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RAIL AND ROAD TRAFFIC IN THE SWISS MOUNTAINS

By H. O. ERNST, Manager, London Office, Swiss National Tourist Office and Swiss Federal Railways.

(Continued from last issue.)

As I have already mentioned, the battle against the forces of nature, the efforts to guard against them and the cost of safety installations are greatest where we have to deal with high mountain railways. The same applies to motor traffic over the alpine passes. I would, therefore, now like to give you an idea how and at what cost in effort and money some of these undertakings manage to keep open to traffic under the most adverse conditions.

The only normal gauge international main line in Switzerland which is not nationalised is the Berne-Lotschberg-Simplon Railway. It links Northern France and the Swiss capital with the Rhone Valley and Italy. Operating conditions are similar to those on the Gotthard Line. The Lotschberg is a typical alpine railway. It was built between 1906 and 1930 at the cost of about nine million pounds. The passenger who travels through this enchanting and often awe-inspiring mountain fastness hardly realises that an additional half million pounds were spent on special safety measures and constructions to protect the line against rock falls, avalanches and damage by mountain streams which in early summer when the snow and ice melt turn into raging torrents. There is, above Goppenstein at the northern exit of the main tunnel, a section of the line especially exposed to danger by avalanches. Its length is 443 metres, and the amount spent on constructional work was 650,000 francs, or 1470 francs per metre. Almost for the whole distance of 23 miles from the southern exit of the main tunnel of Brigue, the line is carried high up on the rocky walls of the Lonza and Rhone valleys, where avalanches are frequent. As a result, the train passes through a succession of avalanche galleries. I am almost certain that their number is a record for so short a distance. Curiously enough they hardly interfere with the magnificent view, as most of them are open towards the valleys. Many of these constructions all along this railway are models of their kind and often visited by interested experts from abroad.

(Concluded.)

"OUR FATHERLAND"

Your editors are often confronted with difficulty in publishing interesting articles; either news from home is stale, or when factual subject matters such as Trade, Statistics, Economics, etc., are printed, many of our compatriots might find it "dry reading."

After due consideration, it has been decided to give you a series of articles entitled "Our Fatherland." We shall describe our cities and customs, our schools and castles, our magnificent alps and lakes; in fact anything typical of Switzerland. There is ample scope describing our lovely land of Peace and Prosperity and we hope that there will be something for every taste. And speaking of "taste," we shall also give details of typical dishes from various parts of Switzerland.

"BERNE AND THE OBERLAND"

It seems fitting to commence our chapter with Switzerland's Capital City and its splendid background the Oberland. Berne, the Capital of Switzerland and of a Canton extending from the French frontier to the crest of the Oberland range, is a city of many endearing charms. Quaint square towers, straight from an old-fashioned fairy book, stand astride its main street, flanked by deep arcades wherein are found fine shops. The old city is surrounded on three sides by the river Aar, flowing at the foot of steep, high banks and crossed by half a dozen high-level bridges, which are ornaments to their attractive surroundings. Everything is so neat and bright and spotless, as are the beautiful buildings, old and new.

The Baroque style arose in the time of the greatest glory of the town, in that aristocratic Berne whose gracious lords ruled the Republic with patriarchal despotism and whose vast territory resembled a proud realm. In the time of Louis XIV and Frederic the Great, Berne took over the vigour and movement of baroque architecture and the elaborate ornaments of the rococo style, yet combined the Gallic elegance of forms with its traditional comfortable solidity and honesty. Out of this arose that German-French character which belongs to the Berne of the seventeenth centuries. We owe to that time not only fine houses of noble families, as for instance the Frischinghaus, the Erlacherhof, the houses of the von Diessbachs and von Tscharners as well the the houses of the guilds, but also the Kornhaus (granary), the church of the Holy Ghost, the Burgerspital, the Hotel de Musique and the Corps de Garde. Berne was rich and mighty.

Along the main streets are a series of handsome fountains, mostly built during the sixteenth century. The most famous, the "Kindlifresser," shows a beast devouring a child while several other infants are held in readiness in his pockets. Owing to the fact that the ogre wears a Jew's cap, it has been said that this fountain is a public reminder of the awful practices attributed to the Jews in the olden days. The other more likely story relates that so many children had fallen