

Switzerland to-day

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SWITZERLAND TO-DAY.

(The following article is reprinted from the March issue of the "SPECTATOR" by courtesy of the Editor.)

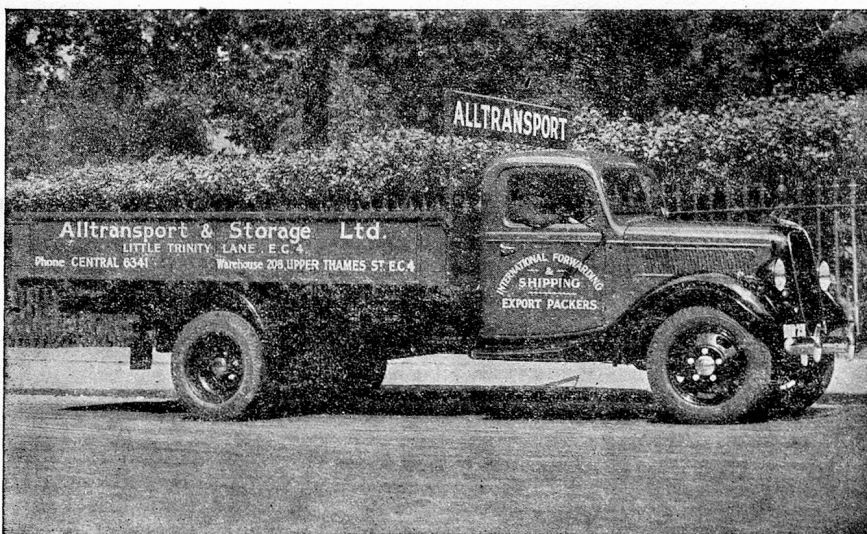
The casual visitor to Switzerland is apt to be over-impressed by sumptuous meals in the hotels and restaurants, which comprise a traditionally favoured national undertaking — the tourist industry. Swiss housewives find catering quite another matter with a ration of only 200 grammes (about 6 oz.) of butter and the same quantity of cooking-fats per month; and the equivalent of the Ministry of Food, which has certainly organised rationing with remarkable efficiency, still has serious problems to face. While the International Emergency Food Council naturally felt that the claims of starving belligerents must be put before those of neutrals, the Swiss feel that the voluntary postponement of their wheat claims at the London Conference of April, 1946, was not fully appreciated abroad; still less the credits they have granted to many needy countries in spite of the fact that their credit capacity was already over-strained.

The casual visitor is, however, right to be impressed by an extraordinary industrial prosperity in Switzerland to-day. At present there is a veritable, indeed an almost feverish, boom; the demand for labour is so great that employers are known to pay children before they have left school, for the mere promise of their completely unskilled work, and the flow of labour from the country to the towns is causing anxiety. But since consumer goods are still short, the boom sends up prices to a point which embarrasses all but the wealthiest housewives. Caricaturists are busy with the worries of contemporary prosperity. Even stranger, perhaps, to a visitor from other countries in Europe is the feeling of having stepped back, not even into Europe in the 'thirties, but into Europe before 1914. For in many ways the standards and habits of forty years ago — with their advantages and disadvantages — still prevail in Switzerland. This means not only that people are better clothed and more

leisurely. It means that national Old Age Insurance is not yet finally established; it means that, whereas the simplest peasant women are enfranchised in the rest of Europe, Swiss women are without any political rights; and it means that the insurances against sickness and accidents which the Italian Government asks for Italian agricultural labourers coming to Switzerland to work are not the right of the Swiss labourer himself. It seems difficult, as the *National Zeitung* of Basle recently pointed out, to justify the fact that, in the referendum which is being demanded on Old Age Insurances, women, who are affected in exactly the same way as men, and who have been contributing equally to the fund upon which the insurance scheme is to be based, will not be entitled to vote.

It is natural enough that foreigners feel impatient with various anachronisms such as these, and above all with the conception of Swiss neutrality. To most Europeans during the last war, a neutral attitude towards Hitler was unthinkable; one was bound to be for him or against him. Long discussions to-day about the sums to be spent upon the Swiss Army so that it shall continue to be able to defend the country's neutrality seem irrelevant, the more in view of atomic energy. But to the Swiss, their neutrality is the condition of the continuation of their existence, and National Socialism in Germany has undoubtedly heightened the national, as contrasted with the cantonal, patriotism of the Swiss Confederates. Their international neutrality is to some extent their national *raison d'être*. This works itself out practically in the large-scale relief work organised all over Europe, about which little is generally known. It is as well to remember, when one hears too much talk among business-men about profits in Swiss francs, how many Swiss francs yet pay for relief work in France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Poland, Finland, Hungary and Yugoslavia. Between May and November, 1946, 22,500,000 Swiss francs were given by the *Schweizer-spende* to feed starving children in these countries,

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the money being voluntarily contributed by the Swiss public. There are also Swiss Socialist centres of distribution of food, clothing and even furniture all over Europe. Many a Swiss village has adopted some war-devastated village abroad, French-Swiss villages naturally choosing villages in France, but it is also quite normal to find a Swiss village supporting some locality far away in Poland.

The Swiss Red Cross has organised the adoption of individual children abroad by Swiss people; in this way, for instance, since 1940, 30,000 French children in France have been paid for by Swiss foster-parents for periods varying from six months up to six years. Further, it has become the regular thing for ill and under-nourished foreign children to be invited to live with Swiss families or in institutions for shorter periods. Finally a village is being built at Trogen in Canton Appenzell where war-orphan are to receive their whole education. This Pestalozzi village, as it is called, so far consists of eight school-houses out of the twenty-four for which it is planned; at present some thirty children from Marseilles and about thirty Polish children have been established there. Eventually it is hoped to provide for nearly 400 orphans of all nationalities. Special and successful appeals are made to Swiss school-children to help with the Trogen scheme.

Pessimists who look far ahead, believing that Europe has committed suicide, can conceive of no future for the miniature Europe that is Switzerland. Whereas her political equilibrium was built up after 1870 upon the triple base of the three Great Powers which surrounded her, to-day all three are vastly impoverished and what was the most powerful of them lies in ruins. For those who think of the future of Europe in terms of the future of the Slavs, the outlook for Switzerland remains a little bleak. Since diplomatic relations with Russia have at last been resumed and a Communist Press allowed in Switzerland, the Swiss-Russian situation has certainly not deteriorated; economic exchanges have begun and it is thought that they may be considerably developed, especially between Switzerland and the Russian zone of Germany. As for Communism, however, in German-Switzerland it has made no progress; indeed one of its leaders in Basle, Hofmaier, has been badly discredited by a recent scandal. In Switzerland, Communism seems in fact only to be strong in Geneva.

Three-quarters of the Swiss are German-speaking,

and until at least 1933 their life was intimately bound up with that of Germany. Not long ago they could not have contemplated Switzerland without a flourishing Germany as her background. To find themselves upright when Germany is prostrate has undoubtedly given them a new sense of independence. They feel, indeed, that the Great Powers would do well to mobilise the Swiss for the re-education of Germany; the return of Professor Karl Barth to the University of Bonn should not be an isolated instance.

A short time ago a public declaration from England accused Switzerland of sheltering Nazis and Nazi funds. This caused great indignation among the Swiss, not because they deny that Nazi activities continue and are ominous, but because they point out that Switzerland is the last place where Nazi conspirators could easily hide. This is probably true. It is difficult to slip through the double police system provided by the Federal and Cantonal authorities. Above all, the last was showed that the German-Swiss for all their neutrality, felt radically anti-Nazi in spite of their many personal ties with Germany. Their suspicion was sharpened by the Nazi threat to their own independence, and they were well informed as to what Hitlerism meant. They have often felt that the British, through insularity and ignorance of German tradition and language, were too slow to react to developments in Germany.

SWISS BOOK EXHIBITION IN DUBLIN.

The Swiss Book Exhibition, which was such a success in London, was opened in Dublin on the 29th of March. The Exhibition is held in the Rotunda of the National Library which is decorated with the Irish and the Swiss Flag.

The President of Eire, Mr. O'Kelly, Mr. de Valera and Mr. Th. Derrig, Minister of Education, attended the opening ceremony. Monsieur W. de Bourg, Swiss Chargé d'Affaires said the exhibition would be a most valuable contribution to an intensification of cultural relations to the benefit of both countries. He thanked the Chairman and Trustees for having put the Library at the disposal of the Exhibition, which he hoped would succeed in giving Swiss Books a place in Ireland.

Mr. Th. Derrig, Minister of Education, in his opening address, said that a great number of the books and periodicals presented for inspection will find a permanent place in the Library collections, for the Swiss publishers and booksellers, with the Swiss government's aid and support, have not only been kind enough to send over these books for inspection, but have also generously presented several hundreds volumes as gifts to the library.

He assured Monsieur de Bourg that this happy manifestation of the desire of the Swiss Confederation to strengthen the cultural relations between the two countries is greatly valued by the population of Eire. Mr. Th. Derrig continued by saying that this Exhibition was the first of its kind in the National Library and that it was fitting that it should be a Swiss Exhibition, for the written records of Irish thought and Irish learning crossed the seas and the lands of Europe, from the sixth to the tenth century, to the monasteries of Switzerland, to St. Gall, Pfäfers and Einsiedeln.

We hear that the Exhibition appears to be a success and well frequented.

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