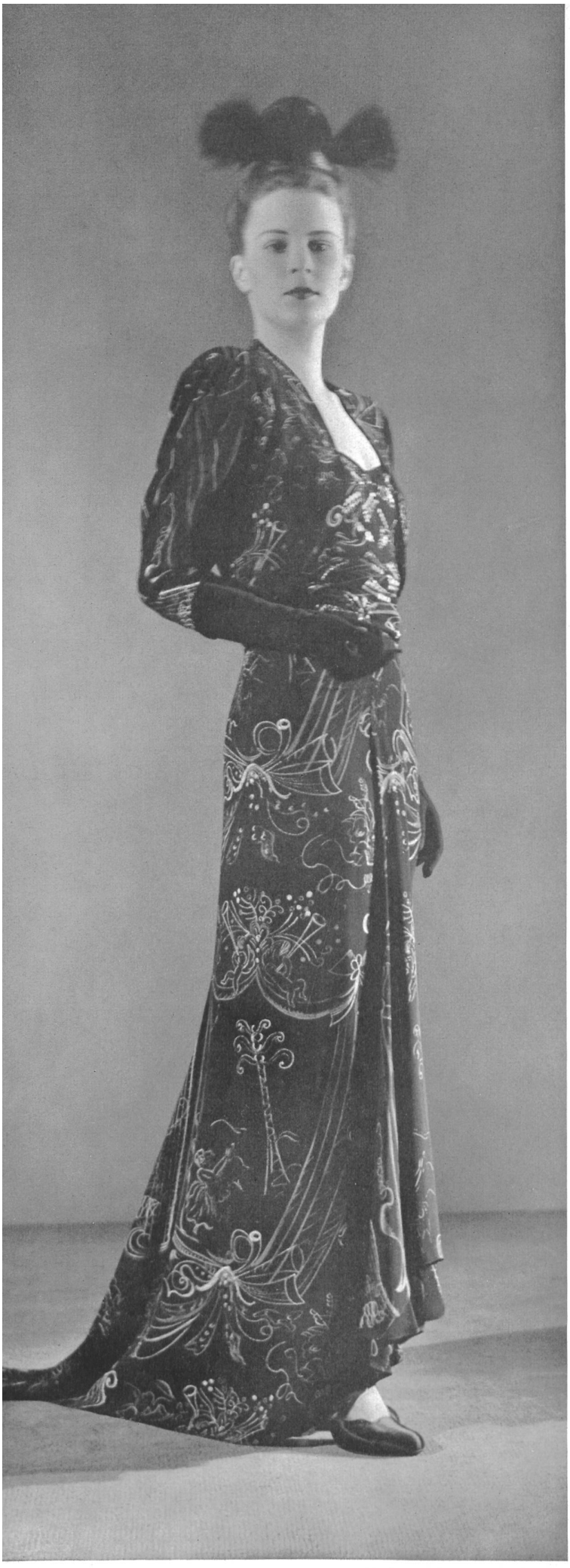
The finishing trade and the textile industry



ABRAHAM

THE FINISHING TRADE AND THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

One of the results of the development of machines in the XIXth century was, quite naturally, the mechanization of finishing and refining processes in the textile industry. Originally a craft, this branch grew into an industry. The old traditional formulas were nevertheless not abandoned ; in many cases they have formed a valuable basis on which to build modern technique, in conjunction of course with the numerous technical and scientific improvements introduced during the last hundred years.

Modern chemistry has contributed generously to the evolution of the trade. It has opened boundless possibilities as regards dyestuffs, colour and printing combinations, such as were undreamt of by the old craftsmen. Today, all the colours of the solar spectrum are at the service of textile manufacturers ; their predecessors had only a very limited range at their disposal.

Science has also made it possible for chemists to learn the specific properties of each dyestuff. Fabrics are now treated differently according to their basic raw material, animal hair or vegetable fibre. Research workers further studied the power of resistance of colours to light, laundering, weaving. The lustre value of each colour has also been closely studied, and everything has been done to obtain shades pleasing and agreeable to the eye.

A logical outcome of the extensive knowledge of various fibres and their chemical and physical properties was the introduction of new working methods. Manufacturers learnt how to finish silk and to mercerize cotton, and processes which up to then had remained purely empirical, were methodized scientifically. Systematic research has increased the potentialities of the industry, and synthetic raw materials have been substituted for natural fibres. Little by little the spinning of artificial silk, made from cellulose, was developed. Staple fibre was discovered, and recent inventions have made it possible to produce and market pure synthetic fabrics such as nylon.

The considerable increase in the number of available basic textile fibres within the last few years has naturally involved a necessary adaptation of finishing processes.

The finishing trade has greatly widened its field of activity. Enormous progress has been made since the days when the empirical methods of the old-time craftsmen were replaced by scientific methods based on an extensive knowledge of the raw materials employed. Such remarkable improvements have been achieved that nowadays it is often difficult to recognize the original raw material of a fabric.

This new technique has made it possible for the Swiss finishing industry to prepare fabrics remarkable both for their quality and originality. It is hardly necessary to mention such products as the Swiss organdies, the surprising range and variety of which have undoubtedly served to establish the reputation of this fine national industry.

(Continued on page 85.)


ABRAHAM
STOFFEL

BISCHOFF & MULLER