

Wool

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WOOL



I. Structure, growth and economic importance of the Swiss wool textile industry.

The Swiss wool textile industry? Even to-day the mention of it still causes a certain amount of astonishment. And yet at the present moment the wool textile industry represents one of the principal branches of the Swiss textile industry. Of the more than 80 different concerns which go to make it up, about 20 are concerned with the spinning and twisting of industrial yarns and knitting wools, and about 40 with the weaving of fabrics for clothes, blankets and furnishing materials. Also included in the wool textile industry are several firms which make carpets, felt and felt cloth, some firms which work with shoddy wool, as well as other concerns specialising in the dyeing and finishing of yarns and fabrics. This industry provides employment for some 10 000 people, while in 1882 its 47 concerns employed only 2500. To-day it makes use of some 330 000 spindles and twisting frames for woollen and worsted yarns and 3000 looms for the weaving of fabrics, blankets and carpets. While certain branches of the wool textile industry have only worked for the home market, others, in particular those concerned with worsteds, produce for export which is of great importance to them. During the course of the last few years, the Swiss wool textile industry has made considerable progress, so that to-day the work it produces is equal in quality to the best products of the classic producers. The best proof of this is the great interest it has aroused abroad.

II. History.

Working with wool has been carried on in Switzerland since the beginning of the Middle Ages. Early documents mention a wool mill in Basle in 1193 and, later, another in Zurich in 1258. From the 16th century onwards, the wool textile industry made extremely rapid progress on the territory of the old Confederation. But subjected to increasing pressure from foreign competition and supplanted by the newly introduced cotton, it suffered a set-back in the 18th century and only survived in piece-work in the home. The growth of the international wool trade and the rapid industrialisation of Europe in the 19th century enabled it to recover and become an important branch of the national economy.

The first cloth mill was founded in Berne in 1748. In the 1860's, first of all the spinning, and later the weaving, of worsted was introduced into Switzerland. Towards the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the present century, the wool textile industry took on the industrial manufacture of special articles, and the production of traditional types was adapted to modern development in technique.

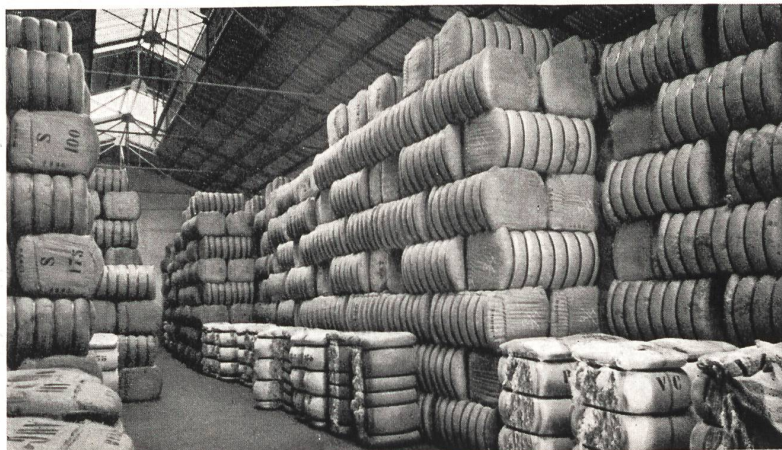
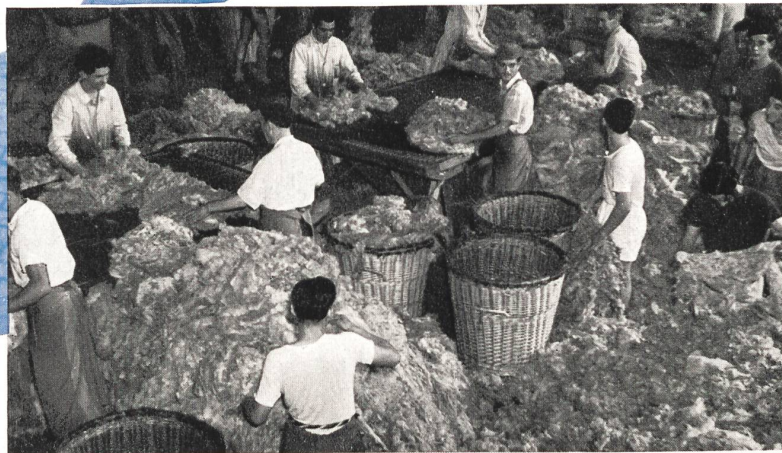


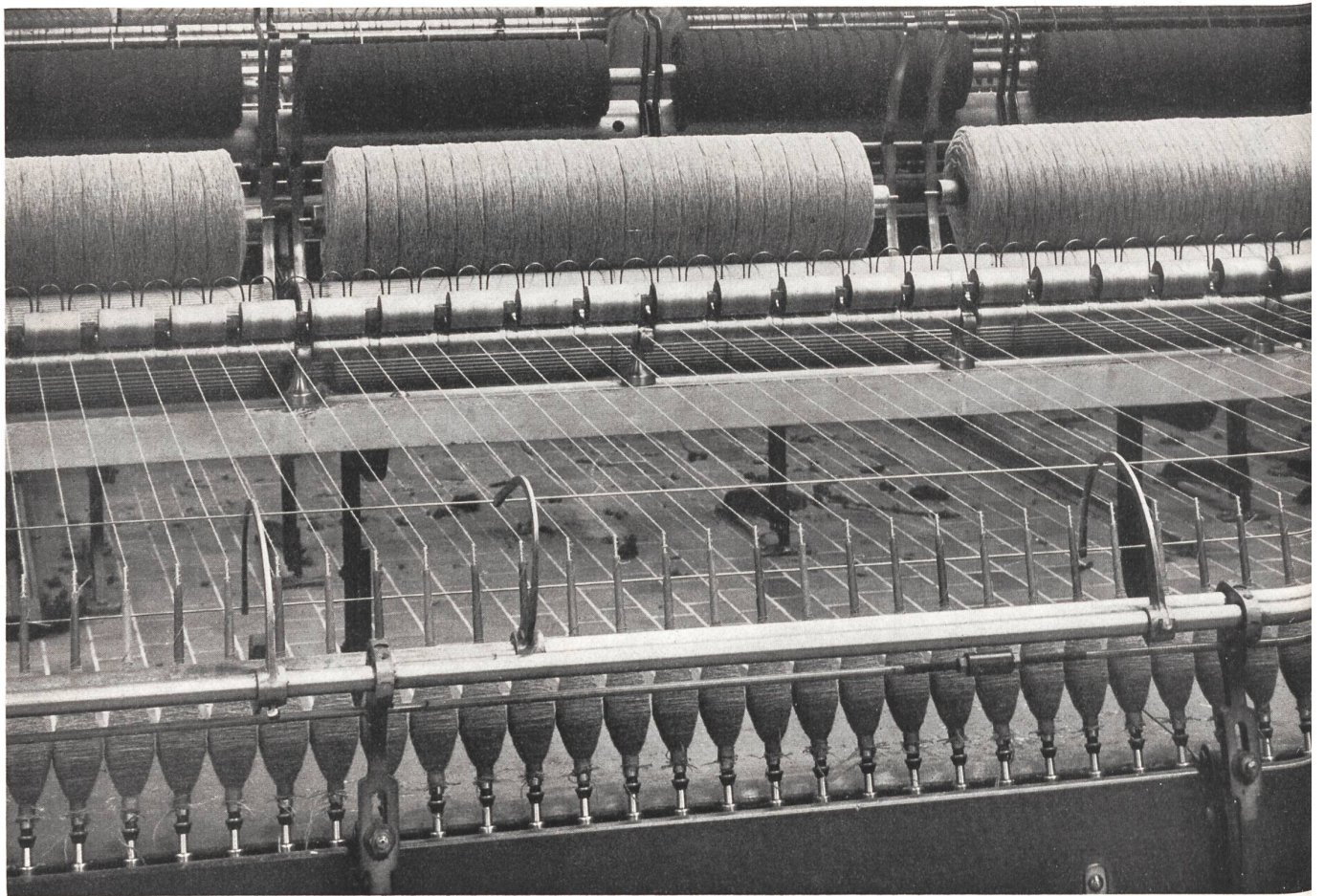


III. Wool supplies; wool trade.

In order to obtain the wool it requires Switzerland is obliged for the most part to rely on imports, particularly from countries overseas, for in normal times home production only meets 3 to 4 % of the demand. Homeproduced wool is mainly used in the manufacture of cloth and blankets, and also in the manufacture of felt and carpets but to a lesser extent.

The Swiss wool textile industry could not continue to exist if it were not able to rely upon the existence of a well-organised commercial machine, that is to say on the services of specialised commercial houses thoroughly acquainted with the world production markets and their particular ways and customs. Firms have been established in the principal centres such as Basle, Zurich, Geneva, etc. to deal in wool, either on their own account — international transit dealings too to a certain extent — or as representatives of foreign firms. To-day the wool trade is represented by about 30 firms, some of them possessing their own agencies in the wool-producing countries overseas, which gives them an international importance. The value of the wool imported annually into Switzerland has risen to 60 million Swiss francs during the course of the last few years.





IV. Programme of manufacture.

1. YARNS.

A. Worsted yarns.

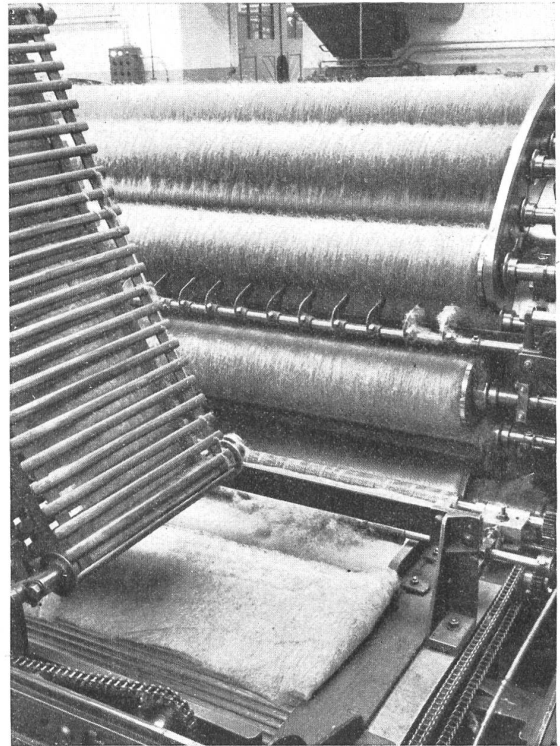
Worsted yarns are obtained by combing the wool fibre. The passage of the wool through the combs removes the short fibres and lays the long fibres out parallel; consequently worsted yarn can be more finely spun, and the yarns are thus smoother and more compact. Owing to the quality of their products, Swiss wool spinning mills have a very high reputation both in Switzerland and abroad which, even before the first World War, gave them a very strong position among the export industries. When international commercial relations were normal, Switzerland exported large quantities of worsted yarns — even to England!

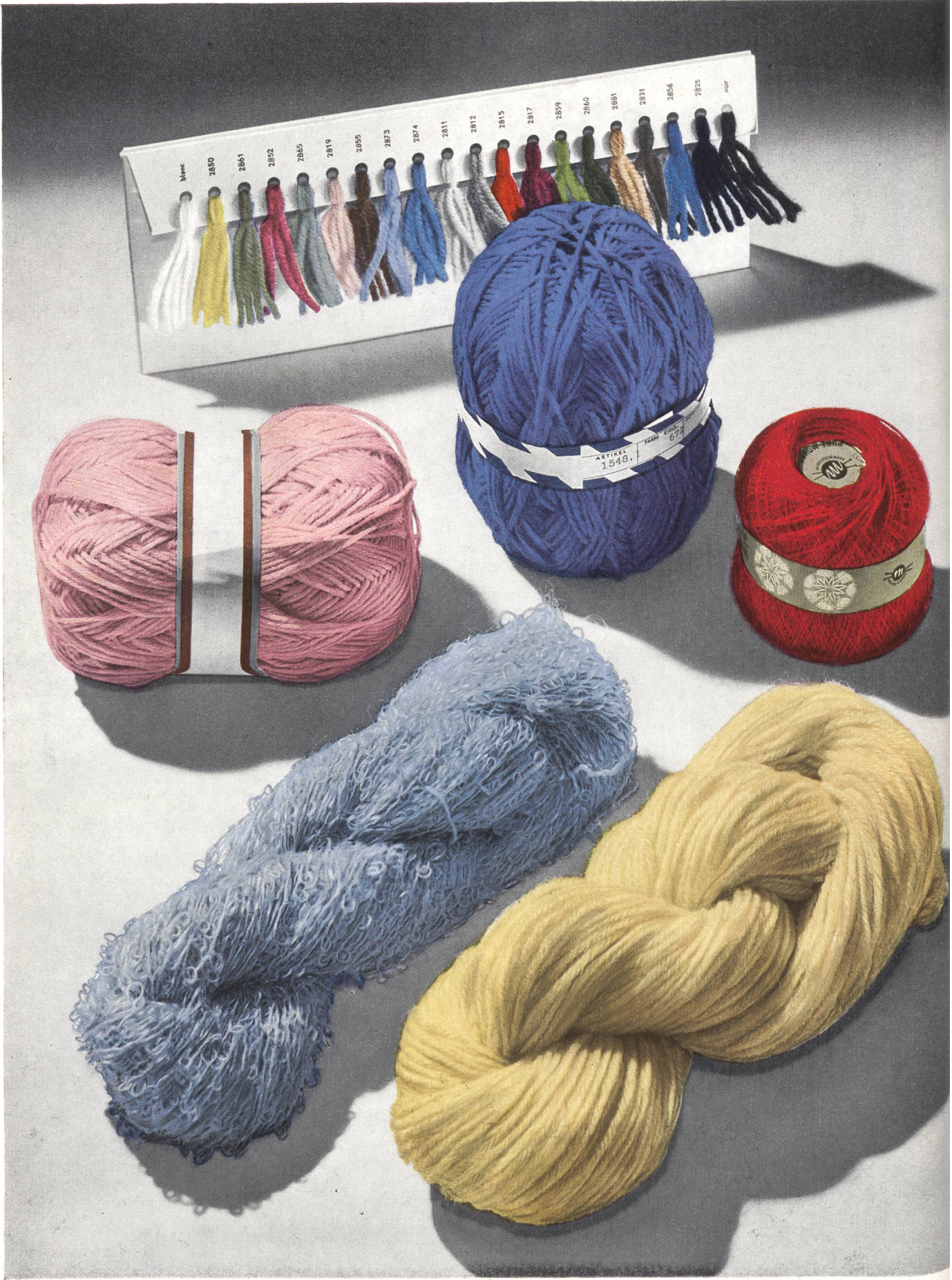
Worsted yarns are used in weaving, knitting, for hosiery and also for the manufacture of hand-knitting wools. Swiss worsted spinning mills manufacture and sell yarns in all the usual counts down to the very finest, in pure wool or wool mixed with alpaca, angora or synthetic fibres, *écru*, dyed, blended and *chiné*, smooth or with spun effects (*bouclés*, *knops*, etc.) and in every conceivable shape and form. Each spinning mill has its own speciality, which enables it to take into particular consideration the demands of its clients.

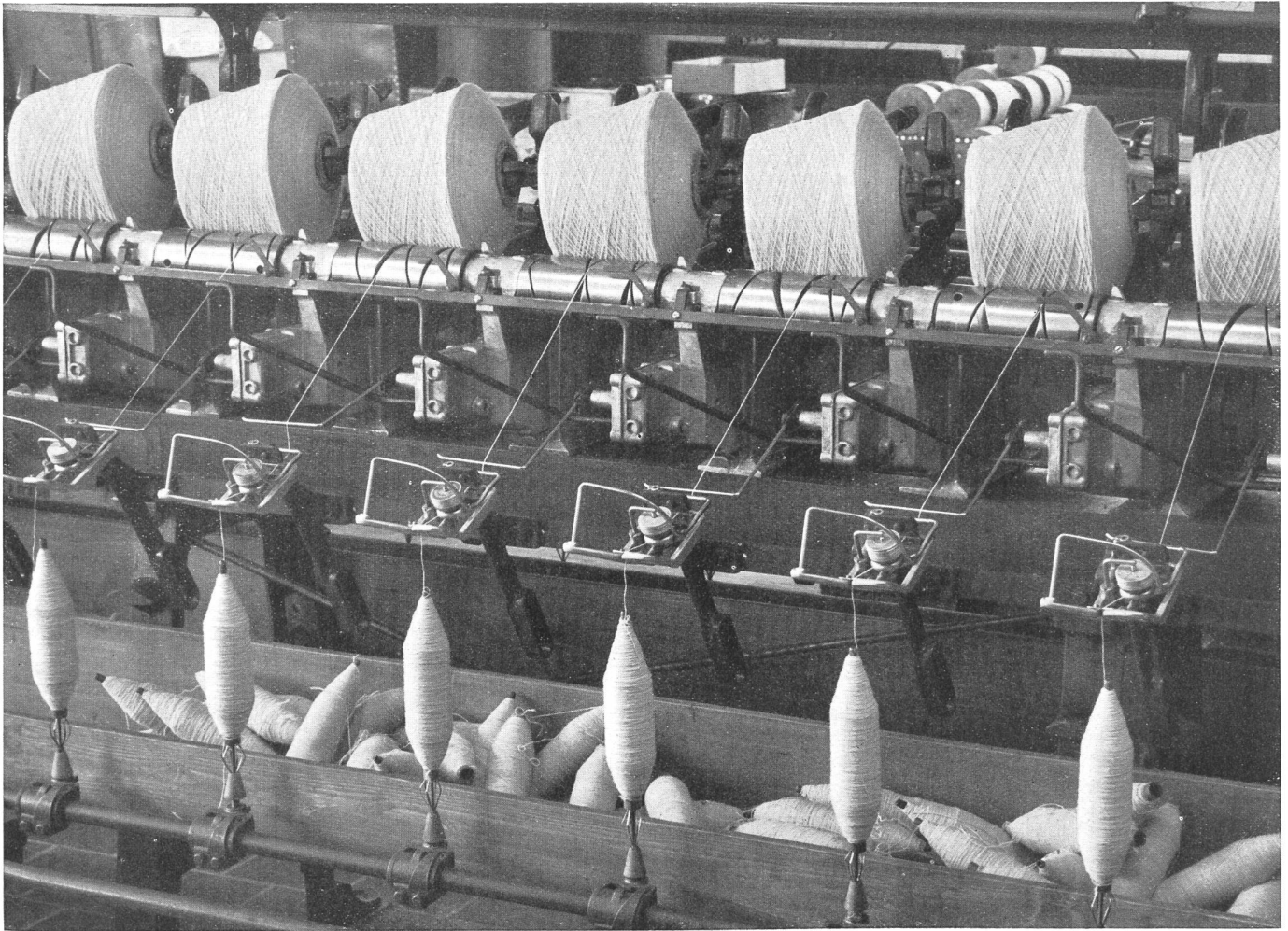


B. Woollen yarns.

The spinning of carded wool has recently developed into an independent speciality, whereas formerly it was generally included in the manufacture of blankets and cloth. Woollen yarns are also used for the most varied purposes, principally for the weaving of fabrics for suits and coats, materials for uniforms, fabrics for furniture, industrial fabrics, and also for hand-knitting and for the manufacture of carpets worked by hand. Like worsted yarns, they are spun and twisted either in pure wools, generally of the somewhat coarser counts, or in mixtures with cotton, other animal « wools » or synthetic fibres, and sold on the home or foreign market in all the usual forms. Certain carded yarn spinning mills, in addition to yarns of waste silk and staple fibre, also manufacture condenser yarns either of pure cotton or cotton mixed with wool and spun according to the principles used in spinning carded wool.



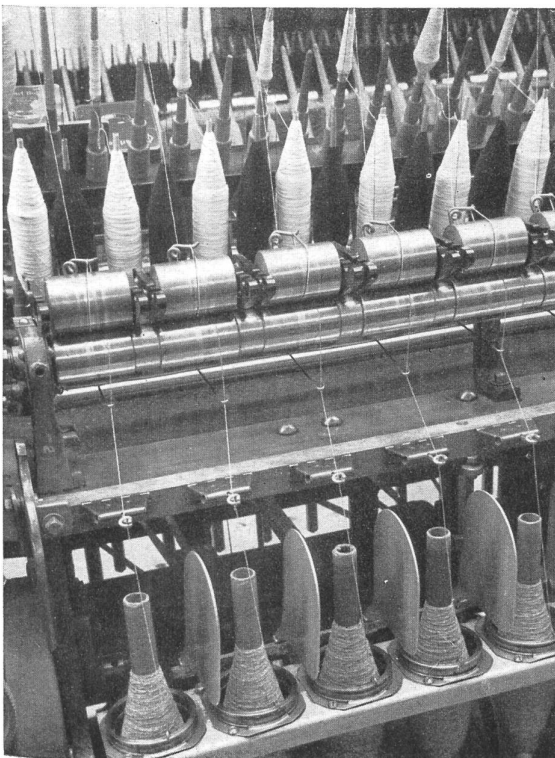




C. Knitting wools.

The manufacture of hand-knitting wools — principally worsted — has grown in the course of the last few decades to the point of forming to-day an important speciality of the Swiss wool textile industry, in conjunction with the subsidiary branches which deal with doubling, dyeing and finishing in general. Swiss production in this field offers an incredible variety of products in all possible counts, in different colours, types, yarn effects, etc., in a quantity of makes and brands well known both in Switzerland and abroad.

An analysis of the market has shown that 97 % of Swiss housewives buy knitting wool. The fashion for hand-knitted outer garments and underwear became more popular during the last war, and has brought about an increase in the demand for hand-knitting wools. It is also apparent that there is a growing demand for this article abroad, unfortunately hampered however by measures of commercial policy and obstacles in the way of the exchange of payments. In 1949 Switzerland exported several times the quantity of knitting wool it imported. Its principal client was Western Germany which consumed about 90 % of the total quantity exported, its wool requirements being not yet completely satisfied. Both France and the Belgo-Luxembourg Union each absorbed more than 200 cwt., and Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Austria lesser quantities.

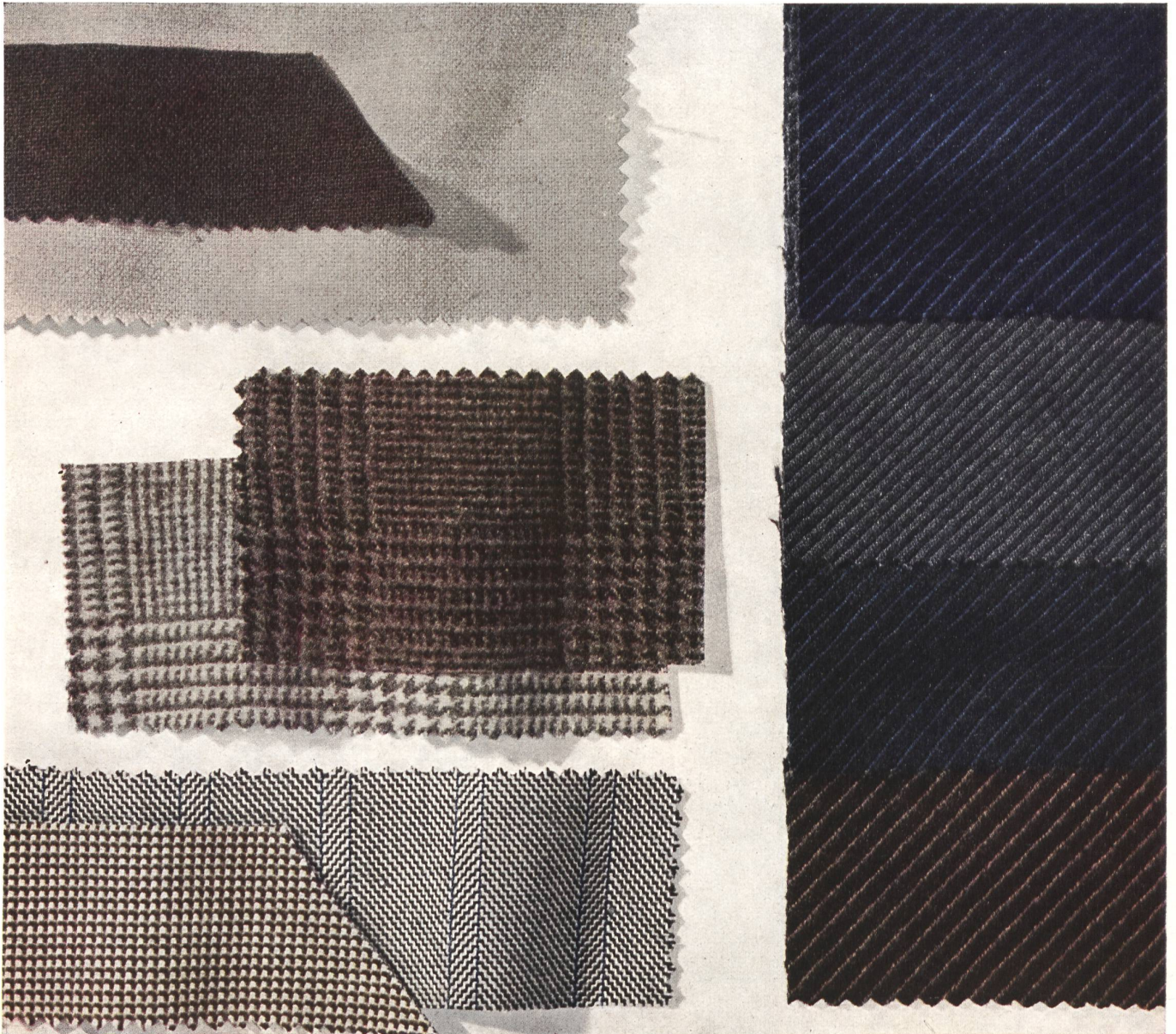


2. WOOLLENS AND WORSTEDS

A. Fabrics for men and women's fashions.

The weaving of wool is at the moment one of the most productive activities of the Swiss wool textile industry ; it is carried on by about 40 different concerns, woollen cloth mills and worsted mills. The total annual capacity of output is about 11 million yards of fabric, that is to say 25 % more than during the years immediately preceding the war. Production is carried out on 2500 looms and employs about 5000 men and women workers, not counting a number of skilled technicians, a decisive element in the level of production.

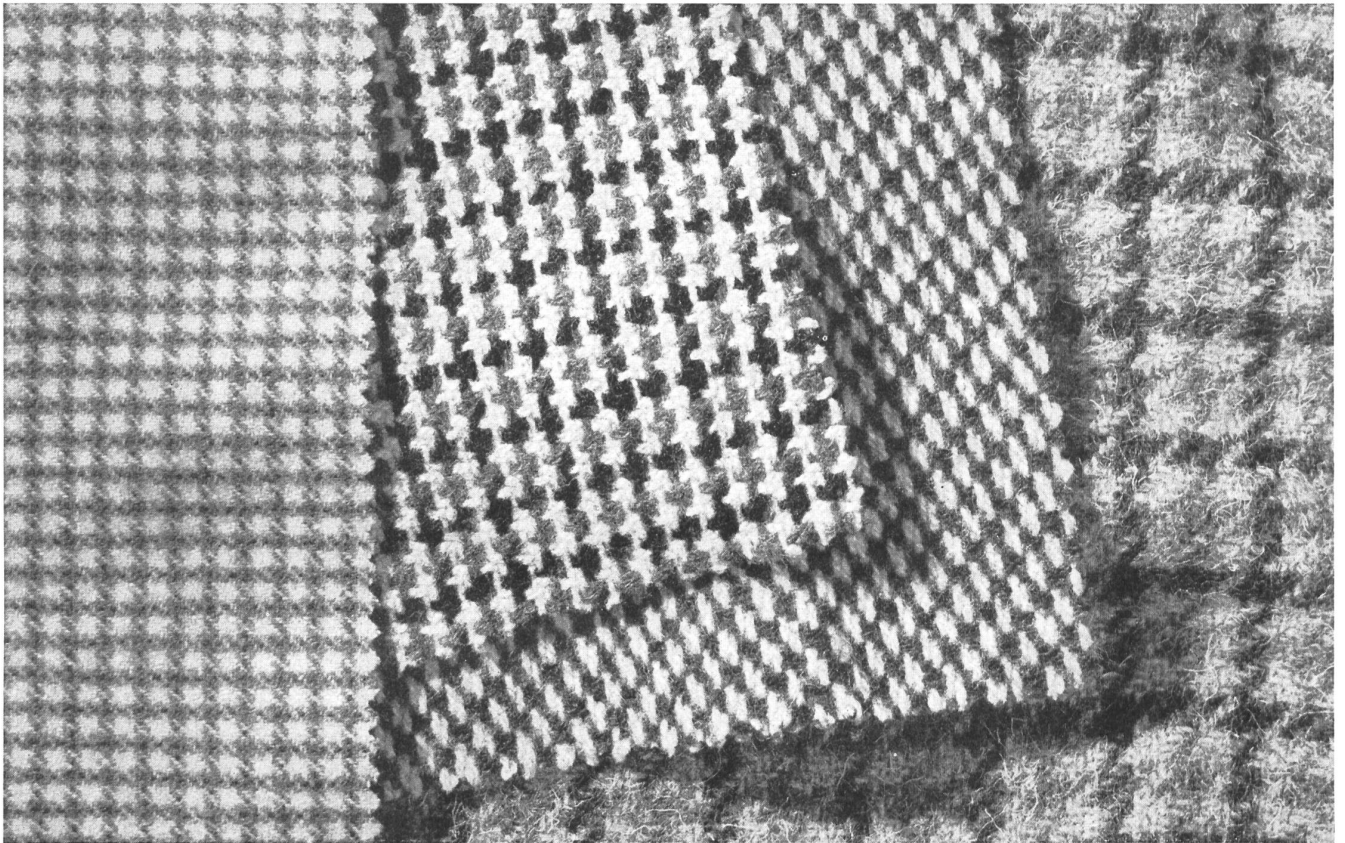
For a long time Swiss woollen fabrics had the reputation of only being suitable for local consumption, that is to say for the simple demands and tastes of the rural classes. Heavy rustic cloth and half-wool fabrics were taken to be typical products of the Swiss cloth mills.



It is true moreover that during the last century these types together with materials for uniforms, constituted the specialities of cloth mills in Switzerland. But the mills developed and also began to produce worsted fabrics which they exported to all countries. For many years and even decades, Swiss mousseline-de-laine for example was in very great demand abroad, until one day a whim of fashion made it disappear altogether from manufacturing programmes.

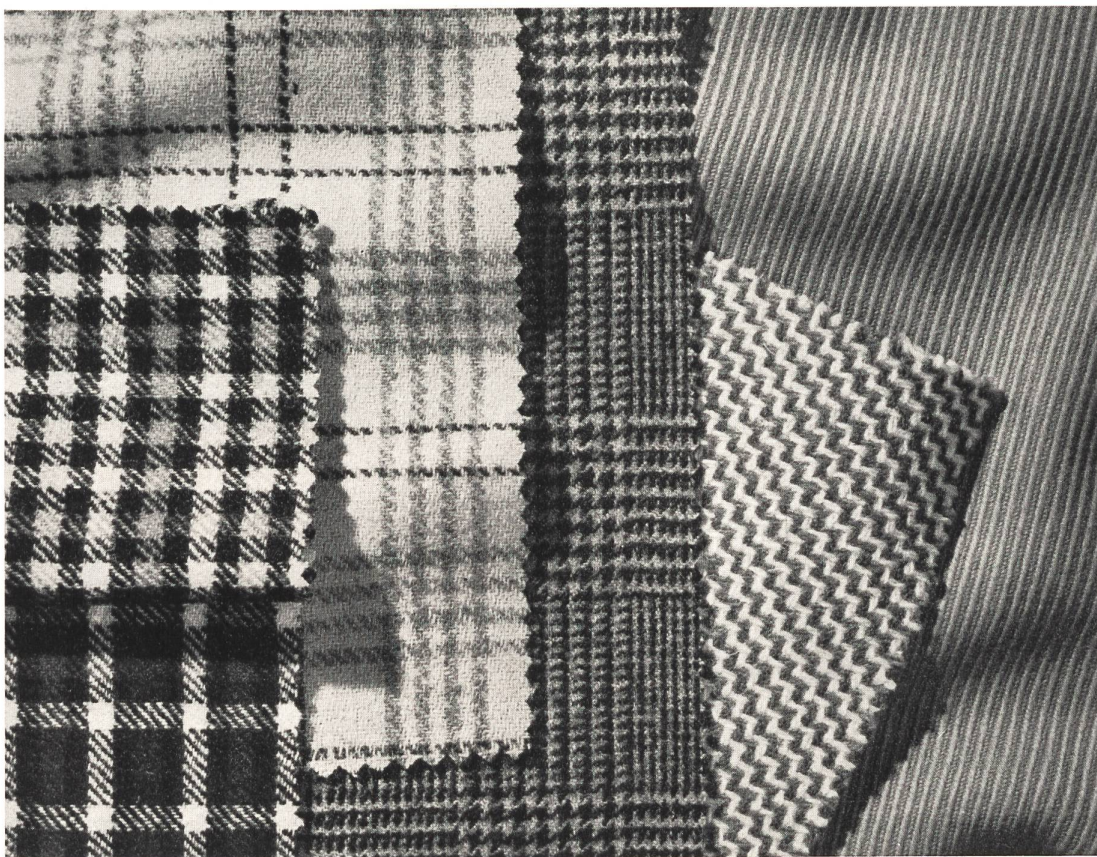
At the present moment mills which formerly only manufactured cloth — and most of these firms still retain in their trade name the title « cloth mills » — are almost all able to weave not only materials for uniforms but woollen and worsted fabrics for men and women's suits, overcoats and sportswear.





Worsted mills manufacture mostly lightweight worsteds which were formerly used almost exclusively for women's fashions, but which are now being used more and more for men's clothes. The increasingly rapid development of fashion, the influence of sport and sports styles have contributed among other factors to blurring the divisions separating the different types to such an extent that a fabric which would have been considered too fancy a few years ago, to-day appears smart, and a woman may now choose the same material for a costume as a man might choose for his suit.

It seems necessary to us to stress here the different phenomena which have influenced each other, and which may be summed up very briefly as follows : changes in taste and habits in clothes, fluctuations in demand, technical and artistic development of manufacture, and enlargement of production programmes. This helps us to understand how Swiss mills have come to produce such a wide range of fabrics, from the heaviest woollens such as reversible fabrics for overcoats to lightweight worsteds for the summer in frescos, tropical styles, etc. Among the fabrics for women we also find an originality and an abundance often unsuspected by the uninitiated.

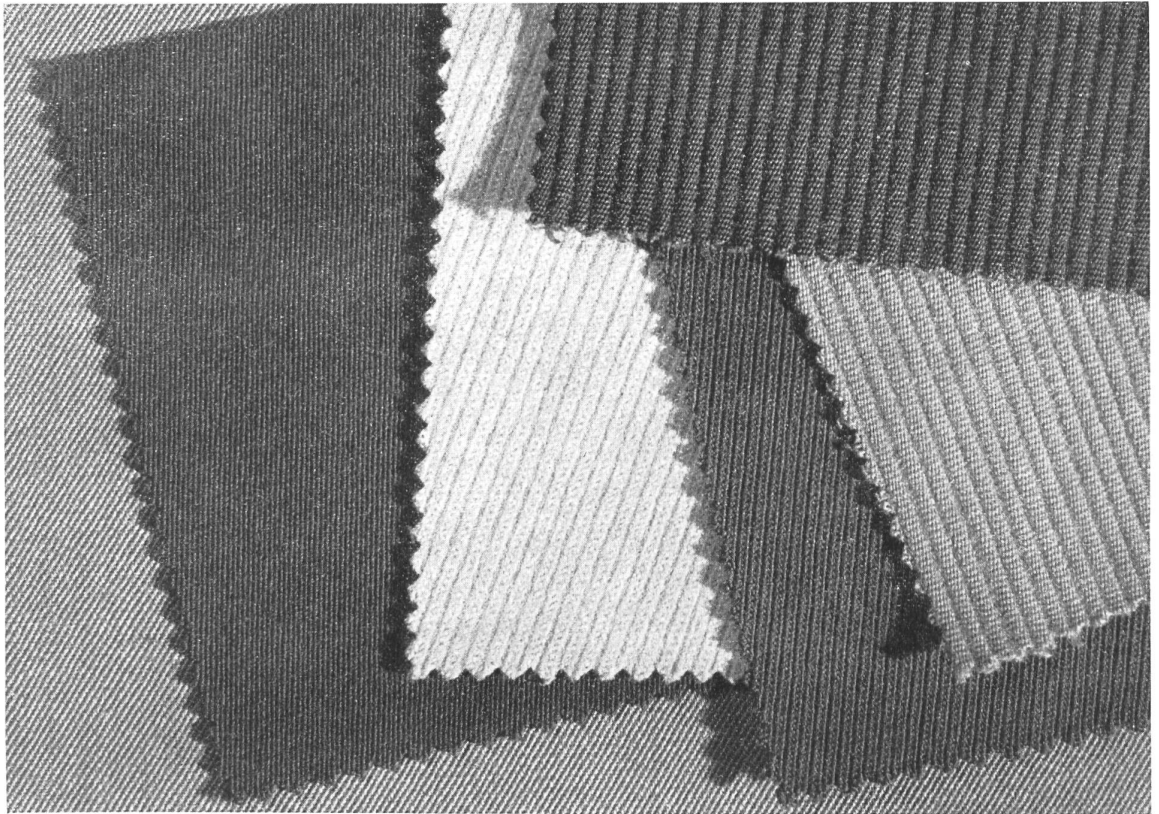
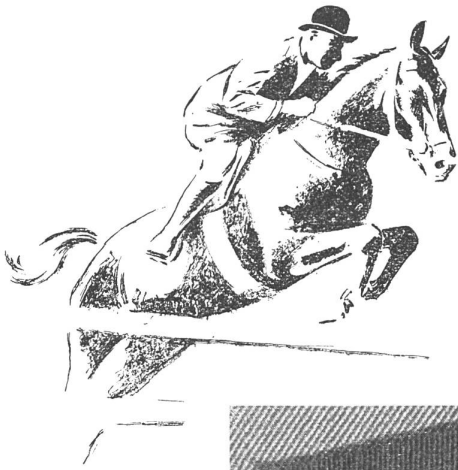


There are woollens and worsteds for all styles and all ages, from the simple printed fabric to the more colourful fancy fabrics, from plain fabrics and materials for classic tailormades to the brightly coloured plaids beloved of young girls, and including all the possibilities offered by stripes, diagonals, checks, houndstooth weaves, etc.

According to a general practice nowadays, many special fabrics are protected by trade names and registered trade marks.

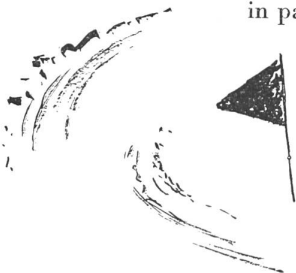
B. Materials for uniforms, fabrics for sportswear.

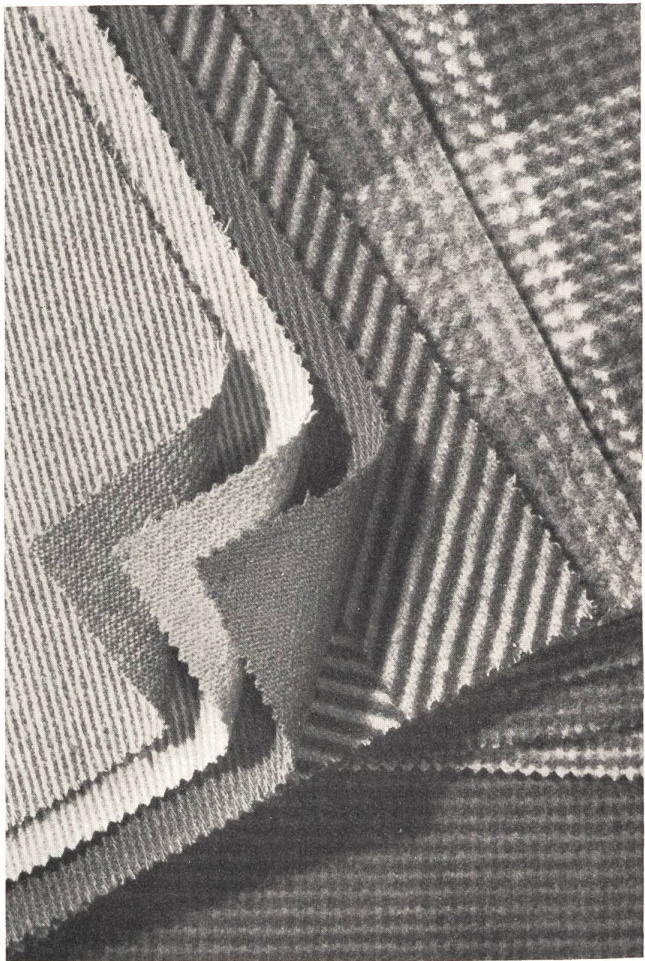
From the very beginning Swiss cloth mills have had the task of manufacturing materials for uniforms for the army, which are fabrics that have to meet very strict requirements. They have always made it a point of honour to justify the confidence implied by this commission. Thus in Switzerland the manufacture of cloth is one of the principal industries necessary to national defence. During the 1939-1945 War, Swiss cloth mills were able to meet entirely the requirements of the army and its auxiliary services out of their own production and thanks to reserves made in good time. Although from 1940 onwards they could not import any raw materials, they never-



theless supplied nearly 11 million yards of cloth for uniforms, the greater part of which was for the army. In addition these firms supply cloth for uniforms for public and private administrative services, the police force, bands, etc. They have also often delivered fabrics to foreign armies and administrative services. The wool textile industries contribute further to military equipment by supplying other articles such as hosiery, blankets, felt, etc.

This review would not be complete if we failed to mention here that the geographical, historical and social character of Switzerland has favoured the development of sport in this country, and particularly of skiing and mountain climbing. Swiss cloth mills have consequently found an interesting field of activity in the production of special fabrics for sportswear, and have succeeded in raising the quality of their products to the very high level demanded by the home market. In the opinion of foreign connoisseurs, Swiss proofed gaberdines rank among the best in international production. Let us also mention here other fabrics such as cords of different kinds, which are greatly appreciated for various sports and for riding in particular.





C. Coating fabrics.

Town coats, travel coats, casual coats — and whatever other name they may be given — are in many countries an indispensable part of one's wardrobe for many months of the year as protection against the cold, the rain and bad weather.

Not only the snug winter coat but also lighter coats for midseason wear, raincoats of wool gaberdine and sports coats of loden are very popular. For women's coats, the choice of design and colour at the disposal of dressmakers and tailors is almost inexhaustible, and each season brings with it novelties well designed to stimulate the imagination of the creators of fashion.

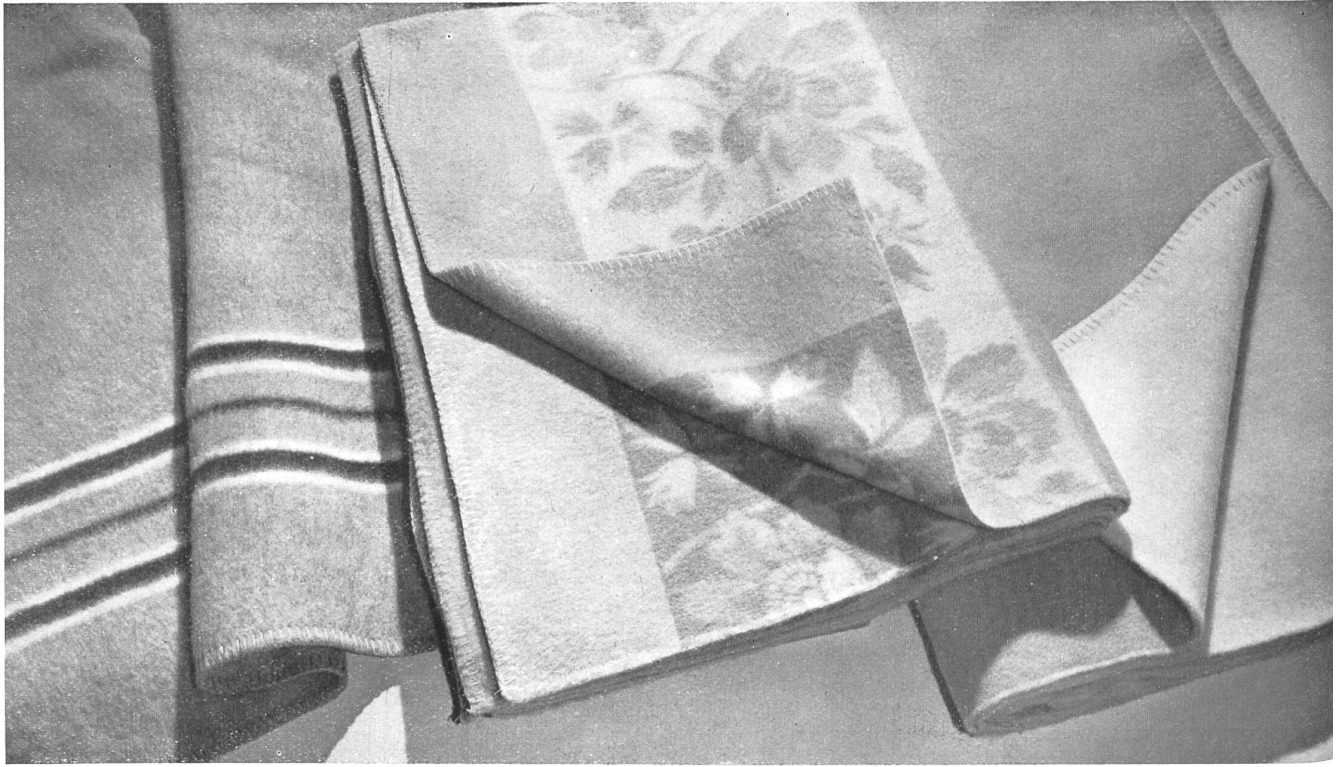
3. WOOL IN THE HOME

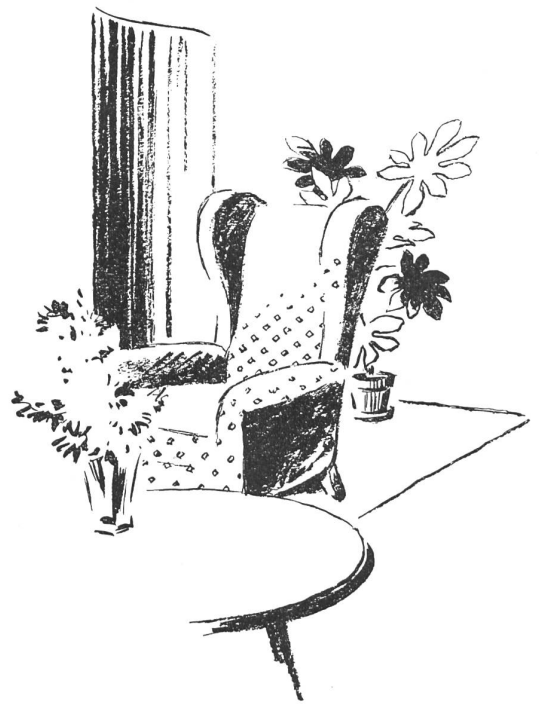
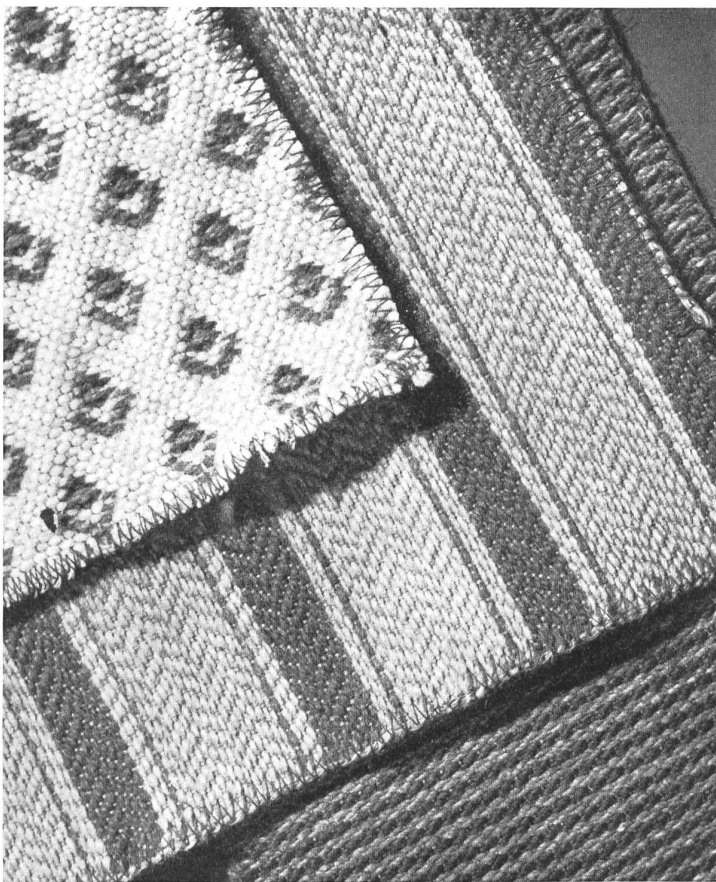
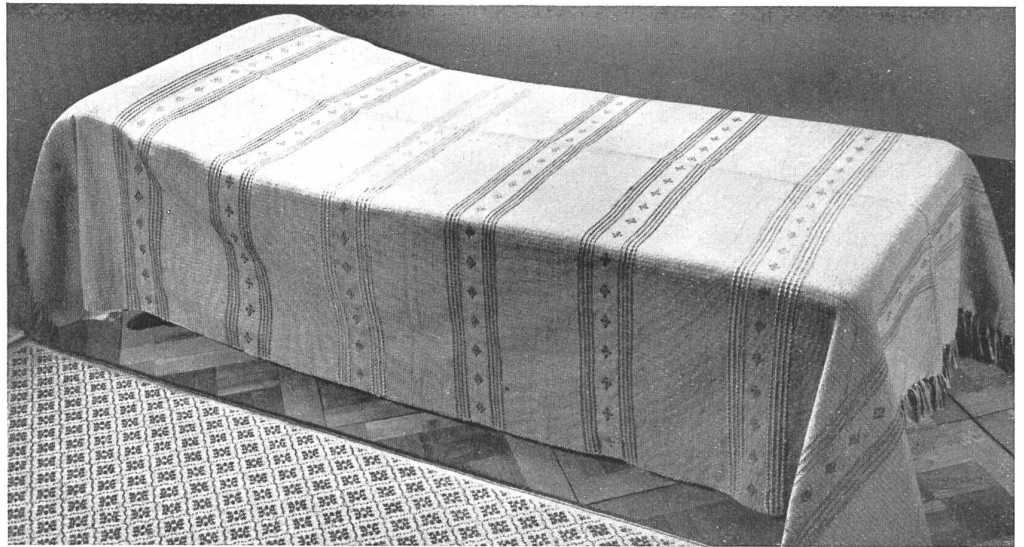
Wool is so indispensable to our clothing, we live in such close contact with it, there is no denying, that we are no longer conscious of it. But the many and varied uses of wool in the home are none the less important, and far be it from us to overlook them in this review.

A. Woollen blankets and rugs.

Wool, the best thermic insulator, is the ideal material for the manufacture of blankets and rugs of all kinds. Blankets have played a much more important role with primitive peoples than in our industrial civilisation.

But in all the countries with a somewhat chilly climate, blankets are an indispensable part of the household equipment. «To write the memoirs of a blanket» a writer once said, «would be to retrace all the stages, all the joys and all the miseries of human life.» Blankets and rugs are made in Switzerland in a great variety of qualities and designs. The most beautiful of all are unquestionably those made of camel hair. Let us also mention blankets of wool or half-wool, plain or striped, with Jacquard designs, reversible or otherwise, blankets with amusing designs for children's beds, plaid style travelling rugs and car rugs, and military blankets which the soldier could not do without.





B. Furnishing fabrics.

The manufacture of furnishing fabrics is partially derived from that of carpets to which it is closely related. In Switzerland it is still carried on to a great extent in the home on hand looms, in the mountains, but also industrially on mechanical looms. The manufacture of these fabrics, divan covers, carpets, etc., which is almost one of the decorative arts, opens up an interesting field of activity to designers and artists. This artistic character of the production gives consumers countless possibilities for furnishing the home both comfortably and tastefully.

C. Carpets.

Carpets are indispensable to every well-kept home, whether in the study or the lounge, the sitting-room or the bedroom. They create a comfortable and luxurious atmosphere, but they also play a decorative role and



are an artistic element in the appointments of the home. Even in the past, the weaving and working of carpets were considered as noble decorative arts. The designing and execution of clever compositions in colour for the adornment of walls and floors open up vast possibilities to artists. Moreover, when carpets and tapestries are made of wool, their artistic value is enhanced by practical advantages. A wool carpet is a protection against dust and dirt and it deadens noise, consequently it is a factor towards comfort and hygiene.

The manufacturing programme of Swiss carpet manufacturers includes an exceptionally wide range of materials, types, styles and designs in all sizes. The principal types are bouclé, velvet, Tournay, Axminster and moquette in all styles and colours. Swiss carpet manufacturers have reached a very high degree of quality in the production of Oriental style carpets. Finally, the manufacture of uncut bouclé carpets may be considered a Swiss speciality.



D. Woollen scarves, shawls and squares.

For a long time now the scarves and squares worn by men and women round their necks have ceased to be dull accessories without imagination or colour but, on the contrary, are an adornment as well as protection against the cold. Fine hand-printed fabrics of mousseline-de-laine and cashmere are characteristic fashion accessories which are in no way inferior in beauty and fantasy of design and colour to scarves of other fibres. These Swiss woollen squares moreover are found in all parts of the world. Women, and especially young girls, particularly appreciate them, not only for wearing round the neck or over the shoulders but also for covering the head. Furthermore, certain Swiss cloth mills also manufacture plain and colour-woven scarves for men and women in soft wool, which are also very popular fashion accessories.





4. FELT AND FELT ARTICLES

The manufacture of felt is an aspect of the use of wool which, although little known, is not without importance. Contrary to fabrics, felt is not made by the regular interweaving of yarns but by the unmethodical matting of the fibres, brought about by rolling and pressing with the help of steam; this is what is meant by the felting of wool. Only fibres of animal origin lend themselves to this process, in particular wool and other animal hair. That is why one talks about wool felt and hair felt. Mention must also be made of felt cloth which, contrary to what has just been said, is produced in the first place by weaving, the cloth being felted afterwards in such a way that its texture disappears completely in the mass of matted hairs. Felt is largely utilized as an insulator, a padding and a damping material and is consequently used for these purposes in many industries; for example in the clothing industries for the padding of clothes and for the undersides of collars, for shoes and the soles of slippers, in the paper and textile industries for the padding of cylinders of various machines, and also in other industries such as flour-milling and tanning. Coloured felts are also manufactured for various purposes: for the applied arts, for decorating and, for technical uses, a quantity of different articles are also made in varied thicknesses and shapes. Hat manufacturers buy wool and hair felt hoods, that is to say semi-manufactured products. Each of the four felt factories existing at the present moment in Switzerland has its own particular manufacturing programme.

