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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

As far back as February 16th a communiqué was issued from Berne to the effect that negotiations had been concluded to regulate payments and the exchange of goods with the countries in the sterling area (Great Britain). Details were promised as soon as the requisite ratifications had been effected and on March 14th a White Paper was issued in this country giving particulars of a monetary agreement between our two governments. Briefly speaking, Switzerland opens a restrictive credit — the usual expression “loan” is avoided — to Great Britain for 10 to 15 millions sterling at the — for this country very advantageous — rate of Frs. 17.35 to the £1. It would appear that this agreement will open a new avenue for filling in vexatious forms and making widely declarations in view of the proviso that either government can exercise a veto so as to prevent transactions “which do not serve direct or useful economic or commercial purposes.” Here is a reprint from the “Statist,” March 16th, which, we hope, will enlighten our readers:

“One by one our continental neighbours have contributed their part in building up an interim post-war mosaic of exchange pending the emergence later on of a freer machinery, and their readiness to do so argues not merely a wish to expand bilateral relations, but to do what they can to achieve a wide degree of multilateralism. In fact, the speed with which limited agreements have been reached may be taken as an indication that the more ambitious, but essentially similar, proposals for the World Fund and World Bank command wide approval in principle. This week's conclusion of the Swiss monetary pact is to be welcomed partly on the material ground that it removes the ban on travelling but principally because it demonstrates an understanding of Britain's difficulties on the part of the Swiss. In form the agreement is similar to others already concluded with various countries. Switzerland engages on her part to sell francs to the value of £5 million during the first of the three years the agreement covers; we on our part engage to sell sterling to a similar amount at the exchange of Swiss Fcs. 17.35.

Additionally, the Swiss central bank engages to sell further francs against sterling in respect of the expected adverse balance of the sterling area *vis-à-vis* Switzerland. This may involve a further £5 million and the National Bank of Switzerland will be prepared to hold £10 million sterling in the first year and £15 million sterling thereafter during the currency of the agreement. A scrutiny of exchange applications will naturally be maintained and capital transactions which do not serve a direct and useful economic purpose will be barred. It will disappoint many that it was not found possible to conclude even a limited trade agreement contemporaneously, but the Swiss have expressed their willingness to take British exports as and when available. In any event, they have undertaken to sell goods and/or services and leave a substantial net balance of £5 million on deposit, and this must surely stimulate our import of things other than hotel services.”

* * *

A delegation is at present sojourning in Washington under the leadership of Minister Stucki which is believed to discuss, among other questions, the disposition of German-held assets in Switzerland.

* * *

No further steps have been taken since October last as regards the employment of compatriots in the American zone of occupation in Germany. Terms of employment have not yet been framed or agreed, the matter still being under consideration in Washington.

* * *

The Soviet Government have accepted the offer of the Federal Council to re-establish diplomatic relations; this important news was given to the Press on March 20th, and we reprint part of the reference which appeared in the “Evening Standard”:

“The Soviet Government announced acceptance

CITY SWISS CLUB

Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE ANNUELLE

aura lieu Mardi, le 9 avril, 1946, au BROWN'S HOTEL, DOVER STREET, W.1, le dîner commencera à 6 heures précises.

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.	Décharge au Comité.
Admissions et Démissions.	Elections du Comité pour 1946-1947.
Divers Rapports.	Divers.

Messieurs les Membres sont priés de s'inscrire par écrit pas plus tard que le 8 avril auprès du Manager, Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, W.1.

of the Swiss offer following an exchange of Notes between the Swiss Minister in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in Belgrade.

For more than six months the Swiss have been trying to negotiate with the Kremlin.

Switzerland will send a Minister to Moscow as early as possible. Although no one has yet been nominated, it is thought that M. Stucki, former Swiss Minister in Paris and Vichy, and is now negotiating in Washington for settling differences with the Allies over German capital secreted in Switzerland, will be favourite.

Negotiations for a commercial agreement between the two countries are expected soon.

Switzerland badly needs Russian markets. Her precision instruments and watches, Diesel engines, high tension transformers, turbines for the Dneiper Barrage and locomotives will come into this commercial exchange.

Russia will let Switzerland have oil, petrol and wheat.

Another important outcome of the re-establishment of normal relations will probably be a request by Switzerland for membership of the United Nations Organisation.

Russia will no longer ban Switzerland as an international centre for certain technical services of Uno and the International Labour Office, now in Montreal, will most certainly be back in Geneva before the autumn."



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At the sitting of the National Council the President offered felicitations to Fed. Council. Petitpierre, our Foreign Minister, for having so successfully completed negotiations, the slow progress of which allowed faint hopes only. A tribute was also paid to our recently appointed Minister at Belgrade, the socialist Zellweger, to whose personal effort the issue is due in a large measure.

Cantonal

The strong and sustained opposition by the local population to the construction of electric power generation works, even when the concession has already been granted, is shown by a little scene that was enacted at Andermatt. A surveyor arrived late one evening to take measurements of certain land which the syndicate had decided to acquire. When his presence became known about 250 villagers besieged him at the hotel and forced him to leave the district under police protection. Not satisfied with this initial success the crowd invaded the offices of the contractors, damaging the contents and retreating after the plans and layout of "New Andermatt" had been discovered and appropriated.

* * *

The first daily newspaper in the canton Schwyz has now appeared in Einsiedeln and is edited by Hans Hilfiker.

* * *

In Zurich the remnants of the now historic "200" are gradually being liquidated. Prof. Dr. Heinrich Frick, a teacher of mathematics at the gymnasium, has been dismissed with thanks for services rendered. Dr. Richard Allemann, a member of the cantonal council, has surrendered his mandate.

* * *

Having been elected a member of the Zurich appeal court Dr. W. Stocker has resigned from the National Council; his place is taken by another socialist, Paul Steinman, also from Zurich.

* * *

After prolonged court proceedings sentences of from one to eight months imprisonment and fines up to Frs. 800 were pronounced against four civil servants in Winterthur. The chief accused was Johannes Merki, a former Stadtammann, and the other three his assistants. They were charged with minor defalcations, accepting bribes and presents, altering bankruptcy documents, overcharging expenses and other petty offences during a number of years.

* * *

Dr. J. Mercier, who represented the canton Glarus in the States Council (Ständerat) for ten years, died at the age of 67; for 21 years he was president of the Glarus municipality.

* * *

The elections for the Grand Conseil in Fribourg showed a notable gain for the socialists. The new council of 80 members consists now of 42 conservatives (49 before), 14 radicals (same) and 24 socialists (17).

* * *

A wide-spread organisation has been discovered at Basle which mysteriously disposed of ration coupons for 670 tons of sugar and other provisions; a large part of these coupons have been recovered. In the

meantime numerous arrests have been effected amongst the many officials of the war economy department.

* * *

Contrary to restrictions imposed on other towns the carnival at Basle (Fasnacht) was held on pre-war lines; days before extra trains were run from Berne and other centres so that the "Mutzen" should be in time for the "Morgenstreich" on March 11th. Over a hundred thousand merrymakers are stated to have thronged the inner thoroughfare of Basle at four o'clock on Monday morning.

* * *

Damages to the tune of Frs. 100 with Frs. 600 towards costs for defamation of character were awarded to Dr. Wagner, the chief of police of Baselland. The defendant was a school teacher, Otto Kopp, who in an article of a local paper attributed to the police chief a more than peculiar attitude (*mehr als sonderbare Haltung*), suggesting thereby prejudice in favour of nazified residents during the war.

* * *

A survey by federal functionaries estimates the bombing damage in Schaffhausen (1st April, 1944) at 34.7 million francs; 17.18 million have been paid so far on account by the American Government.

* * *

The small historic church of Möriken (Aargau), said to date from the year 1521, showed signs of old age; some lovers of ancient architecture collected Frs. 18,000 in order to renovate the church and retain its gothic character. The villagers have now decided by a large majority to demolish the building and construct a bigger modern church on the site.

* * *

An unconfirmed rumour is circulating in Davos to the effect that the sanatoria for tuberculosis patients owned by German interests are to be claimed by Great Britain as reparation payment.

* * *

Little interest was shown by the voters in the canton Ticino when four bills were submitted for their acceptance. One of them sought to disenfranchise Ticinesi residing abroad — it was rejected. The same fate overtook the second one which would have increased the number of the Grand Council. Two others were passed: one rendered it illegal for councillors to occupy civic or judicial posts and the other prolonged the mandate of a councillor from three to four years.

* * *

Prof. Fulvio Bolla collapsed suddenly in a Lugano street and died soon after arriving at hospital. He was 54 and minister of finance and labour in the cantonal government. In former years he was the editor of the "Gazette Ticinese" and a member of the Grand Council.

* * *

An initiative demand launched by the party of labour (communists) in the Ticino asking for the resignation of the cantonal government failed to attract the requisite number of supporters; 3,900 voters were in favour, about 11,000 being necessary.

* * *

Two further earthquake shocks visited the Rhone valley, specially the Sion region, at the beginning of this month; apart from the displacing of furniture no important damage is reported. An official survey of the damage caused by the catastrophe last January gives a figure of between five and six million francs.

Prof. Henri Huguenin, for 27 years a teacher at the Ecole Commerciale in Neuchatel, died there at the age of 72.

Army

In order to further strengthen the supervision of our southern frontiers and counteract the strong smuggling wave the military department is accepting the services of volunteers — all army men — subject to the consent of the respective cantonal labour exchange.

* * *

In the course of a training exercise Corp. A. Rigoni, age 22, from Geneva, made a fatal crash on the Axalp in a Moran plane.

* * *

Transgressions and felonies belonging to the war period are still occupying the time of our military tribunals — some of them in public and others *in camera*. A delinquency which has come before the divisional tribunal 8 has culminated in the conviction of Capt. André Béguin, who was sentenced to 3½ years' hard labour, expulsion from the army and the payment of the heavy costs of the prolonged proceedings. The captain was the commandant of the army penal camp at Wauwilermoos and had to face a long list of counts such as ill-treatment of prisoners, serious irregularities in the administration and excesses in private life.

* * *

Sentenced already during his absence to two years' penal servitude Dr. Max Leo Keller from Sarmen-

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storf — scion of a well-known family in the Aargau — gave himself up, evidently preferring a rest in a Swiss prison to risky roaming on the other side of the Rhine.

* * *

Another war criminal, Alfred Siegenthaler from Interlaken, will have to spend no less than 12 years in penal servitude; he has already been in prison for 2½ years pending enquiries. As early as the summer of 1939 he was working for a German espionage ring and managed in 1942 to obtain a clerical post at the Swiss consulate in Munich which, with the help of Swiss identity papers, enabled him to make frequent trips to Switzerland. Siegenthaler is a former "front-ist"; it is stated that he never accepted any remuneration from his German friends.

* * *

In May 1944 a heavy mine explosion occurred in the fortified area near Hemishofen when ten soldiers were killed. Seven officers in command of that particular sector had to appear before the divisional tribunal at Schaffhausen which pronounced them NOT guilty of the charges of negligence brought against them. The 33 pages of the considered verdict deal in detail with the service implications and the general conclusion seems to be the assumption that there existed overlapping in the high command and that the troops in charge failed to appreciate the extremely hazardous character of the installation.

* * *

A well-known expert on aviation, Prof. Robert Gsell, was the victim of a fatal accident when his glider crashed on March 15th between Muri and Belpmoos. Formerly the director of the Federal Air Ministry and a lecturer at the E.T.H. in Zurich, he was the Swiss representative at nearly all international conferences on civil aviation.

* * *

A shocking accident, the worst on record in our military aviation, took place midday on March 16th, when a squadron of four single-seater Morane planes left Sion for Interlaken on a routine flight. The non-arrival caused search parties with guides and wireless instruments to be sent out for a thorough examination of the Alpine region. The debris of the planes were discovered near Guttanen in the Grimsel area, the four pilots having evidently lost their bearings in the thick fog and cloud formation and colliding with a rock obstruction. The names of the four flight lieutenants

who lost their lives are: Klaus Nägeli, aged 30, a lawyer from Berne; Walter Bach, aged 36, engineer from Zurich; Robert Ursprung, aged 23, a student from Baden, and Bruno Zaugg, aged 22, a student from Berne.

* * *

An unflattering reference early this month in a London labour daily seems to have for its object the disparagement of our neutrality during the war and the disgrace of the good name and constancy of General Guisan. The episode dates back to the "Affair Masson" which is still *sub judice* (see SWISS OBSERVER October 26th last year) and the incident besmeared by the London daily refers to an interview between our General and a representative of the German secret service at a critical time of the war. Col. Masson, of our army intelligence service, was questioned by a high German official (Gen. Schellenberg) as to the attitude of Switzerland in the event of an allied attack on Germany; his assurance of our unswerving neutrality did not carry conviction and a categorical statement from General Guisan personally was insisted upon, as this alone would prevent an immediate invasion of Switzerland. Not quite of his own accord, General Guisan agreed in view of the dire consequences which a refusal might involve. By arrangement with our military intelligence service the interview took place in mufti at the "Bären" in Biglen near Berne. The General reiterated Col. Masson's pledge, adding that our army was fully prepared to suitably receive whatever foreign army chose to cross our frontiers. This ended satisfactorily a memorable parley but the alert "Beizer" had his eye to future business; in a steady manner he

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walked into the room, sedately depositing the visitors' book on the table. All signed nonchalantly. One of the Swiss A.D.C.'s soon afterwards realized the serious inferences to which our General might become exposed and managed to tear out the respective page. The next morning, the hotel proprietor, eager to gloat over his precious acquisition, discovered to his dismay that it had already disappeared; he immediately informed the local gendarme, who passed the information on, thus bringing this secret meeting to the knowledge of a large circle.

* * *

The long-awaited vindication of what is known as the "Affair Masson" was given to the press on March 9th. It is the outcome of a thorough examination carried out under the direction of Federal Judge Couchepin on instructions received from the Federal Council on October 23rd last. Col. Masson is reprimanded and here are some of the findings of general interest. All conversations with German officers were transacted with the knowledge of the Federal Council and General Guisan, to whom regular reports were supplied. Both Col. Masson and the German General Schellenberg had succeeded in convincing each other of their importance while neither of the two was the possessor or bearer of important information. The acute danger which threatened the country in March 1943 came to our knowledge through a totally different channel. No secret information was conveyed by Col. Masson and no benefit was derived by him from certain commercial transactions in which two of his subordinates were interested. The interview between General Guisan and General Schellenberg at the

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Bären where they had supper was followed by another meeting three days later at a ski-ing competition at Arosa. At both places General Guisan re-affirmed verbally and in writing our determination to uphold neutrality and our readiness to repulse with all forces any foreign attack. The merits of Col. Masson in creating and building up the Swiss military intelligence service were again alluded to; it had worked well and minor errors committed in good faith could not always be avoided.

Traffic

Work on the Basle-Mulhausen airfield is being expedited and it is hoped that planes will be able to land there by the 1st of May.

* * *

The first five motor boats for six years arrived in the Basle harbour at the end of last month; they carried bread cereals loaded in Antwerp into express boats and reshipped at Strasbourg.

* * *

The Belgian aviation company in conjunction with Swissair has resumed on the 8th of this month the regular service — three times a week — between Brussels and Zurich; the flying time is two hours and ten minutes.

* * *

A motorcoach service between Sweden and Switzerland is said to be the aim of a newly formed Swedish company. The first coach is stated to leave at the beginning of next month from Halsingborg and the night will be spent at Aabenrade on the Danish-German frontier whence the journey will be continued direct to Basle. The fare is Frs. 200 and the single trip will take 2½ days; a coach will run every ten days in each direction.

* * *

Great progress has been made on the Gotthard route where twelve electric locomotives of the latest type are now in service; they weigh 108 tons each and on the mountain section attain a maximum speed of over 53 miles per hour. Each locomotive has four driving axles and a driver's cab at each end. A further stage in the doubling of the route was reached early in December last, when the northern of the two tunnels between Brunnen and Sisikon was pierced. Brunnen is 7½ miles south of Arth-Goldau, the junction of the lines to Basle and Zurich. "The Railway Gazette" says that the tunnel is 4,500ft. long and is known as the Morschach tunnel. A second tunnel about a mile south of the present one will be pierced during this spring, and it is thought that doubling between Brunnen and Sisikon will be completed by May, 1948. Only the Rivera-Taverne section (between Bellinzona and Lugano) and the Melide-Maroggia section (between Lugano and Chiasso) will then remain to be doubled.

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Economics

No less than 406 new manufacturing centres have been registered under the factory act during 1945; the total number of registered factories at the end of last year was 9,720 — a record.

* * *

A consignment of ten motorcars exported to Switzerland had a somewhat adventurous journey. Shipped to Antwerp, they were loaded on open Swiss railway trucks and on arrival at Basle were found to have shed some of their outfit and gear, such as spare tyres, batteries and tools. Some of the door handles had been screwed off and scraps left in the coachwork disclosed that German prisoners of war had a free ride to an unrevealed destination, in fact in one of the car pockets the uninvited travellers left a letter of thanks to the importer.

* * *

A Swiss Trades Union Congress was held at Zurich during the concluding days of last month at which delegates from the movement in allied countries attended. A number of government officials were also present at some of the meetings and here are a few extracts from a speech by our finance minister, Fed. Counc. Nobs, who is, of course, representing the socialist party in our cabinet. He began by stressing that the Federal Council had not yet arrived at final conclusions and that his remarks were therefore to be taken as an expression of personal opinion. He said that the expected unemployment phase at the end of hostilities did not come about, on the contrary a positive trade boom had set in; our credits abroad had consequently risen, perhaps dangerously, to over three

milliard francs. The exceptional revenue enacted to balance the mobilisation expenses will be exhausted by the end of 1949 when Federal finance will have to be placed on a more constitutional and equitable basis. Means will have to be found to reduce the country's indebtedness to a bearable burden. The defence contribution may have to be retained. The turn-over tax (a diminutive of our purchase tax) cannot be revoked — no more than in any other country, he added. Thanks to the official enlightenment (tax amnesty!) the amount of assessable property had risen by about five milliard francs (25%) which assured the cantons and communes an additional annual income of about 40 million francs. The proposed old-age and dependants' insurance called for an annual Federal contribution of 127 million francs, part of which will be levied by a considerably higher taxation of alcohol and tobacco and increased death duties; the latter is expected to produce 30 million francs annually. About 1½ million francs daily are spent by the Confederation over and above the total revenue; before the end of this year new loans to the tune of 1,200 million francs will have to be raised.

* * *

The employment of foreign domestic servants has been officially sanctioned by the Federal Council some time ago but the entry of suitable helpers is subject to so many formalities that tired-out housewives in spite of repeated representations still remain without the promised assistance.

* * *

Partly to remedy out coal shortage and partly to offer employment to experienced miners previously working in our unprofitable coalfields an appeal launched by a specially founded company has resulted in the departure from Basle of a first batch of about 500 coal-miners to Namur, where they will be engaged in the Belgian coal mines. They are enlisted on a twelve months' agreement at a monthly wage of 450 to 600 Swiss francs with a bonus of 960 Swiss francs after the first year and have facilities to remit savings to their people at home. Their living conditions will equal those in Switzerland, any deficiency being made good by a special allocation through a Swiss supervising office at Brussels. Of the coal produced 3½ to 5 tons per miner in each month will be forwarded to Switzerland which for the beginning is tantamount to a additional supply of 1,700 to 2,500 tons per month. Before leaving our compatriots were medically examined at the barracks in Basle and relieved of the current military tax.

* * *

The wholesale price index as calculated by the statistical office in Berne is slowly falling, though not fast enough. To the end of February the figure was 197.7 (August 1939 = 100), a drop of 1.3% compared with last month and 4.1% with February 1945.

* * *

In an urgent appeal to the farmers for an increased delivery of bread cereals it is stressed that last year's draught and the mobilisation have reduced the crop by about a third in comparison with the two previous years. There are little prospects of making good the deficiency from increased imports.

Humanitarian

Last year's first of August collection, which was earmarked for necessitous mothers, secured a net amount of 1,120,000 francs.

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This year's appeal will benefit the Swiss abroad and will be ministered by the secretariat of the New Helvetic Society in Switzerland.

* * *

As a token of gratitude and friendship Mürren is inviting twelve British children in poor health for a stay of two months this spring.

—oo—

Under the patronage of the New Helvetic Society in Switzerland over a million questionnaires are being distributed among the population in order to learn the point of view on several problems of topical interest such as the vote for women, our neutrality under existing conditions, our future defence organisation, etc. The replies will be classified, commented upon and published in book form for sale. There is, of course, no compulsion. Swiss abroad are not included and it does seem that their opinion is neither wanted nor helpful!

* * *

The departure of Dr. Benziger from Dublin, who is being replaced by Dr. W. A. von Burg, is accompanied by farewell messages in the Irish Press; here is the one from the "Irish Times," February 13th:

"Dr. Charles Benziger, Swiss Chargé d'Affaires in Dublin, is retiring, under the age limit, from the diplomatic service. His retirement removes from the diplomatic corps in Eire one of its oldest and most respected members. Dr. Benziger is one of the most popular diplomatists ever to come to this country, and he has made a large circle of friends here.

He comes of an old Swiss family, which settled in Einsiedeln about 400 years ago and became printers to the Benedictine monks. The present firm of publishers, which branched from the Einsiedeln stem, and of which Dr. Benziger is chairman, is 200 years old, and its branch in New York has completed a century of business.

Dr. Benziger is known in Dublin as a connoisseur of art, and last year he performed the opening ceremony at the art exhibition in Waterford. He studied law at Fribourg University, and graduated from the Ecole des Chartes, Paris, after studying archæology and art history. He then went to Munich University. While assistant librarian at Berne University he wrote books on art and history, and at one time considered the question of taking up archæological work in Baghdad, which he had visited during his Oriental studies."

* * *

Nearly every week one reads of conferences which are held to restore the tourist trade and there are papers that already talk of the millions that are anxious to visit this country, but it will take a good many years before we can offer the amenities available in Switzerland. Dr. Max Riesen, who is described as a master hotelier from Switzerland by the "Daily Express," was interviewed by that paper during his recent stay in this country and he has had the courage of talking plainly. He said that in second, third and fourth-class hotels *he likes the English cooking* because it is healthy, but tourists will not like it; everything is boiled, no salt, no sauces; this must be altered.

Soon after the lifting of the ban on private travel some of the travelling agencies started advertising a 14-day holiday in Switzerland for about £30 inclusive

of fares, visas, hotel accommodation and tips. This is quite attractive; if you travel privately the £100 allowed under the recent agreement enables you to spend a month comfortably: £34 by air and considerably less than half by train, £1 a day all inclusive in a good hotel permit you to bring some present back for the less fortunate ones.

* * *

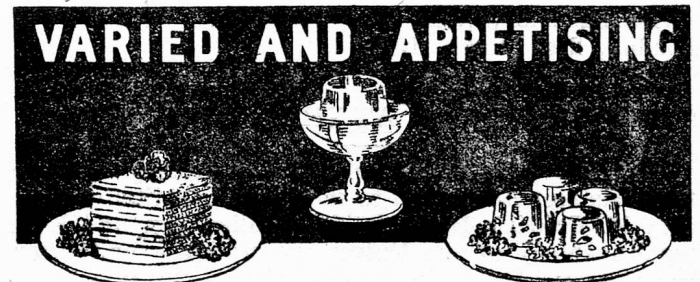
A former Trades Union official and now a director of the Bank of England has told the readers of the "Manchester Evening Chronicle" how he celebrated his arrival in our country: Full-sized fillet steak (his first since New York in 1941), 8s. 6d.; half a bottle of Burgundy, 2s. 6d. (? *Ed.*); coffee, 1s.; Havana cigar, 1s. 9d.; glass of brandy, 2s. 6d. But first he was threatened with starvation. About to order a meal in a restaurant, he was reminded that he could not eat without coupons. Unless he reported to the police within 24 hours he looked like going hungry, but the hotel receptionist came to the rescue with an emergency issue.

* * *

The departure of Sir Clifford J. Norton, K.C.M.G., M.V.O., H.M. Minister in Berne, caused by his appointment as H.M. Ambassador in Athens, is universally regretted throughout Switzerland.

The Swiss Press pays a high tribute to the departing Minister, who, during the four years of residence in the Swiss capital was held in the greatest esteem, both as a diplomat and as a sportsman.

Switzerland loses in Sir Clifford a real and understanding friend.



With Maggis Aspic Jelly valuable additions may be made to war-time menus. From meat, fish and vegetable "left-overs" attractive supplementary dishes can be contrived.

INVALID ASPIC

Maggis Aspic Jelly in a small mould daintily served with two or three small strips of toast will be a welcome change from "beef tea."

MEAT ASPIC

Cooked fresh sausage meat or meat left over from the joints may be used minced. Drop the meat into the jelly before setting and serve with a little watercress or cress.

FISH ASPIC

Cod or Salmon remaining from the boiled fish can be used, also prawns or shrimps. Fill the mould $\frac{3}{4}$ full and when nearly set put in the flakes of fish and fill up.

ASPIC SANDWICHES

Spread the slices of bread with margarine and top with a thin layer of jelly. Add grated cheese, watercress, mustard and cress, meat or fish paste.

JELLIED BEEF SOUP



A rich jellied beef soup may be made instantly with the addition of boiling water. Greatly appreciated by Fire-Watchers.



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