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The Swiss Observer

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HOME NEWS

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FEDERAL.

SWITZERLAND ON GUARD.

The "Observer" writes:—

The Swiss will tell you proudly that their country owed its neutrality in the world war to the fact that the Kaiser attended the Swiss Grand Army manoeuvres in 1913, and was much impressed by what he saw.

To-day they are in an even better state of preparedness than they were in 1914. Their army, admirably trained and equipped, is capable of being expanded into something more than 400,000 men.

A special defence force, composed of men inhabiting frontier regions, is ready for immediate service. They keep their full equipment at home with them; and each man knows just where to report and what he is to do if trouble starts. Last year, when a special test was made, they were at their posts, almost to a man, within a few hours.

In the event of an invasion it will be the task of this frontier force to retard the advance of an enemy for at least twenty-four hours, so that other units of the army can have time to mobilise.

Hard Task for Invader.

But the fulfilment of this task will not be left entirely to man-power. Some idea of what an invader may expect can be gleaned from the preparations made last September at the time of the Munich crisis. Every road or bridge leading into the country was heavily mined, and all preparations made to blow them up at a moment's notice.

Tank traps have been installed on nearly all the Swiss highways. If you motor through the country to-day you will notice in the roadway patches of concrete studded with rows of miniature "manhole-covers." In time of emergency these covers are removed and thick steel posts, embedded in the layers of concrete beneath. No tank in existence could plough a way through these posts.

The traps are invariably placed at points in the road where no detour is possible, and where protective bluffs or other features of the terrain offer ideal emplacements for deadly anti-tank guns.

All Passes Fortified.

Though you might never suspect it, the mountain that rises majestically before you probably shelters impregnable fortifications sunk deep in its flanks. Such, for instance, is the case at St. Maurice, which commands the upper reaches of the Rhone Valley. The St. Gotthard, St. Bernard, and other alpine passes all are heavily fortified; and, within the last two years, the defences along the German frontier have been greatly strengthened.

The Swiss have only a small air force; but they are plentifully supplied with anti-aircraft equipment, and their anti-aircraft guns are said to excel those of almost every other country in Europe.

Within the past two years the army has been completely reorganised. A few weeks ago the Federal Council reduced the minimum age for service from twenty to eighteen years, and at the same time it provided for the recruiting of men between the ages of forty-eight and sixty for service in the Landwehr.

★ SWISS NATIONAL EXHIBITION

ZURICH

MAY 6—

OCT. 29, 1939

● See our Country at Work and Play—our Arts and Crafts and Nationhood.

● This truly wonderful Exhibition, staged in a park-like setting along the shore of the Lake at Zurich itself, must not be missed.

ASK FOR THE ILLUSTRATED SWISS NATIONAL EXHIBITION FOLDER

INFORMATION from the Swiss Railways & State Travel Bureau, 11-B Regent Street, London, S.W.1. Phone: WHitehall 9851.

BASLE FAIR.

Federal-Councillor, Dr. E. Wetter, made a remarkable speech at the Official Day of the Basle Fair; in reviewing the financial and economic situation of Switzerland he said that the public debt stood at 1,990,000,000f. (about £99,500,000) at the end of 1938, and that it would rise to 4,000,000,000f. (about £200,000,000), or 1,000f. (about £50) per head of the population within the four coming years. The increase would be due to the redemption of the railways debt and to expenditure on big public works and on national defence. National defence had cost more than 1,000,000,000f. (about £50,000,000) during the past three years. The Swiss people, he said, were ready to make all the necessary sacrifices for their defence, as only independence could enable them to carry out the Government's economic and financial programme. They wanted their small home to remain completely free.

A GENEROUS GIFT.

The firm of Nestle's has given an amount of 20,000 frs. towards the new building for a children's hospital in Zurich.

SWISS BANKS' SEND GOLD ABROAD.

Disquieted by German troop concentrations in the region of Lake Constance, banks in Basle, Schaffhausen, Zurich, Lucerne and other cities of Northern Switzerland are shipping gold out of the country or to Geneva and Lausanne.

More than £2,000,000 worth of gold was received from these sources by banks in Geneva. All of it was brought to Geneva under guard in motor lorries. Within the last week shipments of considerable value have been made by aeroplane to Paris and London.

Nearly 60 per cent. of the Government's gold reserves, totalling more than £150,000,000, has been sent to London or New York. This action was taken soon after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia.

The remainder, slightly more than 40 per cent., which under Swiss law must be kept within the country, as coverage for currency in circulation, is reported to have been stored in the St. Gotthard fortifications.

SWISS BUYING IRISH HORSES.

The Swiss Government Remount Commission, M. von Gunten and Captain Eghi, are at present in Ireland, where they are buying a large number of selected horses for the Swiss Army.

REFUGEE JESUITS IN SWITZERLAND.

Permission has been given by the Federal Government for the teachers and pupils of the Canisianum, the Jesuit College at Innsbruck, of which the buildings were expropriated by the Germans last year, to remain in Switzerland until July 15th, 1940. Although the Canton of Valais is willing that the college should remain at Sion-Sitten, Jesuits have been banned in Switzerland since 1848. Most of the students who came from Innsbruck are Americans, and will have finished their courses and gone before July, 1940.

SWISS-CZECH PAYMENTS SUSPENDED.

The Swiss Government has decided to suspend payment of sums owed by Swiss debtors to Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. Henceforth payments will be made into the Swiss National Bank, later to be transferred after agreement has been reached with Germany.

NEW LEGATIONS.

The Federal Council has put a proposal to the two Chambers to raise the General Consulates in Caracas (Peru) and Dublin to the status of a Legation to be in charge of a Chargé d'Affaires.