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HOME NEWS

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FEDERAL.

ELECTION OF SWISS PRESIDENT.

According to tradition, the closing meeting of the December Session of the Swiss Parliament was devoted to elections. For this occasion the two Chambers, the Council of States and National Council, hold a joint meeting which is called the Federal Assembly.

Federal Councillor Giuseppe Motta, since 1911 a member of the Federal Government, and four times President, was elected President of the Confederation. M. Motta is chief of the Foreign Office. Born 1871 at Airolo, Canton Ticino. He thus celebrates this month a triple Jubilee, namely 25 years membership of the Government, five times President, and on the 29th of this month he is celebrating his 65th birthday anniversary.

THE GRISONS TRIAL.

For weeks past all the formidable propagandist machinery at the disposal of the German Government has been at work with a view to influencing Swiss public opinion, the Swiss Government and the tribunal at Grisons to pass the maximum sentence on David Frankfurter, the Yugo-Slav Jew who has been tried for the murder of Herr Gustloff, the chief Nazi agent in Switzerland. During the trial itself the German press went to the greatest lengths in misrepresentation. Sentence has been passed. In the canton of Grisons capital punishment does not exist. The maximum penalty for murder is twenty-five years' imprisonment, the minimum fifteen years'. David Frankfurter was sentenced to eighteen years'. It is a severe sentence, but it cannot be interpreted as showing political bias on the part of the tribunal. Political bias was certainly shown some years ago when the murderer of the Russian representative, Vorovsky, was acquitted — anti-Bolshevik feeling was, and still is, strong in Switzerland. But the fact that bias in one direction was shown then does not prove it to have been shown in another direction now. All the indications are that the trial was uninfluenced either by the attempts at persuasion and intimidation on the part of Germany or by any sentimental or romantic feelings on behalf of a man who was, after all, a murderer. As in the case of Berthold Jakob, who was kidnapped on Swiss soil with the connivance of the German authorities, taken to Germany, but sent back to Switzerland as a result of resolute representations by the Swiss Government, Switzerland has stood the test and has shown that she is not to be deterred from the administration of justice. It is something that there is at least one country, and that a small one, left in Central Europe that has civilised standards and is determined to abide by them.

MUSSOLINI CONGRATULATES MOTTA.

On the occasion of the 25th Jubilee as a Federal Councillor, Mussolini has sent a telegram of congratulations to M. Motta.

Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, has also sent a congratulatory message.

CONSECRATION OF NEW BISHOP.

The consecration of the newly appointed Bishop of Basle and Lugano, Franz von Streng, at present priest at the St. Clara Church in Basle, will take place on Sunday, January 24th, 1937.

The Papal Nuncio, Arch-Bishop Filippo Bernardini will officiate.

NEW FRENCH AMBASSADOR.

Monsieur Charles Alphand, the newly appointed French Ambassador to Switzerland was received last week at the Federal Palais by the Federal Council *in corpore*. Monsieur Alphand was previously French Ambassador at Moscow.

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL.

Dr Fritz Hauser, since 1918 a member of the government of the canton of Basle has been elected Vice-President of the National Council for 1937. He entered Parliament in 1919.

SWISS RAILWAYS AND MOTOR TRAFFIC.

In spite of all the efforts of the Swiss Federal authorities, the revenue of the Federal Railways has continued to fall off, and the Budget for 1937 anticipates a deficit of over £3,750,000.

Two main causes have led to this position, which is giving the Government very serious concern:

(1) The general economic stagnation which has hit Swiss tourist traffic as well as her general trade balance;

(2) The ever-growing competition with motor transport.

The number of motor vehicles on Swiss roads is increasing yearly, and they are responsible for a big falling off in the goods traffic of the railways. It is generally hoped that the devaluation of the franc may have the effect of increasing tourist and goods traffic, as soon as the benefits of the measure became effectively operative.

LOCAL.

ZURICH.

The construction of four public air-raid shelters has been started by the Swiss authorities in Zurich.

The largest is to be a huge vault 45 feet below the level of the ground, the shallowest will be 12 feet below.

It is believed that the vault will be impervious to the most powerful aerial torpedo.

BERNE.

Dr. Carl Tanner, " Eidgenössischer Alkohol Direktor " will retire from his post at the end of June of next year. Dr. Tanner was from 1917-1919 a member of the cantonal government (Basle-Country), he was also a member of Parliament (National Council) for several years.

BASLE.

The death is reported from Basle of M. Eduard Bell-Ward, partner in the well-known firm Bell, A.G. in Basle, at the age of 69.

VAUD.

The Federal Council has appointed M. Fernand Chenaux to be the new Director of the 1st District of the Swiss Federal Railways in succession to the late M. Savary.

* * *

The " Banque commerciale de Lausanne " has been granted a Moratorium, the share capital is given as 750,000 francs.

URI.

Mme. Aloisia Grepper-Eller, in Amsteg, has celebrated her 103rd birthday anniversary.

NEUCHATEL.

The death has occurred at Neuchâtel of Mme. Berthe Bouvier, the well-known portrait painter, at the age of 69.

SWISS BROADCAST FROM IRELAND.

'Twas a traditional Manchester winter's evening, wet, dirty and foggy withal, when the comfort of the fireside easily outrivels all external distractions, and so I decided for slippers and an armchair.

Now, I thought, will I try to capture a breath of the Homeland by means of the ether, and so began the usual twiddling of the various knobs on my set, but, as so often is the case with my soundbox, the dear Home station refused to come at my call.

In desperation I millimeted and semi-millimeted to the East and then to the West of the vital spot — all I got was a cacophony of what seemed to be at least a dozen stations, all in a warring mood. However, in one of my side-slips to the West, the strains of the Overture from " William Tell " broke clearly on the air, and not being possessed of a radio programme, I congratulated myself that I had hit the spot at last.

Back I sat, in peace and comfort, to revel in Rossini's music, which ever possesses an irresistible call for me. Then my thoughts went floating over the air to the Homeland, and I relived the glorious deeds of the doughty Tell, and like a Fata Morgana before my eyes, clouds enveloped the majestic contours of the mighty Rigi.

Memories then enveloped me, and I suddenly realised that all was quiet again. Like a child before a conjurer I waited for the next trick to come out of the hat. I thought I was again dreaming when I heard an announcement in English as to a Swiss Colony Concert, and that an introductory talk would be given by Dr. Benziger.

The strong firm voice of our Consul-General in the Irish Free State soon brought me back to ' terra firma,' and up I sat, determined not to miss a word of his discourse. In measured tones Dr. Benziger gave a very interesting analysis of the similarities which exist between the Swiss and Irish people. Fundamentally they are, both races, sons of the soil, children of Mother Earth, compelled by the march of progress, to augment by invention and exquisite patience the fruits of the earth.

He developed the similarity of the Heimarbeit and the cottage industry, the folk weaving, beautiful laces and embroideries, and he brought forcibly home the perfection which is attained by the patience and endurance of the sturdy peasant stock. He mentioned the watch-making, developed by our peasants in the Jura, and also explained how machinery pertaining to the needs of the soil, had been originally invented and perfected in farmers' dwellings. He cited as another parallel, the high standard of horse-breeding in Ireland, and the high standard of cattle-breeding in Switzerland.

I was impressed by the profound knowledge which Dr. Benziger has of the people amongst whom he dwells, and I feel sure that his other listeners were, like myself, very disappointed when he brought his talk to an end.

Now, what next, I wondered, another surprise? and it was. We were favoured with a group of songs in Dialekt by the wife of the Consul-General. Back I sat again to enjoy the dear old melodies, rendered by a sweet voice, so particularly suited to giving the right nuance to this type of song. How I wished that " Dur's Oberland 'f " had had at least a dozen more verses, so that I could continue to be delighted by the gentle cadences of the singer. Her next song " Es kann ein Herr zum Schloessli " was, I must confess, new to me, but Mme. Benziger has now put this amongst my favourites! She brought jolly memories rolling back to me with " Es Bire Biebli mali-i-nid " and all too soon she ended this group of songs with another old favourite " O du liebs Aengeli."

Mme. Benziger is a true " Lieder " singer, and I do hope that she will not keep her talent alone for her family and friends, but will again give her compatriots the joy of hearing her on the air.

A Yodelling record was followed by a talk from Col. O'Brien on " Climbing a Swiss Mountain," and he gave a very exact description for those who have not indulged in this healthy, and to me, most marvellous of all sports.

After Colonel O'Brien's interesting talk, we were again favoured by Mme. Benziger who sang two French songs, and then a group of three Italian songs. I marvelled at the versatility to the singer, who, in each language, in each type of song, was so perfectly " at home." Not only did she make the language her own, but she captured the spirit of the people also. How I wished she might have given us one song in English, but perhaps another time, she might be prevailed upon to give us " Home, Sweet Home!"

Another record, in Romansch, (which incidentally was quite spoilt for me, by a multitude of shrieks, and by Beromünster clamouring for undivided attention!) brought to a close a most interesting and delightful interlude.

W.H.

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