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Autor: Schorer, Edgar

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SWITZERLAND AN EXPORT COUNTRY FOR DECADES

Good value, a swiss speciality.

By Prof. Dr. Edgar Schorer, Fribourg

The Swiss Exhibition in 1939 attracted numerous guests from far and near. It induced even a Chinese to revisit the country where he had studied for years. After taking his degree in Economics he had worked his way up to Founder and Manager of several food factories in Shanghai, Tsingtao, Mukden. Procuring the necessary plants, machinery a raw materials, as well as finding a market for the manufactured goods, such as food-stuffs like soup-powder, faranaceous food for children, etc. required frequent an extensive travelling. Year after year the young manager had to cover over 50 000 miles in airoplane, by rail or ship, on horseback or in a Chinese one-horse carriage.

Before leaving Switzerland he bought himself a first-class Swiss watch as a souvenir of his promotion. And what did our Chinese visitor tell us in 1939? His Swiss watch had been his only faithful, never-failing companion and helper in business transactions; it had even saved his life more than once. Other Chinese business men, in spite of their American, Japanese, Russian or German watches had often come too late. Let him tell his own story:

«In 1933 the Japanese invaded the Province of Chagar. I happened to be in Ichol at the time. News came that the Japanese troops were on the march. A dreadful sand-

storm had, as it were, brought all the watches to a standstill. But my Swiss bracelet-watch showed the time as usual with the greatest precision. Thanks to my watch I managed to get out of the town at the last moment in disguise on a farmer's cart. During the journey by air from Peiping to Tsingtao all the others passengers' watches stopeed, but began to go again after landing. My business rival had not noticed this and came too late to the transactions. I had already bought up all the raw materials wanted. Last December the Japanese evacuated South-West Honan in order to avoid spending the winter in this desolate mountainous district. Communist hordes were marching on the town of Sinyang. My Swiss watch told me it was time to fly. I ran to the station and just caught the last train that was about to start. With an American watch I should have come too late and so fallen into the hands of the communists who show us Chinese merchants little or no mercy. It is incredible that a first-class Swiss watch can stand. The terrific sand-storms of the northern Chinese Plain can harm it as little as the immense changes of temperature in the Manschuria. It stands the floods of the Blue River as well as it did the Japanese bombardments which I went through several times in 1937. Considering these facts it is well worth the price.»

Quality is not what is brought into the market by puffing advertisements. Quality is not always what is presented to the public in an agreeable manner, neither is it the latest technical invention of often doubtful utility. We must not confuse Quality with fashion. Quality is not a monopoly of the wealthy. Quality is not so much exterior, it is far more inherent to the article itself.

Economics cover and satisfy meet demand, not only materially but to a great extent even morally; not only the demands of the individual but also social requirements and that not only temporary but even in most cases permanently.

And herein lies the importance of high-class technical production and construction. The afford a maximum of general satisfaction. The take into consideration the mentality of man. They know that disappointment and annoyance diminish the value of the goods. The bear in mind the social side of the question, by asking it is true, a high but just price and by offering manysided and lasting services. Every buyer weighs the value of an article. If it proves disappointing that gives rise to economical and psychological disadvantages. Satisfaction on the contrary presents undeniable advantages for all business transactions. Small countries with centuries of industrial tradition, high technical efficiency and well founded capital seem to be destined economically to produce highly qualified goods. Great nations rich in raw materials and with superior organisation are more adapted for production in bulk, and in series. Certainly there are many cases which cannot be catalogued. But a certain worldwide economical labour-exchange is the foundation of the happiness and the welfare of nations which the Atlantic Charter has promised and on which is based permanent world-peace.

There are numerous goods suitable for series-or moving band-production that do not require high skilled labour. Quantity supersedes quality. The utility is mostly of short duration and that is why they have to be sold and replaced quickly. Series production and high quality are not contradictory. Is there a demand which gives general satisfaction so that it is unnecessary to differentiate efficiency from mass-production, then both can be combined. A first-class illustration of this fact is offered by the Hermes Type-Writer. In its various types it has begun a real triumphal march throughout the world. In other lines of goods among which machinery, fittings and other investments play a great part, the demand for quality is paramount. Here quality and production in bulk are in conflict with one another, because in most of these cases high individual skill is required. A Dynamo constructed in series production may suffice for ordinary average needs but is insufficient to satisfy special conditions and to assure permanent high-class economic utility.

A Ford-lorry or a General Motor is considerably cheaper than a Saurer of the same type. When the needs of the masses under ordinary conditions are to be considered, the American car comes in question. If however there are special exigencies, e. g. if a lorry has to cover mountainous tracts of land with only bad or no roads at all, as in East Turkey, a Saurer car will be cheaper in the long run, in spite of its higher costs of acquisition. An American lorry does good services in flat countries by fairly good roads, provided the motor oil be of good quality and there be easy possibilities of repairs. Its use in mountainous coun-

tries or on rough roads causes overwork and therefore premature wear-out. More frequent repairs are required which cause great annoyance, take up time and involve high maintenance-expenses. The sudden failure of efficiency very often has most undesirable consequences, i. e. loss of customers, slack in production, uncertainty in calculations and difficulties in keeping contracts.

We now put the question: «What is Quality?» Practical economic experience answers: «Quality is adaptation to the special conditions and special needs in question.» Quality therefore shows itself in lasting and high-class efficiency, in adaptability to actual requirements, in the effect produced by a certain economical expenditure which affords the greatest general advantages.

In other words: high quality serves a long time, serves well, serves universally and serves cheaply. The seeming high expenses of acquisition and adaptation pay for themselves in time by the savings in repairs and the avoidance of instability.

To conclude let us add one illustration: A fellow-student of mine from South America was appointed manager of a rather big Electricity Company. The year 1930 was for his country a year of dangerous crises because of the slackness of export and the fall in the prices of agricultural productions. And yet just at that time he was obliged to consider an expansion of his enterprise, because the government made difficulties for the importation of coal which threatened to unsteady the balance of payment. In consequence the demand for electric power increased considerably.

Asked for advice I suggested to my fellow-student to divide his orders between Switzerland and the U.S.A. As U.S.A. Dynamos were not only far cheaper than those of Brown Boveri, whose transport-costs also proved much higher, the decision was not easy. But finally the experiment was risked. Nine years later my friend returned to Switzerland. On our meeting I enquired after the result of the experiment. The answer was: «During the first years after the installation, more than once I regretted having followed your advice. Over and over again I said to myself: «If only I had ordered everything in the U.S.A. But after three years'time I began already to change my mind. The slowly starting reconstruction, the increasing industry of the country claimed from time to time high attainments from the Dynamos.» It was now that a certain inferiority in the American material began to make itself felt. The repairs and the deficiencies became more and more frequent. Before May 1939 we had to replace three quarters of the «Dynamos» from the U.S.A. On the cars delivered by Brown Boveri no repairs whatever were necessary up to that date. I think that to-day, I should be rather inclined to order everything from Switzerland. You have no idea what it means to a director to be able to work on absolutely reliable material.»

What we have said here of some Swiss firms made be manufacture of machinery, but also to chemical and pharmaceutical products, to firms for apparatuses and installations of all kinds, to articles for daily use which although used less frequently used nevertheless are expected to last for years.

Good value and good service are just the opposite of Bluff and Dumping; good value is more than it seems to be. Bluff seems more than it is. Good value is therefore honesty, inferior and cheap goods are very often fraud.