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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND.

A few aspects of the Swiss economic situation -

May 1948.

The 32nd Swiss Industries Fair in Basle closed its doors on April 20th last after having once again, in this Springtime of 1948, testified in a remarkable fashion to the vitality of Swiss industry. It presented an imposing vista of Swiss manufacture and, even more than in previous years, made a very strong impression on the 600,000 visitors - among them were the representatives of more than 50 nations - who during the ten days of the Fair, thronged the many display halls. The almost unlimited variety, combined with faultless craftsmanship and finish, of the industrial products offered by this small country did, indeed, astonish the general public. It was clearly evident that, despite the heavy commitments of recent years, Swiss manufacturers, had not rested on their laurels but, on the contrary, had untiringly concentrated their efforts on research, invention and quality. It is by ceaselessly trying to improve and to better her production that Switzerland will succeed in surmounting the difficulties which are beginning to loom on her horizon. Certain signs have appeared in the last few months which seem to indicate that her economic impetus is being curbed. This regressive movement, experienced in the export trade especially, is not due to saturation of the markets, but to the obstacles which paralyse the transfer of currency and to keener international competition.

On comparing figures for the first quarter of 1947 with those for the corresponding period this year, it is found that Switzerland's imports have increased by one-third and amount to almost 1.4 billion francs; exports declined slightly to 750 million francs. The fall in the value of exports as compared with the last quarter of 1947 is still more marked. The over-plus of imports is therefore in the amount of 600 million francs, more than double that recorded for the same period last year and almost seven times greater than for the same months in the average pre-war year.

Taken as a whole, Switzerland's trade exchanges with other European States are markedly smaller than during the first quarter of 1947, whereas for the Overseas trade exports only have declined, an increase being reported on the import side. France is still Switzerland's best customer, followed in Europe by the Belgium-Luxembourg group. As in the past, along the extra-European countries, the United States still head the list of Switzerland's buyers and suppliers.

The nation was happy to learn, this Spring, that Government returns for 1947 closed with a profit of 320 million francs, whereas the budget for that year had anticipated a deficit of almost 500 million francs. It is the first time since 1935 that the Federal Government returns do not show an excess of expenditure. This state of things is due to the general prosperity of the country, which has led to a considerable increase of international trade and, consequently, to heavy Customs and Income Tax returns. On the other hand, certain economies were realised in last year's budget. This favourable situation has made it possible to reduce fairly considerably, the Confederation's floating debt which had increased enormously during the war and is still today over eight billion francs.

Although Switzerland is not a member of the United Nations, she does not stand aside from international problems. Switzerland attended the Havana Conference, where a subcommittee was appointed to examine her particular situation in relation to the World Trade Charter. Furthermore, Switzerland was actively represented at the International Press Conference held recently in Geneva.

To conclude this very rapid survey of the Swiss economic situation in the Spring of 1948, we reproduce the following paragraph from an address made by Federal Councillor Rubattel at the Basle Fair. This extract shows that the period of prosperity Switzerland has experienced since the end of the war, has not made her lose sight of reality.

"The period of intense occupation which we have been enjoying for the last three years will come to an end one day. Uncertainty will crop up again and with it, the struggle to maintain a normal level of activity, to keep prices and wages up to a sufficient standard. The chaotic conditions in which the modern world is plunged cannot last much longer; adversity may assume an unexpected form, it may grow more profound, spread, penetrate from one plane to another, be attenuated temporarily only to break out again. All that we can do today to inspire confidence, to help on the reconstruction of war-stricken countries and, widening the base of our own national prosperity, fortify the pillars supporting it - all that we can do to strengthen the reasons we have for hope and faith, which our people sorely need, just as do the people of all nations - this will, in the long run, enable us to keep taut our will to live in peace and the job of work."

THE PESTALOZZI VILLAGES.

The idea of creating villages specially equipped with everything a child victim of the war requires if it is to recover its mental and physical health, to find its way in life and take its first steps in the occupation for which it has shown greatest aptitude - the idea of the "Pestalozzi Village" - has met with a moving welcome in many countries. The first of these villages, built by the selfless devotion of Walter Corti at Trogen in Switzerland, has already been followed by others in Italy, Germany and other countries, and it has already been possible to form an "International Association of Pestalozzi Villages."

And yet we must realise that the name of these villages is not so widely understood as their aim. There are men and women who, more concerned with the future than the past, ask - who was Pestalozzi? Why has his name been chosen for the villages which are to give new life to the child victims of the war?

For the Swiss, the name of Pestalozzi is a symbol of all that is best in the Swiss heritage. The places where he lived are sanctuaries. In 1909, his home at the Neu Hof was bought for the nation, largely by the efforts of the teachers and pupils of all the schools in Switzerland. Thus like the Grutli, the green spot by the Lake of Lucerne which saw the birth of the Confederation, the Neu Hof is a national possession.

What is the reason of Switzerland's profound attachment to this man and the places he lived in? It is not very easy to explain, for in Pestalozzi's lifetime, the Neu Hof was mainly the scene of his profoundest discomfitures. In 1769 he settled there on his marriage, at the age of twenty-two, to begin life as a farmer - the venture failed completely. In 1774 he began to take in small children to begin their education - another failure. In 1824, at the age of 78, he returned to the Neu Hof after the breakdown of his educational venture at Yverdon, and two years later it was from the Neu Hof that he set out in a sledge, one snowy day, to die at Brugg, the little neighbouring town.

For that matter, wherever Pestalozzi lived was a scene of defeat for him. At Zurich, his native city, his attachment to a trend of ideas too liberal for the oligarchic government of the mid-18th century closed every opening, civil or ecclesiastic, to him while he was still a student. Every venture he started - the Neu Hof, Stans, Burgdorf, and Yverdon, broke down.

The training centre which now exists at the Neu Hof is vastly superior, both from the agricultural and the educational points of view, to what it was in the time of Pestalozzi. And even during his lifetime, Wehrli at Hofwil and the Père Girard at Fribourg went much farther than he in realising the schemes he had at heart. Yet these villages bear the name of Pestalozzi - WHY?