

Great Britain and the market & industries of Switzerland

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GREAT BRITAIN AND THE MARKET & INDUSTRIES OF SWITZERLAND.

Two highly interesting and instructive articles have appeared in the English Press, and we make no excuse for reproducing them in extenso.

The one in *The Times* (Oct. 22nd) is inspired by Mr. Alexander Richardson, the secretary of the British Chamber of Commerce in Basle, and deals with the difficulties—and the remedy—which stand in the way of British manufacturers obtaining a strong foothold in the Swiss market:—

"A good deal of misapprehension has existed in this country with regard to the Swiss regulations for the restriction of imports. The object of these regulations is not to exclude British goods, but to prevent the flooding of the Swiss market with goods from countries with a depreciated currency.

Most British commodities are on the Swiss general licence list, provided they are imported via the French or Italian frontiers. The frontiers of the countries with a depreciated currency require an import licence for almost everything entering Switzerland.

Mr. Alexander Richardson, Secretary of the British Chamber of Commerce in Switzerland, whose intimate knowledge of Swiss affairs entitles him to speak with authority, states that the policy of the Swiss Government is to favour such countries as Britain as much as possible, and on the other hand to discourage imports from the countries with a depreciated currency. Many of the alleged high rates of duty are really equivalent to farthings per single article, and are not prohibitive in the case of British goods of high quality.

The British Chamber of Commerce for Switzerland is trying to secure for British exporters permission to import their goods on the general licence list even via other frontiers than the French and Italian, provided they are consigned on through bills of lading direct from the United Kingdom to Switzerland.

The British manufacturer, says Mr. Richardson, continually grumbles about having to compete with Germany. There may be reason for this complaint to a certain extent; yet he does absolutely nothing to cultivate the Swiss market. If the British manufacturers would only study their buyers a little more and realize that the Swiss buyer is a serious and conscientious business man, and, moreover, if the British manufacturer will only let the Chamber help him in every case, there is little doubt that good business could be done.

Competition with German products is unnecessary; there are Swiss products which are more expensive than the British article; there are British articles which are not made in Switzerland and would find a ready sale. The field for British goods is extensive. The cost of labour and the cost of production in Switzerland are high, and the British trader has the advantage of 12½ per cent. rate of exchange in his favour. 'Forget all about Germany' is Mr. Richardson's advice.

Statistics prove that the purchasing power of Switzerland is very high in comparison with the population of the country. There are also important firms in Switzerland who buy British goods exclusively for shipment overseas. Yet several instances have occurred where shipping firms have applied to British manufacturers for quotations, and have been informed that quotations can only be made through United Kingdom shippers.

This attitude of British manufacturers and merchants forces not only Swiss buyers, but also Swiss commission agents resident in Switzerland into purchasing from Germany and other countries. Under present conditions it is difficult for an agent, even of British nationality, to live on his English agencies, and in order to live or to make at least enough to pay his expenses and show a profit in his business at the end of the year he is more or less forced to sell French and even German goods as well as English.

There is no doubt, in Mr. Richardson's opinion, that most Continental and oversea buyers will always give preference to British firms whenever possible, for various reasons. The first reason is that the British merchant and manufacturer have the reputation of being honest in their dealings. Secondly, most foreign buyers like English goods because of their excellent finish. Thirdly, most foreigners like dealing with the Englishman from a personal standpoint. The great trouble is that he never 'shows his face,' whereas the German almost lives on

his buyer's doorstep. It is essential to study the interests of the buyers, and a personal visit is of more value than catalogues printed in English only, with 'prehistoric weights and measures and impossible terms.'

It is useless, for instance, to quote in sterling, ex warehouse in the United Kingdom or f.o.b. London. The Swiss buyer will pay cash, but only on delivery of the goods. The procedure of the German could be followed with advantage. The German quotes in Swiss currency, in any weights and measures the buyer uses himself, and tells the buyer exactly what the goods will finally cost him at his own warehouse. With regard to payment he never appears to be in a hurry for his money. But most important of all is that he immediately sends a traveller to call on the inquirer. When an English firm sends out samples it immediately clamours for its money for every piece sent. The German debits the agents' account for the value of the samples, but does not ask for money right away. There is time enough to pay for the samples when the first order comes through and the first commission is earned.

Happily for British prestige in Switzerland quite a number of firms have adapted themselves to the requirements of the Swiss buyers, and in some cases have actually followed the German methods. The wisest of all have their own office in Switzerland, and these firms are steadily increasing their sales from year to year, even in these critical times."

* * *

The Manchester Guardian (Commercial—Oct. 27th) gives a survey of some of our staple industries and mentions certain efforts to maintain and develop the export trade which have filled the writer with admiration:—

"Switzerland calls up a picture of snow-capped mountains, picturesque chalets, gleaming lakes. We think of Switzerland as the world's playground for lovers of the snow, a sanatorium with life-giving air for the diseased, a country of incomparable (and expensive) hotels.

But business men know that Switzerland is more than this; it is one of the most highly concentrated centres of industry for its size in the world. With a population of little more than half that of London, with great and highly organised nations on all her borders, deprived of any seaboard, Switzerland has yet established herself as an industrial force. Admiration is increased when one remembers that she must depend upon other countries for minerals and coal and that four-fifths of her exports are manufactured goods.

Switzerland has overcome nature by harnessing the rivers and mountain torrents to the machinery which produces electricity. This electricity is her compensation for her lack of coal. Switzerland is a land of electric light and power. There are homes there which electricity has transformed into hotels of comfort. Electricity opens the windows and doors, warms carpets and cushions, makes efficient the bathroom, and enables the cook to excel. In ten years' time the electrification of the railways will be quite complete.

In 1919 private enterprise opened an institute at St. Gall to experiment in and to develop the textile industry. A specially trained technical staff examines all raw materials, auxiliary stuffs, and half-finished goods with a view to constant improvement. In January, 1920, Switzerland imported 5,005 quintals of cotton yarn, compared with 2,998 quintals in January, 1913. The total imports of cotton goods and raw cotton for 1919 was valued at 373.4 million francs, as against 131.8 million francs in 1913. It should be noted that a potential market for British manufactured woollens is waiting in Switzerland. Her home production does not fully meet the demand.

The cotton embroidery of Switzerland has a world-wide reputation; in the first nine months of 1919 the increased value of production was 53 per cent., or a quantity of 70 per cent. over the corresponding period of 1918. Great quantities were sent to Central Europe valued at 160 million francs, which was paid for in produce, furniture, and other goods. The total exports for 1920 were 400 million francs.

Swiss silk goods are marketed all over the world. During the war there was an enormous development in silk exports; 271.3 million francs worth was exported in 1919, against 191.9 million francs in 1913. In 1920 the British Empire alone imported 922 million francs' worth, or 28 per cent. of the total exports, of various Swiss goods. Our own exports to Switzerland were 629 million francs, or under 15 per cent. of the total British exports. Our interest in the development of Switzerland is obvious.

In the year 1679 a blacksmith's boy, aged 15, named Daniel Jean Richard, living at La Sagne, in the Jura, repaired

an English watch belonging to a travelling horse dealer. The marvellous memory of the boy enabled him a year later to produce a similar watch. From that small spring rose the great torrent of Swiss watches.

A striking proof of the international reputation of Swiss watches is that exports to the United States in 1920 reached a total of 72 million francs. The point is that America herself is Switzerland's greatest competitor. But probably the British Empire takes a greater proportion of the Swiss output. The value of these exports for 1920 is given thus: Watches, clocks, and finished parts to all parts 325 million francs. To Great Britain and colonies 78 million francs.

One great development of the industrial life of Switzerland now awaits consummation. Switzerland is faced with the opportunity and task of creating direct access to the sea by the Rhine. Basle will be the first Swiss port. The finest traits of the enterprising and industrious Swiss will be called out by this task. Switzerland is an industrial force to be reckoned with in the days to come."

SOCIAL AND PERSONAL.

Mr. Henri Martin, Councillor of Legation, is expected back from Switzerland on Monday, the 7th inst.

Mr. Paul G. Ritter, who has been attached to the Swiss Legation for some time, has now been appointed Attaché.

Mr. Marius L. Martin, of the Royal Palace Hotel, Kensington, W.8, is leaving London to take up an appointment as Manager of the Grand Hotel in St. Moritz.

SUBSCRIPTIONS RECEIVED.

F. H. Cottier, M. Hoffmann, Rev. U. Wildbolz, A. Bodenehr.

The "Swiss Observer" is on sale at
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A. O. D.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Saturday, November 5th.—**SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY:** Cinderella Dance 6.30 to 11.45 p.m., Midland Grand Hotel, N.W.1.

Friday, November 11th, at 7 p.m.—**NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE:** Supper at 74, Charlotte Street, W. (Schweizerbund).

Friday, November 25th.—**CITY SWISS CLUB:** Annual Banquet and Ball at Prince's Restaurant.

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