

The Grisons people and traffic

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THE NEW YEAR BEGAN . . .

with an address on radio and TV by the President of the Confederation Dr. H. Schaffner. He said it was difficult to be in a festive mood, for the problems facing the country were grave. Above all, there was the question of how to reduce the number of foreign workers without harming Swiss economy which was still flourishing. There were latent talents and a certain production potential not yet fully utilised. And the problem of better education was an urgent one, especially as material assets were relatively easy to come by. The Federal President referred to Switzerland's duty to the developing countries and her obligation as a neutral nation in the preservation of universal peace.

His address closed with the greeting used by the Federal Council in letters to the Cantons: "We take also this opportunity, dear loyal confederates, to recommend you and ourselves to the protection of the Almighty".

For the first time this year, the traditional Reception at the "Federal Palace" did not take place on New Year's Day, but was held on 10th January. The Reception took a new form. At 3 p.m., the delegation of the Bernese Government arrived in eight open landaus. Half an hour later the doyen of the Diplomatic Corps, Mgr. Pacini, presented his congratulatory message to the Swiss Government. He was answered by Federal President Schaffner. During the Reception, the President talked to all the delegations informally. Champagne was served.

[A.T.S.]

THE GRISONS PEOPLE AND TRAFFIC

The language of the Engadine is "Ladin", a popular dialect derived directly from Latin, and one which has been used by writers only since the Reformation. It was a statesman and soldier, Johannes Travers, who is said to have been the "father" of Ladin literature. The Emperor had ennobled him as a reward for a martial poem. Since that time, the spring of Ladin poetry has never dried up. It has produced a complete literature, conscious of its originality. A Rhaeto-Romansch glossary has been published as well as a large German-Romansch and Romansch-German dictionary. In 1938 the Swiss nation, by a memorable vote, proclaimed Romansch a national language. Although firmly attached to their native land, the people of the Engadine have always felt the urge to emigrate. Often it was the very poverty of the soil that forced them to try their luck abroad. Innumerable mercenaries used to be recruited in the region and some of them rose to high positions. Others made their fortunes as restaurant-keepers or confectioners in Rome, Venice, Cairo, Brussels, Berlin, etc., or as merchants or bankers. Nearly all who prospered and grew wealthy returned to their native country and thus helped to raise the standard of living in the whole of the Engadine. It is to them, often enough, that are due those signs of a more refined civilization, even in the villages, and those details of architecture that delight the visitor.

Very close to Nature, the inhabitants of the Engadine are naturally ardent huntsmen, always ready to scour the fields and *névés* in search of game. Who does not know, in the region, those two almost legendary figures, Giachem Küng and Gian Marchet Colani? The latter has even been made the hero of the novel "The King of the Bernina".

Countless inhabitants of the Engadine are today professors, teachers, industrialists, or businessmen either in Switzerland or abroad. It is to the construction of the Rhaetian railway that the hotel industry owes the great boom that it has had in the Engadine, where the population rose suddenly from 4,200 inhabitants in 1888 to more than 10,000. The Upper Engadine has over 13,000 hotel beds to place at the disposal of visitors. There are also children's homes, private clinics, a secondary school of international fame and a well-run and spacious district-hospital.

In the Val Bregaglia a Lombard dialect is spoken, while the literary language is Italian. Generally speaking, the region has remained attached to the system of small-holdings, which has led to an inconsiderable but steady emigration. Between 1888 and 1946 the population decreased from 2,000 to 1,700.

Important passes, much-frequented already in the Middle Ages, and whose strategic importance was recognised very early, lead to the Engadine and the Val Bregaglia. Sanguinary battles were fought for them in the course of the centuries and they saw hordes of pillaging soldiers pass, of peaceful caravans of merchants who were going down towards the Rhine, the Danube, or Italy. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Canton of the Grisons realized a vast programme of roadbuilding, from which the Engadine above all profited. After 1848, that is to say when the postal administration passed into the hands of the Federal Government, postal stage-coaches or diligences circulated according to a fixed timetable over the new roads. This means of communication was soon appreciated by numerous foreigners, who liked the picturesque scenery. Indeed, the rocks used to resound with the echo of the musical notes of the postilion's horn. It was the epoch of romantic journeys. But this poetry of Nature declined when the railway, first the St. Gotthard line and then the Albula, attracted most of the traffic, and the great roads of the Engadine were practically deserted and left to wistful solitude.

But, with a keen awareness of the spirit of our own times, the Postal Administration took the initiative and released the Alpine passes from their isolation, restoring to the roads high up in the mountains their former charm and attraction. After the first World War, the postal motor-coach began to replace the old "diligence". The old-fashioned horn of our grandfathers' days has been replaced by the threetoned motor-horn, and drivers who have undergone a thorough course of technical instruction have succeeded the postilions. The people very soon came to appreciate the new vehicle. Within a few years the postal motor-coach routes developed considerably in the Grisons. It was not long before the difficulties and obstacles of the winter season were overcome, so much so that certain passes are open to traffic all the year round. In this way the Engadine has become a centre of attraction for visitors from the country itself and from abroad. St. Moritz plays the rôle, as it were, of a turntable, whence the postal routes set out to Lugano and Locarno, to Milan via the Lake of Como to the Southern Tyrol, Austria and Munich.

(PTT)

(By courtesy "St. Moritz Courier".)

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