

The Bernese "Dance of Death"

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caused a number of deaths. Due to bad weather conditions, no aircraft could be used on rescue operations. In April, there was another forest fire which destroyed a large part of the "Pfyn-Wald" near Sierre, including the area which serves the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich as experimental ground for forestry. 150 men were engaged in fighting the fire. More avalanches descended in April in the Saastal.

The Valais was chosen by several organisations for holding meetings and rallies. Last summer it was the A.G.M. of the Swiss Federation of Invalids at Saas-Fee, a few weeks later a seminar on teaching methods for 500 members from other parts of Switzerland and abroad, and the following week a seminar on traffic discipline, both held in Sion. A thousand delegates of the Beekeepers' Association met at Saas-Fee early in September (in snow!), and the International Hotel Keepers' Association met at Zermatt. Over one hundred delegates from all parts of the world attended. A short while later, the fourth Compitoir opened at Martigny, and at the same time, three hundred grammar school teachers met in Sitten. The Swiss "Wine Academy" held a meeting at Sierre early in October. The six Valais Bishops who had attended the Vatican Council took part in a forum in Sion in December at which several hundred people took part. Federal Councillor Bonvin addressed the gathering on the role of the laymen and public authority in the Church.

In January it was the International Newspaper Publishers who met at Zermatt. The "golden pen of freedom" was awarded to a journalist who had successfully fought for the freedom of the press; the recipient this year was the Kongolese journalist Gabriel Makoso. The Swiss Conference of Bishops held their Annual Meeting at Saint-Maurice on 18th February. Early in May, over 1,200 delegates took part in an international congress in Sion. The organisation they represented was the "Office International des Oeuvres de Formation Civique et d'Action Doctrinale selon le Droit Naturel et Chrétien".

Epiphany and Carnival brought their own festivities, and an exhibition was opened at Martigny, showing the famous art treasures of the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard, as well as exhibits depicting life in the Valais from the Romans to the present. The exhibition will be open for the whole summer.

The All Saints' Chapel on Valéria near Sion, dating back to 1325, is being restored. The Castle ruin of le Tourbillon will also be improved. These historic buildings of Sedunum (Latin for Sion) attract thousands of tourists who swell the numbers of the 18,000 inhabitants considerably in daytime. The main square of the town is the Planta. There were two large hotels, one was demolished to make room for a store, and the other one, the de la Planta, has suffered the same fate. But in spite of many modern buildings, the town is full of picturesque parts which have survived the eight occasions in its turbulent history when Sion was burnt down.

It is in Sion, too, that the oldest "citizenship" of the Valais celebrated her hundredth birthday at the end of March; Madame Alexandrine Gay who had nine children.

The final item concerns wine. 33 million litres were cellared in 1963, 15% less than in the previous year. 26 million litres are white, 7 million red. The famous Fendant accounts for 19, the Johannisberg 6 and the Pinot Noir for 4.7 million litres. Cheers!

(Based on news received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

THE BERNESE "DANCE OF DEATH"

During the last two years at performances for which every seat was sold out, 50,000 spectators were privileged to enjoy the wonderful experience which the greatest Bernese artist of a former age, Niklaus Manuel (1458—1530), who was at once an artist and a painter, gave to succeeding generations in his "Dance of Death", which is a constant reminder of the transience of our mortal life. The Square with its old buildings and its beautiful Cathedral (whose unique portal provides the background for all dance sequences) combines the witnesses of the period in which Niklaus Manuel wrote the series of death dances with the message of the play which is still so topical today. The "Last Judgment" which embellishes the portal of the Cathedral and is one of the sights of the federal capital, dates from the same period.

The Bernese Festival Association, which in 1962 revived the tradition of open-air performances on the Cathedral Square, once interrupted by the second world war, and achieved a remarkable success with Niklaus Manuel's "Dance of Death", will give these performances again in the summer of 1964. A large stand on the Cathedral Square with a seating capacity for 1,800 persons will afford all the spectators an uninterrupted view of the play.

The text of the play, which is entirely faithful to the spirit and intention of the artist, was written by Dr. Emil Wächter, the music being composed by Heinrich Sutermeister. The services of Harald Kreutzberg were secured for the choreography and his appearance in the play itself greatly contributes to its enrichment. Numerous well-known professional and amateur actors are participating under the artistic management of Adolf Spalinger. The 600 participants also include the Berne municipal orchestra, the Berne women's choir, the Berne choral society, the children's choir of the conservatoire and the Kreutzberg school of dancing.

The gala opening performance, which has been fixed for 26th June 1964, will be followed by performances on 27th, 28th and 29th June, also on 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th and 10th July.

The performances begin at 8.30 p.m. and end at about 10.30 p.m. The tickets cost 6, 9 and 12 francs.

Applications for tickets should be addressed to the organiser: "Verein Berner Festspiele" (Bernese Festival Association), Schauplatzgasse 33, Berne.

(Berne Tourist Office.)

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