

Looking back

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LOOKING BACK.

The year 1933, with its tribulations, disappointments and often bitter experiences has passed into oblivion, and few will be the tears shed over its passing away. It has left the world little better off than at its commencement, and humanity is still eagerly looking forward to the better times, which have so often been pompously heralded, and yet have never materialised.

There is, however, just a glimmer of hope, that 1934 will at last bring us peace, goodwill and prosperity; after a long period of unrest, misunderstanding and ill feeling amongst various countries, eminent statesmen are once again busy trying to cut the Gordian knot of international entanglements, and to bring about a better understanding, amongst the nations of this universe. Peace at Home and Abroad, that should be our motto for 1934; this does not only apply to relations amongst countries, but also to relations amongst individuals, in particular, in our case, to relations amongst our compatriots in the Swiss Colony.

We all, each of us, some in a smaller, some in a larger degree can help to make our earthly abode a fitter and better place to live in, by making an effort to understand each other better, to forgive and forget some things which have vexed or annoyed us in the past, to live more up to the maxim that "to err is human, but to forgive divine."

It behoves the Editor of the *Swiss Observer* to pass a parting glance at the outgoing year, which has been for our paper a trying one, the crisis has made itself felt very acutely, we have lost some of our faithful readers, either through death or on account of adverse circumstances; we have, however, declined to trouble our supporters with appeals of distress, in order not to add to the worries of those who have so generously given us their support, for the last 15 years. We

are trying to fight our own battle, slowly but surely, and we shall not lower the flag yet awhile, nor lay the pen aside.

We have, and we are sure, our readers have their own opinion about New Year resolutions, but if all are going to be broken, let at least one be kept, and that is to remain faithful to our little paper, which is striving hard to keep us in touch with each other, and to strengthen the ties which unite us with our homeland. Surely an undertaking well worth supporting? We repeat what we said last year: "If each one of our present subscribers would make it a duty to induce *one* friend of theirs to become a regular subscriber, *all our troubles and anxieties would be at an end*, and we could then go to work with a joyful heart, to improve and enlarge the *Swiss Observer*."

This seems to us not an impossible task, and we make an earnest appeal to all our friends to try and persuade at least *one* of their friends to give us this help.

The Editor is glad to say that he has again received throughout the year, numerous messages of appreciation and encouragements, many of them from readers from the provinces, to whom the *Swiss Observer* is almost the only link between them and their country. It is true that we have also been criticized, a fact which we do not deplore, we are not infallible and are still open to learn.

There remains one pleasant duty to be fulfilled, the Editor wishes to thank his collaborators Kyburg, ek., M.G. and Mops, for their great and never failing help, they have relieved him of many agonies, and without their generous help it would have been almost impossible to carry on. He wishes to thank the Swiss Minister and the Swiss Consuls at Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow for their appreciated and valuable co-operation. The Publisher for his never failing help and advice. Thanks are also due to all those

who have, from time to time sent articles or communications. Again he wishes to thank most humbly another of his collaborators, who, as his life's partner, has shared "Leid und Freud" with him, who has inspired him, consoled him, struck out sentimental paragraphs, (for the benefit of the readers), listened at his side to good and bad, long and short, speeches, — in short, — who has been a great help to him, in his labours.

ST.

SWISS OBSERVER 10 YEARS AGO.

The issue of January 5th, 1924, recounts the damage caused throughout the western part of Switzerland by the extremely severe weather conditions, which characterized that particular winter.

Monsieur Jaques-Dalcroze announced a lecture-demonstration at the Prince's Theatre.

"Kyburg" is very enthusiastic about the formation of the Swiss Rifle Association. Here is his effusion:—

"The S.R.A. has already developed into a very lusty child and is growing steadily. The individual cost is bearable, and the mere idea of going to a rifle match or to shooting practice near London ought to be enough to make every Swiss itch to join and enrol as a member. ... I am writing quite unofficially, simply because I myself am very keen on the Association, and the happy hours of real Swiss comradeship it presages and because I should like all my compatriots to share the delightful hours in store for the members."

Well, the delightful hours seem to be *tempi passati* now and there seems to be hardly enough spirit left in the once lusty child to hold a pop-gun!

The cars stop at a few points of interest. One of these is the village Pierre St. Bourg where Napoleon had breakfast when he was leading his army across. Another is the Cantine du Proz, the highest public house in Europe. They will sell you beer, wine, coffee, postcards and stamps there. It is a post office as well as a public house. About an hour later the road takes a sharp bend and the Hospice or Hostel comes suddenly into view. It is a drab, weather-beaten set of buildings even in mid-summer, but you must remember that those buildings were erected for use and to withstand winter storms and not for architectural effect.

History does not state or archaeology suggest who was the first explorer to discover and cross the pass. How can any theory worth considering be put forward as to the time? It must be many centuries ago, probably several thousand years. Population was pressing forward from the south-east to the north-west and the Alpine regions had to be crossed.

The people whom we now call the Romans were not the first to occupy Italy. They came as a "wave" which overwhelmed all the existing population that could not move forward in good time. The people who were receding before the pressure from the south-east had perforce to cross the Alps and passages were made through the more accessible parts. Somebody having once made the crossing of a pass others followed on his footsteps. All this, however, did not happen in a day or a year. The Pass was probably used for centuries before the legions of Rome were led through it into Helvetia and onwards to Gaul.

But in those days taking an army over the lowest Alpine pass was no child's play, and the St. Bernard is by no means the least difficult. Remember it is 8,200 feet above sea level, that is more than half the height of Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Europe and more than twice the height of the highest mountain in Ireland. Also it is snowbound for more than half the year. Sometime the Romans established a military post there and built a temple to Jupiter where the monastery now stands. They constructed a military road down to Villeneuve on the Lake of Geneva, and right along the north and western sides of that sheet of water. They marked it with mile stones, some of which remain to the present day. But if you are walking that road and come across those landmarks remember that the Roman mile was 126 yards shorter than the English mile and 406 yards shorter than the old Irish mile, which is still unofficially reckoned in parts of this country. Also remember that the Swiss mark distances in kilometres, but nobody there ever seems to remember how far one place is from the other in kilometres or miles. They always tell you the distance if you ask, in hours or in minutes, and you will find that this estimate between the same two places often varies; for it takes longer to go uphill than downhill.

(To be Continued).

EUROPE'S MOST CELEBRATED HOSTEL.

St. Bernard's Monastery 'Mid the Snows.

By D. J. RYAN, F.R.G.S.
(In *Cork Examiner Weekly*).

A few weeks ago those fellow merchants of mine who collect and read foreign news were able for a moment to forget Hitler and his nationalistic campaign, Dollfus and his crazy would-be assassin, Azana, and the forthcoming elections in Spain; Roosevelt and the dollar, Henderson and disarmament, the eternal French Cabinet crisis, de Valera and Thomas, and to note that a party of monks were proceeding from the famous Hospice at the top of the Great St. Bernard to the Himalays for the purpose of establishing a similar hospice or rets house on one of the passes into Tibet. The world was so much occupied with high political happenings that the monks and their enterprise scarcely received the notice deserved.

Having got the foregoing rather rhetorical introductory sentences (which I hope you will not try to parse) off my chest let me tell you some of my own first-hand impressions of the Swiss hospice and its surroundings. Many years ago when I was at a very rural national school with a very rural schoolmaster we had a class reading book which contained what was then called a "lesson" (I don't know what they call the things under the new educational dispensation) which told us something about the St. Bernard Hospice and the dogs, with slight mention of the monks. For some cause or the other the compilers of reading books in those days were shy of having too much about monks. Anyway, imagination often carried me away to that hospice, but the years passed before I found myself there. Let me add that there was no particular merit about the going. It was accomplished in the most prosaic of all ways, joining a charabanc party and starting out from Montreux at seven o'clock in the morning. We skirted the Lake of Geneva for some miles without feeling the Byronic spirit in the chilly air, for early morning, even in late June, can be chilly in parts of Switzerland. We sped by the Castle of Chillon without glancing at its tower, or merely casting a casual look; we ran through the old Roman town of Villeneuve which could be visited any other day of the week; we ran up the Rhone valley passing several towns and villages situate in the valley or perched on the mountain sides overlooking it. The road is level and there are no thrilling hairpin turns until you reach Martigny.

Whenever I go next to Switzerland with an intention of re-visiting the St. Bernard I hope to make Martigny my headquarters, and should advise you to do likewise. Martigny is not as modernised as Montreux, nor is it a great railway centre like Lausanne. But you will get com-

fort there, and if you wish avoid charabanc transport, which though useful in its way can be a trial to the patience of a Job, if a certain type of tourist, who pretends to be something else, gets mingled with the ordinary folk.

If you wish to get still nearer to the St. Bernard you may continue a few miles further by rail to Orsieres, but of the two I should rather recommend Martigny. It is a quaint old town going back to the Roman period. Part of the Batiaz tower there is Roman work, and the tower itself served as a bishop's palace in the middle ages. The Romans concentrated here and many remains of their occupation are to be found in the immediate surroundings.

Let us suppose that one fine morning, say about eight o'clock or earlier, you decide to set out for the Pass. If you do not object to a strenuous mountain climb it will pay to walk it. At any rate it may be as well to take the electric train to Orsieres, a real Swiss post town. It will take a good walker from five to six hours to go and from three to three and a half hours to return. The road is excellent, but if the traveller does not mind a little rougher going he can take numerous short cuts. In fact, in places, by leaving the modern road, he can follow the old road over which the Roman soldiers, and Napoleon's French soldiers marched. In those days soldiers and civilians followed the shortest feasible route. So do the people nowadays, but the roads feasible for horsemen and muleteers or for the artillery of 1800 would not of necessity be feasible for the motor traffic of 1933. The Swiss being good business people glad to capture the wayfarers' francs have improved their roads, cutting into the mountain sides where necessary and lengthening out the distance if the old gradients are found too steep for the charabancs.

A Stiff Climb.

The route begins to rise at Martigny, but it is at Orsieres that that the real climb begins. In about twelve miles as a crow would fly, if she were there, the road rises over 4,000 feet. If you do not care to face the upward journey on foot take the post bus from Orsieres and do the return journey on foot. It will be worth while. From that little town the road winds up the mountain side. After taking each turn you will see the same valley down below and you will wonder whether you are making any progress towards your destination. But you are. The Hospice is getting nearer and nearer as you twist and wind uphill. Times you may wonder what would happen to you should the driver miss the turn. As the conductor of a particular railway said to a lady who asked what would happen if the steel wire cable broke, "It would all depend on your past life." But you need not be afraid for the Swiss drivers are the world's best. There is no dare-devil driving for them; and you will notice that at every long stop they examine their cars to see that everything is in order.