

The dyestuffs and textile auxiliary products

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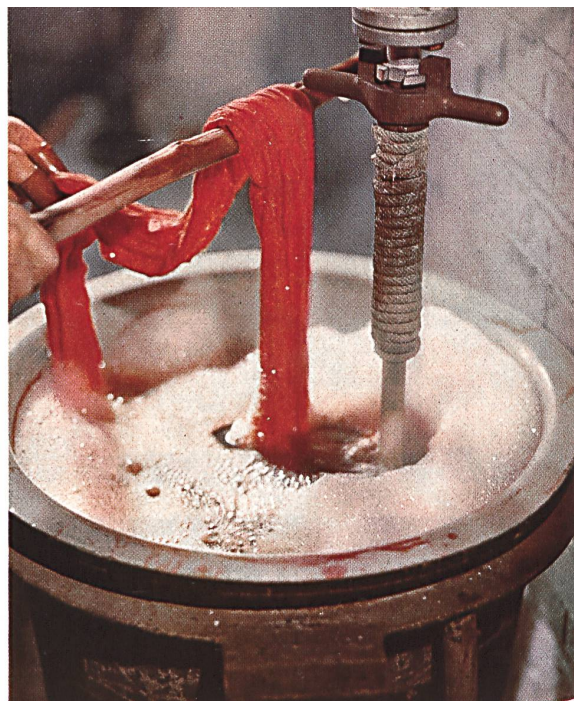
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THE DYESTUFFS AND TEXTILE AUXILIARY PRODUCTS



The Swiss dyestuffs industry has its centre in Basle. As its output is many times higher than the home market's capacity to absorb it, this branch is inevitably compelled to export. In Swiss export statistics, it comes fifth with a value of approximately S. Fr. 450 million. On the international level, Switzerland together with Germany is the biggest supplier of dyestuffs in the world; in fact she accounts for 20 % of the volume and over 30 % of the total value of world exports of dyestuffs. To these figures should be added the large output of her numerous branches and joint enterprises abroad. The Swiss dyestuffs industry produces thousands of types of dyes, including hundreds of patented specialities, in all shades and in all degrees of fastness, for the textile, leather, paper, plastics, paint and printing inks industries. At the same time, for several decades now, it has also manufactured chemical products used in many different textile finishing operations or for simplifying, for example, the process of conferring new properties on the articles treated. The total output and exports of these products are difficult to express in figures, for a large number of articles are involved, listed under many different customs headings; in value they are estimated to represent roughly one third of the figures indicated for dyestuffs.

Obviously if an export industry wishes to compete successfully abroad, it has to specialize in the manufacture of high quality products. In particular, in the service of its main client, the textile industry — which is characterized by its diversity — such a requirement means that it has continually to produce new dyestuffs possessing ever better qualities of fastness and capable of being applied ever more easily to textiles, whether by dyeing or printing processes. The range of products is so huge that it is difficult to describe them except in very broad outline. For cellulosic fibres, there are above all large ranges of substantive and vat dyes; the latter give the highest degrees of fastness and their production has been a particularly interesting task for the Swiss industry in its search for quality. Then the entirely new reactive dyes opened up vast new possibilities; thanks to reactive groups in their molecules, these dyes form a stable chemical bond with the cellulose or wool fibres. They combine a good general level of fastness with particularly bright colours, making it possible to create fast elegant shades fully satisfying the demands of fashion. For dyeing wool or silk, Swiss dyestuff manufacturers have produced assortments of acid, chrome and

metal-complex dyes. Today, in view of the special characteristics of synthetic fibres such as the polyamides, polyesters and acrylic fibres, efforts are being made to overcome the difficulties involved in dyeing and printing them according to traditional processes.

Among the chemical auxiliary products, let us mention in particular various washing, wetting, levelling and penetration agents, as well as textile finishing products, especially those used for giving new properties to textiles, such as, for example, increasing the fastness of direct dyes, the various fluorescent brighteners, the synthetic resins for permanent finishes making fabrics water-resistant, shrinkproof, crease-resistant, resistant to bagging, or the effects of micro-organisms, and preserving wool from shrinking, felting and the attacks of moth and other insects.

The success and development of the Swiss dyestuffs industry are due above all to intensive scientific research. As much as 6 % of the annual turnover is set aside for producing new products and for carefully studying methods of application, so as to be able to meet the varied demands of customers. In this field, the scientific and colouring department of the dyestuffs factories fulfil an essential role, thanks to their excellent technical equipment and the direct contacts they maintain with the textile finishing industry, in order to meet the ever more exacting demands made nowadays on textile products and other industrial articles.

In Switzerland, dyestuffs and finishing products are applied to textiles by a highly developed industry. Situated exclusively in Eastern Switzerland, this industry has developed mainly in the localities where the bleaching of linen and cotton fabrics was practised. Today it uses the most modern methods, created and perfected on the spot or under licence according to foreign patents. Among the former, special mention should be made here of the manufacture of stretch yarns, obtained by heat-fixing the crimped effect in continuous synthetic yarns, according to an original process now used all over the world. Let us also mention bleaching and etching techniques, which are still very widely used even today for embroidery, dyeing, roller and frame printing, the last of these having been developed to a high degree of perfection, and all the modern means for giving fabrics permanent effects such as crease-resistance, shrink-resistance, resistance to stains and micro-organisms, permanent sheen, etc.

