

The Swiss contribution to western civilisation

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When in 1940, after the collapse of France, we were completely surrounded by one single military power, we were left entirely on our own. There was nothing left for us to do but to withdraw into our mountains. Had we remained on the Midland Plateau, where our army had been mobilized in 1939, an enemy might have easily out-maneuvred and encircled the greater part of our forces. Withdrawing into the mountains was a serious decision for us to take, for we had to abandon more than half the country, including its most populated parts and its richest agricultural areas. Nevertheless, it was our General's order to do so. Indeed, because of the circumstances then prevailing, this was our only way out. So we marched into the Central Alps and established ourselves there. The Alpine passes had to be held at all cost. At various points, we built fortifications deep into the rocks. Such fortifications are much harder to overcome than those in the plains, as they are out of reach of aircraft and armour. On the heights and in the valleys, we kept mobile forces ready to counter-attack in case of an enemy break through. For a very long period, all necessary stocks and army supplies were stored deep under ground. During the last four years, this "Réduit National"—as we call it—has been unceasingly fortified; it is, and it will remain for years to come, of the greatest importance.

However, we cannot possibly just sit down in our "Réduit National" and wait for things to happen; this would be much too simple. This year, the military situation has already changed completely. We again have the armies of two different sides at our frontiers. If we are to prevent either of them from marching through our country, we must, again, keep strong forces in the Jura Mountains and on the Midland Plateau. Besides, in the future, we may have to receive as internees foreign troops or political groups. This we have already done on quite a large scale. In order to be able to intern all that come and to maintain order under all circumstances, we must keep sufficient forces on the border. When the war is over, our neighbours may make a readjustment of their frontier lines; in that case, our military situation would be modified. Therefore, we have to be ready for all possibilities. Our "Réduit National" will remain, should bad become to worse, a strong operational base. Of course, this does not mean that our army is not prepared to fight in other parts of the country.

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THE SWISS CONTRIBUTION TO WESTERN CIVILISATION.

* This is the title of a 92pp 8vo pamphlet just received which has conferred upon us a delightful evening of instructive reading. The author who is a busy and learned medical practitioner has gone to the trouble of collecting the names of those of our compatriots who during the last five centuries have made a definite original contribution to knowledge or have left the world a happier, a better or more beautiful place than they had found it." From the list of over 650 names, pastmasters of statecraft or warfare and fashionable pursuits are rightly omitted. The publication is intended to reform the average Englishman's notion that Switzerland is exclusively a country for mountaineering, skiing, T.B. treatment and watch-making; we doubt whether a conversion is possible or even desirable as few of us will harbour scruples about this one-sided impression. We believe that the booklet is of far greater interest to the majority of Swiss, who, in their schooldays have been forced to absorb ancient history and memorize battle-dates. To those of us over here, who during the last five years have been impregnated by the numerous, mostly academical dissertations of the aspects and application of neutrality, the booklet will supply a welcome distraction and healthy tonic, and the last few chapters dealing rather fully with the protagonists in biological and physical sciences are an indispensable "who's who" brought up to-date.

It is not easy to extol the merits of a few hundred celebrities without an agglomeration of tiresome superlatives but the author has achieved it. Here is the odyssey of a minor celebrity and we very much doubt if any of our readers have ever heard of the famous "Bâlois": "Perhaps the most colourful Swiss that ever lived was Johann August Sutter (1803-1880), who was born at Dornach by Basle, where now stands the colossal Goetheanum. He emigrated to the United States, where he made the first discovery of gold in California, built that State's economic prosperity, introduced the wine industry, became as rich as Croesus and finally died a pauper through no fault of his own."

It is intended to publish the work in German and French; we think the first few chapters might be revised with advantage. On page 24 for instance the reader is informed that "there are 22 cantons . . . of which 19 are undivided" and on the following page the "initiative" is incorrectly elucidated. We also believe that the author would be well advised to place a work of this kind on the market through an established publishing firm thus making use of their counsel, experience and connection. The price of the booklet is 5/- and is obtainable from Dr. R. E. G. Armattoo, 7, Northland Road, Londonderry.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

We hope to go to press again on Friday, 29th June, 1945, and take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their enlarged subscription rates: Mrs. S. Barff, E. Steiner, L. Jobin, A. Renou, J. J. F. Schad, M. Gysin, W. Gysler, E. Montag, M. E. Lichtensteiger, Mrs. H. Ellison, F. E. Brunner.