

Our Gottfried Keller

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Scheidegg Pass—for the walk just described is called the Great Scheidegg.

Here one passes such peaks as the Mönch, Eiger and Jungfrau, and never shall I forget the sound of the crashing avalanches down its steep crags, or the sight of the ice crushed to powder in its fall. The walk to Weengen and Lauterbrunnen and then Interlaken is easy and pleasant, and a fitting end to a fortnight's holiday. After the walk you sail up Lake Thun, and then on to Spiez, and so home. The memory of such a walking tour in such scenes of grandeur will pass only with life itself.

One more holiday article, which may be of great interest to visitors to Switzerland:

Valais and its Valleys.

The Spectator, 29th June.

Not without reason the canton of Valais claims to be the heart of Switzerland. Nevertheless, though parts of it are very well known, the majority of its beauty spots have never been heard of by tourists, who pass them by in the train or avoid them for places more crowded and no more lovely. Sion, its capital, standing on two castle-crowned hills and with a thrilling mediaeval history, is an example.

Let us start with the two valleys lying to the east of the canton, not far from the Pass of Simplon. Get out at Stalden, the first stop, and let the busy, smoky, overcrowded little train puff away towards the Zermatt hotels without you, and you will find yourself in a valley where solitude is for hours often broken only by the roaring of the torrential Saaser Visp, where the flora is less preyed upon by tourists, and the villages are as hospitable as they well could be. Saas-fee, six hundred feet higher than Zermatt, lies most picturesquely in velvety meadows, surrounded by an amphitheatre of mountains, with the great Fee glacier gleaming in the sunshine far above.

Farther west we come to Sion, and the phenomenon of the Visp valleys is repeated. There are again two valleys here. That of Horencence, leading to Arolla, is well served by post-motor and comparatively crowded in summer, but the Val d'Herens, in which the chief centre is Evolène, remains unknown beyond Mayens de Sion and Vex. There is a superb view from Vex up this valley, which alone is sufficient to inspire multitudes to invade it. The road is both good and picturesque, running high above the stream of the Borgne, passing the curious formation known as the Pyramids of Euseigne, and a number of unusually charming little log-cabin villages. In this valley—in Evolène, at any rate—the traditional Valaisian costumes are genuinely worn on Sundays: not put on, as is the case in some villages, for the purposes of edifying tourists.

To my mind no valley in Southern Switzerland is more charming than the Val d'Illeiez, near the head of which stands the well-known village of Champéry. For one thing, it gives an unusual impression of spaciousness; for another, it is eternally green, an Emerald Valley if there ever was one; for a third, its heights—the great chain of the Dents du Midi—are hardly surpassed in the country.

The goal of most who tramp or tour this valley will be Champéry, and never had a village a more attractive approach than this. "It would seem to have been set before the Dents du Midi at the most favourable angle," wrote a Frenchman once, "like a seat before a picture in some gallery." That is exactly the impression of the tourist as he contemplates the range from one of the numerous hotel balconies which the village can now offer him. A visit to Champéry is an experience not soon forgotten, and I confess that of all the valleys of Valais I love it best.

Swiss Guards and a Dog.

Daily Telegraph, 3rd July.

The question whether the extradition clause in the Concordat accompanying the Lateran Pact of Conciliation between the Italian State and the Vatican City extends to the Rome Municipal Dog-catching Department, has been brought up here by the conduct of a stray dog in St. Peter's-square.

The dog, whilst in the neutral territory of St. Peter's-square, was chased by two dog-catchers, but avoided them by taking refuge beyond the frontier of the Vatican city. Swiss guards stopped the dog-catchers in their pursuit, and thus raised the question of territorial rights.

A crowd gathered when the dog-catchers were confronted by the Swiss guards, and laughed when they were informed that beyond the Charlemagne Arch of St. Peter's-square another State began, and that to apprehend the dog it was necessary to have recourse to diplomatic channels. Meanwhile, the canine culprit lay beside the stones on the Piazza Santa Marta, sardonically watching its persecutors.—*Chicago Tribune*.

Well, well, I quite understand the zeal of the Swiss Guards, after all, newly acquired rights generally make for zeal and what are diplomatic channels after all? Do not most of us remember the famous "Dienstweg"?

OUR GOTTFRIED KELLER.

It is significant that Gottfried Keller, admittedly Switzerland's greatest writer, should have been of the people, for only a man of the people could have given Switzerland her true expression of literature. Other countries, faced with a less bitter struggle for existence and a less urgent need to protect their national consciousness against foreign influences, have evolved a type of culture best expressed in their salons or their universities, and divided by a deep gulf from the world of labour. But the real spirit of the Swiss lives, even to-day, in their workshops and on their farms, and the most highly cultured among them feel a kinship with it which has been lost in other countries. Whatever wealth or learning they have acquired, the Swiss remain essentially the descendants of that handful of peasants who threw off the Hapsburg yoke.

The native patriotism of the Swiss finds its simplest and finest expression in Keller. He loved his country as he loved nature, with a robust, hearty love. No fruitless wallowing in feeling troubled his vision of either. He was politically active throughout his life, not with politics as a game, but with politics as the seeking for the best his country could achieve. Dangers beset the patriot of a small country—on the one hand, a parochial self-satisfaction at much achieved with small means, on the other, a too great readiness to acquire from other countries in the mistaken attempt to enlarge spiritual horizons. From both these errors Keller was free. Few men who have spent their most active years within the frontiers of their own country have seen it so clearly as Keller saw his, and all he wanted from it was the best it could do and be.

What is most characteristic in Keller, however, and what is probably the most timeless element in his work, is his humour. It pours forth ceaselessly, in limitless variations. It is refreshingly free from the artifices of the humorist—not once do we find that common trick of a leitmotif of phrase or gesture by which we are so often warned that the funny man is being funny. Keller had no need of such crutches for a stumbling invention. In fact, it is but rarely that he has recourse to the spoken word to make his people achieve their comic effect. His humour is drawn from life itself by his own rich sense of the inherent ridiculousness of people and their spontaneous reactions. When, as in *Spiegel* or the *Combmakers*, his own favourite story, with infinite gusto he throws aside all restraint and lets his exuberant imagination carry him into riotous farce, he is great. Here, perhaps, more than anywhere else, lies the reason why he has been more than once called Shakespearean. However much loving fanaticism the word may contain, it has a certain justification precisely in Keller's instinctive sense of the comic. And it is curious how, in other work, his humour, which could be so vigorous and rude in the *Combmakers*, takes on, particularly in the *Seven Legends*, that lyrical and tender note of which Shakespeare was the master. In fact, his humour does follow something like the curve of Shakespeare's.

He is, of course, not a faultless writer. He is prone to preach, and, when he has a moral to point, his artistic instinct falters. His method of narration, which at its best is splendidly broad and leisurely, disdaining baits for the hasty or sentimental, at its worst can be really tedious. To attempt to estimate his place in European literature would be dangerous, for it is easy to overrate one who stands so much alone. It cannot be claimed for a moment that Keller is a genius of the dimensions of a Shakespeare, a Balzac, or a Tolstoy, for whom no frontiers exist. For him, frontiers do exist, and they are the frontiers of Switzerland. But by all that is best in his art, he has brought that particular mode of being which is Swiss into the European picture, given it *droit de cité* there and enriched that picture by just so much. For there is more than Switzerland in Keller, there is humanity; he has, preserving all the peculiarities of the local, given it general significance. He has, of course, his limits; he can by no means correspond to all moods. He has none of those "blank misgivings," those "obstinate questionings" which can only find their expression in art. But what he gives us is based on really personal elements. The beauty of Sali and Vrenchen's morning walk, their last journey on the river, the *Combmakers'* futile race, the delicate humour of the *Legends*—these are things which do not pall or fade. It is, in its buffoonery, its tenderness, its pathos, the kind of art to which the mind turns with a sense of relief from much of the exhausting soul-searchings of to-day. There is human joy and sorrow in it, and rollicking fun, and, beneath it all, a very sound sense of the values of life on earth. It may be limited, but it is not little, and if Meister Gottfried's seat among the immortals be a humble one, it is but what he himself, in true humility, would have deemed right.

M. D. HOLLINGER.

(Extract from the translator's introduction to "*The People of Seldwyla and Seven Legends*," recently published by Messrs. J. M. Dent & Son, at 7s. 6d. net.)

The Swiss Watchmaking Industry.

In the course of the first term of 1929, exports in the watchmaking industry remained practically the same as those of the preceding year. The figures attained are roughly the following: 4.6 million watches, cases and works, representing a total value of 57.8 million francs. A fact which should not be overlooked and which is a confirmation of our excellent reputation in the branch, is that the export of detached parts, and works without cases, has decreased. Inasmuch as perfect working can only be guaranteed when watches are regulated and cased in Switzerland, the change is entirely in our favour and is undoubtedly due to the far-seeing policy of the "Trust de l'Ebauche." In addition to this export of watch cases has also increased which tends to lessen the anxiety caused, of latter years, by the competition of foreign case manufacturers. And lastly, exports of wrist-watches show an extraordinary increase, having reached the figure of 140,000 pieces.

Exports to the United States of America are also higher, which should not be attributed, says the Review "La Fédération horlogère" to a threatened rise in the duty imposed, a condition which is bound to remain, for some time to come, a great source of worry to all Jura manufacturers. A careful examination of the statistics shows that the real cause is to be sought in the development of the sale of ordinary metal watches, particularly of wrist-watches, sold on the American market.

In Great Britain where unemployment and the puzzle of the elections weighed heavily in the balance during the passed months, the sale of watches suffered a decrease. The same may be said of Germany where, for the last year, business has shown signs of relaxation, a phenomenon which does not seem wholly unrelated to the credit crisis. And finally in Spain a certain decrease is also noticeable in the sales which will undoubtedly, be duly compensated by the favourable results of the Barcelona Exhibition, where the campaign of publicity undertaken by our foremost factories will not pass unnoticed. S.I.T.

Pocket Atlas for Motorists.

This pamphlet has been published with a revised text in English, French, German and Italian and with all the latest regulations regarding motor traffic on the ordinary and Alpine roads of Switzerland. It contains nine maps of all the motor roads of Switzerland, a list of the main roads, as well as all the information regarding customs, formalities and the transport of motor cars through the alpine tunnels, the postal motor coach service, regulations concerning the alpine roads and passes, a list of the Swiss customs offices. It may be obtained from the Swiss National Tourist Office or its agencies abroad. Price 3 frs. (discount to retailers).

A NEW SWISS NOVEL.

Gadscha Puti, a posthumous novel of the Far East by Hans Morgenthaler, published by A. Franke A.G., Berne, Price Fr. 7.20 (paper cover Fr. 5.50).

We sometimes take a magnifying glass to see things more clearly. The glass brings the objects nearer to the eye, but we can only see a small part of the whole scenery; we see things from one side only, in proper proportion as far as the picture itself is concerned, but out of proportion to what we cannot see, to what is outside the range of our glass. Such a view of life, such a picture of culture, is Morgenthaler's novel "*Gadscha Puti*."

We follow the young Swiss Infeld as he, full of energy, full of youthful enthusiasm, leaves his native land, travels by land and sea to the shores of far off Siam, up on a second class railway to one of the outposts of civilisation. We accompany him on his tours always looking out for ore, always disappointed; together with him we sympathise with his friend and countryman Schneider who worked for the same firm in a forlorn part of the country and in a forlorn position. We laugh with him over the clumsiness of a third Swiss who took to a brown girl and handled her as hopelessly as he handled his prospective mines. There is life, hot air, wild speculation, in these pages. Yet there is enough humour to let us believe what we read, though the whole "genre" is pessimistic to the extreme. The pictures of the swindling and drinking outpost managers of the mighty Firm Almeida, the nice but undecided manager, the life of lust and desire in town, they are all pictures as seen through the magnifying glass, exaggerated as far as the general view is concerned, but true, only too true, if looked at in their isolation. A true picture of our veneer culture. This is a novel well worth reading.

JOHN HENRY.

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