

The Swiss export position

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THE SWISS EXPORT POSITION.

(The following article is reprinted from the November issue of the "Grocer's Review" by courtesy of the Editor.)

The Swiss and ourselves have a very close affinity in the realm of ideas and institutions. In each country the emphasis is placed on liberty and toleration; in each country the foundations of freedom were laid hundreds of years ago; the Magna Carta and the Charter of Confederation date from the same century.

A LITTLE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE.

And to-day the Swiss have a message for the world, more important than any of the past for during hundreds of years under a federal system of government, peoples speaking four different languages have lived together in harmony and co-operation — a United States of Europe on a small scale that demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that the United States of Europe which Victor Hugo foretold, and in later days such great statesmen as Smuts have advocated, is really a practical possibility.

OUR DEBT TO THE SWISS.

Everyone knows the story of "William Tell," even though they may not have read Schiller's play, or seen Rossini's opera; and thousands have spent pleasant holidays in the now far-off pre-war days amongst the beautiful lakes and mountains of "the playground of Europe," but few realise the debt which we owe to Switzerland, a very great debt indeed, when these contributions to English life are added up.

Soldiers of the Rhaetian Legion, from the district now in the Swiss canton of Grisons, mounted guard for Imperial Rome behind Hadrian's Wall; and the Norman Conquest was assisted by a Swiss Bishop Emenfroy (according to our historian Freeman), for he helped to prepare the plan of campaign.

Geneva's influence on the Scottish churches is generally acknowledged. Indeed, it was at Geneva that John Knox issued his "First Blast of the Trumpet against the monstrous Regiment of Women," which earned him the enmity of Queen Elizabeth. But before Elizabeth's time, during the reign of Mary Tudor, English refugees found a home at Geneva, and these included Bodley, the founder of the famous library at Oxford. Here the Bible was printed in English in 1560.

Swiss doctors were in attendance on all the English sovereigns from Elizabeth to William of Orange; and from Queen Elizabeth's time to the time of George III Swiss tutors taught members of the Royal Families.

Then we have Madam Tussaud, whose maiden name was Marie Grossholz, of Berne. And what would cross-word enthusiasts, and writers, too, do without the Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases, of Dr. Peter Mark Roget? A most marvellous book by a wonderful linguist.

At the present day, largely because through the occupation of France and the lack of Swiss sympathy with Central European ideas during the war, England remained the only country from which literature could be obtained. The Swiss book market became, and is still, dominated by translations of English authors — Cronin, Deeping, Hilton, Huxley, Spring, Walpole, Mary Webb, and many more modern writers.

There has recently been a return flow, and not only books in German, but in French also, are coming to this country, splendid specimens of the printers' art.

From one of these the writer learnt the other day that the great Swiss lyric poet, philosopher, and master of language, Hermann Hesse, now in his seventieth year writes out and illustrates himself books of his own poetry or a fairy tale of his own, for 250 Swiss francs, the proceeds being devoted to relief work in war-devastated lands.

HELP FOR DEVASTATED EUROPE.

It is not sufficiently well known in this country what a noble work the Swiss have done in sending foodstuffs to the countries of Europe, their neighbours, who are on rations so low that the grumblers in this country ought to blush with shame. Of the work Switzerland has done as the home of the International Red Cross, the League of Nations and other international movements, as well as providing an asylum for political refugees, no one can speak too highly.

Her latest gesture to this country has been the holiday to children from our own bombed areas in the North. But Switzerland has done a very great deal besides; so much so that the milk ration in Switzerland is less than our own two pints per head, and everything is strictly rationed. True, thousands of people from this country are going to Switzerland for holidays and are being treated very generously by their hosts; for Switzerland, a country of mountain and little food-producing land, and few industries, always relied to a great extent on "tourism."

OUR REFUSAL TO BUY SWISS CHEESE.

The Swiss do not mind it that we are able to allow £75 per head to the visitors who go from our shores to the Bernese Oberland or the Engadine, or any other of the Swiss beauty spots; but what they cannot reconcile with this, is the apparent refusal of the British Government to pay the price demanded for Gruyère cheese, which could be offered as a welcome addition to the menu of our English households, alongside the French Camembert.

During the war, the Swiss had to man all their frontiers, and that led to a scarcity of labour on the land. The difficulty was solved by conscription of the able-bodied for twelve hours per week work on the land. Only in this way was the country able to maintain its own food supplies.

Taxation is spread evenly all over the products available in shops, and indeed on all purchases. A tax of 4 per cent. (6 per cent. on certain articles) is levied on food, drink, and all goods purchased, on meals in restaurants, hotel bills, amusements and entertainments.

When a "Grocers' Review" representative called at the Swiss Consulate, in Manchester, he found the Consul, Mr. C. A. Pernet, away in New York; but was referred to the British Chamber of Commerce for Switzerland, in Basel, for statistics of trade between England and Switzerland.

OUTLOOK UNHOPEFUL.

Our representative was, however, informed at the Consulate that there is no immediate prospect of exports of foodstuffs to this country from Switzerland, in view of the internal position of foodstuffs, the country's supplies having been seriously exhausted by relief work, and affected by world shortage of supplies normally imported.

No great hope was held out of any great improvement for some considerable time. It will be remembered that in pre-war days Swiss jams and other deli-

cacies as well as cheeses, found their way to the housewives' baskets, and would be very welcome at the present time. Why the Government does not see to it that high-grade groceries as well as wines are imported, one does not know.

LEMBO TICINESE.

Notte di Natale. Notte Santa. Sulla terra, uscita sanguinante dalla tremenda prova, scende la benedizione divina. Tutta l'accarezza, lievemente. Perdonandole i terribili errori. Promettendole aiuto. Additandole quale via seguire, per la pace futura . . .

In cielo brillano tutte le stelle. In tutte le case brillano i lumi. Siano case umili, siano case sontuose. Le vie delle città sono animate da vita insolita. Le stradine dei paesi montani, portano, sulla neve recentemente caduta, orme fresche. In un tripudio di luci e canti si celebra la nascita del Redentore. Nelle cattedrali come nelle chiesette. Le mistiche note si fondono, si elevano, fanno meditare, involontariamente, anche gli increduli.

I solenni rintocchi delle campane chiamano alla preghiera e sul nostro animo scende una dolce mestizia che commuove, facendoci del bene! Rendendoci migliori, tanta potenza hanno queste campane nostre!

. . . Suon di chiesa, suon di chiostro, suon di Culla, suon di Mamma, di casa . . .

Per i nostri emigranti lontani dalla madre patria, la radio della Svizzera Italiana, ha avuto un pensiero gentile. Li ha raggiunti, sulle onde sonore, durante il mese di dicembre, la sera, con il suono delle diverse campane ticinesi, ben comprendendo che nulla, forse, poteva recare loro maggior piacere, come il sentire il suono della "loro" chiesetta natia. Nostalgicamente avranno vissuto, sentendole, gli anni loro primi, sarà sorto in loro il ricordo stringente del dolce passato, della casa avita . . .

Questo il saluto che scorgò, sincero, dal Ticino, per i suoi figli lontani, che mai dimenticò, per i quali tanto tremò e pregò durante i tremendi anni di guerra. E attraverso lo "Swiss Observer" desidero io farmi interprete di tutti i ticinesi in patria e porgere, in modo specialmente cordiale, un augurio e un saluto ai "ticinesi-inglesi" . . .

Noi, che qui siamo ora diventati "inglesi-ticinesi" — dopo l'affluenza dei soldati americani in congedo, che ci visitarono continuamente per oltre un anno, e che fecero conoscere, un po' almeno, le caratteristiche loro, e invogliarono tutti allo studio della lingua inglese . . . tanto che si nota, nel Ticino, quasi una inglesemania! giovani e anziani, commercianti, professionisti, impiegati, dedicano con passione ore serali ai diversi corsi d'inglese, sorti come funghi! Fui non poco meravigliata, un giorno di mercato, sentire una modesta contadina, che mai varcò il Gottardo, rispondere in inglese alle richieste, fatte in francese, da una giovane miss! Nei negozi, accanto alle diciture nelle tre lingue nazionali sempre spicca la dicitura in perfetto inglese. Negli alberghi, sulle liste delle vivande, fanno misteriosa pompa piatti inglesi . . .

Fratellanza di lingua . . . fratellanza di popoli. Fosse questo un buon auspicio per una futura sereno e ricco di promesse. Come il suono delle campane!

Elena Ghiringhelli Lunghi.

SWISS WONDER IF THEIR BOOM WILL LAST.

(*"New York Herald Tribune," 15th Dec. 1946.*)

The industries of Switzerland are booming along to-day at such a pace that the more conservative Swiss can't believe it is healthy. They say the boom can't last. They talk of "over-industrialization," and "over-employment." They say that because of the collapse of German industry, enterprising Swiss industrialists have leaped into fields which aren't natural to the nation's economy, and are producing all kinds of goods which some day will be produced as they used to be, better and more cheaply elsewhere.

Whether the croakings of these Cassandras are true or not, there is no doubt that Switzerland's factories are enjoying to-day one of the most prosperous periods in their history. Export is easy. The whole world, it seems, is clamouring for the goods which Switzerland is making — textiles, fine precision tools, watches, Diesel engines and chemicals — and the Swiss manufacturing plant unharmed through two wars, is pouring them out. Production is limited only by a growing shortage of labour, limitations on available coal, and some difficulty in getting deliveries of raw materials abroad which the Swiss would like to buy, but can't, though they have plenty of money.

In point of monetary value, Swiss exports to-day are at an all-time high. Industrial employment is at 94 per cent. of its 1929 level. So great is Switzerland's need of workers that she has granted 45,000 immigration permits this year — 90 per cent. to Italians — who are taking the place of the Swiss in the farms, on the roads, in the mines and forests, while the Swiss themselves set free from these war-time tasks, go flocking into the better paying factories.

Wages are up, and are being felt in manufacturing costs. But the cost of living, which has advanced about 53 per cent. since 1938, has not yet struck the Swiss worker so grievously that his unions are making trouble. There have been a few strikes, or threats of strikes, this year in the textile and clothing industries, where there is radical union leadership with political as well as economic objectives. But Switzerland, on the whole, has enjoyed industrial peace.

Just now the Swiss National Bank and the Federal government are engaged in putting the brakes on the export boom — although very gently. A fair share of that trade abroad has been done through trade agree-

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