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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

The autumn session of the Swiss Parliament commenced last Monday; in the National Council the project of an accelerated electrification of the Federal Railways is being discussed.

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Over 44 million francs have been voted for the construction of the electric power works Barberine-Vernayaz (Valais); this power station is expected to supply current to the Federal Railways by the end of 1928.

\*\*\*

A preliminary enquiry into the fracas at Lugano between Socialists and Fascists seems to establish the fact that these two political parties have simply transferred their activities to Swiss soil. Of the nine arrests effected by the local police amongst the Socialists, seven were of Italian nationality. Nobody has been hurt, and the allegation that the Ticinese authorities have allowed Italian honour and dignity to be violated seems to be as unfounded as it is ridiculous.

Minister Wagnière has called upon the Italian Prime Minister in Rome to inform him of the result of the official enquiry, and Signor Mussolini has now expressed his entire satisfaction, which should dispose of the matter.

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A conference is at present sitting at Berne to prepare the way for a new international society, the Middle Class Union, which seeks to combine the middle classes of all countries, with a view to defending their economic interests.

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The race for the Gordon-Bennett Cup started last Sunday from Brussels under most unfavourable weather conditions, with the result that some of the intrepid aeronauts paid the supreme penalty for the hazardous venture. Considering that a balloon race under adverse atmospheric conditions is as poor a test of personal skill and endurance as it is practically meaningless from the point of view of science and research, we may well ask whether the deliberate sacrifice of valuable human lives, to satisfy the terms laid down for an antiquated sporting event, is justified. The whole thing was a gamble, and as Fate willed it, luck was against the Swiss competitors. Of the three Swiss balloons, the "Geneve" was struck by lightning soon after the start, caught fire and fell to the ground, killing on the spot the pilot, Lieut. Chr. von Grüningen, and his assistant, Mr. Rud. Wehren. Von Grüningen was an engineer by trade, 45 years old and leaves a widow and three children; Rud. Wehren was a well-known sports enthusiast, 38 years old and the proprietor of the Grand Hôtel des Sports in Saanenmöser. The balloon "Zurich," piloted by Prof. Picard, of Brussels, had to make a forced landing on Sunday evening in Holland, whilst the third one, "Helvetia," in charge of pilot Armbruster, came down early on Monday morning somewhere in Schleswig, about 310 miles away. The winner of the race will probably be Lieut. Demuyter, in the "Belgica" (the holder of last year's cup), who came down on Monday evening at Örebro (Central Sweden); the distance he covered is barely 750 miles.

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National Councillor Jonas Burki, from Biberist, died after a serious operation in a Solothurn nursing home at the age of 61. He was a well-known and respected figure in cantonal politics and held many important offices.

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## LE COMMERCE AVEC L'ETRANGER.

La participation des divers pays au commerce spécial de la Suisse en 1922 a été la suivante:—

Aux importations:

Allemagne 365,585,609 fr., ou le 19.10% du total des importations.

France 302,597,695 fr., ou le 15.81%.

L'Italie 224,463,782 fr., 11.73%.

Grande-Bretagne 173,917,266 fr., 9.08%.

Etats-Unis 190,352,034 fr., 9.94%.

Ont participé aux exportations:

Grande-Bretagne 347,946,780 fr., 19.75%.

France 240,185,918 fr., 13.63%.

Allemagne 192,591,471 fr., 10.93%.

Italie 92,569,245 fr., 5.26%.

Etats-Unis 215,366,711 fr., 12.23%.

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

### Mussolini's Message to Switzerland.

We do not care to deal in these Notes with matters of high politics. To do so with any appreciable degree of pertinence or force would require specialised knowledge and reliable sources of inside information which, we frankly admit, lie, for the present at least, outside our province. We appreciate the element of truth in the saying that "Fools step in where angels fear to tread." We are not angels—we know that for certain. On the other hand, we have always had haunting suspicion at the back of our minds that we really might be justly included in the other category. Of course, we have often called ourselves a fool (with or without the picturesque adjective). That is nothing. When a man calls himself a fool he never means it, and when another man calls him a fool he never believes it, but, on the contrary, "denies the allegation and scorns the alligator"—sometimes in quite a rude and violent manner. Hence our caution in striving to avoid any glaring exhibition of folly, whether inherent or accidental, chronic or temporary. As we have said, therefore, we refrain from dabbling in matters of high politics. We need not hesitate, however, to quote what is matter of common knowledge as reported in the public press. Mussolini's message to Switzerland is thus given in the *Daily Express* (Sept. 14th):—

Italy has officially notified the Swiss Government that she cannot accept arbitration by Switzerland in the dispute with Jugo-Slavia about Fiume.

"The Italian Government," says the message, "does not think that the Government of a country which is a neighbour of Italy could intervene as an arbitrator with complete impartiality."

The comments of the *Liverpool Daily Courier* (Sept. 14th) on this same message, under the heading "Why fear to arbitrate?" are as under:—

Signor Mussolini's refusal to accept the Swiss President's arbitration in the Fiume dispute is in direct contravention to the terms of the Treaty of Rapallo. A special clause written into that agreement provides that in event of the failure of the joint Italo-Jugo-Slavian Commission to agree as to the detailed application of the Treaty terms, the question at issue should go before the President of the Swiss Republic for final and unappealable settlement. The hour for that has arrived, and Signor Mussolini quits.

The reason he offers is significant. The good offices of the highest Swiss official may lead to dangerous difficulties between Switzerland and Italy.

The explanation given in many League quarters in Geneva is that by this action Signor Mussolini has made possible the reopening of direct negotiations with Belgrade, and has prevented the issue's being brought before the League of Nations Assembly.

Rather more amused than provoked, the British public would like to ask the Signor why?

We need not fear that any occupant for the time being of the highest office of the Swiss Confederation would be found lacking in the high moral courage that would calmly undertake and fearlessly adjudicate in any dispute that might be submitted to him.

### Impressions of Switzerland.

If we were to collect for the information of posterity all the complimentary things said about our country and people even in the course of a single summer season, it is certain that posterity would adjudge Switzerland to be the finest country and the Swiss the finest people that ever were, or are, or will be. Of course, we know that posterity would be quite right—with certain unimportant reservations—but our natural modesty restrains us from saying so. Joking apart, however, it is really a fine thing to find men of culture and refinement expressing themselves as they do regarding our native land and us. May we never fall short of these sincere and appreciative commendations! We quoted one clergyman last week; we give extracts from the impressions of two others below—it would occupy too much of our space to reprint in full

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their articles in the *Lewisham Borough News* (Sept. 12th) and *The Methodist Recorder* (Sept. 13th) respectively. What do you think of the enthusiastic assurance of the Rev. W. H. Boyne Bunting, Vicar of St. Bartholomew's, Sydenham: "There is nothing like a visit to Switzerland to do one good *in every way*?" (The italics are ours.)

At the time this is being written, I have just returned from Switzerland, where I had a most glorious holiday. . . . The journey here was not so comfortable or short, thanks to a roughish sea, and the still rougher treatment of our British Custom House officials! One notices the difference between our insular arrangements for travelling and those of other countries, when going abroad. We are strangely behind the times in these ways; nor do we receive the same courtesy and attention as we receive, say, in France and Switzerland. Having had my growl, let me now proceed, in the brief space at my disposal, to tell you of one or two things which struck us most of all in our travels.

Zermatt itself is interesting, especially at night, when the main street is thronged with people from all lands, speaking many and various languages, chatting in groups or buying what the natives have to sell. We happened to be there on August 1—a National Festival—when there were fireworks in the evening, but not quite the kind which we in Sydenham are accustomed to see—and to hear! Visitors from the hotels provided themselves with Chinese lanterns and formed up in procession to the middle of the village, where the people were addressed by an ex-President of the Republic and a very eloquent Swiss pastor.

But I think I was most impressed there by the caves and the cell of St. Beatus. According to tradition, this holy man was the first Christian Missionary to Switzerland, and probably came from Britain, having sought refuge there after being persecuted by northern heathen tribes. He is said to have lived in a cell adjoining the caves for over 50 years. There is a figure of the Saint in his cell, writing at a table; while, in a cell opposite, is the representation of a family group of prehistoric times. The cave itself is accessible to a depth of over a mile and a half. It contains numerous canyons, grottoes, cauldrons, glacier mills and stalagmites and stalactites of many weird objects. We wended our way to the very end and back, conducted by a rather facetious young Swiss guide. No one who goes to that part of the country should miss seeing it.

There is nothing like a visit to Switzerland to do one good in every way. It is an absolute change, which an ordinary seaside holiday does not always give one, and is no more expensive. It broadens the mind as well, and helps to break down national and religious prejudices. It was especially interesting to one like myself, keen on the re-union of Christendom, to see how Roman and Anglican Catholics as well as Nonconformists and French Protestants worship in Churches adjoining one another, where the old monastery once stood. It only needed the walls between to be pulled down to see them worshipping together! By the way, I heard in our Church there one of the very best sermons it has ever been my privilege to listen to, on the life of Service being the true Christian life.

The Rev. Peter Kynn writes as under, and we quote his remarks specially for his version of the extraordinary accident which was recorded in bald and unemotional manner in our columns a few weeks ago:—

A month in Switzerland! That ought to be holiday enough for any man. . . .

It is not difficult to grow enthusiastic when speaking about Switzerland, with its mountains, glaciers and lakes, its wonderful flora and fascinating people. I have heard all the usual adjectives, and a good number of unusual ones, called into service by those who have visited that delightful country. . . .

Switzerland undoubtedly is, to those who see it rightly, a constant demonstration of the extraordinary triumph of man over nature. It was no small thing when about 1230 the St. Gotthard Pass was opened to traffic. That event is of striking historic and international significance, but it is also a demonstration of man's determination to conquer even the eternal hills. There came a time, centuries afterwards, when the first wheeled vehicle went over the Pass, and a further stage was reached in the process of conquest. The progress of that "dominion" is vividly illustrated in the Grimsel Pass. The old road and the new road run side by side, divided by the river Aar, which goes rushing and roaring through the rocky defile. The old road on the left bank is but a crude bridle-track on the mountain side, dangerous in many parts. The new road on the right bank, tunnelled and galleried in the rock, presents no serious difficulties to the frequent motor traffic.

It is not in these mental and physical triumphs that man most of all reveals his likeness to God. How often the danger of the Alps has been the occasion of a greatness of soul before which we can only stand in awe and wonder. On one Sunday I was in Switzerland, and probably at the very time when I was gazing at the Mönch, a tragedy—but also a triumph—was taking place on the other side of the mountain. A lady was climbing on the southern side when her guide fell into a crevasse, and hung there at the end of the rope. The lady mountaineer, prone on the ground, was just able to balance him, but unable to help him back to the surface. For hours they remained, until the guide realised that help was not likely to come, and demanded that the lady should cut the rope and secure her own safety. The lady refused, but he insisted, and as otherwise it meant both perishing, she finally consented. No, the guide was not lost. The rope had cut its way into the edge of the crevasse and frozen in, so that, even when severed above, it still held. After several hours help was secured and the guide saved, but the significance of it all remains. There is a quality of heart and spirit which stands unconquerable in the face of danger such as that. How often has it been illustrated in the stories of this mountain region.

In yet another way has this little country revealed man's true greatness. To dip into the history of Switzerland, especially as one visits the historic centres of the forest cantons, is to realise that Switzerland has a message to give to the world, and one never more needed than the present time. As no other country has she revealed the spirit of a true internationalism. With the people speaking four different languages, and with both Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches throughout her various cantons, she has yet found the way of harmony—the spirit of tolerance. She is crowned with glory and honour by reason of a unity in diversity. If the spirit of little Switzerland could become the spirit of Europe, what a change there would be! . . .

#### The Woman's Point of View.

As a kind of footnote to our remarks in our issue of Sept. 8th, regarding "Switzerland's Sensible Lead," we append two paragraphs from a chatty article in the *Sunday School Chronicle* (Sept. 13th) with the hope that in comparison with what appears immediately above they will not be regarded as too sudden a descent to earth:—

Gruyère is certainly one of the quaintest places I have seen. Apparently each day of the week is a village washing day, for the women were washing their clothes at the fountain in the centre of the cobbled street. Less laborious ways of washing I have seen. They have a flat board, almost as tall as themselves, supported in a slanting position by wooden supports, and on these they bang their clothes incessantly. This seems to be the recognised method in all the villages; even at a lonely mountain station I noticed the inevitable fountain, and the wife of the "chef de Gare" busily banging. . . .

So far as their household arrangements are concerned, the Swiss beat us in many ways. Every morning the beds are not only stripped, but hauled out of the windows on to the veranda into the sun and air; floors are of polished wood, with occasional mats; and the way of serving up meals saves a fair amount of washing up—instead of having a dish for meat and two vegetable dishes, one large meat dish is used. The meat is cut into neat slices before being sent to the table, and placed down the centre of the dish, and the vegetables are arranged on either side. My fondness for carrots dates from the first time I had them in Switzerland. Cut into thin strips, steamed, and a little melted butter added, and then decorated with chopped parsley, they look so pretty one wants to eat them—doubtless with beneficial results, for few vegetables are more valuable. I like, too, the Swiss way of serving tomatoes. Instead of cutting them in halves or quarters, they slice them in "wheels," steam them and then decorate them with chopped parsley. I feel sure that if only our vegetables were served so attractively we should eat more. It was there, too, I first discovered how delicious steamed pears could be when a little lemon-juice is added.

#### Cold Feet.

"When Winter Comes"—whether the common or garden winter of the revolving seasons or the winter of advancing age—it is certain that cold feet will be the affliction of many. We do not know if these unfortunates will be able to derive any comfort from the following note which appeared in *Engineering* (Sept. 14th):—

The electrical heating of the floors of dwelling-houses comes, like several other innovations in electrical heating, from Switzerland. The new heating system was introduced last year by the Electra A.G. of Wädenswil, and the heated floor will appeal to people of sedentary habits who have difficulty in keeping their feet warm.

#### The Swiss "Schwingerfest."

With the presence amongst us of Mr. Robert Roth, our Swiss Champion Wrestler, it may not be inappropriate to quote part of an article on this subject from the *Scottish Field* for September. The descriptions and comments may not be new to our readers, but they may recall thrilling memories of occasions on which they have "assisted" at this virile national sport:—

For generations past the healthy, sturdy Swiss have been wrestlers, spending their spare moments in practis-

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ing cunningly-devised falls, holds, grips and trips, while the fleeting decades have witnessed many a Schwingerfest, as the wrestling tourney is termed. And the most important Schwingerfest of all is the annual summer contest which takes place at St. Moritz, the picturesque little capital of the Upper Engadine. Here the competitors develop thews and sinews in the pine-perfumed mountain air.

A month before the eventful day the wrestlers though perfectly fit, thanks in great measure to their living some 8,000 feet above sea-level, go into training. The method, however, is simplicity itself, for it merely consists in the intending athletes going for a leisurely walk when the afternoon's work is over, or, if they can find the time, climbing the nearest mountain. Meanwhile, as soon as the eagerly-anticipated morning is well under way, sunburned herdsmen from the snow-capped Alps and the lusty agriculturists who farm the intervening valleys meet in friendly contest, also trying conclusions with the local cracks. Amongst the last-named are several sporting tradesmen, whose keenness is so great that they cheerfully sacrifice the chance of making money to unremunerative sport. Indeed, it is no uncommon thing for a lady who pines to have her tresses tinted, or washed, or frizzled overnight, to find that the independent Figaro has shut up shop and gone for a moonlit ramble.

At a recent contest one of the best displays of the afternoon was given by the proprietor of the principal barbering establishment. He arrived upon the ground with moustache carefully waxed, ambrosial whiskers brushed in an outward direction, and hair gracefully festooned about an alabaster brow. Twenty minutes later, a greatly fatigued, dishevelled and totally unrecognizable barber emerged from the fray, and lay panting on the restful grass. But he had vanquished the champion.

The Schwingerfest is held in a beflowered field, enclosed by a roughly knocked together wall of planks above which the inquisitive urchins of the townlet peer till driven away by the watchful police. The last-named, wearing a bottle-green uniform picked out with scarlet braid, march up and down, ready at a moment's notice to preserve law and order with the butt-end of the short, heavy swords which they carry. One of their duties is to assist the gatekeeper, who, sitting at the receipt of custom, hands a blue badge to those who have paid two francs for a seat and a yellow one to the sportsman or sportswoman who expends only half this sum upon accommodation. The other officials are the judges, the referee, and the doctor, while the Schwingerfest cooks and waitresses are kept busy cutting enormous ham sandwiches, cooking "gipsy steaks" (which are sold for a franc apiece), and filling and refilling the glasses of the spectators with good Veltliner Festwein. The steaks, upon which the wrestlers regale themselves, are so-called because the cook, having skewered the delicacy, grills it in the leaping flames of a wood fire. Hungry Engadines cluster around the open-air kitchen, and on receiving the rapidly-cooked steak, eat it (gipsy-fashion) with their fingers, wedges of bread completing the repast, a plank table and form constituting the alfresco dining-room furniture. . . .

The wrestlers, few of whom are above middle height, some being under it, usually restrict their costume to an undershirt and drawers, though some prefer trousers, which, as a rule, are tightly clamped above the ankle. Putting on a broad canvas belt furnished with a rope "handle" on either side, the athlete, nodding to the crowd, shakes hands amicably with his opponent and gets to work. Bending forward, he grasps his rival for the championship by the "handles," and, bringing every conceivable device to bear upon the business in hand, does all that is possible to carry off the prize. As nearly everyone who competes is a wrestler of the first order, he who succeeds in getting into the semi-finals is accounted a hero. The winner is acclaimed throughout the canton for days after the Schwingerfest has taken place.

#### Death for the Insane.

We claim to be sane and sensible folk. Are we to regard the following from the *Daily Express* (Sept. 17th) as one of the exceptions that prove the rule?

Dr. Hauswirth, a mental expert and deputy, created a sensation at a recent sitting of the Grand Council at Berne by declaring that incurable lunatics should be legally put to death. He demanded that his proposal should be seriously considered from the viewpoints of humanity and economy.

A majority of indignant deputies voted against the proposal, denouncing it as "a moral monstrosity," but Dr. Hauswirth pointed out that incurably insane people, although suffering, are maintained at great expense to the end of their lives.

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