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The Swiss Observer

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ON LIVING IN SWITZERLAND.

(Re-printed from *The Listener*.)

There are plenty of us British in Switzerland. Of course, in the month immediately following Christmas, the place swarms with British winter-sporters (mere temporaries, pitiable make-believes), but after they have returned to the repair of their water pipes, hundreds of us remain. This is a great residential district for the British. Within an hour's walk from my house you could, on Sunday, reach any one of five English churches, perhaps six—an indication, isn't it? Since I first lived here, over a quarter of a century ago, my countrymen have, I find, overrun the countryside.

Talking of my house, many must have seen it, for every passenger from Paris to Constantinople as he dashes along the shore of the Lake of Geneva and looks out admirably from the landward carriage window, must have noted it placed on a shelf high above him.

My front view is one of France, over my Swiss lake to the wonderful Savoy Alps—for symmetry and dignity it seems to be the grandest range in the whole world. My side windows at the east look towards the Rhône Valley, and the sharp upturned, cutting edge of the Dent du Midi. On another side I look down over green hills to the mile-distant towers and buttresses of the castle of Blonay, and from the remaining side I look up a wild gorge to a range of pine-clad mountains.

When I decided to go and live in Switzerland all my friends wrote and asked me, 'Are you ill?' Many do come to this part of Switzerland for health (and get it, too), but I came for beauty; the larger view of things that comes of daily looking up at objects high above oneself; the deeper view that comes from gazing down into the mirror lake; the widened sympathy that comes of speaking another language. Surely we all appreciate beauty. The night view from my house, for instance, with the shore of the lake beneath me, outlined in the dark night by a million twinkling spots of light, as by glittering spangles on black velvet. A man does not need bad health as a motive for life in Switzerland! At any rate, I do not!

Now a word on the people of Switzerland. There are places in the world, I was early told, and have since confirmed, where every prospect pleases and only man is vile. A good index of a country's character is its children. This is a land of happy, healthy children. Switzerland is safe for women and children. And you see no cruelty to animals.

Then though this is a land of two religions, and three (or rather four) languages, it is a land of peace. Peace! Every able-bodied man has been drilled for national defence—but for defence only. It is a country of peace—internal peace and peace with its neighbours.

With beauty and health, and first-rate education cheap, or free of charge, with a temperate summer and a sunny, dry winter, and a friendly, honest people, a great proportion of whom speak our language, no wonder we British are settling there increasingly.

But I pause in my panegyric to mention one little practical matter. There are lots of taxes here, but to a beaten-down Briton their grand total does not look very alarming. The other day I rang up my Swiss lawyer, and without giving me any names he let me have the figures concerning one of his clients—a retired British army officer with a pension of between £400 and £500 a year.

This man has bought a small villa for £1,300 or £1,400. His income tax is treated in a way special to foreigners. To put him on the back for his common sense in coming to live amongst them, the Vaudois (for I am taking the Canton of Vaud as my example) exempt him from income tax for his first twelve months. After that his income tax as that of a foreigner will be calculated in a special way that really changes it so that it is

not an income tax any more. Altogether then his taxes and rates (for I lump all of them together) will amount to, say, £22 or £23, and when he has paid that he has finished.

I have just asked an Englishman living in an English town on an income of the same amount what he pays for taxes and rates, and I find his total is about £42—nearly double! There are some people living there whose incomes are higher in proportion to the rental values of their houses who are paying only one-fifth or less of what they paid in Britain. By the way, that man would be insured against fire, willy-nilly, not by a company but by the Canton. As everybody is compelled to insure, and as the Canton insists on all houses being built in as fireproof a way as possible, and sweeps your chimneys for you regularly, they are able to give you a very low rate—as it seems to me, judging from my own policy—about 1s. for every £100 of value.

I must say I admire the practical Vaudois for making fire insurance compulsory. The careless householder is saved from himself. Rich and poor have their fire risks covered. The insurance is collected like a tax. You cannot forget it.

But some of you do not want to live out of your old country, or, if you do, can't. Very well, this is the country for holidays. I do not think everybody realises that it costs little, if any, more to come to Switzerland than to go to a British resort or make a tour in Britain. There are plenty of good clean pensions and smaller hotels in the lovely countryside where I live which will give you board and lodging for a sum of 7s. 6d. or 8s. a day.

"Come to Britain" is a good slogan, but in the interests of world understanding it ought to have its complement in a slogan for Britons: 'Go abroad!' Switzerland has, in every one of its towns, offices especially equipped with a kind-hearted multi-lingual staff, trained to help foreigners.

I am going to quote the composer Mendelssohn. He had been touring Italy, and then came into Switzerland. He walked from my neighbouring town of Vevey over to the Bernese Oberland by such a route that if I had been at my present front window I should have seen him toiling up our mountain side with his knapsack on his back. And at the village just below my house he stopped for breakfast and hired a nice clean, intelligent little girl as guide. He says he much enjoyed her artless, happy conversation.

And that night, at Château d'Oex, he wrote home to his sister and said: 'Really, after the travelling experiences I've had, I've been almost moved to tears on reaching this district, as I noted the happy faces everywhere and the complete absence of beggary and of cross-tempered officialdom. I must close my letter,' he goes on, 'with this praise of Canton Vaud. Of all the countries that I know, this is the most peaceful and the most lovely—and the people are peaceful and lovely, too. If I were free to live where I wished, this is, of all the places in the world, the one where I should wish to spend the rest of my days.' As my readers may have gathered, Mendelssohn and I agree.

Percy A. Scholes.

HOLIDAYS IN SWITZERLAND.

By arrangement with the "Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger" and the "Pro Juventute" in Switzerland it is now possible to receive for holidays a large number of Swiss children born in England at the two centres of Rüthi and Engelberg during the coming summer.

The charges will be between Frs. 3.— and Frs. 3.50 per day, and the fares to and from Switzerland will bring the total outlay to between £7 and £7 7s. for a fortnight.

The children will be under the direct supervision of a carefully-chosen guide and supervisor. Part of the holiday will be spent in travelling through Switzerland, in order to show the children the beauties of our homeland. We trust that a large number of parents will make use of this very fine opportunity to let their children enjoy Switzerland.

All applications should be made during the month of April—in any case not later than the 4th of May—to the Council of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Swiss House, 34-35, Fitzroy Square, W.1.

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HOME NEWS

FEDERAL.

FEDERAL FINANCES.—It is a pleasure to record that the Federal finances have at last actually turned the corner from continuous deficits to an actual surplus. The year 1928 has resulted in a surplus of 23 millions of francs over expenditure. It is true that the deficits of the Federal administration, to which our people have grown all too accustomed since the war, have of late years been gradually reduced. Last year (1927) the balance was on the wrong side only by 1.5 millions. We sincerely hope that henceforth only surpluses will have to be recorded.

AFTER THE "RED" SUNDAY IN BASLE.

—The Federal Council has wisely decided to refrain from prosecuting certain prominent Communists for disregarding or trying to disregard the order prohibiting the "Red" Meeting at Basle on Palm Sunday. The costs of a prosecution through the Federal Assizes would be altogether out of proportion to the actual importance and influences of those political agitators whose aims have been so successfully circumvented. It remains to be seen whether the Cantonal Governments will consider it worth their while to institute proceedings on their own.

FIRST OF AUGUST COLLECTION, 1930 FOR SWISS SCHOOLS ABROAD.—According to the proposal of the First of August Fête Committee, the Federal Council has decided to devote the proceeds of the collections taken in connection with the next Federal Fête to Swiss schools abroad.

SWISS EXHIBITION FOR HYGIENE AND SPORT.—The Central Committee for the first Swiss Exhibition for Hygiene and Sport, to be held in Berne in 1931, has approved the articles of association of the co-operative Society who will be responsible for the organisation of the Exhibition.

LOCAL.

553 KANDIDATEN FUER 200 GROSSRATS-MANDATE IM AARGAU.—Die Vorbereitungen für die am 7. April 1929 fallenden Grossratswahlen im Aargau sind nun so weit gediehen, dass der Wähler sich im Besitze der Kandidatenliste befindet. In den elf Bezirken, welche die Wahlkreise bilden, machen sich fünf Parteien mit insgesamt 553 Kandidaten die Gunst der 65.000 Stimmberechtigten streitig. Mit der grössten Zahl an Kandidaten, nämlich mit 152, ziehen die Sozialdemokraten in den Wahlkampf. Sie besetzen im abgedankten Grossen Rat auch am meisten Ratsessel: 61. An zweiter Stelle folgt die Bauern- und Bürgerpartei mit 132 Kandidaten für die Neuwahl und 47 bisherigen Ratsherren. Die freisinnig-demokratische Volkspartei hat 125 Nominierungen namhaft gemacht für bisher 44 Mandate. Von der katholisch-konservativen Partei kandidieren 89 Mann, bisher 45 Mandate. Am anspruchsvollsten rückt die Evangelische Volkspartei auf, die bisher drei Ratsessel innehatte und nun mit 55 Kandidaten den Kampf aufnimmt. Von dem Sicherungsmittel der Kumulation haben alle Parteien (ausgenommen die Evangelische Volkspartei) sehr zurückhaltend Gebrauch gemacht. Man sieht in Kreisen der Parteikomitees immer mehr ein, wie die Kumulation dem Wähler zuwider ist und infolgedessen die Werbekraft der Kandidatenliste schwächt. Es verzerrt mit der Kumulation gepanzerte Kandidaten die Sozialdemokraten 30, die Freisinnigen 25, die Bauern- und Bürgerpartei 21, die Katholisch-Konservativen 12 und die Evangelische Volkspartei 6. Das sind zusammen 94, bei insgesamt 200 Mandaten.

N.

PERSONALKONFLIKT AN DEN SCHWEIZER BUEHNEN.—Zwischen den schweizerischen Theaterdirektoren als Arbeitgebern und dem darstellenden Personal (Solo und Chor) besteht seit dem Jahre 1922 ein Tarifvertrag auf der Grundlage der Bestimmungen des schweizerischen Obligationenrechtes über den Gesamtarbeitsvertrag. Nach diesem Vertrag sind die Anstellungsverhältnisse der darstellenden Mitglieder in einer das Personal