

Cotton

Autor(en): **Stoffel, Max**

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COTTON

Cotton — or, in Latin, *gossypium* — one of the natural textile fibres most widely employed today, has been utilized in India from time immemorial. The first traces of the cultivation of the cotton plant and the utilization of its fibres in Egypt date back to the IVth century B.C. Nevertheless, it was not introduced into Europe before the Xth century, when it was first cultivated in Spain. The plant was however already known in North America when Christopher Columbus discovered the New World. In modern times, cotton is increasingly planted on a large scale in South America and Russia.

In Lancashire, cotton spinning dates back to 1350, although India remained the chief supplier of cotton fabrics until the XVIth century. By 1650, however, cotton yarns and weaves were already being industrially produced in Manchester and less than two centuries later, in 1812, over 4 million spindles were being employed in that town. A few years later, Heinrich Kunz set up the first spinning mill in Switzerland, at Windisch in the Canton of Aargau. Within the next hundred years, that is to say by 1939, the number of spindles in Swiss spinning mills had increased to over 1,263,000.

It is indubitable that the properties of cotton, which lends itself so admirably to the processes of spinning, weaving, dyeing and printing, its numerous domestic uses both as wearing-apparel and in the household, the advantages it can offer for medical and technical uses, have contributed to make this fibre the most widely employed raw material in the textile industry. Cotton has thus given rise to the growth of major industries all over the world, and has provided work and well-being for millions of wage-earners. It has, however, also become an object of great financial speculations; the cotton market is subject to heavy fluctuations which make and unmake huge fortunes. These fluctuations are influenced rather by crops and harvests than by variations in the demand for cotton fabrics.

In India, cotton was originally grown on trees; later, the plants were reduced to man-high annual shrubs. Consequently, cotton can be planted every year even in regions where the winters are cold; the summer season must, however, be hot, as in America and Russia for example. This method of cultivation has, moreover, enabled planters to improve the quality of their crops and to adopt more rational methods. Until quite recently, the North American and Egyptian crops alone were determinant price factors on the cotton market, but within the last twenty years South American, Russian, African, Indian and Chinese crops have grown to such an extent that they also influence prices today.

The quality of cotton varies greatly according to its origin and the method in which it is cultivated and, as a result, the fibres can be used for all types of fabrics, from the finest to the coarsest. It can also be chemically treated in such a way as to render the raw material hardly recognizable, save by connoisseurs. Rational methods of cultivation, the enormous progress made in spinning and weaving processes, and the recently discovered and hitherto undreamed-of possibilities offered by the final processing — bleaching, mercerizing, opalizing, refining, dyeing and printing — and especially by the most recent crease and crush-proofing methods, have made it possible to produce cotton fabrics at prices accessible to every household, rich or poor.

The Swiss cotton industry has constantly sought to improve the quality of its output, especially as regards fine weaves and finish. Its characteristic products not only cover all requirements of the

home market, but have also become an important element of the export trade, and thereby of Switzerland's national economy.

As regards the use of cotton in Haute Couture, it may be mentioned that among the great dress designers there are some who actually specialize in cotton and have become masters in the creation of lovely models of fine, delicate tissues which ever and again enchant the world of Fashion.

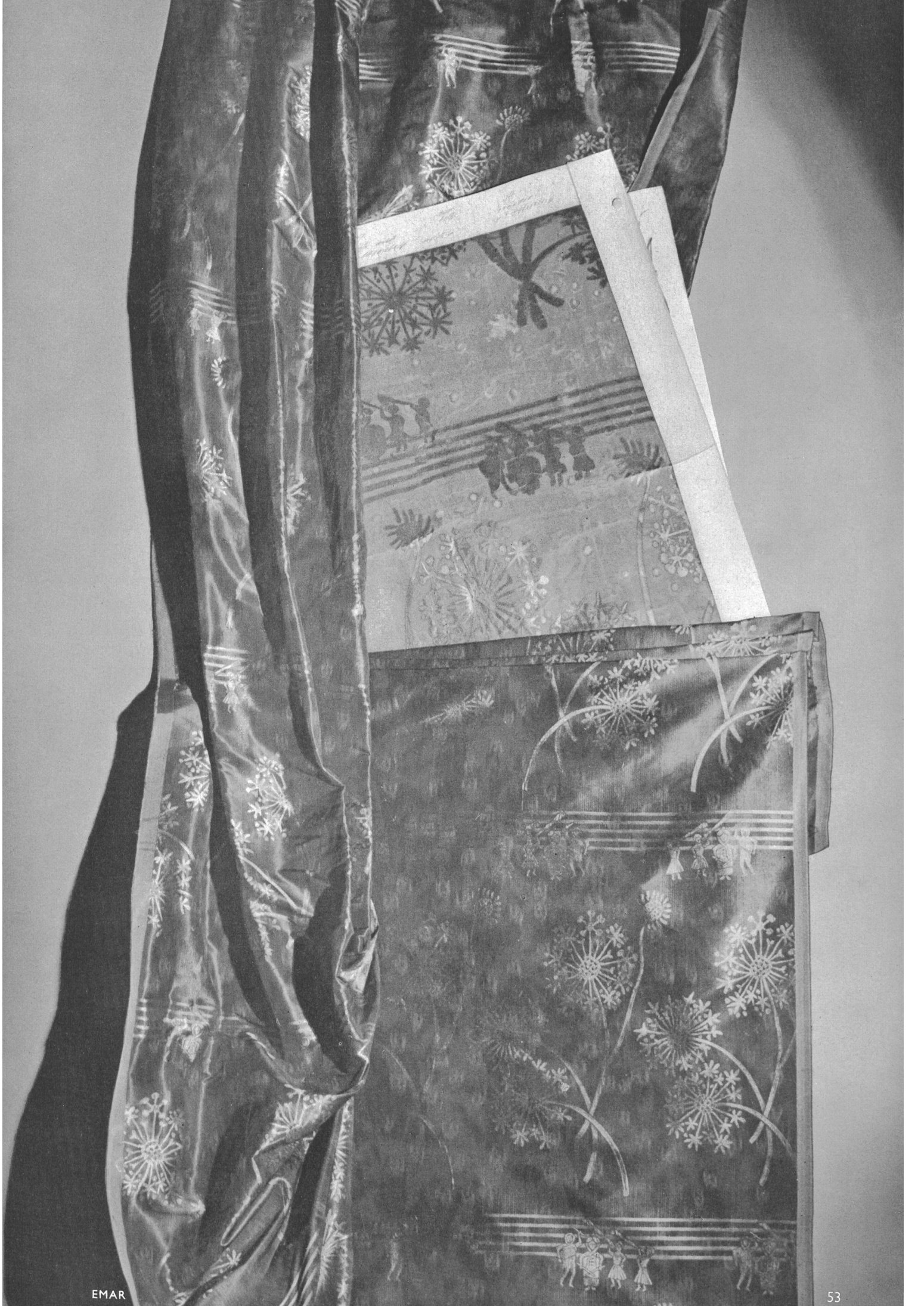
MAX STOFFEL.





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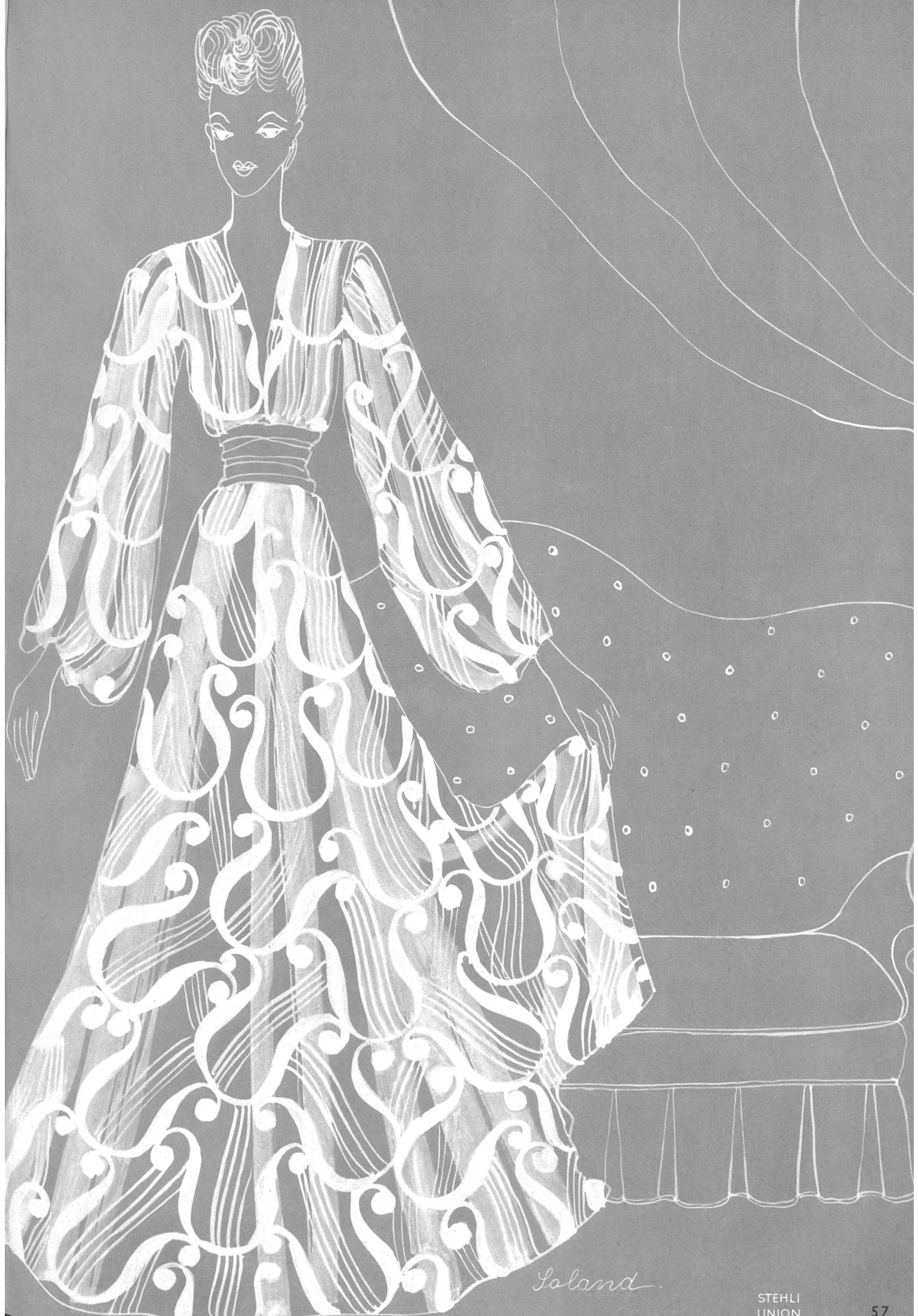
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