

The end of the year

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SWISS WATCHES ROUND THE MOON

The three astronauts in Apollo-8 wore Swiss wrist-watches during their flight round the moon: OMEGA-Speedmaster, not any specially constructed model, but the one on sale everywhere.

One of the three finally chosen instruments which will be used by the Americans when they land on the moon next year, is Swiss, a special device to gather fine gas components. The experiment was made with financial help of the Swiss National Fund for the Promotion of Scientific Research at the *Physikalische Institut* in Berne under Prof. Geiss.

(A.T.S.)

THE END OF THE YEAR

It is already a month since Christmas, but with the inevitable delay in normal news delivery, plus Christmas mail hold-ups, news about Christmas in Switzerland reached us much too late for the last issue.

Early in December, a forum discussion was held in Zurich with the theme "Christmas — popular fair of the satiated?" Christmas everywhere, the speakers held, had lost its real meaning. Indeed, we cannot but agree and ask ourselves what have many of the activities, the rush and mad spending spree to do with the real light of hope and joy? Zurich Youth demonstrated in favour of the developing countries, on the grounds that the present assistance was by no means altruistic. Young students went on a fast in Zurich and in Berne; the latter sent a resolution to the Pope asking H.H. to consider the eight Iranian intellectuals who were political prisoners in Iran.

In many towns, special Christmas meals were organised for the aged; some of them were paid for by individual firms, some from funds collected by papers and organisations. A rich American who spends every winter in Ascona, asked the local tourist office to send anonymously a large number of Christmas parcels to needy families. The Salvation Army made their usual "Pot Collection" — in Basle alone, more than 51,000 francs was collected. The Vaud Agricultural Association gave a donation of 20,000 francs to the cantonal and thirty regional hospitals, whilst the countrywomen made parcels. The Police of the town of Zurich arranged for a special Christmas surprise for the 25 physically badly handicapped children at the Mathilde-Escher-Heim. The police band serenaded them and presented the home with a special invalids bicycle, a projector for slides, a few boxes of building elements and a monetary gift. In many towns, special days or evenings were reserved for shopping by handicapped people. At a Christmas celebration at the Regensdorf Prison, inmates and school-children took part in a concert which was attended by various prominent personalities, including the Government.

In several towns, there were special exhibitions by artists, in Lucerne of the Central Switzerland Group, in Chur of the Grisons artists, whilst in Zurich the "Centro d'Arte e di Cultura Italiano in Svizzera" awarded many St. Nicholas prizes in various fields and to various nationals.

9,000 Christmas trees were imported from Denmark for Zurich alone, whilst the Municipality felled 7,000 trees in their own forest reserves. In the Zurich Main Station, a huge toy in the shape of the National Tourist Office "Ferienmobil", (one-third railway engine, one-third boat and on the top a balloon) amused the public. In many shops there were Santa Clauses, in one supermarket, Santa

took children on pony rides whilst their parents did the shopping. Turnover was apparently higher than last year in the general business. And again, as in the previous 18 years, hundreds of children wrote to the *Christkind*, address "10,000 Valais", and every letter whose sender could be deciphered, was answered by the PTT. The Christmas mail increased by 160% over normal times.

Many were the traditional customs which were followed throughout Switzerland. One of the first of these was the "Foire au Lard" at Martigny-Bourg, a popular festival at which the pigs were led through the streets. The right to hold this fair was given to Martigny in 1801 by the "Executive Council of the Indivisible Helvetic Republic". Many of the customs were already described in our Christmas issue. In the district of Monte Ceneri and the Gambarogno, people looked for holly, and one man from Ascona alone gathered nearly 100kg. in order to give a branch each to all his neighbours.

It was a white Christmas which, in some ways enhanced it. So for the hundreds and thousands of winter sports enthusiasts who invaded the mountain resorts. 150 special trains passed through Chur over the Christmas days, 39 special trains took 22,000 Frenchmen and 4,000 Belgians to Switzerland. To take the Spanish and Italian workers back to their countries, nearly 50 additional trains were needed. On 24th December, 830 vehicles used the Gotthard train transport, and in the Bernardin 1702. The snow also brought its delays and difficulties and sadness in the case of avalanches. Zermatt could only be reached by helicopter. 15 passes were closed. There was no pause, however, for foot and mouth disease which, in the Valais, is the worst for 30 years. On the Great St. Bernard and on the Simplon Pass, the monks held a midnight mass.

On 1st of January, no fewer than 25 skiers broke a leg in the Valais alone. The Bernese Municipal President spent New Year's Eve with the Mayor of Jerusalem. The new President of the Confederation, Federal Councillor von Moos, gave the traditional address to the nation over the radio and on TV; he stressed the wish for peace and said Switzerland could best contribute by giving an example of justice and order, to open wide doors and hearts wherever the Swiss were able to help. The federal offices were closed for the week from Tuesday afternoon — malicious tongues called it not only a bridge from the old to the new year, but a viaduct! Nevertheless, the Federal Council announced — a secret previously — an increase in their monopoly tax on imported spirits, with immediate effect.

Finally, a New Year's Service at the Grossmünster in Zurich opened the year of commemorating Huldrych Zwingli's reforming activities.

[A.T.S.]

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