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HOME NEWS

It is semi-officially stated that the Russian Government may be expected to rescind in the near future the general boycott declared against Switzerland at the time of the Worowski murder.

As a consequence of an official warning from the Federal Council to the effect that a continuation of his hostile criticism of the Italian Government in the Ticinese paper "Libera Stampa" would be followed by an order of expulsion, Sig. Angelo Tonello has resigned from the editorial staff of that paper. (Angelo Tonello was formerly an Italian Socialist deputy, and took refuge in Switzerland last May in order to evade persecution by Fascists.)

Plenty of political excitement is in store for the Geneva electors in the near future, as apart from Cantonal and Federal matters they will have to give their opinion on four initiative requests for the submission of which sufficient votes have been collected. They deal with widely different matters of local interest. The first seeks to liberate dental practitioners from the necessity of obtaining a Swiss diploma, which, as the law stands, is a *sine qua non* before this profession can be exercised. A local dentist with an American certificate, whom the authorities fined and debarred from practising, is the promoter of this initiative, which is not likely to find favour with the electors. — The second proposal is in the nature of a sequel to the recent police scandal, when at the end of last November houses of ill-repute were officially closed; this arbitrary action seems to have offended the sense and notion of personal liberty cherished by a number of Genevese. — The third initiative attempts to strengthen the hands of the tax collector by introducing the publication of individual private assessments; the demand was revived by the Socialists when during a recent liquidation it transpired that a local trader had lost Frs. 40,000, whilst he religiously used to declare and pay tax on Frs. 300. — The so-called "centimes additionnels" are the bone of contention in the fourth initiative; up till now this supplementary taxation, which was introduced barely twelve months ago, has been calculated on a percentage basis, whilst the Socialists wish to have it levied "progressively," i.e., in the same manner as the income and property tax is computed.

A spirited discussion, intermingled with some hilarity, preceded a Socialist motion in the Basle Grosse Rat, which besought the Federal Council to demand the recall of the Italian Consul-General in Basle; the motion was defeated by a narrow majority. (See Special Article.)

A new prison is to be erected in the canton of Vaud at a cost of about 2½ million francs. This will be built on the Orbe plain and replace the existing cantonal prison in Lausanne, which is evidently too small for present-day requirements. A cattle and dairy farm, to be run by prisoners, as well as a home for inebriates, will form part of the new institution.

Owing, it is stated, to disagreement with the native commandant of the Ticinese Mountain Infantry Regiment No. 30, National Councillor Col. Dollfus has asked to be relieved of the command of the 15th Brigade. It is also rumoured that Col. Dormann, commander of the 5th Division, contemplates a similar step.

The resident population of the town of Zurich at the end of 1925 is given as 207,418, which shows an increase of 2,200 as compared with the close of 1924.

All the gymnastic societies in the canton of Aargau, without regard to religion or politics, are to receive a State subsidy in the future.

The picturesque electric tramway line from Zug to the Zugerberg was the scene last Friday (Jan. 15th) of a fatal accident. From some yet unexplained cause the brakes of one of the cars refused to act, and the latter rolled down the mountain; at one of the curves the car left the rails and

somersaulted twice, burying the ten passengers under the debris. The driver, a youth and a girl lost their lives on the spot, one boy was extricated in a hopeless condition, three other boys, all pupils of the college on the Zugerberg, were transported to the hospital, and the remainder escaped with bruises and shock.

A curious mishap took place on the outskirts of a farmstead near Sisikon, where a gang of workmen were felling trees. The trunk of a heavy beech-tree got out of control on the icy ground, and, gliding down a short incline, pierced a farmhouse, where it became embedded in such a way that the fore and aft parts of the trunk projected on opposite sides of the building. Apart from the destruction of the chimney, practically no other damage was done, though the occupant was having dinner with his family on the ground floor at the time.

M. Paul Adrian, the director of the Federal Mint, is celebrating the 40th anniversary of his service with this institution, which he entered on January 1st, 1886, as a book-keeper.

An inmate of a Zurich old-age institution, Frau A. B. Kollhop-Brandenberger, has recently celebrated her 103rd birthday.

The late Mr. Louis Reichenbach, the head of the well-known St. Gall embroidery export business of the same name, bequeathed Frs. 100,000 to charitable institutions.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "KYBURG."

Winter Sports.

The very mention of the two words has assumed a fresh and somewhat personal significance for most of us who—*nolens, volens*—have had to take part in Winter Sports, even if it were only the very sporting way in which we have had to pick our way to the station every day. A rather heavy crop of accidents has been reported, especially during the last week-end, and, unfortunately, one of the worst affected a very dear friend of "Kyburg," who, luckily, however is promised a full recovery by and by. Once again I have been made to remember the sharp difference in our feelings between reading of accidents which have happened to strangers and similar mishaps which have befallen one dear to oneself. And I have wondered again whether, perhaps, the Millennium will be possible only when we human beings are capable of feeling the same pangs of anguish, the same tingling joys whether bad or good experienced by one of our dearest or by comparative strangers, in other words, when we all really feel like brothers and sisters and the very word "stranger" belongs to the past. I wonder?

Meanwhile, I have come across a rather good article anent—

Skating.

in the *London Opinion* (16th inst.):—

The skating, as I sit down to write this article, is all over. The moment I heard people were skating, I made a dash for my study, but it was too late. Whilst I was ascending the stairs, the thaw came and the skating was finished.

Never mind, there may be some more skating this winter, so put this issue of 'London Opinion' where you can get at it without a moment's delay. Do not put off reading the article until you are sure the ice bears. Read it when you are told by the postman or the butcher—they always know first about these things—that there is a chance of the ice bearing. Then, should you take the ice, you will be a well-informed skater.

The reason why there is so little skating in England is simply because the English are so leisurely. We got one day of frost, and nobody takes any notice. We get two days, and still the skaters are supine. On the third day we read that the National Skating Committee are about to meet in the Fens. "About to meet," mind you! By the time they have met, and put motions and amendments and carried everything *nem. con.*, the skating is well over for another year.

The National Skating Committee ought to take up their quarters on the Fens from the 1st of October. They should watch the water day and night. The moment the first film of ice appears they should blow bugles, fire guns; spring rattles, and call meetings of the Committee. There would then be a chance of settling the champion-

ship for the year. One hour of skating would do. A really good Fen skater can go all round Lincolnshire in an hour, and even call on his friends in passing.

As for less ambitious skaters, they don't deserve to skate at all. In a country like this, when real ice skating in the open takes place about once in twelve years, it is clearly ridiculous to keep your skates in the loft and let them get rusty. Just as the warriors of old slept in their breast-plates and thigh-shields—I forget the technical term, but you have seen pictures of what I mean—well, just as they slept in those, knowing very well that if they didn't, the enemy would cut them to pieces long before they could get the damned things fixed, so the keen modern skater should sleep in his skates.

When I was younger, and had all the time there was in the holidays for skating, I invariably did that. For one thing, it took about three hours to fix your skates to your boots. You first of all bored a hole in the heel of your boot, and you then screwed the skate round and round until it "bit." Sometimes it bit and sometimes it didn't. When it didn't bite, you had to fill up the hole with matches and bits of stick, and try again.

One thing we all knew, and that was that the skate which had once bitten was twice shy. If you rashly unscrewed it at the end of the day's skating, it would never bite really well a second time into the same pair of heels. So the wise skater left his skates on his boots.

Next came the problem of how to get home from the ice. Your laces were frozen, and your fingers were so cold you could never unravel the knots. So you either walked home in your skates, which did them practically no good at all, or you got some kind person to carry you. Once home, going to bed in your skates was a simple matter.

Skating fatalities were more common then than to-day, but there were no "popular" papers, and so nobody heard of your being drowned—outside your immediate circle. We used to begin skating long before the ice would bear, and we went on skating when it was rapidly thawing. I can remember skating with an inch of water on the ice. I can also remember playing hockey in that water, and falling on my back, and continuing with the game until I was as dry as before. We must have been pretty keen in those days.

There was always a lovely place marked "Danger." That meant the deepest part of the lake, and running water. This was the spot we liked best. In fact, we invented a simple but exciting game to be played on this spot. You took a ball or a small piece of wood, and you slid it almost to the edge of the thin ice. The game was to get it back.

A lot of nice people were drowned at this game. I suppose they were too heavy for it. They should have played something else. Small boys, being light and quick, won all the honours. It was wonderful how much of the ice you could skate on which had been marked off and put out of bounds. Once inside this boundary, balancing yourself on a quarter of an inch of ice, you could insult all the older and heavier people to your heart's content.

It was a heaven-sent chance. If they came after you, in they went to a certainty. If you went in, they would have to fetch you out. Looking back, I think this was about the only strategic position for the small boy with a load of insults which would be considered impregnable.

Modern skating, of course, is quite different. You do not, if you are a serious skater, spend the winter in England. You go to Switzerland, and there you can skate all the time—if there is no snow.

The year I went there *was* snow. They showed me where the rink should be, and told me I could skate on it if I cared to remove the snow. The snow was only about six feet deep, so I took on the job.

I worked at that task for a fortnight. At the end of a fortnight, a few friends and myself had cleared a nice little patch of ice about fifty yards square. "To-morrow," we said gleefully, "*we will skate!*"

On rising in the morning, we found our patch marked "Reserved for Champions Only." We were not exactly champions—at skating. So we returned to our native land, poorer but full of strange oaths.

Ski-ing Teams.

The British University Ski-ing Team won a

notable victory against our compatriots, according to the *Morning Post* of 11th inst.:—

The match between the British Universities and Swiss Universities started at Wengen on Saturday with a straight race from the Laubhorn to the sawmill above Inner Wengen. Snow conditions and the weather were perfect. The teams were five side, starting at intervals of half a minute. Escher, of Zurich, started first, but was soon overtaken by Mackintosh, running superbly. Dobbs ran at top speed to the slope straight, keeping his ski in old tracks. Mackintosh had a bad fall below "The Bumps."

Dobbs, of Cambridge, three times British champion, finished first in the excellent time of 6 min. 19 sec. Mackintosh, of Oxford, was second in 6 min. 30 sec. Walter Amstutz, of Berne, the Swiss captain, who won the race last year, was third. Schumacher (Berne) was fourth, Escher (Zurich) fifth, McConnell sixth, H. Ford (Cambridge) seventh, De l'Orsa (Zurich) eighth, Dr. Morland (London) ninth, and Kummerly (Zurich) tenth. The British Universities won by 15 points to 10.

The Slalom Race was held to-day at Mürren. Mackintosh was first, Amstutz second, Dobbs third, Schumacher fourth, McConnell fifth, Kummerly sixth, Ford seventh, Escher eighth, De l'Orsa ninth, Morland tenth. Snow and weather were again perfect. The British Universities won by 14 points to 11. The final result of the match was, therefore, that the British Universities won by 29 points to 21. This is the first occasion on which a British ski team has defeated a Continental ski team.

The Swiss University team was thoroughly representative on the results of the Swiss University Students' Championship won last year, in which Amstutz secured the first place, Escher the third place, Kummerly the fourth, De l'Orsa the fifth. The match was followed by a very successful Anglo-Swiss dinner. Mackintosh wins the Anglo-Swiss Challenge Cup for the best performance in the race. Amstutz won the cup last year.

Swiss Avalanches.

During the thaw on Monday night miniature avalanches came down from many roofs in our vicinity, reminding me of the rumbling noise produced by real Avalanches in Switzerland. Over there they seem to have had one or two already and one particularly of a serious nature. The *Daily Mail* (13th inst.) reports:—

An enormous avalanche of powdery snow fell without warning on the village of Netstal, in the Canton of Glarus, covering the streets to a depth of several feet.

The air pressure produced by the displacement of the mass was so great that the inhabitants were unable to leave their houses during the fall.

The chief thing always is that no human lives are lost. That has, happily, also been the case at Schimberg, where, according to *The Times* of the 9th inst.—

Although the landslide on the Schimberg is stationary now that rain has ceased falling, the geological experts who examined it believe that it will be impossible to keep it where it is, and that will move again as soon as a new rainfall occurs.

Part of the village of Ittental is doomed. If the landslide moves eastwards it will block up the river, and the centre of the village will be flooded. If, on the other hand, it goes northwards, it will destroy at least nine or ten farmhouses.

It is reported that another landslide near Ragatz, in the Rhine valley, has destroyed a bridge and covered several fields. The main road near Naefels, Canton Glarus, has been obstructed over a distance of 40 yards by a mass of earth and rocks, which have caused damage to fields and forest.

A big wolf, which last week attacked a sheep-dog on Mont Salève, near Geneva, was killed on Wednesday by local hunters. No wolves had been seen in that region for over a century.

An interesting bit of news, also in *The Times* (Jan. 13th), is the following *re*

Levels of the Lake of Geneva.

The Lake of Geneva seems to be menaced by a new convention which France proposes to conclude with Switzerland in regard to the water level *régime*.

By the convention of 1884, which is still in force, the two countries fixed at 60 centimetres the difference of level between the low water mark of 1.10 metres and the high water mark of 1.70 metres in ordinary years, and at 90 centimetres during leap years. All constructions along the lake have been made on these bases, and that water *régime* was no obstacle to navigation. France now wishes to make use of the water of the Lake of Geneva for industrial purposes, and she proposes to raise the difference of level to 1.20 metres, with the low water mark down to 70 centimetres and the high water mark down to 1.90 metres. This means that low

water level would be 16 in. lower than at present and high water mark 8 in. lower, and in consequence navigation would be suspended during nine months out of twelve, and would only be possible during the summer months when snow is melting in the mountains.

The French proposal is arousing numerous protests on the Swiss side of the lake, and it is hoped that the coming negotiations will result in an agreement on another basis. If not, all embankments, quays, landing piers, and sewers would have to be rebuilt, and this would mean an expenditure of several million francs. Moreover, the steamship navigation company, which is giving a winter and summer service on both sides of the lake, would either have to lengthen its landing pier from 50 metres (164 ft.) to 150 metres (492 ft.) or stop its services during the greater part of the year, thus leaving a number of villages without means of rapid communication.

It may be added that the thaw which began on Dec. 20th and the abundant rainfalls which followed had at least one good result: that of filling the Swiss lakes and rivers, the level of which was very low. At the end of November, the level of the lakes was insufficient to assure the supply of electrical power during the whole winter. The situation is much better now, and it is expected that there will be no stoppage or reduction in the production of electricity.

By the way, and to change the subject, as it were, I do wish our Ticinesi would write more often to *The Swiss Observer*, so that the language of Dante would be better represented. I don't know whether other readers feel the same as I do, but I should be surprised if most of them were not delighted each time there is a bit of Italian in our columns. Not that I am a scholar in Dante's language, but, like most of my compatriots, I know sufficient Italian to comprehend the written word and even to appreciate the beauty of the spoken one. Besides, each time I read or hear Italian, I am reminded of the time when it was my good fortune to help guard the railway lines down Biasca way and to sample the Nostrano and other good things and to make friends with our delightful compatriots on the southern side of the St. Gothard. So, please, cari Ticinesi, roll up and send in contributions to the Editor and make a bit of propaganda for your beautiful language, your charming people, and your majestic canton!

To add a bit of Ticino news, which really brought the above thoughts to the fore in my mind, *The Times* of the 7th inst. says:—

It is reported that the Officine Elettriche Ticinesi, of Bodio, has been authorised to export up to the end of 1931 a maximum of 400,000 kWh per day to the Società Lombarda per Distribuzioni di Energia Elettrica and the Società Idroelettrica Piemontese Lombarda Ernesto Breda, of Milan. From the end of 1931 to the end of the concession the quantity of energy to be exported will be reduced to a maximum of 304,000 kWh per day.

Otherwise, still in thought down at Lugano, the town of Italian character and Swiss cleanliness, of bright shops, splendid hotels, polite tram conductors and splendid mandoline-and-brass bands, the town where at night the jolly steamers rest in the bay like ghostly boats, where the searchlights from behind Gandria stab across to Caprino, picking up a boat here and there, and where, on still nights, the whole length of the promenade along the lake is filled with music, applause and gay laughter, and the voice of the Prima Donna at the Kursaal is wafted across the bay down almost to the so aptly named Paradiso—yes! thinking of Lugano and its beauties and its gloriously peaceful aspect, I am reminded that Schiller says in his "Glocke":

"Es kann der Frömmste nicht in Frieden leben,
Wenn es dem bösen Nachbarn nicht gefällt."

In other words, our Swiss authorities are hard put to these days to prevent the development of bad feeling between Switzerland and Italy under the Mussolini régime, and latest news from that quarter are not at all encouraging.

Another bad neighbour, fortunately somewhat a distant one, is Russia. In this case it was, of course, extremely unfortunate that the murderer of Vorovski was allowed to go unpunished, and the verdict threw a peculiar light on the Swiss penal system at the time. However, the Russians are naturally trying to make more political capital out of the incident than is justified, and the struggle has now developed to such an extent that I find the following in the *Manchester Guardian* of the 12th inst.:—

The Disarmament Conference.

The quarrel between Russia and Switzerland is being followed with great concern in Berlin, because it threatens to do incalculable harm to the coming Disarmament Conference. The Russians, although willing to attend the Conference, are reluctant to send a delegate to Switzerland. The reasons for this will be clear to everyone who remembers the circumstances in which Mr. Vorovski was murdered at the second Lausanne

Conference in May, 1923. He received wholly inadequate protection from the Swiss authorities, and the murderer was allowed to go unpunished. Russia broke off all relations with Switzerland and has not resumed them since.

The "Izvestia" now publishes a leading article, which is quoted in the German press, saying that if Russia does after all send a delegation to Switzerland, no special guarantees for its safety will be considered adequate. The "Izvestia" demands that there be "a situation in which formal guarantees are granted as a matter of course in the same way as they are granted to representatives of the Soviet Union in other countries." In other words, what the "Izvestia" demands is that the Swiss Government shall formally recognise the Russian Government.

If Russia does not attend the Disarmament Conference, then the results of the Conference are bound to remain illusory as far as Eastern Europe is concerned. For Germany the problem of disarmament necessarily and vitally involves Eastern Europe, especially Russia and Poland. That is why the quarrel between Russia and Switzerland is taken more seriously in Berlin than it would seem to be taken in London and Paris.

The "Vorwärts" is of opinion that if this quarrel is not speedily settled it may paralyse the progress of international disarmament for years to come. The "Vorwärts" suggests mediation and writes: "Neither Switzerland nor Russia can have any interest in wrecking the movement for disarmament. The proper mediator between them would be a power which can claim to have the greatest interest in international disarmament and whose relations with both these Powers are friendly." What the "Vorwärts" means to suggest is that Germany should offer to mediate between Russia and Switzerland. The importance of this suggestion is clear.

I have never been able to understand the Swiss attitude towards Russia's recognition. It has always seemed to me, and still seems to me, that the very best thing which can happen to Russia is to let fresh air and light into Russia. As long as you cut them off, they must fester and rot, but as soon as fresh air and light is let in, the more noxious forms of their Government won't have an earthly chance to maintain themselves. It always has been and always will be so. And stubborn sulkenness has never won political battles yet, nor ever struck a blow for Liberalism and progress.

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