

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by CARL KELLER.

Whilst the fight for petroleum in the Near East, on which depends to a very large extent the supply of this commodity to Europe, goes on with unabated bitterness, oil-borings are also going on in Switzerland. Up to the present — it might as well be admitted at once — they have not led to any tangible, practical results; this does not mean, however, that all hopes of finding oil in Switzerland should be abandoned. In any case, various foreign oil trusts have obtained licences for prospecting in Switzerland. Moreover, some time ago, a consortium of important Swiss firms was created, for the purpose of prospecting for oil in the central regions of the country and in the Jura Region. Once and for all, the question must be settled as to whether we can extend our basis for the production of power. Up to the present, Switzerland has only been able to reckon upon her "white coal", i.e. electricity, and as for the generation of atomic energy that, for the present, is only the "sound of distant music".

Swiss geologists and oil experts belong to the afore-mentioned consortium. Concessions have been obtained in all those Cantons in which there exists a possibility of oil being found. In order to be able to proceed as uniformly as possible, the Cantons in the most inland part of the country have concluded an agreement and are guaranteeing their interests in common.

Oil-boring plant is to be found already in our country, in the St. Gall Rhein Valley, in the Canton of Vaud and in the Canton of Lucerne: up to the present, however, no positive results have been achieved by these borings. It is true that on a few occasions the oil gushed up, but there was never enough to be of any economic use.

Recently, attempts have been made to prospect for oil in Switzerland with the help of physical methods, whereby artificial earthquakes were contrived by means of explosions carried out several meters below the surface of the earth. No certain conclusions regarding the presence of oil, however, could be drawn from the resulting geological seismogram; it is also thought that "our" petroleum lies hidden in too great a depth. Nevertheless, experiments are being continued with a certain amount of confidence. It would seem that it is the Jura region and the region which runs alongside the Lake of Neuchâtel which are viewed with special favour, in this respect. It has been proved, unquestionably, that in Switzerland also, there exist geological strata which contain oil. Likewise, it is an established fact that our land is one of the few remaining countries which has not yet been systematically prospected for the presence of oil. As petroleum comes from the residue of dead sea animals and sea plants which have remained deposited for time immemorial in mire, and have hardened into stone during the millions of years that have passed, our country offers, theoretically, the most perfect of conditions for oil deposits. In spite of this, however, no one indulges in any very great expectations in this respect.

However, even without petroleum, the Swiss supply of electric power, taken as a whole, may now

be considered as being assured. The complete exploitation of our hydraulic forces for the purpose of generating electricity is now being pursued with a keenness never attained before. For the rest, it is only too well known, from events which have occurred in recent history, what fate is reserved for those countries which are all too rich in treasures of the soil, and, above all, in petroleum. It must also not be overlooked that those raw materials which are necessary for the production of atomic energy will become more and more important; within a measurable space of time, uranium will no doubt supplant oil, that "liquid gold".

In spite of all this, prospecting for oil continues in Switzerland — more especially because there is a richly flowing well of oil to be found in Lorraine, which is quite close to our frontier. Meanwhile, only the future will show whether our country also possesses sufficient oil of its own to make any further promotion of this business worth while.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

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