

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

Ever since the establishment of railway lines, that is to say for about a century, Switzerland has striven to be the "turn-table of Europe". As a result we find these tunnels bored through our Alps in order to connect, by means of the most direct ways, Germany with Italy and France with Italy.

In 1882 the construction of the St. Gotthard tunnel, followed in 1906 by the piercing of the Simplon Tunnel, to which was added, very shortly, the Lötschberg Tunnel, continued to ensure for Switzerland the transit of travellers and goods for the good of our country's economy.

Today the growing importance of road traffic once more raises a similar problem: how best to preserve for our country passenger and goods traffic through the Alps. There is only one answer to this: to lure motor-car traffic by the quality and the convenience of our network of motor roads.

For one thing, we must strive to build highways, which are important connecting arteries, so that our territory will remain an area through which automobile traffic will, so to speak, be obliged to pass. It is true that in this respect we are somewhat behindhand, but this slowness can be caught up with, within the next ten years, as the necessary plans have been completed and the construction of autostrade is to be started on very shortly.

Furthermore, the question of the piercing of road tunnels under the Alps has been on the agenda for some years past. It would now seem to be a sure thing that a tunnel of this kind will be built under the Mont Blanc massiff. Half of it will be on French territory and half on Italian territory. The Canton of Geneva, however, is interested in this scheme as the roads leading to this tunnel will touch upon Swiss territory, in the vicinity of Geneva. This interest is so evident that the Genevese authorities have decided to contribute towards the cost of construction.

As is well known, the French National Assembly has just voted its adherence to this project. A similar decision must now be awaited from the Senate, i.e. the Council of the Republic, but there would not seem to be any doubts about its favourable outcome.

In our country this French decision — which has now given efficacy to the decisions already taken by Italy and by the Canton of Geneva — has aroused

some rather violent polemics. The fact of the matter is that a plan for another road tunnel has existed for several years, namely the one which was to have been built under the Col of the Great Saint Bernard and to connect the Canton of Valais with the Val d'Aoste in Italy. This tunnel would lead international road traffic towards Switzerland and across a greater part of her territory. Cars and lorries coming from Germany would pass through a great many Cantons, after having entered Switzerland in the vicinity of Basle. Lorries and cars coming from France and Great Britain, as well as from the Benelux countries, would travel through the Cantons of Vaud and Valais, after having penetrated into our territory at Vallorbe.

This second project is of such interest to the national economy of our country that its authors are not allowing themselves to be discouraged by the French decision. They affirm that there is no need to choose between the Mont Blanc and the Great Saint Bernard; that one tunnel will supplement the other just as, in days gone by, the Simplon became a very fortunate addition — at a distance of only some tens of kilometres away — to the Gotthard. The possibility of the simultaneous construction of two tunnels would appear to be all the more plausible as, in both cases, these projects are being supported by private initiative and would not call upon any contribution on the part of the Confederation. And, in any case, road traffic has taken on such dimensions that it would only appear to be rational to relieve our mountain roads and to place tunnels at the disposal of travellers who are in a hurry and of goods traffic.

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