

Miscellany

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many military men and civilians did not believe an invasion would take place. They thought it was all "eye-wash" and part of the war of nerves, maybe because we had waited so long for the second front to be opened. After my broadcast, people were laying bets on whether there would be an invasion or not. A satirical weekly published in Berne printed a front-page caricature showing me as a fortune-teller with crystal ball and pointed hat, telling the future for Churchill, Hitler and Stalin, seated around a table. The caption read: "Professor von Salis, Fortune Teller, Scientifically-based war of nerves rumours. By appointment, purveyor to

Radio Beromünster." And the comment: "Professor von Salis successfully tuned Radio Beromünster into the war of nerves propaganda by forecasting the invasion for the tenth of May".

I think that reactions such as these threw a very revealing light on the conflicting and nervous atmosphere that prevailed on the Continent in the last year of the war. We hardly dared to go on hoping that the miracle of such a difficult operation as the invasion of France would still take place—or we feared it might not succeed. After the war, the reasons why the invasion had to be put off to the sixth of June were revealed".

MISCELLANY

by PMB

DID YOU KNOW? . . .

Who would accept to drink from an incompletely clean glass in a restaurant? No one, we can be sure. How is it then that most users of the restaurant's convenience will accept to use the common towel hanging from its walls? This is the question put forward by Dr. A. Gilgen, a member of the Institute of Hygiene at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich.

According to him and fellow specialists, washing one's hands in a public convenience is not sufficient to escape the risk of contamination. The drying-up procedure is more important, since it rubs away through friction those germs and bacteria which have resisted the washing operation. But the towel must evidently not itself be germ-infected.

A recent piece of research in Germany has disclosed however that common towels in public conveniences contained 98,000 germs per square inch on average. One towel in two carried infectious germs and one in three intestinal germs! The collective hand towel can be a carrier of infections of all kinds, such as typhus, diphtheria, measles, infantile paralysis and this has actually been experienced in hospitals. The fact that the towel is perpetually wet makes it an ideal breeding ground for bacteria.

Some countries have already prohibited the use of the collective hand towel in catering establishments. This is the case in the United States, where the States of Louisiana, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Florida have generalised this prohibition.

There are three other usual and less dangerous collective hand-dryers. The first and best is the paper towel which is discarded after use. The second is the towel distributor in which the towel unwinds and is not used a second time. The third is the hot air dryer, viewed unfavourably by special-

ists. Although this third means does eliminate whatever water is left on the hands, it does not remove germs and bacteria. The air used is the ambient air, which, in a public convenience, is always bacteria-charged, and the fact that it is heated reactivates these bacteria, thus making them a potential danger.

An enquiry showed that 91 per cent of Germans disliked sharing collective towels, and that 7 per cent of them would like to see this practise prohibited. The collective hand towel can then be considered as public enemy No. One!

THE POST ACTS AS YOUR BANK

In England the postal giro system, or possibility of transfer from one postal account to another, was introduced almost two years ago. The system does, however, not appear to have "caught on" and its introduction has barely affected the traditional pattern of payments in Great Britain. The British still make extensive use of the crossed and signed bank cheque for their day-to-day payments. The Swiss, on the contrary, have been using postal orders and postal accounts for a long time. In fact, the Swiss post office and postal cheque office is increasingly assuming the role of a deposit bank. Stamps, telegrams and parcels are one thing. So are savings books. But a growing part of the time of the counter clerk is now taken up by cashing and redeeming postal orders and postal cheques.

Thousands of people and businesses keep postal accounts, for which there is a directory. The bulk of payments in Switzerland is carried out between these accounts and the service is free. There is a small fee when payment is made by one who does not hold a postal account.

The system has been extended to its logical conclusion by the recent in-

troduction of the postal cheque. Any person with a postal (or, more precisely, a giro account) can draw up to two thousand francs in any of the 4,000 post offices of the country. All he needs is an elementary identity document (such as a driving licence) and his postal cheque book. The system has a definite advantage. Indeed, which bank has 4,000 branches? It is possible to draw more than 2,000 francs at two predetermined post offices in the area of domicile or business of the drawer.

The Swiss postal giro does everything that the banks do, and cheaper. It will serve bankers orders and pay the regular bills for telephone, gas and electricity automatically. A giro statement is mailed twice every month to all account holders. The giro will also handle wages, pensions and rents, and all this free! The only cost is the basic rate of keeping an account.

With this system a considerable time is saved by businesses because there is no more need for taking cheques to the bank. They are mailed directly to the firm's giro account, or paid in by the firm itself by mail.

The day when the post office will start investing the money of its clients, then the banks will begin to get worried.

THE BEST FOOD IN THE WORLD

Ask a foreigner what he considers to be the best discovery which has sprouted from the Swiss genius, he will speak of the cuckoo clock, Swiss chocolate, watches, cheese and such like. Will he mention Birchemuesli? He probably will never have heard of it.

For my part, I find Birchemuesli a luscious nourishment and the outstanding discovery of our health-conscious dietetists. I was surprised to learn from our street corner "Express Dairy" that they had been selling the "Familia" (Sachseln) make of Birchemuesli, which I had noticed on the shop's shelves for the first time, for many years. I was told that the packets were selling very well. So much so that there were acute supply problems, and this despite the high cost (4/3d.) of the relatively small packet. When in a hungry and gluttonous disposition, I can finish off such a packet in one meal! Better stick to Corn Flakes.

Birchemuesli is the richest composite food you can imagine. Turn to the back of the packet (the front shows a dish of Birchemuesli, with gorgeous apples, rich cream and honeycombs) and you will read: "*Familia*" **SWISS BIRCHERMUESLI** is an excellent cereal of high nutritional value for the modern family. It consists of oat flakes, apple flakes, wheat and rye, millet flakes, unrefined sugar, dried raisins, honey and crushed almonds. Apples are totally used with peel and core. Wheat is freed only of the outer, indigestible husk; so the precious elements of apples and the wheat-germ are re-



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tained. Apples, wheat and rye are grown without fertilisers of toxic insecticides. "Familia" SWISS BIRCHERMUESLI is based on the work of Dr. Bircher-Benner, the great Swiss founder of a new medical school, based in dietetics, who devised in 1895 a diet rich in healthy fresh fruit. The fruit dish received world-fame as "Bircher-muesli" or "Swiss Muesli". If you add to the excellent contents of this package a liberal amount of fresh fruit, you will have exactly what Dr. Bircher-Benner meant. The diet of Dr. Bircher-Benner is fully explained in the book "Eating your way to health" (Faber & Faber, London).

With such a wealth of beneficent ingredients and such explicit information it is little wonder that Bircher-muesli should be a good line for "Express Dairy". What is surprising is that a British firm hasn't yet decided to produce it cheaply. The British are cereal-eaters and constitute an ideal market for such a product and there shouldn't be any special problems or covered secrets in the ways of producing good Birchermuesli.

AN UNUSUAL MAGAZINE

Students, wherever they are, usually manage to have a publication of their own, exuding nowadays various degrees of dissent and lechery. In Geneva, they used to have a very useful and serious organ run by their equally useful and serious *Association Générale des Etudiants*, but it died during the general rumpus of 1968.

However, it was resuscitated last year under a new name and a new façade. The re-born student journal is a lavish monthly publication called *Eléments* and subtitled *Revue Universitaire Romande*. I can't say whether this means that the students in Lausanne also contribute to the magazine, but it's good enough to be a common French-speaking effort.

Eléments is of the same format as the *Economist*. It's a little thinner, but, in the main, just as interesting. One wonders how long the quality will be kept up. The following are the main headings in the April-May number, which I happen to have in my hands: *Red Cross: individual and humanitarian rights* — *outlets for graduates — the Swiss University and the future* — "The Damned" — "Zabriskie Point" — *Technical Society and Political Decisions* — *Abstentionism*. The previous number contained an exhaustive dossier on the Army and military service with a wide spectrum of student opinion. It also had a strange article by a mathematical genius entitled "*La Cybernétique et l'humain*" which, despite strenuous efforts on my part, completely eluded my comprehension. The first issue of this year had a searching article on sex and its misuses. It was surprisingly moral!

The last pages of the magazine are often devoted to lengthy editorials on internal student policy. The chief

Editor, who's been a law student for the past 10 years or more, and who is probably going to be bound to this frustrating status as long as his magazine lasts, is a talented polemist. He yammers (sometimes he squeaks) against revisionist fellow students, against rival organisations, against conservative town councillors, against prevaricating Presidents of the Confederation, against rectors unwilling to give their chairs to sophomores. It's exciting polemics and must be nice to deliver. Geneva authorities have been said to be very desirous of banning the paper. But altogether it's a healthy and entertaining publication which has the great advantage of being free. It survives on advertisements, which means that the bourgeois world is not always averse to students, and vice-versa. Also, all the articles are written by students, who willingly take this opportunity of expressing themselves and leaving their mark on the world. It's a satisfactory compensation.

PHYSICAL PHENOMENA AND BEAUTY

The cold and lifeless manifestations of physical laws often possess a strange beauty. This reality has been exploited by a Swiss physicist, Dr. Hans Jenny, who has made an extensive study of the various shapes which matter can take when it is submitted to vibrations. A few weeks ago, the *Sunday Times* colour supplement contained some pictures of Dr. Jenny's vibrating bodies and the weird symmetry which they assumed. This new "art" has been baptised with a new name in the vocabulary: it is called *Cymatics*. The following is an explanation of what this surprising new creation is. It is an extract from the guide leaflet at the *Cymatics* exhibition that was held at the *Institute of Contemporary Art*.

The work of Hans Jenny has been exhibited in many cities in Europe and America, but this is the most comprehensive exhibition of his work to date. Dr. Jenny is a Swiss natural scientist and general practitioner, who for 12 years has been observing and documenting phenomena of periodicity, and in particular the effects of applying vibrations to different substances. The name he has given to this research is "Cymatics", from the Greek word for waves.

The exhibition consists of photographic enlargements (colour and monochrome), a continuously shown colour film lasting about one hour, and actual machines which visitors can operate by their own voices or by manual controls.

Dr. Jenny differs from most scientists in that he is in no way a specialist. His studies of periodicity and vibrations are of course focused upon a limited range of phenomena, and are conducted under proper experimental controls. But they continually refer us

outward to the whole range of science, revealing large areas where man's understanding of nature is suggestively incomplete.

His concept of cymatics covers both the living and the non-living world. His work originally began with

or analogical thinking. He calls this 'non-interference with the phenomenon'. 'The object itself must be allowed to point the way from one set of experiments to another'. Those who insist that the scientist must frame hypotheses will argue that Jenny's experimental method is something other than science. But we can define science simply as a process of enquiry into reality. It is then justifiable to insist, as Dr. Jenny does, on refraining from hypotheses until phenomena have been "grasped" in their entirety; patiently attending on the phenomenon, as he writes, "neither raising ourselves above it nor killing it", nor anatomizing it to a skeleton. Rather than carpenter conceptual pigeon-holes or wrap reality in neat packages, he aims to provide a new vocabulary, to "fertilise perception, and, as it were, provide the nucleus for the formation of a perceptive organ sensitive to periodicity".

Sometimes Jenny studies periodic phenomena occurring without an actual vibrational field: for instance, the diffusion of a dye into a liquid. But his chief technique is to use crystal oscillators to excite diaphragms or steel plates on which a substance has been laid. Thus the frequency and amplitude of the vibrations can be controlled.

One of the first lessons we learn from such exercises is the highly specific behaviour of different materials, depending on heat and viscosity and other characteristics.

Visitors will be able to operate Dr. Jenny's "tonoscope", a simple apparatus which enables vibrations from the human voice to be imparted to a diaphragm. This technique has been used experimentally for speech training of the deaf-and-dumb, permitting the visual comparison of their own voice output against a model configuration which a normal person's voice has produced.

Cymatic phenomena are also of great aesthetic interest. But this aesthetic interest, far from being a matter of mere visual form or design, is inseparable from the understanding of specific substances and processes. Artists will understand Jenny's striving towards a sensuous absorption in each cymatic phenomenon as a whole, and

this absorption discloses an unexpectedness and complexity of organisation such as is only rarely experienced in art. There is an increasing tendency today for "art" to be redefined as a process of open-ended research. In the words of Paul Klee, "We learn to see what flows beneath, we learn the prehistory of the visible" (1928). The question will be raised, "Is Dr. Jenny's work art or science?" I can only suggest—though this kind of question should be left to lexicographers—that Jenny's work is both art and science, and furthermore that it is an exemplar of human creativity in our time.

Phenomena of periodicity and vibration occur in such diverse fields of science as histology, mineralogy, solar physics and embryology. Suggestions have been voiced by biologists that Jenny's work is relevant to our understanding of the basic phenomenon of life. Dr. Jenny avoids such speculation himself. Those of us who have helped to organise the exhibition hope that it will generate considerable interdisciplinary interest; and with this in mind a short course of lectures has been planned to accompany the exhibition on Monday evenings.

GOLD PARITY OF THE SWISS FRANC

There is probably no other nation in the world which fixes the parity of its money by law. The "Münzgesetz" of 1952 says that any change in the parity of the Swiss franc has to be made by Parliament. This is now to be altered, and the Federal Council will in future make the decision, that is in consultation with the Swiss National Bank. The Government has prepared the new law, but at the same time, it states its determination to keep to the gold parity of the franc. There is, of course, an advantage in a quick decision which is not possible if Parliament has to be consulted—a complicated procedure. In the case of devaluation or revaluation, quick decisions are vital in order to prevent speculation. The new law has been ready for some time, but the Federal Council waited until the money markets of the world were calm again.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

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a study of vibration in human muscles. It has been demonstrated acoustically, visually and mechanically that when the striate or voluntary muscles are fully contracted they are in a state of vibration corresponding to the frequencies of the nervous impulses transmitted to them. An account of the importance of cymatics in human physiology would include the whole phenomena of language and vision as well as modern specialised techniques like electro-cardiography and electroencephalography.

From human physiology Jenny was led to study vibration and periodicity throughout animate and inanimate nature. For him, cymatic phenomena are so widespread and so elusive that any partial analytic approach—for instance, based on mathematics—is inadequate. Rather than use explanatory techniques, he prefers to explore with complete open-mindedness the effects of vibrations on various substances, using a strictly empirical method and avoiding all interpretative

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