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# The Swiss Observer

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## NEWS AT RANDOM

The accounts for 1939 of the Swiss Federal Railways show a small surplus, the takings having exceeded the anticipated amount by about 40 million francs. This satisfactory result is due to exceptionally heavy goods traffic and leave travelling by soldiers which have compensated the heavy loss caused by the absence of foreign tourists.

What is probably a record in Municipal *laisser-faire* is reported from Grenchen: there the burghers had to vote on the budget for 1940 but only two per cent. of those entitled to vote appeared at the polls. However, the result was none the less convincing as only one of the 73 voters disliked the budget.

The Federal Council has gratefully accepted a gift of two houses in the centre of Milan offered by Pietro Chiesa, of Chiasso, who is a resident in the Italian town; he will also bear the whole of the expense of pulling down the houses and erecting a new edifice, i.e. a Swiss House for the sole use of the Swiss Colony and its institutions. Pietro Chiesa is stated to have made his fortune in the Argentine; some time ago he presented a school building to Mezzana in the Ticino.

The Cantonal Bank of Glarus announced a net profit for 1939 of over half a million francs, the major part of which will revert to the cantonal treasury.

The plight of motorists has found sympathetic consideration in the canton Aargau. Car owners on active service who have already taken out their licences will receive a corresponding refund on condition that cars are kept in repair and ready for a military emergency.

Many examples of sacrifice and sense of duty are recorded in the daily press. Here is one from a great number. In Zurich a small restaurant keeper (*Wirtschaft*) had to join his unit, with only his wife — an expectant mother — to carry on. Occasionally he employed a local accountant to enter up his books; the

latter offered to supervise his staff and business during the owner's absence. When the militiaman returned on leave and found "business as usual" he wanted to present the accountant with a cheque for Frs.500 but to his astonishment the book-keeper refused payment on the ground that being physically unfit for military service he had now been able to make his contribution for the common weal by pledging his services where they were of some use.

The population of Zurich to end of December last is stated to be 337,174, an increase of 7,394 during the last twelve months.

An aircraft factory is in course of construction at Stans; no particulars are available but it is expected that the first machine will be ready for delivery in March.

Navigation on the Lake of Constance will be maintained during the present year but under existing conditions the takings are not expected to exceed Frs. 7,000 against Frs.400,000 in normal times.

The straw plaits industry in the canton Aargau is having a busy time, some of the firms working double shifts; the larger part of the export goes to America.

Damage to the extent of Frs.750,000 was caused by a fire which broke out in the factory of the Tavannes Watch Co. Another conflagration at Basle, due to a street accident, burnt out a large garage belonging to the Basle tramways and destroyed six new autobuses; the cost of reinstatement is said to be 400,000 francs. In the meantime six autobuses have been borrowed from the Zurich municipality, and the blue-white cars of the Limmat-town are now maintaining the service. A third fire reduced to ashes one of the factories of Hans Maurer A.G., paint and varnish manufacturers in Däniken near Olten.

Christian Johann Bener, who died recently in Kerns (Obwalden) aged 70, bequeathed Frs.100,000 to several social institutions in the Grisons, notably to the Home for the Blind.

Col. Leonhard Drissel who for a generation was in charge of the infantry training centre at Liestal died in Basle at the age of 69.

The Swiss press lost a distinguished and leading member by the untimely death of Dr. Rudolf Huber who passed away only 41 years old at Orselina where