

Industry helps farmers in Unique Swiss experiment

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1953)**

Heft 1212

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693955>

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Essi hanno esplorato la città, fissando all'obiettivo i punti più attraenti del diorama luganese.

LOCARNO — Dopo un viaggio di oltre 10 giorni è tornata felicemente la corale "Vos da Locarno". Partita il 30 luglio, la società, per incarico confidatole, aprì col canto del Salmo Svizzero, l'incontro europeo di canto e di musica organizzato a Neustadt in Holstein, Germania. Significativo il fatto che l'onore dell'apertura del festival fu assegnato ad una società svizzera proprio nella ricorrenza del 1° agosto.

ASCONA — Per l'ottava volta si sono ripetute quest'anno le "Settimane Musicali di Ascona". Hanno partecipato esecutori di grido mondiale quali Yehudi Menuhin e Arturo Goldschmidt, Luciano Rosada e l'orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli e Roberto F. Denzler, le cantanti Elisabeth Schwarzkopf e Victoria de los Angeles, nonché la Corale della Cattedrale di Strasburgo.

CAVERGNO — Mentre una sciolta di operai attendeva all'armatura dell'ultimo tratto della galleria a pelo libero Caveragno-Mosogno, sabato 22 agosto scorso, ad un centinaio di metri dal portale nord, una massa di terriccio e di blocchi di roccia, fra cui alcuni del peso di decine di quintali e per un complesso di 80 mc precipitava sulle armature scardinandole e provocandone la caduta. Un operaio rimase pressochè illeso, ma gli altri cinque rimasero imprigionati e schiacciati sotto l'enorme peso.

PIOTTA — Verso le 11 di mercoledì, 19 agosto, un velivolo "C36" mentre volava, poco dopo aver decollato dalla pista, all'altezza del Sanatorio Cantonale, in linea diretta col margine nord del campo d'aviazione d'Ambri, per cause non ancora accertate, l'aereo perdeva rapidamente quota e precipitava al suolo fra due stalle ad una decina di metri dall'abitato di Piotta, incendiandosi. Il pilota Jacques Nauer da Bremgarten (Argovia) venne trovato morto presso i resti dell'apparecchio.

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WHOLESALE & SHIPPING

INDUSTRY HELPS FARMERS IN UNIQUE SWISS EXPERIMENT.

by DEREK MEAKIN.

Prosperity is returning to a little Swiss village where, not long ago, the farmers faced ruin and the young men and women were leaving the valley which their ancestors had farmed for years for more profitable occupations in the cities.

For years Swiss farmers have been encountering ever-increasing difficulties. With higher running costs making it uneconomical for them to continue, small farms which have been in the same family for generations have been disappearing, many being swallowed up by the larger farms who alone can manage to pay their way.

But no where have the difficulties been so acute as in the thankless Canton of the Valais, where nature forces farmers to till soil that is neither flat nor very fertile. And typical of the rest of the Canton is the Alpine village of St. Nicholas, perched 3,390 feet above the sea in a valley of the same name.

St. Nicholas was chosen by the industrialists as an ideal place to start an experiment which, they said, would be the economic salvation of Switzerland's rural areas.

An important firm making electrical equipment in the town of Solothurn sent its experts to St. Nicholas, and it was on their advice that it took over a derelict hotel and turned it into a workshop.

Soon 300 countryfolk, men and women, young and old, were hard at work under the eyes of instructors, and after a short training were able to turn out the same precision articles as city workers in the parent factory.



The result was new life for the valley that once had no future. Since the factory opened more than 30 new houses have been built, and others repaired and renovated. All the houses have running water for the first time, a secondary school has been built, and the village church with its quaint cupola that is listed among the art treasures of rural Switzerland has been enlarged.

But this does not mean that the people of St. Nicholas have forsaken the land that has been their lifeblood for many centuries.

On the contrary, the coming of industry has not only meant a renaissance of the village but a reawakening of interest in agriculture among the inhabitants.

The drift away from the valley has been stopped completely, and many of the natives forced by increasing hardship to seek work in other parts of Switzerland or, in some cases, further afield in France and Italy have returned home. Farmers' wives and daughters have found that factory work means more money for less effort. And specially-arranged shifts give the men the opportunity of doing spare-time work in the fields. Above all the factory wages themselves are going back into the land, for the heavy wage-packets are helping to buy badly-needed fertilisers, seeds and new equipment.

Since 1941 the total number of people in Switzerland has jumped by almost half a million, but a survey of rural communities has shown that one out of every three has less inhabitants than ten years ago.

Even so, the decline goes back far longer than that. A hundred years ago 50 per cent of the Swiss population worked on the land. Today the figure is only 20 per cent.

They face a crisis.

Consequently the St. Nicholas experiment is being watched with great interest throughout the Canton of the Valais. For the Valaisans are facing a crisis more serious than anywhere else in Switzerland. Not only have their costs doubled in the last few years, but the market is no longer as prosperous as it was.

Even in the most highly cultivated area of the Canton — the plain through which runs the River Rhone — there are fears for the future. Year by year thousands of kilos of fruit — apples, peaches, apricots, pears and strawberries — have to be thrown

away because they cannot be sold on the Swiss home market, overloaded with cheaper foreign products. Tons of tomatoes are left to rot because sales cannot be assured.

But the Valley of the Rhone accounts for only a small part of the Canton. The rest is made up of many little rocky valleys where the difficult pasture land is overshadowed by peaks crowned with all-the-year-round snow.

To the Valaisan farmer the arable land is so dear that every inch of it is put to use. Often pastures run right to the foot of glaciers and up to the snow line.

Not far away from St. Nicholas at Findelen, lying above the winter sports and climbing resort of Zermatt, are the highest cornfields in the Alps. Here rye grows at a height of 7,000 feet. And in the Valais, too, are found the highest vineyards in Switzerland — 4,000 feet above sea level.

In the Canton is found the poorest land in the whole country. One-fifth of it consists of glaciers and two fifths irrigated mountain country. So unproductive is it, in fact, that despite it being the third largest of Switzerland's 23 cantons it contains only a 33rd of the total tillable land.

Yet, thanks to the industrialists, the future of St. Nicholas, just one small area in this vast Canton, has turned from depression to one of growing prosperity.

If other firms take up the idea among other rural communities it may mean the saving of many more small farmers who are now finding it so difficult to make ends meet.



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