

Swiss wines survive

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EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME FOR YOUNG SWISS ABROAD

A new scheme has been evolved by the "Fondation Secours aux Suisses", the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, and the "Fondation Suisse Pro Juventute". The aims are not only to provide the funds for a young Swiss to be educated in Switzerland, but also to advise as to the method best suited to the applicant's abilities and background. Once the best training has been chosen the "Ausbildungswerk" will plan the whole course of studies or training as well as arrange for suitable lodgings. Where financial support is needed scholarships can be provided. In addition, the scheme aims at introducing young Swiss from abroad to their homeland by choosing suitable training centres, by fostering relations between the young student and young people in Switzerland, and by arranging special meetings and functions at which the young Swiss from abroad will be able to get to know and love Switzerland.

The services of the scheme ("Ausbildungswerk für junge Auslandschweizer", "Association pour la Formation des jeunes Suisses à l'Etranger", "Associazione per la Formazione dei giovani Svizzeri all'Estero") are available to young Swiss between 10 and 25, exceptionally also to older people. Information may be obtained at the Swiss Embassy, 18 Montagu Place, London W.1.

SWISS WINES SURVIVE

At about this time each year thousands of Britons and Americans take their first cautious sip of Swiss wine, at the Alpine winter resorts. If lucky they will soon learn that there is a good rosé called Malanser from the valley near Chur, that the best whites are perhaps Yvorne and Dézaley and the preferred reds come from the Valais and Neuchâtel cantons. They will be well advised to buy them in bottle, not in carafe; some of the cheaper whites tend to be acid. They will find that Fendant served in tumblers in the lesser taverns can be quite sharp and unrewarding. But, by using discretion, one soon comes to like the better white wines of the country.

The reds are another matter. The Swiss themselves can often be seen drinking a Beaujolais or a Veltliner (their name for the Italian wine from northern Lombardy) instead of Dôle, the best-known red from their own upper Rhône valley. Yet much has been done in recent years to improve fullness and texture by growing more Pinot Noir grapes (the red Burgundy vine). A good Pinot Noir, so labelled, from the Valais or Vaud cantons, when five years old, can produce a fine bottle. The Cortaillod from near Neuchâtel can often be equally good. Production from this last district has been falling off in recent years, partly because of labour shortage; but the wines of Neuchâtel are always well received in certain foreign markets. Though uncommon in England, a white Auvernier or a red Cortaillod is often found in American wine shops. Wines from Neuchâtel and from the Valais are now also sold in Canada. The Swiss Wine Export Bureau at Lausanne maintains a promotional office in North America.

To the average Swiss *vigneron*, however, exports are of minor interest, because of the paternalistic intervention of the federal government in the domestic wine trade. The Swiss are a wine-drinking people and consumption is high. But there is an overbalance of white as against red types in the vines planted. Moreover, grapes tend to be grown on certain steep or gravelled slopes not fit for

other crops, and certain communities would become rapidly depopulated if the vineyards were not kept up.

So for some years now the state has set minimum prices for all varieties, and by controls and purchases has guaranteed these prices. As a result there was for a while an unwanted extension of grape growing to unsuitable soils as peasants in marginal areas sought to take advantage of the subsidy. These grapes were soon declared illegal for purchase; all the same, on dark October nights they were mixed covertly into the crop from legitimate plots. This was a form of bootlegging in the best peasant tradition, comparable with the discovery not so long ago in a corner of the Jura mountains of a score of illicit stills making that forbidden liquor, absinthe.

The authorities finally decided in 1961 to make a disciplinary example of an area near the village of Saxon in the Valais, where illegal plantings persisted. Helicopters were sent and began to spray poison over these plots. But in between his yearly tour of duty in the army every Swiss keeps his rifle at home. Out came these rifles and the helicopters were fired upon. A rebellion, but one that was quickly crushed.

The import of wine is hedged about with regulations; but the Swiss thirst is insatiable, and vast quantities, particularly from France and Italy, are brought in each year. Besides duties there are restrictions on import licences and a quota is attached to each licence. If a wholesaler's trade in foreign vintages begins to expand, he cannot obtain an increase in his quota: his only recourse is to buy wine from some laggard firm whose trade is slipping and whose quota is unfilled.

In principle, no Swiss wine when bought in Switzerland should ever cost as much as any imported French one, but quite a few do. These are well worth looking for; one is *Goût du Conseil*, the best of the *Johannisberg* types from the Valais. As in all wine-producing countries, one should choose the region and type one prefers and then go on to learn more about individual growers. The wine called Dézaley, for instance, comes from several steep slopes between Lausanne and Vevey. Among its many vineyards is one called *Chemin de Fer* — appropriately, since the main line from Paris to Milan runs right past these carefully tended rows of grapes overlooking the lake. The government is now trying to plan a modern super-highway along these and adjoining slopes. At times this results in a legal battle. May the best of the vines win.

(By courtesy of the "Economist", 29th December 1962.)

SHROVETIDE FESTIVITIES IN LUCERNE

Carnival begins in Lucerne on 21st February. The young people of the town forgather in the early morning in front of the Nölly Tower, the Guildhall of the Saffron Guild, to greet the Master, who, as the "Fritschivater", is the central figure of this joyful festival of buffoonery. Their homage is rewarded with thousands of oranges thrown down into the streets by the Fritschivater and his family. The same afternoon the great Carnival procession takes place, to be repeated on the following Monday. In the evenings the hotels, restaurants and inns enjoy a roaring trade; practically every available space seems to be used for dancing, and masked figures prowl in search of "victims", whom they engage in quick-fire repartee. Carnival comes to an end on the night of Shrove Tuesday with the monster concert on the Mühlenplatz, where crowds of "musicians" make a din fit to wake the dead.

(Official Tourist Office, Lucerne.)