

Reciprocity = fair play

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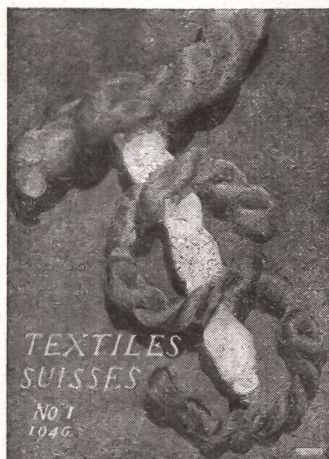
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Cover Page :

T = Italian (top) and Japanese raw silk ;

S = Swiss-made silk twist.

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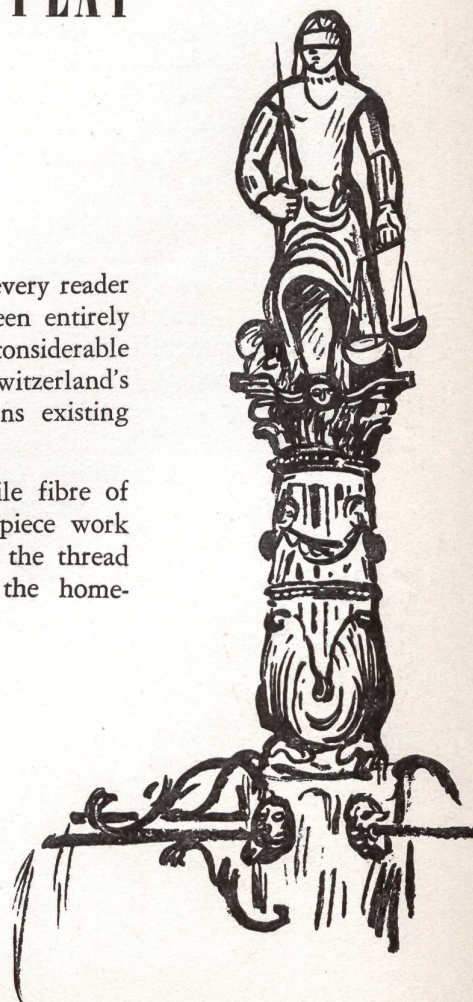
RECIPROCITY = FAIR PLAY

Switzerland exports textiles but also imports them

Textile products represent a very important part of Swiss exports, as every reader of *Swiss Textiles* knows since, for the last twenty years, this journal has been entirely devoted to proclaiming the fact. However, Switzerland also consumes considerable quantities of textiles from abroad. The recently published figures of Switzerland's foreign trade for 1948 give us an opportunity of examining the relations existing between Switzerland and her suppliers and clients in the textile trade.

It is well known that Switzerland produces hardly any natural textile fibre of her own, neither silk nor cotton, but just a little wool and flax used for piece work in the home, and she must import raw silk, raw cotton and yarn, and all the thread needed for her linen industry ; she even has to import wood-pulp for the home-production of rayon and staple fibre (viscose base).

The Fountain of Justice,
in Lausanne.



Here are some figures setting out the extent of these imports of raw materials and semi-manufactured products which are essential to the Swiss textile industry:

SWISS IMPORTS OF RAW MATERIALS FOR THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

	10 ton wagon loads			Value in millions of Swiss francs		
	1938	1947	1948	1938	1947	1948
Cellulose for the manufacture of rayon	607	2268	2311	2.5	18.6	23.0
Raw cotton	2844	2902	2410	37.2	91.4	89.5
Silk waste and cardings	109	61	66	5.6	3.9	2.4
Raw silk	53	23	26	11.5	13.5	7.4
Raw wool	699	1398	966	19.5	75.7	60.0
Wool tops	179	295	283	8.6	31.5	33.0
Totals	4491	6947	6062	84.9	234.6	215.3

It might be thought that the Swiss market amply provided as it is, and even to a certain extent saturated, with fine quality textiles from all branches of home-production, would close its doors to foreign products competing against it. Now this is not the case. As we have also often repeated here, Switzerland presents such ethnical and social differences for a population of only 4½ million inhabitants, that producers cannot be content to manufacture a limited number of standardized articles considered sufficient to cover all the needs of the consumer; on the one hand the population, whose purchasing power is high, insists upon fine quality products and great variety, and on the other hand, the highly specialized man-power could not be properly used to mass-produce articles of indifferent quality. Mass production, therefore, is foreign to Swiss methods of production and so Switzerland finds herself obliged to export in order to maintain her complex activity which the home market alone would not justify. She ought therefore to be able to supply the whole of the products consumed in the country herself. But, on the one hand, as we have just pointed out, she cannot devote herself to all types of production, including those which would not find a ready sale and could be supplied more cheaply by other countries, and on the other hand, the Swiss consumer possesses, owing to the historical and political traditions of his country and to its diversity in structure already mentioned above, a capacity for remaining remarkably independent in his judgement and in his tastes. Switzerland is democratic enough not to be tempted by the wish to protect herself against more or less imaginary influences from abroad, by taking measures to prohibit the consumption of some particular article and that is why the Swiss market is left open to foreign exports, even in the case of articles which are already specialized in by Switzerland herself. As an example we will only mention one item here, that of ready-made clothing (ladies and men's) which in fact amounts to 13 million Swiss francs in the Swiss export figures for 1948 and 15 million for imports in the same year. Switzerland with her strong currency, is a market where every producer nation would like to place its products. Not having any ambitions of political or economic supremacy, and being fundamentally democratic, Switzerland has always followed her tendencies towards liberalism in so far as it has been possible and only when it has been absolutely necessary has she resorted to measures to protect her own national production. In return, she expects similar treatment from other countries. Now her production is entirely based on the idea of quality. In the hands of her craftsmen and workers, the most ordinary raw materials become articles of first-class quality. Only one step separates them from being included in the category of luxury products. This is a step which is only too readily taken by too many countries who, although anxious to obtain Swiss francs, do not want to reciprocate and close their doors to the silks of Zurich, the ribbons of Basle and the embroidery of St. Gall. Even if she so desired, Switzerland could not change her whole economy and set herself, according to principles wholly foreign to her very nature, to producing articles which do not form part of

her manufacturing programme. It is true that her industries have made enormous and rapid strides these last few years, but the highest point of the curve of prosperity has been passed, and that was in 1948.

Moreover, although Swiss exports greatly increased during the period from after the war until 1947, and even 1948, and then began to decrease, imports have also assumed considerable proportions. The falling-off which occurred during the course of last year is due, above all, to the market situation. It is none the less true that Swiss imports of finished textiles from abroad are still considerable. Here are some more figures characteristic of this development:

MANUFACTURED TEXTILE PRODUCTS AND SWISS FOREIGN TRADE

	Exports in millions of Sw. fr.			Imports in millions of Sw. fr.		
	1938	1947	1948	1938	1947	1948
Cotton yarn	23.6	10.7	27.3	5.3	35.0	25.6
Cotton fabrics	58.9	93.6	79.1	20.8	70.1	41.7
Embroideries, resp. lace (import.)	26.0	89.2	62.0	0.7	2.4	1.4
Rayon and staple fibre yarn	20.2	37.3	41.5	8.4	20.9	10.9
Silk and rayon fabrics	30.7	173.7	79.9	19.2	28.3	12.2
Woollen yarn	5.3	3.0	4.0	8.5	61.3	33.4
Woollen fabrics	3.2	5.6	6.0	20.3	68.0	43.0
Hosiery	8.0	26.7	20.2	5.5	30.5	37.5
of which stockings	(0.4)	(4.0)	(3.5)	(1.4)	(21.2)	(28.5)
Ready-made clothing	3.1	17.5	13.0	7.4	14.5	15.9
Totals	179.0	457.3	333.0	96.1	331.0	221.6

The last three items in this table are particularly eloquent, as they refer to industries which have developed considerably in Switzerland in recent decades. However, when considering these figures we must take into account the momentary inactivity of Germany, whose deficiencies Switzerland has had to make up for, but which will certainly take its place again among the most important suppliers and clients of this country.

It can be seen then that, in spite of the importance of its own textile production, Switzerland nevertheless remains an interesting outlet for foreign articles in this line. Moreover, let us recall here in passing that textiles represent only a small part of Swiss imports. The following total figures go to show that Switzerland is, generally speaking, a good client abroad since her balance is always a passive one:

SWISS FOREIGN TRADE

Total exports in millions of Swiss francs			Total imports		
1938	1947	1948	1938	1947	1948
1316.6	3267.6	3434.5	1606.9	4820.0	4998.9

In spite of the well earned reputation of the silk industry of Zurich and its surroundings, the silks of Lyons and of Italy always find buyers in Switzerland. American stockings are sold in great quantities in this country, although those produced at home are well known for their quality. Switzerland also buys American shoes, English woollens, readymade clothing and hosiery from many countries. What would all these suppliers of articles already made in Switzerland say if the Swiss government, anxious to protect its industries and their man-power, were to prevent their import in one way or another?

It is therefore highly desirable that those countries who wish to trade with Switzerland should act according to the principles of fair play and reciprocity and not in an unnecessarily harsh manner, which could only go against their own interests by economically weakening an honest and accommodating client whose money is sound.

