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SHOES

Footwear ranks among the most ancient evidence extant testifying to the development of human civilization. Into this evolution the Bally Shoe Museum in Schönenwerd affords an extensive and interesting insight.

The craft of shoemaking reached a very high degree of perfection in the centuries preceding the discovery of machines, but the advent of machinery opened yet wider horizons and made it possible for the shoemaker to adapt his craft to the variations of ever-changing fashion and obey its every caprice.

The Swiss shoe industry was among the first to recognize the importance of the "vogue" factor in footwear manufacture, and it is owing to this that our leading firms have been able to achieve success on world markets. The Swiss shoe is, in fact, well considered in all the great fashion centres of the world, and has been so for decades. Before the war, nothing daunted by the long journeys involved, buyers from Paris, London and New York paid regular visits to Swiss shoe factories. They could thus see for themselves that our manufacturers followed the evolution of fashions closely, and kept in close touch with Parisian dressmaking circles; such contact is of course indispensable if one is to adapt technique to the requirements of Fashion, to make footwear a worthy accessory of Fashion and, last but not least, to ensure that shoes may "fit like a glove", so to speak.

In the shoe industry, raw materials represent 50 per cent of the cost of the finished product, and it is therefore evident that the greatest care must be taken in the choice of these materials. For this reason, shoe factory research departments constantly control and supervise all the raw materials employed, in order to ensure that the most exacting customers overseas may be fully satisfied. "Nothing beats leather", says an old English proverb. Tanning processes have been scientifically improved; manufacturers and tanners are in constant collaboration to raise the quality of the leather and adapt it to meet the requirements of fashion. The combined efforts of Swiss tanners and shoe manufacturers have made it possible to prepare the skins in such a way as to secure the highest degree of comfort and elegance in footwear.

The question of shape is a vital one. Not only must the shoe be stylish, but it must also ensure foot hygiene and comfort. In almost a century of practical experience Swiss makers, in collaboration with leading retailers the world over, have evolved the lasts and shapes which give Swiss footwear its hallmark.

This untiring quest for perfection has been rewarded. The Swiss shoe has won prestige on world markets and its reputation has been maintained despite foreign competition. The manufacturers of this country wish to express their gratitude to oversea buyers who have so regularly placed orders for the most recherché styles, despite adverse circumstances, and have never ceased to show their confidence in this Swiss industry.

It is this confidence which has enabled one of Switzerland's major industries to keep going, and to await better times when exports can once again be resumed.

MAX BALLY.

