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HOME NEWS

The Federal budget for 1929 foreshadows a surplus of about two million francs. This is the first time since 1910 that the Federal accounts close with a balance on the right side. The accounts for the current year, which are budgeted to close with a deficit of about eight million francs, are also expected to exhibit a much better result.

An initiative committee is being formed in the canton Uri with the object of revoking the new constitutional article of May last, when a modern election system was substituted for the former Landsgemeinde.

Another phenomenon in the canton Ticino begins to attract considerable attention; it is the "wandering village," Campo in the Maggia Valley. Official measurements have shown that its church is moving in a south-easterly direction at the rate of 35 centimetres per annum.

For refusing, on conscientious grounds, to fulfil his military duties a high official in the Basle civil service has been dismissed from his post. On the matter being raised in the Grosse Rat it was stated that all civil servants are expected to observe, and act without reservation in accordance with, the laws of the State.

The dozen of the Swiss Press, M. Louis Oderbolz, the publisher of the *Courrier de la Côte*, died at Nyon at the age of 79; he was still in harness and had started his journalistic career at the early age of 25.

A pleasure trip in a military aeroplane ended in a fatal accident when Miss Clara Gerber, a schoolteacher from Berne, mysteriously dropped out of the observation cabin on to the Aletsch glacier. The machine, which was in charge of Lieut. Mauerhofer, was caught in a whirlwind and it is surmised that the accident happened whilst the pilot manoeuvred to right his plane again.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

There is an exceptional bunch of interesting articles in this week's Gleanings.

Praise of Aargau.

This is the title of the following eulogium of the "Rübliland" which appeared in the *Nation* and *Athenaeum* (Oct. 20th). It is not often that a foreign critic finds everything perfect in our little country; even the aromatic "Misthufe" which defends the approach to most farmhouses is made an object for admiration.

"When the Alps were pinched upwards the rocky crust of the earth was cracked longitudinally into the deep narrow valley in which the Rhine and the Rhône start east and west from the Furka. Close to this same forking, just over the notch of the Grimsel, the Aar, the noblest river of the three in Switzerland (before it renders itself to the Rhine) starts northwards. It grumbles turbulently, like a burrowing puppy, through the narrow gloom of the depths of its early practical joke, the preposterous Aarschlucht, down to Meiringen. Some day it will accomplish its business of making the name of Interlaken a laughing-stock by choking Brienz Lake. It has far the best of the country, for the Rhône and Rhine escarpments south of the watershed are abrupt and narrow, but the long up-tilted shelf that feeds the Aar makes nearly half of Switzerland. Its southern edges run in an almost straight line from the Diablerets to the Saurenstock in Glarus, thence northwards along the Rhine gorge to Buchs, north-west to Koblenz, where the Aar runs into the Rhine, thence along the Bokserberg and Jura right into France, south-east again to the wooded Jorat north of Lausanne, and thence back almost straight to the Diablerets. It gathers the whole of the meltings impounded and filtered by the lakes of Joux, Neuchâtel, Biel, Thun, Brienz, Lucerne, and Zurich, with their auxiliary glacier bottoms, pouring steadily down the slope in more a score of valleys from the whole

length of the Oberland. The river drives steadily its enormous volume eastwards at a low-water rate of about five miles an hour, amusing itself for the last time at Brugg with another deep, narrow gouging through the compacted barrier of a drift of glacier dust. Brugg must have been pre-eminently The Bridge since men were on either side of the unfordable river. A fair-sized fir tree would span the cleft, but it would need a tall one to sound it. In the final sink of its basin at Turgi, the Aar swallows into its own pale glaucous waters the flinty blue-green flood of the Reuss and the cloudy opal of the Limmat and Sihl from Zurich, and thrusts the heavy mass through its northern barrier ridge to bend the Rhine towards Waldshut. No wonder the interglacial terraces of the Aargau, the sheets of gravel laid down and channelled out again through four successive multi-millennial intervals, are so splendid. The escarpments of the second and third layers of deposit drop as sharply as the slopes of railway embankments from as level a surface forty or fifty feet in places.

Switzerland intoxicates all of us. But we mostly keep to the mountainous parts and the lakes for our special excitements. The Aar basin seems to me, on the whole, the most humanly significant part of Switzerland, and being, in its own fashion, completely beautiful, cannot be deemed less admirable in nature than is the Oberland. But the human use of the district is my theme in this eulogy. It is a region of considerable manufacturing industry. The gravels are full of lime-sulphate and there are many cement works. Cement works must needs be dusty; but these are the cleanest and most self-respecting cement works I have ever beheld. No other industry pursued in the district is conducted offensively. There is, of course, no black smoke, because electricity, bestowed by the Aar and its feeders, is almost exclusively used. I saw great engineering factories, in handsome, gleaming buildings, pleasantly tinted, with clean red roofs; and I felt unhappy when I remembered Sheffield. Swiss industrial morality manifestly demands that blackness and foulness and mountains of rusty scrap shall not be deemed the proper accessories of efficient manufacturing industry, even metallic or chemical. This difference of habit is by no means wholly due to the necessities of dealing with dirty fuel: some coke and coal are used. The filthy untidiness of the waste and scrap yards which defile our own manufacturing districts is absent. This means that care is taken and is demanded that the rubbish shall be destroyed or used up, and not thrown aside to accumulate as a normal method of business.

The most impressive thing throughout the whole of this district is the habitual character of the building, for every class of purpose. One can hardly fail to notice this in any railway journey through Switzerland, and the chalet of the mountain and forest districts is familiar as a masterpiece of construction and beauty: but the character of the smaller towns and villages of the lower districts appeared to me almost more impressive. I saw simply no bad building anywhere. Every house is fine in style and solid in workmanship. Even a quite new class of suburban bungalows, approaching towards the despondency of our own post-war tenements, were infinitely removed from the latter's habitual meanness. In the small rural hamlets there is nothing even so modernly decadent as these cheaper suburban tenements. Familiar all my life with English agricultural villages, and living now in a district where building used to be fine, I groaned in shame when I thought of them in comparison with the homes of the poorest Swiss peasantry. The causes of the difference lie deep, but are unmistakable. The colonisation of Switzerland was effected not very differently from that of England, by kindred Germanic tribes. There ruled there, as in England, great feudal fighting landlords. Their castles in the Aargau are as conspicuous as along the Rhine, or as William's were in England and Wales. Here is the Habsburg's eyrie. Here is Lenzburg, as ideally splendid a fortress on a specially-created hill as Salzburg or Wartburg, and in its setting even more lovely, as its name should demand. (On the castle gates there is now a curious inscription apprising the public of the limited accessibility of the precincts permitted by good favour of the proprietor, and signed "Lincoln Elsworth, Esq., not, one infers, a Swiss or English noble." But by the fortune of history the Habsburg overlords grew too big for the country, and their attention being much occupied elsewhere

they were forcibly ousted by a progressive conurbation bred in the mountains and forests which they had never subdued, before they had had time, as in England, to subdivide an extensive manorial squirearchy; and the Cantons took over their lordships. The cultivators therefore retained their holdings. No Statute of Merton or Acts of Enclosure expropriated and impoverished them; no great estates were cleared for extensive farming, and men building homes for themselves went on building in the spirit in which they were building such homes in the Cotswold country up to the end of the sixteenth century, since when there has been no decent village building at all. What happened to our agricultural population after that has been told by Jeffries in "Hodge and his Masters," and again by Mr. J. L. Hammond. Here, then, are these rural villages, with every house well built and handsome, with no appearance of poverty anywhere, with the gardens all brilliant with flowers, and not only the gardens but corners of streets and little recesses of roadside waste. The people cannot be rich: but their children are well fed and well dressed. The agriculture is intensive. These gravelly flats have a hungry subsoil: it is not a wheat country. The upland husbandry is an art apart, but in these lowlands also cattle are an indispensable standby. Apart from beet crops, potatoes and other consumable vegetables, the ground is worked for fodder with rye, vetches, lucerne, clover and other seed herbage. Everyone who knows Switzerland will be familiar with the rather coarse mixed leafage of these hay-fields. But the soil being kept covered and moist, they yield a great deal of feed.

Only one thing in the villages may disturb an English visitor not reared in a cattle country or not sharing the pious Aryan veneration for the cow and all her five products. These being the basis of the rural economy, due recognition is unashamedly given to the fact by the reverence paid to the dung heap. This is not amorphously dumped here and there about open yards or trodden about the milking shed as in England; but upon the margin between the house and the street there is built a neat square concrete enclosure with walls about two feet high (convenient to sit on), in which and arising above it in the guise of an altar to the gods of fertility (honoured in other countries by other emblems) is piled the manure, the sides neatly trimmed like those of a rick, whilst the drainings accumulate in a covered tank below, to be pumped out continually and distributed on the hungry soil of the fields.

The fruit trees are wonderful. South of Lenzburg, which has a renowned jam factory in most comely buildings, the slopes of the wide valley look to me like a park with large oak and elm timber rather thickly planted about the grass. On a closer approach I realised that these were apple and pear trees, disconcertingly exaggerated in growth. Everywhere the care and condition of the trees are remarkable. They have evidently been tended for many years by proper shaping and pruning, such as we are only beginning to see in modern orchards in England. This year they carried beautiful crops of clean, well-grown fruit, whilst our old cankered orchards are cumbered with half-sized produce in equal profusion.

The personal and communal pride which maintains the beauty and dignity of all these villages is shown, by a people thus nurtured, equally in the towns. There also the whole tradition of building is solid and handsome, even in the large blocks of tenement houses that are superseding for wage-earners the family house—which is less the case in this part of Switzerland than in most industrial districts elsewhere that I am acquainted with. The towns not only maintain an impressively high architectural standard in the design of shops and offices, they are full of surprising little patches and benches of flowers, rows of lilies, hydrangeas, and fuchsias in pots, and a general evidence both of loving beauty and decency and of encouraging the manifestation of these human amenities in both private and civic life. The freedom and intelligence which the absence of landlordism has suffered to develop in all this country have led naturally both to intelligent and public-spirited civic administration and to the development of economic co-operation in business among the peasantry."

Monte Arbino.

Since the first reports of this phenomenon have been broadcast, the district has been visited by