

# Much ado about a small mollusc

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the mountain above and some nice hotels with private beaches.

On St. Peter's Isle where the famous philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau happily settled 200 years ago to find peace and solitude as a refugee, the Rousseau gospel "Back to Nature" has many twentieth century adherents. In summer tourists invade this charming spot with tents and rucksacks; fortunately the island is big enough to hold them all and can also satisfy those in search of quietude. It has large sand beaches, a lush vegetation and lovely woods, as well as open fields and vineyards. Its ancient monastery is now a hotel that has kept its old-world charm. In Rousseau's room nothing has been changed and the peaceful atmosphere he describes in his "Confessions" is still lingering about the place. His marble bust languidly watches the lake from the end of a poplar-shaded path. Through the melioration of the Jura lakes a narrow strip of land has formed and people can now walk from the island to Erlach (Cerlier), a pretty little lakeside town with a castle-crowned hill.

Our ship has passed the Thielle Canal and enters the waters of the lake of Neuchâtel, the largest and most romantic of the three lakes, but first we turn into the Broye Canal, which leads to the smallest and quietest of the lakes and the historic town it is named after: Morat (Murten) has scarcely changed in 600 years! Its towers and bastions are reflected in the clear water of the lake at the foot of Mount Vully. The lake of Neuchâtel looks wide and bright-coloured, with the city of Neuchâtel all built in yellow stone, its large vineyards spread out over the country and the dark Jura range soaring above in the background. Places of historical interest adorn its shores, looking as though they were founded to last an eternity. Neuchâtel is a quiet but sophisticated university town, cherishing its old traditions. Here the best French in Switzerland is spoken. Neuchâtel citizens are well-bred and have refined tastes. Some families still live in lovely old mansions and receive their guests in regal style and splendour. A renowned School of Commerce and many excellent boarding schools cater to young people from all over the world. In the Neuchâtel Jura they manufacture wonderful watches, musical boxes and famous automatons, of which there is a good collection at the local Art Museum. One should also visit the Abbey church, the cloisters of the Castle and the exquisite 18th century Palais Du Peyrou.

Immediately upon leaving the railway station one has a breathtaking view of the Alps. A walk on the "quai" along the shores of the lake is a real pleasure and a nice fish- "friture", or a "fondue" (Creamy cheese speciality, eaten out of a pan with bread squares) with a bottle of

"Neuchâtel", served on the terrace of a lake-restaurant, is something worth being experienced.

M. C. RYHINER.

[S.N.T.O.]

### MUCH ADO ABOUT A SMALL MOLLUSC

The Swiss canton of Neuchâtel recently prohibited the taking of snails over the whole of its territory for a period of two years. This measure, which obviously tickled the humorists, was considered in the border regions of France to be directed mainly against French snail pickers, who in fact, unable to find sufficient snails in the French Jura, come to Switzerland in search of their prey. However this general measure has been introduced quite simply in order to protect the species; snails are in fact much sought after owing to the good price they fetch and the continually growing demand for them in restaurants. But it takes three to four years for this gastronomic mollusc to grow big enough for the table. In view therefore of the decline in the number of snails, pickers have a tendency to take them smaller and smaller, before they have had time to reproduce in fact, so that the species is in danger of rapidly dying out; hence the new protective measures.

If such an apparently trivial question nevertheless has a certain interest it is because the snail trade is quite a big one according to Swiss customs statistics. In 1952, for example, imports amounted to 47 tons, and exports to 86 tons; imports have increased but not to the same extent as exports; in 1956, Switzerland imported 100 tons of snails and exported the record figure of 476 tons, which represents almost 20 million snails, since then, the figures have undergone various fluctuations and in 1964 totalled 284 tons for imports and 246 tons for exports. It can be seen therefore that these measures for the protection of snails are fully justified, not only from the point of view of protecting nature but also on the economic level.

[O.S.E.C.]

### A GIGANTIC FIREWORKS DISPLAY

Owing to the serious fires that have been caused in recent years by fireworks and fire-crackers, which are used in ever growing quantities nowadays for national holiday celebrations, the biggest chain of toy shops in Switzerland, with branches in all the big towns, decided a short while ago to give up all sale of fireworks. In order to comply with this decision, it recently destroyed the whole of its remaining stocks, worth between 20,000 and 30,000 Swiss francs, except for a few special items which were given to the Zurich fire-brigade for use during fire practice.

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