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THE WEATHER IN SWITZERLAND

In our issue of 23rd February, the tragic story was told of the avalanche disasters in Switzerland. Unfortunately, that was not yet the end. More snow fell, and more avalanches thundered down the mountain sides, in the Greyerzerland, in the Bernese Oberland (three Alpine huts and a granary dating to 1739 were destroyed on the Alp Hohlenwang), in the Canton of Uri as late as 11th March (the Gotthard route was again blocked by the *Entschigtal-lawine*), and at that time, sixteen passes were still closed.

On 15th March, a new avalanche went down in the Grisons between Lenzerheide and Arosa, which caused the death of a German tourist. In many parts of the Alps, there was plenty of new snow, and even on 24th March, fourteen passes were still closed to traffic. Another avalanche fell onto the Muerrenbahn and buried the line for some 100 metres.

Since the catastrophic winter of 1950/51, about 100 million francs has been spent on avalanche barricades and re-afforestation. On an average, Confederation and Cantons took over 80% of the cost. Without such protection, the disasters last winter would have been even greater. In old chronicles in the Valais, one can read of fatal disasters, so for instance on 18th February 1720, when 84 people were killed at Obergesteln, and on 16th January 1827, when 51 people lost their lives in an avalanche at Biel-Selkingen. Even in 1950/1 over 90 people and 218 heads of cattle and 357 other animals lost their lives in 1,200 avalanches in various alpine regions in Switzerland. The biggest-ever disaster in Europe happened in the first world war when 10,000 soldiers were killed on the Italian/Austrian front on 13th December 1916.

The victims of this year's catastrophies received a great deal of spontaneous and organised help. The Federal Council put a first 100,000 francs aside for them, and many local authorities made donations. The Principality of Liechtenstein and the Vatican sent monetary gifts, and various newspapers made collections. The *Glückskette* campaign of the Swiss radio and television company resulted in over 2m. francs for the earthquake victims in Sicily and slightly more for the avalanche victims. By the end of February, the Red Cross had collected Fr. 667,500.— Municipal workmen in Zug renounced their overtime pay and 67 members of the Davos fire brigade their pay (the latter brought in 4,081 francs). The members of the Grand Lodge Alpina made donations of over 11,000 francs. The most original idea for getting money together was carried out in Lucerne, where 300 prominent men and women from many parts of Switzerland gathered at the Schweizerhof Hotel to eat soup prepared in Army kitchens by well-known chefs, and served with mineral water and bread. During the meal, a collection was made, resulting in 10,000 francs. The next day, five soup kitchens were at work in busy Lucerne streets, served soup and collected another 20,000 francs. The scheme was organised by the Swiss relief society "Caritas", and with it, their total contribution came to half a million francs.

Before ending this report, we think the following items may be of interest: At Tavanasa (Grisons), the *Jägerverein* managed to save seven stags which had been overtaken by deep snow. They have been housed in a well-aired stable and looked after by local farmers and *Jäger*. When the Gotthard railway line was blocked mid-March, five goods trains with cattle and other farm animals were held up. The SBB spontaneously acted as herdsman to the 526 animals, and they saw to the airing and cleaning

of the trucks, and a few farmers' sons on the staff of the SBB took on the milking and fed the milk to the young animals. Finally, at the end of January, news came of several trainloads of Grisons snow being dumped in the Lake of Constance!

The second half of March turned warm, in some parts too warm to be true, and since then, the weather has behaved much like in the British Isles.

(Compiled from news received by A.T.S.)

THE "SWISS OBSERVER" THIRTY YEARS AGO

In the first issue of the "Swiss Observer" 30 years ago, we head that a petition signed by 87 National Councillors had been addressed to the Federal Government, stating that the Swiss people considered national defence should be further re-inforced. It requested the Government to explain their intentions regarding the extension of military service and strengthening of Air Force and anti-aircraft defences. Apart from a few news items from Switzerland, the whole issue was taken up by two reports, one on Annual Banquet and Ball of the Swiss Club (Schweizerbund), the other of the "Swiss Rally" with Dinner and Dance of the Swiss Club Birmingham.

In the following number, there was a report of Mr. and Mrs. Gottfried Keller's wedding at Welwyn Garden City, and a lengthy letter from a *Bündner* (Mr. Albert Tall) supplying details about his Canton with regard to an article on the Grisons which had appeared previously.

In the Easter issue, the regular contributor *Kyburg* (Mr. Bretscher) mused on "*Edel sei der Mensch, hilfreich und gut*", and in Germany, they had banned all "Switzerland" cognomes of German places, such as "Saxon Switzerland" to be called "Saxon Rocky Range" in future. "These comparisons" — wrote the official tourist office paper — "must stop immediately. We owe this much to our self-respect". And were the Swiss glad! Considerable space was devoted in the same issue to a critical reply to Mr. Tall (see above) on the merits of the Grisons. The Unione Ticinese had held their Annual Banquet and Ball at Pagani's with Mr. G. Eusebio in the chair, Mr. L. Chapuis had been elected President of the City Swiss Club and Mr. H. Senn of the London Swiss Rifle Team.

On 23rd April the S.O. published a report that the Diet of the Principality of Liechtenstein had definitely declared their intention of remaining independent, but united with Switzerland in the economic domain, keeping Swiss legislation, currency and customs union with Switzerland. This declaration was issued in order to make quite certain that Germany knew Liechtenstein's position. A *Sauerkraut* evening had been held in Dublin, organised by the Union Helvetia. Various annual meetings had taken place in London, and the rest of the issue was taken up by a banking report and by an article by R. A. Langford in Zurich on "An Englishman's observations on Swiss business life", quite shrewdly observed and not always complimentary, rightly so.

In the last number in April 1938, readers were told of a memorandum which the Federal Government of the day were presenting to the League of Nations with regard to restoring complete neutrality of Switzerland. It was feared that in the event of war, Switzerland's sanctions within the framework of the League would constitute a breach of neutrality, possibly even the League's headquarters in Geneva. On the same page of that issue of the S.O. was the report of an Anglo-Swiss Dinner at the Dudley Hotel at Hove, arranged for the Wine and Food Society. The

paper carried a long illustrated report on a lecture which Swissair's famous Captain O. Heitmanek had given in London. Whilst the lecture had been a success, the film

itself had apparently been a great disappointment which accounted for two indignant letters to the Editor, published at the end of the report.

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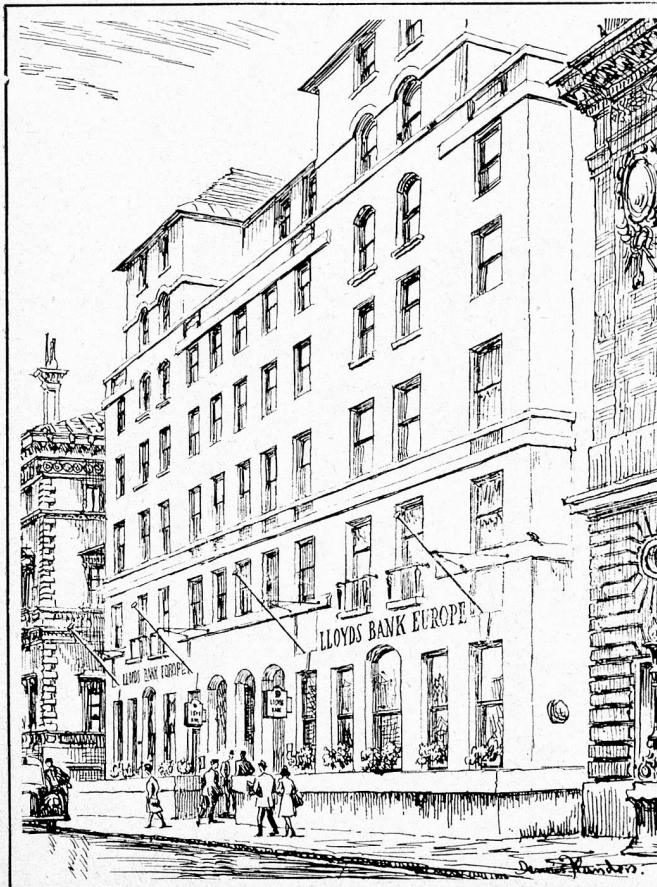
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