

Cultural life in Switzerland

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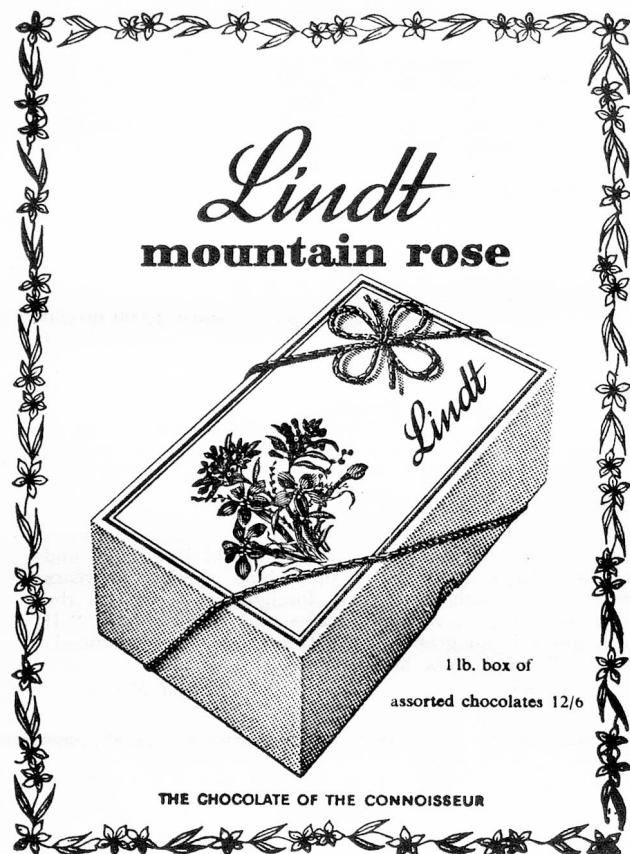
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Golden period for the Chapter Library. No less interesting would it be to retail the story of those fateful years when this treasury of books had to be evacuated in order to preserve them from robbery and fire. Or those times during the Reformation, round about 1530, and during the Villmerger War of 1712, when the Library was exposed to the greatest danger and even lost some of its contents. In spite of all these tricks played by Fate, it always proved possible to save the most precious of these irreplaceable treasures. Gugger von Staudach, in religion Prince Abbot Celestin II, earned for himself a particularly honourable monument, when he began, in 1757, to build a new library, at the same time as a new Collegiate Church. The Master-builders who were called upon to build the Church, devoted all their art and knowledge also to the making of an architectural gem, out of the Library. The Master-builder Peter Thumb, put up the bare stone-work in a very short time. Then the Brothers Gigl of Wessobrunn, furnished the ceilings with the finest Rococo stucco-work, whilst Joseph Wannenmacher painted monumental pictures of four Councils, which, together with his other paintings showed the great mastery possessed by his brush. Gabriel Loser clothed the walls, the columns and the gallery with richly carved cupboard inlaid in noble lines, the intarsia of the floors repeated the designs in the ceilings. With the completion of this building, St. Gall came into possession of a Library, to which nothing could compare, neither in the rest of Switzerland, nor in the neighbouring countries. At last, the ancient and venerable treasures possessed a home that was worthy of them. Moreover, Prince Abbot Beda Angehrn, who completed the construction of the Library, placed considerable means at its disposal so that, for example, in the years elapsing between 1779 and 1791, alone, more than 4,000 very valuable volumes could be freshly procured for the Library.

The entry of the French Army into Switzerland and the downfall of the old Confederation, brought with them new threats to the Monastery and the Library. The monastery fell a victim to them and was suppressed. The Collegiate Library, however, continued to exist. Against all expectations, it was able to save its possessions, and it is with sincere gratitude that we remember the men who created this unique storehouse of treasures, gathered them together and maintained and preserved them for the future generations.

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