

# Home news

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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

It is semi-officially stated that negotiations have been renewed with Russia in order to re-open the suspended diplomatic relations. The main object is to enable the Soviet Government to be represented in Geneva on certain commissions under the League of Nations, when questions touching Russian interests are discussed.

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In the National Council, Federal Councillor Motto vigorously opposed the proposed creation of a commission for foreign affairs which he considered a superfluous interference and an encumbrance; the proposal originated with the Socialist group, who partly based their demand on the alleged failures in the Zones controversy, the Rhine navigation deliberations and the present relations with Italy.

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In connection with the Rickentunnel catastrophe Federal Councillor Haag, accompanied by M. Schrafl, the general manager of the Swiss Federal Railways, paid personal calls of condolence to the families of the victims. In replying to an interpellation in the National Council, Federal Councillor Haag stated that the six members of the first relief party were nothing short of heroes, whose self-sacrificing willingness and insistent efforts in the face of certain death were an outstanding feature. The names of the nine victims, including the six in charge of the fateful train are: Pointsman Zahner, age 30, from Kaltbrunn, father of four children; Engine-driver Klausli, age 44, from Hochfelden, father of three children; Stoker Frommer, age 28, from Dübendorf; Brakesman Kung, age 32, from Hombrechtikon; Conductor Brunner, age 38, from Ebnat, father of three children; Inspector Müller, age 43, from Wattwil, father of two children; Station-master Bleiker, age 34, from Wattwil, father of three children; Conductor Zehnder, age 28, from Einsiedeln and Conductor Meier, age 42, from Künten (Kappel).

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Madam Béguelin, the wife of the Secretary of the Bernese cantonal police department, lost her life in jumping from a runaway car; she was returning with her husband from a visit, when on an incline outside Sonceboz, the brakes of the car refused to act.

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In jumping from his dog-cart, the horse having shied, Municipal Councillor Alfred Honegger, from Wetzikon, fell and injured himself so severely that he subsequently died.

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An isolated farmstead above the village of Gams (St. Gall) was the scene of a cruel robbery. Stirred by the continued calling of the hungry cattle, neighbours forced an entry into the house and found the body of the farmer, Benedikt Kramer, terribly mauled as the consequence of an evident fight. A former labourer, who has disappeared from the district, is being searched for by the police.

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In order to avoid arrest, Max Bornhauser, the clerk to the land registry in Erlen (Thurgau), has committed suicide by shooting; an inspection of his books is said to have revealed defalcations to the amount of Frs. 70,000.

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

Matters Swiss have claimed very little space in the English press during the period under review. The *Manchester Guardian* (October 2nd) has an article on

**Swiss Immigration**, the figures having previously been given in one of the great financial weeklies; here it is:—

Ever since 1870 there has been a considerable influx into Switzerland for reasons that are easily appreciated—Switzerland being an agreeable country with low taxes and cheap living. In 1910 Switzerland contained 522,000 foreigners out of a population of 3,753,293. The war checked immigration, but it has increased rapidly since, and in 1920 the foreign element had nearly reached the proportion of 1910, being over 10 per cent. of the population. Since 1889 147,000 foreigners have been naturalised, and last year a law was passed naturalising children born in Switzerland whose mothers are Swiss. The economic aspect of the question is specially interesting. The foreign immigrants supply most of the workers for the building and clothing industries and most of the food and fruit retailers, shoemakers, tailors, and

navvies. The native population is reduced by a considerable Swiss emigration, but the Swiss emigrants are generally connected with agriculture or hotel-keeping, whereas the immigrants enter industrial life. For this reason there is a movement in Switzerland for the training of the Swiss youth in the industries that are now taking this large force of immigrant labour. It will be interesting to see what is the effect of such measures. The new policy of the United States on the subject of immigration means, that if for any reason the great immigration from Italy to France which has marked the last few years comes to be checked, Switzerland will be specially liable to attract Italian immigrants.

### The Economic Alps.

This is the curious description of a new map, particulars of which are given in the *Daily News* (Sept. 30th); though it supplies a powerful argument in favour of international free trade, its author and compiler—strange to say—is a Conservative M.P.:—

“Prominent London Bankers have been greatly interested in a new discovery in map-making. After elaborate calculation by British and European bankers and economists, Sir Clive Morrison-Bell, Conservative M.P. for Honiton, has designed a model map of Europe, with international boundaries standing out in relief, showing the relative height of the tariff walls in Europe.

According to this map the Alps have moved east. Rising from a contour line of 6 for Holland, the same as for Great Britain, merchandise has to pay duty on entering Belgium, and climb 2 points—these figures are purely relative, showing the ratio of tariffs in the different countries.

To reach the colder climes of Hungary—27 points above Free Trade level—the goods can either climb gradually through France (13 points) or Germany (15 points), and free-wheel comfortably via Switzerland (12 points) before encountering the lower slopes of the Economic Alps.

The map, with these barriers, made to scale, mounting pyramid-like to the apex in Central Europe, shows at a glance the suicidal hindrances artificially erected against international trade. Is it any wonder that economically the old Austria-Hungarian Empire is but a shadow of its old self, when an 11 point barrier separates Austria (16 points) from Hungary.

Russia's barrier of 43, aptly enough, and not without a touch of humour, is superimposed by a miniature wire fence, representing obstacles other than economic.

This model, at present housed at the Bank of England, should be reproduced and be open for inspection in the industrial centres. British manufacturers would then realise what a multitude of hindrances in Europe combine to swell our unemployment totals. More important still, if models were available in Central Europe, they would show manufacturers there forcibly and vividly the futility of sacrificing economic benefits for political jealousies and aspirations.”

### The Hospice of St. Bernard.

Judging by the multitude and diversity of descriptive articles which have appeared in the English press ever since the famous hospice has been converted into a commercial venture, the monks seem to have been able to secure the services of a most successful advertising agent, unless one of the “fifteen” has made a thorough study of this art at one of the American commercial universities. The following excellent instructive sketch is taken from the last issue of *Sunday-at-Home*, No. 5:—

“After an existence as such for nearly a thousand years, the world-famous monastery of St. Bernard has been converted from a free Hospice to an hotel with a fixed tariff. The reasons for the change are two. The first is that modern conditions of transport have rendered its original purpose (namely, to succour travellers crossing the Pass into Italy and Switzerland) no longer necessary; and the second is that funds to meet the ever increasing cost of the establishment's maintenance are urgently required.

In bygone days the Hospice of St. Bernard was a comparatively wealthy institution, and received substantial grants from all over Europe. Some of its revenues even came from England, for the Priory of Hornchurch in Essex (where the Hospice actually had a cell) and Savoy House in the Strand were once part of its endowment. Those days, however, are long past, and the present annual income of the establishment is sadly depleted. Yet the calls upon its coffers are larger than ever.

Despite its remote position, perched high up and solitary among the snow-clad mountains and precipitous ravines separating Italy from Switzerland, the Hospice of St. Bernard is not nearly so inaccessible as is generally thought. During the

summer months at any rate, it is visited, in addition to chance travellers, by thousands of tourists from all parts of Europe. Judging, too, from the signatures in the visitors' book, many of those who enjoy the kindly hospitality of the monks come from even further afield. The number of such guests in the course of a year runs into five figures; and sometimes as many as five hundred are sleeping there on the same evening. More than half of these visitors are Italians, on their way into Switzerland to look for work. Of the remainder, the majority are Swiss and French, the balance consisting of tourists of all nationalities.

The most convenient starting-off place from which to make an expedition to St. Bernard from the Swiss side is Montreux. The journey can be made within an early breakfast and a late dinner. By motor-car the trip occupies about six hours, allowing for halts on the way. The customary route is *via* Martigny and Orsières. From this latter point the road gradually becomes more and more precipitous, and a few kilometers further on the eternal snow commences.

Just beyond Bourg St. Pierre, where Napoleon once spent a night when leading his army across the Alps, is the establishment in which are bred the famous St. Bernard dogs. It is, however, to the Hospice itself that the dogs are removed as soon as they emerge from puppyhood.

The original St. Bernard pack was formed in 1812, being bred from short-coated Newfoundlands and Danish mastiffs. Some years afterwards, during an exceptionally severe winter, the monks were compelled, owing to the shortage of food supplies, to disperse the pack. A long time elapsed before they were able to reassemble it. Under normal conditions, its strength is kept up to fifteen at a time. All the members are magnificent specimens of their class, approximating to the size of young calves, and strong enough to carry a helpless man. Still, strong as they are, the severities of the climate exact a heavy toll of them, and in four or five years at the most they are apt to succumb to rheumatism and heart troubles.

To train the St. Bernard dogs for their responsible work, the method adopted is to send them out as puppies with the older dogs, who prevent them running away and getting lost. They soon develop a wonderful instinct for direction, and can be trusted to serve as guides even in the thickest fog. When news is received by telephone from the Swiss and Italian observation points below the Hospice that travellers are proceeding towards it, a party of monks and dogs start off to conduct them.

The dogs always run ahead in pairs. When a wanderer is found, probably sheltering from the snow behind a rock, one stops there while the other returns and leads a rescue-party. The most famous dog ever possessed by the Hospice, was one called “Barry”; and in memory of his exploits this name is always given to the biggest and strongest specimen that happens to be still on the active list. The original “Barry” is now to be seen (stuffed, in a glass case) in the Berne museum.

By the way, there is a popular delusion about the St. Bernard dogs that should be dispelled. This is that they carry, slung round their necks, a small keg of brandy, with which to refresh travellers lost in the snow. They do not carry brandy. They carry blankets.

The founder of the Hospice was St. Bernard, of Menthon, near the Lake of Annecy. Born in the 10th century, he was sent to complete his education at Paris. On returning, he became betrothed to the daughter of a rich Savoyard. His heart, however, was set on the priesthood, and abandoning romance for religion, he threw in his lot with the Augustine Fathers. The Bishop of Aosta made him Archdeacon of the Cathedral there; and it was while doing this work that he crossed the Mons Jovis Pass and established the Hospice ever since connected with his name. The Castle of Menthon, where he was born, still exists; and a service to his memory is held there once a year.

The Hospice of St. Bernard consists of two main buildings joined in the centre by a covered wooden bridge connecting the second floors of each. The buildings themselves are solid structures of stone, five stories high, with slated roofs. The older portion, in which are the guest rooms, with the chapel, library and refectory, etc., dates from the sixteenth century, and the newer and smaller one is comparatively modern. At the back is a picturesque little lake, the surface of which is frequently frozen even in summer; and just beyond is the road leading towards Italy. Near at hand is a small outhouse to which is attached a grim purpose. This is the *morgue*. It serves as a last resting place for the bodies of travellers who