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I FIND TRANQUILLITY OF SPIRIT IN GENTLE SWITZERLAND.

By R. G. JESSEL.

We reproduce herewith, by courtesy of the Editor, an article, which has appeared in the July issue of the "BRITISH WEEKLY".

It is rarely difficult to find high moral arguments (or their second cousin) for not doing something one cannot afford. Since I came home from Germany in 1946, I have fiercely set my face against foreign holidays, though my prejudice has not gone unchallenged in the family.

"England is best," say I, "and a week in Borrowdale is better than a month in Brittany. It is also cheaper." My wife also loves the English Lakes; but not having been abroad for twelve years, she loves them less exclusively.

She gently reminds me that a comparison between different types of excellence is unprofitable, that foreign travel broadens the mind and the waist-line, and that if I persist in my new-fangled insularity indefinitely she will reluctantly become a convert to separate holidays for married people. Mercifully, the children are still very young and adore Anglesey. We will cross that bridge when we reach it.

Her attitude compelled me, however, to re-examine my own not very profound argument. In the last year or two a number of our friends have been to France, Belgium and Switzerland for their holidays. They returned intolerable bores; worse still, gastronomic bores.

"Let me tell you about the meals," began Mrs. Cauliflower, almost before we had shaken hands. "The things in the grocers' shops — and all unrationed!" sighed Miss Apple-blossom. Then followed an account of a typical day's menu at the Hotel de la Paix. If the strophe was bad, the antistrophe was worse — a monologue on the nylons purchased without coupons.

Occasionally (but not as often as I should have liked) this was followed by a little fumbling in the handbag and the presentation of a dainty souvenir. But the whole recital was dreadful. These returned travellers are really neither gourmets nor epicures, but intelligent, temperate persons. They did not come home from abroad like this in old times. Now, like the unlovely locust, they miss nothing.

Am I being smug and uncharitable? Yet other friends have confessed to the same hatred for the returned British tourist, with variations on the theme. Major Lupin has evolved his own scathing technique. "So you like Brussels, Mrs. Cauliflower?" he murmurs. "Ah, Brussels! I shall never forget the day my regiment liberated it in 1944 — the garlands of flowers, the cheering crowds, the golden girls. No hotel bills, no passports then — they wouldn't let us pay a sou for anything. I shouldn't care to go back as a mere tourist."

Ours is an unjust world. I had no craving for a Continental holiday this year, or next, or the year after. Then with only five days' notice, fate offered me a business trip to Switzerland, a short tour planned by Swiss tourist interests for the benefit of British journalists to show them that Sir Stafford's £35 is not

such a miserly sum as it might appear. Were our far more deserving wives invited? They were not.

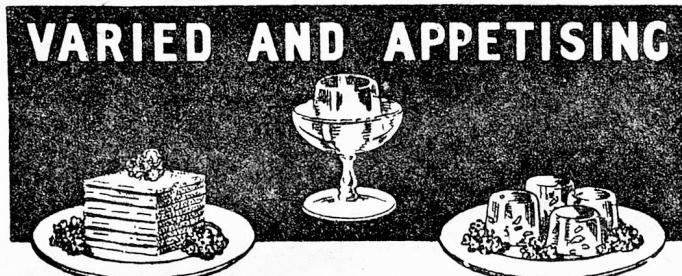
Of our impressions on that tour I will only say here that under the new regulations the English visitor can have a perfectly good two weeks' holiday (or, with discretion, three), and that the Mrs. Cauliflowers and Miss Apple-blossoms of this world will still have some francs left for silk stockings and other choice booty.

But mainly I must confess to a complete change of heart towards holidays abroad which engulfed me as we advanced from Montreux to Lucerne, from Lugano to Lake Maggiore.

For more than two years I have been quite wrong. In pre-war days I visited most European countries, Switzerland included. During the war I became moderately familiar with four or five of them. So when our Dakota touched down the other day at Zurich airfield I was not altogether a starry-eyed innocent. I came, saw, and was conquered, and I am disturbed that it should have happened, and curious to know why.

Partly, it must have been the courtesy and gentleness of ordinary Swiss people — the boy selling papers, the café waitress, the shop assistant. You will object that this is just part of the stock in trade of any tourist industry; the Swiss have the sense to see that hearts are trumps. None the less, the impact on the British traveller of 1948 is shattering — and so is his return to London.

The Times in September, 1939, reported some hard-headed public man as saying that kindness is always



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the first war casualty. It certainly is. It would take more than a suave Swiss hotelier to make me apologise for all Britain did and suffered in the war. But it is healthy to be reminded how shrill and militant in our ordinary social and business affairs we have become in the last nine years.

We all know our rights; we neither take nor permit liberties in dealings with others. In our present society most people feel it necessary to be permanently watching the milkman, the tobacconist, the clerk at the Town Hall, in case he "tries a fast one." The manager and the union secretary, the M.P. and the prospective candidate — and the housewife — have learnt to keep their eyes wide open. We are all watchdogs now, and the cacophony of yapping in these islands is almost deafening.

"It's pretty noisy in here, isn't it?" I bellowed at a mill-girl the other day in a cotton mill near Manchester. "Is it, love?" she shouted back, and added: "We come not to notice it at all." That is the terrible thing about our modern shrillness.

The food in Switzerland? Yes, Mrs. Cauliflower, it is still superlative, even in quite small hotels. And here again it is surely a good thing for us to be reminded how much worse one's daily meals at home and in the canteen are than they used to be. It is nothing to be ashamed of, since we have just fought a war. But it is something to be dissatisfied with, and this dissatisfaction need have nothing to do with politics.

Most of us males are extremely ignorant of and conservative about food, and are today much better fed than we deserve. But it is almost worth going to Switzerland to be reminded how appallingly badly the ordinary English hotel cook (I dare not say housewife) handles potatoes and fish. And perversely we have come to take it for granted, and even like it that way....

Switzerland's Natural beauties seem lovelier this year than I can ever remember them. It is, of course, an illusion. It is we, and not Switzerland, that have changed, and as our lives have become gradually greyer and grittier, the clean pure air of the mountains and the timeless silence of the meadows and terraces affect us more acutely. But indoors as well one is aware that the Swiss have contrived to keep alive something near to the pre-war way of living. Please do not think that I regard this way as better than our own, or purchased at anything but a great price. But here, in the very centre of troubled Europe, is a small and exquisitely lovely country which by remaining neutral in two wars has contrived to keep intact something which all other European countries have lost.

Tranquillity of spirit partly describes it. This the Swiss want to share with their neighbours, and we in turn (and the Germans, for that matter) would greatly benefit by sending holiday-makers to benefit from it for a few weeks a year. The 200,000 or 300,000 visitors authorised by the Board of Trade this year are only a fraction of what Switzerland needs and can absorb. Is there really no way of stepping-up this total?

The answer is that of course there are ways, if we want to do it enough and think it worth-while. The Swiss could make it easier for us by buying British goods more eagerly and accepting long-term deliveries. But if their hotels stay empty much longer they will not be buying anything much anywhere.

FLAG THAT KNOWS NO FRONTIERS.

By JAMES DREW.

(This article is reprinted from the "Yorkshire Evening News," by kind permission of the Editor.)

Just 84 years ago there appeared on a field of battle a symbol entirely new to the world.

It was carried on the arm of a Swiss surgeon whose name is remembered by few people to-day, but the courageous and idealistic action of the man who carried it as his sole protection in the thick of battle will shortly be finding an important echo in the modern world.

The then strange talisman worn on the doctor's arm, on that momentous occasion during the Prusso-Danish War, was a plain red cross on a white background — now recognised and respected the world over as the emblem of the International Red Cross, which has called in Stockholm this August the first International Conference it has been possible to hold since 1938.

Most people think of the International Red Cross purely as an organisation which looks after the wounded and prisoners in time of war. But this, one of the world's few really effective international bodies, has many beneficent activities in time of peace — as the recent appointment of the head of Sweden's Red Cross Society to the ticklish role of peacemaker in Palestine well illustrates.

Here, for example, are just a few of the numerous tasks for suffering humanity successfully undertaken under the sign of the Red Cross during 1947.

Some 15,000 "displaced" Chinese nationals, driven from their Javanese homes during the disturbances which occurred last year in the Dutch East Indies, were fed, clothed, registered and finally sent home.

Two thousand reports were made on P.O.W. camps in Africa, Czechoslovakia, the Far East, France, Great Britain, the Middle East and Poland. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war, having no Protecting Power, were rendered legal and judicial assistance and received valuable relief.

Vigorous appeals were made, and are still being made, to the victorious Powers for the release or repatriation of all prisoners of war.

In its permanent role as an international information centre, the Red Cross opened 50,000 new individual inquiries on behalf of private persons and military

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