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Le présent arrêté entre en vigueur le 1er décembre 1948.

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## SWITZERLAND AND WESTERN UNION.

By MAURICE CRANSTON.

*The following article is reproduced from the October issue of "Time and Tide" by the courtesy of the Editor.*

If you travel on the international express which crosses from France into Switzerland at Delle, you will stop for a while at that small forlorn French village while railway workers change the locomotive and customs officers climb aboard to ask their usual questions. The landscape there is shabby, for it is a corner of France the French have fought for, but never spent much care to cultivate. The buildings have a drab, unpainted aspect; the farms are poor; the people, the few there are of them, shuffle gloomily about their work. Two wars have not improved the looks of the place. Not far away in the Haute-Savoie there are vineyards, flourishing and gay, and there have been new mines and factories opened in the province since the Liberation, but Delle gets bleaker as the years go by. Bleak beyond words it seems, when you are a mile away from it. For after the steam-engine of the French *chemin de fer* has been taken off and the Swiss electric locomotive coupled, your train moves out of Delle towards a pretty pink house marked *Douane Suisse*, and suddenly everything is different.

Green meadows and white roads surround you, and farms as bright as toys, fir trees neatly planted, and little wooden chalets in picture-postcard photochrome. On the hills above you may catch a glimpse of a soldier in grey and of guns that guard the frontier. You are in Switzerland. It is so different, so conspicuously different from what you have left behind you, that is somehow seems unreal. Whether you go by rail or road, whether you cross from Austria or France or Germany or Italy, the experience is much the same. The feeling is of passing from one world into another. Since 1939, Switzerland, geographically the centre of Europe, has been, by an irony of history, an island of prosperity and plenty in an alien sea of troubles. And nowadays, with its echo of a half-forgotten past, its curious new resemblance to America, its freedom first from war and then from the conflicts of Left and Right which have plagued the rest of Europe since the war was won, Switzerland is comfortably, if perhaps a little anxiously, remote.

The boundary of Switzerland is an arbitrary line drawn in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna; but insubstantial as it is, that line has separated peace from war, security from peril, freedom from slavery, well-being

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from misery. Neutrality was always the goal of Swiss diplomacy, and since the fall of Napoleon I it has had uninterrupted success. It has brought the Swiss prodigious dividends, more than any country ever won in war. Not many generations back the Swiss were among the poorest people in Europe. Their land, for the greater part, is of no use for cultivation: their natural resources are exiguous. Yet the President of Switzerland was able to say, at the recent celebration of the federal settlement a hundred years ago, that Switzerland was the only country in Europe which was financially independent of East and West alike. Switzerland became a Marshall Plan nation to help in the economic reconstruction of Europe, but she did not need to seek American aid for herself. Technically, Switzerland is better equipped than any other European nation. The Swiss franc, of all currencies in the world, is now the most keenly coveted.

Of all European peoples the Swiss are the most businesslike. They are a nation of craftsmen, not artists; of journalists, not poets; of tradesmen, not noblemen; of farmers, not adventurers; of engineers, not saints. Their most remarkable achievements are technical: the Simplon and Gotthard tunnels, the scores of lifts and bridges on the Alpine ravines. Swiss engineers hope soon to drive a line through Mont Blanc and thus to cut by hours the journey from London to Rome. They would like to make a waterway from Locarno on Lake Maggiore to Milan to link up with the Italian project for a ship canal along the River Po to the Adriatic, for Switzerland would then have a more substantial outlet to the sea than Basle provides as an "ocean port" on the Rhine.

In terms of social economy the only European country which shares the post-war prosperity of Switzerland is Sweden, seven hundred miles away by air from frontier to frontier. Like Switzerland, Sweden is an industrial democracy; like Switzerland, she took no part in the two world wars. Yet, of course, Sweden is far richer in territory and natural resources; her population is nearly seven millions where Switzerland's is less than four and a half millions. There is one Swedish race and one Swedish tongue. There is no Swiss race, but Germans, French and Italians united by hazards of history; no Swiss language, but four different languages spoken in Switzerland, Sweden has a Socialist Government. Switzerland has a national coalition with Democratic Republicans as the largest party. Sweden is a kingdom. Switzerland is a federal republic.

Still, they are important characteristics, the two that Switzerland has in common with Sweden: industrialization and a century or more of peace. They are the keys to Switzerland's present prosperity. If she had not to spend so much on national defence, she could do even more for her people's welfare. For not everyone in Switzerland is at present economically secure. The cost of living has gone up as elsewhere since 1939; for the Swiss the rise is officially 62 per cent. and in practice rather more. While there has been an augmentation of wages, it has not kept pace. The Swiss Winter Help still has to solicit funds from the generous for the aid of families who suffer special deprivations or illness. Social security lags markedly amid the general conservatism of Swiss politics. In Government programmes for social betterment, Switzerland has a long way to catch up with Sweden or Britain or even other supposedly less developed countries like Mexico.

Foreigners never hear of Swiss politics. That the system is exemplary most of us accept. For the rest, since good news is no news, silence. I am told that no British or American newspaper maintains a staff reporter in Berne, although several have correspondents in Geneva and one or two in Zürich. The simple explanation of this is that Swiss politics are dull. They are largely decentralized, and the federal politics are not usually more important than cantonal politics, village politics and even family politics. At the federal level, political differences tend to be settled by compromise. Of the national party struggles that exist in Britain and France and America, for example, Switzerland knows very little.

In local politics, the Swiss are more combative than most peoples. But the conflicts rarely follow the set pattern of Left versus Right. Issues are argued on their merits, and personalities count for much. Outside a few industrial centres such as Zürich, Basle and Chaux-de-Fonds, the prevailing political sentiment of the Swiss generally is Capitalist. The trade unions are Conservative, the Socialists are of the less Radical kind. But the Communists, who call themselves in Switzerland the Labour Party, won several seats at the 1947 Election, and are nowadays a force to be considered.

Swiss patriotism is conspicuous. I know of no other country, save Russia, where the national flag is so often exhibited. Oddly enough, their constant contact with the world, through its travelling representa-

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tives, has not given the Swiss people any real international outlook.

Membership of UNESCO, however, has been an interesting experiment for the Swiss people, and especially for the more world-minded minority. It may even be a step towards membership of the United Nations itself. Before 1935, when the League of Nations had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland was a member with reservations guarding her neutrality; she would not enter a system of collective security. Since the emergence of UNO, and especially since the Marshall Plan, Switzerland has been called upon once more to consider her relations with the rest of Europe. Reservations remain, even concerning the project of a customs union between Western European nations. When recently the Foreign Minister, M. Max Petit-pierre, gave his consent to the examination of a customs union, and pledged Swiss support that far, he had to defer to the unreadiness of his countrymen to go any length towards international co-operation.

At the time I write, the crucial issue in international affairs is Western Union. It was at Zürich in 1946 that Mr. Winston Churchill first adumbrated the plan for which he has since secured European-wide support and to which, in principle, Mr. Bevin later committed the British Government. Switzerland's place in any Western Union is of particular significance. For Switzerland is already in herself a Western Union in miniature: a centre of French, German and Italian unity which might be the nucleus of a Federal Europe. On the other hand, Switzerland is a rich country while her neighbours are, in consequence of the second world war, poor countries. Western Union

would never be a real union unless there were economic as well as political unity, a single or freely exchangeable currency and an end to customs barriers. Such changes would inevitably mean for Switzerland at any rate a short-term loss, and it is hard at present to visualize their coming.

So there is something of a paradox about Switzerland's position in post-war Europe; she affords a practical model for European unity and yet, because of the very success of her system, she will not easily fit into a wider pattern of Western Union.

Still, the more important factor is Switzerland's unique experience of federal government; and that experience is relevant to the situation of every European people and especially to those greater European Powers which have vainly sought security through national sovereignty and national defence. Necessity drove the Swiss cantons together in the thirteenth century and after; will the same necessity seal the union of Europe in the present century?

#### OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, November 26th, 1948.

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