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RANDOM

The production of asparagus in Valais for the current year fell to 190,000 kilos. It is the poorest crop for some thirty years.

* * *

Switzerland's newest hotel, the Beatus, opened its doors to visitors recently. It is built on the same site as its demolished predecessor: in the village of Merlingen, on the banks of Lake Thun, half-way between Thun and Interlaken. Almost all the guest rooms, which include 130 beds, have private baths, and all of them have sun balconies over the lake. The Beatus Hotel takes its name from the patron saint of the region.

* * *

Philippe Amiguet, the well-known French Swiss writer, has just celebrated his 70th anniversary. Mr. Amiguet, reputed to be a brilliant literary critic, was recently awarded the prix "Theromane" by the French Academy for his book, 'La Grande Mademoiselle et Son Siècle'.

* * *

A group of Iranian students from Swiss Universities staged a sympathy sit-down strike in front of the Iranian Consulate in Geneva. Their protest arose from a decision by the Iranian Government to withdraw the visas of two students studying in the United States, in the middle of their examination period.

* * *

Recently published statistics indicate that there are now over 10,000 foreign workers in the Canton of Zurich alone.

* * *

Montreux is using young traffic wardens to alleviate traffic congestion at the week-ends. Boys in their late teens and early twenties, trained by the Swiss Touring Club in conjunction with the local traffic police, direct traffic at well-known trouble spots when the roads are filled with week-end traffic and returning holiday-makers on Sunday evenings.

* * *

The school commission of Fleurier (Neuchâtel) has decided to forbid its girls to wear "blue jeans" during school hours.

* * *

The death is announced of Pierre Bara, a star of Geneva's "Théâtre de Poche". He was killed in a road accident while holidaying in Spain.

(Most of the above items were received from the A.T.S. News Service.)

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LUCERNE IN EARLIER TIMES

The first settlement on the shores of Lake Lucerne dates back to the dark ages. According to authentic historical documents the place was first known as Lucerne (Luciaria) in 840. At that time a monastery, which had already existed for about a hundred years and which enjoyed the patronage of the royal Carolingian dynasty, became affiliated with the Benedictine Abbey of Murbach, in Alsace. From that time onwards numerous farms, and other properties in and around Lucerne, came into the possession of the Abbey. Although originally only a fishing village, Lucerne now became a centre of trade and culture and developed into a town of markets and town walls. In 1291 Lucerne came under the rule of the Duke of Habsburg, but the self-willed independent citizens could not easily subject themselves to this foreign power. An earlier alliance, probably concluded about 1240, with Schwyz and Unterwalden (lost later), a municipal constitution, the first deed of alliance (1252), the anti-Habsburg league consisting of 26 citizens (1328), the eternal union with the "Waldstätte" (Forest States) (1332), and the courageous Swiss defence at the battle of Sempach (1386): All these were stepping stones to freedom.

Since the beginning of the 15th century the town has shared fate and fame, victory and defeat with the Swiss Confederation. Lucerne fought on the Italian and French battlefields. Frischhans Theiling fought as captain at Giornico, Tessin (1478). They sent their troops to the Burgundian wars (1476-77). Casper von Hertenstein led one of the three army groups at Murten (1476). Also in the Swabian wars (1499) Lucerne Schultheissen (mayors), standard bearers, officers and soldiers distinguished themselves.

Internally, the community inevitably developed into an austere patriarchal municipal state. Tendencies towards an oligarchical form of government had always been present. The Gundoldingen family ruled in the 14th century for over 50 years. Earlier settlers looked with favour on the withholding of all citizen rights from newcomers. They scarcely noticed, how, in their midst, regimental prerogatives were being retained by a few families who acquired influence and distinction by mercenary agreements with France, and who received from the Roman Catholic Church, always a powerful factor in Lucerne, the implied status "by the grace of God". Lucerne became the centre of the Catholic Swiss states, and leader of the counter-reformation movement. Ludwig Pfyffer (1524-1594), "The Swiss King", as aristocratic Schultheiss (mayor) and colonel of the French guard, symbolises Lucerne's "golden" century. He defended the aims of the Church as well as the cause of the king, and did not lose by it. The town also gained by the prestige and wealth of its patricians, for neither the lengthy religious wars (1526-1712) nor the hard-fought peasant war (1653) succeeded in breaking its power.

It was not until the advent of the French revolutionary army that the old regime was shattered (1798). In the upheavals which characterised the beginning of the 19th century, Lucerne was alternately administration centre of a united Helvetian state (1799), independent federal state (1803-1815), restored aristocratic republic (1815 to 1830), and, in 1848, a federal state, third in rank, which, like all parts of the country, now follows the political, economic, and cultural directives set by an even more centrally governed Confederation.

KUNO MUELLER