

# News at random

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1940)**

Heft 954

PDF erstellt am: **26.04.2024**

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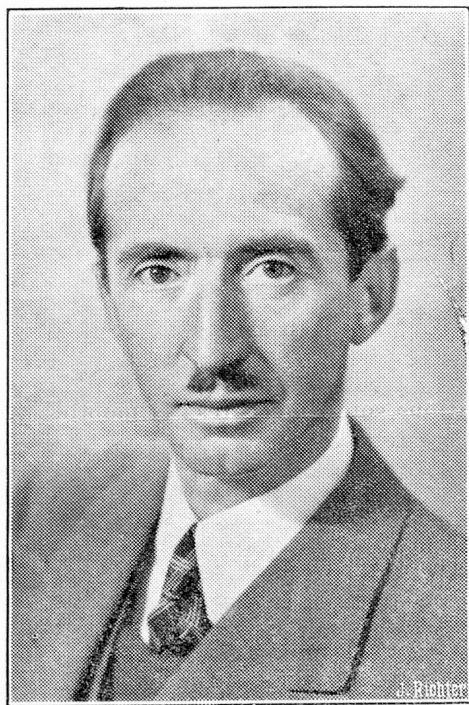
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Le Comité

Heavy losses have been incurred by a Geneva bank and private industrialists through defalcations. A clerk, F. J. Wasesca, said to hail from the Grisons, managed to multiply the amount of bank drafts by occasionally adding a zero and doctoring the written figure. 120 so enriched drafts have so far been discovered and the amount involved is in the neighbourhood of a million francs.

\* \* \*

A learner, in charge of a petrol tank lorry, lost control of his vehicle when descending the steep incline leading into Ursy, near Romont. The lorry came to a standstill in a carpenters' shop and the escaping petrol caught fire destroying the whole of the building; the driver perished in the flames.



The new Federal Councillor Dr. Enrico Celio was born on June 19th, 1889, at Ambri. After absolving the local schools and the College at Balerna he completed his early education with the jesuits at Milan and the benedictines at Einsiedeln, at the same time as Federal Councillor Etter. He studied literature and law at the universities of Milan, Florence and Fribourg. Returning home, Dr. Celio was entrusted with the editorship of the catholic-conservative "Popolo e Libertà." In 1924 he was for the first time elected a member of the National Council but in 1932 he had to relinquish his seat on being chosen — in succession to Cattori — president of the Ticinese Government as the cantonal constitution forbids contemporaneous membership of the Federal Parliament.

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### A NOTABLE BICENTENARY.

*(Little notice was taken in the Swiss press of the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dr. H. B. de Saussure. A number of laudatory articles appeared in English papers; the first one reproduced here is from "Nature" (17.2.40) and the description of the ascent of Mont Blanc is taken from "The Manchester Evening News" (19.2.40).*

On February 17th occurs the bicentenary of the birth of the celebrated Swiss naturalist and geologist Horace Bénédict de Saussure. He was born at Conches, near Geneva, in which city he passed most of his life and in which he died on January 22nd, 1799. As a boy he was a diligent collector of plants and minerals, being stimulated in his studies by his uncle, the naturalist Charles Bonnet (1720-93). At the age of twenty he made his first tour to the glacier of Chamonix, an excursion regarded generally as dangerous. This was the beginning of his many journeys in the Western Alps and his travels in England, Germany, Sicily and Italy. At the age of twenty-two he was given the chair of physics and philosophy at the Academy of Geneva, and this post he held until 1786 when he resigned and was succeeded by his pupil Marc-Auguste Pictet (1752-1825). Among his earliest writings was a volume on electricity published in 1766. Year by year he extended his knowledge of the Alps, and in 1787 on August 2nd with Michel Cachet he ascended Mont Blanc. The first Englishman to make the ascent, Mark Beaufoy (1764-1827), reached the summit a week later. In 1788 Saussure spent about a fortnight on Col du Géant and between 1789 and 1792 climbed Monte Rosa, the Breithorn, and other mountains. The upheaval in Switzerland due to the revolutionary movement in France drew him for a time into political life, but in 1794 most of his activities were brought to an end by a stroke of paralysis. From this he never really recovered.

Saussure's great work "Travels in the Alps 1779-1786" was described by von Zittel as a model of clear language, exact observation and cautious reasoning. His "glowing descriptions of the Alpine world removed the prejudice against the 'Montagnes Maudites', and awakened a feeling of enthusiasm for the infinite wonderland of beauty and delight in the higher altitudes of the Alps. Apart from his achievements