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HOME NEWS

The clearing and reconstruction work undertaken by volunteers in Someo and the neighbouring districts was officially terminated on Dec. 20th. The recruits and other helpers, numbering 310 in all, had put in a total of 5,586 working days. Col. Ceresole was in charge of the operations.

* * *

The Central Secretariat of the Schweiz. Kaufm. Verein (Société Suisse des Commerçants) is circularising business firms at home with an appeal, suggesting that, in view of the rising living costs in Switzerland, the salaries of employees should be proportionately increased.

* * *

The Swiss painter, Robert Schiess, of Cham (Zug), has been awarded by the Pope the golden cross order "Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice" for work executed in the St. Martin's chapel at the Vatican.

* * *

Four buildings were destroyed by fire last Saturday in Villigen (Aargau), the flames spreading from a barn belonging to Johann Suter before the arrival of the fire brigade. Four families were thereby rendered homeless.

* * *

Francesco Balli, a former National Councillor, died in Locarno at the age of 72. The construction of several local railways in the canton Ticino, especially the one in the Maggia Valley, was chiefly due to his incessant efforts in that direction.

* * *

Pater Berthier, Professor of Theology at the University of Fribourg, and an authority on Christian archæology, died in that town at the age of 76.

* * *

Mr. W. Walz, aged 47, a dealer in optical and photographic instruments in St. Gall, and well known in literary circles, met with a fatal accident. In trying to put his car into its proper place at the garage, he fell backwards through an open trap-door and broke his neck.

* * *

Carl Friedrich Georg Spitteler, the famous Swiss writer and poet, died last Monday, Dec. 29, in Lucerne after a long illness at the age of 79. Born in Liestal (Basel-Land), where his father was a cantonal official, he early showed leanings towards music and painting. He subsequently devoted himself, however, to literature, studying at the universities of Basle and Heidelberg. At the close of his studies he went to Russia, where he spent about eight years as a private tutor. He travelled a great deal in Europe, though he has never been to England. Recognition came to him only late in life, though some of his works appeared in print as early as 1881. During the war Spitteler displayed a very decided attitude in denouncing publicly the mentality of the Germans, as exhibited in the famous memorandum from the German intellectuals. In December, 1914, he delivered a patriotic address in Zurich on "Our Swiss Standpoint," a speech which is said to have done more than anything else in the direction of reconciling and harmonizing the opposing sympathies existing then in French and German Switzerland. Carl Spitteler was awarded in 1920 the Nobel prize for literature.—We reproduce the following character sketch from an interesting *mémoir*, published in the *Daily Telegraph* of Dec. 30th:—

Spitteler's home was in Lucerne, and every market day he might be seen going to market, with his parcel net. In private life he was very simple, his hobby being planting trees, experimenting to see which would grow best in his garden. His face, not typically Swiss, let the Swiss say what they will, might perhaps recall certain Scottish types. It was lined, as was to be expected in the case of a man of well over 70 years, but far more with thought than with suffering. Its dominant expression was kindliness, tolerance, and geniality, mixed with shrewdness in the best sense of the word, yet devoid of what the Swiss call "Schlauheit"—cunning. Not that there was not a trace of mischievousness visible also. To other Swiss authors not in too prosperous circumstances his house was ever open, and his purse, I have heard, never closed. Of interviewers, however, after one or two experiences during the war, he fought shy. Spitteler's work, which is not, comparatively speaking voluminous, may be said to fall into three periods—that from about 1865 to 1883, including his epic poem, 'Prometheus und Epimetheus'; that from 1883 to 1896, including his 'Mädchenfeinde,' which caused a great outcry when it appeared, his 'Conrad der Leutnant,' several comedies, and his 'Schmetterlinge,' as well as his essays, 'Lachende Wahrheiten' and 'Literarische Gleichnisse' (Literary Analogies); thirdly, from 1896 onwards, the period of his ballads, his 'Glockenlieder,' his novel 'Imago,' his 'Earliest Experiences,' and his 'Olympischer Frühling.'

In literature he will probably live as a philosophical essayist and epic poet. As the Swiss themselves admit, he could never have been a popular writer; for that he was too much of an idealist and made too heavy demands on the reader's knowledge and intelligence. He certainly towered above all other Swiss writers of the present, and, indeed, of the past, unless Gottfried Keller be an exception. The main thought underlying 'Prometheus und Epimetheus' is that the only saviour of mankind is he who saves his own soul alive, who maintains his own personality, concluding no compromises with human society. His 'Olympian Spring,' however, is to be ranked higher. In it we are transported to the time when the world was young, when the Olympian gods ruled, and had not been forced aside by the incoming Man. But to the Olympian Spring no Olympian Summer, but a Human Summer succeeded, and we are not told what this may be like. The world, except Germany and Spitteler's own small country has not yet had time to form a ripe judgment upon his work. In France he is known only through his famous speeches already mentioned and his attitude throughout the war. Some of his prose works have been translated into French, and an attempt has been made, but I believe not completed, to translate some of his verse and epic poetry. His prose could easily be "Englished" or "Frenched," but to translate his poetry into any language would need a poet of at any rate equal calibre.

EXTRACTS FROM SWISS PAPERS.

Conseillers fédéraux et cantons. — Cinquante conseillers fédéraux se sont succédé à Berne depuis 1848. M. Musy est le quarante-neuvième, M. Haeberlin, le cinquantième, ayant été élu conseiller fédéral deux mois après lui, soit le 12 février 1920. Or, ces cinquante conseillers ont été fournis par quinze cantons seulement. Uri, Schwytz, Unterwald, Zoug, Schaffhouse, Appenzell et Valais attendent encore leur tour.

Au point de vue de la répartition entre les cantons, on sait que trois d'entre eux, soit Zurich, Berne et Vaud, bénéficient d'un privilège traditionnel. De fait, Vaud emporte la part du lion avec neuf conseillers fédéraux sur les cinquante.

Vient ensuite Zurich avec six conseillers fédéraux et Berne avec cinq conseillers. Le canton qui prend rang ensuite est celui de Neuchâtel avec quatre conseillers. Cinq cantons ont eu chacun trois conseillers fédéraux, soit Tessin, Argovie, Lucerne, Thurgovie et Genève; Saint-Gall, Soleure, Bâle et Grisons, chacun deux, enfin Glaris et Fribourg, chacun un.

La répartition des présidences pendant ces 77 premières années de la Confédération de 1848 n'est pas moins intéressante. Ici, c'est Zurich qui vient en tête avec 14 présidences, puis vient Berne avec 13, Vaud avec 12, Argovie avec 10, Neuchâtel, Lucerne et Thurgovie furent chacun 4 fois à la présidence, Bâle 3 fois, Tessin, Genève, Grisons 2 fois, enfin Glaris et Fribourg chacun une fois. (*Gazette de Lausanne.*)

Deux histoires de Seldwyl. — On sait que Gottfried Keller, quand il voulait ironiser nos moeurs locales, parlait des gens de Seldwyl. Ses histoires ne dépassaient en somme pas beaucoup la réalité. Le rapport de la commission de gestion du Conseil général de Schaffhouse nous révèle en effet deux de ces faits qui méritent d'être relevés dans l'histoire. Voici le premier cas.

Deux conseillers généraux ont présenté à la caisse communale une petite note ascendant à 600 francs pour avoir assisté à une conférence officielle ayant eu lieu à St-Margrethen (St-Gall) ajoutant qu'ils y étaient encore allés de leurs propres deniers (?) Cette promenade débuta par une course en canot-moteur, puis fut terminée en auto, et ce, en compagnie de l'épouse d'un des deux conseillers et de deux demoiselles de bureau, qui s'en allèrent promener en auto pendant que les deux "hommes d'Etat" assistaient aux délibérations. L'un des deux "ambassadeurs" serait, soit dit en passant, un communiste!

Et le second cas: Un maître de métier schaffhousois avait demandé à la Direction des travaux de la ville une avance de 5000 francs sur un travail qu'il avait à exécuter, ce qui lui fut accordé. Plus tard, on lui versa encore une fois cette somme. On finit cependant pas s'apercevoir de l'erreur et le chef du dicastère promit que l'on ne l'y prendrait plus.

On comprendra qu'après ces tours-là, les citoyens et le conseil soient d'avis qu'un contrôle plus sévère de la gestion des affaires soit indispensable. (*Démocrate.*)

Ein gefährlicher See. — Im obern Saastale, in einer Höhe von 2100 m. ü. M., liegt zwischen dem Allalingletscher und dem Anschutt des Schwarzenberggletschers, 5 km. südlich vom Monte Moro, der kleine Mattmarksee, mit einem Umfang von ungefähr anderthalb Kilometern. Der See war früher wesentlich grösser und ist heute noch ein Dorado für Botaniker. Der See wird gebildet durch den Allalingletscher, der sich wie ein Wehr über das Tal schiebt bis zu den untern Hängen des Mittelgrates. Das Wasser läuft ab durch die Höhlen des Gletschers, wenn dieser wächst, und längs der Stirnmoräne, wenn der Gletscher abnimmt. Da aber der Abfluss durch den Gletscher nicht immer möglich ist, so wächst manchmal der See und füllt die ganze Mattmarkebene auf. Es ist auch schon mehrmals vorgekommen, dass der See die Gletscher durchbrochen und sich talwärts gestürzt hat. Die Saaser Chronik hat für das 17. und 18. Jahrhundert drei derartiger grosser Katastrophen erwähnt, von denen namentlich diejenige von 1633 gewaltigen Schaden anrichtete. Bis zur Ortschaft im Grund wurde das ganze Becken der Mattmark mit Geröll von Steinen angefüllt, so dass die Hälfte der Einwohner der Talschaft die Wohnungen verlassen musste und während vierzehn Jahren dort keine Hochzeit mehr stattfand, weil die Männer erwerbslos waren. Im Jahre 1680 zerstörte ein weiterer Durchbruch 18 Häuser von Visp und riss Millionen von Bäumen mit. Neue Durchbrüche erfolgten 1772, 1840 und 1850. Als der See im Jahre 1908 wieder drohend anstieg, wollte man ihm durch den Gletscher einen künstlichen Ablauf geben, aber die Sache unterblieb, weil die Gefahr zurückging. Nun aber soll dem gefährlichen Zustand ein Ende gemacht werden, denn die Regierung des Kantons Wallis hat ein neues Projekt gutgeheissen, dessen Verwirklichung auf 400,000 Fr. zu stehen kommt, an das aber der Bund 45 Prozent und der Kanton 20 Prozent beitragen wird. (*St. Galler Tagblatt.*)

Ein originelles Legat. — Der verstorbene Notar Gottlieb Zulauf, von Schinznach, hat seiner Heimatgemeinde ein Geschenk von 1000 Franken gemacht. Durch letztwillige Verordnung hat er aber verfügt, es sei der geschenkte Betrag durch die Zinserträgnisse so lange zu äufnen, bis das Kapital den Betrag von zwei Millionen Franken erreicht habe, was in etwa 200 Jahren möglich sein könnte. Hat das Kapital die zwei Millionen erreicht, so dürfen die Zinsen im Interesse der Gemeinde und der Armen Verwendung finden. Es sind somit kommende Generationen, welche die Nutzniesser dieses Legates sein werden. (*Tagesanzeiger.*)

Perle romande — Il est des expressions dans notre Suisse romande qui sont bien pour surprendre l'étranger mal informé du langage de chez nous.

On pouvait lire récemment cette annonce dans un prospectus de société:

Demain, grande sauterie-vacherin.

Ce qui nous conduit à la polka des petits suisses et à la marche des camemberts — marche lente bien entendu. (*La Suisse.*)

Nos cartes postales illustrées. — Les cartes postales illustrées émises par l'administration des postes suisses ayant, cette année encore, suscité un vif intérêt, tant en Suisse qu'à l'étranger, il est prévu pour l'année prochaine l'édition de nouvelles séries de ces cartes avec vignettes représentant des sites et des villes du pays. Une partie de ces séries sera réservée à des paysages d'hiver et à des sujets, reproduits dans des cadres naturels appropriés se rapportant aux sports d'hiver, afin de faire participer aussi ces derniers au bénéfice de ce nouveau moyen de propagande.

Les renseignements ultérieurs concernant la prise en considération des sujets de vignettes pour les différentes séries peuvent être obtenus auprès de la Société de développement de la ville de Berne. (*La Suisse.*)

3630.

Ceux qui renoncent à la nationalité suisse. — Un de nos concitoyens, M. J—— N—— H——, domicilié à Londres, désire renoncer à la nationalité suisse. Il adresse la requête suivante au Conseil d'Etat:

Londres, 1er décembre 1924.

Monsieur le président du Conseil d'Etat, Genève.

J'ai l'honneur de vous demander respectueusement de me dégager de la nationalité suisse pour la raison suivante:

Je suis marié depuis le 30 août 1924 à une dame anglaise et pour des raisons de famille je désire acquérir la nationalité anglaise, car mon intention est maintenant de rester définitivement en Angleterre.

Je vous communique à cet effet une lettre du "Home Office" m'informant que la nationalité anglaise m'est assurée si vous vouliez bien annuler ma présente nationalité suisse.

J'ose donc espérer que vous ferez un accueil favorable à ma requête.

(*La Tribune de Genève.*)

Un hôtel de la monnaie clandestin. — On signale de nouveau la mise en circulation de fausses pièces d'un franc Confédération suisse, 1920, en argent, au titre officiel et dont la frappe ne diffère des pièces authentiques que par de menus détails que seuls des experts peuvent apprécier.

Rappelons à ce propos que depuis une dizaine d'années, on a constaté que des pièces de deux francs en argent, fabriquées de la même façon, étaient répandues en abondance. La seule différence appréciable entre ces pièces et celles de la Confédération était que pour ces dernières, le bas de la robe de l'Helvétia dépassait d'une tête d'épingle l'écusson fédéral, alors que sur la pièce imitée, on avait omis ce détail.

Mais comme, à l'époque, les autorités fédérales firent une large publicité pour mettre le public en garde et signalèrent avec précision les plus petits défauts de la pièce fausse, il est probable que le peu scrupuleux fabricant resté inconnu en fit son profit et que ses émissions ultérieurs furent corrigées et mises au point avec soin.

Il y a lieu de remarquer, d'ailleurs, que le préjudice causé par cette frappe de monnaie est nul et qu'en somme tout le monde en profite, puisque la fortune publique est augmentée d'autant. Le particulier qui se livre à cette fructueuse industrie (au taux de l'argent, il gagne environ du 50%) ne fait que s'arroger un droit réservé strictement à l'Etat.

Rappelons qu'une affaire à peu près semblable donna lieu, il y a bien des années, à un long procès qui se déroula devant les tribunaux genevois, puis devant le Tribunal fédéral: des industriels avaient frappé en grande quantité, sur notre territoire, de la monnaie égyptienne, identique à celle de l'Etat, et avaient réalisé des bénéfices considérables en mettant ces pièces en circulation en Egypte. (*Journal de Genève.*)

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "KYBURG."

2LO in Switzerland.

Daily Mail (13th Dec.):—

London's Christmas broadcasting is not to be relayed for winter visitors by Swiss stations, because the Swiss themselves are showing preference for direct British rather than Swiss broadcasting.

Swiss listeners-in have increased from a few hundred a year ago to more than 30,000, and with all who have sets of sufficient range, Chelmsford or 2LO is the favourite entertainment. Thousands of people in Switzerland nightly tune in these two stations.

Shall I ever forget the thrill I experienced last New Year, when on a four-valve RI set I picked up a message from Barcelona, wishing everybody a Prosperous New Year? And, on a Saturday afternoon, a few months later, when I got Lausanne and heard somebody talking about the Société des Carabiniers Suisses! Truly, wireless telephony is a wonderful invention, and it would be strange if it did not result in getting the various peoples a good deal nearer to each other. And who could talk of the stillness of the night, or even the stillness of the air, who has ever listened-in to the tumult of sounds, on various wave-lengths? But to all I would advise not to shirk the initial expense, but to buy a good valve set, so as to be able to pick up Continental stations. Listening-in to dear old 2LO is so tame by comparison, and, besides, it *is* nice to get a bit of lively music from Radiola Paris just at the time one sits down to enjoy the Sunday pre-dinner *apéritif*! Or to have some dance music on a Sunday afternoon, a thing which British broadcasting stations still shrink from giving out.

Swiss Banks and French Capital.

Financial Times (18th Dec.):—

It transpires that large quantities of short-term Treasury Bills have during the past few months been sent abroad by their French holders for foreign, chiefly Swiss, banks to collect in France at maturity, then converting the proceeds into sound currencies and holding them abroad to account of their French customers.

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This is a roundabout form of exporting capital from France, and the export of capital is legally forbidden.

At a time when the question of repaying war debts is being discussed by French and other Governments and peoples, it is funny to note that the practice above referred to should be resorted to by patriotic French investors. I remember the fulminations against German "patriots" doing the same thing a little while back. But then, capital and patriotism are different things, else one would not have seen the British over-subscribing the Greek Loan, whereas underwriters had to take up 91 per cent. or so of the Victorian Loan! For most of the really moneyed people capitalism expresses itself in "percentages" and *ubi bene ibi patria* is their motto.

Swiss Railway Rates.

Western Mail (19th Dec.):—

A report received by the Department of Overseas Trade from the British Legation at Berne calls attention to articles in the Swiss press regarding the reduction of railway rates in Switzerland. According to a statement in the "National-Zeitung" it would appear that the rates for the transport of goods on Swiss railways are the highest in Europe. They exceed Swedish rates, which are the next highest, by no less than 24 per cent., whilst the difference compared with Belgian rates amounts to 78 per cent. These figures, the paper claims, appear to prove that the Swiss Federal Railways cannot afford to retain their exorbitant tariffs much longer if they are to compete with foreign railways in international transit traffic. The "Zeitung" further states that although the present high charges obtaining in Switzerland have been an important factor in the brilliant recovery in the financial situation of the Swiss Federal Railways, their purely fiscal character cannot fail to exert a restrictive influence on the development of local and transit goods traffic in Switzerland if a reduction does not intervene in the near future.

The Direction-General of the Swiss Federal Railways have, however, grasped the importance of reducing freight rates at an early date, and it appears from a communiqué published in the "Feuille Officielle Suisse du Commerce" of October 3rd that in addition to the reductions proposed previously the following modifications will presumably be made, as from January 1st, in the goods tariffs on the Swiss Federal Railways:—(a) Modification of rates in class II. for part consignments of goods in order to adapt them to pre-war basic rates; (b) establishment of a special tariff, based on the pre-war special tariff No. III.b; (c) modification of the tariff for the transport of luggage in express tariff, and of cattle, etc., correlatively with the reduction to be effected in the tariff for the transport of goods over long distances.

It is anticipated that a decrease of six million francs in the revenue of the Swiss Federal Railways will be the direct result of the steps towards a reduction of freight rates.

Another powerful argument—as Mr. Lovat Fraser would describe it—of my old contention that it would pay any country to levy taxes for the cost of running trains and other travelling and transport facilities, rather than make users pay individually. We shall come to it, dear readers, in another few hundred years, just as we came to do away with bridge and road tolls!

Swiss Airman for Persia.

Daily Express (20th Dec.):—

The Swiss aviator Lieutenant Mittelholzer, who has been invited to Persia by the Persian Government, left Zurich on Dec. 18th for Teheran by way of Italy, Greece, and Turkey, a distance of 5,600 miles. He hopes to reach his destination within nine days.

Lieutenant Mittelholzer is flying in an all-metal monoplane, and is carrying a weight of about one ton.

All Heil!

Swiss Book Printing.

The Star (18th Dec.):—

There is a little Christmas Exhibition this week at the London School of Printing in Stamford-street of the specimens of the best Continental printing which its principal (Mr. E. R. Riddell) brought back on his recent Continental tour.

Although technical institutes abroad are more imposing than our own, Mr. Riddell did not find the extensive plant or the large enrolments of the London school.

In Switzerland he found a machine with a keyboard like a typewriter. When the operator has completed a line, it is inked, and when a page has been completed, an impression is taken on special paper, which, after developing, becomes the negative to be photographically printed on to the machine plate.

A book is being printed for an English publisher by this method.

The New Year.

By the time my readers see these lines, they will have almost recovered from the after-effects of the New Year's Eve celebrations. Most of the New Year's resolutions will also have joined those similar ones of yester-year. Life will have become quite normal again, and the festivities and parties, the merrymaking and the searchings of soul, which precede the end of the year, will have given place to every-day considerations of business and the daily routine of life.

It is too late, therefore, for me to add to the more or less platitudinous phrases which we all either hear, read or perpetrate at this time of the year, and my readers will be spared this at least.

One or two reflections I should, however, like to put before my readers:—

(*a*) I have been wondering why we Swiss do not have a Pantheon or Valhalla in which to lay to rest our illustrious Dead?

(*b*) I have been wondering why our gracious Minister does not hold a New Year's Reception, as Ministers of other countries do? I do not mean one of the select social functions, for which admittance is by private invitation only, but a real democratic "at home to countrymen and countrywomen," just to make them feel, once a year, that the "President of the Swiss Republic in London" is somebody alive, real and *primus inter pares*?

I wish my readers a Happy New Year, with "Glück und Gottes Säge," as we say at home.

PERSONAL.

Dr. William Martin, directeur de la Politique Etrangère du *Journal de Genève*, is at present passing a week in England. He is lecturing to English students on international economic problems of the present time. Dr. W. Martin is a brother of Monsieur Henri Martin, of the Swiss Legation in London.

The Publisher will be pleased to forward free specimen copies of "The Swiss Observer" to likely subscribers whose addresses may be supplied by readers.

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