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# HELVETIA

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X SWITZERLAND TODAY. X  
X (Continued) X  
X By: E. Merz. X  
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Our return from Zermatt took us via Simplon - Italy to Locarno. Before entering the Simplon, the world's longest rail-tunnel, passport inspection was made by the Italian authorities at Brig. The unpleasant feature was that none of the customs officials knew Swiss, English or French to explain the procedure. We all were simply asked "prega passport" and had to hand over the precious document without receiving any explanation or receipt. The only consolation was to see hundreds of passports under the arms of the officials, indicating that everybody was treated alike. As it happened the passes were returned at the first stop in Italy to those staying or visiting the country, whereas travellers proceeding to Locarno received them back at the Swiss border.

What a contrast when we reached Domodossola! Everything looked neglected, dirty and scores of men standing around doing nothing. We had to wait two hours for the Customs to let us board the little decrepit train. However, the long and slow journey through the Centovalli, with the deep gorges and the southern vegetation, was quite interesting.

At about 5 o'clock we reached Locarno, very pleased to be in lovely Switzerland again. Sunny Locarno lies on the southern clove of the alps, nestled along the famous Lake Maggiore. This garden town is well protected from cold winds and completely free from mists; snow or ice in winter are very rare. Spring, similar to nearby Lugano (where we spent a week already 4 months previously) bursts forth into a veritable riot of colour and bloom. Above the town, reached by cable-rail, is the famous Madonna del Sasso, where we saw the wonderful, original, painting of "Christ's Entombment" by Ciseri. The panorama from the church-terrace is one of peace and still beauty.

A relative of mine had invited us to his summer residence in RONCO, midway between Locarno & Brissago, high up the hills, overlooking half the length of lake Maggiore. This was a charming spot and the garden presented a confusion of colour; it is really amazing the variety of flora grown on these sheltered slopes: magnolia, camellias, azaleas, passion fruit, camphor, cypresses, etc., all compete to present a colourful picture. We spent some pleasant and happy days, doing a few hours gardening, walking over hills or through the fascinating little village of Ronco.

We come now to the last stage of our holiday. Long ago we had decided to explore the most southern part of Switzerland and again we were lucky to secure a suitable abode. Our stay for the next 6 weeks was CARONA, situated above Lugano, high up on the declining saddle behind the famous mountain San Salvatore. This little village is in typical Italian style, very old and beautifully placed high above an arm of the lake of Lugano, just where the Gotthard rail crosses the lake by the great cause-way of Melide.

Many of these villages in the Canton of Tessin are similar in aspect, built

of rough stone, always clustering round, or adjoining a beautiful church and of peaceful and contented appearance. An easy access by bus connects Carona with Lugano.

The sunny South of Switzerland in autumn is certainly the nearest realisation of a dreamland one can expect. The mild climate, the profusion of colours, the people so well contented and without claims to participate in modern pleasures, all inspire fresh spirit and a natural happiness. Lugano, in my estimation, is easily the most charmingly situated town in the whole wide world. Stretched on a long gulf at the foot of lovely heights, the city is enframed by the shapely Monte Bre and San Salvatore on each flank, and opposite rise the Caprinos and Monte Generoso. All this glorious surrounding is reflected in the deep-blue placid waters of the lake. Lugano's suburbs Castagnola and Paradiso, built on steep slopes north and south of the City, interspersed by many imposing hotels and private residences, enhance the impressive panorama. At night, if viewed from one of the peaks, you see the nearest picture to a fairy-dream: Lugano a great mass of countless lights, all around the coast and high up hills thousands more and sprinkled here and there over the dark lake you see the lights of slowly moving boats. It is just as spectacular as the great city and harbour of Hong Kong, which we had the privilege of visiting during 1938.

Along the fine quay of Lugano, shaded by trimmed chestnut trees, one can stroll for hours, or else visit one of the many open-door cafe or restaurants, or the fine Casino and listen to a top-class orchestra. The weeks were fully occupied with scores of interesting excursions to choose from, all in close proximity. First of course, a round-trip on the lake; then the many mountain tours; and finally the colourful villages with their quaint, homely inns and wine-grottos.

We went up the Monte Generoso, commanding a wonderful view of the long alpine chain from Mt. Blanc/Mte Rosa in the West, right through to the Bernina group in the far East. The lakes of Lugano, Como and Maggiore, are easily discernable and make a perfect picture. The journey, after crossing the lake by boat, is by cog-wheel railway, pushed (not pulled) by a tiny, but very powerful, steam engine. A rather unique experience, as it is, excepting the Rothornbahn above Brienz, the only non-electric locomotion still existing in Switzerland.

The Monte Bre and the San Salvatore afford quick access by finiculai. The rocky, solitary, salvatore is really the finest peak of this southern fairyland. The panorama is incomparable: the encircling arms of the blue lake in every direction; Lugano spread along the horse-shoe gulf and the great alpine chain as an imposing background. I must have been a dozen times up this peak from our home in Carona; it took 1½ hours and was my favourite walk before breakfast. I had many happy jaunts and rambles in forest and field, past some isolated lovely churches, such as for instance the Madonna d'Ongera with several beautifully preserved paintings, frescoes and statuaries inside the old dignified building. Then often I walked down to Lugano to do some shopping, past the wild and rocky San Salvatore, through the old and poor hamlets of Carabbia, Pazzallo and Calprino. This road descends behind the mountain towards Lugano, with a fine view of the alps northwards, but upon passing Calprino, around a sharp bend, the road unexpectedly opens up the whole magnificent panorama of the city, the lake and the eastern mountains, at a point just above Paradiso. I can never forget this breath-taking view, and every time had to stop for 10 or 20 minutes, to fully absorb the beauty of it all. As much as Gandria (on the south-eastern flank of Lugano) is picturised, so just as much is this spot a really classic scene, embracing the whole of Lugano proper in close proximity and the long eastern arm of the lake down to Porlezza, deep into Italy.

Other beautiful walks and excursions we made to morcote, directly on the water's edge, and to its fine church, 355 steps up above the village. Or we went to Ponte-Tresa, past the picturesque lake of Muzzano; or to the port of Ceresio, already in Italian territory. One night some friends invited us to visit the famous gambling hall "Campione". This is across the lake from Lugano, in Italy proper. The establishment is run by Italians, but all transactions are in Swiss Francs; you hardly ever see a Lira change hands. It is a popular attraction for tourists and wealthy Swiss, and the half dozen Roulette-tables are always thick with eager gamblers from 9 p.m. until the early morning hours. There is ample space to dine and wine with a "floor-show"; with "tailed" waiters and all the usual glamour pertaining to such amusement dens. We watched the fickle roulette for several hours; some players placing 50-100 Frs. each bet. It takes less than a minute between the croupiers' call "fait vos jeu, rien ne va plus" and one can hardly calculate the vast turnover during a night at the six tables.



All around Carona are countless clusters and small forests of Chestnut Trees, and during weekends we often went gathering these edible nuts. After the middle of October the large clumps of the thorny prickly shells commence to burst open through the force of the growing fruit inside. After the split of the shell, it take only a few days for the chestnut to fall off the tree and we gathered them by the thousands and sent many parcels to relations. For me it was just as much joy, as it was to our little daughter, in collecting the bright reddish-brown, often dark-brown chestnuts, and needless to say, we baked them on the open fire, or boiled them for an hour and indulged in eating large quantities. And speaking of eating, we certainly enjoyed many times the famed Italian Spaghetti with grated cheese and tomato-sauce, together with the inevitable Chianti; or the "risotto" with delicious dark-red Valpolicella wine. These wines we never drank without suitable food and only modestly; neat they taste far too heavy and of course, are fairly intoxicating, if not accustomed to it.

During October the people everywhere began harvesting the crop of dark, velvety grapes. We sampled the fresh sweet "Sausser" (unfermented grape juice) but generally found the local wine called "Nostrano" too sauer. The grape-leaves, the gardens, the forests, everything visible, now commenced to change to vivid shades of gold, orange, dark brown, a picture of colour I had forgotten for many years. With the rising, or the setting sun, the sight became a vision of flamboyant hue, belonging quite to a world apart. The softness of the green meadows, the radiant purity of the mountain-air, the profound peacefulness of the towering hills and the valleys below, all contributed to the intense delight and pleasure of our holiday.

(To be concluded.)

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

An examination of the figures for Swiss foreign trade during the first half of 1949, shows that the economic overexpansion which has been prevailing during the last few years, is giving way at the moment to a situation that is fast becoming more normal. However, trade relations with other countries are becoming more difficult, as the most recent economic negotiations have shown. Swiss foreign trade has been distinguished on the whole by a considerable drop in the import surplus resulting from a falling off in imports and an almost stable value for exports. The prosperity enjoyed by Swiss economy has diminished, particularly where production is concerned. It must be stressed however, that it is a question, in almost all fields, of a return to normal conditions of economic activity; there is no reason therefore to speak of a crisis.

It should be noted that imports, totalling 1,964 million francs for the six months under consideration, are almost a third less than those for the first half of 1948; on the other hand, they only show a very slight recession (3%) compared with the corresponding volume in 1938. It is of interest to note that the prices of imported goods have undergone a slight drop - about 10% - compared with those of the previous year. Foodstuffs have shown the greatest drop. This phenomenon is partly explained by the fact that North America has to a great extent replaced Argentina in the supply of wheat; the prices of this cereal have consequently dropped almost by half since the first six months of 1948.

The figures for exports show that only the sales of manufactured products exceed the 1938 half-yearly average, both in quantity and value. In almost all sectors, a slight falling off is noticeable compared with the figures for the second half of 1948. The most marked declines are in foodstuffs and raw materials and are due to a reduction in the consignments of heavy consumption goods. The total exports reached a figure of 1,638 millions, a result which lies somewhere between the relatively low figure for the first half of 1948 and the somewhat higher figure for the second half of the same year.

All this has its repercussions on the trade balance which, it must be remembered, traditionally shows a deficit. The adverse balance amounts, at the moment, to