to print light, mordant colours on a dark background. By using covering colours, however, the printers were finally able to overcome this difficulty and to reproduce exactly the colours of the original design.

Embroiderers

We also find that embroidery manufacturers had to solve many difficulties arising from the opposition between technical realization and the *purely artistic conception*. St-Gall laces and embroideries have for many decades been composed according to drafts made by professional designers who have themselves been born, as it were, into the industry and grown up with it.

One of the first tasks laid before St-Gall designers was therefore to go over the drafts presented by the artists and to adapt them to the exigencies of machinery and "repeats".¹ It proved relatively easy to determine technical details for some of the designs, but for others many calculations were necessary.

In the case of the "Gordian Knots" design, many experiments were necessary before obtaining the plastic effect of the embroidery. (Pages 17 and 19).

The "Calypso" design (see cover) necessitated most perfected machinery, capable of reproducing the extreme delicacy of the motif. For several weeks, three or four designers worked continuously on different parts of the block — enlarged to six times the size of the original design — on which each stitch had to be shown. The block is indispensable to the embroiderer, for it serves as a guide to his work. The slightest error in the block might spoil the whole effect of the embroidery.

These few general remarks will serve to make our readers realize a few of the problems manufacturers had to solve in the making of the fabrics presented in the Special Collection.

A Question of Detail

Do you know how many stitches go into the making of a single one of these embroidery and lace models ?

The heavy beach-coat, « Gordian knots », (page 17), required 1,584,000 stitches for a length of 9 metres ; in other words, 63,350 per repeat.

As for the « Calypso » design, there are 79,000 stitches in each repeat, or a mere 721,000 in a length of 9 metres, owing to the fact that the motifs are set very wide apart.

Just think of the number of weeks and even months such work would have meant in the old days when each stitch had to be made by hand !

Are the beautiful women for whom these gowns of lace and embroidery are destined always aware of the amount of work and striving expended in the making of the fabrics they admire ?

ELISABETH NATURAL.

¹ A repeat is the *unity* of a pattern, namely, that part of the pattern which is repeated and run on, thus producing the whole of the design. The dimensions of the repeats are limited by the capacity of the machinery and other means of reproduction used.

Swiss textile notes

The textile industry and some current problems

The problems to be solved by the Swiss textile industry are growing more complex every day. Among the chief factors which bear on the industry as a whole, the following groups must be mentioned :

- a) raw material supplies
- b) labour
- c) research work.

Flax and Hemp

The development of agricultural food production has naturally restricted increased cultivation of these two textile plants. Nevertheless, the acreage under flax and hemp has been tripled during the last two years. The greater part of this supply, however, is not delivered to the trade or for current consumption, as it is absorbed by the producers themselves ; the cultivation of flax has been encouraged by exempting the harvest from restrictions, in so far as it is used for the private household needs of the producer.

Staple Fibre

The home production of wool has not shown a marked increase since 1939, and Switzerland's last wool and cotton imports were received about a year ago. This means that synthetic fibre fabrics are becoming increasingly necessary. The prejudice still felt among the general public against staple fibre is partly due to the over-excessive praise given to this product before it was quite perfected ; this is no longer the case, as manufacturing processes have made astonishing progress. Staple fibre has, up to now, been considered as a substitute only to be employed during the wool and cotton shortage. It is not generally realized that in the United States the manufacture of staple fibre has grown tremendously during the last few years. This development cannot, therefore, be due to a cotton shortage, but to the fact that staple fibre is a new raw material holding all kinds of potentialities. Today, many firms are content to note that the development of the manufacture of this article in Switzerland ensures a higher degree of activity than they could otherwise have hoped had they not included this article in their fabrication schedule.

The importance of chemicals in the production of staple fibre should not be forgotten. The coal factor also plays an important part, for the manufacture of one kilo of staple fibre requires 3 kilos of coal.

The role of private enterprise

Despite supply difficulties, the textile industry is " carrying on ". It is able to ensure the livelihood of about 200,000 workers, and unemployment in this industry is almost non-existent. This is due to the co-ordination of the efforts of private enterprise with those of the State which, by a fair distribution of stocks, is able to canalize production in the way most profitable to the community. One cannot, however, stress too strongly the preponderating influence of private enterprise. As Mr. Zipfel, author of the programme of public work schemes, recently stated in Zurich : " The future structure of our national economy will be determined by the fact whether private enterprise is, or is not, capable of solving the unemployment problem. All abdication on the part of private enterprise will mean an increase in the State's right of control. Private enterprise must therefore defend its own liberty of action. " That private enterprise is already finding a concrete method of defence is proved by the rapidity with which the textile industry has adapted itself to market conditions and by the impulse given to the creation of substitute materials.

Post-war problems and the question of " quality "

The conflict is not yet ended. Preparation for the post-war period is already raising many serious problems. Switzerland is armed with a powerful, but dangerously exacting weapon with which to maintain her markets and to capture new ones : the quality of her products. But

quality means renewal and profound research work, whatever the state of affairs or the time it costs ; it also means the subjugation of perfect machinery to an untiring creative spirit.

The fabrics illustrated in these pages show more eloquently than mere words, what Swiss textile manufacturers understand by " quality workmanship ". Quality, today, implies even more than perfection and beauty ; it entails sacrifice and faith which lend a new dignity to the word.

Umbrella fabrics

Considerable efforts have been made in the Swiss textile industry as a whole to produce new fabrics and novelties of all kinds.

Besides the vast range of fabrics for clothing and linings, the production of materials for neck-wear, girdles, raincoats and umbrellas is an important element of the industry. As regards umbrella fabrics, preference is shown today for gaily coloured artificial silks which have ousted sombre, black fabrics. Dull black still remains the classic colour of men's umbrellas, however. On the other hand, cotton and half-silk umbrella fabrics are still welcomed on the market, for pure silks are still characteristic of the luxury article.

Swiss soft furnishing tissues and materials for industrial or technical uses have also come very much to the fore.

Fashion, the unknown quantity !

Speaking of textiles, can we resist diverting the conversation to that other favourite — Fashion ? Fashion ? What is it ? Some declare it is an art. Others nonchalantly raise their eyebrows with disdain when mention is made of that futile thing. Others again speak of fashion as a science. There are even some who pretend it is a technique, perhaps even a method... No, no ! Stop ! That word used in conjunction with " Fashion " makes one shudder. No ! Let us not try to define Fashion, for there we step where angels fear to tread.

It is generally accepted that Fashion was born with the flowers Eve used for her first ensemble. But, after that... ? Why, what highways and by-ways, what circuitous paths one must follow down the ages in order to summarize, with a few brief strokes of the pen, so rich a heritage ! Why try to grasp the intangible ? Fashion is always a semi-conscious thing. Ideas are abroad, they float in the air, imperceptible to the common herd, yet full of significance for the initiated. The eye which can perceive the invisible, the thought which can interpret the yet unformed, the hand which can shape the unseen future — those are the creators of Fashion, the powers which form that atmosphere of sensitiveness and ethereality in which Fashion can hold its ephemeral sway.

For the creator, Fashion is first of all a mere suspicion, the vibration of a fleeting thought ; then, it quickly becomes an obsession of the eyes, the hands, the mind. Striving to grasp that which is yet unborn, the creator walks, sleeps, works and eats in a state of strained expectation. Then, suddenly, it comes ! The idea is there, clear-cut, yet mysteriously fragile, poised before the eyes of the mind. It need only be seized and developed.

One day, as I was out walking with one of these talented creators of Fashion, we saw a gardener watering his flower-beds. To my great surprise my companion stopped suddenly in front of the man and gazed at him wide-eyed. " That apron, " he said, seizing my arm, " that apron... that's the green I want ! " Whereas I had only seen a plain, workaday apron faded by sun and rain and countless launderings, my couturier friend had found in it a sudden revelation of a glorious pageantry of *green*. There was the green he had sought so long and never found, there was the one and only shade, never yet created, that the Haute Couture was to launch and which would be all the vogue for the space of a season.

This year, like Ophelia, Fashion has wandered along the shores of lakes and by many a shady brook. There, where

*" A willow grows aslant a brook
That strews his hoar leaves in the glassy stream "*

she has sought to renew her inspiration. She found aquatic plants, strange shells and fish, and old, forgotten tales. A world of nymphs and tritons woke to her touch and joyfully sprang dancing in wild frolic around her.

From her journeyings by the waters, Fashion returned bearing " fantastic garlands " and " weedy trophies " from which artists, manufacturers and couturiers have culled forms and colours with which to make their works of art.

E. N.

HAURY & C^o

ST. GALL

Baby linen

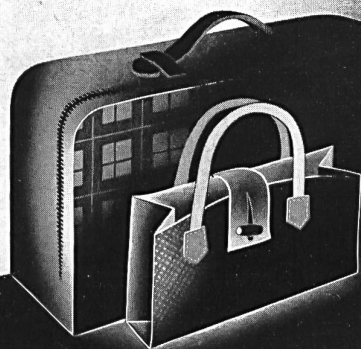
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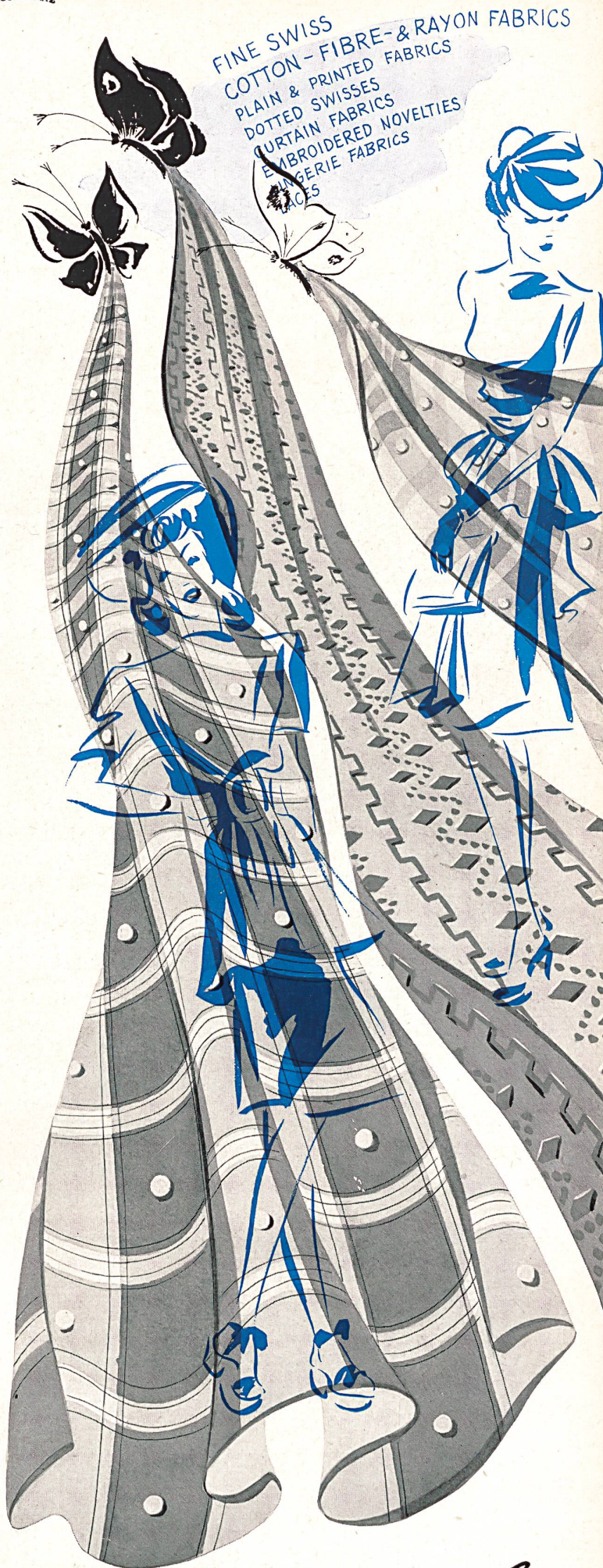
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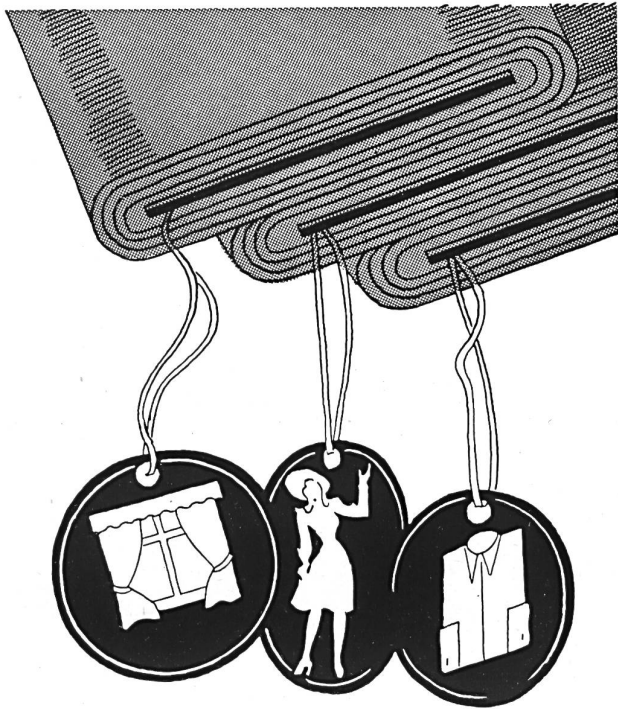
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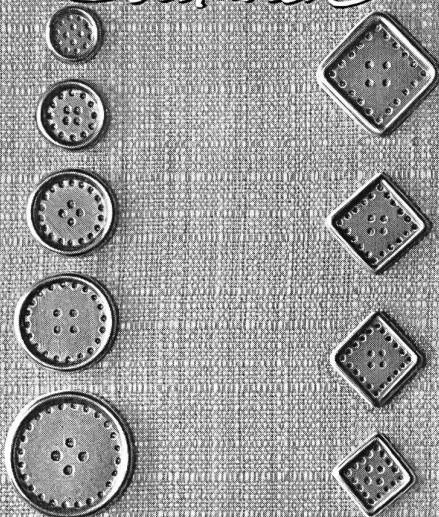
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