

A notable bicentenary

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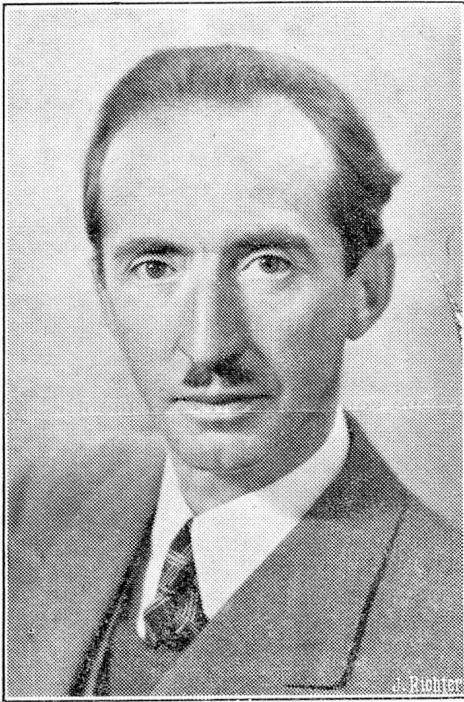
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Heavy losses have been incurred by a Geneva bank and private industrialists through defalcations. A clerk, F. J. Wasesca, said to hail from the Grisons, managed to multiply the amount of bank drafts by occasionally adding a zero and doctoring the written 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 Romout. 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 benedictins 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 Bénédicte 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

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in science de Saussure may be regarded as the pioneer of a practically new cult in human enjoyment, the love of mountain climbing." As a geologist de Saussure's aim was to observe, and to observe accurately. He examined the mineral composition of the rocks and studied their topographical, meteorological and physical relations on the mountains. He improved the hygrometer and the anemometer and devised a cyanometer and a diaphanometer for comparing the degrees of transparency of the atmosphere at different altitudes. Half a century after de Saussure's stay on the Col du Géant, J. D. Forbes visited the same spot and in 1843 he wrote in his "Travels through the Alps of Savoy" that "No system of connected physical observations at a great height in the atmosphere has ever been undertaken which can compare with that of de Saussure. At any time such self-denial and perseverance would be admirable; but if we look to the small acquaintance which philosophers of sixty years ago had with the dangers of the higher Alps, and the consequently exaggerated colouring which was given to them, it must be pronounced heroic."

* * *

The first ascent of Mont Blanc was made in the year 1786, though as early as 1760 Dr. Saussure, who had realised the scientific value of an ascent to the topmost peak, offered a substantial prize to the first man to find a practical route to the top.

There were many attempts, but it was not until 1786 that Jacques Balmat and Dr. Michael Paccard, two Chamonix men, conquered the renowned Alp.

The journey took three days, and success was attained on August 8th of that year.

But it was too late for Dr. Saussure to attempt the ascent, and preparations were made for the following August, the best time to attempt the climb.

Accompanied by Jacques Balmat and 17 other guides, the party with Dr. Saussure set out. The first night they slept in a tent on the Montagne de la Cote, and the second night bivouacked in the snow.

The summit was reached at 11 a.m. on August 3rd, and the party remained until 3 p.m., so that Dr. Saussure could make his scientific observations.

Down in Chamonix the doctor's wife and two sisters watched the ascent through a telescope. When the party had reached the summit the doctor's wife and friends ran a flag up to show they had witnessed the feat.

L'INSTRUCTION D'HIVER DE L'ARMÉE SUISSE.

L'entraînement de ses troupes aux manœuvres d'été et d'hiver en montagne a pour la Suisse une importance qui apparaît clairement dans le schéma de ses frontières. Celles-ci sont, de trois côtés, protégées par d'importants massifs: à l'est les Préalpes d'Appenzell et de Saint-Gall et les Alpes grisonnes, au sud un formidable rempart de rocs et de glaces, à l'ouest le Jura qui, pour être d'altitude inférieure, n'opposerait pas moins, avec ses denses forêts, des difficultés certaines à une armée en mouvement. Les routes qui traversent le plateau, du Rhin au défilé genevois, sont flanquées par les premiers contreforts de ces montagnes et le cœur du pays est porté par des sommets qui s'abaissent vers tout un réseau de vallées, de rivières et de lacs. C'est pourquoi l'armée suisse compte depuis longtemps dans ses formations, des troupes de montagne où se recrutaient principalement les patrouilles de skieurs.

Les cours de ski datent de la guerre précédente et l'on n'a pas oublié les succès de quelques-unes des patrouilles militaires qui participèrent aux grands concours internationaux. Elles disputèrent souvent les premières places aux équipes scandinaves et finlandaises et réussirent à être victorieuses aux Jeux olympiques. Cependant ces vingt dernières années, l'instruction des skieurs ne prit pas une très grande place dans les programmes militaires, et le niveau d'excellence de nos patrouilles tenait essentiellement à la qualité du ski pratiqué en Suisse. Mais aujourd'hui les conditions sont différentes; la mobilisation de notre armée a permis à son chef d'entreprendre une action rapide et d'importance pour instruire nos troupes dans la technique militaire du ski et de l'alpinisme, les entraîner à surmonter toutes les difficultés qui pourraient se présenter, et surtout coordonner les efforts pour constituer au sein de chaque unité, de plaine comme de montagne, des cellules homogènes capables de rendre de précieux services au pays.

Nous voici au mois de février. Nous avons à peine dépassé le milieu de la saison de ski et déjà les résultats obtenus sont étonnants. En effet, on sait

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