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Less-known Products of the Swiss Export Trade

Export is, as is well known, of primordial importance to many branches of Swiss industry. The names of some companies and typical products are in fact recognised as Swiss by broad sectors of the public in many foreign countries. Switzerland's worldwide export activities, however, are not restricted to the well-known firms but also include many dynamic medium or small enterprises of whose existence only a relatively small circle of initiates is aware. Behind the main categories of exports there is also in reality a much more varied spectrum of products with numerous unexpected items. Since a complete list is out of the question here, we shall take a brief look at a few of these products, selected unsystematically and not by any criteria of quality, originality or rarity.

One of the best-known of all Swiss companies abroad is the country's principal airline, Swissair. While the services of this airline need no further comment, many will be surprised to hear that aircraft manufacture — admittedly only of small types — also has its place in Swiss industry. The country's aircraft constructors in fact have quite a respectable tradition and can point to a number of new developments that originated here. In 1905, for instance, the world's first helicopter was built in Switzerland, and it was also here that the first supersonic wind tunnel was installed. For various reasons, however, the aircraft industry has remained fairly small. From the point of view of export, the Pilatus Porter is its mainstay, a machine distinguished by the short run required for take-off and landing. So far some 300 of this small craft have been produced and are in use in all parts of the world as passenger and material carriers, on sanitary, rescue and photographic assignments, for pest control and other purposes.

While on the subject of transport, we can cast a glance at another of the many Swiss products in this field: funiculars and cableways. Several Swiss companies manufacture such installations not only for tourist requirements in the homeland but for the international market. They can consequently be found, say, in Disneyland (the Skyride) or in a Swedish zoo, where they help visitors to enjoy the view. In Madrid a circulating cabin conveyor serves the ends of public transport as a connection between the city and a park, while in West Iran, Indonesia, copper ore is transported by an aerial cableway of Swiss design. A still stronger position on world markets is held by a Swiss undertaking from another branch of transportation: the world's second largest lift manufacturing company is domiciled in Central Switzerland. Not far removed from the transport branch proper is another Swiss product, a spray which is widely used in Europe by motorists for repairing surface damage to the bodywork of their cars.

Cars suggest the topical problems of environmental pollution. Swiss industry has produced a range of processes and plants for coming to grips with these problems. One firm has already installed sufficient

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equipment to purify a waste water flow corresponding to over 2 million head of population and has signed licence agreements in over fifty countries on all continents. It is not always big installations, however, that are needed to meet the requirements in the way of clean and portable water, and another, smaller company has a production range which for this reason includes portable drinking-water filters (for travel, sport, the army, etc.) and tablets for sterilizing small volumes of water and keeping them in a fit state for drinking.

Other companies have developed refuse incinerators to enable the consumer society to keep a step ahead of its garbage production. These meet with keen interest abroad, and markets already include West Germany, Poland, Spain, the U.S.A. and India.

The improvement of the environment in a rather different sense is the aim of a Swiss group manufacturing ladies' and gentlemen's cosmetics. Its products hold a leading position on the home market and in West Germany and are doing well in several other countries. The good odours spread abroad by a number of makers of synthetic scents, aromas and flavourings — who are well to the fore internationally — have an even wider geographic distribution.

These are of course only a very few of the items that will be found on the lists of the Swiss Office for the Promotion of Trade. To correct the picture a little, here are a few heterogeneous facts from this area: The combined machine for printing and folding corrugated cardboard packages made by a French-Swiss manufacturer was at the time of its introduction the largest in the world. Rotary presses of Swiss provenience are used in many countries for printing stamps and newspapers. "Made in Switzerland" will be found on numerous machines and automats used for filling and sealing tins and for stoning fruit. It is intriguing to note that a small enterprise engaged in "industrial data processing, digital positioning and the manufacture of equipment for the automation of type composition" should be domiciled in the comparatively rural fastnesses of Appenzell, while a firm in French Switzerland with less than a hundred employees produces sapphire and diamond tips for all types of gramophone needles available on world markets.

Since this has been a rather random array of products, let us close it equally unsystematically — and not because the Swiss are specially good shots, or because William Tell set a first famous example — with reference to hunting and sporting firearms, including the Swiss pistols and rifles that are regularly used by many marksmen at world championships.

—Edwin Kradolfer.

Notice

Would Clubs please take notice that owing to Printer's holidays, we should have the dates of your January and February Forthcoming Events by the 10th December, 1975.

Editing Committee.