

The Swiss embroidery industry

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THE SWISS EMBROIDERY INDUSTRY.

The centre of the Swiss Embroidery Industry is St. Gall and its domain extends throughout the whole of Eastern Switzerland as far as the frontier regions beyond the Rhine and Lake of Constance.

From the middle ages, St. Gall has occupied a prominent position among the producers of fine linen tissues. Later, when cotton weaving was developed, it won further renown through its speciality of fine muslins which, under the name of "Swiss Mulls" still find an excellent clientele, as also the fine voiles introduced on the market during the last few years. This industry owes a great deal of its success to the exceptional value of Swiss finishing, which enjoys a first class reputation everywhere. The finishing gives these products new and greatly appreciated qualities by submitting them to appropriate chemical treatment, for example mercerisation and the delicate operations destined to give them an opaque or transparent appearance.

Thus, Eastern Switzerland has herself manufactured for nearly two centuries tissues which lend themselves especially to embroidery work; their light weft shows off each stitch to the fullest advantage. Formerly it was a question of fine hand chain stitch embroidery used for adorning the whole toilet, chiefly that of women and children, and even on occasion, in the form of ruffles and cuffs, that of men. The great transparency of the fine tissues soon led to their employment for making curtains of all kinds. Embroidered curtains soon became the great speciality of chain stitch embroiderers, who later worked besides muslin, transparent tulle. The discovery of a chain stitch machine with one needle largely contributed to the increase of this industry. Fancy articles in colours, in natural and artificial silk, or with metal threads succeeded in placing it at the head of Swiss embroidery and opened to her, besides others, the markets of England and North America.

Appenzell hand embroidery is universally known. In the small country to which it owes its name, the peasants from their youth have acquired an extraordinary ability in producing at home marvels, the delicacy of which can never be equalled. The principal article of this industry is to-day represented by fine ladies' pockettes, which delight the elegant, not to mention the delightful little children's garments and splendid pieces of bed linen. The designs employed for these various kinds of work are continually renewed to suit the taste of the day.

The more recent "Lorraine" embroidery is made at home on machines with one needle, similar to sewing machines. The competition which was feared at the beginning, has happily not proved harmful, as the technique interested quite a different, though extremely vast class of customers.

Also, without causing any prejudice to the three specialities mentioned above, mechanical embroidery entered the lists towards the middle of the 19th century, thanks to the invention of a hand worked embroidery loom, which caused 200 to 300 needles disposed in two rows one above the other, of 4 yards each, to act simultaneously. Successive improvements thus permitted the perfect production of all kinds of embroidery at such a moderate price, that the new articles were soon within the reach of every purse. Production and cheapness increased still further by means of the shuttle machine invented by a Swiss technician; the length of the frame attained 6½, 10 and up to 15 yards, in two series, and the mechanical movement of these machines assured infinitely more rapid execution than that of hand looms. When the weaver in command of the embroidery loom was replaced by an automatic apparatus, pessimists pronounced a rapid falling off of hand-loom. But no, they retained an important advantage for the confection of a great number of fancy articles and have amply justified their existence by their triumph with regard to the embroidery of pockettes, which enjoy an exceptional vogue to-day. In spite of their high price, the shuttle machines rapidly spread throughout Eastern Switzerland. They are installed in proper factories; to such a point that these new constructions specially raised for the purpose have entirely transformed the familiar aspect of numerous villages.

The chief condition of this expansion, that is to say extension of the markets liable to absorb an evergrowing production, lay in the fact that, until a few years ago, women throughout the world all wore white embroidered underclothing and that, on the other hand, they maintained the fashion of embroidered dresses.

A new and quite unexpected field of activity opened out once more, as much for handlooms as shuttle machines, not on account of the invention of a new machine, but by the achievement towards 1880 of the process of so-called embroidery. After having surmounted infinite difficulties, one at last succeeded in reproducing almost all kinds of lace and in obtaining an almost absolute illusion. Specialists themselves own to often not being able to distinguish the famous St. Gall lace from the original hand-made article, except by means of a magnifying glass. Their price being

incomparably low and the time taken in delivery much more rapid, they became accessible to all feminine customers and no longer only to the well off. Worked by able operators, a number of these machines were set up to improve so interesting a domain and designers of great talent collaborated in this evolution, searching for precious inspirations among the marvellous collection in the St. Gall Museum of Industry and Applied Arts.

These last few years have unfortunately darkened the brilliant picture we have just traced, especially on account of the radical changes in women's underclothing. Renouncing practically from one day to another the elaborate decoration formerly employed, a truly disconcerting simplicity was cultivated. This swerve in the fashion badly hit the Swiss embroidery industry. In that matter all foreign regions specializing in embroidery suffered just as much and this crisis has affected still other industries such as lace, ribbons and trimmings, for women have also turned from trimmings which they formerly so much appreciated, to the wear of untrimmed printed material and knitted and woven goods. If Swiss embroidery nevertheless shows more than 100 million francs in exports, it is due to the merits of its qualities.

The fashion, however, continues to change. Lately it has shown a more favourable aspect principally with regard to women's linen. One at last is tired of excessive simplicity and one again enjoys rich trimmings especially of lace. Besides that, embroidery is regaining its former favour, for example for decorating shirt tops threaded with ribbons. Dressmakers are also tending to employ lace and embroidery and one can see Paris models which permit us to hope for a happy future; notably collars and cuffs of embroidered batiste are worn.

It suffices to state that Swiss embroidery manufacturers have deposited more than 200,000 new models at the Federal Patents Office to understand that they neglect nothing to regain public favour by the attraction of original models and that their vitality is far from being exhausted.

WAR RESISTER'S CONFERENCE IN ZURICH.

The Council of War Resisters' International met at Zurich on the 2nd September. Mr. Fenney Brockway, M.P., presiding. Mr. Runham Brown secretary, reported that there were 43 affiliated organisations in 21 countries and correspondents in 53 countries.

It was announced that the following reply had been sent by Professor Einstein to the question "What would you do in another war?"—"I should unconditionally refuse every direct or indirect war service, and try to induce my friends to adopt the same attitude irrespective of the general opinion on the causes of the war." The publication of this reply, it was stated, had been prohibited in Czecho-Slovakia.

The reports showed a diminished number of war-resister prisoners in conscript countries owing to some releases in Jugo-Slavia, but imprisonments continued in Holland, Switzerland, Russia, Poland, France, and elsewhere.

Mr. Brockway, addressing a large public meeting, stated that the object of the War Resisters International was not to escape war service but to end war. War had its roots in capitalism and imperialism, and would only be removed by the construction of a new social international order, but meanwhile resistance psychology and organisation was necessary to prevent war.

THE CONCERT OF EUROPE.

Long after the B.B.C.'s Sunday evening programme had finished, two musicians sat beside a loud-speaker in a studio at Savoy-hill playing an oboe and a violin to the accompaniment of a piano which was being played in Zurich 500 miles away.

Only those listeners in this country who possessed receiving sets powerful enough to pick up the Swiss broadcasting stations heard what Savoy-hill was sending to Zurich. They heard in fact, not just a piano, an oboe and a violin, but a whole orchestra playing from six different European cities.

The programme was arranged experimentally by Dr. Erich Fischer—a Swiss—who has invented a remarkable piano which can be played without the player hearing it. Dr. Fischer sat in the studio at Zurich and played his "silent" piano via telephone wires to different parts of Europe—London, Berlin, Paris, Vienna and Milan—where the rest of an orchestra of 18 instrumentalists were scattered about. The combined music from all the instruments was brought back to the central telephone exchange at Zurich and then broadcast from various European wireless stations.

At the five hotels in Geneva, where the League of Nations delegates were staying, special loud speakers were installed so that they could hear the "League of Nations Concert," intended to symbolise the co-operation of the nations.

The experiment was entirely successful, and it is expected that further League of Nations Concerts will be broadcast on similar lines.

THE SWISS SILK INDUSTRY.

The Swiss Silk Industry is at the same time one of the most important and one of the oldest industries of Switzerland. Silk weavers and exporters were to be found at Zurich as early as the 13th century.

All the branches of this industry are represented in Switzerland. Sericulture is practised in the plain of the Ticino where the cocoons are also unwound in raw silk spinning mills. Numerous silk-throwing mills are occupied in making skeins. The Chappé Industry also flourishes at Basle and has a large share in the supplying of raw materials for Swiss and foreign trade.

The chief branch of the Swiss Silk Industry consists of the weaving of goods, in which about 14,000 mechanical looms and 1,000 hand-loom are occupied. Nearly 40 factories are engaged in this branch of industry which has its commercial centre in Zurich. Switzerland manufactures every kind of silk goods. Whilst tissues with coloured stripes, more particularly taffeta, were formerly the great national speciality, the owners and managers of the factories have lost no time in conforming to the fashions of the day, and now supply materials dyed by the piece, especially various kinds of crêpe. Marvellous printed tissues are also produced, whilst special silks for ties, which have made extraordinary progress in the course of the last few years, should also be mentioned. The value of the annual exports amounts to more than 200 million francs, divided among the various countries.

The wholesale silk trade is largely engaged in exports and is carried on by various important firms who deal in foreign goods. These firms, together with those dealing in raw silk, give the town of Zurich an international character.

The manufacture of silk ribbon has its seat at Basle. The number of establishments is comparatively small, though important business is done, both in trading with other countries and in producing ribbons of every kind, from the cheapest artificial silk goods to the most expensive novelties. The value of the annual exports amounts to nearly 40 million francs. The weaving of materials and of silk ribbons goes hand in hand with several extremely capable allied industries: (dyeing, printing, finishing), which occupy several thousand workmen and execute large orders for foreign countries. Silk tissues for reticules which are made exclusively by hand-loom, are a particularly interesting speciality, of unrivalled quality. The figure of exports for this article alone amounts to about 10 million francs per annum.

The spinning of sewing-silk and of embroidery silk must also be mentioned here. This industry has been established in Switzerland for a very long time, the products being much appreciated in other countries. Switzerland has for many years also owned a very active artificial silk industry which is chiefly engaged in manufacturing "Viscose." More than four million kgs. of this artificial silk are produced annually. Besides considerable sales in this country, exports are developing from year to year.

Considered as a whole the Swiss Silk Industry has the highest figures for exports in our commercial balance-sheet and stands in the first rank on the world's market. This situation is strengthened in certain respects by the numerous Swiss mills which are established in other countries, more particularly in Germany, France, Italy and the United States of America, and which largely increase the volume of production concentrated in Swiss hands. (Reproduced from S.I.T.)

Round the Lake.

A certain dainty little French revue artiste arrived in Geneva the other day, where her company were about to play for a short season. She had never visited that city before, so hailing a taxi in front of her hotel she asked to be taken for a drive. "Where?" asked the man, with that directness of speech characteristic of taxi drivers the world over. "Oh, just a little promenade. Tiens, I have an idea; drive me round your lake. I have got half an hour to spare before dinner!" The lady in question lives in Paris and her motoring is usually confined to a drive round one or the other of the pretty lakes in the Bois de Boulogne. The Lake of Geneva, it may be added, is 45 miles in length, and in one part 9 miles wide!

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