

Louis de Rougemont [to be continued]

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Naret Lake and the Giacomo Pass, traversing the Binn valley, pursued their course down the Rhone valley and reached the Geneva aerodrome Cointrin at 7.57, where the machines were overhauled and the benzine tanks refilled. At 9.30 the flight was resumed, the planes landing on the Sternfeld near Basle at 10.45, departing again for the ultimate goal, Schaffhausen, which was safely reached at 12.10 p.m., terminating an enterprise which does great credit to our Swiss military aviators. It may be added that the actual flying time occupied in making the complete circuit is $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours less than the time taken by the late Oscar Bider two years ago for a little shorter circuit.

The aerodrome of the "Ad Astra" in Interlaken is receiving increasing patronage from visitors desirous of taking flights over the majestic giants of the Bernese Oberland.

The opening of an aerial service between Lausanne and Paris will shortly be realised. Further services between Lausanne—Genoa and Lausanne—Milano are the subject of advancing negotiations.

* * *

A committee of prominent political and military personages have decided to invite public subscriptions for the purpose of erecting a modest monument in commemoration of the late Oscar Bider, Switzerland's first and foremost pioneer in aviation.

The Municipal Council of Berne has offered a site for the monument on the Kleine Schanze promenade, facing the wonderful Bernese Alps, which Bider was the first to fly over by aeroplane.

* * *

The "Bodensee," the last of the Zeppelins to be handed over to the Allies, left Friedrichshafen on Sunday,

July 3rd, en route for Italy. Traversing Switzerland from north-east to south-west, it passed at a low altitude over Zurich at 7.20, Berne at 8, and Geneva at 9.45 a.m., then crossing the Swiss frontier headed for Italy, landing near Rome.

NOTES & GLEANINGS.

Commenting upon the Souvenir-booklet which was sent by the Commercial Intelligence Department of the Swiss Legation to the Editors of the London and Provincial Press, the "Yorkshire Observer" writes in the issue of July 12th:—

THE TRADE OF BASLE.

"The Chamber of Commerce of Basle has issued an artistic and interesting souvenir of the spring conference of the Manchester Textile Institute, which was held at Basle in May last. The book is really a handbook to the trade and commerce of the town, and gives an interesting glimpse into the manifold business activities of that important centre of industry. Switzerland is a country almost wholly devoid of natural advantages. It has no raw materials, and practically owes its present position in industry and commerce to the genius and resource of its inhabitants. It is where highly technical skill is required that Switzerland has excelled, and in its chemical and pharmaceutical industries it has done much valuable work. The present position of the country is a beautiful illustration of how much can sometimes be done out of very little if the matter is gone about in the proper way. The Swiss have every reason to be proud of their achievements. In the old days they had to assert their independence, which was not always an easy matter in presence of powerful and sometimes not very particular neighbours. New problems for Switzerland, as well as for the rest of Europe, have arisen out of the world war, and are in process of being solved. Switzerland has its schemes for its own development, particularly in regard to the Rhine, which, when carried out, will add to the country's importance and will also assist in the reconstruction of Central Europe."

Feuilleton.

LOUIS DE ROUGEMONT

(† June 10th 1921.)

(By Dr. A. LATT.)

It was owing to mere chance that I became interested in Louis de Rougemont. I am indebted for this acquaintance to "The Daily Graphic." The last time I got hold of a copy—that of June 11th—I noticed a photo, representing a naked old man riding a giant turtle. The accompanying text stated that Louis de Rougemont, the notorious Swiss adventurer, who with his tales from the bush had hoaxed and amused the world some 23 years ago, had just died at the Kensington Infirmary at the age of between 85 and 90 years.

From another copy of "The Daily Graphic"—dated 1st or 2nd January, 1920—I secured a cutting with the photo, of an old, white-bearded man leaving the London Homœopathic Hospital, where he had undergone an operation. The patient had been admitted to the hospital shortly before Christmas under the name of Louis Redmond. As some letters, evidently intended for this man, arrived at the hospital addressed to Louis de Rougemont, the curiosity of the doctors and staff was excited, but the mystery man left without giving a key to his identity. "A press representative," says "The Daily Graphic," "who called at the hospital was not allowed to see Mr. de Rougemont, or Redmond, on account of his poor condition. The resident medical officer said the old man was very much opposed to publicity. 'If you speak to him,' said the doctor, 'you will upset him; he does not want to see anybody at all outside his own friends. All the letters which are addressed to him in the name of Louis de Rougemont he refuses to open.' Inquiries made at Queen's Gate, Kensington, said to be his address, showed that the old man was very little known in the district."

I then tried to get first-hand information about my queer

countryman. He was unknown at the Legation, and figured in none of the lists of the various Swiss societies. Mr. Geo. Forrer, who for many years had been Swiss Vice-Consul in London, knew the case well. "Louis de Rougemont was a remarkable fellow," said my informant; "though his book is a fraud, he must have had the strangest life that one could imagine for a Swiss. He has long been forgotten by the public, which used to discuss with real passion this modern Robinson Crusoe. You see, he is still alive and doing well"—and Mr. Forrer handed me a copy of "The Daily Chronicle" of 30th July, 1915, from which I quote the following passages:

"Louis de Rougemont, whose famous story startled the world some years ago, has been married in London at a West-end registry office, the bride being Miss Thirza Cooper. The lady carries on an occupation in Regent Street as a financial agent, under the name of 'Cooper,' mainly transacting business with clients in London and Paris. The wedding ceremony, according to one who was present, was quite 'a simple affair,' no friends or relatives being present, except a lady and gentleman well known in London society. Mr. de Rougemont looked well and happy and bore himself in debonnaire fashion. . . ."

Then there follows the usual description of the dress and good looks of the bride who took Louis de Rougemont as her third husband.

"She met him in London for the first time some few months ago, in connection with literary work, and found him a delightful 'child of nature,' recounting for hours together tales true and marvellous. She said, when discussing her husband with mutual friends before her marriage, 'one cannot be dull in the company of Louis de Rougemont. His imagination is livelier than that of other men. And then, when he represented the truth interestingly, the world called him an outrageous liar.'"

"I believe in Louis de Rougemont. He will yet startle the world with the revelation of a great truth, and those who have thrown stones at him will live to see his name vindicated before the world."

M. and Mme. de Rougemont are now preparing for a trip to Australia, in connection with 'a highly interesting discovery,' the nature of which, however, is being kept a profound

FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

The Zürcher Depositenbank.

The directors of the Zürcher Depositenbank in Zurich have issued the following communiqué:—"The Board of Directors elected at the General Meeting on April the 27th of this year, were specially instructed to proceed with the reorganisation of the concern and to prepare to effect any measure of relief that may be necessary. In the course of their duties they were unfortunately compelled within the first few weeks to report the bank to be in a very insolvent condition. They attempted to obtain the necessary funds through the means which were available in the circumstances and at the same time opened negotiations with a view of relieving the situation and setting the business on a firm footing. Before this operation could mature, the results of the insolvent state of the bank's affairs, which had its origin back in the war period, had developed into a more acutely critical situation. The directors, therefore, find themselves compelled to avail themselves of the facilities open to them by law. As far as it has been possible to ascertain, at present there is no fear of the interests of the creditors being endangered, and a moratorium is therefore being applied for."

Compared with our big commercial concerns the Zürcher Depositenbank is of only secondary importance. It originated in 1889 with a capital of frs. 4,000,000, which was augmented during 1919 by the issue of 8,000 shares at frs. 500.— to frs. 8,000,000. In 1920 the bank amalgamated with the Incasso- and Effectenbank in Zurich, thus raising the whole share capital to frs. 12,500,000.

The communication caused no surprise in banking circles in Switzerland, as it had been known for some time that the Depositenbank was in difficulty.

A Swiss-Roumanian Bank.

The formation of a Swiss-Roumanian Bank is being promoted at the present time in Switzerland. This new bank will be specially organised to assist in the liquidation of the heavy stocks of merchandise, especially textiles, that are lying in Roumania.

It is expected that the bank will open its doors on the 1st of September.

The Forces Motrices Bernoises.

The net profit for the past year amounts to frs. 2,321,268, which is distributed as follows: The dividend is fixed at 6½% as against 6% for the year 1919; frs. 235,000 are allocated to reserves (this in accordance with a provision of the Articles of Association) and frs. 6,268 are carried forward.

Only a short time ago a new power station for the company was finished, the "Kraftwerk Muehleberg," and it is no doubt in view of this achievement that the company has been authorised by the Federal Council to export electrical power to Mulhouse and Strasbourg.

The managers of the company are already making preparations to carry out the "Oberhasli" project referred to in No. 9 of the "S.O." For this purpose the share capital, which is now frs. 32,000,000, is to be increased by frs. 60,000,000. 40 million francs will be issued in the course of this year, whilst the remaining 20 million francs will be issued 1925 and 1926.

Thus the Forces Motrices Bernoises are making considerable headway amongst the Swiss electric power-producing undertakings, all of which are constantly developing.

Another Big Power Scheme.

Another big power scheme is the Waeggithal project, which will probably be executed by the Akt.-Ges. Kraftwerk Waeggithal, a company to be formed with a share capital of 40 million francs, of which 20 million francs will be subscribed by the City of Zurich.

The Growing Importance of the Swiss Electrical Industry.

To what importance our electrical industry has grown up may be seen from the following figures, which appeared lately in an article in "The Financial News," entitled, "Switzerland as Power Purveyor." "It now appears," runs the article, "that Switzerland not only supplies herself with electricity in profusion, but is also sending electrical power over the frontier. Thus, in December last it was reckoned that Switzerland had supplied Germany with 36,610 kilowatts of electricity, France with 24,296 kilowatts, and Italy with 46,859 kilowatts. The

secret. For the present they are quietly residing in London, Monsieur engaging himself in play-writing and in the study of the occult, in which latter science he has always delved deeply.

"The narrative of 'The Swiss Family Grin' in 'The Daily Chronicle' (1898) disposed of Louis de Rougemont as an author and lecturer, but he has bobbed up serenely several times since. About nine years ago (1906) he persuaded the manager of a variety theatre to 'star' him as a rider of turtles, but his appearance in that capacity was not a success. Soon after he took to hypnotism, and claimed to have effected wonderful cures, and his last transformation, about a year ago, was in the shape of a polar explorer, with a projected expedition to the Antarectic."

Knowing so much, I went to the British Museum and secured a copy of the "Adventures of Louis de Rougemont," as told by himself, and an illustrated booklet entitled "Grien ou Rougemont," a reprint of a series of articles published by "The Daily Chronicle." From these two sources I gathered the main part of my information. When I handed the books back, the superintendent, a man who had never spoken a word to me during the four years I was his regular customer, stood up and, pointing to the "Adventures," said: "Isn't this one of the finest books that were ever written? Oh, he was a sharp fellow—and how well he did them all! He was far more clever than the lot of his enemies. I knew him well; for years he would be the first reader in the morning and the last at night. There he used to sit, near the door, having piles of books about him. He never spoke to anybody. For days and weeks he would be scribbling page after page at an incredible speed. He looked a bit funny, but he certainly was not mad as they pretended he was—he simply was too clever."

The second-hand bookseller opposite the British Museum had known him, also an old member of the firm of George Newnes & Co., Ltd., who had published the strange book. They never doubted the absolute veracity of the account. "If you had heard him," they would say, "you would not believe all 'The Daily Chronicle' brought up against him. Those people doubted that he could ride turtles and guide them with his feet—but did he not do it even on the stage? They doubted

that the soles of his feet could have become as hard as horn, but why did the British Association never investigate in the case of Red Indians before calling Louis de Rougemont an impostor?"

The Bristol meeting of the British Association (autumn 1898) had already thrown de Rougemont over, when "The Wide World Magazine" began the publication of a series of articles which were by the editor believed to be a remarkable find for his review, which only published "true stories of peril and adventure and articles on quaint and peculiar subjects." Every issue was sold out as fast as it was printed; so was the book, which was published in 1899. Whilst the adventures, told in the first chapters, were fairly plausible even to critical readers, the narrative grew wilder and more unreal as the account proceeded, so as to provoke doubts and queries in a number of papers. "The Daily Chronicle" then took up the matter in conjunction with one of the leading papers in Australia and gradually produced another version of the story, which left very little merit to Louis de Rougemont.

The author of the "Adventures" begins by saying that he was born near Paris as the son of a fairly prosperous man of business. When he was ten years of age, Louis went with his mother to Montreux in Switzerland. When about 19, he fell in love with a Russian girl of noble descent who was staying at a pensionnat at Montreux. As Louis' father would not consent to the marriage, the young man went out to the East, with some 7,000 francs in his pockets. He saw Cairo and Singapore and fell in with a Dutch captain, who engaged him as a clerk and a mate for the ship "Veieland," which in 1863 set out on a pearling expedition in the Torres Sea. The harvest was excellent, but the expedition came to grief during the storms of the winter season. The "Veieland" was wrecked on a coral rock, and Louis, the only man surviving, was stranded on a low and sandy island. There he lived for about 2½ years, feeding on the provisions which he had saved from the wreck, on birds' eggs, fish, turtles and some corn which he grew in pearl shells.

(To be continued.)