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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

In order to combat the serious competition of motor lorries, the Swiss Federal Railways are offering special rebates to firms handling a large volume of goods; in Berne the management is seeking an arrangement with local forwarding firms for the delivery to domicile of goods arriving by train.

\*\*\*

A long overdue reform in assessing family incomes has just been passed with a small majority by the Grand Council of the canton of Ticino. In future the incomes of the different members of a family will be taxed separately; up till now the head of a family was heavily overcharged on account of the high progressive rate. The loss in revenue to the cantonal treasury is estimated at Frs. 100,000.

\*\*\*

Heavy rains and the consequent rising of the Rhine and its tributaries are responsible for some damage and considerable anxiety in the Eastern part of Switzerland.

\*\*\*

It is stated in some of the Swiss dailies—though not officially confirmed—that Col. Gertsch has been offered by the Bolivian Government the post of military adviser and director of military instruction. Aviation Captain Häberli is already in Bolivian services supervising military aviation.

\*\*\*

It has just been ascertained that the former Zurich bank director Züllig, who recently died suddenly when travelling in France, has contrived to evade during the last few years the payment of income and property tax on his considerable estate. The taxing official at Egnach, in the canton of Thurgau, where the deceased capitalist was domiciled, neglected to issue the statutory assessment demand.

\*\*\*

A new Swiss philatelic society to encourage the collection of "entires" was constituted last Sunday at Lucerne.

\*\*\*

The Rathaus police-station at Basle, in the centre of the town, was the scene last week of a somewhat undignified rencontre. A young malefactor, who had been revelling, was awaiting his doom in the charge-room when all of a sudden he tried to commit suicide. A policeman who was near by took the shot to be meant for him, and promptly pulled his own revolver in order to retaliate; he missed his quarry, but hit a policeman standing at the other end of the room.

\*\*\*

For having intentionally refused to salute some passing officers, three soldiers, who were under treatment at the hospital in Burgdorf, were sentenced by the military tribunal of the 3rd Division to three weeks imprisonment each.

\*\*\*

Prof. Dr. César Roux has resigned, as from October 15th next, his chair at the medical faculty of the University of Lausanne. A surgeon of international fame, he has, during the 26 years of his lectureship, enhanced the reputation of the Lausanne University immensely. Prof. Roux, who will be 70 on his next birthday and is in the best of health, will continue his private practice.

\*\*\*

Losing control of the steering wheel whilst taking a sharp curve at too great a speed was the cause of a serious motor accident on the road to Gümligen near Berne, when Messrs. Emil Richard Haberer, a builder and decorator, and Paul Wilhelm Frey, an architect, both of Berne, were killed on the spot. The car was driven by the wife of the former, and after running against and rebounding from two trees on the road border finally came to a violent standstill in front of a third tree.

\*\*\*

In attending to his horse and trap on the road, Mr. Otto Meier, the clerk of the Reinach (Basel-Land) civil registry was knocked down by a passing motor lorry and fatally injured; the driver was unaware of the accident until stopped by the police a few miles farther on.

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## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "KYBURG."

### Swiss Sports.

There is one branch of purely Swiss Sport which was not practised at Herne Hill last Saturday, and which is well described in the following from the *Eastbourne Gazette* (26th May). Perhaps I should have said "Bernese Sport." At all events, "Hornussen" was practised in my time, 20 odd years ago, at Winterthur by the "Berner-Verein" and was not then considered a National Sport, but if the *Eastbourne Gazette* says truly that there exist now some 250 clubs in Switzerland, the game has evidently made good progress. That it is a very good game I know, and that it is not easy to drive the disc from the tee I know too, and I have often thought the game would appeal to golfers over here, because it introduces, more than does golf, the element of *team* work, which is so priceless a factor when it comes to the educational value of sport.

### "Killing the Hornet."

Had Jack Hobbs or Cyril Tolley been born and reared in the Canton of Berne, they would probably have been leading champions of the ancient and strenuous game of "Hornussen," which may be termed Switzerland's national sport.

"Killing the Hornet" (as it may be called in English) survives from mediaeval times, and grows rather than wanes in popularity. It contains features common to golf, cricket and tennis, but is played with a disc instead of a ball.

Hornussen is played by two opposing teams each of 14 to 18 members. The attackers, called *schlager* or "strikers," take it in turn to drive a small disc from a tee with the object of landing it somewhere within a narrow course 225 yards long, marked off with wooden stakes and starting about 75 yards from the driving point. The disc, of hardened briar root, is tied up on an iron plate, and driven off by the striker with a long, pliant club. The defenders, called *abtuor* or "killers," are placed in strategic positions along the course and are armed with huge rackets, their game being to ward off or "kill" the disc as it comes hurtling through the air, in the same way as a tennis player "kills" a volley shot.

Three points are scored by the attackers if they succeed in landing the disc within the boundary lines of the course. An additional point is scored for every 10 metres beyond the entrance line covered by a successful shot. Each striker is allowed three drives unless the disc (or hornet) should be intercepted at the first or second shot by one of the defending fieldsmen.

At half-time defenders and attackers change sides. The team which scores the greater number of points wins. In the case of a draw, the sum total of the drive lengths decides the issue. Three umpires are appointed by each side to settle disputes and to reckon the scores.

The game is exciting and spectacular. The sturdy *Schlager* are able to put tremendous force behind their shots, and 200 metres is the average length driven. As the disc shoots from the tee like a bullet, cat-like agility and the swiftest vision are needed by the fieldsmen if they are not to avoid danger, but in addition "kill" the "hornet" with their rackets. These countrymen of Berne, however, have been bred to the game from their earliest youth and are extremely keen-eyed and muscular.

Spring and autumn are the popular seasons for visitors to Switzerland to see the game, since large playing fields are necessary and are seldom available when the land is being tilled. One or two Hornussen festivals are, however, held every summer on the public grazing commons, outside the large towns, and these are attended by crowds of spectators and players. At one festival no fewer than 160 teams and a grand total of 3,000 players participated.

Every year the game grows in popular favour, and to-day there are some 250 clubs in Switzerland.

### Preparing for Disarmament at Geneva.

Some of my readers may take in papers of this, some of that shade of politics, and there may be some who take the trouble to read various shades. The latter practice, although alone enabling one to come to a fairly accurate judgment on matters political, is often exasperating, because one has one's preconceived ideas and bias, and it is often bad for one's liver to read through articles written from a different point of view and advancing thoughts and even arguments which one cannot easily admit. Hence the danger of eliminating all

but those articles with which one agrees beforehand and knows it. Carlyle said once that leading articles were useless, because they were read only by those who agreed beforehand with what was said in them. Well, the following from *The Economist* (29th May) seems to me a pretty fair summing-up of what is being done at Geneva, and it may interest my readers and correct some views they have gathered from the "Daily Mail," the "Morning Post" and a few other able exponents of the mailed fist.

It is true that the Preparatory Committee for Disarmament, which is just concluding its first meeting, has not made very appreciable progress, but the suggestions made in one or two quarters away from Geneva that it has been a failure indicate a complete misapprehension of what the Committee is, and what it has to do. Only a blue-eyed optimist unacquainted with the circumstances would have expected from this first meeting of a Committee appointed to draw up a programme for an eventual conference on disarmament, that its work could be done at one meeting, and that the lines upon which the international conference should take place would be agreed upon in a few days, or a few weeks, or even months. It has always been understood that there was little, if any, probability that a general conference could be held before 1927.

The preliminary nature of the Committee's work is plain enough if its programme is considered for a single moment. This is contained in a list of questions submitted to it by the Council, and covering an extremely wide field of inquiry, some of which enter into technical categories, some into political and economic categories, and a small part almost into the realm of philosophy. It is to be doubted whether any scientific basis can be arrived at for the reduction and limitation of armaments, but the questions do include some strictly relevant considerations which must be decided before any schemes can ever be approached. On some of these essential points progress has been achieved, and one or two points have been decided; one of them seems to bring the discussion down to strictly practical grounds and marks something like a healthy return to Article 9 of the Covenant. This is in the form of a statement accepted on the proposal of the French delegation that the Preparatory Committee considers the task entrusted to it by the Council should be undertaken on the understanding that every Government should bring to the proposed international conference definite and quantitative proposals accompanied by reasons in support, calculated with reference to the degrees of security existing at the date when the conference meets. That begins to look like business. No State can assume that it is entirely without security, and it is important to note that the French delegate, M. Boncour, stated that the Covenant and the Locarno Treaties (when they are in force) do at least provide some security.

In the general debate with which the Committee began its work there was an almost complete series of declarations on principle and policy by most of the eighteen States represented, including Germany and America, and a considerable part of it was rather unkindly described by Count Bernstorff, the German delegate, as appearing like a set of arguments in favour of the maintenance rather than the reduction of armaments. This observation was a little too clever, but there was certainly a tendency at first to go back over the old issues raised on security and the Geneva Protocol instead of considering the possibilities of business in the existing state of political relations. As both Lord Cecil and Mr. Gibson (of the American Delegation) pointed out, if a little progress can be made in reduction of armaments in existing circumstances, that would contribute to security, and a little strengthening of security would promote again the chances of further reductions. No progress can be made if absolute security—which is unattainable—is demanded as a necessary preliminary to reduction, and there is now less rigidity in the attitude of the States who are that way inclined.

The points consistently raised by the French and others as to the assistance and the rapidity of assistance to be expected under Article 16 of the Covenant in the case of an outbreak of war have been modified in the form of a suggestion to the Council to investigate methods which might facilitate the meeting of the Council at very brief notice in the case of war or threat of war; to secure rapid drafting of recommen-

dations regarding military assistance when the Council shall have decided to make such recommendations; and one or two cognate points. This is a matter which has, therefore, been taken out of the hands of the Preparatory Committee and put into the hands of the Council, the idea being to provide, if possible, for the more expeditious execution of Council decisions. It is, all the same, a ticklish affair, and may very likely lead to the raising of complicated issues.

Apart from this reference to the Council, the Preparatory Committee has defined more precisely the terms of the questionnaire submitted to it, and has referred these questions to two sub-committees—one a committee of military, naval and air experts, and the other a mixed committee of economic financial, transit and other representatives. These committees are asked for technical replies, and when these replies have been furnished the Preparatory Committee will meet again later in the year to consider them and to see how far they form a basis for a programme. One substantial decision of the Committee is that it would not be practical at the present time to limit the ultimate war strength of a country, but that it is possible to limit the forces permanently maintained or capable of immediate use without preliminary mobilisation measures. A study is to be made of the possibility of limiting mobilisable forces available on outbreak of hostilities. A study is also to be made of the kind of things to which limitation should be applied, such as peace-time forces, munitions, expenditure on national defence, etc., how strengths between different countries may be compared, how far armaments in general are affected by geographical situation, vulnerability of frontiers, length and character of communications, etc.

Some important references were made to the possibility of regional disarmament. This was a matter raised by various delegations, including the American, which held that circumstances differed so much in different quarters of the world that it might be easier to make progress in one part than in another. A study is to be made on this point, including considerations of what regions could be taken separately and what factors the term "region" should connote. This is an essential consideration; regional schemes must not be uni-lateral.

A declaration was made by the German delegation that while not contesting the necessity of determining the methods to put rapidly into force assistance which a State attacked might receive, they contended that before this was done the limitation and reduction of armaments should be so effected that no State should be strong enough to prevail against the League. If States were to be able to bring effective help to a State attacked by another Power of preponderant superiority, it was evident that their joint armaments would have to be superior to those of any eventual aggressor. Curiously enough, this is exactly the proposal which was originally put forward by the French, and though both parties suggest the same thing there is an ironic difference in the angle of approach.

On the whole, though there is an enormous field of discussion still left open, some little advance has been made, and it must be recognised that there is no wisdom whatever in trying to force the pace. To risk failure through impatience, and to go to a general conference before the time is ripe, and before the Committee has even thoroughly investigated whether a general conference is, after all, the most appropriate way, would be fatal.

#### University for Invalids.

The progress of Wireless Telephony has been made use of in Switzerland to help along ailing students who otherwise would have been losing much valuable time while recuperating.

*Yorkshire Observer* (25th May):—

The broadcasting of University lectures to invalid students is a remarkable new use which has been found for wireless by the Swiss.

At a sanatorium in Leysin, in the Canton of Vaud, built for the treatment and care of students whose education has been arrested by illness, University lectures are brought actually to the bedside of invalids by means of a special radio installation. The lectures are delivered by visiting professors to all students who are fit to attend them in the special room appointed for the purpose, and they are thence broadcast to the other patients in bed.

The patients are enabled by means of these daily lectures, and by intercourse with people of similar intellectual interests, to keep in touch with their interrupted work. Every effort is made to preserve the academic atmosphere rather than that of the hospital. A fine library containing more than a thousand volumes is available for the students' use.

Forty students from universities all over the world are accommodated in this invalids' college, which is called the University Sanatorium of Leysin.

#### A Fascist Climb-down—Farinacci's 400-ft. Flagstaff.

*Daily Herald* (27th May):—

The anniversary of Italy's entry into the Great War was to have been the occasion of an unprecedented Fascist demonstration on the Italo-Swiss frontier. Ponte-Chiasso, an Italian village of about 200 houses, was the place chosen for the demonstration.

Its houses were placarded the other day with large posters, which displayed the thrilling news that Farinacci was to come "at the head of the Fascist squads of the Como province." A steel mast, 400 feet high, was erected in the most conspicuous part of Ponte-Chiasso—the centre of the square facing the frontier line.

An enormous Italian flag was to be hoisted to the top of this mast. The size of the mast and of the flag were calculated to enable, according to the Ponte-Chiasso posters, "foreigners on the other side of the frontier to take note of and observe the Italian colours."

There was, however, no Farinacci and no hoisting of Italian flags. And the steel mast is to be removed. It appears that those who caused it to be erected had overlooked the fact that an international convention forbids the hoisting of flags within 250 metres of border lines. The Swiss authorities, it appears, pointed out to Rome the political inconvenience of the intended demonstration, and this caused Farinacci to call off his project.

Now that "Il Duce" has his own flag, has his own picture on Italian stamps—thereby assuming a rôle hitherto reserved for Sovereigns—it must be expected that his publicity agent is looking around for fresh fields of activity.

#### Great Music Festival at Zurich.

*The Times* (31st May):—

Particulars of music festivals to be held at Zurich in June and at Salzburg in August have now been made public. The International Society for Contemporary Music holds its fourth festival at Zurich from June 18 to 23. The first concert is choral and will consist of Kodaly's *Psalmus Hungaricus* and Honegger's *oratorio King David*, of which an account by Mr. Fuller-Maitland was recently published in "The Times." On the second day a memorial to Busoni will be unveiled and a chamber concert given of works by Geiser, Schönberg and Jacobi. On Sunday there will be a performance at the Swiss Marionet Theatre of de Falla's "Master Pedro's Puppet Show." At an orchestral concert works by W. T. Walton, Hindemith, Casella and others will be performed. Sacred music by Chapelier and Petryre occupies one concert, while the last concert will be devoted to miscellaneous chamber music, including a piano sonata by Mjaskowsky, a work for chamber orchestra by Krasa, a concerto for wind instruments by Weill, and a septet by Hourée. The performing artists are mainly Swiss, but there are conductors from Paris, Prague and Vienna, singers from Paris, Munich and Holland, and among the pianists is Herr Walter Giesecking from Hanover. There are no British performers except Miss Alma Moodie, who, though Scotch, is accredited to Berlin, and the only British composition is W. T. Walton's overture "Portsmouth Point."

#### Blindness Cured.

It was only the other day I bought a tiny red flower, the proceeds to be for the blind of this country. How often one comes across blind people or hears of effort made to help them to overcome their terrible handicap and to bring some interest or joy into their darkened lives. And who does not realise that to become blind is probably the most appalling misfortune that can befall a living creature (moles, etc., excepted)? The *Daily News* (1st June) publishes the following remarkable report which seems to give hope to at least the sufferers of one form of blindness:—

A Geneva oculist, Dr. Pierre Bolle, has recently communicated to the French Academy of Medicine details of a method by which he has achieved complete success in curing cases of blindness due to the detachment of the retina.

Cases of this kind are by no means uncommon, and are generally precipitated by physical shock or overstrain, though probably due to pre-disposing causes not yet fully understood. When the retina becomes detached a pocket of serous fluid forms between it and the wall of the eye, preventing re-attachment.

Dr. Bolle states that in case of a lesion of this kind the patient should take immediate and complete rest, lying flat on his back.

Injections of common salt have long been used in such cases, but Dr. Bolle's discovery lies in the setting up of what is called osmotic action by simultaneous injections on both sides of the eye. The fluid in the pocket being deficient in sodium chloride content as compared with that in the centre of the eyeball, Dr. Bolle, by graded injections, induces an action through the detached membrane which brings the fluid on each side to the same degree of salinity.

The patient being kept on his back, the retina, so to speak, sinks in the fluid and becomes re-attached to the wall of the eye. Indeed, the

doctor affirms that, by reason of a kind of glue which is formed, it adheres more firmly than before.

During the past five years he has treated 20 cases, and he reports complete success in every case. Sight has been completely restored and has remained unimpaired.

Since his paper was read before the French Academy, Dr. Bolle has had numerous letters asking for treatment. He asks me to make it clear that immediate treatment is necessary. Once a membrane is dead nothing can be done. Thus a case of three years' standing mentioned in a letter from Liverpool is quite hopeless.

#### New Electricity Undertakings in Switzerland.

British tourists visiting Switzerland often remark upon the universality of electric power and light in our country. Compared with England, Switzerland does make more use of electricity, but an enormous increase in the consumption of electric power, with consequential increases in the manifold applications of electrical accessories, is still possible. That the power can be got is clear from the following in the *Electrical Review* (28th May):—

According to a report lately issued by the Swiss Water Economy Department, the total available water power in the country is equal to four million h.p. for an average of 15 hours per day. Of this only one million h.p. is so far being utilised. At the beginning of the present year work was in hand on the establishment of several new hydro-electric stations, among them being the Ober-Ems, with a capacity of 11,000 h.p., the Vernayaz (108,000 h.p.), the Handeck—the first of three on the Upper Hasli—(100,000 h.p.), and the third extension of the station on the Lungern Lake, which will increase its capacity from 20,000 to 22,000 h.p.

#### Church in Fetters.

*Leicester Daily Mercury* (29th May):—

Crowds of early summer tourists in Switzerland are being drawn to the village of Safan, in the Grisons, by the spectacle of a church that is held back only by immense cables from disappearing into a deep ravine. The church is perched on the summit of an enormous rock at the meeting of two streams, and the swirl of the waters has so undermined the base of the rock that it has slipped bodily forward and threatens at any moment to topple over, carrying the church with it. Alarmed parishioners, awakening one morning recently to find their church slipping to destruction, obtained great cables, bound them round the fabric, and made them fast in the solid ground on the side farthest from the danger.

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