

The Britannia hut

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THE BRITANNIA HUT.

The Britannia Hut, situated at a height of over 10,000 ft. on the Klein Allalin between Saas and Zermatt, will be formally re-opened on Sunday, August 25. Originally presented by the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club to the S.A.C. in 1912, it has become the Mecca of British climbers in summer, and of skiers during the winter months; and it is also increasingly popular with climbers and skiers of varied nationalities—Swiss, German, Austrian, Italian, American, who make of Switzerland their holiday playground. During last summer more than 1,500 persons were accommodated in this old refuge, and nearly 200 skiers during the winter.

Britons provided the Britannia Hut. As they have been the pioneers of many other forms of exploration and endeavour, so men of our race may be truly said to have been the first in the field of Alpine climbing, as witness the conquest of the Matterhorn and the expeditions to Mount Everest. The buffeting of mighty winds, Nature in her grandest and fiercest mood, have sought to overthrow this permanent memorial to the feats of British mountaineers, in a land infinitely friendly. It was apparent some years ago that the old hut must not only be increased in its capacity for housing the guests of the mountains, but must be reconstructed of good stone and heavy timber, if it were to stand against storm and tempest and the extremes of temperature. An appeal was made therefore by the Swiss Alpine Club to its British members to produce the funds for enlargement and reconstruction.

Climbers are not ordinarily drawn from the ranks of industrial magnates or the plutocracy. For the most part, they have been, and still are, schoolmasters, soldiers, Civil Servants, parsons, professional men, journalists, and students. It is perhaps a curious commentary that this arduous pastime, fraught with physical difficulty and danger, demanding iron nerves and self-control, and offering no tangible rewards or championships, attracts those whose chief reward in other walks of life is the satisfaction of service wholeheartedly given and faithfully performed, and who in their leisure hours prefer year after year to test their physical and mental quality, and to resume the daily task with confidence renewed and with physique braced to the standard of youth. Such men and women, too, find inspiration in the quiet grandeur of the Alps and rediscover the exhilaration of conquest and achievement in general denied to them in their daily task, whereas the man of affairs throughout his life gives battle and enjoys the mental satisfaction of his victories. The fact remains that for the most part the funds contributed have, therefore, come from thin-lined purses; and though the Britannia Hut is to be re-opened, the funds are not yet complete.

Britons have continued to set up milestones in mountaineering achievement. Last year Mr. G. Winthrop Young, who lost his leg in the war, succeeded in mastering the Matterhorn, while Professor Graham Brown and Mr. F. S. Smythe, between August 6 and 8, surmounted Mont Blanc by the new route across the Brenva Face in the minimum of time without guides. An Englishwoman, Dr. Jordan Lloyd, for the first time climbed the Eiger by the hazardous Mittellegi route and descended again in one day; while Miss Mand Cairney made an entirely new ascent of Dent Blanche by its eastern flank, described by Edward Whymper, the pioneer of mountaineering, as one of the most difficult climbs. An English public-schoolboy of only fifteen years of age accompanied the writer to the summit of Dent Blanche under most unfavourable weather conditions, this being the first occasion upon which any lad so young has accomplished this hazardous climb. So far as the British are concerned, the re-opening of the Britannia Hut will be the outstanding event, though doubtless with the precedence of last year's feats, those who will congregate in the Saas Valley to do honour to this British achievement will mark the re-opening in the annals of mountaineering by new and pioneer conquest.

(Extract from an article by Lieut.-Colonel G. S. Hutchison, D.S.O., M.C., in the "English Review.")

Alpine Accidents.

It is a bad season for accidents in the Alps; the recent unsettled weather tends to make climbing peaks in Switzerland almost as risky as crossing streets at home. A correspondent of *The Times* wrote that the current frequency of fatal Alpine accidents is due mainly to guideless climbing by inexperienced people.

Guideless climbing is all very well for experts, but unfortunately there is nothing to prevent non-experts from attempting it.

Expertness and the company of guides is no absolute guarantee against accident. Two people have just been killed on the Matterhorn. Of the party of four to whom the accident happened, one was a guide and another an experienced climber. No high mountaineering is absolutely safe, but it is certainly less unsafe for those who know the game than for those who do not.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN SWITZERLAND.

FOREIGN TRADE.

Imports: The total for June was 212.9 millions against 226.3 millions for the preceding month.

Exports: As compared with the month of May the total has decreased from 170 millions to 169.4 millions.

COST OF LIVING.

The cost of living in Switzerland has increased by one point from May to June, having risen from 160 to 161%. This variation is due in the first place to the season and chiefly concerns food-stuffs. It must be noticed that if we distinguish between the cost of living in large towns and in other localities there is a marked difference. The index for large towns in Switzerland was 164%, and that of other localities 157%. This difference is explained by the difference in rents in these two classes of places. In the former, rents were 194% higher in June than in pre-war times, whilst in less important localities the index was only 162%. The mean rent index in the whole of Switzerland is 181%.

The index of wholesale prices based on 78 articles, grouped in 10 categories, continues to fall regularly. It has now reached 139% as compared with June, 1914.

The labour market only shows insignificant fluctuations as compared with the preceding months. The number of requests for employment has gone down and the number of vacant posts has diminished in a very slight degree.

COMMERCIAL TREATIES, ETC.

Discussions are still taking place between the Swiss Government and the United States with the object of trying to obtain a modification of the new customs tariff adopted by the Chamber of Representatives a few months ago, and about which we have spoken several times. Up to the present 50 protests coming from 38 countries have reached the government of the United States. It is to be hoped that this energetic pressure will bring about a better understanding of international solidarity on the part of the American authorities. The position, however, still remains threatening for Swiss exporters. This explains the hasty importation which has been observed in certain branches during the last few months, more especially in the watchmaking industry. During the course of the first six months, the works sent by Switzerland to the United States have reached the figure of 1.16 millions of pieces, equalling 15.5 millions of francs, whilst during the corresponding period of 1928 the number of pieces was hardly more than 900,000 representing a total value of 13.6 millions. The difference is still more striking as regards watches, Swiss exports to the United States having risen from 231,000 pieces (3.8 millions of francs) to 851,000 pieces (9.4 millions of francs) from one half year to the other. In a general manner it is considered that this excessive exportation does not correspond to the risks which the threat resulting from the application of the new United States customs tariff represents for the Swiss watch trade.

FINANCE.

The demand for capital on the Swiss market was somewhat less plentiful during 1928 than in 1927. National and foreign loans showed a considerable decline which may generally be regarded as a favourable symptom as far as the consolidation of the Swiss and foreign financial situation is concerned. This consolidation made itself particularly felt in connection with our Federal finance: Interior loans for 1927 reached 513.9 mill. but in 1928 were reduced to 397.8 mill. Out of these 397.9 mill., 326.7 mill. concern loan conversions, whereas new emissions attained but the sum of 71.1 mill. The most important operation was the emission, in May 1928 of the Federal Loan for 150 mill. in conversion of the 5% loan of 1918/19. The cantons' financial needs attained 65 mill. exceeding by 15 millions those of the preceding year. But here again this sum contributed largely toward the conversion of former loans, as the new subscriptions attained only 7 millions. The townships also contracted loans for the comparatively moderate sum of about 2.5 millions.

Foreign demands for capital on the Swiss market remained within remarkably narrow limits as compared to those of 1927. While foreign loans in 1927, reached 235.7 millions they only amounted to 90.1 mill. in 1928. The total issues of foreign companies' shares is not known as it is impossible to determine the figure according to Swiss data.

A BUSY SUMMER IN THE WATCHMAKING INDUSTRY.

Exports in the Swiss watchmaking industry have increased as compared to those of 1928

which was, however, already considered to be a "big year." In June they reached 26 million fr. against 24.6 in the same month of 1928. It is of interest to state that the last 3 months show a constant progress, rising from 22 millions in March to 26 in June. The total of the first half year comes to 131 million frs. against 127.8 during the first six months of the preceding year.

As was to be expected high exports created an intense activity in all the factories in order to supply the autumn demands. For many months the labour market has been excellent and even partial unemployment is practically non-existent. It is of interest to note that the number of employees engaged in Swiss watchmaking factories has increased by nearly ten thousand units since the end of 1913: 36,865 workers of both sexes at the end of 1913 against 46,007 at the close of 1928. This phenomenon is all the more striking when one considers the tremendous progress realized in machinery during the last 15 years. It indicates clearly that in spite of all the difficulties of war and post-war times, Swiss watchmaking was not prevented from maintaining the first rank on the world market. Its position would be better still were it not for the protectionism of certain big markets which only succeeded in raising the prices without any profit for a national industry practically non-existent as in England or already overloaded as in the United States. S.I.T.

Basle, the Junction of International Aerial Traffic.

Basle forms a natural centre for the numerous northern and western lines of aerial communication. These air lines run by Swiss, German, English and Dutch Companies, lead eastwards to Zurich and southwards to Geneva.

The "Balair" Air Company created in 1926 for the purpose of extending Basle's air traffic, has its seat in Basle itself. It has a regular service not only in Switzerland but in foreign countries also. The Basle aviation station possesses, at the present day, two large sheds for planes of considerable dimensions. One with adjoining cabins, mechanical workshops, garages, is built 30m. underground and its door is 40m. wide 7.5 high. The other one is also built 30m. underground but the door measures only 28m. in width and 7.5 in height. In addition to these two sheds there are three others, one civil and two military.

The various aerial companies, of which Basle is a station, run the following lines:

Basle-Zurich-Munich (Vienna-Prague-Breslau-Warschau). Basle-Geneva-Marseille-Barcelona. Basle-Paris-London. Basle-Frankfurt o/M. Hanover-Hamburg-Copenhagen-Malmö. Basle-Brussels-Rotterdam-Amsterdam. Basle-Berne. Basle-La Chaux de Fonds-Lausanne-Geneva. Basle-Stuttgart. S.I.T.

SWISS ATLANTIC FLIEKS.

In connection with the various accounts of the two Swiss airmen who attempted a transatlantic flight, and who have unfortunately added to the many failures of recent years, it may not be out of place to give a short account of their previous experiences.

Kaeser, who was 23 years old obtained his certificate as pilot three years ago and was an experienced man. He recently completed a successful flight from Switzerland to India and has taken part in international contests. For over two years he planned a flight across the Atlantic, and last Spring he underwent special practice in preparation for the attempt.

In a completely darkened cabin, the invention of Farman, the builder of his machine, he practiced with the aid of maps and navigation instruments to obtain the necessary confidence needed for an Atlantic crossing. (It would be interesting to know how many of the pilots who have previously attempted the flight, have gone to such pains). Kaeser's attempt was by no means a foolhardy attempt by a landlubber and he is one of those pioneers who have lived for an ideal and perished in the fulfilment of it.

His companion Luescher was less experienced and only 21 years old.

A Short Holiday.

Swiss newspapers report that 40 soldiers and several officers engaged in French Army manoeuvres in the Jura mountains recently threw down their arms and crossed the frontier into Switzerland.

Their commanding officer, thinking that they had deserted and would later attempt to re-enter France in civilian clothes, strengthened the frontier guards.

That same evening all the men presented themselves to the guards, and were conducted into France.

The Hendon First of August Film will be shown in conjunction with other New Swiss Films, probably on Monday evening, September 16th next. Full programme, definite date and place of entertainment, will be announced in the next issue of the 'S.O.'

Drink delicious "Ovaltine"
at every meal—for Health!