

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 16 (1951)
Heft: [10]

Artikel: Swiss farming [continued]
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942738>

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NEW SWISS GUARDS TAKE OATH

(The following article has appeared in the issue of May 9th in "The Irish Press" and is herewith reproduced by courtesy of the Editor.)

A colourful ceremony took place in the Belvedere courtyard in the Vatican recently; the annual taking of the oath of service by the latest recruits to the Swiss Guards.

Seventy of the hundred Guards that make up the corps lined up and paraded the courtyard in full dress uniform with shining breastplates, helmets and halberds, and the nineteen new recruits of recent months took the oath: "I swear to serve faithfully and loyally His Holiness the reigning Pontiff, Pope Pius XII, and his legitimate successors, as well as to devote to them all my strength and, if needs be, to sacrifice my life for their defence. . . ."

May 6th is a sacred day for the Swiss Guards, the anniversary of the most glorious page in their history. On that date in 1527, only 22 years after the Corps had been established, all the Guards—42 of them—lost their lives in defending Pope Clement VII against the forces of the Emperor Charles V.

Having sacked Rome, the German and Spanish troops attacked the Vatican Palace. They easily disposed of the Papal Gendarmes and the other Vatican Guards, but the little group of Swiss resisted valiantly against overwhelming odds. One by one they were slain in hand-to-hand combat as they covered the Pope's retreat through the 500-yard covered passage that led to the fortress, Castel Sant' Angelo. The last Swiss Guard fell before the spears of the attackers as he banged the door of the fortress behind the Pope.

Twenty years later the corps was reconstructed and increased to the strength of 200 men. The massacre of 1527 set the headline for the fidelity of this chosen Corps, and in 1848, when Pope Pius IX was besieged in the Quirinal Palace by a Roman mob, the Swiss Guards were the only ones to remain loyal to their posts. On this occasion, too, many of them fell before the muskets of the crowd, but they managed to repulse the attack.

At the moment the Swiss Guards are a hundred in number. The commander is a full colonel, and he is assisted by a lieutenant-colonel, a major and four captains, including the chaplain, Mgr. Kreig, who has captain's rank. There are twelve non-commissioned officers—four sergeants and eight corporals—and the rest are all simple privates.

In their fancy mediaeval dress (designed for them by Michael Angelo himself), with their striped uniforms of red and gold and blue, these Guards are on duty at every entrance to the Vatican City, in the Pope's ante-room during audience hours, and outside his private apartments during the night.

At Papal functions in St. Peter's they are present in a body in their full dress uniform, flanking the Sedes Gestatoria as the Pope is carried in to the Basilica, and lined all around the Throne and Papal Altar during the ceremony.

There is little in their daily lives to attract them to the service—no adventure, no booty, no gain. Their discipline is most rigid, their free time very restricted, their pay rather meagre, like that of soldiers everywhere. They sleep in their own quarters, in Vatican City, where they have their chapel, library and canteen.

Service at the Vatican gives them a chance of picking up a foreign language or two, in addition to their own "Schweizer-Deutsch," and this enables many of them to enter the hotel and tourist business in their native country when they return. Most of them use their free time to educate themselves: they study music and art, and one of them, Sergeant Scheiss, has made quite a name for himself in Rome's artistic circles as a painter and sculptor.

But those sturdy lads from the mountains of Switzerland are all staunch Catholics, and they are not seeking material advantage or worldly gain: for them the honour of serving the Holy Father is ample reward.

Candidates for admission must be under 25 years of age, unmarried and at least five feet eight inches in height. But the most important qualification of all is

the certificate from their local Parish Priest testifying to their moral character. They may retire at will on two months' notice. Ten years' service entitles them to half pension, twenty years to full pension.

Of all the different Corps of Papal Guards, the Swiss are the ones that give the unmistakable impression of perfect training and physical fitness, as they parade and change guard at their various posts, or as they jump smartly to attention at the sergeant's call of "achtung" whenever a high-ranking ecclesiastic passes by.

They are very faithful in their attendance at morning Mass and at weekly Communion. They run a St. Vincent de Paul Conference of their own for the benefit of the poor in the Roman Borgo, and each year they sponsor the education of a few students for the foreign missions.

On Sunday last, as the new recruits stepped from the ranks one by one, and, with their left hand on the Papal flag and their right hand raised to God, pronounced the solemn words of their oath, one felt that those medieval helmets and breastplates concealed heads and hearts that are worthy to continue the glorious and honoured traditions of which the corps can boast during its 400 years of service to the Vicar of Christ.

SWISS FARMING

(Continued.)

Types of Buildings.—The following main types of agricultural buildings are to be found in Switzerland today. In French-speaking western Switzerland, the influence of the Celtic-Romantic style as embodied in the farmhouse of the Jura is particularly noticeable. As of old, the Burgundian chimney is its main feature. In the Celtic farmstead small houses were arranged around the yard. By roofing the yard a farmhouse resulted having a low broad-shaped roof. The house of the Engadine type reminds one through its hall of Roman architecture. Indeed, the Engadine style house belongs to the finest agricultural architecture. The house of the Ticino style is equally of Romanic if not of Italian origin. Its characteristic features are its loggias and vaults. The population with the Latin tradition gives preference to stone buildings while the population of Alemannic strain is in favour of timber buildings. Block structures are particularly noticeable in the Alpine regions. Ranging from the plain modest haybarn to the splendid characteristic structures of the Bernese Oberland, and to the houses of the farmers in the mountains of the Cantons of Fribourg and Vaud all forms of architectural transition may be found.

The handsome characteristic houses of the Appenzell country and Toggenburg region belong to the type of farmhouse peculiar to the mountain regions. In the Midlands, many buildings may be traced back to the Argovian thatched house, specimens of which are only rarely to be found. It was the fundamental form from which the various kinds of the three-division house developed. The three divisions consist of the dwelling-house, the barn floor and the stable. The finest specimen of this architecture may be seen in the characteristic

farmhouses of the Emmental region. In Eastern Switzerland, stone houses were adopted at an early epoch. In the north-east of the country, many fine half-timbered houses have been preserved to this day. In western Switzerland, the three-division house was affected by the Celtic-Romanic architecture, and the Burgundian type chimney may still occasionally be found there.

In the modern buildings erected by the building office of the Swiss Farmers' Union allowance is made to an increasing extent for labour-saving installations. This is revealed by the very location of the buildings, particularly by the gateway, by the mechanical unloading devices, the storage of stocks and fodder-crops and so on. In the stablehouse, improved lying-down places for livestock, better mangers, liquid waste drains and improved ventilation ducts have been adopted to an increasing extent. Particular attention has been paid to alleviating the farmer's wife by means of rational kitchen installations and by decreasing the distance of the garden, the wash-house and the modern poultry-houses, etc. Cheap building is no longer possible, but it is possible to make building costs less burdensome by rational plants and equipment. It must not be forgotten either that the house, in addition to being part of the working equipment of the farm, is also the background for the happiness, ease and purpose of life of the family on the farm.

Machines and Implements.—The expanding activities on the farms and the shortage of agricultural labour caused the Swiss farmer to an increasing extent to ease and improve their work by the use of machines. The rainy climate had been an early incentive to the adoption of hay-harvesting machines, particularly with a view to shortening the duration of the hay-making. The machine which has generally been first introduced on a large scale in arable land districts is the threshing machine, often hired out by co-operatives or contractors. The revival of arable farming during the war caused interest in the tractor to increase, in the first instance in those farms where it proved impossible to find full employment for two horses. The Swiss industry is able to supply good types of tractors. The tractor owners try to make fuller use of their machines by placing them at the disposal of their neighbours. First-class mouldboard ploughs have also been available in Switzerland since several decades.

The use of cereal harvesting machines and binders is somewhat restricted owing to the smallness of farms. The adoption of electrically-operated liquid manure pumps in conjunction with hose systems also meant a notable progress. Their use results in a considerable saving of labour, and in much higher yields in grass farming and fruit-growing. Atomisers to combat pests and diseases are, in the main, used on a co-operative basis. The same holds true in respect of cereal cleansing plants, while winnowing machines have been in general use in farm-houses since an early epoch. Plants for the processing of fruit and grapes have reached a high level of development. Up-to-date plants for the treatment of consumer milk and for the production of butter and cheese are in use in all co-operative factories. A Swiss invention, the CO₂ butter machine, has met with intense interest all over the world.

NOTICES

In 1947, the Swiss people voted the introduction of a general Old-Age, Widows' and Orphans' Insurance ("Alters- und Hinterlassenenversicherung"). This insurance, which is compulsory for the inhabitants of Switzerland, is also available to Swiss living abroad who wish to participate.

A maximum age limit of 30 years is set for admission. However, exception was made for the first year after the Act came into force, when persons up to 65 years of age could enrol. That date limit for joining the social insurance for these Swiss citizens (also for "dual nations" or "Doppelbuerger") residing abroad who

were born between July 1st, 1883, and December 31st, 1920, and who have at no previous time been insured, has recently been extended to the end of 1951. After December 31st, 1951, no applications from persons born on or before December 31st, 1921, can be taken into consideration. This affords a unique opportunity, particularly to elderly people not born prior to July 1st, 1883, to participate in the Swiss social security scheme. A stipulation for admission is that the registration of the citizen with the Consulate is in order.

The annual premiums, which are payable until the age of 65 years, are to be assessed and paid with retro-active effect from January 1st, 1948. Persons gainfully occupied are liable to contribute 4 per cent. of their income in cash and in kind. The contributions of persons not gainfully occupied are levied according to the fortune and income from life annuities.

Single old-age pensions are paid out to single, widowed or divorced men and women from the first day of the calendar half-year following completion of their 65th year of age. Furthermore, single old-age pensions are paid to husbands who have themselves completed the 65th year of age though their wives have not yet completed their 60th year of age. Insured husbands have a claim to a married couple's pension when they have completed the 65th and their wives the 60th year of age. Persons who have reached the age of 65 years, between July 1st, 1948, and June 30th, 1951, may now request the old-age pension. Moreover, the Consulate may receive pension applications from registered survivors of Swiss nationals who died meanwhile. In both cases the contributions due will be deducted from the pension. The amount of the pension depends on the sum total of the contributions paid and on the number of years for which contributions have been made. Only those who have been contributing for at least 20 years will receive the full pension, which will vary according to payments effected, from Sfr.480 to Sfr.1500 annually for single persons, and Sfr.770 to Sfr.2400 for married couples. The minimum pension is paid whenever the average contribution is Sfr.30 or less annually; the maximum pension whenever the average contribution is Sfr.300 or more annually. The amount of the single orphan's pension varies from Sfr.145 to Sfr. 360 a year, and the pension of an orphan who lost both parents varies from Sfr.215 to Sfr. 540 per annum. The amount of a widow's pension depends on various factors.

In the event that you are interested in joining the insurance and desire further information, please contact the Consulate of Switzerland, P.O. Box 386, Wellington, the sooner the better.

PESTALOZZI CALENDARS

"Helvetia" subscribers are informed that they may order Pestalozzi Calendars, 1952 (in French or German) at the price of 6/- each. Orders should be sent to the Swiss Consulate, P.O. Box 386, Wellington, not later than December 31st.

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Printed by McKenzie, Thornton, Cooper Ltd., 126 Cuba St., Wellington, for the Swiss Benevolent Society in New Zealand (Inc.).