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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

According to figures just published, the accounts for 1927 of the Confederation close with a deficit of 1,4 million francs, 14 million having been originally budgetted for.

In the course of replying to an interpellation in the National Council Federal Councillor Scheurer stated that twenty different aeroplanes had recently been purchased in order to give our military pilots an opportunity to discover the type most suitable for Swiss conditions.

The Basle Government is proposing to subscribe shares to the tune of six million francs in the Oberhasli power generating station and to spend another four million francs towards the construction of the cable line bringing the electric current from Innertkirchen to Basle.

Swiss recruits returning to Bellinzona for their repetition course and two Italian Fascists found themselves passengers in the same train. The Italians ventured some insulting remarks which earned them deserved corporal castigation at the hands of the Swiss; the matter ended with the interference of the stationmaster at Lucerne. On the arrival of the train at Art-Goldau the combat was renewed and the Italians had to be locked into their compartment by the guard. The incident is now being inquired into by the military authorities.

The total cost of the damage caused in the cantons Ticino and Grisons by the high water catastrophe last September has now been officially estimated at 30,8 million francs. The Federal Council proposes to allocate an initial credit of two million francs to the two cantons concerned.

About half a million francs have been bequeathed by the recently deceased Dr. Ad. Walder for the creation of a fund the interest from which is to assist necessitous medical students originating from his native commune of Hinwil (Zurich).

The municipal gas works of the town of Berne are to be transformed and enlarged at a cost of nearly four million francs.

The "Parc du Denantou," an estate along the Lac Léman, and the property of the late Mr. Ed. Sandoz-David, is to be acquired by the town of Lausanne at a cost of half a million francs.

The well-known guide, Antoine Bovier, who was the first to climb Mont Blanc from the northern slope in 1896, died at Evolène at the age of 78.

### NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

## Stockport and After.

The controversy about this order is gradually dying out except in the technical Press, where the biased statements of Mr. Hugh Quigley, of the B.E.A.M.A. are denounced by those who can speak from actual experience. Another trenchant rejoinder appeared in the *Electrician* (March 16th) from the pen of the Dublin City Electrical Engineer. We reproduce it herewith:—

"The technical world will appraise at its proper value Mr. Quigley's letter on the above subject in your last issue. The patronising, sneering, personal tone, and the irrelevancies indulged in will not win any sympathy for Mr. Quigley in his impossible position. My personal character or temperament, and my efficiency or inefficiency, are not the matters under discussion.

The comparison between Dublin and Wallasey is, of course, quite irrelevant and amusing. If Dublin had Wallasey's industrial and tramway load, and Wallasey's consequent high load factor, the works cost comparison would be quite different. In addition to high load factor, Wallasey has cheap coal and labour. If Dublin's *average* selling price were based on the same proportions of lighting, power, etc., as Wallasey's, the "average selling" prices would show comparatively little difference; for the rates of charge are not so substantially different in Wallasey and in Dublin. The Dublin rates of charge are no higher than those in the average British or Continental city.

But even if costs and prices in Dublin were extraordinarily high, why should this be attri-

buted to the £50,000 worth of Swiss equipment rather than to the £250,000 worth of British equipment!

What Mr. Quigley has to show is that the steam consumption of the Swiss turbines is higher than that of the much more expensive British turbines. And this is just what neither Mr. Quigley nor anyone else *can* show, because it is not true. This untruth is exactly what was suggested in the B.E.A.M.A. brochure, which every fair-minded Britisher has already condemned. The contents of that publication are no credit to anyone concerned, and the sooner it passes into the limbo of forgotten things the better for the people who wrote and published it.

The current issue of the *Schweiz. Industrie Zeitung* also deals with the Stockport Tender. We are informed that the labour costs in Switzerland are higher than in England and that the price of the British Syndicated Turbine Builders provides for a good margin, especially in view of the fact that they subsequently offered to reduce it to the extent of £8,000. The *Schweiz. Industrie Zeitung* enlarges on the price policy of English firms in regard to Continental business and says that recently Escher Wyss & Co. "despite very keen Belgian, French and British competition, have been awarded the contract for two 40,000 h.p. steam turbines for a new power station at Sihelle, near Antwerp. The turbines are of a somewhat similar design to that required for Stockport, and the Escher, Wyss Co. worked out its estimate on the same basis as before, only to find that at Antwerp they were underbid by the British makers. Thanks to the extraordinarily favourable results which have lately been obtained with Escher, Wyss turbines at several power stations—results which have not yet been attained by British makers with turbines of this type—the Antwerp contract was awarded to the Swiss firm notwithstanding the lower British offers."

Talking about electricity, we have come across a very candid statement made by the British Minister of Transport when addressing members of the Constitutional Club on this subject. We reproduce part of it as published in the *Times* (March 20th).

“Col. Ashley said that the cause of Britain being behind other countries, until a few years ago, in the use of electricity was of a threefold character. We were a very conservative nation, not disposed easily to new inventions and new forms of manufacture. There was also the existence of a well-organised and efficient gas industry such as was not met with in those countries which passed straight from the oil lamp to electricity. Thereby at the start we were inclined to leave to municipalities the generation of electricity instead of, as was now being done, generating in large central stations. There was now no doubt that we could produce electricity as cheaply as any other country, by reason of our magnificent coal supplies and abundant water supplies for cooling purposes.

The increase in the use of electricity had been steady and very considerable during the last five or six years. There had been an increase of about 12 per cent. a year, except in 1926, when, owing to the general strike and the coal stoppage, the increase was only 3 per cent. This year would be seen a substantial increase of possibly 19 or 20 per cent. The Act of 1926 did not directly deal with distribution, but only with generation, and the main purpose of that Act was to reduce the number of public generating stations from between 5,000 and 6,000 to about 100. Obviously, if that could be accomplished without increased cost, the effect must be a decrease of cost and increase of efficiency. At the present time the average price for all purposes of electricity in this country was 2d.

As compared with some Continental countries the price of electricity in England is as exorbitant as its general distribution and application is deplorable. Switzerland serves 97% of her population with electricity from her water power resources. We are surprised to be informed that the average price for all purposes of electricity in this country is 2d. What we do know is that in the district whose hospitality the writer enjoys, 8d. per unit is the charge for lighting purposes.

**The Basle Trading Co.**

The claims of the Basle Mission are receiving a large amount of publicity in the English Press, to which the President has contributed his share with a letter to the *Times* (March 19th) refuting the general notion that German influence was at any time in evidence. We doubt whether the case has been materially strengthened by discarding the commonly accepted name and using the appellation

"Société Evangélique des Missions de Bâle" as practically all the English papers are in sympathy with the unqualified restitution of the confiscated property. We reproduce a leader from the "Morning Post" (March 17th) which relates the history of the case and is somewhat isolated in its neutral attitude.

"In such an obscure and complicated controversy as rages over the Commonwealth Trust, it may be useful to relate the history of the case. There are two institutions in question, which must be kept clear in the mind, although they are closely related—the Basle Mission and the Basle Mission "Factory." The Basle Mission, which went to the Gold Coast in 1828 and from 1843 onwards pushed its way into the Interior, was always so much German that it was commonly called the South German Mission, to distinguish it from the North German Mission, with headquarters at Bremen. Warneck's standard History of Protestant Missions describes it thus: Although it has its headquarters in Basle, it has from the beginning, and maintains to the present time, its distinctively German character. Early in its career, as it needed supplies, it established a small trading firm, which grew as time went on and gradually came to work entirely separately from the mission, although supporting Mission policy. This "Factory" adopted articles of association, which made it a limited liability company, with a capital of £60,000, the bulk of which came from Germany. When shareholders had received 5 per cent. dividend, and reserves were provided for, the surplus profits went to the Mission and were used for its work, not only on the Gold Coast, but all over the world.

British policy during the war was to allow all missionaries to remain ; but no Germans were allowed to come out. From the Factory the Germans were at once removed, also in accordance with Government policy, so that its *personnel* became entirely Swiss. It incorporated itself anew with headquarters in London, and removed all Germans from its Board at Basle. On that basis it was allowed to remain.

As for the Mission, it was asked to remove its German Directors from its Basle Board ; but refused on the creditable enough ground that it could not desert its chief supporters. This defiance, however, made it difficult for the British Government to tolerate the presence of a fundamentally German institution, in control of large educational work among the natives at such a crisis. In these circumstances, the Government decided to remove all the missionaries, but delayed owing to the anxiety of British missions lest work among the natives should suffer. Towards the end of 1917, however, an event occurred which precipitated matters. The Abosso was sunk by a German submarine, and many Government officials from the Gold Coast were drowned. The authorities ordered all missionaries as well as the staff of the factory to be removed immediately. The properties both of mission and factory were transferred to the Controller of Enemy Property ; the United Free Church of Scotland continued the work of the mission ; but had nothing to do with the Trading Company. It is, we believe, a fact that the order for removal came from Whitehall.

In the peace treaty it was provided that enemy mission property should be maintained for mission purposes ; although, of course, the Basle Mission claims to be not enemy, but neutral. In accordance with the practice in other Colonies an Ordinance was introduced in the Gold Coast vesting the property both of the Basle Mission and the Basle Mission Factory in a body of trustees known as the Basle Mission Trustees ; it was their duty to transfer the trading property to a Corporation approved by the Secretary of State, and the Mission property to an approved Society. This they did, the Society being the United Free Church of Scotland, and the Corporation being the Commonwealth Trust, Ltd. The Commonwealth Trust worked under very great difficulties during a period in which loss was inevitable, and suffered from inexperience at first ; but has gradually brought its affairs into much better order and seems to have been faithful to its trust of supporting missions. It may be added that as a first charge the Basle Company's shareholders were paid off in full. Now, however, it appears that the Secretary of State proposes to give the property back to the original owners. It seems to us, in the circumstances, that the Commonwealth Trust has a very good case for the inquiry it demands."

No unbiased person will blame the directors of the Commonwealth Trust for fighting for the rights

of its shareholders as the latter cannot be expected to be penalised for what in the first instance was a *faux pas* inadvertently committed by the British Government.

#### The Savoy Free Zones.

In deference to the desire of a correspondent for some details of the arguments in the French Senate which preceded the ratification of the Franco-Swiss compromise, we reproduce the report relating thereto from the *Times* (March 14th); the measure was passed the following day (March 14th), thanks to the strong recommendation of the French Foreign Minister.

"In the debate M. Fernand David, Senator for the Department of Haute Savoie, gave a vivid historical survey of the whole dispute, and referred to a number of actions on the part of the Swiss authorities which helped perhaps, in some degree, to explain the local French opposition to the proposed settlement.

Two projects were before the Senate:—(1) The Bill adopted by the Chamber, proposing that the President of the Republic be authorised to ratify the convention embodying the arbitral compromise between France and Switzerland with regard to the Free Zones of Haute Savoie and the district of Gex, signed at Paris on October 30th, 1924; and (2) a resolution introduced by M. David, supported by two other Senators of Haute Savoie, MM. Gallet and Curral, demanding the postponement of any discussion of the above until the Swiss Confederation should have ratified unconditionally that part of Article 435 of the Treaty of Versailles containing the abrogation of the provisions laid down by the Congress of Vienna and the Treaty of Paris in 1815 on the subject of the neutralised Savoy Zone.

Mr. Fernand David declared that, since the French Government had moved up the Customs frontier to coincide with the political frontier, the whole situation with regard to the zones had greatly improved, and there was now no dispute between the Government and the representatives of the Savoy. Their opposition to the ratification of the arbitral compromise was intended to be a protest against the attitude of the Swiss Government, which threatened that, if the Senate refused to ratify the compromise, it would itself refuse assent to the provisions in the Treaty of Versailles relating to the neutrality of the northern Savoy Zone. These provisions were political in that they envisaged the military neutrality of the Savoy region, between the Jura and the Lake of Geneva, and they were economic in that they affected the Free Zones bordering upon Geneva itself. In obtaining the inclusion of Article 435 in the Treaty France thus intended to get rid of a double obligation, and informed Switzerland to this effect. Switzerland, however, was chiefly concerned to preserve her peculiar state of permanent neutrality, without that neutrality being considered an obstacle to her membership of the League of Nations. Switzerland, in fact, wanted all the advantages without giving anything in return, and to this extent her ratification was conditional.

M. David went on to give some illustrations of the relations between the two countries on the frontier. He recalled the opposition of Switzerland, at the beginning of the War, to the establishment of a hospital for French wounded in the Northern zone. This opposition was persisted in even when France offered not to send back the wounded to the front, and to allow Swiss medical officers to exercise control. He also recalled the Swiss protest when a French regiment coming out of the trenches had been sent for a period of rest to Saint Julien. He reminded the Senate that the part of Article 435 relating to the Swiss Zones, which envisaged an economic *entente*, had been ratified by the Swiss Federal Chambers, but had been rejected by a referendum of the Swiss people under the influence of German propaganda and Genevese Nationalists, as a protest against French Imperialism and the occupation of the Ruhr. M. Poincaré had then offered to enter into fresh negotiations, but the Swiss had refused, and it was after he had seen that no advance was to be made on these lines that the Customs posts were moved up to the political frontier. As to the so-called 1860 zone, he ascribed the opposition of Switzerland to possible disappointment in that this zone was destined to be assigned to her if Germany had won the war. The Swiss claimed rights over it on historical grounds that were quite untenable, and the population had the right to demand that the Senate should watch over the interests of a region that was French, and was determined to remain French.

M. David was followed by M. Victor Bérard, the *rapporteur* on the Bill, who resisted M. David's proposal for an adjournment. M. Bérard traced the history of the free zone controversy, and came to the conclusion that Switzerland, when she obtained recognition of her right of neutrality, and her entry into the League of Nations, abandoned in favour of France the claim to neutrality of Northern Savoy and the administration of the free zones. The first paragraph of Article 435 of the Treaty of Versailles definitely

abolished the neutrality of Savoy, according to M. Bérard. The second paragraph did away with the zone system, but only on the understanding that a convention on this subject would be drawn up between France and Switzerland. Switzerland obtained the two advantages which she sought, and should be willing to concede, in return, the abandonment of Savoyan neutrality.

After M. Bérard's speech the Senate adjourned.

The speeches of the Senators David and Bérard also contained some statements (disregarded in the above report) which suggested reflections on the President of the Confederation in office at the time when the Versailles Treaty was drawn up. M. Gustave Ador has issued a declaration in the following terms (*Times*, March 21st):—

"He explained that when he arrived in Paris in 1919 and was told that the Treaty of Versailles contained an article—No. 435—concerning Switzerland, he at once objected that a clause regarding Switzerland, who was no party to the Treaty, could not be inserted without her previous assent. In the ensuing conversations there was practically no discussion on the question of the confirmation of Swiss neutrality and the eventual renunciation by Switzerland of her right to occupy northern Savoy in case of war. But M. Ador obtained an assurance that the question of the Free Zones in Savoy and the Pays de Gex should be left aside. He further never admitted that the second paragraph of Article 435 suppressed or would have the effect of bringing about the suppression of the Free Zone. Not only had the words "by mutual consent," inserted in that article at the request of M. Ador, excluded any unilateral modification of the status of the Free Zones, but he never admitted either that the Free Zones were suppressed by that second paragraph or that they would be suppressed by the Franco-Swiss Agreement for which that article of the Treaty did provide.

MM. Bérard and David pretended that M. Ador was not in agreement with the Swiss Government on that question. M. Ador emphatically states that he was in complete agreement with the Swiss Federal Council, which shared all his views on the subject and consequently addressed on May 5th, 1919, a Note to the French Government, in which it indicated the conditions on which it could agree to the proposed wording of Article 435. M. Ador, moreover, did not give any pledge in any circumstances concerning the immediate or subsequent suppression of the Free Zones. It may be added that the points to which M. Ador referred in his statement are among those which will be submitted to the examination of The Hague Court."

#### BARNUM ET CIE.

J'ai, soyez-en persuadés, autant de respect et d'admiration que vous pour la Société des Nations. Mais l'on ne peut s'empêcher—lorsqu'on n'est pas secoué par un parti-pris qui peut, suivant les circonstances, devenir une maladie grave et chronique au même degré que la danse de Saint-Guy ou la fièvre jaune—de suivre avec gaité les méandres marécageux dans lesquels s'est embourbée la Commission préparatoire de la Conférence du désarmement.

Il est évident que nos hauts diplomates européens, pour traverser cette jungle douteuse et fourue, ont eu recours à des porteurs d'une curieuse espèce. Ces derniers venaient de Moscou ou étaient fort imprégnés des odeurs qui règnent en ces régions ultra-carpathiennes. Notre équipage a donc manqué de s'enliser totalement, malgré toute la clairvoyance des chefs et comme, finalement, chacun tirait de son côté, que les porteurs ne voulaient plus rien porter, que les guides ne voulaient plus rien montrer, que les bêtes ne voulaient plus marcher et que les chefs eux-mêmes en avaient assez, notre vaillante cohorte s'est souhaitée "bien le bonjour" et chacun est rentré chez lui par le plus court chemin. Or, chose remarquable, autant la brousse semblait infranchissable pour cette noble compagnie prise en entier, autant elle n'exista plus lorsque chacun fut livré à lui-même!

On a dit tout le bien qu'on pouvait attendre des débats publics instaurés par la Société des Nations, et jusqu'à présent nous avions cru qu'il y avait dans cette voie un élément de plus pour assurer au monde une paix que nous pouvons peut-être taxer, aujourd'hui, d'utopique! Mais pour ceux qui ont assisté aux deux dernières séances de cette Commission, il est hors de doute que la mésentente manifeste et les propos totalement opposés que se jetaient à la face les délégués ne sont pas faits pour plaider en faveur de ce nouveau système.

Epicure disait déjà qu'il fallait "prendre la vie comme elle vient, et savoir la voir toujours en rose!" Nous opinions pour ce système et ne doutons nullement que d'ici une future séance nos diplomates n'arrivent à un accord parfait, dûment établi à l'avance.

En attendant, le spectacle était vraiment étonnant où, sans se soucier—et la chose est bien rare à Genève!—de l'avis de son voisin, le délégué affirmait purement et simplement son point de vue.

Il fallait ou, s'en émouvoir très fort ou le prendre "avec le sourire." C'est ce que nous avons fait et nous estimons avoir trouvé la bonne méthode.

Le Russe, donc, veut qu'on désarme immédiatement. Comme son projet soulève des montagnes de protestations...et de paperasserie, il recule ses batteries et propose un désarmement graduel, mais encore bien problématique. Une fois de plus, il laisse exulter la joie qu'il éprouve d'avoir mis le feu aux poudres...de l'opinion publique mondiale.

Michel, toujours sympathique, n'est qu'un tout petit garçon en l'affaire. On lui a enlevé son cuirassé à moteur, ses dirigeables à ficelle, ses canons en tire-bouchons et ses soldats de plomb...ou de chair! Se sentant désarmé, il réclame que les autres en fassent autant, avec une véhémence et une ténacité qui sont bien la caractéristique de sa race.

Mais le plus admirable est sans doute l'envoyé de son Altesse très romaine qui, en des déclarations fort ambiguës, déclare tout simplement n'avoir rien à faire avec ce problème compliqué, pour lequel il marque du reste le plus grand des délais. On sent dans ses déclarations le peu...d'intérêt, pour ne pas dire d'autre chose, que lui inspire l'institution de Genève.

Seuls Marianne et John Bull se tiennent tendrement par la main, parlant à tour de rôle, tandis que l'autre opine du bonnet ou du chapeau-claque. La jeune fille reprend en chœur et sur un air doux et les vaillantes paroles de son camarade, alors que ce dernier ponctue de savants coups de poing les propos déagés de sa compagne.

Autour de ces grands ténors, c'est une foule de seconds rôles aussi acrobatiques, aussi pressés, aussi brailards, aussi bien habillés les uns que les autres. Tels les satellites autour des astres qui leur donnent vie et raison d'être, ils acquiescent lorsqu'on acquiesce, ils protestent lorsqu'on proteste, ils font écho lorsqu'on le leur demande, ils se répandent en imprécations désordonnées lorsqu'ils ont l'impression de pouvoir en tirer quelque...bénéfice.

Admirable chose que cette session, qui restera la "pièce" la plus réussie de l'année, comme le Chateaubriant le plus suavement préparé, comme le sorbet le plus admirablement dosé. Reste seulement à savoir qui ingurgitera ce mets délicat, et surtout qui paiera l'addition du repas!...

*L'Auguste poudré.*

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