

Aux armes

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is said to take five days or more. English newspapers which on account of their reliable news service enjoy wide popularity are over a week old when received. On the other hand it is stated that the postal service from Germany is practically normal.

* * *

A.R.P. preparations are now completed throughout Switzerland. Black-outs so rigidly enforced in this country are so far dispensed with as it is held that a blaze of lights in towns and villages constitute a sure indication to foreign aircraft that they have strayed into neutral territory.

* * *

The International Committee of the Red Cross which celebrates this year the 75th anniversary of its foundation has now resumed its operations and is installed in the "Palais du Conseil Général," a large building in the centre of Geneva. Many voluntary workers have already been inscribed and their services will be utilised as the organisation develops.

* * *

Fanciful news is not the exclusive prerogative of the propaganda scribes; a report in some of the Swiss dailies recently stated that all the wild animals in the London Zoo had been destroyed as a precaution in case of air raids!

* * *

All sorts of ruses to evade expulsion are being put into practise by foreigners in Switzerland who have no love for their own country. In Sarnen (Obwalden) an otherwise respectable thirty-year-old German immigrant committed a burglary in the hope that his sentence may give him a respite.

"AUX ARMES."

Friday, September 15th and Saturday, September 16th, 1939, will remain for a very long time in the memory of many a Swiss. For these were the days when the members of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain, who had done military service in Switzerland were assembled at Swiss House in Fitzroy Square to answer the call the Motherland sent out to its sons, to rally round the flag and to protect the frontiers of Switzerland against any aggression.

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Perhaps never before was the necessity of having a home of its own in this great Metropolis brought so strongly to the notice of members of the Swiss Colony than on that memorable Friday and Saturday. Already in the morning young men from all over England came to Swiss House to inquire if this was really the right place from which they would leave, others again thought that it was the Legation, asked questions about when the train was leaving, which route they would be travelling; if they could bring their luggage here and hundred more similar inquiries were put.

One particular instance could not fail to give amusement to those who witnessed it. A taxi laden with about half a dozen large trunks arrived outside Swiss House and a young man who came from Glasgow, bringing with him all his goods and chattels, emerged out of it anxiously inquiring where he could put his luggage until he would leave London with the special train taking the Swiss home. When he was told that he should only take as much luggage as he himself could carry, he was most disappointed as he said he was told in his marching-orders that he should present himself at 2 o'clock at Swiss House bringing his luggage with him. Whether he expected to find porters waiting for him or not could not be ascertained but it took quite a considerable time for him to realise that the best he could do was to return to his Hotel, repack and leave the luggage in the custody of the proprietor until such time that the remainder could be sent on to him.

On Friday afternoon the sky began to shed tears, evidently in sympathy with the sweethearts left behind by many a young man. It was rather rough on these girls who had to wait outside to wave a last good-bye to their departing swains, or then give them the last kiss under an umbrella, as by an austere order of the Officer in charge no relatives could be admitted. But in spite of this instruction there were a few who risked the rather stern look of authority and who penetrated the precinct of Swiss House. Good luck to them for to the valiant belongs the world and they had at least the opportunity of spending the few remaining hours with their loved ones and of keeping out of the now drenching rain. On those who went on Friday, one could see a rather keen expression of more or less relief from the pent-up expectation and uncertainty when the moment of departure would arrive, which was very noticeable on the faces of some of the young fellows since the first intimation of mobilisation was received. There was certainly a martial air about the whole proceedings, particularly expressed in the person of the C.O. who, booted and spurred had arranged the whole organisation of the mobilisation according to schema F. After very little time the whole routine worked fairly well so that at about 5 o'clock the work of getting everyone of the nearly 300 people into their proper places was over and the eight buses of the L.P.T.B. were gradually filled with the flower of Swiss manhood residing in the British Isles.

Just before departure of the buses, witnessed by a considerable number of wives, sweethearts, friends, landlords and landladies, our Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, snatching a few moments from his arduous duties, paid a visit to Swiss House to bid God's speed to our soldiers.

On Saturday a similar picture presented itself at Swiss House when another party, this time of about

150 answered the call. These were the older contingent and many an anxious face was seen. Men who had to leave their business and occupation to go back to Switzerland, which they had left years ago, to dig trenches or relearn to shoulder a rifle or handle a machine gun. Many of these had not touched a lethal weapon for years in many cases not since leaving the "Rekrutenschule" and the present art of soldiering will be an entirely new experience to them. But whatever the circumstances are when Mother Helvetia calls, her sons hear the call and answer back "Hast noch der Söhne, ja, wie sie St. Jakob sah, freudvoll zum Streit."

We of the old guard, who responded to our country's call in 1914, wish all those who left England to protect the Swiss neutrality a hearty "God's speed and a safe and speedy return to the hospitable shores of Great Britain."
J. J. S.

CORRESPONDENCE.

(In encouraging and publishing correspondence on any matter of interest to our readers we wish to stress that we do not necessarily subscribe to the opinions expressed therein. Ed. S.O.)

136, Bath Road,
Cheltenham Spa.
18th Sept., 1939.

The Editor,
The Swiss Observer,
23, Leonard Street,
London, E.C.2.

SWISS NEUTRALITY.

Sir,
I read with interest Mr. J. Frei's letter in last week's issue of the S.O. but regret that I cannot share his views.

May I remind the writer that the Swiss Neutrality Act is not solely a matter of National Convenience, but rather an International Necessity.

There is little doubt that the people of Switzerland look favourably on the war-like actions of France and Great Britain, in so far as they protect and defend democratic ideals (and incidentally themselves) *But*, and let this be a "big but," Switzerland did not ask them to do so.

Mr. Frei's reply will be that had not France and Britain fought over Poland, in due course of time Switzerland would had gone the same way as Austria, Sudetenland, etc. This argument, to my mind, is hypothetical and a presumption, no doubt arrived at by deduction of past events, but nevertheless a presumption and therefore, over such a speculative theory, Switzerland *cannot* and *must not* do or say anything that would mar her most important national and international political asset, namely, her Neutrality and with that is included her integral independence.

We believe that Great Britain and France are fighting for a Principle. Swiss public opinion may approve of that Principle, but not necessarily of the Powers' action thereof. Switzerland can and will only fight when her great neutrality Principle has been violated, by *any* foreign political Power.

Mr. J. Frei's opinion is strongly commensensical and no doubt very popular in many quarters, but as I see things insufficiently logical.

Yours in all good Faith,
ALFONSO TOSIO.

THE ORIGIN OF THE "RED CROSS."

Quietly and without any fanfare, the Red Cross has just celebrated its 75th birthday. Its originator was a Swiss banker named Henri Dunant who happened to be travelling near Solferino in 1859, where the Austrians, under the Emperor Francis Joseph, were fighting the French and Italian troops under Napoleon III.

The wounded had to look after themselves, since their comrades were too busy to give them any assistance.

Dunant made it his business to organise a corps of women nurses. He also persuaded, bullied, and commandeered civilian peasants to carry the wounded into shelter. He himself worked all day in the battlefields. He utilised his nights to write letters describing the situation to the newspapers of Paris and Geneva.

These letters were published, and as a result the citizens of France and Switzerland began collecting bandages and lint. The start was small enough, but it was, at least, a start, and once again newspapers demonstrated their value in public service by backing Dunant's ideas.

Shortly after his return to Switzerland, Dunant published an account of his experiences under the title "Souvenir de Solferino." The book became a best-seller.

Eventually an international conference was called, and the result was the Treaty of Geneva in 1864. Each signatory nation bound itself to organise national units for the purpose of giving impartial treatment to all wounded, regardless of nationality. The symbol adopted was that of the Swiss flag with the colours reversed, a red cross on a white background.

The Red Cross soon gained world-wide recognition. In Mohammedan countries the symbol was changed to the Red Crescent, and in Persia to the Red Lion and Sun, but the objects of the movement remained the same in all countries.

The scope of its activities widened, too. Although originally evolved for the succour of war-wounded, the Red Cross found many other fields of endeavour. Cyclones, earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters take an annual toll of human life, and the Red Cross found plenty of permanent work to do in looking after the victims of such upheavals.

The World War saw many further extensions of Red Cross work. At Geneva an international agency with a staff of 2,000 people was maintained. The seventeen different departments of this agency dealt with inquiries from thirty belligerent nations. Its daily post varied from 2,000 to 17,000 letters. Before the end of the war the agency's card index contained 5,000,000 cards.

Thanks to this agency, thousands of missing men were traced, assistance was given to prisoners of war, regular visits of inspection were made to internment camps, and facilities were obtained for the evacuation of civilians.

In peace-time the Red Cross concerns itself with relieving distress wherever it occurs, looking after refugees, aiding the victims of famine, and so on.

It has established an international nursing centre in London, where nurses from different countries go through special courses. The Red Cross also maintains a number of permanent general hospitals.

E. H. 14.9.39.