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Cover page

Break-through of the Gothard-Tunnel a hundred years ago, i.e. on the 29th february 1880. The chief engineers Bossi and Stockalper congratulate each other (wood print from a drawing by Jauslin).

Passports

Do not wait until the eve of your holiday before applying for Swiss passport to be renewed ... It may not be possible to return it to you in time.

Obwalden

A small State worth visiting

The author

Niklaus Theiler is a citizen of neighbouring Entlebuch, but was born in Sarnen in 1946. He went to school there up to matriculation (Type A). He studied at the University of Fribourg and then returned to Obwalden. After a period of practical training in the administration and at the Courts, he qualified as lawyer. He is legal adviser to the Obwalden Government.

Obwalden is an independent Canton between the Pilatus and the Bruenig and completed by the valley community of Engelberg. It received its name because it is situated above the Forest of Kern which forms the boundary with Nidwalden. The six Communes of the old part of the Canton, Sarnen, Kerns, Sachseln, Alpnach, Giswil and Lungern, as well as the former Monastery State of Engelberg, which was attached to Obwalden in 1815, cover a total area of some 491 km². Nearly half of its territory consists of agricultural land (31.9% alpine pastures, 15.5% meadows, 0.3% arable soil). Approximately one third of the ground is covered in woods, barely a fifth part is barren. 26 000 people live in this region of the Lower Alps.

Within the Confederation, Obwalden belongs to the Half-Cantons. The only difference from the full Cantons lies in the fact that it sends only one Councillor of States to Berne, rather than two, and thus it counts only as half a State in federal plebiscites on changes to the Federal Constitution. In anything else, Obwalden is no different from other Cantons: The administrative organization consists of power-sharing, Parliament, Government and indepen-

dent Courts of Law. The same tasks have to be tackled as in other Cantons; although taking in the conditions at a glance does often allow simplified procedures. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Obwaldner feels himself a proud and original Confederate.

A turbulent past

Traces of habitation reach back to the later Stone Age (3000 B.C.). At that time, Celtic tribes lived in the region. The Romans came later and settled along the at that time vital arterial route from Vindonissa to Lombardy across the Bruenig, the Grimsel and the Gries passes. It was only towards the end of the 7th century that the Alemans settled there. The legal systems in the Middle Ages were complicated; secular rulers such as the Counts of Lenzburg, Zaehringen, Kyburg and Hapsburg, and numerous religious communities (Murbach-Lucerne, Beromuenster, Muri, Engelberg) owned extensive settlements. In addition, however, there were always free peoples who were accountable only to the district bailiff as representative of the Empire. In the 13th century, these free men resisted the expansionist efforts of the House of Hapsburg. This resistance finally culminated in the alliance with Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden of 1291. The oldest account of these events are to be found in the famous «White Book» of Sarnen kept at the State Archives.

The poor Land of Unterwalden uniting Ob- and Nidwalden existed only at the beginning of the 14th century. Yet in the Old Confederate Alliance, Unterwalden was counted as one State. In the Diet, Obwalden had two-thirds of the voices, Nidwalden one.