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SWISS HOLIDAY.

By SHEILA FORMAN.

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In general the Scots are more popular on the Continent than the English. This is especially true in Switzerland where the Scots visitor (he will not conceal his identity for long) receives a very warm welcome. Perhaps this is partly due to an affinity between the peoples of these two small countries where many of the prevailing conditions have been the same over hundreds of years.

Both countries have natural boundaries in coast-line and mountain barriers respectively, but neither nation has maintained its independence without fighting for it. Both countries have struggled continuously for less material things such as liberty of Thought and Belief and the preservation of their native traditions against pressure by larger powers.

One of the members of the Brains Trust who had just come back from Switzerland, remarked the other day that he had come to the conclusion the Swiss were the most democratic people in the world. Democracy there is not merely an idea or a form of government but a way of life, rooted in their traditions and their past. This is also peculiarly true of the Scots.

Poverty, stony ground and the elements have bred in Scotland and Switzerland a hardy race not devoid of ambition who are only content with their labours when they have made "of necessity a glorious gain." These characteristics have made both nations good craftsmen and successful traders, as Clyde-built ships and Swiss watches — among other things — can testify.

In peacetime, mountains and a ragged coast-line are ornamental rather than useful. But when an ornament becomes fashionable, it is immediately of use to someone. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, mountain scenery came into vogue in Europe, and Switzerland reaped the first commercial rewards. Rousseau and Goethe, and later Wordsworth, Byron and Ruskin, poured out paeans of praise to the Swiss Alps, and this was the best kind of propaganda in those days when most travellers were leisured and cultured people who read the poets as eagerly as we read the Sunday papers. By the middle of the following century, Switzerland was established as a holiday resort de luxe, although winter sports were not initiated until the 1890's.

The back-wash of all this enthusiasm for mountain scenery reached England in early Victorian times and, soon after, the invasion of Scotland by the Sassenach tourist began. As the century proceeded, a flowing tide of visitors poured over the Border. Londoners gasped at the wild beauty of the Highlands and Islands, rich Midland manufacturers bought country houses in the Lowlands for the summer holidays and the Royal Family restored Balmoral in nineteenth-century Scottish Baronial. Landseer, Wilkie and Millais exhibited the Highlands in the Royal Academy with romance, pathos and picturesque savagery and Scott's novels raised a storm of interest in Scottish history all over Europe.

But the Scots did not take their tourist traffic so seriously as the Swiss. This was partly because the English visitors insisted on finding romance in dirty inns and badly cooked porridge as well as in barefoot bairns and Scotch mist. While the Romantic Revival lasted, they were content with heather and rugged peaks as long as they went with grouse-moors and whisky galore. Besides which, they often brought their own transport, servants and home comforts.

Those days are over. Servants and shooting lodges are things of the past, and although there is still heather on the moors, grouse and whiskey are less plentiful. But tourists still continue to come to Scotland in spite of expensive travelling, petrol restrictions and economic difficulties. Moreover, they have become an acknowledged asset to the Scottish Exchequer. How can we replace the old order of things with new attractions? Broadcasts from the Edinburgh Festival and Railway posters of the Western Isles may tempt a visitor over the Border once. They will not persuade him to return if he has found other things wanting.

Look at Switzerland for a moment. In spite of the Alps and the snow, the sunshine and the wild flowers, at least half the pleasure of a holiday there nowadays is the excellent accommodation, food and service which you are almost sure to find whether you stay in one of the large hotels, a Pension, or with a family in a chalet. Your welcome is assured, your reception courteous and your welfare everybody's first concern. A warm, spotless bedroom awaits you, to which your



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breakfast will be brought each morning on a tray unless you leave instructions to the contrary. Lunch and dinner, although equally delicious, will consist of entirely different menus, and if you are half an hour late, the food will be just as hot and appetizing.

In the hall or lounge a notice-board will put you right about social entertainments and local places of interest. There is plenty of opportunity to mix with the other guests if you want to, but no one will think you anti-social if you prefer a corner of your own. Out of all this is created the essential core of a holiday, the right atmosphere to relax in.

Ah, yes! you may say, but look at Switzerland's advantages in the matter of entertainment. Reliable weather, no war scars, better and more plentiful food and drink, no labour troubles and fewer trade restrictions. Weather is certainly their trump card (but how many people would be disappointed if they didn't have a little rain on a Scottish holiday even if they aren't fishermen?) and their labour difficulties are less acute than ours, but it is a mistake to think the Swiss have enormous supplies of unrationed food. They are, in fact, also rationed but somewhat differently from us. What is the secret of their universally excellent hotels?

When winter sports were first introduced into Switzerland (mainly by the British) at the end of the nineteenth century, the real boom in tourist traffic began, and it was only then that the Swiss began to study the art of innkeeping with professional care. There are very few really old inns in Switzerland, such as are to be found in England and France. The Swiss were quick to see what opportunities the tourist trade held for them. Now it is their greatest source of national wealth.

Although we do not rely to the same extent on our tourist traffic in Scotland, we have a steady influx of visitors from April to October and a small but enterprising coterie of winter sports' enthusiasts. We are beginning to realize the immense possibilities which might be developed along these lines, but our drive has so far gone into advertising Scotland abroad rather than consolidating the home front. By this I mean the hotel front, and not only the front but the back, the outside and the inside right down to the kitchens and the cellar.

Variety is the spice of life. The visitor is agog for it and here is an opportunity to produce our Scottish best. So let us go native and get out our bagpipes and tartans. Let us serve porridge, haggis, cock-a-leekie, herrings (fried in oatmeal), grilled trout, roast venison,

girdle scones and oatcakes, but let them be cooked to perfection and beyond criticism. They will be far more popular than familiar English dishes and bad imitations of French cooking.

Think of the variety of drinks which could be made with a whisky or rum base and a little imagination. It is a mistake to think visitors prefer neat whisky when they can get it.

One of the nice things about foreigners is that they are always more interested in our history than we are in theirs. Too often information about our ancient buildings and places of interest is locked away in the country library. A supply of short, intelligent leaflets or guide-books about local history and buildings would be immensely appreciated in hotels and boarding-houses.

So, in spite of the many obstacles which confront Scottish hotel-keepers (and if anyone has a genuine grouse about petrol rationing, they have), I believe the future success of our tourist trade lies with them. In their hands they hold the power to make or mar a very promising commercial project. I dare to hope that they may attain the prestige enjoyed by our doctors, our engineers, our whisky and our incomparable scenery.

CONCERT EDWIN FISCHER.

The Swiss pianist Edwin Fischer gave a Beethoven recital at Wigmore Hall on Sunday, 29th May.

The concert hall was overcrowded, which is quite an unusual thing for a Sunday afternoon concert and amply shows the very great interest that Mr. Fischer's concert had created in the London musical world. The recital was brilliant, and tremendous applause was given to the artist. It was an outstanding success.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published, Friday, June 24th, 1949.

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