

The "Swiss Observer" thirty years ago

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THE "SWISS OBSERVER" THIRTY YEARS AGO

In the first issue in May 1938, we read that Switzerland planned to strengthen her defences in order to make her more prepared to meet a sudden surprise attack. The Government's proposals also included an extension from 13 to 18 days of the annual refresher course. The Governor of Rome had informed the Swiss Minister in Italy that the square on which the Swiss Legation was situated, would be called "Piazza Helvetia". City Swiss Club, Swiss Accordion Club and Swiss Y.M.C.A. had all had a meeting, celebration (Golden Jubilee of the Y.M.C.A.) or dance.

On 14th May, it was reported that Swiss unemployment figures had gone down by 10,400 to 60,300 in a year. Major Paul de Vallière's lecture to the N.S.H. "Comment la Suisse est née — Premières Luttes — Le Secret de sa Vitalité" was reported in full.

The following issue carried the first part of an article (U.S.A.) about the "Paradox of the Satisfied Swiss", an article on "Pour la Défense Spirituelle" and a reprint from "The Times" on "Swiss Neutrality". In contrast, there were reports on Swiss football and on detailed arrangements for the Swiss Sports, at that time a regular fixture in the life of the Swiss Colony.

In the last issue of May 1938, there was more football news from Switzerland and the first part of a report on a well-known historian's lecture on the "European Situation"; Dr. G. P. Gooch had once again been at the Swiss Mercantile Society. How remarkably correct have proved most of his predictions! There was a news item relating to a Swiss General of the U.S.A., Brigadier-General Léon A. Matile (Neuchâtel) who had just died at the age of 94 and been buried with military honours.

In the first issue of June 1938, a report was published of a German map which included nearly the whole of Switzerland in the territory of the greater Germany. The Federal Council had also extended a previous decree which would now not only cover Communist but also Nazi propaganda "likely to endanger the State". Switzerland's population was declining, and it was feared that by 1960, there would be 100,000 fewer inhabitants than the four million odd in 1938. The country had at that time one of the lowest birthrates in the world.

In the next issue, it was said that the Swiss Olympic Committee had decided that Switzerland would not take part in the Olympic Games in Japan in 1940, if "Japan was still in a state of war one year before the beginning of the Games". There was a long report on the Annual Dinner and Dance of the Union Helvetia at their premises in Gerrard Place, W.1. There was a statement that La Chaux-de-Fonds was the cheapest town in Switzerland, followed by Bienne, with Davos the most expensive. Under Swiss Church news, the Confirmation of no fewer than eleven boys and girls, including Edith Sommer and Paula Haberstick and a negro remembered by the writer of these notes as a pretty girl speaking impeccable "Baseldytsch".

The number published on 18th June was the 19th anniversary issue printed on glossy art paper, twelve as against its usual four pages (twice today's size). Adolf Hitler had assured the new Swiss Minister in Berlin that he thought the maintenance of Switzerland's neutrality of greatest importance. A holiday home had been opened for the Swiss abroad at Castle Rhaezuens in the Grisons. Mr. Eusebio wrote on the "Unione Ticinese di Londra,

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Sezione Autonoma della Pro Ticino". The World Transport Agency celebrated its silver jubilee (*and still today, we are happy to count the firm among our regular advertisers and now congratulate it on its 55th anniversary*). "*Pan am Berge, irgendwo im Engadin*" published an article on "*Vom Ausland-Schweizertum, draussen und daheim*". It contained an appeal to remain abroad and not to burden the Swiss labour market even more. Among the 90,000 unemployed, there were apparently 10% Swiss from abroad. There were the sad cases of Swiss who had lost everything in Spain and China, who had refused to wear the swastika on their lapels and had to leave their country of residence. (*There was no Solidarity Fund for the Swiss Abroad in those days — makes one think, doesn't it? Today, we have a chance to insure against just that kind of misfortune.*) The article also contained an appeal to join the Swiss organisation of *Heimgekehrter Auslandschweizer*, founded thanks to the initiative of a great friend of ours, the then National Councillor Ph. Schmid-Ruedin. There was a preview of the Swiss National Exhibition to be held in Zurich in 1939, and a report of the *Service d'Installation* of Monsieur le Pasteur M. Pradervand at the Eglise Suisse in London.

In the last issue in June 1938 we read that the electrification of Swiss railways had cost 800 million francs to date, 300 of which had been spent on over 500 electric engines. Nearly two pages were covered with a detailed report on the 69th Fête Suisse held in London and attended by 1,499 people. The Swiss Orchestral Society under Mr. Dick was still in existence at that time, and the Schmid Family of the Glendower Hotel were in charge of refreshments in Swiss style. Pastor Hahn's prayer, Mr. A. F.

Suter's presidential address and the Swiss Minister's speech had apparently all met with the same fate — half the people could not hear a word!

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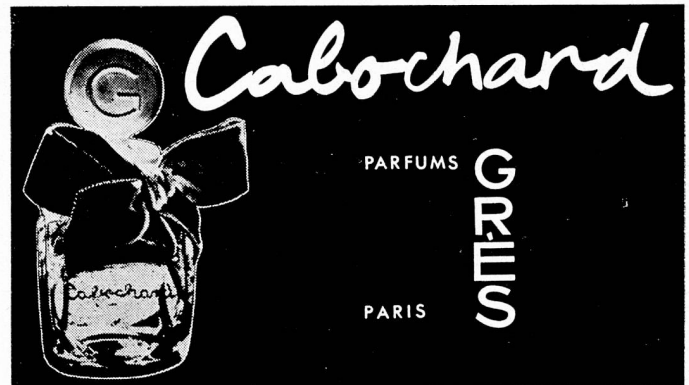
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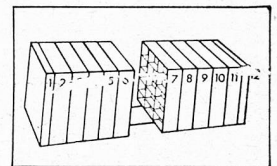


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