

# English appreciations on the Swiss

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Moby-Dick story. We were allowed to visit the bridge and the navigation room with its complex equipment—electronic apparatus, functional computers, records, charts, shipping documents, flags, etc., etc. We had a look at the spacious and comfortable accommodation accorded to officers and crew. At one time the ship carried 20 first-class passengers, but this ceased a few years ago. We were particularly impressed and overawed by the immense size and complexity of the machine and propulsion section, comparable to a multi-storey house. For the profane it seemed an indescribable labyrinth of pulsating machinery, conducts, ladders, lights, in a very warm atmosphere where you could detect the odour of diesel oil, and steam, leaving us with the lively impression of great and limitless power.

For one of the participants who has had an almost life long connection with this type of machinery and who worked for the important Swiss manufacturers of ship engines—"Sulzer", this visit must have been a sheer delight, and a surprise to the ship's officer to speak to a Swiss so familiar with all the intricacies of such a plant. After having a short look at the mixed cargo—varying from poisonous liquid chemicals to cars, all well secured, the time had arrived to take leave of the friendly members of the crew. Some felt regret, but most of our ladies felt quite relieved, quite understandably.

Off again, across the Mersey River, blessed by a warm autumn sun and caressing winds. It did not take us long to reach the Roman Catholic Cathedral, and we were immediately struck by the lovely surroundings, a fitting framework for this most impressive building of concrete, stone and glass, and by its very modern conception, though perhaps not to everybody's liking. The inside was enhanced by the unforgettable sight of its luminous glasses, going from the deepest blues and reds at the sides, to the blaze of gold above us. The arrangement of the seats around a central altar was another interesting

feature, sober in line, but rich and tastefully finished. It was all so very different from what we had seen in earlier years. For many of us it was a pleasant surprise to find out that in the basement there was a first-class tearoom and cafeteria, providing soft drinks, cakes and snacks, and for the people coming by car there was ample parking space and garage. We gained a fair idea of how things might look long after we have gone.

Not far away is the imposing building of the Anglican Cathedral, which is very different in style and execution, not yet fully completed but open to worship. The building is of local hand-cut stone, very classical and sober, of a pure—I may almost say perfect—new Gothic. The inside, gracefully finished, subdued in tone, with lovely high windows of old design, reminded us of the works of old such as the Notre-Dame in Paris, or Chartres Cathedral, inviting us to rest, prayer or meditation.

Our time was now running short, and we had to make our way back to the city centre. We were warmly welcomed by the staff of the excellent Restaurant of Reece's, which we could sincerely recommend to any future visitor to this great and busy city. We all enjoyed our dinner very much. It was then time for us to take leave of each other and start our journey home. Even travelling through the outskirts of the city we were struck by the many new residential developments, multi-storey flats, and parks—a testimonial to the growth of the population, good living standard and faith in the future of their city.

In concluding, may I say that there was no doubt at all in our minds that such combined outings and the idea behind it, and the organisation and execution of it appealed to us all, and it should be a stimulus and pleasure for any active and club-minded Committee to repeat such efforts in the future. With that may I say: "Au revoir cher compatriotes."

E. Berner

## ENGLISH APPRECIATIONS ON THE SWISS

*Pedestrian excursions are by no means uncommon in Switzerland, and it is most extraordinary that they appear sometimes to be undertaken by persons to whom economy need not be an object.*

MURRAY FORBES

*My hat shall ever be ready to be thrown up, and my glove ever ready to be thrown down for Switzerland.*

CHARLES DICKENS

*Switzerland is a curst selfish, swinish country of brutes, placed in the most romantic region of the world. I never could bear the inhabitants.*

LORD BYRON

*He who would travel pleasantly and profitably in Switzerland must leave at home all prejudice of rank and station, all pride, and demands of vanity, and take with him only the man.*

J. G. EBEL

*The Lord loves Switzerland, and will save many who might not be suitable for the congregation.*

JAMES HUTTON

*Do you ask my opinion of Switzerland? . . . . In the investigation of the assertion that the Swiss mountains are beautiful: with a certain amount of clouds, a sunset, a cheerful companion, a contented stomach, I think it perfectly true; but with too many clouds, or none at all, with a glaring noonday sun, alone, or tearing up a hill after dinner, I think it perfectly false.*

DEAN STANLEY

*Very much of the charm of Switzerland belongs to simple things—to greetings from the herdsmen, the Guten Morgen, and Guten Abend, that are invariably given and taken upon mountain paths; to the tame creatures with their large dark eyes, who raise their heads one moment from the pasture while you pass; and to the plants that grow beneath your feet.*

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

*Helvetia! Land of romance!  
Forget thee? never—Fare-thee-well!*

JOHN MURRAY

*You poor Yankees are to be pitied for many things, but for nothing so much as your distance from Switzerland.*

LESLIE STEPHEN

*Everybody is seldom in the right; but everybody is in the right in saying, the Swiss are good people. . . . You are not mistaken, Sir, in your opinion about the beauties of Switzerland.*

MARTIN SHERLOCK

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*With sincere reluctance I bade Switzerland farewell. Who can leave such a country without regret? If we find its governments defective, or its societies dull, there is always a resource against every feeling of dislike, or of weariness, in the meditation of that glorious scenery, the view of which renders the mind insensible to human evils, by lifting it beyond their reach. Switzerland has opened to me a new world of ideas; its landscapes are indelibly impressed upon my memory; whenever the delightful images of nature present themselves to my imagination, I find that I have been thinking only of Switzerland; and whenever I amuse myself in that sort of visionary architecture, called castle-building, my chateau is always seated at the foot of an Alpine hill, a torrent stream rolls invisibly past the dwelling, and an enormous glacier lifts its snows in the neighbourhood.*

HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS

(from the S.N.T.O. booklet "Romantic Switzerland")

## AN ENQUIRY THAT LEAVES OPEN QUESTIONS

Why have we waited four years for the first results of an enquiry on the worst glacier catastrophe of the century to be made known? The geological and glaciological report asked for by the enquiring judge had alone taken three years to produce. The experts have not made their own task easy, neither has, for that matter the Judiciary of Valais, who, immediately after the disaster, had done everything in view of a completely impartial and independent enquiry. For that reason, it had commissioned foreign experts completely uninvolved with the construction of the Mattmark and strangers to the Swiss electricity business. The three experts in question were Professor Bernhard Brockamp, Director of the Geophysical Institute of the University of Munich, Professor Louis Liboutry, director of the French National Glaciological Institute at Grenoble and Professor Leopold Muller, director of the Institute of Rock Mechanics of the Karlsruhe school of technology. These three internationally renowned capacities have investigated

the site of the catastrophe for months and have produced their findings in a 150-page report which, however, does not give a clear answer to a number of questions. These experts insist that there could have been no possible way of foreseeing such a catastrophe. On the other hand, their report seems in some sections to point to the contrary. Many of the essential questions put forward by the judge of enquiry must still be considered by the outside observer as unanswered.

## The Families of the Victims Renounce a Further Enquiry

In spite of this, the lawyers of the dependants of the victims have not asked for any further enquiry. One reason is that all the civil amends that the wives and children of the victims were entitled to receive have long ago been made good by the insurance companies. The judge of enquiry, at the demand of these lawyers has asked for the opinion of three other experts, without asking from them a fully-fledged report. These experts were Italian, a fact which sheds light on the political background of this shifty enquiry. 56 Italians died in Mattmark and a good dozen motions and interventions have been made in the Italian Senate, mostly by communists or union representatives. This shows that the Italians are very keenly interested in the outcome of the Mattmark enquiry. The Swiss judicial authorities are well aware that, in view of its international connections, the causes and responsibilities of the Mattmark disaster ought to be clarified in an unrepachable way. The Valais judiciary had done all it could in this respect, the lack of competent jurists was another matter.

## "Nobody had thought of it"

Over seventy witnesses have already been heard. Due to the Valais' legal system, which calls for a secret enquiry, we do not know yet what these witnesses, some of them highly important, have said. Maybe their depositions will clear some of the aspects not fully answered in the 150-page professoral report. Public opinion is meanwhile interested in the three following points:

First: In September 1949 already, 50.000 cubic metres of ice had broken away from the Allaling glacier. The

photographical documentation of the department of hydrology and glaciology at the Federal Polytechnic in Zurich show that similar ice-slides have occurred in 1954, 1961 and 1963. During the construction of the dam, slipping ice had blocked a road and destroyed a compressor house. This incident had not led to any regular watch over the glacier. As stated by the report, no one thought that these ice movements, frequent in the alps, could be the forerunners of a catastrophe. On the other hand, the professors agreed that an experienced glaciologist could have distinguished from a low-flying helicopter the imminent breaking away of the glacier's snout.

Secondly: The round-the-year photogrametric survey of the glacier that had been planned by the Federal Polytechnic to make a study of its movements was not carried out through lack of funds. According to the report, the experts officially commissioned to supervise the glacier had only been concerned with the safety of the future dam. The numerous warnings voiced by geologists and glaciologists over the dangers ice-slides as a consequence of the general withdrawal of Swiss glaciers had apparently not made their effect on the planners and constructors of the dam. When Professor D. H. Annaheim from Basle, following an excursion to Mattmark, warned the management of the site of the very serious dangers of a glacier-break, he was told very frankly that the builders of the dam knew what they had to do.

Thirdly: Following the findings of the three professors, the labour management at Mattmark had in 1961 renounced erecting living-quarters on the construction site, but following economic considerations, this had been finally done. The report is formal in that the concentration of barracks and work-posts in the direct danger zone of the glacier would have been avoided had the "possibility of a catastrophe been imagined."

To bring an action there were, and still are, many people who refer to the mountain rules of the Swiss Army, which forbid crossing glacier breaking-zones or camping on such places. The reference work published in 1945 entitled "The available water-power resources of Switzerland" advise against

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