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HOME NEWS

In place of Dr. Fritz Ostertag, who last February was appointed director of the Bureau International pour le propriété intellectuelle in Berne, the two Federal Councils elected at a united sitting Prof. Jos. Piller as a member of the Federal Tribunal in Lausanne. Prof. Piller, who is only 36, comes with a great reputation from the University of Fribourg; he has also been lecturing at the University of Geneva during the absence of Prof. Eugène Borel. Prof. Piller subscribes to no particular political creed, and his choice adds lustre to the unbiased judgment of our Members of Parliament.

After a lively discussion the Zurich town council, the majority of which is held by the Labour party, decided to suspend the local tram service during the whole afternoon of to-day—Labour's great holiday; at a subsequent meeting of the authority concerned it was, however, resolved, to maintain the usual service during the whole of the day.

At the Landsgemeinde in Stans last Sunday National Councillor von Matt was elected Landammann for Nidwalden, whilst at Sarnen apothecary Stockmann was appointed to that office for Obwalden, though he had to give way to his opponent, State Attorney Amstalden, as a member in the Federal States Council.

In Trogen the Appenzell A.Rh. Landsgemeinde was attended by some distinguished visitors, amongst them being Federal Councillor Schulthess and the French Ambassador in Berne; the chief item of interest was the proposed introduction of an entertainment tax, which, however, the majority of the 8,000 voters present rejected.

The cantonal courts at Chur have acquitted Jakob and Adele Flugli, husband and wife, of the charge of having caused the recent conflagration at Sûs; many sensational statements were made during the trial, which commenced on March 22nd and was subsequently adjourned for further investigations.

In order to encourage saving, the "caisse d'épargne" of Thounne, has decided to present every baby born in the district with a deposit book showing Frs. 5 to its credit. More than a thousand births are registered in this district annually.

Lady clerks who have reached the age of 50, and who for at least 20 years have been employed in the town of Berne, become entitled to a yearly pension of Frs. 300 to Frs. 600, for which purpose the late Mr. Karl Ludwig Portenier has just left the whole of his fortune of about Frs. 200,000 to the municipality of Berne.

A regular fight tragically terminated a camping party of itinerant basket makers from Lucerne, who near Brunnlen were regaling themselves sumptuously: Jakob Mehr, from Armenz (Grisons), was stabbed to death by Franz Moser; the latter and his brother, who were both hiding in a neighbouring forest, have been placed under arrest.

In an attempt to overtake—and "cut in"—a motor-car on the Hochdorf road (Lucerne), a motor cyclist fell in front of the latter, he and the pillion-rider being run over. The lady companion was killed on the spot, whilst the driver, a Mr. Hunkeler, employed by the Lucerne municipality, was taken to the local hospital in a critical condition, and has since died.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "KYBURG."

For uncivilised peoples, living in the tropics, it may not be so important that they are unable to read, as it would be for us Northerners. Hence, I take it, comes the fact that Eskimos take to the Gospel and subsequent education much more readily than do our dusky brethren of Africa and other hot climes, not to forget the Pacific Islanders.

You cannot guess why I write the above? According to the newspapers, and according to the state of health of most of my relations and friends in these foggy parts of the world, the SUNSHINE records of the present month show a shortage of actual sunshine of more than 150 hours. We all feel more or less miserable, and anxiously scan the weather forecasts or listen to the B.B.C.'s weather reports, hoping, almost against hope, that they may promise us SUNSHINE for the morrow.

Meanwhile, one great and real consolation, I find, we have is to read about Sunshine. This is where we score over those who cannot read, and whose mind, therefore, must be considerably more affected by such weather as we have been having of late.

You see now? The Scotsman on April 12th had the following—by the way, is it not significant that it should be The Scotsman?—

Lucerne Revisited.

That Lucerne should be one of the most popular gateways into Switzerland is easy to understand. Not only is it situated on the threshold of the Alpine country, but it presents a microcosm of the scenery of "The Playground of Europe"—to borrow the happy title which Sir Leslie Stephen gave to a book which has long been a classic in the literature of mountaineering. Almost everything that makes Switzerland what we know it to be is to be found in or near the delightful old town of Lucerne. As I stood the other morning on the Seebücke, I beheld the same scene of enchanting beauty as had greeted my eye eighteen years before—a scene reminiscent of what Wordsworth wrote of a very different prospect—

"Earth has not anything to show more fair;
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty."

In front was the broad bosom of the Lake of the Four Forest Cantons, its shores steep and rugged, its placid waters glistening in the morning sun, and reflecting the jagged contours of encircling mountains, their summits capped with snow—

"Imperishably pure beyond all things below," as Byron says in one of those noble lines with which "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" abounds. On the far horizon I could dimly discern those gaunt spectres—the peaks of the Bernese Oberland. Nearer, on my right, was Pilatus, wild, forbidding, but superbly grand—the Mount on which, as the legend runs, Pontius Pilate, in an agony of remorse, took his own life for having condemned Jesus. But Pilatus has a dangerous rival across the Lake, where stands, sentinel-like, that renowned Alpine peak, the Rigi, famous not for its elevation; but for the striking panoramic view which it affords. Then, nestling in the foreground, and imparting a human touch to surroundings so awe-inspiring, is Lucerne itself—a mediæval town, with hoary walls and watch-towers, quaint streets, and quaint buildings.

After this forerunner of articles on Switzerland in the Summer—when you lucky ones who have holidays in the offing, sit up and take notice!—I came across the following description of the great—

Zurich Spring Festival.

Westminster Gazette (19th April):—Festivals welcoming the Spring still survive in many parts of Europe. That at Zurich in April is invested with the real spirit of Carnival. The root-idea is the burning of Winter for all its wickedness and harshness. But on this is super-imposed political or social satire, which ever happens to be the topic of the moment.

The name of the festival, "Sechseläuten," looks awful enough in print, and is quite unrecognisable in its more general sound of "Zaks-loot." When fully restored to its original compound phrase it means Festival of the Six o'Clock Bell. This recalls the curfew marking the close of the working day, and dates from the time of the Guilds, which, still existent in Zurich, have long lost their economic and political significance. But Zaks-loot sees them in

all their mediæval panoply, with modern accretions, some pungently up-to-date.

It is the children's day, in the main. They have a holiday from school, dress themselves in the Swiss national or more grotesque costumes, with the boys favouring masks. In the morning they march in procession through the streets with a triumphal car representing the Goddess of Spring and her attendant nymphs. This ends where the Limmat pours into the lake. Here the bonfire takes place at the clanging of the bell. Zaks-loot is thus a combination of May-day and the Fifth of November, organised as a city celebration.

In the afternoon it is the turn of the adults. The Guilds have their processions. Once solemn, this part of the performance has developed accumulations of burlesque. The Guilds bedeck themselves in their ancient garb. Others run riot amid the local costumiers and their own wardrobe resources. Half Zurich gets itself up fantastically. Many of the revellers endeavour to express topical ideas. Imagine a procession of the Friendly Societies in full regalia, with a huge fancy dress parade tacked on, and you have some idea of how Zurich prepares for the auto-da-fe of the Winter Ogre.

All processions and people make for the scene of the bonfire. The Ogre, locally termed the Bögg, is a huge monstrosity made of white cotton wool, overfed with fireworks, well doped with paraffin and oil. The Bögg has frequently a double debt to pay. Not only has he to bear the sins of his fathers, but of whatever his godfathers thrust upon him from the unpopular personages or themes of the moment. He represents something more than Cruel Winter. He may be the effigy of some local celebrity, or symbolic of some scheme or idea that is in the black books of the populace. Nor is he always alone. There is no lack of "guys" when people are out to burn something for sheer enjoyment.

On the stroke of six the bells are set ringing. The Bögg, raised high on a pole, is set ablaze. The well-soaked rascal flares up at once. The multitudes that throng windows, balconies, roofs, and every point of vantage round about, set up lusty cheers. Wit his stuffing of fireworks the Bögg has an uproarious death. Each outburst draws a deafening din from the crowds, is answered with the whistling and the hooting of the lake steamers, with rival explosions and bonfires from the heights around.

Daylight fades, twilight rapidly deepens into dusk. Illuminated boats dot the lake, fireworks continue to whistle into the air. Gratitude for the awakening of the Spring is continued long into the night after the manner of mankind the world over.

Yes, and the morning after some of the members of those Zurich Guilds feel the awakening of Spring very much in their heads!

Summer Toboggans.

Winter Sports have taken such a hold on people that they have given birth to an idea, sketched in the following from the Yorkshire Observer of 17th April:—

An English resident of Vevey has invented a new summer sport for visitors to Switzerland. It takes the form of tobogganing on wheels. Something like an ordinary "luge" is mounted on a steel chassis with four solid rubber-tired wheels; the "luge" is detachable, and substantial springs have been fitted as shock absorbers. Steering and braking are controlled by hand levers, and a very necessary "hooter" gives warning of the toboggan's approach.

Successful experiments have been made with the new "wheeled toboggan," and great speeds have been attained on the mountain roads near Vevey.

So that pedestrians have yet another danger to reckon with, and sentimental promenaders will have to go farther afield and seek even less frequented and narrower lanes than hitherto.

New Swiss Railway.

For the old and infirm, and for the lazy ones who do not appreciate the joys of getting tired in the pure Swiss mountain air, a further means of seeing some of the loveliest and stateliest spots will soon be available. Lloyds List of April 12th states:—

The Swiss Federal Railways announce the opening next July of the new Furka Railway, which will link up Brig, on the main Simplon Tunnel route into Italy, with the Furka Pass, Andermatt and Disentis, in the Grisons. The completion of the line will establish through

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