

Notes and gleanings

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NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By KYBURG.

At luncheon the other day, when I was the guest of a very good Swiss friend who is not only one of the successful commercial invaders of Great Britain, but also a very knowing man, we were discussing the *Swiss Observer* and I was gratified to hear him say how very useful such a small paper could be and what real services the *Swiss Observer* undoubtedly renders to the Swiss Colony in England. One criticism my friend made struck me rather, because I have felt its relevant force long ago myself, and that is that in our Notes and Gleanings we are apt to get too much flattering. It is, of course, a well-known phenomenon that most of us, especially we older ones, are frightfully patriotic Swiss when here in Old England, and when we are over in Switzerland we stand up for Great Britain with all our might!

But, we Swiss undoubtedly often get a surfeit of flattering and it would do us good, perhaps, occasionally to hear more or less friendly criticism. However, as I explained to my friend, it is almost impossible to find such criticism of things Swiss in the British Press.

But, strange things do happen. This week's cuttings from the British Press contain some good criticism of Swiss methods and institutions, written, not by a Britisher, but by a *Swiss*, which almost reminded me of that post-card manufacturer of German origin who was unearthed by the Swiss authorities during the war for making and selling anti-German Post-Cards contrary to Switzerland's Neutrality Obligations! However, I will give you, from the *Shipping World*, 7th inst.

Government in Business: The Example of Switzerland.

In Switzerland the Government supplies more than three-quarters of the country's electric power; operates railroads, communication services, and absorbs 40 per cent. of the insurance business. Here, if anywhere, Government operation has been given a thorough trial, but Dr. Adolph Jöhr, a well-qualified observer, since a member of the Direction Generale du Credit Suisse at Zurich, sees only one result—failure.

For several decades the Swiss Confederation, the cantons and the municipalities, each with considerable autonomy, have, under pressure brought by political parties, striven zealously, Dr. Jöhr records, writing in *The Nation's Business*, to pass each other on the road leading to the nationalisation of all public enterprises capable of being termed "public utilities." Three-quarters of Switzerland's electrical power is supplied by public enterprise. All the main railways are held by the State, and most other standard, narrow gauge and tramway lines are in whole or in part operated by public authorities. The State also controls the postal, telegraph and telephone services. In nearly all the cantons there is a State bank, and such banks hold, as their balance sheets show, a third of the capital deposited with Swiss banks. Moreover, the State absorbs at least 40 per cent. of the country's insurance business.

The first obstacle to success lies in the laws and ordinances upon which State enterprises are founded. Such rules are not usually made on a basis of business reasoning, but on political differences and compromises. They inevitably hamper the free action of public enterprises, and can only be modified with difficulty and loss of time. The consequence of a heaping up of authorities is inefficiency of the bodies that really manage and are responsible for the enterprise. This phenomenon runs parallel with a distrust of officials, and the origin of that feeling is thoroughly democratic.

A democratic Bible could never open with the words: "In the beginning was action," but with "In the beginning was a committee." Hand in hand with inefficiency goes dread of responsibility, and that leads to a worship of the most pernicious idol an enterprise can set before itself—precedent. Where the manager of a private enterprise makes a deliberate decision, relying on his past experience and confident that his judgment is right, the head of a public enterprise, hampered at every turn by laws and standards, consults the regulations and hunts for precedents. Allowance must be made for the meddling of all those who busy themselves with public welfare, members of the executive authority. Members of Parliament, secretaries of associations, officials of federations, editors of newspapers, and all the thousands of political reformers of which democracy has always had its fill.

Switzerland has never lacked men of great capability to devote themselves to the arduous and ungrateful task of managing public enterprises. If we consider the numberless difficulties they have had to face, we shall not be surprised that in time even the most worthy

have given way to discouragement. How could the manager responsible for the State railways have the courage to economise on operation when Parliament habitually goes beyond his most reasonable proposals as regards wages and shortens the working hours of employees in a time of deficit?

The exercise of such power is all the easier for State operations because they are as a rule based on a monopoly or enjoy extensive privileges secured to them by the State, tax exemptions, stamp duties, and the like. From the point of view of competition these privileges give them favoured treatment and make it difficult, if not impossible, to compare their results with those of private enterprise. Brought into the world by politics, public enterprises in a democratic state remain before all, in whatever form they may take, instruments in the hands of public authority. How can we expect the representatives of the people to resist the temptation to increase their popularity by constructing new railway lines, particularly new tunnels under the Alps, new stations and post offices? They are equally tempted to increase their prestige by establishing new communications and new stops for through trains and by defending the interests of State employees.

It is an unfortunate fact that along with the extension of State and municipal industrial operation, continually widening circles of industrial and technical interests find that their development depends on deliveries effected by the State, and are thus led to solicit State help in cases where a self-respecting private business should make it a point of honour not to depend on external aid. The greatest drawback to public operation lies in the fact that, when all is said and done, it is the taxpayer who bears the risks. A private enterprise established on an unsound foundation and run on uneconomic lines loses its capital as well as its profits, and faces bankruptcy if it cannot begin on an economic basis. On the other hand, public operation, as the State itself, is of its very nature permanent, and taxpayers are obliged to pay for the crockery broken by those in control.

Private enterprise is the source of the most abundant State revenues. "Nationalisation" of any kind undermines the very foundation of taxation to the detriment of the State, and only affords a compensation when the enterprise is operated less on an economic than on a fiscal basis. The economic and technical progress realised during the last century was the work not of the state, but of private initiative. So far the State has never taken the trouble to discover new methods of production and only when there is a question of finding new taxes has it shown an inventive spirit. The country where economic output is unquestionably the greatest—the United States of America—is also a country where public ownership and Government monopoly are virtually unknown.

There are, as some of our readers will probably notice, quite a few observations in the above which can very easily be explained, controverted, or which are quite misleading in their comparative application. However, stet!

Being rather keen on critical studies this week, I have, after much anxious searching, found another rather apt article in the *Manchester Guardian*, 9th May called

The Question of Façade.

Perhaps the most expensive thing in life is façade. You take a house with no light and no air in a fashionable street and you pay enormous sums for it, merely because of its name. There are English hotels which actually charge for being without hot water and baths, and for using iron bedsteads because, being in a "good" street, they are thus preserving façade. And so Americans splash in hip-baths and enjoy paying for the quaintness of old England. Façade, however, applies to much less tangible things than houses. In this country there is façade in education, because education is still regarded as a luxury. There is façade in nursing homes and doctors and dentists and oculists because, again, health is considered better when it is expensive. And schools and doctors and dentists alike have to keep up the appearance of façade lest their patients should not think they were getting their money's worth.

It Switzerland it is possible to go to a good oculist for ten francs—these are real francs and not the depreciated variety—and to have a very good one for twenty. Eyesight is considered a necessity, and good eyesight or improved eyesight is thus within the reach of the multitude without the necessity for going to a free hospital. Similarly any specialist will give advice for a sum well within the means of the ordinary person. Dentists are on a similar scale—unless they be American so-called, when the price is expected to go up. In France, unless special terms be made for the notoriously wealthy foreigners, charges for medical services are on

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the most modest scale. Again there is no need to become a free patient at a hospital. There are, of course, doctors on the Continent of world-wide reputation and they ask world-wide fees. But the ordinary and perfectly competent specialist does not imply that the patient hesitates for weeks before going to him. It also means that there is no Harley Street, no façade to keep up. In order to have specialised in something, it is not necessary to live in a particular quarter with all the increase in rentals and expenses which that implies. Doctors are necessities. They must be kept within the reach of the many.

In Continental education the question of façade is even more noticeable. Education is not merely a luxury, an extra, something which is best hidden lest your fellows should think you are putting on side. It is a fundamental necessity to the national life. Thus, education is incomparably cheaper than in our own country. The expensive preparatory schools which thrive in England, and which drain the parents to the utmost limits or else force them to give their children an education without the ordinary hall-mark, hardly exist or are at most a foreign importation. On the other hand, there is a good deal less of the exclusiveness which obtains in England whereby all children are brought up to know only their own type, to do the same things, to speak, think, and act in the same way. Much more stress is laid upon learning and it is not the highest quality to be a champion at ski-jumping or running. Continentals admire the stress laid on sport in English schools as productive of an independent type of child, but they continue to realise that knowledge is power and not the disgrace it is almost taught to be in so many English schools.

Façade in English schools is mostly snobishness in its purest form. It is not that special luxuries are provided. Boys, in particular, are often extremely badly looked after, and that at the most expensive type of school, but façade demands that they should have been to a school which leaves its particular brand upon them and which moulds them, not so much to do certain things but not to do a great many others. And even the most intelligent parents hesitate before sending their children to a school which may afterwards be called "crank," as opposed to that in which the façade is of the regulation type.

In France the absence of façade is particularly noticeable with regard to shops. There are, of course, the big shops which everywhere have taken on an international complexion. But there still remain the little unpretentious shops and businesses which, instead of putting their value into façade, put it into their goods. Some of the best things in France are not produced in a shop at all, but in the quarters where the family live. You climb four flights of stairs, very often dark, and at the end of them you find some of the most beautiful lingerie, some of the best dress-making in France. It is enabled to be good because façade has simply not entered into the question. There is no outside show to keep up.

No doubt façade is demanded by the public, which likes things to be obvious. There would not be the fortunes spent on outsiders were there no answering response. But the whole question of values becomes thereby extraordinarily mixed. Money is to some extent a measure of things, but in the question of façade it fails altogether. In the matter of schools expensiveness has no relation at all, for the most part, to the advantages obtained. A school is expensive very often because it is the fashion to go there and to have indifferent food and be sent home with a dirty neck. That is to say, parents must ignore the money aspect, even if the schools do not, in order to achieve for their children some intangible quality which is supposed to come from having been there. There is a great deal to be said against a purely academic education, but there seems to be still more against an education of which the greatest merit is perhaps that several little boys live together and educate each other—a process which could be achieved at infinitely less expense to parents did not the question of façade arise.

We have often been called a snobbish nation. There is perhaps no greater evidence of snobbery than our attitude toward the necessities of life. While we grumble, we really like paying for things, really like receiving the regulation hall-mark, really like to be exclusive—in a crowd, it is true. Education, to take only one instance, is rather like a fashionable race meeting—where everything is much more important than the horse. And so we are doctored and lawyered and educated with everything spared, except the expense, and all in the interests of façade. MURIEL HARRIS.

And although not only Swiss, but all sorts of "Exteriors" are dealt with in this article, I do think it will be a treat for a lot of our readers to read it, and, I hope, *incardly digest it!*

Alpahrt-Alpage.

Burton Evening Gazette, 7th May:

Green is now the predominant colour of all lower, and even middle, mountain slopes in Switzerland. Along the shores of the Lake of Geneva aubretia is massed in its purple, hanging from a hundred vineyard walls. Wild narcissi, gentians and a score of other Alpine blooms are colouring the pastures.

These are the obvious natural signs of the passing of winter and spring in the Alps.

But there is another, at first less obvious, sign of the definite arrival of summer; a sign only visible to the tourist who side-tracks the more famous resort and makes straight for those little valley villages which are the true soul of Switzerland.

Now, in the final weeks of spring and the first weeks of summer, the cow herds are taken from the valley pastures, where they have been all winter, and led high into the mountains to graze upon that rich, vividly green grass which lies within a few feet of the lowermost snows.

This time of the alpage, as the trek to the mountains is called, is one of hectic activity for the peasant villages.

It is also a strange time of picturesque rustic ceremony.

Early in the day the herds are assembled from the scattered valley farms which make up a Swiss village. The ascent to the high pastures is staged as a procession, headed by the herdsman in peasant gala dress of bright embroidery and brass ornaments. In a choir which echoes from the vast surrounding mountains they sing the "Ranz des Vaches," followed by a chorus of yodelling.

All this is a merry and dramatic prelude to months of hard work and isolation for those who accompany the herds. For five months at least the men will be separated from their women folk in the villages below. Until the first snows of autumn signal the time to return their lot is one of monastic remoteness among the peaks of the Alps. Herds must be tended ceaselessly. Herds must be milked and many hundreds of pounds of cheese made for storage in the winter.

About October the return is made to the valleys—with all the herds and all the cheeses.

Then, in the villages the rejoicing lasts for many days.

Fifth Century Frescoes.

According to *The Bulletin and Scots Pictorial* of the 8th inst. an *interesting discovery* has been made at Bellinzona.

It is stated that the frescoes recently discovered during restorations in the church of the Madonna della Grazie at Bellinzona, the capital of the Swiss canton of Ticino, date from the fifth century and constitute an artistic and historic find of the highest importance. The finest of the paintings is a "King David," in a wonderful state of preservation and of admirable conception and execution. The colours are still as fresh as on the day on which they were laid on the walls of the church 1400 years ago, and the signature of the artist is clear and visible.

Further interesting discoveries are expected, and in view of the opening of the summer tourist season the renovation of the church is being speeded up so that visitors may have an opportunity of seeing the discoveries.

The Paris Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* had the following item on May 7th:

Records for Year 2180.

"Our scientists, it would appear, are content to make elaborate experiments of which the results will only be known long after they are dead. The Paris Academy of Science has just been officially informed of one such experiment which was begun recently by the Swiss Glacier Commission and which is to last for 250 years.

"The object of the experiment is to determine the exact speed at which certain glaciers move. This is known to be at the rate of only a few inches a year, but scientists want to have it accurately measured. Therefore, metal receptacles resembling shells were buried in the ice at the starting point of various glaciers. Each of these shells contained a scientific record of observations already made concerning the glacier, and the date, hour and place of its burial in the ice. When two and a half centuries hence these shells are found by our descendants at the foot of the glacier, they will no doubt furnish useful information to the scientists of that age.

"An account of the experiment has been duly sealed and deposited in the safe of the Academy, with the note that it is not to be opened until the year 2180."

Well, who knows? by swallowing all sorts of glands, etc., some of us may yet live to be there when those receptacles are being delivered up by the glacier in 2180! I wonder what the income tax will be then?

Doings in Our Colony.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Once more, gentle reader, I take up my pen to render an account of the doings of the C.S.C. and at the last meeting which was held on Tuesday May 6th at Pagan's Restaurant, the outstanding feature of the evening was the re-appointment for the present Session of "ck" as Reporter. This important item of news will no doubt be received with mixed feelings, but I should like to express my thanks to Uncle Max for having stepped so nobly into the breach during "ck's" absence and I will promise that "ck" will try to be a good little boy in future and not to offend the susceptibilities of Mary or other readers. As a matter of fact I am doubly grateful to Uncle Max, as he has given me an idea. I must confess I found his dope (Anglice prose) rather involved and I think his style might perhaps be copied with advantage. Otherwise nothing very important happened at the meeting. Mr. H. Senn was in the chair in the absence of the President, Mr. C. Chapuis, and presided over the proceedings with undoubted skill and charm. After the usual business of minutes, admissions, resignations, votes of credit had been transacted, Dr. Eckenstein gave a talk about his experiences in America and the impressions he had gained during his short stay in that country. He gave an interesting account of the beach at Daytona, and described the arrangements made for the speed trials and the atmospheric conditions necessary for the beach to be in a good condition.

From his remarks, I gathered that the climate of Florida is similar to that of the Riviera, although the vegetation is more luxuriant.

The doctor appears to have had many interesting experiences in the short time at his disposal and it is a pity that he was prevented from gaining more by an illness which obliged him to make the acquaintance of the inside of an American Hospital, but perhaps his stay will not have been altogether in vain, as no doubt he gained useful experience of what it feels like to be a patient.

At any rate he told me that he could not have been made more comfortable and he seems to have spent most of his time trying to learn to speak American.

Apparently his most pleasant memories are a visit to a fruit plantation, coloured boxing matches and a tour of New York behind a police escort. I cannot close this account of last meeting without referring to the minutes of the Annual General Meeting which were read by the Secretary. They were a model of clearness and remarkable for completeness of detail. Mr. Zimmerman received the congratulations of the members and well did he deserve them. ck.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY. EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

In connection with the scholastic programme the following lectures were given by the students during last week:—

Mr. R. Schaffner, Baden: "Cheap Trips." Mr. A. Arbenz, Genève: "League of Nations." Mr. R. Schwarzenbach, Zurich: "Wine Making." Mr. E. Zbinden, Burgdorf: "Elections in Corsica." Mr. H. Obrist, Tramelan: "The Swiss Watch Trade." Mr. H. Paravicini, Wädenswil: "A Day in Genoa." Mr. A. Holliger, Basle: "A Journey through Italy." Mr. M. Vogt, Aarau: "My Hobby." Miss M. Schweiter, Horgen: "English People." Miss A. Buhlmann, St. Gallen: "Venice." Mr. P. Hubmann, Steckborn: "When we had ice on our Lake." Miss G. Wuthrich, Brugg: "Hamlet." Mr. H. Morf, Zurich: "Money." Mr. R. Naef, Zurich: "Paris." Miss E. Walder, Rapperswil: "Rapperswil." Mr. O. Stettler, Langenthal: "The Cotton Crisis." Mr. Rebmann, Spiez: "Swiss Watches." Mr. Nussbaumer, Zug: "Kew Gardens." Miss E. Bezzola, Chur: "My Journey to England."

The debating classes dealt with the following subjects:—

"Can Beauty and Brains go together?" Affirmative: Miss F. Huber. Negative: Mr. A. Eindemann.

"Do you believe in the Possibility of United States of Europe?" Proposer: Mr. Arbenz. Opposer: Mr. Niggli.

On Friday May 9th the Students of the S.M.S. listened to a very interesting and instructive lecture on "Some Aspects of London Life" delivered by P. Seaford, Esq., during which lecture, Mr. Seaford showed them, by means of Lantern Slides, the most interesting, although not very widely known, parts of London. At the end of the lecture, Mr. Levy, Headmaster of the S.M.S. School proposed a vote of thanks to the lecturer.

On Saturday May 10th the students visited Kew Gardens under the leadership of one of the Teachers, B. Davis, Esq., B.A. They enjoyed very much the walk by the riverside to Richmond.