

Our fatherland [continued]

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Extension of Swissair Activities

Swissair is extending its activities. For the summer season it intends to introduce air freight services to North America. Once a week a freight aircraft will leave Kloten, touch down at Basle, and then fly off to the United States, bringing back on its return journey freight taken on through the offices of a special freight service which has been established in New York by the Swissair. At the same time a DC-6B will carry each week to the United States freight which has been collected in Geneva.

Passenger transport is also to be developed. Swissair will increase the number of its trans-Atlantic flights; it will introduce a weekly service, Zurich-Geneva-Lisbon-Dakar-Recife-Rio de Janeiro-Sao Paulo, will create a line between Switzerland and Beyrouth, via Istanbul, and will put some DC-6B on its airlines to the Near East. It will also reintroduce its afternoon service between Berne and London, and will extend its night flights in several directions.

As a result of an international agreement, there will be a reduction in the tariffs for the transport of goods, and it will be possible to send collective consignments, similar to those accepted by the railways. Swissair, following in this respect the general tendency to be observed in commercial aviation, is thus contributing towards making the aeroplane the ideal vehicle for the transport of goods, possessing a small volume and a great value, such as constitute, as a matter of fact, the greater portion of Swiss exports.

Swiss People Prefer Small Cars

About two-thirds of the motor-cars circulating in Switzerland are vehicles of less than 11 h.p. This fact has just come to light as a result of a recent checking up on the number and types of cars to be found here. During the last few years, small cars have distinctly gained in popularity.

As regards the origin of these cars, more than a quarter of them come from Western Germany, the other principal suppliers being, in order of importance, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France and Italy.

As for lorries, rather more than a third are manufactured in Switzerland, the rest coming mostly from the United States and Germany.

OUR FATHERLAND

[Continuation]

MOUNTAIN DISASTER: As a diversion from our past descriptive articles of Switzerland, we give you a story of calamity that struck two villages in the Canton of Glarus in 1881. It

is an event almost forgotten, in fact not even known to most of us.

One of the most delightful valleys for a summer visit is Elm, in the Sernfthal, a branch valley of the Linthal. This was the scene of an appalling catastrophe, and as this was the greatest of its nature that has occurred within the living memory of the Swiss some account may be of interest.

The village of Elm was situated close beneath a steep tree-crowned mountain known as the Plattenbergkopf. This mountain was really a buttress of other and higher mountains behind. One mile down the valley was Musli, another village where dwelt some hundreds of people who spend their lives in tilling the land, milking and cheese-making.

The people of both villages had another occupation besides their agricultural work. The Plattenbergkopf was rich in slate and, as there was a good market for that commodity, they quarried for years into its base. Had there been a skilled engineer to supervise the work, this catastrophe would never have occurred.

The mining was carried out with no attention to safety devices, and a hole 600ft wide and 200ft deep was made in the base of the mountain. There was no shoring up of the roof of this immense cavity. In 1876 cracks began to appear in the mountain, including a very large one which split it across behind the summit. This crack slowly widened and lengthened. By 1881 it was 15ft wide. Some people expected the mountain would eventually fall, but nothing was done about it, and they went on with their ordinary occupations at Elm and Musli. The last part of August and the first part of September, 1881, was very wet. On September 7th masses of rock began to fall from the Plattenbergkopf. On the 10th a committee of "experts" investigated the mountain and reported that there was no immediate danger. Falls of rock were now constantly occurring, and the mountain began to groan and rumble like some great beast suffering internal agony.

Sunday, September, 11th, was also wet. In the afternoon a number of men gathered at an inn close beneath the mountain at the foot of its labouring rocks. They seemed to have been quite unconscious of the danger. At 4 p.m. people of Elm were on the watch and expecting a fall, but they also did not recognise the danger.

The first fall from the mountain came at 5.15 p.m. It was a small one compared with those that were to follow, and it stopped short of the inn by less than twelve yards. No one as yet was alarmed but preparations were begun to move the sick and bedridden from Elm. At Musli there was no alarm whatever and people from the village walked up the valley to see what had happened. As for the sightseers who had retreated a little

distance from the inn, they now returned to examine the debris which had fallen.

The first fall was from the east side of the mountain. Seventeen minutes later a second and larger fall descended from the west side. This fall overwhelmed the inn with many of the sightseers and four other houses, killing twenty people. Everyone was now seized with panic and started to run, many people making for the slopes of the Duniberg, the mountain rising opposite to the Plattenbergkopf. Here they felt they were safe from a further fall, and most of them stopped when they had climbed about 300ft up the slopes. Many people thought that the danger was now over, but the two falls had undermined the Plattenbergkopf, leaving the main mass of the mountain without support, and now, four minutes after the second fall, ten million cubic metres of rock broke away and toppled across the valley beneath. Horrified spectators gazing from Musli and points near that village saw the people on the Duniberg racing up the slopes "like a herd of terrified chamois." But most of them were too late. The huge masses of rock fell upon the mountainside and they were blotted out like insects beneath a steam roller.

Deflected from the Duniberg, the fall poured down the valley, wiping out Elm in a single instant. It flung a fearful wind-blast before it which whirled whole houses high in the air, together with their unfortunate occupants. Four of the six survivors on the Duniberg were saved by being carried through the air by the wind and cast on to places which the avalanche failed to reach. The other two had wisely used the four minutes between the falls in climbing as far as possible.

When a great mass of rock, millions of tons in weight, is set in motion the friction of its passage over the ground is negligible as compared with its mass and momentum. Thus the rocks continued to flow like water, and at tremendous speed, down the valley in a wide stream thirty feet deep, preceded by a tornado of wind and a great cloud of dust.

According to the schoolmaster, who escaped with the notes he made, the avalanche took about twenty seconds to cover the mile from the quarry to Musli and some of the sightseers on a bridge had time to run aside. The torrent of rocks cut the village in half. The parson, watching from his house and seeing the dust cloud rolling down the valley, believed that it was only dust that came so far. Imagine his feelings when it cleared and he saw that half his village had disappeared, and with it 115 of his flock.

The roar of the fall ceased suddenly, and in the silence came the screams of the mortally frightened and the lamentations of those who

feared for their loved ones. One man whose house stood undamaged to one side of the debris found it deserted. His whole family—wife, daughter, son, son's wife, and two grandchildren—had all run out and been killed. Few were the injured and few the bodies recovered. The injured were mostly those who had been hurled by the wind from the path of the avalanche.

Such was the disaster of Elm and Musli. The sturdy and industrious Swiss would not accept the devastation of their valley. The debris was levelled and covered with soil, and a channel cut for the stream. Trees now grow, their roots reaching towards the bones of those who perished. Only the scar in the hills remains unhealed by Nature. It provides an object lesson as to what the forces of Nature can do when man unlooses them.

NOTICE TO INTENDING TRAVELLERS

Due to the difficulties experienced in the past by Swiss nationals who have travelled away from New Zealand, and who subsequently have wished to return, it is thought desirable to draw the attention of all intending travellers to the fact that before leaving New Zealand they should make application to a Collector of Customs for a Certificate of Registration authorising their readmission to New Zealand. The procedure is for the travellers to produce their passport with two photographs of passport size and complete a written application. The period of validity of the certificate granted is shown on the face of the certificate, and the holder is permitted to return to New Zealand provided that on arrival back at a New Zealand port they establish their identity and the certificate is still valid.

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