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# Economy in Clothing Selection

Cotton  
Materials



Extension Service  
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# Economy In Clothing Selection

## COTTON MATERIALS

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**C**OTTON has been called the "crop that clothes the world" for it is estimated that three-fourths to nine-tenths of the world's clothing supply is made of cotton fabrics. The fibre is of more value to mankind than any other textile fibre because of its cheapness, its availability and its varied usefulness.

Natural cotton as a textile material has not only replaced linen, silk and wool in many common uses but it has so closely imitated these more expensive fibres that the uninformed person is often deceived when buying materials. The fibre is like a rubber tube which has been slightly twisted. The natural twist aids in the many varieties of spinning needed to produce different kinds of yarns. The hollow structure aids in the complete dyeing of the fibre by giving complete saturation in stock and yarn dyeing. There are few impurities in cotton. It absorbs water slowly and is much stronger wet than dry. The length of the fibre shortens in water and allowance must be made for shrinkage when cloth is being woven or garments of a certain size are being planned.

As cotton is pure cellulose with natural oil and a wax, it is highly inflammable. Materials having a nap and imitating wool are dangerous for clothing worn near open fires. Cotton becomes very absorbant when the natural oil and wax are removed. It is seldom adulterated as it is inexpensive. Although some materials may have foreign substances added for the purpose of giving a more attractive appearance, the fibre is cotton.

The fibre is very lacking in elasticity. For this reason the yarns must be spun in such a way that the weaving may be loose enough to give under strain. Nap materials, bathrobe cloth and double weave blankets represent the most satisfactory attempt to equal the permanent spring of wool materials.

The high state of durability of cotton is due to the strength and stable condition of each unit fibre and the power of resistance to natural wearing conditions. It ranks next to silk in natural cleanliness and stands frequent cleansing for a longer time than linen. This gives it a high sanitary value which can be controlled to advantage. There is no element of beauty in a cotton cloth in "the gray" but there is a very great satisfaction in the way such cloth responds to bleaches, dyes and surface finishes without great loss of its durability.

Cotton is a better conductor of heat than silk or wool. This makes cotton fabrics very popular in summer. On the other hand, considerable warmth can be conserved by knitted fabrics and napped materials which give almost the comfort of wool in moderate temperatures.

### Chemically Treated Cottons

Mercerization is a process by which cotton yarns or fibres are treated chemically and stretched under tension. The result is a straight, translucent, lustrous fibre which has greater strength and beauty than natural cotton fibre. The "Non-crush" guarantee given a dress linen

is due to mercerized cotton mixed with linen before spinning the yarn. Mercerized materials launder satisfactorily. Cheap materials are often given a finish similar to mercerization which disappears with the first washing. Artificial fibres are now made by converting cotton linters and stems into a chemical substance from which a fibre is made by means of mechanical devices and additional chemical treatment. A great variety of materials are being made from these fibres. Yarns are

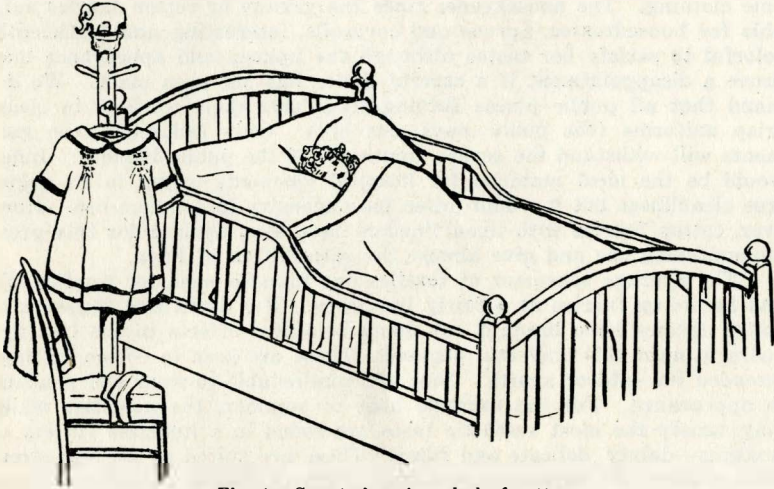


Fig. 1.—Sweet sleep in a bed of cotton

used to produce pin and line stripes and checks in natural cotton materials. Materials with artificial fibre filling and cotton warp are common. The perfection of synthetic fibre materials is reached in such fabrics as wash satins, plain and figured crepes, velvets and trimmings formerly made of worm silk. "Rayon", "Celanese" or "Lustron" and "artificial wool" are trade names typical of these strange new chemical processes and products.

#### Specific Uses of Cotton Materials

The hygienic requirements of children's wardrobes are satisfactorily met in the variety of cotton materials suited to many uses. All children's clothing should be washable in order to counteract the child's lack of judgment in caring for the garments while they are being worn. Given proper care, most cotton materials can be brought back to the original condition with very simple laundry methods.

Knitted cotton underwear is not only a universal need of children but of adults as well. The pliable texture, comfortable fit, light weight and smooth feeling of these garments, which can be of a surprisingly open mesh and still protect the wearer, has given to cotton knitted fabrics the place formerly occupied by woolen underwear. These porous fabrics allow air to circulate over the skin which stimulates and gives vigor to counteract sudden changes of temperature while, at the same time, these fabrics remain fairly dry. Comfort can be maintained by wearing open cotton materials in summer, and by supplementing cotton



underwear with heavier cotton or woolen outer garments in winter. At all times, the secretions of the skin are quickly absorbed by the cotton yarns which are never scratchy or harsh. The fabric itself does not shrink and mat together beyond remedy as might be the case of woolen yarns in similar knitted weaves. The frequent and complete cleansing of these garments is a great satisfaction when comfort and health are outstanding objectives.

Sanitary control of the home demands that all workers wear washable clothing. The housekeeper finds the variety of cotton fabrics suitable for housedresses, aprons and coveralls, interesting and sufficiently colorful to satisfy her tastes although the upkeep and appearance may prove a disappointment if a careful choice has not been made. We demand that all public places serving food have their workers in clean, crisp uniforms (the public pays this bill). Only tailored cotton garments will withstand the severe treatment of the public laundry. Linen would be the ideal material for hospital garments owing to its germ-free cleanliness but it would prove too expensive in common use. However, cotton fabrics with linen finishes have been devised for this great humanitarian use and give almost the satisfaction of linen.

The average consumer of textiles has found a need for comfortable and becoming fabrics at a fairly low price. The dyers and finishers of cotton fabrics have brought out many beautiful effects in the last few years to meet this universal demand. These are seen in cotton suitings intended for outdoor sports. They are comfortable to wear and pleasing in appearance. For the extreme heat of summer, the novelties which may satisfy the most aesthetic taste are found in a limitless variety of textures—dainty, delicate and filmy. These are suited to the less strenuous phases of recreation such as afternoon social occasions. Dark printed voile dresses are excellent for short periods of travel in hot weather. The cheaper grades are not intended to meet the home laundry tests.

Factory-made utility garments are necessary in all industrial work while the costume for a real back-to-nature vacation is the cotton khaki seen everywhere. The materials are planned to endure strain and meet emergencies in rough work and strenuous play.

#### **System In Economical Shopping**

As each particular garment requires a purchasing act, it is well to make a special effort to make use of all agencies which will aid in the purchase of the materials and supplies needed to construct a specific garment. It is necessary to (1) keep informed as to the styles and the leading materials to be used during the season, (2) to recognize and maintain ideal standards of worth for selecting cotton goods and (3) to learn the real value of standard materials by simple tests. "Shopping is the art and science of making choices."

#### **Sources of Information**

The various women's magazines give the season's leading styles and the appropriate materials to be used. Newspaper advertisements announcing the new season's materials give the names and prices while the local stores have these materials on exhibition where they can be observed at close range. Style shows and window displays give sug-

gestions for individual selection and accent. Salespeople are eager to give information when the purchaser asks questions and expresses appreciation for such service. Bulletins relating to clothing and household textiles are published at the various State Agricultural Colleges and by the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. These are sent free upon request. Valuable first-hand information is given in the demonstration clubs in the State Extension Service and is appreciated by the women whose environment is limited to a very small buying center and who cannot take the time to gather their own information.

#### Standards In Selection of Materials

It is well to observe the elements of a piece of cloth which will, together, cause it to maintain a stable appearance in the course of wear. Will this material look well at all times, be fresh, unwrinkled and clear in color? Is the texture suitable to the individual and does the weave and yarn promise durability according to the purpose? A becoming surface design is very important. Color is used lavishly to give an otherwise uninteresting material an artistic finish. Inferior grades of fibers and yarns are often hidden under printed designs which are familiar to the housekeeper in better qualities of cloth. "A color should never be selected because it is beautiful in itself but because it has the power to enhance the beauty or best points of the wearer. It should not overshadow the coloring and personality of the wearer and thereby be conspicuous." Pattern designs with color give interest and variety to cotton fabrics. The varieties of gingham require that a careful choice be made as the designs are hard to control in garment construction. Prints with both large and small motives and close or wide spacings may produce a wrong effect if they are spotty or draw attention to physical defects.

The material in ready-to-wear garments should be given close inspection from the above angles. Inferior qualities are seen in attractive styles and colors. There are several grades of factory work these days.

#### Fabric Tests According to Value and Purpose

Samples of materials may be tested to determine the quality and the degree of durability. The texture of the weave, the twists of the yarns

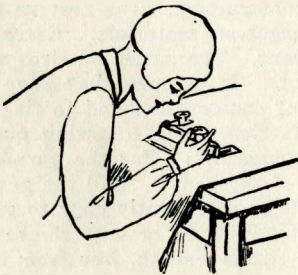


Fig. 2.—Reading the weave with the thread counter

and the grade of the average individual fibre can be observed. The amount of shrinkage, sizing or flecting of color which may occur can be determined by washing the samples. Shrinkage and sizing are noted after the first washing while the degree of color fading should be determined after the series of fifteen washings. Sun drying is necessary for materials intended for hard wear and frequent tubbing.

Very exacting tests are made in textile laboratories to determine the amount of wear there is in a cloth. Friction tests determine how much rubbing a cloth will endure before appearing old, before the yarns break and the fabric goes into holes. The amount of stress and strain along the yarn length is determined on a tensile strength testing machine. Reactions of different kinds of cloth to laundry methods are

carefully recorded. Detailed procedure with hot and cold water, all kinds of solvents such as soaps and powders, steam and dry heat give results which become criteria for the care of some materials which are standards. Materials put out under a trade name and a guarantee have been given tests for stability and appearance. They may safely be relied upon to give good time service under proper laundry methods. Standard materials which have been subjected to these and additional tests are being recommended in oral demonstrations to Extension Club members and others interested in State Extension training groups.

#### The "Fore-Plan" For a Garment of Definite Purpose

There is often much unnecessary indecision in a buying act. Every new garment needed should be first planned in relation to the individual. A suitable design must be chosen. A pattern which is tested to the figure and which is workable, in co-ordinating with the design, is basic to good construction. It is then important to plan a definite list of the materials, the trimmings and supplies needed for construction. If the amounts needed, the quality most desirable and the suitability have each been planned, the actual buying of materials takes but a few minutes at a counter.

#### Buying Points to be Observed

The shopper's information and knowledge of textiles, together with the working plan will aid in making a satisfactory purchase. It is self-evident that a customer who states her need in an indefinite way will discover later that the salesperson has done both the selling and the purchasing by regulating the choice. The following statements and those similar are pleasantly stimulating and give complete satisfaction on both sides of the counter: "Please show me some Devonshire gingham in blues suitable for children's rompers." "I wish to see some guaranteed, fast-colored, domestic prints with a white background, suitable for housedresses," indicates up-to-date information and calls for a careful presentation of shelf goods.

If the purchase is to be a ready-to-wear garment all of the above observations concerning yard goods must be considered in conjunction with the ideal values in factory garment construction. The best values are guaranteed garments made from guaranteed materials. Extreme styles limit a garment to one season of wear. The series of sizes are not so complete as in silk or wool garments. It becomes necessary to give careful examination to the processes of construction and to fit the garment to the individual to insure satisfaction. The following questions help to test values of ready-to-wear garments: Has the garment been cut to hang straight from the widths of the body? Will the goods stand the strain at the seams? Will the fit be sufficiently easy to give comfort to all body movements while standing, sitting or with the arms lifted? Is the stitching continuous and the seams smooth, free from unnecessary bulk and without raw edges to ravel? Are the edge finishes well applied and consistent throughout the garment? It is important that the material be appropriate to the wearer and that it be properly selected for the garment design. Crosswise stripe materials used for circular skirts are an extreme sample of poor selections which are far from the artistic. We discard garments which we have found disappointing in combinations of materials, odd in style or not suitable to the



natural coloring. This is a waste and needless expense. If we discipline ourselves to wear these misfits, we are uncomfortable in the knowledge of our misjudgment.

Factory garments are made to appear well while on sale. Sometimes a combination of materials would require a great amount of time to keep the garment in condition to wear. Note the requirements for keeping up the appearance of all such garments. Collars, cuffs, vestees, etc., often require special treatment while materials of different textures are often combined which cannot be given the same treatment. An organdy and gingham combination is often unsightly after the first tubbing.

#### Economical Preparation of Material For Construction

If home construction is the plan to be pursued, it is often necessary to give the materials special attention before cutting and making the garment at home. Cotton goods is not always folded or pressed straight. Materials intended to be laundried often should be shrunk and pressed. All materials should be pressed straight before cutting out garments and during their construction.

#### Preparation of Ready-to-Wear Garments

Factory garments are seldom ready to wear without slight changes or reinforcement of the construction. A few hand stitches or slight changes in seams prolongs the time of wear and saves mending. Undergarments not purchased in sanitary packages should be laundered before wearing. Aside from the hygienic advantages of washing, these garments mold to the body with a more even stretch, and give the fit and comfort necessary.



Fig 3.—A means of extending the home funds.

#### Factors Which Affect Methods of Clothing Selection

No one plan can be devised for managing the buying of clothing because each family or individual has different controls of time, money, and energy. Interest and skill enter into the enjoyment of making clothing and of keeping it in condition for wearing. The well dressed family is not necessarily expensively dressed but it is appropriately dressed according to its place and service in the community. "Family accent" is to the family what personality is to the individual. It is now conceded that hosiery, knitted underwear and adult tailored garments are best purchased ready-made. Young home-keepers should practice thrift and gain textile experience by home construction while older women who have poor eyesight may "earn" their ready-to-wear clothing from the garden, their poultry or the kitchen.

The ideal wardrobe is one which is adequate to all purposes, does not require too much time for its upkeep and has all garments chosen for harmonious costumes. The homekeeper may have such a wardrobe at a moderate expense. She can dress even more economically than the



business or professional woman. Her use of cotton housedresses for her work is an advantage over the expensive silk and wool garments needed by women in public life. Someone has said, "Your appearance is all of your message to most of the world." It is possible for the homekeeper to meet all the requirements of appearance in her environment with an independence and economy not possible for the business woman in her sphere of activity. Cotton fabrics give an all-around satisfactory service in the homemaker's sphere. They satisfy all the requirements of sanitary control, give variety of texture and design, maintain a high state of durability and can be selected with the most complete economy if forethought, experience and ideal values are considered in a buying act.

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