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Aids for the Shopper

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AIDS FOR THE SHOPPER

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It has been said that quality speaks for itself, and this is especially true of quality in material. The design and color of a garment may be lovely, but if a closer observation reveals the fact that the material is poor in quality, the dress immediately loses some of its former charm.

To be able to recognize quality is the first requisite of a good buyer. What is the basis for judging quality? The question is difficult to answer, since some of the requisites of quality are not tangible. It is the tangible points on which a study of materials may be made. The others will come as the person familarizes herself with textiles. It is true that most people have very little information on this subject, yet every woman comes in contact with textiles in many forms every day. So many women place themselves at the mercy of salespeople who may know even less than they do concerning fabrics. The wise woman will become acquainted with the many facts surrounding textiles and develop herself into an intelligent and independent buyer.

The suggestions given here should serve merely as a guide for the study, and the woman wishing to continue her study should train herself to feel cloth and to learn how to distinguish different kinds. She will find materials for her study right at hand; her own clothing, household linens and even the piece bag offer many possibilities.

Textile Fabrics

Textile fabric is a term used to denote the finished product which is made from any fiber. There are on the market now five common fibers—wool, silk, cotton, linen, and rayon. The first two named are animal fibers, the next two vegetable, and the last, rayon, is a synthetic fiber. These fibers have many characteristics in common, but each has some distinctive characteristics which will distinguish it from the others.

In comparing qualities it is not fair to any one fiber to compare it with another. Quality comparisons should be made not between fibers but between fabrics made from one fiber. For example, pure silk should not be compared with rayon, nor wool with cotton. Each fiber has its place and a definite use.

Wool

Wool is the wavy or crimpy hair that comes from sheep. It varies from one to fifteen inches in length.

Characteristics.—It feels warm to the touch and springs back in place when crushed in the hand. It is very absorbent and is a poor conductor of heat. It is this property that makes it such an excellent fiber for use in baby's clothes. It takes dye quite readily.

Tests.—Microscopic tests are, of course, the most accurate and if an accurate analysis is desired, this or a chemical test should be made, but this is not necessary for the average woman. The burning test is simplest and easiest. Wool burns slowly and with an unsteady flame. The fiber crumbles when burned and gives off an odor of hair. Wool will dissolve if boiled in a solution of lye. One heaping tablespoon of lye to one pint of water should be used. A piece of an all wool fabric boiled in this solution

for five minutes will be practically destroyed. A mixture boiled for 20 minutes will have all the wool removed.

Adulterations.—Cotton is sometimes made to resemble wool, but it lacks the feeling of warmth that wool has. Where a small amount of cotton is combined with wool it is more difficult to detect.

Trade Terms.—Shoddy wool is old and re-worked wool. The fibers are very short. Sometimes small amounts of shoddy will be combined with new wool and then it is difficult to detect. Shoddy wool is found in heavy felted materials, quite generally.

Virgin wool is new wool. The term 100 percent pure wool may be applied to shoddy, but the word virgin insures the buyer that the wool is new.

There are two classes of wool fabrics, woolens and worsteds. Woolens are the soft elastic, and dull finished fabrics. The yarns are very loosely twisted. A worsted material is more harsh and shiny and shows the pattern of the weaving clearly. The yarns are tightly twisted.

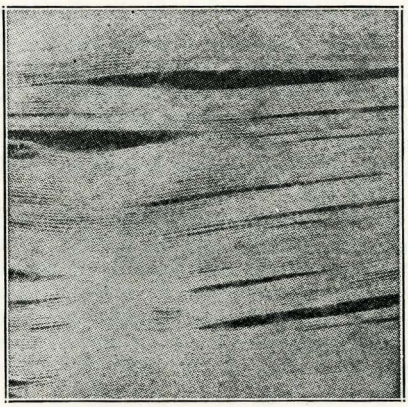

Fig. 1.—The above picture shows a portion of a blanket which retailed at a price that should guarantee a pure wool fabric, strong enough to withstand laundering. Examination after the first laundering process showed that the warp threads were cotton and the filling threads loosely spun threads from short staple wool fibers. Blankets cannot be tested when they are purchased, therefore, buy from retail stores that sell no goods not guaranteed to be what they appear, and that back up their guarantee.

Laundering Qualities.—Wool shrinks in the laundering process, and repeated washings make the fiber harsh. White wool turns yellow with constant washing. It also yellows with age. Strong soap and hard water are very hard on woolen fabrics and should never be used.

Silk

Silk is a natural long fiber and does not have to be spun. It is merely unwound from the cocoon and re-wound on a bobbin.

Characteristics.—It is a soft fiber unless it is weighted. It takes dyes readily and the colors are richer and have more depth than cotton or linen.

Weighted Silks.—A weighted silk is one that has had some material added to give it body or stiffness. The materials used for weighting are usually solutions of salts of tin or iron. Sometimes, shantung and pongee are weighted with China clay. Mineral weightings break down the fabric and cause it to split and tear easily. Taffeta is a fabric which depends on weighting for much of its texture. Cheaper grades of taffeta are very heavily weighted. Inexpensive crepes are very apt to be weighted. Weighting tends to make material spot easily.

Adulterations.—In many instances, rayon is combined with silk and the fabric is sold as all silk. Rayon added to a fabric does not necesserily decrease the cost, but a consumer should know when she is purchasing pure silk and when rayon and silk combined.

Laundering Qualities.—Silk is easily laundered but care should be taken to see that the successive waters are the same temperature. A pure soap should be used and the material pressed with a warm iron.

Tests.—Burning is again the simplest and easiest test for home use. Ravel out several threads of the cloth. Pure silk will burn more quickly than wool but also with an unsteady flame. It leaves a beady ash. The ash, however, is very soft and crumbles when touched. The odor is that of burning hair or feathers. Silk is readily destroyed by strong acid and alkali. A wet silk thread when drawn taut will make a resonant sound similiar to a violin tone.

If the material is weighted with a tin or iron solution it burns slowly and with difficulty and the residue is the same shape as the sample burned. The color of the ash depends on the metal used. Tin weighting will turn black, iron, rather a rusty color. If a clay weighting has been used, a dusty powder will fall when the material is torn. Clay weighting does not affect wearing qualities, for it washes out during the laundering process. It tends to be misleading for the consumer, however, for she is unable to accurately judge the weight of the material.

Rayon

Rayon is a synthetic fiber made from the pulp of wood or cotton. There are several kinds of rayon on the market. Most of it is glossy. However, Celanese and Bemberg do not have this high luster.

Characteristics and Uses.—Rayon is not elastic, and the lustrous kinds are undesirable for many uses. However, it is used in many hose that are now on the market. Hose in which it is used has a statement of it stamped

The Advantages of Using Soft Water

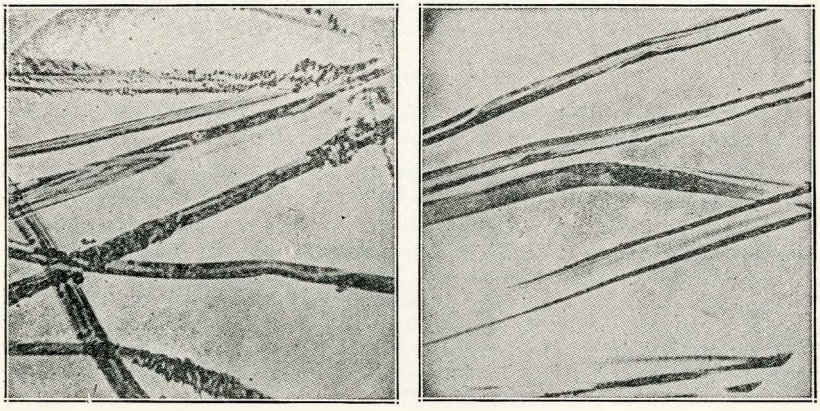

Fig. 2.—The illustration at the left shows fibers that have been washed and rinsed in hard water. The curd formed by the soap has adhered to the fibers, carrying with it particles of dirt. At the right are shown fibers washed in soft water. No curd is formed and the fabric is kept beautifully white.

on the labels. Bemberg is quite commonly used in hose. Rayon takes dye readily. Celanese, however, requires special dyes.

Adulterations.—Adulteration of rayon is not common. However, in some of the less expensive rayon fabrics, tests show that rayon waste has been used. This, of course, does not give the wear new rayon would.

Laundering Qualities.— Rayon is weakened very much when it is wet, hence great care should be exercised in handling it. Never wring or twist a rayon garment that is wet. It should always be squeezed. Press always with a warm iron. White rayon will not turn yellow.

Tests.—Burn threads of rayon fabric. Celanese will burn with a flash, smell like paper, and leave a beady, gummy ash. This will not crumble like a silk bead. Bemberg and other rayons will burn with a flash, a yellow flame, smell like paper, and leave very little ash. Untwist a thread, break it. The fibers will be straight and wiry.

Cotton

Cotton is probably the most commonly used fiber. A few years ago, the trend was away from cotton fabrics, but within the last few years, cotton regained its popularity.

Characteristics.—Cotton adapts itself to many kinds of fabrics. It is very often sized to give it body and gloss. It may be treated with chemicals to make what is known as mercerized cotton. Mercerization strengthens the fibers and gives them a silky luster. Cotton is more difficult to dye than other fibers but mercerized cotton takes dye more easily.

Adulteration.—Since cotton is the cheapest of all fibers it is never adulterated.

Laundering Qualities.—Cotton launders nicely. There is usually some shrinkage, the amount being dependent somewhat on the closeness of the weave. A material that is heavily sized does not wash well, for the sizing comes out with the washing, and leaves a very sleazy material.

Tests.—Threads from cotton material burn with a flash and smell like paper. If a thread is broken the end of the yarn will be fuzzy and brush-like. Rub the material together. If a fine powder falls, it is quite heavily sized. Wash a piece. Let it dry. Compare with the original.

Linen

Characteristics and Laundering Qualities.—Linen does not have the elasticity that cotton does and hence it wrinkles easily. It is snowy white when bleached. It has a cool, leathery feel about it. It does not take dye well, and fades easily in both sun and water. It does not retain stains so persistently as cotton. This quality makes it of value as table linen and towels.

Tests.—Linen burns with a flash and smells like paper. It reacts the same as cotton, so this test is not sufficient. Wash a sample and drop onto it a drop of ink. If cotton, the ink is absorbed irregularly and not so quickly. Another good test for linen is the hot olive oil test. A drop of hot oil on linen will be absorbed immediately and the material becomes translucent.

Weaves

The common weaves are known as plain, twill, satin, and sateen weave, and their variations.

Plain Weave.—In this weave the filling thread goes over one warp and under the next. Examples of common materials using this weave are—muslin, gingham, wool batiste, and handkerchief linen. One common variation of plain weave is monk's cloth, known as basket weave.

Twill Weave.—Twill weave is common to serges and all materials termed twills, as poriet twill. In this weave the lines on the material are diagonal. The angle of the twill depends on the fabric. The twill in serge runs at an angle of 45 degrees. A twill weave is firmer and is usually a better wearing weave than a plain weave.

Satin and Sateen Weave.—In these weaves a series of yarns are thrown to the top with the surface broken as little as possible. A filling yarn passes over one warp and under from 5 to 12. This is termed a float. In sateen the floats run the width of the material and in satin the floats run with the length of the material. Material with long floats will not wear as long as material with shorter floats. There is a tendency for them to catch and make the material rough.

Pattern in Material

Design or pattern in material may be added in a number of ways, the commonest of which are addition of color by dyeing or printing or by the weave itself. Materials such as monk's cloth, damask, and granite cloth, are examples of design by weaving.

Color may be added to material in several ways, namely, yarn dye, piece dye, or printing. In a yarn dye, the threads are dyed before they are woven. In a piece dyed material, it is dyed after it is woven. The method that has been used can usually be readily ascertained. Material with more than one color in it is usually yarn dyed. However, there are a few exceptions to this.

A few threads raveled out and untwisted will show the dye method used. A yarn dyed fabric will usually keep its color, while piece dyed material is often not fast to washing or light. This, however, is not true of all piece dyed materials. A large percentage of the materials on the market now are sold under a color fast guarantee.

Another process of adding color to material is known as printing. Colors are put on by rollers, each roller adding a different color.

A printed design should have a "fast" look. However, not all materials that appear fast color are fast. Material that has a large amount of sizing is very apt to fade. A great majority of the prints now on the market are guaranteed fast color. It is wise to select materials with this guarantee.

Tests that can be made at home and will give satisfactory results are as follows:

Crocking.—Rub the sample briskly with a white cloth and note whether any of the color has been transferred to this cloth.

Fading Test.—A small sample placed in strong sunlight will, if left long enough, give the purchaser an idea of the fastness of the color. It is often wise to test certain materials this way. The difficulty with this test is the lack of patience on the part of the tester. The material should be left at least 50 hours in strong sunlight to give an accurate test.

Bleeding Test.—Baste a sample to a piece of white cloth and wash and iron it several times. If the color bleeds or runs, the white background will show it.

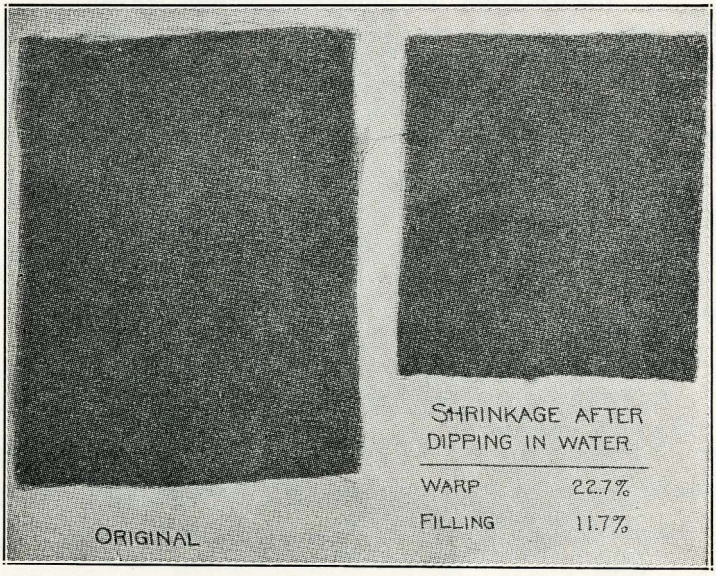

Fig. 3.—Abnormal shrinkage. The above fabric consisted of a tightly twisted cotton warp and a rayon filling. Had the material been made into a dress before the test was made, the first washing would have ruined the dress. Dry cleaning did not affect the fabric.—Courtesy Harper & Bros.

Perspiration Test.—The effect of perspiration can be roughly estimated by sewing the sample onto a piece of white material, dipping it into a mild solution of acetic acid (vinegar), drying it, and redipping it.

Material and Dress Design

Material is one of the first considerations in planning or buying a dress. There are materials suitable for different occasions, ages, and figures. It is always well to select material of as good quality as one can afford. It serves the wearer better, and gives greater satisfaction while it is being worn. The extra money spent at the time is usually money wisely invested.

Quality in printed material is not so evident as quality in plain colors. Patterned material possesses an interest which plain material does not have, but it calls attention to the figure more than plain material and therefore should be avoided by many women.

Designs in materials should be in scale with the wearer. A small pattern makes big people seem bigger by contrast. Children should wear materials that are easily laundered and are dainty in appearance. Small figures, and not large patterned or heavy looking material should be used. Stout women look best in a design that is large and yet not spotty. There is a tendency to count the spots, and estimate the size. Dots or figures in strong contrast to the background impress the beholder with their multiplicity and these make the body seem larger. Pronounced stripes, plaids and all over patterns call attention to the figure and add to the effect of bulk by leading the eye in more directions. Narrow, vertical stripes add to apparent height. Printed materials with an effect of stripes in which the contrast between the background and pattern is slight are best for the large figure.

Velvet and satin are rich looking, and should be worn only on those occasions which call for elaborate dress. These materials are heavy and add bulk to the figure. They should be avoided by the stout woman, as well as the very dainty, frail looking person. These materials appear as if they were too heavy for her. Transparent velvet does not give that appearance of bulk, and may be worn by figures which could not wear other velvets.

Information All Shoppers Should Have

Wool—
1. Wool and rayon are not a good wearing combination. The friction of the wool against the rayon causes it to split.
2. Shoddy wool can sometimes be detected by separating a thread into fibers. A wide variety of colored fibers is usually an indication of shoddy. The term all wool, includes shoddy as well as virgin wool.
3. Burning test—burns with unsteady flame; smells like hair.

Silk.—
1. Avoid cheap silks. They are apt to be heavily weighted and not worth the time and money spent.
2. Test all silk for weighting and adulteration.
3. Burning test—pure silk burns similarly to wool and smells like hair or feathers; leaves soft beaded ash.

Rayon—
1. Know the use of the rayon. It is not suitable for all purposes.
2. Transparent velvet has a rayon pile.
3. Tests—Celanese—burns with flash, smells like paper; leaves a gummy beady ash. Other rayon and Bemberg—burn with a flash; smell like paper; leave little or no residue.

Cotton—
1. Most white cotton fabrics are 36 in. wide.
2. Some ginghams are only 32 in. wide.
3. In buying sheeting, look for evenness of threads to insure long wear.
4. Guaranteed fast colored fabrics usually are stamped so in the salvage.
5. Bleaching agents used now as a rule do not injure fabrics.
6. "Basco" is a trade name given to a kind of cotton table damask. It wears very well. Some hotels use it in preference to mercerized cotton. It is similar in appearance.

Linen—
1. Linen is hard to dye a fast color although guaranteed fast colored linens are now on the market.

General—
1. Fancy, novelty materials with some heavy threads and some small ones do not wear well together. The wearing of the finer one against the heavier one soon causes the finer one to break.
2. The finish should be permanent, e. g., mercerization is permanent but some cotton materials that are not mercerized appear that way until after first laundering.
3. A yarn-dyed fabric will probably keep its color better than a piece-dyed.
4. Any fabric that has a rough finish or long floats, etc., that are apt to catch do not look as well after the same period of wear that a more closely woven fabric does.
5. Any hard twisted smooth finished fabric will wear shiny whenever it is subjected to hard wear or friction.
6. Any all-silk or all-wool fabric is liable to spot unless it has been previously sponged.
7. If purchaser insists, she may buy fast colored materials in every fiber.

Many times in selecting material or a ready-made dress, one thing is forgotten. A good looking and becoming dress, must have all essential points. It must be suitable to the occasion, age, income, and personality. To buy intelligently, a woman should keep in mind these factors and buy accordingly. It is well to keep in mind that many sales-persons do not know materials, so that it is not wise to rely on their judgment. A standard product that has been tried and found successful should be purchased before an unknown product. A bargain is only a bargain when the article is needed and when quality is secured.

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