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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

The summer session of the Swiss Parliament came to an end last Thursday (June 28th). Amongst the last measures to be passed was the creation of a Swiss Legation at Angora (Turkey). An interpellation in the National Council dealt with the policy promoted by two Ticinese papers, the *Adula* and the *Seggella Italiana*. The first one, which is edited by a lady, Parini Colombi (a civil servant in the canton Ticino) proclaimed the line Gothard-Tödi-Rätikon as the legitimate frontier between Italy and Switzerland, whilst the latter, edited by her father, exhibits a singularly provocative activity.

At the meeting of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce (Vorort) in Zurich the Federal Council was invited to take steps to secure the abolition of international double taxation; the incidence of Swiss firms not domiciled but doing business and being taxed in foreign countries was most detrimental to our export trade.

During the discussion on the report of the Military Department in the States Council it was stated that the canton Appenzell A.Rh. disclosed the highest proportion of military unfit. The movement for Swiss disarmament emanating from some irresponsible schoolmasters at Geneva was severely criticised on account of its influence on boys under their tuition.

A claim for over Frs. 400,000 for taxes against a chocolate syndicate domiciled in Geneva, now pending before the Federal Tribunal in Lausanne, has been compromised by the Berne municipality for Frs. 50,000. The syndicate had its offices formerly at Berne, whence it departed to evade the heavy impost.

The catering arrangements in the buildings of the Basle Fair (Museumstrasse) formed the subject of a critical discussion in the Basle Grosse Rat when it was stated that the separate company in charge of this department was being liquidated and that the whole of the subscribed capital (Frs. 400,000) had been lost.

In recognition of his having presented his large residence and grounds in the centre of the town for the purpose of establishing a central home for the Federal Gymnastic Society, Mr. Rudolf Zurlinden, the well-known cement manufacturer in Zolingen, has been made a honorary citizen of the town of Aarau.

The cashier of the Unionsdruckerei in Berne, Ida Grossenbacher, has been sentenced to 15 months' hard labour for defalcations amounting to Frs. 70,000; her fiancé, E. I. Schneeberger, received eight months' imprisonment for connivance.

Col. Habisreutinger, a well-known figure in industrial and banking circles of the canton, has died in Dozwil (Thurgau) at the age of 86.

Through the bridge near Zweilütschinen over the Riedbach (Berne) having been washed away by the swollen torrent, a train of the Bernese Oberland Railway came to grief. The train was composed of six carriages with a locomotive at each end and the accident was rendered worse through the driver of the rear engine, unaware of the danger, not attempting to slow down whilst the brakes of the front engine were full on. The latter plunged into the bed of the torrent followed by the luggage van and two carriages. Miss Anna von Allmen, age 20, from Lauterbrunnen, was killed on the spot; of the seven passengers, not fatally injured, transported to the hospital at Interlaken three were subsequently discharged.

Many motor accidents are reported from different parts of the country. In a collision just outside Lucerne between a lorry and a combination the petrol tank of the latter exploded and the two occupants, Herr Soltermann and Frau Junger, from Berne, contracted fatal injuries.—The body of the retired police official Zahler, who was cycling during the night to Vérenas (Geneva) was found on the road presumably knocked down by a passing motorist.

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

### The B.E.A.M.A.

The pamphlet recently published by this Association and containing deliberate mis-statements with reference to electric plants laid down in this country by Swiss firms, has now been officially withdrawn, as will be gathered from the following notice from the *Manchester Guardian* (June 27th). "It is never too late to mend" though the wide publicity originally given to these erroneous assertions can hardly be influenced.

"In a recent publication by the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association Incorporated entitled 'Foreign Plant in British Power Stations: The Case for Support of National Production,' some criticism was levelled at Edinburgh Corporation for purchasing Swiss plant. This criticism was resented by Edinburgh as it was held to be unjustified, being based on incomplete data and creating a wrong impression in the minds of the public. As a matter of fact, the electricity officials of Edinburgh were quite well pleased with the efficiency of the Swiss plant.

The matter of the pamphlet was raised with the Incorporated Municipal Electrical Association, and a letter has now been received by the Electricity Committee of Edinburgh Corporation from the secretary of that body stating that 'the Manufacturers' Association have expressed their regret and withdrawn the offending publication from circulation. The Manufacturers' Association have further stated that to prevent the possibility of a similar occurrence in future the Municipal Association will be consulted before any publication which might possibly adversely affect their members is issued."

In this connection it will be interesting to record that Swiss engineering firms have just secured, in face of powerful English competition, a large order for 27 locomotives for the Indian State Railways, as well as two contracts for public utility undertakings in Rumania and Czecho-Slovakia.

### Artificial Silk.

A most instructive article about the trade in Switzerland is contained in the *Manchester Guardian Commercial* (June 21st). Though the money invested in the industry at home bears hardly any comparison with the enormous sums at stake in this country it will be noted that in spite of customs barriers the export trade is holding its own.

"In no branch of the textile industries of Switzerland has the synthetic fibre received a warmer welcome or a more intelligent application than in the silk trade. 'One might almost think,' said a Swiss silk weaver to me, 'that artificial silk had been invented for our special benefit.' One might, indeed; for artificial silk has saved from ruin the historic industry of Zurich in the trying period of post-war competition.

It must be admitted that the existence of an artificial silk manufacturing industry in Switzerland is due to French initiative. The well-known Emmenbrücke factory, the oldest now existing in the country, was opened in 1906 by the Société Suisse de la Viscose, a French company forming part of the Groupe Carnot, now incorporated in the larger group known as the Comptoir des Textiles Artificiels. In 1922 a Swiss company was formed for fiscal reasons to run the mill under the present style of Société de la Viscose Suisse. The French company became a holding company, retaining 80 per cent. of the capital (Fr. 10,000,000 Swiss) of the Swiss company. The technical and commercial management of the concern has been from the beginning in Swiss hands. In 1924 a second mill was erected by the same company at Heerbrugg-Widnau (St. Gall.)

About this time competitors entered the field. A mill was erected at Rorschach (St. Gall) by capitalists interested in the embroidery trade one at Rheinfelden (Aargau) under the auspices of the German Glanzfäden concern (this mill is now controlled by La Soie de Châtillon of Milan), and one at Steckborn (Thurgau), which had a short and unhappy career and was reopened last year by a new company. During the next three or four years no further expansion took place, but a mill is now in course of construction at Arbon (Thurgau). The following is a list of the various undertakings as they now exist :—

*Société de la Viscose Suisse, S.A.*—Mills at Emmenbrücke (Lucerne) and Heerbrugg-Widnau (St. Gall). Capital, Fr. 10,000,000. Production

in 1927, 4,000 tons. Probable production in 1928, 5,000 to 6,000 tons. Produces, in addition to ordinary viscose silk, staple fibre known as "Visca," and artificial hair and straw. Is interested in the following foreign undertakings: S.A. de Fibras Artificiales, Blanes (Spain), Aktiebolaget Svenskt Konstsilke, Borås (Sweden), Seta Bemberg Italiana, Gozzano (Italy). This concern has had a career of unbroken prosperity. The original capital of Frs. 2,600,000, which has long since been redeemed, was the only fresh money ever put into the business, subsequent increases having been effected by the incorporation of reserves.

*Feldmühle - Rorschach A.G.*—Mill at Rorschach (St. Gall). Capital, Fr. 5,000,000. Production in 1927, 1,200 tons. Probable production in 1928 1,600 tons.

*Steckborn Kunstseide A.G.*, Steckborn, Thurgau.—Capital, Fr. 1,500,000 (plus Fr. 2,000,000 capital of holding company). Production in 1927, 600 tons. Probable production in 1928 1,000 tons.

*Viscose Rheinfelden S.A.*, Rheinfelden, Aargau.—Capital, Fr. 3,000,000. Production in 1927 400 tons. Makes artificial hair and straw.

All these concerns work on the viscose process. The total number of workers employed is about 7,000.

The new mill now being constructed at Arbon (Thurgau), in which Heberlein and Co., textile manufacturers, of Wattwil (St. Gall) are interested, will work on the cuprammonium process. It is understood that the initial capital of the company will be at least Fr. 5,000,000.

The total Swiss production in 1927 amounted to 6,200 tons. This estimate is higher than most of those which have appeared from time to time in the Swiss Press, but is based on figures supplied by the producers themselves. In the present year, if there is no setback to trade, the extensions already made and in progress will bring up the total output, even if the new mill at Arbon does not begin work this year, to between 8,000 and 9,000 tons.

Switzerland is both an importer and an exporter of artificial silk. This position, which occurs nowadays in all countries in which synthetic fibre is manufactured, is here attributable (apart from ordinary considerations of supply and demand) to the fact that the Swiss producers specialise in viscose yarns of the best quality, for which they find a ready market abroad. Thus there is always a certain demand on the part of the home trade for foreign yarns made on other systems, as well as for lower quality viscose yarns.

It has often been pointed out that Switzerland has what is probably a lower import duty on artificial silk than any other country in Europe—two centimes a kilogramme. In spite of occasional agitation it does not seem probable that this duty will be increased. The quantity of low-grade artificial silk produced in the country is not sufficient for the growing needs of the textile trades, so that a higher duty would merely increase the difficulties of the exporters of manufactured goods without materially benefiting the artificial silk producers, who evidently prefer to concentrate on the high-quality yarns which they can export profitably.

At the beginning of this article it was stated that artificial silk has found its most extensive application in Switzerland in the silk-weaving mills. A Swiss silk-mill in which no artificial silk is used is to-day an exception, and the quantities employed are noteworthy. In one of the biggest concerns in Zurich, from which women's dress materials are exported all over the world, 70 per cent. of the new material used to-day is artificial silk. Some of the fabrics produced consist entirely of artificial silk, but in most cases the new fibre is mixed with natural silk, with cotton, or with wool; very seldom is it entirely absent. The same firm has another mill devoted to the manufacture of fabric for ties, in which 40 per cent. artificial silk is used.

It would be a mistake to suppose that this general use of artificial silk entails a reduction in the consumption of natural silk. On the contrary, the experience of both producers and users of the new fibre is that its consumption acts as a stimulus to that of the old; it permits the creation of entirely new articles containing a percentage of natural silk, and also the large-scale production of existing articles by the introduction of a proportion of the cheaper material. The Swiss silk trade, depending as it does almost entirely on exports, which have to be carried

on against the handicaps of tariff walls abroad, high costs of production at home, and low wages in competing countries, would by this time be in a parlous condition indeed without the timely aid of artificial silk. In many articles the Swiss mills could not compete with the French and Italian manufacturers, who pay much lower wages, on a basis of pure silk; but by the skilful use of artificial silk to cheapen a given article the balance can be, and usually is, redressed. Naturally, the competitor is apt to retaliate with an article containing still more artificial silk, but in the battle of wits which ensues the Swiss weaver pretty well holds his own.

In the cotton trade the problem presents itself somewhat differently. Swiss cotton spinners claim to have been the first to investigate seriously the possibilities of artificial silk mixed with cotton, but they were forced to abandon it, except in the case of the very finest goods, by reason of the fact that in almost all countries goods containing artificial silk now have to pay duty as though they were made entirely of natural silk. Every branch of the Swiss textile trades works principally for export. In ordinary cotton goods the use of artificial silk is impossible, since the price is not high enough to carry the duty. With very fine goods, however, it is just possible, and very striking effects are obtained. I have seen some double voiles destined for the United States, with an artificial silk weft stripe pattern, produced on a drop-box loom, which find a ready market in spite of the duty. Such goods, however, are produced only by a few large and well-organised mills, in which the difficulties of preparing artificial silk for the loom have been overcome. At first the prepared warps were supplied by the artificial silk makers on the beam, all ready for the loom, and the weft on shuttle pirns; this system was found too expensive, in addition to the fact that the yarns were usually too soft for the fast-running cotton looms. Experiments were made, with the result that the cotton mills using artificial silk on a sufficiently large scale now do their own winding, warping and sizing.

The knitted goods trade absorbs large quantities of artificial silk, chiefly as a substitute for cotton. A well-known cotton spinner who also owns a hosiery factory is converting the whole plant of one of his spinning mills in order to spin staple fibre into hosiery yarns. Here, again, silk interests do not appear to be damaged, but rather assisted. Pure silk hosiery is still made and has its market, while the simultaneous production of artificial silk goods keeps a large quantity of machinery running and spreads overhead charges, thereby allowing the classic article to be sold more cheaply than would otherwise be possible.

In embroidery manufacture artificial silk is now used a good deal for the design instead of mercerised cotton, but the consumption here is not so great as it should be by reason of the chronic depression of the embroidery trade. Large quantities of machinery have been scrapped during the last few years in St. Gall, and the process does not appear to have come to an end. The Basle ribbon trade is also severely depressed, and mills continue to close. Artificial silk is used as much as conditions permit, and will find an extensive application when trade improves.

The use of artificial silk waste, or "artificial schappe," is not being neglected. The important Industrie-Gesellschaft für Schappe in Basel, which has a dozen mills in Switzerland and France, reports that good results have been obtained from the use of this material.

On the whole, the prospects of the industry in Switzerland are very bright. The mills are by no means over-capitalised, and are well run. Their product is of a very high quality, and commands a good price in foreign markets; at home it constitutes an effective weapon in the hands of the textile manufacturers."

#### The Relief of Liechtenstein.

How the damage due to the Rhine inundations last autumn is being made good, under Swiss supervision, in the little principality, is described in the following article from the *Observer* (June 24):

"An interesting experiment is going on in the little Principality of Liechtenstein, on the right bank of the Rhine, between Switzerland and Austria, formerly a part of the latter country but now in postal and customs union with Switzerland. By the disastrous inundations of the Rhine last September and October extensive stretches of fertile soil were covered with sand and pebbles, especially near the village of Schaan, where these materials have been deposited a yard deep in places. The desperate population, unable to remove them (and not trying very hard to) appealed for foreign help.

Pacific, Socialist and anti-militarist organisations, including the Quakers, took the matter up and organised a volunteer service, granting a free journey, board and lodging, but no pay. An extensive propaganda' attracted volunteers to Liechtenstein from all countries of Europe, chiefly Swiss, Scandinavians, Englishmen, Germans and Frenchmen, though some even have

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come from such distant countries as India.

The majority of the volunteers being of Teutonic blood, they did not take long to create a sort of common language, by which they understand each other quite well. Those whose mother tongues are Latin find somewhat greater difficulty in taking part in the conversation, and in the discussions that fill the evenings, discussions of a highly abstract and idealistic tenour.

They certainly form a strange gathering. Some have come with the expectation of getting cheap holidays and an opportunity to loiter about. Others are real idealists and try to prove the possibility and efficiency of a strictly communist community. There are many students among them and boys of rich and even aristocratic origin.

The Berlin Communists and Paris anarchists are active in these discussions. At one of the first gatherings they protested against compulsory washing and going to bed, and against discipline in general, on the ground that those were odious reminders of military service.

The work is going on under the supervision of the Swiss Military Department, which furnishes tools and old uniforms, and prevents any extravagance and loosening of order and discipline. Without that, the whole experiment would certainly go to pieces."

#### The Watch Trade on the Watch!

From the *Times* (June 27th):—

The Swiss Chamber of Watch Manufacturers has issued a warning to all Swiss watchmakers against a scheme which the Soviet Government is now preparing with a view to creating a watchmaking industry in Russia.

The Soviet Government, it is said, intends to devote 3,200,000 gold roubles (£320,000) to the manufacture of clocks and 5,500,000 gold roubles (£550,000) to the manufacture of watches of all models. Even if the Soviet Government has the necessary capital for starting this industry, it lacks the necessary expert workers for producing clocks and watches. It therefore proposes to send to various countries, among which is Switzerland, some Russian technicians to study watch and clock making.

The Swiss Chamber of Watch Manufacturers strongly urges all Swiss manufacturers to prevent Russian agents from entering their workshops and to prohibit their employment as workers."

#### Where Husbands are Plentiful!

A Swiss girl temporarily staying in London has been fortunate in getting the *Daily Mail* (June 25th) to publish some rather bold statements about the marriage facilities in the Bernese Oberland. Anyhow, it is refreshing to learn that there are still some places in the world where the weaker sex is obviously not compelled to call in the aid of the latest products of the chemical industry in order to find favour with the chosen swain. Thus speaks the Bernoise:—

"A Swiss girl like myself from the Bernese Oberland visiting England for the first time is astonished by the preponderance of women almost everywhere, and the consequent desperate struggle for husbands, and the enormous number of old maids and potential old maids.

In the villages of the Bernese Oberland the men are in the majority, every eligible girl is keenly competed for, and spinsters are rare. A maiden endowed with the average good looks and intelligence has no need to worry about her chances of getting married. Her principal fear is that she might make the wrong choice, for she has the pick of at least three or four desirable young men.

There are always more men than women at dances, and it is a common sight to see half a dozen and more lonely males sitting out, lucky if they get five or six dances in the course of the evening with a girl. You rarely see the pathetically common sight in England of women walking home alone or in couples on holidays or after work hours. A Swiss girl need never be without a male escort.

The scarcity of girls in my country is not attributable to the birth rate, but to the fact that there is no work for most of them in the villages and they seek domestic service in the towns. A large number go abroad as domestic servants in order to learn languages. Some return able to speak English, French and Italian fluently, and

are able to get well-paid jobs in Swiss hotels, the ambition of most Swiss girls who have managed to avoid marriage when very young.

The men stay at home because there is work for them on the land, for it is difficult to employ machinery in these mountainous regions.

There are only two old maids in my village. The sweetheart of one of them died many years ago, and she has remained true to his memory. The other has always been very eccentric, and she is so devoted to her cattle that she buys her milk rather than allow her cattle to breed. With the exception of the cows, they all live under the same roof."

The Swiss Council of State on 22nd June approved a decree for the creation of a permanent Swiss Legation in Turkey.

#### QUOTATIONS from the SWISS STOCK EXCHANGES.

		June 25	July 2
BONDS.			
Confederation 3% 1903	...	81.25	81.00
5% 1917. VIII Mob. Ln	...	100.90	100.75
Federal Railways 3½% A—K	...	86.10	86.55
" 1924 IV Elect. Ln.	...	101.50	101.60
SHARES.			
		Fr.	Fr.
Swiss Bank Corporation ...	500	812	811
Crédit Suisse ...	500	939	952
Union de Banques Suisses...	500	730	730
Société pour l'Industrie Chimique	1000	2727	2768
Fabrique Chimique ci-dev. Sandoz	1000	4850	5000
Soc. Ind. pour la Schappe ...	1000	4000	4010
S.A. Brown Boveri ...	350	595	598
C. F. Bally ...	1000	1585	1595
Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss Cond. Mk. Co.	200	870	886
Entreprises Suisses S.A.	1000	1190	1198
Comp. de Navig. sur le Lac Léman	500	500	505
Linoleum A.G. Giubiasco ...	100	320	324
Maschinenfabrik Oerlikon	500	875	883



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