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NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

The introductory remarks which preceded last week's article under this heading might be repeated; winter sports continue to form the main topic and overshadow any other Swiss event which, had it been otherwise, would have been enlarged upon in the English Press.

Our Railways.

A fortnight ago I reproduced a study dealing with the organisation and management of our national railway system; the following article taken from *The Times* (October 29th) illustrates the progress of electrification and the heavy financial burden—phenomenal compared with our resources—created by carrying out this organic change in our economic structure:—

It was recently announced that 627 miles of the Swiss Federal Railways had been electrified. It is now possible to cross Switzerland from north to south—from Basel to Chiasso, through the St. Gothard Tunnel, a distance of 151 miles—in electrically-driven trains. Next year it will be possible to travel in electric trains from west to east—from Geneva to the Austrian frontier, a stretch of nearly 260 miles.

The electrification of the Swiss railways was decided upon in 1913. The St. Gothard line was the first to be dealt with. The preparatory work was ready when the war broke out, but the lack of raw materials, particularly copper, and of labour made it necessary to postpone the constructive work until 1916. The scheme then adopted provided for the electrification of 1,566 kilometres (978 miles), at a cost of 760 million francs (£30,400,000), and the work was to be spread over a period of 30 years. It was later decided, mainly with a view to alleviating unemployment, to hasten the completion of the work and to finish it within a period of 15 years. A further 33 miles of line will have been electrified by the end of this year; another 127 miles will be added before May 1, 1927; and 980 miles, or rather more than half the total length of line in the country, will be electrified by the end of 1928.

The electrical power is supplied to the different lines by five water-power plants, built by the Federal Railways at Massboden (Valais), Ritom (Ticino), Amsteg (Uri), Barberine and Vernayaz (Valais), as well as by several private plants producing altogether 490 millions of kilowatts a year. Triphased current is used on the Brieg-Iselle section of the Simplon line, while all the other lines are supplied with monophased current of 15,000 volts, mainly supplied by the powerful groups of Ritom-Amsteg, on the Gothard line, and Barberine-Vernayaz, on the Simplon line. These two groups are linked by high-tension lines transporting and distributing the current all over the country with the help of 25 sub-stations.

The electrification of the railways has already produced important results from a financial point of view. Up to the end of 1925, a sum of 492,653,468 francs (£19,706,138) has been spent on electrification. The Federal Government supplied 30 millions (£1,200,000) in the form of a subsidy, and the remainder was raised by means of loans which the Railways Board issued on the Swiss market. The railways have, therefore, to disburse a yearly sum of about 20 millions (£800,000) for the payment of interest on the loans.

In 1925, with only 562 miles of electrified lines, the railways showed a saving of 15½ million francs (£620,000) on coal, the consumption of which was 280,000 tons less than in the previous year. A steam engine hauls a load of 210 tons, while an electric engine is capable of hauling 300 tons at a higher speed, so that the railway staff can be employed to better purpose at a lower cost.

A further sum of five millions (£200,000) was saved on the upkeep of locomotives and the wages of train crews. Electrification is the only means for making good the deficit resulting from the introduction of the eight-hour day. In 1913, when the working day was of 10½ hours, the number of engine drivers was 3,250, and it should have been raised to 4,960 after the eight-hour day was introduced. Thanks to electrification, however, the number of engine drivers was only 3,172 last year, and will be still further reduced when the use of one-man-driven engines has become general. This is to be done, in spite of the strong opposition of the railwaymen's trade unions.

Taking everything into account, it is estimated that the increasing use of electricity resulted, in 1925, in a total saving of 23 millions (£920,000). This is a most satisfactory result, because, two years before the completion of the scheme, the saving realised exceeds the interest to be paid on the borrowed capital. It is also announced that the completion of the process of electrification will cost 680 millions (£27,200,000) instead of the 760 millions (£30,400,000) anticipated, a total reduction of 80 millions (£3,200,000). It may be therefore assumed that the 36½ millions (£1,460,000) which has to be found in interest on the total expenditure will be met by the savings arising out of the use of electricity.

It is, however, feared in some quarters that the financial advantages of electrification will be reduced to nothing by reason of the increase in wages which has just been accepted by the National Council. If this decision is upheld by the Second Chamber of the Swiss Parliament, the new rates of pay will bring an extra expenditure of 20 millions (£800,000) upon the railways.

Apart from the fact that electrification is doing away with the great inconvenience resulting from smoke and soot, and that it enables the numerous Swiss tunnels to be well ventilated, it has the advantage of shortening journeys and also of allowing a greater number of trains to be run on the same line without increasing the general expenditure very much. For instance, steam-driven trains took 5 hours 19 mins. to cover the distance from Chiasso to Lucerne or Zurich through the St. Gothard tunnel—a stretch of 151 miles with very steep gradients—while electrically-driven trains cover it in 4 hours 37 mins. The journey from Geneva to Lausanne—55 miles—which took 55 mins. in former times, is now made in 44 minutes by the electric trains.

The various types of electric engines were all planned and built in Switzerland, in the big factories of "Brown Boveri," at Baden, "Oerlikon," near Zurich, and "Sécheron," at Geneva, which are now constructing similar engines for foreign countries, among which are France and Italy. Interesting and conclusive experiments have recently been made with a new type of powerful electric engine weighing 128 tons and capable of reaching a speed of 40 miles an hour. These engines, one of which is running on the Gothard line, are specially intended for goods trains. They have been found capable of hauling a goods train weighing 600 tons on a line with a gradient of 1 in 5 and a 1,150 tons train on a line with a gradient of 1 in 10.

The successful completion of the electrification programme is a tribute to the skill of Swiss engineers in face of great technical and financial difficulties. It is remarkable that a country with a population of under 4,000,000 has been in a position to finance such a scheme without borrowing from foreign countries.

Switzerland and the Ex-Kaiser.

Prominence is being given in the English dailies to the reputed intention of the head of the Hohenzollern family to join some of its members who have already made Switzerland their adopted home. It seems to be taken for granted that our Government will not countenance such a suggestion. The whole matter strikes me as a cleverly engineered "*ballon d'essai.*" I quote from the *Manchester Guardian* (November 2nd):—

The Swiss press is paying increasing attention to the ex-Kaiser's future residence, taking for granted that Wilhelm desires to leave Holland and that the German Government will not allow him to stay in Germany. There is unanimous opposition to the idea of the ex-Kaiser making a home in Switzerland, and fear is expressed that important enlargements and renovations now being made at the Kurhaus, Monte Verita, near Locarno, may have been undertaken for this purpose. Enlightenment on this point is demanded. It is thought that Wilhelm might desire to settle in the Swiss Canton of Ticino, as two of his sons have done already.

The biggest German-Swiss newspaper, the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," says Wilhelm can render only one service to humanity—that is, to remain silently in the country to which he fled from the field of war. The "Journal de Genève" claims to have been informed that the Government would certainly refuse any demand from the ex-Kaiser for admission to Switzerland, for though the Government desires to maintain the traditional right of asylum Wilhelm could not invoke this right because he is not forced to leave Holland.

The Troubles of the Swiss Watch Industry are the subject of an article in *The Times* (October 30th). In common with practically all our great exporting trades present conditions and prospects are most discouraging, the only exception being experienced by the chemical industry, which in the manufacture of dyestuffs and alkaloids maintains its world reputation. As regards watches latest statistics show that the exports for the first nine months of this year amounted to 175 million francs, a decrease of about 40 million francs over the corresponding period of last year:—

The Swiss watch industry is in a precarious position. Export to Great Britain, which is Switzerland's most important market, is unfortunately affected by the stocks which accumulated there on the eve of the reimposition of the McKenna duties. Another grave feature is the diminution in the value of exports relative to the quantities shipped. The increase in the average selling price for each watch amounts to 57 per cent., compared with 1914, but the increase in the cost of wages and materials exceeds 100 per cent. Further, the number of movements alone, without cases, sent abroad, has advanced very greatly, to the detriment of the export of the complete article. Consequently the Germans and Americans are gradually supplanting the Swiss manufacturer in turning out watch cases.

In most other countries, including Great Britain, this branch of manufacture has been started, especially for the wristlet watch. No success has attended the various efforts made in Switzerland to restrict the export of parts, movements, etc. There is a question of establishing an export tax on such products, but apart from the difficulty of applying such a levy the question arises whether it would be possible to fix the duty at an effective level, having regard to the heavy import duties frequently imposed abroad on the finished article and the comparatively low duties imposed on the parts in countries where manufacture of assembly is undertaken.

Once again an investigation is taking place into the possibility of combining the various concerns making rough parts with a view to controlling the export of semi-manufactured articles and the production of watches in general. It is now suggested that a powerful holding company should be formed. It is felt that the industry's principal trouble is over-production, and a number of suggestions have recently been put before the Federal Council, with a view to improving this state of affairs. It is proposed that the export of rough parts should be rationed, that of unassembled movements prohibited, and that export duties should be levied on rough parts. The Government has expressed its willingness to study the suggested measures.

The German-Swiss Treaty of Commerce diminishes the duties on pocket and wristlet watches in gold cases, but, on the other hand, those in ordinary metal cases are subject to duties too high to permit the Swiss manufacturers to