

"La vraie civilisation"

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it passes, but in order that the spring sun may melt the snow many weeks earlier than would be the case on the north slope. Moreover, if the road runs for many miles high up on the slopes of the Meien Valley, where it passes to a large extent through sections in the rock and over artificial embankments instead of in the bed of the valley where less labour and expense would have been required, this is not without its reason. In winter the avalanches pass right over the road into the valley without covering it with tremendous masses of snow, and even the avalanches on the other side of the valley, which often sweep up the opposite slope, cannot reach it and damage its bridges and other constructions.

The new Susten road is also laid out with a view to the villages and agriculture in the districts through which it passes. The first principle was to take as little cultivated land as possible in order not unduly to reduce the already meagre means of existence of the inhabitants. For this reason the road has been let into the mountain-side at more than one place where it could quite easily have been built on the flat. It was the aim, however, that the road should link up the solitary villages but not dissect them and it has therefore been led round these villages and hamlets, even if considerable additional expense was entailed.

Finally long stretches of the old narrow road which the two cantons, Berne and Uri, built already 130 years ago were made available to pedestrians by connecting them with the motor road which occasionally passes over them. All these problems were solved in the best possible way to make the Susten road the perfect alpine pass.

In this way with the considerable financial assistance of the Confederation — in accordance with the constitutional structure of Switzerland — the two cantons concerned have not only realised a magnificent achievement in the Susten road, but also a means of communication of the utmost importance and a work of great aesthetic value.

This route is now ready for thousands of visitors, from Switzerland and all other European countries and even from other continents who are already looking forward to visiting a hitherto unexplored part of Switzerland and seeing one of her proudest achievements in road-engineering.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

We intend to go to press on Friday, March 29th, 1946, and take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their enlarged subscriptions:—

Miss A. Wiedmer, A. Rueff, H. Monney, A. G. Pluess, C. Hagenbach, E. Dubois, F. Eggar, C. Baerlocher, A. Steiner, A. Knapp, E. Steiner, L. J. Faivre, R. A. Merz, Mrs. Th. Lunghi-Rezzonico, S. Lorsignol, O. E. Simmoth, A. Biucchi, H. Frutiger, M. Lienhard, L. Lindhurst, Mrs. H. Sharp, M. Wintsch, R. Back, A. Hohlfeld, A. Strittmatter, M. Zullig.

'LA VRAIE CIVILISATION.'

(This entertaining exhilarating account of a trip to Switzerland is reprinted, with acknowledgement, from the Oxford paper "Isis," February 6th.)

The one o'clock London — Paris train from Victoria (the time varies according to the tides) is filled with English and French business men, American army officers, U.N.R.R.A. service women with bright enamelled faces ready for the Continent, and a sprinkling of frightened prostitutes returning to their native land.

At Newhaven and Dieppe the completion of the thirty-three forms required for a visit to Switzerland bears fruit in the shape of two single tired stamps from an official who, on the French side, wears no uniform. In the queue at the douane a little French girl whispers to her mother, 'Mais, alors, tout le monde parle anglais, maman.'

Dieppe bears the traumata as well as the scars of war — a restless cafard, seasoned by the lawless elements of ex-prisoners and discharged soldiers. From their first-class compartments passengers have ring-side glimpses of the brawls outside waterfront cafés. The train, well-lit and heated, and infinitely more comfortable than its English counterpart, proceeds slowly through the night and arrives in Paris at 5.30 a.m. the next morning. Those who did not have cars to meet them were just unlucky. There are no taxis in Paris, there is little food, the electricity is switched off at 7.30 on alternate sides of the Seine every morning, and — above all — THERE IS NO HEAT. The average Parisian is cold, cold, cold, all over him, all of the time.

Though Paris still has its charm, the intellectual atmosphere of a city that names its streets after authors, the somnolent *je-ne-sais-quoi* of the quays, yet it has tasted morally — far more than Naples — of the aftermath of war. The famous joke is still current where a German officer, entering Picasso's studio, exclaimed in horror 'Did you do all this?' To which the painter replied 'No; you did.' Most English people imagine (if such a thing is possible) that Paris bread was put back on the ration, after having been taken off for a month, because there wasn't enough to go round. The truth is that the Parisians were so hungry that, when bread was de-rationed, they made themselves gravely ill eating too much of it.

Nevertheless it is possible to eat 'trop bien,' as one Frenchman put it to me, in the many brilliant little 'marché noir' restaurants dotted around Montmartre — Le Rendezvous des Bretons, Le Petit St. Benoît, Le Gafner, to name three. Paris still lives, as Sartre, considered her most important literary figure to-day, claims.

From Le Bourget aerodrome, Airfrance (a concern which, I think, is optimistic in its aspirations to 'span the world') takes you to Geneva in a pleasantly converted JU troop-carrier. I felt I was about the only Christian in the aeroplane and longed for a false nose. Out of those I travelled with, I was later to meet four — still wearing their vast gold Croix de Lorraine (to show their patriotism) — in the Palace, Gstaad.

At Cointrin airport, Geneva, most of us bought a large bag of bananas, tangerines and grapes, costing a few centimes. As I had no Swiss money, my first job was to telephone. I was surprised to find

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that, even in the central post office in Geneva, I was not allowed to get the number myself. I was courteously given a chair and a magazine and was respectfully requested to wait whilst the assistant would do her utmost to obtain the number for me, in less than immediately, if monsieur would but possess himself in patience.

Outside, the shops, their neon lights glittering through the growing dusk of the lake, dazzled my eyes with watches, silk stockings, perfume — the luxuries, in fact, of the world, for Geneva to-day is the world's shop-front. You could even buy there, if you wanted to, the latest model Austin or Morris. But not many want to.

A fast train to Lausanne, where I had too much caviare for fourteen francs, another change at Montreux, and then round the winking lake up the Bernese Oberland railway to Gstaad, where I was met by a sleighman who covered me in heavy furs and took me, bells ringing through the clear night, to the chalet that was my destination.

The rest of my stay — for one who had seen the seamy rather than the dreamy side of Europe for six years — was too good to be true. The blue clarity of atmosphere, the suffused whiteness of snow, the coruscating brilliance of the ice; at night, gleaming lakes, ripe, effulgent moons, good 'skis' and 'shees' and san fairy ann.

In brief, Gstaad has become a centre for displaced royalty, having beaten St. Moritz, where the Palace has but recently opened, by a short head. Davos, with its fog of sanatoria, is less popular with the 'socialites' than with the skiers. Zürich stands out in my memory as a gem, a showpiece of material prosperity. The Veltliner Keller there is better than ever. It specializes, as always, in young goat, and the Veltliner wine is excellent. Should you order crêpes suzettes there, you get about a dozen, going through all the liqueurs (especially brandy, benedictine, curacao, cherry brandy and, strangely enough, dom) and finishing with gin and whisky. You are then asked which you liked best and given two of those to be going on with.

The standard of skiing has naturally improved tremendously throughout Switzerland during the war, particularly the jumping. There are also some very promising young girl skaters to be seen there.

The great question for every foreigner in Switzerland is that of money. Unless you are lucky, you will not succeed in getting Swiss francs in England. However lucky you are, you certainly won't in France (the reply of every 'bureau de change' still rings in my ears: 'notre pauvre franc'). In Switzerland you can buy English pounds two a penny — unofficially of course. I met only one other Englishman during my stay there. He was a millionaire's son and hadn't a bean. American soldiers on leave are left uncomfortably (and, I must confess, amusingly) short. This may account for their fine record of behaviour there, which has made them, as Arnold Lunn put it in the latest copy of the British Ski Year Book, 'such excellent ambassadors of their country.' I bought a book with an Italian girl. She paid twelve francs for hers. Coming out of the shop, she gave me a happy smile.

'That cost me 1,000 lire,' she said.

Everything is obtainable, everything — relatively — cheap. (I usually paid three to five francs for a night's dancing in a bar, which included three or four

liqueurs and perhaps two glasses of whisky.) The Swiss are looking after themselves, physically and morally. Throughout Switzerland a truly magnificent feeling of trust and goodwill prevails. For instance, when it became hot one could leave one's ski coat, full of money, out on the hills with perfect confidence of finding it there later in the day. My guide was quite insulted when I first doubted this. The shadow of fear has not visited this country. Maybe the secret is that the Swiss have all they want. All I know is that, returning to England through Paris (which cost me three times as much as before, owing to the devaluation of the franc and the consequent increase in prices to meet that devaluation) it was depressing to find such lack of trust, to find a country where, to quote Cyril Connolly in January's *Horizon*, the 'consumption of tobacco and alcohol has practically doubled, you will pay two hundred and fifty pounds for a hideous leather armchair which Ribbentrop may have sat in, you will plank down three quid for a bottle of Scotch, you can't be trusted with a railway towel or a piece of hotel soap, the club nail-scissors have to be kept on a chain, you'll queue a mile for a black market lipstick, you talk about 'putting the vedge in the fridge,' and smoke all through meals, your manners are dreadful, you're full of hate against other countries, you talk of Frogs and Yanks and Wops, and write to *The Times* against Picasso.'

It is the precise absence of this which characterizes Switzerland to-day.

In one of our best-known daily papers the Paris correspondent recently quoted a Frenchman as having complained to him of 'la nouvelle mentalité' with the words, 'For instance, if a doctor had too many supplementary petrol coupons on his hands in England, he'd take them back.' I wonder!

The contrast between a junior common room in 'respectable' Oxford, where the weekly papers vanish after a day, and the third-class compartment of a Swiss train, where the railway company confidently leaves magazines for the comfort of the meanest peasants, is too great to be anything but depressing.

There are many things that make a man more profoundly unhappy than seeing people killed in battle. Until the mind develops its callous veneer, he is shocked at watching carnage — but the shock is at the physical mutilation, not at its implication. A hungry child is far more significant of the indifference of man to a civilised life. Grabbing the last corner seat in a crowded railway carriage is a better gauge of our development than the barbarisms of the bomber.

EASTER GIFT BOOKS.

We wish to draw the attention of our readers again to two recent publications of the Lomshie Research Centre for Anthropology and Race Biography, Londonderry, which were advertised in this paper, namely: "The Swiss Contribution to Western Civilisation" by Dr. R. E. G. Armattee, with a foreword by Professor Julian Huxley, F.R.S. (5/3 post free), and "The Golden Age of West African Civilisation" by the same author (8/6 post free).

Both books are making interesting reading and are suitable for Easter gifts. They can be obtained at the Office of the "Swiss Observer," 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.