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"To be merry and charitable" is the motto which guides the Risotto Festival, celebrated yearly on Tuesday before Ash Wednesday at Bellinzona, capital of Switzerland's Italian speaking canton of Ticino. As a result all the aged, the sick, the widows and orphans of the town and immediate neighbourhood are given a generous portion of risotto before general merry-making begins.

Early in the morning the "Compagnia Risotto" starts its work with some 35-40 men. The town furnishes 15 huge cooking vessels, which are placed in a semi-circle on Independence Square on simple portable stoves, equipped with high stove pipes. Before 10 a.m. the pots start to steam and a tantalizing aroma begins to permeate the usually mild air. Enthusiasm runs high among the cooks and their helpers. Delicious sausages, onions, huge rolls of fresh butter and other ingredients help to make this rice dish into a treat fit for kings. Always on the alert is the commander of the "Compagnia Risotto." He tastes here and there and the finishing touches are invariably added at his expert suggestions.

Shortly after 11 a.m. the distribution of Ticino's favorite dish begins. And now the recipients-to-be, both young and old, arrive in large numbers, each and everyone equipped with a container and with happy expectation reflected on their faces. While finely cut up sausages form part of the risotto, the portions handed out also include some tiny sausages served with a delicious sauce. Gifts of risotto and sausages are also sent to invalids, hospitals, homes for the aged and orphanages at Bellinzona and environs.

After some 4,000 portions of risotto have been distributed Prince Rabadan, the "Lenten Saint," is honored with a jolly parade through the town, and a colorful masquerade concludes the day.

Not far from Einsiedeln is Lucerne. Highlight of this lively city's pre-Lenten festivities is the Fritschi Parade. Its origin goes back to medieval days when masquerades, archery and wrestling matches, also open-air theatricals were frequently arranged for the benefit of the inhabitants and neighbouring towns. The latter in turn staged similar affairs to which Lucerne was invited.

Then came a time when war clouds dimmed Lucerne's carefree happiness. Many citizens enlisted for foreign military service and diversions became fewer. In those dull times the amusing sayings and merry pranks of Fridli an der Halden, generally known as "Brother Fritschi," became the topic of the day.

After his participation in the Burgundian wars Fritschi's fame as a humorist spread throughout the land. Once he was carried off to Basle and several hundred burghers of Lucerne marched to that city. They were welcomed by a reception committee attired in martial uniform and Fritschi waved a greeting from one of the patrician residences. The mock warriors from Lucerne then were induced to enjoy several days of feasting at Basle.

Upon his return to Lucerne, Fritschi inaugurated a celebration whose main feature was a parade of men and boys in armor. This procession was held on the last day of the pre-Lenten Carnival, and with the addition of several historical scenes it still is today an outstanding attraction of the Carnival season.

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NEWS IN BRIEF.

Radio licenses issued in Switzerland at the end of 1939 amounted to just below 600,000.

The total voluntary Swiss contribution for the Finnish Red Cross at the end of January was over 1 Million Francs.

A relief labourer in Avenches (Ct. de Vaud) whilst digging a trench, discovered a pure gold Bust of the Roman Emperor Aurelius. The Bust is considered one of the finest pieces of Art and is exhibited in Berne.

News in Brief (contd)

Sixty years ago the registered factories in Switzerland numbered 2642 with 135,000 employees. Today the figures reach 8386 and 410,000 respectively.

During 1939 some 2186 persons emigrated to foreign countries beyond Europe, an increase of 210 over 1938.

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BASLE AND THE SWISS SAMPLE FAIR.

The Exhibition in Zurich was still open, when plans were put forward for the Swiss Sample Fair in Basle. It will take place from the 30th March to the 9th April, 1940. Far from reducing the spring of its activity, the events of the last few months have, on the contrary, stimulated it. It is true that Basle has already known hours no less anxious than those we live in, and sometimes even tragic. The foundation of the town can be traced back to the Roman period, although nothing can be definitely ascertained as to the exact date. Excavations have made it possible to determine, however, that this colony was more an "emporium" than a strategic fortified place. The town has remained faithful to this economic tendency throughout the centuries.

Situated as it is in the crook formed by the Rhine before it flows northwards, Basle will always remain an important bridge town. Moreover, every advantage has always been drawn from this ideal position. Although the town passed successively under the domination of the Dukes of Burgundy and of the Counts of Habsbourg and formed part of Lotharingia or the German Empire, it always retained its essential characteristics, anxious above all to defend its privileges and its liberties and to strengthen its economic power. For a long time it was an episcopal see and drew great profit from this independent position, developing its commerce and trade. It was under the rule of a bishop that the first bridge was built over the Rhine in 1225.

It was under the same episcopal rule that Basle, in 1471, received Letters Patent from the Emperor authorising the town to hold an annual mercantile fair. In 1501 Basle joined the Swiss Confederation of which it was soon to become one of the chief centres of culture and commerce.

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