

Science and practice

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Science and Practice

We intend to devote this feature to regular articles on technical problems of the textile industry, considered from a strictly practical point of view. We think that it is to the interest of every buyer of Swiss textile products, whether he intends to make them up, sell them again, or use them himself, to receive objective information about certain of their technical peculiarities which lead to definite advantages in their use. It will not therefore be a question of publishing scientific reports here, but reports of popular interest intended to render service to every reader of our periodical. With this end in view, we shall work in collaboration, not only with the private concerns in the textile industry — spinners, weavers, finishers — and in the chemical industry, but also with the professional associations and the « Federal Laboratory for the Testing of Materials» (Textiles section, at St-Gall).

The very rapid technical progress that has taken place in recent decades, in part due to the needs of the armies at war, and the modifications that have occurred in textile production as a result of the scarcity of various raw materials, have caused a certain amount of confusion in qualities and terms; the public has been made suspicious by the admitted use of «ersatz» and is now very careful about what it buys; but its carefulness may be at fault for, without special apparatus, it is not possible for the layman, and in many cases for the professional, to recognise with the eye and by the touch alone, the particular qualities of a fabric, its composition, its resistance to wear, to creasing, to washing, the fastness of its colour, etc. Manufacturers naturally try to win the confidence of the consumer by describing their products as favourably as possible, and the only guarantee for the buyer is the good faith of the manufacturer and the seller. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the honest industrialist who has in view the improvement of production before the realization of large profits, should be seeking to defend his position by emphasizing the real qualities of his products and by protecting in so far as it is possible, the designations used for that purpose. We see a notable sign of this tendency in certain of the tasks placed on the agenda of the new «International Silk Union», in particular the defence of the term *silk*. (It should be noted that the International Silk Federation had gone into this question before the war, and France and Italy have already adopted legislative measures of protection.) We shall have occasion in this feature, to return to these different questions as they are settled.

There would still be a great deal of progress to be made with the designations given to the composition of textile materials and, above all, the enormous task of informing the general public, to which end we have the ambition to devote ourselves within the modest limits of our means. Most of the new fibres, for example, are not appreciated at their true value by the consumer: either they enjoy exaggerated favour, cleverly produced by intensive propaganda or, on the contrary, they suffer from an unwarranted lack of confidence on the part of the public, provoked by unfortunate experiences in the past or hasty judgements, or even from a simple defensive reaction to propaganda. Yet, in our opinion, the new textiles merit «neither this excess of honour, nor this ignominy», and manufacturers will be the first to benefit from a more just appreciation of the facts by the public.

There are still many fields in which a strict classification of types and qualities will be as profitable to the producer as to the consumer. We are thinking in particular of the question of the fastness of colours and of the qualities obtained by special processing which make an article uncrushable, waterproof, mothproof and unshrinkable, etc. Internationally accepted standards for these qualities based on known criteria would be most desirable. Thus when buying textiles possessing known and guaranteed qualities, the consumer would know exactly what practical requirements they fulfil.

It is not without interest to know that Switzerland possesses a highly developed chemical industry, which devotes itself to the production of high-grade specialities and collaborates with the textile industries through the intermediary of numerous equally well-known finishing establishments. It supplies among other things, dyes and numerous subsidiary products used in dyeing, and special processing products. These different preparations are already widely used by Swiss manufacturers. Generally speaking, at the moment, tests are being carried out and systematic research is being made to determine accurately, on the one hand, the requirements that may normally be made as to the qualities of textiles in relation to the different uses for which they are intended and, on the other hand, the limits of efficiency and fastness of the dyes and processing products, in the given conditions of use. We shall be understood more clearly if we say, for example, that to be considered effective, the processing intended to prevent moth from attacking a fabric must remain thoroughly effective over quite a considerable period of time; if it is a question of a product used by individuals during washing (rinsing), it must last from one wash to the next; if it is a product applied by a manufacturer it must be resistant to being washed a certain number of times, the frequency of washing depending on the nature of the object treated: the processing of a bathing costume will have to withstand a theoretically unlimited number of immersions in fresh or salt water, while the requirements made in this respect in the case of curtains, which will be washed comparatively seldom, will be correspondingly less.

It is almost superfluous to call attention to the interest, for the consumer, of these tests and this research. However, we wish to point out here the next step in this development, which should be the recognition and the adoption on a level, national first of all, then international, and even worldwide eventually, of these designations of quality and criteria of appreciation. When we have reached this point — and we shall, of course, have to wait a little — the public will be protected against advertising based on misleading statements; and competition between producers will be made, with qualities equally based, in the field of workmanship, price and taste.

Let us add that the «Federal Laboratory for the Testing of Materials and Research Institute» at St-Gall (Textiles section) has already undertaken in collaboration with private enterprise, important research in the fields under discussion here. We shall speak of this again in more detail in this feature, now that we have shown the great interest of these problems and of their solution, for the textile industry and trade and for the consumer.

R. C.