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Staël closed her eyes for ever. She was faithfully taken to Coppet by her son Auguste, the Duc de Broglie and Benjamin Constant. At length, after a moving ceremony, she was buried there as she had instructed, alongside the tomb of her father.

Many of us still ask of what importance is Mme. de Staël to us today? The answer is as a writer, not very much; none of her works is read in its entirety, a few pages of *De la Littérature* and *De l'Allemagne* appearing perhaps in anthologies for the edification of students. But easy though it is to criticise her on personal grounds as being vain, self-centred and hysterical, what it is not easy to do — indeed impossible — is to ignore the one woman, more than any other, who summed up the aspirations of her age. Whatever her faults, Germaine was a shrewd realist, fully aware that her contemporaries were adamantly opposed to conceding any significant social rights to women.

In fact, as a group they gained very little from the Revolution except the right of divorce and more equitable inheritance laws, and even these modest advances were soon lost after the Bourbon restoration. Even though it would be inaccurate to claim that Germaine bent her considerable energies towards the lot of womankind in general, her courageous example served notice that intelligence and ability were equally divided between the sexes. In an age noted for enthusiasm and brilliance, no light outshone that of Germaine Necker, Mme. de Staël.

What more lasting epitaph could the world bestow than the tribute paid many years later, in 1832, by two of her once-famed group, Chateaubriand and Mme. Récamier.

Again at Coppet beside her resting-place and with their eyes fixed on Lake Geneva and the mountains beyond, they recalled Lord Byron, Voltaire and Rousseau: in the words of Chateaubriand — “It was on the threshold of Mme. de Staël’s tomb that so many illustrious dead came to mind. They seemed to be seeking their kindred shade in order to soar to heaven with her. If ever I have felt both the vanity and the value of fame and life, it was at the entrance of the silent wood, dark and unknown, where rests the one who had shone so brightly and who had enjoyed so much fame.”

“How sad and long a story is life!” wrote Mme. de Staël to Mme. Récamier in 1814. This life that had been so agitated and filled with unrealised hopes, with passion and tears, which had always been dominated by enthusiasm for an ideal and which had always shone with kindness, with generosity — this life, like a sad and long story, was ended. All the charm of the cool evenings behind the domed Jura mountains whose ember sky drew the silver paths of the moon on the ripple-free lake, all this charm was now lost for ever. To the turmoil, to the fame that had surrounded this stormy life, reigned a hollow silence. . . . Alone a bird was singing.

ROMANSCH IS STILL SPOKEN HERE

THE United Kingdom is currently labouring through a devolution argument, an argument that threatens to be long and sometimes bitter. But the argument about the use of minority languages is much older with Wales probably making its voice felt more than the rest. The Welsh Language Society is an active and militant body trying its hardest to establish Welsh as the first language of the Principality. In some areas the members go to great lengths to achieve their aims. On a recent visit to Caernarvon I was surprised to see that public notices and road signs originally produced in both languages had had the English versions erased or obliterated. Generally this idiosyncracy does not matter overmuch but there were instances when the action of these zealots was downright dangerous. I saw a sign warning of an extremely dangerous bend in the road and another on a high-voltage electricity sub-station on both of which the English text had been removed.

As a believer in the encouragement of the use of minority languages I support the campaign to rejuvenate Welsh but deplore irresponsible action such as that described above.

Equally I am a keen supporter of the campaign to keep alive and indeed revive interest in the use of Romansh in Switzerland. I was particularly delighted to see that it appears on the new banknotes. My favourite holiday spot is a remote corner of Graubünden where Romansh is still very much alive. During one visit there I was privileged to meet and to play cards with a local teacher actively engaged in protecting this charming little bit of our Swiss heritage.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I have pleasure in publishing an article on the subject which appeared in the 15th September edition of The Swiss American Review. Our thanks to the publishers and to the author, Mr. Peter Tonge of The Christian Science Monitor.

“If you want to learn more about Romansh, go up the Surselva valley to Disentis.”

So next morning, as a strengthening sun brushed a few remaining tentacles of mist from off the mountainside, I caught the early train for Disentis. The ride up the narrow-gauge line takes little more than an hour, rising steadily to where the retreating snows of spring seem only a stone’s throw away.

Today the Surselva, and a few other valleys in the dramatically beautiful Grisons, are the last enclaves of a language that once predominated throughout the eastern half of present-day Switzerland. It is the oldest of Switzerland’s four national languages — the original Raetian tongue (part Celtic) which was latinised when the Romans invaded the area almost 2,000 (15 B.C.) years ago.

Today, only 55,000 people consider Romansh their mother tongue. German, “the language of bread” as the Romansh themselves readily concede, continues to make steady inroads. And English, of course, is taught in schools throughout Switzerland. But Romansh won’t give way easily.

Four dialects of the language have developed in the centuries since the surrounding sea of German languages cut off one Romansh enclave from another. “We understand each other, but only with a lot of goodwill,” one Disentis resident explains.

Still, it is that kind of goodwill and popular sentiment throughout Switzerland which are increasingly supporting a revival of Romansh. The federal government subsidises the publishing of Romansh literature and school books in all four dialects. A dictionary-cum-encyclopedia dealing with all aspects of the Romansh language and culture also is being compiled. “We are up to letter F,”

says Dr. Hans Stricker, one of three lexicographers currently involved in the project. Work on the dictionary, which began in 1900, is likely to go on for at least another 35 years.

One word in the dictionary is “alp”. That is a Raetian word, preceding the Roman influence. It means mountain or a high place where cattle are sent to graze in summer. That, says Dr. Stricker, is one Romansh word that all the world knows.

At the thousand-year-old Disentis abbey, Father Ambrosias — who, like Dr. Stricker, is not Romansh — explains why it is important to preserve the language. “The Swiss cultural house is a mountain hut with four windows — German, French, Italian and Romansh,” he says. “Close one window and the hut will be that much darker.”

Father Ambrosias is confident that won’t happen soon.

Recently tourism also has had a stabilising effect on Romansh. The increase of summer and winter resorts in the area has provided new job opportunities and stemmed somewhat the flow of young Romansh out of the valley.

Doris Candinas’s experience is a case in point. Miss Candinas, who runs the Office of Tourism, says the town used to be a summer resort with a tourist office that opened for one month only. Then, in 1970, a new cable car brought skiers by the thousand to the area. Now Disentis plays host to visitors year-round and Miss Candinas keeps the office open full-time. “I might have left if this job had not opened up,” she comments.

Spinoff from the tourist trade appears to benefit the whole community. Indeed, many villages in the region now seem to enjoy the best of both worlds — the beauty, peace, and tranquillity of the countryside, with adequate salaries and most of the comforts of a city.

"Buna sera," the Disentis station-master greets me as I arrive to catch the last train to Chur. And on the way back down the valley, alive with tumbling mountain streams, the train passes through many small towns — Rabius, Somvix, etc. Like Disentis, many bear the Latin-sounding Romansh names.

They've borne them for a long time. And even a short visit with this area's determinedly pro-Romansh residents convinces you that despite the encroachments of non-Romansh civilisation, they will bear them for a long time to come.

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After a sales launch in Europe, Mr. René Schweizer, Chairman of Uniton Commerce AG announced that he was introducing a marketing operation in Great Britain for the wide range of Uniton, Swiss-made public address and background music systems, also a range of Favag industrial clocks. The first product group to be available is the Uniton "mini-block" PA System.

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LA GAZZETTA NOSTRANA

AIROLO. — *Un altro passo avanti.* — Giovedì, 16 dicembre scorso è caduto l'ultimo diaframma della Galleria stradale del San Gottardo che con i suoi 16,290 m. è la più lunga del mondo. La caduta dell'ultimo diaframma è avvenuta al km. 8,300 circa. Gli ultimi giorni i 2 tronconi della galleria (versante sud e versante nord) erano ancora divisi d'una parete ormai esigua di 3½ m. Si è poi provveduto al carico delle mine per l'ultimo brillamento, avvenuto appunto il giovedì. Fatto il buco, sul cantiere del S. Gottardo i minatori hanno tenuto la loro festa, mentre il giorno dopo il cantiere stesso veniva chiuso per le tradizionali vacanze natalizie, che dureranno fino al 10 gennaio. La caduta dell'ultimo diaframma della galleria autostradale del S. Gottardo non ha dato luogo a celebrazioni particolari dato che queste celebrazioni avevano avuto luogo lo scorso 26 marzo quando venne fatto cadere l'ultimo diaframma del cunicolo di sicurezza.

— *Grave disgrazia sul lavoro.* — Al km. 7,552 della costruenda galleria stradale del S. Gottardo è avvenuto un tradico incidente all'1.50 della notte su giovedì, 25 novembre scorso. Mentre gli operai si trovavano sul ponte mobile di protezione per eseguire lavori di punteggiamento alla volta del tunnel dove poco più di 2 ore prima erano state fatte brillare le mine, un masso del peso di 20 Qli. s'è improvvisamente staccato dalla volta del tunnel colpendo 2 minatori; uno è rimasto ucciso sul colpo, l'altro, pur non essendo in pericolo di vita, ha avuto la gamba destra amputata all'altezza del ginocchio. Entrambi i minatori sono di cittadinanza italiana. Quello rimasto ucciso si chiamava Roberto Zubani, aveva 32 anni, era sposato e padre di 2 bambini. Abitava a Marmentino, in provincia di Brescia, dove la salma è stata traslata ancora in giornate. Quello infortunatosi gravemente è Martino Cotti, 30 anni, anche egli sposato e padre di 2 bambini e

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