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NEWS AT RANDOM

M. Charles Alphan, who since November 1936 was French Minister in Berne, is leaving his post to make room for M. Robert Coulondre who represented France in Berlin until the outbreak of the war.

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The Federal Council has appointed Dr. W. Meile President of the board of management of the Swiss Federal Railways, in place of Engineer Hans Etter, who has reached the age limit; for a number of years Dr. Meile was the director of the Basle Fair. Herr Paul Kradolfer, who so far has been directing the Federal post and railway departments, has also been appointed a member of the Board.

* * *

A new decree issued by the Federal Council intensifies the penalties for sabotage, espionage and disobedience to orders of the military and civil authorities as well as the spreading of false news. The death penalty which hitherto could only be pronounced in war-time may be applied in cases of treasonable offences.

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Though the army command exercises a very strict censorship on any newspaper comment praising allied operations both the Neue Zürcher Zeitung and the Basler National Zeitung have published leading articles eulogising the epic retreat of the B.E.F.

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The coal quota for the coming winter has been fixed at 25% of normal requirements and consumers are officially warned to place their orders without delay. Deliveries may be delayed on account of shortage of lorries and labour due to mobilisation. It is stated that as soon as the existing import difficulties can be overcome the quota may be increased by another 25%. The use of coal or petrol to obtain warm water is allowed on Saturdays only but there are no restrictions where gas or electric current are available.

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In order to prevent speculation and a rise in wages, cantonal authorities have made the acceptance of new employment subject to the sanction of labour

exchanges. This affects primarily agricultural labourers who cannot now leave their employment for a better paid job elsewhere.

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In order to facilitate the settlement of wage or employment disputes labour conciliation boards are being set up; they have no legal power and their activities are limited to "peaceful persuasion."

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In the 12 months to December, 1939, an amount of over Frs.662,000 has been paid by Swiss residing abroad in military exemption taxes (Militärsteuer).

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The peeling of church bells in certain districts of the inner cantons is being reduced to a single one for the ordinary purposes as the full peal will be used to give alarm.

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Loss of civil rights is to be advanced a step further. It is stated that legislation is in preparation to inflict the loss of Swiss nationality on those who have proved themselves unworthy to be called Swiss. We seem to be following a contemptible example devised elsewhere.

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The canton of Glaris has shut its doors to the influx of evacuees from other parts of our country. In the canton Valais foreigners, though permanently residing in Switzerland, cease to be admitted.

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The accidental explosion of a hand grenade during drill at Brig caused the death of two infantrymen; they are Arnold Schumacher, stud. theol. from Naters, and Otto Schmid, a commercial representative in Brig. Two others contracted major injuries.

* * *

Heavy rainfalls in the neighbourhood of Rorschach interfered with railway traffic; the swollen torrents brought down large masses of boulders which damaged agricultural land and gardens.

* * *

Dr. Charles Daniel Bourcart died in Basle at the age of 80. He represented our country at the Court of St. James' from 1890 to 1902, first as Chargé d'Affaires and General Consul, and during the last three years as Minister. Many of the older generation will remember the modest but picturesque premises at Lexham Gardens in South Kensington, which were then the official residence of our Minister. After his return to Basle he devoted himself to historic research studies, but in 1912 he joined the diplomatic corps again and from 1915 to 1925 he was our Minister in Vienna.