

News at random

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The well-known surgeon, Dr. F. de Guervain, died in Berne at the age of 78; he first practised at La-Chaux-de-Fonds but soon moved to the university centres of Basle and Berne where his lectures and many publications earned him international fame. He has been in retirement since 1938.

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A water shortage is reported from districts along the Jura; receding of the springs and the custom of allowing the water to flow during the night to prevent freezing are said to be the causes.

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All the roads leading into Germany are closed during night time, i.e., from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. Opposite Basle a high barbed-wire barrier is being erected to prevent unauthorised persons (Schwarzgänger) crossing into Switzerland. Local workmen engaged in German factories along the border are, however, allowed unimpeded passage.

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On behalf of the Committee of the International Red Cross, Mr. R. A. Haccius, who has many ties with the London Colony has been surveying prisoners of war and internment camps in this country. He is one of the five delegates charged with this mission in the belligerent countries.

GIUSEPPE MOTTA.

("Irish Independent," 24.1.40.)

It is not only the man who was five times President of Switzerland, not just the statesman who for more than twenty years was her Minister of Foreign Affairs, whose loss his own country mourns to-day. It is the deeply Catholic leader, the undaunted upholder of the rights of small nations, who has passed away at a time when Europe can ill afford to lose a man of his calibre.

He was born at Airolo, son of the concessionaire of the mail coaches down St. Gotthard. That giant among Alpine giants, is more than the geographical centre of the country, it is the watershed of a Continent. To-day electric express trains thunder through its enormous tunnel, a masterpiece of engineering. No longer have man, horse and mule, to conquer its passage by their own humble devices.

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Motta had still known it thus in his youth. At his father's place, those who had just made the descent mingled with those who still had to do the ascent. His character was formed by this medley of men and professions, of races and languages, round the very cradle of his youth. The great international statesman was born in the Swiss village where the North meets the South.

As a boy of nine, young Giuseppe went to Ascona to the College which St. Borromaeo had built three centuries before, between the forests, the mountain slopes and the magic mirror of the upper reaches of the Lago Maggiore, loveliest and greatest of the lakes. Here, in the perfumed silence of this veritable garden of paradise, the poet and the romantic within the realist ripened, influences which could be traced in all his official speeches.

From there he went to the Catholic University of Fribourg, in French-speaking Switzerland, and finally to that greatest of all German seats of learning, Heidelberg, where he graduated as Doctor of Law with the highest distinction. Hence, though Italian was his mother tongue, which he always spoke at home, he could switch over into the German of a Cabinet meeting at Berne or to the French of a League of Nations speech in Geneva, without being so much as aware of it.

As a young man of twenty-four he had returned home. These were his happiest years. With buggy and horse, the young lawyer went round the mountain slopes to look up his clients, and though the Tessiner is known to like litigation even more than law, he managed — it remained his proudest boast — to settle the great majority of his cases by agreement. This sense of balance marked also the budding politician. Hence he was selected to represent his *petite patrie*, the Tessin, in the Government of his *grande patrie*, Switzerland.

His long and honorable career was a worthy epitome of Switzerland's typical democracy. He was a devout Catholic in a country preponderatingly Protestant; Italian-speaking amidst a population mostly of German, partly of French tongue; politically he belonged to a small minority party. The secret of his charm and his success was that the three greatest European civilisations had shaped his personality — Italian grace and humanity, clear French logic, and the methodic German order with which he was accustomed to work.

The world got to know him at the League of Nations. He was President of the First Assembly, and he held another unrivalled record, that of being the only Foreign Minister who has headed his country's delegation, ever since the League was founded.

More than once the universal regard in which he was held by the statesmen of all countries made him their spokesman at many a tense moment. At such times he was the keeper of the League's conscience. Only once did he speak out without that moderation which was so typically his — when, supported only by Holland and Portugal, he warned against admitting Soviet Russia amidst the council of civilised nations. On eternal values, on great principles, this astute diplomat did not know of any bargaining, though no one worked more convincingly for a better European collaboration.