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The Centenary of the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry

We devoted a large part of our first number this year to the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry on the occasion of its centenary. As we mentioned in our introduction (see «Textiles Suisses» No. 1/1954, p. 81) Mr. T. Niggli, who devoted half a century of activity to this association, has told its history from its foundation to the present day in a recently published book. It was at the request of the board of this association that its former secretary, now a member of honour, wrote this important work of some 200 pages which constitutes, in accordance with the wishes of its sponsors, an account of the work done by the association on behalf of its members from its foundation right up to 1954. It does not therefore contain any philosophic considerations or picturesque anecdotes concerning the Swiss silk industry but rather all the landmarks in the existence of the association in chronological order and arranged according to subjects.

We could not therefore attempt to analyse here, even briefly, this book published by the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry, which is a veritable mine of information for the historian or economist who wishes to study a particular aspect of the industrial, political and economic development of Switzerland. However it is interesting to note in passing that, according to the figures of the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry, its members in 1855 numbered about 150 (118 of whom were producers) and today 152, after having reached the record figure of 213 in 1919. We should also like to mention that the Zurich Association took an active part in the creation in 1870 of the Swiss Union of Trade and Industry (of which it was one of the first members), which is an organisation representing the interests of the whole of Swiss private enterprise.



In this centenary year, the ordinary general meeting of the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry, which took place in Zurich on June 11th, assumed unusual importance. It was honoured by the presence of representatives of the federal, cantonal and communal authorities. In his speech congratulating the association on reaching its centenary, Mr. Homberger, a representative of the Directorate of the Swiss Union of Trade and Industry, pointed out that the silk industry has always adhered to the principle of the defence of economic interests by those directly concerned.

“The close collaboration between the authorities and the organisations of private enterprise in the carrying out of tasks of political economy, which is only possible in Switzerland, can only be really effective” continued the speaker, “if the heads of firms themselves place their practical experience at the service of the political economy of the country.”

Mr. R. A. Stehli, president of the Swiss Association of Silk Manufacturers tendered the good wishes of his group. He pointed out the difficulties experienced by the silk industry owing to fluctuations in fashion and the increasing industrialisation of countries overseas. “If it is not possible” he said, “to open up in Europe big markets for ordinary quality Swiss products within the framework of an economic integration, the Swiss silk industry will have to continue to specialise more and more in the production, irrational and risky though it is, of high novelty fabrics.”

Various other spokesmen of the textile associations and representatives of the authorities also made speeches during the official part of the meeting. Afterwards, members of the Zurich Association of the Silk Industry, their wives and guests attended a reception during which they were shown couture models of today and yesterday, made of silks and novelty fabrics from Zurich. Opposite we show some of these models.



Some of the old silk dresses presented on the occasion of the meeting.



Dr. Alphonse Bürkhardt, president of the Swiss association of silk ribbon manufacturers (Basle) handing a souvenir to Dr. H. Schwarzenbach, president of the Zurich association of silk manufacturers.