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HOME NEWS

To stop the torrential flooding of the Swiss market with so-called "valuta-pianos," i.e., pianos of Austrian and German origin, the wholesale importation of which threatened to completely paralyse the manufacture of pianos in Switzerland, the Federal Council has decreed that future import of these instruments, the quality of which the purchasers found to be on a level with the low exchange rates, shall be subjected to special import licence.

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At the suggestion of interested circles and Chambers of Commerce of the French eastern regions and of Alsace, a meeting was held in Paris under the presidency of Minister Le Trocquer. The object of the meeting was discussion and investigation of the means necessary for the exploitation of the Rhine between the Swiss frontier and Strasbourg, for which the project advanced at the meeting favours the construction of a canal running parallel to the Rhine, with locks permitting simultaneous passage of two barges of 1,000 and 1,200 tons each.

The French minister pointed out that agreement must be unanimous among all those closely interested in the scheme to allow for its being carried through efficiently and for proceeding later to the exploitation of the available water-power for the benefit of industry and agriculture. A resolution was adopted at the meeting to appoint a commission to study the technical and financial questions involved and to prepare a definite plan for the vast scheme.

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The Federal Supreme Court dismissed an appeal directed against the decision of the Government of Schaffhouse which prohibited the son of a fully qualified local dentist to act as dentist's assistant and to advertise himself as Dr. J. Stritmatter, jun. The evidence before the court proved the appellant to have never studied at any university nor to have passed any examinations qualifying him as assistant, he having simply purchased his doctor degree from the official representative in Switzerland of one of those notorious American sham universities, in this case the "Oriental University" of Washington, whose extensive sale of these worthless certificates was being carried on from Geneva by the self-styled "Professor Dr." Aloys Demole. In consequence of the strong press campaign that followed the trial, the activity of this sham university agent has come under the limelight so much that the "learned

professor" will now have to answer charges of fraud in the courts of Geneva, brought by a good many dupes whose vanity he has lucratively exploited.

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At the festival of the Federation of French Gymnastic Societies in Lille the "Bürgerturnverein Basel" secured three first prizes in the following events: 100 metres race, 100 metres relay race, and a hurdle race.

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The regulation of the motor, aerial and cycle traffic, which up till now has been in the hands of cantonal and municipal bodies, has now become a matter for Federal legislation, the plebiscite taken on Sunday, May 22nd, sanctioning by an overwhelming majority the necessary amendments to the Constitution.

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The following cantonal deficits were incurred during the past fiscal year: Zurich frs. 7,474,118, Berne frs. 3,328,334, and Neuchâtel frs. 693,000.

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For the Canton of Appenzell Dr. Hofstetter, from Gais, has been returned as National Councillor in place of Mr. Arthur Eugster, who has retired.

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The Swiss Federal Railways have placed orders for 32 electric locomotives at a cost of about 24 million francs, which is to be distributed over the budgets for 1921 to 1923.

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For the period of January 1st to April 30th the Swiss Customs show receipts of frs. 33,721,745, whilst the expenses amounted to frs. 44,153,632, so that it would appear that the cost of administration and collection has exceeded the proceeds from the Customs by frs. 10,432,887.

* * *

The figures of total unemployment for the fortnight to May 23rd record a slight decrease of 4,338, the unemployed at the date mentioned numbering 146,143. The metal, machinery and clothing industries are faring a little better, whilst the conditions in the watch industry have become worse.

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The preliminary sittings in connection with the settlement of the Savoy Zone dispute show very little progress: the original French attitude having been only slightly modified.

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A unique distinction has been bestowed upon Prof. Dr. J. F. Schär, who in younger years was a well-known commercial teacher in Basle and who about two years ago retired from a similar position at the Handels-Hochschule in Berlin. On the occasion of his 75th anniversary his former colleagues propose to erect his bust in marble in the Aula of the Berlin University.

In spite of increased charges, the Swiss postal revenue for the first quarter of this year totalled £1,348,829 only; £162,000 less than in the corresponding period of last year.

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OBITUARY.—Nationalrat Gustav Müller, the Vice-President of the National Council, succumbed in a Berne hospital to the results of a fatal accident; he died on May 24th, at the age of 61, without having recovered consciousness. The deceased was a member of the Social Democratic Party.

Christian Fischbacher, a commercial notability and reported to be the richest citizen of St. Gall, died on May 13th at the age of 76.

NOTES & GLEANINGS.

The report has been published of the special Commission of experts, appointed by the League of Nations to inquire into its cost. This Commission was composed of Comte Avet, of the Italian Chamber; Senor Figueras, chairman of the Bank of Bilbao; Mr. Johnson, of the British Treasury; M. Noblemaire, of the French Chamber; and M. Villanueva, Nicaraguan Minister in Paris, who state in their summary that it is not for the Commission to make any comment upon the transfer of the seat from London to Geneva, adding:—

“Since, however, the main purpose of the Commission of Inquiry is to suggest every possible form of economy, it feels bound to point out that, at the moment, Geneva is—and, so far as it is possible to foresee, will long remain—a city in which the cost of living is, comparatively speaking, higher than in almost any city in Europe, and where the rate of exchange is, at the moment of writing, the most disadvantageous for the great majority of States members of the League. We therefore feel bound to point out, as a pure matter of fact, that, were the seat of the League situated in a town which was less expensive from the point of view both of cost of living and of the rate of exchange (if, for instance, it were at Brussels, Fontainebleau, Turin, Vienna, or almost anywhere else), an immediate economy would be effected which would be appreciable in the case of all members of the League without exception, and very considerable in the case of countries with a depreciated exchange. The only serious objections, at any rate, from a purely financial point of view . . . arise from the purchase (which is not, moreover, completely liquidated) of the buildings in which the Secretariat is accommodated. Should the Council ever contemplate a transfer of the seat of the League, it would appear that in almost all cities to which it might be transferred the use of suitable accommodation could be arranged without cost to the League. It would appear that the financial loss in such an operation (apart from the rather considerable cost of removal) would possibly not be greater than the sum to liquidate the ultimate difference between the cost price and selling price of the existing building, the latter presumably being the lower.”

Regarding the staff and their salaries the report proceeds:—

“After detailed examination of the various salaries as compared with equivalent salaries elsewhere, and the reasons upon which the present figures are based, we have formed the general conclusion that while the average throughout is on the high side, in comparison with what is paid for work of equivalent value in organised Government Departments of long standing,

this high average is fully justified during the critical period while the organisation of the Secretariat is still in the making. We admit that the salaries which we propose we based on those of the highest paid civil services in the world, i.e., those of the British Empire.” Concerning the Secretary-General’s emoluments the report states:—

“There is no doubt that hospitality is an excellent engine for diplomacy, and a real aid to good relations. Entertainment allowances, therefore, are sometimes inevitable. We do not, therefore, recommend the reduction of his present allowance to a lower figure than £2,500, and then only on the understanding that he will be entitled to draw on the general fund for official entertainments given elsewhere than at his own house. It has further been brought to our notice that the terms of his engagement included the provision of an official house in addition to his present salary of £4,000 per annum, plus £6,000 *frais de représentation*. No such house has yet been supplied, and we understand that in the present state of the finance of the League Sir Eric Drummond has decided to waive the point. If, however, the recommendation made above is carried into effect, the circumstances are obviously changed, and we consider that it is only just to him that the engagement as regards the provision of an official house should be implicated in the form of a special allowance at the rate of £1,000 per annum.”

Severe comments are passed on the cost of League Congresses held away from the actual seat where they should be held, thus involving the League in extra expenditure, which in the case of the Council meeting of the League in Paris last February amounted to frs. 120,000, and the Transit and Communications Conference in Barcelona in March and April, for which special trains had to be provided to carry the staff from Geneva to Barcelona and back, cost another £7,800.

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The report will doubtless provide welcome material for the enemies of the League, in particular to those who have from the beginning strongly opposed the choice of Geneva as seat for the League, and it will be exceedingly interesting from our point of view to watch future developments.

* * *

A good many years ago there lived in London one H. W. Draber, who was well known in London musical life. Now his domicile is Zurich, and there he has been largely instrumental in organising, with a committee, a series of international festival plays and concerts to take place in June and July. Performances are to be given of “Parsifal” and of “Il Seraglio” under the direction of Bruno Walter. There are to be also several concerts, of which the conductors will be Nikisch, from Leipzig, Gabriel Pierné, from Paris, Volkmar Andreae, of Zurich, and our own Sir Henry Wood. The last has selected for performance there Elgar’s “Enigma Variations,” Butterworth’s “A Shropshire Lad,” and Tchaikovsky’s “Francesca da Rimini.” A lovely place is Zurich, an ideal spot for a festival that includes not only music, but horseracing, yachtracing, lawn tennis and so forth. Has the Swiss Government abandoned an idea that prevailed a few years ago of converting Zurich into a modern Munich? Why not make the attempt?

(From *The Daily Telegraph*.)

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