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SWITZERLAND TODAY.

By: E. Merz,
Auckland.

With my introductory remarks in last issue, let us now have a look at some of the sights. Basel is the usual point of entry, and although the Customs authorities are fairly strict, they give you a "free" entry, being a visitor. A nephew of mine and his wife gave us a splendid welcome, and the hospitality extended to us in their lovely home at Dornach, just below the famous Antheanum, was a fitting introduction to Switzerland. Most of my readers know that the preparation of Swiss food is first rate, and certainly always plentiful, so after two weeks in London we enjoyed the many special dishes prepared for us. Basel today is the centre of the chemical and dye-stuff industries and a great share of the world markets, once dominated by the Germans, is now successfully exploited by the several large combines.

To please our little daughter, we had to visit the Zoo, certainly a nice spot interspersed by many lovely gardens and trees. No less interesting are the old streets, the bridges over the Rhine and the fine cathedral.

Every Spring the now famous "Mustermesse" opens the door to the hundreds of thousands of visitors. The first fair in 1917 brought 800 exhibitors, whereas 1948 saw the number increased to 2,000 and every year the size increases and new permanent buildings are erected. Apart from the space allocated to stands, there are large restaurants, banquet and congress halls, etc. A special hall, accommodating 5,000 people is reserved for concerts and festivals.

The three most impressive exhibits are machinery, watches, and textiles, and to inspect the truly wonderful show is something that none of you would ever forget. To describe the exhibition in detail is quite impossible here; personally I was greatly impressed by the very high standard of textiles and embroideries, apart from the watches. Although the plain watch is again more popular, there are still an amazing variety of highly ornamental ladies' watches, with fantastic bracelets, often valued up to £5,000 - and more. We saw among others a replica of a wrist watch worn by the Empress Josephine Bonaparte. The annual export of watches has now achieved the 50 million mark, valued at about 500 million frs.

After two weeks in Basel, we moved to Oberhofen on the Lake of Thun where a chalet had been reserved by our relations.

For the first time after 20 years, we travelled again on a Swiss railway, and I must tell you a few of our general impressions. All foreigners, excepting the Americans, describe our railways as superb. The rolling stock on all fast trains is now composed of the new light weight aluminium coaches, with every comfort and wide windows afford an unobstructed view. The electrification is now universal; I did not see a single steam locomotive,

except for shunting purposes. The punctuality, both in arriving and departing is proverbial, in spite of the many special trains running during the tourist season. Express trains require 5 hours from Basel to Lugano, or 1½ hours from Zurich to Berne, non-stop. Once we had occasion to talk to a leading railway engineer whilst travelling to Lugano, and some interesting facts were related to us. The electric locomotive pulling our train over the Gotthard has a capacity of 12,000 h.p. and is the largest in the world. This locomotive consists of two halves, with a total length of 120 feet on 14 axles. There are two motors each on eight driving axles, a total of 16 motors, each with 750 h.p. capacity. These machines pull the heavy international trains over the Gotthard approaches at a speed of 75 k.m. per hour and climb in some sections one yard every second. No less interesting is the 6,000 h.p. locomotive of the Lotschberg line, running from Berne to Brig. A new enterprise is the "Red Arrow" used for scenic excursions such as Lucerne-Lugano or Interlaken-Lotschberg-Montreux-Berne. The "Arrow" is an elegant red express car, the exterior resembling a double arrow, and the interior very pleasingly fitted, and all seats upholstered. Another innovation is the Brunig "sight-seeing coach," whose front and side walls, as well as part of the roof, are made of glass to permit an uninterrupted view. Or else, another special achievement is the steam revolving snow-plough which clears the Bermina pass in Winter, where the rails are often covered with four to six metres of snow.

Whilst talking of trains, let me remind my readers of the Rigi railway, which transported 350,000 visitors to the top during 1947; or the Gornergrat starting at Zermatt and running amid mountains of overwhelming grandeur, in full view of the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa to a height of 10,500 feet; or up the Jungfrauoch, passing through five miles of solid rock to a height identical with New Zealand's Mt. Cook. Finally I want to mention that the Zurich main station dispatches and receives 600 trains a day, or counting from say 5 a.m. until midnight, one train every two minutes.

Our arrival in Thun was thoroughly spoiled by rain, thick mist and fairly cold atmosphere. We continued our journey a further 10 k.m. by rail-train, a rather ramshackle affair running from Thun to Beatenbucht. Later I occasionally watched calfs, even goats, being transported by this line, and the animals were always lifted by hand from the street on to the goods coach. On several occasions we even saw cattle being loaded on passenger steamers on the lake; a real treat to watch amid the modern surroundings. Next morning we enjoyed a glorious view from our chalet in brilliant sunshine; at our feet the blue lake of Thun and directly opposite the splendid conical shape of the 8000 foot Niesen, covered with fresh snow from half way up. Further south the splendid Blumlisalp and the majestic chain of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau appeared hardly a stone's throw away. We now realised the reason for the great popularity of the right hand shore of the lake of Thun; the embankment of the entire length is studded with week-end houses, chalets and many hotels; it is also favoured by retired people for its mild climate. We made frequent half-day or day excursions to Thun and Berne, to get thoroughly acquainted with these two old cities. Thun, as well as Berne, has many charming, old-fashioned shops, but believe me, the goods sold are far from old-fashioned. We found great varieties of foods and clothing, all attractively displayed. Prices were fairly high compared with New Zealand, although I must say that everything appeared of a much higher standard, no matter what it was. Berne has a charm all of its own, you may find quaint old buildings in the main street, flanked by deep arcades; or, you may watch and study the many beautifully decorated fountains. Most of these fountains were built in the middle of the 16th century, but are still perfectly preserved and may represent warriors, hunters, or the famous "Kindlifresser." The river Aare is winding itself on three sides of Berne, crossed by four high-level road bridges, apart from the great Railway-bridge, and are certainly an ornament to their surroundings. The famous terraces in front of the Palais Federal command a fine view of the Bernese Alp, rising to 14,000 feet above a wide, open landscape of meadow and woodland. The architecture of the old city dates back to the 15th century, after the great fire of 1405. The town was rebuilt completely in stone, and is of typical Gothic style, splendidly represented in the cathedral and the many fine

style, splendidly represented in the cathedral and the many fine family houses along Junkergasse. During the 17th century, many great "Baroque" style mansions were built; in these times Berne was rich and mighty. All these historical buildings and monuments are still the pride of the city, and can be seen by anybody who has interest to delve in history. We spent much time admiring the famous Clock-Tower; mansions such as the Erlacherhof, the Dissbachs, and the von Tscharners; or else the Kornhauskeller and, of course, the great, dignified Bundeshaus was always a source of attraction.

The shops generally are a revelation, compared with New Zealand or England. Every commodity imaginable is available, no matter what type. Goods from every corner of the globe are displayed and we were specially pleased to see a great deal of British products. America is well represented with luxurious motor-cars, tinned foods, typewriters, etc. Prices as a whole are probably somewhat higher than in New Zealand although here staple food is fairly highly subsidised and it would therefore be difficult to compare; then also, wages are much higher in Switzerland. For instance, a locomotive-driver receives now Fr.900 per month, or a skilled office typiste up to Fr.600.

Marked progress is noticeable in the national crafts such as Ceramic and porcelain, principally produced in Langenthal and Thun. Some of the China exhibited at the Mustermesse was very exquisite and artistic. The type of new building seems to change from the old pretty Chalet or the once rather popular "streamlined" houses, to a distinct Southern style with lovely heavy tiled roofs and overhanging eaves and heavily carved wooden doors. This of course, refers only to private buildings and not to the city apartment houses, or the many co-operative settlements put up by large private associations. In Zurich for instance, which by the way is soon reaching a population of 400,000, we found very impressive office buildings, such as the famous "Claridenhof" with over 1,000 rooms large and small, or the Kongress House with its large convention-halls and the spacious Restaurant, - accommodating 2,000 people comfortably.

(To be continued....)

SWISS FEDERALISM.

In the following article we shall endeavour to explain why Swiss Federalism is not only different from any other kind of Federalism, but even unique. The people of the Swiss Confederation, ever since its inception 658 years ago, have had to fight for their freedom, be it in bloody battles or be it by their wits. Often the question is asked "How was it possible for the Swiss Confederation to survive?" It was by the deep sense of freedom and justice that the "miracle of the Swiss Confederation" as it is often called, has been brought about; in fact, many an historian attributes the success to law enforcement, which plays a paramount part in the life of the Swiss Confederation.

LIBERTY, THE STAPLE RAW MATERIAL.

The fact that Switzerland, so insignificant a country from the economic standpoint, should have become the home of 4½ million people is due entirely to intelligence and hard work. Without the peculiar political attitude of the Swiss, it would have been quite impossible to raise the public economy of the country to such a level. Only a free people could attain this standard of living and only as a free state could Switzerland, remote from the sea coast and without her own sources of raw materials, succeed in commanding the respect of the whole world and in taking a prominent part in world trade. We have therefore every reason to regard the independence of the Swiss people as having the significance of a "staple raw material."

We must therefore enquire into the origins of that freedom. In the 13th century, under the Holy Roman Empire, the three communities of Uri, Schwyz