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The 5th International Silk Congress in Brussels



The Brussels Town Hall.

This meeting of the representatives of the silk industry and trade, which took place in Brussels from May 9th to 13th, was attended by some two hundred and thirty delegates from twenty-two different countries together with their wives. The big contingent from Switzerland, headed by Mr. R. H. Stehli, the Swiss vice-president of the International Silk Association, took an active part in the proceedings. Switzerland moreover has always taken great interest in the work of this international organisation which, as a matter of fact, it was decided to found at a meeting held in Zurich in 1949. Taking place every two years, these Silk Congresses are intended above all to enable silk industrialists from countries all over the world to exchange ideas and experiences. The main results of the Brussels talks are as follows :

1. The Japanese silk producers declared themselves ready to continue to give their financial support to the campaign in favour of silk. The allocation of the funds for this campaign to the different countries concerned was agreed upon. Furthermore, the countries using large quantities of Chinese silk agreed to the introduction of

a tax on these purchases for the purpose of financing the campaign.

2. The introduction of an international silk trade mark, which had come up against unexpected difficulties after the 1953 Milan Congress, was also finally agreed upon. A compromise had to be accepted, however, the trade mark only being registered in the different countries when it does not infringe existing national legislation. The difficulty is that the Italian and American laws do not permit the term " pure silk " to be applied to weighted silk without special reference. The General Secretariat was entrusted with the task of drawing up regulations governing the use of the trade mark.

3. The methods of testing and classifying Douppion raw silks were examined in the light of recent experience. The meeting also recommended the continuation of the policy of price stabilisation and urged the Japanese government to build up immediate stocks by purchasing on the free market so as to be able to deal efficiently in the future with any rise in the cost of silk above the maximum ceiling price.

Another task of the Brussels Congress was to *serve as propaganda for the promotion of natural silk*. In order to convince Brussels and Belgium of the beauty and advantages of silk, Robert Hirsch, the enterprising president of the organising committee and owner of a well-known fashion house in Brussels, had organised a programme of extraordinary interest. Unfortunately he did not live to see his plans carried out as he died suddenly a week before the beginning of the congress. In order to respect the wishes of the deceased however, everything took place exactly as he had planned.

In the unique setting of the Gothic Town Hall of Brussels, the Noble Society of the Ommegang presented an historically exact reconstruction of the Emperor

Four centuries separated by only a few feet.



At the Brussels Town Hall: dancing before the Emperor Charles V.



Charles V's reception by the Lord Mayor and authorities of Brussels in 1544. It was an unforgettable pageant reviving all the splendour of a 16th century court, with its music, its dances and minstrels. The parts of the princes and their suite were played by actual descendants of the nobility of the Low Countries. The splendour of the old silk costumes vied in elegance with the modern ball gowns of the women in the audience.

Delegates to the Congress showed particular interest in the festival of silk films, at which the films of nine countries were shown. As many as five performances were held every day and during the last few days of the congress people even had to be turned away.

In the Royal Museums of Art and History, at the "Palais du Cinquantenaire", a magnificent exhibition of old fabrics had been organised under the title „The arts of silk", which was inaugurated at the end of the Congress. During a brilliant banquet — a further occasion for displaying silk to advantage — given after the opening of the exhibition, the Belgian Minister of

Trade stated that he had not been aware before of the wealth of ancient and medieval fabrics scattered throughout the country in different museums and now assembled for the purpose of the present exhibition. Rather than go into further details, we prefer to reproduce here a few lines from the preface to the exhibition's richly illustrated catalogue which recalls the early history of the silk industry of today.

“Wherever the refinements of civilisation have aroused a taste for precious materials, for sacred or profane ceremonial, silk has always played a big part. Wherever the use of the soft and lustrous thread produced by the “*bombyx mori*” has been introduced, textile art has blossomed. The Exhibition at the Palais du Cinquantenaire bears sufficient witness to this. May it be our admiring tribute to the inexhaustible inventiveness and genius of the ornamentalists and textile craftsmen of the past.”

U. GEILINGER

The Lord Mayor and authorities of Brussels provide entertainment for their imperial guest.

