

Operating difficulties of our merchant fleet

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OPERATING DIFFICULTIES OF OUR MERCHANT FLEET.

(“Lloyd's List,” Dec. 29th, 1941.)

Discussing the difficulties of the Swiss seagoing merchant fleet, which now totals 39,260 tons, the “Journal de Geneve” states that the employment of these vessels is subject to very complex formalities which prevent them trading with the speed which is desirable. The total tonnage represents about one-ninth of what was needed before the war, but the present difficulties are not exclusively due to the insufficient capacity of the fleet. As the seamen of belligerent countries are all mobilised and United States seamen are not allowed to sail in foreign ships (the article appeared before the extension of the war), and Switzerland has very few of its own nationals who are engaged in this occupation, the finding of crews is very difficult, cohesion is not their strong point, and discipline and good understanding are often difficult to maintain. Thus, the crew of the Swiss steamer *St. Gotthard* includes a dozen White Russians holding Nansen passports, and a few Spaniards. Portuguese and Dutchmen.

Owing to war risks, wages have increased to an alarming extent, the article continues; in addition to accommodation, food and life and accident insurance premiums, a seaman receives \$150 a month, a cook \$215, a first engineer \$340, a first officer \$360, and a master \$560. Most of the men are unwilling to sign on without a guarantee that part of their wages will be paid to their families, which also necessitates delicate international negotiations. When it is added that coal or fuel oil cannot always be obtained without some trouble, that the ship-repairing yards are full of work, that freight rates and war risk insurance premiums have quadrupled, that the luxury of making up cargoes in a rational manner cannot now be afforded, and that it is often necessary to sacrifice weight to the space available, or vice-versa, it will be seen that the operation of the small Swiss merchant fleet is no easy matter under present conditions.

THE FEDERAL PRESIDENT AS SEEN BY THE “IRISH INDEPENDENT.”

(January 7th, 1942.)

The new President of Switzerland, Philipp Etter, is one of the most cultured Catholic statesmen to be found in the world to-day. A man of classical education, he is a real humanist, widely read, deeply experienced, just fifty, and an exemplary family man, father of ten children! As President of the State, he continues to live, as Swiss democratic tradition wills it, in his own home, a roomy villa on the other side of the deep Aar Valley dividing Berne city, between Government Buildings and the Alps, so to say!

Tall, and of proportionate build, without being on the heavy side, carrying himself as straight as a rod, he is an imposing figure to behold. Yet there is great simple friendliness in his blue eyes. His head has the profile of a Caesar, yet in his natural modesty, when he starts talking, you could think of him, with his fine spiritual face, clad in a cassock, the head of a great Order.

He hails from the simple little town of Menzingen, so peacefully enfolded by its hills — one of the most Catholic towns in all Switzerland. His father, who was doctor there, was of a family as old as Switzer-

land herself. After studying law he settled down in 1917 as lawyer in Zug, the capital of his native province — his own “canton.” Lake-bordered Zug, halfway between Zurich and Lucerne, is one of those picturesque gems of an old city of which Switzerland counts so many: its gabled houses, statued fountains — pumps really — mosaic-tiled, coloured spires of churches and public buildings.

When he was 27 he became a member of his provincial Parliament; at 31, member of the Government of his province, for Switzerland never believed in the modern heresay of super-centralisation. He has written a great deal, and his handwriting is one of the most characteristic I have ever seen: precise, yet full of personality, the letters upright, the words and sentences almost built architecturally, like streets of houses.

Much in demand as a speaker — he has a warm, confident voice — he never utters mere verbiage, not even in the most impromptu speech. I remember vividly one of his sayings — he was addressing the centenary celebration of Swiss historians: “Divine Providence has willed diversity of opinions, hence we must not only tolerate such diversity but honour it, for every exclusively self-opinionated opinion has something wrong, something false, which we must evade.” I am quoting somewhat freely from the German, which is President Etter’s vehicle of thought, but near enough, I believe, to do it justice.

HUEHNER SUPPE.

In the year 1390, the district of Burgdorf was overrun by a horde of robbers, stealing and plundering whatever they could get hold of. The brave burghers lost no time, rounded them up, killed twenty-five men and took about sixty prisoners. The women of Burgdorf, armed with all kinds of weapons did more than their share to catch the plunderers. Their bravery was duly rewarded by the mayoress of the town, who promised to provide every year sixty chickens, eighty-one pieces of meat and bread for an annual dinner in honour of the womens’ brave behaviour.

For many years this dinner was cooked in the castle kitchen and distributed in eight different streets of the town, but one year, when carried down the steep castle hill, the cauldron was upset and from then on the chicken and meat was provided uncooked.

In 1737 the mayoress, Ursula Manuel, refused to supply the usual things for the great annual dinner. After pleading with the mayoress without result the women sent a deputation to Berne. The Council decided, that the mayoress had no right, to stop such an old custom and was commanded to provide the dinner every year as usual.

Thus the old “Hühner Suppe” has survived all these years and is annually served, at a prominent hotel of the town and greatly appreciated and enjoyed by to-day’s burghers.

H. E.

Drink delicious “Ovaltine”
at every meal—for Health!