

The first book on Switzerland

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"SUMMIT CONFERENCE" IN THE ALPS

About 250 journalists, radio and TV reporters, photographers and filmmakers, and an equal number of guests from all over the world, assembled recently at Zermatt for a week-long celebration in honour of the centennial of the first successful climbing of the Matterhorn on 14th July 1865, by the Englishman Edward Whymper. At a press conference, Dr. Werner Kämpfen, Director of the Swiss National Tourist Office, re-emphasized the *leitmotiv* of the current Year of the Alps festivities: the restorative and healing powers of the mountain world and its high-altitude climate. At the same time he declared that the assembly which had been convened on the Riffelberg above Zermatt was a special kind of "summit conference", which should become a tradition in the years ahead, as the various Alpine lands come to enjoy closer relationships. Each year, he suggested, a similar meeting should be held in one or another Alpine nation, "at the foot, or at least within sight of a well-known mountain". Such events would serve to strengthen the sense of unity and relationships among the Alpine people, the inhabitants of the "backbone of Europe". In keeping with an ancient Celtic custom, a cairn (a mound of stones) was erected during the Riffelberg ceremony, beneath which was buried a Golden Book with the signatures of all the participants. The cairn will in future serve as a signpost for climbers and hikers. Dr. Kämpfen suggested that, at future meetings, similar cairns should be erected on other mountains.

During the celebrations, Zermatt became a museum as well as the meeting place of mountaineers and friends of the Valais and the Swiss Alps. For much of the Valais cultural treasure has been on show, and paintings and mountaineering relics have been exhibited.

Some 500 guests were invited to take part in the festival week, and visitors flocked to Zermatt from all parts of the world. Messages were received from governments and mountaineering organisations and well-known personalities. The particularly strong British delegation included Lord Sandford, Sir John Hunt who delivered the greetings of the British Government, Lord Lunn, members of the British Alpine associations and thirteen descendants of the first climbers, with them Edward Whymper's daughter Mrs. Blandy.

On 13th July, a Swiss woman climber stole a march on the televised centenary assault of the Matterhorn. Mrs. Yvette Vaucher, aged 27, a shop assistant from Geneva, climbed the treacherous North Wall and reached the summit on the morning of the centenary climb.

It may interest readers to learn that one of our subscribers, Dr. Hugo Rast, was amongst those who climbed the Matterhorn this summer.

(A.T.S. and S.N.T.O.)

THE FIRST BOOK ON SWITZERLAND

No. 193 in the "First Book" series published by Edmund Ward Ltd., is dedicated to Switzerland. It is written by Sam and Beryl Epstein and costs 11/6.

The book gives a picture of Switzerland past and present. As we are informed by the publishers, it deals with "the life of the villages, governed by the movement of flocks and herds up and down the mountains to pasture; the modern cities, commerce and industry, with the tradition of craftsmanship and skill; the making of the famous cheeses and chocolate, and the tourist trade that brings visitors from all over the world. Swiss government is explained and the system of democracy that is at its root —

a system that grows naturally from the historical background of the Swiss Confederation and has led also to the important position of neutral Switzerland in international affairs.

Varied and colourful, independent but hospitable, Switzerland is a fascinating country, of which the text and many photographs throughout present a clear and lively account."

The first chapter, preceded by a sketchy map of Switzerland, is headed "Mountains, Mountains Everywhere". From there we soon proceed to "Cheese and Chocolate", an interesting account of how they are produced. By that time, the English reader will have his ideas confirmed that Switzerland is mainly a country of herdsmen and cheese makers, and the more critical Swiss reader who has been trying for years to convince his English friends that Switzerland is an industrial country, is getting slightly annoyed when he finds that only a couple of pages or so are devoted to watchmaking, precision instruments, drugs and textiles, with exactly one sentence to machinery, i.e. marine and diesel engines — all under the heading of "Also Made in Switzerland".

The chapter on communications shows Switzerland as a more up-to-date country, the efficient Zurich Airport and Basle Harbour being given their rightful places. History gets a chapter, but there, again, rather too much emphasis is put on the legendary William Tell. The chapter reserved for "Democracy, Swiss Style" explains Swiss political institutions and government in plain and easy language, and a most interesting account of local customs and festivals follows one on language.

Voting methods and the "Landesgemeinden" get a chapter to themselves, and there is a short, but to the point explanation of what it means to be a Swiss citizen. The Swiss reader will not altogether agree with the authors on "What Neutrality Means"; on the other hand nobody could quarrel with the chapter on Geneva and the Red Cross, and the chapter on "Citizen Soldiers" gives a simple, but fair picture of the Swiss Army. The book ends on another, longer chapter on tourism.

The First Book on Switzerland is profusely illustrated, and most of the pictures (mainly supplied by the Swiss National Tourist Office) are first class, specially considering that they are reproduced on a mat paper. The volume is pleasingly got up and written in an easy style. The biggest criticism is that there is too much stress on mountains, cheese and folklore, and that the modern industrialist and business side of the country is not in the right perspective.

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ON HORSEBACK THROUGH THE ALPS

The little mountain village of Elm in Canton Glarus recently was the scene of the completion of a most unusual undertaking within the framework of the current Year of the Alps celebrations. A group of six horseback riders, which included a housewife, a vicar and an apprentice gardener from Zurich, a director of personnel and a secretary from Winterthur, and a police constable from Nidfurn (Canton Glarus), ended a two-week saddle trip through little-known parts of the Prealps and Alps. High point of their unorthodox vacation trip was the Panixer Pass (altitude 7,290 ft.), which leads northward from Ilanz, "first city on the Rhine". Mounted on sure-footed Iceland ponies, the equestrians carefully followed in their travels the route taken 166 years ago by Russian Field Marshal Suvorov who brought his army to this part of Switzerland for what turned out to be a disastrous cam-