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HOME NEWS

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FEDERAL.

GAPS IN DEFENCES OF SWITZERLAND.

There can be no doubt that Swiss opinion has been profoundly disturbed by what happened during September. While appreciating the manner in which the crisis was handled it was sharply brought home to them that countries which are not in a position to defend themselves and to rely on their own strength for their defence stand a very poor chance in the modern world. They realise that only an adequately prepared Switzerland can continue to exist in Europe. This has led to a drastic overhaul of their resources, and especially their military resources, and has shown that all is not well with the Swiss defences. New efforts both in man-power and in taxation have become necessary.

The Swiss have reason to suspect above all things that in the event of hostilities in Europe an attempt would be made to outflank the Maginot Line by way of Swiss territory. This at least is the contingency that is recognised in all Swiss military writing of the present time, perhaps not without reason, since there has been a marked strengthening of French defences in that quarter of the Franco-Swiss frontier called the Swiss bottle-neck, in the neighbourhood of Bâle. Natural conditions are an asset to Switzerland, and there is no doubt that if the Army were mobilised in time and there persisted a determination to defend Swiss neutrality at all costs, such a turning movement traversing Swiss territory might bring the enemy into a veritable wasps' nest. But the whole question lies in the rapidity with which the Swiss Army could be ready for the emergency.

Recent events both in Austria and Czechoslovakia have revealed the rapidity with which the armies of well-armed States can be mobilised and advanced to the scene of action. Speed and surprise will be the characteristics of the next war, when what seemed impossible, or at least improbable a few hours before, becomes the hard fact of the moment. What will be aimed at will be a decision based on a lightning stroke. The theory that it must succeed may be mistaken, but it will certainly be tried, and the results to a nation unprepared may be disastrous. The defensive methods of the last war have been so much improved upon, that military opinion considers that a quick decision cannot be sought by a frontal attack on a defended line, and that all must be staked on a surprise thrust, carried out with ruthless violence, speed and brutality. Hence the attention paid to motorisation of units and gigantic air armaments.

It is felt that there is no guarantee that the danger parried by Mr. Chamberlain's action may not recur, when the problem will present itself to Switzerland in the form outlined above. The Swiss motto now is "Hope for the best but prepare for the worst." It is argued that if Switzerland is to be defended the army must be mobilised in time, at the very outset of events and in conditions when it is likely to be undisturbed. The critical moments will lie in the first few hours.

For this reason public opinion is putting pressure on the Government in order that the neglect of the past few years may speedily be made good. For military unpreparedness is seen to be a weak spot in the Swiss democracy. A militia equipped with the best possible arms and given the best possible training in the circumstances will be of no avail if the defensive force is not ready to be flung into the struggle at once.

Switzerland has a frontier force of an élite that can be at its post in a few hours. But it is

only a front line, with no depth or reserves, and if it were sufficiently broken by artillery or air bombardment to allow motorised units to get through there is nothing in its rear to stop them. Mobilisation of a civilian militia necessarily takes a lot of time. The "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," the leading organ of Switzerland puts it thus: "A country that relies upon a militia, but has no standing troops, is peculiarly vulnerable during the mobilisation period. Every Swiss officer knows how difficult it is even in peace time to weld into useful military units our soldiers, N.C.O.s and officers who have suddenly been called forth from civil life." It adds: "The whole nation knows how incomplete are the anti-aircraft measures and the measures for the protection of the civil population."

How certain highly-placed Swiss citizens see their problems may be deduced from a declaration made only the other day by M. Picot, the President of the Geneva State Council:—

"We have respectfully saluted the courageous efforts of a great Minister abroad to safeguard the peace of the world; we have admired him for boldly putting aside the sentiments of *amour propre* of a great maritime empire, by journeying — three times — to discuss peace with another foreign head of State. But we have none the less deplored the outcome of a crisis which has dealt a serious blow to the principle of the rights of small nations. It goes without saying that the Swiss people, who voted for the League of Nations on May 16th, 1920, prefer those methods which fully guarantee liberty to the small nations of those which have prevailed during the present year."

SEVENTY-FIFTH JUBILEE OF THE SWISS ALPINE CLUB.

The Swiss Alpine Club celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary at Olten, where the Club was founded in 1863 on the proposal of the geologist, Dr. R. Theodor Simler of Berne, who was the first President.

At the banquet which numbered 470 participants a great many prominent people were present such as: late Federal Councillor Häberlin, Dr. Ernst Jenny, editor of the "Alpen," Central-President A. Spring, Director Bittel, Dr. de Hahn, representative of the Dutch Alpine Club, Colonel of division Grosselin, Professor Hagenbach (Basle), Colonel Simon (Berne), Professor Niggli (Zurich), and representatives of Alpine Clubs of the United States, England, France, Italy, Germany, etc.

SWISS EXHIBITION IN STOCKHOLM.

The King of Sweden paid a visit to the Swiss Exhibition in Stockholm. He was accompanied by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Dinichert and Director Masnata of the "Schweizer-Zentrale für Handelsförderung," the King expressed his great satisfaction at the different exhibits shown.

KING OF SIAM'S DEPARTURE FROM SWITZERLAND.

The King of Siam has, previous to his departure from Switzerland, addressed through the Siamese Minister in Berne, a telegram to M. Motta, the Swiss Foreign Minister, thanking him for the hospitality which he and members of the royal family have enjoyed in Switzerland. The telegram says that they will always remember their stay with grateful and unforgettable gratitude.

SWISS MINISTER TO LUXEMBOURG.

The Federal Council has appointed M. Maxime de Stouze, Swiss Minister in Brussels, to represent at the same time the Confederation at the Ducal Court.

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SWISS FEDERAL BUDGET.

The Federal Budget for 1939 estimates a deficit of 38 million francs.

SWITZERLAND'S HIGHEST RAILWAY.

This year is the fortieth anniversary of the opening of the railway from Zermatt to the summit of the Gornergrat, and we are reminded by *The Railay Gazette* that not only was this one of the earliest of the Swiss mountain lines, but that it is still, by an easy margin, the highest railway track in Europe laid entirely in the open air, save for a very short tunnel near Riffelalp. Indeed, its maximum altitude of 10,236ft. is surpassed in Europe only by the 11,340ft. of the upper terminus of the Jungfraujoch line; but the last four miles of the latter, from an altitude of just over 8,000ft. upwards, are in tunnel. From Zermatt to Gornergrat the difference in level surmounted by the Gornergrat Railway is 4,920ft. in a journey of six miles, which is completed in 70 minutes, and throughout almost its entire length it commands some of the finest glacier panoramas in the Alps.

A CONCENTRATION CAMP WITHOUT TERRORS.

A concentration camp without terrors has been erected by the Swiss Government for harassed refugees from Nazi rule. About 300 men, women and children wait there for their permits to emigrate overseas. Oldest inhabitant is a 74 year old woman whose son had carried her on his back through the Rhine into Switzerland. Youngest is a seven week baby of a former jeweller from Vienna. The camp's darlings, however, are a young couple — he 19, she 16 — who had married two days before they fled from home. Seven doctors — refugees themselves — care for the health of the campers who are given complete self-government. No barbed wire is needed to keep them in their sanctuary.

SWISS GIFT TO PREMIER.

The gold chronograph watch, which the people of the town of Neuchâtel are presenting to Mr. Neville Chamberlain as a token of their gratitude for his peace efforts during the crisis, was handed over to the British Charge d'Affaires in Berne by a delegation from Neuchâtel.

The watch bears the inscription: "Happy are those who secure peace."

NEW FIFTEEN MILLION POUNDS CREDIT FOR DEFENCE.

The Swiss National Defence Commission, charged with filling up gaps in the Swiss rearmament plan, decided to open a new credit of £15,000,000.

The credit was described as a matter of urgency and as additional to other national measures.

ONE HUNDRETH BIRTHDAY ANNIVERSARY OF LATE FEDERAL-COUNCILLOR EMIL FREY.

On the 24th of this month it was 100 years since the birth of the late Federal-Councillor Emil Frey from Arlesheim (Basle-Country).

On the completion of his studies he went to America, where he entered the Army and where he fought during the American war of Liberation (1861) against the Southern States. He reached the rank of captain; at the battle of Gettysburg he was taken prisoner.

After his return to Switzerland he was a member of the cantonal government from 1866-72, and subsequently editor in chief of the "Basler Nachrichten," during which time he sat in Parliament (National Council). In the year 1882 M. Frey was appointed Swiss Minister in Washington, and in 1891 he entered the Federal Council, where he remained until 1897. On his retirement from the government he was elected to the post of "Welttelegraphendirektor." He died in 1922, at the age of 84.

LOCAL.

BERNE.

A young student, Hans Werder (17), was killed when descending the Aermighorn.

Dr. h.c. Carl Moser, late member of the States Council (Ständerat) and President of the Board of the "Kantonal Bank" in Berne, has tendered his resignation.

Colonel Haccius, commander of the "Kavallerieremontedepots" is shortly retiring from his post.

Colonel Haccius was born in 1883 in Lancy near Geneva, he was for a great number of years a member of the Federal Instruction Corps (Cavalry). He is one of the best horsemen in our country and his services to our army have been manifold.

* * * * *

The Federal Council has appointed M. Alexander Berner from Schafisheim to the post of Director of the 1st Customs District.

* * * * *

Dr. Ernst Delaquis has been appointed Professor of Law at the University of Berne. M. Delaquis has been general secretary of the "Internationale Gefängnis Kommission."

LUCERNE.

The death is reported from Hochdorf of Colonel Fritz Wyss, at the age of 53. The deceased was a partner in the well-known Brewery firm Hochdorf, he played a conspicuous part in the political sphere of the canton of Lucerne, and in the army reached the rank of a cavalry colonel.

GLARUS.

The late Mme. Catherine Zwicky in Mollis, has left an amount of 60,000 frs. to charitable institutions.

ZUG.

M. Xaver Schmid, for the last sixteen years Mayor of the town of Zug is retiring from his post shortly, he was for twenty-two years a Member of the Municipal Council.

ST. GALL.

Mme. Julia Herzog-Zobel, the widow of General Herzog, who died in the year of 1894 at the age of 74, has celebrated her 90th birthday. General Herzog was appointed head of the Federal Army during the Franco-Prussian war 1870-71.

TICINO.

The "Fiera di Lugano" closed its doors on Sunday last. Nearly 50,000 visitors attended the Fair, or about 10,000 more than last year.

GENEVA.

The States Council has appointed Dr. Ferdinand Morel to the post of Director of the Asylum Bel-Air, and at the same time to a Professorship at the medical Faculty of the University of Geneva.

LA POLITIQUE.

Défense spirituelle.

Il rentre en somme assez naturellement sous la rubrique politique, le sujet que les écrivains romands ont traité dimanche, dans leur réunion d'Estavayer. On avait donné pour titre à ce débat: "Entretien sur les problèmes touchant à la vie spirituelle du pays." Et il va de soi que la discussion, sur un pareil thème, risquait beaucoup de s'égarter. Elle n'a peut-être pas abouti à des conclusions très claires; mais elle a eu l'utilité de provoquer un échange de vues nécessaire, à un moment où cette "défense spirituelle" dont l'on parle sans cesse, et que l'on conçoit très diversement, suscite tant de commentaires contradictoires.

Des gens zélés ont pris les devants, paraît-il, en s'entourant, comme tous les magiciens, de quelque mystère, et ils ont préparé un "plan" sur lequel nous ne pouvons rien dire, sinon qu'on se propose de le présenter au Conseil fédéral pour qu'il en fasse la base de sa propre action. Car le Conseil fédéral veut agir pour la défense spirituelle du pays; il nous y faut prendre garde tout de suite, afin d'émpêcher et des mesures bureaucratiques et centralisatrices, et des confusions de valeur dans lesquelles on tombe, au Palais fédéral, presque par instinct, et aussi une mainmise fédérale sur une activité qui, par définition, n'a de sens que si elle est libre.

Des rumeurs rassurantes circulent. On affirme, et nous aimons à le croire, que M. Etter est adverse de toute mesure qui partirait pour ainsi dire d'en haut, qui prétendrait régenter et réglementer le travail de l'esprit, bref, qui, sous couvert de sauvegarder la liberté de l'écrivain, agirait à son égard comme les pays totalitaires, lesquels, on ne le sait que trop, font de l'homme de lettres comme du journaliste un serviteur du pouvoir.

Que l'on ne puisse même envisager chez nous, où les écrivains sont plus ombrageux peut-être que partout ailleurs — et c'est tant mieux — une domestication de cette gent essentiellement individualiste, cela va de soi. Mais nous ne voudrions rien qui ressemble à fût-ce de loin, à cette "synchronisation." Il ne nous suffit pas de recevoir à ce sujet des assurances verbales. Tous les textes qui finiront bien par paraître, après la longue période de gestation qui est de rigueur en Suisse, tous ces textes devront être épilogués. Il faudra avoir notamment la certitude — je dis bien : la certitude — que les fonds mis à la disposition des lettres par la Confédération ne seront pas employés, selon des critères opportu-

nistes, à des fins politiques, et qu'ils serviront intégralement et exclusivement la cause de la littérature suisse, tant romande qu'allemande et tessinoise.

Moins l'Etat interviendra lui-même, plus il laissera d'initiative aux associations compétentes, mieux cela vaudra. L'Etat est incapable, par lui-même, de protéger la culture de l'esprit. Je dis une chose qui semblera énorme et scandaleuse à certains; mais c'est, profondément, ma conviction. Dès qu'il se mêle de problèmes intellectuels, autrement que pour payer la facture quand c'est le moment, l'Etat déraille et fait des bêtises. Pourquoi? C'est une question qui mériterait d'être étudiée à part; mais le fait est là. L'influence officielle va fatidiquement au conformisme, à la banalité souriante, à la médiocrité dorée à peine, à la solennelle sottise. Qu'il soit donc et d'emblée bien entendu que nous n'aurons, sous aucun prétexte, de contrôle dans le domaine de l'esprit. C'est un postulat, non au sens absurde où l'on prend ce mot dans le langage parlementaire, mais au vrai sens du terme.

Il ressort à l'évidence aussi des échanges de vues d'Estavayer que le fédéralisme, l'autonomie cantonale et régionale, l'originalité et le particularisme doivent être respectés si l'on veut, en soutenant les œuvres littéraires du pays, défendre l'indépendance du pays lui-même. L'occasion nous sera fournie bientôt d'y revenir.

Leon Savary.
(Tribune de Genève).

THE CRADLE OF WINTER SPORTS.

By LEWIS SPENCE.

The devotee of winter sports will learn with interest that four centuries have elapsed since the first literary reference was made to skiing, skating and those other pastimes which now occupy so much of the social round of "the inverted year." It is in the "History of the Goths" of Olaus Magnus, Archbishop of Upsala, which saw the light in 1537, that we find the earliest mention of ski-running and one of the first allusions to skating, as practised by the ice-bound Swedes and Laplanders.

Those who glissade at one or other of the luxury resorts among the snows of Switzerland or the Austrian Tyrol will read with amusement the first naive description of the apparatus which contributes so much to their enjoyment. The Lapp skiers, says Olaus, "go on crooked stilts or long stakes fastened to the soles of their feet, moving with a winding and arbitrary motion" — phrases which will awake confirmatory echoes in the minds of countless novices in the craft of the skier.

But the Archbishop reveals that his knowledge of the sport was impersonal. He tells us that the Lapp performer "transported himself over mountains in a dangerous manner." If he did so frequently, the custom explains the sparseness of population in Lapland. Even the most daring modern skier gives mountains a decided miss nowadays. In the first decades of this century a handful of pioneers was rashly addicted to skiing on the Alpine slopes, but the attendant risks of a treacherous terrain and the possibility of starting an avalanche, to say nothing of a growing accident list, quickly brought the practice into disfavour.

The Lapp hunter, who used ski as a means of earning his living and chasing his dinner, unlike the modern winter sports fan, could not choose his ground, nor was he restricted to the comparatively gentle slopes environing a comfortable hotel. His leaps were not rehearsed, no map indicated his trail. If, as old Olaus assures us, he was able to shoot a deer or hare with bow and arrow when in full career, the ability to perform the feat must have cost him a life's apprenticeship.

The whirlwind international skater of to-day in fancy Alpine kit or abbreviated ballet skirts, will find equal amusement in the garrulous Archbishop's description of the primitive "instruments" by means of which the wild Goths and nimble Finns of Scandinavia skimmed across their iron-bound lakes and fjords. But the exciting pictures he draws of the great winter fairs and festivals at which multitudes thronged to witness the pirouettes of the heroes and heroines of the ancient "rink" in numbers vastly greater than to-day will fill them with envy. These fixtures appear to have been attended by tribes and "nations" en masse, indeed, the whole Scandinavian North seems to have poured out her "frozen loins" upon the selected lake or gulf. "Cold fires" glittered across the compact ice, raised high above it on hearths of soil and stone, inns and caravanserais were built across the estuaries for the accommodation of the thousands of visitors and merchants from distant Lübeck and Hamburg pitched their booths near the scene of the contest.

The nature of the prizes offered for races and exhibitions, "romantic as they sound, would scarcely appeal to the up-to-date pot-hunter — cloaks made from the beautiful blue cloth which was the boast of industrious Lübeck, brought thence by those chapmen who became the prototypes of Santa Claus, silver spoons from the workshops of cunning Finnish jewellers who had derived their skill from the northern dwarfs, swift ponies, so shod that they could gallop across the ice and "ornaments for the insatiable women," cloak-clasps and bizarre adornments for intricate head-dresses.

The skates in use among these Gothic exhibitionists of four centuries ago would most certainly be barred from a modern rink if the manager had any respect for his surface. As well might one dance in sabots upon a polished floor. They were turned or carved from "the shanks of deer or bulls," so ground on the upper surface as to fit the foot and sharpened on the "business" side.

These primitive "instruments," as Olaus insists upon calling them, were smeared with the fat of hogs, "because so, they cannot be hindered by the drops of cold water, that in the most vehement cold weather will rise up, as it were, through the pores of the ice." If you do not grease your "instruments," the Archbishop warns you, you may come a cropper and, plunging through the surface, be neatly decapitated by the sharp edges of the hole you make! He hastens to add that "the inhabitants seldom perish by that or the like danger, only strangers that travel to deserty countries," a politely ecclesiastical manner of admonishing the greenhorn.

The bone skate, we are informed, "has a natural slipperiness," a statement which even those who have not essayed its treacheries will feel disinclined to question. For the well-to-do there was a variety of super-skate, "like wooden shoes with points of iron," which recalls those on which some veterans first fitted themselves out in the late 'eighties, at the expense and ruin of a perfectly good pair of boots.

But the modern winter sportsman in his luxurios Swiss or Norwegian hotel will shudder at the description of those "inns upon the ice" to which Olaus devotes an entire chapter and which were run up for the convenience of visitors from afar. Great beams, about two or three feet in thickness, were laid as foundations upon the frozen surface and upon these houses built of stout boards were erected. "And withal they have more security upon the ice than they would have in a palace. And in these inns they have feasting and wassail" and "could hearken to the pleasure to the whistling winds and the rattle of hail outside." Let the winter sportsman of to-day ponder the passage when he complains of a burst pipe in his *suite de luxe* or of the absence of some far-fetched delicacy from the hotel menu!

Scot. Educ.

HUMORISTISCHES.

Der Tunichtgut. Lehrer: "Weissst du auch, Karl, dass du deinem Vater schlaflose Nächte bereitest?" —

Karl: "Die hat er sowieso, Herr Lehrer; er ist Nachwächter."

Lehrer: "So? Dann wird er vor Kummer über dich graue Haare bekommen."

Karl: Fein Herr Lehrer, da wird er sich bestimmt freuen. Er hat nämlich eine Glatze.

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