

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

In accordance with a very ancient tradition, Switzerland has never sent any ambassadors abroad. She has never accredited to other Governments, diplomats of this high rank. Firmly decided not to manifest any disproportionate ambitions, she has been content with appointing ministers plenipotentiaries or Chargés d'affaires to the various capitals.

As the principle of reciprocity is one of the major rules of international relations, no ambassadors either have been accredited to Berne by foreign governments. With two exceptions, there are only ministers to be found in the Diplomatic Corps in Berne. As for the two exceptions — the Papal Nuncio quite naturally possesses the rank of an ambassador and he is always the Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps. On the other hand, the French Republic has sent an ambassador to Berne since a very long time ago, in fact, since before the French Revolution. This tradition goes back to those ancient days, when the Kings of France were the allies of the Confederates, were anxious to possess their friendship and flattered them by means of this special treatment. However, even if these two exceptions exist, they have not given rise to any measures of reciprocity. On the one hand, Switzerland has not appointed any diplomatic mission to the Vatican, and on the other, she has not sent an ambassador to France, but only a simple minister.

This situation exists since the last century. But everything seems to point to the probability of a profound modification taking place, in this respect, and this, as a result of an evolution in diplomatic customs, which, willy-nilly, we shall be obliged to take into account.

What is happening is that all the countries of the world, including the least important of them, are multiplying the number of their ambassadors and cutting down that of the ministers plenipotentiaries. Diplomats belonging to the First Class, are now becoming more numerous than those belonging to the Second Class. In view of this, several States have been asking Switzerland for some time past, permission to have an ambassador accredited to this country. At the same time, various Swiss ministers are asking to be promoted to the rank of ambassador, which would

increase their prestige and facilitate their task in the country where they are posted.

Quite recently, the Federal Council took a decision in regard to the principle of this matter. It declared that it was quite ready to accept the nomination to Berne of diplomats, having the rank of an ambassador. This can only be of benefit to our land. It will make it possible for diplomats of great experience and of undisputed authority to be welcomed in the ranks of the Diplomatic Corps in the Federal city. Up to the present, it has been impossible for them to exercise their activity in Berne, because they could not have the rank to which their talents and their seniority gave them a right. Italy has, at once, made use of this possibility and has just announced that Signor Reale, who until now was the Italian Minister in Berne, has been promoted to the rank of an ambassador. Everyone is delighted. If this measure had not been taken, Signor Reale, who is a faithful friend of Switzerland's would have been sent to another post.

What still remains unknown is whether Switzerland will accord reciprocity to Italy and to other countries. This question has not yet been settled. It is one that is not incumbent on the Government but on Parliament. A certain amount of opposition must be expected in political and in Parliamentary circles. Nevertheless, the fact should not be disguised that a refusal to grant reciprocity and to appoint ambassadors to certain countries, might be looked upon as a lack of international courtesy. Besides, even if we wish to give evidence of our modesty, we should still be clear-sighted enough to put our official representatives abroad in a position which would allow them to furnish the best possible work and give them the necessary prestige. Our attitude should be dictated by this sole consideration. Everything else is merely prejudice.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

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