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Textile Industries Meet War's Challenge

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A CHALLENGE to woolen mills is the government's order for 1942 which is six times the 1940 demand for wool. In view of the wool shortage, those in the business marvel at the way this fiber is being stretched to meet the needs of the Army, Navy and civilians.

Wool fibers may be used over and over again and they may also be used in combination with other fibers. Mixing of wool with other fibers is really a form of rationing the available wool which includes the three classes: new, reprocessed and reused wool. Reprocessed and reused wools have been used in this country since 1890. The amount of such wools in use continues to increase with need and to gain in favor with improved processes of reclaiming wool.

Cotton is more and more in demand to replace wool. It is used in combination with wool and in combination with rayon. There is an ample supply of raw cotton but approximately 50 percent of the cotton textile mills are working on government orders. Other mills, particularly woolen mills, have been diverted to the production of cotton textiles. Cotton is being used more extensively in clothing of all kinds.

There are today spun rayons which closely resemble wool, lacking only wool's resilience. Wool is also mixed with cotton, especially in blankets. Rayons released for civilian use are 79 percent or less of the past supplies. Much goes into stockings, some to other countries. There is now a shortage of acetate rayon because of the war needs. The fabrics made from rayons are serviceable and in high demand by the public.

A new protein fiber, "Aralac," from milk casein has been developed to be used with rayon or cotton or as interlinings. It can be dyed so as to be color fast to dry cleaning and to light. It has shrinkage of less than two percent.

Efforts are being made to start producing silk in the United States. Flax is grown in some of the northern states but has yet to be developed into a major industry. Textile fibers from redwoods in the West and yuccas of the desert are being studied. Textile scientists are learning and studying how to make the most of combinations of fibers and of new fibers.

The forecast says there will be a return to simpler, sturdier clothes for the duration. Staples in materials are also in order: cotton piques, woven chambrays, woven gingham, glazed chintz. Some cotton velveteen, corduroy and gabardines will be offered but in smaller, more limited quantities than last year. There will be no novelty weaves available. Fabrics made of combed yarns are likely to be scarce because most of these are required for defense purposes.

Fabrics will have a dual purpose, some of the materials being made for women's and men's clothing alike. Women's wear will be a little heavier and men's wear slightly lighter. Materials in supply this year will be similar to last year's.