

# The Universal Postal Union

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the electric current is distributed over the whole country, lighting homes and stores, driving locomotives, turning countless wheels in factories and is utilised for manifold industrial and domestic purposes. Electric energy obtained from running water has become the very life-blood of Switzerland.

Our power stations are situated at very different altitudes, and are placed in various "strategic" positions throughout the land. In winter the highlands are icebound for many months and little flow of water is then available. Well do I remember a visit to the great barrage of the Grimselsee, high up in the centre of imposing mountain chains. An engineer willingly gave a few explanations of this great power station. From the large "Aare"-glacier the water flows into a valley into which several tributaries also send their snowy supplies. This valley has been blocked by a high dam of solid masonry. Behind the barrage great masses of water are accumulated; they flow at great pressure through a tunnel from the Grimselsee to the lower situated Gelmersee. This tunnel is hewn out of solid rock and therefore did not require lined walls. The diameter of the tunnel is  $8\frac{1}{2}$  feet and has a capacity of 10 tons of water per second. The total fall to the power house at Innertkirchen is over 4,000 ft. spread over a distance of 10 miles. The storage capacity of the two lakes is over 110 million tons. At Innertkirchen the power house is a subterranean hall of imposing dimensions in the base of the mountain where 5 large generators are installed. Each of these produces about 40,000 horsepower, a total of 200,000.

Switzerland output of electric power per square mile is by far the largest of any country, and I was able to find out that in 1942 we had 209 larger generating stations, apart from many smaller ones, dispersed all over the country. The high tension network, approx. 12,000 miles long, links up all the larger stations, so that in case of emergency the power can be changed over from one to the other. There are over 400,000 electromotors and nearly 2 million heating devices. The production and the distribution of electric energy has been developed to such a high standard of efficiency that it will be hardly possible to make very considerable improvements in the near future.

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#### THE UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION.

Among the many international organisations which have their headquarters in Switzerland, is one of great importance: the World Postal Union. The staff, housed in an unpretentious building on the outskirts of Berne, is comparatively small, but its function is important.

The officials, numbered about 50, are statisticians of the first order, and to see them juggling with the astronomical figures created by the multiplicity of the world's exchange rates, is amazing. The bureau is under the surveillance of the Swiss postal administration, which also serves as intermediary between members of the Union. Its main tasks are to collect, co-ordinate and distribute all information concerning international postal affairs, give advice on legal questions and generally act as a clearing house.

The expenses of the bureau are divided among the States members, in seven different classes. The standard value for all transactions is the gold franc. Postal fees are established on the basic equivalent of the nation's currency value to the gold franc.

Every three years a gigantic "census" lasting 15 days is made of all postal matter in transit throughout the world. The mystery of who gets the fee on a letter, say from Zurich to Sydney, is less complicated than it appears. Special books, denoting the

different types of mail, enable officials to see at a glance the nature of the contents. Exchange bulletins are checked on entering and leaving a country. Each sack weighs 5, 15 or 30 kilos. Multiplied by 26, the figures for 14 days give the average volume of traffic for one year. At the end of the "census" each country compiles a list of amounts owing to it by other countries for transit charges.

Debit and credit balances are then established by the bureau at Berne. Only on rare occasions, however, are cash settlements made between debtor and creditor States, the bureau acting as a sort of clearing house through which accounts are settled on the compensation system. International telephone and cable charges are apportioned much on the same basis.

#### SWITZERLAND, A DESIRABLE CUSTOMER, BUT ALSO A USEFUL SUPPLIER.

The position which Switzerland occupies amongst the nations as regards the exchange of goods between different countries never fails to surprise in comparison with the small size of the country. Compared with the figure of the population, the extent of the commercial transactions carried out by Switzerland is only exceeded by two other small countries which, however, each have quite a large amount of maritime business: the Netherlands and Denmark. According to the figures which we have been able to regroup, the share of foreign trade (imports and exports) is in Switzerland 7% higher per head of population than in Great Britain. Compared with France, it is more than 250%, with Italy 500%, and with the United States of America 400% higher, and we only quote one or two countries. In spite of the smallness of its territory, Switzerland has a great density of population with a very high purchasing power, and this makes it a market particularly worthy of attention. On the other hand, this country which has been able to acquire by its work and its export trade the living space which it lacked, is a supplier of a very wide variety of goods which have established a reputation for first-class quality. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that the Swiss Industries Fair, the most important Trade Fair, which takes place each year in Basle, is the meeting place of a large number of foreign buyers.

They shall again find in Basle from the 15th to the 25th April, a vast display of Swiss production in all the best known industrial categories: watchmaking, textile, machinery, electro-technical goods.

#### INDUSTRIES FAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

Industries fairs are, nowadays, the modern reflexion of the old-time markets which were largely the forerunners of international relations. The fairs of bygone days contributed for centuries to the prosperity of trade, having created between merchants an atmosphere of confidence by the liberalism which they brought to the exchange of goods. In a world which is trying to re-establish this same liberty of exchange, industries fairs have resumed their old mission. Without neglecting in any way the necessity of keeping the home market supplied with goods, they all tend at the present time to favour international exchanges. The Basle Industries Fair is no exception. Each year, since the end of the war it has been the meeting place of thousands of foreign buyers. Something like 9,000 of them were counted at the Fair this year. Some people may be surprised to learn of the popularity enjoyed by the Industries Fair in Basle, knowing that it has maintained a strictly national character with regard to those who may participate in it. Is this circumstance not in contradiction with the liberal policy followed by Switzerland in the matter of economic exchanges, the more so as Switzerland is closely bound up with other countries as much by her imports of essential foodstuffs and raw materials, as by her exports by which she lives? This contradiction, lacking any