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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

The Federal Council has accepted, with thanks for services rendered, the resignation of Monsieur A. J. Fontannaz, the honorary Swiss Consul at Liverpool; M. Faivre, the Chancellor is at present in charge of the Consulate.

The Budget estimates for 1927 of the canton Geneva provide for a deficit of over six million francs.

The first anniversary of the signing of the pact of Locarno is to be made the occasion of a special celebration which, however, will only have a local character.

The proprietors of newspaper stalls at Swiss railway stations, have formed themselves into an association in order to maintain their independence, and fight against the creation of a monopoly which tends to destroy the individual kiosk holder.

At a conference of wine merchants, held in Berne last week, it was stated that the consumption of white wines in the German part of Switzerland showed a continued decline; it is feared that even with a general lowering of prices it will be difficult for the wine growers to realize their large accumulated stocks.

The central committee of the Schweiz, Kaufmänn. Verein (Société Suisse des Commerçants) has sent a memorandum to the Federal authorities concerned pointing out the insufficiency of existing possibilities to enable commercial students to complete their practical education abroad and suggesting that in the forthcoming Federal Budget a fund should be provided from which the required subsidies may be granted.

The news circulated in the Swiss press last week that Federal Councillor Musy, during a hunting expedition in the Valée de Bagnes (Valais), shot no less than thirty chamois, is now officially contradicted; it is stated, that although he was a member of the party securing this bag he had not slain a single chamois.

The cantonal state treasurer of Glaris, Mathias Hösli, has been placed under arrest, an official investigation of his accounts having brought to light the fact—apart from gross irregularities—that an amount of Frs. 4,550 had been abstracted.

For selling bread under weight, a Bernese master baker has been sentenced to four months' imprisonment and a fine of Frs. 2,000; the shortage is stated to have been as much as 20%.

The Rieckentunnel between Uznach and Wattwil (Zurich), which is known to harbour deadly gases, was the scene of a dreadful accident last Monday. A goods train, though correctly signalled as having left the Kaltbrunn station, at one end of the tunnel, failed to emerge at the Wattwil terminus. A hand trolley, despatched at once from the latter station, was only able to ascertain that a terrible tragedy had taken place, the smoke and fumes being so dense that the centre of the tunnel could not be reached; though considerably overcome they were able to return, but of the original party of six, three succumbed to the asphyxiating gases. It was in the evening, about eight hours afterwards, that a properly prepared relief gang extricated the train from the ill-famed tunnel and brought it back to Rapperswil together with the bodies of the engine-driver and four guards in charge of the train.

A shocking accident happened last week near Unterägeri (Zurich) when a military aeroplane piloted by Lieut. Mauerhofer from Dübendorf, had, owing to engine trouble, to make a forced landing. In restarting, the plane flew into a tree, turning a complete somersault, without injuring the two occupants; three school boys, however, who were standing near by watching the operations, were hit and killed on the spot. They are all from Unterägeri and their names are Jos. Steiner, Jos. Wilpert and Jos. Ithen.

Road Accidents.—Whilst walking at night time along the road from Wangen to Olten, Ernest Hünziker, a clerk in the Cement Factory at Olten, was knocked down by a motor cyclist, and succumbed to his injuries a few days afterwards in the local hospital.

As a consequence of a motor accident, in which on June 5th near Egghölzli (Berne), three persons lost their lives, Frau Marie Haberer, who was driving the car, was sentenced by the Bernese courts to six months' imprisonment, loss of licence and to the payment of fines and indemnities amounting to about Frs. 85,000; she was found guilty of negligent driving.

For having arranged with a third party to break into his shop at Basle as well as his private residence, and subsequently making a claim of Frs. 30,000 under his insurance policy, M. Hügin, a stamp dealer of Birsfelden, has been sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

The unfortunate Fire Brigade rehearsal at the Gonzenbergwerk when in February last four miners were killed through coming into contact with the high tension line, has had another sequel. The commandant, R. Mühler, whom the district court at Werdenberg had exonerated from blame, has now been convicted of manslaughter by the St. Gall courts and sentenced to a fine of Frs. 400.

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

### League of Nations.

To wind up this subject for this season, the following resumé taken from the *Daily News* (Sept. 27th) may be opportune; it also shows the feverish hurry shown by the delegates in getting back to their own countries:—

The Seventh Assembly of the League of Nations has run its course. It has, all things considered, been a good Assembly. A Foreign Minister who has spent every September at Geneva since 1920 (though the Assembly was in November that year) tells me he thinks this year's meetings among the best. Germany has been admitted to membership, the Council has been reorganised (though not necessarily improved), a slavery convention has been adopted, America's reservations to her adherence to the Permanent Court of International Justice have been dealt with.

All this is to the good, and some of it is better than it seems. Germany's entry, for example, is not epitomised in the notable speeches of Dr. Stresemann and M. Briand on Sept. 10, valuable though those utterances were in setting the tone of the new co-operation. More important is the way in which the German delegates dropped into their places in the League machine. Dr. Stresemann took a quite prominent and quite useful part in discussions on the Council. Dr. Breitscheid was rapporteur to the Assembly on various humanitarian questions. Baron von Rheinhaben addressed the Assembly (in excellent French) on the plans for an Economic Conference. Though Germany will no doubt play a larger part at Geneva next year, when she has fully found her feet, she has already played a very satisfactory one this.

But welcome as the admission of a country like Germany to the League of Nations is, it is by no means enough in itself to justify undiluted optimism about the Assembly at which the event took place. And while the Seventh Assembly has no doubt been a good one on the whole, there have been emerging a number of tendencies which will need careful watching in the future. One is the way in which the work has been rushed. Whatever happens, there must be no tacit assumption next year that the Assembly is going to last just three weeks or just four weeks, or just any other precise period.

As things are, *wagons-lits* are the curse of the Assembly, for a sleeping-berth has to be ordered days or weeks in advance, particularly when there is a rush for limited accommodation, and if by chance you are prevented from travelling on the intended day, not only do you have to pay for your place without occupying it, but, what is far worse, you will in all likelihood have to prop your weary diplomatic frame in the unsatisfactory corner of a mere first-class carriage.

Diplomats prefer sleepers, as Miss Anita Loos would put it, and diplomats not only prefer to occupy their sleepers on the night they have ordered them, but in most cases insist on occupying them at any cost. This is written in all seriousness. Every year at Geneva it is the same story. As the Assembly gets near its end there are speculations on every side as to whether it will finish on Saturday. Everyone knows it ought not to finish on Saturday. Everyone can see the work being scamped, important resolutions being put and accepted without discussion, sub-committees' reports being accepted mechanically by

the full committee, and the full committees' in turn by the Assembly. Yet speculation is only in reality half-hearted, for everyone tells you in the end, just as you yourself in the end tell everyone, that of course it will finish on Saturday because the delegates have ordered their sleepers.

The effect of this is serious. It means that delegates themselves are gravely overstrained. Committees, attended by men who have been working hard all day, have been meeting at 10.30 at night and ending at one in the morning. One delegate to whom I was talking close on midnight, told me he had started his work that day at 6.10 a.m. The point need not be laboured further. Its importance is that it is one of several factors, some of them more formidable, tending to rob the League Assembly of much of its influence and prestige. The Assembly's great function is to be a forum of public opinion. No one can pretend it has been that this year. Large questions have been pushed off to committees without any proper preliminary discussion on the Assembly platform, and the reports of the committees have been adopted, often by mere mechanical registration, equally undiscussed, because diplomats prefer sleepers and they had ordered them for Saturday night. The world's conscience cannot express itself that way.

### Swiss Floods.

Somewhat alarming accounts were published in the English Press, probably due to the presence in Geneva (in connection with League matters) of the many unoccupied reporters, who were still waiting to get away. From a local point of view the floods are nothing short of a disaster, but compared with what has recently happened in other parts of the world we have been let down very lightly. The total loss is estimated to be about £60,000 and falls on the cantons of Valais and Vaud, and of course the Swiss Federal Railways. Not a single life has been lost. Instructive are the conjectured causes which in the eyes of experts are responsible for the catastrophe. The *Daily Telegraph* (Sept. 28th) attributes it to the recent great heat, which caused the bursting of the pocket of the glacier at the foot of the Dents du Midi and the consequent rush of water. The *Yorkshire Post* (Sept. 29th) flatly contradicts this theory, as will be seen from the following extract:—

The theory of a burst "pocket" on the Plan Nèvé glacier, to which the first fall was attributed ten days ago, was exploded by a military aviator, M. Mercanton, who, flying near the mountain, noted that there was a little cloud on the flank of the Cime de l'Est, whereas the day was otherwise cloudless. He soon discovered that the "cloud" was due to dust from a great rock-fall on the south-eastern slope of the peak. The glacier of Plan Nèvé is supposed by local tradition to serve as a purgatory for those people of St. Maurice who have failed to lead pious lives, and their spirits are popularly reputed to throw down blocks from the glacier to annoy survivors in the valley. The little alpine hamlet of La Rasse, which has frequently been menaced by bursting glacier pockets, is said to be protected by a very early rustic chapel dedicated to Saint Barthélémy. Many pilgrimages are made to this chapel, the sound of whose bell is said to be sufficient to avert a catastrophe.

Another opinion still is quoted by the *Daily Express* (Sept. 29th) thus:—

Switzerland, where heavy land-slides and floods have swept the Rhone Valley, near Lavey-Bains, and St. Maurice, is a country of sudden disasters.

"In the high lands of Switzerland," said Doctor H. H. Thomas, of the Museum of Practical Geology, to a *Daily Express* representative yesterday, "you may have torrential rain in one district and none in the next. The effects of the rain thus appear without warning some miles away.

"I should say that the cause of the sudden floods in the Rhone Valley is material washed into the river bed by swollen streams from lateral valleys. This forms a series of temporary dams that burst successively as the Rhone rises.

"The landslides and rock avalanches are due probably to the disintegration by heavy rain of the scree or deposit that mounts up piecemeal at the foot of a cliff, as the mass above crumbles in the ordinary process of weathering. These scree are all right as long as you do nothing to them, but even one man walking across them may start an avalanche.

"There are, of course, landslides of quite another type that begin for no apparent reason. Some years ago, above Lake Zug, a great frag-