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The Swiss Observer

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HOME NEWS

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FEDERAL.

GOLD RESERVES OF THE NATIONAL BANK NOT REMOVED.

A statement has appeared in some Swiss and English papers that the gold reserves of the National Bank will be shortly removed to some unknown place in the Swiss Alps.

It has been officially stated in Berne that there is not a word of truth in this statement.

FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT TO M. MOTTA.

The American Minister in Berne has handed over to M. Motta a personal letter from the American President, congratulating him on his 25th Anniversary as a member of the Swiss Government.

SEVEN KILLED IN ALPINE AVALANCHES.

An avalanche killed seven Swiss skiers who set out to cross Mount Brisen (Unterwalden).

The party was moving at a height of about 6,250 feet when the snow bore down and buried them. Six members of the party were able to save themselves. The names of the victims are: Hans Furrer (60); Jakob Greter (46); Edith Greter (15); Mrs. Böhnen; Mr. Saager (20); Klaus Kaufmann (28); Louis Berber (20).

LEAGUE GETS BACK £200,000.

The Federal Council has decided to pay the whole sum involved in taking over the late temporary building of the League of Nations Secretariat, a sum amounting to 4,000,000 Swiss francs (approximately £200,000).

Thus ends the chequered history of the old Hotel National at Geneva, where so many hopes were hatched under the reign of Sir Eric Drummond. It ends with a net loss of 4,000,000 francs to the Swiss Confederation.

The original idea had been that the Confederation and the Canton of Geneva should between them repay the cost of the old Hotel which was duly paid for by the League in 1921. When the League removed to its new building last year efforts were made by the two bodies to mitigate their obligations by letting their newly acquired "white elephant" to anyone who would take it, wholesale or piecemeal.

All these efforts failed. Attempts to let the great building by floors fell through because the international bodies approached — all societies for peace and good will — could not or would not agree among themselves.

SWISS "DEFENCE STAMPS."

The sale of the special set of "Defence stamps," which was issued in connection with the Swiss defence loan of Frs.235 millions has yielded a profit of nearly Frs.500,000, which will be used for defence purposes. The stamps were sold at a price higher than their face value, the 10 centime ones, for instance, at 15 centimes.

ALLEGED RECRUITING IN SWITZERLAND.

The Swiss Federal police have arrested a former Socialist Deputy of the Geneva Cantonal Parliament and the leader of the Communist Party in Canton Vaud, who are alleged to be at the head of an illicit organization for the recruitment of Swiss citizens for service with the Spanish Government forces. Several persons have also been arrested at Zurich in connection with the discovery of a recruiting centre there.

SWITZERLAND TO REDEEM £9,500,000 LOANS.

The Swiss Federal Council and the Cantonal Governments are increasing their efforts to augment the liquidity of the financial market by reducing money rates. The Federal Council decided to redeem two Four per Cent. loans

totalling 200 million Swiss francs (say £9,500,000) on 15th April and 15th July.

The Lucerne Canton is issuing a loan for 20 million Swiss francs (£950,000) at 3½ per cent., to convert the Four and Three-quarter per Cent. 1928 loan.

MR. DE VALERA'S EYESIGHT.

Mr. De Valera, President of the Irish Free State Council, is understood to have been given a very favourable report on the condition of his eyes after his visit to Dr. Alfred Vogt, Professor of Ophthalmia at Zurich University.

Dr. Vogt carried out the operation on Mr. De Valera's eyes last March. There is apparently no indication of a recurrence of the trouble.

SWISS NATIONAL BANK.

On December 31st, 1936, the Swiss National Bank's reserves of gold amounted to 2,709 million Swiss francs; discounts and advances on securities reached 94.8 millions. The notes in circulation (1,482 millions) and the other liabilities at sight (1,363 millions) were covered by 95.20 per cent. in gold.

EXCLUSION ORDER FOR ITALIAN JOURNALIST.

The Police "Fédérale des Etrangers" has decided to exclude from Switzerland the Italian anti-Fascist journalist Carlo a Prato, who has lived in Geneva for the last ten years, and who has been for eight years assistant correspondent of the "New York Times" in Geneva, and is one of the principal members of the staff of the "Journal des Nations" the international paper published in Geneva.

Signor a Prato's father, the late Baron a Prato, was the head of an Italian family living at Trento, which before the war was in Austria. His mother was Swiss by birth. He was educated in Switzerland, first at Berne and then at Zurich University, where he took his degree. He went in 1913 to the London School of Economics. When the war broke out Mr. a Prato, who was then nineteen years old, was mobilised in the Austrian army and sent to the Russian front. A Socialist in politics and an ardent Italian patriot, he succeeded at the risk of his life in deserting the Austrian army and, reaching Italy, joined the Italian Air Force, in which he had a brilliant career and was given, among many other decorations, the rarely awarded gold medal of the Air Force. Owing to his wounds he had to leave active before the end of the war. He was for a time on Mussolini's paper, the "Popolo d'Italia," then a Socialist paper, but his friendship with Mussolini came to an end when the latter started the Fascist movement. For a time he was private secretary to Count Sforza when the latter was Italian Foreign Minister. After the murder of Matteotti Mr. a Prato returned all his medals and decorations to the Italian Government and left Italy. He was refused a passport, although he has not been deprived of Italian nationality, and when he came to Geneva in 1926 he was given a "permis de tolérance," which has been constantly renewed for periods varying from two to six months.

SWISS CONCESSION TO MOTORISTS.

The Swiss Government has renewed until October 31st the 30 per cent. petrol price concession to motorists who stay in the country for three days or longer. The price of petrol in Switzerland is 43c. per litre, so that the net cost to the visiting motorist is only 1s. 3½d. per gallon at an exchange rate of Swiss francs 20.20 to the pound.

Upon entering the country motorists are handed a petrol form, which is presented for endorsement at the pump stations each time when filling up. Upon leaving Switzerland the form is handed back to the Customs, who refund the cash equivalent to 13c. per litre of petrol purchased up to a maximum of 300 litres (66 gallons). The concession represents a saving of 6½d. per gallon.

The Swiss Government is thus giving visitors the benefit of the recent devaluation of the Swiss franc, which made the pound worth 40 per cent. more in Switzerland.

WORLD EMPLOYMENT.

According to the returns for the last quarter of the year which have just been issued by the International Labour Office in Geneva, world employment is steadily increasing. The figures indicate a decrease in unemployment of about 26 per cent., corresponding to a drop in the number of unemployed from about 20,000,000 in 1935 to 14,500,000 in 1936. They show that in practically

every country the registered unemployment has again declined, as compared with the corresponding date in the previous year. It is clear from the returns that the improvement, which has now been taking place for nearly four years, steadily continues in nearly all the countries of the world. Both Austria and Switzerland are exceptions to this rule, and the situation is not quite clear in Estonia, the Netherlands, Poland, and Yugoslavia. It is noted that while in several countries the number of people recorded as being in industrial employment is now greater than in 1929, it is less than it was in that year in Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, and the United States. Hungary has now improved her employment figures, and is no longer in the above list. As no index figures are available, it is not possible to draw a comparison in the case of Austria and Germany.

ACCIDENT TO FEDERAL COUNCILLOR OBRECHT.

Federal Councillor Obrecht met with an accident, when slipping on the ice on the way to the Federal Palais, he broke a rib and will be confined to his room for some time.

COMMISSION FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

The Federal Council has appointed the following to be members of the commission for Foreign Affairs: M. Motta, President of the Swiss Confederation; M. Baumann, Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation, and M. Meyer, late President of the Swiss Confederation.

WEDDING PRESENT FOR PRINCESS JULIANA.

Swiss Ladies, residing in Holland, have presented to Princess Juliana an illuminated address and a present of "Appenzeller" embroideries as a wedding present.

LOCAL.

BERNE.

Considerable damage was caused at the military barracks in Berne, when a fire broke out. Owing to the great efforts made by the fire brigade the fire could be localised before it reached bigger dimensions.

* * *

Dr. Theodor Steck, late librarian of the town and University of Berne has died at the age of 80.

* * *

During the Xmas holidays no less than 955 special trains have been put into operation.

* * *

M. Hans Buchli has been elected Director of the "Verkehrsverein" of the town of Berne, in succession to M. A. Stäuble. M. Buchli, who hails from Rothenbrunnen (Grisons), is a well-known writer and Journalist, and a former chief editor of the "Sport" (Zurich) and the "Sport Illustriert" (Basle).

* * *

The population of the town of Biel numbered on December 31st, 39,300 inhabitants.

LUCERNE.

M. Haecki, a farmer at the "Langenfluh" near Weggis, is the happy winner of the first prize of the "Gebirgslotterie" amounting to \$0,000 francs.

URI.

M. Alois Nager, a military courier was swept away by an avalanche near the Furka Pass and was killed.

BASLE.

The death is reported from Basle, of Dr. Theodor Beck, a well-known medical practitioner. The deceased was from 1914-1926 a member of the Grand Council of the canton of Basle.

LAUSANNE.

In 1937 the University of Lausanne will celebrate the 400th anniversary of its foundation. Upon this occasion a fund has been created with a view to encouraging and furthering scientific research. A gift of Frs. 1,000.— has just been received as a personal contribution of Mr. Mussolini in his quality of former student at that University.

VALAIS.

A large fire which broke out at Vison near Charrat (Valais) destroyed several houses and hamlets. The damage caused is estimated to be considerable.

* * *

The King of the Belgians, with his family has arrived at Montana for Winter Sports.

APPENZELL A.RH.

The late Ferdinand Fisch has left an amount of 25,000 frs. to the Swiss Y.M.C.A.

VALAIS.

The Banque de Monthey, of Monthey, has been granted a one year's moratorium as from January 5th, 1937. A commissioner has been appointed to supervise the bank's transactions while the moratorium is in force.

ST. GALLEN.

A disaster occurred on Sunday last at the "Paulfirst" in the Aigle district, when an avalanche fell on a party of four skiers, two of which were killed, the names of the dead are: Christian Zogg, father of two children and Hansruedi Hösl, an apprentice from Buchs.

THE EVOLUTION OF WOODCARVING IN THE BERNES OBERLAND.

A year of famine, back in 1816, is held responsible for the birth of wood-carving in the Bernese Oberland. At that time Christian Fischer, a clever turner in the little village of Brienz, finding himself no longer able to buy the box-wood and horn necessary for fashioning the pipes for which he had already acquired a certain amount of fame, began experimenting with maple and other species of native wood. He made egg cups, napkin rings, goblets, plates and bread baskets and decorated them with simple carvings, the result being so pleasing to the eye that foreign visitors were eager to buy these articles. This initial success inspired Christian Fischer to further and more complicated efforts and he also gave free instruction to the peasants of Brienz who were so much in need of a side income.

The enthusiasm of the pupils was as great as the master's and with simple sharp knives they managed to sculpture articles which were typical of their environment. Their reproductions of animals and flowers were based on their own careful studies of Nature.

Other Bernese Oberland communities, such as Meiringen, Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, also began to give attention to wood-carving as a home industry, and through the income from his wood sculptures, many a poor mountain peasant was able to banish want from his home.

Presently Christian Fischer's remarkable pioneer work in this field was brought to the attention of the authorities and both the Federal and cantonal governments, as well as the village of Brienz and some neighbouring localities, voted yearly subventions for the maintenance of a Woodcarving School. The purpose of this institution, which was founded in 1860 and which is flourishing to-day, is to enable students to acquire a thorough practical and scientific training in the wood sculpture profession.

One of the primary conditions for admission is good eyesight. New pupils are moreover on probation for eight weeks to test their aptitude for drawing, which is a decisive factor. The apprenticeship for home and ornamental carvers is respectively two and three years, and for animal and figure sculptors it is four years. At the end of these terms the students have to pass a state examination.

Tuition is free for Swiss citizens, as well as all the tools and working materials. Sculptures produced in the school are the property of the institution, but any articles which are not kept for the school collection, or otherwise claimed by the school, may be bought by the pupils for a small refund for materials.

An interesting feature of the Woodcarving School at Brienz, which since 1928 is a special department of the Cantonal Industrial Museum in the city of Berne, is the small Zoological Park belonging to it. There students are able to make practical animal studies.

The products of the more advanced pupils are on sale in a special showroom and exhibitions are also arranged occasionally to acquaint the public with the general activity of the institution.

A visit at Brienz is an experience which is as charming as it is enlightening. For who would not love at first sight a village of cozy brown chalets, with flowers blooming on every windowsill and balcony; a village which is mirrored in the mountain-enclosed lake to which it has given its name, and whose back-ground culminates in the Brienz Rothorn, one of the finest points of view in all Switzerland, accessible, of course, by a mountain railway!

Things assume an exciting aspect as soon as one arrives at Brienz, for Switzerland's woodcarving capital flaunts the most attractive road signs to be found anywhere. Most appropriately they are carved in wood, and their designs vary cleverly according to their location. Thus the road sign pointing the way to the Chamois Park is surmounted by replicas of two of these nimble animals; the road signs to the landing place for steamers bears a quaintly garbed traveller, receiving road directions from a little boy; a portly tourist, preceded by an equally corpulent little dog, surmounts the sign directing to the Rothorn,

and a sprightlier little man, equipped with all the hiker's paraphernalia, is headed for Axalp. Ultra smart is a feminine figure with a beautiful hound, looking in the direction of Fluhberg Pavilion.

Woodcarving at Brienz has experienced a glorious evolution. More and more the artisan is vanishing, and the artist comes to the fore. One of the foremost masters in wood-sculpture nowadays is Hans Hugger, who recognized long ago that it was more important to catch the spirit and expression of a model than to reproduce it. In a series of bold strokes and slashes, a simple arrangement of planes and angles, he brought a block of wood to instant and vigorous life that it could never acquire through the careful modelling of the old school. Then he began his character sketches that are now familiar to every tourist who visits Switzerland. With the keenest understanding the affection he carved these little men and women, and painted them roughly in the dull, beautiful colours of the home-dyed stuffs the peasants wear. In these liliputian woodcarved figures many people of Brienz and environs recognized themselves and their neighbours with conscious pride, for while their fellow townsman respected them, he did it with a touch so whimsical and so kindly that he never gave offense.

But the "little people" are only a part of Hans Hugger's artistic creations. He, too, has caught and preserved with his magic chisel the animal and wild life of his world, but in a striking way all his own.

Then there is Karl Binder, also a native of Brienz, who in 1908, at the age of twenty-three, was urged by Rodin, Bartholomé and Desbois to exhibit in the Salon National des Beaux Arts in Paris. A sculpture "Ivresses" earned him the title of "associé," and only one year later another creation, "The Bagpiper," elevated him to the rank of "Sociétaire" in the Beaux Arts Society, a distinction equaling a gold medal. Several of Karl Binder's wood sculptures have been acquired by the city of Paris, and in other lands his works are equally admired.

Another gifted Brienz artist is Emil Thomann, whose noble sculptures of ecclesiastical subjects have received most favourable comments.

In addition to the displays of the before mentioned works of art in wood, the little village is literally alive with wooden bears in every size and conceivable attitude. Bears inviting you to entrust your hat or umbrella to them, or both; bears eager to do duty as a seat; bears holding smokers' accessories, etc. Chamois, deer, eagles, cows and goats are introduced in ever so many clever combinations, while chalets of different sizes are ready to serve in numerous ways. Bread-baskets, book racks, paper knives, ink wells, salad sets, bowls, clocks and pictures lend further variety to the displays, so that a visit in Switzerland's woodcarving capital is not only instructive, but a rare visual delight.

M. MOTTA AND SWISS CLUB LIVERPOOL.

The Committee of the Swiss Club Liverpool sent, on the 16th of December, the following letter to Monsieur Motta, then Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation:

Liverpool, December 16th, 1936.

Herrn Bundesrat G. Motta,

Vize-Präsident des Bundesrates,

Bern.

Herr Vize-Präsident,

Das vereinigte Komitee des Schweizer Klubs Liverpool in seiner heutigen Sitzung erinnert sich daran, dass Sie während 25 Jahren unserem lieben Vaterlande ganz ausgezeichnete Dienste geleistet haben und wir erlauben uns den Wunsch auszudrücken, dass Sie dies noch manche Jahre tun können.

Genehmigen Sie, hochgeschätzter Herr Bundesrat, die Versicherung unserer Dankbarkeit und ergebener Hochachtung.

Sig. Ls. C. Comte, E. Montag, E. Tüscher, Th. Leyvraz, L. J. Faivre, G. Ray, Chs. Clottu, H. Ott, A. Baer.

In reply the Swiss Club Liverpool has received the following letter:

Der Bundespräsident
der Schweizerischen
Eidgenossenschaft.

Bern, den 6. Januar 1937.

An das Komitee
des Schweizerklubs Liverpool,
Liverpool.

Geehrte Herren,

Ihr Brief vom 16. Dezember mit den Glückwünschen des Schweizerklubs Liverpool zu meinem Amtsjubiläum hat mich sehr gefreut, und ich danke Ihnen herzlich dafür.

Empfangen Sie bitte, mit meinen wenn auch etwas verspäteten, so doch aufrichtigen Wünschen für ein gutes Neues Jahr, meine besten Grüße.

Sig. MOTTA.

A FEW PECULIARITIES OF THE SWISS RAILWAY SYSTEM.

The expenditure incurred for the establishment of the Swiss Federal railways, not including therefore the secondary lines which are privately owned, came to a round sum of 2,787 million francs, of which 717 were employed for purposes of electrification. This sum corresponds to frs. 936.— per meter and represents a very high figure compared with foreign railways. The main reason is obviously the configuration of the ground. There is scarcely a line to be found throughout the country for which only simple infrastructure was required such as is the case in flat countries. High embankments and deep excavations, innumerable bridges and long tunnels, damming in of mountain torrents and protection against land-slides and avalanches are some of the characteristics of Swiss railways. The total length of tunnels is 165.1 km. i.e., 5.74 per 100 km. of rail. This proportion is only of 1.49% for Austrian railways, 0.42% for German railways and 0.04% for the Hungarian State railways. Another factor which has contributed in raising the cost incurred for the construction of Swiss railways, is that, with exception of the inhabited regions of the high Alps, the agglomerations are very close to one another so that there must be a great many stations. Apart from the Austrian railways, of all other European railways, the Swiss lines have the smallest distance between stations. In Switzerland there are 27 stations per 100 km. of rail, in Germany there are 22, the Hungarian and Swedish railways have 17. And lastly, another factor which should not be overlooked is the density of the road network which leads to a great number of road and rail crossings. Switzerland's road network comprises thus over 6,700 crossings, of which 4,100 level crossings, 2,000 underground passages and 600 overhead crossings.

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