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THE SWISS TROPICAL INSTITUTE IN BASLE

By HERBERT GRÖGER

Great foresight was shown in the decision to found the Swiss Tropical Institute in Basle in the middle of the Second World War (end of 1943). It sets itself various aims. Economically, it is meant to secure outlets for Swiss goods, particularly for chemicals and pharmaceutical articles. Of greater importance, however, is the Institute's scientific work which is meant to benefit research generally and emigrants in particular. Foremost among its aims and objectives is its emigrants' advisory service. In its turn, this advisory service depends on the library with its documentation section. Whereas the advisory service gives information of a more general nature on necessary inoculations, medical prophylaxis and special conditions, the Institute also organizes its own courses on tropical medicine for young doctors and veterinary surgeons. In these courses, which last for three months, students intending to work overseas are prepared for their special duties by lecturers with experience in the tropics. At the end of the course successful candidates are awarded a Diploma in Tropical Medicine. In shorter courses lasting a mere eight weeks, students without previous university training are prepared for the special conditions of life in the tropics and sub-tropics; their training includes lectures on customs, tropical diseases, and fauna as well as on the most important problems of colonialism.

A "Tropical School" with specialist courses lasting a year is attached to the Institute. Its main function is to train plantation-owners and sugar chemists, and prepare them for duties overseas. The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects and, among other things, presupposes a period of training in a Swiss or other West European sugar factory. Here again, a Diploma, which is intended to confirm the vocational training only, is awarded at the end of the course. Subsequent success in overseas territories will largely depend on personal initiative, tenacity and adaptability. Some of the students who have obtained a Diploma from the school can be found in leading positions all over the world. An information paper is published twice a year by the school, and students are given help and guidance in looking for jobs.

A clinical department works hand in hand with this "Tropical School". People returning from the tropics with a disease can be examined and can receive treatment here. An inoculation institute for intending emigrants is also included in the services of this department. All its activities are based on scientific research, mainly medical and entomological, and tropical medicine. The most important items in the programme of study are: research into the spread of pathogen, development of methods for testing medicines, examination of pathological symptoms

caused by tropical pathogen, testing of the efficiency of certain insect repellents and the reaction of various materials to different climates. The results of these and other activities in the field of research are published four times a year in the magazine "Acta Tropica".

With the growing importance of the Tropical Institute its range of activities soon widened so that it became necessary to move into a new building. This was completed in 1961. Alongside purely medical questions, aid to developing countries is now an important part of the Institute's activities. A scheme for Tanganyika was, for example, carried out on behalf of the "Institution for the Advancement of Developing Countries", founded by chemical firms in Basle. In 1949, a team of scientists from the Institute went to Southern Tanganyika for the first time to carry out research on yellow fever mosquitos, sand fleas and tree-destroying termites at the Capuchin missionary centre in Ifakara. A second expedition to the same spot in 1954 investigated malaria and the epidemiology of African relapsing fever. It became increasingly apparent that it was very important to have a permanent research institute. Accordingly, in 1957 the Basle Tropical Institute set up and opened its own field laboratory as a scientific base in a wing of the new Ifakara hospital. Chemists, biologists and doctors can do unique work in their special fields, since Ifakara is situated in the Ulanga Plain, which is still comparatively unspoiled by civilisation. Various tropical diseases can be studied at first hand in the many patients pouring into the hospital. Zoologists, botanists and ethnologists also find their efforts rewarded. Moreover, it has always been possible to recruit and train laboratory assistants from among the native population.

Aid to developing countries has inevitably produced further challenges. They can be summed up under three main heads: medical help in distressed areas: training and further training of the natives of developing countries in their homeland; and the admission of scholarship students from overseas to the courses in Basle. Under the first mentioned group of activities, the Tropical Institute responded to an inquiry from the Swiss Red Cross in 1960 by sending a team of doctors to Leopoldville in the Congo. Leopoldville still suffers from a dearth of qualified medical personnel, and the Swiss doctors have had to tackle an immense programme of work, which they are not likely to complete in the foreseeable future. No less important is the training of the native auxiliaries known as "rural medical aids". Thanks to the funds provided by the Basle industry and to the far-sighted support of the first Prime Minister of Tanganyika, Dr. Julius Nyerere, training-courses lasting three months have been held in Ifakara

every year since 1961. This particular establishment was further honoured by being asked to participate, as part of the public programme of education, in the second year of training of this "bush medicine". At the end of their training the Tanganyikans are put in charge of the first-aid posts in remote medical centres and have to perform important auxiliary services.

Training of native students was only made possible through the erection of the Institute's own teaching centre equipped with lecture-room and premises for practical training as well as with bungalows to house doctors and students. The work was successfully tackled as a joint effort thanks to the close co-operation existing between various authorities, not least among them being the "Swiss Capuchin Mission" and the Swiss company owning sisal plantations, Amboni Estates Ltd. Since the new centre was officially inaugurated in 1961, a great many students have been trained by the Tropical Institute; this has been important not only because of the professional training offered but also because it was a tricky educational experiment with young Africans. A further advance has been made in the meantime, the teaching centre assuming responsibility for the further training of medical auxiliaries to become medical officers. The Institute thus performs the two-fold function of training the natives and, at the same time, of establishing a staff of Tanganyikan teachers. In this way the "Rural Aid Centre" becomes an important outpost of the "Medical School" in Dar-es-Salaam.

The acceptance of scholarship students to Switzerland is an even greater challenge than this cautious training of a middle-range of medical personnel, since the successful candidates are brought from the country of origin and transplanted to a completely new world. Only students with good educational background and reliable character are considered.

Of the many successful activities of the Swiss Tropical Institute we still have to mention its special scientific work and expeditions overseas. Its first expedition was organized to the Congo in 1945. The material brought back was made the subject of scientific study in Basle. In 1951 a Swiss research centre was established on the Ivory Coast, which, while being attached to the Swiss Natural Science Society, works in close co-operation with the Tropical Institute. Possessing good laboratories and workshops, this centre, too, became popular very quickly; it is very important if for no other reason than that it is situated in the centre of rich arable land. We see, then, that the Swiss Tropical Institute in Basle and its outposts in Africa are doing a great volume of constructive work of benefit to the most varied scientific, technical and social fields.

(Pro Helvetia Foundation.)

A NEW SWISS AIR TRANSPORT COMPANY

In order to improve transport in the Jura region, a number of Swiss and French industrialists from this mountainous region decided to found a private air transport company to be known as "Air Jura". The new group, which will have Swiss legal status, will have its main base at La Chaux-de-Fonds airport. The company already possesses a 5 to 6 seater twin-engine "Beechcraft Baron" with an average cruising speed of 220 m.p.h., and a loading capacity of approximately 880 lb. It will provide much-needed connections in the Jura itself as well as with the nearby intercontinental aerodromes, in particular Basle-Mülhausen, as well as longer flights on request.

[O.S.E.C.]

NO RESHUFFLE IN THE SWISS GOVERNMENT

When Federal Councillor Wahlen retired, his successor was elected in the person of Regierungsrat Gnägi. The Federal Council then had to decide whether to have a thorough reshuffle or only some small change. At its first official meeting, the decision was taken by the Government to leave its members in their Departments with the exception of Federal Councillor Spühler who is Mr. Wahlen's successor as Foreign Minister. The new Councillor Gnägi takes over the Department of Communications and Energy.

Public opinion has it that this is only a provisional solution, and that in the near future there are bound to be changes. In two years, Parliament has to be re-elected, and by that time it will be seen whether the prediction is right or whether the French proverb "C'est le provisoire qui dure" is proved.

There has been strong criticism recently, particularly of the Military Department and of the Department of Public Economy. Responsible personalities in Switzerland regret the lack of a coherent policy of the Federal Council who should be able to take the responsibility as a whole for whatever happens in any of its Departments. The fact that some of the Departments are liked and others are not popular, has largely to do with the proportional system in which the four major Parties share in the Government. This lack of corporate responsibility, says National Councillor Peter Dürrenmatt, is the cause of the feeling of uneasiness present in many circles in Switzerland.

The new distribution of the Federal Departments are as follows: Political: Spühler (Deputy Chaudet), Home Affairs; Tschudi (Von Moos); Justice and Police: Von Moos (Bonvin); Military Matters: Chaudet (Gnägi); Finance and Customs: Bonvin (Tschudi); Public Economy: Schaffner (Spühler); Communications: Gnägi (Schaffner).

The delegations of the Federal Council, which have to prepare specially important matters, have been set up as follows: Financial questions: Schaffner, Bonvin, Spühler; Railways: Gnägi, Bonvin, Spühler; Foreign Affairs: Spühler, Chaudet, Schaffner; Military matters: Chaudet, Bonvin, Gnägi; Atomic questions: Gnägi, Tschudi, Spühler; Agriculture: Schaffner, Von Moos, Bonvin.

("Basler Nachrichten" and A.T.S.)

STUDY TOUR OF SWITZERLAND BY HIGH FOREIGN OFFICIALS

As part of a refresher course organised by the United Nations, high officials from government departments, banks and economic institutes of some twenty developing countries visited the firm of Motor-Columbus, Engineering Consultants at Baden. For three days those taking part in the course were able to study the means and methods used in Switzerland for the planning and financing of electrification. After visiting several hydro-electric power stations in the Canton of the Grisons, and attending talks by a number of Swiss experts, these foreign guests had the opportunity of exchanging views on the execution of development plans, the methods used and the experience gained so far by Swiss engineers in their planning and consulting activities in the developing countries. Those taking part, who came from Asia, Africa and Latin America, were greatly interested in the methods of financing development as well as in the possibilities offered by Swiss firms of consultant engineers for the development of their own countries.

[O.S.E.C.]