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HOME NEWS

According to statistics published by the Federal Labour Office, the unemployed have cost Switzerland 406 million francs to end September last; of this amount 225 millions have been contributed by the Confederation, 164 millions by the cantons and communes, and 17 millions by factory owners.

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The preliminary figures with reference to the working of the Swiss Federal Railways during 1922 disclose a considerably improved position. The probable surplus will be 34½ million francs (21 millions in 1921), which is chiefly due to a reduction in the working expenses of 24 million francs.

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The expert commission, presided over by Federal Councillor Musy, to study the revision of the law relating to the military tax, is making a few recommendations which, it is anticipated, will increase the revenue from this source by about 4½ million francs annually. The personal tax of Frs. 6.— is to be increased to Frs. 15.—, and the age limit is to be raised from 42 to 48. The taxation of possible inheritances is to be maintained.

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Dr. Locher, formerly general director of the Swiss National Exhibition, has been appointed director at Zurich of the Swiss Federal Railways, in place of Director Mezger, who is retiring.

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The Swiss League of Nations Union has presented to the Federal Council a petition, drawing attention to the great economic sacrifices imposed upon other countries by the present serious friction between France and Germany, which is fraught with great dangers to international peace.

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At the request of the Federal authorities, a small delegation of the National Council has gone to France in order to study the possibility of finding employment for Swiss agricultural workers.

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To destroy the fear of higher coal prices, the French authorities have stated that instructions have been given that no obstacles should be placed in the way of a continuance of the coal deliveries from the Ruhr.

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Emigration during last year shows a decrease, 5,787 Swiss having left their home for overseas countries, against 7,129 in 1921.

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Free postage, which has been the privilege of Government and other official bodies in Switzerland, will probably be abolished, the cantons receiving as compensation a yearly subsidy of one million francs from the Confederation.

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The electorate of the canton of Geneva is giving its verdict to-day and to-morrow on a proposed increase in the cost of dog licences, pensions to retired states councillors who have been in office for nine or more years, and an increase in the property tax.

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Of the 37,413 voters in the canton of Geneva one-half are Swiss who belong to other cantons, chiefly Vaud and Berne.

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Taxation of foreign residents, to the tune of the equivalent of the military tax paid by Swiss, is the object of an initiative presented to the Regierungsrat of Zurich, which will submit this proposed law to the people with a recommendation for its rejection.

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A referendum having been demanded on the new fiscal decree promulgated by the canton of Lucerne, which imposes a higher though graduated income tax, the voting will take place next Sunday.

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The town of Bienne is in the fortunate position of anticipating in the budget for 1923 a surplus of Frs. 73,384.

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Several farmsteads have, these last few days, been destroyed by fire: the Spittel in Madiswil

(Langental), rendering six families homeless; a farmhouse in Oberzeihen (Laufenburg); and another in Asuel (Porrentruy), the latter belonging to Xaver Choulat; a fourth in Wölflingswil (Frick), the property of Jakob Belser. The vicarage in Dittingen (Laufental) was completely burned out on the 19th inst.

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The falling of an avalanche was the cause of a grave accident to a party of fifteen tourists, members of the Geneva section of the Swiss Alpine Club, who were undertaking last Sunday the customary winter ski excursion. Near the Porte du Soleil (Champéry) they were overtaken by an avalanche; three of those who were buried were able to extricate themselves, but Henri Gex-Crotter, a well-known and much respected guide of Morgins, remained entombed in the snow. Help soon arrived, and the two search parties brought back his remains, which were discovered 1.2 metres under the snow, about 15 metres distant from the spot where the accident happened.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

The Winter Season.

To be compelled to read, while at the same time prevented from responding to the call of, the many enchanting and enticing reports from the winter resorts appearing now in the English press is as atrocious a mental punishment as can be imagined. We will not inflict upon our readers the same penalty, but only illustrate the gravity of the latter by giving one or two extracts, culled at random. This is what *Estace E. White* says in *Ladies' Field Fashions* (January):—

"Those who have themselves drunk of this cup of pleasure know that they who write and speak rapturously of 'winter-sporting' in Switzerland do not exaggerate—cannot, in truth, find words which make exaggeration possible. No description that writer, speaker, or camera can fashion is worthy of the reality. Switzerland in winter is the Seventh Heaven. My own introduction to winter Switzerland, thirteen years ago, is fresh as yesterday. Friends who had been to Adelboden the previous year were responsible for this first visit. They had so rhapsodised over their experience that it became impossible not to taste and see for oneself. The usual preliminaries of outfit and learning the ropes over, my companion and I set out for Villars, the chosen bourn.

Oh, the transition! Thursday a.m. the mud and fog of Kensington below sea-level; Friday p.m. the snow and sunshine of the Alps 5,000 feet up. That promises well for a start, and promise is more than fulfilled.

"Something for Everybody" is, of course, a strong appeal of Winter Switzerland, and not merely 'something,' but something superlatively good. Age matters nothing; the child and the octogenarian and everyone between can find suitable, salutary and satisfying recreation in the following: skating, curling, bob-sleighing, tobogganing, luging, tailing, ski-ing, ski-kjöring. Nor are the sports the beginning and end of the delights. The social activities and the amenities of the hotel life, gymkhana, snow modelling (if the weather is unkind), competitions of every kind, and a hundred things besides, cater for all tastes and keep the holiday spirit at true concert pitch.

Years ago I used to think a round of tennis tournaments at seaside resorts an ideal holiday. But after going to Switzerland in winter I knew there was something better. Tennis is tennis, plus a band and a dance perhaps at night, but Switzerland in winter is a dozen first-class sports plus all the gaieties of a London season. . . .

And the price of all these delights is a great deal less than the same amount of pleasure would be anywhere else. Five pounds will fit out the ski-er with all except actual clothing, a good pair of skates will cost from £2 to £3, luges and other snowcraft can be hired at a moderate charge on the spot, while hotel charges do not hurt so much as at home. The gain in health, strength and recuperation is an asset that may cancel the doctor's bill and fortify against the trying months ahead.

St. Moritz, Pontresina and Mürren represent the trio which claims most of the space in the English papers. The train service to the Engadine has had to be doubled, thus providing accommodation for some 40,000 visitors. St. Moritz is, of course, an easy first, but the neighbouring Pontresina, whose unpretentious rural surroundings seem to appeal specially to the English, has come very much to the front. Mürren appears to have a clientèle of its own, to judge by the following pen-picture by Alan Bott in the *Evening News* (Jan. 11th):—

"I shall call them rectors' daughters, not because some of them really are rectors' daughters, but because most of them belong to the rectors' daughters: fresh face, easy carriage, frank manner, courageous, merry, self-possessed, moderately intelligent, satisfying to the ultimate heel-edge in outdoor clothes, but rather awkward about the pink shoulders, the hanging sleeves, and the hairdressing schemes incident to dinner-dance frocks.

At the fag-end of each December the rectors' daughters hurry into the Bernese Oberland—to Wengen, Adelboden, Grindelwald, Mürren (St. Moritz, Davos, and Pontresina are more for the cosmopolites to whom even sport must be a function).

With them they bring waterproof breeches and flaring jerseys and iron-tipped boots and wild woolies and laughter and the Tunbridge Wells drawl.

There come with them also menfolk of similarly standard pattern. The young and the youngish wear sweaters rimmed in the colours of this college or that public school, ties made in regimental or Air Force patterns. Their hair is uniformly neat and crisp à l'Anglaise; their faces are firm and fresh, as only young Englishmen's faces can be fresh and firm.

The no longer young are mostly old-stagers whose features have been overscrawled by the pencil of strenuous success. They are the doers of flawless 'rockers' in the figure-skating competitions, the leaders of parties who, on skis, and with luncheons in rucksacks, climb and descend mile upon mile of snowdeep mountainside.

There are other old 'uns whose status is merely that of fathers persuaded to start winter-sporting at nearly fifty.

These arrive intending to skate a little and walk a little and rest a lot. But the air, the Veuve Cliquot 1911, Extra Dry, air, incites them into wanting to tumble around on skis and hurtle into snowbanks on luges. Like the very young on holiday from the prep-schools, they make their difficult way to the top of the ski beginners' 'nursery slopes'; but since the very young have plastic and resilient bodies, the old 'uns fall much more often.

And the usually sedate old 'uns mind not at all the smiles at their snow-wallowings. The rectors' daughters and the rest have brought England to Switzerland—no language but English is spoken among the visitors at the hotel—yet it is England freed from the reserve of English formality. The blinkers of self-consciousness have been left in railway carriages somewhere between Calais and Interlaken.

Many clerks in Throgmorton-street and the Temple, by the way, would drop shocked jaws could they see the bankers and corpulent barristers who in the Bernese Oberland, and only in the Bernese Oberland, become exuberant to the degree of blackening their faces, wearing fishponds on their heads, and generally playing the giddy deuce at these fancy dress affairs....

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An interesting article in the *Bystander* (Jan. 17) deals with "The Origin and Development of Winter Sports"; the same journal also contains a number of photographs of well-known society people enjoying sports.

The international ski-jumping championship at Klosters, for which there were forty competitors, was won by the Austrian Risch, whose three jumps aggregated 132 metres, the Swiss flying officer Baertsch being a good second with only one metre less; the latter, however, made the longest individual jump (47 metres).

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Mussolini as a Tramp.

When nearly every fallen statesman becomes conscious of the desirability of enlightening his partisans by conferring upon them the benefit of his memoirs, it is quite in keeping with modern precedents that the Italian Prime Minister should have written an autobiography for publication. *The Scotsman* (Jan. 16th) publishes the first installment of a free translation, which has been supplied by a correspondent, and we reproduce that part which describes Signor Mussolini's stay in Switzerland, as this is possibly meant to be the "official" version:—

"I telephoned," reads the autobiography, "to my mother to send me the money necessary for the journey, and she sent me by telegraph 45 lire. On the evening of July 9th, 1902, I arrived at Chiasso. As I waited for the train to carry me into the centre of Switzerland I bought a 'Secolo' newspaper. What was my surprise and grief to find it a notice of the arrestment of my father. He, with other Socialists, had smashed to pieces the election urns at Predappio and Orte to prevent the Clericals gaining a victory. This news placed me in a dilemma. Should I go back or go on? I decided to continue my journey, and the next day (July 10th), in the afternoon, I arrived at Yverdon with 2 lire and 10 centimes (1s. 9d.) in my pocket. But I did not care. I wished to see, to study, to work, to knock about topsy-turvy in the world. . . .

Night fell, and Mussolini was tramping on aimlessly and he was hungry. The road was dark, but at last a dim light appeared. As he approached it he saw a family at supper in the courtyard of a house. He hesitated for a moment, then he boldly entered and asked: 'Have you any bread?' There was dead silence. 'Give me a piece.' Still no answer. Then a man slowly picked up a bit from the table and offered it to him. Mussolini took it and said 'Thank you,' but still there was no answer, so he turned on his heel and went out into the night. His first impulse was to throw the bread away, and he raised his arm to do so, but slowly it was lowered till the bread reached his mouth, when he ate it greedily—still tramping on.

The next day he hired himself as a bricklayer's labourer, and carried hods of lime and bricks up the scaffolding of a house in course of erection. His wages were two and a half francs a day. But this was not seeing the world, so we are told, one fine morning he threw the sack, which he wore on his shoulder to save his coat from being too much stained with the red bricks, into a ditch and set out once more on the tramps.

That night Mussolini met a Russian. He had a bundle of books under his arm and an alarm clock in his hand. He was a fine-looking man, and Mussolini felt friendly towards him. After exchanging names, he said, 'Why do you carry the clock?'—'Because I have no place to put it.'—They may suspect you as a thief.'