

A Retirement : H. O. Ernst

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A RETIREMENT.



H. O. ERNST.

Late one foggy afternoon in 1919 there arrived in this country a young Swiss full of enterprise and youthful enthusiasm. In his pocket he carried a letter from the General Management of the Swiss Federal Railways confirming his appointment as a junior clerk at their London Agency.

In those days bitter memories of the dark days of the war were still fresh, and travellers arriving in this country were subjected to close interrogation and examination by the immigration authorities. One immigration officer, obviously not conversant with the language of the recent enemies of his country, without much ado arrested the youngster, together with another Swiss fellow traveller, and confined them to a solitary room for about four hours during which telephone calls were put through to the London Office of the Swiss Federal Railways, and to the aliens section of the Home Office, after which both travellers were released from their involuntary confinement and allowed to proceed to their destinations.

This was not exactly the reception expected by our young arrival, whose full name was Heinrich Otto Ernst, still known as Otto amongst his Swiss friends and as Henry amongst his English friends.

Soon after his "release" he started work at the Lower Regent Street office of the Swiss Federal Railways. Holiday travels to Switzerland — which obviously had come to a standstill during the war period — started afresh in 1920, and soon increased to such proportions that the staff was subjected to much "unpaid" overtime work during the seasons, which was for some years not the exception, but the rule.

During the period between the two wars our friend was promoted to the post of chief clerk. Then came the second world war, which brought business almost to an end. The office, however, was kept open although callers were few and far between, mainly consisting of a number of home-sick Swiss, who wanted, if only for a few fleeting moments, to have a friendly chat in "Schwyzerdütsch", or a few staunch English clients who were reminiscing on past happy holidays, making optimistic plans for holidays after the conclusion of the hostilities. If, however, the "day-work" was not excessive, becoming almost boring, our friend had the splendid idea during the spell of heavy night-bombing, in 1940/41, to entertain — accompanied by a captain of the British Army Educational Corps — the troglodytes in West End shelters, with Swiss films and talks on our country. It was tiring work, but Ernst was just the man for this job.

At last the war came to a close and, in 1946, Mr. Ernst was appointed manager of the London Agency. Once more the appetite of the Britishers to visit the country where they had spent so many happy hours in the past was wetted afresh, and in spite of severe currency rationing, and often chaotic travelling conditions, traffic increased very considerably from year to year, and the formerly deserted offices at Lower Regent Street could be once more compared to a beehive. It is perhaps not generally known that about 86 per cent of holiday bookings from this country to Switzerland are made through Travel Agents, such as Thomas Cook & Son, Ltd., etc. It was the endeavour of Ernst to work in close relations with these hundreds of agencies, by giving them every possible assistance and encouragement. This policy, carried out with much persistence and unabated energy, must often have taxed our friend's strength to the limit, but it proved successful, and if to-day the relations between the Agency of the Swiss Federal Railways and the Swiss National Tourist Office vis-à-vis the British Travel and Transportation Industry are happy and beneficial, it is mainly due to the unflagging efforts of Mr. Ernst. It is not too much to say that he is at present one of the most popular men in tourist circles, where his friends are innumerable.

So far we have spoken only as far as his work has been concerned; let us now see what kind of a man he is, and what his more intimate background life consists of.

In 1923 he married a Yorkshire girl, a Miss Carolina Bond, which induced him to settle down permanently in London. This marriage was, and still is, a very happy one. His wife presented him with two strapping daughters, Myrian and Betty. The former lives at home and works with an International Travel Office, whilst the latter is married to a "Winterthurer" who occupies a post in the Frankfurt a. M. agency of the Swiss National Tourist Office. She has two children, a boy and a girl, both born within the sound of Bow Bells.

During his long stay in the Metropolis, Mr. Ernst has always taken a lively interest in the doings of the Swiss Colony, although the nature of his work — which necessitated much travelling — did not allow him to take any offices in the various Institutions and Societies. He is a member of the Swiss Economic Council, the City Swiss Club, the Swiss Mercantile Society, the Swiss Rifle Association and the Nouvelle

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Société Helvétique, in which circles he and his wife are often seen. Wherever our friend went he was *persona grata*, he was consistent in friendship, painstaking in his work, and always willing to help his compatriots with advice; can one wonder that he became so popular?

Mr. Ernst will be greatly missed by his staff, to whom he was always a fatherly boss. He was fair and understanding, and he kept his manager's office door wide open to everyone who was seeking advice.

At a recent interview with the writer, who acquainted him with his intention to write a few words of appreciation, he expressed the wish that he should on this occasion mention the gratitude he owes to H.E. the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker for the constant interest they have shown him in his work, and the help they have always given him. "They could not have been kinder to me personally", he said "and I shall always remember this with feelings of deep gratitude."

He also asked the writer to let it be known how deeply grateful he is for the support and collaboration the members of the Colony have given him over so many years.

May we in return, and especially the writer, who has enjoyed and valued his friendship over a great number of years — during which he had become an occasional "unpaid" contributor to the "Swiss Observer" — thank him for so much he has given us, and for so much we owe to him.

On his retirement we wish him, and his wife, a happy and carefree eventide, blessed with good health, and as he intends to remain in this hospitable country, we can assure them that they will always be received wherever they go

WITH OPEN ARMS AND HEARTS.

ST.

NEWS FROM THE SWISS EMBASSY.

Consul Ernst Hofstetter, Swiss Consular Agent in Balloch, is retiring at the end of this year after more than quarter century of faithful service. His successor will be Mr. Bruno Frick, Director of Dunfermline Silk Mills Ltd., Dunfermline, a citizen of Zurich, who will be given the personal title of Vice-Consul.

* * *

The Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker will leave for Switzerland at Christmas and Madame Daeniker will not return to London before the end of January.

COCKTAIL PARTIES.

The Swiss Military and Air Attaché, Colonel Th. Mosimann and Madame Mosimann, gave a cocktail party, on Wednesday, 9th December at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

* * *

The Commercial Counsellor of the Swiss Embassy, and Madame R. Faessler, gave a cocktail party, at 233, Cromwell Road, S.W.5, to bid farewell to Mr. W. Wyler and O. Ernst.

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