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THE GOTTHARD — GATEWAY TO THE TICINO

By LEE EUGSTER

The canton of Ticino beyond the Swiss Alps can be reached by railway through the Gotthard or the Simplon tunnels, or by road over the San Bernardino, the Lukmanier, the Gotthard and the Simplon Passes.

In the South the pass road descends through barren valleys cut deep into cliffs of granite by wild rivers. Pine trees cling precariously to steep slopes, but are gradually replaced by thick forests of chestnut trees. Finally, the rivers and roads squeeze through narrow passages before emerging into the plain above Lake Maggiore.

Coming out of these sombre valleys, one is struck by a fantastic change in the landscape. Under the bright Italian sky every inch of ground is covered by an exuberant growth of sub-tropical plants. The dark foliage of cypresses, palms, fig-trees, magnolias, orange and lemon trees enhances a riot of vivid flowers.

Flat-roofed Italian-style houses with balconies and terraces, painted in bright colours, cling to the hills above the shore and line the narrow, cobbled streets of towns and villages. Strollers are protected from the blazing sun under arcades where merchants display a wondrous variety of goods.

The picturesque and very animated holiday resorts, Ronco, Ascona, Locarno, Muralto and Minusio line the Swiss shore around the upper lake. From Locarno, a funicular climbs to the splendid church of Madonna del Sasso commanding a wide view over the town and lake region.

The Monte Ceneri, a low mountain range, separates the Lake Maggiore from the Lake of Lugano. The town of Lugano sprawls around a beautiful bay. On its two extremes rise two mountains resembling sugar-loaves — The Monte Bré and the San Salvatore. A funicular leads to the top of one, a cogwheel train to the other. Both afford a marvellous view over the plains of Lombardy in the South, the chain of high Alps in the North.

A nice road skirts the twisted Lake of Lugano and passes through many quaint villages, of which Gandria and Morcote are best known. In Morcote it is worth while to climb the stairs to the church high above the village.

In the valley leading from the Lake of Lugano to Chiasso at the Italian border, the lovely town of Mendrisio spreads in the midst of rich orchards and vineyards.

In the canton of Ticino, the vines grow high over suspended wires, and their blue grapes produce a delicious wine which is served in small earthenware jugs instead of in glasses.

However, to see the true Ticino and know its inhabitants, one must leave the tourist centres around the lakes and go deep into the valleys above both lakes. There the villages have preserved their ancient character.

Crooked lanes twist between houses whose bare walls are made of tiny slabs of granite. One passes under archways, and balconies spill a riot of flowers or are hung full of corn cobs which ripen to a deep gold in the sun.

The gay, vivid people of these valleys lead a sober life, earning very little by tilling their small, stony fields. In order to prevent the young from deserting their homes, factories have been built in some of those valleys, and old handicrafts, such as spinning, weaving and braiding straw for baskets and hats have been reintroduced.

(“Weekly Tribune”, Geneva.)

INTERNATIONAL CHORAL FESTIVAL

Montreux, the Swiss lakeside resort whose recently-held autumn musical festival, the “Septembre Musical”, broke all records, is to organise an annual choral competition.

Called the Montreux International Choral Festival, the first is to be held from 9th to 12th April 1964. Invitations are now going out to choral societies all over the world.

There will be two major awards. The Jury Prize will be awarded by a panel of judges consisting of well-known figures in the international world of music. There will also be a Public Prize, voting for which will be on ballot forms handed out to members of the audience.

Apart from its competitive element, the Festival will also include concerts to be organised in the different halls in Montreux and given by choirs not taking part in the contest.

It is hoped that radio and television will be able to carry highlights of the Festival to a much wider audience beyond the frontiers of Switzerland.

The chairman of the Festival committee and one of the leading figures behind the decision to launch it on an international scale is Mr. R. Chessex, President of one of Switzerland's leading choral groups, the Chanson de Montreux.

Further information can be obtained direct from the Montreux International Choral Festival, Grand-Rue 8, Montreux, Switzerland.

(*Helvetic News Service.*)

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