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HOME NEWS

In the by-elections for two members of the Regierungsrat of the canton Berne the Liberal party retained their seats with the elections of Dr. Mouttet and Dr. Rudolph. Robert Grimm, one of the unsuccessful Socialist candidates, is instituting legal proceedings against the *Bund* for defamation of character, the paper having ascribed to him an active interest in a newly-formed company to establish a gaming centre in Greece.

A new income tax Bill slightly reducing the existing progressive rate has found favour with the electors of the canton Lucerne.

The ruins of the castle "Zwing Uri," immortalised by Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell," have passed into Swiss ownership again, thanks to the munificence of Mr. A. Dufour, the President of the Swiss Automobile Club, who is also on the committee of the recently-formed Swiss Association for the Preservation of Historic Castles and Ruins (Burgenverein). Zwing Uri, about twenty years ago, was bequeathed to Wilhelm II. (the ex-German Emperor) who in his turn made it over to a German Art Society.

Another wild chamois has been captured alive in the Charmey valley and is to be sent to the London Zoological Gardens, where one secured last Christmas is already in residence.

Whilst ascending from Urmäsch to Thierwies in company with two friends, in order to inspect his mountain hotel, the owner, Johann Dähler from Appenzell, slipped on the frozen ground on to a steep incline and was dashed against a rock, being killed instantaneously.

In descending on his skis from the Niederhorn to the Justus valley, Karl Böschenstein, a goldsmith from Berne, made fatal fall; a search party subsequently recovering his body.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

The Stockport Comedy.

The Stockport Town Council have cancelled the contract for the generating plant placed with Messrs. Escher Wyss & Co., or as the *Daily Mail* (Feb. 16th) conveniently puts it "are reconsidering their proposal for awarding the order to a Swiss firm." This decision, which was carried by a small majority (30 against 28) at a stormy Council Meeting, was fostered by the misleading statement made in a pamphlet issued by the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association and reproduced in most of the large dailies. The distorted way in which the case has been presented by these very same papers to the public constitutes a slur on the traditional British fairness and sense of justice. We quote the *Daily Mail* :—

"We congratulate the authorities of Stockport upon their decision to reconsider their proposal for awarding to a Swiss firm the order for new electrical plant. The Swiss tender was £34,307, and the lowest British tender was at the outset £52,220, which figure has subsequently been reduced to £42,000.

Though on paper the British tender may look higher than the foreign one, there are numerous points to be taken into consideration by a British municipality before it sacrifices the British worker to the alien. It is claimed for British electrical machinery—and we believe with entire truth—that its fuel costs are much lower than when foreign machinery is used. Thus the British Electrical Manufacturers' Association has issued figures showing that in the case of three British towns which installed foreign plants the loss in four years from excessive fuel costs was no less than £70,000.

A second fact which must not be overlooked is that British wages are very much higher than any paid on the Continent of Europe, and British manufacturers are saddled with every sort of costly regulation, and with heavy and steadily mounting charges for social service, from which many of their foreign competitors are free."

Contracts are broken every day with more or less dire consequences, but we did not know that it was a matter for congratulations when such a tort is committed by a town council. As regards the merits of British electrical machinery we will leave this to the experts, who have voiced their opinion in English technical and other papers, *vide* for instance the *Manchester Guardian Commercial* (Feb. 16th), but when the *Daily Mail* unearths again the long-exploited fallacy of cheaper wages in Switzerland we can only conclude that this untruth is purposely reiterated in the hope that "something will stick." We agree with the concluding sentence as to the "Heavy and steadily mounting charges for social services," though these exist everywhere on the Continent, they are decidedly inequitably distributed in this country. The same refrain is chanted in an article dealing with this controversy in the *Weekly Dispatch* (Feb. 12th) when it says :—

"...The other reason is that our industry is heavily burdened with rates and taxes from which our foreign competitors in many cases are almost completely free. That is our legacy from the war, the price we must pay for our effort to save civilisation. We are adding to it needlessly and thoughtlessly when we buy foreign goods where we could buy British, and deliberately unravelling the web of our own prosperity."

We thought it had been agreed long ago that America had won the War and could therefore claim to have "saved civilisation"!

The only large daily which gives the matter a fair hearing is the *Manchester Guardian*. We reproduce a letter which appeared in its issue of Feb. 17th from a local resident which seems to reflect the opinion of the intelligent layman :—

"As a Stockport ratepayer I wish to record my protest against the mismanagement by the Stockport Borough Council of the matter of the Swiss tender for electrical plant recorded in your columns to-day. As you state in your leader, this affair is of more than local interest, as it raises questions of the purity of local government in general. This is a case where the considered judgment of an important borough, based upon the advice of technical advisers, has been reversed as a result of public clamour or commercial wire-pulling, which, if it becomes common, would seriously depreciate the whole tone of public administration. No wonder that an eminent local administrator like Sir Thomas Rowbotham has resigned in disgust, though one hopes for the sake of the town he will reconsider his decision."

One argument in favour of the Council's volte-face seems to be that by spending £10,000 more on a British contract we provide employment for our own people. It is overlooked, of course, that if, on the other hand, we save £10,000 on the rates, by obtaining the most economical plant, we have, as a result, £10,000 more to spend productively. It is also urged that these contracts should be given to home firms irrespective of price. This argument, if carried to its logical conclusions, would lead the Borough Council to place all such contracts with Stockport firms, regardless of cost. If this is absurd it is equally absurd to think there is any special benefit to anybody in giving the contracts to any but the lowest tenderers, wherever they may be. The only ones to benefit in the long run by the present unbusinesslike procedure are the directors and shareholders of certain companies who will obtain a monopoly price by the crushing out of fair and legitimate competition.

Stockport ratepayers are entitled to ask what benefit British workmen on this electrical plant are likely to get out of the extra £10,000 that other working-class ratepayers in Stockport will have to pay for it. If, however, the British tender is eventually brought down to the Swiss figure we shall want to know whether this will be done on an economic basis or at a loss in order to undercut the Swiss firm; and, if at a loss, what guarantee the ratepayers will have that they will not have to make up this loss in future contracts which they will be forced to place with British firms owing to these squeezing-out practices."

The following letter from an engineer challenging the "Beama" was published in the *Daily Dispatch* (Feb. 17th) and will help our readers to form their own judgment :—

"It is time that the British public knew how municipal organisations and general buyers of plant have been dictated to by the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association.

The tenders that would be received by the Stockport Corporation for this plant from British

firms would all be within five per cent. of each other, except one, which would have been a smaller percentage below the remainder. I am not speaking of something I have heard, but something I have good knowledge of, and I would like to ask this same Association if they mean to tell the British public that the works costs of all the manufacturers are within five per cent.

If so, can they please tell us how it is possible for one firm to reduce to the tune of £12,000—nearly 25 per cent.

The general public are not aware how prices are controlled by this Association. The Association have certainly done much to keep up the very high standard necessary in this type of plant, but it must be admitted by them that the Continental manufacturers also have a standard which is not by any means below our own. The difference between the lowest British tender and the Swiss firm was £17,000. This represents about 36 per cent. below the British tender, and is a very large sum of money, particularly when it has to be paid by the ratepayers of Stockport. I challenge the British manufacturers to show me in your columns any just reason why the ratepayers of Stockport should subsidise British plant manufacturers.

There are many sides to this controversy, but if the whole truth is told I feel quite certain that a concerted movement will be made by buyers of plant to break down this combine which controls prices so effectively, generally at the expense of ratepayers.

This letter is by an engineer, and I am quite willing and ready to enter into the matter wholeheartedly and submit this as a challenge to Mr. Dunlop, secretary of the Association."

(At a meeting of the Stockport Town Council held last Tuesday the original contract placed with Messrs. Escher Wyss & Co. was confirmed by a majority of one vote out of 65.)

The Basle Mission.

Thanks to the untiring efforts of Viscount Templeton the claims of the Basle Mission Trading Company are not allowed to lapse; the following motion stood in his name and was dealt with in the House of Lords on February 22nd :—

"That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the matters so many years in dispute between His Majesty's Government and the Basle Trading Company."

The Marquess of Salisbury, replying to a query by Lord Londonderry, said he must be extremely careful not to deal with the merits of the case, but in the public interest it was his duty to make an appeal to Lord Templeton and the House. He was aware Lord Templeton had great reason to complain of the delay in this matter, and he could not defend in all respects those who were responsible for it.

Would they be wise, he asked, to enter upon this discussion? The question was full of complications. He was unable, so far, to make a statement on the part of the Government, but so far as the Colonial Office was concerned, he was able to say that negotiations took place throughout last summer and autumn on the basis of :—

(a) The restoration of the share capital of the Company, plus interest.

(b) The restitution of their properties.

(c) Some additional compensation.

They had not been able to arrive at a settlement on (c), but were willing to continue negotiations.

So far as the Indian aspect of the question was concerned, the matter was complicated by the regard which must be paid to the authority of the Indian Legislature, but in respect of both, he would put it that those who were called upon to negotiate with a foreign company on behalf of the Government would find their difficulties seriously increased by the discussion of Lord Templeton's motion, and he suggested to him not to proceed with it then.

The Earl of Birkenhead, dealing with the Indian aspect of the question, said he was in correspondence with the Viceroy upon this matter.

He thought he would do more harm than good if he put the matter higher than this: he was sure the development of the situation in India and the conclusion ultimately reached must be very greatly effected by the agreement announced by the Leader of the House in relation to those claims which particularly affected the Colonial Office. A detailed debate that day would not be helpful.

Lord Templetown said the matter had been going on for ten years. He was willing to put off the motion and leave it to Lord Salisbury (who had said he would give facilities) to suggest a date some time during the session when it might be discussed.

Avalanches.

Several victims have been claimed these last few days by the most dreaded enemy of the skier. Few live to tell the tale, but one of the lucky ones has sent the following description to the *Daily News* (Feb. 17th):—

"Four of us left the little village of Silvaplana, near St. Moritz, early one cloudless morning in the hope of reaching our destination—the Savretta ski hut—before night.

By two o'clock we entered a pass high up in the mountains. Snowy peaks towered right and left, shutting out the sun.

In silence we started up the valley. It was a fearful place. Cold and bleak. On one side, high up, bare rocks soared into the sky. On the other a glacier gleamed green and white in the sunless glare.

Beyond the jagged cliffs, the sun was shining, life was calling.

Here, Fear reigned.

We began to skirt a steep mountain slope, the guide leading a high cut across.

The slope was icy, and in places almost sheer. We edged our skis and cut each step.

Above, sullen, ominous, hung tons of wind-blown, frozen snow. Beneath yawned a ravine. I looked up and caught fixed upon me the glacier's glittering eye.

Suddenly there was a report—like a shot. Then silence. We held our breaths and crept on—like flies crawling across a leaning, white wall.

I was last in the procession, and my friends had just rounded the shelter of a protected corner when there was a second report, not so loud, muffled in the now moving snow. An avalanche was starting!

The white wall had cracked in a hundred places. Like a giant the mountain was starting into life. A wind slab avalanche, most fearful of Alpine horrors, was about to roar into the ravine.

Facing death, in one supreme moment I was conscious of all that life held dear. This was the end.

Thought died and instinct roused itself. I leaned against the massive slabs of snow that crumbled, hissing, past me, covering my feet. In vain. Slowly I was overborne—fell—and hung head down over the ravine, anchored by skis held fast in solid cakes of snow.

Slip, slip, slip! This was no sudden death, but suffocation and slow burial.

I looked for my companions, in safety under the ledge. They could do nothing for me. Had they moved, the scales of Fate, trembling in the balance, might have fallen and crushed us all.

There was a lull. The pile ceased to slip. But I was captive. Encircling snow clung like the tentacles of some shapeless horror round legs and body. Blood beat in my hanging head. The ravine spun giddily below.

Wielding an alpenstock I fought to free my limbs.

No sign from the snow above. Would it fall?

The sight of a ski-tip poking its way through the snow was like the smile of a lost friend.

I remember little else. The struggle to turn and stand without slipping into the ravine, and the last scramble to safety are like fragments of an evil dream gone in the light of day.

An hour later we passed a little wooden cross, a crude Alpine memorial. Upon it in rough hewn capitals leapt out the word—AVALANCHE!

LES DEUX FACES D'UN MEME SUJET.

Si vous vous intéressez tant soit peu à l'avenir de la paix sur notre vieux continent, vous savez que pour l'étayer la Société des Nations a fait appel à un comité spécial dénommé "comité de sécurité et d'arbitrage." Vingt-deux pays y sont représentés et cherchent, non sans difficulté, une formule, que dis-je! un système propre à assurer, par la sécurité, la conciliation et l'arbitrage, cette grande idée, qui n'est peut-être après tout qu'un mot : la Paix.

Ces messieurs, avec une bravoure et un courage qu'il faut relever, se brisent la tête en d'interminables séances dans cette salle appelée "salle vitrée." Espérons que les blessures qu'ils se font ne seront pas graves et que de tant de bonne volonté sortira, telle un *deus ex machina*, la formule qu'on souhaite ; car ce sont des formules qu'on bâtit avec grand peine à Genève. Certaines sont applicables ; d'autres s'entassent en de poussiéreux volumes. Toujours est-il que nous marchons à grands pas vers... la paix, je vous l'ai déjà dit!

Il semble que cette session, malgré l'opposition tenace de l'Angleterre et de l'Italie, aura bâti des

cadres : je dis des cadres, car il sera sorti de ces délibérations un projet (ce n'est qu'un projet!) de traités-types d'arbitrage et de conciliation. Les nations dites civilisées en feront par la suite ce qu'elles voudront. Mais cette structure, si vague qu'elle sera, permettra néanmoins d'agir plus vite, de s'entendre mieux lorsque deux pays seront vraiment décidés à se lier par un traité de ce genre.

Et tandis que M. Paul-Boncour se donne une peine en tous points remarquable à poser la France comme champion des idées d'arbitrage, la question des zones semble devoir s'éterniser. Vous n'ignorez pas que les Français domiciliés à Genève sont intervenus directement auprès du président du Conseil en une missive remarquable où ils réclament eux-mêmes avec énergie que le Sénat doit non seulement délibérer au plus tôt, mais ratifier le compromis des zones. Certaines populations du pays de Gex et du département de l'Ain sont intervenues dans le même sens auprès des autorités compétentes. J'ai tenu à noter ce geste, qui est tout à leur honneur et je lui opposerai la conduite pour le moins étonnante, si ce n'est fort édifiante, de la population d'Annemasse qui, par l'intermédiaire de sa chambre de commerce, vient d'envoyer télégramme sur télégramme au président du Conseil et aux sénateurs "David et consorts" dans un sens tout à fait contraire. Se référant au différend qui opposa en son temps la Turquie et la France en une question maritime connue sous le nom de *Lotus* que portait l'un des navires en cause, nos voisins repoussent de toutes leurs forces ce qu'ils appellent un *Lotus savoyard*. Le mot est d'eux! Il valait la peine d'être relevé.

On peut se demander comment M. Briand, qui doit être le 5 mars à Genève pour la séance du Conseil, va s'exprimer. Car longtemps on a fait croire à la population genevoise que les revois successifs du projet devant le Sénat étaient uniquement dûs à un surcroît de travail de la Haute-Assemblée ou encore à des difficultés de procédure ; mais que quelques "spécialistes" mis à part, nul ne s'opposerait à cette ratification, déjà votée à la presque unanimous par la Chambre. Il semble maintenant que la ratification par la seconde chambre n'ira pas toute seule, que M. David a su soulever autour de lui des passions violentes et tenaces et que si, finalement, un vote permet de transporter l'affaire devant la Cour de la Haye, qui l'attend depuis bientôt trois ans, des rancunes exaspérées resteront pour garnir les...carreaux.

Nous avons, quant à nous, pour la France une admiration sincère et souvent exprimée. Mais nous ne comprenons pas l'ambiguïté qui est siennne en cette curieuse question. Nous savons que M. Béroud, de passage en Belgique, a fait une longue conférence sur ce problème. Que n'a-t-il poursuivi sa route pour la répéter purement et simplement, et pour la dernière fois, dans la capitale hollandaise? Car, que ceux qui nous veulent du mal le désirent ou non, c'est bien devant la Haute Cour de Justice que cette affaire trouvera son épilogue. Or, pour tous ceux qui l'ont suivie dans ses moindres détails, il n'y a pas l'ombre d'un doute que la sentence qui, rappelons-le, ne vise pas une question de fait mais bien une question de droit, ne nous soit que favorable. Le coup de force dont nous avons été victime sous un précédent régime poincariste doit être reconnu illégal ; il le sera. Pour le reste, l'avenir seul peut préciser. Mais de ce côté du Jura, et dès que des juristes seuls seront saisis de ce complexe problème, l'avenir s'avère ensoleillé et paisible.

L'Observateur.

New Route to Switzerland.

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The L.N.E.R. announce that as from May 15th a new route to Switzerland will become available via Liverpool Street, Harwich and the Hook of Holland. This will be made possible by co-operation with the German railways, who are to introduce a new saloon car train operated by "Mitropa" between the Hook of Holland, Basle and Lucerne, via the Rhine and the Black Forest. This service has the advantage of a departure time from London of 8.30 p.m., a night sea crossing, and a daylight journey along the Rhine Valley, Basle being reached at 6.32 p.m. and Lucerne at 8.32 p.m. the following evening.

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Federal Railways 3 1/2% A-K	86.20	86.12	86.12
" 1924 IV Elect. Ln.	102.30	102.30	102.30
	SHARES.	Feb. 21	Feb. 28
	Nom.	Frs.	Frs.
Swiss Bank Corporation	500	834	833
Credit Suisse	500	879	875
Union de Banques Suisses	500	761	752
Société pour l'Industrie Chimique	1000	2902	2875
Fabrique Chimique et-dev. Sandoz	1000	4975	4937
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S.A. Brown Boveri	350	600	594
C. F. Bally	1000	1492	1462
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