

Artistic life in Switzerland

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Artistic Life in Switzerland.

The following very interesting article by J. A. P. Orban appeared in the *Apollo*, A Journal of the Arts, in a recent issue giving a picture of the artistic phases of Swiss Life:

On my way to the French-speaking part of Switzerland, I tried to find out some particulars about the coming musical season. However, I found the competent people either making preparations for their well-earned holiday travels, or wrapped up in mysterious silence, so that I was not able to get much information at all. One has to concede to extenuating circumstances. Orchestral conductors are fairly tired of their work by the end of the season, when the summer sets in and draws one to the mountains. Not everybody has the elemental strength of a Mengelberg, who at short notice interrupted his stay in Val Sinestra (Engadin) in order to give a concert with his famous cohort in Amsterdam. On the whole, it is the custom here to hide in some deep valley or high in the Alps and to remain in seclusion. When once the dress coat has been put aside and the baton replaced by a walking stick, it is usual to remain away a long time with the intention of breathing in fresher air than the sultry atmosphere offered by the various concert halls.

These will reopen their portals soon enough. The music-loving masses are already waiting with impatience for their favourite *maestro*: Brun in Berne, Ansermet in Geneva, and so on. It is said that in the main the programmes have already been arranged. They are only waiting to be submitted for approval to the various sub-committees which play such an important part in Swiss social life. There was no means of finding out which works by native composers had withstood the trial of the Baden musical festival sufficiently to deserve the honour of the podium. The opera, too, has not yet aired the curtain that covers what the Italians would call the *cartellone*, in other words the winter programme.

Occasionally, some foreign singer lands in Switzerland during the course of his European tour, which usually ends with triumphs in the Metropolitan Theatre, New York, or the Opera House, Chicago. As Switzerland is not their native country these singers never think of delighting the public with free performances of their art, as for example Lazzarri was accustomed to do in his native city of Assisi. Gigli certainly had no such motive when he came to Zürich, where, however, his voice was not found to be on the level of Caruso's, as fame and skilfully conducted advertisement had led one to believe. I had been told that opera airs sung in a concert hall do not find much favour in Switzerland. Yet this was undoubtedly the case with an artist like Ada Sari, who was very highly thought of here some years before she received her musical consecration in the United States. True, that was really *bel canto*, which does not even come into consideration according to the principles of present-day snobism, though fortunately these do not set up a standard in the world market of music, as is clearly shown by the index numbers. *Anzi*, as the Italians would say.

Zürich, for example, surrenders itself sufficiently to these high, thrilling regions to make an Italian *stagione* the last act of the winter season, and there were many who enjoyed old Verdi's melodies, and those of Puccini, who may no longer be called young either.

Just before I started on my voyage of discovery I met Egger, the well-known Austrian art-historian, who, since the death of our dear Lanciani, is the greatest living authority on Roman topography, besides Hülsen and Ashby. Every specialist knows the wonderful edition of Heemskerck's "Drawings" by Hülsen and Egger to which Ashby added his "Dupérac." Many have found Egger's reproductions of old architectural drawings very useful, and his "Roman Vedute" ought to be better known even among the more intellectual tourists. I may add in this connection that the second volume of the "Roman Vedute" dealing with the Renaissance and later times is guaranteed—a piece of good news which I heard with one foot already in the stirrup on the banks of the Limmat! It is a sign that our profession is again taking up its old habits.

On my way, in Basel, I was able to attend a little ceremony in the artistic home of the Sarasinos to which Francesco Steffanoni of Bergamo had transported no less than three frescoes by Böcklin (painted in 1868), as the hostess announced in a free and easily delivered speech, which reminded one of her schooling in New York.

Böcklin is once again coming into his own, and the beautiful selection of his works, which is the pride of Basel, is only waiting the day when the new museum will be ready in order to contribute their note among the old masters of bygone centuries which we admire in the temporary galleries of the Kunsthalle.

A still more international man is Desiderius Erasmus, who was obliged to leave his resting place in Basel for a time. His venerable remains were taken out of his grave because some repairs had to be carried out in the church exactly at the spot where his bones lay under a marble slab, which bears a Latin inscription composed by his friend Amerbach, whom we know so well from Holbein's portrait. A cast has been taken of his skull, and both the tomb and the skull have been the objects of a series of studies, which will supply every detail to the conclusions at which the various scientists will arrive concerning the life and death of this man, who would certainly have been a universal journalist had he lived in our time. As an example of what we may expect from these investigations, Dr. Major, the director of the interesting Historical Museum in Basel, has already brought out a little book containing some notable supplements to the iconography of this remarkable Dutchman.

Basel, as well as Berne, might serve as an introduction to the art of the Suisse Romande. Both towns pay a heavy tribute in homage to the art of their French brothers, even though the compliment is not returned to the same extent on the other side of the Saane, which forms the linguistic frontier. That may be taken as another example of the reverence so readily paid to the *genti sangue latino*. This is particularly the case in Berne, where the splendid old Davinet lived to a great age in full possession of his intellectual faculties and was replaced as director of the Municipal Museum of Fine Art by de Mandach.

Since then the building has become too small to show up all the collections to advantage; but it has been found possible to place in a good light a series of modern paintings which show the achievements of the contemporary school of Geneva and other parts of French Switzerland. Beside the astonishing work of a Martin Lauterburg we see the audacious portrait of an orchestral conductor in full swing by Cuno Amiet, Solothurn-Berne, which, together with a painting by Blanchet, was found worthy of a place in the next international Rockefeller Exhibition in Pittsburg. Amiet is looked upon as a follower of Hodler. Although this great and thoroughly Swiss master preferred to spend his last years in Geneva, his work is very highly valued in Berne, where he felt quite as much at home. This will be proved once again when the firm of Gutekunst and Klipstein, so well known in London, will open its new premises in the Theaterstrasse in Berne with an exhibition of Hodler's graphic work.

The aristocratic and highly elaborate work of Théophile Robert, the son and grandson of well-known painters, makes a very striking impression in the Berne Museum. Other remarkable "Romands" are Hans Berger, Frédéric Zbinden of La Chaux-de-Fonds, Maurice Berraud, and the bewildering Auberjonois, who, together with Blanchet, occupies the forefront of modern Swiss painting, though the landscape painting of a countryman on the other side of the linguistic frontier, Stauffer, deserves all our attention.

A visit to the Kunsthalle reveals again the elegance of Cardinaux's works, and Paul Zehnder's sketches for the interior decoration of the principal Protestant church in Winterthur produce the impression that such an art is possible even outside the Catholic Church as long as the models set up by it are departed from as little as possible and are constantly borne in mind. In this case the models were the mosaics of Sant' Apollinare in Ravenna. Otherwise, Christian art must be studied in the Rhone valley through which Christianity found its way to Helvetia, and in Freiburg, which lay this time outside my route. Lausanne can show very little in this line, as the town was obliged to give up all her art treasures to the Bernese conquerors and reformers, when the Bernese General Nægeli conquered the Canton Vaud in 1536. The only thing that could not be removed was the cathedral, which forms to-day the pride of the town, together with the art gallery, which, like the Neuchâtel gallery, is very strong in the early—we might say the classical—masters of Swiss landscape painting. Fine organ recitals and much admired oratorios are given in the cathedral. The Canton Vaud has recently produced a sumptuous book on the cathedral, illustrated with beautiful photographs. The burgomaster, Monsieur Rosset, a lover of fine art and music, was surely the *spiritus rector* of this publication.

NOTA BENE!

On December 14th, another Special Issue of the *Swiss Observer* will be broadcast so as to reach the whole Swiss Colony in Great Britain. This will be a unique opportunity for advertisers to secure the Christmas trade. Please communicate in good time if you wish to secure space, which can be booked at the ordinary rates for serial advertisements.

The true kernel of modern art in the Suisse Romande, which the glory of Lake Lemane must have produced, is naturally in Geneva, where those artists live who have always consistently withstood the powerful attraction of Paris, to which even the mystical Steck was subjected. In the beautiful museum at Geneva, under the guidance of our distinguished colleague M. Deonna, we may observe how Swiss were the feelings of Edouard Vallet, and discover the fact that A. Blanchet and M. Barraud form a close group with Auberjonois, whose plastic nudes produce a less uneasy effect than his daring experiments with human countenances in the special room devoted to him in the Zürich Art Gallery. Benjamin Vautier, one of the best known "Bohemians" of the new "Genava"—as the city is styled in a Roman inscription *ibidem*—is followed by René Guinaud, who paints surprisingly French-looking corners of the town, while A. Hermentjat follows Hodler as closely as Amiet. Still more syncretized landscapes are those of E. Bressler, A. Silvestre, P. Perrelet, A. Morard, and E. Martin.

THE EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

The Editor is not responsible for the opinions expressed by Correspondents and cannot publish anonymous articles, unless accompanied by the writer's name and address, as evidence of good faith.

Dear Sir,

I am pleased to send you herewith a copy of the "*Dovere*," Ticino's most prominent Daily, containing an editorial article discussing Mr. W. Notari's letter to you of several weeks ago and I give you hereunder the translation of the said article.

AMBIGUITY or DISPARITY OF TREATMENT?

"We have just been favoured with the translation of an article signed W. Notari, which appeared in the "*Swiss Observer*" of London regarding the refusal made by the Swiss Consular Agents abroad to our emigrated compatriots who ask for the passport in order to return to their country, if they have not yet settled the payments due for the Military Exemption Tax.

A few days ago, on the same subject, we received from a Ticinese compatriot in Chicago a similar protest to which, after having obtained the necessary information, we answered publicly in the "*Dovere*."

Reading, however, the article of the "*Swiss Observer*," official newspaper of the Swiss Confederates in London, one has the impression either that the passport to return home is refused, for the reason aforementioned, only to Ticinesi citizens, or that, at least, our compatriots believe it to be thus; so much is true that although in a Swiss paper the article speaks only of Ticinesi and asserts also that several Ticinesi have definitely renounced their Swiss citizenship owing to the treatment already described.

Now it is good that one knows that orders to the consular agents, not to deliver passports for the return home to citizens who are not up to date with the payment of the military tax, do not emanate from the Cantonal, but from the Federal Authorities and that they (the orders) affect or should affect all Swiss residents abroad who are in arrears with the payment of the Tax in question.

The legality of this way of proceeding has been confirmed by a decision of the Federal Tribunal on an appeal by a Confederate who had been affected by the measure against which our distinguished compatriot protests in the columns of the "*Swiss Observer*."

The question has also been raised by our Overseas Emigrants, not only Ticinesi, on the occasion of the Tiro Federale, as many who intended coming home on this occasion had the passport refused to them on account of their military tax being unpaid. Then the "*Repertorio di Giurisprudenza Patria*" published a notable article on this question on a general Federal basis, not Cantonal, and not in the least Ticinese.

It is good that our emigrated Ticinesi Compatriots know this in order to convince themselves that they are not subjected to a different treatment in comparison with the other Confederates abroad and so that they may know, per adventure, where to send in their complaints.

Unless the disparity of treatment lamented by our Ticinesi emigrants should originate from an excessive fiscal zeal of our Finance Department while the corresponding Departments of the other Cantons close one eye and eventually both! . . .

Four your guidance I would add that the last paragraph aims at the Minister of the Ticinese Finance Department (Conservative) by the Editor of the "*Dovere*" (Liberal).

I am, dear Sir,

Your faithfully, J. EUSEBIO.

CUSTOMS' WATCHDOGS.

On October 9th a consignment of Swiss watch movements, valued at £20,000, were seized by the United States Customs Authorities, who allege they were smuggled into the country.