

Choose autumn for the Alps

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illustration of this fact is the construction of the Dixence power-plant which has recently been undertaken. The Dixence river takes its source in the Valais mountains and flows through the Dix Valley which owes its peculiar name to an ancient legend according to which ten brigands are said to have established their headquarters there, from whence they pillaged the neighbouring districts. The tale runs that it was only by setting fire to the forests, where their hiding place was situated, that they were finally captured.

An artificial lake, 3 Kms. long, is to be built at an altitude of 2,000 m., from which the water will be conducted to the Rhone Valley, near Sion, after a drop of 1,750 m. It is the highest construction of the kind in the world, exceeding that of Ffully by about 100 m. which, until now, had held the world record. A 180,000 h.p. generating plant is to be set up there. The total expenditure for the various installations will amount to 73 million Swiss francs.

ELECTRIC APPARATUS.

During the past year 131,000 electric heating and cooking apparatus were set up in Switzerland. At the close of 1928, about 1,300,000 of these apparatus were in operation throughout the country, comprising 124,000 kitchen stoves, 70,000 boilers, 180,000 kettles, tea and coffee pots, 600,000 electric irons and 140,000 stoves. The proportion thus attained is that of about one apparatus for every three heads of the population. Were these apparatus to operate simultaneously, they would consume, roughly, ten times the quantity of electricity necessary to run all the electric trains on the Swiss railway lines, at a time of most intense traffic.

BUILDING ACTIVITY.

During the first half year of 1929, 1,600 resident buildings, comprising 6,000 lodgings, have been constructed in the 25 Swiss towns of over 10,000 inhabitants. During this same period nearly a hundred new plants for industrial purposes have been completed.

TRUSTS AND HOLDING COMPANIES.

At the close of 1928, there existed in Switzerland 770 limited companies created as Trusts and Holding Companies with a nominal capital of nearly 2 thousand million francs, i.e., 28% of the social capital of all Swiss Limited Companies. At the same period a capital of over 20 million francs was invested in 31 Swiss Holding Companies, which sum is equivalent to more than one half of this category of companies' total capital.

AN ENGLISH TRIBUTE.

The *Engineering Review* has recently published a highly complimentary article on the soundness of the industrial, commercial and financial position in Switzerland, with a particularly generous tribute to the efficiency of our industries. Following are a few extracts:

Much of the economic interest of Switzerland lies in the means by which the country has overcome its natural disadvantages. With a population of about four million, placed in the centre of Europe far away from the sea, compelled to import the bulk of its raw materials and some of its food, it has built up thriving industries and a strong financial position, mainly through its success in the export trade. Most of this trade consists necessarily of manufactures which go to all parts of the world, and its success is the more remarkable because not only most of the raw material has to be bought, but both it and the exported products have to bear a substantially heavier cost of transport than has to be paid by competitors. The prosperity of the export trade has naturally been accompanied by an increased purchasing power in the population, and, both for this reason and to supply the raw material of the industry, the imports of the country are larger than the exports. A report by Mr. M. Ashton Johnston, of the commercial Department of the British Legation at Bern, has recently been published by the Department of Overseas Trade (H.M. Stationery Office, price 1s. 6d. net).

Stable foreign trade can be built up only by a country whose financial basis is sound. In this respect Switzerland is particularly well off. Its public funds have been administered with prudence, its banking organisations are highly developed, its money market has been providing the lowest rates in Europe, its currency stands normally round about par within the limits of the gold points, and through the stabilisation of the exchange of neighbouring countries, especially France and Italy, and the conclusion of various

commercial treaties, its foreign trade has benefited considerably. Agriculture, indeed has been passing through a critical time, which, however, now shows signs of coming to an end, and there is reason to hope that measures now being taken will restore the decreased purchasing power of the agricultural classes. . . .

. . . . When these facts are put together, they show that the engineering and electrical industries in Switzerland are being conducted economically, and with the success which engineers have long recognised in their technical achievements. They show also grounds for believing not only that the country as a whole has by no means reached the limits of its economical development, but that active measures are being taken to enable it to do justice to that development as it may be made.

CHOOSE AUTUMN for the ALPS.

The woman traveller who wants to get to know the country she visits will do wisely to choose an off-season, especially when this off-season gives her a good promise of better weather.

The crowds at the height of Summer and Winter in the Alps internationalise the scene in the least satisfactory sense, and the Swiss people have their hands too full with their annual crisis of business to present their most characteristic aspect to the tourist.

In the height of Summer the cows are up in the pasture, at their highest, grazing the last strips of herbage that struggle up almost to the glacier level and fleck the gaunt cliffs with verdure.

Keats, after gazing down the Northern precipices of Ben Nevis, could exclaim, with one of those flashes of insight into activities which he did not share, that are the privilege of the poet, "And precipices show untrodden green." Thereby voicing in one word, "untrodden," one of the most secret springs of the mountaineer's passion.

But in the Alps, there are not many patches of untrodden green—cows and goats will usually graze them, borne up aloft like small balloons by economic pressure! And after the cows go, the herdsmen and fruitiers, the experts who make those gruyères and other cheeses.

But if you want to see the real life of the country, you must go in September, when the work is lighter and the cows have been brought lower down to the valley to gather round the cheese maker's chalet.

The women who make such an idyllic picture haymaking in August are in reality being worn down to exhaustion beneath a load of almost overwhelming labour. The hay has got to be got in, and most of the men are away in Savoy making cheeses, up in the *alpage* with the cows, or acting as guides, and the women must toil with the rake from very dawn till well after nightfall, with an hour or two's sleep in the mid-heat of the afternoon.

Every Alpine visitor has seen those prostrate figures, in their dark brown home-spun, lying face downwards in the fields—a sight which moved Ruskin, in describing the Mountain Gloom, to a passage of prose which, without his knowing it strayed into verse and even into rhyme:

"For them there is neither rest nor relaxation of labour.

Black bread, rude roof, dark night, laborious day;

Weary arm at sunset and life ebbs away."

But later in the year you can see the domestic crafts—the spinning and weaving, the embroidery the gathering together of the home life in the ancient wooden chalets with their overhanging eaves and geranium-filled window-boxes.

For the active walker Autumn offers as good an opportunity as any season. To give the considered verdict of one of the best informed experts on Alpine conditions, Mr. Arnold Lunn in his "Switzerland," writes as follows:

"It is in Autumn that the Alps are least visited; why, I have often wondered, for the weather is usually far more settled in October than in the Summer, and a three or four weeks' spell of unbroken fine weather is the rule rather than the exception, and October is perhaps even more beautiful than May.

"The mellow, golden light of October subdues all distances and tones down the harsher contrasts, and is yet so crystal-clear that the details of distant ranges are revealed with a precision which, in Summer, would augur the immin-

ence of rain. It is this contrast of tenderness and clarity which is the chief glory of those long, unbroken weeks of sunshine which we associate with the Alpine Autumn."

What he has to say of October equally applies to September. About the middle of the month there may be a small fall of snow when most of the visitors vanish and the season officially closes, but in the weeks that follow, the lover of quiet and solitude can find a new perfection in the Alps.

You may meet a marmot-hunter with his gun—the practice too common in some valleys of digging out these little creatures in their Winter retreat is very heavily fined, and quite rightly, as it entails the destruction of the entire family. But to shoot an old one is not an unsportsmanlike proceeding. Marmot ragout, heavily spiced and cooked in red wine, is a tasty dish, and the marmot's grease is alleged to be a sovereign remedy for rheumatism.

The discovery of such items of country lore, together with the fellowship of the village, are the rewards of the traveller who is willing to break away from the beaten track, not only in choice of place but in choice of season.

(Morning Post).

BOOK NOTICES.

The Great St. Bernard Pass and Hospice, by Jane Dee Thompson. (The Epworth Press; 2s.).

An exceedingly well-written account of the Monastery of St. Bernard, of its situation, its famous dogs and its great and humane mission. The latter portion of the book is devoted to an account of the life of the saint who founded this world-famous hospice. The book is illustrated by several interesting and pleasantly reproduced photographs.

Wanted: Translations into English.

Will readers who have the time and inclination occasionally to translate German or French articles into English, for publication in the *Swiss Observer*, kindly send in their names.

GESCHÄFTS - ANZEIGE

Anstatt durch Zirkular, gestatte ich mir auf diesem Wege meinen verehrten Landsleuten anzuzeigen, dass ich das von Herrn F. W. Rühmann anno 1887 g'gründete, sich eines sehr guten Rufes erfreuende,

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Erfreuen Sie mich durch Ihren werten Besuch, ich werde dafür sorgen, dass Sie wiederkommen!
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The Film depicting *Life and Scenes of the Patriotic Rally* at Hendon, in celebration of the Swiss National Day will be screened at 7 p.m., and will be followed by: *Locarno, Engelberg and Wintersport* and *"D'Bärner Mutze als Filmschauspieler"*

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