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HOME NEWS

A deficit of about 14 million francs is anticipated in the Budget estimates of the Confederation for 1927.

With a view to lightening the heavy loss in the accounts of the Swiss Federal Railways a specially appointed Commission is visiting and inspecting the different railway stations to study the possibility of reducing the staff; in addition it is proposed to re-introduce a longer working-day.

A somewhat remarkable decision has just been taken by the Conseil d'Etat of the canton Valais: the traffic of motor lorries and private cars, accommodating more than eight passengers, is prohibited on the route between Monthey and Champéry, so as to eliminate their competition with the local railway company which is serving this sector.

The electors of Zug have declined to sanction the imposition of a ticket and amusement tax proposed by the town fathers.

The recently enacted dancing restrictions in the canton Ticino have resulted in a regular exodus on Sunday afternoons into the neighbouring extra-cantonal valleys, notably the V. Misocco.

Influenza is very prevalent in the lower parts of Switzerland, the higher regions and touring resorts, which are literally crowded with visitors for the winter sports, not having been affected at all. Most of the schools and colleges, notably in Basle and Geneva, remain closed and in some towns public meetings are prohibited.

National Councillor Charles Naine has died at the age of 53, following an attack of pneumonia. He started life as a mechanic, later on studied law taking his degree and finally settled down as a very forcible writer and propagandist in the cause of Socialism; he believed in constitutional methods and was unflinchingly opposed to Bolshevik principles. For 15 years uninterruptedly Naine represented Neuchâtel in the National Council, where his fiery and dauntless speeches carried considerable influence; though the accepted leader of the Socialists in the western part of Switzerland he had little in common with Grimm, the official head of the Swiss Socialist party.

Skidding on the frozen road was the cause of an accident near the Eggölzli (Berne) when on Sunday afternoon the family of the Bernese confiseur Baer suffered more or less serious injuries. One of the daughters succumbed to fractures on the head, her sister still being on the danger list; the condition of the mother is also stated to be serious, whilst the father escaped with slight abrasions.

SWISS TYPES.

The following article appeared in the Glasgow Herald (Dec. 4th and 11th) and is reprinted by courtesy of the author, whose delightful description of modern Swiss institutions and conditions is characterised by a fascinating gift of seeing but the bright and beautiful side of things. The second part of the articles reviews in an alluring strain a well-known war story by the Vaudois writer Benjamin Vallotton:—

After Captain Bluntschli, the hero of "Arms and the Man," had enumerated the assets to which he had fallen heir—his 200 horses, his 70 carriages, and his tablecloths, blankets and eider-down quilts by the thousand—his prospective father-in-law, Major Petkoff, asked in an awed whisper—"Are you Emperor of Switzerland?" "My rank," replied Bluntschli, "is the highest known in Switzerland; I am a free citizen!"

This proud boast gives us a key-note to the Swiss character. The Switzer is intensely patriotic—one might almost say chauvinistic, if such a term can be applied to a people whose militarism is purely defensive. And surely no nation in Europe has better justification for its pride than

the Swiss. French in the south-west, Teutons in the centre and north, Italians in the south, Rhaeto-Romans in the east, speaking their own languages, preserving their own customs and costumes, have by their efforts welded themselves into a compact confederation of 22 cantons, each a little republic but all federated for defence, foreign policy, communications and Customs regulations. The history of Switzerland deserves more study than it usually gets. It is the history of a gallant people gradually freeing themselves from powers spiritual and powers temporal, the history of the evolution of the three tiny Forest Cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden into the Switzerland that we know to-day. Switzerland is the home of political experiments, such as the initiative and the referendum, of efforts for the betterment of mankind, a platform for international causes, and a city of refuge for the victims of lost causes. Democracy may have failed elsewhere to justify itself as a form of government, but in the Swiss Cantons it is an unequalled success, whether representative as in the larger Cantons or absolute as in the tiny Canton of Appenzell, where the Landsgemeinde consists of the whole adult population, who attend the biennial open-air meetings with sword on thigh, and, in the event of doubtful weather, umbrella in hand.

The Swiss are often contemptuously described as "a nation of hotel-keepers," but on the most inclusive estimate only 10 per cent. of them are engaged in the Fremden-Industrie. Though faced with enormous disadvantages, as compared with other nations, in the absence of coal and iron, of seaboard and of navigable rivers, they have by sheer skill and industry raised their little country with its population about half that of London, to a high position among the manufacturing countries of the world. To take one example only, Winterthur, though all its raw materials come from abroad, is one of the world's great engine-works, whose products are known in every civilised land. Efficiency is "writ large" all over Switzerland, over its hotels, its railways (and what country can show greater feats of engineering?) its postal system, its business establishments, and its local government. Apropos of the last, I was, as a pedestrian, overjoyed to find that in the Canton of Glarus all motor traffic is prohibited on Sunday between the hours of one and six p.m., so that the humble paterfamilias may shepherd his flock along the roads in peace! Mr. Lunn finds significance in the ding-dong of the Swiss station bell as the train glides away from the platform. It seems to say "Pass, friend, all's well!"

As for the land questions that agitate other countries, nine out of ten Swiss cultivators are owners, and Communism is forlorn hope. Though Lenin started on his fateful journey in 1917 from Switzerland, he left little of his influence behind him. The proposal of a Capital Levy was rejected by Referendum, and in the election of 1925 only three Communists were returned to the Federal Assembly. Education reaches a very high level, and, apart from the agricultural class, most of the Swiss are bi-, if not tri-lingual.

Though as Voltaire said: "L'histoire de la pomme est bien suspecte," the figure of the sturdy bowman, William Tell, has been adopted as the national symbol. And rightly so, for whether Tell belong to history or to legend (and recent researches point to the former) his dogged independence is the leading note in the Swiss character. More than a hundred years ago Wordsworth, after a holiday in the Alps, wrote of

"The simple dignity no forms debase,
The eye sublime, the surly lion-grace."

It is this quality of independence, this lack of what Henry James called "soft curves" in the Swiss temperament, that may account for the complimentary estimates that one sometimes encounters. Without going back to Voltaire, Madame de Staël or Ruskin, there is the Italian Papini of to-day, who, dividing human history into four epochs, each headed by an apple—the Biblical by the apple of Eve, the Hellenic by that of Paris, the Mediaeval by Tell's and the scientific by that of Newton—goes on to say: "The one whose fate I most regret is the one the Swiss bowman with the cock's feathers transixed on his son's head. The first was eaten with consequences that have made us what we are; the second was an award to the fairest creature in all mythology; the last, though somewhat injured in its fall, gave us the law of universal gravitation; but the apple of Tell gave us the Swiss nation, and what the Swiss nation has given us I refrain from saying!" That inveterate "grouser," Bret Harte, too, has his grudge

ANNIVERSARIES OF SWISS EVENTS.

January 11th, 1841.—Attempted rising by the Ultramontanes against the Liberal Government in the canton of Aargau when, in retaliation, eight monasteries were closed. In consequence of the threatening attitude of the clerical cantons four nunneries were later on, in 1843, restored.

January 12th, 1746.—Joh. Heinrich Pestalozzi born in Zurich.

January 14th, 1866.—First attempt to revise the Federal Constitution of 1848; of the nine articles submitted in the referendum on this date only the one granting equal rights to the Jews was accepted. This slight revision was the inevitable result of a very favourable commercial treaty concluded with France in 1864, under which the right of free settlement was guaranteed to all her citizens, including the Jews. A modification of the Constitution was necessary, as under the existing one native-born Jews were debarred from the right of free settlement and it was, of course, inadmissible to treat the latter less favourably than those hailing from abroad.

January 15th, 1814.—Forcible overthrow of the Cantonal Government in Fribourg, when the patricians recovered their ancient authority lost to them in 1798.

against the Swiss people. "How the mountains must despise them," he writes in a letter from Lucerne: "No wonder they take a shy at them every now and then with an avalanche!"

For my own part, whenever I hear a complaint of Swiss discourtesy, I am tempted to put the plaintiff through an examination on his own manners. My experience of the Swiss dates from the 1880's, when in the Ormonts-Dessus I enjoyed the amenities of a Chalet-Pension at three francs fifty a day (tout compris) in the company of a dozen or so of Lausannois, legal or scholastic by profession, all friendly and congenial souls. And can I ever forget Burkhardt Reber, chemist and archaeologist of Geneva, with whom I foregathered in the same year, on a tramp in the Valais, and later in his own city; Reber, always bubbling over with enthusiasm, whether he was exhibiting his famous collection of "Venice Treacle" jars, or exploring the rocks of the Binnthal for marks of Druidical sacrifice, or turning a lesson in English conversation into a joyous symposium with a bottle of that delectable wine, the Malvoisie of Sion! I have only to turn to my diaries to find instances of friendliness in the mountain inns and in the less frequented valleys, where the black-coated water is unknown and one is served by the daughters of the family in their native costume. There was Inden at the foot of the Gemmi, where an aged member of the family gave up her room to accommodate the benighted traveller; and Appenzell, where the host was the Landammann of the Canton and his pretty daughters were the Hebes of the house. Nor can I recall without gratitude an experience of 1922, when I inadvertently strayed across the Austrian frontier into an almost uninhabited region of Switzerland, and late in the evening was forced to ask for shelter in a cheesemaker's hut, three or four hours distant from the nearest village; when I supped and breakfasted on lordly bowls of milk and great hunks of bread, slept on the hay in the company of the Senn and his merry lads, and in the morning paid for my entertainment with 20,000 kronen, to the infinite astonishment and amusement of the Senn who, ignorant of the depreciation of the Austrian currency, thought for the moment that he was dealing with a demented millionaire!

To generalise on the character of a nation is easy but rarely justifiable, and in the case of the Swiss, where the particulars are so varied—French, Teutonic, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic—it is almost impossible. Everyone will form his own conception according to the region with which he is most familiar, whether it be Vaud or Valais, the Oberland or the Engadine, or the northern regions of the Italian lakes. My own preference is for "la Suisse romande" from the south-west corner of Lac Léman to the Val d'Anniviers in the Valais; the foundations laid by a winter of study in the University of Geneva and the superstructure added by many summer holiday rambles. And the figure which sums up my best impressions of its people is that of David Potterat, ex-Commissary of Police, the genial creation of Benjamin Vallotton in his war novel "Ce qu'en pense Potterat." But Potterat cannot be dismissed in a few lines; he deserves a chapter all to himself.