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The Swiss Observer

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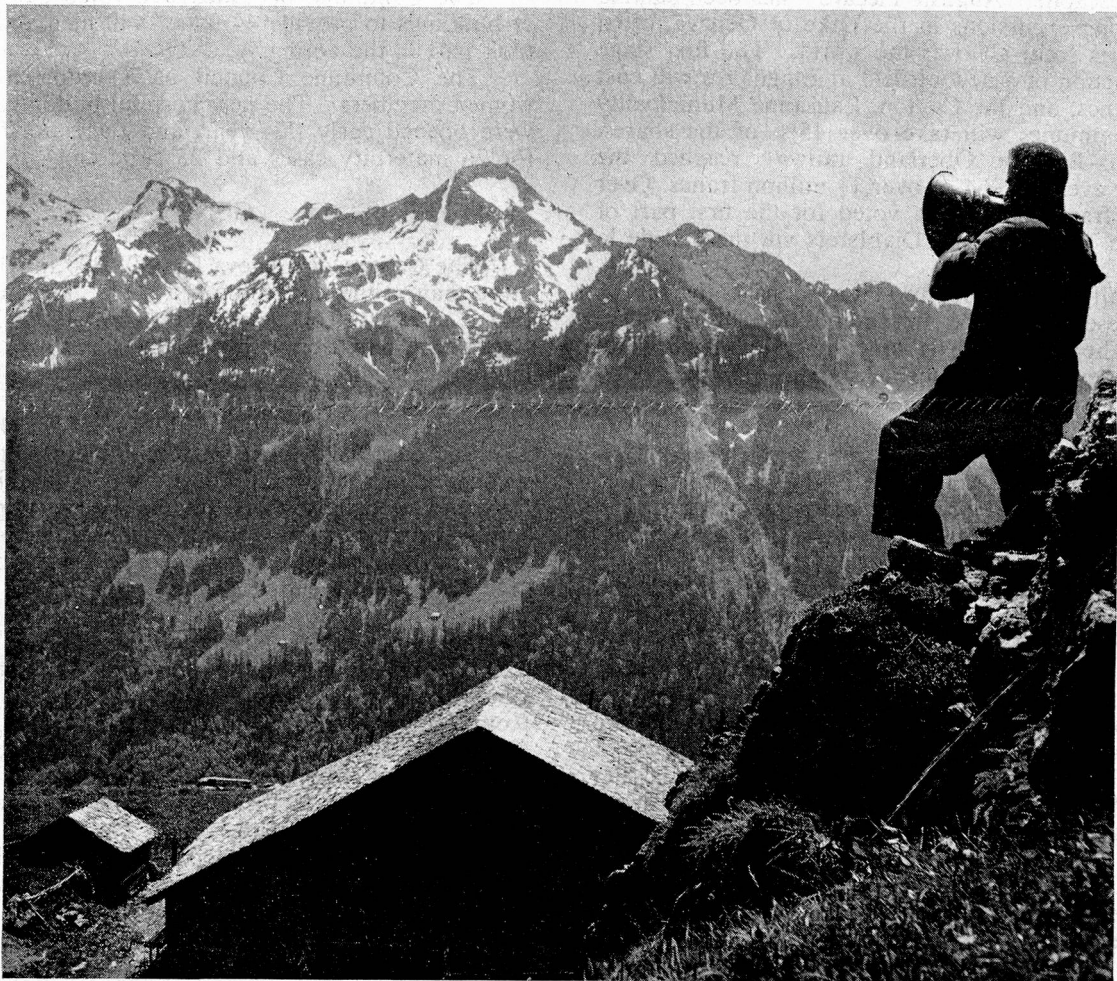
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SWISS FEDERAL DAY OF PRAYER



By courtesy
Swiss
National
Tourist
Office

On 19th September, the Federal Day of Thanksgiving, Atonement and Prayer is being celebrated throughout Switzerland. This picture was taken on the Fronalp, high above the Lake of Lucerne. It represents the "Bet-Ruf", the call to prayer which is often mistakenly called "Alpsegen".

The latter, however, is the ceremony at the beginning of the alpine pasture season when a priest is present to ask for God's blessing and the warding off of all evil.

In the "Bet-Ruf", the oldest herdsman uses a wooden milk funnel as a megaphone and says a prayer into the still of the alpine evening.

Both "Bet-Ruf" and "Alpsegen" have the same origin, for they go back into the heathen times of the old Germanic period. Originally, the herdsmen tried to ban the evil spirits by using so-called "howling horns". When Christianity began to spread, the old heathen customs were not immediately banned; and this is how the "Bet-Ruf" and "Alpsegen" began. The wording of the heathen formulas were Christianised, where it used to be a Germanic Deity, it was now St. Peter who had to ban the wild beasts. This is how age-old mythology has taken a Christian form. To the true-to-nature mountain people, the "Bet-Ruf" is the expression of deep feelings, and, up in the alpine world, it is their prayer.