

Our fatherland [continued]

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export trade of our country have developed in an outstanding way during the past century. What we earn today and what more than 50 per cent. of our population lives on, is the difference in price between the imported raw material and the high-class finished goods which we export.

This means that we solely sell our work and craftsmanship. And this means that we have to be highly competitive. We therefore have to work very hard, have to start early in the morning, our factories must be well organised, our chemists, engineers and all the workers have to be highly efficient, so that all our export goods, such as cheese, chocolate, food products, engines, watches, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles and so on, are of an outstanding quality and can be sold all over the world for a fair price. If such were not the case, nobody would buy our manufactured goods, we could close our factories and . . . you never can tell . . . maybe become soldiers again!

Let us be honest and let us be modest. If our country is wealthy, let us not forget that this is due to two very special reasons. The most important is that since the time of Napoleon—more than 100 years ago—our country has never been occupied—which is almost an exception in Europe. For more than one hundred years the Swiss have been able to build up their industry and powerful export trade without being disturbed in their task as their neighbours have been.

The second reason is that since 1918 up to the present time there have been no important strikes in Switzerland. This does not mean that we are better boys than other nations around us. But being allowed to live in peace during World War I and World War II, inflation has not been as important as elsewhere in Europe. So that tension between rising prices and salaries has never been as acute as in neighbouring countries. Then the political structure of Switzerland has avoided any serious misunderstanding between the various classes. Our small country is divided into a great number of small geographical and social units. In small firms human relations are no problem. In small units they are much easier to cope with than in large political and social units. In our country employers and employees frequently know each other personally: maybe they were in school together or met each other during their periods of military service.

What about our future?

The problem is terribly clear. A nation which has to be so highly expert-minded, absolutely needs a climate of freedom and liberty.

OUR FATHERLAND

[Continuation]

The Canton of Valais

To break the hard struggle, many festivals of all descriptions are arranged by the Walliser and at Corpus Christi the old uniforms worn by the eighteenth century Valaisans who fought as mercenaries in many foreign armies—and which have been carefully preserved by their descendants—are still worn with pride.

French is spoken at the Western end of the Canton and the Swiss German dialect, spoken at the Eastern end, is very difficult to understand, even among other Swiss. There is also, due to the difficult life in this Canton, a strong and steady emigration to foreign countries, and today for instance, there appear to be more people of Saas-Fee settled in Argentina than there are in Saas-Fee itself.

Sion, the capital of the Canton, is noted for the beautiful church of the Notre-Dame de Valerie dating back to the twelfth century. Conspicuous also are the ruins of the castle of Tourbillon perched close on two neighbouring hills and visible from a great distance. These two hills rising abruptly out of the surrounding plain, crowned with their lovely buildings and ruins, give Sion quite an original aspect. The city has an interesting and colourful history, dating back right to the time of the conquest of this countryside by the legions of Julius Caesar.

Sierre, one of the sunniest places in Switzerland, is the starting point for the mountain rail to Montana-Vermala, where so many foreigners have regained their health. Further towards the lake of Geneva is the charming resort of Champéry, a picturesque village perched on the mountainside facing the famous Dents du Midi. This small place is well known for the magnificent swimming pool and as a centre for mountain climbing.

From Visp, at the other end of the Canton, an important rail and road leads to Zermatt and to Saas-Fee. This small village is another spot where the sun shines profusely. It is surrounded by the highest peaks of the Alps and being well off the usual travel routes, it offers ideal vacation to those interested in mountaineering. The rail leading to Zermatt is well known and has been described in the Helvetia some three years ago, together with the incomparable Matterhorn, Gornergrat, Monte Rosa, etc.

Brig, at the eastern end of Valais, is another interesting town and a railway centre of considerable importance. Here the famous daily Orient express enters the longest tunnel in the world, the Simplon. From the north-west also joins the great Loetschberg rail with about twelve daily express trains connecting Central

Europe with Milan and Rome. One of the most interesting and rewarding tours can be made from Brig through the beautiful Loetschental. Every Easter Monday a famous religious festival is held at Ferden, which is visited by the inhabitants of all the other villages in the valley and where, according to an old custom, everyone receives his share of bread and cheese. The Loetschental is filled with beautiful flowers and is an ideal place for the real lover of nature.

A description of the Canton of Valais should never omit the Hospice of the great St. Bernard and of the Abbey at St. Maurice. The Hospice is a plain structure near the summit of the pass where a temple to Jupiter stood in Roman times. The Hospice accommodates 300 people and the monks belong to the Order of St. Augustine. No charge is made for food and lodging and the hospitality of the monks is still genuine as in olden days. As many as 30,000 travellers have been sheltered in some years, and in days gone by, many lives have been saved by the famous St. Bernard dogs trained to rescue travellers caught in storms or avalanches. These dogs are world famous and probably share, with William Tell and the Lion of Lucerne, first place in the imagination of such foreigners who have heard just a few things about Switzerland.

At St. Maurice is the oldest cloister in Switzerland. Though at first sight disappointing, its sacristy contains a world-famous collection of very rare and valuable goldsmith's work, some dating back to the eighth century. This most ancient of all monasteries traces its foundations back to the Burgundian King Sigismund in 517 A.D. The church as it exists today knew ten preceding building periods.

The Canton of Valais is full of interest, but unfortunately not sufficiently known even by the Swiss in general. Rewarding vacations can be spent there almost every season, and although a mecca for all advanced mountaineers, there are numerous towns and villages with lovely walks in larch and pine forests and the hiker in particular will find endless pleasure. The Valaisans themselves are as picturesque as the beautiful scenery. For instance in Sion on market days when the peasants come in from the surrounding countryside, it looks as if the clock had been turned back at least a hundred years. The women, with their weather-beaten faces and their black stockings, reflect the difficult life and the sturdy tradition of these mountain folk. Even the younger women who have been to the large cities to work, when they return to their families or marry their childhood sweethearts, adopt again the habits and dress of their ancestors. The Valaisans cling with passionate devotion to this land of theirs, and to anyone who has seen this region and fallen under its charm, this devotion is easily understood.

In conclusion a few lines about the famous Walliser Wine. This Canton possesses every advantage for good wine growing—no fog, little rainfall and plenty of sun and heat extending far into the autumn months. The quality of the wines produced between Brig and Martigny can easily hold its own with that of almost any country. Immense plantations extend along the right bank of the river Rhone and with the elaborate system of artificial irrigation, they are still further enlarged every year. The excellent climate, however, is not sufficient to produce such excellent quality wine. The winegrowers have given endless years of hard work removing stones from the soil and building carefully graduated terraces so that the vines might have every protection. The best known Wallisers are the white "Fendant" and the red "Dole," the latter similar to the Burgundy wines of France.

E.M.

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