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HOME NEWS

The Federal Council has appointed a special commission for the purpose of studying and suggesting means to arrest the depopulation of Swiss Alpine valleys.

* * *

In order somewhat to counterbalance the deficit of 9½ million francs in the working of the Federal Railways in spite of considerably increased goods and passenger traffic returns, it is contemplated to let the wall-space inside the passenger coaches for advertising purposes and to issue a travel journal (*Reisezeitung*) which, apart from advertisements, will contain articles of general interest to the travelling public and a list of sport and other fixtures in Switzerland.

* * *

In the Zurich Stadtrat a proposed increase of the local police force, rendered necessary by traffic considerations, was vigorously opposed by the Socialists; a member of this party also complained that there were no less than 40 dancing halls and 36 private employment agencies in the town.

* * *

At the Landsgemeinde in Glaris which, in spite of unfavourable weather conditions, was attended by 6,000 electors, Regierungsrat A. Tschudi-Jenny (Democrat) was elected Landesstatthalter; uncontrolled dental practice in the canton has been abolished and is now subject to a Federal patent.

* * *

The 1st of May celebrations in Swiss towns followed a very peaceful course, the enthusiasm and noisy demonstrations of previous years being absent.

* * *

This year's international Zionist Congress will be held in the last week of August at Basle, where exactly 30 years ago this movement was initiated.

* * *

Considerable excitement has been caused in Geneva by the arrest of the proprietors of the important silk concern Fleggenheimer & Co., which has stopped payment, the liabilities exceeding three million francs. The firm was founded some 85 years ago and employed a staff of 120.

* * *

Unlucky speculations on the Stock Exchange are said to be the cause of a considerable deficit discovered in the books of the Treasurer of the Geneva Swiss Automobile Club, François Nally, who also acted in a similar capacity for some philanthropic institutions of the town: the losses to these different funds are said to be in the neighbourhood of Frs. 350,000. He has since been arrested. It is also stated that the loss of Frs. 118,000 incurred by the local Winkelried foundation has been made good by an anonymous benefactor.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

The League of Nations.

A correspondent has sent me an article from the *New Leader* (April 22nd) which among other inaccuracies contains a graceless reference to Switzerland. It is a pity that some of the minor scribes sent to Geneva by English papers cannot keep to the point and must indulge in diatribes which can only do harm to the lofty ideals of the League. The article is by H. N. Brailsford, who may claim some authority to write on Labour matters at home but who is utterly at sea when dabbling in foreign politics. It is the same apostle who, in a recent report published in the *Daily Herald* (vide *Swiss Observer*, April 23rd, p. 1472), said that "M. Motta, who is, of course, French Swiss, would never take the responsibility of a friendly move towards Russia in the present state of Anglo-Russian relations, as he is anxious to please Great Britain."

Alpine Accidents.

The toll of the Alps is, after all, not so very heavy if the following figures for three years compiled by a *Daily Mail* (April 21st) correspondent can be relied upon:—

One hundred and thirty-eight lives were lost in the Swiss and Mt. Blanc Alps during the years 1923-25, 112 serious accidents in all being recorded.

Ski-ing fatalities accounted for 13 per cent., while 11 per cent. of the accidents occurred to people in search of rare flowers.

The toll was heaviest among Germans and Austrians, many of whom deliberately tempted fate by undertaking dangerous ascents without proper equipment and guides.

Cremations.

The following figures on cremations, taken from the *Birmingham Post Weekly* (April 16th), illustrate the tremendous strides, comparatively speaking, which this movement has taken in Switzerland:—

Last year in the sixteen crematoria in Great Britain there were 2,877 cremations. That is a slight increase of 5 per cent. in the number over the year before. Any increase, of course, is gratifying, but compared with other nations this country is still a considerable way behind in this important matter. In the United States of America there are 87 crematoria, and there were 17,000 cremations in the last available year. In the Argentine there were 12,000 cremations last year. In Switzerland, with a very much smaller area, and with 17 crematoria, there were 3,619 cremations. In France there are five crematoria and 4,600 cremations. In Germany there are 76 crematoria, and in the last available year there were 40,000 cremations, while Italy, with 36 crematoria, had 18,000 cremations. There is no doubt that in this country municipalities are taking an increasing interest in cremation, because both urban and rural districts are being faced, year by year, with an increasing difficulty in getting the large spaces required for cemeteries, without seriously limiting convenient sites for building houses and for open spaces for public recreation. For that, if for no other reason, they are turning to cremation. The Cremation Society of England recently issued a questionnaire to municipalities to find out the present cost of the disposal of the dead. It has already received returns representing 30 millions of the population, which provide a complete and convincing answer to show that cremation is cheaper than burial.

Swiss Frothblowers.

Under this title the *Shields Gazette* (April 23rd) publishes a short story and description of the forthcoming "Fête des Vignerons"; the use of this title for a century old festival strikes me as a sacrilege.

The Fête des Vignerons, one of the most interesting and elaborate pastoral pageants in the world, is to be held in Vevey this summer for the first time for 22 years.

The fête, which dates its origin back to the formation of a Guild of Winegrowers at Vevey in the Middle Ages, is held only once in a quarter of a century, and the preparations for the forthcoming presentation have occupied the authorities concerned almost continually for the past two years. In co-operation with the leading historians, musicians and decorative artists of Switzerland they are producing, at a cost of over a million francs, what will be without doubt the greatest fête in all the centuries-long history of the institution.

The pageant will occupy the first nine days of August. Nearly two thousand actors are being trained to take part in it, most of them peasant workers from the vineyards of the region. In a series of acted scenes, ballets, processions, and massed choir singing, the fête depicts the glorification of the wine-producing earth. Bacchus, Pales, Ceres, and the other pastoral gods of mythology are drawn through the streets in monumental wagons harnessed to teams of oxen. Most of the scenes take place in a huge temporary stadium erected in the Place du Marche. Visitors are expected from all parts of the world, and it is stated that accommodation actually in Vevey for the fête period will be unobtainable in a few weeks. There will be ample accommodation, however, at Lausanne, Montreux, and other lakeside resorts near at hand.

The same publication makes an attempt to describe how **Spring is hailed in Switzerland**; here it is:—

Many Swiss towns will put on gala dress this week-end and hold their festivals in official welcome of the coming of spring.

To-day and to-morrow the lakeside town of Locarno, famous for the historic Pact drawn up in its Town Hall, will have its carnival of Flowers, the Fête des Camélias, which rivals in beauty and spontaneity the carnivals held annually in Nice.

ANNIVERSARIES OF SWISS EVENTS.

May 9th, 1805.—Friederich von Schiller died at Weimar.

May 10th, 1861.—Great fire at Glarus. Joh. Peter Hebel born at Basle.

May 12th, 1798.—Torture to extort confessions abolished in Switzerland.

May 14th, 1394.—Great fire at Berne.

May 15th, 1403.—Battle of Vögelinsegg (Appenzell). It was here that the peasants of Appenzell gained their freedom from the oppressive Abbot of St. Gallen. The peasantry received support from the Schwyzer, while the Abbot of St. Gallen looked for support to the South German towns, especially Konstanz, which made great sacrifices during the battle.

A special feature of this festival will be an open-air opera, called the "Miracle of the Camélias," composed and written locally, in which 350 young men and women will take part. The story is a fable in honour of the camelia which, at this time of the year, covers the Locarno countryside in a blaze of colour. Thousands of English and American visitors are expected at Locarno for the occasion.

On Monday the Sechselauten (literally "six ringing"), one of the most curious festivals surviving from ancient times, will fill Zurich with visitors from all parts of Switzerland and abroad. When the clocks of Zurich strike six o'clock the townspeople and ancient guilds of the city, in traditional costume, will witness the official burning of Böög, an effigy representing Winter, in a great open square near the lakeside.

The custom of burning the bog of winter survives from very ancient times when winter, with all its attendant hardships, was the greatest enemy the Swiss people possessed. Even now, though winter brings an influx of tourists, and is Switzerland's true harvesting time, the custom is still annually celebrated with undiminished enthusiasm and rejoicing.

Before the bonfire takes place a great procession of guildsmen will march through the streets bearing the emblems of the various Zurich crafts, and representing in tableau form picturesque scenes and episodes in the Swiss national history.

An Alsatian Story.

From the *Daily Mail* (April 23rd):—

The Swiss newspapers record another remarkable achievement by Wigger, the Alsatian police dog, which has already been instrumental in bringing a number of criminals to justice.

A few nights ago burglars entered a factory near Nyon, on the Lake of Geneva, and attempted to rifle the safe. The following day Wigger was taken to the scene and allowed to scent the ladder which the thieves had used to climb through a window. He took up the scent, which led across fields to a village two miles away and back to the factory. Here he picked up another trail and set off at a rapid pace towards Nyon, where he entered a café. Inquiries showed that a strange man had taken a drink there the night before at a table indicated by Wigger.

As the result of further enquiries the police arrested a much-astonished employee at the factory, who confessed that to throw the police off the track he and two confederates had made the long detour which had been followed by the Alsatian.

REPONSE A UN AIMABLE LECTEUR.

O lecteur! mon ami, permets qu'en ces lignes je vienne rassurer ta foi, calmer ton indignation et corriger ton injustice.

Et vous, amis, qui avez lu mon article paru dans le numéro du 23 Avril de ce journal ainsi que la lettre de Monsieur X parue le 30 du même mois, je vous convie, en toute gaieté à cette joute d'un genre nouveau.

Il y a longtemps que je préconise dans les colonnes du *Swiss Observer* une saine discussion, elle est l'apanage des honnêtes gens et la preuve d'une juste curiosité. Je la salue donc avec joie, mais je regrette que pour son début elle touche aussi à faux. Car si vous voulez être impartial vous reconnaitrez bien vite comme moi que Monsieur "X," ou bien ne sait pas le Français, ou se moque du rédacteur qui généreusement lui ouvre l'hospitalité de son journal.