

News from Switzerland

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THE MATTMARK CATASTROPHE

The Allalin Glacier which caused the awful avalanche on August 30, is one of ten glaciers which was expanding in 1962/63. Its source is the Saaser-Visp which flooded badly several times during the past centuries. The glacier begins at the Rimpfischhorn and the Strahlhorn and ends at the Mattmark Lake, at an altitude of 2,100m. The Mattmark power works were founded in 1959, and they produce something like 580 mio. kwh. per annum.

Unexpectedly, huge masses of ice and rock broke off about a kilometre above the camp and came hurtling down on 30th August, destroying about one-fifth of all machinery and equipment (the damage is estimated at 8 mio. francs). The tragedy is, that nearly one hundred workers and engineers were buried by the avalanche, 20 Swiss, the others foreigners. Rescue work went on with utmost difficulty owing to the threat of new ice falls from the overhanging glacier. Explosives dropped by the Glacier Pilot Geiger and bombardment with mine-throwers and mortars of the Swiss Army failed to dislodge the threatening glacier blocks. Mountain guides kept watch on the glacier, whilst work went on. Bad weather hindered operations, and only on Sunday, 5th September, the sun came out. By the time, the "Swiss Observer" went to press, only twenty-six bodies had been found, and it was estimated that it would take several weeks before the ice and rocks could be shifted. Glaciologists and other experts inspected the glacier constantly, and after a week, it looked as if it had become settled.

Mourning in Switzerland and the countries most affected, i.e. Italy and Spain, is widespread. Collections for the bereaved families (55 of them Italian) are being made, and cantonal authorities have granted liberal sums. Insurance compensation has already been paid out, and the Confederation has promised to help. Volunteers offered assistance, also from other countries. The Red Cross, and other organisations helped in dealing with the many relatives who arrived in the Valais. Army and Police were on duty.

It was stated that the power works already in operation had not been affected, and that the lake had not suffered.

The celebrations arranged for 3rd October to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the admission of the Valais into the Confederation, have been postponed.

On 9th September, a Funeral Service took place at the Church of Saas-Grund. The President of the Confederation addressed the

large congregation of relatives and friends of the dead, as well as authorities and employers.

Last minute news is of very bad weather conditions and renewed changes in the glacier. Work had to be suspended.

(A.T.S.)

A PARADISE OF TOYS

With 23 branches in all parts of Switzerland, the firm of Franz Carl Weber ranks as the country's leading toy manufacturer and outlet. In direct connection with its 75th anniversary in 1956, the company, which is still headed by a direct descendant of the founder, came up with the idea of creating a standing collection of old toys. Now, nine years later, the concept has been realised.

In what were formerly attic rooms of the 5-storey main Weber building on Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse, there has been opened what the local press called "the city's most charming museum."

Twenty-eight showcases display toys from the late 18th, the 19th and early 20th centuries, arranged thematically. Central to the exhibition is a copy of the first illustrated catalogue issued by Franz Carl Weber back in 1891.

The first thing which greets a visitor to this paradise of toys is a group of still functioning, splendidly painted steam engines, model autos, ships and miniature versions of some of the earliest railways. There are various examples of French and English "Magic lanterns," forerunners of modern home-movies and television. And, as survivors of the passing years, there are splendid dolls in precious, hand-sewn costumes, with artistic coiffures and adorable porcelain faces.

Laugh a little . . .

"Excuse me Mr Manager, my wife wants to know if I could have a small wage rise!"

"Very well, I shall ask my wife what she thinks about it."

* * *

Mister Naive: "It has been a sleepless night. At 11 p.m. the doorbell rang non-stop. I got up, looked out the window and what did I see? A couple of lovers embracing by the front door, and the enamoured bloke had his back to the door bell push button. I lost no time, got a basin of water and tipped it down over the two. Half an hour later, hardly had I dozed off to sleep my wife came home—soaking wet. I must say we do have some awful weather these days."

—Nebelspalter.