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# The Swiss Observer

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## A Merry Christmas to all our Readers



### HOME NEWS



#### FEDERAL.

##### NEW PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION.

The two Chambers sitting as one body, elected on Thursday, the 14th, the new President and Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation.

Dr. Marcel Pilet-Golaz was elected President of the Confederation for the year 1934. The new President is, for many years, the youngest Swiss citizen to occupy this distinguished position, as he will celebrate his 44th birthday anniversary on New Year's Eve.

M. Pilet entered the Government in December 1928 in succession to M. Chuard, who resigned from his post. He then took over the Home Office Dept. until a vacancy occurred at the Federal Post and Railway Dept. through the departure of M. Haab, when he took over this Department.

M. Pilet hails from the canton of Vaud, he entered the Grand Council of his canton in 1921, where his brilliant qualities made him at once one of the most influential members of this body.

Four years later he was sent to Parliament (National Council).

The new President is one of the most brilliant politicians in our home country, and we join the whole Swiss Press in congratulating him on having been elected to this high and responsible office.

##### THE NEW VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION.

The Chambers have elected M. Rudolf Minger, Vice-President of the Confederation; he entered the Government in 1929 as successor to the late M. Scheurer. Like his predecessor, M. Minger is a Bernese; and he was the first farmer who entered the Federal Council. He is 52 years of age. Until the year 1918 he was quite an unknown personality in politics; he occupied himself in administrating the large farm at Schüpfen, which was left to him by his father.

In 1918 he founded the Farmer's Party of which he was the 1st President. In 1917 he entered Parliament (National Council) and 10 years later he was made a member of the Government, where the Federal Military Department was assigned to him. In the Army he reached the rank of a Colonel.

##### SAVOY FREE ZONES.

Negotiations between France and Switzerland for establishing a new régime in the Free Zones of the Pays de Gex and Upper Savoy have now been brought to a conclusion. As the discussions at Territet during October and November failed to produce agreement on a number of points, the questions in dispute were referred to the arbitration of Sir John Baldwin, M. Uden (Sweden), and Señor Lopez Olivan (Spain). A permanent arrangement has been made by which free entry into Switzerland is accorded to the agricultural products of the Free Zones, the term being interpreted for the present to mean dairy produce, cattle, and wine. With regard to industrial products a list of quotas is to be issued. A permanent Franco-Swiss Commission will be appointed to deal with any differences which may arise from the working of the new arrangement.

The decision of the arbiters on the economic régime of the Free Zones in Savoy and the Pays de Gex, which adjoin the territory of the Canton of Geneva, was published on the 15th inst., and it is evident that the new arrangement satisfies both the Canton of Geneva and the population of the Free Zones, as it again permits free trading between the two areas. Some agricultural products from the Free Zones will be freely imported into Switzerland provided that they are brought to market in Geneva by the peasants themselves. A number of agricultural and industrial products will be imported with duty from the Free Zones, but subject to yearly quotas.

This new arrangement will come into force on January 1st, 1934, when the French frontier posts, which were advanced to the political boundary in 1923, will be withdrawn to that of the Free Zones as specified by the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. Thus comes to an end a dispute which has lasted since the end of the War and had at times affected friendly relations between France and Switzerland. The Hague Court had acknowledged the right of Switzerland to insist on maintaining the Free Zones, but the remaining economic questions were left to settlement between the parties.

##### £295,000 FINES FOR SMUGGLERS.

A vast conspiracy to defraud the Swiss Customs authorities resulted in the imposition of enormous fines by the Swiss Federal courts. The total of the fines was nearly five million francs (£295,000), and the principal offenders, who had incidentally fled from Geneva, were sentenced to six months imprisonment each.

The conspiracy was discovered by chance, when a railway van, specially made for carrying wine, was damaged in a railway accident at Fiume.

Italian railway officials discovered that instead of the red wines supposed to be in the tank, crude alcohol was flowing from the damaged container. In the investigations which naturally followed it was found that inside the main tank was a smaller container filled with pure alcohol.

Warned in advance that official action was to be taken, the two principal persons accused fled the country. In their absence they were fined £135,000 each, as well as the sentences of imprisonment already mentioned. Three persons who had been used in the conspiracy by the principals and had remained in Geneva, were sentenced to fines totalling £25,000. The convicted persons were well-known wine merchants.

##### SWISS ROADS PUSH.

The Swiss National Tourist Office announce a big push is to be made to widen and improve and extend the roads in the Swiss Alps with a view to making the climbs easy and safe for all road users. This is good news to anyone who delights to tour in Switzerland. The rather pronounced auto-motoring attitude of some of the Cantons, which was marked a few years ago, seems completely to have evaporated.

##### LOCAL.

##### ZURICH.

The shareholders of the Banque Fédérale (Eidgenössische Bank) have at an extra-ordinary General Meeting, which took place on the 14th, decided to reduce the share-capital from 100 million to 75 million francs. The reduction is to be effected by the purchase and cancellation of shares; which have already been bought in the open market, so that there is no question of any loss. The reduction is being made because a general shrinkage of banking business has rendered a part of the capital superfluous. (The "Basler Handelsbank" and the "Schweizerische Bankgesellschaft" have also reduced their share capital owing to the same reason.)

##### LAUSANNE.

M. Theodor Weiss, Federal Judge has celebrated his 25th anniversary of being a member of the Federal Tribunal. M. Weiss was born in 1868 at Zurich, he entered the Federal Tribunal in 1908 over which he presided in 1925.

##### BERNE.

Dr. Meyer, Manager of the Swiss Bank Corporation Zurich, has been appointed General Manager of the Banque Populaire Suisse (Schweiz. Volksbank). General Manager Hirs will remain at his post. General Managers Steiger and Stadlin are leaving the institution.

\* \* \*

Mlle. Nelly Schulthess, daughter of M. E. Schulthess, President of the Swiss Confederation, was married last week to M. Vasco de Quevedo Pessanha, son of a former Portuguese Ambassador.

##### COLLEGE OF THE SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

##### STUDENTS' CHRISTMAS DINNER AND BALL.

Some people, in order to feel young again, are injecting monkey glands into their withering bodies, others are reverting to beauty specialists and having their faces shifted and lifted, if not to feel, at least, to look younger. — A much cheaper and equally efficient cure for rejuvenescence seemed to me to attend the Students' Dinner and Ball of the S.M.S. College, which took place at the Prince's Galleries, Piccadilly, W., on Friday, December 15th. There was glorious youth in unlimited abundance, nearly two hundred young Ladies and Gentlemen adorned the nicely decorated tables. But, there was really no need to have any floral decorations at all, the happy, smiling faces, the sparkling eyes and sunny smiles of the maidens created a picture which not the most beautiful flowers could have equalled. The spirit of youth and adventure even affected an old stager like me, and back wandered my thoughts to those days when I was a Student too, back to those carefree happy times, when the world looked good and the future rosy. —

Almost punctual to the hour, the company sat down to dinner, to a fare, which was not only good but wholesome.

I had just tackled a delicious Pêche Melba, when a terrific bang nearly brought on a choking fit. I had a suspicion who was the instigator of this noise, and I was right; with a voice, as if he was going to summon the sinners to their last judgment, Mr. J. J. Schneider, the vivacious Secretary of the S.M.S. Society, informed the revellers, that the Chairman wishes to "take wine" with all the Ladies. That was not all, in quick succession he condemned the poor Chairman to "take wine" with the "Gentlemen present;" with the "Teaching Staff;" the "President of the S.M.S." the "Committee Members," the "Press," etc., etc. I cast an anxious glance at the Chairman, Mr. E. Hardmeier, and I was much relieved when I saw that he bore the strain with courage and fortitude, ably seconded by his charming Lady, as I expected at any moment, that the popular Chairman would have to be put on a dinner wagon, and wheeled out of the Banqueting Hall. This "drinking bout" of the Chairman, who was thus victimised by the Master of Ceremonies, was at each occasion heralded with a tremendous bang with a mallet on the table, which nearly brought me to the verge of a nervous breakdown. I understand that these ceremonies are the special feature of a certain fraternity, and I have no objection to that, they get used to it, and no doubt in time begin to like it, but I thank Heaven, and the Stars above that this practice has not yet been adopted at other Swiss Banquets and Dinners, as I should at the end of the Season be reduced to a raving maniac. If such be the case, I would leave in my will (the only thing I ever shall be able to leave) instructions, to put the following inscription on my tomb stone:

Here rests ST.  
"hammered" to death  
by thoughtless friends.

The company too was at frequent intervals asked to "take wine" with someone or other, with the result, that long before the toast to "H. M. the King" and "La Suisse" was proposed my glass and the bottle was empty. Being a guest, I could of course, not order on my own, and all I could do when the Loyal Toast was proposed was to carry an empty glass to my mouth and swallow the air it contained, no, it just had some sediment at the bottom, which enabled me to honour the toast to my beloved country, but I never before toasted it with such discomfort. —

Shortly before the coffee was served, Mr. Hardmeier, Chairman of the Education Committee, amongst great applause rose and addressed the gathering as follows: