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land, who for so many years contributed towards the expenses of the College. In thanking the donors and contributors most heartily for their support in the past, the Chairman expressed the hope that their help could again be enlisted when normal activities were resumed.

**Conclusion.** In concluding his report, the Chairman thanked the Swiss Minister, Dr. W. Thurnheer, for the interest he has shown in the Society and the Staff of the Legation for their support and assistance. He also expressed his appreciation of the loyal support and co-operation from the members of the Society, the Council and the Committee in trying circumstances.

The adoption of the Chairman's report was passed with a hearty vote of thanks.

The President then vacated the Chair and Mr. A. Stauffer, a former President and Hon. Member, was elected Chairman pro tem. to conduct the elections. He paid a very sincere tribute to the President who had so ably guided the Society during the past three years, a most difficult period. By his immense efforts and undying optimism he had kept the flag proudly flying and Mr. Stauffer moved that Mr. Boos be re-elected for another term of office, which was duly seconded and passed with prolonged acclamation. All other retiring members of the Council and the General Purposes Committee had offered themselves for re-election and as no further nominations were received, they were declared duly elected without opposition.

The proceedings then terminated.

#### CONSTITUTION OF THE COUNCIL AND THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1942.

**Council:** Chairman: Mr. J. J. Boos; Vice-Chairman: Mr. W. Meier. Trustees: Messrs. G. E. De Brunner, W. Eichenberger, E. Steiner. Members: Messrs. Ch. Chapuis, R. Chappuis, G. E. De Brunner (Trustee), O. Grob, E. Hardmeier, M. Heilinger, G. Jenne, L. W. Krucker, J. J. Pfaendler, A. C. Stahelin, A. Steinmann.

**General Purposes Committee:** President: Mr. J. J. Boos, Vice-President: Messrs. W. Meier and L. W. Krucker; Hon. Secretary: Mr. R. Chappuis; Hon. Treasurer: Mr. M. Heilinger. Members: Messrs. W. Burren, W. Fuchs, R. Seun and F. Streit.

**Auditor:** Mr. Percy H. Green, F.C.A.

**Secretary:** Mr. J. J. Schneider, F.I.A.C.

**Press Reporter:** Mr. W. Burren.

**Delegate to the Advisory Board of the Employment Department:** Mr. Ch. Chapuis.

**Delegates to the Swiss Sports Committee:** Messrs. R. Chappuis and F. von Bergen.

**Delegate to the Nouvelle Société Helvétique:** Mr. F. Streit.

The next Monthly Meeting of the Society will be held at Swiss House on Saturday, March 14th at 2 p.m. This will be the last meeting with the S.M.S. in full possession of Swiss House. The cosy Members' Room and some of the larger rooms upstairs will be available for games of cards and table-tennis, darts, etc. The Committee hopes that many members will avail themselves of this last opportunity. Philatelists will also have a room placed at their disposal. Please, therefore, reserve March 14th for the S.M.S.

W.B.

## RECENT SWISS RAILWAY ACCIDENTS.

(*"Modern Transport,"* 14th February, 1942.)

Considerable attention has been attracted by a succession of serious railway accidents which took place on the Swiss railways during 1941, notably at Piano Tondo Tunnel on the Gotthard line and near Veytoux-Chillon on the Lausanne-Brigue line, Swiss Federal Railways, and at Kiesen station on the Berne-Thun section of the Lötschberg route, also on the Federal system but involving a Berne-Lötschberg-Simplon Railway express. Official comment on the causes of these three accidents is guarded and very scanty.

This reticence is not unnatural in the case of the Piano Tondo and Veytoux disasters. It will be remembered that in the former instance a freight train ran away on the gradient descending to Giornico, causing great damage and a considerable fire in line-side buildings before the locomotive was finally halted by a collision with another train. The causes of the runaway, which took place on July 29th, were apparently inexplicable. It is scarcely possible for even a heavy train to run away with one of the standard Swiss Federal electric locomotives as did a French troop train in the very disastrous accident near Modane in the last war. The French train, it may be remembered, was headed by an old steam locomotive lacking the tremendous brake power of the modern electric, and its own brakes failed as it gained momentum.

The original causes of the accident to a goods train on the old Jura-Simplon line between Lausanne and Brigue on September 25th are likewise obscure, but there are outward features of the occurrence resembling those of two cases in Belgium before the German invasion, when mines placed for defensive purposes were accidentally exploded, one by lightning and the other by a straying cow. No information as definite as this is forthcoming from Switzerland, save that the line in question was mined. The published facts are these: On the date in question; at 4.29 p.m., mines placed under the roadbed exploded in front of goods train No. 5415 as it was passing ordinary passenger train No. 1430 on the curve by Castle Chillon on the shores of Lake Geneva. The passenger train had left the small station of Veytoux-Chillon a minute previously.

The explosion produced a huge crater, into which the freight train, proceeding westwards, plunged headlong. It was found that Driver Oppelguier, who was driving this train, had made a full application of the brakes on the instant of the explosion. He died of his injuries shortly afterwards. Damage to permanent way and equipment was very severe; rails and overhead contact equipment were festooned over adjoining trees and retaining walls, and the crater completely engulfed the large 2-D-1 (4-8-2) electric locomotive No. 10894 and the wreckage of 15 wagons, the latter having been completely destroyed. Some of the wreckage of this train was thrown into the adjacent lake.

Passenger train No. 1430 escaped destruction by a matter of seconds, as the mines exploded behind its last vehicle. Guard Plancherel was killed by falling debris, which, together with blast, caused additional serious damage within a radius of some 80 yds. The station-master was blown out on to the platform from his office, which immediately after was penetrated by a

large falling rock. He was uninjured, though masses of debris fell around him as he lay outside. His wife was blown downstairs and an apprentice was thrown behind the slender shelter of a pylon, these people also having miraculous escapes. The apprentice, believing the telephone lines to be destroyed, mounted his bicycle as soon as the rocks ceased to fall, and hurried to Territet in order to report the occurrence to the stationmaster at Montreux. As it happened, the railway's lines were undamaged, though the post-office lines were broken.

This explosion cut communication on the Jura-Simplon line between Montreux and Villeneuve, which became temporary termini. The first relief train, with electric and steam locomotives, reached the scene within 80 minutes. The divisional superintendent established touch with the Lake Geneva Navigation Company, whose normal steamer service was suspended owing to war conditions. Two steamboats were commissioned for emergency service the same evening, the first leaving Montreux at 8.15 p.m. with 1,000 passengers. Buses were employed to transport passengers and luggage between the station and the pier at Montreux. These buses had come straight from another emergency service involved by the collision at Kiesen, two days before. Goods traffic was completely suspended over the Montreux-Villeneuve section, urgent freights from the Simplon to Lausanne and points west being sent via the Berne-Lötschberg-Simplon Railway. The journey time of the emergency steamer service was fifty minutes; ten minutes is the normal railway running time between Montreux and Villeneuve.

Restoration of the railway link was one of the heaviest tasks undertaken by Swiss breakdown gangs, even though these have had, in the past, to deal with the effects of avalanches and other drastic phenomena peculiar to very mountainous countries. Of those employed on repair work, sixty were railwaymen and twenty local labourers. Additionally, forty soldiers from a company of sappers worked through the first night, being relieved next day by men from an infantry battalion, who undertook salvage and transhipment work. The heaviest item was the recovery of the goods train locomotive, which, although it remained upright, was below the level of the track whereupon it had been running. By 6.50 p.m. on September 30th it was possible to reopen the eastbound track (that nearest the mountain) for goods trains travelling dead-slow. The westbound track was still closed pending the recovery of the buried locomotive, and was not levelled and brought into reuse until October 3rd, nine days after.

On the morning of September 23rd, owing to repairs to the down track, single-line operation was in force on the Berne-Thun line between Wichtrach and Kiesen. Trains were also subject to delay owing to the heavy Axis transfer traffic which uses this line on its course between Germany and Italy. Visibility was down to 100 yds. owing to fog. Up express passenger train No. 307 from the Berne-Lötschberg-Simplon Railway, consisting of portions from Brigue and Interlaken combined at Spiez and hauled by an electric locomotive, was booked to pass down slow train No. 1970 between Thun and Uttingen. The local train, however, was running late. It was standing at the Kiesen down home signal, on the temporary single-track section between Kiesen and Wichtrach, when the express struck it head-on at about 60 m.p.h. The local train's

motor-coach, its luggage van, and a following second class coach mounted the express locomotive, while of the express train the luggage van, a T.P.O. van, and two coaches likewise piled up. Ten persons were killed, these including three permanent-way men out of some thirty who were working on the closed track.

There were various contributory causes to this accident. The provisional single line devices, and everything depended on the staff at Kiesen and Wichtrach. Operation was very difficult, owing to delays and traffic congestion. The Kiesen assistant stationmaster did not know the section, having been newly transferred from Delsberg. This man said he did not hear the bell signal for the slow train, and it is possible that this coincided with, and was drowned by, the longer bell signal for the northbound express. He said he thought the local train was still at Wichtrach; the fog prevented him from seeing it standing at his down home signal. The Wichtrach stationmaster, receiving a message from his colleague at Kiesen relating to this train, thought it referred to a relief goods train following a section behind, and agreed to hold this until the express passed.

Although it is impossible to attempt to reconstruct the sequence of events precisely, the following details call for comment: The stationmaster at Wichtrach appears to have failed to ask Kiesen for permission for the down slow train to enter the Wichtrach-Kiesen section, which he should have done as single-line working was in operation. Had he done so, the assistant stationmaster at Kiesen would not have been ringing up to enquire the whereabouts of the down slow in question. The assistant stationmaster at Kiesen failed to make out a train order to hand to the driver of the up express advising him that the crossing with the down slow train was at Wichtrach. Finally, the driver of the up express should have been watching for the down slow and, not seeing it, should have stopped at Kiesen to ascertain the reason. We have not received any comment on the failure of the down train, standing on the up line, to whistle the down home signal, or, if it did so, why the assistant stationmaster at Kiesen did not hear it. The accident thus appears as a coincidence of the failures of several persons.

The Kiesen accident clearly shows up the weakness of the method of operation in a number of Continental countries on double track lines when one track is blocked by obstruction. In comparing the extremely elaborate precautions taken in this country in circumstances of this kind with the position on many Continental railways, it can be said that this is the type of accident which the British regulations of working with pilotmen prevent.

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