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## COMMERCIAL NEWS

### Business contacts between Africa and Switzerland

A visit was paid recently to Switzerland by the Minister for Labour of Nigeria, Mr. M. J. Wada, who was accompanied by a lady secretary and by a technical adviser, Mr. Nigumi, who is an architect. This trip was of a private character and was undertaken at the invitation of the Swiss firm of Durisol, whose plant was visited by the Nigerian delegates in order that they could see for themselves the possibilities offered by the building material produced by this firm. The Durisol prefabricated panels are arousing great interest in Nigeria, as well as in other African and Asian countries, where there is a magnificent and ideal field for their use, as is also the case wherever buildings have to be put up rapidly. Their lightness and the fact that they are non-combustible render them particularly suitable where there is a risk of earthquake or fire.

### New portable recorder for business

The success enjoyed in the business world by recorders has now aroused new demands, and, in particular, the desire for portable apparatus, light and independent of any electricity network, that can be used in motor cars, trains, etc. In order to meet this new aspect of the demand, the manufacturers of the "Ultravox" recorders have just perfected a new model, with transistors, suitable for travelling purposes, the size of which does not exceed that of the surface of a sheet of paper such as is used in business correspondence, and the height of which amounts to not quite three inches. This appliance, which is supplied with every improvement that can be wished for, weighs only a little more than nine pounds. With it it is possible to make a recording, lasting for ten uninterrupted minutes, on a magnetic sheet of a normal size of A5.

### Revival of an old favourite

The ocarina is a popular small musical instrument, which was invented ninety years ago, and which has been somewhat forgotten. The fragility of this article, which is made of terra-cotta or of porcelain, and the difficulty of obtaining pure sounds from it have been the cause of its falling out of favour, in spite of the fact it possesses a velvety sound which is not unpleasant. A Swiss manufacturer has now had the idea of providing the ocarina with an additional finger-hole, which makes playing more easy, and the sound more true,

and of manufacturing it in die-cast aluminium. Under the name "Metall-Kibitz", this transformed ocarina is sallying forth to conquer music-lovers in schools, societies and families. Impervious to knocks and blows, easy to play, and available in several musical tones, so that it is possible to play a quartet, the "Metall-Kibitz" will no doubt enjoy great success.

### Automatic figure reading machine

Only a short time ago the automation of book-keeping work was hampered by the difficulty of bringing forward figures, an operation which had to be carried out by hand, with all the errors which might result from it. The Swiss firm of Hasler has therefore attacked the problem of bringing forward figures automatically, and with this aim in view has invented and perfected apparatus for the optical reading of figures and characters. In this device, the characters which are to be read are swept over by a ray of light, of which the reflection, which varies in intensity in accordance with whether it comes across anything written or not, is caught by a photo-electric cell, which transforms it into electric signals. It is naturally necessary that the figures and characters to be read possess very differentiated forms; however, the Hasler apparatus is made in such a manner that even badly printed characters cannot give rise to any errors. Mounted on book-keeping machines, this new device makes it possible to bring forward book-keeping data in an entirely automatic manner, thus eliminating a cause of error.

### Functional aesthetics exhibition in Geneva

An Exhibition of Industrial Aesthetics was held, from 10th March to 4th April, at the Musée Rath, in Geneva. It was the first show of this kind to take place in that city; its purpose was to make the general public better acquainted with the idea of useful and aesthetic forms, which, in our century of technique, deserve greater recognition than is given them either by the manufacturers or by the consumers. The promoters of this Exhibition applied to independent and specialised organisations in Switzerland, Great Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, etc., in order to be able to select the best creations of industrial aesthetics to be found in each country. This Exhibition was devoid of any commercial character, and merely showed articles of various kinds, from a child's toy to machine-tools, not forgetting household articles and furniture.

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