World Travel Letter No. 3, Switzerland (1928)

Dear Friends:

World-Travel-Letter No. 3

 All of you have heard of the picturesque mountains and charming lakes of Switzerland, but you will never realize what they are until you see them, because all the word pictures and photographs you can find are entirely inadequate to make you visualize fully and vividly the wonderful scenery. Of course, this is not the season for tourists in the mountains, but I am glad we came thru this way, as this was the only opportunity Mother and I had to see this district. All the mountain tops are covered with snow, and today it has been snowing a little in the valleys and around the lakes where grass is green, spring flowers are beginning to show their heads and leaves are starting to come out on some of the trees. They have had two or three weeks of quite warm weather which started the grass and flowers to grow.

 In the summer time Switzerland’s hotels and resorts around the many lakes are crowded with tourists from all over Europe and America. Some have said that the Alps of Switzerland are no more beautiful than our Rookies, and possibly this is true, but the Alps are better known and their grandeur has been heralded thruout the world; furthermore Switzerland has an intricate network of interesting routes by rail, automobile highway and footpath, as well as by steamer on its chains of lakes. All these routes could not be traversed, even hurriedly, in a whole summer.

 We entered Switzerland at Basel, a city of 125,000, which is at the junction and stands on the land of the three countries: Switzerland, France and Germany. We had about two hours between trains at Basel, but could not take in very much in that short time. We were headed for Lucerne that night, where we staid over two nights and one day, until this morning. The blue lake of Lucerne, extending its numerous irregular fingers many miles along the valleys, with its water so clear you can see the bottom; the towering snow covered mountains all around and the green slopes decorated with hundreds of white homes and hotels, present an unsurpassable scenic picture, which merits the interest of the traveler. Lucerne is a beautiful city with its numerous hotels and apartment houses extending from the lake up the slopes for considerable distance. The buildings are all kept clean and bright, the streets cleaner than those in an ordinary city and even the street cars are painted and trimmed up to match with the surroundings. Instead of a dirty yellow, brown or dark green color like we have in many of our cities, the street cars are painted a light gray, nearly white, trimmed in baby blue, and look as if they were washed and scrubbed every day. The pleasure yachts and tourist steamers on the lake are painted white and are very attractive. We took a three hour boat trip, which touched only a small part of the many arms of the lake. We passed several villages and attractive summer hotels which adorn the shores of the lake and the scenic mountain sides. Leaving Lucerne we passed by several lakes and thru many tunnels, one of which I believe is said to be the longest tunnel in the world, over ten miles long, thru the backbone of the Alps.

 During the World War Switzerland was the marvol of other counties in that it kept out of the war. They were thus fortunate in saving lives, but a Swiss gentleman told me yesterday that the country suffered a great financial burden became they had to make the same preparation as tho they were in war. They had to maintain a standing army, he said, of 350,000 men, which is quite large for such a small nation (only seven million inhabitants), and those soldiers with all the ammunition and machinery of war, were kept in readiness on three fronts to prevent invasion of Switzerland by the belligerent powers. The Swiss money has not fallen in value since the war, like the money of other European countries. The Swiss Franc has fallen to about four cents, the Belgium Frabc to about three cents, and the German Mark to about twenty-four cents. The German Mark, of course was down to nothing after the war, but under the new financing program, inaugurated under the Dawes Plan, the new Mark has an established value in international exchange of slightly under twenty-four cents. The “main crop” of Switzerland is the tourist crop, and also their cattle and dairy products amount to considerable volume. They manufacture certain kinds of machinery quite extensively. Swiss watches also are known almost everywhere and are sold in good volume in nearly every nation.

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ENTERING ITALY

 Coming down out of the Alps to the south, we dropped rapidly into a warm sunny climate where people were working in the fields, flowers were growing on all sides and trees were in blossom. One of the most certain evidences that we were approaching Italy appeared when we entered the dining car, that is, the first course of the meal which was brought on without being ordered, was a big plate of spaghetti. We soon reached Milan, Italy, but our Mr. Singleton evidently has moved or for some reason did not get my letter, as he did not show up. From Milan to Venice it is mostly level agricultural country, growing grapes, other fruits and miscellaneous farm products.

ONE DAY IN VENICE------(March 15, 1928)

 All of you have heard of the city that has no streets except water-ways, and you must do all your travelling by boat. Venice is a city of 148,000 people and there is not an automobile or a horse in the city. The city is built on 117 little islands in a great lagoon and the land of the islands is practically all covered with buildings, so that all streets and alleys are water. There are very few sidewalks except along certain parts of the Grand Canal and along the ocean front, and short sidewalks in certain other parts of the city. There are 370 bridges over the streets and alleys for foot traffic, and these bridges are high enough so that row. boats and small freight barges may go under.

 Nearly all travel is by gondola (row boat) and there are about 1500 of them in daily use taking people to and from work and for general traffic. Small motor boats are beginning to come into use, so that gondolas gradually will become fewer. Small stream Ferry Boats run on regular schedule on the Grand ( or main) canal. Possibly you have seen pictures of the ancient gondola, or have read fascinating lines from the poets in which they depict traditional stories of romance, “where the gentle swish of the waters added to the serene beauty of the silvery moon and crowded the imagination with an infinite store of memories”,etc. or something along that line. Anyway, I did not see anything romantic about them, and the gondoliers cannot speak a word of English, so you have to depend upon them to remember the directions given them by the hotel portor as to where you wish to go. The gondola is narrow, only about four feet wide, and 36 ft. long, pointed at the ends and the stem of the boat comes up with a fancy scroll or decoration on top. All gondolas, whether private or for public use, are now painted black, by order of the Doges (Dakos) in order to prevent extreme rivalry in fancy decorations which prevailed some time ago.

 Venice was founded by the Venetians along about 452 A.D., who were a people from Syria or some place in Asia Minor, and they built the city on these islands in the large lagoon ( or In-gu-ne’, they call it) in order to be safe from invading armies, but nevertheless it has been the scene of many struggles. It is located at the north end of the Adriatic Sea, and its back country forms the north-eastern part of Italy, altho it has been a part of Italy only since 1605. Formerly this territory belonged to Austria, France, Turkey, and other owners since the time it was the “Venetian Republic” in 811 A.D., and during the world war it came very nearly being taken again by Austria, as they were pretty close on the north at the time of the armistico.

 Sightseeing in Venice is very interesting to the tourist, not only because of traveling on the streets of water, but there are several ancient and noted things of interest, including the old Palace of the Doges, the Camanile (or Tower\_ and the old St. Mark’s Cathedral. The present Doges Palace was begun in 1312 and finished in 1365 A.D. and the masonry looks equal to present day work, except that it is of ancient design. Three or four former Palaces of the Doges were built by the early Venetians and destroyed by enemies between 600 and 1300 A.D. the present building is used only as a museum to display the early relics, paintings, and statues. One room, the Council Chamber, is said to be about 60x150 ft. with 50 ft. ceiling, no posts or columns. Some of the most wonderful paintings of the middle ages, up to the 16th century, adorn the walls. One painting, “The Glory of Paradise” by Tintoretto, contains 800 figures and faces and covers almost all one end of the room, or a space about 79x35 ft. If today this hall presents to the visitor a wonderful sight with its superbly magnificent decorations in Art, what must have been the imposing appearance to the spectators several hundred years ago, especially when the enthroned Doge met with his 500 Knights and Nobles of the various ranks to deliberate upon State matters.

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 In another part of the building is displayed the old spears and relics of war and instruments of torture. We went over the original “bridge of sighs” which leads from the Judgment hall of this Palace across a narrow water street to the prison. Prisoners were taken over this bridge to receive sentence and then back to the dungeons or to the place where they were executed. I saw the place where they laid prisoners down with the neck over a bar, and by pulling a rope, as the guide explained, a large weight with heavy blade attached, dropped down and severed the neck, and a place was arranged to receive the blood from the body. This seems terrible, but I believe I prefer this method of beheading, if it has to be done, rather than the method used by our dear old English ancestors, who used a large size axe and block carved out to fit the neck and shoulders, which I mentioned in the first letter. With the axe the executioner might get

nervous and miss his aim, but the drop-blade would be more sure, and then the

Venetians did the work down in the prison, while the English did it right out in the yard.

Our guide in London told of many horrors of the early days and then he would always say “and those were the good old days.”

 The Campanile, or Tower of St. Mark, stands over 300 ft. high, and from the top we enjoyed a wonderful birds-eye view of the island city. The present tower is new, having been built since 1902, the year in which the old tower fell down. The first one was built during the period 800 to 912 A.D., and while it was injured several times by earthquake and lightning, it stood until 1908, or about 1000 years. The new one is constructed along modern lines, and has an elevator for the convenience of night-seers, but I wonder if it will stand 1000 yrs. Italy is a great place for Americans to buy old “Antiques”. Our guide pointed out to us a factory where they are manufacturing “Antiques, 1928 model”.

 The Venetians claim to have brought the bones of St. Mark to Venice in 827 A.D. and they created a temple over the spot where they buried the bones.The first temple was destroyed by enemies, and the present one was created in 976 to 1071 A.D., altho the trimmings and decorations were added for hundreds of years afterward, even up to the 17th century. This is not the largest but is considered one of the most richly decorated Cathedrals in the world. Many hundreds of square yards of wall space is decorated with colored fancy Venetian glass, small particles of which are set in cement, and arranged by artists so that they appear to be beautiful paintings. It seems impossible that such work could have been done in early ages and no one can readily see why it required several generations to complete the job.

 The Venetians are noted for their fancy glasswork, and at the present time, their most important industry is the manufacturers and exportation of glass ware, including many varieties of glass novelties in fancy colors, I went thru two glass factories and found it intensely interesting. In one factory they make many kinds of household glassware from plain tumblers to large colored bowls, vases and glass decorations, such as flowers, birds, fish, fruit, etc. A man is certainly a skilled workman who can take a long piece of pipe and dip up a little melted glass on the end of the pipe, then blow it, whirl it, reheat it a little, keep on whirling it, touch it here and there with a tool, flare it out, add a stripe around the edge with another color of melted glass, and finally finish up with a beautiful platter just exactly the size to fit a certain measurement,and then break loose the iron pipe from the bottom without injuring the platter.

 In another factory I saw them making fancy glass bowls, and I am a sure those of you who have never seen such work done, will be interested to know how they go about it. The workman sits at the work bench and a short, hot flame shoots out from a jet where he can reach it easily. The glass in the various colors comes in slender strips something like wire (or spaghetti, I should say, while I am in Italy). The workman takes a piece of real small steel wire which is not easily affected by the heat, holds it in the flame with the end of a piece of glass touching the wire, then whirls the wire and rolls onto the wire some of the molten glass. Then he rolls the bead in the groove of a forming tool to give it a certain shape, then pits it back into the heat and old fancy

decorations with very small size strips of glass of bright colors, then rolls it again in the forming tool, and the bead is ready to lay in the sand, wire, and all, until it cools so it can be removed from the wire. I did not think to time the workman I watched, but I should say he turns out about two beads a minute by working rapidly. In this factory they make fancy glass lamps and chandeliers, and other fine decorations, including clusters of fruit, which look like the real fruit with an electric light underneath. Our tour also included a lace factory, where fancy hand work is done. I did not take much interest in that and you cannot expect me to tell you as much about the patterns as mother could. One thing I did learn is that

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the poor girls who make the bobbins fly all day in weaving this lace, get only about 50 cents per day, while the men in the glass factory get about one dollar per day, and I think the girls have to work the hardest.

 In Venice children learn to swim and row a boat almost as soon as they learn to walk. They are not allowed to go to school until they can swim. The residents of the island city think it is the only place. Our guide told us that his mother lived to be 62 and was never on the mainland, which is only three miles from the city. He has visited America and other countries but was anxious to get back to Venice to stay. There is no danger of being run over by automobiles or street cars, and there is no noise except the yell of the gondoliers as they approach street and alley intersections.

Somewhere in southern Italy 3/17.w8

ONE DAY IN ROME-----------THE “ETERNAL CITY”

You have heard the saying “Rome was not built in a day”; and it is equally true that the tourist cannot “do Rome” in one day but should have ten days. The regular tour did not include Rome on the way to Palestine, but the party will stop there several days on the return trip, and as Mother and I will not be with them then, we left the party at Venice and cut our stay one day short there, so we could have one day in Rome, the meet the party at the Port of Brindisi at southeast corner of Italy. We arrived in Rome yesterday morning about 9:30 and took in as much as we could of the Forum, Vatican, Picture Gallery, Colosseum, Cathedrals of St. Peter, St. John and St. Paul, outside the walls where St. Paul was beheaded; the Catacombs, the dungeon where St. Peter and St.

Paul were imprisoned, and also saw the Scala Santa (Holy Sisters) which are claimed to have been imported from Jerusalem from the judgment hall of Pontius Pilate where Jesus was condemned and crowned with thorns before walking up these steps. I also visited Monte Carlo Methodist College and met Dr. and Mrs. Irwin who are in charge.

This would seem like a full day, but we caught the train all right in the evening, altho we did not have as much time at each place as we should have had, but it was better than not to have seen these noted places at all. Of course, mother could not stand the rush, so part of the time she staid in the car with the driver while I went with the guide, whom I had engaged before reaching the city. Once the guide gave up and that was before we got to the top of the dome of St. Peter’s Cathedral, which is something over 400 ft. high.

The elevator helped us to the base of the dome, about 225 ft. from the floor, and therest of the way was up thru small spiral stairs and steep narrow passage ways around the arch part of the dome between the inner and outer walls. Other people were going up, so I kept on to the top, and I am glad I did, for a birds-eye view of Rome on a clear day, is a sight one will not soon forget. The last part of the climb was the hardest, as it was up a perpendicular ladder thru a hole that would not take a large person. into the bronze ball on top of the dome. This bronze ball looks only about two ft. diameter when you are on the ground, but it is in fact about seven ft. in diameter, as you learn when you got inside of it. Small openings permit a view of the city, but not over three people could easily get into the place at one time. This Cathedral joins the Vatican (the home and private grounds of the Pope) and is said to be the largest Cathedral in the world, over 600 ft. long by 280 ft. wide. The marvelous paintings and carvings of marble surely required ages to complete. I shall not undertake to describe all that I saw, as that would not by possible.

THE COLOSSEUM, OR FLAVIAN AMPHITHEATER

 The Colosseum, that is, the old ruins of it, are impressive. It is said that in its day it seated 70,000 people, and that our modern amphitheaters are patterned after it. It was built immediately after A.D. 70, by prison labor, when Emperor Titus of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and brought many thousands of prisoners back to Rome. At one side is the old den where the lions were kept and where the Christians were thrown in to the lions.The massive stone walls and arches still look sound, except in some places the stone has crumbled. The structure still stands full height for about one third the entire circle. Mother and I had a photograph taken with the old ruins as the back ground. It came out rather dim and I am afraid it will not be plain enough to reproduce in the Accelerator.

 According to history they had some “high old times” in those early days. During the opening spectacles the first 100 days after the Colosseum was completed, we are told that over 5000 wild beasts were killed in the fighting, for the entertainment of the crowds. It was along about that time that Emperor Titus, and Nero just before him, tried to stomp out Christianity, and on different occasions groups of Christians were brought into the arena of the Colosseum, then the wild beasts turned in and allowed to tear them

up, to warn the people against having

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anything to do with Christianity. Under all this persecution, however, Christianity increased until Constantine in 381 A.D. made it the national religion of the Roman Empire.

THE CATACOMBS

 Cut the Appian Way, a mile or two beyond the great Arch of Drusas or gateway of the city walls, we went down into the Catacombs or secret burying place of the Christians. During the first, second and third centuries over 50 of these Catacombs were used as cemetaries and often as places of worship where the Romans could not discover what was going on. The place we went down had four levels under ground and we found our way with lighted candles thru many narrow passageways for considerable distance from the opening. Recent excavations have been made and it has been learned that there are still many places that have never been opened. I saw quite a number of human bones and skulls, and some stone caskets, partly uncovered, which were found securely set in the walls of the passage ways. It seems that certain rich Romans who had land near Rome, such as Caecili, Corneli, Pomponi and others, were converted and they gave land to the Christians for this purpose.

PAINTINGS AND STATUES

 Some of the tourists rave a great deal about the wonderful Art,(pronounced “Awt” or “ought” or “ott” by would-be high-brows), but somehow I have not become very much interested in the Picture Galleries and fine sculpture work. Possibly I need a little training along this line to develop a greater appreciation for them, as there are thousands of pictures and statues in Rome, as well as all over Europe, that represent an infinite amount of labor, patience and skill. Our guide in Rome seemed to take great pride in reeling off the names of the noted pictures and the artists who painted them. He displayed an enthusiastic air, as tho he expected us to be greatly thrilled even to hear the names called of such great artists, but to me it sounded as if he might be calling the names of their different brands of Italian spaghetti. These pictures may, as many claim, depict truthfully the actual brilliance of human life in those early days, but if so, all I have to say is that conditions were dreadful, for there certainly was a sad shortage of clothes. The entrance fee to get into the Picture Gallery was two Lire (about eleven cents) and I staid only about five or ten minutes, so that was about the only place I did not get my money’s worth. When I came out I felt something like the Scotchman when he went to a ball game and bought a score card on which to keep a record of the game, and then neither side made a score. You have heard the old saying “when you are in Rome you must eat Roman candles”. I think one day is too short a time, however, to learn to “do as the Rome does’, when it comes to learning to appreciate Art. In the Gallery I saw one old fellow walking around, leaning on a cane, long hair down nearly to his shoulders and an ancient look on his face. I am sure he could stay there all day long and enjoy it immensely.

AUTOMOBILES IN ROME

 I have been informed that Italy forbids the importation of automobiles from other countries, thereby protecting home manufacturers. The only way you can get other cars into Italy is for temporary use in touring the country. In Rome, I noticed the city auto license numbers run as high as 12,356 and I saw only two American cars, a Hudson and a Ford. Then I saw one other Ford farther north in Italy, which shows that two-thirds of the American tourists who bring their cars along insist on having a “good car”. The Fiat is by far the most numerous, but there are several other Italian cars that apparently are made in fairly good volume. Michelin tires seem to take the lead here, as well as in other European countries thru which we have passed. The Italian tire “Pirelli” is quite popular here as equipment on new Italian cars. Their tire sizes are in metric figures, but the most popular size seems to correspond with our 30x5.25, and even their balloons are clincher type.

 In Rome I noticed only one auto supply store and it did not amount to

very much. I saw a sign “Auto-Reinfornimenti, Accessori”, which did not look entirely familiar, but the nearest of anything I had seen for a few weeks, so I stopped to look it over and found crude glass front display cases, about one ft. deep and six ft. high, attached to the stone walls on either side of the door. In these cases were displayed such articles as rubber horn bulbs, hand operated mechanical horns, Italian type steering wheels, some brands of polish (the brands sounded as if they might also be spaghetti), some crude poorly finished wrenches, Bosch spark plugs, and then a few familiar items such as Malco Automatic Wiper, Firestone tire sundries, Veedol, Shell and Mobile Oil, etc. On the inside the store had some rough greasy benches and practically no display of merchandise. You boys in the “Western Auto” stores may not be experts on Art, but you certainly know a great deal more about the art of running an auto supply store than these fellows over here.

 Southern Italy is a great place for Olives. We passed thru miles and miles of olive orchards. In northern Italy grapes seemed to be the main crop. I have heard it said that a great deal of olive oil made in California codes to Italy to be branded and then is reshipped to New York. Americans are particular, you know, about getting the “best brand” no matter what is inside the container. Probably many carloads of beans raised in California go to Boston so they can be placed in cans made and labeled in Boston, and be returned to us as "Boston Bated Beans". That is all right tho, because the railroads must have enough business to keep them going, and the Boston people need some profit.

ON THE MEDITERRANEAN, Mar.19, 1928

 Upon our arrival at Brindisi, the seaport at the southeast corner of Italy, we went to the International Hotel and found the lobby full of people, mostly from Los Angeles, who had just arrived from the east on their way around the world. The first man I saw in the party was a friend, Mr. Axelson, with whom I have been associated for some time on the Mfg.& Industries Committee of the Chamber of Commerce. I knew this group would arrive that day but I did not know Mr. AxeIson was in the party. They left California last October and sailed westward, visiting Japan, Korea, China, Philippines, Java, Burma, Siam, French Indo China, Federated Melay States, India, Palestine, Egypt Asia Minor, Greece and are now in Italy. Those with whom I talked were highly pleased with the trip. Some of them think it is so wonderful that they want to go again next year, but the leader, Mr.Donaldson, said he had advised them to wait a year and net take two trips in such rapid succession.

 The Mediterranean is an historic old sea. Around its shores grow the first civilization of which we have record and over its waters the first international commerce flourished. Around the Mediterranean was the center of human activities for thousands of years. After western Europe began to develop and. America was discovered the center of commerce shifted to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean had to take second place. Now the Pacific, the greatest of all the oceans, with two-thirds of the population of the globe living in the countries tributary to it, is beginning to become a great factor: in world commerce and is destined, eventually, to become the center of human activity. The ceaseless and irrepressible urge of the Anglo-Saxon people to march westward is stronger now than it has ever been; the Pacific Coast of America is the limit to which they can go, and that district will become very densely populated. Then with the rapid development of South America, Australia, the Dutch, French and English possessions on the western side of the Pacific; the gradual awakening of the sleeping Giant Chinese Empire and the meteoric rise of Japan to world prominence, the Pacific will find itself, within a few generations, the center of world commerce. Rome was founded about 753 B.C. on the old palatine hills whore I saw some of the ruins of the Palaces of the Caesars. Rome grow until it finally became the center of power and industry in the then-known world, and it held its prominence for many hundreds of years. It is now a notable and historic old place with a population of 700,000, but docs not rank very high commercially. When the Atlantic became the center of commercial activity, then London came into prominence as the financial center of the world, but now New York is about equal in population and handles much more money than London. The center of human activity is slowly but surely going westward. When the Pacific becomes the center of world commerce, then Los Angeles will be not only the financial and commercial center of the world, but also the center of educational, cultural and spiritual development, as well as the headquarters for moving picture producers, super-real-estate operators, auto supply chain stores, and Chamber of Commerce Boosters. How is that for a day-dream out here in the middle of the Mediterranean when the waves are rolling high and many of the passengers are in bed? It may sound like a real estate salesman's talk, but I have no lots for sale. I intend to keep those few I have to prove and confirm my belief in the future of Los Angeles. But please do not be in too big a hurry for all these things to come to pass. It will take time for all these developments to take place. You may tell your grandchildren that their grandchildren may live to see Los Angeles the center of world activity. The future destiny of Los Angeles is sure; its world supremacy is inevitable, whether we hold back or boost, but the rapidity with which the change shall come will depend somewhat upon the enthusiasm and intelligence with which we boost.

 Tomorrow we shall reach Alexandria, Egypt. Then we go to Cairo and up the Nile. In the next letter I shall tell you something about Egypt and the Pyramids. I understand we are going to see some of the things that came out of King Tat's Tomb, where they found ten million dollars worth of gold. They know there are many tombs yet undiscovered. Possibly it would be a good idea to stop and dig a while if the desert sand is not too hot. Will decide upon that later.

                                                                             Sincerely yours,

GEORGE PEPPERDINE

P.S. The next letter (No.4) will be written after I leave Palestine, going east, and will net reach you for several weeks after No. 3, because of longer time required for mail to travel across Indian and pacific Oceans.

                                                                                                            G.P.