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INCREASE IN SWITZERLAND'S POPULATION.

One hundred years ago, Switzerland had a population amounting to not quite two and-a half millions. To-day, the number of her inhabitants will very soon have attained some four and-a half millions. In forty years time, will Switzerland possess eight million inhabitants? This question is being asked by a well-known Swiss medical man, Dr. Lauener, who is the medical officer for the Bernese schools, in a study based on a careful investigation of the statistical office. He is not only carrying out researches into the increase in the number of births, but simultaneously into the decline of infant mortality. Between 1870 and 1880, the death rate still amounted to nearly one fifth of all live births, whereas to-day it represents less than a twenty-fifth part of the total. In Dr. Paul Lauener's opinion it would be almost a catastrophe for Switzerland, a country which has to feed its inhabitants almost entirely by means of imports, which in turn have to be paid for by exports of its population nearly doubled.

The figure for births per 1,000 inhabitants in Switzerland amounted during the period 1911-13 to 23.8; this figure sank slowly, but steadily to 19.5 immediately after the First World War, then to 16 in 1935 and to 14.9 in 1937. After that, for several years, it remained constant and slightly higher, and then began to rise, somewhat rapidly, as from 1941; there was a slight decline in 1946, subsequently to which it attained suddenly and mysteriously the figure of 20.8 in 1947. A great deal of wondering went on in Switzerland with regard how it had proved possible to raise the birth rate, which was already beginning to give cause to a considerable amount of anxiety on account of its decline. Most observers believe that this increase is a direct consequence of the wage compensation allocations introduced in 1940 for men on Military Service. This enabled their families to be amply provided for. Another reason suggested, is the economic boom which this country has been enjoying and perhaps also the widespread campaign for the enlightenment of the masses which has introduced during the National Exhibition of 1939, and which so clearly and emphatically stressed the importance of a high birth rate for the renewal and maintenance of the nation, may have had some influence on this matter.

The Doctor in question now probes deeper. He has undertaken to delve into the statistics of the United Nations. From this survey, he has drawn the conclusion that most countries experienced a turning-point in this particular direction during the period between 1939 and 1943. Strange as it may seem, at first glance, it was during the most difficult time of political trials, war, occupation by the future, that there was an upward trend in birth figures. The rising curve is almost dramatic in such countries as Finland, Denmark and, quite recently, also in the United States. The phenomenon is universal and one is almost inclined to think that every aggravation in the difficulties of the existence of the individual, leads to a strengthening of the vitality of the people as a whole. However, all these theories, those which proceed from the thesis that food is the principal factor, and those who reject it, as well as those which consider that distress and uncertainty are a positive factor for the fertility of a nation and that well-sated ease and comfort are a negative one — all these theories lack any really scientific basis or proof. Dr. Lauener does not contest the esti-

mates of a German scientist, whereby, it is alleged that the Earth could hold ten thousand million men, but he drawn attention to the fact that it is no only a matter of how many people the planet could contain, but also — and this above all — of the living conditions of the people. Those of the Swiss people are of a very high standard; excellent hygienic conditions contribute largely to the fact that the nation does not grow old quickly. Up to the present, thanks to her manifold connections with World Markets, Switzerland has been able to carry along satisfactorily in spite of her lack of raw materials and extensive food supplies of her own. It was not always like this, and for many centuries she had to get rid of her surplus population by means of service as mercenaries in foreign armies, and then, at a later period, through emigration to sparsely inhabited territories. Nevertheless, whether this country would be able to provide for a population of eight millions would appear to be somewhat doubtful. Already now, the rapid increase in the population is causing certain difficulties, more especially as regards housing. Perhaps in no other domain is it as difficult to make any safe prognostications as in that relating to population statistics. For factors may arise therein very easily, the effects of which may transform the entire outlook. However, what is interesting is that already to-day anxieties are being expressed with regard to a too large Swiss population, whereas, only a short time ago, a lively propaganda was undertaken in Switzerland in favour of large families, and there was talk not only of the possibility of the Swiss people dying out, but that it was already on the road to extinction.



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