

# Home news

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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

The budget of the Swiss Confederation to the end of 1926 closes with a debit balance of 9.4 million francs, though a deficit of over 24 million francs had originally been anticipated. The total indebtedness on that date was 2,175 million francs and nearly 80 million francs had been paid off during that period.

It is officially announced that the long-standing dispute between Switzerland and the Soviet Government has been settled through the good offices of German diplomacy. As a condition the Swiss Federal Council "absolutely condemns and greatly regrets" the criminal acts at the Lausanne Conference in May, 1923, which culminated in the murder of the unofficial Russian delegate, Vorovsky, and also declares its willingness to grant an indemnity to the daughter of the victim, subject to certain Swiss claims being admitted. Great satisfaction is expressed in official circles at Bern over the success of these negotiations, whilst in Moscow the result seems to be hailed as a great diplomatic victory. The immediate outcome will be the removal of the trade boycott between the two countries, though the regular exchange of diplomatic courtesies by the re-opening of legations in the respective capitals will be subject to a good many other considerations.

The new Federal Motor Bill, which regulates the traffic of mechanically-driven vehicles in the whole of Switzerland, will be submitted to the plebiscite on May 15th, the referendum having secured over 91,000 signatures. Though favoured by all the political parties, considerable controversy is expected to precede the votation as the bulk of the motorists strongly object to the compulsory insurance and liability clauses contained in the Bill.—On the same date largely increased Federal subsidies to the cantons of Uri, Grisons, Ticino and Valais for the upkeep of the international alpine route will have to be voted upon.

At the next Landsgemeinde (May 1st) of the canton Uri a proposal is being submitted to fine all those who take their stand in the ring or participate in a show of hands though not entitled to the cantonal vote.

Probably on account of the heavy rains, a landslide has occurred just below the Balmühl, near Balm (Solothurn), where a meadow and other cultivated land has disappeared into the abyss and the telephone standards sunk into the ground.

By a legacy of Frs. 122,000 under the will of Frau D. Legler-Weber, the widow of a former States Councillor, several philanthropic institutions of the canton Glaris are deriving considerable benefit.

For slandering the Rev. Mr. Altwegg, of Wipkingen-Zürich, the district court has sentenced the two editors of the now defunct publication "Morgenstern," Jean Hirt and Eugen Schneider, to a fine of Frs. 300 each. The slander was contained in an article which accused the clergyman of using the pulpit for propagating his own political views.

A cashier of the Zurich branch of the Swiss National Bank, Oscar Kessler, has mysteriously disappeared, a deficiency of Frs. 560,000 being subsequently discovered in his cash entries. As a few days previously he had obtained a passport it is surmised that he has left the country; in the meantime his private motor launch has been found adrift on the lake of Zurich with the engine in such a condition as to lead to the assumption that he had fallen overboard when refilling the tank with oil. A reward of Frs. 10,000 has been offered for information which may lead to his arrest.

Losing control of his car through the bursting of a tyre, Franz Grosser, a baker of Biberist (Solothurn) was thrown against a fence; he was taken to the local hospital in a hopeless condition.

The unattended level-crossing near Villmergen-Anglikon was the scene of a fatal accident when the farmer Adolf Setz-Berner, from Dintikon, crossing in a trap, was thrown on the boiler of an approaching engine; a child sitting next to him in the trap was later on picked up on the permanent way in a critical condition.

While cycling Hans Roth, a decorator in Olten, collided with a motor-cycle and subsequently died from the injuries received.

## FIRST OF AUGUST CELEBRATION.

As in previous years, the Swiss National Committee is making a special appeal for funds, which on this occasion will be devoted to the *Welfare of Invalid Nurses*. The badge, which will be sold in our Colony at 1s., is in the form of a silk ribbon depicting the Federal Cross. It is hoped that everyone will contribute to this patriotic work of charity, and that the London collection will constitute a powerful manifestation from Swiss abroad.

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

### The Basle Mission and the British Government.

In a leading article, *Truth* (April 6th) comments on the wrongs which, under the pressure of war-time agitation, have been inflicted on this neutral enterprise and which the British Government is very reluctant to redress. The article is inspired by a recent motion in the House of Lords in the name of Lord Templeton and drawing attention to the still unsatisfied claims of the Basle Trading Co. :—

For a great many years before the war Swiss missionary enterprises had been carried on in West Africa, in India and elsewhere by means of two separate and distinct, though associated, organisations—the Société Evangélique des Missions de Bâle, founded in 1814, and the Société Commerciale des Missions de Bâle, founded in 1854. It will be convenient to refer to these concerns as the Basle Mission and the Basle Trading Co. respectively. The former was engaged in purely religious work; the latter was a trading company which, after payment of 5 per cent. to its shareholders, handed over its surplus profits to missionary societies—chiefly the Basle Mission. The trading company devoted itself to the encouragement and development of native industries, especially agriculture, and I am told that it did much to promote the remarkably successful native cocoa-growing industry of the Gold Coast. In the course of time the Company had built up a very extensive and valuable business both in West Africa and in India. From the outset of the war there were complaints both in India and in West Africa of the German character and connections of the Basle Mission. It is admitted that the Basle Trading Co. also had some German directors, but 88 per cent. of the shareholders were Swiss. In November, 1914, the Company, as a neutral operating in British territory, got rid of its German directors and employees and stopped its subsidies to the Basle Mission, finally severing all connection with the Mission. Both in India and in West Africa the authorities took action against the Mission, eventually confiscating its properties in 1916.

In the case of the Basle Trading Co., an agreement was made with the British Government in 1916, whereby the Company transferred the control of its business to agents in England who were nominated by the Government. The Gold Coast Government, however, continued to hold that the presence of the Company was "a definite source of danger to the colony" (!) because of the alleged pro-German sympathies of some of its Swiss employees, and at the beginning of 1918 the Legislative Council passed an ordinance under which the Company's property was sequestered. Similar action had been taken in India, and the British Government, after protracted discussions, evolved a scheme for the permanent expropriation of the property of the Basle Trading Co. Its Swiss owners valued this property—comprising lands, factories, stores, machinery, and stock in trade—at £1,500,000. The British Government offered them £120,000 as compensation—this being the amount of the nominal share capital—but held that for the rest the property was in the nature of a trust for the natives and could be dealt with on that footing.

Eventually in 1919 the Commonwealth Trust, Limited, was formed with a nominal capital of £60,000 of which £51,000 was subscribed, to take over and manage the Basle company's assets and business, the articles of association keeping the new Trust in some respects under the control of the Colonial Secretary, strictly limiting dividends to 5 per cent., and providing that surplus profits shall be applied to native education and welfare. Coming into possession of a great commercial undertaking with no purchase price or even rent to pay, the Trust was placed in an exceptionally advantageous position. Instead of profits, however, the Trust made losses on the Gold Coast aggregating nearly £370,000. In India

## ANNIVERSARIES OF SWISS EVENTS.

April 24th, 1832.—First Federal Gymnastic Festivities at Aarau.

April 24th, 1732.—Execution of Major Abraham Davel. In the battle of Villmergen (1712) he had distinguished himself, and was therefore appointed one of the four majors who had to conduct the military manoeuvres of Vaud. Major Davel was universally loved as a man of the finest character and of profound piety verging on mysticism. In the dispute regarding the *Formula Consensus* he was wholly on the side of the academy of Lausanne; and the persecution which that body experienced at the hands of the Bernese government was regarded by him as an intolerable oppression of his conscience. He also regarded the temporal rule of the Bernese bailiffs with profound disapproval; and for these reasons there matured in his mind the idea of detaching Vaud from Bern, in order to make it a fourteenth canton of the Confederation. He disdained to gain over recruits in secret meetings, or to make underhand preparations of any kind, for he wished to have no accomplices in case of failure. The only crafty action performed by this remarkable conspirator was that in the spring of 1723, when the offices of the bailiffs were vacated and all of them had gone to Bern, he collected the unsuspecting troops of his district as if for a review and entered Lausanne at their head. Here he appeared before the town council and disclosed his design. If Lausanne would lead the rising the whole country would follow.

Instead of agreeing to this proposal the honourable gentlemen of Lausanne were so greatly alarmed "at this detestable proceeding" that they immediately sent a special messenger to Bern, and threw the guileless Davel into prison. In Bern the news at first caused great excitement which, however, soon subsided when it was seen that all remained quiet in Vaud. Consequently Bern was able to allow the case to be peacefully judged by the Lausanne council; and when this body condemned Davel to have his right hand hewn off and to be subsequently decapitated, Bern was able to display a semblance of magnanimity by commuting the sentence to a simple decapitation. With Christian calmness, and convinced that his sacrifice would not be in vain, the high-minded man went to meet his death.—*Oechsli*.

April 26th, 1573.—Duke Sforza cedes Lugano to Switzerland.

April 27th, 1792.—Porrentruy annexed by France.

April 28th, 1487.—The Confederates defeated by the Milanese.

the profits in six years have amounted to £25,000. Some time ago the Indian branches were entrusted to managing agents, Messrs. Parry and Co.

Seeing what a mess has been made of the African section of the business, a body of the shareholders have urged that this, too, should be placed in more experienced hands. The African and Eastern Trade Corporation has offered to assume the management in Africa on terms, including a guaranteed profit of £10,000 a year for the Commonwealth Trust. The offer has been rejected. As one reason for this decision, Mr. A. D. Jackson, the chairman, objected to the association of the Trust with a company which, among other things, is concerned with the sale of spirits to natives. Apart from the willingness of the proposed managers to undertake that liquor should not be sold in the Trust shops, the Trust chairman's objection is decidedly curious. Mr. Jackson holds one other directorship—and that is a directorship of an Indian distillery company. But there is another and perhaps a still more forcible reason why the Commonwealth Trust is reluctant to give up the management of a business in which it has been losing about £50,000 a year. The business provides a number of well-paid jobs.

Much more important, however, than this dispute in regard to the management by the Commonwealth Trust is the question raised by Lord Templeton's notice of motion. The question is whether the confiscation of the property of the Basle Trading Co. was not legally, as well as morally, an unjustifiable act. Sir John Simon, K.C., Mr. F. H. Maugham, K.C., and Mr. John Barrington Ward, K.C., gave a