

News at random

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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

Reports — not official — which appeared in the Swiss press sporadically since the end of last month indicate that the Washington negotiations have broken down. The Swiss delegation is said to insist on the priority of Swiss claims, i.e. that debts contracted by Germany before and during the war should be settled before the allied demand for the surrender of German assets can be entertained. Some English papers pretend to know that our delegation has offered to turn over to the allies "£15,000,000 out of the £37,000,000" supposed to have been deposited with our banks during the war. On the 22nd inst. vague reports reached the English papers that an agreement has been concluded and the following is taken from "The Times"; no mention is made of the many vital details such as the black list and the frozen bank balances in the U.S.A.

"Delegations representing France, Britain, and the United States have arrived at agreement with a Swiss delegation on the division of German holdings in Switzerland, and concerning gold received by Switzerland from Germany. Negotiations had been going on for several weeks.

The proceeds of the liquidation will be divided equally between the allies as trustees for countries claiming reparations and Switzerland. The allies will turn over the funds they obtain to the Inter-Allied Reparations Agency for the rehabilitation of countries devastated or depleted by Germany. They will accept a payment of 250,000,000 Swiss francs (about £14,000,000), in consideration of which the Governments which have signed the Paris reparations agreement will waive their claims and those of their central banks for restitution from Switzerland of monetary gold. This amount also will be divided in accordance with the Paris agreement."

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Following the resumption of diplomatic relations with Russia the Federal Council has appointed Col. Hermann Flückiger to the post of Swiss Minister in Moscow. He is a lawyer by profession and for many years had an extensive practice in Biel as a notary. In the army, after having been in charge of a frontier

brigade, Col. Flückiger was advanced in January 1941 to the command of the third division from which he retired at the end of December 1944. The colonel emerged into prominence by his successful chairmanship last September over the Russia-Swiss military commission in regard to our treatment of Russian refugees and internees, the felicitous outcome of which largely paved the way to the present friendly relations with the Soviet Union — relations which in 1924 had been broken off as the sequence of an unpleasant incident. Col. Flückiger was born in 1885 at Barga (Berne) and has never been in the diplomatic service. The Russian Minister to Switzerland, Mr. Anatoly Kulaschenkow, is a young diplomat of 34 years who has already held important posts in Italy, Persia, Turkey and Greece.

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At the delegates' meeting of the Swiss liberal party held at St. Gall, Federal President Kobelt praised the distinguished services of Federal Councillor Petitpierre, our foreign minister, to whom in the first instance we were indebted for the re-establishment of normal relations with Russia and which thereby removed the first obstacle in the way of a possible co-operation with UNO. Federal Councillor Petitpierre pointed out that Switzerland was the only state in the constitution of which neutrality was a fundamental article; he did not believe that we could be asked to change our constitution in order to become eligible for UNO.

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The first of May manifestations organised in all Swiss towns passed off peacefully, large crowds attending everywhere. The banners and streamers displayed the usual slogans such as "Increase in Wages", "Old-age Insurance", "Equality of rights in Switzerland", "Participation in UNO" (Geneva), and "Break off with Franco regime" (Berne). Federal Councillor Nobs addressed the crowd at Berne and expressed the

CITY SWISS CLUB

Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que la prochaine ASSEMBLÉE MENSUELLE aura lieu **Lundi, le 17 juin, 1946, au Dorchester Hotel, Londres, W.1, à 6.30**, le dîner commencera à 7 heures.

SIR CHARLES PETRIE
nous parlera au sujet:

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LE COMITÉ.

hope that Switzerland would be able to join the world security organisation without surrendering her neutrality and without taking part in future quarrels among nations. He also dwelt on the unsatisfactory state of the Federal finances. The last war had cost our country about five times as much as the previous one; in 1913 the assets of the Confederation amounted to about 100 milliard francs which in 1920 was converted into an indebtedness of 1,2 milliard rose in 1920 to 1,5 milliard and stood now at 8,5 milliard francs.

Cantonal

Dr. Caspar Diethelm, a well-known lawyer and student of local history, died in Sarnen at the age of 56; he has been a member of the cantonal council and several municipal institutions.

The bathing establishment, boathouse and restaurant Fürigen near Standsstad has been destroyed completely by a fire that broke out early on Tuesday morning, May 14th.

The persistent shortage of farm hands in the canton Zurich has been mitigated by the importation of 600 agriculturalists of both sexes from Upper Italy.

The widely known author and poet Edgar Chapuis, a vaudois, celebrated his sixtieth anniversary on April 30th; he resides in Zurich and his many novels and lyrics written in German are very popular.

Four election rounds were necessary at the Landsgemeinde in Glaris until the requisite votes were obtained for the new Landammann Dr. Rudolf Stüssi; he takes the place of the former Ständerat Dr. Mercier. Several minor proposals were sanctioned without opposition.

Of all the Swiss towns Berne disposes of the smallest number of cinemas, namely eight. Zurich takes pride in 29, Geneva 20, Basle 15 and Lausanne eleven.

In the elections for 194 members of the Grosse Rat in Berne the two parties of the left scored a victory, though not sufficiently decisive to gain control of the council. The socialists increased their mandates from 55 to 69 and the new "party of labour" marched up with three newcomers.

A fantastic and probably ruinous sum of over 200,000 francs, representing costs, fines and repayments, will have to be found by the Bernese boot and shoe dealer Schneider. He was charged with having sold to the Red Cross and another charitable institution 118,000 pairs of second-hand shoes at exorbitant prices from which his profits would have been not far short of a quarter of a million francs; through the timely intervention of the police, he had so far netted 60,000 francs only. The enterprising shoe merchant will also have to retire for ten months into a prison cell.

After two days' deliberations the Basle criminal court fined the editor of the local "Vorwärts" 400 francs for slandering the editor of the "Badener Tagblatt." During the recent election campaign the Vorwärts stated, among other pungent epithets, that his opposite in Baden was a former frontist and therefore not different from a nazi and a most disreputable person who had ever besmeared the soil of Switzerland.

A few days after the above proceedings, Peter Surava (alias Hirsch), described as the director of the Basle "Vorwärts," now an extreme-left publication, was arrested at the instance of the Berne police; he is charged with the forging of documents and attempted frauds while employed as editor of the "Nation," a well-known socialist paper. An accomplice in Zurich, engaged in the distribution of papers, was also arrested.

A peculiar commotion in the village of Surava (in the Grisons near Tiefenkastel) followed the news of the above arrest. Some months ago proceedings were initiated by the villagers to prevent the one-time Hirsch from usurping their name as a new pseudonyme. Now, protests are lodged against the Berne and Basle police courts for interfering with the pending legal action and a resolution, addressed to the cantonal government, has been passed asking for power to immediately change the name of the village to Hirschingen.

Less than 40% of the electorate went to the polls when the unopposed socialist H. Abegg was elected a Regierungsrat. By a small majority a bill was passed which paves the way for civil servants, teachers and pastors to be elected members of the new Landrat.

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Damage of about a quarter of a million francs was caused by a fire which broke out on May 15th in the Gipsfabrik Läuferlingen (Baselland). Thanks to the prompt assistance of the fire brigades from Liestal and Olten the conflagration was mastered within a couple of hours.

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In a frantic endeavour to resist the theft of a postal bag containing 150,000 francs mostly in notes, two postmen lost their lives at Wil (St. Gall). They are Mathias Brunner, aged 60, and Paul Gasser, aged 31. They were taking the money one afternoon from the post office to the local branch of the Kantonalbank; as Brunner lifted the bag from the handbarrow at the entrance of the bank he was shot in the neck and collapsed. The robber with lightning speed snatched the bag and ran to a waiting car followed by Gasser, who vainly tried to regain the bag; he received a fatal shot in the chest and the gangster was able to drive away in great haste and with marvellous precision without hindrance. Thorough investigations helped by co-incidences enabled the police to arrest after two days the miscreant in the person of the 34-year old Felix Stamm, a motor mechanic by trade. The stolen chevrolet car was found discarded in a wood in the canton Thurgau about six miles away from Wil. An apartment owner in St. Gall had reported some strange occurrences and Stamm was subsequently secured in his own lodgings; he is a known criminal but, with the help of plastic surgery, had so far succeeded in hiding his identity. So far he has only admitted the theft of the car and no trace of the postbag or its contents have been discovered.

The temperance movement in the canton Aargau has addressed an urgent appeal to the Federal Council to restrict to a minimum the fermentation of malt, fruit and grape; it is considered a normal and practicable contribution of Switzerland towards the present fight against famine.

* * *

Against a decision of the Lugano council to allow the construction of an amphitheatre for open-air concerts and moving picture shows a protest has been lodged backed by sufficient signatures to demand a people's vote.

Consternation has been caused in the little village of Corticiasca by the wide firing of an artillery platoon that was undergoing training one morning in Magadino along the lago Maggiore and was aiming in the direction of the Val Colla. Four heavy projectiles dropped in or near Corticiasca but by a miracle nobody was hurt. Apart from broken windows, a two-meter wide crater in the middle of the village was the only damage recorded.

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The historic church steeple of Bex, damaged by the recent earthquake, has now been restored. Photographs, MSS and newspapers relating to the catastrophe have been deposited in the globe of the tower.

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A people's initiative demand supported by the necessary number of signatures in the canton Vaud seeks to declare the 1st of August a public holiday.

* * *

The former Federal chancellor, Georges Bovet, died in Lausanne at the age of 72. For ten years from 1934 he occupied the distinguished post with exemplary efficiency and thoroughness; he was first, in 1910, an ordinary translator in the administration and by passing through the different stages acquired a unique experience for the ultimate object of his ambition.

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Neuchâtel is the latest town that voices the desire for an airfield; negotiations are in progress with the adjoining communes of Boudry and Colombier for the acquisition of a suitable ground.

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A devastating hailstorm over the region between Concise and Vaumarcus along the lake of Neuchâtel is reported to have ravaged wide tracts; all the fruit trees and three quarters of the corn and vintage districts are said to have been rendered barren.

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Based on a judicial enquiry and in agreement with the Federal Council, George Oltramare, the former frontist, has been temporarily released from detention.

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It does not always constitute an enjoyment to gather "how others see us" but the following extracts from a report sent by a casual correspondent to the

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"Sunday Express," May 12th, may gladden the hearts of some of our Genevese subscribers:

"The Genevese are furious cyclists. One in two of the population has a bicycle and 90,000 in a small town which one can cross on foot in half an hour is quite a lot.

The local people prefer to live cramped inside the town in modern flats rather than ten minutes outside in cottages.

The mentality of the citizens of Geneva is ardently Swiss, patriotic and freedom-loving.

Bordering on France, they have imbibed some of the carefree customs and the *laissez-faire* of the French. They take life easy, and don't worry about the great events that fill the newspapers in other countries.

Far more important to them is the fact that the Genevese police have discarded their dark blue winter uniforms for pale blue summer attire, that a century old lime tree has its first flowers, or that a 4 lb. trout has been caught in the lake.

A feature of this sun-drenched town is the life of the café terraces.

Here at aperitif time all important transactions are effected, from buying a car to the clandestine purchase of foreign money or gold for smuggling into France.

Switzerland is the only country in Europe and Geneva the only town in Switzerland where one can get any kind of drink one desires. Tobacconists are piled high with cigarettes of every brand and the

main streets are crammed with jewellers' shops, their windows filled with watches.

You can tell these shops at a distance, as outside each you will see a bunch of American soldiers on leave. They seem to spend the greater part of their time looking at watches, and then selling their own kit to be able to buy. The number of civilians now wearing khaki shirts and trousers gives one the impression of being in an occupied country.

The British are loved here, and it is hoped by all that travel problems will soon disappear and the town be filled again with short-sighted old ladies in extraordinary hats and with Baedekers under their arms, asking incongruous questions in excruciating French."

Traffic

Alluring descriptions appear in the Swiss press about the motor service between Sweden and Switzerland which is now in operation. The coaches are painted in a bright blue which has given rise to the name "blue dream" for the whole of the trip. Every possible comfort is provided and the miniature kitchen and buffet is run on pre-war Scandinavian culinary assortments, even champagne being obtainable. The 38 seats are sold out weeks before departures. The whole enterprise constitutes a triumph of organisation and forethought as the strictly controlled occupation zones in Germany seem to be negotiated without undue delays and without upsetting the advertised timetable.

Another sector of the old railway line Schaffhausen-Romanshorn has now been transformed and the first electric train passed over the 19 km. stretch Romanshorn-Kreuzlingen on the 4th of this month; the annual amount of coal previously consumed on this line reached 2,260 tons, costing nearly 340,000 francs.

A new international autobus service commenced operations between Prague and Paris prompted by the continued overcrowding of the Arlberg express. Passengers spend the night at Basle in either direction.

It is to be expected that the present negotiations with the allied chief of railway communications will lead to an early resumption of railway traffic between Sweden and Switzerland.

Economics

The general hope of an early abolition of all rationing in our country is experiencing a slight set-back though food supplies have been approaching normal conditions. Prompted by the desire to relieve within our means the food shortage in Europe it has been decided to postpone the already contracted purchase of the annual quota of bread cereals in the anticipation that this year's home harvest may fill the gap. As from the 1st of June the daily bread ration will be reduced from 250 to 225 gr. (9 to 8 oz.). The sugar ration remains but sweets, honey and preserved fruit have already come off the control. Further retrenchments are to be expected during the summer in the supply of farinaceous products, fats, cheese, oats and confiture. As elsewhere, some alleviation is foreshadowed by a slight increase in the meat ration. Instead of the former three meatless days in hotels and restaurants, two only — Wednesday and Friday — are adhered to.

VARIED AND APPETISING



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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."

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.

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.

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

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* * *

The favourable trade conditions are reflected by the large number of commercial vacancies registered during the first three months this year with the employment office of the Schweiz. Kaufmännische Verein. For the 3,200 clerical posts to be filled there were no more than 2,100 applicants; half of the latter were already in employment and merely wished to improve their positions.

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During the last year the Federal mint stamped, amongst others, 3½ million 20 francs pieces for the National Bank.

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Compulsory measures to combat the destruction of fruit trees caused by the "San José" shield-louse have been decreed by the Federal Council; a special tax will be levied on all imports of fruit and plants in order to finance this campaign of extermination.

* * *

A provisional trade agreement to remain in force until June 1947 has been concluded with Hungary. While no credit or loan has been arranged, financial resources have been made available to Hungary until her currency and export facilities have improved to more normal conditions. An immediate export of certain food stuffs, cattle for breeding, machines and chemicals is anticipated against which we are to receive at some later date wines, poultry, eggs, timber, pharmaceutical plants, etc. Swiss exporters will be reimbursed through the Swiss clearing office.

* * *

A national conference of workers in the building trade held at Berne accepted an offer by the employers granting a general rise in wages. The hourly rate is increased by 22 cts. in the five large towns, by 20 cts. in smaller towns and by 18 to 15 cts. in specified rural districts; in addition extra payments for annual holidays are conceded. The new agreement affects about 70,000 craftsmen and labourers and disposes of the acute tension that dominated the building trades for some time.

* * *

The personnel of the Federal administration is now more than four times as large as it was in 1913; in the customs section the increase has been 72% only while in the postal service and the railways employment has remained practically stationary.

Tobacco growing is reaching record figures. The cultivated area extends now over 1,300 ha. of which about 25% each are found in the cantons of Valais, Fribourg and Ticino. In the Broye valley 1,173 tons, the highest ever, were produced last year with a value of 2,8 million francs.

* * *

Last year about 5,500 medical practitioners were registered throughout the country. They seem to be in great demand in Geneva where every 650 inhabitants claim a "docteur"; in the canton Zurich one is required for every 900 and in Appenzell IRH a physician's clientele reaches 2,600.

* * *

A new Swiss invention shown at the Basle Fair and stated to attract the biggest crowds at its stand is the "Isophone". It records messages when one's own phone is left unattended; the rent of this tattling attachment is about £8.10.0 per month. And here is a short report about the Basle Fair published in "The Times," May 16th:

"During the 10 days of the Basle trade fair, which has just closed, the exhibition buildings were visited by 425,600 persons. This is an increase of 65,000 on last year's figures and is the highest on record. More than 12,600 were visitors from foreign countries. The success of the fair has drawn attention to the eminently favourable economic situation of Switzerland, which is now enjoying an unexpected period of trade prosperity. Unemployment figures have never been so low. The attractions of industry have caused a scarcity of labour in the agricultural and building trades. Requests to the Federal authorities for permission to bring in foreign workers have greatly increased.

It has been found necessary to warn the business community that the present high demand for Swiss goods is artificial, in that it is merely the reflex of the immediate needs of foreign countries, and that it will not last. The Federal Council has warned industrial firms against over-employment and over-expansion and has counselled them to defer wherever possible expanding their works and enlarging their staffs."

* * *

An international fur and leather fair will be held at Basle from the 2nd to the 8th of September.

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Humanitarian

A strange cargo has been deposited by two American army lorries at St. Margrethen: it consisted of 45 Swiss who had been members of a German S.S. unit. They have now been placed in an isolation camp under a military guard pending a strict investigation into their national status; most of them, it is surmised, are deserters and they may have been deprived of their Swiss nationality in which case they will be returned to the country of their adoption.

* * *

The office for the care of war refugees is being liquidated within the next few weeks. A special train left Basle at the beginning of this month repatriating 430 German military internees, 220 civilians and 81 employees of the diplomatic and consular services. About 300 Germans had to be left behind as for various reasons they refused to return to their fatherland; for the present they will be settled under police supervision in a separate camp in the Jura. There are still some Polish, French and Russian refugees (the latter in the Aargau) to be dealt with; their plight is desperate as a good many of them prefer to stay where they are now; amongst the Russians suicide is a common way out of their misery as the Soviet seems to insist on their surrender.

* * *

The Federal Council is submitting a message to the two houses of parliament which will be dealt with at one of the June sittings and which attempts to settle the future of compatriots who have been repatriated from belligerent countries. Altogether about 60,000 were forced to return — about 130,000 managed to cling to their precarious place of abode — and the catalogue of loss and damage reached the stupendous amount of 876 millions francs; the Federal Council has fixed a sum of 75 million francs (125 francs each) towards efforts to put them on their feet again, i.e. to find them similar employment or teach them a new promising trade. As regards the heavy losses the government cannot accept any responsibility but will continue its exertions to secure some compensation and the unfreezing of credits (mostly accumulated savings).

* * *

Over 14 million "Pro Juventute" stamps and postcards were sold last December and the amount of 1.69 million francs will go to a welfare fund for juveniles past the school age.

* * *

Here is a cutting from "The Times," May 21st:

"The Joint War Organisation of the Red Cross and St. John has made "a parting gift" of £100,000 to the International Red Cross in Geneva as a token of its deep appreciation of the inestimable services rendered to British prisoners of war and of its co-operation in the work of the War Organization in many other difficult tasks of the war. The Scottish branch of the British Red Cross Society has joined in the gift by adding £15,000.

M. Max Huber, the acting president of the International Red Cross, in expressing "utmost gratitude and profound relief" to Field-Marshal Lord Chetwode, the chairman of the executive committee, Red Cross and St. John, said so great a financial respite in their obligations made all the difference between "the pursuit of our present endeavour or relinquishing many essential parts of it." M. Huber added:—"Your gift comes at a moment when the problem of maintaining our traditional activity is at its most acute, owing to various circumstances attending the end of this war."

—oo—

Talking of serious matters we have come across an address delivered at the Christian World Exhibition by another churchman, perhaps not yet world-famous, and which has found publicity in the English press. We do not like readers to miss it and the following extract is taken from the "Caterham Weekly Press," May 10th:

"The Rev. Marcel Pradervand said when the war ended many people thought the dawn of a new world had come and to-day there was a feeling of disappointment that, despite the sacrifices made, the unity of the world was not yet complete. But how could the war have created a new world? It could not change man. We were living in a world in which there were great opportunities for constructive forces. Among these forces, which gave us hope for the future, was the Christian Church, working towards the gradual unity of mankind. Although some people thought the Church was dead, it was still alive and was working for a new conception of human relations.

During the recent war, there was a great unity among Christians. It was something very different to what happened during the 1914-18 war when the Christian Churches in every country took sides with their Governments and attacked one another bitterly. "I am Swiss," went on M. Pradervand. "I love my country, but my first loyalty is to Christ. There is growing in every Church the feeling that Christians belong first to Christ. The Church stands for a united world, a world in which there is room for different traditions, different ways of living but in which there is no room for hatred or misunderstanding. It also stands for a just peace. If, in the peace, there are injustices the Church will fight against them because it is only on justice that a lasting peace can be built."

After remarking that the Church was concerned that there should be equal opportunities for all races, M. Pradervand said it also stood for the value of the individual. It would not be possible to build a new world without that respect for every individual life. The Church offered a new basis for reconstruction

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and the Christian message had a great relevance to the world situation. It was our only hope. The Church in this country occupied a central position as the Christians of the Continent looked to Britain for guidance. In the years to come it would be our responsibility and privilege."

* * *

A matter of interest to holiday makers is supplied by recent court proceedings before the Eastbourne magistrates. Three Swiss girl students, members of a local boarding school, left this country for a couple of weeks to visit their parents; their ration books remained in the possession of the housekeeper who subsequently during their absence drew some of the rations. The principal and housekeeper were summoned by the Food Enforcement Officer with the result that they were fined £36 including costs.

* * *

The bad luck as we prefer to call it, seems to sway our footballers even when they have the advantage of playing at home. The West Ham F.C. on their Swiss tour could not be beaten: they pounded Lausanne 7-1, Lucerne 5-0, Zug 5-1, Grenchen lost the odd goal out of five and a combined team at Zurich had an even share in the four goals. An international game at Basle against Holland gave the visitors a victory of seven to one. It seems clear that our players will have to change their tactics when they compete against first class foreign teams.

* * *

A new game called football-chess, is according to the "Star," May 15th, well established in Switzerland. It is the first time we have heard of it but some of our

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readers may wish, no doubt, to match themselves against their grandchildren and obtain a book of rules after having read the following:

"Its inventor is Swiss-French M. Henri Boissier who came to England to report the international soccer match last Saturday for 20 Swiss newspapers.

The game, "Football-Chess," is now well established in Switzerland. It is played on an oversize chess board 22 squares long by 15 squares wide, with 11 pawns on each side representing the players.

Pawns can be moved in any direction and all the rules of football are observed — except fouls — the object being to get the ball into the five squared goal on the base line.

M. Boissier, who has spent 20 years perfecting the game, says that the only person whom he is afraid might beat him is his ten-year-old daughter Evelyne."

* * *

According to the latest information the winter sports events to the Olympic Games will be contested at St. Moritz in February, 1948.

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A world-famous theologian is remembered on his 60th anniversary by the "Sussan Daily News," May 13th:

"The famous Swiss professor, Karl Barth, formerly of Bonn University, thence dismissed in 1935 because he refused to take an oath of allegiance to Hitler as a State official, was 60 on Friday. He is Professor of Theology at Basle, but for this term has gone back to Bonn. The Bishop of Chichester (Dr. G. K. A. Bell) and the Dean (the Very Rev. A. S. Duncan-Jones) are among the signatories of a letter of greeting in the following terms:—

"We who sign this letter are men of different confessions in Great Britain, and belong to various theological schools, some of them very different from that in which you are so famous a teacher. But we unite to-day in offering you this tribute of heartfelt admiration and respect on the occasion of your sixtieth birthday.

"We salute you as a great Christian prophet who in dark and dangerous times withstood the enemy in Germany with undaunted courage and gave so superb a lead to the Evangelical Church in its conflict with the National Socialist State. We salute you also especially with a thankful recognition of the stand you made in your own country's championship of freedom throughout the war, and of the letter you addressed to your Christian brethren in Great Britain.

"With you we rejoice in the overthrow of the enemy; and with you we hope and pray that by God's help Germany purified and healed, may yet find a true and peaceable place in the family of nations."

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